

**THE MARTIN J. KELLY WRITING CONTEST
OF THE IRISH CULTURAL SOCIETY (2019)**

HELPFUL HINTS

Dear Writer,

Thank you for your interest in our writing contest. Your entry will be eligible for one of our prizes, and you will receive a Certificate of Merit to show our appreciation for your effort and talent. Good luck!

Use the painting enclosed with our contest material as a springboard for creating the character of your interior monologue. The full title of the painting by the Irish painter William Orpen is “Thinker on the Butte de Warlencourt.” You can find more about the painter and the painting by searching William Orpen and “Thinker on the Butte de Warlencourt.” This material will provide you with references you can use in specifying a setting for your interior monologue. The setting can be any WWI setting, not just those mentioned in the material about the painting.

Since the 300-400 word piece you will write has to be an interior monologue, check “interior monologue” on the Web. No doubt your best sources for information on interior monologue have been your English classes where you have studied interior monologues in works of literature, such as the soliloquies of Shakespeare. The article you write will be the private thoughts of an Irish soldier fighting in the British army in WWI. The poem “The Man He Killed” by Thomas Hardy is an example of the thoughts of a fighting man. You know interior monologues also in the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, such as “The Cask of Amontillado.”

The classic novel of WWI is *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque which was made into a classic black and white film. The novel and film recreate with remarkable fidelity the tension and uncertainty experienced by the front line soldier. Another great WWI movie is *Paths of Glory*. This film puts the viewer into the trenches with the “Tommies” who fear “going over the top” into the killing field of No-Man’s Land. Films and books with photographs from WWI can help the writer to visualize the experiences of the soldier in “Thinker on the Butte.” Try to find a book with pictures like Niall Ferguson’s *The Pity of War* and Laurence Stallings’ *The First World War: A photographic history*.

An excellent novel which has all of the elements which we hope to read in the entries to our contest is *The Canal Bridge* by Tom Phelan, a local novelist. Told in a series of first person narrations, the novel captures the horrors of the war and the anxieties of those on the home front. Phelan’s characters Matt and Con are young Irish lads fighting for the British in France and Belgium during WWI, just like the soldier you will be creating. Ask your local public library to order this book for your use in our contest.

All of the references above will help you to put your soldier in an authentic WWI place, such as the Battle of the Somme. They will also help you to incorporate some of the unique horrors of WWI, such as trench warfare, poison gas, and No-Man's Land. You will find the "Christmas Truce" of 1914 a fascinating story of generosity of spirit in the midst of all-out war. This remarkable incident is the subject of the movie *Joyeux Noel*, available on DVD. A Web search will bring you to a host of articles on this event.

The art of your story will be your successful creation of a human being. You will decide upon what he is reflecting. Is he thinking about comrades lost to the bombardments, the poison gas, the withering machine gun fire which soldiers faced when they went "over the top," or about death from inadequate medical attention? Is he thinking about his own survival? Is he thinking about being home in Ireland with family, loved ones and friends? Is he thinking about the heroic deeds he has seen or has performed or hopes to perform? Is he conflicted by the circumstance of his fighting for Britain on the continent while other Irishman at the same time are fighting against the British in Ireland's capital city Dublin during the Easter Rising of 1916? (Search Easter Rising 1916.) The excellence of your interior monologue will be measured by the choices you make in recreating the setting and capturing the mind of a fighting man.

To make your soldier Irish, Irish names will help. Of course, in an interior monologue the soldier may not refer to himself by name, but other name references, such as loved ones or comrades, can be Irish. Most Irish names do not start with O' or Mc; ask classmates, teachers and parents for some strongly Irish names, and if you aspire to capture the judge's attention with names, try a few Irish names in their original Gaelic version, such as Sean Breathnach (John Walsh) or Eibhlin Dhubh Ni Chonaill (Eileen O'Connell). Irish place names belong in this reflection. A map of Ireland will give you the counties of Ireland (Kerry, Mayo, Cork, etc.) and perhaps place names within the counties, such as Lahinch, Listowel or Castlebar.

You will learn a great deal about World War I and a bit about Ireland and its history under British rule when you write your interior monologue. Most of all you will learn how to write creatively. Interior monologues are not the most common form of writing asked of writers in real world settings, but the manipulation of the written word to create an effect is a skill highly prized in that real world.

Thank you again for your efforts. Enjoy the process; we will enjoy the results.

Sincerely,

John Walsh
Contest Chair