

IRISH PROVERBS AND *EURÓPAI KÖZMONDÁSOK*¹

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Abstract: Dr PACZOLAY's *magnum opus* "Európai Közmondások" affords, among other things, a foundation on which comparative studies can be made. Initially my paper will describe how the Irish language versions it contains, in association with the Celticist Dr A. J. HUGHES, were selected. Of Dr PACZOLAY's one hundred and six common European proverbs, that is, those found in over half of the 55 languages included and present in all five areas of Europe – Central, Western, Eastern, Northern and Southern – Irish language versions were found for over 60%. Those which were found, as well as those which were absent, will be discussed. It is obvious that many common European proverbs, while represented in Ireland, are rare. It seems that often other proverbs with similar interpretations serve as substitutes for those quoted or not present in *EK* in addition there are sometimes Irish variants which are commoner than the standard European. Particular points of style and reference within the Irish language corpus will be highlighted. The corpus will also be compared with those in the other Celtic languages represented in *EK* – its close cousin Scottish Gaelic, and its more distant relatives, Welsh and Breton. Finally, the English language proverbs of Ireland, for which an equivalent percentage for *EK* as those in the Irish language can be found, will be compared.

Keywords: paremiology, European proverbs, Irish proverbs, Celtic proverbs, Hungarian proverbs, biblical proverbs

My first contact with Hungary was more than fifteen years ago when I wrote to Vilmos Voigt in connection with *Proverbium Paratum*, which he had edited. Later, Wolfgang Mieder, that distinguished journal's current editor, suggested that Dr PACZOLAY contact me about Irish² versions for his magnificent work *European Proverbs in 55 languages ... / Európai közmondások 55 nyelven ...*, and it is these which are discussed below.

SELECTION

Ireland, on the north-west fringe of Europe, is a small island with a small population – five million, of whom only a tiny minority, thirty thousand, or less than one percent – use Irish as their first language and of whom all would now be bilingual

¹ PACZOLAY, Gyula: *European Proverbs in 55 Languages ... / Európai közmondások 55 nyelven ...* Veszprém 1997. Here and elsewhere the title has been abbreviated to *EK*; the number indicates the number allocated to the proverb in that publication.

² Irish, also known as Gaelic or Irish Gaelic, is a Celtic language closely related to Scottish Gaelic and Manx (recently revived on the Isle of Man). It is more distantly related to Breton, Welsh and the now extinct Cornish (formerly spoken in Cornwall in the south-west of England).

Irish / English speakers. Despite the small number of speakers, Irish-language versions for sixty-nine of the one hundred and six European proverbs as defined in Gyula PACZOLAY's *European Proverbs ...*³ were obtained. To qualify as a European proverb each had to appear in all of the main geographic regions of Europe – North, Central, South, West and East and in at least 28 of the 55 living languages examined.⁴ My aim in providing the Irish versions was to, as far as possible, endow the corpus with cohesion as regards period and dialect. Proverbs in Irish have been recorded from at least the ninth century and collecting still continues. The selection forwarded to Dr PACZOLAY were, by and large, collected from oral tradition, mostly in the twentieth century and, in the main, belong to the Ulster dialect, which is one of the three dialects in Modern Irish. All have a documented source, whether manuscript or printed.⁵ Preference was given to the variant (for variants did exist for many of the proverbs) most akin to the *lemma* supplied by Dr PACZOLAY. In some cases the closest variant was not the commonest, for example, in the case of *EK 28 Like father, like son*,⁶ *Caidé dhéanfadh mac an chait acht luchóg a mharbhadh?* / *what would the cat's son do only kill a mouse?* and even *An rud atá sa chú tá sé sa choilean / that which is in the hound is in the pup*⁷ are both very common compared with the closest example which was picked: *An cleas a bhíos ag an deaid, bíonn sé ag an mac / the trick the father has, the son has*.⁸ Within this a further preference was given to manuscript versions not previously published. Obviously, where examples inside these parameters were not apparent, the limits set were crossed here and there in order to supply as full a quota of Irish-language proverbs as possible. Dr A. J. HUGHES of the Centre for Irish and Celtic Studies, the University of Ulster

³ PACZOLAY, op. cit.; see Appendix 1 for the 106 and those found in Irish.

⁴ Data for the few remaining has not been included – see PACZOLAY, op. cit., 14 and 24; as this work is bilingual the first page number refers to the English section and the second to the Hungarian.

⁵ For manuscript references the source is the Schools' Manuscript Collection housed in the Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin. It was made in the late 1930s in the twenty-six counties of the Irish Free State, now the Republic of Ireland, by the Irish Folklore Commission. A card index of all of the proverbs in it in both English and Irish for several counties is in the Department. Some of the proverbs quoted here are from the baronies of Boylagh and Kilmacrenan, County Donegal, parts of which remain Irish-speaking to this day; these baronies were indexed by Nóilín NIC LOCHLAINN. Donegal is in Ulster, one of the four provinces of Ireland, the others being Leinster, Munster and Connacht. I wish to thank the Acting Head of the Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin, for permission to quote previously unpublished material from the archive.

⁶ In *EK* the proverbs are arranged in descending order according to the number of languages in which they have been identified therefore *EK 28 Like father, like son* is the twenty-eighth most widespread proverb.

⁷ The former is from Schools' Manuscript Collection Volume 1050, page 205, Boylagh, County Donegal; henceforth such references will be reduced to 'IFC S' followed by the volume and page numbers separated by a colon. The later is from Leaslaoi U. LÚCÁS' *Cnuasach Focal as Ros Goill* ['a collection of words from Ros Goill' (Kilmacrenan)] Baile Átha Cliath, 1986 – one of a series of regional dictionaries – *Deascán Foclóireachta* 5 General Editor Tomás DE BHALDRAITHE, 14 under 'cú', interestingly from a female informant Cáit Bean Uí Chuillinn, born 1901, Gort na Brád, County Donegal. The dates of birth of the informants were kindly supplied by Leaslaoi LÚCÁS in a letter to me 4 / 4 / 88.

