

Hungarian Perspectives on Ireland

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Edited by **Krisztina Kodó, Dóra Pődör**



KÁROLI GÁSPÁR UNIVERSITY
OF THE REFORMED CHURCH
IN HUNGARY

L'Harmattan

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Hungarian Perspectives on Ireland

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Krisztina Kodó, Dóra Pődör

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INTRODUCTION



The Editors

KRISZTINA KODÓ, DÓRA PÖDÖR

The present volume aims to showcase the diversity of Irish Studies in Hungary; its significance also lies in the fact that it is the first publication of its kind. The volume brings together thirteen studies that reflect a wide range of subject matters, historical periods, and geographical perspectives. Its scope extends from medieval hagiography to analyses of contemporary writers. The topics are approached from the perspectives of history, literary theory, film studies, and linguistics, while certain aspects of Irish–Hungarian, Irish–American, Irish–Sri Lankan, and Irish–European relations are also explored. The contributors’ academic backgrounds are similarly diverse: some are at the beginning of their scholarly careers and are currently enrolled in master’s or doctoral programs, while others are well-established Hungarian scholars of Irish Studies. In addition, the volume includes a contribution by an Irish colleague who has been working in Hungarian higher education for many years.

Both terms in the title, “Irish Studies” and “in Hungary”, are understood in a broad sense in this book. Accordingly, “Irish Studies” encompasses research related to language and linguistics, while “in Hungary” also includes the work of the Irish colleague mentioned above.

The first part of the volume, entitled “Historical Perceptions”, contains five studies that examine historical connections and relationships. László Takács traces the origins of the Irish Saint Columbanus’s veneration for the Pannonian-born bishop Saint Martin of Tours. Examining evidence from hagiographical and historical sources, he draws attention to the fact that the founding of the monastery of Bobbio in northern Italy could ultimately be traced back to Saint Martin. Eglantina Remport explores the interest of Sir William Gregory, a prominent Anglo-Irish figure and high-ranking British colonial official of the nineteenth century, in the Pali Buddhist manuscripts of Sri Lanka, as well as his role in establishing the Colombo Museum in Ceylon. She situates Gregory’s activities within the broader context of what was then referred to in Great Britain as “Southern Buddhism”. Michael McAteer’s study presents and analyzes in detail the agricultural cooperative, socialist, and nationalist ideas published around the turn of the twentieth century in *The Irish Homestead*, the weekly journal of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society. The writings published in this journal provide valuable insight into how certain

Irish thinkers attempted to chart a community-based path of development for rural Ireland at the time. Lili Zách places the work of the Northern Irish civil rights activist Bernadette Devlin in the context of the African American non-violent civil rights movement and wider anti-colonial movements, highlighting the importance of the protest song “We Shall Overcome” within the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland between 1968 and 1972. This section concludes with a lexicographic study by Dóra Pődör, who examines Ireland- and Irish English-related content in two pairs of English–Hungarian and Hungarian–English dictionaries. She organizes the material into semantic groups, including terms connected to geography, personal names, history, politics and institutions, food and drink, and music and dance. By comparing this type of content across the dictionaries, she identifies certain information gaps and draws attention to the complex decisions that lexicographers must make.

The second part of the volume consists of three studies whose central focus is poetry and film. Péter Dolmányos analyzes the role of the opening poems in the collections of the Nobel Prize-winning Irish poet Seamus Heaney and offers an original perspective on the ideas underlying the poet’s deliberate selection of these poems. Dolmányos argues that the arc of movement evident within each collection assigns a significant role to its opening poem. Fanni Fekete-Nagy explores the creative reimagining of the Virgin Mary in the works of two outstanding contemporary Irish poets, Éiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and Medbh McGuckian. Drawing on the concept of ekphrasis, she guides the reader through her argument by adopting an interdisciplinary approach that combines literary analysis with an examination of the visual details in both the poems and the paintings to which they respond. The final study in this section is Gréta Alberti’s analysis of the representation of childhood and family dynamics in the Oscar-nominated, predominantly Irish-language film *The Quiet Girl* (*An Cailín Ciúin*), as well as in several other Irish short films. Alberti draws attention to positive changes in the depiction of childhood in Irish cinema, and her perceptive analysis demonstrates how cinematic devices such as camera position, lighting, and spatial composition emphasize the emotional world of the quiet girl.

The third part of the volume also contains five studies, this time focusing on prose and drama. Gabriella Hartvig examines the reception of Jonathan Swift’s *Drapier’s Letters* in Hungary during the 1950s and 1960s, demonstrating convincingly how the developing scholarship on Swift at the time was strongly influenced by Soviet interpretations grounded in socialist realism. These interpretations emphasized aspects of Swift’s writings and beliefs that appeared compatible with contemporary communist ideology. Márta Pellérdi offers a comparative analysis of two short stories: *A Memory* by the Irish American writer Mary Lavin and *The Beast in the Jungle* by the Anglo-American author Henry James. She persuasively demonstrates James’s influence on Lavin’s

portrayal of lives marked by emotional and existential unfulfillment. Borbála Ribáry examines the interrelations of gender and space in the play *Portia Coughlan* by the contemporary Irish playwright Marina Carr. Her vivid presentation and detailed analysis reveal the complexity of the play and the ways in which it achieves the dramatic effects intended by its author. Krisztina Kodó investigates the role of cultural memory, metaphorical imagery, and identity relations in the novel *The Heart in Winter* by contemporary Irish author Kevin Barry, published in 2024. She offers thought-provoking insights into the construction of Irishness in the novel and argues that literature enables memory to migrate beyond the boundaries of the nation. The sequence of studies concludes with Mária Kurdi's contribution, which provides a detailed analytical overview of the work of Hungarian scholars who have examined the writings of Irish women playwrights. Her analysis highlights the richness of Hungarian scholarship in this field.

The final section of the volume presents translations by five translators, as well as an interview with an Irish Traveller storyteller. The translations cover a broad range, from Irish ballads and contemporary authors to a folktale from the Irish Traveller tradition, and they showcase the work of both experienced and emerging translators.

The editors hope that this volume will contribute to the development of Irish Studies in Hungary and will find an audience among scholars and students both at home and abroad.

The editors dedicate this volume to the memory of Dr. Ferenc Takács, Associate Professor and one of the founders of Irish Studies in Hungary, who taught and inspired many of us. A longstanding and highly respected scholar of Irish Studies, and President of the James Joyce Society in Hungary, he passed away on 5 December 2025. He would undoubtedly have been included among the contributors to this volume, and his absence is deeply felt.

The editors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the two expert readers and the twenty-three anonymous peer-reviewers whose thoughtful and constructive reports not only provided encouragement but also helped to identify shortcomings and make the necessary corrections to the manuscript.

The editors also gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Irish Studies Programme Project (ESP), Dublin, Ireland. They are equally indebted to the Irish Embassy in Budapest for its encouragement and support, and in particular to His Excellency Ragnar Almqvist, Ambassador to Hungary.

PART I



HISTORICAL PERCEPTIONS

SAINT COLUMBANUS AT THE TOMB OF SAINT MARTIN OF TOURS



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Abstract

The life story of Saint Columbanus was written by Jonas of Bobbio, who became a monk at the monastery in Bobbio three years after the death of the legendary abbot, in his work Vita Sancti Columbani. Jonas gives a detailed account of the conflicts that forced Columbanus to leave the monastery he had founded in Luxeuil, and how he set out on his journey back to his native Ireland. During their journey along the Loire, Columbanus and his exiled monks arrived in the city of Tours, where special and miraculous events took place that had an impact on Columbanus's entire future destiny. The study focuses on the question of where Columbanus's veneration of St. Martin originated: whether it was influenced by his time on the continent, where he held the confessor bishop in high esteem, or whether we should rather think that he brought the most essential elements of the cult with him from Ireland. Considering other Irish hagiographies and the folk customs and rituals associated with the feast of St. Martin in Ireland, Columbanus's tradition from his homeland laid the foundation for his unparalleled veneration of the saint.

KEYWORDS

Saint Columbanus, Jonas of Bobbio, cult of Saint Martin, miracle, biography

¹ The research and preparation of this study were financially supported by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary, within the framework of the PPKE-BTK-KUT-25-4 project.

Saint Benedict may still have been alive when, around 540, another influential figure in Western European monasticism – Saint Columbanus (or Columban) – was born in Ireland. The first four decades of his life passed almost uneventfully, as nothing remarkable is recorded of him except that he lived the ordinary life of a monk. He first lived at Lough Erne (Loch Éirne) in County Fermanagh, where he composed his now-lost commentary on the Book of Psalms, and later entered the famous monastery of Bangor, under its abbot, Saint Comgall (Comgallus in Latin).²

Here he received permission from Comgall to leave the monastery and undertake a pilgrimage to the Continent. Columbanus was already over forty when he set out with twelve fellow monks. They first crossed the Irish Sea – landing first on the coast of Britain – and in 585 arrived in Brittany, now part of France, then inhabited by Celts. The memory of Columbanus remains strong in this region even today.³

The Irish monks did not remain in Armorica, however, but travelled on to Burgundy, where King Gontram received them with respect and granted them the abandoned Roman fort of Annegray for settlement and the founding of a monastery. A few years later, the king granted them another site at nearby Luxovium (modern Luxeuil), where they established what would become a renowned monastic center on the ruins of another Roman fort.

Columbanus's influence extended far beyond the founding of monasteries.⁴ He acted with great vigor and determination in matters concerning the Gallic Church and the political life of the region, which inevitably led to conflicts with both ecclesiastical leaders and secular authorities.⁵ As an Irish monk, Columbanus represented the distinctive ecclesiastical and monastic tradition of the Irish Church, in which authority was typically exercised not by bishops but by abbots, the heads of monastic communities. For this reason, Columbanus felt justified in dealing with bishops as equals.

Several issues caused tension, but the most significant was the dispute over the calculation of Easter. The Celtic churches followed a different method of determining the date of Easter from that used by Rome, with the result that some Christian communities – especially those under Irish influence – celebrated the Resurrection at a different time from those in Italy or North Africa. Columbanus took an extraordinarily firm position in favor of the Celtic

² For Saint Comgall, see Saint Comgall of Bangor, *Omnium Sanctorum Hiberniae*, the online database of Irish saints: www.omniumsanctorumhiberniae.com.

³ Jacques Baudoin: *Grand livre des saints, Culte et iconographie en Occident*, Créer, Nonette, 2006, 173.

⁴ About his interacting with local residents see: O'Hara, Alexander (ed.), *Columbanus and the peoples of post-Roman Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

⁵ George Metlake: *Life and Writings of St. Columbanus, 542–615*, Philadelphia, The Dolphin Press, 1914, 145–154.

calculation,⁶ as is most clearly demonstrated by his letter to Pope Gregory I on the subject.

This dispute was still unresolved when Columbanus became entangled in conflict with the Frankish royal family. After the death of King Gontram (532–592), Childebert II (570–596), the son of Sigebert I of Austrasia (535–575) and Brunhilda (543–613), ascended the throne.⁷ Upon Childebert's death, his two sons, Theuderic II (587–613) and Theudebert II (585–612), divided the realm between them: Theuderic became ruler of Burgundy, while Theudebert ruled Austrasia. Because both were minors, real power fell to their grandmother, the formidable Brunhilda.

Although Theuderic II respected Columbanus, the monk openly expressed his disapproval when the king fathered an illegitimate child. This provoked Brunhilda's anger. Determined to take revenge, she sought to turn both ecclesiastical and secular leaders against him. She succeeded to some extent: Columbanus was arrested and imprisoned at Besançon. He escaped, however, and returned to the monastery at Luxeuil.

Brunhilda then resolved that Columbanus could no longer remain in the kingdom and that he should be sent back to Ireland. Under military escort he was taken to the town of Nancy on the banks of the Loire, from where he and his companions were placed on a small boat – or perhaps a somewhat larger vessel, described in the Latin text as a *scapha* – to be transported back to Ireland.

We know the stages of Columbanus's journey – as well as many later events of his life — thanks to Jonas of Bobbio, who entered the monastery founded by Columbanus at Bobbio (near Piacenza) three years after the abbot's death and composed the *Vita Sancti Columbani* on the basis of eyewitness testimony from those who had known the Irish abbot personally. The next major city along the Loire was Orléans, and shortly thereafter the group reached Tours, also situated on the river and renowned as the city of Bishop Saint Martin. Jonas provides a detailed account of the events that occurred there, unsurprising given that Tours represented one of the most significant points on Columbanus's journey and that the cult of Saint Martin was already widely established.⁸ The credibility of Jonas's narrative is further strengthened by the near-contemporary nature of the *Vita*: even if one were inclined to question the author's reliability or to suspect later embellishment of the cult of Saint Martin, such doubts are substantially diminished by the fact that the text is not a compilation produced

⁶ On the controversy surrounding the date of Easter, see E.T. Dailey, 'To choose one Easter from three: Oswiu's decision and the Northumbrian synod of AD 664', *Peritia* 26 (2015), 47–64.

⁷ Yitzhak Hen: *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, AD 481–751*, Brill, Leiden – New York – Cologne, 1995, 201.

⁸ The question of what Irish roots Columbanus's veneration of St. Martin had can obviously be raised, but this study does not deal with it because it would lead too far afield. On the knowledge of Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Sancti Martini* see: REEVES, William: *The Memoir of the Book of Armagh*, Lusk Vicarage, 1861, 4.

centuries – or even decades – after the events. As an almost contemporary record, it offers accounts, particularly those concerning the cult of a saint, that are far less open to suspicion and far more deserving of trust.

According to the *Vita Sancti Columbani*, when Columbanus arrived at Tours by river, his escorts, who were supervising and controlling his departure, refused to allow the boat to moor, despite the monk's pleas. At this point, however, a miraculous event occurs, which Jonas recounts as follows:

Sailing along the Loire they come to the city of Tours. There the holy man begs the guards to take the boat into port and allow him to visit the tomb of the blessed confessor Martin. The guards refuse and force the oarsmen to move on energetically, urging them to pass the port quickly, while ordering the helmsman to keep the boat mid-stream. Seeing this, blessed Columba sadly raises his face to Heaven, complaining that he is so loaded with sorrows that he is not allowed to see the tombs of the saints. Although everyone is straining hard, as soon as they came opposite the port, the boat comes to a standstill, as if someone had dropped anchor, and its prow began to turn towards the port. When the guards could not stop it, they reluctantly allow the boat to go where it would. In an amazing way it speeds, as if winged, from mid-stream to the port and having reached it opens the way for the man of God. Columbanus gives thanks to the Eternal King, who does not disdain to comply with the wishes of His servants. Having safely landed, Columbanus goes to the tomb of blessed Martin and spends the whole night there in prayer.⁹

This scene serves merely as an introduction to the marvelous and significant events in Tours, yet it remains unclear what caused the guards' efforts to fail and Columbanus's wish to be fulfilled. Was it the power of Columbanus's prayer, or that of Saint Martin, whose relics Columbanus sought to venerate? The narrator's words at the beginning of the episode do not indicate that Saint Martin played any role in making the miracle possible, so it seems most likely that the author intends to suggest that the will of the otherwise stubborn and determined Columbanus prevailed. This is not surprising, considering what Columbanus wrote in his fourth letter while in exile: although his superiors wished him to return to Ireland, his guards were not particularly strict with him, leading him to suspect – rightly, as it later turned out – that he could escape if he desired.¹⁰ Indeed, they eventually allowed him to depart for northern Italy instead of returning to his homeland.

⁹ Ionae Bobbiensis *Vita Sancti Columbani*, 1, 22. Translated by Alexander O'Hara. In: *Jonas of Bobbio, Life of Columbanus, Life of John Réomé, and Life of Vedast*, translated with introduction and commentary by Alexander O'Hara and Ian Wood, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2017, 147.

¹⁰ CELT, Letters of Columbanus, Epistula 4,7: *Nunc mihi scribenti nuntius supervenit, narrans mihi navem parari, qua invitatus vehar in meam regionem; sed si fugiero, nullus vetat custos; nam hoc videntur velle, ut ego fugiam.* (Corpus of Electronic Texts Edition, <https://celt.ucc.ie>)

In this scene, however, what stands out is Columbanus's intense desire to visit the tomb of Saint Martin. This raises several questions. On the one hand, it is clear that Columbanus was motivated not only by personal reverence but also by the broader, contemporary ecclesiastical cult of Saint Martin, which had already made Tours a major pilgrimage site. On the other hand, it is uncertain what lay at the root of Columbanus's devotion to Saint Martin. Did he bring it with him from Ireland, or was it a relatively new development, something he encountered only after arriving on the Continent? In other words, was Columbanus shaped primarily by the cult of Saint Martin as it existed in the Irish Church, or by that of the Gallic Church? To answer this question reliably, we must look back a little further.

Saint Martin is regarded as the founder and primary promoter of Eastern monasticism within the Western Church.¹¹ By establishing monasteries, he contributed immeasurably to the spread of monastic life. Irish monasteries later came to play a particularly significant role in the history of Western monasticism, owing to the combined effect of several factors. Among these, one should emphasize that, unlike other regions of Western Europe, the island of Ireland was never conquered by the Romans. Thus, while in Italy, Gaul, and North Africa Christianity emerged as a cultural rival to pagan Roman and other cults within a Roman or heavily Romanized social environment, in Ireland it was Christianity itself that brought cultural benefits – such as literacy – that elsewhere were not the exclusive preserve of Christians.

In this way, Christianity offered the Irish the possibility of remarkable cultural advancement compared with their traditional oral culture. They embraced these opportunities, and in the decades following the mission of Saint Patrick, roughly during the 5th century, at a time when the Western Roman Empire was disintegrating, the Irish succeeded in compensating for the developmental “gap” created by the absence of Roman conquest. As a result, during the 5th and 6th centuries – on an island where no towns existed prior to the Viking Age – the monasteries founded in rapid succession became important centers of learning and culture.

Although scholarly opinion is not entirely uniform on the subject, it appears, as the example of Saint Patrick suggests, that the Christianization of Ireland was influenced in part by the Gauls, who were themselves Celtic Christians, as well as by Welsh and pre-Anglo-Saxon British Christianity, and by the

¹¹ Sylvie Labarre: Szent Márton és a szerzetesség a Vita Martini prózai és verses változataiban [Saint Martin and Monasticism in the Prose and Verse Versions of *Vita Martini*], *Világtörténet*, 2016, 1, 69–85. Especially p. 69. Allan Scott McKinley: Tours-i Szent Márton tiszteletének első kétszáz éve [The First Two Hundred Years of the Veneration of Saint Martin of Tours], *Világtörténet*, 2016, 1, 119–145.

Church of Hispania.¹² This implies that Irish Christians maintained close ties with other Celtic churches.¹³ (In the case of Saint Patrick, for example, the view that he studied in Gaul was not totally rejected.) Therefore, even if we assume that Columbanus brought the cult of Saint Martin with him from Ireland, we may still conclude that the form of the cult he encountered ultimately originated in Gaul.¹⁴

Among the valuable documents of hagiographic literature are the Irish hagiographies,¹⁵ whose monastic authors often lived long after the saints whose lives they recorded and who, for the most part, remained anonymous and thus unknown. In these works – significant from historical, literary, cultural, and theological perspectives – we encounter several references to Saint Martin. In the work entitled *The Life of Saint Tigernacus, Bishop of Clones, Co. Monaghan* (Cluain Eois) (†549), written by an unknown author, we read the following:

Then, having received his master's blessing, he went to Rome and brought back the relics of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, after which he hurried home, as the aforementioned vision had warned him. When the blessed man set out on his journey, accompanied by Saint Keranus, the son of Euchodius, they reached the city of Saint Martin in the middle of winter. They were taken in for the night at a pilgrims' hostel, where nine dead bodies lay outstretched. Saint Keranus, moved by the immeasurable grief of the mourners, said to Saint Tigernachus: 'Let us pray through the night to Almighty God, that in His unspeakable mercy He may deign to raise these dead.'

The gracious father, whose whole being was filled with love, immediately obeyed the holy man's request and poured out pure and fervent prayers before the Lord on their behalf. And since God did not wish the pleas of His beloved servant to be in vain, He restored the nine dead to life, to the praise and glory of His name and of His saints. Saint Tigernachus and Saint Keranus then sealed their friendship by joining their right hands.¹⁶

We encounter a similar expression of reverence in the biography of Saint Lasrianus, or Molaissus, abbot of Dam Inis (25 October 650):

¹² Cf. Jocelyn Nigal Hillgarth: Visigothic Spain and Early Christian Ireland. *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 62 (1961), 167–194.

¹³ Nora K. Chadwick: *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church*, London, Oxford University Press, 1961, 56–59.

¹⁴ Michael Richter: *Ireland and Her Neighbours in the Seventh Century*, Dublin, 1999, 225–230.

¹⁵ VSH I. – *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae tomus primus, Partim hactenus ineditae ad fidem codicum manvscriptorum recognovit prolegomenis notis indicibus instruxit Carolus PLUMMER*, Oxonii, 1910. For Irish Saints' Lives generally, see Richard Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives. An introduction to Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991.

¹⁶ VSH II., 262–269.

It happened that a poisonous snake, which had previously caused great harm to people, behaved so gently towards him that it ate from his hand and did him no injury. Later he arrived in the city of Saint Martinus, where he found the church he wished to enter sealed with seven seals. When the man of God could not enter, he asked the gatekeeper to open the door. But the guard refused to obey his request, treating him as a stranger and ignoring him. Then, by God's will, the church door immediately opened, although it had been securely locked. After these and other miracles, he continued on his way and at last reached Rome.¹⁷

The city of Saint Martin is also mentioned in the biography of Findanus, another renowned Irish saint of the ninth century: "However, Findanus remembered his promise. He gathered companions around him, and after receiving permission from his bishop, he prepared to travel to Gaul. He first arrived at the seat of Martinus."¹⁸

These quotations clearly demonstrate Saint Martin's popularity among Irish Christians, but they also highlight the significance of Tours' location along the route taken by Irish pilgrims travelling to or from Rome. Because of this, Irish pilgrims – often travelling on foot – likely visited the city on every such journey. However, the favorable geographical position of Tours was only one external factor. The other – illustrated particularly by the biographies of Bishops Tigernacus and Lasrianus, and of course by the *Vita Sancti Columbani* – is closely connected with the cult of Saint Martin, with prayer (including all-night vigils), and with miracles.

A shared motif in the biographies of both Columbanus and Lasrianus is that they are initially prevented from visiting Saint Martin's tomb or entering the church. Columbanus is kept away by the guards accompanying him, while Lasrianus is refused entry by the gatekeeper responsible for maintaining the peace of the church. In both cases, however, a miracle occurs, and Columbanus and Lasrianus – desiring to venerate the saint – are ultimately able to reach the relics of Saint Martin.

The biography of Bishop Tigernacus does not report any refusal of entry; on the contrary, he and his companions are received with compassion and immediately welcomed into the pilgrims' hostel. Here, however, they face a different obstacle: they discover nine dead bodies in the lodging. After Bishop Tigernacus prays throughout the night, the dead are restored to life. Yet, as in the case of Columbanus, the narrative does not clarify whether this

¹⁷ VSH II., 131–140.

¹⁸ VSF: *But Findanus, remembering his promise, gathered his companions, obtained permission from his bishop, and prepared to travel to Gaul. From there, seeking the seat of Martin, he then travelled through France, Alamannia, and Langobardia, and finally arrived in Rome on foot. (VSF – Vita Sancti Findani, ed by Reidar Th. Christiansen, Electronic edition compiled by Beatrix Färber, Funded by School of History, University College, Cork. – CELT.)*

miracle occurred through the intercession of Saint Martin or whether it should be attributed entirely to Bishop Tigernacus.

Although Bishop Tigernacus lived earlier than Saint Columbanus, his biography was probably written later than the work composed by Jonas of Bobbio, who became monk in the monastery three years after Columbanus's death. We might therefore suspect that the biography of the sixth-century saint reflects the influence of the later, extensive cult of Saint Martin. Although this possibility cannot be ruled out, it is reasonable to assume that the Irish bishop – and, like him, other Irish pilgrims – arrived in Tours already shaped by the cult of Saint Martin, a devotion that was itself spreading as a result of these very pilgrimages. Ultimately, these were mutually reinforcing processes: the more Irish pilgrims visited Tours on their journeys, the more widely the cult of the saint spread in Ireland through the pilgrimage routes.

Moreover, the fact that Saint Martin's feast day fell during a period already marked by cultic significance among the pagan Celts – namely Samhain, celebrated from 31 October to 1 November (the festival often considered a precursor to Halloween, All Saints' Day, and All Souls' Day) – can be linked in many ways to the night of purification from 10 to 11 November, known in Irish as *Oíche Shean Shamhain*, meaning "Old" or "Great Samhain".¹⁹

When we examine the Irish customs associated with Martinmas (Saint Martin's Day), their pagan roots become readily apparent. One of the most widespread traditions involved animal sacrifice: on the eve of Saint Martin's Day, a hen or goose – and in some regions a sheep or pig – was slaughtered, and the blood of the animal was sprinkled around the house or smeared on the threshold as a ritual intended to ward off evil spirits and misfortune.²⁰ According to the Christianized version of this ritual, the blood was collected in a cup, and the members of the household dipped their hands into it to make the sign of the cross to protect themselves from harm. Crosses or cruciform signs were often drawn on the doorway with the animal's blood.

From these pagan-rooted Christian rituals associated with the feast of Saint Martin – rituals intended to protect against evil – and from the written Christian sources, it is clear that the saint's cult had acquired a special significance among the Irish after the arrival of Christianity. Here too we observe a mutually reinforcing interaction between elements of tradition. One of the most striking examples is the tradition that Saint Patrick's mother was the sister of Saint Martin, making Saint Martin the uncle of Ireland's apostle, and that Patrick was educated at the Gallic monastery of Marmoutier, founded by his supposed

¹⁹ Lisa Morton: *Trick or Treat: A History of Halloween*, Reaktions Books, London, 2012, 28–29.

²⁰ Richter, 225–230.

maternal uncle.²¹ The persistence of this belief is confirmed by the fact that the *Book of Armagh* manuscript – Armagh being the seat of Saint Patrick’s bishopric – contains, in addition to the entire *New Testament* and texts relating to Saint Patrick, the writings of Sulpicius Severus on Saint Martin.

We do not know whether Columbanus believed that Saint Patrick was Saint Martin’s nephew, but given the intensity of the cult in Ireland, we can be almost certain that the reverence he showed for Saint Martin in Tours did not stem from his brief stay on the Continent but from the influence of the cult of Martin in his homeland. This may explain why the Martyrology of Tallaght includes an entry for 20 April stating: *Communis sollemnitas omnium sanctorum et virginum Hiberniae et Britanniae et totius Europae et specialiter in honorem sancti Martini episcopi*.²²

The miracles that occur through Saint Martin’s intercession and in the vicinity of his relics also attest to his special power: Tigernacus raises nine dead people at the pilgrims’ hostel, Columbanus’s boat moors at Tours despite all contrary efforts, and the seals on the church gate fall open before Bishop Lasrianus. Although it is unclear what literary intentions guided Jonas of Bobbio and the anonymous authors of the other saints’ biographies, we cannot ignore the symbolic message of these scenes. If we regard the representatives of the continental Church as the guardians of the cult of Saint Martin, then in the Irish monks whom they attempted to restrain – Columbanus and Lasrianus – we may see the Irish Church itself, which, although remaining faithful to Rome in matters of doctrine, was increasingly in conflict with other Western churches. This tension would reach its climax in Columbanus’s bitter dispute over the date of Easter.

Seen against this ecclesiastical and historical background, the miracle that took place at the shrine of Saint Martin – whereby neither Columbanus nor Bishop Lasrianus could be prevented from reaching the saint’s relics – suggests that the principles they upheld enjoyed the approval and support of the holy bishop of Tours. This interpretation lends even greater significance to the miracles associated with Saint Martin.

This special significance is further underscored by what happens to Columbanus after he spends the night praying at the saint’s tomb. Jonas of Bobbio continues his account as follows:

[...] and spends the whole night there in prayer. At dawn he was invited to eat by Leupecharius the bishop of that city. He did not refuse to go, especially as he wanted

²¹ This conviction remained firmly established in the 19th century. Cf. William Bullen Morris: *The Life of Saint Patrick, Apostle of Ireland, with a preliminary account of the sources of the saint’s history*, London and New York, Burns and Oates, 1888³, 59.

²² John Hennig: Britain’s Place in the Early Irish Martyrologies. *Medium Ævum* 26, no. 1 (1957), 17–24, especially p. 17.

to allow the brothers to rest, and so he spent that day with the bishop. When it was time for the meal, Columbanus sat down at table with the bishop who asked him why he was returning to his country. 'Because that dog Theuderic has driven me away from the brothers', Columbanus replies. Then one of the guests named Chrodoald, who was married to one of Theudebert's aunts, but who was a follower of Theuderic's, replies humbly to the man of God that it was better to drink milk than wormwood. The man of God says to him, 'I know that you want to maintain your fidelity to King Theuderic.' Chrodoald declares that he will keep his oath of fidelity to Theuderic, as he had sworn, for as long as he could. He [Columbanus] says, 'If you are joined in treaty to King Theuderic, you will be happy to act as an envoy from me to your friend and lord. Announce, therefore, to Theuderic that he and his children will be destroyed within three years and that the Lord will annihilate his descent and lineage.' 'Why, servant of God', says the man, 'do you say such things?' 'I am unable to conceal what the Lord has ordered me to reveal', replied Columbanus. All the peoples of Gaul saw this fulfilled later, and this confirmed the sentence that had been announced previously to Ragumund.²³

Columbanus clearly refers to the night he spent at the tomb of Saint Martin. The bishop receives him with respect – evidence that Columbanus's influence had not completely vanished despite his disgrace and banishment – and Columbanus even allows himself to speak with unvarnished bluntness about the reason behind his attempted deportation to Ireland. He goes still further, delivering a dark prophecy concerning King Theuderic and his sons.

After this historical and political digression, the author of the *Vita Sancti Columbani* resumes his account of Saint Martin's miraculous intercession and intervention:

After consuming the meal, the man of God returns to the boat where he finds his companions depressed by a great sadness. On enquiring what had happened, he learnt that those things they had kept on the boat had been stolen during the night and also the gold coins which he had not distributed as alms to the poor. Having heard this, Columbanus returns to the tomb of the blessed confessor and complained that he had not spent the night in vigil by the relics of the saint in order that Martin should allow him and his brothers to be robbed. Without delay, the thief who had stolen the bag of gold began to shout out amidst lashes and bodily torment and to reveal that he had hidden the gold pieces in this place and that. Seeing this, all his associates rush to return all that had been stolen and beg the man of God to pardon such a great crime.²⁴

²³ Iona Bobbiensis *Vita Sancti Columbani*, 1, 22; translated by O'Hara, 2017, 147–148.

²⁴ Ibid., 148–149.

This miracle filled everyone with profound fear, so that those who heard of it no longer dared to touch anything belonging to God's saint, treating such objects as sacred. Leuparius then provided Columbanus with everything he needed and took his leave of him.

After dining with Bishop Leuparius, Columbanus bitterly reproaches Saint Martin for allowing their alms money to be stolen, confronting him in his characteristic blunt manner. Yet the former holy bishop of Tours demonstrates his power in a striking way: the thieves are seized with torment and confess their crime. Viewed in light of Irish folklore concerning Saint Martin, it becomes clear that Columbanus is accusing the saint of failing to offer the protective intervention that plays such an important role in Irish devotional tradition.

At the same time, in Jonas of Bobbio's narrative, the powers of two saints seem to meet: those of Saint Martin and those of Saint Columbanus, who compels the holy bishop to act. Although the favorable turn of events enhances the authority of Saint Martin, who proves that he can still be relied upon for protection; it is ultimately Columbanus whose authority grows even more. As Jonas says of the late founding abbot of his monastery: "This miracle strikes terror into all, so that those who heard of it did not dare to touch anything which belonged to the man of God, as if it had been consecrated."²⁵

If we interpret these events in terms of Columbanus's later life, it becomes evident that what happened at Tours marked a turning point in his decision-making. Since the events at the shrine of Saint Martin, however stylized, must ultimately go back to Columbanus himself or to one of his companions, from whom Jonas later received the account, we may assume that Columbanus attached great significance to them. The night spent in prayer beside the saint's relics and the miracles that manifested Saint Martin's protective support may have served as confirming signs, prompting Columbanus to continue his journey not to Ireland but to Italy. In this way, the founding of Columbanus's monastery in northern Italy can ultimately be traced back to Saint Martin.

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²⁵ Ibid., 149.

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SIR WILLIAM GREGORY AND THE COLOMBO MUSEUM: SRI LANKA'S PALI BUDDHIST MANUSCRIPTS

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Abstract

Sir William Gregory was a high-ranking British colonial official, who served as Governor-General of the Crown Colony of Ceylon. Today, Sir William is best remembered as owner of the Coole Park estate in County Galway and husband of Lady Augusta Gregory, patron, co-founder, and dramatist of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Within Ireland, little attention has been given to the appraisal that Sir William received for his work in establishing the Colombo Museum in the administrative capital of Ceylon. The chapter evaluates William Gregory's work with regard to the collection of the island's ancient Buddhist manuscripts at the museum and it assesses his contribution to the evolution of textual Pali studies and "textual" Buddhism in nineteenth-century Britain, as part of a colonial "re-discovery" of Ceylonese history during the Victorian period.

KEYWORDS

Sir William Gregory, Colombo Museum, Pali studies, Buddhism, Lady Augusta Gregory

Sir William Gregory was an Anglo-Irish landlord with an estate in the west of Ireland, great-grandson of a former Chair of the East India Company, and grandson of the former Under Secretary of Ireland. Both forefathers had distinguished themselves as highly ranked officials within the British Empire. William Gregory himself was bestowed knighthood by Queen Victoria while serving as Governor-General of Ceylon (today's Sri Lanka); he was made Knight Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George (KCMG) during Albert Edward the Prince of Wales's one-week visit to Ceylon in early-December 1875. Sir William showed a keen interest in the affairs of the first public museum

in Colombo, the administrative center of the island and the location of the Governor of British Ceylon's Office. He supported the gathering of the island's Pali manuscript heritage in the newly established Colombo Museum, in which endeavor he was assisted by local antiquarian Louis de Zoysa, who collected and copied the manuscripts still held in Buddhist monasteries. The present article discusses Sir William's interest in this museum project as someone who had been involved in art matters relating to the British Museum and the National Gallery in London prior to his arrival to Ceylon. Besides this, the article considers the Pali manuscripts in the context of the textualization of "South(ern)" Buddhism in nineteenth-century Britain. These investigations are interesting because the case of the Colombo Museum is indicative of the level of interest Sir William had in art matters, an interest that had influenced his whole life, and by extension the life of his wife, Lady Augusta Gregory. Lady Gregory's efforts to establish a Municipal Gallery of Modern Art in Dublin at the beginning of the twentieth century bore certain resemblance to her late-husband's cultural endeavors in Ceylon a few decades previously, at the end of the nineteenth century.

"TEXTUAL" BUDDHISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

British interest in Buddhism and the Buddhist cultural heritage of Eastern Asia can be traced back to the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, following sustained European imperial contact with Eastern Asia from the "Age of Discoveries" onwards.¹ Evidence of this early cultural interaction can be found in Robert Knox's *A Historical Relation of Ceylon* (1681) and William Chambers's article in *Asiatic Researchers* (1788), continuing with articles and entries in the *Encyclopædia Perthensis*, the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and the *Pantologia* in the first half of the nineteenth century.² Cultural contact with the region increased significantly during the latter period, through "encounter[s] [with] the East by travelers, diplomats, missionaries, soldiers and traders", who recorded their experiences and understanding of Eastern Buddhism.³ At the same time, Buddhist manuscripts were being collected in Oriental libraries and institutions to be studied by British antiquarians and experts of Eastern Asia. By the mid-nineteenth century, therefore, as Philip C. Almond put it, "[t]he essence of Buddhism came to be seen as expressed not 'out there' in the Orient, but in the West through the [...] control of Buddhism's

¹ Philip C. Almond: *The British Discovery of Buddhism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, 10.

² *Ibid.*, 9.

³ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

textual past.”⁴ In other words, a scientific study of Buddhism and its textual heritage began in earnest in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century, and the “rediscovery” of Ceylon’s Buddhist manuscript heritage was regarded at the time as a significant contribution to the evolving field of the study of Eastern Buddhism in Britain.

Continental European powers had also been collecting Ceylonese manuscripts and artifacts: Jonathan Sweet notes that from the 1820s onwards, Ceylon’s palm-leaf manuscripts of Buddhist texts were slowly being removed from the island to enrich the collections of the Royal Library in Copenhagen, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, and the Royal Collection (today’s National Library of Russia), in Saint Petersburg.⁵ Anne M. Blackburn remarks that, in general, the heightened attention to the public display of historical documents from colonies had to do with demonstrations of power by European imperial nations.⁶ She further remarks that it was a “competitive display of civilization and empire” on the part of the European imperial powers in cultural competition with one another at the time, each with its own imperial history in the East Asia region.⁷ In Britain, from the 1830s onwards, “the textual base of the Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and consequently of Burma, and of Thailand also, had been progressively selected, translated, and interpreted”; and from the 1850s onwards, “Buddhism was an object determined both by its Sanskrit and its Pali [textual] sources”.⁸ As a result of this “increasing presence of Buddhist manuscripts in Europe during the Victorian period”, Arnold reflects, more scholarly work was conducted in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁹ The end of the Victorian period witnessed a “significant upsurge in the editing and publishing of many Pali works”, as well as of Sanskrit sources, which contributed to the “process of textualization of Buddhism” in Britain.¹⁰

During this process, the cultural and historical hierarchy between the Sanskrit and Pali sources of Asian Buddhism was being assessed and the origins of the religion were heavily debated. Among others, Orientalists George Turnour, Brian H. Hodgson and James Bird considered the historical hierarchy between the “Northern” (Nepali/Tibetan) and the “Southern” (Ceylonese) sources, the discussion continuing between Edward Salisbury, William Kington and Horace

⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁵ Jonathan Sweet: Colonial Museology and the Buddhist Chronicles of Sri Lanka: Agency and Negotiation in the Development of the Palm-leaf Manuscript Collection at the Colombo Museum, *Museum & Society* 12:3 (2014), 231.

⁶ Anne M. Blackburn: Early Preservation Efforts in Sri Lanka: William H. Gregory at Anuradhapura and Kandy, in Melanie Hall (ed.): *Towards World Heritage: International Origins of the Preservation Movement, 1870–1930*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2011, 64.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Almond: *The British Discovery*, 26.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Wilson. By the mid-1870s, the Pali material had been identified as having priority, as it was perceived to contain “simpler, purer, more intellectual Buddhism”.¹¹ In light of these discussions, the significance of the palm-leaf manuscript collection of the newly established public museum in Colombo was manifold and far-reaching. Firstly, the collection brought to light some new material previously held in local Buddhist monasteries. Secondly, it provided a new venue for the preservation of the local Buddhist heritage, preventing further cultural usurpation by collectors, antiquarians and imperial powers competing in the region. Thirdly, supported by the British government’s India Office in London, the Colombo Museum reaffirmed Britain’s imperial dominance over Ceylon, an island previously under Portuguese and Dutch/French colonial rule. Consequently, the British colonial establishment regarded the new museum as one of the “visual encyclopædias of knowledge about empire”, to borrow an idea from John M. MacKenzie’s seminal work, *Museums and Empire: Natural History, Human Cultures and Colonial Identities*.¹² Finally, the new collection was seen as contributing to the “rediscovery” of the history of “Southern” Buddhism; as was Hikkaḍuvē Sumaṅgala and Paṇḍit Baṭuvantuḍāvē’s work on the Pali-language chronicle, *The Mahāvamsa*, which was carried out with the financial support of Sir William Gregory’s governorship.¹³ The Colombo Museum project thus came into being at an important time in Britain’s colonial history and it drew considerable attention from British and Continental European Orientalist circles, as well as from the emergent museum circles of subcontinental India and Burma.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY CEYLON AND THE MUSEUM PROJECT

By the end of the nineteenth century, Ceylon’s history and the island’s Pali manuscript heritage had become integral to the debate on the cultural and chronological supremacy between “Southern” or “Northern” Buddhism.¹⁴ As mentioned, there was an increase in editing and publishing Pali works in Britain, which resulted in a more serious study of Ceylonese Pali manuscripts.

¹¹ Ibid., 28.

¹² John M. MacKenzie: *Museums and Empire: Natural History, Human Cultures and Colonial Identities*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2009, 2.

¹³ Diacritics are maintained in the text with the exception of the word Pali and Sri Lanka as their use without the diacritics is more widespread and more commonly accepted in English.

¹⁴ Some of the issues in relation to the Southern/Ceylonese/Pali and the Northern/Nepali/Tibetan/Sanskrit sources: which ones should be considered the “original”/“uncorrupted” and which ones were “derivations”/“corruptions”; and how the supremacy of one school over the other influenced the interpretation of the Buddhist scriptures from East(ern) Asia. Almond: *The British Discovery*, 27.

Within this context of the “textualization of Buddhism”, Jonathan Sweet notes, the Colombo Museum “became a respected scientific and cultural institution”.¹⁵ On its establishment, it became the custodian library of the Royal Asiatic Society Ceylon Branch (RASCB) and the repository library of the island’s palm-leaf manuscripts previously held in Buddhist monasteries.¹⁶ The RASCB and Sir William Gregory as its patron were of the view that a public museum would grant greater access to the manuscripts “than was then available at Buddhist temples”, as it was not uncommon that monks restricted access to their monastic libraries.¹⁷ In order to carry out this “mission”, the museum needed to collect manuscripts in an organized and methodical fashion, inspired by the work of James d’Alwis, author of *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit, Pali, and Sinhalese Literary Works of Ceylon* (Colombo, 1870).¹⁸ James d’Alwis was a government official who conducted the first survey of the palm-leaf manuscripts, one that led to the Legislative Council’s decision to grant the finances for the establishment of a public museum.¹⁹ According to Philip McEvansoneya, the museum welcomed an astonishing number of visitors within the first twelve months of its opening, with a steady flow of visitors coming in the years that followed.²⁰ This was an undoubtable success for the new institution and for Sir William Gregory, the Governor-General who established the Colombo Museum.

The foundation of the museum coincided with what K.M. de Silva referred to as “the second stage in the rediscovery of Sri Lanka’s ancient past” in Britain.²¹ This period saw “the publication of Eduard Muller’s *Ancient Inscriptions of Ceylon*, 2 vols. (London, 1883), and the establishment of the Archaeological Survey of Ceylon” in February 1890 “by H. C. P. Bell, Archaeological Commissioner of Ceylon, 1890–1912”.²² The *first stage* of the “rediscovery” of the island’s cultural heritage took place in the 1820s and 1830s, after the

¹⁵ Sweet: *Colonial Museology*, 226.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁸ For the sake of the cover of the *Catalogue*, his name is given here as James d’Alwis, but he is also known as James De Alwis (1823–1878).

¹⁹ Sweet: *Colonial Museology*, 234.

²⁰ Philip McEvansoneya: Sir William Gregory and the Origins and Foundations of the Colombo Museum, in Sarah Longair – John McAleer (eds.), *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2012, 201.

²¹ K. M. de Silva: Ceylon (Sri Lanka), in Robin W. Winks – Wm. Roger Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume V: Historiography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, 244.

²² *Ibid.*

integration of the island into the British Empire.²³ Ceylon held maritime significance for the British navy and was renowned for its lucrative coffee and tea plantations during the nineteenth century. Jonathan Sweet writes that the first “opportunistic collection” of the island’s palm-leaf manuscripts started during this early stage of the island’s integration into the British Empire.²⁴ While European collectors removed several manuscripts from the island, the British establishment also carried out relocations to civil servants’ private collections or British institutions. For example, Sir Robert Brownrigg, British Governor of Ceylon (1813–1820), “amassed a substantial war-chest of cultural and religious material” during the subjugation of the Kandyan Kingdom in the mid-1810s, material he later donated to the British Museum.²⁵ Hugh Nevill, Honorary Secretary of the RASCB (1868–1869), too, used to collect local artifacts and palm-leaf manuscripts. He assembled a collection of around two thousand pieces, some of which he later presented to the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.²⁶ Alongside the numerous scholarly publications, these new collections of Ceylonese artifacts and manuscripts had a considerable impact on the study of Buddhism in Britain during the second half of the nineteenth century.

However, at the same time, the RASCB and some members of the British establishment in Ceylon made efforts to preserve *locally* what was left of the island’s cultural heritage. Originally, the RASCB’s parent organization, the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (RAS), was founded in March 1823, to which the Asiatic Society of Ceylon joined in 1845.²⁷ According to the Royal Charter from King George IV on 11 August 1824, the RAS was founded for “the encouragement of science, literature and the arts in relation to Asia”, with the Ceylon Branch focusing primarily on the new Crown Colony.²⁸ James d’Alwis,

²³ De Silva discusses the imperial change of hands of Sri Lanka/Ceylon at the turn of the nineteenth century in detail, starting with the British acquisition of the Dutch coastal areas in 1795–1796 and the subjugation of the last native society, the Kandy Kingdom in the mountainous region of the island, between 1815–1818. De Silva: Ceylon, 243. The East India Company’s role was central in the acquisition of the littoral areas from the Dutch East India Company. The East India Company itself had a personal link to the Gregory family, Robert Gregory having been its Director (1769–1773, 1775–1779, 1780–1782) and Chairman (1782). It was Robert Gregory, Sir William Gregory’s great-grandfather, who acquired the land in Coole Park, Co. Galway, Ireland, on which the family home was later built, in 1768. Bridget Hourican: Gregory, Robert, *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, <https://www.dib.ie/biography/gregory-robert-a3623>, (accessed 30 December 2025). See also History, *Coole Park Nature Reserve*, <https://www.coolepark.ie/history/>, (accessed 30 December 2025).

²⁴ Sweet: Colonial Museology, 230.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 230–231.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 228, 230, 232.

²⁷ The RASCB (also referred to as the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society) came into being following the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Ceylon in 1845 and its application for membership of the RAS the same year; the RASCB started its operation on 1 January 1846.

²⁸ Qtd. in C. F. Beckingham: A History of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1823–1973, in Stuart Simmonds (ed.), *The Royal Asiatic Society: Its History and Treasures*, Leiden, Brill, 1979, 1.

who later became known for his work in the establishment of Colombo's public museum, became a regular contributor to the *Journal* of the RASCB. During the tenure of Sir William's predecessor, Sir Hercules Robinson (1865–1872), the local government established a repository library for the storage of some of the remaining palm-leaf manuscripts. Hence, some steps had been taken towards the preservation of the island's cultural heritage *locally* prior to the arrival of Sir William Gregory. Further to this, on the recommendation of local Ceylonese scholar and civil servant, Louis de Zoysa, the Government Oriental Library (GOL) was established in 1870, with de Zoysa appointed as its first Curator.²⁹ Simultaneously, as mentioned, James d'Alwis carried out a survey of the palm-leaf manuscripts in Buddhist temples, one that was presented to the island's Legislative Council. D'Alwis was highly regarded in government circles and was an unofficial member of the Legislative Council; hence, his words carried weight: his survey was essential for securing the finances of the new public museum, with a repository library for the manuscripts.³⁰ The process experienced a blow with d'Alwis's untimely death in 1878 but de Zoysa was soon promoted to the trusted position of the librarian of the new museum.³¹ As a local antiquarian and government translator of historical Pali manuscripts, de Zoysa had the required knowledge to hold that important position. Finally, the GOL transferred its valuable holdings to the Colombo Museum prior to its opening in 1877, while Sir William Gregory was Governor-General of Ceylon.³² The events unfolding in Ceylon were carefully followed within Orientalist circles in Britain, given the significance of Ceylonese Buddhism in the evolution of textual Pali studies during the second half of the nineteenth century.

SIR WILLIAM GREGORY AND THE COLOMBO MUSEUM

Members of Victorian Orientalist circles were very interested in determining Buddhism's "textual past", a consequence of the increased availability of Buddhist manuscripts in Britain and in Continental Europe.³³ By the last quarter of the century, it was established that "Southern" (Ceylonese) sources held cultural dominance over the "Northern" (Nepali/Tibetan) sources. Almond writes that, following much debate, the Pali version of the Buddhist scripture was finally established as the "only genuine and original one".³⁴ This seems to have halted the debate between Orientalists George Turnour and Brian H. Hodgson, among

²⁹ Sweet: *Colonial Museology*, 233.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 234.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 226.

³³ Almond: *The British Discovery*, 13 and 26.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

others, who were researching the Pali (Ceylonese) and Sanskrit (Nepali) origins of Asian Buddhism. The significance of James d'Alwis's survey of the palm-leaf manuscripts of Ceylonese monasteries and Louis de Zoysa's report on the existence of hitherto unknown Pali texts in the island's Buddhist monasteries need to be understood within this context. So does the significance of Sir William Gregory's involvement in the new museum project in Colombo. Researchers of Sir William's museum project have tended to discuss the project in relation to his devotion to museum affairs, or within the cultural framework of "museum and empire", as established by MacKenzie's seminal work on the topic, *Museums and Empire: Natural History, Human Cultures and Colonial Identities* (2009). No study yet considered the role the Colombo project played in the increased interest in "textual Buddhism" in Victorian Britain, even though both Philip C. Almond and Emily Rose Eiben outline clearly the parameters of this rising interest. There was a "flowering of interest in the middle and upper classes", as Almond put it; an "unprecedented surge in popular interest in Buddhism", according to Eiben.³⁵ Within the scholarly circles, this was indicated, among others, by Robert Cæsar Childers's *A Dictionary of the Pali Language* (London, 1874) and by the foundation of the Pali Text Society by Orientalist T. W. Rhys Davids in 1881.³⁶ According to its founding document, the Pali Text Society was "to foster and promote the study of Pali texts", and its work was highly regarded in late-Victorian Britain.³⁷ Eiben contends that Ceylon, as Britain's Crown Colony, was pivotal for the British public's cultural engagement with Buddhism, as well as Orientalist textual examination of Buddhist historico-religious documents, during the late-Victorian period.³⁸

When Governor Sir Hercules Robinson took farewell from the Legislative Council of Ceylon, he assured his audience that financial provisions had been made for the new museum. When William Gregory took office in March 1872, he acted swiftly and moved towards the realization of the long-held aim of the Royal Asiatic Society Ceylon Branch and the British Establishment in Ceylon. Building on the work of the Archaeology Commission for Ceylon, founded by his predecessor in the 1860s, Sir William started correspondence with the India Office Library and the Secretary of State in London on the matter of Ceylonese artifacts and manuscripts.³⁹ Through the India Office Library, writes Anne M. Blackburn, he contacted one of the leading Orientalists, Max Müller, to solicit advice on the foundation of a new library for the safekeeping of the Pali, Sanskrit

³⁵ Ibid., 33; Emily Rose Eiben: *Representing Buddhism in British Media and Popular Culture, 1875–1895*, Doctoral Dissertation, Ludwig–Maximilians–Universität München, 10 October 2016. 7.

³⁶ Almond: *The British Discovery*, 26 and 33; Eiben: *Representing Buddhism*, 11.

³⁷ Qtd. on The Pali Text Society, *The Pali Text Society*, <https://palitextsociety.org/about-the-pali-text-society/>, (accessed 15 December 2025).

³⁸ Eiben: *Representing Buddhism*, 8–9.

³⁹ Blackburn: *Early Preservation*, 66–67.

and Sinhalese manuscripts.⁴⁰ Sir William held the view that some of Ceylon's revenues from its very prosperous coffee and tea plantation economy should be put towards the safekeeping of the island's cultural heritage.⁴¹ He arranged James George Smither as the chief architect of the project and argued at a Legislative Council meeting in 1875, when the local "establishment" support was somewhat wavering, that "to preserve the ancient records of Ceylon [...] is a duty we owe, not merely to the large and annually increasing number of students of Oriental history and of Oriental philology, but to the natives of the island, many of whom have already widely distinguished themselves by antiquarian research, many more of whom will devote themselves to it, if facilities for study be afforded".⁴² Sir William's words indicate that he intended to serve the needs of both the local learned society and the members of the Orientalist circles of Britain and Continental Europe. Philip McEvansoneya describes Sir William Gregory's engagement in the museum-cum-library project in the following way: "Motivated by his personal interests in museums, antiquities and natural history, he refined the vague earlier plans into a viable new one."⁴³ McEvansoneya is right in citing various sources for Sir William's preoccupations: he could realize a museum project to his own liking; he diverted his attention away from the grief he felt over the untimely death of his first wife, Elizabeth; he established himself as a worthy colonial leader. However, Sir William's words cited above also indicate that he had internalized Louis de Zoysa's argument about the necessity of accessing the manuscript material in light of the emergent Pali texts scholarship in nineteenth-century Britain and Ceylon.

James George Smither, Ceylon's first Government Architect, was commissioned to design the museum in Colombo's Cinnamon Gardens. He worked for Ceylon's Public Works' Department and had surveyed the ruined structures of the Buddhist pilgrimage site at Anuradhapura, the former capital, in the northern part of the island.⁴⁴ Blackburn notes that this project was high on Sir William's agenda, who had secured the help of the Royal Engineers to photograph the site and its inscriptions.⁴⁵ Smither's museum design was of a sturdy, two-story building, purpose-built with large exhibition rooms and a library that

⁴⁰ Ibid., 66.

⁴¹ Ibid., 72.

⁴² Qtd. in Sweet: Colonial Museology, 234.

⁴³ McEvansoneya: Sir William Gregory, 196.

⁴⁴ The results of his work were published in James G. Smither, *Architectural Remains Anuradhapura, Ceylon: the Dugabas and Certain Other Ancient Ruined Structures, which Comprised Information on Anuradhapura's Stupas and Other Ancient Ruined Structures* (Ceylon/London, 1894). Smither will later work for Sir William Gregory at Coole Park, Co. Galway, Ireland. Smither, James George. *Irish Architectural Archive Dictionary of Irish Architects, 1720–1940*, https://www.dia.ie/architects/view/5574/smither-JamesGeorge%23#tab_works, (accessed 30 December 2025).

⁴⁵ Blackburn: Early Preservation, 70.

had comfortable seating arrangements. Sir William favored the European way of displaying artifacts in public museums, hence “objects [were] grouped in wall and island cases” and in series that would “show consistency and variation.”⁴⁶ The ground floor showcased Ceylon’s cultural heritage, such as antiquities, sculptures, coins and inscriptions. The first floor had room for showing the natural history of the island, with cases of bones, shells, taxidermized animals, as well as samples of agricultural produce and industrial products. Believing in the scholarly and educational value of the new institution, Sir William organized a series of lectures for the general public. Some of the lectures advertised local produce and products to those visitors who were looking for investment in Ceylon. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the director of the Colombo Museum and member of the Council of the RASCB, Arthur Willey, wrote with pride about the museum’s holdings of Buddhist, ethnographic, archaeological, zoological exhibits, and its extensive library of “native literature in the form of Ola Manuscripts, relating in one form or another chiefly to BC 105–04.”⁴⁷ He specified that the manuscripts were “written in Sinhalese characters by hand with a pointed iron stylus, upon properly prepared slips of palm-leaves called ‘ola,’ and [were] composed either in Sanskrit, in Pali, or in Elu, the pure Sinhalese language.”⁴⁸ There was a difference between the Sinhalese and the Tamil manuscripts: Sinhalese texts were written on palm-leaves harvested in the Kandyan Districts of Ceylon and “made from the fan-shaped fronds of the Talipot Palm (*Corypha umbraculifera*)”, while Tamil manuscripts were “commonly made from the similarly shaped leaves of the Palmyra Palm (*Borassus flabelliformis*)”, and were slightly narrower.⁴⁹ Museum records and the high numbers of visitors suggest that local priests, the general public, and foreign visitors on their way to subcontinental India all made good use of the educational services of the Colombo Museum.⁵⁰

SIR WILLIAM GREGORY AND CEYLONese PALI SCHOLARSHIP

The Colombo Museum followed late-nineteenth-century British and Continental European museological trends in that it was both a venue for entertainment

⁴⁶ For the layout and the educational value of the Colombo Museum, see McEvansoneya: Sir William Gregory, 197.

⁴⁷ Arthur Willey: *Colombo Museum: Guide to the Collections*, Colombo, The Government Press, 1905, 1. Willey also gives a description of the collection on pp. 1–2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ McEvansoneya: Sir William Gregory, 201. McEvansoneya cites the number of visitors within the first two years of the museum’s opening to have been around 150 000 people, local priests and the public and British and other, foreign visitors included.

and a place for scholarly endeavors.⁵¹ Sir William's biographer Brian Jenkins emphasizes Gregory's involvement in museum affairs in London, a point that has been taken up by scholars researching the Colombo Museum project (Blackburn, 2011; McEvansoneya, 2012; Sweet, 2014). Prior to his arrival to Ceylon, Sir William had been involved in parliamentary debates, artifact acquisitions, and budgetary reviews for the British Museum and the National Gallery in London.⁵² Sir William was aware that British parliamentarians would have preferred the island's cultural heritage to be represented in "the general colonial museum in the South Kensington complex" in London, rather than in a separate museum in Colombo.⁵³ The considerable local (Ceylonese) and colonial (British parliamentary) funding that was to be attached to the project was also a point of contest. Philip McEvansoyeva notes the following about Sir William's perseverance: "the National Gallery and the British Museum were hedged around with the cheques and balances of procedure and government policy", whereas in Ceylon, he enjoyed a certain degree of financial independence and "adjudicated the cheques and balances and set the policy" himself.⁵⁴ "[H]e could enact his personal interest", writes McEvansoyeva, "which matched the existing, imperial conventions of social and educational usefulness, and influence the fundamental decisions about the remit and display of the museum".⁵⁵ However, Sir William could not have realized the museum-cum-library project in Colombo without the assistance of local antiquarians well versed in Pali scholarship, who were members of the British establishment circles of Ceylon. One of these locals, who received little to no attention in contemporary scholarship on the Colombo Museum, was Sir Charles Peter Layard. Sir Charles was a leading member of the RASCB and the Chairman of the Colombo Municipal Council (1866–1877), who, like Sir William Gregory, was made Knight Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George in 1876. His father, Charles Edward Layard, a British civil servant, had the privilege of owning a private collection of local Ceylonese artifacts, inscriptions and manuscripts back in the 1820s, not long after the island came under the rule of the British Empire.⁵⁶ His son, Sir Charles Peter Layard, became a member of the antiquarian circles of Ceylon early on in his life, and continued the family's interest in the local heritage

⁵¹ MacKenzie makes the point that museums in the colonies (and overseas dominions) and in the imperial centers (especially within the British Empire) were considered to be venues of "research, education and inspiration" because "[m]useums were indeed seen as treasuries, storehouses, laboratories and colleges." MacKenzie: *Museums and Empire*, 12.

