

Toast by Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland

A Shoilse Banríon, A Mhórgacht Ríoga:

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highness:

Thank you for your kind and generous welcome and for the warm hospitality you have extended to me, to Sabina and to our delegation.

That welcome is very deeply felt and appreciated by me, and by the people of Ireland, whom I represent. However long it may have taken, Your Majesty, I can assure you that this first State Visit of a President of Ireland to the United Kingdom is a very visible sign of the warmth and maturity of the relationship between our two countries. It is something to be truly welcomed and celebrated.

Your Majesty: You famously used some words of Irish during your State Visit to Ireland. Today I would also like to draw from the oral tradition of our ancient language a seanfhocal, or wise saying, often applied to the mutuality of relationships. It observes simply: “ar scáth a chéile a mhairimid.”

Because scáth literally means shadow, this phrase is sometimes translated as – “we live in the shadow of each other.” However, there is a more open and more accommodating meaning. Scáth also means shelter.

The word embodies the simple truth that physical proximity brings with it an inevitability of both mutual influence and interaction. But more importantly, I believe, it implies reciprocal hospitality and generosity; the kind of generosity reflected in your words this evening that encourages us to embrace the best version of each other.

Ireland and Britain live in both the shadow and in the shelter of one another, and so it has been since the dawn of history. Through conquest and resistance, we have cast shadows on each other, but we have also gained strength from one another as neighbours and, most especially, from the contribution of those who have travelled between our islands in recent decades.

The contribution of Irish men and Irish women to life in Britain, which Your Majesty has acknowledged with such grace, is indeed extensive and lends itself to no simple description. It runs from building canals, roads and bridges in previous decades, to running major companies in the present, all the while pouring Irish personality and imagination into the English language and its literature.

Like so many of our compatriots, Sabina and I feel very much at home when visiting Britain, which should be the case with our nearest neighbour and our

close friend. Tonight we celebrate the deeply personal, close neighbourly connection which is embodied in the hundreds of thousands of Irish and British people who have found shelter on each other's shores.

Your Majesty: History evolves, if we are fortunate, into greater mutual understanding between peoples. The welcome that is so naturally afforded to British visitors in Ireland today was, I think, wholeheartedly expressed on the occasion of your State Visit in 2011. Your gracious and genuine curiosity, your evident delight in that visit, including its equine dimension, made it very easy for us to express to you and, through you to the British people, the warmth of neighbourly feelings. It laid the basis for an authentic and ethical hospitality between our two countries.

Admirably, you chose not to shy away from the shadows of the past, recognising that they cannot be ignored when we consider the relationship between our islands. We valued your apt and considered words when you addressed some of the painful moments of our mutual history, and we were moved by your gestures of respect at sites of national historical significance in Ireland.

These memorable moments and these moving words merit our appreciation and, even more, our reciprocity. While the past must be respectfully recognised, it must not imperil the potential of the present or the possibilities of the future – ar féidireachtaí gan teorainn – our endless possibilities working together.

This present occasion, which completes a circle begun by your historic visit three years ago, marks the welcome transformation in relations between our countries over recent years – a transformation that has been considerably progressed by the advancement of peace in Northern Ireland.

We owe a great debt to all of those who had the courage to work towards, and make manifest, that peace. I wish to acknowledge here the remarkable contributions of my predecessors Mary Robinson and Mary McAleese. I am especially pleased that former President McAleese, and her husband Martin, are here with us this evening.

We must, however, never forget those who died, were bereaved, or injured, during a tragic conflict. As the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur wrote, to be forgotten is to die twice. We owe a duty to all those who lost their lives, the duty to build together in peace; it is the only restitution, the only enduring justice we can offer them.

We share, also, the imperative to be unwavering in our support of the people of Northern Ireland as we journey together towards the shelter and security of true reconciliation. We celebrate what has been achieved but we must also constantly renew our commitment to a process that requires vigilance and care.

Your Majesty: We have moved on from a past where our relations were often troubled, to a present where – as you have indicated - Ireland and the United Kingdom meet each other in mutual respect, close partnership and sincere friendship. That friendship is informed by the many matters of mutual interest in which we work together and support one another.

In recent times we have seen our two Governments working ever more closely together in the European Union and in the United Nations. We have seen deepening partnership in the area of trade, as well as in development aid where we both share a common commitment to tackling hunger and upscaling nutrition.

The future we each desire, and seek to work towards is one where Ireland and the United Kingdom stand together to seek common opportunities and to face common global challenges as partners and friends.

Your Majesty: Ar scáth a chéile a mhairimid. The shadow of the past has become the shelter of the present. While we grieve together for lost lives, we will not let any painful aspect of our shared history deflect us from crafting a future that offers hope and opportunity for the British and Irish people.

We again thank you for the hospitality that allows us, on this most joyous occasion, to celebrate the bonds of mutual understanding between our two peoples, and the warm, enduring friendship on which we have so happily embarked.

I therefore invite you, distinguished guests, to stand and join me in a toast:

To the health and happiness of Her Majesty and His Royal Highness, and the people of the United Kingdom; To a creative cooperation and a sustainable partnership between our countries and our peoples; and To valued neighbours whose friendship we truly cherish.

Go raibh maith agaibh go léir.