⁸ Ó MÁILLE, T. S., *Sean-fhocla Chonnacht* ['Proverbs of Connacht'] Vol. 1, Baile Átha Cliath, 1948. No. 1946. Henceforth in this paper Irish versions published in *EK* will simply be referred to by their *EK* number.

at Coleraine, verified and edited the manuscript versions and also supplied some further versions and provided precise literal translations, all of which I gratefully acknowledge.

BIBLICAL INFLUENCE

Twenty of the corpus of 106 in *EK* occur in the Bible and of these three-quarters, or fifteen, had Irish-language versions. Christianity came to Ireland in the fifth century and monastic writings survive in manuscripts from the sixth century. Through the church from this early time there was continuous contact with Continental Europe and this must also have had its repercussions for the proverb repertoire. It was not until the seventeenth century, however, in line with other languages, that Ireland had a vernacular version of the Old Testament but the impact of this, a version produced by the archbishop of the establishment denomination, which was not that to which the majority of the population belonged, must have been limited.⁹ This, too, was the century which saw the change in power from the old Gaelic order to the new, also bringing with it a new language – English – and complete Bible – Old and New Testaments – in that tongue. From then on the proverb repertoire is responding to the presence of two main languages, Irish and English, and what seems to emerge is an overall corpus of proverbs in which those in the English language are influenced by existing Gaelic models and *vice versa*. Irish-language versions of proverbs instanced in the Bible whether metaphorical or not are usually fairly close to the original which may reflect deference for the well-known source, however, there are a few which display some variation and merit further comment. One, *EK* 9, *He who digs a pit / grave (or sets a snare) for another, will fall into it himself*, is to be found in the Old Testament where it occurs many times and in different forms. While *He who digs a pit ...* is only rarely found in Irish *Is minic a bhain duine slat a sgiúrfadh é fhéin / it is often a person cut a stick which would thrash himself*¹⁰ is common and probably substitutes for it.

Stretch your legs according to the cover [EK 50] does not seem to have been recorded in Irish in this form, however, there are at least five variants, the commonest of which is: *Caithfaidh tú do chota ghearradh do reir do ghreasain / you have to cut your coat according to your roll of cloth*, which is also, but not exclusively, found in other northern European languages such as Icelandic, English, Dutch and German. While other Irish-language variants and, indeed, variants in many languages still refer to cloth, the making of it or apparel, one employs a novel metaphor: *Fuin do reir na mine / knead according to the meal*.¹¹

⁹ BEDEL, Uilliam *Leabhair na Seintiomna / The Books of the Old Testament* London, 1685; the British Library Catalogue citation for this edition adds '[annotated by Murtagh KING and Dennis SHERIDAN]' to the attribution. I thank Siobhán O'RAFFERTY, Librarian of the Royal Irish Academy, 19 Dawson Street, Dublin, 2, for these details.

¹⁰ For example, IFC S 1060:309 Boyleagh, County Donegal.

¹¹ DE BHALDRAITHE, Tomás: *English-Irish Dictionary*, Baile Átha Cliath, 1959. 127 under 'coat'.

IRISH REFERENTS AND STYLE

REFERENTS

With a collection as thoroughly European as those in *EK* it may seem unlikely that specific cultural referents or styles would be present, nevertheless, while some common proverbs stubbornly resist alteration across space, others in Ireland have taken on insular attributes. A case in point is *EK* 2, that is, the proverb found in the second highest number of languages: *As you sow, so you reap*, which is very common in Irish in several variants based around the biblical wording. More specifically Irish versions, however, such as: *Má chuireann tusa scidíní sin is mo scidíní a bheas agat / if you sow small potatoes the greatest you will have will be small potatoes*¹² are also to be found and a similar variant is cited in *EK*. As an adjunct to what I learned as a student from Dr Kevin Danaher reference to the potato in proverb variants stands out in strong contrast to free forms of folk narrative and to folk custom, where the older indigenous foods such as oats and apples retain their place. It reflects the central position the potato came to occupy in what had been a cereal economy.

*Ní féidir leis an ghobadán an dá thráigh a fhreastal / the gobadan cannot serve the two strands*¹³ is also likely to be an insular variant, in this case of: *He who runs after two hares will catch neither* *EK* 67.¹⁴ Dr Christopher MORIARTY, an ornithologist who assisted with *Ainmneacha plandaí agus ainmhithe*,¹⁵ official glossary of plant and animal names, tells me that ‘sandpiper’, which has been used as a translation of ‘gobadán’, would be ‘an acceptable generic term for a number of small [sea]shore birds and includes dunlin and sanderling’¹⁶ all of which are very noticeable because of the way they dart about unceasingly in search of food at low water.

Apart from difficulty with identifying the species there is also difficulty here with the word ‘trá’ as it can be translated ‘strand’, ‘tide’ or ‘low tide’. Since these birds feed at any time that the beach is uncovered whether the tide is ebbing or flowing it seems that ‘strand’ is the likely meaning. English-language versions in Ireland, for example: *The sandlark can’t attend two strands*¹⁷ support this interpretation.

¹² LÚCÁS op. cit., 38 under ‘scidín’, informant Seán Ó Buaigh, born 1906, Tamhnach an Locha, County Donegal.

¹³ This version is from IFC S 1066:31, Kilmacrenan, County Donegal.

¹⁴ Only proverbial expressions *a race of a hound after two hares*, and *a race of the hound after two deer* (Ó MÁILLE, op. cit., Vol. 2, Baile Átha Cliath, 1952, No. 4513 and Énrí Ó MUIRGHEASA, *Seanfhocla Uladh* [‘Proverbs of Ulster’] Baile Átha Cliath, 1907, No. 1001, respectively) were located for this.

¹⁵ *Ainmneacha Plandaí agus Ainmhithe* / Flora and Fauna Nomenclature Oifig an tSoláthair, Baile Átha Cliath, 1978.

¹⁶ Personal electronic mail message, 5 / 5 / 98. I would like to thank Dr MORIARTY for his interest and help.