⁵² Brian Jenkins: *Sir William Gregory of Coole: The Biography of an Anglo-Irishman*, Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, 1986, 200–209.

⁵³ McEvansoneya: *Sir William Gregory*, 188.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 197–198.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 193. Charles Edward Layard is mentioned here only in passing. McEvansoneya makes no connection between the Ceylonese and the European branches of the Layard family, nor their connection to Sir William Gregory.

of the island. He was the Chairman of the Colombo Municipal Council at the time of the establishment of the museum and, despite occasional disagreements with Sir William, was supportive of the antiquarian project under the umbrella of the Colombo Museum. Also noteworthy is the fact that Sir Charles Peter Layard was second cousin of Sir Henry Austen Layard, with whom Sir William Gregory had served as fellow-member on the British Museum parliamentary committee in Westminster and as a fellow-trustee of the National Gallery in London during the nineteenth century.⁵⁷

Sir William Gregory was assisted by another local antiquarian, government translator Louis de Zoysa, whose ideas on the “rediscovery” of the old Buddhist manuscripts Gregory shared. His task was to gather the Pali manuscripts (or their copies) from the local Buddhist monasteries. He travelled far and wide to visit as many temples as possible around the island. Among the works he succeeded in (re)discovering were two unique palm-leaf manuscripts: the *Moggallāyana Pancikā Pradīpaya*, which he dated to be three or four hundred years old, and the *Padasādhana Ṭikā* or *Buddhipasādana Ṭikā*, which he dated back to the second half of the fifteenth century.⁵⁸ He found both manuscripts in the Buddhist temple Ridī Vihāre, located in the middle of the island, in 1873.⁵⁹ He recorded these in his *A Catalogue of Pali, Sinhalese, and Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Temple Libraries of Ceylon*, in which he noted to have been following in the footsteps of George Turnour, a highly regarded expert on Pali manuscripts and “Southern” Buddhism in Victorian Britain, correcting Turnour’s work on the chronology of Ceylonese/Lankan history where he deemed it necessary.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Charles Peter Layard (1750–1803) was Dean of Bristol, who had several children, among them Charles Edward Layard (1786–1852), a civil servant in Ceylon, who was father of Sir Charles Peter Layard (1786–1852), Chairman of Colombo Municipal Council. Another son of the Dean of Bristol was Henry Peter John Layard (1783–1834), who too was a civil servant in Ceylon, but spent much of his adult life on the European Continent. His son was Sir Austen Henry Layard (1839–1894), who was a British politician, Assyriologist and renowned member of European art circles. For some of the family history, see Hugh Karunanayake: *Travails of an Early Coffee Planter, History of Ceylon Tea*, 2022, <https://www.historyofceylontea.com/ceylon-publications/feature-articles/travails-of-an-early-coffee-planter.html>, (accessed 15 December 2025). Sir William and Sir Henry Layard remained in contact during the Governor’s tenure in Ceylon.

⁵⁸ Louis de Zoysa: *A Catalogue of Pali, Sinhalese, and Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Temple Libraries of Ceylon*, Colombo, George J.A. Skeen, Government Printer, 1885, 24 and 26.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 25 and 26. The name of the location has many different versions, the one given here is the one that was used in *A Catalogue*.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, iii. De Zoysa wrote here that he had categorized the Ceylonese palm-leaf manuscripts into the following groups: Canonical Scriptures of Buddhism; their *Aṭṭhakathās* or Commentaries; their *Ṭikās*; General Religious Works; Historical Works; a Compendium of Buddhist Metaphysics; Grammatical, Poetical and Miscellaneous Works. He wrote that the newly “rediscovered” manuscripts will be useful in any future re-adjustment of Sinhalese chronology which has been fixed by the late Mr. Turnour in his *Epitome of the History of Ceylon*. He further remarked here: “Many of these works have never before been brought to the notice of European scholars, and I think if analyses of these works are made they will form a new and important contribution to the history of Ceylon.”

De Zoysa collected an inventory of nearly two hundred volumes that were subsequently housed at the Colombo Museum.⁶¹ Sir William commended the local antiquarian's efforts to the Legislative Council, emphasizing the difficulties de Zoysa had to face in his "fieldwork", difficulties that were rooted, in Sir William's view, in the reckless practices of colonial collecting in previous times. Jonathan Sweet reckons that the difficulty "was most likely to have been a reaction to the poor or corrupt collecting practices that had followed the international interest in these manuscripts [during the nineteenth century]"; but he adds that there was a fear on part of the monks that "the exclusive authority that the monasteries had over many centuries to interpret the chronicles was being systematically undermined".⁶² It was undoubtedly true that the local priests' authority to interpret the old manuscripts diminished to a certain extent following this new wave of "colonial rediscovery" of the local heritage of the island. However, it is equally important that the understanding of the learned British élite of Ceylon's ancient past increased through the work of Ceylonese antiquarians, such as Louis de Zoysa and Sir Charles Peter Layard. Furthermore, similar to Sir Charles who was bestowed knighthood, de Zoysa was awarded the honorary title of Maha Mudaliyar, a chief Ceylonese government position. He received this in recognition of his work during the governorship of Sir William's successor, James Robert Londgen (1877–1883).⁶³

Simultaneously to the *Catalogue*, de Zoysa worked on a new translation of *The Mahāvamsa*. *The Mahāvamsa* (or "The Great Chronicle") is a pseudo-historical account of the history of Ceylon, with the life of Buddha interwoven in it, which was revered in British and Continental European orientalist circles. It had two English-language translations in the early nineteenth century: Edward Upham's version, *The Mahavānsi, the Rājā-ratnācari, and the Rājā-vali, Forming the Sacred and Historical Books of Ceylon*, published in 1833, and George Turnour's version, *The Mahavamsa (The Mahāwanso in Roman Characters, with the Translation Subjoined; and an Introductory Essay on Pāli Buddhistical Literature; in Two Volumes; Vol. I. Containing the First Thirty Eight Chapters*, published in 1837.⁶⁴ Jonathan S. Walters and Matthew B. Colley emphasize that the chronicle, especially George Turnour's more carefully translated version, "became *the* authority on which all the island's ancient and mediaeval history was sorted, adjudicated, interpreted and read into

⁶¹ Sweet: Colonial Museology, 236.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.; de Zoysa, *A Catalogue*, i.

⁶⁴ Sujit Sivasundaram: *Islanded: Britain, Sri Lanka, and the Bounds of an Indian Ocean Colony*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013. 111; Jonathan S. Walters and Matthew B. Colley: Making History: George Turnour, Edward Upham and the "Discovery" of the Mahavamsa, *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, 32 (1&2) (2006), 135. Sivasundaram, Walters and Colley provide an excellent history of the two translations and their impact on Pali scholarship in Britain.

physical, cultural and political landscapes”.⁶⁵ They further emphasize that the founder of The Pali Text Society, T.W. Rhys Davids, considered it foundational to Pali scholarship in Britain.⁶⁶ Louis de Zoysa himself became a member of the Pali Text Society, publishing in its journal on the subject of Ceylonese temples and manuscripts, the way he used to do in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Ceylon Branch*, this way too contributing to the study of “textual Buddhism” in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century. Blackburn argues that Governor-General Sir William Gregory was in “close communication with orientalist in Britain and in Europe”, who could assess the significance of the 1830s translations of the *Mahāvamsa*, and could advise him on the translation of the chronicle’s remaining chapters that was planned in Ceylon.⁶⁷ Turnour only translated the first third of the over one hundred chapters; therefore, much was left to be done to complete the translation of the entire chronicle. In Ceylon, a Buddhist monk by the name of Hikkaḍuvē Sumaṅgala and local antiquarian and Pali scholar Paṇḍit Baṭuvantuḍāvē were commissioned to edit the Pali edition of the remaining two thirds of the chapters, with the aim of preparing the material for the English translation. When this edition was finally published by the Government Printer of Colombo in 1877, the last year of Sir William Gregory’s tenure in Ceylon, it was dedicated to him.⁶⁸ This new edition included a praise of the chronicle —*Mahāvamsasathomanā*— which “articulated the value of *Mahāvamsa* in terms of its contributions to the nineteenth-century work of retrieving South Asian chronology and royal history”.⁶⁹ Blackburn argues that the editors “set their Pali edition squarely within the frame of reference used by scholars who sought to create an empirically rich, chronologized event history of South Asia.”⁷⁰ Hikkaḍuvē and Baṭuvantuḍāvē thanked the Governor and his administration for supporting the transliteration project and for contributing to the elevation of the local Ceylonese literature.⁷¹ Walter and Colley comment that until the publication of Wilhelm Geiger’s even newer edition of the text – published in 1908 and translated in 1912 – scholars of Ceylonese history used the Hikkaḍuvē-Baṭuvantuḍāvē version as the defining source for chronology and accounts of historico-religious events.⁷² Supporting the work of local antiquarian Louis de Zoysa, the foundation of the Colombo Museum

⁶⁵ Walters and Colley: *Making History*, 135.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁶⁷ Anne M. Blackburn: *Locations of Buddhism: Colonialism & Modernity in Sri Lanka*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2010, 71.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Qtd. in Blackburn: *Locations of Buddhism*, 72.

⁷² Walters and Colley: *Making History*, 135. Wilhelm Geiger’s *The Mahavamsa, or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, was published by the Pali Text Society and Oxford University Press in 1912. This was an English translation of Geiger’s original German-language translation, put into English by British Pali and Sanskrit scholar Mrs. Mabel Haynes Bode.

with the repository library of Pali manuscripts, and the publication of the new Pali version of *The Mahāvamsa* add layers to the importance of Sir William Gregory's work for textual Pali studies in late-Victorian Britain.

CONCLUSION

Sir William Gregory's undertakings in Ceylon regarding agricultural improvements, archaeological investigations, and museological innovations were held in high regard in British government and scholarly circles. When Albert Edward the Prince of Wales journeyed to India and Ceylon at the end of 1875, in advance of Queen Victoria adopting the title "Empress of India" in 1876, Sir William Gregory was bestowed knighthood. He was made Knight Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George, and this was reported in the press in Britain and Ireland.⁷³ Eiben argues that the whole trip to India and Ceylon was intended to draw attention to British territories in East Asia.⁷⁴ Eiben makes the important point that the heavy publicization of the event in the British press contributed to the emergence of interest in Buddhism in late-Victorian England.⁷⁵ Coupled with this was the fact that William Gregory had established good working relations with the local Ceylonese press – responsible for formulating news about the Crown Colony – prior to the commencement of his tenure in Ceylon.⁷⁶ The one-week event of Prince Albert Edward's visit was reported in all major news outlets in Britain, generating well over a thousand articles. These provided details of the warm welcome by the local population and Sir William Gregory; the organized nature of the events in Colombo, Kandy and the Ceylonese countryside; and the bestowal of the knighthood on the Governor-General.⁷⁷ There can be little doubt that this level of exposure ensured a relatively high degree of interest in the island and its culture, as well as in its first ever public museum in the island's administrative capital, Colombo. As mentioned, museum records indicate that visitor numbers were indeed high after the opening of the Colombo Museum, including non-local visitors from

⁷³ See, for example, The Prince of Wales in India, *The Birmingham Daily Post*, 6th December 1875, 8. The Prince of Wales in Ceylon, *The Northern Whig* (Belfast), 6th December 1875, 5.

⁷⁴ Eiben: Representing Buddhism, 23–24. and 42–43. Eiben comments that "the tour was an unparalleled sensation." Eiben: Representing Buddhism, 44.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 23–24.

⁷⁶ Jenkins: *Sir William Gregory*, 220.

⁷⁷ See, for example, The Journey of the Prince of Wales, *The Manchester Evening News*, 2nd December 1875, 3; The Prince of Wales in Ceylon, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4th December 1875, 7; The Prince of Wales, *The Staffordshire Daily Sentinel*, 7th December 1875, 2; The Prince of Wales, *The Mail*, 8th December 1875, 8; The Prince in India, *The Manchester Evening News*, 8th December 1875, 3; The Prince of Wales—Incidents at Kandy, *The York Herald*, 9th December 1875, 3; The Prince of Wales's Visit to Ceylon, *The Southend Standard and Essex Weekly Advertiser*, 10th December 1875, 5; The Journey of the Prince of Wales, *The Graphic*, 11th December 1875, 578–579.

subcontinental India, Eastern Asia and the European Continent. Brian Jenkins comments that, in general, Sir William Gregory's governorship was considered to be a success by the political standards of the times, especially in terms of the local social advances, the economic improvements, and the increase in local antiquarian scholarship, all of which were foundational to British imperial power in Ceylon.⁷⁸ His contribution to nineteenth-century textual Pali scholarship, in terms of sponsorship, cannot be overstated; in a way, it contributed to the deepening of British interest in "Southern" Buddhism.

Sir William Gregory met Isabella Augusta Persse (soon-to-be Lady Augusta Gregory) at her family demesne in Roxborough, Co. Galway, at a cricket match in 1877, after his return from colonial service to Ireland.⁷⁹ Augusta Gregory's biographer, Mary Lou Kohfeldt, comments that "[t]hey spent the afternoon talking about Ceylon".⁸⁰ They remained in contact for the following years, to be married in March 1880. Throughout their courtship and then during their marriage, Sir William Gregory maintained a keen interest in museum matters, being in correspondence with Colombo, London and Dublin. Given this background, it was only natural for Lady Augusta Gregory to be preoccupied with the matter of housing her nephew's collection of contemporary paintings in Dublin. This nephew, the art collector Hugh Lane, willed that, following his death, his invaluable collection should be housed in Ireland, if a suitable building were provided.⁸¹ Lane had intended for a new museum to be built – in the city center near the River Liffey, if possible. Post-First World War Ireland, however, was on a different financial footing to the Crown Colony of Ceylon at the height of British colonial dominance in the 1870s. Hence, the realization of the museum project in Dublin proved to be significantly more difficult than the realization of the museum project in Colombo. However, Lady Gregory's preoccupation with the new museum – published in *Hugh Lane's Life and Achievement, with Some Accounts of the Dublin Galleries* (London, 1921) – was indicative of the extent of Sir William Gregory's enduring legacy in her life. This preoccupation with museum matters, as evidenced in her personal journals, lasted until her passing day in May 1932.⁸²

⁷⁸ Jenkins: *Sir William Gregory*, 250.

⁷⁹ Mary Lou Kohfeldt: *Lady Gregory, the Woman Behind the Irish Renaissance*, New York, Atheneum, 1985, 37.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸¹ It is beyond the remit of this paper to address all the issues related to the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art in Dublin. For more on the project, see Lady Augusta Gregory: *Hugh Lane's Life and Achievement, with Some Accounts of the Dublin Galleries*, London, Murray, 1921.

⁸² Kohfeldt: *Lady Gregory*, 299.

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ALTERNATIVE IRELANDS: CO-OPERATION, SOCIALISM AND NATIONALISM IN *THE IRISH HOMESTEAD*

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Abstract

The Irish Homestead was one of the most vibrant and thoughtful newspapers of the early twentieth century. It was the official organ of the Irish Co-operative Movement, founded by Sir Horace Plunkett in 1895 under the auspices of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society. In its early years, the Jesuit priest, Fr. Thomas Finlay, edited the newspaper, followed by Harry F. Norman and Thomas Patrick Gill, the Irish Parliamentary Party Member of Parliament. The painter, poet and theosophist, George Russell (AE), took over editorship in 1905, with poet and writer, Susan Langstaff Mitchell, acting as assistant editor. This article considers the ideas of the Co-operative Movement in editorials of The Irish Homestead discussing capitalist and socialist economic principles and practices. I look at proposals for economic development in rural Ireland that the newspaper advocated in terms of capitalist financial improvement and tendencies towards socialist or part-socialist economics of co-operative endeavor. The article also addresses a persistent concern with idealism and pragmatism in The Irish Homestead, evident in the space it devoted to Standish O'Grady's idea of a rural Irish experimental utopian community. Finally, I discuss the case that The Irish Homestead made for a separation of economic from political nationalism in Ireland in its effort to promote and sustain the Co-operative Movement as one that drew its membership from both Irish nationalist and Irish unionist quarters.

KEYWORDS

Co-operation, Community, Capitalism, Socialism, Nationalism

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IRISH CO-OPERATION: IDLE DREAM OR LOST OPPORTUNITY?

During my years of PhD studies at Queen's University Belfast from 1994 to 1998, at the height of the Northern Ireland Peace Process, I had the good fortune to attend the John Hewitt Summer School at Garron Tower, County Antrim, in the summer of 1995. Professor Edna Longley ably directed the program that year; a remarkable poetry critic and wife of the wonderful Belfast poet, Michael Longley. One of the guest speakers that summer was Professor Joep Leerssen, the Dutch-based scholar of Irish literary history and European nationalism. Following a characteristically erudite and far-ranging talk, I asked the eminent Professor for his opinion on the Irish Co-operative Movement, as I was about to embark on a research visit to the British Newspaper Library in London to consult *The Irish Homestead* newspaper in its entirety. Leerssen summarily dismissed the affair as an eccentric late Victorian experiment that carried little long-term significance to understanding Irish social, political and cultural development from the early twentieth century. Feeling rather disheartened at this response, my enthusiasm revived somewhat at a later conference that we organized at Queen's University in 1997, "The Stories of Ireland", in conjunction with the extraordinary endeavors that the heroic Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, was then making to advance the Peace Process in Belfast and beyond. After a classic early-morning conference panel session of three papers presented to an audience of somewhere in the region of four to six delegates, a Danish gentleman approached me afterwards. He spoke of how saddened he was to learn of the damage that the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War had inflicted on the Co-operative Movement. He also told me that Denmark's success as an economy in the twentieth century grew entirely out of the Co-operative Movement in his native country. So, I was left with this puzzle. Was the Co-operative Movement indeed an eccentric social experiment with little real chance of advancing the quality of Irish life in the first decades of its existence? Or did it promise the kind of transformation and advancement that Denmark – a country of similar size and population to Ireland – had apparently experienced as a consequence of co-operative economic formations? Returning to these questions after thirty years under completely different circumstances, what follows is a reconsideration of the Irish Co-operative Movement in its early years.

In this paper, I explore the kind of economic ideas that the Movement expounded in the pages of *The Irish Homestead*, official publication of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society. A persistent thread in the newspaper editorials was the link between pragmatism and idealism. The newspaper kept aiming towards ideals beyond the provision of financial security, opportunity and technical instruction to Irish farming communities. At the same time, it often insisted on the practical economic effectiveness of the Co-operative

model, warning against utopian notions not feasible in reality. Enveloping these concerns was a keen sense of Ireland's welfare and what could be done to redress the continued dwindling of rural populations to levels that verged on the kind of extinction that Synge had imagined so vividly in *Riders to the Sea*. In the current times of economic, environmental and demographic calamity, the aspirations and strategies of Ireland's advocates of co-operative initiatives no longer seem so aloof or deluded as they once appeared in the eyes of some.

CO-OPERATION AND CAPITALISM

Through *The Irish Homestead*, the Co-operative Movement advocated a form of banking based on co-operative credit, out of which the Credit Unions developed in Ireland.² These Unions offered a system of borrowing based on small amounts of savings that Credit Union members in towns and surrounding townlands placed in local Credit Unions, which in turn made small loans available to members at low interest rates. Support for this kind of banking appears in the lead article of *The Irish Homestead* of 18th July, 1896, a review of a new edition of Henry Wolff's *People's Banks*.³ The editor of the journal at the time, the Jesuit Priest Fr. Thomas A. Finlay, described the history of the type of finance that Wolff surveyed as "poor man's banking", adding that the Irish Co-operative Movement had as good an understanding of "the system of Co-operative banking" as "the most progressive social reformers beyond the Channel".⁴ Finlay saw how this system could be used "to promote industry amongst a population where otherwise needed capital would be unattainable, and to stamp out usury – one of the worst of the economic evils which prey upon the poor".⁵ He mentions Schulz-Delitzsch and Raiffeisen as advocates of the system in Germany, and Signor Luzzatti and Fr. Cerrutti in Italy, building up "a gigantic system of village banks, in which the poor men, the small farmer, the artisan, the petty trader, are directors, managers, lenders and borrowers, in which honesty is the rule and solvency a tradition".⁶

The Co-operative Banks operated as part of a capitalist economic system in the provision of financial services through which industrial production could develop. However, they pushed against this same system in making the

² For an account of the development of the Credit Union Movement in Europe and the USA, see J. Carroll Moody – Gilbert C. Fite: *The Credit Union Movement: Origins and Development 1850 to 1980*, 2nd ed., Dubuque IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1984.

³ Henry W. Wolff: *People's Banks: A Record of Social and Economic Success*, 2nd ed., London: P. S. King, 1896.

⁴ The People's Banks, *The Irish Homestead: The Organ of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society*, Vol. 2, No. 20, 18th July, 1896, 311–312.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁶ *Ibid.*

collective labor force the primary beneficiaries rather than individual financiers and industrialists. Finlay recognized that individual capitalists relied on the mass of populations to achieve their success. Not so far from the ideas of Marx in *Capital*, the Jesuit priest recognized in this state of affairs the opportunity for the lower middle class and laborers to make the system of capital work in the interest of the general population, rather than the wealthy upper middle class. Finlay observes:

Individuals can work out great schemes in the department of manufacture or trade only by turning to account the power and the resources of the multitude. In fact, it is only by using the crowd that the individual can amass wealth. If the crowd will use its resources for its own purposes – that is, for the benefit of its members – the creation of wealth is bound to follow, provided only the resources are intelligently employed.⁷

Given how profoundly the idea of individual entrepreneurialism informed the development of industrial capitalism in Britain and the USA from the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, Finlay's remarks seem tinged with a socialist affirmation of collective development as a value of greater importance to personal social and economic advancement. Some of the most intriguing aspects of *The Irish Homestead* in the twentieth century concern how far the Irish Co-operative Movement strayed into socialist economics, how much it resisted this tendency and how the matter affected its political identity as a national movement.

In July 1899, Finlay came out with a leader piece in *The Irish Homestead* that was stridently anti-capitalist. "The Capitalist Invasion of Ireland" is noteworthy not only for the opposition that it presents to full-scale capitalist economics, but also for the fact that Finlay uses nationalist rhetoric in criticizing capitalism. He complains that the Irish butter industry faced not only the transition from home industry to factory production, but also the prospect of English capitalist investors taking over the entire process. Bemoaning the prospect of the Irish butter industry "passing into the hands of strangers", Finlay touches on a theme upon which Irish dramatists dwell in the new Irish Literary Theatre of the early years of the twentieth century: the stranger in the house.⁸ The attitude takes ideas derived from Marx in the nineteenth century but develops them in a direction markedly at variance with Marx's concept of the working class as the universal class that would eventually break the constraints of nation-state formations. Finlay reverses the terms of this socioeconomic perspective.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ For a further discussion of this topic in Irish drama, see Nicholas Grene: "Strangers in the House", *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 51–76.

Instead of the nation as an ideological instrument through which the bourgeois class maintained its grip on the power of the laboring class, Finlay regarded the fighting Irish spirit as a defense against a form of capitalism that would destroy “a national industry”: Irish butter. The importance of maintaining this defense was that it prevented “the curse” of “the conflicting interest between capital and labour” overtaking economic practice in Ireland.⁹ The logic of Finlay’s position was not one of labor organized to defeat a national bourgeoisie in class war, but the evasion of class conflict by frustrating the development of a large-scale disjunction between bourgeois and labor interest in the agricultural sector. Through the Co-operative Movement, in other words, Finlay hoped that the Irish rural communities would prove resilient enough to keep English capitalism at bay and with it, the conditions for social strife between classes.

Finlay’s position as a Roman Catholic priest obviously influenced his attitudes, reflecting the support that Catholic clergy gave to the Irish Co-operative Movement at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.¹⁰ Many Catholic clergymen welcomed the arrival of local Co-operatives, both as a way of sustaining farm and village life in Ireland and as a means of building up national self-confidence through the development of Irish moral character. These aspirations not only reflected Catholic social doctrine but also the aims of cultural organizations like the Gaelic League and the Irish Literary Theatre, when they were formed in the 1890s. A series of short pieces by H. F. Norman that appeared in *The Irish Homestead* in 1899 underlined the extent to which the Co-operative Movement cut across the historical division between Catholic and Protestant in Ireland. These articles also advocated an alternative to the spirit of individualism and competition driving British capitalist acceleration in the nineteenth century, but within a strongly Christian understanding of life that materialists like Marx and Darwin considered either ideological distortion or unscientific belief.

Norman drew the attention of readers of the newspaper to the thought of the prolific English intellectual, John Ruskin, as a source of inspiration for the development of the Co-operative Movement in Ireland. The articles addressed the four lectures that Ruskin published in 1867 under the title, *Unto this Last: Four Lectures on the First Principles of Political Economy*. Norman acknowledged that, by placing human wellbeing at the center of political economy, Ruskin left himself open to the objection that, from the

⁹ “The Capitalist Invasion of Ireland”, *The Irish Homestead*, 17th June, 1899, 423.

¹⁰ For a detailed consideration of the involvement of the Catholic Church in the Irish Co-operative Movement, see Liam Kennedy: *Colonialism, Religion and Nationalism in Ireland*, Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, Queen’s University, 1996, 117-34. Diarmaid Ferriter is right in observing how the founder of the Co-operative Movement, Horace Plunkett, came in for criticism of the Catholic Church. However, he ignores the active leadership role Finlay took as a Catholic priest in the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, editing *The Irish Homestead* for several years. Ferriter: *The Transformation of Ireland*, London: Profile Books, 69.

point of view of economic calculation, his argument was entirely deficient. Norman defends Ruskin in supporting his view that *laissez-faire* economics, the guiding principle of capitalist development in 19th-century Britain, relied upon a form of selfishness “whose shibboleth is every man for himself”.¹¹ In a damning indictment of the belief that competitive struggle among individuals brings forth general social advancement, Norman also highlights Ruskin’s declarations that “Government and co-operation” were “the laws of life”, while “anarchy and competition” were “the laws of death”.¹² Ruskin obviously had in mind the prevailing view of general economic progress in his lifetime as the outcome of a relatively unregulated struggle between individuals and groups to increase their prosperity by defeating their rivals. He saw this economic Darwinism produce not a dynamic social energy reflected in the transformation of England in the nineteenth century, but widespread pollution and disease in urban conglomerations accompanied by the death of English rural communities. Norman observes Ruskin’s concern with the spiritual effect of an industrialized and financialized society, but also his conclusion that their impact may be as much to the material as to the moral detriment of England as a nation. He draws attention to Ruskin’s contention of an exact equivalence between individual enrichment and individual impoverishment in practices of overcharging and underpaying, such that the national wealth of a society remains stationary, if not actually reduced, in consequence.¹³

STANDISH O’GRADY’S COMMUNES

Norman concludes his reflections on Ruskin with the stated conviction that science was ultimately justified by the amount of social happiness and social health it produced. Central to this notion was the idea that “national character reflected the true wealth of a nation, in the prevalence of vitality, self-reliance, symmetry, sympathy, and grace”.¹⁴ Norman presents this reflection as the aspect of Ruskin’s thought that carried greatest relevance for Ireland. And the figure who best expressed this attitude was Standish James O’Grady, in his pamphlet, *All Ireland*, published the previous year 1898 (O’Grady, *All Ireland*). Norman acknowledged that the case O’Grady made for the Anglo-Irish gentry to unite and assume leadership in Irish political life was one that divided opinion, at a time in which the influence of the predominantly Protestant gentry was declining. Yet he saw in O’Grady’s work the best expression of Ruskin’s idea

¹¹ H. F. Norman, Co-operation in Literature – 1. – John Ruskin’s “Unto this Last”, *The Irish Homestead*, 23rd Sept., 1899, 658.

¹² Norman, Co-operation in Literature, 23rd Sept., 1899, 658.

¹³ Norman, Co-operation in Literature, 30th Sept., 1899, 672.

¹⁴ Norman, Co-operation in Literature, 7th Oct., 1899, 689.

that “the end of all politics is manhood, and the most central fact of the life of man is brotherhood”, declaring that “this teaching has in no country found a readier acceptance than in Ireland”.¹⁵

Standish O’Grady featured extensively in *The Irish Homestead* during the first two decades of the twentieth century, not only for his literary importance, but also as one of the most significant voices conveying the ideals towards which the proponents of the Co-operative Movement aspired. Commenting in April 1904 on a piece published in *Co-operative News*, publication of the Co-operative Wholesale Society in England, the editor reflected on its proposal that land should be owned by communities rather than individuals, “cultivated by associated labour, using the best machines [...] and that by a co-ordination of work between the town and the country the factory hands should be released at times for labour in the country”.¹⁶ *The Irish Homestead* concludes that this sounded more like socialism than co-operation, adding that Standish O’Grady had recently been advocating similar ideas. In one of the more colorful asides in *The Irish Homestead*, the newspaper described O’Grady in November 1904 as “the poet of profitable tillage”.¹⁷ On 30th December 1905, the year in which George Russell (AE) took over editorship of *The Irish Homestead* from Fr. Finlay, the newspaper dedicated its main article to O’Grady’s recent ideas on utopian society. The editor expressed sadness at how he “had fallen under the dream of the brotherhood of man on earth, and especially in Ireland”.¹⁸ The source of this disappointment is the editor’s observation that in O’Grady’s hope to attract men in Ireland to fashion a form of society “close to the Christian ideal”, he made no mention of the Co-operative Movement.¹⁹ Richard Noble, a Co-operative Society member from Letterkenny in County Donegal, issued a strident defense of O’Grady in *The Irish Homestead* two weeks later, claiming that, “as an apostle of tillage”, O’Grady stood on firm economic soil, judging by the experience of farmers in Ulster.²⁰

Debate over O’Grady’s ideas reached a peak in 1910 during the course of extended references to him between February and April. The dispute centered upon O’Grady’s complaint that the Irish Co-operative Movement was too materialistic in character and George Russell’s counter-charge that O’Grady’s thought on ideal life was not practical enough. On 12th February, the newspaper noted O’Grady’s complaint that there was too much information about money and prices in *The Irish Homestead*, creating the impression that advocates of the

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Co-operative Towns and Colonies, *The Irish Homestead*, 9th April, 1904, 283.

¹⁷ The Romance of Growing Potatoes, *The Irish Homestead*, 30th Sept., 1905, 720.

¹⁸ Agricultural Communities, *The Irish Homestead*, 30th December, 1905, 949.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Richard Noble: Two Men, *The Irish Homestead*, 13th Jan., 1906, 26.

Co-operative Movement regard money as “the symbol of health and liberty”.²¹ The editor, either George Russell himself, or his assistant editor, Susan Mitchel, refuted the charge, asserting that most of the people who O’Grady derided as “grubbing for money” were actually “working for family as best they know how, for love, and for some other of the idealisms for which Mr. O’Grady has a respect for”.²²

The debate between O’Grady and Russell gained momentum two weeks later. On the 26th February, *The Irish Homestead* published a letter from O’Grady that was, in his own words, “an explosion”, emphasizing the centrality of mysticism and idealism to human life, criticizing what he considered the mediocre economic objectives of the Co-operative Movement and declaring that no economist could find fault with the economic basis for the type of rural commune that he was advocating.²³ The same issue of the newspaper also includes a letter signed “E. M. C.”, advocating a socialist-style collective ownership of land in Ireland, adding that O’Grady’s scheme for agricultural communes would give a great boost to the Co-operative Movement.²⁴ A letter signed “An Irishwoman of 1910” wished success to O’Grady’s Irish Commune idea, hoping that he would explain it more concretely.²⁵ However, *The Irish Homestead* cast doubt on the practical efficacy of O’Grady’s proposals for a utopian community of laborers founded on Christian principles of communal ownership. Hoping that O’Grady’s experiment might succeed in finding enough people to join it, the newspaper nonetheless defended the need for the Irish Co-operative Movement to maintain its focus on practical matters in rural Irish life.²⁶

The prominence of O’Grady in *The Irish Homestead* in 1910 was indicative of a growing awareness of socialism as a character-trait of political development in Ireland and beyond at the time. Already in 1907 and 1909, *The Irish Homestead* was debating the extent to which the Co-operative Movement was socialist in nature. In October 1907, the newspaper gave over its leading article to a consideration of socialism, commenting that while “the co-operatives the world over were semi-Socialistic”, Irish farmers would resist fiercely a State takeover of their land and Irish towns were incapable of working up any strong movement in support of a movement like socialism.²⁷ *The Irish Homestead*

²¹ Are we Journeying to the City of Mammon? *The Irish Homestead*, 12th February, 1910, 123.

²² Ibid.

²³ Standish O’Grady, The First Irish Commune of the New Order, *The Irish Homestead*, 12th Feb., 1910, 130.

²⁴ “E. M. C.”: Rural Communes, *The Irish Homestead*, 19th Feb., 1910, 152.

²⁵ “An Irishwoman of 1910”, Social Reform, *The Irish Homestead*, 19th Feb., 1910, 148–49.

²⁶ Communism of Effort versus Communism of Property, *The Irish Homestead*, 19th February, 1910, 145.

²⁷ Organise! *The Irish Homestead*, 19th Oct., 1907, 825–26.

returned to the topic two years later in October 1909, asserting that everyone had become socialist or half-socialist, even those who opposed socialism.²⁸

The issue arises again at the end of February 1910, with O'Grady's idea of Irish rural communes once more the subject of discussion. Russell foresaw a flight from urban living as cities became overcrowded, expensive and unhealthy environments. He expected a rebellion against city life to take a socialist form, with "many wild chimeras and Utopias" pursued.²⁹ The editor sees O'Grady in this light, a man too impatient for the evolutionary social development of the Co-operative, a man "with all the fiery power and insistent spirit which his young men will require".³⁰ He sees O'Grady's thought directed towards exceptional men, rather than the general mass of the people, O'Grady having a poetic temperament that prefers the exceptional to the norm: "He is more enraptured by a hero like Cuchulain than by the patient progress of large masses of people. To our mind, humanity is the hero, and to help to guide large numbers of men wisely in their evolution to a higher social order is the best work to which we can put our hands".³¹ *The Irish Homestead* followed up this line at the beginning of March, expressing the newspaper's admiration for O'Grady's nobility and character, yet feeling that his voice had become "too high-sounding for his message to reach the multitude".³² At the start of April 1910, the newspaper re-iterated the objection that O'Grady's ideas for a commune were too vague to demonstrate how they would work in practice, adding that O'Grady seemed to have taken passages from the Gospels literally in support of the view that even idlers would be accepted in the communes that he envisaged.³³ Further criticism followed in July 1911, when *The Irish Homestead* objected that O'Grady's ideal of a rural commune run without money would deny its members access to any goods in the wider world available to purchase.³⁴ A letter of September that same year declared that O'Grady's rural commune had not the slightest chance of coming about.³⁵

CO-OPERATION AND SOCIALISM

As the 1910s progressed, the perspectives that *The Irish Homestead* offered on developments in Ireland and beyond recognized that socialist politics was

²⁸ We are All Socialists Now, *The Irish Homestead*, 9th Oct., 1909, 819. A considerable number of letters to the Editor in October and November 1909 concerned the question of socialism.

²⁹ The Rebels against the City, *The Irish Homestead*, 26th Feb., 1910, 163.

³⁰ Ibid., 164.

³¹ Evolution or Revolution, *The Irish Homestead*, 26th Feb., 1910, 164.

³² Co-operative Agricultural Colonies, *The Irish Homestead*, 5th Mar., 1910, 185.

³³ The Ethics of Communes; Wanted a Bridge, *The Irish Homestead*, 2nd April, 1910, 271–72.

³⁴ Are we Money Grubbers? *The Irish Homestead*, 22nd July, 1911, 567.

³⁵ Fair Play, *The Irish Homestead*, 16th Sept., 1911, 734.

gaining in strength with the organization of the labor force through trade union organizations. One sign of this state of affairs was the increasing interest in utopian experiments, leading to the newspaper devoting a full article to the topic in December 1911. At the same time, the newspaper pulled back on some of the reservations it had directed against O'Grady's rural commune when proposing that the best chance a utopian experiment had of succeeding was through a community that worked close to nature, rather than in urban conglomerations, where international finance capitalism had weakened the autonomy of nations.³⁶ In June 1913, *The Irish Homestead* called for an alliance of the Trade Union and the Co-operative Movements in common opposition to the capitalist. As editor, Russell proposed that all Trade Union members should become members of the Co-operative Wholesale Society in England and that the Co-operative Movement should supply laborers with food and money at a time of strike action.³⁷ In September 1913, *The Irish Homestead* speculated how the labor movement might develop, with an eye to the impact of the socialist agitator and new leader of the workers' movement in Ireland, Jim Larkin: "Labour, long voiceless, has found a voice, and the stormy petrel of labour, who has just set Dublin in a blaze, has told us that he feels a divine mission to awaken discontent".³⁸ The newspaper warns that the labor movement, in its present state of "passionate discontent", can become a revolutionary force:

[...] may easily become syndicalist, socialistic, revolutionary, or anarchical, if the guiders of public opinion in Ireland will not take the trouble to investigate the real causes of the discontent and find no better policy to advocate other than suppression [...] The ostrich in Ireland is reported to hide its head in the sand when pursued. There are hundreds of thousands of human ostriches in Ireland.³⁹

Attitudes to the growth of class politics fluctuated between support and apprehension in *The Irish Homestead*, evidence of how the Co-operative Movement was trying to adapt to new circumstances created by the First World War and the 1916 Rising in Ireland. In March 1917, the newspaper welcomed the development of class consciousness in Ireland: "The most interesting thing about Ireland to the close observer of a civilisation is the emergence of a class consciousness, class ambitions, and a clear theory of its own future development among the agriculturalists, who half a century ago were the most unorganised class in Ireland".⁴⁰ However, in September of that same year, *The Irish Homestead* feared the prospect of imminent social revolution, seeing

³⁶ Troubles before the Utopians, *The Irish Homestead*, 21st Dec., 1912, 1041–42.

³⁷ Co-operation and Trade Unionism, *The Irish Homestead*, 21st June, 1913, 510.

³⁸ The Parable of Labour, *The Irish Homestead*, 20th September, 1913, 777.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ The Evolution of Society in Ireland, *The Irish Homestead*, 17th March, 1917, 185.

those who neither owned land nor manufactured goods as the class of people most likely to take control of the State, if they united together.⁴¹

Earlier in August 1914, as war in Europe seemed imminent, *The Irish Homestead* commented on the disaster that lay ahead if the warring parties entered the fray with no clear idea of the type of civilization that should be formed in its aftermath. It denounced a circumstance by which 99% of the people hated the idea of going to war “yet the nations have committed the power to let this horror loose upon society to a few very fallible and mediocre people”.⁴² The chronic incompetence and stupidity of statesmen, diplomats and military generals was, tragically, to prove fatal for the young men of Europe, their partners and families. *The Irish Homestead* included Ireland in the picture, when observing that the three armies now in the country had their own legitimate aspirations and principles, but each lacked a vision of what kind of society would come to be in the aftermath of conflict between them. The armies in question were the Imperial British Army, the Ulster Volunteer Force which was founded in 1912 to resist the imposition of a Home Rule Parliament for Ireland, and the Irish Volunteers, founded in 1913 to ensure that Home Rule was implemented.⁴³ AE drew on his familiarity with Irish mythology to imagine the *zeitgeist* immediately preceding war in Europe as akin to the war phantom of the Red Swineherd Bove Derg who “moved invisibly among the fighting men and whipped them into madness”.⁴⁴

The Irish Homestead was sharply alert to the social and economic crisis that was unfolding during the years immediately after the First World War. In February 1919, the editor complains that “we are told by financial lunatics the people were never so rich before. Yet production is less and less. Exports show a decline every year since the war started. There is less real wealth and a vast increase in paper wealth”.⁴⁵ The complaint shows that O’Grady may not have been entirely off the mark in his idea of a moneyless commune, dismissed by *The Irish Homestead* as impractical in 1910. By 1919, the newspaper conceded that artificial wealth was replacing real wealth in the form of the volume of goods produced and consumed in the open market. In 1920, the newspaper observed how wealth and industry was being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, leading to the large swell of lower-middle class and working class laborers organizing themselves politically by way of reaction, creating the possibility of a Labour Party forming the Government in Britain.⁴⁶ The editor claims that in Ireland – engulfed in a guerrilla war of independence at the time – the

⁴¹ The Danger of Social Revolution, *The Irish Homestead*, 1st Sept., 1917, 657.

⁴² Creators and Destroyers, *The Irish Homestead*, 1st Aug. 1914, 613.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ireland in Time of War, *The Irish Homestead*, 8 Aug., 1914, 633.

⁴⁵ The Better Way, *The Irish Homestead*, 8th Feb., 1919, 81.

⁴⁶ A New Co-operative Society, *The Irish Homestead*, 31st Jan. 1920, 69.

co-operative society “is rapidly becoming the national form of organisation, and in the country towns the prevalent idea is making headway”.⁴⁷ The newspaper supports a policy “which would bring farmers and labourers into the same co-operative societies, unite their interests and implicate them both in the management of the societies”.⁴⁸ Later in July, 1920, *The Irish Homestead* observed that “political forces have become more powerful than economic forces”, reference to the war that was ongoing between the Irish Republican Army and the British military.⁴⁹ In these circumstances, representatives of the labor unions, the farmers’ unions and the co-operative societies agreed that no Irish produce could be exported from the country if export threatened food shortages within Ireland itself.⁵⁰ Thus the conditions brought about by the Irish military campaign for political independence had produced an alliance of farmer and laborer interests that *The Irish Homestead* had advocated at the beginning of the year. The editor considered the potential impact of a railway blockade in the south and south-west of Ireland against British military forces. He predicted that this could lead to a significant proportion of the Irish population adopting communism, similar to the shift witnessed in Russia, Germany and Hungary.⁵¹

CO-OPERATION AND NATIONALISM

Around all questions of economic systems, practices and policies that *The Irish Homestead* addressed in the early twentieth century lay the question of nationality. A desire to organize and energize rural Irish communities, in a state of stagnation due mainly to emigration, was fundamental to the activities of the Co-operative Movement in the country. This goal linked the organization to others dedicated to revitalizing Irish culture, most notably the Gaelic League and the Irish Literary Theatre, later the Irish National Theatre Society. In 1902, *The Irish Homestead* proclaimed the aim of the Co-operative Movement not merely as one of improving the economic circumstances of the Irish countryside and village population, but of uniting the spirit of Irish imagination with practical knowledge in pursuit of a grand national awakening:

We are convinced that when the imagination of the Irish people has practical knowledge and facts to work on that it will not recoil from contact with the practical. But their imagination must be fired by some great end to be accomplished. We have

⁴⁷ Ibid., 70.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Facing Facts, *The Irish Homestead*, 10th July, 1920, 513.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 514.

⁵¹ Crisis and Character, *The Irish Homestead*, 20th Nov., 1920, 835.

found in the co-operative movement that the best societies and the best workers have derived their incitement to work from the idea that they were promoting a great national movement, and the extra profit, while welcome, was a secondary consideration. We are on the whole rather proud to belong to a people who are in this sense unpractical, that the desire for personal progress is not an obsession with us, and the desire for united and national progress is the only one which will stir to a real activity the intellect and the immense capacity for work and sacrifice in the best Irishman.⁵²

An article published the following year on Irish Arts Industry spelt out this call for a combination of the imaginative and the practical in concrete terms. *The Irish Homestead* insisted “that Irish Art industries must work on tradition, and where they cannot find one they must make it”.⁵³ The newspaper proposed that Irish producers of brasswork, lace, pottery and other ornamental goods should take inspiration from “the old Celtic arts”, multiple examples of which were available for study and copy in the Dublin Museum. *The Irish Homestead* saw these objects as lying neglected for far too long and urged that the resources of the country and the capacities of the Irish people needed to be developed if Ireland was to “survive as a people of our own, to entitle us to claim a place in the world of the future”.⁵⁴ In this case, the thrust of *The Irish Homestead* is towards market capitalism, but with an emphasis on the imaginative character of Irish culture. Irish artistic style could gain international recognition in the future but at the risk of Irish artworks becoming mass-produced commodity objects.

Tensions between practical commercial benefit and national ideals resurfaced in *The Irish Homestead* under different guises. Relations between the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS) and the English Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) were a case in point. Obviously, the Irish Co-operative Movement welcomed the development of a Co-operative Movement in England also. In “A Dual Alliance” of November 1904, the newspaper pointed to the cordial nature of relations between the English Co-operative Movement and that in Ireland, pointing to how the English Co-operative Union helped the founders of the IAOS draft their rules and organize the Movement before withdrawing from the Irish Society.⁵⁵ In the same year that Arthur Griffith advocated his famous Dual Monarchy solution to Ireland’s relation to Britain, modelled on the example of Hungary’s relation to Habsburg Austria, *The Irish Homestead* announced an alliance between the Irish and the English Co-operative Movements with the aim of benefiting co-operative agricultural

⁵² The Department and the Cork Exhibition, *The Irish Homestead*, 28th June, 1902, 498.

⁵³ Nationality in Industry, *The Irish Homestead*, 19th Dec., 1903, 1022.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ A Dual Alliance, *The Irish Homestead*, 19th Nov., 1904, 962.

practices in both countries.⁵⁶ The newspaper was careful to emphasize that this would not entail any loosening of its commitment to “Irish Ireland” ideals which Sir Horace Plunkett, speaking at a gathering of Irish Co-operative members in Dromore, County Tyrone, a few weeks earlier, “declared to be the rightful aspiration of his audience”.⁵⁷ Along with Fr. Finlay, Plunkett had inaugurated a domestic science experiment at Dromore, presented in *The Irish Homestead* the following year in terms that placed the Co-operative Movement in an intimate relation to the Irish cultural revival of the early twentieth century. The Dromore experiment released “three of the living forces out of which the Ireland of the future is being made – domestic instruction, or, we should rather say, more modestly, the home-making influence of household science, the energising influence of the Gaelic revival, and - to us and to our readers an all-important force - the unifying influence of co-operation”.⁵⁸

Conflicts arose, however, between the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society and the Co-operative Wholesale Society in England. In April 1905 the IAOS requested the CWS hand control of the creameries that they operated in Munster over to IAOS members. The argument was advanced that the Irish creameries were a loss-making venture for the CWS but the real issue was the claim that Munster farmers were not benefiting from a wholesale method of business through which the CWS managed the creameries: “for though the traditions of Wholesale are co-operative in England, in Ireland they are not”.⁵⁹ *The Irish Homestead*, in other words, proposed that trade worked differently in Ireland than in England, meaning that the factor of national distinctiveness entered the sphere of capitalist business models, making English economic encroachment into Irish terrain non-co-operative, even in the name of co-operative economics. Tensions between the Irish and English organizations erupted in March 1907 following a CWS meeting at Manchester. The tone of reporting CWS attitudes to the IAOS, over the situation of creameries in Munster, was bitter and resentful:

It [the Co-operative Wholesale Society in England] never did anything to be ashamed of. It only refused to let its creameries be co-operative, in spite of the fact that it calls itself the Co-operative Wholesale Society, and why should Irishmen object? Is it not absurd that an inferior race like the Irish should want a system of business which is only fit for advanced races like the English. The friction arises solely from the claim of these absurd Irish that dairying must be conducted on

⁵⁶ Arthur Griffith, *The Resurrection of Hungary: A Parallel for Ireland*, Dublin: James Duffy & Co., M. H. Gill & Son, Sealy, Bryers & Walker, 1904; A Dual Alliance, 962.

⁵⁷ A Dual Alliance, 962.

⁵⁸ The Economic Problem and Domestic Life, *The Irish Homestead*, 3rd June, 1905, 438.

⁵⁹ The Munster Farmers and English Wholesale, *The Irish Homestead*, 22nd April, 1905, 307.

co-operative lines, and that they should control their own business, and that the C.W.S. should act up to the spirit of their principles and promises.⁶⁰

This line of criticism is far removed from that spirit of cordiality upon which *The Irish Homestead* remarked earlier in November 1904. It is further evidence of capitalist economics as a system subject to the force of national differences as much as a process of international trade. The oppositional stance taken by the IAOS in the case of the Munster creameries supplies an example of co-operative economics in Ireland at the start of the twentieth century reinforcing rather than loosening nationalist sentiments of attachment to locality.

If the Irish Co-operative Movement opposed the incursion of the English Co-operative Movement into the sphere of Irish agriculture, it equally stood against pressure from within Ireland to cut itself off from its counterpart in England. In August 1908, *The Irish Homestead* criticized calls from Irish County Councils for the IAOS to separate completely from the CWS. Whereas previously the newspaper had introduced national difference as a prominent factor in economic activity within Britain and Ireland, in this later instance *The Irish Homestead* separated nationalist politics off from economic concerns. Quite correctly, the newspaper observed that England and Germany were actively trading with one another and seeking to increase the volume of trade, even though public opinion was widespread that both countries were on the verge of going to war with one another. More domestically, *The Irish Homestead* speculated that trade with England would continue even if Ireland succeeded in winning Home Rule, and England “would probably be our best customer even if Ireland was absolutely independent”.⁶¹ This state of affairs most certainly came to pass after 26 of Ireland’s 32 counties formed an independent nation-state in 1922. As the Home Rule crisis in Ireland was entering a critical phase in the months prior to the outbreak of the First World War, *The Irish Homestead* restated its position that politics and economics were separate spheres, it being possible to conduct business with one’s political opponents. In an article that acquires retrospective poignancy in light of the subsequent partition of Ireland, *The Irish Homestead* described Belfast as the great distribution center for all of Ireland. The city’s business activity was so dynamic that it became more intertwined and interdependent with all of the provinces of Ireland.⁶² This was happening at a time, as the newspaper observed, when political division between Unionists and Nationalists threatened an outbreak of civil war on the island.

The 1916 Rising threatened to destroy the years of work that the Irish Co-operative Movement had dedicated to economic and social development

⁶⁰ The C.W.S. on its Defence, *The Irish Homestead*, 30th March, 1907, 243.

⁶¹ Commerce and Politics, *The Irish Homestead*, 8th Aug., 1908, 625–26.

⁶² Civil War and its Consequences, *The Irish Homestead*, 18th April, 1914, 302.

in rural Ireland. Immediately following the defeat of the uprising, *The Irish Homestead* described it as “one of the most tragic episodes in Irish history”. The great fear was that the Rising would split the Co-operative Movement, which the newspaper regarded as the one great movement to endure and develop over the previous twenty-five years that had brought people of opposing traditions together, including “extremists on both sides”, uniting them under the umbrella of economic co-operation.⁶³ This foreboding came to pass when, during the Irish War of Independence in September 1920, *The Irish Homestead* was forced to condemn attacks on Irish co-operatives throughout the countryside:

The integrity of the movement is threatened from many quarters. We have spoken, we believe with great restraint, about the wreckings and burnings of co-operative societies. But the political excitement by which Irishmen of opposing parties are wrought up to the last degree of antagonism against each other makes it also possible for attacks to be directed against the movement by cool, wicked and calculating men who see their profit in the destruction of co-operative unity.⁶⁴

In the end, the Irish Co-operative Movement survived the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War. Far from being some eccentric impractical endeavor, the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society proved tough and resilient. It was the launching pad for the Irish dairy and livestock industries as they developed during the twentieth century. The sector was a cornerstone of Ireland’s economy during the bleak decades from the 1920s to the 1950s. It was during this period that Kerrygold butter, one of Ireland’s most successful products on the international market, emerged. The pursuit of community-based economics was also evident in the success of the Credit Union movement across Ireland, particularly in city suburbs, towns and villages. The acceleration of corporate global capitalist companies and practices – of which *The Irish Homestead* was aware at the start of the twentieth century – ensured that socialist or neo-socialist tendencies disappeared from the organizations and companies that emerged from the Irish Co-operative Movement. *The Irish Homestead* leaves an impressive legacy of opinion from the early twentieth century on how Ireland, especially rural Ireland, might have developed socially and economically in the decades preceding and during the First World War.

⁶³ The Hope that Remains, *The Irish Homestead*, 29th April, 6th–13th May, 285–86.

⁶⁴ Keeping the Ark Afloat, *The Irish Homestead*, 11th Sept., 1920, 673.

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BERNADETTE DEVLIN: A VOICE OF ANTI-COLONIAL SOLIDARITY AND TRANSNATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISM

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Abstract

By highlighting the significance of transnational solidarity within the context of civil rights activism, this article focuses on County Tyrone-born Bernadette Devlin (now McAliskey) and her commitment to defending the “peasants” and the “havenots” (as highlighted in her maiden speech at Westminster in April 1969) in and beyond the six northern counties. This study provides insights into how Devlin’s memoir, The Price of My Soul (1969), revealed the universality of her commitment to the defense of civil rights and anti-colonial solidarity. Moreover, it analyzes the importance of the African-American non-violent civil rights protest song, We Shall Overcome, in the North of Ireland between 1968 and 1972, arguing that the communal performance of the song functioned as an act of solidarity with not only the protesters “walking hand in hand” but also with those across the globe following non-violent resistance and civil disobedience against oppression.

KEYWORDS

Transnational solidarity, civil rights activism, non-violent resistance, Northern Ireland, protest songs

INTRODUCTION

The image of Bernadette Devlin (now McAliskey) became inseparable from the civil rights movement in the North of Ireland after 1968.¹ Together with the members of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), Devlin's commitment to solidarity across borders (and not only the Border) linked her activism to the Black liberation movement in the United States of America, while highlighting her support for disadvantaged, marginalized or oppressed communities in Palestine, South Africa, or Quebec, among others.² Notably, Devlin's "imagined community" (as per Benedict Anderson³) did not exclude Protestants; she argued that "we cannot build an island, we cannot build a nation, we can't build a state, we can't build a new republic, that has at its core a new disadvantaged, marginalized, isolated community, which is the Northern Protestant. We can't do that."⁴ This thought demonstrates the universality of solidarity in her rhetoric as well as her actions up to the present day.

After providing an overview of the historiographical context of transnational solidarity connecting Ireland with civil rights movements, anti-apartheid activism, and anti-colonial struggles, the present paper provides a detailed analysis of the significance of transnational acts of solidarity in Devlin's activism before the massacre of Bloody Sunday (January 30, 1972), when British paratroopers shot dead thirteen unarmed protesters in Derry, leaving several others wounded.⁵ The American civil rights anthem, *We Shall Overcome*, became an indispensable part of civil rights protests in the North; the final section of the paper demonstrates how performing the song proved to be a powerful act of transnational solidarity. As American folk singer Pete Seeger pointed out: "it wasn't just the black people of Alabama who were going to overcome,

¹ Among other scholars, Brendan O'Leary has addressed the questions regarding objectivity with regards to terminology on Northern Ireland as a formal political unit, highlighting that while the "North of Ireland" is employed by nationalists or republicans, "the North" was an expression agreed to in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. The present paper uses "Northern Ireland", "the North", the "North of Ireland", and "the six northern counties" interchangeably. See Brendan O'Leary: *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume I: Colonialism*, Oxford University Press, 2019, xxix-xxiv.

² Bernadette Devlin McAliskey: "We took the notion" in Zeina Maasri – Cathy Bergin – Francesca Burke (eds.): *Transnational solidarity. Anticolonialism in the global sixties*, Manchester University Press, 2022, 32.

³ Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1991.

⁴ Devlin McAliskey, "We took the notion", 35.

⁵ Emer Nolan: *Five Irish women. The second republic, 1960-2016*, Manchester University Press, 2019, 119–120.

but, I said, you and I are going to overcome, all of us in this world are going to overcome someday”.⁶

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

...Once you do what you know to be right because you can't sit and look at what you know to be wrong... See, once you do that, and people do it together, something inside you changes. You know, you get a sense of... it's not power in a way powerful people think of power – it's the power of people. It's the power of solidarity. It's a strength and a courage that comes from being together. And once you get it into you, it's very-very hard to knock out.⁷

Fifty years after the civil rights movement transformed the North, the above words of Bernadette Devlin continue to inspire and attest to the power of solidarity in social movements across the globe. The present paper focuses on the years 1968–1972, tracing the transnational⁸ networks of solidarity that informed her activism. As the editors of the volume *Transnational solidarity: Anticolonialism in the global sixties* (2022)⁹ argued, Devlin's “border-crossing identification with radical anti-racism” demonstrated that she refused to be kept in her place – both literally and metaphorically. Their book has been a recent addition to the study of transnational solidarity as a central element of “radical imagination that connected New Left and civil rights movements with anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggles” of the Global South in the 1960s.¹⁰ In addition, Crozier-De Rosa investigated anti-colonial solidarity in Irish republican feminist discourse in particular, shedding light on “how republican Irish women identified the operation of colonial power dynamics in their identity formation” in a Global North-South framework, analyzing

⁶ Patricia Woodard: Beyond “We Shall Overcome”: The Lasting Legacy of Freedom Songs, in Victor V. Bobetsky (ed.): *We Shall Overcome. Essays on a Great American Song*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, 99.

