

Title: Who are we without our culture?

The truth is, I don't know what the future has in store for us. I don't know what's to come and I won't ever know, something that causes my breath to catch in my throat at times. Yet however worrying this may be, it possesses a sort of beauty that everyone can relate to. The future is limitless. Life will go on long after our shared time in this world.

My name is Éire Ní Fhaoláin and as I write this, I have lived to see eighteen summers. Eighteen beautiful summers in my warm, safe country. My hope for the future is that people will live to see as many summers as possible, lingering in the warmth of existence and allowing it all to wash over them. For as long as I remember, I have had a deep passion for our traditions, culture, our music and a connection to our land. I truly believe that the culture of every country matters and that if we lose our culture, we lose our soul. There's an old Irish proverb; 'Tír gan teanga, tír gan anam'. When translated to English, it loses its gravity, but it essentially means 'A country without a language is a country without a soul'.

As I said, I don't know what's to come. Nobody does. I can only wish that the people of the future – the youth of the future will preserve our culture; everybody's culture. I can only hope that the future generations will continue to sing, to write and to exist with peace in their hearts, allowing their homeland to take up space in their soul.

Here in Ireland, we have an unequivocal bond with our ancient land. Nature is at the heart of our folklore, our songs and our stories. Our beloved Rowan Tree, for instance, a tree with a purpose to protect. As I write this, I am gazing out at the Rowan Tree in my garden. I don't recall a time when she wasn't there, yet I'm learning to imagine a future without her. She is tall, adorned with red berries and she is powerful. Yet despite her strength, she is dying. Her family is dying, her friends are dying and her roots are dying. We are losing our Rowan Trees and before we know it, they will collectively wither away. The future is a scary realm, yet it *can* be a hopeful one if we try. To the youth of the future – please do not lose the value of nature. Please do not lose the value of our land.

The truth is, I don't know who the youth of the future are. I don't know if you exist. If you do, however, I have hope. I have hope that our culture, music and song will remain at the centre of who we are. Perhaps it will take a different role in society, bending to the background of daily life. But keep it there, always. Allow it to burn pages in the back of a book, living and breathing. Revisit this book as often as you can and allow yourself to feel it. Allow yourself to remember what those of the past felt in their souls. Who are we without our culture? Who are we without our souls?



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