¹⁷ IFC S 966:294 County Cavan; the words of the English-language Irish variant appear to display some affiliation with the proverb found in the Bible ‘No man can serve two masters’ instanced in Matthew 6 verse 24 (and also Luke 16, verse 18) however, as my husband, Brian WILLIAMS reminded me, the Bible version continues ‘or either he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon’ which is not precisely the sense of *EK* 67. *No man can serve two masters* itself is indeed another of the common European proverbs and is found at *EK* 54. It does occur in Irish but is very rare, the only other version located in addition to the one in *EK* being Ó MÁILLE op. cit., 1952, No. 3693 *Is deacair freastal do dhá mhaighistir / it is difficult to serve two masters*.

In most cases where there is a variant there is also a more standard form and sometimes the standard form is commoner, as in the case of *As you sow* but, as mentioned in my introduction and as regards the *gobadán* above, an insular form can become the commoner one.

With the possible exception of *Praise a good day at night*, EK 64, only proverb 4 in EK – *One swallow does not make summer* – can also be used literally as a weather saying. A common variant, found in many languages including Hungarian, Bulgarian and Romanian, is *One flower makes no spring* which, I suppose, could similarly serve as a weather saying. In Ireland, while swallows themselves are plentiful visitors, the proverb *One swallow* is very rare in Irish. There are variants but they are also rare. Superficially they appear to be simply metaphorical proverbs rather than having a dual function and run as follows: *Ní tread caora / a sheep is not a flock* and *Ní sgaoth breac / a fish is not a shoal*.¹⁸ However, these variants are tied into human livelihood – farming and fishing – which are both precarious activities in Ireland due to the uncertainties of the weather. The variants may therefore incorporate a subliminal or encoded weather element.

The last proverb in this section which I would like to offer for consideration is EK 66: *No rose without a thorn* which, like *One swallow*, is also extremely rare in Irish but has occasionally been found in variants such as *Ba mhinic leis an sgeach gheal dealg ghear a bheith uirthi / the hawthorn [bush / tree (*Crataegus monogyna*)] often has a sharp thorn on it*.¹⁹ Particular flora are seldom mentioned in Irish proverbs but the species in question is one of a small group of ten or so trees which were already in Ireland when the first people arrived and around which lore clusters. Hawthorn is, even nowadays, associated with the supernatural fairyfolk and, indeed, the Queen's University of Belfast has its own fairy thorn which workers refused to fell to make way for a new building.²⁰ This Irish variant, therefore, encapsulates advice on both natural and supernatural dangers.

Proverb 73 in EK – *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth* – appears many times in the Bible in both Testaments in various forms. In Irish we find what must be an equivalent, perhaps of different origin, or possibly a variant: *Beim i n-aghaidh beime*

¹⁸ Both under 'swallow' in DE BHALDRAITHE op. cit., 1959. 731.

¹⁹ Ó MÁILLE, op. cit., 1948. No. 1954.

²⁰ EVANS, E. Estyn, *Irish Heritage*, Dundalk, 1942, 1945 reprint. 168: 'A venerable thorn, pink flowering, stands under my window as I write and casts its shadow into the Senate room of the University. But no one will remove or even lop its branches, and the story goes that when the buildings were being erected the plans had to be changed in order that the thorn should not be interfered with. If a lone tree surrounded by half a dozen scientific departments has claimed such respect it can be imagined in what awe the country thorns are held!' The tree in question must have stood west of the main quadrangle. The wing containing Estyn Evans' office was extended in 1881. In 1962 a new physics building was opened to the west of the quadrangle and that particular tree may have been felled in preparation for this, however, the story seems to have become attached to a second thorn which stands near the Institute of Irish Studies on the boundary of the garden of 75, Fitzwilliam Place. Immediately beside this nineteenth century terrace of three houses, now university property, is the Student Union built in the 1960s. It is said that the thorn should have been felled to make way for it but that workmen refused to tamper with it as it was a fairy thorn.

'gus goin i n-aghaidh gona / blow against blow and wounding against wounding,²¹ and also, *Bualadh ar an mbualadh is buille ar an mbuille / striking upon striking and blow upon blow*.²² The Breton variant runs *Krog evid krog, krav evid krav / [attack by] teeth for [attack by] teeth, [attack by] claw for [attack by] claw*. A similar variant has been recorded in Scottish Gaelic: *Ine air son ine, a Chonain / a claw for a claw, Conan*,²³ and also in Scots: *Claw for claw and the dvil [devil] take the shortest nails*.²⁴ Conán, the speaker, enters the literature in Ireland from the twelfth century.²⁵ He is one of the Fianna, the most famous band of warriors in the hero tales of Ireland and Scotland. Perhaps there is some influence on these North European examples from the single combat frequently described in hero tales? There may also be resonances from the *blason populaire* attached to the Fianna – *Cothrom na Féinne / the even-hand-edness (or fair play) of the Fianna*.²⁶

STYLE

Besides particular referents in Ireland some Irish-language variants of some of the proverbs in *EK* display a particular style. *A good beginning is half the work* [*EK* 40], found in 40 of the 55 languages, is also found in three Celtic languages – Irish and Scottish Gaelic, and Welsh. While the standard form occurs in Irish, all three Celtic languages, as noted by Dr PACZOLAY at *EK* 40, also have interesting variants: *Is trian de'n obair tús a chur / it is a third of the work to begin* (Irish), *Deuparth gwaith yw ei ddechrau / 'two-thirds of a work is to begin it'* (Welsh) and *Is da thrian tionnsgnadh / 'Begun is two-thirds done'*²⁷ (Scottish Gaelic). The predilection for division into thirds or threes in all folklore is maintained or demonstrated here. There are in addition some examples of 'two-thirds' in English-language variants in Ireland, although 'half' is much commoner.

²¹ Ó MÁILLE, op. cit., 1952 No. 4129; see also Thomas F. O'RAHILLY, *A Miscellany of Irish Proverbs*, Dublin, 1922. No. 334.