⁷ “Bernadette Devlin McAliskey”, *The Blindboy Podcast*, 14 November 2018, <https://shows.acast.com/blindboy/episodes/bernadette-devlin-mcaliskey>, (accessed 26 October 2025), (33:41-34:13).

⁸ Transnational history traces the movement of people, ideas, and goods across borders. Within the study of transnational Irish history I consider the following research the most relevant: Niall Whelehan (ed.): *Transnational Perspectives on Modern Irish History*, New York, Routledge, 2015; Enda Delaney: *Our Island Story? Towards a Transnational History of late Modern Ireland*, *Irish Historical Studies* 37:148 (2011).

⁹ Zeina Maasri – Cathy Bergin – Francesca Burke: Introduction: transnational solidarity in the long sixties, in Zeina Maasri, Cathy Bergin, Francesca Burke (eds.), *Transnational solidarity: Anticolonialism in the global sixties*, Manchester University Press, 2022, 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

Devlin's strategies for constructing her political identity in comparison with other republican feminists writings.¹¹

Along with many people on the island of Ireland (not limited to Republicans), Devlin also drew attention to the struggle of black South Africans during the years of apartheid (1948-1994). In the Irish context, Kevin O'Sullivan's transnational assessment of *Ireland, Africa and the end of empire* has provided the most thorough investigation of (among others) anti-apartheid activism in Ireland, completing Guelke's studies from the late 1990s that had traced the relationship between Ireland and South Africa throughout the 20th century.¹² Furthermore, Kylie Thomas presented Irish identification with anti-apartheid struggle through the investigation of "how affective archives of music, images, and poetry travel across time and space and serve as a conduit for raising awareness about injustice and for forging transnational solidarity".¹³ Similarly, commonalities between Ireland and Palestine had played an important role in Irish Republican¹⁴ rhetoric since the last three decades of the 20th century. Louvet (2016), among others, addresses the use of the Middle East conflict in the discussions of the island of Ireland, providing a scholarly assessment of the so-called "Durban strategy", comparing segregation and apartheid in Israel with those on South Africa.¹⁵

BERNADETTE DEVLIN: CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISM AND ANTI-COLONIAL SOLIDARITY

When addressing what drove her (and others) to the civil rights movement, Bernadette Devlin explained that when watching civil rights protesters marching

¹¹ Sharon Crozier-De Rosa: Solidarity and colonial analogies in Irish republican feminists' discursive practices, 1890s–1980s, *Third World Quarterly* (2024), doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2024.2421986, 14.

¹² Adrian Guelke: Ireland and South Africa: a Very Special Relationship, *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 11 (2000), 137–146; Adrian Guelke: The influence of the South African transition on the Northern Ireland peace process, *South African Journal of International Affairs* 3:2 (1995), 132–148.

¹³ Kylie Thomas: Bitter Emotion: Affective Archives and Transnational Solidarity against Apartheid, *Interventions. International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 23:1 (2021), 42–60, 42.

¹⁴ A detailed exploration of Devlin's relationship with Sinn Féin and its armed wing, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), is beyond the scope of this paper with the main focus being on her civil rights activism. As she pointed out in her memoir, she realized that "the task was not to free the Six Counties but to start again the national revolution", highlighting that Ireland's problems were first and foremost economic and social. Thus, even though she was associated with left-wing republican groups during the Troubles, later she distanced herself from republican militarism and was never, as Nolan pointed out, "reluctant to criticise Sinn Féin or the IRA". See Devlin: *The Price of My Soul*, 88; Nolan: *Five Irish Women*, 119–21.

¹⁵ Marie-Violaine Louvet: *Civil Society, Post-Colonialism and Transnational Solidarity. The Irish and the Middle East Conflict*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 133, 24, 29.

on television, “we could see people in America, whose skin was a different colour to ours, but I don’t remember noticing that as a matter of distinction. What I saw was a matter of commonality. [...] Simplistically: they were us, and we were them!”¹⁶ Therefore, the American civil rights marches were not merely an inspiration for speaking up against inequalities and social injustice (which in Northern Ireland included the treatment of the Catholic population as second-class citizens), but they also fostered a deeper sense of solidarity across religious or class lines or state borders. Devlin described herself as a socialist along with the other leaders of the People’s Democracy movement at Queen’s University Belfast: “I’m not a socialist because of any high-flown intellectual theorizing: life has made me one.”¹⁷ This explains why she was of the opinion that the Protestant working class was not the enemy, arguing that “If we get the Protestant working class on our side, the fun will really start.”¹⁸ Her maiden speech as the MP for Mid-Ulster at Westminster in April 1969 attested to this commitment to representing “poverty-stricken” Catholics as well as Protestants: “There is no place in society for us, the ordinary ‘peasants’ of Northern Ireland”, she argued. “There is no place for us in the society of landlords because we are the ‘have-nots’ and they are the ‘haves’.”¹⁹

Therefore, her alliances were not limited by the confines of traditional Catholic Irish Nationalism but demonstrated a strong commitment to solidarity across religious, class, and racial lines due to the influence of the African-American civil rights campaign, among others.²⁰ Notably, her maiden speech revealed that although Devlin was committed to the “non-sectarian [civil rights] movement”, she was by no means naïve enough to expect “true reforms” by the Unionist Government: “If they introduce the human rights Bill and outlaw sectarianism and discrimination, what will the party which is based on, and survives on, discrimination do? By introducing the human rights Bill, it signs its own death warrant.”²¹ The same sentiment is to be found in her memoir; she did not expect a change to come from Westminster. This distrust and resentment proved to be mutual, as, according to Devlin, the “self-respecting” Members of Parliament in the House of Commons “have discovered that their little child of Parliament is a monster who doesn’t care about their Parliament, or their parliamentary system, or their parliamentary formalities, or their parliamentary parties”.²² She, on the other hand, cared about the people of Ulster and their right to work,

¹⁶ Devlin McAliskey: “We took the notion”, 29.

¹⁷ Devlin: *The Price of My Soul*, 45; Nolan: *Five Irish Women*, 115–116.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁹ NORTHERN IRELAND HC Deb 22 April 1969 vol 782 cc262-324 [282], https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1969/apr/22/northern-ireland#S5CV0782P0_19690422_HOC_27

²⁰ Nolan: *Five Irish Women*, 115–116.

²¹ NORTHERN IRELAND HC Deb 22 April 1969 vol 782 cc262-324 [288], https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1969/apr/22/northern-ireland#S5CV0782P0_19690422_HOC_27

²² Devlin: *The Price of My Soul*, 49.

fair housing and an equal right to vote (all of which are interrelated). It was this that drove her and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) into the streets in the first place. Eventually, “the civil rights movement’s demand for simple justice sent the country up in flames”.²³

As Nolan highlighted, Devlin’s commitment to fighting for the poor of Northern Ireland was rooted in her worldview as an egalitarian socialist, which rendered her different from feminists who focused on self-expression or individual liberation in the personal sphere as opposed to Devlin’s commitment to challenge the public discrimination of the powerless.²⁴ She was convinced that the “best feminists in Ireland [were] those who grew out of the anti-imperialist movement in the north”,²⁵ pointing to the strength of anti-colonial solidarities across borders. Thus, her voice has been unapologetically anti-imperialist as she drew attention “to the violence of the British colonial state” and its long-term impact on the present of the (North of) Ireland, disrupting the “parochial lens through which the Northern Irish ‘Troubles’ have been understood”.²⁶

Although in her maiden speech in Westminster she claimed that she represented the “same tradition as the first woman ever to be elected to this Parliament, Constance Markievicz, who was elected on behalf of the Irish people”, her inspiration was not limited to the island of Ireland. For instance, even though she had been vocal about her sympathy with the Black civil rights movement, the fact that “most of her ‘good learning’ about feminism came from African American women” after her visits to the United States in and after 1969, is a lesser known fact.²⁷ The influence of militant black leader Angela Davis, whom Devlin visited in prison in 1971, was particularly noteworthy, since Devlin stressed that they were “involved in the same struggle ... for the liberation of our own people”.²⁸ The interest was mutual, as Davis recalled meetings debating whether in the late 1960s Northern Ireland “belonged politically to the Third World because of the situation of colonization because of the continued repression and because of the similarities and the way people – Catholics – were treated in Northern Ireland”.²⁹ Interestingly, when Davis

²³ Ibid., 164.

²⁴ Nolan: *Five Irish Women*, 116–118.

²⁵ Crozier-De Rosa: Solidarity, 10.

²⁶ Maasri et al.: Introduction, 20.

²⁷ Nolan: *Five Irish Women*, 135–136.

²⁸ Dooley, Brian: *Black and Green: The Fight for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland & Black America*, London, Pluto Press, 1998, 3, 66.

²⁹ Ibid., 53.

first visited Northern Ireland in 1994, the military presence and the vigilance of security measures reminded her of South African apartheid³⁰— a parallel not lost on many Irish Republicans.³¹

In *The Price of My Soul*,³² Devlin also highlighted the comparison between the “violent settler-colonial authority”³³ in the six northern counties and the apartheid government in South Africa.³⁴ She put words into action when she participated in the protest organized in Dublin (and Limerick) against the visit of the Springboks, the South African rugby team, in January 1970. Besides the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement (IAAM), the march was “headed by Patrick Lynch (Professor of Economics in UCD and chairman of the IAAM), Bernadette Devlin, Conor Cruise O’Brien and Alec Foster (a former Irish international)” and included a wide range of trade union activists, socialists, members of the *Coiste Cearta Sibhialta na Gaeltachta* (the Gaeltacht Civil Rights Movement), People’s Democracy, and the Students for Democratic Action, among others.³⁵ Crucially, the Irish protest against the tour constituted a part of the wider wave of international boycotts.³⁶ Anti-apartheid campaigners managed to use boycotts to their advantage north of the border as well, as illustrated by the success of students at Queen’s University, Belfast, to force the university rugby club to cancel their proposed tour to South Africa in June 1971.³⁷

As a republican socialist feminist, Devlin’s solidarity with those “similarly oppressed” has also included analogies with Palestinians or Native Americans due to their shared “history of being driven off our lands”.³⁸ In her keynote

³⁰ Ibid., 125–126.

³¹ Gerry Adams’s 1986 book illustrates the persistence of the South African analogy in the 1980s, well after the heyday of the Northern civil rights movement, in the rhetoric of Irish Republicans, which continued after the end of apartheid in 1994, mostly in hopes of inspiring trust in a peaceful transition of power modelled on the successes of the African National Congress (ANC). Gerry Adams: *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, Dingle, Brandon Book Publishers Ltd., 1986, 5, 22, 26, 27, 130.

³² The Hungarian translation of *The Price of My Soul* is not only noteworthy because it was published as early as 1969 but also due to the fact that the translator was Árpád Göncz, later President of Hungary (1990–2000). See Bernadette Devlin: *A lelke árát*, Európa Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1969.

³³ Crozier-De Rosa: *Solidarity*, 9.

³⁴ Devlin: *The Price of My Soul*, 113.

³⁵ As O’Sullivan noted, the banners of the marchers included slogans in Irish such as “‘Boks Amach [Springboks out]’ and ‘Ná bac leis na Boks [Ignore the Boks].’” Undoubtedly, the message of 8000 protesters was noticeably amplified by these bilingual puns. See Kevin O’Sullivan: *Ireland, Africa and the end of empire. Small state identity in the Cold War 1955–75*, Manchester University Press, 2014, 151.

³⁶ Booth highlighted that after 1968, international federations began expelling or suspending South Africa, following the International Olympic Committee’s lead – with the exception of rugby. The lead of the charge against apartheid was thus taken by civilian movements when it came to rugby. See Douglas Booth: *Hitting Apartheid for Six? The Politics of the South African Sports Boycott*, *Journal of Contemporary History* 38: 3 (2003), 480.

³⁷ O’Sullivan: *Ireland, Africa*, 164.

³⁸ Crozier-De Rosa: *Solidarity*, 10.

lecture at the 2019 conference at the University of Brighton, entitled “The Radical Sixties: Aesthetics, Politics and Histories of Solidarity”, she “reconfirmed the anticolonial politics of this transnational solidarity by noting: ‘where we came to in 1968, where Palestine came to, where South Africa came to, where Quebec came to, where the Afro-Americans came to in the sixties was written in the sands of the birth of the British Empire, and European empires’.”³⁹ Her people were not the Irish Americans but those who knew about oppression, discrimination, prejudice, and poverty; they were “black, Puerto Rican, Chicano”.⁴⁰ These alliances were not simply rhetorical; Devlin’s transnational solidarity was put into practice as concrete acts of solidarity. One of the most memorable instances occurred in March 1970, when Eamonn McCann, on behalf of Devlin, presented the honorary keys to New York to the Black Panthers, as a “gesture of solidarity with the Black liberation and revolutionary socialist movement in America”, castigating Irish Americans as “hypocrites”.⁴¹

This act of solidarity was not without precedents since in August 1969, Devlin had decided to visit civil rights leader Jesse Jackson instead of the Mayor of Chicago, Richard Daley, on her tour of America. Devlin resented Daley, who “even suggested that the money for relief in Northern Ireland should be given to the Red Cross instead of Devlin. Devlin responded by saying that during the Battle of the Bogside in Derry⁴² ‘we saw no Red Cross coming in when the police bombarded us for forty-eight hours with tear gas, a weapon I believe not uncommon to Mayor Daley’.”⁴³ Furthermore, the day before arriving in Chicago, she refused to speak in Detroit until the sponsors allowed the young African Americans to enter the Ford Hall auditorium.⁴⁴ Altogether, her words and actions during the tour evoked the criticism (and even hostility) of Irish Americans. What happened in Philadelphia, however, demonstrates a lesser-known dimension of Devlin’s transnational solidarity: namely, the significance of the song “We Shall Overcome” in the civil rights movement both in America and the North of Ireland.

³⁹ Maasri et al.: Introduction, 6; Devlin McAliskey: “We took the notion”, 32.

⁴⁰ Maasri et al.: Introduction, 6.

⁴¹ Devlin received the keys from Mayor John Lindsay in September 1969. For a detailed assessment on the political divide between Devlin and Irish Americans, see Matthew J. O’Brien: *Irish America, Race, and Bernadette Devlin’s 1969 American Tour*, *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* 14:2 (2010), 97–98.

⁴² The Battle of the Bogside took place shortly before Devlin’s tour, between 12 and 14 August, 1969, and it marked the start of “The Troubles” in the North. Devlin was in the Bogside and “supervised the erection of barricades and the making of petrol bombs. She believed that the violence involved was purely defensive and she took no direct part in it herself.” She was there to organize resistance; her words were aimed to “build solidarity and to foster cooperation”. See Nolan: *Five Irish Women*, 129–131.

⁴³ On many occasions, Devlin drew attention to the fact that they called the Chief of Police in Derry after Mayor Daley. See Dooley: *Black and Green*, 89.

⁴⁴ O’Brien: *Irish America*, 85.

WE SHALL OVERCOME

The controversy Devlin caused in Philadelphia was sparked by the song she asked the local black tenor, John Russell, to sing at the fundraiser. When at the end of the performance, Russell asked Devlin, “the guest of honour, what she would like him to sing for her”, she requested “We Shall Overcome”.⁴⁵ According to O’Brien, this happened after “she impetuously jumped onstage for a duet version of ‘We Shall Overcome’,”⁴⁶ but in several interviews, Devlin emphasized that she was asked to request a song. In 2018, she admitted having regretted “putting a person in a position I shouldn’t have put them in”, realizing what implications it would have to have a black singer performing “We Shall Overcome”:

It was at that point that the colour of the tenor’s skin became important. Because he was black and I knew when I said it, I probably cost this man his job. If he doesn’t sing, what is he going to do? If he does sing, what is he going to do? I started to sing first and he joined in. And you could feel the tension in that place. And the singing started up here with the black young people and then people in the crowd started to sing. But when I looked down amongst the dignitaries who had the best seats at the front, only a very few brave people stood up.⁴⁷

But why *this* song in particular? *We Shall Overcome* became one of the most iconic songs of the American civil rights movement in the first half of the 1960s, with its popularity peaking between 1963 and 1965. As Geary and Sheehan pointed out, the song’s “most commonly accepted lyrical ancestor is the 1901 spiritual, ‘I’ll Overcome Some Day,’ composed by a Methodist minister, Charles Albert Tindley”.⁴⁸ The song became a political song during the 1940s at the Highlander Folk School, which is where “the song’s ‘I’ became ‘We’”, when white anti-racist musicians (most notably Pete Seeger) “hybridized and instrumentalized it”.⁴⁹ The significance of this change cannot be overstated when examining the significance of solidarity and protest across communities.

In Ireland, the earliest documented stage performance of the song dates back to Luke Kelly’s concert (from Dubliners) in April 1964; thus the song had enjoyed general popularity several years before it was adopted by the civil rights movement in the North.⁵⁰ The summer of 1968 also proved to be

⁴⁵ Dooley: *Black and Green*, 87-88; Daniel Geary – Jack Sheehan: “We Shall Overcome” and Ireland. The Transatlantic Politics of a Protest Song, in Timothy H. Parsons (ed.), *Black 1968*, Routledge, 2025, 105.

⁴⁶ O’Brien: *Irish America*, 85.

⁴⁷ “Bernadette Devlin McAliskey”, *The Blindboy Podcast*, 14 November 2018, 01:00:47-01:02:45).

⁴⁸ Geary – Sheehan: “We Shall Overcome”, 106.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 108–111.

a watershed from the point of view of the song since after July that year, “We Shall Overcome” would be associated only with the cause of the civil rights movement.⁵¹

Given the impact of the African-American civil rights movement’s influence on the civil rights movement of the North in terms of their tactics and political vocabulary, it was hardly surprising that the iconic black American anthem was also adopted by Irish activists as an act of solidarity.⁵² In *The Price of My Soul*, Devlin drew attention to the power of folk songs when she argued that

...there was more real politics in the Folk Music Society than in any of the parties. They sang black civil-rights songs in the Folk Music Society before anybody else in Queen’s was interested in the race problem, and they were singing songs about unemployment in Belfast long before the civil-rights movement took it up. That was a good society. It had a strong American influence in it, but because of this there was another section that was determined to keep Irish influence, so you had the best of both American protest songs and traditional Irish folk music.⁵³

Consequently, even though there was occasional conflict between the singers of *We Shall Overcome* and those of Republican rebel songs such as *A Nation Once Again*, Devlin highlighted that on the long march to Derry in January 1969, they were “singing Orange songs, Green songs, red, black, and white songs, and just general pub-crawling and rugby songs, to keep us marching, and the whole tone of the thing at this stage was very good-natured”.⁵⁴ Therefore, rebel songs and *We Shall Overcome* were often sung alongside one another without causing any fraction within the civil rights movement. As Geary and Sheehan argued, “the coexistence of ‘We Shall Overcome’ with rebel music refutes the simple binary that is often drawn between the ‘good’ peaceful civil rights activist and the ‘bad’ physical force Republican [...]”.⁵⁵ Curiously, when Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams met veteran civil rights activist Rosa Parks in September 1994, he told her how he used to join the marches in the streets of Belfast, singing *We Shall Overcome*.⁵⁶

Undoubtedly, solidarity had been at the very heart of *We Shall Overcome* in the African-American as well as the (Northern) Irish context: what connected

⁵¹ Press reports and first-hand accounts named Fionbarra Ó Dochartaigh as the first (civil rights protester) to sing “We Shall Overcome” in Derry. As Dooley claimed, “within months, tens of thousands of people who had never been on a protest of any kind would be marching across Northern Ireland, demanding civil rights and singing ‘We Shall Overcome’.” See Dooley: *Black and Green*, 48; Geary – Sheehan: “We Shall Overcome”, 111, 120.

⁵² Dooley: *Black and Green*, 3–5.

⁵³ Devlin: *The Price of My Soul*, 76.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 131.

⁵⁵ Geary – Sheehan: “We Shall Overcome”, 114.

⁵⁶ Dooley: *Black and Green*, 124.

them beyond the words (even though there was action behind those words as they did “walk hand in hand”) was the importance of the beat and rhythm, which created a common sense of identity and togetherness among protesters, unifying “crowds of individuals in a single, clearly and rhythmically articulated cause” and hope in the future.⁵⁷ Indeed, as Geary and Sheehan highlighted, *We Shall Overcome* was more than “a symbolic reflection of the movement but an active instrument in its struggle”.⁵⁸ This sense of shared community, Smith noted, could also be interpreted along the lines of Benedict Anderson’s theory of “imagined communities”.⁵⁹ As one of the best-known performers of the song, folk singer Joan Baez, (literally) one of the most vocal supporters of American civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., demonstrated it when she performed *We Shall Overcome* in support of the Free Speech Movement in December 1964: the song “was not simply a voting rights song but applied to all people who saw themselves as oppressed”.⁶⁰ The song uniquely allowed civil rights activists across the globe to “define their struggles away from nationalist framings”, focusing rather on the universality of human rights, creating connections between oppressed peoples, thereby linking the Northern Irish movement to African Americans as well as the liberation struggle, for instance, in the apartheid state (1948-1994) of South Africa.⁶¹

Rosenthal drew attention to how elements of folk culture, such as *We Shall Overcome*, act as bridges between people across time or space, and serve as outstanding examples demonstrating the power of solidarity. More specifically, he argued that when South African activists rallied against apartheid by singing *We Shall Overcome*, they “forged an explicit connection between themselves and black Americans during the civil rights movement” in hopes of a victory already achieved by the African-American civil rights movement.⁶² One of the most memorable renditions of *We Shall Overcome* may be attributed to the American Senator for New York, Robert Kennedy, who “was one of the first major American (or foreign) politicians to go to South Africa to attack apartheid”.⁶³ Kennedy, who identified closely with the African-American civil rights movement, toured South Africa in 1966 and was widely reported to have

⁵⁷ Thérèse Smith: Chapter 24: “We Shall Overcome”: Communal Participation and Entrainment in a Protest Song, in Aileen Dillane – Martin J. Power – Eoin Devereux – Amanda Haynes (eds.): *Songs of Social Protest. International Perspectives*, London, Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, 394, 398.

⁵⁸ Geary – Sheehan: “We Shall Overcome”, 115.

⁵⁹ Smith: Chapter 24, 399.

⁶⁰ Michael Scott Cain: *Folk Music and the New Left in the Sixties*, Jefferson, N.C., McFarland & Company, 2019, 73, 109.

⁶¹ Geary – Sheehan: “We Shall Overcome”, 120.

⁶² Sam A. Rosenthal: A Folksong in Flight: Pete Seeger and the Genesis of “We Shall Overcome” in Victor V. Bobetsky (ed.): *We Shall Overcome. Essays on a Great American Song*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, 24.

⁶³ Dooley: *Black and Green*, 73.

led the crowds singing the song, standing on the roof of his car.⁶⁴ As the South African Nobel Peace Prize Winner Desmond Tutu explained after the end of apartheid, the song was “not about eliminating the enemy” but about “winning over a new friend”.⁶⁵ Therefore, by singing “We’ll walk hand in hand” together, across religious and racial lines, “We” are not merely expressing symbolic solidarity with an imagined “other” but “we” are including them in “us” as an act of solidarity. It needs to be added, however, that South African music had a much more complex role in the world of anti-apartheid activism. For instance, in contrast to “*Senzeni Na?*” [*What have we done?*], one of the most iconic songs which became the emblem of mourning and desolation in the post-Sharpeville period,⁶⁶ the reach of *We Shall Overcome* was more limited in South Africa. Still, both freedom songs were adapted in the post-apartheid period among protesters in 2010, highlighting the role of freedom songs as not only facilitators of collective bonds but also as “tactics of a liberation struggle against the ravages of war, against colonialism and most notably, against apartheid”.⁶⁷ Notably, in June the same year, Roger Waters (Pink Floyd) re-arranged and released a version of *We Shall Overcome* in support of Palestine, encouraging global support for peace efforts in the Middle East.⁶⁸

CONCLUSION

While the impact of the American civil rights movement on the strategy and rhetoric of the civil rights movement in the North of Ireland has been widely acknowledged in historiography,⁶⁹ studies addressing the significance of transnational transfers, connections, and acts of solidarity connecting Irish activists with groups and movements across the globe have recently started to nuance our understanding of the complexity of solidarity. This paper

⁶⁴ Stuart Stotts: *We Shall Overcome*, Baker & Taylor, 2010, 53.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ The Sharpeville massacre took place on 21 March 1960, when the police opened fire on peaceful protesters who demonstrated against South African pass laws, killing 69 people and wounding another 180. The tragedy marked a milestone in both the brutality of the apartheid regime as well as the outrage it attracted internationally. On the transformative role of music in South African anti-apartheid activism, see Anne Schumann: The Beat that Beat Apartheid: The Role of Music in the Resistance against Apartheid in South Africa, *Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien* 14: 8 (2008), 25.

⁶⁷ Omatoyo Jolaosho: Chapter 16: “Freedom is a Constant Struggle”. Performance and Regeneration Amidst Social Movement Decline, in Aileen Dillane – Martin J. Power – Eoin Devereux – Amanda Haynes (eds.): *Songs of Social Protest. International Perspectives*, London, Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, 260, 266.

⁶⁸ Inike Tesiana Putri – Silis Triyono: “We Shall Overcome”. A Humanity Song by Roger Waters: Critical Discourse Analysis, *Humaniora* 30: 2 (2018), 119–127, doi.org/10.2216/jh.v29i3.32775, 119–127.

⁶⁹ Dooley: *Black and Green*, 68.

analyzed the significance of transnational acts of solidarity in the civil rights activism of Bernadette Devlin McAliskey between 1968 and 1972. Building on the research carried out on the history of the song *We Shall Overcome*, this paper also drew attention to the fact that due to the broad and universal appeal of the song, it fostered solidarity amongst singers from all walks of life and from all over the world.⁷⁰ As Smith highlighted, the song has been heard

...in a myriad of contexts, from the civil rights movement that took to the streets of Derry in Northern Ireland in 1968, to its performance on that movement's Bloody Sunday, on January 30, 1972, when it echoed through the ranks of marchers protesting against internment who had their path blocked by British soldiers; to the anti-apartheid struggles focused on the Soweto township of South Africa (1976); the massacres of students at Tianamen Square *[sic]* (1989); protests against China's repatriation of North Korean refugees (2008); protests against bombings in Beirut (2015); and protests against the shootings at Emanuel AME church in Charleston, South Carolina (2015). It [...] features widely as an iconic referent for a non-violent, but not to be defeated, struggle against injustice.⁷¹

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⁷⁰ Geary – Sheehan: "We Shall Overcome", 112.

⁷¹ Smith: Chapter 24, 393.

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IRELAND, IRISH CULTURE AND IRISH ENGLISH IN THE EYES OF HUNGARIAN LEXICOGRAPHERS¹

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Abstract

This study intends to explore how Ireland, Irish culture, and Irish English are represented in two pairs of contemporary online English–Hungarian and Hungarian–English dictionaries of Akadémiai Kiadó (Akadémiai Publishers).² Headwords, entries, and senses related to Ireland, its people, and its Celtic language, those connected to Irish history, politics, and culture, and to the English language as used in Ireland, will be scrutinized in the aforementioned dictionaries. The presence and absence of certain geographical names, first names, lexical items connected to politics and culture, and of words and senses used in Irish English will be explored, analyzed, and commented on. Based on the lexicographical data examined, a picture of the representation of Ireland, Irish culture, and Irish English in these dictionaries will emerge, which may provide a useful starting point for future revisions of these dictionaries and for other dictionaries as well.

KEYWORDS

Lexicography, English–Hungarian dictionaries, Hungarian–English dictionaries, Irish English, Ireland-related terms

¹ It was during the final revision stage of this article, on the 28th of February 2026, that Tamás Magay, the doyen of English–Hungarian and Hungarian–English lexicography, passed away. During his career spanning more than sixty years, he contributed to the compilation and editing of more than fifty bilingual dictionaries, two of which are the objects of analysis here. This paper is dedicated to the memory of this inspiring lexicographer and colleague.

² The publishing house does not have an official English name.

INTRODUCTION

The work and role of lexicographers is extremely important in several respects. Their responsibility is to provide good quality and accurate linguistic data, and, in the case of bilingual dictionaries, to map two different languages onto each other by providing the equivalents in language 2 (i.e. the target language) of the headwords in language 1 (i.e. the source language).³ As well as that, which headwords they select and with what method is also of huge importance. No dictionary can contain all the words used in a language, thus the choices a lexicographer makes will reflect what they think of the relevance of the word, and in the case of a so-called passive bilingual dictionary, its relevance for the speech community which is the target group, i.e. in whose first language the equivalents are given.

The observations above also apply to bilingual English–Hungarian dictionaries. The lexicographer, for example, would have to tackle questions concerning the inclusion of geographical names, personal names, realia (culture-specific lexical items, which also include the names of institutions or political parties), or the senses of a word connected to a specific country. Thinking along these lines, one can understand why it would be interesting to examine what headwords and senses related to Ireland and Irish English certain English–Hungarian and Hungarian–English bilingual dictionaries include and in what contexts. Thus, this research explores what one may call the Irish-related content of four dictionaries published in Hungary that are available in online format and can be searched with the help of a search engine. The hypothesis is that as Ireland and Hungary have always had fewer contacts with each other than with other English-speaking countries, there are going to be gaps in the Irish-related content in these dictionaries, that is, several words, senses, and proper nouns would be absent that a Hungarian with a more than average interest in Ireland would intend to explore with the help of a dictionary.

³ An important point to note here is that in bilingual lexicography, the terms ‘target language’ and ‘source language’ have the same meaning as in translation: “**target language 1** In TRANSLATION, the language into which a SOURCE LANGUAGE text is to be translated. → ACTIVE DICTIONARY, BIDIRECTIONAL DICTIONARY.” (R.R.K. Hartmann – Gregory James: *Dictionary of Lexicography*, London, New York, Routledge, 1998, 137.); “**source language 1** In TRANSLATION, the language of a text which is to be translated into another (the ‘target’) language. → ACTIVE DICTIONARY, BIDIRECTIONAL DICTIONARY.” (Ibid., 128.) Thus, these terms have a different meaning when used in the context of language teaching, where the source language is *always* one’s native language, and the target language is *always* the one to be mastered.

THE DICTIONARIES EXAMINED

The four dictionaries examined are two pairs of general-purpose dictionaries, and they can be accessed by subscribers on the online dictionary website of Akadémiai Kiadó (Akadémiai Publishers), one of the most prestigious dictionary publishers in Hungary. This website is <https://www.szotar.net/>.

The first editions of two of the dictionaries examined, *The English–Hungarian Universal Dictionary (Angol–magyar egyetemes nagyszótár)* and *The Hungarian–English Universal Dictionary (Magyar–angol egyetemes nagyszótár)* by Péter Lázár A. and György Varga (editors-in-chief), both by Akadémiai Kiadó were published in 2000, and since then, the dictionaries have been growing in size, having been revised more than ten times. The online digitized versions are from 2021.⁴ At this stage, both dictionaries contain about 100,000 headwords, thus greatly surpassing the size of a concise dictionary.

The other pair of dictionaries was also published by Akadémiai Kiadó. Here, the editor-in-chief was the doyen of English–Hungarian / Hungarian–English bilingual lexicography, Tamás Magay, who was also the founder of the English Department (now the Institute of English Studies) at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary (Budapest). Both the *English–Hungarian Dictionary (Angol–magyar szótár)* and the *Hungarian–English Dictionary (Magyar–angol szótár)* contained 60,000 entries and 625,000 lexicographical data when they were published in 2021. According to the publisher's website, the online version, available at szotar.net, is constantly being expanded.⁵

RESEARCH METHOD

As no search can be conducted based on geographical register labels (which are also called regional labels) in these online dictionaries, that is, no search can be made for the label 'Ireland' or 'Irish', the following procedure was adopted:⁶ a search was made for a certain number of geographical names and related terms, first names, terms connected to history, politics, and institutions,

⁴ Impresszum, in: Lázár A. Péter – Varga György: *Angol–magyar egyetemes nagyszótár*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, <https://www.szotar.net/>, (accessed 10 November 2025), and Lázár A. Péter – Varga György: *Magyar–angol egyetemes nagyszótár*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, <https://www.szotar.net/>, (accessed 5 November 2025).

⁵ Leírás [product description], Magay, Tamás: *Angol–magyar szótár*, <https://akademiai.hu/p100x00003-angol-magyar-szotar.html> (accessed 19 March 2026), and Leírás [product description], Magay, Tamás: *Magyar–angol szótár*, <https://akademiai.hu/p100x00004-magyar-angol-szotar.html>, (accessed 19 March 2026).

⁶ For example, when one types into the search engine the regional label *IRE*, used in Magay's dictionary to indicate terms connected to Ireland or Irish usage, the hits will only be the ones for the English word 'ire', and no entry with the regional label *IRE* will come up as a result of the search.

cultural terms connected to Ireland, and finally, some common words that are considered to be either an Irish English lexical item or have a sense that is only known in Irish English. One also has to keep in mind that the Lázár–Varga dictionaries contain considerably more lexicographical data than the Magay dictionaries.

An important point would need to be made here about regional labels. These are “used to mark the dialect or regional variety with which a word or phrase is associated”.⁷ According to Pődör’s article from 2012, which traces the appearance of such labels in the concise English–Hungarian dictionaries of Akadémiai Publishers, Irish English usage is the fourth geographical register label to appear in these works after British English, American English, and Scottish English, and it first appears in Ország’s *Angol–magyar kézikönyvtár (Concise English–Hungarian Dictionary)*, published in 1981.⁸ The latest concise dictionary at the time of the publication of this article already had eight geographical register labels.⁹ Thus, in our globalized world, the question is not whether to include items connected to a certain English-speaking country in English–Hungarian / Hungarian–English dictionaries, but how many of these to include.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Attempt has been made to present the complex data in a digestible format. The findings are presented in thematic tables, where only those parts of the entries appear that have been considered relevant to this article. For example, subject field labels like *földr.* (*földrajz* ‘geography’) or *pol.* (*politika* ‘politics’) are omitted, and so is information given on pronunciation (pronunciation is always indicated for each headword with the help of the International Phonetic Alphabet in both English–Hungarian dictionaries, and in Magay’s dictionary a sound file is also often provided); in the case of polysemous headwords, only the relevant meaning is given (in such cases, the omitted parts are indicated with ‘(...)’; and part of speech information is also only given when relevant. The Hungarian glosses and explanations on the lexical items examined are translated only when this is considered to be essential. When the lexical item examined appears in more than one entry, then a blank line is inserted between them. The index number distinguishing different parts of speech is retained

⁷ Hartmann – James: *Dictionary of Lexicography*, 118.

⁸ Pődör, Dóra: A skóciai angol megjelenése az Akadémiai kiadó angol–magyar kézikönyvtáraiban [‘The Representation of Scottish English in the Concise English–Hungarian Dictionaries of Akadémiai Publishers’], in T. Pintér – D. Pődör – K. P. Márkus (eds.): *Szavak pásztora. Írások Magay Tamás tiszteletére* [A Shepherd of Words. Festschrift for Tamás Magay], Szeged, Grimm Kiadó, 2012, 135–141.

⁹ László Ország – Tamás Magay – Dezső Futász – Zoltán Kövecses: *Angol–magyar kézikönyvtár (Concise English–Hungarian Dictionary)*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2010.

(e.g. **Celtic**¹, **Celtic**²). The typography of the original entries was retained wherever it was possible; however, for example, words in color could not be reproduced here. In order to save space, no link is provided for the more than two hundred entries examined here in the footnotes and the 'Works cited' section; for further information, the reader is referred to the dictionaries in question. Each table is followed by a short summary and analysis. The thematic tables appear in the following order:

- I. Geographical names and related terms (43): a) Names for the country and the island (5); b) Names for the inhabitants and for their language (17); c) Offensive terms for or connected to Irish people (8); d) The provinces of Ireland (2); e) Seas, lakes, and rivers (3); f) Cities and towns (8)
- II. First names (14) + prefix in surnames (1)
- III. History, politics, and institutions (21): a) Terms mostly connected to Northern Ireland (15); b) Terms connected to the Republic of Ireland (6)
- IV. Food and drink (8)
- V. Music and dance (8)
- VI. Animals and plants (5)
- VII. Other cultural terms (12+4)
- VIII. Some other Irish English lexical items or meanings (6)

Reference to the dictionaries is mostly made with abbreviations: *LVEH* stands for Lázár and Varga's *English–Hungarian Universal Dictionary*, while *LVHE* for their Hungarian–English one. Similarly, *MEH* stands for Magay's *English–Hungarian Dictionary*, and *MHE* for his Hungarian–English one.

I. GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES AND RELATED TERMS (43)

Some of the geographical names discussed in this section fall into the category of place names. According to Styles, "It is the policy of most general dictionaries not to include entries for place names, a convention which has prevailed in the lexicography of most of the major European languages for the last two centuries."¹⁰ She also adds, however, that there are some exceptions, for example, *The Oxford Dictionary of English*,¹¹ since its first edition in 1998, and some major dictionaries in the United States also include quite a few

¹⁰ Tania Styles: Place-Name Dictionaries, in Ph. Durkin (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Lexicography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, 255.

¹¹ Published in 1998 as *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* in 1998 and as *The Oxford Dictionary of English* in 2003; Oxford, Oxford University Press.

place names as headwords in general dictionaries. As it is going to be seen, to a limited extent, this latter practice is followed by *MEH* – continuing the practice of the much earlier comprehensive and concise English–Hungarian dictionaries of Akadémiai Kiadó, first edited by László Országh, and later by Országh and Tamás Magay.

a) Names for the country and the island (5)

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>	<i>MHE</i>
Éire / Eire	Eire VAGY Éire Írország [ír neve]	Írország Ireland; Eire; Éire	Eire Írország [gael neve]	Írország Ireland, [írül] Eire
Ireland	Ireland Írország Ir. = Irish; (...) Ireland Ire. = Ireland	Írország Ireland, [írül] Eire; → ír ³	Ireland Írország the Republic of Ireland (ROI) Ír Köztársaság; → Britain , → Northern Ireland	Írország Ireland; Eire; Éire
Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland Észak-Írország NI = (...) Northern Ireland; North Ireland	Észak-Írország Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland Észak-Írország; → Britain , → Ireland NI 2. <i>Northern Ireland</i>	Észak-Írország Northern Ireland NI 2. Northern Ireland
Republic of Ireland / Irish Republic	–	–	Ireland földr [orsz] Írország the Republic of Ireland (ROI) Ír Köztársaság; → Britain , → Northern Ireland ROI <i>the Republic of Ireland</i> Ír Köztársaság → Ireland	ír ³ I. <i>mn</i> Irish Ír Köztársaság Republic of Ireland, Irish Republic

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>	<i>MHE</i>
Northern Ireland as part of the UK	U.K. = United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) United Kingdom VAGY UK (...) the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Nagy-Britannia és Észak-Írország Egyesült Királysága	Nagy-Britannia (...) Nagy-Britannia és Észak-Írország Egyesült Királysága the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Britain (...) The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Nagy-Britannia és Észak-Írország Egyesült Királysága United Kingdom, the, rövid UK (...) the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Nagy-Britannia és Észak-Írország Egyesült Királysága	egyesült (...) Nagy-Britannia és Észak-Írország Egyesült Királysága United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Nagy-Britannia (...) Nagy-Britannia és Észak-Írország Egyesült Királysága United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Table 1

Éire (the Irish name for Ireland), **Ireland** and **Northern Ireland** can all be found as headwords in both of the English–Hungarian dictionaries. The official name of the country, the **Republic of Ireland**, can only be found in *MEH* in the entry for **Ireland**, and also as the expansion of the abbreviation **ROI**, which appears as a headword. **Irish Republic** can only be found in *MHE* in the entry for **ír** ('Irish'), where it is given as one of the equivalents of **Ír Köztársaság**.

One of the equivalents of **NI** in *LVEH*, **North Ireland**, must be a mistake. **Northern Ireland** appears in other entries as well, e.g. in the entry for **Britain** and **the United Kingdom**, as well as in the entry **egyesült** ('united') in *MEH* – see the details above. The phrase "the Island of Ireland" cannot be found in any of the dictionaries examined.

‘Ireland’ in example sentences and phrases in *MHE* and *MHE* (7)

Headword with the Hungarian or English equivalent	Example sentence in English and Hungarian
commentary 2. (rádió)közvetítés	There’ll be a live commentary on the Scotland–Ireland match. Élő közvetítést adunk/sugárzunk a Skócia–Írország mérkőzésről., A Skócia–Írország mérkőzést élőben közvetíti a televízió.
go down 11. veszít, kikap, vereséget szenved	Ireland went down 2–1 to the Scottish team. Írország válogatottja 2:1-re kikapott a skót tizenegytől.
hail from vhonnan származik	my father hails from Ireland apám Írországból származik
her ¹ 2. azé; annak a... [<i>hajóra, autóra, országra vonatkozóan</i>]	The ship was on her way from Ireland to England. A hajó úton volt Írországból és Angliába.
introduction 2. bevezetés; elterjesztés, meghonosítás; forgalomba hozatal	the introduction of the potato into Ireland a burgonya meghonosítása Írorszáiban
north ² <i>mn</i> északi, észak-	the north coast of Ireland Írország északi partja
mez 2. strip, <i>US</i> jersey, colours (<i>US</i> -ors)	zöld-fehér mezben játszik Írország Ireland are playing in the green and white strip

Table 2

Only Magay’s dictionaries have example sentences with the word **Ireland**. Out of these seven, three are connected to sport, and one to a plant associated with Ireland: the potato.

‘Ireland’ and ‘Northern Ireland’ in examples in *MEH* (2)

Headword with the English equivalent	Examples in Hungarian and English
királynő 1. queen	II. Erzsébet angol királynő Elizabeth II, queen of the United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
várományos <i>fn</i> jog 1. (...) heir apparent	az angol trón várományosa heir apparent to the throne of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, heir apparent of the British sovereign (= the Prince of Wales)

Table 3

These two examples evoke official contexts.

b) Names for the inhabitants and for their language (17)

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>	<i>MHE</i>
Celt	Celt kelta ember; kelta	kelta ¹ FNÉV Celt; Kelt ¹²	Celt <i>fn</i> kelta (ember)	kelta II. <i>fn</i> [ember] Celt; [nyelv] Celtic
Celtic (noun)	Celtic ¹ FNÉV kelta nyelv	kelta ² MNÉV Celtic; Keltic; Gaelic kelta nyelv(ek) Celtic/Keltic (languages)	Celtic ² <i>fn</i> kelta (nyelv)	kelta I. <i>mn</i> Celtic kelta nyelv Celtic II. <i>fn</i> [ember] Celt; [nyelv] Celtic
Celtic (adj.)	Celtic ² MNÉV kelta C ² (...) Celtic	kelta ² MNÉV Celtic; Keltic; Gaelic	Celtic ¹ <i>mn</i> kelta	kelta I. <i>mn</i> Celtic
Erse	Erse ír(országi) gael/ kelta (nyelv)	–	Erse írországi gael/ kelta (nyelv); → Gaelic ^{1, 2}	–
Gael			Gael <i>fn</i> gael [skót kelta ember]	
Gaelic	Gaelic gael; (skót/ír) kelta	gael Gaelic	Gaelic ¹ <i>mn</i> gael [nyelv] Gaelic ² <i>fn</i> gael (nyelv) [skót/ír kelta nyelv]	gael <i>mn</i> ▪ <i>fn</i> Gaelic
Goidelic	Goidelic VAGY Godhelic VAGY Gadhelic észak-kelta [ír gael, skót gael, ill. Man szigeti]	–	–	–

¹² The form Kelt does not appear in either of the English–Hungarian dictionaries.

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>	<i>MHE</i>
(the) Irish (noun, person, people)	Irish¹ FNÉV 1. ír the Irish az írek	ír¹ FNÉV 1. férfi Irishman; nő Irishwoman; (...) két ír two Irish people az írek the Irish	Irish² fn 2. <i>tsz</i> the Irish az írek, az ír nép	ír³ II. fn 1. (...) az írek the Irish
(in) Irish (noun, language)	Irish¹ FNÉV 2. ír (nyelv) in Irish ír nyelven; írül 3. ír nyelvtudás her Irish is very good nagyon jól tud írül	ír¹ FNÉV 2. ír NYELV Irish írül in Irish írül in Irish	Irish² fn 1. ír (nyelv)	ír³ II. fn 2. [nyelv] Irish írül [beszél] [speak] Irish, [írva] [written] in Irish
Irish (adjective)	Irish² MNÉV ír	ír³ MNÉV Irish	Irish¹ mn ír, írországi	ír³ I. <i>mn</i> Irish (...) az ír nép the Irish
of/from Ireland	–	írországi Irish; (...) of/ from Ireland		írországi Irish, of Ireland
of the Irish Republic				ír³ I. <i>mn</i> (...) ír köztársasági (of the) Irish Republic
Irishman	Irishman ír (férfi)	ír¹ FNÉV II. 1. [férfi] Irishman, [nő] Irish woman	Irishman ír ember, ír [férfi]	ír³ fn II. 1. [férfi] Irishman, [nő] Irish woman
Irish- woman	Irishwoman ír nő	ír¹ FNÉV II. 1. [férfi] Irishman, [nő] Irish woman	Irishwoman ír [nő]	ír³ fn II. 1. [férfi] Irishman, [nő] Irish woman
Irishry			Irishry 1. ír nép 2. ír tulajdonság; ír szokás; ír kifejezés	

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>	<i>MHE</i>
Middle Irish	MIr. = Middle Irish			
Northern Irish	Northern Irish észak-írországi; északír	észak-írországi Northern Irish; of/from Northern Ireland északír Northern Irish; of/from Northern Ireland		észak-írországi <i>mn ▪ fn</i> (of) Northern Ireland

Table 4

It is interesting to note that while **Erse**, which is considered to be old-fashioned by the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD)*,¹³ appears in both *LVEH* and *MEH*, **Irish Gaelic** does not. It is also somewhat puzzling that while the history of the Irish language can be divided into several periods, only the abbreviation of one of these, **MIr.**, standing for 'Middle Irish', appears in one of these dictionaries, *LVEH*, without any explanation. Gael, denoting a person, is explained in *MEH* as [*skót kelta ember*] ('a Scottish Celtic person'), which is not quite accurate, as it can also refer to an Irish person.

In the entry for **Celtic** (adjective), six compounds appear in *LVEH* (**Celtic cross**, **Celtic harp**, **Celtic Sea**, **Celtic Studies / Celtic scholarship**, **Celtic studies scholar / Celtic scholar**, **the Celtic Tiger**), while in *LVHE* only one (**the Celtic fringe**). In *LVHE*, the following compounds appear under the corresponding adjective, **kelta**: **kelta hárfá**, **kelta kereszt**, **kelta nyelv(ek)**, **a kelta tigris**, while in *MHE* only one, **kelta nyelv**. Thus, the editors of the two dictionaries treat these entries quite differently, and the corresponding English–Hungarian / Hungarian–English entries are also quite different. These compounds can be found in the thematic tables according to their semantic category. **Irish** also appears as the first element of compounds in these dictionaries, as well as an adjective accompanying a noun. Lexical items that can be considered compounds are the following: **Irish breakfast**, **Irish bull**, **Irish country hat**, **Irish elk**, **Irish harp**, **Irish moss**, **Irish night**, **Irish setter**, **Irish wolfhound**. Some of these have their own individual entry (**Irish country hat**, **Irish harp**, **Irish moss**, **Irish setter**, **Irish wolfhound**), while some appear in the entry for

¹³ *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>, (accessed 25 November 2025).

the adjective **Irish** or in some other entries (**Irish breakfast**, **Irish bull**, **Irish night**). **Irish elk** only appears in *LVHE* as one of the equivalents of ‘óriásszarvas’. Adjective + noun combinations that are not compounds but noun phrases are **Irish culture**, **Irish films**, **Irish legend**, **Irish plays**. Again, these are listed in the tables according to their semantic category.

The Hungarian adjectival form, which is the equivalent of **Northern Irish**, has an entry in both Hungarian–English dictionaries; what is more, *LVHE* gives both Hungarian forms (**észak-írországi** and **északír**) an entry; furthermore, only *LVEH* lists **Northern Irish** as a headword.

**‘Irish’ as an adjective in example sentences
in the dictionaries examined (6)**

Headword with the Hungarian or English equivalent	Example sentence in English and Hungarian
accent ¹ 3. akcentus; ejtésmód; kiejtés; kiejtésmód	she hasn’t lost her Irish accent nem veszítette el az ír akcentusát
akcentus 1. accent	nem veszítette el az ír akcentusát she hasn’t lost her Irish accent
become of become of smb lesz vkiből/vkivel	what became of that Irish girl? mi lett azzal az ír lánnyal?
lesz 4. become; make; prove	mi lett azzal az ír lánnyal? what became of that Irish girl?
behold, beheld, beheld megpillant; meglát	he beheld a fair Irish maiden szép ír leányzót pillantott meg
cap ² 2. maximalizál, befagyaszt [pl. fizetést]	Irish Finance Minister was seeking to cap bankers’ salaries at 500,000 euros. Az ír pénzügyminiszter igyekszik 500 000 eurónál maximalni a bankárok fizetését.

Table 5

All of the examples are from the Lázár–Varga dictionaries, with the exception of the last one, which is from *MEH*. The first four examples can be found in two corresponding entry pairs. Out of these six examples, **Irish** twice qualifies **accent**, and three times **girl** or **maiden**.

There is one case where the term **Irish** denotes the language in an example sentence in *LVHE*: **írül beszélnek, de angolul facebookoznak** they speak Irish at home but Facebook in English (in the entry **facebookozik** ‘Facebook’).

c) Offensive terms for or connected to Irish people (8)

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>
bog-trotter		ír ³ MNÉV (...) ír paraszt bog-trotter [!]	
Irish twins	Irish twins [!] egy évnél kisebb különbséggel született testvérek		
Mick / mick	Mick 2. [!] ír férfi [megszólításként is]	ír ³ MNÉV (...) ír férfi paddy [!]; mick [!]	mick szl sértő 1. ír(országi személy)
Paddy	Paddy 1. [!] ír férfi	ír ³ MNÉV (...) ír férfi paddy [!]; mick [!]	Paddy 2. <i>sértő tabu</i> ír (férfi)
Taig	Taig [!] római katolikus [északír gúnyneve]	–	–
Teague	Teague [!] római katolikus [északír gúnyneve]	–	–
West Brit	West Brit [!] ír [gúnynév]	ír ¹ FNÉV 1. (...) gúnynévként West Brit	
West Briton	West Briton [!] brit-szimpatizáns ír	britszimpatizáns pro-Brit; pro-British britszimpatizáns ír West Briton [!]	

Table 6

The Lázár–Varga dictionaries cover derogatory terms used for or connected to Irish people quite extensively, as *LVEH* has seven such terms, while *LVHE* five, one of which does not appear in *LVEH*. *MEH* treats only two of these. In all of these cases the offensive nature of the terms is highlighted – in the Lázár–Varga dictionaries with the [!] symbol, while in Magay’s dictionary with register labels.

d) The provinces of Ireland (2)

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>
Connacht / Connaught	–	–	Connacht [Írorsz] Connacht Connaught [Írorsz] [<i>Connacht korábbi neve</i>]
Ulster	–	–	Ulster [GB Észak Ír] Ulster

Table 7

Of the four provinces of Ireland, none appear in *LVEH*, and only two of them are listed in *MEH*. These two are **Ulster** and **Connacht**, of which the earlier form of the name, **Connaught** is also given as a headword. It may be that these two names are given as they are more likely to appear in a political or historical context known to Hungarians than the other two, Munster and Leinster. It should also be noted that the geographical label for Ulster is *GB*, not *UK*, and *Észak Ír* (= Northern Ireland), although three of the counties of Ulster can be found in the Republic of Ireland. In this respect, *MEH* follows English monolingual dictionaries, for example, the *OALD*, which states in the entry for ‘Ulster’ that it is “another name for Northern Ireland”.¹⁴ **Ulster** also appears in other entries as part of the expansion of certain abbreviations (see in the section on ‘History, Politics, and Institutions’).

e) Seas, lakes, and rivers (3)

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>
Liffey	–	–	Liffey [Írorsz] Liffey [<i>folyó</i>]
Shannon	– (only as a woman’s or man’s name)	–	Shannon 1. [Írorsz] Shannon [<i>folyó</i>]
Celtic Sea	Celtic ² MNÉV (...) Celtic Sea Kelta- tenger	Kelta-tenger Celtic Sea	–

Table 8

Of the three longest rivers in Ireland (the Shannon, the Barrow, and the Suir), only the **Shannon** is given and only in *MEH*. The personal name which derives from this river name appears in both *MEH* and *LVEH*. Dublin’s river, the **Liffey**, is also given in *MEH*. The River Foyle in Belfast, and the River Boyne, which has historical significance because of the Battle of the Boyne that took place

¹⁴ *OALD*, (accessed 20 November 2025).

on the 12th of July in 1690, are not mentioned in either of these works. *MEH* also gives the information that the Shannon and the Liffey are rivers in Ireland.

None of the five biggest lakes of Ireland (Lough Neagh, Lough Corrib, Lough Derg, Lough Erne, Lough Ree) are mentioned in either of the English–Hungarian dictionaries. As far as seas are concerned, the Irish Sea or its Hungarian equivalent, ‘Ír-tenger’, are not given in any of the four dictionaries; however, **Celtic Sea** appears in *LVEH* as a sub-entry under the adjective **Celtic**, and also in *LVHE* as the equivalent of **Kelta-tenger**.

f) Cities and towns (8)

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>	<i>MHE</i>
Belfast	–	–	Belfast [UK, Észak-Írorsz főv] Belfast	–
Derry / Londonderry	–	–	Londonderry [UK] Londonderry	–
Dublin	Dublin Dublin		Dublin [Írorsz főv] Dublin	
Dubliner	Dubliner <i>fnév</i> dublíni	dublíni <i>fnév</i> Dubliner	–	dublíni <i>mn</i> ▪ <i>fn</i> Dubliner
Baile Átha Cliath	–	–	Baile Átha Cliath, Baile Átha Cliath «Dublin ír neve»	
Cork	–	–	Cork [Írorsz] Cork	–
Galway	–	–	Galway [Írorsz] Galway	–
Limerick	–	–	Limerick [IRE] Limerick	–

Table 9

The six biggest cities of Ireland appear in Magay’s English–Hungarian dictionary, but only Dublin appears in *LVEH*.¹⁵ Magay’s dictionary is the only one which also gives the Irish name of Dublin. The dictionary also explains that Dublin is the

¹⁵ List of settlements on the island of Ireland by population, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_settlements_on_the_island_of_Ireland_by_population, (accessed 1 November 2025).

capital of Ireland, while Belfast is the capital of Northern Ireland, and that **Baile Átha Cliath** is the Irish name for Dublin. Also note that the name Derry, which is the older and non-official, although extensively used name for **Londonderry**, does not figure in these dictionaries. (It is not the aim of this paper to discuss the Derry/Londonderry name dispute, which has political connotations.)

Dubliner, a derivative of **Dublin**, is only given in *LVEH*, but its Hungarian equivalent, **dublíni**, is provided by both *LVEH* and *MEH*, *LVEH* assigning it only one part of speech (noun), while *MEH* two (adjective + noun).

‘Dublin’ in examples in *LVEH* and *LVHE* (4)

Headword with the Hungarian equivalent	Example sentence in English and Hungarian
around ² 3. közelében; környékén	she lives around Dublin Dublin környékén lakik
elrepül 3. fly	elrepül Dublinba fly to Dublin
késve late	már Dublinból késve indultunk we were already late leaving Dublin
late ¹ MNÉV 1. be late késik; elkésik	we were already late leaving Dublin már Dublinból késve indultunk

Table 10

In the *LV* dictionaries, Dublin also occurs four times in examples in entries other than Dublin, two of which are in basically the same entry, but in two different language directions (**késve** and **late**).

II.

FIRST NAMES (14) + PREFIX IN SURNAMES (1)

Styles has been referred to earlier in connection with place names. These fall into the broader category of proper names, just like first names. Rundell and Atkins state something similar to Styles in connection with proper names: “Formerly, proper names were usually excluded from the headword list, and sometimes corralled into a list at the end of the book”¹⁶ and “Nowadays most reasonably sized English dictionaries include them as headwords.”¹⁷ Thus, it is not surprising to find first names as headwords in the dictionaries examined.

¹⁶ Sue B. T. Atkins – Michael Rundell: *The Oxford Guide to Practical Lexicography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, 186.

¹⁷ Ibid., 187.

Several dozens of commonly used first names in Ireland, names in Irish form, or names connected to Ireland were checked in these dictionaries. The selection was not based on statistical data regarding frequency, as there are several differing lists available on the internet, and obtaining reliable data is complicated by the fact that the names can have several spellings: e.g. **Seán** (Irish spelling with an accent), **Sean** (anglicized spelling without an accent), or **Ciarán** (Irish spelling) and **Kieran** (anglicized form). Moreover, people in the Republic of Ireland have the right to use either the Irish or the anglicized form of their name (or the English equivalent). So, a person called **John** may also sometimes use the form **Seán**.

