

THE RIDDLE

According to Mr. E

The cock crew

The sky was blue:

The bells in heaven

Were striking eleven.

'Tis time for this poor soul

To go to heaven.

The fox burying his grandmother under a hollybush.

Joyce's Version

The cock crew

The sky was blue:

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Original

Riddle me, riddle me right:

What did I see last night?

The wind blew,

The cock crew,

The bells of heaven

Struck eleven.

'Tis time for my poor sowl to go to heaven.

The fox burying his mother under a holly tree.

There is a collection of old Irish riddles collected by Patrick Weston Joyce entitled "English As We Speak It In Ireland" from 1910 in which this is one. However, Joyce changes some of the words and phrases for his own purposes such as in the answer "mother" is the original as opposed to "grandmother" so we know Joyce knew of this riddle and altered it. The original has no clear meaning as it is designed to just be a frustrating joke on whoever tries to solve it. Joyce's alterations suggest there is more to his version.

Syllables

- 3 The cock crew
 - 4 The sky was blue:
 - 5 The bells in heaven
 - 6 Were striking eleven.
-

- 6 'Tis time for this poor soul
- 7 To go to heaven.

The fox burying his grandmother under a hollybush.

Syllables

3 The cock crew
4 The sky was blue:
5 The bells in heaven
6 Were striking eleven.

6 'Tis time for this poor soul
7 To go to heaven.



Past Tense

Present Tense

The fox burying his grandmother under a hollybush.

Syllables

- 3 The cock crew
- 4 The sky was blue:
- 5 The bells in heaven
- 6 Were striking eleven.

Past Tense

DISJOINTED
FROM POEM

- 6 'Tis time for this poor soul
- 7 To go to heaven.

Present Tense

The fox burying his grandmother under a hollybush.

Syllables	3	The cock crew	}	Past Tense
	4	The sky was blue:		
	5	The bells in heaven		
	6	Were striking eleven .		
DISJOINTED FROM POEM	6	'Tis time for this poor soul	}	Present Tense
	7	To go to heaven.		

The fox burying his grandmother under a hollybush.

Rudy, Leopold Bloom's son, would have been eleven-years-old if he had lived.

Dignam's funeral, which Bloom attends, is at 11 a.m.

The cock crew

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To go to heaven.

The fox burying his grandmother under a hollybush.

In Ogham, ancient Irish writing, the letter tinne  is “T” and in medieval kennings means “one of 3 parts of a wheel or weapon.”

6 out of 7 of the riddle’s lines begin with “T” and the odd one out has the word “eleven” (the number of syllables in the last 2 disjointed lines).

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The **fox** burying his **grandmother** under a **hollybush**.

In Ogham, ancient Irish writing, the letter tinne **┆┆┆** is “T” and in medieval kennings means “one of 3 parts of a wheel or weapon. All Ogham letters are associated with plants and tinne is associated with holly, which is one of 3 nouns in consecutive alphabetical order in the answer.

The cock crew
The sky was blue:
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To go to heaven.

The fox burying his grandmother under a hollybush.

Stephen refers to his mother in his own thoughts after revealing the answer to the riddle and says: "A poor soul gone to heaven: and on a heath beneath winking stars a fox, red reek of rapine in his fur, with merciless bright eyes scraped in the earth, listened, scraped up the earth, listened, scraped and scraped. Sitting at his side Stephen solved out his problem.



The fox is Stephen burying his mother, but also the Vulpecula constellation (Fox) commonly seen in the northern hemisphere at its strongest in June/July.

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The fox burying his grandmother under a hollybush.

May, Stephen's mother, was a devout Catholic and a “grand mother” (as opposed to “grandmother”). She was interred on June 26. Holly is strongly associated with Christianity with its red berries symbolizing the blood of Christ and its thorny leaves symbolizing his crown.



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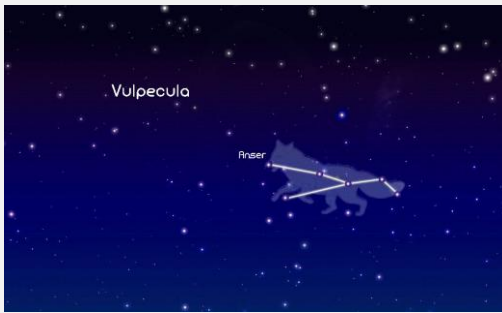
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Rapine means the violent seizure of someone's property. This refers to the seizure of Stephen's family's property due to their financial state. The fox reeks because Stephen has a fear of water and rarely bathes.



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This last phrase which starts the next paragraph could refer to Stephen helping Sargent with his algebra, but it wasn't "his problem"...it was Sargent's problem. This phrase could allude to the solution, instead, to his own subconscious riddle.

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Stephen clearly felt guilt over his mother's death, much as Joyce did for his mother. Stephen sees Sargent, struggling with his schoolwork, as a younger version of himself and thinks about how coddling mothers can be toward their children. This all comes together in his distorted version of the old Irish riddle to reveal his subconscious guilt.