²² Ó DÓNAILL, Niall, *Foclóir Gaelige-Béarla* ['Irish-English Dictionary'] Baile Átha Cliath, 1977. 153 under 'bualadh'; the dictionary's source for this was Máirtín Ó Cadhain, an Irish speaker born in Connemara, County Galway, Connacht, who died in 1970. Dictionary's source kindly supplied to me by Máire NIC MHAOLÁIN of the Dictionary's editorial team in a letter c. 1988.

²³ MACDONALD, T. D., *Gaelic Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings*, Stirling, not after 1926. No. 595.

²⁴ CHEVIOT, Andrew, *Proverbs, Popular Expressions and Popular Rhymes of Scotland*, Paisley and London, 1896. 76: 'Conan the jester, a Celtic hero, made a vow that he would never take a blow without returning it, and having descended into the infernal regions, he received a cuff from the arch fiend ... which he instantly returned using the expression, "Claw for claw, and the deil ['devil'] take the shortest nails" – "Waverley", note W., ch[apters] 22 and 42. The proverb was used by a man who was resolved to fight manfully, no matter who might have been his opponent, and to return with interest any blows he might receive.' *Waverley* – a novel by Sir Walter SCOTT (1771–1832).

²⁵ See Ó HÓGÁIN, Dáithí, *Myths, Legends and Romance: An Encyclopedia of the Irish Folk Tradition* London, 1990. 110–11.

²⁶ University College Dublin, a college of the National University of Ireland, uses it as its motto; see, too, Ó MÁILLE, op. cit., 1952, No. 2670 and also MACDONALD, op. cit., No. 587.

²⁷ Proverb translations in inverted commas are those of the respective editors of collections.

The most widespread European proverb – the one with which *EK* commences, *No smoke without fire* – has been located by Dr PACZOLAY in every single language except Georgian. It is also very common in Irish, in fact, two extended variants are very common, the dual: *An áit a mbíonn toit bíonn teine, an áit a mbíonn teine bíonn teas / where there is smoke there is fire, where there is fire there is heat* and the quatrain which begins in the same way but continues: *an áit a mbíonn teas bíonn mná agus an áit a mbíonn mná bíonn geab / where there is heat there are women and where there are women there is gossip*. The simple one sentence variant, while it does exist, is much rarer in the record of Irish-language proverbs. As regard the versions in different languages in *EK* only two others – German and Romany [of Yugoslavia, as designated in the 1989 publication from which it came] are extended. The German version with an addition runs: *Ohne Rauch kein Feuer, ohne Mäuse keine Scheuer / ... no store without mice*, however, this is a new metaphor, as opposed to the Irish variant where the extension builds on one metaphor – smoke, fire, heat, women, leading up to the final equation and punch-line – women / gossip. Although each of the extra three sentences could stand alone they do not appear to do so. The extended Romany variant *Naj jag bi thuvesqo, vess bi ruvesquo, ni caxra bi auklesqo / no smoke without fire, forest without wolf, no tent without dog* resembles the one in Irish in that it amplifies one word picture smoke / fire, forest / wolf, tent / dog, however, its stylistic effect rests on contrast, contrast between the danger, darkness and wildness of the forest and its creatures compared to the protection and light at the campfire in the clearing with the domestic dog outside the tent, rather than building up to a climax. Expanding the metaphor, attaching another metaphorical proverb and creating a synonym, although rarely a parody, are all typical strategies adopted in Irish to re-vamp common metaphorical proverbs and instances of all are to be found amongst those in *EK*.²⁸

None of the 106 lemmas in *EK* are Wellerisms or quotation proverbs, however, for one found in the Bible *Misfortunes seldom or never come alone* [*EK* 6] as well as the standard version a Wellerism variant is also to be found: *‘Ní thig an lean leis féin’, mar dúbhairt an tsean-bhean, nuair a cailleadh an fear ’s rug an cearc amuigh / ‘Woe does not come alone’ as the old woman said when her husband died and the hen laid out[doors]*, with the humour lying in the absolute disparity in scale of the two misfortunes. Wellerisms are not common in Irish but there is some evidence for this particular one in the English of Ireland which may well be a strong contributory reason

²⁸ An example of attaching another metaphorical proverb can be found as regards *EK* 14 *A rolling stone gathers no moss* etc., where, as well as having this type in Irish, examples like the following also occur: *Ní chruinnigheann cloch reatha caonach, ach cruinnighean meach siubhal mil / a running stone does not gather moss, but a travelling bee gathers honey*, Ó MÁILLE, op. cit., 1952, No. 2339. An example of a synonym for *EK* 34 *Better one bird in the hand than two in the air* etc., which is the commonest metaphor amongst the Irish examples, would be: *Is fearr gloine anois na beirt ar aist / ‘It is better a glass now than two anon’*, LÚCÁS, op. cit., 3 under ‘anois’, informant Mánas Mac Giolla Bhríde, born 1910, Leargain Riach, County Donegal.

for its occurrence.²⁹ While extending a well worn non-metaphorical proverb by ‘Wellerising’ is an effective way of recharging it this method is rare in Irish. Instead, truisms or apothegms tend to be extended by an explanatory introductory phrase as in the case of *Rather hear / see than speak* [EK 44]: *Má’s maith leat síothchán, cairdeas’s moladh – éist, feic agus fan balbh / if you want peace, friendship and praise – listen, look and remain dumb.*

There are a few personifications in *EK*. Personification is rarer in Irish-language proverbs than those in the English language. Although for *EK* 85 – *Love is blind* – personified versions of the abstract in both languages are to be found the more down to earth metaphor: *Má cuireann tú speis ins an charn aoiligh ní fheicfidh tú an dubhlagan ann*³⁰ / *if you set your heart on the dungheap you will not see the mote in it* is much more popular in both languages.