<i>First name</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>MEH</i>
Aisling	–	Aisling <ír női név> ¹⁸
Aoife	–	Aoife <ír női név>
Ciara	–	Ciara <ír női név>
Ciarán	Ciaran (női név)	Ciaran <ír férfinév>
Deirdre	Deirdre [női név]	–
Éamonn, Éamon (Éamann)	Eamonn VAGY Eamon [férfinév]	Eamon, Eamonn <ír férfinév>
Fergus	Fergus (férfinév)	Fergus <ír és skót férfinév>
Kieran (Ciarán)	–	Kieran <férfinév>
Maeve (Méabh)	–	Maeve <ír női név>
Maureen (Máirín)	Maureen VAGY Maurene (női név)	Maureen <ír női név>
Patrick	Patrick [férfinév]	Patrick <ír férfinév> <i>magy</i> Patrik
Séamas	Seamas VAGY Seamus [férfinév]	Seamas, Seamus <ír férfinév> <i>magy kb.</i> Jakab
Seán	Sean (férfinév)	Sean <ír férfinév> <i>magy kb.</i> János
Siobhán	Siobhan [női név]	Siobhan, Siobhán <ír női név>
<i>Prefix in surnames</i>		
O'	–	O' <ír (gael) családnevekben>

Table 11

¹⁸ ír női név = Irish woman's name; ír férfinév = Irish man's name; női név = woman's name; férfinév = man's name; ír és skót férfinév = Irish and Scottish man's name; *magy* = in Hungarian; *magy kb.* = in Hungarian approximately

The findings are presented in the table below. Note that as neither of the Hungarian–English dictionaries provide any of these names as equivalents, these columns have been omitted. In the first column, the names are given in their Irish form or in their Irish form as well (with the exception of **Patrick**, which is of Latin origin).

The first thing to note is that only Magay’s dictionary indicates the Irish connection of a first name. The only exception is **Kieran**, the anglicized spelling of **Ciarán**, which does not have any labels. **Fergus** is given both as an Irish and a Scottish first name. (Note that **Ciaran** is given as a female name in *LVEH*, which is a mistake.) Next, it can be observed that *MEH* lists more Irish names than *LVEH*: there are twelve names with the Irish label in the table above from *MEH*, only eight of which appear in *LVEH*. However, *LVEH* has **Deirdre**, which does not appear in *MEH*. (In the *OALD* it is indicated that **Deirdre** is used in Irish English.)¹⁹

In *MEH*, the Hungarian equivalent of the name is given for **Patrick**, **Sean**, and **Seamas**, although for the equivalents of **Sean** and **Seamas**, the qualifier *kб*. ‘approximately’ is provided. This is not necessary, as ‘János’ IS the Hungarian equivalent of **Sean**, just as ‘Jakab’ is the Hungarian equivalent of **Seamas**.

Some of the names of Irish origin that have been looked up have become so widespread in the English-speaking world that their connection to Ireland has been obscured and is no longer a characteristic feature worth labelling. Such names are, for example, **Brian**, **Eileen**, **Kevin**, **Liam**, **Rory**, and **Sheila**. All of these appear in the above-mentioned two dictionaries, but there is no indication of the Irish connection. The name **Patrick** is very popular in Ireland because of its patron saint, and so its feminine form, **Patricia**, and the shortened versions **Pat** and **Paddy**. All of these names are also widely used outside Ireland, and the Irish connection is not indicated in the dictionaries with the exception of **Patrick**, so only this one is given in the table above. (**Paddy** as a derogatory term for an Irish person has already been discussed.) Many of the other Irish names that have been looked up (e.g. **Áine**, **Cathal**, **Colm**, **Eoin**, **Máire**, **Niamh**, **Nuala**, **Pádraig**, **Peadar**, **Rónán**, **Sinéad**, **Tomás**, **Úna**) do not appear in either of the English-Hungarian dictionaries.

There are two frequent elements prefixed to Irish surnames: **O’**, literally meaning someone’s grandson or descendant, and **Mc**, an abbreviated form of **Mac**, meaning someone’s son. Of these two, **O’** can be found in *MEH* with the appropriate explanation.

The categories that follow include several entries that contain what is called encyclopedic information in lexicography, which is based on factual knowledge, and cultural information, which is “Knowledge about the social, intellectual

¹⁹ *OALD*, (accessed 20 November 2025).

and artistic achievements of a particular group or civilisation”.²⁰ These types of information may be present explicitly and implicitly – however, it is not the aim of this paper to analyze these aspects. According to Svensén, “encyclopedic items are more typical of monolingual dictionaries than bilingual ones”,²¹ so one has to bear this in mind when approaching this topic.

III.

HISTORY, POLITICS, AND INSTITUTIONS (21)

a) Terms mostly connected to Northern Ireland (15)

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>
DUP	DUP = Democratic Unionist Party (<i>Észak-Írországbán</i>)	–	–
first minister	first minister miniszterelnök [<i>Skóciában, Walesben, Észak-Írországbán</i>]	miniszterelnök (...) SKÓCIÁBAN, WALESBEN, ÉSZAK-ÍRORSZÁGBAN first minister	–
INLA	INLA = Irish National Liberation Army	–	INLA <i>Irish National Liberation Army</i>
IRA	IRA = (...) Irish Republican Army	–	IRA <i>Irish Republican Army</i> Ír Köztársasági Hadsereg, IRA
Orangeman	Orangeman észak-írországi protestáns unionista; protestáns északír	protestáns ¹ FNÉV (...) északír protestáns Orangeman	Orangeman «észak-írországi protestáns unionista, az Orániai Rend tagja»
Orange Order, the	–	–	Orange Order, the az Orániai Rend [<i>észak-írországi protestáns koronahű társaság</i>]
Provie	Provie az ideiglenes IRA-hoz tartozó	–	–

²⁰ Hartmann – James: *Dictionary of Lexicography*, 32–33.

²¹ Bo Svensén: *A Handbook of Lexicography*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 290.

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>
Provo	Provo az ideiglenes IRA-hoz tartozó	–	–
RUC	RUC = Royal Ulster Constabulary	–	RUC, the Royal Ulster Constabulary
SDLP	SDLP = Social Democratic and Labour Party	–	–
Sinn Fein (Sinn Féin)	Stickie a Sinn Fein tagja	–	Sinn Fein «szeparatista nacionalista mozgalom Írországbán» Sinn Fein
Stickie	Stickie a Sinn Fein tagja	–	–
UDA	UDA = Ulster Defence Association	–	UDA, the <i>the Ulster Defence Association</i> «illegális protestáns katonai szervezet Észak- Írországbán»
UDR	UDR = Ulster Defence Regiment	–	UDR <i>Ulster Defence Regiment</i> «a brit hadsereg Észak- Írországbán állomásozó egysége»
UVF	UVF = Ulster Volunteer Force	–	UVF <i>Ulster Volunteer Force</i> «illegális protestáns katonai szervezet Észak- Írországbán»

Table 12

Of the political parties, only those that are active in Northern Ireland (**DUP**, **SDLP**, **Sinn Féin**) appear. Note that Sinn Féin is also one of the political parties of the Republic of Ireland. Still, not all the Northern Irish parties are included (e.g. the UUP and the Alliance Party). Also, the DUP and the SDLP are only listed and *LVEH*, and the Irish connection is not given in the latter case. Sinn Féin only gets an entry in Magay's dictionary, while the name of this party appears in *LVEH* in the entry **Stickie**, where it is explained that this is a term

used for a member of Sinn Féin – but there is no explanation of what Sinn Féin is, and there is no reference to (Northern) Ireland. Moreover, this explanation is not correct, as **Stickie** refers to a member of the Official (as opposed to the Provisional) IRA.²²

Several other abbreviations and terms connected primarily to Northern Ireland appear in these dictionaries: **first minister**, **INLA**, **IRA**, **Orangeman**, **(the) Orange Order**, **Provie**, **Provo**, **RUC**, **UDA**, **UDR**, **UVF**. All of these figure in *LVEH* with the exception of **(the) Orange Order**, while **first minister**, **Provie**, **Provo**, and **Stickie** do not appear in Magay. In the case of abbreviations, *LVEH* only provides the expansion, while sometimes Magay also gives an explanation between angle brackets. **Orangeman** also appears in *LVHE* in the entry for ‘protestáns’, as the equivalent of ‘északír protestáns’ (= Northern Irish Protestant); thus one of the equivalents of **Orangeman** given in the English-Hungarian dictionary, ‘észak-írországi protestáns unionista’ (= Northern Irish Protestant Unionist) is not provided here. **IRA** also appears in an example sentence in *MHE* in the entry for **vállal**: {**az IRA magára vállalta a robbantást** the IRA has claimed (responsibility for) the bombing in...} It is interesting to note that a very similar example can be found in *LVHE*, but here the IRA is not mentioned: **magára vállalja a robbantást** claim/assume responsibility for the bombing.

b) Terms connected to the Republic of Ireland (6)

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>
Celtic fringe	–	–	Celtic¹ mn kelta the Celtic fringe Skócia, Írország és Wales, kelta szegély
(the) Dáil	–	–	Dáil Eireann, the Dáil «az ír alsóház»
Dáil Éireann	–	–	Dáil Eireann, the Dáil «az ír alsóház»
Irish Free State	IFS = Irish Free State	–	–
Taoiseach	Taoiseach Írország miniszterelnöke; ír miniszterelnök	miniszterelnök (...) ÍRORSZÁGBAN Taoiseach	–

²² *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* (online), Oxford, Oxford University Press, <https://www.oed.com/>, (accessed 17 March 2026).

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>
Celtic tiger	Celtic² MNÉV (...) the Celtic tiger a kelta tigris [az ír gazdaság az ezredfordulót megelőző és követő évtizedben]	kelta² MNÉV (...) a kelta tigris (az ír gazdaság az ezredfordulót megelőző és követő évtizedben) the Celtic Tiger	–

Table 13

Interestingly, there is no overlap between the two dictionary pairs, as three lexical items belonging to this category appear in each. For the historical term **Irish Free State** no Hungarian equivalent or explanation is given.

Based on tables 12 and 13, it can be stated that the primary focus of these dictionaries seems to be on Northern Ireland. The following terms connected to history, politics, and institutions cannot be found in any of the dictionaries examined, although one may come across them not only in Irish newspapers, but also in British ones (in alphabetical order): **Anglo-Irish** (although several terms with the prefix **Anglo-** can be found in these dictionaries, e.g. **Anglo-Catholic**, **Anglo-Frisian**, **Anglo-Indian**), **Áras an Uachtaráin** (the residence of the president of Ireland), **Dublin Castle** (which serves as a government complex), **Fianna Fáil** (the name of one of the dominant political parties in the Republic), **Fine Gael** (the name of one of the dominant political parties in the Republic), **Garda/Gardaí** (the Irish police), **Leinster House** (seat of the Parliament), **Seanad Éireann** (the upper house of the Irish parliament), **Shinner** (a derogatory term for a supporter of Sinn Féin), **TD / Teachta Dála** (a member of the Irish parliament), **Uachtarán** (the president of Ireland), **Tánaiste** (deputy prime minister), **UUP** (Ulster Unionist Party). Most of these are connected to the Republic of Ireland.

IV.

FOOD AND DRINK (8)

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>	<i>MHE</i>
Irish breakfast	full² 10. bőséges; kiadós [pl. étkezés] full English/Scottish/Irish breakfast (mindent tartalmazó) meleg angol/skót/ír reggeli			

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>	<i>MHE</i>
Irish coffee	Irish coffee ír kávé [tejszínes/ whiskys]	–	Irish coffee konyha ír kávé [viszkis- tejszínes kávé]	–
Irish stew	Irish stew ír (birka-/ ürü)pörkölt krumplival	birkapörkölt (...) hagymás birkapörkölt krumplival Irish stew	Irish¹ mn ír, írországi Irish stew konyha kb. ír (birka)gulyás	Irish¹ mn (...) Irish stew ír ürügulyás
Irish whiskey	Irish whiskey ír whisky	–	–	–
Liffey water	Liffey water [!] Guinness sör	–	–	–
poteen	poteen ír ír zug- pálinka; ír burgon- yapálinka	burgon- yapálinka ír poteen; potheen krumpli- pálinka ír poteen; potheen zugpálinka (...) ír potheen; poteen	poteen whisky [engedély nélkül párolt ír whisky]	cefre fn mash , crushed fruit cefrébe megy will be used for making poteen pálinka fn kb. brandy, kb. spirit, [házi, kb.] poteen
shebeen	shebeen VAGY shebean ÍR SKÓT AFR zugkocsma; bögrecsárda	bögrecsárda ZUGKOCSMA shebeen; shebean pálinkamérés gin palace; TITKOS shebeen; shebean zugkocsma (...) shebeen; shebean	shebeen zugkocsma, bögrecsárda	–

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>	<i>MHE</i>
sláinte	slainte VAGY sláinte VAGY slàinte ÍR egészségedre!; egészségetekre!; egészségére!; egészségükre!	-	-	-

Table 14

Eight lexical items are presented in the table above. In *LVEH*, all of them are connected either explicitly or implicitly to Ireland. (**Liffey water** would be implicit, as the Liffey is the river of Dublin.) There are corresponding entries in *LVHE* for only three of the *LVEH* entries, and the Irish connection is not indicated in the ones for **shebeen**. *MEH* has only four out of the eight items of *LVEH*, and no Irish usage is indicated for **shebeen**. **Irish stew** and **poteen** also figure in the corresponding entries in *MHE*, but **Irish coffee** and **shebeen** do not.

V.

MUSIC AND DANCE (8)

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>
bodhrán	bodhran VAGY bodhrán bodhrán (dob); ír/ skót népi hangszer	–	–
ceilidh	ceilidh tradicionális ír/skót tánc(mulatság)	–	ceilidh SC IRE ‹falusi mulatság skót v. ír néptáncal, zenével és énekléssel›
Celtic harp	Celtic ² MNÉV kelta Celtic harp kelta hárfa	kelta ² MNÉV Celtic; Keltic; Gaelic kelta hárfa Celtic harp; clarsach	
clarsach	clarsach kelta hárfa	hárfa harp kelta hárfa Celtic harp; clarsach	–

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>
Irish harp	Irish harp ír hárfá	ír hárfá Irish Harp	–
Irish night	–	–	night 2. est, este [program] an Irish/Scottish night ír/skót est [zenés, táncos]
Irish whistle	Irish whistle (ír) furulya	–	–
reel	reel 4. gyors skót/ír tánc(zene)	–	reel 5. «gyors skót tánc» reel

Table 15

Eight lexical items connected to music and dance are given in the table above. Seven of these appear in *LVEH* (with the exception of **Irish night**), but only three (**ceilidh**, **Irish night**, and **reel**) in *MEH*. The Irish (or Celtic) connection is always indicated with the exception of **reel** in *MEH*, as only a Scottish reference is given there.

VI.

ANIMALS AND PLANTS (5)

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>	<i>MHE</i>
Irish bred	–	–	breed² II. 1. szaporít, tenyészt [állatot, növényt] Irish bred ír tenyésztésű [ló]	tenyésztésű (-)bred ír tenyésztésű [ló] Irish bred, of Irish breeding
Irish elk	–	óriásszarvas giant deer; Irish elk	–	–

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>	<i>MHE</i>
Irish moss	Irish moss ital/orvosság/ zselé formában [főleg Írországbán] használt vörös színű tengeri növény	–	–	–
Irish setter	Irish Setter ír szetter	–	Irish setter ír szetter	–
Irish wolfhound	Irish Wolfhound ír farkaskutya	ír ³ MNÉV (...) ír farkaskutya Irish wolfhound	–	–

Table 16

Five lexical items belong to this category, and there is only a 20% overlap in the two dictionary pairs, as only **Irish setter** appears in both *LVEH* and *MEH*. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, in **Irish setter** and **Irish wolfhound** the initial letter of the second word is not capitalized; however, there are many examples on the internet with capitals.

VII.

OTHER CULTURAL TERMS (12+4)

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>
banshee	banshee FNÉV banshee; halálesetet sikollyal előre jelző női kísértet [Írországbán] she was up in the night wailing like a banshee éjjel fenn volt, és banshee módjára sikoltozott banshee ² IGE rikoltozik; kiabál; zajong	rikoltoz VAGY rikoltozik (...) banshee	banshee, banshie fn «nőnemű kísértet, aki sikolyával előre jelzi egy családtag halálát [Írországbán, Skóciában]»

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>
Celtic cross	Celtic ² MNÉV (...) Celtic cross kelta kereszt	kelta ² MNÉV (...) kelta kereszt Celtic cross kereszt 1. cross kelta kereszt Celtic cross	–
Celticism	Celticism kelticizmus	kelticizmus Celticism	–
Celtic Studies	Celtic ² MNÉV kelta Celtic studies/ scholarship keltisztika; keltológia Celtic studies scholar / Celtic scholar keltológus	keltisztika VAGY keltológia Celtic/Keltic studies/scholarship	
Celtic scholar / Celtic Studies scholar	Celtic ² MNÉV kelta Celtic studies scholar / Celtic scholar keltológus	keltológus Celtic/Keltic scholar; Celtic/ Keltic studies scholar; Celticist	
Gaelic football	Gaelic football [15 főcsapatok közötti] ír football	–	–
hurling	hurling 2. ír hokifajta	gyephoki VAGY gyeplabda (field) hockey; SKÓT VÁLTOZATA shinty; ÍR VÁLTOZATA hurling	hurling 2. [egy fajta] hokizás [Írországbán]
Irish bull	bull 5. (Irish) bull önellentmondás	–	–
(Irish culture)	Irish ² MNÉV (...) Irish culture az ír kultúra		
Irish country hat	Irish country hat horgászkalap; surdakalap	horgászkalap (...) Irish country hat surdakalap (...) Irish country hat	–

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>
(Irish films)		játszik 5. a Mars moziban/ színházban ír filmeket/darabokat játszanak Irish films/plays are on at the Mars cinema/theatre	
Irish joke	Irish joke ír vicc [„rendőrvicc”]		
(Irish legend)	legend 2. mondavilág in Irish legend az ír legendavilágban	legenda 1. legend (...) régi ír legenda old Irish legend	
(Irish plays)		játszik 5. a Mars moziban/ színházban ír filmeket/darabokat játszanak Irish films/plays are on at the Mars cinema/theatre	
leprechaun	leprechaun kobold [ír néphitben]	kobold (...) leprechaun	leprechaun manó [ír néphitben], kobold
punt	punt 4. ír font [pénzegység]	–	punt 4. ír font [Írország pénzegysége az euró bevezetése előtt]

Table 17

Twelve lexical items and four phrases (**Irish culture**, **Irish films**, **Irish legend** and **Irish plays**) appear in this category. (**Irish culture**, **Irish films**, **Irish legend**, and **Irish plays** are not real compounds but phrases consisting of a noun + adjective.) The connection to Ireland or to Celtic culture is indicated in all of these cases in *LVEH* (with the exception of **banshee** functioning as a verb; however, the verb form here must be a mistake, as no other monolingual English dictionary seems to have it). Only four of these can be found in *MEH* as well: **banshee**, **hurling**, **leprechaun**, and **punt**. *LVHE* has eleven of these in the corresponding entries, but the Irish connection is not always indicated.

Gaelic Athletic Association, GAA (abbreviation of the aforementioned), **Gaeltacht** (Irish-speaking district) were also looked up, but were not found in these dictionaries.

VIII.

SOME OTHER IRISH ENGLISH LEXICAL ITEMS OR MEANINGS (6)

In this section, some Irish English lexical items and meanings are discussed. A search was made for many items in *LVEH*, *MEH*, the *OALD*, and the *OED*, and those that appear only in the *OED* or whose Irish English meanings appear only in the *OED* (e.g. **yoke** ‘a thing’) will not be discussed here, as the *OED* is the most comprehensive dictionary of the English language, thus it includes a considerable amount of lexical data that other dictionaries would not.²³ In the table below, only those headwords are listed where the connection to Irish usage is made either in *LVEH* or *MEH*.

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>
begorra	begorra ír 1. istenemre!; szavamra! 2. a nemjóját!; a teringettét!	–	–
colleen	colleen 1. ír lány; fiatal ír nő 2. ír lány; (fiatal) nő	–	colleen <i>régies IRE</i> leány
craic	craic ír 1. móka; mulatság just for the craic a móka kedvéért 2. duma; dumaparti	móka (...) ír craic mulatság (...) ír craic	craic <i>IRE</i> kellemes beszélgetés
glen	glen völgy; szurdok [<i>r.szerint Skóciában/Írországbán</i>] ²⁴	völgy (...) glen	glen <i>GB</i> völgy, szurdok, hegyszoros
lough	lough ír 1. tó 2. (hosszan benyúló) tengeröböl	–	lough <i>IRE</i> 1. tó 2. keskeny tengeröböl, tengerszoros

²³ *OED*, <https://www.oed.com/>, (accessed 10 November 2025).

²⁴ = usually in Scotland/Ireland

<i>Lexical item</i>	<i>LVEH</i>	<i>LVHE</i>	<i>MEH</i>
yous/ Youse	yous VAGY youse [!] ír ti; titeket; maguk; magukat I'm fed up with youse! elegem volt belőletek! I hope yous guys like it remélem, tetszeni fog nektek	–	–

Table 18

With this method, only a handful of entries have been found in *LVEH* (6), *LVHE* (1), and *MEH* (3) where it is indicated that the headword or one of its meanings is used specifically in Irish English or in connection with Ireland. (No such entries have been found in *MHE*.) These can be seen in the table above. Note that the connection of **glen** with Ireland is only indicated in *LVEH*. **Colleen**, **craic**, **glen**, and **lough** can be found in both *LVEH* and *MEH*. (Colleen also figures as a woman's name in *LVEH*.) Although the data are scant, what has been found seems to indicate that *LVEH* covers this aspect somewhat more extensively than *MEH*.

All of the words in the table above figure in both the *OED* and the *OALD*, and all of them are connected to Irish English or Ireland. **Glen** is also connected to Scotland, while in the case of **youse/yous**, the *OED* indicates that it is used in Scotland, Ireland, Australia, and the US; however, the *OALD* labels it as “non-standard, dialect”.²⁵

In two cases, the words in question also appear as the equivalents of some Hungarian entries in *LVHE*, but it is only in the case of **craic** that a reference is given to Irish English. In a couple of cases, example sentences are also given in the entries; these are also provided in the table above.

There are also some words in these English–Hungarian dictionaries that appear in the *OED* (but not in the *OALD*), where they are connected to Irish English, but this is not indicated in *LVEH* and *LVHE*. Such words, for example, are **banjax** / **banjaxed** ‘ruin, destroy’ / ‘ruined, destroyed’ (*LVEH*), **eejity** ‘idiotic’ (*LVEH*, *LVHE*), **feck** ‘damn’ (*LVEH*, *LVHE*), and **fecking** ‘despicable, damnable’ or ‘very, extremely’ (*LVEH*, *LVHE*). With the exception of **eejity**, these are labelled as “slang” in the *OED*, and they do not appear in *MEH* or *MHE*.²⁶ Some others appear both in the *OED* and the *OALD* with the Irish English label (and, with the exception of **eejit**, in the *OED*, with the Scottish English label as well), for example, **eejit** ‘idiot’, or **press** ‘a large cupboard for holding clothes’. **Eejit** appears in *LVEH* and *LVHE*, but without any regional

²⁵ *OALD*, (accessed 12 November 2025).

²⁶ *OED*, (accessed 12 November 2025).

labels; and **press** does appear with this meaning in *LVEH* and *MEH*, but the only regional label that can be found is in *MEH*, and it is for Scottish usage.

CONCLUSION AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Although from the lexicographical point of view relatively few entries have been examined, still, quite a few interesting differences have been detected between *LVEH* and *MEH*, as well as some inconsistencies between *LVEH* and *LVHE*. If not counting the four phrases, then 120 lexical items are presented here, of which 93 can be found in the Lázár–Varga dictionaries, while 80 in the Magay ones. 52 items are shared by both. In general, it can be said that *LVEH* covers lexical items connected to Ireland and Irish English somewhat more extensively than *MEH*, which is not surprising considering the fact that the *LV* dictionaries are considerably larger in size; however, in the case of geographical names and first names, Magay's dictionaries contain more information.

When it comes to political terms, the focus seems to be more on Northern Ireland than on the Republic of Ireland, and in the case of Irish English lexical items and meanings, the connection is made in fewer cases than in the Oxford dictionaries. Some asymmetry has also been detected in corresponding entries in the reverse language direction. For example, one of the Hungarian equivalents given for **craic** is 'duma' in *LVEH*; however, under **duma** in *LVHE*, 'craic' is not given. Some gaps have also been identified: e.g. neither of the English–Hungarian dictionaries lists **TD** and **Irish Sea**. All in all, it can be stated that these are excellent dictionaries into which a huge amount of professional lexicographical work has been invested, and the minor inconsistencies and the gaps that have been identified here show how complicated the work of the lexicographer is. However, this paper also hopes to be useful to lexicographers in that it may lead to the reassessment of some editorial practices and their application. Specific recommendations for these dictionaries, however, would require more research, for example, into the treatment of the same items in the major monolingual English dictionaries for advanced learners.

Furthermore, research along these lines could be expanded to involve more English–Hungarian and Hungarian–English dictionaries, for example, by comparing older ones with the ones examined here, or comparing more dictionaries of different sizes, that is, pocket, concise, and comprehensive dictionaries. Comparison with monolingual English dictionaries for native speakers could also be a path to follow.

All in all, conducting this type of research can provide interesting insights into the choices that lexicographers make, and can also demonstrate that some aspects of the rich cultural tapestry of a speech community can indeed be presented in a dictionary.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND OF HUNGARIAN TERMS USED
IN THE DICTIONARY ENTRIES CITED

[!] – taboo word
fn – főnév – noun
 FNÉV – főnév – noun
 GB – Great Britain
 IGE – verb
 ÍR – Írország – Ireland
 IRE – Írország – Ireland
kb. – körülbelül – approximately
magy – magyar -- Hungarian
mn – melléknév – adjective
 MNÉV – melléknév – adjective
 OALD – *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*
 OED – *Oxford English Dictionary*
régies – old-fashioned, dated
 SC – Skócia – Scotland
szl – szleng – slang
tsz – többes szám – plural
 VAGY – or

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PART II



PERCEPTIONS ON POETRY AND FILM

HEANEY'S FIRSTS

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Abstract

Seamus Heaney's volumes of poetry demonstrate a carefully planned negotiation of the dual itineraries of continuity and exploration of new directions. Heaney's constant critical (re)assessment of his own poetic practice resulted in collections that would regularly resituate emphases and focuses yet at the same time they also demonstrate a solid and stable underlying matrix of values that sustains a consistent core of poetic sensibility. Heaney's whole oeuvre is a body of poetry that has its anchoring in a set of recurring concerns with an increasing range of approaches, motifs and themes as each volume resituates the poetic direction in a subtle way. While the structural organization of volumes differs in terms of division into sections, the arc of movement each collection displays give a prominent role to their respective opening poem. Heaney's choice of the first poem, on occasion dedicatory, on occasion simply placed as first without specific marking, yet involving anticipatory and epiphanic potential, provides an intriguing cue to his tactics not only in terms of the respective collection but his whole career as well. A more thorough consideration of these first poems, especially those of his late phase, can offer further insight into Heaney's view of poetry and his own poetics.

KEYWORDS

Heaney, poetic vocation, authority, poetics

While Seamus Heaney referred to his poem *Digging* as a “big coarse-grained navy of a poem”¹ in his essay “Feeling into Words”, he would also acknowledge it as a decisive first as “the first poem I wrote where I thought my feelings had

¹ Seamus Heaney: *Preoccupations. Selected Prose 1968–78*. New York, The Noonday Press, 1980, 43.

got into words, or to put it more accurately, where I thought my *feel* had got into words”,² an example of “finding a voice”.³ The poem is cited as an example of a step in a personal process of discovery with a well-defined understanding of poetry as itself a discovery, “poetry as divination, poetry as revelation of the self to the self, as restoration of the culture to itself”.⁴ As part of this, the personal process involves the finding and uncovering of the relation “between the core of the poet’s speaking voice and the core of his poetic voice, between his original accent and his discovered style”.⁵ This is eventually a fusion of what could be termed filiation and affiliation, and eventually forms the basis of what is best described as the authenticity of the poet. *Digging* is thus a poem that represents more than a moment of recognition, of forging an imaginative bond between his ancestry and himself despite the apparent discontinuity between agricultural and intellectual work which in effect became, and came to be regarded, as his poetic creed. Thus, the poem in hindsight is not only the opening piece of his first collection but a complete decisive first step of his entire poetic career.

Heaney’s piece of reflection is also emblematic and has its own significance that extends beyond its immediate concerns. “Feeling into Words” was originally a lecture the poet delivered in 1975, after a considerable period of well-established practice of publishing poetry, thus Heaney could rely on the benefit of retrospective reflection on his own writing. By that time his assessment of his own practice as well as his reading of other poets provided him with a solid poetic foundation that would equally serve the notion of stability and continuity as well as could facilitate the exploration of new concerns and directions for his own poetic practice. The essay testifies to Heaney’s honest practice of rigorous reflection on his own poetry, a concern with his sense of artistic responsibility that characterizes his whole career, which would practically turn him into his own first critic, as Declan Kiberd notes, “the worst that can be said against Heaney always turns out to have been said already of himself by the artist within the poems”.⁶ This self-aware and self-conscious element is observable in the thematic and structural organization of his volumes of poetry as well as in the relationships between those volumes.

Heaney’s practice of organizing his collections around certain concerns and suiting the internal architecture of the volumes accordingly is noted by several of his commentators. The poet himself provided clues for this in interviews and reflective prose pieces, in addition to his self-reflexive poetic practice in the volumes themselves. The initial focus of his early collections on his familiar

² Heaney: *Preoccupations*, 41.

³ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁶ Declan Kiberd: *Inventing Ireland. The Literature of the Modern Nation*. London, Vintage, 1996, 594–595.

environment, observed and assessed in a broadening circle, would increasingly give way to a more communally informed enquiry into the context of the deteriorating conditions of the Northern situation, culminating in the effort of *North* for a synthesis. The special status of that volume was also acknowledged by Heaney in an interview as he admitted "I'm certain that, up to *North*, that that was one book, in a way it grows together and goes together".⁷ With the ambitious myth-informed frame not yielding a satisfactory result, Heaney employed a more personally oriented approach in *Field Work*, providing an intriguing contrapuntal structure through the contrast between the almost-pastoral of the *Glanmore Sonnets*, placed centrally in the volume, and the elegies responding to the loss of friends and relatives in the Troubles. A similar personal element is at work in *Station Island*, with an explicitly self-reflexive confessional dimension in the title sequence of the volume which also includes tentative readjustments of some concerns of the elegies of the previous volume. The collection *The Haw Lantern* is also structured by the dynamic contrast between the poet's elegiac sequence *Clearances* and the explicitly allegorical *From...* poems which seem to echo some of the earlier attempts of coming to terms with the Northern situation. From *Seeing Things*, in accord with the implications of the title, Heaney's attention is concentrated on apparently more quotidian elements that, on closer scrutiny, offer illuminating insight, 'marvels' that are at once relatable by virtue of their seeming ordinariness and still intimate transcendental dimensions. The final four volumes focus on such themes with varying degrees of reincorporating earlier motifs of Heaney's poetry and recontextualizing them.

The respective thematic and organizational concerns of the volumes differ but the first poems of most collections occupy a special position in Heaney's oeuvre. While they retain their own closed system as individual poems, they simultaneously set thematic or conceptual directions. The opening poem initiates the arc of movement that the collection follows, and some of them point beyond the concerns of the collection they introduce, marking more encompassing points of reference within Heaney's writing career. Whether explicitly marked as dedicatory or simply placed first without any specific marking, typographic or other distinction, opening poems tend to demonstrate anticipation, intimation of a new point of departure, even the potential of epiphany, facilitated by the poetic situation created within the text. In this way these first poems illuminate a broader range of concerns and issues than their immediate textual environment would imply.

The poem *Digging* has its own symbolic status by virtue of its position as the opening poem of Heaney's first volume, thus the first of the firsts, not only because of its self-conscious resolution of the spade vs. pen relation. The tactics

⁷ John Haffenden: *Viewpoints. Poets in Conversation*, London, Faber, 1981, 64.

that Heaney uses to create the structure of the poem are reflected in the broader organization of the volume as well. The opening image of the microcosm of the speaker's situation, located indoors, with the pen in his hand, prepared for action that stems from intellectual concentration is complemented by the sound from outside that seems at first a disruptive and disturbing one, yet the rhyme and the alliterations work against the tension that is intimated. The father's figure is identified without being seen, which suggests the familiarity of routine and familial intimacy. The speaker's ambiguous choice of the phrase "I look down"⁸ carries more than a simple reference to the perspective of the relative positioning of the window and the scene of digging as the sight is eventually a recollected memory of shared experience rather than the observation of the present moment. This, in turn, leads to another recollection even further back in time, encompassing the grandfather's figure, with the effect of losing sight of the current moment by the association. The memories connected with the two earlier generations ultimately blend into one common experience, also based in recollection, creating a harmonious-looking image – only to be contrasted with the sudden denial of the possibility of continuity due to the speaker's admission of his difference in terms of his vocation, expressed by the absence of the tool that links his ancestors. Yet the absence is quickly compensated for and is thus overcome by the resolution of the speaker of forging his own, self-defined link with his forebears, acknowledging at once continuity and difference and the act of embracing the experience that stems from this situation.

The resolution demonstrates a self-conscious state of preparedness to address the actual and to accept it as the setting in which to operate. This approach is reflected in the entire collection as Heaney explores his targeted field of familiar surroundings in a way in which the presumed affectionate relationship with the place of his upbringing is balanced and readjusted by the acknowledgement of the harsher aspects of farming life. This indicates a simultaneous presence of alignment and continuity with the tradition that he also revises and reconsiders, as the poems that focus on his experience of farm life demonstrate a carefully balanced use of pastoral and anti-pastoral elements. The poems of the collection eventually achieve their balance in the way the opening poem intimates, leading to an intriguing conclusion in the final *Personal Helicon*. The closing poem reassesses the passage from innocence to experience in the context of the speaker's own progress, with a testimony to the recognition of "adult dignity"⁹ that sees poetry as continuous with the child's actions of physical enquiry towards self-knowledge, in a suggestive parallel with the pen and spade analogy of the opening poem of the volume, which sets up *Digging* as an emblematic opening piece that governs the first collection not only

⁸ Seamus Heaney: *Death of a Naturalist*, London, Faber, 1966, 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

on a thematic level, as a conceptual introduction, but in terms of structural organization as well.

Heaney's third volume, *Wintering Out*, begins with an untitled dedicatory verse to David Hammond and Michael Longley. The poem is set in italicized type, and it is situated right after the title page, preceding the contents and separated from what constitutes the body of the volume, yet this act serves to foreground the poem as the de facto opening piece of the volume. This specific typeset and positioning already direct special attention to the poem, which is further increased when its form is considered. The poem focuses on the increasingly bleak Northern situation, with images of such landmarks as "the new camp for the internees",¹⁰ "machine-gun posts"¹¹ and the graffiti "Is there a life before death?",¹² the effect of which is a feeling of unsettledness and concurrent anxiety. The form appears as a mitigating force since the poem is written in quatrains using a neat pattern of alternating rhymes, which suggests a comforting arrangement. However, the prolific use of enjambment obscures the rhyme scheme and eventually leads to only half the lines having a line ending which is at once a syntactic pause as well, and the arrangement of these shows an intriguing pattern of one in the first stanza, two in the second and three in the final one, which ultimately reflects an attempt to impose order on what is felt to be defying such attempts. The result is a pattern that reflects the confusion the speaker experiences in the disintegrating fabric of everyday life in the province increasingly ruled by the conflict which eventually diminishes expectations regarding normality and alters the relative positions of individual and community.

The poem, similarly to *Digging*, is more potent than its modest designation of dedicatory verse would suggest. The thematic elements that are employed recur in the collection as a result of their increasing interference with the daily experience of life in the province, and their relation and what they induce as response from the observer are likewise elaborated on in the volume. The conclusion of the poem is seen by Michael Parker as a reference to the experience of the Catholic minority,¹³ yet in the image "we hug our little destiny again",¹⁴ it is possible to see a more encompassing context of the individual citizen in the face of events shaping the larger scheme of social reality. This orientation of individual experience as a possible stable point of reference in the midst of menacing public events marks a transition that defines the direction of the volume from the predominantly private individual experience of the earlier collections towards a position that is gradually more concerned with locating

¹⁰ Seamus Heaney: *Wintering Out*, London, Faber, 1972, pre-Contents.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Cf. Michael Parker: *Seamus Heaney. The Making of the Poet*, Houndmills, Macmillan, 1993, 94.

¹⁴ Seamus Heaney: *Wintering Out*, London, Faber, 1972, pre-Contents.

that individual in a community, reflected in the progress from the “I” to the “we” in the movement within the dedicatory poem.

Heaney’s next volume, *North*, opens with a pair of dedicatory poems entitled *Mossbawn: Two Poems in Dedication*. While the practice of separating the dedicatory section from the main body of the collection is retained from the preceding volume, neither of the poems bears a specific font type and they are immediately placed before Part One, which creates a special case in the light of the organization of the whole collection. Heaney wrote the poems of *North* after his move to the Republic, thus geographically distanced from life in the province, addressing the situation in a public, myth-oriented first group of poems and a set of more private pieces that would balance the collection in terms of viewpoint. The choice of a retrospective evocation of the childhood home of the poet – an apparent pastoral elsewhere both for the place of composition and the conflict-ridden present of the Northern province – is at once a doubling of the distancing and an attempt to dismiss the potential incongruity of addressing the Northern situation from the distant safety of the Republic. The poems eventually illuminate the essential pastoral contrast between peace and the threat of conflict, yet this becomes apparent only by the end of the collection as the Mossbawn poems focus on recalled moments of domestic ritual with a considerable degree of nostalgia, producing an image of what Parker terms “a past perfected”.¹⁵ As a result, the poems create a sense of lull, yet with an anticipation of disruption of that feeling, to be elaborated by the two parts of the main body of the collection, and to find a fitting conclusion in the explicitly antipastoral vision of the final section, *Exposure*, the closing poem of the volume. The dedicatory pair also anticipates the formal characteristics of the poems in the collection with their contrasting patterns. *Sunlight* uses the narrow and quickly moving, predominantly unrhymed “artesian stanza”,¹⁶ whereas *The Seed Cutters* is a sonnet, albeit with some concessions in line length and rhyme. In a corresponding manner, Part One is dominated by the short line form, while Part Two employs mainly leisurely moving longer lines and a more frequent use of rhyme.

The opening poem of *Station Island* is another example of an intriguing piece that sets the direction of the entire collection in a subtle manner. Entitled *The Underground*, the poem offers a rich texture of different registers and allusions, with an ambiguous conclusion that conflates mythological reference with personal self-reflection. The event described is a personal memory of the poet’s honeymoon,¹⁷ enriched by allusive evocations of Pan, the Hansel and Gretel story and Orpheus, which results in a quickly moving narrative that is full

¹⁵ Parker: *Seamus Heaney*, 126.

¹⁶ Bernard O’Donoghue: *Seamus Heaney and the Language of Poetry*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994, 6.

¹⁷ Cf. Parker: *Seamus Heaney*, 184.

of instances of metamorphosis which are fed by the speaker's act of recollection. By virtue of the nature of the account as a recollected experience, reflection is actively involved, with an apparently self-conscious set of associations that build on varying degrees of kinship with mythological and literary precedents. The concluding image of "damned if I look back"¹⁸ makes the risk of reflection explicit, and the allusion itself is the device that broadens the scope of the phrase into a metaphor of general reference in terms of Heaney's practice of reflection on his own poetry. Several poems of the collection involve this self-reflection and looking back despite the indicated risk; yet such moments also include the act of confirmation of the rightness of his artistic position, in Heaney's own estimate, that is embodied in his self-imposed requirement of authenticity.

The choice of the title *The Underground* is also indicative of Heaney's analogue for his reflexive inquiry. The central sequence of the volume is informed by a strong thematic influence of Dante, as Heaney himself admitted in his essay "Envy and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet",¹⁹ with an observable linguistic influence also at work.²⁰ The subterranean experience, recalled and recontextualized in a nearly visionary manner through the richly allusive and associative texture of the poem, anticipates the more ambitious venture of the poet in the title sequence, where Heaney performs a reassessment of his position in relation to his community by reflecting on his responses to specific earlier events.²¹ On the stylistic level, the tendency towards swift metamorphosis in the imaginative extravaganza of the opening poem is handled with more control and care in *Station Island*, but the broadly informal style of *The Underground* encourages a confessional approach that is employed in the title sequence.

The allegorising tendency discernible in a great number of poems in *The Haw Lantern* is introduced in the first poem of the collection. In contrast with the tripartite division of the previous volume, this collection does not contain sections, and *Alphabets* is placed first without any marking of specific placement or hint at an explicit structural organizing principle for the volume as a whole. Yet, as Helen Vendler notes, "*The Haw Lantern* is Heaney's first book of the virtual",²² a realm that would engage the poet's attention in his later volumes in varying manners and to varying extents. The poem is accordingly a definitive opening piece, Heaney's own concise "growth of a poet's mind", traced through the concept of language, more precisely written language, with its abstract graphic representation as its governing motif. This foreshadows the

¹⁸ Seamus Heaney: *Station Island*, London, Faber, 1984, 13.

¹⁹ Cf. Heaney, Seamus. "Envy and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet." *Irish University Review*, Spring, 1985, Vol. 15, No. 1. (Spring 1985), 18–19.

²⁰ Cf. O'Donoghue: *Seamus Heaney*, 94.

²¹ Cf. Andrew Murphy: *Seamus Heaney*, 3rd edition, Tavistock, Northcote House Publishers, 2009, 64.

²² Helen Vendler: *Seamus Heaney*, London, Fontana Press, 1999, 113.

preference for allegorical discourse in the collection and the shift towards an explicitly abstracting approach in the treatment of subject matter. The poem also points backwards in terms of its concentration on written language to some sections of “Station Island” with its reflections on writing, as well as to the pen and spade analogy of *Digging*, yet the abstracting tendency inherent in allegory and parable marks an underlying principle that represents an eventually new direction for the poet.

The volume *Seeing Things* is now acknowledged as marking a decidedly new direction in Heaney’s poetry, suggesting a new phase in his poetic career. Bernard O’Donoghue uses the term “late middle Heaney”²³ as a tentative reference to it, whereas Kieran Quinlan employs the designation “‘transcendentalist’ period”²⁴ for the final decades of Heaney’s career which is introduced by the volume. Heaney’s own admission in the poem *Fosterling* of having come “To credit marvels”²⁵ has a similar effect on approaches to his poetry as his earlier comments in *Feeling into Words*, and the second section of the volume is seen as testimony to the poet’s self-reflexive comment. The virtual realm which Heaney began exploring in the preceding volume is made a more palpable presence in *Seeing Things*, and the framing of the volume by two translated pieces neatly aligns with the internal organization of the collection. A translation of the section on the golden bough from *The Aeneid* provides a thematic key to the poems dealing with the marvelous, intimated through the motif of the specific enabling power of the golden bough. The closing section of the passage also suggests a means of testing the status of the hero through the image of being singled out by fate to be able to cut down the bough, which may be taken as a tentative analogy for the poet being suited to the task of dealing with the targeted subjects. The poem also shows a marked formal contrast with earlier poems with its long lines, prompted by the source text, and the predominant line length of the rest of the collection is the pentameter, suggesting an overall move towards a more spacious metrical field.

While *Seeing Things* is seen as a new departure, it is Heaney’s final four volumes that appear to mark a systematically constructed poetics that would link the more recent poems with the earlier concerns underlying his poetry. The first of these final volumes was *The Spirit Level*, the first collection to be published after Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize, with expectations towards it corresponding to the consensual weight of the award. Heaney’s choice of the first poem of the collection is emblematic in a similar way to the status of *Digging* as indicative of a poetic creed. *The Rain Stick* is a poem that

²³ Bernard O’Donoghue: *Late Heaney and Expectation*, Budapest, Széchenyi Irodalmi és Művészeti Akadémia, 2023, 19.

²⁴ Kieran Quinlan: “Catholicism”, in G. Higgins (ed.), *Seamus Heaney in Context*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021, 218.

²⁵ Seamus Heaney: *Seeing Things*, London, Faber, 1991, 50.

also shows stylistic kinship with *The Underground* in its register favoring the colloquial and informal, personal discourse while retaining richly evocative imagery. By focusing on an instrument with a rather peculiar sound that is closer to noise than music there is a suggestion of a self-legitimizing poetics, a claim for the relevance of internal structuring and organization that is regarded more important than the pleasure of superficial eloquence by virtue of being true to its own nature, by being consistent from within. This argument is in line with Heaney's "commitment to the authority of art as a jurisdiction at least as strong as the public or the religious world".²⁶ While the sound of the rain stick may be only "Downpour, sluice-rush, spillage and backwash",²⁷ the effect is that of the metamorphosis of the player as "You stand there like a pipe / Being played by water"²⁸ with an increasing set of imaginative associations facilitated by the produced sound. The suggestive and transformative power of the instrument is further elaborated on by the repeated action of making sound with it, with further reflection on the sound and reflection on the act of repetition itself:

Upend the stick again. What happens next

Is undiminished for having happened once,
Twice, ten, a thousand times before.
Who cares if all the music that transpires

Is the fall of grit or dry seeds through a cactus?
You are like a rich man entering heaven
Through the ear of a raindrop. Listen now again.²⁹

The principal emphasis is on the "undiminished" nature of the effect of the experience, which eventually suggests the uniqueness of each instance with an emphasis on essence regardless of surface, since it is the essence that facilitates the reception of the marvelous, a possibility even in such an apparently simple device as the rain stick. As the action required to 'play' the rain stick is an indication of its being a closed system, the marvel lies in its capability of what the speaker suggests is still an endless variety, an apparent paradox that by analogy turns the poem itself, and by metaphoric extension all poems, into the same system. The repeated action of upending the stick carries, in a similarly paradoxical manner, the potential of endless variety, with the resulting promise of new experience on each occasion the action is performed. This repeated (and

²⁶ O'Donoghue: *Late Heaney and Expectation*, 25.

²⁷ Seamus Heaney: *The Spirit Level*, London, Faber, 1996, 1.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

repeatable) action intimates the idea of seeing the same experience with a fresh eye, a variation of the Wordsworthian attempt, since, as the poem suggests, the imagination is at work during listening.

The Rain Stick is an instance of illumination, the possibility of praising the simple and the everyday. The idea of repetition is seen not as an attempt to ritualize the exercise but on the contrary, the potential recognition of the uniqueness of each occasion, the momentary condition of the receiving consciousness with its active powers to effect and even constituting the received experience. The register of the poem remains embedded in the colloquial and the informal with its use of “you”, which is neatly balanced with such expressions as “glitter-drizzle, almost-breaths of air”³⁰ that evoke the usual richly sensuous language of Heaney. With this approach the poem is a definitive opening piece that governs the collection, and similarly to the framing of *Seeing Things*, it also aligns with the closing poem of the collection, *Postscript*, a poem that includes echoes of the earlier *The Peninsula* and resituates its potential visionary opportunity in a similar manner as *The Rain Stick* deals with its motif of repetition.

The penultimate poem of *The Spirit Level*, *Tollund* brings back a prominent motif by the geographical marker of the title, suggesting an explicit imaginative link with an earlier concern in Heaney’s poetry and thus regarding the earlier body of poems as a significant basis of reference for the later poems. The volume *Electric Light* begins with a similar tactical move as the opening poem evokes a reference to the place-name poems of *Wintering Out*. Toome was already revisited in the volume *Field Work* as part of a Troubles episode, with the poem representing a position defying intrusion and the persistent status of Heaney’s favored image of the omphalos. The poem *At Toomebridge* resituates the interpretative context of the place in its conclusion but its full itinerary involves various stages of Heaney’s preoccupations with a whole range of earlier topics and concerns. This is what is partly referred to by Ruben Moi in the assessment of the poem as a “poetic parasite on Nationalist ground, historical events and Heaney’s own poetry”,³¹ yet such a reading is a rather narrow one that loses sight of the current significance of the collage of earlier items. The past tense used to describe the place in the first half of the poem indicates the firm placing of the location as a memory for the speaker, an apparently familiar personal experience that is sufficient for the speaker to evoke the setting. The location acquires communal significance by its former position of hosting the checkpoint and the even more distant historical association of the place of execution for a rebel boy. The present importance of the place,

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ruben Moi: “‘The cure by poetry that cannot be coerced’: Text, Canon and Context in Seamus Heaney’s *Electric Light*”, in A.B. Crowder – J.D. Hall (eds.): *Seamus Heaney. Poet, Critic, Translator*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 174.

however, is personal as the speaker connects inspiration with it, switching to the present tense for its description: "Where negative ions in the open air / Are poetry to me."³² This is brought into contrast with a similar potential in the same place by lure of "The slime and silver of the fattened eel",³³ making an intertextual reference to *A Lough Neagh Sequence* in *Door into the Dark*. This closing reference endows the place with the potential of sustaining inspiration, yet at the same time it indicates a massive shift in sensibility. The physically observable visual appeal of the local fauna is replaced by an intangible presence whose knowledge is of a different origin and therefore of different nature than the immediately available sensory experience of the sight of the fish. This shift is accompanied by a degree of ambiguity as well since the exclusivity of what constitutes the effect for the speaker remains unspecified. Nevertheless, the poem functions as a vivid snapshot, a still image in spite of the several elements that involve or intimate a temporal element constitutive of the experience, and thus it acknowledges both the abstracting elements at work in *Seeing Things* and the more concrete imagery of *The Spirit Level*.

In *District and Circle* Heaney's opening piece is *The Turnip-Snedder*. The title refers to a farm device of older times and thus it appears to connect with Heaney's earliest memories and poetic universe, evoking the rural world of Mossbawn. The description of the device, however, involves several military images, linking the machine to war and violence, which is in a way a subtle backward look and evocation of Heaney's own earlier concern with violence in connection with the Northern situation. The poem thus embodies a form of return, with a different approach compared to the initial poem of the previous volume, but with a similar potential for linking up with Heaney's earlier work. Several poems in the collection likewise return to earlier themes and poems, entering into dialogue with them, which provides an explanation for the title of the collection itself. Although the words of the title of the collection refer to lines in the London underground system, the metaphoric appeal of the phrase is broader and apparently more applicable to an expanded pattern of revisiting earlier concerns and motifs. The self-reflexive element of the title of the volume and its instances of actual revisiting of Heaney's own earlier motifs eventually move well beyond the scope of the opening poem, setting up a wider trajectory for the collection than that of the preceding volume.

The opening poem of Heaney's final collection *Human Chain* shows a close connection with the *Squarings* section of *Seeing Things* as well as points back to *Exposure* through its evocation of a specific moment in which vision is possible. The ability to experience that particular moment and receiving that vision, however, depends on several conditions, with being prepared for it

³² Seamus Heaney: *Electric Light*, London, Faber, 2001, 3.

³³ Ibid.

as an essential element. This state is referred to, with the term of Simon B. Kress, as “receptive expectancy”³⁴ and it forms the central motif of the poem *Had I not been awake*. The sureness of the first line, “Had I not been awake I would have missed it”³⁵ identifies the necessary condition for the observed phenomenon as well as expresses the privileged nature of the speaker in the moment of the facilitated vision for meeting that condition to receive it. The sudden arrival of wind becomes observable as sight and sound, both mediated through the movement of leaves that produces an agitated state in the speaker as he becomes “Alive and ticking like an electric fence.”³⁶ The repetition of the opening conditional sentence creates an emphatic sense of the experience, akin to a replay of the scene, with added emphasis on its unexpected nature which in turn makes it appear even more of an unusual occurrence, further underlined by the conclusion of the poem: “But not ever / After. And not now.”³⁷

The form of *Had I not been awake* is basically identical with the one used in *Squarings*, twelve pentameter lines organized into four tercets, with only the closing line departing from that pattern by its 5-syllable length. The return to the form of the earlier sequence indicates the relation of similarity in terms of approach to experience and the nature of the experience itself, as the recalled instance aligns with the marvels dealt with in *Squarings* in terms of its emotional and intellectual appeal. Yet there is a subtle shift in the assessment as the primary emphasis is put on the receptive propensity of the observer, the (pre)condition of reception itself, and in this way the poem anticipates the underlying concern of the whole collection that results in what is described as “an intently remembered present”.³⁸ The poems of the collection, “economical but powerfully substantial”,³⁹ depend on this state of openness to receive experience, partly realized through a conscious effort of being ready to observe and partly acknowledging the circumstantial necessities for it, as it happens in the opening poem. The opening and later repeated conditional sentence, made more emphatic by the inversion in its structure, is a powerful rhetorical device to express the precariousness of situational benefits – moments that facilitate and eventually make possible such instances of experience as the one Heaney admitted to in connection with *Digging* in his “Feeling into Words”.

In the essay Heaney makes a proper distinction between what he terms “craft” and “technique”. “Craft is the skill of making”,⁴⁰ “[i]t knows how to keep up

³⁴ Simon B. Kress: “Music”, in G. Higgins (ed.), *Seamus Heaney in Context*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021, 163.

³⁵ Seamus Heaney: *Human Chain*, London, Faber, 2010, 3.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ O’Donoghue: *Late Heaney and Expectation*, 30.

³⁹ Roy F. Foster: *On Seamus Heaney*. Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2020, ch. 7. par., 19.

⁴⁰ Heaney: *Preoccupations*, 47.

a capable verbal athletic display".⁴¹ Technique, however, is a bolder and more encompassing, and as a consequence, a more challenging dimension of poetry as it points beyond the purely technical associations of verse. Technique "involves also a definition of [the poet's] stance towards life, a definition of his own reality. It involves the discovery of ways to go out of his normal cognitive bounds and raid the inarticulate: a dynamic alertness that mediates between the origins of feeling in memory and experience and the formal ploys that express these in a work of art."⁴² The term thus incorporates the personal effort and insists on the essential role of the subjective intelligence in shaping experience into an artefact, for the authority of art and the authenticity and responsibility of the poet. As revealed in the course of Heaney's poetic career, technique is not a constant and once discovered and perfected faculty or feature of the poet but a facilitating potential that keeps evolving in the wake of its own operation.

Heaney's lifelong preoccupation with this self-conscious sense of vocation underlies the thematic and structural organization of his volumes, both in terms of their internal relations and their connections with one another across his whole oeuvre. His technique is closely intertwined with his understanding of the question of vocation. The first poems of individual collections set expectations and suggest directions along which the poetry can be read, to be elaborated on and tested in the collections themselves, with a frequent complementary element of self-reflexive comments in his prose writings. The self-critical aspect of Heaney's poetic practice is an apparent consequence of his consideration of self-contained authority as a first requirement for art, which turns him into his own first critic, and that creed eventually endows the first poems with a specific position of authority. This authority, however, involves an essentially paradoxical element as the first poem of the collection is encountered first but its full potential is realized only after the final poem of the respective volume has been read, which in turn invites repeated readings, as suggested in *The Rain Stick*, especially with its concluding sentence "Listen now again."⁴³

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REIMAGINING THE VIRGIN MARY IN EILÉAN NÍ CHUILLEANÁIN'S AND MEDBH MCGUCKIAN'S POEMS

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Abstract

Religious themes and Catholic imagery often take center stage in both Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's and Medbh McGuckian's poetry. Although the figure of the Virgin Mary is an inescapable and hugely influential presence in Irish Catholicism, both poets seem wary of representing her in their poetry due to her figure's connections to misogynistic attitudes within the Church. The paper analyzes two ekphrastic poems, Ní Chuilleanáin's Fireman's Lift and McGuckian's Red Angels in detail. Both poems are based on paintings about the death of the Virgin Mary by Correggio and Conrad von Soest respectively. The paper argues that the poems make use of vivid visual detail to represent the Virgin Mary as a mortal woman and to escape the negative connotations of her figure. The essay will draw on both traditional (James A. Heffernan, W. J. T. Mitchell) and more recent (Gabriele Rippl, Maria Iona Zirra) theories of ekphrasis in order to outline the multifaceted relationships between Marian dogma, the aesthetic appeal of religious art and the contemporary poets' representations of the Virgin Mary in their work. In addition, the paper will emphasize Ní Chuilleanáin's and McGuckian's similar overall attitudes towards the figure of the Virgin despite their different poetic techniques and approaches to ekphrasis.

