

lingua weekly

Springtime

By Dónal Thompson



Spring is my favourite season. It is the one time of year that is guaranteed to see me smiling and striding along the street full of positive thoughts and magnanimity.

After the frosty winter it is time to make a damage report on the garden. The dahlias have been devastated by the January frost and the thin stem of the nasturtian, brought over from my mother's garden, seems tired and undernourished.

The winter sun has encouraged the hated *madreselva* to creep like a malevolent spider along the fence. The only way to combat its execrable tendrils is to uproot it. This is easier said than done as its roots must now be somewhere between Tasmania and Melbourne.

I have, ready for planting, a small ivy plant (*Parthenocissus Quinquefolio*) that on maturity will spread green and claret leaves along the side wall of the garden. It sits on my bookcase in a green plastic nursery bag trying to contain itself. It has already produced a shoot.

Due to merciless pruning last autumn the housemartins, swifts and sparrows who nested with us last year will have to look elsewhere to set up home. I'll miss the teatime calls of sparrow chicks hidden in foilage. But I'll still enjoy the laughing cries of the swallows sometimes mistaken for bats in the early evening air.

And the human race, for all its technology and talk, is not immune to the cycle of the seasons. Tennyson, the English poet, reminds us in his poem '*Locksley Hall*':

In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love

And who can deny that, as nature renews its vows with the planet, we breathe new life into our plans, our hopes and our loves.

But too much science and too much modern life have, for some, made the springtime a time of blocked sinuses and oozy eyes. Allergies to pollen, what we call 'hay fever'. Have increased dramatically in recent years. We are reduced, in some cases, to dependence on antihistamines and decogestants. Alas, not the stuff of poetry.

In Madrid, summer is just a three month buzz of radiation that fries insects and dessicates plants. That's why I like springtime. A gentle breeze and the warm nuzzle of sunlight.

Some people prefer summer because they can go and climb mountains and swim in the sea. Others prefer the colours of autumn - the oranges, brown and gold of fallen leaves. Some, strange in my opinion, prefer winter and the dark evenings and open fires of the Christmas time.

I suppose we all have a season inside us. Perhaps those of us who love spring have a garden inside us and that explains our joy at this time of the year.