PROPORTION OF IRISH-LANGUAGE PROVERBS

As regards the number of Dr PACZOLAY’s 106 proverbs found in Irish there are 69³¹ including synonyms which also occur in other languages and are cited for them in *EK*. If one divides the number of versions found in various languages into four with Hungarian, Czech, Dutch, English, French and Italian having the full quota of 106 and being part of the first quarter, Irish falls into the third quarter of languages which have between 58 and 78 of the total. There are ten other languages in that same group and twelve in the group below with the lowest number of versions (22–52). Along with Irish are its close relation Scottish Gaelic with 64 and its neighbour Scots with 65 equivalents. Other languages in that quarter which have almost the same number (although they are totally unrelated) are Icelandic with 69 and Kare-

²⁹ Cf *Dick died and the hen laid out* IFC S 907: 418 County Carlow; cf also the following from a locally composed, long, untitled poem: ‘– In going for a doctor a man must by conny [‘careful’] / For before you’d set out you might count out your money / – To make the long story short he [the doctor] arrived about ten / And pronounced it a bad case and a wonderful pain / – The very next day the poor craythur [creature] died / And my grief was so great that I very near cried / And sure one trouble never comes without two / I usedn’t to heed it, but now I know that it’s true / I got a letter from the Doctor before the next week went round / That for “services rendered” he demanded £2 [‘two pound’] / I wrote back and said “Divil [‘devil’] a penny I’ll pay / Didn’t poor Biddy die the very next day?” –’ IFC S 939:227 County Monaghan. I heartily thank Bairbre Ní FHLOINN, Archivist of the Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin, for her help with the précis of this poem and for her unflinching support.

³⁰ IFC S 1054:136 Boyleagh, County Donegal. An example from the English of Ireland would be: *Love the dunghill and you’ll see no motes in it*, IFC S 966:844 County Cavan.

³¹ The slight discrepancy between this figure and that in *EK* scarcely detracts from the overall picture and is, of course, minor considering the magnificent scale of the work *in toto*. Some differences may possibly be accounted for as follows: 17 and 73 submitted but not included, 102 a synonym not submitted and 33 and 86 not requested? While 73 has been exemplified in the text instances of the others in numerical order follow: 17: *Nuair a bhíos an cat amuigh bíonn na lúcha ag rinnce / when the cat is out the mice dance*, IFC S 1073:314 Kilmacrenan, County Donegal (common), 33: *Is fearr go mall ná go bráth / better late than never* IFC S 931:381 County Monaghan (common), 86: *Mar rinne tú do leabaidh luídh uirthi / ‘As you make your bed lie on it’* Ó MUIRGHEASA, op. cit., No. 1141 and, lastly, 102: *Ní hé an sionnach a bhíos ina chodladh is mó a mharbhuigheas éanlaith / the sleeping fox is not the biggest fowl killer*, Ó MÁILLE, op. cit., 1948, No. 1194.

lian with 63. While these five languages have about equal numbers of equivalents in *EK* one would not expect their repertoires to be identical. However, the biggest overlap might be expected between Irish and Scottish Gaelic as both languages grew from Classical or Early Modern Irish and they had a shared literary tradition. *EK* allows us to show that this is the case.

ENGLISH-LANGUAGE VERSIONS

Most people in Ireland are monoglot English speakers and, although both Scots, ultimately a variety of English, and Scottish Gaelic are included in *EK* for Scotland, Irish Gaelic is the only language included in *EK* for Ireland. This certainly reflects the more advanced state of research into non-standard English in Scotland as opposed to Ireland. However, as most of my own research has been based on English-language proverbs in Ireland, it is possible to make a brief examination of them in relation to the 106. While the full quota of 106 is available in Standard English when we look at the English of Ireland it is a different matter. At the present state of indexing, Irish-language versions, as mentioned, were found for 69 and there appear to be 71 in English. As all 106 occur in Standard English this indicates that language is only a part of what goes into the cultural make up of proverb repertoires.

While 61 were common to both languages there were ten³² which occurred in English but not in Irish and eight³³ which occurred in Irish but not in English. This, of course, leaves a much larger and more significant shared group of 27³⁴ absent from both languages. It is possible that in either language references may yet emerge for the odd proverb but it is unlikely that the overall picture will alter radically. While there are gaps in both languages from *EK* 13: *Ravens ... will not ... pick out ravens' ... eyes*, *EK* 62: *Measure ... two ... times (before you) cut once* is the first one absent entirely for which the same alternative immediately springs to mind: *Ná labhair go deo nó go smaoinighir fa dhó*³⁵ [literally, *never speak until you have twice thought*], the English-language version of which is usually *Think twice before you speak once*³⁶ and other blanks could be filled in this way.

While it is relatively easy to suggest compatible alternatives for those of the 106 absent in both English and Irish it would be more complex to unravel what and why some of them are present in English but not in Irish and the converse. In passing, it can be remarked that with the exceptions noted solely in English of *All's well that*

³² The ten which have been traced in English but not in Irish are: *EK* 31, 43, 46, 52, 61, 76, 77, 81, 103, 106. See Appendix 1 for *lemma*.

³³ The eight which have been traced in Irish but not English are: *EK* 25, 39, 48, 49, 63, 67, 75, 91. See Appendix 1 for *lemma*.

³⁴ The twenty-seven not traced in either language are: *EK* 13, 21, 29, 32, 47, 51, 53, 58, 59, 62, 68, 72, 74, 79, 82, 83, 89, 90, 92, 93, 96, 97, 98, 99, 101, 104, 105. See Appendix 1 for *lemma*.

³⁵ Ó MÁILLE, op. cit., 1948. No. 658.

³⁶ For example, IFC S 934:248 County Monaghan.

ends well [EK 52], where it is very common³⁷ and *They that sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind* [EK 103] noted only once in English³⁸ the repertoire of biblical proverbs matches.