KEYWORDS

Contemporary Irish women's poetry, religion, ekphrasis, Virgin Mary

INTRODUCTION

Despite their stylistic differences, the work of acclaimed Irish poet and Saoi of the Aosdána,¹ Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, and that of the well-known Northern Irish poet, Medbh McGuckian often intersect thematically. A striking example of this is the similarity between Ní Chuilleanáin's *Fireman's Lift* and McGuckian's *Red Angels*, both of which depict the Virgin Mary at the end of her earthly life. The two poems, first published in the collections *The Brazen Serpent* (1995) and *The Book of the Angel* (2004), respectively, converge both in their main theme and their approach as both reference works of visual art. Ní Chuilleanáin's *Fireman's Lift* was inspired by Correggio's monumental fresco, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, adorning the cupola of the Cathedral of Parma. McGuckian's *Red Angels*, in the meantime, draws on different paintings by Conrad von Soest, mainly his *Marienaltar* in the Marienkirche in Dortmund. The two poems both give empathetic, sensitive descriptions of the dying Virgin with close attention to physical detail. I argue that both poets reference visual details from paintings to depict the Virgin Mary as a mortal, human woman as opposed to an ephemeral, saintly figure as she is often represented by the Catholic Church. This is especially significant in Irish Catholicism, where the figure of Mary has often been placed on a pedestal as the embodiment of perfect womanhood – an unattainable ideal that many Catholic women have found debilitating. In addition, I will show that both poets highlight the constructed nature of the ekphrasis in order to foreground the figure of the Virgin Mary as an accreted image of various faith traditions and pre-existing representations through time. While the use of ekphrastic tools and the emphasis on corporeality destabilize some aspects of the conventional, idealized portrayal of the Virgin Mary, the poets' subtle approach preserves some sense of Mary's saintliness. Neither Ní Chuilleanáin nor McGuckian completely subvert traditional representations of the Virgin but instead explore possible artistic ways of restoring some of her humanity. The paper starts by outlining some relevant concepts of Catholic Mariology, and explaining their social, and cultural consequences, followed by a brief foray into theories of ekphrasis laying the groundwork for the close readings, and comparison of the two poems.

¹ The Aosdána is an association of creative artists in Ireland. The members can vote to award the title of Saoi to an artist among themselves. This title is the highest distinction within the Aosdána, as maximum seven living members can hold this honor at any one time. The Arts Council: Saoi, *Aosdána*, n. pag. <https://aosdana.artscouncil.ie/saoi/>

MARIAN DOGMA AND FAITH TRADITIONS

Although the Virgin Mary is only mentioned in a few brief passages in the gospels, she has evolved into a central figure in Catholic devotion. Mariology, the study of religious doctrines regarding Mary, relies mainly on four dogmas. Mary's role as Theotokos, the mother of Christ, was confirmed by the Second Council of Ephesus in 431. Her perpetual virginity became an official dogma at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553. Mary's Immaculate Conception, the belief that she had been free from original sin from the time of her conception, was signed into official doctrine by Pope Pius IX in 1854; while her Assumption, the belief that both Mary's body and soul were taken into heaven at the end of her life, was declared as a dogma by Pope Pius XII in 1950. It is important to note that all of these dogmas were based on beliefs and faith traditions held by many Christians prior to becoming official doctrines of the Catholic Church. The dogma that is the most relevant to the present discussion, the Assumption of the Virgin, originates from faith traditions dating to around 600², though it was only declared an official doctrine more than 1300 years later. Correggio's fresco, referenced in Ní Chuilleanáin's poem, and painted between 1526, and 1530, depicts the Assumption of Mary into heaven in accordance with the later dogma. Von Soest's altarpiece, painted around 1420, which McGuckian alludes to, depicts an alternative tradition called the Dormition of Mary, which posits that Mary died without pain or suffering, therefore her death was like falling asleep, before she was taken up to heaven, body and soul. This latter tradition is still the accepted official teaching of the Orthodox Church. Earlier, these two were rival conventions within the Catholic Church as well. The two faith traditions share the preconception that Mary's death must have been special and unlike that of ordinary people. Moreover, both the Catholic, and Orthodox Churches agree that both Mary's body, and soul were taken up to heaven eventually; the major difference lies in what happened before then.

Essentially, both faith traditions seek to explain the fate of Mary's incorruptible, forever virginal, sanctified body. The focus of the Catholic discourse on Mary's simultaneously virginal, and motherly body, and the way her figure was presented to women as an ideal, has had powerful social, and psychological consequences for many Irish Catholic women. Instead of being a welcome female presence in the often very masculine Church, the figure of the Virgin Mary often became a source of difficult, confusing feelings. This is because, as Jenny Beale puts it, "Mary experienced none of the physical events common to all women. She is presented as a static figure, whereas women experience life as a series

² Marina Warner: *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, 67.

of cycles”.³ Beale’s interviews conducted with Irish women in the eighties demonstrate how the moral instruction young Catholic girls received in school often led to intense confusion and guilt in connection with their bodies later in life.⁴ Irish-language poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill has memorably termed the representation of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism as “simultaneously virginal and motherly”, and a “spiritual double-bind”.⁵ In this social and historical context, Ní Chuilleánáin’s and McGuckian’s ways of reimagining the Virgin at the end of her life by focusing on physical aspects of her body can be read as an attempt at bringing the sacred Virgin closer to actual human women.

Given that the Virgin Mary is such a central figure in Irish Catholicism, and that both Eiléan Ní Chuilleánáin, and Medbh McGuckian have frequently addressed religious topics in their poetry, one might expect the Virgin to be discussed fairly often in their work, which is not the case. Although Eiléan Ní Chuilleánáin often writes about women in the Bible (Mary Magdalene, Ruth), a number of female saints (St. Margaret of Cortona, St. Catherine, St. Brigid, etc.) and, famously, nuns, Mary appears surprisingly infrequently in her work. Medbh McGuckian’s case is somewhat different because she has dedicated a nine-poem sequence to the Annunciation – the biblical scene when the archangel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will be the mother of the Messiah (Lk 1:26–38) – in her 2004 collection, *The Book of the Angel*. However, Mary is only named once in the whole sequence in *A Blessing Christ*. Moreover, most of the descriptive details about her are not individualized (*A More, Modello*) and her figure is completely absent from her usual place, opposite the angel, in *Chrisom Child*. In an interview with Elin Holmsten, McGuckian explained why she finds representing the Virgin in her work difficult:

In my deepest consciousness, whatever she means to me is that she must have been a real person sometime. She must have existed and she must have had some qualities that made her a valuable, sacred being. I try very hard then when I’m writing – not writing about her exactly because I think she’s very remote – to strip away all the accretions of heresy and the accretion of losing whatever was human. Even though she’s been so twisted, torn and manipulated by men for their own purposes, she still for me has an identity that I’m drawn to.⁶

The poet’s words highlight the paradox between Mary as a once mortal woman who has “found grace with God” (Lk 1:30), and her remoteness as a saint. She also emphasizes here the “accretions” of male-centered, and even misogynistic

³ Jenny Beale: *Women in Ireland: Voices of Change*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987, 92.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 93–94.

⁵ Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill: What Foremothers?, *The Poetry Ireland Review*, No. 36 (1992), 30.

⁶ Elin Holmsten: Double Doors: An Interview with Medbh McGuckian, *Nordic Irish Studies* 3 (2004), 97.

interpretations of the figure of the Virgin that, clearly, make it very difficult for women artists to relate to her.

THEORIES OF EKPHRASIS

In *Fireman's Lift* and *Red Angels*, both poets have relied on ekphrasis to sidestep the idealized image of the Virgin Mother and focus, instead, on Mary's once living, physical, female body. Ekphrasis, according to Heffernan's usefully broad and widespread definition is a "verbal representation of visual representation".⁷ Heffernan, drawing on J. T. Mitchell's work, posits ekphrasis as *paragonal*, as a struggle between "the power of the silent image" and "the rival authority of language".⁸ More recently, however, critics like Gabriele Rippl have noted that in contemporary literary examples, ekphrasis might be better understood "as a descriptive mode based on collaboration between text and image, which helps to understand the world, to communicate, and to transmit and store knowledge".⁹ This idea is corroborated by Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux in her essay "Ekphrasis and Textual Consciousness". Ní Chuilleánáin's and McGuckian's poems then defy traditional, paragonal tendencies of ekphrasis, since in both poems, as it is shown below, the relationship between text and image seems collaborative, blending details and subtly shifting the focus to create a new, composite image. Heffernan also notes the enduring nature of the literary mode of ekphrasis and the historical connections it can create.¹⁰ Maria Ioana Zirra combined Heffernan's observation with Astrid Erll's concept of intermediality to develop a hypothesis of ekphrasis as an intermedial "tool for cultural memory".¹¹ Following Zirra, I understand the relationship between the paintings and poems here as a kind of intermedial dialogue whereby the poets engage with pre-existing visual representations of their subject, which are themselves interpretations of even older narrative traditions. This allows the poets to see religious dogma as a result of centuries of changing beliefs, and traditions, and enables them to partly avoid problematic aspects of dogmatic representations of the Virgin Mary.

Another often cited element of the ekphrastic mode of literature is that, especially in poetry, it frequently involves a contemplation of the power of art

⁷ James A. W. Heffernan: *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993, 3.

⁸ Heffernan: *Museum of Words*, 1.

⁹ Gabriele Rippl: Postcolonial Ekphrasis in the Contemporary Anglophone Indian Novel, in Gabriele Rippl (ed.) *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature – Image – Sound – Music*, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2015, 129.

¹⁰ Heffernan: *Museum of Words*, 1–2.

¹¹ Maria Ioana Zirra: *Visual Poetic Memory: Ekphrasis and Image-Text in Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott and Wopko Jensma* Stockholm, Department of English, Stockholm University, 2019, 25.

and the role of the artist, culminating in a kind of *ars poetica*. Shane Alcobia-Murphy analyzes McGuckian's ekphrastic work in this vein, claiming that "[e]kphrasis becomes for her a way to confidently re-assert the validity of her poetic enterprise".¹² Although both *Fireman's Lift* and *Red Angels* contain one or two lines that reflect on the role of the artist, the poems as a whole contemplate instead questions about death, representations of the female body and memory. Ní Chuilleánáin and McGuckian often let their poems hover in the space between death, and resurrection, grief and consolation. This characteristic of their poetry is analogous to the crucial distinction between literature and painting, often discussed in theories of ekphrasis: the static nature of the image and the linear, narrative nature of writing. Murray Krieger, connecting the classical (Hellenistic), and the modern understanding of ekphrasis in literary criticism, describes it as "a device intended to interrupt the temporality of discourse, to freeze it during its indulgence in spatial exploration".¹³ In *Fireman's Lift* and *Red Angels*, both poets evoke scenes at the end of the Virgin Mary's life, in an attempt to capture her body just before it is taken into heaven, and thus becomes irreversibly remote and alien to other women. Both Ní Chuilleánáin and McGuckian seem to take advantage of the inertia of painting to resist the linear progression of writing and thus extend the last moments of the Virgin's earthly life in the poems, allowing her to be beheld in her still mortal state.

COLLABORATIVE EKPHRASIS AND CORPOREALITY IN NÍ CHUILLEÁNÁIN'S *FIREMAN'S LIFT*

Eiléan Ní Chuilleánáin's *Fireman's Lift* discloses its ekphrastic nature from the start, emphasizing the constructedness of artistic representation. The first stanza frames the context of the poem both through the act of looking and that of remembering:

I was standing beside you looking up
Through the big tree of the cupola
Where the church splits wide open to admit
Celestial choirs, the fall-out of brightness.¹⁴

¹² Shane Alcobia-Murphy: *Medbh McGuckian: The Poetics of Exemplarity*, Aberdeen, AHRC Centre for Irish & Scottish Studies, 2012, 86.

¹³ Murray Krieger: *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, 7.

¹⁴ Eiléan Ní Chuilleánáin: *The Brazen Serpent*, Winston-Salem, Wake Forest University Press, 1995, 10.

The poem is dated “Parma 1963 – Dublin 1994,” where the first date marks the poet’s visit to the Cathedral of Parma with her parents and the second, her mother’s, Eilís Dillon’s death shortly before the publication of the collection *The Brazen Serpent*. *Fireman’s Lift* is also highlighted as the opening piece of the volume, in which the connection between looking and believing is a central theme. The motto of the collection and the inspiration for its title is the Old Testament narrative, recounted in the Book of Numbers 21:6-9, where the Israelites are attacked by venomous snakes as punishment for speaking with contempt about the Lord. When they repent, God orders Moses to create a serpent of brass and place it on a high pole “and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived” (Num 21:9, KJV, as quoted by the poet). The question whether seeing can lead to belief informs several poems in the collection, most notably *The Real Thing*, *Our Lady of Youghal* and *Vierge Ouvrante*. In the opening stanza of *Fireman’s Lift*, the act of looking at the fresco covering the cupola allows the heavenly message to penetrate the church and shine on the viewers. The act of seeing is continuously emphasized throughout the text in lines like “we saw the work entire”, “this is what love sees, that angle” or “we saw them lifting her”.¹⁵ The past tense verbs reveal that the time of seeing the painting is also being remembered. In terms of ekphrasis, as the appearance of the painting is recalled by the speaker, it is simultaneously recreated, reconstructed in words for the reader. Characteristically of her work, Ní Chuilleánáin draws attention to the constructed nature of memory and, by extension, art.

Through the details and descriptions of the poem, Correggio’s *The Assumption of the Virgin* is clearly identifiable, and its main details and important artistic features are reflected in the text. Even though Ní Chuilleánáin’s ekphrasis follows the inspiring image closely, her verbal reconstruction is necessarily also already an interpretation. The second stanza of the poem summarizes the main theme of the painting:

The Virgin was spiralling to heaven,
Hauled up in stages. Past mist and shining,
Teams of angelic arms were heaving,
supporting, crowding her [...] ¹⁶

The fresco makes extensive use of the shape of the cupola by depicting concentric circles of clouds, and angels, and saints, creating a spiraling effect towards the top of the cupola, where the figure of Christ seems to be leaping downwards to meet his mother being lifted towards him. The style of the early sixteenth-century

¹⁵ Ní Chuilleánáin: *The Brazen Serpent*, 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

artwork is described by the website of the Cathedral of Parma as “between the Renaissance pictorial language and the audacity of Baroque art”.¹⁷ The fresco creates a powerful illusion of space and movement that is manifested in Ní Chuilleánáin’s descriptions, as well. The third and fourth stanzas emphasize the unique treatment of light, seeming to be pouring down from above. These lines also put into words the bewildering flurry of various body parts seen in the painting:

[...] how the light
Melted and faded bodies so that
Loose feet and elbows and staring eyes
Floated in the wide stone petticoat
Clear and free as weeds.¹⁸

The image of the petticoat is linked by Patricia Boyle Haberstroh to the emphasis on the female body in the painting: “The observer is in effect looking up under the petticoat of a female.”¹⁹ In an interview, the poet herself explained the same image as “leading to the idea of churchgoers being enclosed like children under their mothers’ skirts”.²⁰ Both interpretations highlight both the intimacy of the image and the simultaneous potential of the fresco, aided by the monumentality of the architecture, to encapsulate and overwhelm its viewers. Similarly, lines like “the back making itself a roof”, “the pillars of their arms” or “her face a capital leaning into an arch” closely reflect the ways Correggio incorporated the architectural elements into his fresco. These details in the text also demonstrate Ní Chuilleánáin’s approach to ekphrasis: they reflect an impression, and thus, inevitably, an interpretation of the painting. Nevertheless, the verbal description remains faithful to the most important visible characteristics of the image that inspired it.

Through the ekphrasis, Ní Chuilleánáin enters into a broader intermedial dialogue with the religious traditions that the painting is also part of, while retaining the focus on the painting itself. Painted shortly after the Protestant Reformation, Correggio’s striking fresco is often understood as the visual reaffirmation of several Catholic doctrines, especially those relating to Mary’s role.²¹ When the painting was created, the Assumption was not to become an official doctrine for another 400 years. *Munificentissimus Deus*, the apostolic

¹⁷ Santa Maria Assunta Cathedral, *Piazza Duomo Parma En*, n.d., 2025, <https://www.piazzaduomoparma.com/en/the-square/cathedral/>.

¹⁸ Ní Chuilleánáin: *The Brazen Serpent*, 10.

¹⁹ Patricia Boyle Haberstroh: *The Female Figure in Eiléan Ní Chuilleánáin’s Poetry*, Cork, Cork University Press, 2013, 114.

²⁰ Quoted in Haberstroh: *The Female Figure*, 115.

²¹ Esperança Camara: Antonio Da Correggio, Assumption of the Virgin, *Smarthistory*, n. pag., 2025, <https://smarthistory.org/correggio-assumption-of-the-virgin/>.

constitution in which Pope Pius XII defines the dogma of the Assumption, includes long and very detailed supporting arguments for the dogma, citing both how long the Assumption had been accepted as a faith tradition and the authority of theologians and church fathers. As tangible proof of this belief, he also mentions religious art and architecture: “The innumerable temples which have been dedicated to the Virgin Mary assumed into heaven clearly attest this faith. So do those sacred images, exposed therein for the veneration of the faithful, which bring this unique triumph of the Blessed Virgin before the eyes of all men.”²² The Santa Maria Assunta Cathedral of Parma and Correggio’s fresco in it are prime examples. In turn, Correggio also relied on earlier sources affirming the Assumption as an article of faith. An important textual source for the Assumption that he drew on²³ is Jacobus de Voragine’s thirteenth-century compilation of the lives of saints, *The Golden Legend*. The English translation (1483) includes several narratives about “the Assumption of the Glorious Virgin”, all agreeing on the main points, but differing in some details.²⁴ This clearly shows that the faith tradition Correggio has captured in a visual form was already multifaceted and diverse. Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin must have also been familiar with *The Golden Legend* since she alluded to various chapters of it in poems like *Mary Magdalene Preaching at Marseille* or *Saint Margaret of Cortona* in order to juxtapose diverse strands of religious tradition.²⁵ In *Fireman’s Lift* she retains focus on Correggio’s visual interpretation of the Assumption, but the ekphrasis still opens the door to a dialogue with shifting beliefs and traditions across time.

In the third stanza, while contemplating the work of the painter and his viewpoint, the physical effort of creating the painting becomes central: “we stepped / Back, as the painter longed to / While his arm swept in the large strokes.”²⁶ Here, there is a perspective change from that of the viewer to that of the artist; simultaneously, the focus shifts almost seamlessly from the act of looking to that of the physical act of painting. A similar shift happens in the fifth stanza, even more subtly: “This is what love sees, that angle: The crick in the branch loaded with fruit,”²⁷ where “crick” can also refer to the pain in the painter’s shoulders from working in an awkward position or the pain in the viewers’ neck from staring at the tall cupola for long. The act of looking thus

²² *Munificentissimus Deus*, 1950, n. pag., http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus.html.

²³ Camara: Antonio Da Correggio, n. pag.

²⁴ Jacobus de Voragine: *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints*, ed. F.S. Ellis, trans. William Caxton, IV. London, Temple Classics, 1900, Vol IV., <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/goldenlegend/GoldenLegend-Volume4.asp>.

²⁵ *The Golden Legend* is one of the sources for another poem, “Mary Magdalene Preaching in Marseille,” published in *The Magdalene Sermon*, the collection preceding *The Brazen Serpent*.

²⁶ Ní Chuilleanáin: *The Brazen Serpent*, 10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

becomes commensurate with bodily effort. It is this physical effort that the viewers of the painting share with both the painter and the characters in the picture itself, creating a “triangular relationship” akin to Mitchell’s “ekphrastic triangle”. Here, instead of creating a relationship between the “speaking / seeing subject”, the “seen object” and the “audience or addressee of the ekphrasis”,²⁸ Ní Chuilleánáin creates a connection through shared physical effort between the figures depicted, the viewer of the painting and the artist, whereby all of them become, to some extent, participants in the creation of the visual impact of the painting.

In its ekphrastic interpretation, physicality and tactility are seen as key characteristics of the painting. As she included references to architectural features in order to reflect Correggio’s use of the features of the cupola, Ní Chuilleánáin also closely follows the painter in her focus on the physical features of the bodies depicted. The vocabulary of the poem, the naming of so many different body parts continuously, draws attention to the corporeality of the bodies depicted. This contrasts with the celestial light flooding the cupola in the first stanza and adds an almost tactile component to the focus on seeing. Ní Chuilleánáin writes about this poem in an essay, where she also highlights the physical aspect of the poem: “I could not describe the picture itself – I could only concentrate on one aspect, the way it shows bodily effort and the body’s weight.”²⁹ Beyond the focus on various body parts, the weight of the body is emphasized through verbs like “hailed up,” “heaving, supporting,” and in the final stanza, “the muscles clung and shifted [...] under her weight”.³⁰ In the same essay, the poet stresses that, in her work, the starting point is usually “the body’s experience”.³¹ This is clearly true of this poem, which starts with the bodily act of looking, incorporates the physical effort of the painter, and maintains an emphasis on corporeality throughout the text.

The foregrounding of bodies is, of course, crucial to understanding how the Virgin Mary is depicted in the poem. By describing the body, she once inhabited, Ní Chuilleánáin reinstates a sense of Mary’s humanity. In the painting, she is a beautiful woman, looking up at her divine son with outstretched arms, seemingly paying little attention to the angels lifting her up. Ní Chuilleánáin, however, describes her as “heavy”, in stark contrast to the ethereal figure as she is often presented. In *Munificentissimus Deus*, quoted above, the emphasis is on her uncorrupted, perfectly virginal body, a body so sanctified that God

²⁸ William John Thomas Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994, 164.

²⁹ Eiléan Ní Chuilleánáin: Acts and Monuments of an Unelected Nation: The Cailleach writes about the Renaissance, *The Southern Review*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 578, <https://www.proquest.com/openview/35dc034b2ef153ab34dda31bafb5a3e0/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=41220>.

³⁰ Ní Chuilleánáin: *The Brazen Serpent*, 10–11.

³¹ Ní Chuilleánáin: Acts and Monuments, 578.

preserved it from physical decay after death. It is difficult to imagine such a body as so heavy that “teams of angelic arms” had to struggle under its weight. The passage from earthly existence to eternal life in heaven, or “the final purchase” as the poet phrases it, is not an easy one, even for Mary, the poem implies. The Virgin, “spiralling to heaven”, is depicted here as still a firmly physical creature, weighed down by her human body, no matter how virginal and uncorrupted it might be. The focus on the weight of her body makes her more relatable to ordinary women, even as she is becoming more and more like the angels and saints surrounding her in the seventh stanza: “Their heads bowed down to reflect on her / Fair face and hair so like their own.”³² Ní Chuilleánáin ends the poem, just like Correggio had captured the exact moment, when she “came to the edge of the cloud,”³³ just before she finally reached heaven and was irrevocably transformed into a saint.

The focus on physicality and depicting the Virgin Mary with an emphasis on the weight of her human body also had a personal significance for the poet, since the poem was written in memory of the death of the poet’s mother after a difficult illness. In order to create a parallel between her mother’s suffering, and eventual passing, and the Virgin Mary’s passage into heaven, it is clear that Mary had to be depicted more akin to ordinary women than the way she is usually represented. The poet explained that, while describing the angels lifting Mary into heaven, “she had in mind the nurses lifting her mother when she was dying”.³⁴ Even beyond the physical aspect, there is an element of gentle care that also makes its way into the poem:

This is what love sees, that angle:
The crick in the branch loaded with fruit,
A jaw defining itself, a shoulder yoked,

The back making itself a roof
The legs a bridge, the hands
A crane and a cradle.³⁵

The body described here could be that of Mary, of the angels, or perhaps even that of Christ. The metaphor connecting the hands, and the cradle recalls not only the care with which the angels move Mary towards heaven, and the idea of the nurses caring for a dying patient, but also the way a mother’s hands cradle their infant child, the way Mary cradled Jesus or the way Eilís Dillon had cared for Eiléan Ní Chuilleánáin once. The image also draws attention

³² Ní Chuilleánáin: *The Brazen Serpent*, 10.

³³ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁴ Quoted in Haberstroh: *The Female Figure*, 114.

³⁵ Ní Chuilleánáin: *The Brazen Serpent*, 10.

to the reversal of these roles at the end of a mother's life, when she is the one in need of physical care.

The first line of the above quoted section is similarly ambiguous: it could refer to the loving look shared by the Virgin Mother and Christ, it could be the way the angels and saints look at Mary with admiration, but it could equally reference the care the painter took in creating the artwork or the look of an enchanted viewer of the fresco. The idea of loving care extends to the artist, and the viewer as well in stark contrast to traditional competitive or voyeuristic conceptions of ekphrasis. Here, the speaker not only sees the loving look shared by the characters in the painting or imagines the effort and care the artist took in creating his masterpiece but is also involved in recreating the emotional impact of the painting. The almost tactile descriptions coupled with the physical effort – stepping back, craning one's neck – the viewing of the monumental fresco requires from onlookers underline the collaborative aspect of Ní Chuilleanáin's ekphrastic practice.

COMPOSITE IMAGE AND THE INHERENT VALUE OF THE BODY IN MCGUCKIAN'S *RED ANGELS*

In contrast to the overtly ekphrastic *Fireman's Lift*, McGuckian's *Red Angels*, in spite of some vividly pictorial details in the text, only reveals its ekphrastic nature after some research. The short poem was published in Medbh McGuckian's highly structured, religiously focused 2004 collection, *The Book of the Angel*. As the title suggests, angels take center stage in the collection, but it is also arguably McGuckian's most intensely ekphrastic volume, full of references to paintings from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. Within the collection, *Red Angels* appears as the seventh poem in a nine-part sequence that makes up Part Two of *The Book of the Angel*. As Jefferson Holdridge also notes, the Annunciation and, as a direct consequence, the Incarnation of Christ are the themes that link this sequence together.³⁶ In this context, it might be surprising that *Red Angels* describes the death of the Virgin. On a closer look, however, it appears that McGuckian uses ekphrasis to create a composite image of Mary's life, including the Annunciation and the birth of Christ as well. Written using the poet's characteristic palimpsestic technique which mirrors the constructed nature of conventional representations of the Virgin Mary, the poem combines phrases from Brigitte Corley's book, *Conrad von Soest: Painter among Merchant Princes*. The book is one of the

³⁶ Jefferson Holdridge: 'A Roar of Wings': Faith, Scepticism, the Sublime in Medbh McGuckian's *The Book of the Angel*. *Review of Irish Studies in Europe*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2021, 71, <https://doi.org/10.32803/rise.v4i2.2830>.

few existing scholarly monographs about the fifteenth-century Westphalian painter. McGuckian, in her short poem, borrows phrases and expressions from various descriptions in Corley's book with the result that the ekphrasis here is a composite of details alluding to various paintings by the same artist. There are not many extant works by Conrad von Soest: his two main works are two altarpieces, consisting of several panels: the *Niederwildungen Altarpiece* and the so called *Marienaltar* in Dortmund. Other than these two, there are only a few small surviving paintings on wooden panels. To complicate matters further, Corley questions the attribution to von Soest of one of these, which is a panel depicting St. Nicholas with other saints.³⁷ Medbh McGuckian's poem describes a scene similar to the Dormition scene on von Soest's *Marienaltar*, although, surprisingly, many of the details come from descriptions of other paintings in Brigitte Corley's monograph. McGuckian's poem reveals itself to be a composite work of art, where the technique reflects the way the Virgin Mary can be understood as a composite figure constructed by both artists and religious authorities from elements of diverse faith traditions.

As opposed to Ní Chuilleanáin's choice of a clearly identifiable, quite well-known monumental fresco by an acclaimed artist, McGuckian has chosen to reference a little-known painter with few extant works. The obscurity of the source of inspiration, the covertness of the ekphrasis and the fact that most of the descriptive passages of the poem were borrowed from a scholarly work might even raise the question whether the poem should be read as ekphrasis. The use of Corley's monograph completely disrupts W. J. T. Mitchell's ekphrastic triangle and complicates the relationship between the poem itself, the "speaking / seeing subject" and the paintings.³⁸ Ní Chuilleanáin's ekphrasis in *Fireman's Lift* was based on a personal impression of the painting mediated through memory, as the poet herself revealed in different interviews. In McGuckian's case, it is likely that the poet had only seen reproductions of Conrad von Soest's paintings in Corley's book and had not seen the panels in person before she composed the poem. Thus, the monograph on von Soest takes the place of personal impression, and by the time it reaches the readers, the impact of the paintings is doubly mediated, once through Brigitte Corley's description, and through the poem. It also must be taken into account that the monograph McGuckian relies on contains scholarly analyses of the paintings, further displacing the emotional immediacy of the viewing experience that is tangible in Ní Chuilleanáin's poem even as it is remediated through memory. On the other hand, the scientific attention to detail helps create a striking vividness in *Red Angels* in spite of the way the scholarly language seeps into the poem in phrases like "calmer fold

³⁷ Brigitte Corley: *Conrad Von Soest: Painter Among Merchant Princes*, London, Harvey Miller, 1996, 77.

³⁸ Mitchell: *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, 164.

pattern” or “intended highlights”.³⁹ Nevertheless, McGuckian’s composite poem can be read as an attempt to construct a verbal image that has comparable emotional transport to Conrad von Soest’s original altarpieces even as the technique tests the limits of what can be considered ekphrasis.

The scene McGuckian recreates in *Red Angels* is that of a dead woman laid out with angels attending to her, which is recognizable as the Dormition, if we accept that the unnamed woman is the Virgin Mary. Her composite poem combines details from different paintings by von Soest resembling the painter’s method of assembling elements of iconographical tradition in original ways. Both of Conrad von Soest’s major works, the *Niederwildungen Altarpiece* and the *Marienaltar*, depict scenes from the life of Mary, but only the latter shows the death of the Virgin in the way McGuckian has reconstructed it. Dormition scenes, based on apocryphal legends detailing Mary’s death, were very popular in religious iconography in Byzantine art and later in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Elizabeth Walsh traces the development of the iconography of the Dormition and notes that depictions of this scene became popular in the West around the thirteenth century and remained widespread until the sixteenth century, when artists began to favor scenes of the Assumption instead.⁴⁰ Correggio’s fresco, which Ní Chuilleanáin reconstructs verbally, was painted right around the time of this shift, while von Soest’s *Marienaltar* is dated to the early 1400s. Walsh shows that earlier Western depictions of this theme drew heavily on Byzantine exemplars⁴¹ and Corley’s analysis confirms that some of the motifs in von Soest’s *The Death of the Virgin* are retraceable to Byzantine roots.⁴² Nevertheless, von Soest’s treatment of the subject is consistent with religious and artistic traditions of the time period.⁴³ Significantly, von Soest’s *The Death of the Virgin* is part of a triptych: the panel to the left depicts the Nativity and the one to the right shows the Adoration of the Magi. In addition, the regrettably damaged backside of the piece shows the Annunciation and the coronation of Mary in heaven. Unlike the monumental fresco by Correggio, which captures the exact moment the Assumption is taking place, von Soest’s altarpiece highlights key scenes in the Virgin’s life, and although they are not arranged in chronological order, they do still tell a story. Interestingly, as Ní Chuilleanáin follows Correggio’s dynamic composition in her poem and makes use of the inherently static nature of the painting to halt the narrative progression of the text, McGuckian also follows Conrad von Soest in the way she composes a nonlinear narrative using details from various paintings.

³⁹ Medbh McGuckian: *The Book of the Angel*, Loughcrew, Oldcastle, Gallery Press, 2004, 36.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Walsh: Images of Hope: Representations of *the Death of the Virgin*, East and West, *Religion and the Arts*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2007, 29, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852907X172412>.

⁴¹ Ibid., 29.

⁴² Corley: *Conrad Von Soest*, 110.

⁴³ Ibid., 110–11.

Red Angels begins with a detailed, gentle description of a female figure which is constructed of elements from various paintings:

The sky suffers cloudmarks.
A patch of green lining
turned up over her foot
takes the shade from the room.

Her timeless robe with its pomegranate
motif has a calmer fold pattern
than the escaped piece of veil
falling forward over her hair.⁴⁴

Brigitte Corley repeatedly praises the “gentle, lyrical mood” of the paintings and “the gentle humanity of [von Soest’s] descriptive style”.⁴⁵ This tenderness, through Corley’s verbal descriptions, spreads to the language of the poem as well. In the lines above, the Virgin’s clothing almost seems to caress her modestly covered body. The specific details in these stanzas demonstrate McGuckian’s composite technique. The “green lining / turned up over her foot” appears in a description where Corley compares similar details of the Virgin’s clothing in the Pentecost scene in the *Niederwildungen Altarpiece* and the *Adoration of the Magi* in the *Marienaltar* from Dortmund.⁴⁶ The “timeless robe” appears in more general descriptions, where Corley notes that von Soest usually depicts the main characters in timelessly elegant clothing, whereas the attire of minor characters in the paintings reflect contemporary fashions.⁴⁷ Somewhat confusingly, the “pomegranate motif” does not appear on any of Mary’s dresses – it appears on St. Barbara’s dress in the St. Nicholas panel that had been attributed to von Soest, but Corley argues that it was painted by a less talented artist following von Soest’s style closely.⁴⁸ The “calmer fold pattern” is similarly from a passage comparing paintings: this time Corley is discussing one of von Soest’s possible models for the *Niederwildungen Nativity*.⁴⁹ Finally, the last two lines of the second stanza are from a description emphasizing a unique detail in the *Madonna and Child* in the Dortmund altarpiece.⁵⁰ Read in this way, McGuckian’s lyrical, seemingly smooth description of the Virgin

⁴⁴ McGuckian, *The Book of the Angel*, 36.

⁴⁵ Corley: *Conrad Von Soest*, 142, 115.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 49, 107.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

becomes a mosaic of details from at least four different paintings, one of which does not even depict Mary.

The way McGuckian constructs this image of Mary in her poem thus mirrors the “accretion of losing whatever was human” the poet mentioned in the interview quoted earlier as the Virgin’s figure was continuously reinterpreted and redefined through Church history. The composite description reflects the process through which various beliefs, legends and faith traditions were distilled into the four Marian dogmas professed by the Catholic Church today. This is also similar to the way various conventional motifs used by artists in often depicted biblical scenes or scenes of saints’ lives were accreted over time, making the symbolic messages of these paintings decodable to contemporary viewers, just as Elizabeth Walsh traces the development of the representations of *The Death of the Virgin* in her study. McGuckian also takes the various scenes of the Virgin’s life depicted by von Soest and reassembles them so that the death of Mary becomes an assemblage of the events of her life that shaped how she is remembered. Medbh McGuckian’s composite description of the Virgin Mary replicates the cultural processes that influenced the paintings that inspired her poem and shaped the image of the Virgin Mary both in Conrad von Soest’s time and today.

In the third and fourth stanzas, McGuckian describes the funerary rituals performed by angels over the body of the Virgin with details that foreshadow her impending assumption into heaven:

The red angels are sorrowing
at the nuptial meaning of her body
in their angelic time, the highest
taking a burning coal in his hand,

with intended highlights on his raised
arms and red collar, the lowest
holding a candle for the dying
with a coin, a curve in his sleeve.⁵¹

Although the “intended highlights” and “red collar” are mentioned by Brigitte Corley in connection with another painting, *The Adoration of the Kings*,⁵² the majority of these two stanzas stay close to von Soest’s *The Death of the Virgin*. Corley credits Conrad von Soest with introducing the candle and coin motifs to the scene, which were later adopted by some of his followers.⁵³ Another

⁵¹ McGuckian, *The Book of the Angel*, 36.

⁵² Corley: *Conrad Von Soest*, 65.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 109.

interesting point of departure from the central panel of the *Marienaltar* in the poem is the color of the angels, which are blue in *The Death of the Virgin*. The red angels appear in von Soest nativity scenes both in the Dortmund *Marienaltar* and the *Niederwildungen Altarpiece*. Corley, while discussing the angels, mentions a few theories relating to the hierarchy of angels in Christian tradition, but then decides that “no iconographic conclusion can be drawn from the color of angels in Conrad’s altarpieces; the choice of color seems to have simply depended on decorative preferences”.⁵⁴ McGuckian’s choice of red angels as opposed to blue ones does not seem to be random, however. Corley earlier suggests that, according to some traditions, the angels closest to God burned in love for Him and were thus red. The image of the “burning coal” is also taken from Corley’s text, who quotes it from Isaiah 6:6 in her attempt to explain the iconography of the angels, even though the powerful and awe-inspiring, even terrifying angels described by Isaiah are nothing like von Soest’s small, gentle angels. The key here may be the idea of burning love and closeness to God, which would foreshadow that Mary would soon be reunited with her son in heaven. This is reinforced by the important detail that red angels appear in von Soest’s nativity scenes, where the Madonna gently holds her son in a gesture that parallels how she will later be received, and held by her son after her death.

The striking phrase, “the nuptial meaning of her body” is one of the few in the poem that were not borrowed from Brigitte Corley’s monograph. Although on a surface level it could be read as a slightly sarcastic comment on Mary’s chastity, the dogma that her body had never been “nuptial” in marriage, McGuckian’s addition foregrounds the uniqueness of Mary’s body in and of itself. However, the phrase has a specific significance in Catholic conceptions of the human body as has been explicated by St. John Paul II. In a General Audience entitled “The Human Person Becomes a Gift in the Freedom of Love,” St. John Paul II analyzes Genesis 2:24-25 emphasizing the unique value of the human body. He defines the nuptial meaning of the body both as “a particular capacity of expressing love, in which man becomes a gift” and as a reminder that everyone is a unique creation of God in His own image.⁵⁵ He understands the human body as a gift everyone is free to give either to another person in marriage or can offer to God in chastity. If read in the light of St. John Paul II’s definition, the nuptial meaning of Mary’s body in the poem highlights what the poet has said about her, that “she must have been a real person sometime. She must have existed and she must have had some qualities that made her a valuable,

⁵⁴ Corley: *Conrad Von Soest*, 111.

⁵⁵ John Paul II: General Audience, 16 January 1980 - The Human Person Becomes a Gift in the Freedom of Love, 2025, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1980/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19800116.html.

sacred being.”⁵⁶ At the center of the poem, McGuckian emphasizes Mary’s body as uniquely valuable in and of itself in a similar way to how Ní Chuilleánáin foregrounds the physical weight of her body in *Fireman’s Lift*. This focus on physicality is reinforced in *Red Angels* by the angels gently touching and attending to Mary’s dead body in von Soest’s painting just as they caringly lift her body towards heaven in Ní Chuilleánáin’s poem based on Correggio’s depiction. Here, underneath all the elegant clothing, accretions and beliefs, McGuckian uses the phrase “nuptial meaning” to centralize the “unique and unrepeatable” mortal human being Mary had once been.⁵⁷

The last stanza of the poem further disrupts any semblance in the chronology of the poem by superimposing the nativity onto Mary’s death in a way noticeable even without knowing the source of the poem:

All earthly things have died for her,
the silver choir lights in the porch
setting, the snowflake pattern

The first line of this stanza is immediately ambiguous. In the context of the death of Mary, this would indicate that she must no longer concern herself with earthly life because she will soon be in heaven. The phrase, however, is from Corley’s discussion of von Soest’s *Annunciation*, where Mary is surprisingly depicted as the Queen of Heaven with a crown, foreshadowing her future importance.⁵⁸ McGuckian follows the painter in collapsing the chronology and combining pivotal moments of Mary’s life into one image. The Annunciation is indeed a key event when Mary becomes the Virgin Mother and the future Queen of Heaven, the defining moment not only for her, but for Christianity as a whole. McGuckian, like von Soest, projects the Annunciation onto the end of Mary’s earthly life. The line also implies that with the Annunciation, Mary ceased to be an ordinary human woman, she was changed forever. “The snowflake pattern” can be seen in *The Death of the Virgin*, whereas, as expected, “the bright stable” references von Soest’s *Nativity*.⁵⁹ The last lines of the poem conflate the death of the Virgin Mary with the birth of Christ. In a religious interpretation, this implies that Mary has eternal life through Christ’s salvation and the line also foreshadows that Mary would soon be reunited with her son in heaven. In a sense, the poem leaves off just before that could happen, similarly to Ní Chuilleánáin’s *Fireman’s Lift*.

Through her composite poetic technique, Medbh McGuckian parallels the cultural processes that have shaped the figure of the Virgin Mary as she is

⁵⁶ Holmsten: *Double Doors*, 97.

⁵⁷ John Paul II: General Audience.

⁵⁸ Corley: *Conrad Von Soest*, 100.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 37, 141.

usually imagined and represented. McGuckian's ekphrasis combines many small physical details in order to reconstruct a verbal image of the death of the Virgin and simultaneously highlights the accreted nature of the image. By assembling details from Conrad von Soest's different paintings depicting different scenes from the Virgin Mary's life, the poet follows the painter's attempt at telling a story through static images. The chronology of the events represented dissolves and key scenes of Mary's life are projected onto one another in the moment of her death in the poem. The phrase "nuptial meaning of her body", as an allusion to Catholic theology, depicts Mary as an inherently precious, unrepeatable person by centering her body as valuable in and of itself. Even so, the assemblage of details in the poem draws attention to the impossibility of completely deconstructing the accreted meanings and array of representations that have been assigned to this body over time.

CONCLUSION

Despite the apparent differences between the two poems compared here in their poetic style and choice of paintings as inspiration, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's and Medbh McGuckian's ekphrastic representations of the Virgin Mary show some striking similarities in their approach. Both poets sidestep traditional conceptions of ekphrasis in the ways they complicate the relationship between the poet, the painting and the reader. Both poets draw on some fundamental characteristics of the paintings that have inspired them in the way they construct their poems. The visual illusion of space Correggio creates in the cupola informs Ní Chuilleanáin's foregrounding of the relationship between the act of seeing and believing, while the relationships between the different scenes depicted in Conrad von Soest's multi-panel altarpiece are reflected by McGuckian's composite poem. Both poets clearly grapple with reclaiming the figure of the Virgin Mary as a relatable, human woman. In these poems, a partial solution is to focus on the physical details of Mary's body as seen in the paintings. The centralization of the body is coupled with descriptions showing a gentle, caring attitude toward Mary's mortal but inherently valuable body, which represents her as more relatable and restores a sense of her humanity lost in conventional portrayals of her figure. Through the paintings, both poets also engage with the long iconographical tradition of representations of the Virgin Mary. In this way, they both emphasize and draw attention to the constructed nature of these images but also acknowledge the impossibility of stripping away all accretions that are now part of how the Virgin Mary is imagined and revered.

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THE REPRESENTATION OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY DYNAMICS IN *THE QUIET GIRL (AN CAILÍN CIÚIN)* (2022) COMPARED TO IRISH SHORT FILMS

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Abstract

This article will discuss how family relations, and children are represented in Irish drama films, mainly focusing on The Quiet Girl (An Cailín Ciúin) (2022), which will be compared to, and analyzed in relation to some Irish short films like Dance Lexie Dance (1996), Rúbaí (2013), and Boogaloo and Graham (2014). The research begins by placing the representations of Irish children, and their families into a historical context, and how certain events in Ireland have influenced, and shaped the changes of their portrayals. With all films being made during or after the Celtic Tiger period, the changes post-Celtic Tiger films introduced to the portrayal of Irish families, and children, and what traditional components, and archetypal elements remained, will be investigated. When it comes to the characters of the children who appear in the chosen films, the center of attention in this paper will be on how they act within their domestic environment, and how their family setting impacts them. Their financial situations, their ways of living, and how the parents' conduct influences the behavior of the children within the stories will be analyzed. It will also be discussed how the cinematography – camera positions, lighting and spaces – is used to emphasize and support the child's feelings in The Quiet Girl. This article is a rewritten version of a BA thesis written in 2024.

KEYWORDS

Children on film, Irish cinema, Irish short films, *The Quiet Girl (An Cailín Ciúin)* (2022), family dynamics

INTRODUCTION

The way children are represented in Irish films is a complex phenomenon. Their portrayals can be discussed from various perspectives depending on the desired focus. The importance of the research for this article lies in the perspective from which the topic of children in Irish films is analyzed. It is true that the stories of children are a theme that Irish directors have focused on in the twentieth, and twenty-first century so far, and these approaches have been studied by academics. However, the research on Irish cinema rarely focuses on the positive post-Celtic Tiger representations of children on film or the representation of children on film in general.

This article considers the Celtic Tiger period and shows how the changes it brought to the country have impacted the way children are portrayed in Irish films. Their positive depiction in, and after the Celtic Tiger period is a subject matter Irish film scholars like Ruth Barton, and Lance Pettitt do not discuss extensively in their influential books, as children on film have mostly been analyzed in the context of abuse cases. Moreover, by analyzing a positive foster story in *The Quiet Girl*, as mentioned above, this research aims to further the discussion of child characters in Irish films post-Celtic Tiger.

The focus is narrowed down to mostly the twenty-first century, and the article views changes through the selected films: *The Quiet Girl* (2022), and three short films, *Dance Lexie Dance* (1996), *Rúbaí* (2013), and *Boogaloo and Graham* (2014); these films prove that post-Celtic Tiger directors have approached the stories of children in their films from a more positive perspective. However, the reaction to the revelation of major child abuse cases in Irish filmmaking is not a topic of this article.

When researching which short films to include, the Irish Film Institute's *Children on Film* archive was used. Concerning the characters of the children who appear in the films, the center of attention in this article is on how they act within their domestic environment, and how their family setting impacts them. Their financial situations, their ways of living, and how the parents' behavior influences the conduct of the children within the stories are highlighted. A section focusing on the depiction of the child characters who feature as main protagonists in the short films is followed by a detailed analysis of *The Quiet Girl*; the analysis refers back to the short films and searches for common patterns.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To delve into how Irish children are depicted on film, it is important to look at the bigger picture, which is Irish history. Most Irish films about children mirror their real-life circumstances and situations, their problems and struggles.

These depictions started with documentaries in the early and mid-twenty-first century and hit their peak as a result of the Celtic Tiger period. Therefore, this article will briefly consider how the Celtic Tiger period was crucial for the diverse representation of children on film.

To begin with, the Celtic Tiger period was one contributor to the growing number of films with children in focus. This period started in the mid-1990s and lasted until the financial crisis in 2008. As its exact year of start is debated, this paper uses Barton's approach according to which it started in the mid-1990s.¹ During these years the Irish economy flourished, meaning that the period impacted all aspects of everyday life in the Republic as the country became extremely relevant on the global market. Living conditions changed radically in the country that had mostly known poverty and emigration before.² The Good Friday Agreement was also signed around that time (in 1998), putting an end to the violent conflict in Northern Ireland, called the Troubles. The Celtic Tiger period mostly had positive outcomes, however, the gap between the poor and the wealthy widened even more with the rise of consumption, which caused societal problems. Among the Western countries, Ireland had one of the biggest gaps "with the richest 10 per cent of the population 11 times wealthier than the poorest 10 per cent".³ Evidently, this economic growth impacted filmmaking in the country as well. The thriving of the entertainment industry meant that the amount of funds for projects increased compared to before the Celtic Tiger period. Apart from the improvement of equipment and increase in budgets, more diverse stories began to be told, which provided an opportunity for stories about children in focus to come forward.

Children also gained more significance on film in the 1990s. Barton argued that heritage films like *Into the West* (1992) and *War of the Buttons* (1994) were common in the period and they often concentrated on children, and the countryside, and their innocent nature worked as a tool to represent the innocence of Irish people of the past.⁴ Children had been represented on short films before the 1990s, for example in the documentaries *Gloucester Street* (1930s), *Irish College Ranafast* (1962), and *Irish Boy, Story of Sean* (1970). These focused on the lives of children in school and Irish lifestyle in general. However, the role of children in fictional genres like drama and animation is insignificant before the 1990s. Therefore, it is very likely that the child protection laws and the economic rise of the country worked together for the topic of children to become something that filmmakers were interested in.

¹ Ruth Barton: *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-First Century*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2019, 4.

² Ibid., 3.

³ Diarmaid Ferriter: *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, London, Profile Books, 2005, 663.

⁴ Barton: *Irish Cinema*, 117.

This article analyzes films that were created after the Celtic Tiger period, with the exception of *Dance Lexie Dance*, which was made at the beginning of the period in 1996. *Dance Lexie Dance*, *Rúbaí*, *Boogaloo and Graham*, and *The Quiet Girl* are films set in different decades, and all of them include historical events, social norms, and issues that are all around their child protagonists. These films display very different experiences of growing up due to the differing places, and times the characters live in, and the family dynamics they have. While influenced by both history and the Celtic Tiger, these films do not have a negative focus as they do not depict abuse cases. Instead, they have a more positive approach to showing children despite the times the films are set in, and their majority conclude with an optimistic ending. In the selected films, the earliest decade is the 1970s in *Boogaloo and Graham*. Its historical significance – the period of the Troubles in Northern Ireland – is more of an underlying theme rather than the focal point, showing everyday life from the perspective of two siblings. *The Quiet Girl* depicts the early 1980s in the Republic by showing rural life and family conditions of the era. *Dance Lexie Dance* continues with the 1990s and the religious differences of Ireland through a little girl's love for Irish Riverdance. Finally, *Rúbaí* focuses on how relevant religion remains in the 2010s, where a small girl struggles with her belief due to her personal experience with grief.

FAMILY BACKGROUND AND ITS IMPACT ON THE CHILD CHARACTERS

Family Situations in Short Films

Dance Lexie Dance, *Rúbaí*, *Boogaloo and Graham*, and *The Quiet Girl* all represent children whose stories have been impacted by Irish history. However, regardless of the time the characters live in, their experiences show universal elements of growing up, for example their relationships with their parents, siblings, and peers, and how those elements impact their early years. They are mostly shaped by their parents: their beliefs, support – or the lack of it – and the way they guide them in the world.

To begin with, *Dance Lexie Dance* and *Boogaloo and Graham* both show the happiness of empowered children, and the positive outcomes of having a supportive family. In *Dance Lexie Dance*, Laura is raised by her blue-collar worker father called Lexie after her mother's passing. She becomes passionate about Irish Riverdance, which she has seen on television. She tells her father she wants to learn it, but at first, he is dismissive of it, saying "We don't dance",⁵ referring to them being Protestants in Northern Ireland. Traditionally, the dances

⁵ *Dance Lexie Dance*, directed by Tim Loane, Raw Nerve Productions, 1996, 3:31.

of Riverdance are practiced by Catholics, but Laura is eventually supported by her father to learn them. He even gets her a video tape with instructions from which she can learn from. He takes her to a competition as well, and at the end of the short film, Laura teaches Lexie Riverdance, when they can cope with their grief together. Barton wrote: “Symbolically, the film illustrates its theme of bridging divides – between father and daughter, Protestant and Catholic traditions, life and death.”⁶ The support of the father gives Laura the opportunity to find fulfilment in the thing she enjoys doing most, and to live up to her potential in dancing. Despite their financial situation, the long hours her father spends at work, or the loss of her mother, Lexie is always there for Laura, making her happy and content. In *Boogaloo and Graham*, the boys live in a similarly supportive household. Jamesy and Malachy are raised by their mother and father in Belfast during the Troubles. They get exposed to the sight of the armed soldiers and therefore are aware of the fightings, but their parents do a great job of trying to preserve their innocence at a time which can be especially scary for a child. Their father is very kind-hearted, and gets them baby chicks to raise. While having fun with them as pets, they simultaneously learn responsibility by taking care of them. Their mother is a lot stricter, and when she gets fed-up with the chickens being constantly brought into the house, she tells her husband it is time to eat them, which highly upsets the boys. However, upon discovering the eggs the chickens laid, they are allowed to keep them. Rothman wrote: “A parallelism emerges: in caring for their pets, the boys are creating their own little family, which they will protect with the same practical and rhetorical ingenuity their parents use to protect them.”⁷ It is shown that the boys are cared for, loved and supported, and their personalities are allowed to blossom in their home environment.

The parent in *Rúbaí* is not as evidently supportive. The case of young Rúbaí is complicated because of her father’s death. Her mother is struggling with raising her alone, which becomes even more complicated by the girl’s rebellion against religion. Rúbaí’s internal conflict is a result of opposing ideas – what is told to her through religion, namely that if she prays her father will get better, and what she experiences, which is his inevitable death. She says the following at her father’s grave: “I said my prayers so you’d get better”,⁸ which directly explains her inner struggle. Rúbaí does not understand why she is being taught Catholic belief at school when most of it was proven wrong in her life. Her mother is conflicted, too. She is trying to process her grief while learning

⁶ Ruth Barton: *Irish National Cinema*, London, Routledge, 2004, 176.

⁷ Joshua Rothman: Screening Room: “Boogaloo and Graham”, *The New Yorker*, 12th April 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/screening-room-boogaloo-and-graham>, (accessed 14 March 2024).

⁸ *Rúbaí*, directed by Louise Ní Fhiannachta, 2013, 8:29. (As the film is in Irish, the English subtitles are used for this quote.)

to raise her daughter alone at the same time, a difficult position to be in. She scolds Rúbaí a couple of times for not behaving, she is seemingly harsh with her. However, she breaks down crying when she arrives at the cemetery after following Rúbaí. She comforts her daughter whom she clearly loves, but it is left ambiguous whether Rúbaí's struggle with faith remains or not.

The Establishing of Cáit's Character

The Quiet Girl shows two opposing domestic settings, starting with a negative one, and moving on to a positive one. In the film, the main character's representation can be approached from different perspectives, one of them is the attribution of quietness to her as the most notable trait, which has developed because of her domestic background. To understand her, it is indispensable to analyze her family situation, as it is one of the key factors of a child's development growing up.

The story is set in the Irish countryside in 1981, focusing on a nine-year-old girl, Cáit. The film's opening scene establishes her situation, shows how she feels about the world around her. She is hiding in the bog while people are shouting her name repeatedly, trying to lure her out. The fact that she is hiding from someone – her family, as it is revealed later on – is already a warning sign that something is not right when it comes to her situation. Another child's voice is persistent in shouting her name, which makes one wonder who the reason for her temporary escape is. Cáit is walking back very slowly and carefully, her body language further confirming her lack of desire to leave the bog. The shot of her legs is very telling, she is wearing worn-out sandals, and a dress without stockings, leaving the skin of her bare legs pink in the cold weather.

The first signs of her neglect are therefore established at the beginning of the film. She is only picking up her pace when she can hear her mother's voice coming from the house, which is represented as a run-down, unwelcoming building, the first direct sign of the poor financial condition of her family. The first glimpse of the inside of the house is a crying baby in an armchair of a dark kitchen, who is alone as there is still no caretaker in sight. When Cáit arrives home, she goes into a room which is possibly her bedroom. There, she continues her isolation from her family upon hearing that someone has arrived. The bed under which she hides – most likely hers – contains only a mattress without sheets.

As her mother enters the room, the camera changes to show Cáit's perspective from under the bed. The mother does not greet her; she only acknowledges her presence by telling her she has muck on her shoes. As the mother walks out, the camera shows Cáit lying under the bed, breathing heavily from anxiety, then her sign of relief is shown as she relaxes her muscles. This sequence indicates that she had expected something more serious to await her before her mother

walked out. Based on her reaction, it can be assumed that her experiences in her domestic setting have been mostly negative. By the third minute, the film establishes Cáit's family background, and situation, and gives the viewer a sense of uneasiness; on the one hand, the child has presumably been exposed to some kind of domestic abuse, either verbal or physical, indicated by wanting to escape, and hide by all means, and by expecting a harsher reaction from her mother. On the other hand, because no one knows exactly where she went, the way she is dressed, and the presence of the various siblings she has, neglect is also a conclusion that can be drawn.

In the first three minutes, Cáit is shown mostly from behind, her face is only visible when she is lying under the bed after her mother left, and she has not uttered a word yet. Then, there is a cut to the title. Her back being seen in all the scenes can indicate different things to the viewer of the film. First, the perspective of her back results in us seeing what she sees in front of her, which confirms her status as the main character of the story. We follow her around, experiencing what she experiences, all through her eyes. Furthermore, not seeing her face provides a sense of mystery to her character, which is paired with her being not only quiet as the title suggests, but completely silent. The opening sequence therefore raises questions like what is happening to her or why she is quiet and starts answering them by showing glimpses of her life at home.

Cáit's Relationships and the Reasons for her Quiet Nature

To expand the theme of the first scene, we can see the mother's frustration while doing housework. In the background, the radio is on in the kitchen where Cáit and three of her older sisters are sitting and chatting. Cáit does not join the conversation about how babies are made, during which it is revealed that their mother is pregnant again. A quick counting will tell that there are already five children with one on the way, which would put Cáit in a large nuclear family. However, the girls go quiet as a man – their father – makes his way through the kitchen, and resume their conversation as soon as he is out of the room. The father is shown to be tired as he walks over to the kitchen with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth. He leaves the kitchen with a frustrated sigh, while we can hear the whimper of the baby in the background being ignored. As the school bus arrives for the girls, they notice that their mother has not prepared lunch for them. When they tell their father about their non-existent meals, he only tells them to take some bread instead. It is made clear that neglect comes from both parents, as they fail to take care of the needs of their children.

In addition, Cáit is not only quiet at home, but also at school, where she is visibly uncomfortable and self-conscious. She is sitting alone at her desk during the break, indicating she does not have any friends at school. Drink gets spilled on her, and as she is walking in the corridor in her wet dress, she runs into one

of her older sisters and her classmates, who are judge her by saying, “Her sister’s such a weirdo.”⁹ That causes her to run away from school. Cáit’s relationship with her siblings is the opposite of Jamesy and Malachy’s dynamic, who are very loving and supportive brothers to each other, while Cáit’s sisters do not care about her, and are possibly ashamed of her, as shown by the moments in the corridor. Thus, it is shown that the only two places where she spends her days – home and school – are both oppressive to her, and she is unable to make herself heard. She is abused, neglected and bullied, and she lacks the tools to help her case due to her young age. She is completely vulnerable in these conditions which make her a nervous child. It is quite impossible for her to do anything to improve her situation. Her quiet nature could have developed because of her being rebuked when talking, never having a positive reaction to her thoughts. Nault argued in his journal article about quiet girls in films that for these children talking does not necessarily mean that they get encouraged or considered, and at times standing up for themselves is not beneficial for them.¹⁰ The case seems to be exactly like Cáit’s situation, as she would probably only anger her already all-time frustrated parents if she were more talkative. She prefers to stay in the shadows and keep herself invisible as much as possible. The director Colm Bairéad also confirmed the historical influence of the film in an interview. He explained, in answer to a question if he believes the film covers something typically Irish: “[Children] were expected to be seen and not heard, and I guess that’s the thing that’s really specifically Irish about it.”¹¹

The next instance when Cáit’s relationship with her parents is shown is when her father picks her up from school after she ran away from there as well. The car ride is spent in silence, the father is only shown through the rear-view mirror in the car where his eyes radiate frustration towards Cáit. They do not go home immediately, but stop in a pub. There, she is sitting on a chair in the back of the dark place alone, waiting for her father to finish his drink. On the way home, a woman is walking in the middle of the road from where they pick her up. The woman not being her mother suggests his father’s infidelity, and the non-functioning marriage of her parents. Her father is not trying to hide any sign of him having a relationship with the woman, which means that he either does not care about what his daughter thinks of his marriage, and is not

⁹ *The Quiet Girl*, directed by Colm Bairéad, Fís Éireann / Screen Ireland, 2022, 00:05:40. (As most of the film is in Irish, this line as well as the ones appearing later are all quoted using the English subtitles.)

¹⁰ Curran Nault: The Cinematic Quiet Girl from The Breakfast Club to the Badlands, *Feminist Media Studies*, 13 (2013), 304–305, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2012.708517>, (accessed 10 March 2024).

¹¹ ‘The Quiet Girl’ Director Colm Bairéad on Telling an Irish Story in the Irish Language (Exclusive), *A.Frame*, 23rd February 2023, <https://aframe.oscars.org/news/post/the-quiet-girl-colm-bairead-interview-exclusive>, (accessed 26 February 2024).

worried about his wife getting to know about him cheating, or that he feels like she would not tell anyway, expecting her to be quiet, or even both. When it comes to children, boys are thought of as “noisy”, “defending themselves”, “defying punishment”, while girls are considered “helpful”, “well-mannered”, and, yes, “quiet”.¹² These stereotypical views apply to Cáit, as she stays quiet no matter what when she is with her father. She behaves well in his presence, never showing any sign of defiance towards him. A female character who breaks these stereotypes is Rúbaí, who is living in the more modern time of the 2010s. Even though she is not rebelling against her father, but against her teachers at school, her father is an indirect catalyst of her behavior. His death caused Rúbaí to struggle with her faith, and her contemporary setting and supportive mother allow her to speak her mind more freely than Cáit. Its director Louise Ní Fhiannachta said the following about *Rúbaí*: “I didn’t want to make a controversial film, I wanted to make a film about a little independent thinker, who would really send a message out and challenge our traditions in society.”¹³

The next scene of *The Quiet Girl* is at night after Cáit and her father arrived home. We are in the bedroom of the girls, who not only share a room, but also beds. Cáit’s lack of privacy in the soon family of eight is further visualized, making her runnings-off, her desire to spend time alone increasingly understandable. When she wakes at night, she leaves the room and she can hear her parents’ voices, her mother frustrated again. They are discussing the details of sending her away for the summer. The first time Cáit speaks voluntarily is when her mother calls her to tell her the details of her so-called vacation, and even then, it is only a “Yes” reply. Her father takes her to her more distant relatives, where, upon leaving, he carelessly forgets to take Cáit’s belongings out of the car, leaving her with no clothes but the ones Eibhlín, her mother’s distant cousin, gives her. After she realizes that her father really left her there, she is desperate for him to come back. Despite her living conditions at home and her relationship with her family, being torn out of the familiar environment of her childhood, and having been left with strangers for months is scary, and hurtful for Cáit, as it would be presumably for other children as well. Her family situation, therefore, is left on pause there until the end of the film when she is put back to where she had started, but only after she had experienced a very different domestic setting previously unknown to her, changing her forever.

¹² Carol Lynn Martin: Stereotypes about Children with Traditional and Nontraditional Gender Roles, *Sex Roles* 33 (1995), 729, <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01544776>, (accessed 10 March 2024).

¹³ Aoife Barry: This Irish Film about an 8-Year-Old Atheist Girl Is Winning Lots of Awards, *The Journal*, 29th December 2015, <https://www.thejournal.ie/rubai-short-film-interview-2522861-Dec2015/>, (accessed 14 March 2024).

The Positive Development of Cáit during her Stay with her Foster Family

As the abuse and neglect previously discussed are not the only things Cáit gets to experience in a family setting, it is equally important to examine how she changes in her new environment, and how she overcomes quietness as her most defining trait. As Cáit is transferred to her mother's relatives, she goes through positive changes.

One huge difference between Cáit's family and her foster parents, the Cinnsealachs, is their wealth. The changes in the scenery surrounding her are well represented visually from the start of her arrival at her home for the summer. At the end of the car ride there, she can see the long line of trees framing the road that leads to the house. There are other utility buildings along the road, all of which indicate the size of the foster parents' estate. As the house comes on screen, it is in an obvious contrast with the one Cáit lives in. It is a two-story building similar to what she is used to, but the levels are a lot more spacious, making it more inviting with a huge archway over the front door. Just the looks of the outside indicate the good financial situation of the couple. Moreover, this house is radiant, while her home is gloomy. In this shot, the building is a beige color, and the walls are clean in contrast with the grey, discolored walls of the house she is used to. It has a lot of windows of substantial size, while the other house had a few tiny ones. As natural light has a considerable amount of positive impact on one's feelings and mood, this representation of the change of her physical surroundings can foreshadow the change within her by the end of the film.

Moreover, the mentality of the parental figures towards her is also the opposite of what she has experienced so far at home. When they arrive with her father, Eibhlín, her foster mother greets Cáit first, opening the car door, encouraging her to get out so they can get introduced. She is gentle with her, smiling and squatting down, getting down to her level in size, making herself less intimidating to her. She is starting the conversation by telling her she has not seen her since she was in a pram, the fate of which they can discuss to break the ice, and Cáit has already talked more in those couple of sentences than she had before in the film in total. Then, Eibhlín examines her physical condition, acknowledging her dirty feet, her worn-out clothes, and messy hair. She fixes the latter with motherly care, then invites her in to show her the house. During their very first interaction, Eibhlín has shown more compassion and care towards Cáit than her parents have. When they arrive in the kitchen, Eibhlín tells her: "Sit down if you'd like, pet. Make yourself at home."¹⁴ These lines indicate that Cáit is welcome there, and Eibhlín is trying to show her that

¹⁴ *The Quiet Girl*, 00:15:40.

she is not a burden. When they are sitting at the table with the men joining, her father talks about how hard it is to feed so many children as they eat so much, applying it to Cáit as well. His long complaint about the topic suggests he views his children as financial burdens, and makes Cáit aware of his belief. He does not say goodbye as he leaves her.

Cáit has her own bedroom at the Cinnsealachs, something she has never had before. In the first evening she spends there, she is tucked in by Eibhlín, asked if she is okay, and asked about her family. The loving way in which Eibhlín acts towards Cáit is the same parental love that appears in *Dance Lexie Dance* and *Boogaloo and Graham*. Eibhlín is slowly trying to make out the situation of the family back home, referring to a previous question she has asked Cáit about the hay, which should have been harvested by the time of their conversation. Cáit reveals that they do not have the money to pay people to harvest, and this verifies Eibhlín's conjecture of their financial situation. She leaves Cáit to sleep, but her struggle with her sudden privacy in the new, and unknown environment is substantial. However, Eibhlín does not scold her at all for her mistakes. In Cáit's behavior, there are patterns brought from her experience with her parents. The hiding from parental figures that happened in the beginning with her hiding under the bed parallels with her hiding inside her bedroom at the Cinnsealachs at night. Cáit, for obvious reasons, expects the same responses, and reactions from Eibhlín, and Seán that she has seen from her parents.

As opposed to Eibhlín, who lets Cáit participate in the domestic work, it takes a lot more time for her husband Seán to warm up to Cáit. When she first arrives at the house, he does not greet her or acknowledge her in any sense. Eibhlín even asks him: "Aren't you saying hello to our guest?"¹⁵ after he has been in the kitchen for quite some time without even looking at her. Seán reacts very differently to her presence than his wife, refusing to connect with her at first. The first night she spends in the house, he says good night without looking at her, turning his back towards her, sitting in his armchair while he is watching the telly. She approached him with visible anticipation, as if expecting him to show interest. She is standing there looking at him for a couple of seconds after Eibhlín has left, as if pondering about what to expect from him later. Their breakfast the next morning shows a more direct rejection from his part towards her. When Eibhlín asks him if he would take Cáit with him for the day to work, Cáit is looking at him, interested in his answer. Upon his refusal, he leaves the house with a door slam, causing Cáit to feel sad, and disappointed. The next time they are left alone in the kitchen, Seán flees in a hurry to avoid any interaction between them. Later, because Eibhlín has to leave urgently, Seán is forced to take Cáit with him for the day. He is frustrated, not waiting for or looking back at Cáit as he is swiftly leading the way toward the stables. Cáit is

¹⁵ Ibid., 00:16:59.

running after him, asking him a lot of questions, which is unusual of her; this is where we can see her being herself without the fear of being lashed out at. As he fails to include her in his tasks, she wanders around the farm, which is something that changes Seán's attitude towards her completely.

Cáit disappears, and her quietness and "vanishing invisibly into the landscape" could be an "ominous foretaste of something horrible or violent" but what comes is "something gentler than this, as well as realer and truer than this".¹⁶ Upon her disappearance, Seán immediately starts looking for her. He becomes terrified when he cannot find her, running around shouting her name. When he finds her, he shouts at her for her actions as an embodiment of his fear, frightening her. He is unaware that this is her usual behavior. At home, she was used to her parents not paying attention to her, leaving her free to go wherever she pleases. From Seán, she received the same attitude of indifference, which led her to leave the area and find something for herself to do. After he admonished her coupled with raising his voice, she got scared as she did at home for the same occurrence, causing her to run away and hide. That night as she is going to bed, he reacts the same as before with the exception coming when no one can see it. He turns his face in her direction moments before, conflict on his face. After that, he starts doing acts of kindness and affection towards her like placing a biscuit next to her on the table. She starts helping him on the farm by mimicking his actions in absence of his direct guidance. Cáit learns responsibility by caring for the animals, similarly to the boys in *Boogaloo and Graham*. She is even mimicking Seán during breakfast, showing how much, she wants to appeal to him. She is trying hard to get on the good side of him. As they spend more time together, he becomes a positive father figure to her, someone she had lacked before.

During Cáit's summer with the Cinnsealachs, Eibhlín and Seán become the parents to her she deserves. They have a hard time saying goodbye at the end of the summer as they found the missing pieces in each other, the family they needed. (While staying with the Cinnsealachs, Cáit learns that they had lost their young son in a farm accident a long time ago, and had no other children, which could partly explain the way they are taking care of Cáit.) In that one summer, Cáit is given the opportunity to be her true self without fear and regulations. Her true self is allowed to thrive thanks to the parental support, similarly to Laura's case in *Dance Lexie Dance*. Cáit learns a lot about love while she gains practical skills around the house, all with the guidance of supportive parents. As Abele remarks, for Cáit it is a summer of "usefulness, warmth and

¹⁶ Peter Bradshaw: The Quiet Girl Review – Deeply Moving Tale of Rural Ireland Already Feels Like a Classic, *The Guardian*, 11th May 2022, The Quiet Girl review – deeply moving tale of rural Ireland already feels like a classic | Film | The Guardian, (accessed 4 April 2024).

learning”.¹⁷ Separation for Cáit from her foster parents at the end of summer is painful. It remains ambiguous in the final scene whether Cáit’s return to her real family is permanent, or if she gets to stay with her new-found parents. Either way, it is certain that the kindness she has experienced has changed her life forever.

CONCLUSION

This article discussed the portrayal of children in selected Irish films. Starting with the historical context, it explored the impact the Celtic Tiger period might have had on filmmaking – especially the influence on the depiction of children in post-Celtic Tiger period films. Irish film history was considered as well, and the selected films were compared to what earlier Irish films had been about.

To examine the representation of children, the article analyzed *The Quiet Girl* (2022) and three short films, *Dance Lexie Dance* (1996), *Rúbaí* (2013), and *Boogaloo and Graham* (2014). It explained how the short films present children who are extremely reactive to their parents’ behavior, and argued that children cannot be considered out of the context of their family environment when discussing the reasons for their behaviors. The paper discussed the portrayal of Cáit in *The Quiet Girl* and argued that her family situation was a major reason for her quiet attribute. It was claimed that the positive changes in her behavior are largely because of her summer spent with a supportive family. Her depiction was connected to the children in the short films, and similar parental practices for similar traits of characters in the children were observed.

The conclusion of this article is that the changes brought by the Celtic Tiger period have caused an alternation of approach from the side of directors, and positive stories of childhood are now being told, as shown by *The Quiet Girl* and certain short films. Further research could focus on how and why such a shift occurred in Irish cinema.

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¹⁷ Robert Abele: Review: Ireland’s ‘The Quiet Girl’ Speaks Quiet Volumes about Kindness, *Los Angeles Times*, 15th December 2022, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2022-12-15/review-the-quiet-girl-ireland>, (accessed 4 April 2024).

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PART III



LITERARY PERCEPTIONS

THE *DRAPIER'S LETTERS* IN 1950S HUNGARIAN LITERARY CRITICISM

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Abstract

In the 1720s, the debate about Wood's halfpence – a royal patent authorizing William Wood to mint copper coinage for Ireland – between the British government and the Irish was just the tip of the iceberg, signaling broader tensions. From the declarations signed by merchants, tailors, and weavers in Dublin in 1724 to the newspaper notices for editions of Dean Swift's Miscellanies in 1735 and 1736, early newspaper responses to Swift's pamphlets are essential to understanding their reception history. Equally important might be the political reaction to them two centuries later in Hungary. By examining summaries and critical approaches to Swift's Drapier's Letters, I aim to demonstrate how his pamphlets were received in Hungary during the 1950s, as reflected in contemporary newspapers and book reviews.

KEYWORDS

Jonathan Swift, *Drapier's Letters*, Hungarian reception, Hungarian translations

The controversy over the patent to mint copper money between the British government and the Irish population united the Irish nation and signaled widespread tension. The reaction to William Wood's debased half-pence was so profound that the pamphlets, broadsides, letters, and poems during the coinage controversy constituted "the largest body of ephemeral literature ever published until that time over a single issue".¹ The Drapier's print campaign not only mobilized a nation but also had another important effect: for perhaps

¹ Sabine Baltes: *The Pamphlet Controversy about Wood's Halfpence, (1722–1725) and the Tradition of Irish Constitutional Nationalism*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2003, xv.

the first time, print was seen as a “medium of national unity”.² Moreover, the published letters were highly self-reflexive. As Valerie Rumbold remarks, “There is, in short, an enormous amount of talk about print in the Drapier’s letters...”³

Beginning with the declarations signed by merchants, tailors, and weavers in Dublin in 1724, and continuing with proposals, and newspaper notices for the first collected edition of the letters in *Fraud Detected: or, The Hibernian Patriot* by George Faulkner in 1725, the early newspaper response to Swift’s pamphlets is crucial for understanding their reception history. Swift himself recognized the importance of advertising his pamphlets. In the Drapier’s second letter, addressed to John Harding the printer, he requests the widest possible publicity: “Pray Advertise both in every News-Paper, and let it not be YOUR Fault or MINE, if our Country-Men will not take Warning. I desire you likewise to Sell them as Cheap as you can.”⁴ Examining reported news, brief notices, and contemporary advertisements for the printing of Swift’s *Drapier’s Letters* may provide insights into how the Drapier’s campaign reached its readers. By presenting a few examples, we can receive information on how Swift’s letters were perceived in contemporary British and Irish newspapers, and how, after the conclusion of the Drapier affair, Swift showed a growing preference for being published in London. Equally important is the political reaction to Swift’s writings more than two centuries later, during the Communist rule. Through an analysis of summaries and critical approaches, I aim to demonstrate, first, how Swift’s pamphlets were received, and discussed in England, and second, how they appeared in Hungary in the 1950s, as reflected in contemporary newspapers.

John Harding is credited as the printer of the first four *Drapier’s Letters*, published between March and December 1724 in Dublin; he was arrested after printing the fourth. When examining the publicity surrounding the letters, it is important to heed Swift’s own observation in his fourth letter: “no London Printer dare publish any Paper written in Favour of Ireland, and here no body hath yet been so bold as to Publish any thing in Favour of him [Wood]”.⁵ Swift implies that the press was divided during the controversy: Irish newspapers refused to defend Wood’s halfpence, while the newspapers in London, and the countryside avoided taking the Drapier’s side.

After John Harding’s death, George Faulkner took over the publication of Swift’s works. He established his shop in Dublin in 1724, launched the *Dublin Journal* where his proposals for publishing Swift’s works appeared, and published

² Valerie Rumbold: *Swift in Print. Published Texts in Dublin and London, 1691–1765*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020, 147, 157, 172.

³ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁴ Herbert Davis (ed.), *The Drapier’s Letters and Other Works 1724–1725*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1965, 24; also quoted in Rumbold: *Swift in Print*, 167.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 64; also quoted in Rumbold, *Swift in Print*, 167.

the collected Drapier's letters in 1725, titled *Fraud Detected: Or, The Hibernian Patriot* (Dublin, 1725).⁶ The same collection was published as *The Hibernian Patriot* by William Bowyer in London five years later,⁷ marking a transition not only in the publication but also in the reading audience.⁸ The following decade marked the beginning of the publication of Swift's collected works. Faulkner played a significant role in cementing Swift's Irish reputation by publishing his collected works in Dublin. His *Dublin Journal*, which launched around the same time as the Drapier's first letters, also contributed to promoting Swift.⁹

NEWS FROM DUBLIN

In August 1724, the report of the English Privy Council found Wood innocent of fraud. To abate the conflict, Wood proposed that his coinage be limited to 40,000 pounds.¹⁰ Excerpts from this report were published in the *Dublin Intelligence*, and the Irish people now recognized that the danger posed by Wood's copper money suddenly felt more immediate than ever.¹¹ In response, the Irish Government refused to accept Wood's copper coinage, and use it for payments to the army.¹²

In September 1724, during the peak of the campaign in Ireland against Wood's money, and before the publication of the fourth Drapier letter, the *Newcastle Courant*, the most important newspaper in the Northern region at the time alongside the *Newcastle Gazette*, showed a particular interest in Wood's halfpence throughout September and December. At the beginning of September, it reported news from the *Dublin Gazette* about two Declarations. The first was "sign'd by 360 Merchants, and Tradesmen", and the second by "about 109 Weavers of the City of Dublin", both opposing the "receiving any of the said Wood's Half-Pence or Farthings", as they were not legally obligated

⁶ See, H. Teerink: *A Bibliography of the Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Arthur H. Scouten, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963, 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸ See, James McLaverty: George Faulkner and Swift's collected works, in Paddy Bullard – James McLaverty (eds.): *Jonathan Swift and the Eighteenth-Century Book*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 157.

⁹ Robert Mahony: *Jonathan Swift. The Irish Identity*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1995, 1–7.

¹⁰ This was reported in several London newspapers during August, in the *Daily Courant* (8 August), *Daily Journal* (19 August), *Parker's London News* (21 August), or the *Universal Journal* (22 August).

¹¹ Davis: *Drapier's Letters*, xix.

¹² *Ibid.*, xxix.

to do so.¹³ A week later, another report stated, “In the *Dublin Gazette* dated the 25th, is inserted a Declaration of the Freeholders, and Inhabitants of the Burrough of Swords in the County of Dublin, against the receiving or uttering Mr. Wood’s Copper Half-Pence, and Farthings, as being destructive to common rights, and an unprecedented Invasion on his Majesty’s loyal Subjects.”¹⁴ The 19 September issue continued to report on events in Dublin, also commenting on the frequent news about Wood’s halfpence in Dublin, and citing a letter from London: “There’s scarce a Mail arrives from Ireland, but some accounts are given us, shewing the Aversion of those People to the receiving of Mr. Wood’s Half-pence, and Farthings.” An example is given of a person who tried to pay with Wood’s money on the market, but the butcher refused to accept it. The letter concludes, “How these Proceedings will terminate, we don’t pretend to say; but some think they seem to clash with an Order issued from above, in Relation to the said Mr. Wood’s Coinage.” On page 9 of the same issue, the decision regarding the declaration against Wood’s halfpence is reported: “on Thursday Night before the Date, the High Sheriff and Justices of the Peace of the County of Dublin, met at Kilmanham on an Adjournment of the Session, and agreed upon a Declaration against Mr. Wood’s Half-pence and Farthings, which they order’d to be engross’d, in order to be sign’d and speedily printed...”¹⁵ England’s response to this opposition was to send the Lord Lieutenant to Ireland, which further heightened fear, and resistance among Irish tradesmen. With its weekly reports, the *Newcastle Courant* turned the sequel of events in Dublin into a sensation for its readers, who eagerly awaited the continuation of the story. On 26 September, Lord Carteret’s forthcoming journey to Ireland was reported, twice, on two separate pages: “Some People are not a little impatient to know how the Affair relating to Mr. Wood’s Coinage of Half-Pence and Farthings will terminate. Mean Time, ‘tis remarked, he has good Friends here, and been at some Expences. We hear the Lord Carteret will be going in a few Weeks for Ireland...”¹⁶ A few pages later, a regular letter from London (by “Mr. W-----”) is cited:

¹³ See, *Newcastle Courant*, 5 Sept., 1724, 7, “News.” *Newcastle Courant* [1724], 5 Sept. 1724, 17th and 18th Century Burney Newspapers Collection, link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000987398/BBCN?u=wellcome&sid=bookmark-BBCN, (accessed 22 August 2024).

¹⁴ See, *Newcastle Courant*, 12 Sept., 1724, 3, “News.” *Newcastle Courant* [1724], 12 Sept. 1724, 17th and 18th Century Burney Newspapers Collection, link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000987402/BBCN?u=wellcome&sid=bookmark-BBCN, (accessed 22 August 2024).

¹⁵ See, *Newcastle Courant*, 19 Sept., 1724, 9, “News.” *Newcastle Courant* [1724], 19 Sept. 1724, 17th and 18th Century Burney Newspapers Collection, link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000987407/BBCN?u=wellcome&sid=bookmark-BBCN, (accessed 22 August 2024).

¹⁶ See, *Newcastle Courant*, 26 Sept 1724, 3, “News.” *Newcastle Courant* [1724], 26 Sept. 1724, 17th and 18th Century Burney Newspapers Collection, link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000987411/BBCN?u=wellcome&sid=bookmark-BBCN, (accessed 13 October 2024).

It is the general Opinion that his Lordship [Lord Carteret] will go in a very few Weeks for Ireland, as Lord Lieutenant of the Kingdom, where Things are come to a great Height... which is very surprizing to many People here; because they cannot think this Affair to be of such Importance, as should occasion such a general Discontent and Uneasiness in that Kingdom, and so many gross Reflections, as not to be mentioned: 'Tis inserted in the Flying Post, of this Day, that most of the Papists in the City of Dublin have entered into an Association to refuse Mr. Wood's Copper Money.¹⁷

This must be the accusation which elicited Swift's response on the Catholics in the Drapier's fourth letter. Remarks on readers' views about the situation in Dublin clearly illustrate how significantly the average English reader underestimated the gravity of the events – and how distant these events seemed.

The fourth letter of the Drapier, *A Letter to the Whole People of Ireland*, was published on 21 October, just one day before Lord Carteret arrived in Dublin.¹⁸ Swift wrote it to bolster the opposition. Six days later, a proclamation by the Lord Lieutenant, and the Council of Ireland was issued against the Drapier's letter.¹⁹ On 6 November, the *Daily Courant* in London published the proclamation on its front page, calling the Drapier's letter scandalous, and seditious, and accusing it of alienating England from Ireland. A bounty of 300 pounds was offered to anyone who would "discover the Author of the said Pamphlet so as he be apprehended and convicted thereof".²⁰

Five weeks later, however, events took a different turn. On 28 November, the new Grand Jury officially ruled against Wood's copper coins, offering "a grateful acknowledgment of the services of all those patriots who have been zealous against Wood".²¹ Two weeks later, the *Newcastle Courant* reported: "They write from Dublin, That on the 28th past, the Grand Jury of that City presented all such as shall, or do endeavour by Fraud to promote the Currency of Mr. Wood's Half-Pence, as Enemies to his Majesty's Government and Peace of their Country..."²² On its last page, the newspaper cites the following description from its London correspondent, dated 15 December: "Things are come to a considerable Height in Ireland, in Relation to Wood's Half-Pence;

¹⁷ See, *Newcastle Courant*, 26 Sept 1724, 6, "News." *Newcastle Courant* [1724], 26 Sept. 1724, *17th and 18th Century Burney Newspapers Collection*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000987411/BBCN?u=wellcome&sid=bookmark-BBCN, (accessed 13 October 2024).

¹⁸ Davis: *Drapier's Letters*, xxxiv.

¹⁹ Also see, Baltes: *Pamphlet Controversy*, xxxvii.

²⁰ See, *The Daily Courant*, 6 November, 1724, 1, "News." *Daily Courant*, 6 Nov. 1724, *17th and 18th Century Burney Newspapers Collection*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000207279/BBCN?u=wellcome&sid=bookmark-BBCN, (accessed 13 October 2024).

²¹ Davis: *Drapier's Letters*, xxiii.

²² See, *Newcastle Courant*, 12 Dec 1724, 9, "News." *Newcastle Courant* [1724], 12 Dec. 1724, *17th and 18th Century Burney Newspapers Collection*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000987470/BBCN?u=wellcome&sid=bookmark-BBCN, (accessed 13 October 2024).

but we hope are not so great, as some Accounts insinuate, to give Occasion for recruiting the Forces there.”²³ Given this concluding remark, readers may have feared that a revolution was about to break out in Dublin. As a result of the Drapier’s fourth letter, Lord Carteret proposed prosecuting the printer, and Swift, as Davis expresses, “crossed the narrow line that distinguished opposition from sedition”.²⁴

The Drapier’s sixth letter is dated 26 October 1724. Swift composed it, admitting authorship, in response to the proclamation against the Drapier but withheld it from publication after Harding’s arrest on 7 November.²⁵ Three days before its printing, the *Daily Post* (London) reported on the conclusion of the affair of Wood’s halfpence: “We hear that the Affair of Mr. Wood’s Patent for coining Copper Half Pence and Farthings for Ireland, is as good as accomodated, to the Satisfaction of all Parties; a Stop being already put to the Coinage, and Mr. Wood order’d to give in an Account of his Expences &c.”²⁶ With the relaxation of the political conflict, the years to come for Swift would involve balancing publication between his editors in Dublin, and London. The published letters of the Drapier established Swift as the Hibernian Patriot. However, as Rounce notes: “the *Drapier’s Letters* had a lack of immediate relevance to London, and this, rather than quality of printing, was of importance”.²⁷

Lord Carteret announced “the full surrender of Wood’s Patent” on 21 September 1725 in Parliament in Dublin.²⁸ The Archbishop of Dublin suggested that “his Majesty’s great wisdom” should be acknowledged in an Address of thanks. The debate over the use of the word wisdom became the focus of the piece *On Wisdom’s Defeat in a Learned Debate*.²⁹ As a result of its publication, the *Daily Courant* (along with other newspapers) reported on 12 October that the printer, John Harding’s widow, was being prosecuted, and the incriminated piece burnt: “Upon Complaint made this Day in the House of Peers of a scurrilous Pamphlet, printed, and published by Sarah Harding, intituled, Wisdom’s Defeat; it was read. Ordered, That the said Sarah Harding

²³ See, *Newcastle Courant*, 19 Dec 1724, 12, “News.” *Newcastle Courant* [1724], 12 Dec. 1724, 17th and 18th Century Burney Newspapers Collection, link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000987470/BBCN?u=wellcome&sid=bookmark-BBCN, (accessed 13 October 2024).

²⁴ Davies: *Drapier’s Letters*, xxxvi.

²⁵ Rumbold: *Swift in Print*, 175.

²⁶ See, *Daily Post*, 28 Dec 1724, 1, “News.” *Daily Post*, 28 Dec. 1724, 17th and 18th Century Burney Newspapers Collection, link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000267545/BBCN?u=wellcome&sid=bookmark-BBCN, (accessed 22 August 2024).

²⁷ Adam Rounce: Swift’s texts between Dublin and London, in Paddy Bullard – James McLaverty (eds.): *Jonathan Swift and the Eighteenth-Century Book*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, 201.

²⁸ Davies: *Drapier’s Letters*, xxviii.

²⁹ See, Davis: *Drapier’s Letters*, xxix-xxx; James Woolley: Sarah Harding as Swift’s Printer, in Christopher Fox – Brenda Tooley (eds.): *Walking Naboth’s Vineyard: New Studies of Swift*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1995, 164.

be taken into Custody by the Gentleman-Usher of the Black Rod. Resolved, That the said Pamphlet is base, scandalous, and malicious, highly reflecting upon the Honour of this House, and the Peerage of this Kingdom. Ordered, That the same be burnt To-morrow Morning by the Hands of the Common Hangman, before the Parliament-House, and the Tholsel of the City of Dublin.”³⁰ Sarah Harding, who continued her husband's printing business, had two more commissions for printing from Swift, *A short view of the present state of Ireland*, and *A Modest Proposal*, before Swift turned to George Faulkner.

NEWS FROM HUNGARY

In Hungary, the reception of Swift's works arrived late. Hungarian translations of his prose only began to appear in the early twentieth century. In 1921, a collection of his pamphlets on Irish affairs was published as *Jonathan Swift: Pamfletek* [Pamphlets], in the *Tevan-könyvtár* [Tevan's Library] series. Edited by Andor Tevan, the series aimed to rival *Nyugat*, the most prestigious literary forum of the time, by publishing both Hungarian and foreign masterpieces. Béla László (1909–1980), a Transylvanian poet and journalist, selected for this edition “A Modest Proposal”, “An Answer to the Craftsman”, “Causes of the Wretched Condition of Ireland”, and a pamphlet concerning the Irish National Bank; together, these texts were evidently picked to demonstrate both Swift's political activity and his polemical voice. Thinking that it was a sermon, the translator's reasoning of his choice of “Causes” is given in a footnote:

[Swift] admitted that he used the pulpit as a political weapon: “I could only preach political pamphlets.” The sermon which I have chosen for translation might be less significant from a literary point of view but, as a psychological document, it is more interesting than the rest. Although it does not reveal more about Swift's political activity than we already know from his polemical writings, it sheds a more vivid light on the relationship between Swift and the Irish people. Moreover, it illustrates Swift's insolent and coarse style, and, above all, his practical and dry sobriety.³¹

³⁰ See, *Daily Courant*, 12 October 1725, 1, “News.” *Daily Courant*, 12 Oct. 1725, *17th and 18th Century Burney Newspapers Collection*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/Z2000208695/BBCN?u=wellcome&sid=bookmark-BBCN, (accessed 18 September 2024).

³¹ Béla László (trans.): *Jonathan Swift. Pamfletek*, Békéscsaba, Tevan, 1921, 39. Also see, Gabriella Hartvig: The Dean in Hungary, in *The Critical and Creative Reception of Eighteenth-Century British and Anglo-Irish Authors in Hungary: Essays in Intercultural Literary Exchange*, Pécs, University of Pécs, Institute of English Studies, 2013, 25. Translations from the Hungarian are mine.

Swift appears as the true-born Englishman, a “relentless and berserk person, a dialectician” who nevertheless understands the Irish cause, even while he personally rejected an Irish identity, writes László.³²

During the era spanning the two world wars, translations and adaptations of *Gulliver's Travels* were shaped strongly by contemporary political circumstances. After producing the first complete Hungarian translation of Swift's novel in 1914, Frigyes Karinthy went on to write two imaginative continuations of the story – *Voyage to Faramido* (1916, English translation 1965) and *Capillaria* (1921, English translation 1965). Sándor Szathmári likewise created his own reinterpretation of the Gulliver narrative, publishing another sequel, *Gulliver utazása Kazohiniában* (1941, English translation 1975).

LITERARY CRITICISM AND SWIFT SCHOLARSHIP IN THE 1950S

As Zsófia Gombár argues, Hungary's weak democratic traditions prior to the Communist rule and the frequent suppression of free speech contributed to society's largely passive acceptance of Soviet military control following World War II. Stalinist leader Mátyás Rákosi aimed to replicate the Soviet totalitarian model and restructure Hungarian society according to Stalinist principles.³³ The mid-twentieth century phase of Swift's Hungarian reception can be traced back to 1952, when Miklós Szentkuthy published what has become the authoritative Hungarian translation of *Gulliver's Travels*. Two years later, Tibor Lutter released a monograph on Swift, appearing at the same time as the second, revised edition of Szentkuthy's *Gulliver*, marking a significant moment in this period's critical engagement with Swift. Once complete translations of *Gulliver's Travels* and its various adaptations were available, Swift studies began to take firm shape in the decades that followed the major restructuring of Hungary's literary sphere.³⁴ During this period, research on Swift flourished: few other English authors saw three separate books devoted to them or had their major works translated into four distinct Hungarian versions, as happened with *Gulliver*. This was an era that prioritized critical realism, so Swift's other works besides his imaginary voyage got translated and commented on as well such as *A Tale of a Tub* [*Hordómese*, 1958] by László Kéry. Hungarian literary criticism was indebted to Soviet Swift scholarship.

³² See, László: *Jonathan Swift*, 3–9.

³³ See, Zsófia Gombár: *Communist Censorship in Hungary and Beyond 1*, in Denis Merkle and Brian James Baer (eds.): *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Censorship*, London, Routledge, 2024, 207–221.

³⁴ Also see, Gabriella Hartvig: *Hungarian Swift Scholarship in the Period of Censorship*, in Kirsten Juhas – Hermann J. Real – Sandra Simon (eds.): *Reading Swift: Papers from The Sixth Münster Symposium on Jonathan Swift*, Munich, Wilhelm Fink, 2013, 633–645.

In the 1950s, the dominant interpretive framework for Swift in the Soviet Union was shaped by Anatoly Lunacharskii, People's Commissioner for Education, together with the Soviet Swift scholar Mikhail Davidovich Zabludovskii – a position that Hungarian literary policy later adopted, as well. As Michael Düring notes, Lunacharskii did more than simply urge Swift's inclusion in the canon of world literature; he also initiated the now-influential portrayal of "Swift as an atheist".³⁵ This ideological framing was further reinforced when Maxim Gorky, at the First Writers' Congress in 1934, celebrated Swift as the leading anti-bourgeois and atheistic figure. Following this development, and particularly after Socialist Realism was declared the official artistic doctrine in 1934, Düring argues, "Soviet critics aligned with the orthodox position – among them Zabludovskii – and began to reinterpret Swift through a socialist-realist lens, as seen in Zabludovskii's 1936 study, *Satira i realizm Svifta* [*Satire and Swift's Realism*]".³⁶ Similar thoughts can be found in Tibor Lutter's book on *Swift* (1954). For many decades, it was Zabludovskii's reading of Swift that shaped critical and scholarly assessments of Swift's work, a model that extended beyond the Soviet Union and influenced Hungarian criticism, as well. Although Zabludovskii adopted Swift in the socialist realist tradition, he simultaneously emphasized a central limitation: Swift, in his view, could expose and mock social injustice through satire, but he was ultimately unable to offer any concrete remedy for the conditions he condemned.³⁷ In 1954, the Hungarian journal *Irodalomtudományi Értesítő* printed an extensive essay on Cervantes, Swift, and Fielding, written by Miklós Szenczi in the thematic issue on "Chapters from the History of Realist Prose". As is noted in the introduction, Szenczi partially translated Zabludovskii's chapter on Swift from the three-volume *History of English Literature* issued by the Scientific Academy of the Soviet Union in 1945.³⁸ In that account, Zabludovskii presents Swift the satirist who relentlessly attacks the moral failings of his era, arguing that Swift's use of fantasy and allegory highlights the broader, structural nature of the targets of his ridicule, while stripping away incidental, short-lived, or superficial details. His continuing popularity as a satirical writer was thus attributed to the power of his irony and his socially critical perspective, elements that resonated strongly with the socialist realistic climate of the 1950s. Lutter's book on Swift also received numerous reviews. His former colleague, László Kéry, praises Lutter who presents Swift as a satirist with socialist leanings. He describes Lutter's study as an adequate

³⁵ Michael Düring: From Russian "Swiftovedenie" to the Soviet School of Swift Criticism: The Dean's Fate in Russia, in Hermann J. Real (ed.): *The Reception of Jonathan Swift on the Continent of Europe*, London, New York, Continuum, 2005, 186.

³⁶ Düring: From Russian "Swiftovedenie", 186.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 186–187.

³⁸ See, Miklós Szenczi: M.D. Zabludovskij: Swift, *Irodalomtudományi Értesítő* 4 (1954), 731–740.

Marxist interpretation, one that focuses on the underlying social conflicts of the period. In Lutter's interpretation, *A Tale of a Tub* becomes "one of the most destructive anti-church satires of the era and of all time".³⁹

In 1951, the most important literary and political journal of Hungarian émigrés, *Látóhatár* – published in Paris that year – published an excerpt, translated by Zoltán Szabó, of *Gulliver's Travels* entitled "Gulliver's Advice to Moscow". The translator also cites his source, translating part of the sixth chapter of Gulliver's third journey, "A Voyage to Laputa", from Benjamin Motte's first edition in London. The translation is faithful to the original, but is preceded by a short "recommendation" by the translator: "What perfected methods Swift recommends to the communist political police in his book, published in 1726, which contains Captain Lemuel Gulliver's account of his travels in 'some remote countries'."⁴⁰ In the excerpt, Gulliver encounters a professor at Lagado Academy who claims he can uncover political conspiracies by analyzing the suspects' diets and bodily excretions, believing that physical waste can reveal their thoughts and intentions. The excerpt invites comparison with surveillance mechanisms associated with Rákosi's regime.

This publication was succeeded by another volume of Swift's works entitled *Szatírák és röpiratok* [*Satires and Pamphlets*, 1961], translated and provided with notes by László Kéry (1920-1992). He produced an annotated Hungarian translation of Swift's second and most renowned work, *A Tale of a Tub* [*Hordómese*, 1958]. In preparing his translations of the pamphlets, Kéry relied on the most authoritative scholarly source available, Herbert Davis's Oxford edition of *The Drapier's Letters and Other Works 1724-1725*.

SATIRES AND PAMPHLETS

In 1956, Európa Kiadó introduced the *Világirodalmi Kiskönyvtár* (*World Literature Mini Library*) series, followed a year later by the *Modern Könyvtár* (*Modern Library*) collection. Each volume included an afterword that offered readers context about the work as well as insights about the author's life and career. In 1959, the educational journal *Köznevelés* released an article about the series. It examined the collection closely and clarified its mission. The primary objective of the editorial board was, Attila Szilassy writes, "the cultural

³⁹ László Kéry: Lutter Tibor: Jonathan Swift, *Irodalomtörténet* 42 (1954), 528: "Lutter Tibor helyesen mutat rá a swifti bíráló teljes egyházellenességére."

⁴⁰ Zoltán Szabó: Gulliver tanácsai Moszkvának, *Látóhatár* 2 (1951), 44: "Milyen tökéletesített módszereket javasol Swift a kommunista politikai rendőrségnek az 1726-ban megjelent könyvében, amely Lemuel Gulliver kapitány 'némely félreeső országokban tett utazásainak' leírását tartalmazza."

education of the broad working masses".⁴¹ The launch of the series was part of the paradigm shift in Hungarian literary policy, and it helped impose order on the entire realm of book publishing: "Once harmful popular fiction had been eliminated, a range of affordable, high-quality volumes began to appear... Today, we can confidently say that these books, sold for 5 to 10 forints, represent some of the final accomplishments of our socialist culture."⁴² How did Swift's pamphlets end up in the series?

Issued as part of the earlier mentioned *Világirodalmi kiskönyvtár* series, *Szatírák és röpiratok* [*Satires and Pamphlets*, 1961] includes the *Battle of the Books*, "Bickerstaff's Predictions for the Year 1708," and four of the *Drapier's Letters*. As previously noted, a few years earlier, Kéry had already translated Swift's experimental piece, *A Tale of a Tub* [*Hordómese*, 1958], a job he liked very much. In the autumn of 1944, he recalled, he was invited to prepare a short sample of the book. By the end of the decade, he had completed the full translation. It was originally to be published by Franklin, then Hungária Publishing House, but the publisher later altered its plans, and the work never appeared in print. Throughout the 1950s, he frequently revised the text. As he says in the interview: "It was Swift who I translated with the greatest enthusiasm... I was inspired by the fact that this satire was completely unknown in Hungary and I felt it was important to bring it to Hungarian readers. (Later, I felt it was important to compile a collection of Swift's other satires and pamphlets). After these vicissitudes, *A Tale of a Tub* was published by Európa in 1958."⁴³

In the Translator's Afterword to the collected pieces, Kéry provides an overview of Swift's life and literary career. His principle of selection is, he writes, to explore those dimensions of Swift's oeuvre that connect with and surround *Gulliver's Travels*, familiar to Hungarian readers, and *A Tale of a Tub*, now also published in Hungarian translation. What distinguished Swift in English literature for Soviet literary critics is also evident here: while Defoe was seen as a supporter of the bourgeois order in his writings, Swift "always opposed

⁴¹ Attila Szilassy: A Világirodalmi Kiskönyvtár sorozatról, *Köznevelés* 15 (1959), 520: "A Világirodalmi Kiskönyvtár szerkesztősége első és legfontosabb céljaul a dolgozók széles tömegeinek kulturális nevelését tűzte ki."

⁴² Ibid.: "A mérgező hatású ponyvák likvidálása után, sorra jelentek meg az olcsón megvásárolható, nívós tartalmú könyvsorozatok... *Ma már nyugodtan állíthatjuk, hogy ezek az 5 - 10 forintos könyvek szocialista kultúránk legnagyobb fegyvertényei közé tartoznak.*"

⁴³ Júlia Szekrényesy: Írók műhelyében: Kéry Lászlónál, *Élet és irodalom* 18 (1974), 7: "A legnagyobb becsúgygyal Swiftet fordítottam... Lelkesített a munkában az is, hogy ez a satíra nálunk teljesen ismeretlen volt, s fontosnak éreztem, hogy eljuttassam a magyar olvasókhöz. (Amint később fontosnak éreztem, hogy gyűjteményt állítsak össze Swift további satíráiból és röpirataiból.) A *Hordómese* illetén viszontagságok után 1958-ban jelent meg az Európánál."

the most sacred aspirations of the class-based order”.⁴⁴ The *Drapier's Letters* are closely connected to Swift's life in Ireland. As Kéry explains, his position became controversial with the fall of the Tories, and he then took up the Irish cause: “his sentiments increasingly merged with those of the Irish patriots demanding equal rights from England, and with the Irish people, who were groaning under the burden of national and class oppression and unimaginable misery”.⁴⁵ Kéry also gives an account of the historical background of the *Drapier's Letters* of which he selected the first four for his volume.

TRANSLATING THE DRAPIER'S LETTERS

Kéry's source text was the best contemporary scholarly edition available at the time: Herbert Davis's Oxford edition from 1935. The word “drapier” in the title sounds somewhat dated in Hungarian (*rőfös*). With some exceptions, Kéry provided a largely faithful translation of four letters, presenting the third and fourth only in excerpt form and leaving out the second entirely.

The translation of the original cover pages – where Swift provides a more detailed and informative title along with a brief description of each letter's contents – are mostly omitted. The rendering is faithful and includes some, not as many as in the original, scholarly annotation, in the form of endnotes. There are, however, minor errors that cannot be attributed to the translator's lack of linguistic competence. Mr. Wood was given the patent to “coin FOURSCORE AND TEN THOUSAND pounds in copper for this Kingdom” (4). In a footnote, Davis explains that it equals “108000 l.”, yet in Kéry's translation it becomes 90,000 pounds, for reasons that remain unclear.⁴⁶

Kéry decided to leave out entirely the second letter, *A Letter to Mr. Harding the Printer*, and translate only parts of the third letter, *Some Observations Upon a Paper, Call'd The Report of the Committee...* The second letter responds to a part of Harding's report of the news and accuses Wood of forcing the Irish people to accept his minted coins.

The excerpt from the third pamphlet is taken from the middle of the letter and consists of approximately one page, comprising a single long paragraph, whose ending, however, is omitted. Kéry translates imaginary cases illustrating

⁴⁴ László Kéry: *Swift: szatírák és röpiratok*, Budapest, Európa, 1961, 174: “az osztályuralmi berendezkedésén buzgólkodó polgárság legszentebb törekvéseivel... lényegileg mindig szemben állt”.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 178: “érületben egyre inkább összeolvad az ír hazafiakkal, akik egyenlő jogokat követelnek Angliától, s az ír néppel, amely a nemzeti és osztályelnomás, a minden képzeletet meghaladó nyomor terhe alatt roskadozik”.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 112: “bizonyos Wood, nagypecsétes engedélyt kapott öfelségétől, hogy kilencvenezer font értékű rézpenzt veressen ennek az országnak a céljaira”.

what might happen if a “fierce captain” decided to pay for clothes with Wood’s coins, or if a “common soldier” first drank his beer and then paid the landlady in Wood’s copper money: in both cases, the shopkeeper and the landlady would be placed in difficulty.⁴⁷

The next translated pamphlet, *A Letter to the Whole People of Ireland*, is likewise presented only as an excerpt from the original text. Kéry again reduces the thirty pages to thirteen, omitting essential sections. This is the final, originally published letter which was printed by John Harding and for which he was cast into prison, before, the entire Wood’s halfpence affair ended in a victory for Ireland and, indeed, a victory for Swift, who emerged as the Irish patriot. The translation begins with the second paragraph of the original source text. The omitted opening section offers a conclusion to the first three letters and ends with a biblical reference (Gen. 25.29–34): “And when Esau came fainting from the Field at the Point to Die, it is no wonder that he Sold his Birth-Right for a Mess of Pottage.”⁴⁸ This reference parallels the exhaustion of the Irish nation during Wood’s halfpence affair, as the preceding sentence makes clear: “A people long used to Hardships, lose by Degrees the very Notions of Liberty, they look upon themselves as creatures of Mercy, and that all Impositions laid on them by a stronger Hand...”⁴⁹ There may be several reasons why Kéry decided to omit this passage: given that he had already omitted the second pamphlet, he may have wished to avoid confusing his readers. Alternatively, he may have thought to prevent his book from being banned or suppressed because of the overt political implications and biblical references in the omitted section, and to avoid censure for its explicit political parallels.

The translated section ends with a reference to newspapers in London and in Dublin: “no London Printer dare publish any Paper written in Favour of Ireland, and here no body hath yet been so bold as to Publish any thing in Favour of him [Wood]”.⁵⁰ This passage refers to the divided nature of the press and illustrates how news can be distorted or misrepresented when it is distant – both geographically and in terms of readerly interest – from the site of the original event. Kéry stops where a new topic begins in the source text: “There was a few Days ago a Pamphlet sent me of near 50 Pages Written in Favour of Mr. Wood and his Coynage, Printed in London, it is not worth answering, because probably it will never be published here...”⁵¹

The fifth pamphlet, *A Letter To the Right Honourable the Lord Viscount Molesworth*, was translated by Kéry in its entirety. The letter sums up the history of the entire controversy and provides comprehensive information about the

⁴⁷ Kéry: *Swift*, 123–124.

⁴⁸ Davis: *Drapier's Letters* (1935), 67.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 64; also quoted in Rumbold: *Swift in Print*, 167.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

drapier. It emphasizes that the Irish nation's resistance to Wood's coinage was lawful and did not imply disloyalty to the king. Although the fourth letter is more significant and might therefore have merited full translation, the fifth letter nonetheless serves as an apt conclusion to the Drapier affair, and Kéry may have just been justified in choosing to publish it in full. The next and last pamphlet in the collection *Satires and pamphlets* is *A Modest Proposal*.

Although it was a small-size little book, Kéry's scholarly edition, with its afterword and critical apparatus, together with his edition of *A Tale of a Tub*, broadened the scope of Hungarian Swift scholarship. As a result, Swift was no longer known merely as the author of *Gulliver's Travels* but was more fully recognized as the author of other major satirical works as well. *A Modest Proposal* became set reading in secondary schools during the 1970s and 1980s.

As Zoltán Kenyeres sums up in his review of Kéry's collection: "László Kéry has compiled the best of Swift's satires and political pamphlets in this small volume thereby bringing the author of Gulliver closer to Hungarian readers. With the addition of *A Tale of a Tub* and Tibor Lutter's critical monograph, the picture is now almost complete."⁵²

Beyond translations, book reviews, and newspaper articles, a range of additional documents offer valuable insight into the official, centralized understanding of world literature under Communism.⁵³ When Európa Publishing House was established, it solicited expert opinions in the form of reader's reports assessing whether certain masterpieces of literature should be translated and published. Those reports were stored in the Petőfi Literary Museum in Budapest,⁵⁴ where we can also find assessments of Swift's works, and, in some cases, objections to certain pieces of his prose. The Museum stored some five reports on Swift's works. Three are on Miklós Szentkuthy's translation of *Gulliver's Travels* and the Preface to the 1952 and 1954 editions, and two on other works by Swift.⁵⁵ In the report on "The Anti-Religious and Anti-Clerical Writings of Jonathan Swift" in 1951, the blind reviewer declares that *A Tale of a Tub* is Swift's satire on the clergy's cruel practices. In this piece, Swift anticipates Marx by expressing in unmistakable terms that religion serves as the opiate of the people.⁵⁶ The

⁵² Zoltán Kenyeres: Szatírák és röpiratok. Válogatás Swift írásaiból, *Élet és Irodalom* 5 (1961), 6: "Kéry László Swift szatírának és politikai röpiratainak legjavát válogatta össze ebben a kis kötetben és ezzel örömdetesen közelebb hozta a magyar olvasóhoz a Gulliver íróját. A *Hordómesét* és Lutter Tibor elemző monográfiáját is hozzászámítva már csaknem teljes a kép."

⁵³ Zsófia Gombár: Dictatorial Regimes and the Reception of English-Language Authors in Hungary and Portugal, in Catherine O'Leary – Alberto Lázaro (eds.): *Censorship across Borders: The Reception of English Literature in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2011, 105–128.

⁵⁴ Zsolt Czigányik: Readers' Responsibility: literature and censorship in the Kádár era, in Hungary, in Bálint Gárdos – Ágnes Péter et al. (eds.): *Confrontations and Interactions: Essays on Cultural Memory*, Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2011, 221–232.

⁵⁵ Hartvig: Hungarian Swift Scholarship, 639.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 643.

reviewer seems to have had a knowledge of Kéry's translation in the making: he notes that, to the best of his knowledge, Kéry had already translated *A Tale of a Tub*, which Franklin Publishing House had intended to publish but never did. He also suggests including a brief study at the beginning of the volume to introduce readers to the lesser-known Swift, along with an account of his life.⁵⁷ Another report on the *Journal to Stella* did not recommend the work for translation and publication, partly because of the hardships caused by the challenging inner references and the language of the text, partly because of the troubled love life of Swift.⁵⁸

From these documents we can see that Swift and his works were appreciated in Communist Hungary, probably following the advice from Moscow. Both Szentkuthy's and Kéry's translations of the Dean's works were excellent, running in large print numbers and their reception was favourable as well. On the other hand, one cannot but feel that Swift was exploited by the Communists to further their agenda, namely, Soviet critical realism.

CONCLUSION

The two early phases in the publication of the *Drapier's Letters* reflect distinct contexts of reception. The political and literary circumstances surrounding the printing and circulation of individual letters were represented in markedly different ways by the Irish and English press. For English readers, the Drapier controversy may have appeared remote, resembling sensational news from Dublin – an act of apparent disobedience without a clear cause, ultimately resolved through the wisdom of the monarch. For the Irish, and especially for Swift, it was an event in which resistance united the whole nation and defeated Wood's fraudulent scheme while remaining loyal to the king. Later twentieth-century Hungarian reception seems to likewise "misinterpret" Swift's political pamphlets, especially the *Drapier's Letters*. Davis's scholarly edition provides the best source text to Hungarian Swift scholars, not merely to Kéry and Lutter, but also to Zoltán Abádi-Nagy whose excellent book *Swift, a szatirikus és a tervező* (*Swift the satirist and projector*, 1973) examines mock projects such as *A Tale of a Tub* and serious projects as some of the political writings of Swift.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 644.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 644.

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UNFULFILLED LIVES: MARY LAVIN'S *A MEMORY* AND HENRY JAMES'S *THE BEAST IN THE JUNGLE*

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Abstract

This essay explores the extent to which Mary Lavin's A Memory echoes Henry James's novella The Beast in the Jungle, and how this relationship reshapes the treatment of time, memory, and inaction. Although James has rarely, if at all, been acknowledged as a major influence on Lavin, the structural and thematic correspondence between the two stories invites closer analysis. Drawing on Henri Bergson's concept of duration and its relation to memory and perception, this study reads both narratives as explorations of lives in which the protagonists fail to integrate the past into their present experience as a continuous, shaping force. In Henry James's work, John Marcher is obsessed with anticipation of the future and arrives only belatedly at the recognition that his passivity has emptied both his past and his future meaning. Lavin radicalizes this pattern: her researcher-protagonist, James, clings to the safety of a static present and suppresses the implications of earlier emotional failure, eventually collapsing under the strain of resurfacing memory. Lavin thus sharpens James's parable into a critique of intellectual ambition detached from lived experience and intensifies the gendered dynamics implicit in the earlier text. Through this intertextual reworking, A Memory transforms the Jamesian paradigm into a meditation on the relationship between memory, perception, and wasted life.

KEYWORDS

Bergson, memory, duration, perception, inaction

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In the introduction to the new *Modern Irish Classics* edition of *In the Middle of the Fields*, Colm Tóibín highlights Mary Lavin's preoccupation with "the drama around the solitary figure rather than the drama around Irish history, or large questions of identity".² This emphasis on character partly explains why her stories baffled Frank O'Connor, who, in his study of the short story, *The Lonely Voice*, was "at a loss" to understand why Lavin refused to engage with the upheavals and consequences of early twentieth-century Irish history.³ She is "The Girl Outside the Gaol Gate", standing outside the Irish short story tradition as O'Connor conceived it: where the modern Irish short story, from George Moore to James Joyce, is rooted in Irish social and historical actuality.⁴ Lavin's work instead looks back to European classical forerunners such as Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov, Austen, Woolf, and Bowen, aligning her with an international literary tradition rather than a strictly national one.⁵ In fact, Tóibín sees Lavin as doing in the short story what Somerville, and Ross, and Kate O'Brien – her precursors, in a sense – did in the novel: helping to establish an Irish literary tradition that models itself on Jane Austen and Henry James while reshaping those influences within an Irish context.⁶

Despite this, Henry James is rarely mentioned as a major influence on Lavin. Yet James was deeply invested in the art of the "beautiful and blest *nouvelle*", and several of Lavin's works are, in fact, novellas rather than short stories.⁷ Works such as *The Cuckoo Spit*, *The Becker Wives*, *The Mock Auction*, *Villa Violetta*, and *A Memory* clearly demonstrate this tendency. Interestingly, Frank O'Connor, writing in the early 1960s, contends that Lavin has a penchant for the long short story, and thus her "real achievements will all be done in the form of the *nouvelle*".⁸

In addition to this shared interest in literary form, there is another analogy between Lavin and James that is particularly striking: both writers are preoccupied with the power of memory as a force shaping the present. Lavin had already explored the theme of memory in "In the Middle of the Fields" where, after many years, the memory of a beloved woman whom a widower believes he has forgotten resurfaces unexpectedly and compels him to act in a manner

² Colm Tóibín: Introduction to *In the Middle of the Fields and Other Stories* by Mary Lavin, Dublin, New Island Books, 2016, xii.

³ Frank O'Connor: *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story*, Cleveland and New York, The World Publishing Company, 1963, 203.

⁴ The chapter on Lavin in O'Connor's book is entitled "The Girl Outside the Gaol Gate," Frank O'Connor, 202–213.

⁵ Colm Tóibín: Introduction to *In the Middle of the Fields*, xiii; Patricia Laurence, 389.

⁶ Colm Tóibín: Mary Lavin: Context and Character, *American Journal of Irish Studies*, vol. 10, 2013, p. 99, *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23595041>, (accessed 3 December 2025).

⁷ Henry James: *The Lesson of the Master, The Death of the Lion, The Next Time, and Other Tales*, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1922, viii.

⁸ Frank O'Connor: *The Lonely Voice*, 212.

that is emotionally and sexually inappropriate; a behavior that the protagonist Vera rejects, but the source of which she understands. In *A Memory* Lavin introduces another male character, James, who seemingly has forgotten about the great and only passion of his life for the sake of scholarship. He suppresses those decisive moments in his past when he might have chosen a fuller, more engaged life – marrying the woman he loved – rather than retreating into a narrowed existence defined by scholarship and intermittent visits to his close friend (but not partner) Myra. Moments of recollection are fused with the present when after many years Myra finally rebels against James's selfishness, and his refusal to commit himself more deeply. Her unusual behavior reinforces the flow of memories that had begun earlier that morning in James, returning him to his youth, when, as a young university instructor, he had acted in a similar manner toward Emmy, the woman he once loved. From the very beginning of the story, Emmy and Myra are disturbingly intertwined in his mind. In a moment suggestive of Bergson's *durée*, past and present merge as he walks home; his earlier refusals live on in the present. When he loses his way in the woods near Emmy's estate, it is metaphorically suggestive of his fruitless wandering in the realm of scholarship, the years of emotional postponement, and his refusal to commit himself to live and love.