THE COMMONEST PROVERBS IN IRELAND

While *EK* is composed of the 106 commonest proverbs in languages the length and breadth of Europe if one were to pick the top 106 proverbs in Ireland, in either English or Irish, how closely would they compare? Looking at a small booklet *A Hundred Irish Proverbs and Sayings*³⁹ published in 1978, merely six of them (it actually contains 101 proverbs) are also in *EK*. While the editor's selection does not purport to be the commonest proverbs most of them are common. The booklet was commissioned for use in schools as an aid to teaching Irish so the collection was chosen from this perspective some, for instance, illustrating points of grammar. (In the Republic of Ireland Irish is a compulsory part of the curriculum in all primary and secondary education.) Among the six are *EK* 94 *Silence is / means / gives consent: Is minic ciúin ciontach / 'the silent one is often the guilty one'*,⁴⁰ chosen to demonstrate alliteration, and *EK* 37 *A mountain never meets a mountain, but a man meets a man: Castar na daoine le chéile, ach ní chastar na cnoic ná na sléibhte / 'people meet each other but hills and mountains don't'*.⁴¹

Turning to a different kind of collection – a series of 26 postcards⁴² begun approximately nine years ago (in 1989) which comically illustrate Irish proverbs 'as an alternative to the scenery type card'⁴³ three of the widespread European proverbs are represented: *New brooms sweep clean* [EK 12], *A rolling stone gathers no moss* [EK 14] and *Every man has his faults*⁴⁴ [EK 49]. The greater constraints here compared with the usual printed collection are that not only should the proverb be popularly identified as Irish and have a familiar English (-language) version or meaningful translation, but must also inspire the illustrator with a comic image.

³⁷ For example, same location, IFC S 934:248 County Monaghan.

³⁸ *He who sows the storm reaps the whirlwind* IFC S 909:66 County Carlow. While not found in this form in Irish it is interesting to note in DE BHALDRAITHE's English-Irish dictionary, op. cit., 1959, 849 under 'wind': 'sow the wind and reap the whirlwind, ól gloine is caoin dabhach P'[roverb, literally: *drink a glass and cry a vat*]. The same proverbs are in turn quoted in Ó DÓNAILL's Irish-English dictionary, op. cit., 1977, 647 under 'gloine', their source (supplied in Máire NIC MHAOLÁIN's letter mentioned in Note 22) being the earlier dictionary.

³⁹ PARTRIDGE, Angela, *A Hundred Irish Proverbs and Sayings*, Tallaght, 1978, 36 pp.

⁴⁰ PARTRIDGE, 4.

⁴¹ PARTRIDGE, 6.

⁴² The postcards are designed and printed by Chordcraft Cards Ltd., 14 Kenilworth Lane, Harold's Cross, Dublin 6. Six of the series are also produced as notelets in packs of six, single design or assorted.

⁴³ Extract from a letter to me from Anthony CORR, proprietor of Chordcraft Cards Ltd., who adds: 'The conceptual ideas and artwork are my own as drawing and painting are hobbies of mine. I'm afraid my Gaelic is not expert enough to translate the proverbs from English so I have done this by a Gaelic teacher. This in a way governs the choice as some original Irish proverbs don't lend themselves to convenient translation, the Gaelic idiom distorting the sense of the phrase ...' 29 / 4 / 98.

⁴⁴ Chordcraft Cards Ltd., Order Form [Postcards] 1. *Proverbs*, Nos. 21, 1 and 9 respectively.

What is perhaps the best known Irish proverb is included in both these and most other contemporary collections but is not in *EK* – *Níl aon tinteán mar do theinteán fhéin*⁴⁵ / *there is no fireside like your own*. This proverb is known not only to speakers of Irish but also to English speakers, where it is often retained in Irish, most certainly because there is little or no awareness of an English-language version. It is often equated with *There is no place like home*.⁴⁶

Curiously, while this is regarded amongst English speakers as a typical Irish-language proverb it may never have been that widely used by native Irish speakers. Only one of the three chief published collections of Irish proverbs, most recent of which is 1952, for instance, records it.⁴⁷ One must therefore deduce that current widespread knowledge of it is not directly from Irish speakers but perhaps through a printed medium such as school text books.

While it is not at present possible to be precise about the commonest proverbs in Irish, due to an extensive index of English-language proverbs in Ireland⁴⁸ one is able to be more exact. Taking the county of Monaghan, for example, of a total of approximately 1000 different proverbs the six commonest in descending order are: *It's a long lane that has no turning*, *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*, *Far away fields are green*, *Too many cooks spoil the broth*, *A new broom sweeps clean* and *You will never miss the water till the well runs dry*. So we can see that, at his period at least, that is, the late 1930s, two – *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush* and *A new broom sweeps clean* – of the six commonest are also among the commonest 106 in Europe. The time span in *EK* is, of course, much more expansive and it is quite likely if only collections made in the twentieth century had been included the repertoire would vary.

This short paper has, I hope, given a glimmer of the possibilities into regional studies which could flow from the comparative *opus* of Dr PACZOLAY. To conclude I would like to express my gratitude to Wolfgang MIEDER for forwarding my name in the first place to Dr PACZOLAY, leading not only to wider opportunities, but also to friendship.

⁴⁵ PARTRIDGE, 15, Chordcraft Cards Ltd., Order Form [Postcards] 1. *Proverbs*, No. 2 and Chordcraft Notelets No. F 2.

⁴⁶ While this is nowadays certainly the better-known English proverb along these lines compare: *One's own fire is pleasant*, F. P. and Joanna WILSON, Editors, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, Oxford 3rd edition 1970, 1975 reprint. 604.

⁴⁷ Ó MÁILLE, op. cit., 1952. No. 3007.

⁴⁸ See Note 5.