In *A Memory* Lavin has been influenced, partly through her admiration of Virginia Woolf's writing, by Bergsonian ideas of duration and memory, which reached her through Woolf's modernist representation of time, and consciousness,⁹ and partly through the writings of Henry James. According to Bergson, "memories, messengers from the unconscious, remind us of what we are dragging behind us unawares. But, even though we may have no distinct idea of it, we feel vaguely that our past remains present to us."¹⁰ Thus, even what is consciously repressed can continue to exert a hidden influence, shaping the present without full awareness. Perception, Bergson further argues, in *Matter and Memory*, "is impregnated with memory-images",¹¹ it is never isolated but always interwoven with the past. In his account of perception, "movement"

⁹ See Patricia Laurence on Woolf's influence on Lavin and Ann Mary Gillies for Bergson's influence on Virginia Woolf. Patricia Laurence: *The Dream Work of a Nation: From Virginia Woolf to Elizabeth Bowen to Mary Lavin*, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and Contemporary Global Literature*, J. Dubino, P. Pajak et al. (eds.), Edinburgh University Press, 2021, 387-398. Mary Ann Gillies: *Henry Bergson and British Modernism*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996, 107-131.

¹⁰ Henri Bergson: *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell, New York, Modern Library, 1944, 7.

¹¹ Bergson: *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer, London, George Allen and Unwin and Sons, 1911, 170.

– understood as action – is also essential.¹² Against this philosophical background, it is no coincidence that *A Memory* echoes, in theme and structure, Henry James's *The Beast in the Jungle*, a parable of life wasted in expectation, about a man "to whom nothing on earth was to have happened".¹³ Read in the light of Henri Bergson's theory of duration, the present of both Henry James's John Marcher and Lavin's James is shaped not by a creative integration of the past but by its distortion: each lives under the continuing pressure of an earlier refusal that has never been transformed into action.

In Lavin's story, James's fruitless effort and life are synonymous with intellectual labor devoted to the study of the creativity of others rather than the production of an original work. James, a researcher, stashes away his recollections, "dragging" them "behind unawares".¹⁴ These memories, long obscured by routine, can unexpectedly reemerge and spring upon the victim like a "beast" and reveal how different life might have been. Those who are familiar with Mary Lavin's writings have likely read her account of how she gave up scholarship for writing in the 1930s when she was still working on her doctoral dissertation. She realized that Virginia Woolf – the subject of her dissertation – was still alive and writing fiction. "I said to myself, What is Virginia Woolf doing? She's not writing a thesis. And I went home and took my thesis and I tore ... I turned it upside down", she later recalled, and on the back pages wrote her first short story.¹⁵ When Lavin was composing *A Memory*, around the age of sixty, she had reached the height of her artistic powers and did not regret that she had given up an academic career for the pleasures and risks of an independent, though financially uncertain, life of creative writing. Henry James was also sixty when he wrote *The Beast in the Jungle*, the novella that has long been regarded as one of the author's masterpieces, in Leon Edel's words, "perhaps James's finest story".¹⁶

First published in the collection of stories *The Better Sort* in 1903, *The Beast in the Jungle* belongs to a period when, according to Leon Edel, James was also writing criticism of other major authors and was deeply preoccupied with the question of "what made the artist on a 'great scale'".¹⁷ Edel describes the *The Beast in the Jungle* as one of the author's "parables of the artist and the

¹² "To call up the past in the form of an image, we must be able to withdraw ourselves from the action of the moment, we must have the power to value the useless, we must have the will to dream. Man alone is capable of such an effort. But even in him the past to which he returns is fugitive, ever on the point of escaping him, as though his backward turning memory were thwarted by the other, more natural, memory, of which the forward movement bears him on to action and to life." Bergson: *Matter and Memory*, 94.

¹³ Henry James: *The Beast in the Jungle*, in *The Better Sort*, New York, C. Scribner' Sons, 243.

¹⁴ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 7.

¹⁵ Belinda McKeon: *An Arrow in Flight. The Pleasures of Mary Lavin*, *The Paris Review*, 12 June 2012.

¹⁶ Leon Edel: *Henry James. A Life*, New York, Harper and Row, 1985, 555.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 556.

acts of life".¹⁸ Yet John Marcher is not portrayed as an artist but rather as an idle gentleman or dilettante – an aesthete who travels, frequents the homes of others, and consumes art without ever producing anything himself. For the artist – or pseudo-artist, memory, whether visual, verbal, or aural, would seem to be of utmost importance. Marcher, however, fails precisely in this faculty: he does not remember May Bartram, whom he had met ten years earlier, when he encounters her again at Weatherend. It is May, "whose face [is] a reminder, yet not quite a remembrance", who recalls their meeting in Sorrento and, more importantly, reminds him of the secret he had once confided in her.¹⁹ This carefully guarded "secret" is his sense of being reserved for "something rare and strange, possibly prodigious and terrible, that was sooner or later to happen to [him]".²⁰ However, Marcher has forgotten both the confession and the woman to whom he entrusted it. May now offers to wait and watch with him for this imagined destiny. Decades pass, but Marcher is so narcissistically immersed in his own presumed fate that he fails to notice the woman in May and fails to act—to love and marry her.

In James's story, memory is thus inextricably linked with the female figure of May. As John Lurz observes, "May comes to embody the idea of a feminine commemorative power and stands as perhaps the paragon of the 'modern' Mnemosyne."²¹ Through her representation as the allegorical figure of Memory (the mother of the Muses), May becomes the living medium of duration itself: the accumulated, shared time of many years within which love and commitment might have developed. Marcher fails to realize this because he refuses lived experience in favor of passive anticipation of the future – he lives only for the future – and thus never commits himself to her. For this reason, Henry James endows his protagonist with faulty memory: Marcher's memory does not participate in the interpenetration of past, present, and future that would give rise to action – or, in Bergsonian terms, to "movement".²²

Their relationship is more like a habit, as May points out: "we answer so completely to so usual an appearance: that of the man and woman whose friendship has become such a daily habit, or almost, as to be at last indispensable".²³ Yet it never develops into anything more. As May grows old and ill, she gradually arrives at the insight that continually escapes Marcher. Her perception, unlike his, is not confined to the selective anticipation of a future event but remains open to the continuity of lived time. Shortly before her death,

¹⁸ Ibid., 557.

¹⁹ James: *The Better Sort*, 190.

²⁰ Ibid., 198.

²¹ John Lurz: *Modern Mnemosynes: Female Memory and the Allegory of Gender*, *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2008, 69.

²² Bergson: *Matter and Memory*, 94.

²³ Henry James: *The Better Sort*, 208.

she understands what the “beast” truly signifies and attempts to warn him; yet, because she loves him, she does not reveal the truth directly. Even after decades of waiting, she continues almost to the end to hope – and to hint – that he might recognize for himself that there is a way to escape the terrible fate the beast represents, before she finally abandons that hope:

It had become suddenly, from her movement and attitude, beautiful and vivid to him that she had something more to give him; her wasted face delicately shone with it, and it glittered, almost as with the white lustre of silver, in her expression....The end, none the less, was that what he had expected failed to sound. Something else took place instead, which seemed to consist at first in the mere closing of her eyes. She gave way at the same instant to a slow, fine shudder, and though he remained staring—though he stared, in fact, the harder—she turned off and regained her chair.²⁴

May understands that the catastrophe Marcher fears has in fact already taken place within the unnoticed flow of shared years. Her final withdrawal marks the moment when Marcher’s last chance to understand what he has missed irretrievably slips away from him. After her death, the shared time spent together continues to haunt Marcher’s present and future. The final recognition comes to Marcher too late, many months after May’s death:

The escape would have been to love her; then, *then* he would have lived. *She* had lived – who could say now with what passion? – since she had loved him for himself; whereas he had never thought of her (ah, how it hugely glared at him!) but in the chill of his egotism and the light of her use.²⁵

By placing the narrative within the framework of Marcher’s consciousness, the text heightens the sense of his belated recognition. The “beast”, then, is not an external catastrophe but Marcher’s failure to love, a failure that leaves him with a life “unlived”²⁶ and is revealed only when May is already dead, and all possibility of action has vanished.

In Lavin’s *A Memory*, James will also encounter the “beast”. The final day in the protagonist James’s life is narrated from morning until night. The reader is confined to James’s self-absorbed train of thought, which reveals his complacency and his emotional indifference toward the woman who has grown old during the long years of waiting. A researcher, living in isolation in the countryside, James has devoted himself entirely to what he regards as “academic

²⁴ Ibid., 226–227.

²⁵ Ibid., 243.

²⁶ Leon Edel: *Henry James*, 557.

dedication",²⁷ working on what he considers "the most ambitious thing he'd attempted so far – it was no less than an effort to trace the creative process itself back, as it were, to its source-bed".²⁸ Yet the passage he had written the night before in a frenzy of imagined inspiration "was meaningless, absolutely meaningless – gibberish".²⁹ His analytical and creative powers are failing, and his intellectual collapse reflects the hollowness of his life lived in deliberate emotional withdrawal.

Like Henry James's John Marcher, Lavin's James is marked by emotional coldness and evasiveness. Both men sacrifice lived experience to abstract speculation and thus allow both love and life to slip away. A lifelong bachelor, "his energies ... totally expended in mental work",³⁰ James is imprisoned in routine, with only Myra as a companion. Their relationship is like John Marcher's and May Bartram's, "whose friendship has become ... a daily habit".³¹ She is his devoted confidante, whom he visits in Dublin when inspiration fails him. Myra is always there; each evening she waits in uncertainty, for James never calls to announce his arrival yet assumes that she is always available. Like May Bartram, Myra remembers even the smallest details of James's past, including his first love, Emmy Balfe: "James was staring at her, hardly able to credit she had picked up Emmy's married name."³² Myra, in an effort to please James, pays habitual "lip service"³³ to his self-justifications by echoing what he wishes to believe. On the occasion when they speak of his first love, she reassures him that he was right to abandon Emmy when he was still an aspiring university instructor, since "[m]arriage would have put an end to his academic career".³⁴ Similarly to May Bartram, Myra also spends her best years hoping for what will never come to be. Now, unable to bear children after an operation, she is left emotionally and physically barren. She has already made sacrifices for James in the past by denying part of herself, suppressing her natural talent for cooking and sewing.³⁵ While she earns a living as a freelance translator, rendering other writers' "creative processes" into new linguistic forms, her own emotional life remains unfulfilled. May Bartram and Myra are bearers of a truth the men fail to recognize, and each woman ultimately sacrifices herself to the emotional blindness of the man she loves.

²⁷ Lavin: *A Memory and Other Stories*, 163.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 169–170.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

³¹ James: *The Better Sort*, 206.

³² *Ibid.*, 180.

³³ *Ibid.*, 208.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

³⁵ Heather Ingman: Masculinities in Mary Lavin's Short Stories, in Elke D'Hoker (ed.): *Mary Lavin*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2013, 38.

On the morning when the story unfolds, James is satisfied to think of Myra waiting for him, a perfect embodiment of the woman he believes he needs. While making a fire in the hearth, he is already thinking of Myra, their past conversations, rather than the work awaiting him. Unlike on other days, he sets off for Dublin too early; yet, too rigidly fixed in his habits, instead of going to see Myra, or spending the day with her, he merely wanders through the unfamiliar city, waiting for the accustomed hour in the evening when they are to have supper together. In Dublin he feels displaced, everything seems unfamiliar, and he is estranged from the academic world as well. In his treatment of Myra, he resembles John Marcher, who “occasionally went in with her [May] to finish, as he called it, the evening, and, the better to make his point, sat down to the frugal but always careful little supper that awaited his pleasure”.³⁶

The crisis between James and Myra reaches its peak when she, unlike the quietly enduring May in Henry James’s story, finally rebels and pours forth a stream of complaints that leaves James shocked and disappointed, ready to withdraw. For Myra, “a marriage of minds” is no longer enough.³⁷ She resents the fact that he had “[T]ime to kill”³⁸ instead of calling her immediately and letting her know that he was in town:

Wouldn’t it be a very small sacrifice to make, James, when one thinks of all the sacrifices I’ve made for you, And over so many years?” Her words, which to him were exasperating beyond belief, seemed to drown her in a torrent of self-pity. “So many, many years,” she whispered.³⁹

When Myra realizes that her words have not moved him, that “she’d never change him now”, that “[h]e was fixed in his faults, cemented into his barren way of life”,⁴⁰ she is forced to confront the finality of her situation. Her shocking outburst: “You have denatured me”,⁴¹ is not simply an expression of anger on her part, but a desperate demand to be understood; her last attempt to secure a future that has taken too long in coming. Myra’s final plea: “James! Look at me!” only receives the chilling reply, “I am looking, Myra.”⁴²

This verbal exchange recalls May Bartram’s final attempt to awaken Marcher to what he is losing (discussed earlier), when her “movement and attitude” suddenly become “beautiful and vivid”⁴³ to him – yet he remains staring without comprehension, as she turns away and returns to her chair. In both

³⁶ Henry James: *The Better Sort*, 213.

³⁷ Mary Lavin: *A Memory and Other Stories*, 175.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 190.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 198.

⁴³ Henry James, *The Better Sort*, 243.

scenes, the men's gaze acknowledges the women's physical presence yet falls short of any understanding. Like Marcher, whose lifelong absorption in his anticipated destiny prevents him from imagining happiness with May, James withdraws from genuine commitment, unable – or unwilling – to grasp what is expected from him. As Heather Ingman rightly points out, James's dedication to scholarship "has impoverished his life".⁴⁴ Lavin's Myra, like May Bartram, comes to realize that the catastrophe has already occurred in the form of an un-lived possibility. The "beast" has sprung in the form of evasion and delay. James will not, and perhaps cannot, become the man she hoped for. In this sense, the past is irretrievable. He leaves selfishly, without consoling Myra. All is over between them.

There is also a striking parallel between the endings of the two stories. Marcher finds his jungle in the "wilderness of tombs"⁴⁵ surrounding May Bartram's grave, where he is finally forced into recognition by the sight of a "deeply stricken"⁴⁶ mourner's face. The grief he witnesses in that stranger's face, and the envy it provokes in him reveal the truth he has long evaded: the catastrophe he has been waiting for has already occurred in the form of an "un-lived" life:

He saw the Jungle of his life and saw the lurking Beast; then, while he looked, perceived it, as by a stir of the air, rise, huge and hideous, for the leap that was to settle him. His eyes darkened – it was close; and, instinctively turning, in his hallucination, to avoid it, he flung himself, face down, on the tomb.⁴⁷

In Lavin's story, James is left completely disoriented after his clash with Myra and, on his way home, gets off the bus too early and wanders into the countryside, eventually losing himself in the woods. Lavin also introduces an important psychological twist: it is a sudden, involuntary chain of unconscious associations that unexpectedly triggers the memory of Emmy, the first woman in his life, that morning. Although he had tried to consign his memories of Emmy to "a drawer", they run through James's entire day, intermingling with his initially complacent musings about conversations with Myra, who occupies his present. Lost in the woods, he is seized by the humiliating fear that he may have strayed onto the very estate where Emmy is now living as a married woman with children. Physically unfit and unused to exertion, and shaken by his argument with Myra, he experiences pain in the region of his heart and suffers a fatal heart attack. The Irish countryside on the outskirts of Dublin thus becomes James's "jungle", a physical counterpart both to the metaphorical jungle of Marcher's wasted existence and to the "wilderness of tombs" in Henry

⁴⁴ Heather Ingman: *Masculinities in Mary Lavin's Short Stories*, 39.

⁴⁵ Henry James, *The Better Sort*, 237.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 244.

James's story. Lavin's protagonist is physically battling against the bushes and the thick undergrowth in the dark, which "seemed to thrust him back".⁴⁸ But unlike Marcher, whose realization comes too late to act, James's recognition is fragmented, panicked, and culminates not in insight but in physical collapse and death:

And where was Emmy?

With a last desperate effort James tried to stop his mind from stumbling and tried to fasten it on Myra. Where was *she*? She wouldn't have failed him. But she *had* failed him. Both of them had failed him. Under a weight of bitterness too great to be borne his face was pressed into the wet leaves, and when he gulped for breath, the rotted leaves were sucked into his mouth.⁴⁹

His final moments reveal that it never occurred to James that he had failed them both.

Mary Lavin once claimed in an interview that, later in her career, she was mainly concerned in her stories with "the philosophical ideas and attitudes to life [she] wanted to express".⁵⁰ In *A Memory* she explores an "attitude to life" that she finds particularly damaging and characteristic. In the story, memory becomes the force that disrupts James's carefully ordered academic existence. A chain of long-suppressed recollections surfaces, carrying him from thoughts of Emmy in the morning back to Myra in the evening and finally, in the last moments of his life, to both women at once – revealing that they had mattered profoundly to him despite his lifelong denial of emotional need. In Bergsonian terms, what resurfaces is duration itself: the accumulated past that has never ceased to coexist with the present and now presses to be acknowledged. James thus emerges as a man twice confronted with a choice between life and the sterile security of intellectual ambition, and twice choosing the latter. The memories that unsettle him, however, never crystallize into the kind of perception that would induce "movement" or action.

While both Henry James and Mary Lavin explore the theme of unfulfilled life and the suffering it inflicts on others, Lavin narrows the focus by centering her narrative on the academic researcher, tellingly named James, in a clear intertextual gesture toward the author of *The Beast in the Jungle* and in implicit acknowledgement of the lesson of the master. Her story does more than merely rewrite Henry James's parable: it offers an unmistakable critique of sterile scholarship pursued at the expense of living. Lavin suggests that academic life may become not a vocation but a refuge from the experience of life itself – one

⁴⁸ Mary Lavin: *A Memory and Other Stories*, 220.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁵⁰ Maurice Harmon: From Conversations with Mary Lavin, *Irish University Review*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1997, 287, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25484734>, (accessed 29 November 2025).

that, in her protagonist's case, proves finally fatal. Seen in this light, the story casts a backward glance at Lavin's own early decision to abandon academic life, as if acknowledging that she herself stepped away from the very fate she now assigns to James.

James and Lavin thus present protagonists whose lives are not simply marked by emotional failure but defined by a refusal to live within duration itself. In *The Beast in the Jungle*, memory returns as recognition, though at a moment when it can no longer lead to action. Lavin's *A Memory*, however, offers an even bleaker variation in this pattern. Here, memory returns not as understanding but as physical collapse, culminating in death; James is denied even the consolation of knowledge. Where Marcher arrives at a tragic awareness of what he has lost, Lavin's James succumbs without comprehension, destroyed by the very past he has long refused to acknowledge. Lavin thus intensifies Henry James's theme of an "unlived" life by removing the redemptive function of recognition: memory does not redeem such a life but reveals – at least to the reader – the terrible cost of having attempted to live without it.

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GENDER AND SPACE IN MARINA CARR'S *PORTIA COUGHLAN* – DESTABILIZING THE DOMESTIC WOMAN-IMAGE

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Abstract

Portia Coughlan is the second major work of prominent contemporary Irish playwright Marina Carr from the mid-1990s, set in the Midlands region of Ireland. In Portia Coughlan and other plays from the period, Carr revisits the early twentieth-century trend of rural domestic drama, subverting its conventions to draw attention to the issue of women's entrapment in the domestic sphere. As opposed to earlier stage iterations of the Irish mother-homemaker character, Carr's female protagonist fails to be the perfect and selfless woman contained within the home. This article aims to examine how Carr uses space in Portia Coughlan to destabilize the idealized image of domestic womanhood and explore the possibility of establishing an identity outside this narrow definition. Carr's stage instructions, Portia's interactions with domestic, public, and natural spaces, as well as her imaginative descriptions of home and nature will be closely examined, tracing Portia's hopeless quest for self-determination.

KEYWORDS

Marina Carr, Irish drama, gender, space, women's issues

INTRODUCTION

Portia Coughlan is the second major work of Marina Carr, Ireland's most prominent contemporary woman playwright. The play was commissioned by the Irish National Maternity Hospital in Dublin and premiered on the Peacock stage of the Abbey, the National Theatre of Ireland in 1996. Although a relatively early work in Carr's career, *Portia Coughlan* remains relevant to this day. The

play was restaged in 2004 as part of the *Abbey100*, the centenary celebration program of the Abbey Theatre, underscoring its importance. Written and set in the mid-1990s, a time of important social changes in Ireland, the play reflects contemporary attitudes to women's problematic position in Irish society. Dominant political discourse in 20th-century Ireland, best illustrated by Article 41 of the Irish Constitution, posited homemaking and motherhood as the primary purpose of women's lives: "In particular, the State recognizes that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved."¹ Part of the unbroken appeal of *Portia Coughlan* is the way the play showcases with shocking intensity the identity crisis of a woman brought about by her entrapment within the traditionally feminine role of the homemaker.

This article aims to examine how Carr uses space in *Portia Coughlan* to destabilize the idealized image of domestic womanhood and explore the possibility of establishing an identity outside this narrow definition. *Portia Coughlan*, like Carr's other plays from the period, is set in a rural household, surrounded by the beautiful, if somewhat eerie, Irish Midlands landscape. Carr reinvents on the stage the familiar setting of early twentieth-century Irish domestic drama, where "[a] room within a house, a family in the room, stand in for normality, for ordinary, familiar life".² Through her choice of setting, Carr opens a dialogue with the Irish dramatic canon, while also using it to challenge its major conventions. As Karin Maresh, among other scholars, points out, women of those earlier plays are more often than not portrayed as "[s]elf-sacrificing mothers, whose needs and desires are always secondary to those of their children and any male characters", a woman image quite similar to the one endorsed in the dominant political discourse of the century.³ Central to Carr's play is a woman who fails to live up to the idealized image of domestic womanhood. The action of the three-act play spans three days, presented as a non-linear sequence. Act One takes place on the day of Portia Coughlan's thirtieth birthday, which is also the anniversary of her twin brother Gabriel's death. Set two days later, Act Two opens with the family finding Portia's drowned corpse in the Belmont River. Act Three goes back to the day after Portia's birthday and follows her until she makes the decision to commit suicide at the very end of the play. The plot, as well as Portia's suicide, is partially motivated by the return of the ghost of Gabriel, who urges Portia to fulfil her end

¹ *Constitution of Ireland 1937*, art. 41.2.1°, <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/cons/en/html>, (accessed 11 April 2023).

² Nicholas Grene: *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 52.

³ Karin Maresh: Un/Natural Motherhood in Marina Carr's *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, and *By the Bog of Cats*, *Theatre History Studies* 35 (2016), 180, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/ths.2016.0009>, (accessed 11 April 2023).

of the twins' suicide pact from fifteen years earlier. Portia, however, seems to be haunted in another sense as well. Dissatisfied with her unfulfilling life, Portia is plagued by a yearning for self-determination, something just as unavailable as the company of her lost twin. In the following pages, I aim to explore how Portia's displacement in her domestic roles and her effort to establish a new identity for herself are expressed through the use of space. My reading of the play will trace Portia's doomed quest for self-determination through the stage instructions, Portia's dialogues and her interactions with the spaces on and off the stage. Portia's revolt against the house, her limited access to public spaces of socialization, and the way she aligns herself with the natural landscape outside in an attempt to free herself from containment in the domestic space will be analyzed in detail.

"THE HOUSE CREAKIN' LIKE A COFFIN"
– THE DOMESTIC SPACE

In the initial stage directions, Carr specifies that all three spaces that serve as the setting of the play are to be on the stage simultaneously at all times: "the stage must incorporate three spaces: the living room of Portia Coughlan's house; the bank of the Belmont River; the bar of the High Chaparral".⁴ This rendering allows the audience to compare Portia's behavior in each of these different environments. Her frustration and violent outbursts at home are contrasted with flirtatious escapades at the bar or her search for privacy in nature. Portia's battle against containment is also visualized through this arrangement: she cannot stay in one place too long but keeps moving around the stage restlessly. The feeling of displacement dominates the play from the opening scene, when we find Portia in her living room on the morning of her thirtieth birthday. While she "stands there, drinking, lost looking", the ghost of her dead twin brother Gabriel appears by the Belmont River and the two "mirror one another's posture and movements in an odd way".⁵ The disturbingly close bond between Portia and Gabriel is emphasized throughout the play. The twins are revealed to have had an incestuous relationship characterized by mutual obsession. Fifteen years later, Portia perceives it as an inevitable unity that has been broken by Gabriel's suicide, leaving her lost in the world of the living. Marianne, the twins' mother recounts an unequal relationship with the male twin dominating the female. She points out how Portia subordinated herself to Gabriel, "trailin' after him like a slavish pup".⁶ It was against Gabriel's

⁴ Marina Carr: *Plays One*, London, Faber and Faber, 1999, 191.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 249.

suffocating control that Portia first rebelled, long before her present struggle against containment in domestic life. She broke the bond between them first by neglecting Gabriel in favor of her friends Stacia Doyle and Damus Halion, also starting a sexual relationship with the latter; then by refusing reconciliation through double suicide. Portia now longs to reestablish the unity between herself and her male twin, succumbing to obsessive thoughts about him. Throughout the play, the ghostly figure of Gabriel functions as Portia's double, luring her to join him by the Belmont River, and ultimately in death. The doubling of the characters in the opening scene, placing one inside the house and the other outside in nature, carries an important suggestion: only half of Portia – “the worst half”, as she refers to herself at one point – is contained within.⁷ Gabriel, the better, perhaps more authentic half, is outside its confines; his character “acts as a symbol of Portia's ‘split self’ torn between the confines of her home and wanting to escape, between living and wanting to be dead”.⁸ Portia is visibly split in half in the opening scene, and although she is physically present in the house, her mind is already outside with Gabriel. Her figure in this scene – drunk, disheveled, idle – is in stark contrast with “idealized images of femininity which present woman variously as symbols of nation, the maternal and the domestic” found in famous early-twentieth century Irish plays such as *Riders to the Sea* by John Millington Synge or *Cathleen ni Houlihan* by Lady Augusta Gregory and William Butler Yeats.⁹ Soon enough, Portia's husband Raphael Coughlan enters the stage and immediately calls Portia out on her abandonment of domestic duties: “And there's dishes in the kitchen as hasn't seen a drop of water this week nor more.”¹⁰ This first dialogue, during which Portia's mind is wandering outside by the Belmont River, underscores that her preoccupations lie not with the maintenance of the home but rather with her inconsolable grief and fantasies of escape.

Over the course of the play, Portia's frustration with the expectations put on her as wife and mother surfaces as frustration with the house that comes to represent these ideals. She refuses to do housework, and the unkept, disordered state of the house generates conflict between Portia and her family. Unable to perform according to expectations, Portia is regarded as a failure by her mother, who berates her: “You'd swear you were never taught how to Hoover a room or dust a mantel; bloody disgrace, that's what ya are.”¹¹ Later in the play, Portia reveals how she never wanted to become a mother, and therefore is unable to identify with the role while arguing with her husband:

⁷ Ibid., 210.

⁸ Trench: *Bloody Living*, 119.

⁹ Melissa Sihra: *The House of Woman and the Plays of Marina Carr*, in Melissa Sihra (ed): *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 210.

¹⁰ Carr: *Plays One*, 193.

¹¹ Ibid., 209.

I never wanted sons nor daughters and I never pretended otherwise to ya; told ya from the start. But ya thought ya could woo me into motherhood. Well, it hasn't worked out, has it? You've your three sons now, so ya better mind them because I can't love them, Raphael. I'm just not able.¹²

Portia unequivocally expresses her refusal to be defined by the roles of mother and homemaker. Presenting her protagonist as the antithesis of this woman-image, "Carr challenges the audience to acknowledge in Portia a being freed from the value-laden terms conventionally used to define the female".¹³ Portia's containment in the domestic space is unnatural; she is unable to feel responsible for the state of her home and children, as she has never willingly chosen those responsibilities as the goal of her life.

The house is meant to take up only one-third of the stage space in *Portia Coughlan*; consequently, it appears limiting and claustrophobic right beside the open space of nature. Portia's dissatisfaction with her containment in the metaphorical domestic space surfaces as discomfort in the physical space of the house, which is presented as "a space of disillusionment and limitation".¹⁴ Portia vocalizes these feelings to her friend Stacia Doyle, evoking vivid imagery:

These days I look at Raphael sittin' opposite me in the armchair. He's always tired, his bad leg up on a stool, addin' up the books from the factory, lost in himself, and I think the pair of us might as well be dead for all the joy we knock out of one another. The kids is asleep, the house creakin' like a coffin, all them wooden doors and floors. Sometimes I can't breathe any more.¹⁵

The house, as described by Portia in this passage, is a claustrophobic, restricted space. Through this cry for help, she admits that she feels like "[s]uffocating within the tomb-like domestic space".¹⁶ Portia's darkly imaginative description is not the only instance in which the coffin analogy is employed to visualize women's entrapment in the domestic sphere. Carr disrupts linear time in the play and reveals the protagonist's tragic death in the middle of it in Act Two. Following a heated argument with her husband and the violent expression of her dissatisfaction, Portia drowns herself in the Belmont River, finally joining Gabriel in death. Similarly to the protagonist of Carr's preceding Midlands play, *The Mai*, Portia commits suicide in an attempt to free herself from her

¹² Ibid., 221.

¹³ Cathy Leeney: Ireland's 'exiled' women playwrights: Teresa Deevy and Marina Carr, in Shaun Richards (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 160.

¹⁴ Sihra: *The House of Woman*, 211.

¹⁵ Carr: *Plays One*, 207.

¹⁶ Sihra: *Marina Carr: Pastures*, 96.

unfulfilling life at home and reclaim control over her fate. However, Carr denies her protagonist this escape and closure in death as the play does not end with Portia committing suicide. In Act Three, which chronologically precedes Act Two, Portia is back on the stage alive, repeating the same tedious routine that motivated her decision to end her life. The concluding scene of the play takes place in the house, just moments before Portia makes the desperate decision to kill herself. From floating in the river at the beginning of Act Two, she is brought back to the life and space she tried to escape in Act Three. Her attempt to end her confinement proves to be futile; she remains trapped in the domestic space, “forced to come back and perform” from beyond death.¹⁷ In the final act, when Portia comes onto the stage alive again, it becomes clear that the house imprisons her more effectively than any coffin can.

Domestic abuse is one of the focal issues in *Portia Coughlan*; home in the play is presented as a space that accommodates violence. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, men are not the only ones exhibiting violent behaviors – women are portrayed just as destructive. “Containment leads to violence”, Maria Doyle notes; Carr’s women’s frustration in the domestic space where they are contained erupts in violent actions.¹⁸ Blaize Scully, Portia’s grandmother, is revealed to have been a perpetrator as well as a victim of domestic violence. After being physically abused by her husband for years, she took her frustration out on her daughter-in-law Marianne Scully. Marianne, Portia and Gabriel’s mother suffered psychological abuse from Blaize, who used to lock her in a room as a form of punishment – the house, in her case, literally became a hostile space she could not escape. Marianne then used her children as an outlet for her own frustration: “[her] response to the power-relationship imposed on her is a perpetual engagement with it, taking her frustrations out, in turn, on the ‘weaker and smaller’ twins”.¹⁹ Grown-up and a mother herself, Portia in turn “perpetuates the loveless mothering she has experienced with her own children”.²⁰ She expresses an urge to hurt her own children during a fight with her husband, conjuring vivid, violent imagery:

¹⁷ Brecken Rose Hancock: ‘That House of Proud Mad Women!': Diseased Legacy and Mythmaking in Marina Carr’s ‘The Mai.’, *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2005), 22, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25515591>, (accessed 27 June 2022).

¹⁸ Maria Doyle: Dead Center: Tragedy and the Reanimated Body in Marina Carr’s *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan*, *Modern Drama*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2006, 53, doi.org/10.1353/mdr.2006.0048, (accessed 11 April 2023).

¹⁹ Margaret Maxwell: ‘The Claim of Eternity’: Language and Death in Marina Carr’s ‘Portia Coughlan.’ *Irish University Review*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (2007), 414, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25505049>, (accessed 02 October 2023).

²⁰ Clare Wallace: Tragic Destiny and Abjection in Marina Carr’s ‘The Mai, Portia Coughlan’ and ‘By the Bog of Cats...’, *Irish University Review* Vol. 31, No. 2 (2001), 443, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25504887>, (accessed 01 October 2023).

When I look at my sons, Raphael, I see knives and accidents and terrible mutilations. Their toys is weapons for me to hurt them with, givin' them a bath is a place where I could drown them. And I have to run from them and lock myself away for fear I cause these terrible things to happen.²¹

Portia's rage is directed not only towards her children but also against her mother. She goes as far as physically attacking Marianne in Act Three: "Portia leaps, a wildcat leap from the table onto her mother, knock her down, on top of her."²² Witnessing her mother's life, her evident dissatisfaction and no available alternative, Portia gains a glimpse of her own possible future. Marianne's life is an insistent reminder of how Portia will also stay trapped by the boundaries of the domestic sphere for the rest of her own life. This realization motivates a violent response "not against the boundaries themselves but against those who share them with Portia",²³ Turned bitter by her lack of control over her life, Portia takes out her frustration on those closest to her – her mother, husband and children. Depicting the house as a space that harbors violence challenges one of the key conventions of the early twentieth-century Irish domestic drama tradition mentioned earlier.

In many early plays produced by the Abbey Theatre, the initial state of normality and safety in the home is disturbed by the arrival of a strange figure. This formula supplies the central conflict in plays such as *Cathleen ni Houlihan* mentioned above, as well as J.M. Synge's *In the Shadow of the Glen* or W.B. Yeats's *The Land of Heart's Desire*. In *The Land of Heart's Desire*, a young wife is lured away from her secure, if somewhat dull, domestic life by a Fairy Child. Once she gives in to the fairy's temptation and attempts to leave the house for the promised land of excitement, she pays with her life. While in such plays normal family life is often disturbed, the disruptive force typically threatens the peace of the home from the outside. In *Portia Coughlan* and Carr's other Midlands plays, however, the origin of danger and corruption is to be found within the home. Here, the notion of the stranger in the house who brings disharmony into the domestic scene does not come from without. It is Portia herself, along with Gabriel, who already managed to escape and is waiting for Portia to join him outside.

²¹ Carr: *Plays One*, 233.

²² *Ibid.*, 248.

²³ Doyle: *Dead Center*, 53.

“HAD ME PLACE AND ALL” – PUBLIC SPACES

Stage-bound through most of the play, Portia only seems to have access to the spaces that are also present on the stage: the domestic space of the house, the surrounding natural landscape, and a little bit of public space represented by The High Chaparral, the local bar. Anything beyond this little circle within which she moves around is unavailable to her. Most of the public sphere belongs to the invisible offstage region beyond her reach: political activity, career and education are visibly excluded from her life. Portia has been a stay-at-home housewife since the age of seventeen, even though at that age she visualized a vastly different life for herself involving higher education and possibly some sort of career later. She laments her lack of opportunities to fulfil this dream and being ultimately forced to abandon her aspirations to her aunt Maggie May Doorley: “And I was going to college, had me place and all, but Daddy says no, marry Raphael.”²⁴ Despite having talent, ‘having her place’, she is denied access to education as her family rather coerces her into choosing the conventional lifestyle prescribed to Irish women in rural areas. This conversation on Portia’s lack of opportunities takes place in Portia’s living room, whose restricted space visually translates her feeling of entrapment. Meanwhile, the college she wished to attend remains in the inaccessible offstage world. In the same scene, Portia receives “a three-foot white delft horse on its hind legs” as a birthday present from Maggie May.²⁵ Portia reacts to the present, laughing: “God Almighty, I may jump up on him and ride off on him one of these days.”²⁶ However playful, Portia’s reaction is a plea for escape from her unfulfilling life while “[her] sense of entrapment is realized visually through Maggie May’s gift”.²⁷ Portia’s inability to leave the stage is contrasted with the way her husband Raphael is free to enter and exit several times, indicating his going to work or engaging in social activity. It is revealed that Raphael has a limp due to an industrial accident that happened years before; his mobility and his ability to work are therefore restricted. His physical disability is seen as a loss of his masculinity by some members of the local community. Damus Halion, Portia’s secret lover, ridicules Raphael, calling him “auld Hopalong” and an “excuse of a man”, disclosing his view of Raphael as inferior.²⁸ Raphael’s situation highlights the arbitrariness of gender-based discrimination in the public sphere. Despite his condition, which is recognized by the community as a hindrance, he is allowed to leave the domestic sphere, retain his career and possibly even seek self-fulfillment outside. Portia, on the other hand, was denied the opportunity

²⁴ Carr: *Plays One*, 199.

²⁵ Ibid., 198.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Maxwell: ‘The Claim of Eternity’, 416.

²⁸ Carr: *Plays One*, 202.

to leave for college, despite having all the necessary qualifications. She can only go as far as the stage space permits, a rendering through which Carr powerfully illustrates her limited opportunities.

Portia and her friend Stacia go to The High Chaparral for drinks before collecting their children from school in Act One and Act Three. The couple of hours at the bar – complete with a jukebox and an aggressively flirty barman – is all the time and space Portia and her friend, both thirty-year-old housewives, have for socialization. They are temporarily placed outside the home, having drinks and, in Act Three, dancing wildly. Women drinking in the bar instead of doing housework at home could be seen as undermining the image of domestic femininity promoted in the Irish dramatic canon and the dominant ideological discourse. However, the two women's excursions in public do not result in any substantial change in their position. Although they are granted some free time for socialization, this time is very limited. When Portia proposes staying for more drinks in Act One, Stacia objects: "School's nearly over. Kids'll be waitin'."²⁹ Similarly, their bonding is cut short in Act Three, when Stacia reminds her friend of her obligations: "Portia, better get a move on, the kids is well out of school."³⁰ The two women's domestic duties impede their bonding with each other and limit the time they can spend outside their homes. Thus, the female characters' brief excursion into the public space of the bar serves only to draw attention to their severely limited access to social life.

"BUT ME MIND'D BE TURNIN ON THE BELMONT RIVER"

– NATURAL LANDSCAPE

The third part of the stage is dedicated to the bank of the Belmont River, an "allocated realm of 'otherness'" where Portia often flees to have some privacy and time for herself, which she is denied in her own home.³¹ The river – free-flowing, uncontrollable – serves as the visible antithesis of the static and restricting environment of the house. Her alienation from the ideals of domestic womanhood prompts her frantic search for "spaces of possibility beyond the monological discourse of home."³² As both the domestic and public spheres fail to accommodate her authentic self, Portia turns to nature as a possible alternative. She is mobile on the stage to some extent and "negotiates interior and exterior space, public and private", as if testing the boundaries that are meant to keep her contained within.³³ Her overt wish for escape from the enclosed

²⁹ Carr: *Plays One*, 208.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 246.

³¹ Trench: *Bloody Living*, 126.

³² Sihra, *The House of Woman*, 211.

³³ Doyle: *Dead Center*, 53.

domestic space is visualized through her (ultimately pointless) ventures outside. Carr renders the bank of the Belmont River onstage, where it stays throughout the performance as a constant reminder of Portia's yearning for control over her life. At the same time, Gabriel's ghost is visually aligned with the Belmont River in which he drowned himself, foreshadowing the connection between the ideas of escape and death.

Portia expresses her deep-rooted connection to the river in terms of inevitability: "I come here because I've always come here and I reckon I'll be comin' here long after I'm gone. I'll lie here when I'm a ghost and smoke ghost cigarettes and watch ye earthlin's goin' about yeer pointless days."³⁴ Whereas the house and the notions it represents do not succeed in "touching the deeper levels of her being", the river seems to constitute an unalienable part of herself.³⁵ The Belmont River's fluidity and changing nature are emphasized several times in the dialogues. Portia expresses her fascination with the river's ability to transform and express itself as it wishes:

Oh I'm sure I'd live through what other folks calls holidays, but me mind'd be turnin' on the Belmont River. Be wonderin' was it flowin' rough or smooth, was the bank mucky nor dry, was the salmon beginnin' their rowin' for the sea, was the frogs spawnin' the waterlilies, had the heron returned, be wonderin' all of these and a thousand other wonderin's that river washes over me.³⁶

Here, Portia expresses her need for a space that accommodates creative thinking and authentic self-expression: "her evocative descriptions of nature [...] enable a negotiation with spaces that renew rather than fossilize her subjectivity".³⁷ Portia identifies with the river and turns this environment into a new feminine territory replacing the domestic space. Her character is closely associated with water and its tendency "to overflow, to transgress demarcated boundaries".³⁸ During the first visit of Portia's parents in Act One, her father Sly reveals that he has witnessed her rendezvous with Damus Halion while mending the fences along the Belmont River. He condemns his daughter's behavior, who, in turn, accuses him of spying. With this exchange, Carr establishes a link between the image of Sly applying limiting measures to the river (i.e. putting up fences) and his attempt at exercising control over Portia's life. Like the river destroying the fences put up by Sly, Portia too commits transgression by abandoning her

³⁴ Carr: *Plays One*, 203.

³⁵ Csilla Bertha: The House Image in Three Contemporary Irish Plays, *New Hibernia Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2004, 74, doi.org/10.1353/nhr.2004.0035, (accessed 11 April 2023).

³⁶ Carr: *Plays one*, 207–208.

³⁷ Melissa Sihra: 'NATURE NOBLE OR IGNOBLE': WOMAN, FAMILY, AND HOME IN THE THEATRE OF MARINA CARR, *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)* 11, no. 2 (2005), 142, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41274324>, (accessed 04 August 2022).

³⁸ Sihra: *Marina Carr: Pastures*, 107.

appointed position and duties within the home. She destabilizes the patriarchal definition of 'woman' by engaging in undomestic, 'unwomanly' behaviors such as heavy drinking, sexual promiscuity, and idleness at home. Portia ends the interaction with her parents by leaving them abruptly, going for a walk by the Belmont River. Portia's overstepping the boundary of the home and spending her time by the river instead can be read as a metaphorical expression of overturning limiting social norms that define 'woman'.

An important element of Portia's unspoken agenda is to free her sexuality from its narrow confines. Maresh explains: "[Portia] has affairs and is very free with her sexuality, which is contrary to a primary goal of essential motherhood, that is, linking women's sexuality with motherhood".³⁹ Portia's promiscuity aims to sever this link and take control of her own sexuality. Portia carries out her extramarital affairs in nature, meeting her suitors by the riverside; the exercise of female sexuality is thus placed visibly outside the domestic space of the house. In nature, Portia also overturns the dynamics that characterize traditional male-female relations. During the failed rendezvous with the barman of the High Chaparral, Fintan Goolan, Portia, no longer desiring a sexual affair with Fintan, attempts to have a conversation instead. Fintan, however, dismisses her, saying: "There's one story as interests me, Portia Coughlan, the story of you with your knickers off. Now that's a story I'd listen to for a while."⁴⁰ Melissa Sihra analyses the scene: "A toxic masculinity is displayed at the end of the scene when Fintan Goolan shuts down Portia's story while simultaneously sexually objectifying her."⁴¹ Damus Halion, Portia's long-time lover, exhibits a similar attitude. He pretends to care about Portia's feelings, while he only endeavors to coerce her into sexual intercourse: "If ya spent less time thinkin' about that silly little brother of yours and more time on how I could please ya, you'd be a happy woman."⁴² However, Portia does not subscribe to the traditionally feminine, passive attitude to sexuality. Rather, she assumes an active, decision-making role in her affairs. She accepts or rejects her suitors as she pleases, and most importantly, refuses to be objectified by them. "Well I'm not yours or anyone else's, Damus Halion", she declares.⁴³ In her own feminine space, Portia is in control of her sexuality and makes her own decisions.

Portia, however, cannot break away from the domestic space permanently; she returns to the house repeatedly throughout the play. She occupies a liminal position between two equally magnetic spaces: she commutes between the house and the bank of the Belmont River. Her attempted transition from her grounded, limited state to being free and self-determining is not

³⁹ Maresh: *Un/Natural Motherhood*, 186.

⁴⁰ Carr: *Plays One*, 219.

⁴¹ Sihra: *Marina Carr: Pastures*, 101.

⁴² Carr: *Plays One*, 235–236.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 202.

complete. Emphasizing this idea, Carr inserts the scenes set on the riverside in between scenes that take place in the house. Maria Doyle calls attention to how Portia visits the three different spaces of the play in a cyclical pattern: "Portia spends the action of the play cycling through a series of spaces; the pattern of home to river to bar to river to home is repeated in Acts One and Three."⁴⁴ Both acts begin and end with Portia being in the house: her containment in the domestic space is reinforced after each of her excursions outside. She is incarcerated in the liminal, "in limbo between life and death and unable to find happiness in a world that has always expected her to be something other than what she is".⁴⁵ Gabriel's ghost appears by the Belmont River as well, visualizing this liminality, while also connecting the river to the idea of death right from the beginning of the play. Gabriel is displaced in the world of the living, just as Portia is displaced in her own life: "[his] ghostly disembodiment echoes Portia's haunted dislocation".⁴⁶ Portia oscillates between the house where she does not belong and feels that she "might as well be dead" and the bank of the river where she is allowed to exist authentically, if only for brief episodes.⁴⁷

By finally completing the twins' suicide pact, Portia also completes her rite of passage. She cuts her ties to the domestic space and decisively relocates herself on the outside. Her identification with the river becomes complete when she drowns herself in it. She visibly merges with the river in Act Two, when "[s]he is raised into the air and suspended there, dripping water, moss, algae, frogspawn, waterlilies, from the river".⁴⁸ Maria Doyle suggests that "the immersion in water can also be read symbolically as a union with a feminine element".⁴⁹ Scholarly interpretations of Portia's suicide differ. Her motivation may be found in her grief and a wish to reunite with her lost twin, as Margaret Maxwell suggests, writing: "[Portia] chooses death, therefore, in a bid to (re)unite her 'worst half' (her actual self) with its missing counterpart (Gabriel)".⁵⁰ The twins' incestuous relationship, as discussed earlier, was characterized by unbalanced power dynamics with Gabriel exercising control over Portia. While this highly problematic relationship did not grant Portia the freedom she is fighting for in the present, she seems to perceive it as a favorable alternative to her current situation. While grief and longing for her brother are definitely part of the whole picture, I propose to focus here on another factor that contributes to Portia's decision to kill herself: her alienation from her current life, of which her longing

⁴⁴ Doyle: *Dead Center*, 53.

⁴⁵ Maresh: *Un/Natural Motherhood*, 187.

⁴⁶ Sihra: *Marina Carr: Pastures*, 94.

⁴⁷ Carr: *Plays One*, 207.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁴⁹ Doyle: *Dead Center*, 44.

⁵⁰ Maxwell: 'The Claim of Eternity', 419.

for Gabriel and the earlier life they shared as children is symptomatic. Her suicide, therefore, may be read as a desperate attempt at reclaiming some degree of control, a culmination of her obsessive urge to reinterpret herself outside the limiting roles imposed on her in her adult, married life. Cathy Leeney also argues that in *Portia Coughlan*, "death is reframed as the final resistance".⁵¹ By the same token, Mária Kurdi interprets Portia's suicide as "the only way to reconfirm her autonomous selfhood".⁵² Opposing these interpretations, Clare Wallace argues that for Portia and other female protagonists from Carr's Midlands cycle, suicide is rather a way of admitting defeat to patriarchal power: "[they] seem to abdicate from a confrontation with patriarchy, or if they do engage they, disappointingly, throw in the towel by committing suicide".⁵³ Nevertheless, Portia's committing suicide outside in nature rather than inside the house implies an attempt at ending her containment in the domestic space. She is very clearly not planning on entering the house again; rather, she opts for suicide by drowning as a means of self-liberation. Carr, however, structures her play so that it does not end with a promise of such liberation. As discussed earlier, the play does not end with the revelation of Portia's death, but with the moments of desperation before she kills herself. After her dead body is found and buried in Act Two, she is once again alive and struggling to fulfil her domestic duties in Act Three, which chronologically precedes Act Two. Her presence in the house – and thus her containment in the domestic space – is reinforced. When the family finds Portia's drowned corpse and manages to retrieve it from the river, Raphael suggests: "I suppose I may take her up to the house."⁵⁴ Portia's body is carried back to the place she tried to escape; she fails to emerge from the river liberated. Gabriel's triumphant singing, heard at the moment Portia makes her fatal decision at the end of the play, further complicates the question of whether Portia gains any control over her fate.

CONCLUSION

The triptych of spaces – domestic, public, nature – presented on the stage and Portia's engagement with them renders visible the question of where woman truly belongs. Which space – if any – can accommodate her authentic identity, free from externally imposed roles? Portia's escape attempts from

⁵¹ Leeney: Ireland's 'exiled' women playwrights, 158.

⁵² Mária Kurdi: Women on the stage in the 1990s: foregrounding the body and performance in plays by Gina Moxley, Emma Donoghue and Marina Carr, in Scott Brewster and Michael Parker (eds.): *Irish Literature Since 1990: Diverse Voices*, Manchester University Press, 2009, 69, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wn0rxk.8, (accessed 11 April 2023).

⁵³ Wallace: Tragic Destiny and Abjection, 435.

⁵⁴ Carr: *Plays One*, 224.

her house and her lack of care for it clearly show that for her, the domestic fails to be that space. Marina Carr renders her female protagonist mobile on the stage and allows her access (although a limited one) to different spaces, physically severing the long-established link between woman and the domestic sphere. Thus, through the use of space in her play, Carr effectively destabilizes the idealized image of domestic womanhood prevalent in Irish culture and literature. However, even if Portia is allowed to engage with non-domestic spaces outside and is portrayed as considerably more self-assured in nature, the play does not offer a solution to the issue of women's entrapment in the domestic sphere. The world beyond the stage on which she is bound remains unavailable, and Portia finds no viable alternative to containment on it. As we see in the play, she must repeatedly return to the house, and the only way for her to end this cycle is through death. Portia's death in the middle of the play may be shocking, but it is not cathartic. It does not lead to resolution, partially due to the peculiar structure of the play. By the end, secrets are unveiled, the relations between the characters become clearer, Gabriel's ghost is appeased, and Portia's quest for self-determination also comes to an end with her suicide. The tension, however, remains, and the play ends on a note of despair, with Portia still trapped in the house she despises. She rejects containment but dies before she can find a space where she can be herself without externally imposed limitations. Thus, one of the central questions of the play – whether there exists a space where nontraditional female identity can be accommodated – remains insistently open.

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MAPPING IRISHNESS ON THE AMERICAN FRONTIER: METAPHORICAL IMAGERY AND CULTURAL MEMORY IN KEVIN BARRY'S *THE HEART IN WINTER*

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Abstract

This article explores how Kevin Barry's The Heart in Winter (2024) reimagines Irish cultural memory and identity within a transnational context. Set in Butte, Montana, among Irish immigrants at the end of the nineteenth century, the novel transforms the American frontier into a site of remembrance and reinvention. Drawing on Pierre Nora's "lieux de mémoire" and Aleida and Jan Assmann's theories of cultural memory, the study examines how exile and displacement reshape collective identity through narrative and ritual. Barry's grotesque humor, violent imagery, and lyrical prose operate as stylistic carriers of memory, translating trauma into aesthetic endurance. Through a multidirectional framework informed by Michael Rothberg's theory of global memory, the article argues that The Heart in Winter constructs an Irishness that survives through transformation, while demonstrating how literature enables memory to migrate beyond the nation, preserving identity through imaginative continuity rather than geographic permanence.

KEYWORDS

American frontier, metaphorical imagery, Kevin Barry, Irish identity

INTRODUCTION

The American frontier, generally considered a vast expanse of promise, hardship, and reinvention, has long occupied a mythic place in the global imagination. This territory represents both a geographical boundary and a symbolic space where American identity, democracy, and individualism were shaped through

expansion, conflict, and transformation. The concept signifies the moving edge between “civilization” and “wilderness”, embodying ideals of opportunity, progress, and reinvention, while a parallel line of development reveals histories of displacement, conquest, and mythmaking.

The most influential critical articulation on the American frontier comes from historian Frederick Jackson Turner in his essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893), in which he states the following:

The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin.¹

This outlines the movement of the colonial-settler between civilization and wilderness. Turner’s “frontier thesis” defines the frontier as the crucible of American democracy, which highlights a dynamic process that shaped the national character through adaptation and innovation. Later critics, however, such as Patricia Nelson Limerick in *The Legacy of Conquest* (1987), challenge this view, arguing that: “Reorganized, the history of the West is a study of a place undergoing conquest and never fully escaping its consequences.”² Together, these perspectives show that the American frontier is both myth and material reality, a space where ideals of freedom and self-reliance coexist with histories of violence, exclusion, and ecological transformation. This remains a key metaphor for understanding the American experience and its contradictions.

For the Irish, whose modern history is inextricably bound to patterns of displacement and migration, the frontier represented both a refuge from colonial constraint and a stage upon which questions of identity could be redefined. Waves of Irish emigrants, driven by repeated famines during the eighteenth century, and the movement of large masses during the years of the Great Famine between 1845 and 1852; moreover, political repression, and economic precarity, forged new communities across the United States, bringing with them the cultural memory of a homeland still haunted by dispossession. The large number of Irish immigrants who arrived on American soil were ready to confront the American frontier with the aim of creating a new life for themselves aimed at forgetting their poverty-stricken past.

Kevin Barry’s 2024 novel, *The Heart in Winter*, situates this historical movement within the frontier town of Butte, Montana, in 1891, a site emblematic

¹ Turner, Frederick Jackson: *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, *The Frontier in American History*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920, 4.

² Limerick, P. N.: *The legacy of conquest: The unbroken past of the American West*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1987, 26.

of both Irish labor migration and transatlantic cultural exchange. By depicting Irish immigrants navigating the moral and physical extremities of the American West, Barry reframes the frontier not merely as a geographical boundary but as a metaphorical space where Irishness itself is tested and transformed. This essay examines how *The Heart in Winter* maps the experience of the Irish diaspora onto the mythos of the American frontier, revealing the ways in which cultural memory, exile, and endurance converge to produce a distinctly transatlantic narrative of belonging.

The work also draws on Jan Assmann's distinction between communicative and cultural memory in his essay on *Collective memory and Cultural Identity* (1995). The novel illustrates how collective Irish memories as legends, traumas, and storytelling survive beyond the living generations through narrative, imagery, and symbolic acts. Pierre Nora's concept of "lieux de mémoire" ("sites of memory"), in his work *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire* (1989), further illuminates how both physical spaces, such as the copper mining town of Butte, and metaphorical landscapes of winter, silence, exile, and escape function as crucial repositories for diasporic memory. Scholars of diaspora emphasize how texts mediate memory across temporal and geographic boundaries. Additionally, the concept of storytelling serves as a cultural and communicative tool that strengthens Irish identity and memories. Barry's portrayal of Irish identity spares no illusions. His characters are misfits, drunkards and utterly lost and fragmented souls, who are not meant to perform great deeds. There is a strong sense of the *carpe diem* present in the novel highlighted by Barry's grotesque humor, exaggerated violence, and lyrical prose that transform the frontier into a site where Irishness is continually reconstructed against the backdrop of an unforgiving landscape.

THE FRONTIER: SURVIVAL

The establishment of Butte, Montana, as the primary setting for *The Heart in Winter* is the foundational act of Barry's creative work that ensures the literal mapping of Irishness onto the American frontier. Butte functions as a foreign landscape that is ultimately a test of endurance and survival for its newly arrived immigrants.

In the late 1800s, large numbers of copper miners from County Cork moved to Butte, Montana, with the hope of better job opportunities and wages than in Ireland. By 1891, Butte's copper mines had attracted several waves of Irish immigrants, up to "ten thousand in number", according to Kevin Barry.³ Butte became a community whose very social structure was a mirror, albeit

³ Barry, Kevin: *The Heart in Winter*, YouTube, *Politics and Prose*, 11 July 2024.

distorted, of the parochial structures left behind in County Cork or Limerick. This frontier town, described with harsh, evocative realism, is a microcosm of the diasporic experience, where every street and saloon becomes a space defined by the negotiation between the past and the present.

The first chapter of the novel titled “The First Encounter”, launches the story by placing the reader “at the hour of dusk” as the main protagonist, Tom Rourke, stumbles through the streets of Butte. Barry’s underlying humor, present from the beginning, is used to describe his main character as a “patent Irish [...], some crazy old meathead in a motley of rags and filthy buckskins, [...], the eyes burning now like hot stars, [...], and he lurched and tottered on broken boots like a nightmare overgrown child”.⁴ By following Tom Rourke from street to street, Barry draws a minutely detailed map of the town which is by no means tranquil and harmonious. The passages of the town by night contradict the descriptive lyrical beauty of the landscape that surround the town as “in the evening sun the East Ridge glowed sombre and gold and an ignorant wind brought news of the winter”.⁵

The sheer physicality of the American West with its brutal winter, and unforgiving mountains acts as a demanding canvas upon which the fluid identity of the Irish immigrant is painted. Barry’s descriptions of the Irish are by no means favorable. And perhaps it is no coincidence that the Irish characters featuring in the story meet Tom in one of several pubs, bars and saloons. They are either miners, or like Tom, the down and under outcasts of the town. As Tom Rourke contemplates: “All he wanted from life was quiet and stillness. There was hope of neither in this place.”⁶ Crucially, the town’s vibrant yet precarious social fabric, characterized by Irish-led bars and saloons, and tightly knit, often desperate, social networks, illustrates how cultural affiliations are not erased by displacement but are simply re-charted across a new and hostile terrain. This is clearly illustrated by Barry as the reader follows Tom Rourke through the night as he visits the various bars: the “Pay Day”, “Collar & Elbow”, “Graveyard”, “Alley Cat”.⁷ This foundational setting establishes that in *The Heart in Winter*, the persistence of Irish cultural identity is not merely an internal, sentimental process, but an external, geographical one, rooted in the very soil and social friction of the American West.