APPENDIX 1

List showing the full complement of 106 common European proverbs as researched and published by PACZOLAY in *European Proverbs in 55 Languages ... / Európai közmondások 55 nyelven ...*. Where the book has alternatives in the *lemma* only the first appears in this list, neither are the variants included. Those shown in bold occur in Ireland, not necessarily in the *lemma* form. Those traced in both Irish and English in Ireland are followed by 'Both', those in Irish only 'Irish only' and those in English only 'English only'.

| | | |
|----|----|---|
| EK | 1 | <i>No smoke without fire.</i> Both |
| EK | 2 | <i>As you sow, so you reap.</i> Both |
| EK | 3 | <i>A dog barking does not bite.</i> Both |
| EK | 4 | <i>One swallow does not make a spring.</i> Both |
| EK | 5 | <i>Look not a gift horse in the mouth.</i> Both |
| EK | 6 | <i>Misfortunes seldom come alone.</i> Both |
| EK | 7 | <i>The shoemaker has bad shoes.</i> Both |
| EK | 8 | <i>Two eyes see more than one.</i> Both |
| EK | 9 | <i>He who digs a pit for another, will fall into it himself.</i> Both |
| EK | 10 | <i>So many men, so many minds.</i> Both |
| EK | 11 | <i>Never put off till tomorrow, what may be done today.</i> Both |
| EK | 12 | <i>New brooms sweep clean.</i> Both |
| EK | 13 | <i>Ravens will not pick out ravens' eyes.</i> |
| EK | 14 | <i>A rolling stone gathers no moss.</i> Both |
| EK | 15 | <i>A spark may kindle a great fire.</i> Both |
| EK | 16 | <i>Strike while the iron is hot.</i> Both |
| EK | 17 | <i>When the cat is away, the mice will dance.</i> Both |
| EK | 18 | <i>Fields have eyes.</i> Both |
| EK | 19 | <i>All that glitters is not gold.</i> Both |
| EK | 20 | <i>You see the mote in another's eye but fail to see the beam in your own.</i> Both |
| EK | 21 | <i>Like mother, like daughter.</i> |
| EK | 22 | <i>Walls have ears.</i> Both |
| EK | 23 | <i>Empty vessels make much sound.</i> Both |
| EK | 24 | <i>God helps those who help themselves.</i> Both |
| EK | 25 | <i>A horse has four legs and still it stumbles.</i> Irish only |
| EK | 26 | <i>A true friend is known in need.</i> Both |
| EK | 27 | <i>Far from the eye, far from the heart.</i> Both |
| EK | 28 | <i>Like father, like son.</i> Both |
| EK | 29 | <i>Hand washes hand.</i> |
| EK | 30 | <i>In at one ear and out at the other.</i> Both |
| EK | 31 | <i>One learns while one lives.</i> English only |
| EK | 32 | <i>The wolf may change its hair but not its nature.</i> |
| EK | 33 | <i>Better late than never.</i> Both |

- EK 34 **Better one bird in the hand than two in the air.** *Both*
- EK 35 **If a blind man leads a blind man both shall fall into a ditch.** *Both*
- EK 36 **Give him an inch and he will take an ell.** *Both*
- EK 37 **A mountain never meets a mountain, but a man meets a man.** *Both*
- EK 38 **Do not sell the bear's skin before the bear is caught.** *Both*
- EK 39 **An unbidden guest knows not where to sit.** *Irish only*
- EK 40 **Begun is half the work.** *Both*
- EK 41 **Blood is not water.** *Both*
- EK 42 **He that climbs high, falls deep.** *Both*
- EK 43 **Make haste slowly.** *English only*
- EK 44 **Rather hear than speak.** *Both*
- EK 45 **One's shirt is nearer than one's coat.** *Both*
- EK 46 **A tree is not felled at one stroke.** *English only*
- EK 47 **He that will not work, shall not eat.**
- EK 48 **The apple does not fall far from the tree.** *Irish only*
- EK 49 **Every man has his faults.** *Irish only*
- EK 50 **Stretch your legs according to the cover.** *Both*
- EK 51 **Children tell the truth.**
- EK 52 **End good everything good.** *English only*
- EK 53 **He that has not head, should have feet.**
- EK 54 **Nobody can serve two masters.** *Both*
- EK 55 **The pitcher only goes so long to the water until it breaks.** *Both*
- EK 56 **One scabbed sheep will mar a flock.** *Both*
- EK 57 **Do not do unto others that which you do not like to be done to you.** *Both*
- EK 58 **Fish and guests smell in three days.**
- EK 59 **He that greases, travels.**
- EK 60 **Man proposes, God disposes.** *Both*
- EK 61 **The master's eye makes the horse fat.** *English only*
- EK 62 **Measure many times cut once.**
- EK 63 **The pot abuses the kettle.** *Irish only*
- EK 64 **Praise the day at sunset.** *Both*
- EK 65 **A prophet is not honoured in his own country.** *Both*
- EK 66 **No rose without a thorn.** *Both*
- EK 67 **If one runs after two hares, one will catch neither.** *Irish only*
- EK 68 **He adds oil to the fire.**
- EK 69 **To buy a cat in a poke.** *Both*
- EK 70 **The cat would eat fish but would not wet her feet.** *Both*
- EK 71 **Constant dropping wears away the stone.** *Both*
- EK 72 **Every beginning is difficult.**
- EK 73 **An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.** *Both*
- EK 74 **One must howl with the wolves.**
- EK 75 **He that lies also steals.** *Irish only*
- EK 76 **Silence is gold.** *English only*
- EK 77 **He carries water in a sieve.** *English only*

- EK 78 ***Still waters are deep.*** Both
 EK 79 *All cats are alike in the dark.*
 EK 80 ***Clothes do not make the man.*** Both
 EK 81 ***A man drowning will catch at a straw.*** English only
 EK 82 *Every man is the architect of his own fortune.*
 EK 83 *It is good fishing in troubled waters.*
 EK 84 ***He laughs well who laughs last.*** Both
 EK 85 ***Love is blind.*** Both
 EK 86 ***As you make your bed so you will lie upon it.*** Both
 EK 87 ***If an ass goes abroad an ass will return.*** Both
 EK 88 ***Out of a fly he makes an elephant.*** Both
 EK 89 *Long hair and short brain.*
 EK 90 *An ox is taken by the horns, and a man by his tongue.*
 EK 91 ***Big fish eat little fish.*** Irish only
 EK 92 *The devil is not so black as he is painted.*
 EK 93 *Time is money.*
 EK 94 ***Silence is consent.*** Both
 EK 95 ***Sweep before your own door.*** Both
 EK 96 *All roads go to Rome.*
 EK 97 *Fish always begin to stink at the head.*
 EK 98 *In the kingdom of the blind the one eyed is king.*
 EK 99 *Appetite comes with eating.*
 EK 100 ***Rome was not built in one day.*** Both
 EK 101 *He who gives quickly gives twice.*
 EK 102 ***Roast pigeon does not fly into one's mouth.*** Both
 EK 103 ***They that sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind.*** English only
 EK 104 *There is nothing new under the sun.*
 EK 105 *Let the shoemaker stick to his last.*
 EK 106 ***It's an ill bird that soils its own nest.*** English only

APPENDIX 2

Headings and proverbs cited in text (Lemma in bold italic).

SELECTION

EK 28 Like father, like son

Caidé dhéanfadh mac an chait acht luchóg a mharbhadh? ‘what would the cat’s son do only kill a mouse?’

An rud atá sa chú tá sé sa choilean ‘that which is in the hound is in the pup’

An cleas a bhíos ag an deaid, bíonn sé ag an mac ‘the trick the father has, the son has’

BIBLICAL

EK 9 He who digs a pit / grave (or sets a snare) for another, will fall into it himself

Is minic a bhain duine slat a sgiúrfadh é fhéin ‘it is often a person cut a stick which would thrash himself’

EK 50 Stretch your legs according to the cover

Caithfaidh tú do chota ghearradh do reir do ghreasain ‘you have to cut your coat according to your roll of cloth’

Fuin do reir na mine ‘knead according to the meal’

IRISH REFERENTS AND STYLE

Referents

EK 2 As you sow, so you reap

Má chuireann tusa scidíní sin is mo scidíní a bheas agat ‘if you sow small potatoes the greatest you will have will be small potatoes’

EK 67 He who runs after two hares will catch neither

Ní féidir leis an ghobadán an dá thráigh a fhreastal ‘the gobadan [sandpiper] cannot serve the two strands’

The sandlark can't attend two strands English-language version

EK 64 Praise a good day at night

EK 4 One swallow does not make summer

One flower makes no spring / summer

Ní tread caora ‘a sheep is not a flock’ & *Ní sgaoth breac* ‘a fish is not a shoal’

EK 66 No rose without a thorn

Ba mhinic leis an sgeach gheal dealg ghear a bheith uirthi ‘the hawthorn [bush / tree (*Crataegus monogyna*)] often has a sharp thorn on it’

EK 73 An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth

Beim i n-aghaidh beime 'gus goin i n-aghaidh gona ‘blow against blow and wounding against wounding’ & *Bualadh ar an mbualadh is buille ar an mbuille* ‘striking upon striking and blow upon blow’ both Irish

Krog evid krog, krav evid krav ‘[attack by] teeth for [attack by] teeth, [attack by] claw for [attack by] claw’ Breton

Ine air son ine, a Chonain ‘a claw for a claw, Conan’ Scottish Gaelic

‘Claw for claw’, and the deil [devil] take the shortest nails

Comhthrom Féinne ‘the even-handedness [or fair play] of the Fianna’

Style

EK 40 A good beginning is half the work

Is trian de'n obair tús a chur 'it is a third of the work to begin' Irish

Deuparth gwaith yw ei ddechrau 'two-thirds of a work is to begin it' Welsh

Is da thrian tionnsgnadh 'begun is two-thirds done' Scottish Gaelic

Ek 1 No smoke without fire

An áit a mbíonn toit bíonn teine, an áit a mbíonn teine bíonn teas 'where there is smoke there is fire, where there is fire there is heat' and the same + *an áit a mbíonn teas bíonn mná agus an áit a mbíonn mná bíonn geab* 'where there is heat there are women and where there are women there is gossip' both Irish

Ohne Rauch kein Feuer, ohne Mäuse keine Scheuer 'no smoke without fire, no store without mice' German

Naj jag bi thuvesqo, vess bi ruvesquo, ni càxra bi 3uklesqo Romany (of Yugoslavia, as designated in the 1989 publication)

EK 6 Misfortunes seldom / never come alone

'Ní thig an lean leis féin', mar dúbhairt an tsean-bhean, nuair a cailleadh an fear 's rug an cearc amuigh '“Woe does not come alone” as the old woman said when her husband died and the hen laid out[doors]'

EK 44 Rather hear / see than speak

Má's maith leat síothchán, cairdeas 's moladh – éist, feic agus fan balbh 'if you want peace, friendship and praise – listen, look and remain dumb'

EK 85 Love is blind

Má cuireann tú speis ins an charn aoiligh ní fheicfidh tú an dubhlagan ann 'if you set your heart on the dung-heap you will not see the mote in it'

PROPORTION OF IRISH-LANGUAGE PROVERBS

Pye charts, no proverb individually cited

ENGLISH-LANGUAGE VERSIONS

EK 62 Measure...two...times (before you) cut once

cf *Ná labhair go deo nó go smaoinighir fa dhó* 'never speak until you have twice thought' Irish-language

cf *Think twice before you speak once* English-language

EK 52 All's well that ends well**EK 103 They that sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind**

He who sows the storm reaps the whirlwind

THE COMMONEST PROVERBS IN IRELAND

Irish-language

EK 94 Silence is / means / gives consent

Is minic ciúin ciontach ‘the silent one is often the guilty one’

EK 37 A mountain never meets a mountain, but a man meets a man

Castar na daoine le chéile, ach ní chastar na cnoic ná na sléibhte ‘the people meet together but the hills and mountains do not meet’

EK 12 New brooms sweep clean

Scuab nua is fearr a scuabas an teach ‘a new brush sweeps the house best’

EK 14 A rolling stone gathers no moss

Ní bhailíonn cloch reatha craonach

EK 49 Every man has his faults

Ní bhíonn saoi gan locht ‘there is no wise man without fault’

Níl aon tinteán mar do theinteán fhéin ‘there is no fireside like your own’
cf *There is no place like home*

English-language

It's a long lane has no turning

EK 34 Better one bird in the hand than two in the air

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush

Far away fields are green

Too many cooks spoil the broth

EK 12 New brooms sweep clean

A new broom sweeps clean

You 'll never miss the water till the well runs dry.

EK: Európai Közmondások Gyula PACZOLAY, Veszprém, 1997

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