⁴ Barry, Kevin: *The Heart in Winter*, UK: Cannongate Books Ltd., 2024, 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

METAPHORICAL IMAGERY

Winter, silence, exile, and escape emerge as the dominant motifs through which Irish cultural memory is encoded into and traced onto the American frontier. If Butte's physical geography provides the raw material for diasporic mapping, it is through these interwoven images that memory, loss, and endurance are given symbolic form. Barry's use of metaphor transforms the harsh external world into a site of internal reckoning, where the landscape itself becomes a text upon which the trauma and persistence of Irish identity are inscribed. The interplay of these motifs not only defines the emotional texture of the novel but also reveals how memory survives through atmosphere, affect, and suggestion rather than through direct narration.

Winter functions in the novel as both setting and symbol. Barry is very specific about the locality and its time frame, stating "It was the October again",⁸ and continues by later adding, "The winter it came slowly west."⁹ The characters are indifferent to their surroundings within the town, yet when Tom and Polly reach the "edges of the forest pretty quick even on foot" and they realize that "feeling the cold all the same it was a good painful cold that made you truly alive".¹⁰ The presence of nature, and the physical attributes of winter contradict the indifference and chaos of the surrounding world felt within the constraints of Butte. There is a seeming paralysis that afflicts the community which is caught between remembering and forgetting. The recurring coldness of the landscape, and its snow, its stillness, serves as a corporeal metaphor for memory's endurance and fragility, preserving the past in a frozen state that is both protective and suffocating. In this suspended environment, the act of remembering becomes an act of survival. The characters' lives, bound by labor and hardship, mirror the seasonal cycles that alternately conceal and reveal traces of the old world. Winter thus stands not only for cultural stagnation but for the latent potential of renewal: the frozen terrain hints that, beneath its surface, memory waits to thaw and speak again. Memory, however, is suppressed by the fragmented existence of the characters in the novel. Tom's wasted life and suffering are reflection of the misery and hardship shared by the other Irish immigrants and immigrants from other parts of Europe, as well (Slovaks and Croats are also mentioned in the novel).

The cold and harsh winter landscape presented in the novel is intricately woven into a romantic love affair that eventually takes a tragic turn. Tom and Polly are destined to meet; they are two wayward souls who have lost themselves within the labyrinth of life. Their passionate romance signifies the heated

⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁹ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰ Ibid., 47.

“heart” within the title that is brought to life in the winter of 1891, because “whatever their souls were made of they were made of the same substance”.¹¹ As a result, this intense and fierce affair is capable of jolting Tom out of his stupor and destructive present life.

Silence, by contrast, captures the ineffable dimension of diasporic experience, the unspoken griefs, the inarticulate heritage that resist translation. In Barry’s depiction, silence is not simply the absence of speech but the resonance of what cannot be voiced. It pervades domestic spaces, communal gatherings, and even acts of humor, shaping an atmosphere in which the characters’ identities are defined as much by omission as by expression. This silence becomes a sacred medium through which cultural memory is both protected and obscured, demanding that readers listen for meaning in what is withheld rather than declared. This deeply penetrating silence contrasts with the constant noise of the town, because as Polly observes, “the city of Butte it turned out was no kind of sleeping town. This place was screeching and crazy and loud as the depths of hell”.¹²

Beyond the noisy and chaotic Butte, nature and the untouched wilderness of the frontier confront Tom and Polly with a silence, “a spell of pure quietness like they were alone entirely in the world”.¹³ Even as Polly “walked a slow circle around the shack and listened. There was nothing to be heard of men or horses in the approach of any direction.”¹⁴ The intense power of silence that surrounds them strengthens their feeling of awe mixed with fear and wonder. As the two characters travel from Butte to “Utah & Northern at Pocatello Junction”,¹⁵ heading west toward their destination to California, their fear is strengthened by their resolution to reach the sea and begin a new life.

Finally, exile and escape complete the triad, binding these motifs into a shared psychological condition. This defines the liminal position of the Irish immigrant caught perpetually between nostalgia for a lost homeland and the practical necessity of adaptation in the new world. Exile and escape are not merely spatial but temporal: they fracture continuity, forcing memory to become portable and adaptive. Memory is triggered through the Irish accents Tom immediately recognizes and makes a mental note of, identifying the locality in Ireland. While another longing that is only realized after he meets Polly and they decide to escape is Tom’s determination to head for the sea, “for the sea is what it is”. And he also adds that “It’s not natural to live away from the sea. [...] I wasn’t right in myself in Butte. On account of the no sea. Day one I wasn’t

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹² *Ibid.*, 39.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.

right.”¹⁶ Tom’s intention to move by the sea with his love is an unconscious effort to intensify his longing for the home, his identity and heritage he left behind in Ireland. By continually invoking winter, silence, exile and escape, therefore, Barry constructs an aesthetic of displacement in which landscape and psyche mirror each other. The result is a portrait of diasporic endurance where memory, though muted and refracted, remains an active force, an invisible inheritance that shapes the characters’ emotions, gestures, and imaginations long after their departure from Ireland.

CULTURAL MEMORY: PERSISTENCE AND DISTORTION

Cultural memory in the Irish diaspora endures through a complex process of persistence, reshaping, and distortion. As Aleida Assmann observes, cultural memory functions as a “system of texts, images, and rituals” through which communities sustain continuity with their pasts.¹⁷ Displacement, rather than erasing memory, prompts its reconstitution across new environments and generations. Within this framework, Pierre Nora’s concept of “lieux de mémoire” *drawing* attention to “sites where memory crystallizes and secretes itself”, shows that once the “milieux de mémoire” (“realms of memory”) have disappeared, it becomes central to understanding how diasporic Irish identities are preserved and reinvented.¹⁸

For Irish migrants and their descendants, emigration to America severed the intimate “milieux de mémoire” of rural Ireland, that is its oral storytelling, Catholic ritual, and landscape, necessitating new mnemonic anchors. These anchors emerged in both symbolic and material forms. Dialects that still echo Irish intonations, intimate storytelling that re-creates lost conversations, and ritualized behaviors, drinking toasts, shared jokes, and communal songs, which function as embodied sites of continuity. These ritualized behaviors and storytelling heavy with Irish intonations that depict local gossip between Irish expatriates come alive through Barry’s humor within the novel. Such practices externalize what Jan Assmann calls cultural memory: a mode of remembrance that “transcends the bounds of communicative memory” and persists through symbolic representation.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid., 124.

¹⁷ Assmann, Aleida: *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*. Cambridge University Press, 2011, 37.

¹⁸ Nora, Pierre: *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire, Representations*, no. 26, Spring 1989, 7.

¹⁹ Assmann, Jan: *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*. Stanford University Press, 2006, 6.

Symbolically, rituals like St. Patrick's Day parades throughout the world have evolved from modest religious observances into civic spectacles, as performances that reaffirm Irishness through repetition and visibility. Declan Kiberd observes that such diasporic ceremonies "translate loss into ceremony", turning trauma into continuity.²⁰ Similarly, Luke Gibbons describes a persistent "poetics of loss and recovery", in which exile functions simultaneously as "a wound and a source of creativity".²¹ In this sense, Nora's "lieux de mémoire" in diaspora are not mere relics but dynamic forms of cultural translation; and what Aleida Assmann terms "memory work" is the conscious rearticulation of identity through narrative and performance. The act of storytelling and relating gossip, hence different versions told of the same incident, clearly highlight Barry's creative imagination as Tom formulates poems and ballads in his head which he enjoys singing. This act of harking back to an ancient tradition displays a strong sense of collective memory, albeit a fragmented one.

The persistence of memory inevitably involves distortion. Nora cautions that "lieux de mémoire" "thrive only because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning".²² Irish-American remembrance demonstrates this elasticity. The Great Famine, for example, is refigured as a unifying narrative of suffering and endurance, while the image of Ireland itself becomes idealized, as a land incorporating the pastoral, pure, and spiritual, altogether an aspirational contrast to the industrial modernity of America. Gibbons argues that such mythic constructions are not falsifications but "acts of imaginative reparation", necessary to preserve meaning amid displacement.²³ Through selective recollection and ritual performance, memory becomes a vehicle of identity persistence that shapes belonging by transforming history into heritage.

Generational transmission intensifies this dynamic. Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory", the "memory of memory" that descendants inherit through stories and images explains how later Irish-American generations engaged affectively with ancestral trauma.²⁴ These inherited memories are imaginative rather than experiential, yet they retain emotional authenticity. Songs, photographs, and symbols of Irish nationalism sustain the emotional continuity of exile, ensuring that the past remains a living presence even when its direct witnesses are gone. Such mediated recollection demonstrates, in Jan

²⁰ Kiberd, Declan: *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*. Harvard University Press, 1995, 312.

²¹ Gibbons, Luke: *Transformations in Irish Culture*, Cork University Press, 1996, 27.

²² Nora, Pierre: Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire. *Representations*, no. 26, Spring 1989, 19.

²³ Gibbons, Luke: *Gaelic Gothic: Race, Colonization and Irish Culture*. Arlen House, 2002, 65.

²⁴ Hirsch, Marianne: *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Harvard University Press, 1997, 22.

Assmann's terms, memory's "identity-forming function": its power to bind dispersed communities through shared imagination.²⁵

This interplay of persistence and distortion becomes especially visible in Kevin Barry's *The Heart in Winter*, which transposes Irish cultural memory onto the frontier landscape of the American West. The novel employs winter's imagery, sonic silences, and the motif of exile and escape to dramatize how memory adapts to alien terrain. Through grotesque humor, stark violence, and lyrical reflection, Barry transforms the frontier into a site of memory, a stage upon which Irishness is renegotiated. The novel's characters preserve ancestral sensibilities through irony, song, and storytelling, enacting the very mechanisms of diasporic memory outlined by Assmann and Nora. Exile and escape here are both loss and invention: the re-creation of home through acts of imagination. As Barry suggests, cultural identity endures not because it resists change, but because it can be remade. And through Tom's character Barry manages to re-create a powerful and unified sense of Irishness which Tom, however, would rather distance himself from than adhere to (like connecting to God, or listening to his premonitions).

In this light, Irish-American "lieux de mémoire", whether parades, folk songs, or Barry's fictional frontiers, embody the paradox of memory's endurance: it persists precisely because it transforms. Diasporic remembrance converts absence into narrative, displacement into ritual, and trauma into continuity. Through these mechanisms, Irish cultural memory remains both volatile and tenacious; overall, an evolving project of collective self-definition that binds the past to the present through the creative work of remembering.

STYLISTIC STRATEGIES:

GROTESQUE HUMOR AND VIOLENCE AS CARRIERS OF MEMORY

In *The Heart in Winter*, Kevin Barry transforms style into a medium of remembrance, allowing grotesque humor, violence, and lyricism to serve as aesthetic conduits for cultural memory. If the previous section traced how the Irish diaspora reconstructs identity through ritual and narrative, this section explores how Barry's stylistic techniques perform that same work on a formal level. His prose enacts the volatility of memory, its capacity to veer between laughter and pain, brutality and tenderness, thereby revealing that style itself can function as a mnemonic archive of exile.

Barry's use of grotesque humor emerges as an inheritance of Irish modernism, a tool that both destabilizes and humanizes the diasporic subject. The absurdity that pervades his characters' speech and actions recalls the dark

²⁵ Assmann, Jan: *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*. Stanford University Press, 2006, 8.

wit of Flann O'Brien, whose *The Third Policeman* renders existential despair through comic absurdity. Like O'Brien, Barry employs humor as what Declan Kiberd calls "a strategy of survival" within a history of colonization and dislocation.²⁶ In *The Heart in Winter*, this humor functions as cultural self-defense: it ironizes suffering, converts trauma into anecdote, and reclaims agency through laughter. An appropriate example is how the "news of the lovers' fate travelled the high country and finally got back to Butte", however "it got even more fucked up and tangled and there was just no way of telling truth from falsehood anymore".²⁷ Scenes of grotesque exaggeration, such as barroom violence, drunken camaraderie, or surreal encounters on the American frontier distort reality in ways that both conceal and expose the psychic residue of displacement. Such tonal instability mirrors the diasporic condition itself as being precarious, performative, and perpetually on the edge of dissolution.

In the novel, violence may serve as a stylistic and thematic conduit for memory. Barry's depictions of sudden brutality, such as gunfire erupting in snowbound silence, Tom's final showdown with Kitto – a ritualized cruelty of masculine confrontation, evoke a spectacle that one may rightly ask whether this is also an inherited grammar of survival. The excessiveness of his violence, its abruptness and theatricality, recalls the narrative rhythms of Irish oral storytelling, where communal trauma is retold in heightened, almost mythic form. The instance of Tom's final battle to save Polly, resembles graphic-like violence: "Tom Rourke drew his own knife and turned his mouth to a sneer and walked on down to meet him [Kitto]".²⁸ It is questionable whether this scene externalizes the unresolved memory of famine, exile, and colonial suppression, a concept that Luke Gibbons terms the "psychic residue of a long history of dispossession".²⁹ Or it is simply Barry's black humor at its best, ingeniously taking a commonly recognizable image from a Hollywood western movie.

Barry restrains this grotesque and violent world with moments of startling lyricism, where brutality yields to reflection. His sentences oscillate between colloquial banter and poetic cadence, echoing what Seamus Deane identifies in Joyce as "the lyric recuperation of a violated landscape".³⁰ In Barry's prose, winter's desolation transforms into a canvas for memory's persistence: snow becomes both erasure and illumination, silence both threat and solace. These lyrical passages function as apertures through which suppressed feeling surfaces, allowing the novel to convert pain into aesthetic resonance. As Aleida

²⁶ Kiberd, Declan: *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*. Harvard University Press, 1995, 421.

²⁷ Barry, Kevin: *The Heart in Winter*, Canongate Books Ltd., 2024, 193.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 192.

²⁹ Gibbons, Luke: *Gaelic Gothic: Race, Colonization and Irish Culture*. Arlen House, 2002, 82.

³⁰ Deane, Seamus: *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880–1980*. Faber and Faber, 1985, 144.

Assmann argues, artistic form can “stabilize and transmit” cultural memory by giving trauma a communicable shape.³¹ Barry’s lyricism performs precisely this stabilization, rendering the inexpressible visible in sound and rhythm.

Dark humor and lyricism thus operate as complementary strategies. The former exposes the absurdity of survival; the latter dignifies it. Together, they embody the paradox of diasporic memory, which is basically its need to both remember and transform. Humor prevents the past from ossifying into tragedy, while lyricism redeems the grotesque with grace. In combining these registers, Barry situates *The Heart in Winter* within an Irish aesthetic lineage that includes not only O’Brien but also Beckett and Joyce, writers who turned linguistic play, absurdity, and pain into tools of cultural endurance. As Beckett once wrote, “nothing is funnier than unhappiness”;³² Barry extends that insight into the twenty-first century, using humor and violence to map how exile’s memory survives through style.

Ultimately, Barry’s grotesque and lyrical language reimagine memory as a living, performative act. Violence marks the persistence of historical trauma, humor negotiates its emotional legibility, and lyricism translates both into aesthetic continuity. Through these stylistic strategies, *The Heart in Winter* transforms the legacy of Irish displacement into art. This is a narrative where the struggle to survive becomes indistinguishable from the struggle to remember. In this way, Barry’s fiction demonstrates that cultural memory can be preserved in tone, rhythm, and the dark laughter that binds a person to their past.

TRANSNATIONAL IRISHNESS: RECONSTRUCTING IDENTITY

As *The Heart in Winter* unfolds across the liminal space of the American frontier, it envisions a form of Irishness that exceeds national borders by presenting a transnational identity forged through the negotiation of memory and displacement. The novel’s diasporic consciousness aligns with what Michael Rothberg terms “multidirectional memory,” the idea that collective memories “interact, overlap, and borrow from each other” rather than existing in isolation.³³ In Barry’s frontier world, Irish remembrance does not remain confined to the past or to Ireland itself; instead, it circulates through encounters with new landscapes, peoples, and myths. Cultural memory thus becomes both adaptive and relational, shaped by global contexts rather than national continuity.

³¹ Assmann, Aleida: *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, 83.

³² Beckett, Samuel: *Endgame*, Faber and Faber, 1958, 18.

³³ Rothberg, Michael: *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford University Press, 2009, 3.

Stephen Black's work on diaspora emphasizes that transnational identities emerge from "the productive tension between place and displacement".³⁴ Barry's fiction dramatizes this tension through its hybrid settings and mythic inflections. The frontier is not merely a geographic space but a symbolic threshold where Irish cultural memory meets other histories of migration (Croatian, Slovakian, Métis, Cornish, Swedish, etc.), violence, and survival. In this setting, memory becomes a creative force of reconstruction: the past is reimagined through the surreal, the grotesque, and the lyrical, which allows Irishness to evolve without losing its coherence.

Mythic and surreal elements within *The Heart in Winter* appear in the form of ghostly presences (the stranger who gives Tom advice), forebodings and premonitions (on future happenings, meetings, death), and the heightened lyricism of the landscape (winter, snow, wind, starlings, etc.), function as aesthetic strategies for reassembling fractured identity. These stylistic dislocations parallel the temporal and geographic ruptures of diaspora itself, revealing what Rothberg describes as "the transnational circulation of memory as both trauma and resource".³⁵ Barry's use of myth bridges this circulation, transforming memory into a living, imaginative practice that transcends origin. His characters carry Ireland not as a fixed homeland but as a portable constellation of stories, symbols, and sounds, which adapts to foreign terrains.

In constructing an Irishness that survives across displacement, Barry's novel contributes to a vision of cultural identity as fluid, performative, and globally networked. The frontier becomes a mirror of the diasporic psyche: both desolate and generative, alien and strangely familiar. Through its surreal poetics and tonal multiplicity, *The Heart in Winter* affirms that Irishness persists not through geographical rootedness but through its capacity for imaginative reinvention that can create a continuity sustained, paradoxically, by motion itself.

CONCLUSION:

MEMORY, STYLE, AND TRANSNATIONAL CONTINUITY

In *The Heart in Winter*, Kevin Barry unites form and history, showing that the endurance of Irish identity depends on both memory's persistence and art's capacity to transform it. Across the essay's preceding sections, cultural memory emerged as both a thematic and stylistic phenomenon: from Pierre Nora's symbolic concept of "lieux de mémoire" that sustain diasporic continuity to the grotesque humor and lyrical violence that give trauma an aesthetic

³⁴ Black, Stephen: *The Irish Diaspora and Transnational Identity*, Routledge, 2018, 112.

³⁵ Rothberg, Michael: *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford University Press, 2009, 19.

voice. Barry's novel extends this dynamic into the global sphere, reimagining Irishness not as an inherited essence but as an evolving practice of storytelling. Barry's story presents a haunting love story of two misfits; fallen souls whose fragmented existence portrays the harsh and brutal reality of the American frontier. Instead of presenting fairy tales, Barry reveals the other side of the coin.

By mapping exile onto the mythic and physical space of the American frontier, Barry transforms displacement into a source of creative energy. His use of metaphor, humor, and lyricism allows Irishness to inhabit new geographies without erasing their origins. As Declan Kiberd suggests, the Irish imagination has always "converted defeat into performance";³⁶ Barry reconfigures that performance for a transnational age, turning memory into narrative art. The grotesque becomes a way to confront trauma, humor a language of survival, and lyricism as a mode of reconciliation.

Ultimately, *The Heart in Winter* demonstrates both the instability and persistence of diasporic identity. Its fusion of history and style reaffirms that collective memory does not vanish with migration, but rather it migrates itself, adapting to new cultural ecologies as the American frontier. The novel thus participates in a broader redefinition of Irishness as a transnational formation, one that links cultural memory to narrative form and imaginative geography. In doing so, Barry confirms literature's enduring role as both preserver and performer of shared memory: the art through which history survives, transforms, and continues to speak across borders. This notion complements Barry's final thoughts in his novel: "the wind blows and the past shifts again and rearranges"³⁷.

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³⁶ Kiberd, Declan: *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, Harvard University Press, 1995, 412.

³⁷ Barry, Kevin: *The Heart in Winter*, Canongate Books Ltd., 2024, 214.

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CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON IRISH WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS' WORKS BY HUNGARIAN SCHOLARS

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Abstract

In 2007 an article was published on the subject of Irish Studies in Hungary, which assessed the critical reception of Irish literature by Hungarian scholars up to 2006. That article abounds in the names of Joyce, Yeats, Beckett and Brian Friel, while it cites only a few papers which analyze Irish literary works by women. To a measure, the present essay is a sequel to that article, finding that nearly two decades later the balance has fortunately changed since many Irish women authors' works have become the subject of Hungarian scholarship in the meantime. For the purpose of this essay, I have selected only around a dozen critical inquiries into the respective achievements of Irish women playwrights, given the richness of the material. The authors covered range from eighteenth-century Frances Sheridan to writers who began their career in the theatre world of the twenty-first century, for example Lucy Caldwell in Northern Ireland. This essay surveys monographs, articles and essays using a comparative approach where appropriate and attempts to offer a sound introduction to the selected critical texts.

KEYWORDS

Irish women playwrights, Irish theatre, Hungarian scholarship, monographs and shorter studies, critical approaches

In 2007 I was commissioned to write an article on Irish Studies in Hungary for the US-based journal *New Hibernia Review*, which would aim to assess the critical reception of Irish literature by Hungarian scholars up to 2006. That article abounds in the names of Joyce, Yeats, Beckett, and Brian Friel, while it cites only a few papers which analyze Irish literary works by

women.¹ To a measure, the present essay is a sequel to that article, demonstrating that nearly two decades later the balance has fortunately changed since many Irish women authors' works have become the subject of Hungarian scholarship in the meantime. This essay focuses on over a dozen critical inquiries into the respective achievements of Irish women playwrights, selected from a vast number of texts written by Hungarian scholars and published in Hungary or abroad. The authors of monographs and shorter studies covered in the critical material range from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first inclusive. I discuss the selected material following the chronological order of the studied Irish women authors and works to demonstrate that aspects of all the major periods of Irish theater history with a strong female contribution have been researched by Hungarian scholars. In sampling and assessing these achievements I focus on both thematic and theoretical issues as they appear in the Hungarian critical texts.

Gabriella Hartvig, scholar of primarily eighteenth-century literature, prose works in particular, has published on Frances Sheridan (1724–1766) and her contemporaries extensively. In her essay addressing Sheridan's first and lasting success, the epistolary novel *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761), Hartvig writes: "Sheridan's other works remained advertised through *Sidney Bidulph*. This shows that Sheridan must have remained fairly known in the eighteenth century; but she could never exceed the success of *Sidney Bidulph* with her later works."² The latter include three plays and, in fact, the first of them, *The Discovery* (1763) did earn considerable success as a sentimental comedy, even though it was more complex than most contemporary representatives of that popular dramatic genre. In 2024, to mark the three hundredth anniversary of Sheridan's birth, Hartvig and Csaba Maczelka edited a collection of essays on Sheridan and her English contemporary, Margaret Cavendish for the journal *FOCUS: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies*. In their "Introduction" they note: "the theme of this issue is the work of female authors in England and Ireland during the period 1660–1837, commonly referred to as the long eighteenth century."³ Beside Irish scholar Clíona Ó Gallchoir's leading essay in *FOCUS* 2024, my contribution titled "From Frances Sheridan's *A Trip to Bath* (1765) to Elizabeth Kuti's *The Whisperers* (1999): Questions of Genre, Adaptation Strategies and Authorship" is a paper dealing with Sheridan's afterlife manifest in Elizabeth Kuti's (1969) completion of her unfinished

¹ Kurdi, Mária: Irish Studies in Hungary: Dreams and Reality, *New Hibernia Review* 11, 1 (2007), 137–151.

² Hartvig, Gabriella: Early Advertisements of *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, in Zsuzsa Csikai and Andrew C. Rouse (eds): *Critical Essays in Honour of Mária Kurdi*, Martonfa: SPECHEL e-editions, 2017, 60.

³ Hartvig, Gabriella – Maczelka, Csaba: Introduction, *FOCUS: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies* XIV (2024), 9.

play *A Trip to Bath* (also known as *A Journey to Bath*) under a new title, *The Whisperers*. In this essay I survey Sheridan's works for the stage and examine the generic characteristics and relation to other eighteenth-century comedies of the unfinished and never produced *A Trip to Bath*. The main part of my essay is devoted to the analysis of the ways and modes in which Kuti re-imagines the missing fourth and fifth acts of the original and succeeds in keeping her textual intervention and work of completion to fit Sheridan's style and the possible direction of her play's plot. Relying on adaptation theories I also discuss the play as an adaptation, a unique kind of collaboration between women authors across the centuries. To sum up my investigation I claim that "By its devices and dramaturgical choices *The Whisperers* re-animates the social and emotional variedness of the best of eighteenth-century comedy, along with its embedded social critique."⁴

Arguably, the tradition of Irish women's writing for the stage began during the period of the Irish Dramatic Revival, continuing from 1900 onwards. The first major female playwright was Lady Augusta Gregory (1852–1932), one of the first directors of the Abbey Theatre and an acclaimed writer for the Irish stage. Probably the first book-length study on Lady Augusta Gregory in Central Europe was a doctoral dissertation at Pázmány Péter University of Budapest, written by Mária Margit Flachner Szekeresné and published in 1931, still in Gregory's lifetime. Gregory's pivotal role in the foundation of the Irish national theater is duly presented in the book along with central features of the Cultural Revival that triggered the renaissance of the genre of the drama. Regarding the oeuvre of Gregory, the author's discussion of the plays in groups according to their sources highlights diversity while their chief value is shown to be the intimate and complex insight they offer into the communal life of rural Irish people. The choice of Gregory, a cultural nationalist in colonized Ireland for the topic of a dissertation in post-Trianon Hungary where national feelings had just been reawakened by the wound of losing more than half of the former territory of the country, comes as little surprise. Both countries shared an interest in how literature and theater could contribute to raising the nation's consciousness of its own history and cultural worth. At the same time, concerning the politics of the Abbey Theatre, Szekeresné highlights that the managing trio, Yeats, Gregory, and Synge insisted on maintaining artistic value against the claims of political propaganda, and she pinpoints the satirical vein in Gregory's representation of Irish colonial society.⁵

⁴ Kurdi, Mária: From Frances Sheridan's *A Trip to Bath* (1765) to Elizabeth Kuti's *The Whisperers* (1999): Questions of Genre, Adaptation Strategies and Authorship, *FOCUS: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies* XIV (2024), 53.

⁵ Szekeresné Flachner, Mária Margit: *Lady Augusta Gregory: Az ír nemzeti színpad megalapítása* (Lady Augusta Gregory: The Foundation of the Irish National Stage), Budapest: Magyar Királyi Pázmány Péter Tudományegyetem Angol Philológiai Intézet, 1931, 17.

Decades later, Márton Mesterházi wrote about Gregory as playwright in a chapter of his book *Ír ember színpadon* (The Irish on the Stage, 2006). Working as a dramaturge of the Hungarian Radio for many years, literary scholar and translator Mesterházi developed a fine sense of what made a good play and recognized the merits while also the occasional flaws of Gregory's one-act comedies. He compares *Hyacinth Halvey* (1906) with the more widely known *Spreading the News* (1904) and prefers the former for the greater subtlety of its farcical techniques while considering *The Workhouse Ward* (1908) as, perhaps, the best of this genre by Gregory.⁶ Mesterházi translated both *The Gaol Gate* (1909) and *The Rising of the Moon* (1907), which he also adapted for the Hungarian Radio. Discussing these plays, he focuses mainly on the artistic use of language: the keening in *The Gaol Gate* and the power of a popular song in *The Rising of the Moon*.⁷ Of the mythology-based plays he chooses *Grania* (1912) for a detailed scrutiny in terms of its dramaturgical innovations, examining its structural principles and the stunning *coup de théâtre* turns of the plot including Grania's sudden decision to become Finn's wife at the end.⁸ Surprisingly, Mesterházi pays a considerable amount of attention to *The Golden Apple* (1920), one of Gregory's plays for children, tracing its similarities with the Hungarian Mihály Vörösmarty's poetic play *Csongor és Tünde* (*Csongor and Tünde*).⁹ Less is written in the book chapter about Gregory's religious plays, of which only one seems to have merit for Mesterházi, namely the miracle *Dave* (1927), the writer's last drama. In his opinion, the fate of Dave, a young servant despised by all in a squire's house except for the master's wife, allegorizes the destiny of the Irish people who, like Dave, see a vision in a dream which finally enables them to free themselves from oppression.¹⁰ One of the biographers of Gregory, Mary Lou Kohfeldt claims that this last play has a narrative arc suggestive of what motivated the writer's deeds through her life.¹¹

Eglantina Remport's monograph, *Lady Gregory and Irish National Theatre: Art, Drama, Politics* (2018) is a pivotal work in Hungarian scholarship about Irish women playwrights. It differs from the previous three monographs on Gregory by Anglophone authors in its more specific approach, which is interdisciplinary, intra- and intercultural. Remport's ambitious description of the intellectual and cultural developments in England and Europe which Gregory became familiar with during the years of her marriage to the art lover Sir William Gregory, is

⁶ Mesterházi, Márton: *Ír ember színpadon* (The Irish on the Stage), Budapest, Liget Alapítvány Műhely, 2006, 93–95, 101.

⁷ Ibid., 96–100.

⁸ Ibid., 116–18.

⁹ Ibid., 107.

¹⁰ Ibid., 106.

¹¹ Mary Lou Kohfeldt: *Lady Gregory: The Woman behind the Irish Renaissance*, London, André Deutsch, 1985, 291.

exceptionally rich in detail. An Anglo-Irish landowner, Lady Gregory was also interested in how the arts could contribute to the improvement of the quality of life, which reflected her concern with the needs of ordinary people, especially in Ireland. Rempert claims that “her views on the social function of the arts and the social responsibility of the artist were shaped, in large measure, by Ruskin’s social and political thought”.¹² Gregory’s participation in the Irish Literary Revival was not separable from this influence, Rempert opines, as in the Irish milieu “she felt that the possibility of establishing a theatre along lines proposed by Ruskin and his disciples was far greater in an archipelagic capital than in the centre of the British Empire”.¹³

About a dozen of Gregory’s plays are tackled in the monograph, partly different from Mesterházi’s selection. They are discussed in loose groups to provide an informed analysis of their concern with social issues, their connection with the fine arts, history or contemporary politics, and at times a mixture of these. The premiere of Gregory’s first play of single authorship, *Twenty-five* (1903) coincided with the passing of the Wyndham Land Act (1903), a political event instigating her “to draw attention to the problems faced by the rural population of Ireland” at that time, as Rempert points out.¹⁴ Also, Gregory became aware of a developing co-operative movement for the improvement of Irish agriculture and welcomed it especially because of its potential to effect personal and moral advancement. Writing about *Hyacinth Halvey*, Rempert claims that Gregory placed “the question of Halvey’s character formation at the centre of the play” while in *The Jackdaw* (1908) she “contrasts sharply the co-operative ideal of achieving a special status within a community through honest endeavour, and the inflated egoism displayed by the self-professed ‘hero’ of the community”.¹⁵ Rempert notes that sophisticated visual qualities appear in, for instance, the plays *The Image* (1909) and *The Full Moon* (2010), which import aspects of the “painting-in-the-painting” device into drama. She points out that in *The Image* each of the characters’ stories about the whales lying stranded on the seaside is different yet they all contribute to “representing the main scene of a painting” while the mountain man, Malachi Naughton’s “tale of Hugh O’Lorrha, about whom nobody seems to know anything, begins first to penetrate and then to take over the main story of the play”.¹⁶ Likewise, Rempert continues, in *The Full Moon* the background story is by Cracked Mary, the traditional wise woman figure known from folklore as Melissa Sihra

¹² Rempert, Eglantina: *Lady Gregory and Irish National Theatre: Art, Drama, Politics*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 102–103.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

refers to her,¹⁷ whose story “about a supernatural dog begins to take over the foreground story of the young man waiting for the train to leave the village”, turning the man into a raging and barking mad dog.¹⁸ In the analysis the “narrative-in-the-narrative” term would work just as well, I believe.

The monograph focuses on the pictorial, artistic, and social significance of Christian and biblical symbolism of certain works by Gregory. In *The Travelling Man* (1905), the author explores the connections between religion and the peace-making value of art (originally an idea of Yeats), highlighting that the visitor, Jesus in disguise, “transforms into an artist in the instance of building the paradise-like garden with the plates of the child’s mother” and gives the boy a beautiful, magic branch. Thus, the artist can become a facilitator of changes, Rempfort suggests, claiming that Gregory, like Ruskin, possessed a Christian sense of responsibility to do good which she “carried over into her work for the Abbey Theatre”¹⁹ with the aim to educate the people. The book draws a convincing parallel between Gregory’s Christian plays and those of the 1916 martyred writer, Patrick Pearse, who also used Christian symbolism and artist figures; in his *The Singer* (1915) the singer can be identified with Jesus. However, Rempfort clarifies the difference in the two writers’ approach to the theme: as a revolutionary, Pearse believed in the necessity of blood sacrifice therefore inevitable self-sacrifice, while “Gregory’s visionary Christ-figure [in *The Travelling Man*] was a bearer of good news and the bringer of a living branch”.²⁰

Turning to Gregory’s historical plays, an example Rempfort succinctly highlights is *The Wrens* (1914), which Gregory wrote during the third Home Rule debate in the British parliament. Establishing a historical analogue, the play is set during the heated milieu of deciding about the independence of the country just before voting on the Act of Union between Britain and Ireland in 1800. First performed in London, it was, in Rempfort’s opinion, a kind of appeal to the British that the failure of passing the Home Rule Act the third time might result in armed rebellion by Irish republicans,²¹ which actually did happen in 1916. As in *The White Cockade* (1905) and *The Canavans* (1906), “the theme of domestic preoccupations outweigh[ing] national sentiment” governs the plot in *The Wrens* too, the scholar claims, which is a sound observation, yet Rempfort does not seem to notice Gregory’s ambition to represent history as experienced by the lower groups of the society. Instead, Rempfort underscores

¹⁷ Melissa Sihra: *Spinning Gold: Thread of Augusta Gregory and Marina Carr*, in D. Clare – F. McDonagh – J. Nakase (eds): *The Golden Thread: Irish Women Playwrights, 1716–2016. Volume Two (1992–2016)*. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2021, 228.

¹⁸ Rempfort: *Lady Gregory and Irish National Theatre*, 139.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 172–173.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

the presence of alcoholism as a crucial subject in these plays because, along with the quarrelsome nature of the Irish, it impacts the fate of the country.²² The problem with her remark is that singling out these thematic elements without suggesting their relation to colonial oppression seems to interpret the writer's critique of national flaws in terms of anti-Irish stereotypes. Similarly, in the play *McDonough's Wife* (1913), Rempert considers the drink the protagonist has taken on the way home from the fair as a deed leading to the ruin of family life,²³ disregarding the more conspicuous fact that he is a piper who, with the mesmerizing power of his art, manages to bring people together to take part in the funeral procession and give his beloved wife a proper burial. In her monograph Ann Saddlemeyer sees in McDonough's figure an evocation of the ancient artist who can have unique power over the people, not unlike Yeats's Seanchan in *The King's Threshold* (1904).²⁴ An unquestionable merit of Rempert's book is, however, that it calls attention to the uncommon variety in Gregory's dramatic oeuvre and inspires scholars to investigate the rarely analyzed pieces as well.

Of the other writings on Gregory by Rempert, I have selected a more recent article with an unusual comparative approach, entitled "Mimesis, Diegesis, and Narrative Frames: Gregory, Beckett, McGuinness". The main, though not the only theoretical source the author relies on here is Michael Issacharoff's "theory of mimetic and diegetic dramatic spaces"²⁵, which can be applied to the analysis of most plays in world theater as the side-by-side or joint use of showing and telling has been known in this form of art since the Greeks. This time, Rempert has chosen *The Workhouse Ward* from the oeuvre of Gregory, which is an excellent example in terms of containing a lot of references to places other than the one in the title, given that it is a "talky" play with little movement. In the introductory part the author posits that the article looks at the significance of the localities coming up in the characters' dialogue of the three plays, and also "investigates the ways in which universal human themes play out in these locations: whether they be in Ireland, continental Europe or the Far East".²⁶ Rempert pays attention to Cloon, the fictional small town which is often the scene of the writer's comedies, and so of *Workhouse Ward* too, placing it in the context of Gregory's larger canvas and her creation of a stage version of the Galway dialect.²⁷ Throughout her analysis, the scholar refers to Gregory's own lectures and articles on the genre of drama and its European tradition.

²² Ibid., 190–91.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ann Saddlemeyer: *In Defence of Lady Gregory, Playwright*, Dublin, The Dolmen Press, 1966, 74.

²⁵ Rempert, Eglantina: *Mimesis, Diegesis, and Narrative Frames: Gregory, Beckett, McGuinness*, *Open Library of Humanities* 10, 1 (2024), 2.

²⁶ Ibid., 2.

²⁷ Ibid., 5.

The example by Beckett in the essay is *Waiting for Godot* (1949), no doubt full of references to the places remembered or conjured up by the characters; the emphasis on Lucky's monologue in this regard is well justified. Finally, McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985) is treated as a memory play, with a sharp eye for the historical and cultural complexities of its spatiality, both physical and imagined. The links between the three plays are duly identified in the conclusion, which ends with the sentence: "[w]hether written during the Irish Revival, after the Second World War in Europe, or during the Ulster Troubles, the three plays discussed share vital denominators in their treatment of locality and universality."²⁸

Between Lady Gregory and the women playwrights of our period from the 1980s on, Teresa Deevy stands out as an author who made her mark in Irish theater, whom Anthony Roche refers to as "the second lady of the Abbey"²⁹ – the first having been Lady Gregory, of course. However, after her early success at the Abbey in the 1930s, Deevy's work was rejected by the conservative theater management. Nowadays there is a kind of renaissance of scholarship on her oeuvre; in 2025 the first book addressing her versatile achievement was published.³⁰ I joined the line with my essay "Taking the 'Black Stick': Ageing Husbands and Fathers in the Plays of J. M. Synge and Teresa Deevy", which explores representations of ageing fathers and husbands in J. M. Synge's and Teresa Deevy's theater. In Synge's *The Shadow of the Glen* (1903) the old husband threatens his young wife with a black stick, a phallic motif symbolizing impotence, and the father, a religious fanatic in Deevy's *Katie Roche* (1936), wants to punish his daughter who seeks to have some autonomy, by flogging. *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) by Synge and *The King of Spain's Daughter* (1935) by Deevy also use the motifs of the stick and domestic violence. In my essay I study the ways in which the ageing male characters in the four plays mirror the destructive nature of patriarchy and its concomitant paralyzing ideologies which determined the fate of many young people, especially women in early twentieth-century colonial Ireland and 1930s post-independence Ireland, respectively. The theoretical underpinning of the essay is provided by scholarly works which probe into the background of conflict-ridden colonial/postcolonial phenomena in the joint fields of gender and generation.³¹

²⁸ Ibid., 20.

²⁹ Anthony Roche: *The Irish Dramatic Revival 1899-1939*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015, 150.

³⁰ Úna Kealy – Kate McCarthy (eds.): *Active Speech: Critical Perspectives on Teresa Deevy*, Cambridge, UK, Open Book Publishers, 2025.

³¹ Kurdi, Mária: Taking the 'Black Stick': Ageing Husbands and Fathers in the Plays of J. M. Synge and Teresa Deevy, in M. Schlage-Früh – T. Tracy (eds.): *Ageing Masculinities in Irish Literature and Visual Culture*, London, Routledge, 2022, 17–32.

The contemporary woman playwright whose work shows affinities with both Gregory and Deevy as “foremothers” is Marina Carr. The “Coda” closing *The Golden Thread Volume 2* which collects essays on playwrights’ works written over the span of more than two centuries is by Melissa Sihra. She underlines an important aspect of the kinship between Gregory and Carr through their respective plays *The Full Moon* (1910) and *By the Bog of Cats* (1998): “The Irish tradition of wise-women healers and visionaries is deeply embedded in these plays by Carr and Gregory to access such hidden histories of female knowledge.”³² Regarding the Deevy – Carr relationship suffice it to quote here the focus of Cathy Leeney’s essay titled “Ireland’s ‘exiled’ women playwrights: Teresa Deevy and Marina Carr” in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*.³³ The heroine of my book, *Representations of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama by Women* (2010) is also Marina Carr as her major plays written before 2010, *Low in the Dark* (1989), *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996), *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), *On Raftery’s Hill* (2000), and *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006) all feature across the chapters. As it appears in the title of the first chapter, I also thought it important to ground my point of departure in the great Irish women forerunners of modernism: “The Legacy of Foremothers and Contexts for the Development of Women’s Playwriting in Ireland”.³⁴ In addition to Marina Carr, the following writers are included in *Representations*, focusing on one or two plays by each: Patricia Burke Brogan, Elizabeth Burke-Kennedy, Charabanc Theatre Company, Anne Devlin, Emma Donoghue, Stella Feehily, Miriam Gallagher, Jennifer Johnston, Marie Jones, Elizabeth Kuti, Paula Meehan, Gina Moxley, Christina Reid. Chapters from two to seven are arranged in view of the themes, dramaturgical strategies, and techniques deployed in the plays, resulting in each work being discussed in more than one chapter. The chapters are framed by theoretical ideas, most of them from international scholars on theater, while for charting the plays’ social, cultural, and ideological embedding mainly Irish critical material is used.

One of Marina Carr’s plays, *On Raftery’s Hill* is also analyzed in a comparative journal article by Csilla Bertha from a special angle as indicated by the title, “The House Image in Three Contemporary Irish Plays”. Concerned with space in three Irish dramas, the article also links up with Rempert’s above-introduced shorter study. In Bertha’s discussion the Carr play is flanked by two

³² Sihra: Coda – Spinning Gold: Threads of Augusta Gregory and Marina Carr, in D. Clare et al. (eds.), 233.

³³ Cathy Leeney: Ireland’s “exiled” women playwrights: Teresa Deevy and Marina Carr, in S. Richards (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 150–163.

³⁴ Kurdi, Mária: *Representations of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama by Women*, Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter, The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010, 15–37.

seminal works of contemporary Irish theater, Stewart Parker's *Pentecost* (1987) and Tom Murphy's *The House* (2000). The theoretical framing of the article draws on the Gaelic tradition of joining place and identity which formed the foundational concept of the lore of place, while Bertha also quotes modernist inquiries into the significance of space, for instance Gaston Bachelard's relevant ideas about the strong links between the house and memories. In contrast with *Pentecost*, Bertha writes, the house in *On Raftery's Hill* does not become the home of transformation.³⁵ Importantly, she points to the possible implied parallel between the Raftery house and Olympus, to conclude that Raftery with his monstrosity may be seen "as a grotesque inversion of Zeus" and that the play itself lacks the mythical level present in the writer's Midlands Trilogy. Bertha refers to the role of home and nature in the earlier plays, where "[t]he place really does embody part of the characters' selves" as an alternative space, totally missing from *On Raftery's Hill*.³⁶ In the Midlands Trilogy and *Ariel*, Melissa Sihra claims that "water is a central aesthetic and conceptual motif" a metaphor of "the resistance to fixity", therefore an alternative space for the heroines who feel constricted or entrapped by the patriarchal world.³⁷ Bertha's corresponding observation stresses the lack of this female element in the play she analyzes: "[t]here is no water in any form in *On Raftery's Hill*, while the house's solid walls and the garden gate stop all efforts to find a less confined life."³⁸ In fact nature is destroyed by Raftery, who tortures and kills animals on his farm, leaving their dead bodies unburied and festering on the land. While Bertha's critique states that the play does not engage with social issues of contemporary Ireland,³⁹ in her monograph on Carr Sihra suggests an ecofeminist reading of the play, which could broaden the scope of critical perspectives on this work.⁴⁰

Another article by Csilla Bertha, *Crossing Borders in Irish Drama and Theatre. Art, Artist and Sacrifice*⁴¹ focuses on respective works by five modern and contemporary Irish playwrights including Marie Jones, a female author from the North. The drama Bertha has chosen for an analysis fitting the subject announced in the title is *Stones in His Pockets* (1999) which, like one of the selected four plays by men, Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* (1979), has been translated into many languages (including Hungarian) and has travelled to numerous

³⁵ Bertha, Csilla: The House Image in Three Contemporary Irish Plays, *New Hibernia Review* 8, 2 (2004), 71.

³⁶ Ibid., 72, 74.

³⁷ Melissa Sihra: Renegotiating landscapes of the female: voices, topographies and corporeality of alterity in Marina Carr's *Portia Coughlan*, *Australasian Drama Studies* 43 (2003), 16–31.

³⁸ Bertha: The House, 77.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Melissa Sihra: *Marina Carr: Pastures of the Unknown*, London, Macmillan, 2018, 182.

⁴¹ Bertha, Csilla: *Crossing Borders in Irish Drama and Theatre. Art, Artist and Sacrifice*, *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica* 10, 1 (2018), 7–23.

theaters in other countries (including Hungary). Bertha's firm theoretical framing of her investigations refers to the most influential experts in theater studies, for instance Peter Brook, Erika Fischer-Lichte, and Gay McAuley to support her own ideas about Irish *kunstlerdrama* in which "sacrifice is frequently related to the artist figure even in today's secularized world".⁴² She argues that *Stones in His Pockets* is one of the experimental, border-crossing works on the contemporary scene because it demonstrates the ways in which "postmodernist theatrical tools can be used *not* to deconstruct identity, but to expose the disrupting effects of globalization as neo-colonialism with its construction of false identities".⁴³ The false Irish identities are constructed by a team of Hollywood filmmakers who exploit the locals of a village in County Kerry to play the extras in their would-be film. Bertha underscores that both the comic and the tragic are present in the drama; the two narrators' often hilarious role-playing takes a new turn after the suicide of one of the local young men due to his sense of humiliation. This tragic death constitutes the sacrifice Bertha relates to the birth of art: the narrators become artists who plan to make their own film based on their own story about Irish realities as "a form of resistance: in an attempt at cultural re-territorialization".⁴⁴

Place and space form an important thread in Krisztina Kodó's essay *Multicultural Identities in Elizabeth Kuti's Dramatic Writing*, which focuses on the issue of identity in relation to the characters' multiethnic background and liminal state of being. Rightly, Kodó starts by exploring Kuti's sense of belonging to Ireland too, although she was born in England as the daughter of an English mother and a Hungarian father. The play *Treehouses* (2000) is a projection of the writer's Hungarian identity, Kodó claims,⁴⁵ which is justified by much of the play enacting Young Magda's story taking place in Hungary. *Treehouses* is introduced here as a memory play, the characters' recollections evoking coordinates of place and time which, in Eva's case for instance, mean the Eden-like garden and the treehouse among the branches of a tree that her father built for her when she was a little girl.⁴⁶ Regarding the plural of 'treehouse' in the title, Kodó dwells on its possible multiple meanings as it can signify a place of refuge in several different contexts of the present, past, and the future.⁴⁷ As for the significance of Hungary in the play and for the writer herself, Kodó writes: "As the play progresses, the key, the music box and the song gradually link the stories [...] to Hungary, which is featured as an idyllic place of beauty

⁴² Ibid., 8.

⁴³ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁵ Krisztina Kodó: *Multicultural Identities in Elizabeth Kuti's Dramatic Writing*, *Freeside Europe Online Academic Journal. Modern Cultural, Literary and Linguistic Perspectives* 7 (2017), 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 4–5.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 5–6.

and wonder”, although memories of this place do not lead to a happy ending but the realities of life.⁴⁸ The essay tackles Kuti’s *The Sugar Wife* (2005) as another play about questions of identity relating to place and memories, but allows the reader or audience to realize that it is a play of more complexity than *Treehouses*, given that the characters are from different cultures, lifestyles, and religious affiliations. *The Sugar Wife* manages to reflect on multicultural aspects of Ireland and its history, especially the contribution of the Quakers to the Irish economy. The issue of “insider” or “outsider” trails through Kodó’s essay, who opines, importantly, that the later play “does not treat the question of belonging to a specific nation to such an extent as *Treehouses*” but chooses the grounding of individuals in relationships,⁴⁹ which seems to be closer to human experience in our time.

Among contemporary Irish woman playwrights Deirdre Kinahan’s popularity rests on the fact that most of her plays focus on issues with strong social relevance while she chooses different strategies in each of them. Significantly, her works bring to the fore problems which arise from narratives that tend to be suppressed in contemporary Ireland, enabling the renegotiation of value systems related to family, class, and gender. Kinahan began her playwriting career in 1999 when she wrote *Bé Carna* (meaning women of the flesh, in fact prostitutes in Early Irish) at the request of the group called Ruhama Women’s Project which supported women earning a living as sex workers in Dublin. Regarding her plays’ relation to Irish dramatic traditions, Patrick Lonergan says: “Conor McPherson, Mark O’Rowe and Deirdre Kinahan are developing the form by building on the achievements of earlier writers.”⁵⁰ In 2022 Irish scholar Lisa Fitzpatrick and I co-edited a collection of essays on Kinahan’s work for the stage and an interview with the playwright.⁵¹ The overall aim of the collection is to enhance the general understanding of and further inspire the academic research into Kinahan’s drama. Authors of the collection represent several countries: Ireland, the UK, Hungary, the USA, Nigeria, Canada, and Taiwan; overall they display a considerable range of critical ambitions to address various aspects and segments of Kinahan’s oeuvre.

One of the two Hungarian contributors to the Kinahan collection is Lenke Németh, who is known for her research on American drama, which mainly targets the contemporary period. In “Moments that Matter: *Hue & Cry* and *Moment* by Deirdre Kinahan and American Family Drama” Németh argues that American domestic drama, having been defined as a subgenre by Arthur Miller, and Kinahan’s plays in the focus of the essay share certain paradigmatic

⁴⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁰ Patrick Lonergan: *Irish Drama and Theatre since 1950*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019, 7.

⁵¹ Lisa Fitzpatrick – Mária Kurdi (eds.): “*I love craft, I love the word*”: *The Theatre of Deirdre Kinahan*, Oxford, Peter Lang, 2022.

features. Németh places her discussion in the context of interfaces between American and Irish drama, which date back to Eugene O'Neill who attended and expressed fervent admiration for the touring Abbey Theatre's performances in New York. Németh's discussion of family problems as they appear in *Hue & Cry* and *Moment* points to American parallels in the works of Sam Shepard and David Mamet as well as in those of women playwrights like Marsha Norman, Adrienne Kennedy, and Susan-Lori Parks, who deploy and also alter the conventions of family drama through a variety of dramatic techniques that range from absurdist to postmodern.⁵² Nevertheless, the distinguishing feature of the two Kinahan works is, Németh claims, that in spite of the deep-rooted conflicts and traumas they dramatize, the plays conclude on a note of some hope that family members may develop a better understanding of each other. Concerning elements of the dramaturgies Németh calls attention to the healing power of the Kriyah dance in *Hue & Cry* and the therapeutic role of art in *Moment*.⁵³ Apart from being a co-editor of the volume I am also the other Hungarian author who contributed with the essay "An Act of Love? Filicide and Child-killing in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* and Deirdre Kinahan's *Spinning*", which delves into and compares the possible motives behind the terrible deeds committed in the two plays by departing from the socio-cultural contexts drawn up in them.⁵⁴

Zsuzsa Csikai, an expert on Irish adaptations of Russian works for the stage, has published two journal articles on aspects of the subject recently, both texts being about young Irish female authors' rewritings of famous male Russian classics. The first one is concerned with Nancy Harris's adaptation of a major novella by Tolstoy under the original title, *The Kreutzer Sonata* in 2009 with Peter Reid's adaptation of another Tolstoy novella, *The Devil* renamed as *Desire* in 2014. Csikai places them in the context of the century-long urge in Irish theater to retranslate and adapt classics, saying: "[w]hile the rewriting of Russian literature, mainly Chekhov, in the 1980s served as a means of resisting British cultural influence through the re-appropriation of Chekhov for Irish audiences, the Tolstoy adaptations produced in the 2000s [...] by Harris and Reid [work] without such a public agenda and instead they focus on private issues of individual lives".⁵⁵ The plays deploy the monologue form, the advantages of which have been discussed in many theater studies recently, confirmed also by Csikai who claims that "[t]he monologues can offer a kind of rejuvenation of theatre, as it is

⁵² Németh, Lenke: Moments that Matter: *Hue & Cry* and *Moment* by Deirdre Kinahan and American Family Drama, in Fitzpatrick and Kurdi (eds.), 206–208.

⁵³ Ibid., 212–220, 225.

⁵⁴ Kurdi, Mária: An Act of Love? Filicide and Child-killing in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* and Deirdre Kinahan's *Spinning*, in Fitzpatrick and Kurdi (eds.), 183–204.

⁵⁵ Csikai, Zsuzsa: "Telling My Side of Things": Tolstoy Novellas into Monologue Drama, *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 23, 1 (2017), 191–192.

a form able to create immediacy, direct intimacy with the audience, rendering the experience of the individual self the monologue conveys more tangible, more readily accessible and credible.”⁵⁶ Csikai admits that although the two contemporary Irish adaptations of Tolstoy have similarities, they much differ as to the changes they make in the originals works: Harris’s play does not alter the setting in terms of time and place while Reid’s shifts the plot to Ireland in our time. However, a major change in the Harris text is, Csikai continues, that it omits the listener to the protagonist’s confession of having murdered his wife which, thus, seems to be addressed to the audience, enhancing the theatricality of the monologue-form adaptation. Another significant addition by Harris to the original is “a layer of intense irony” which detaches her play from Tolstoy’s outlook on sexuality governing the protagonist’s narration, and brings the work closer to audiences of our time.⁵⁷ All in all, Harris’s transposition virtually does not move away from the nineteenth-century milieu which is the setting of the novella, yet a conspicuous addition to the Tolstoy work lies in its language of poetic intensity, Csikai argues.⁵⁸

“Suspended Lives: Lucy Caldwell’s *Three Sisters* in Post-Agreement Belfast” also by Csikai begins with a panoramic picture of Chekhov in the Irish theater through translations and adaptations from the early twentieth century on. Caldwell’s *Three Sisters* (2016) is set in Belfast and, as Csikai notes, “once again [the playwright] discovers in Chekhov’s vision of human life powerful material for representing the human condition in her own cultural and political contexts, exploring young women’s lives in suspension between past and present, desire and reality”.⁵⁹ Since the time of the plot is the 1990s, the years leading to the 1998 Belfast Agreement, the author opines that “in addition to the intertextual dialogue with the original Russian play, Caldwell also creates a dialogue between the recent past and the present of its Northern Irish audience”.⁶⁰ A major difference from the original is the addition of an outsider woman from a far-away country to the three sisters, who is to become their sister-in-law, thus the play also voices issues of the immigrant experience in the context of potentially erupting racism, Csikai claims.⁶¹ Taking the sisters as representatives of young people of their troubles-ridden homeland, the conclusion of the essay is that “The sisters’ failure to ‘move on’ in terms of either their private relationships or their plan to literally move on and start a new life in the US corresponds to Northern Irish society’s incomplete achievement of genuinely moving on.”⁶²

⁵⁶ Ibid., 192.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 194–196.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 199.

⁵⁹ Csikai, Zsuzsa: *Suspended Lives: Lucy Caldwell’s Three Sisters in Post-Agreement Belfast*, *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 28, 2 (2022), 358.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 361.

⁶¹ Ibid., 365.

⁶² Ibid., 368.

Csikai contextualizes Caldwell's *Three Sisters* in two major ways: relating it to the writer's other Belfast-set works and relating it also to similar pieces in the Northern Irish theatre. She mentions Caldwell's 2007 play *Leaves*, in which the protagonists are also three sisters surrounded by the traumatized milieu of post-Agreement Belfast and refers to Brian Friel's version of *Three Sisters* (1981) as an obvious antecedent of Caldwell's. Moreover, she calls attention to another Northern Irish woman playwright's "three sisters" (actually two sisters and their sister-in-law), the protagonists of *Ourselves Alone* (1986) by Anne Devlin. Bence Gábor Kvéder's essay "The Witness, the Silenced, and the Rebel—Women in Search of Their Voice: Female Characters in Brian Friel's *Translations* and Anne Devlin's *Ourselves Alone*" traces parallels between the play by Devlin and *Translations* by Friel (1980) with which the Field Day Theatre in Derry opened, and where Friel's Hibernicized *Three Sisters* was later also performed. Kvéder explores the significance of Friel's heroines, Brigit, Maire, and Sarah as forerunners of the historical/political experiences and the search for individual solutions embodied by Devlin's three female protagonists, Josie, Frieda, and Donna, in a way descendants of Friel's female characters. Comparing them in pairs, for instance Maire in Friel with Frieda in Devlin as rebels the author finds that, at some points in history, "a nation's state of political affairs and its people's collective mind can be analyzed quite effectively by taking account of the plights and chances of women as represented across time".⁶³

Although the content within this paper offers the reader only a selection of the published critical material, I hope it testifies to the committedness and richness of the multisided research of Hungarian scholars into women's work for Irish theater. The number of books, articles, and book chapters published in English and the reviews of and quotations from them in many critical platforms in or outside Hungary testify to the established presence of Hungarian scholars among international researchers within this area of scholarship. All of the texts surveyed here place their subject in the relevant contexts of Irish socio-cultural history and Irish playwriting more generally while providing comparative readings of Irish plays by women in dialogue with other Hungarian or non-Hungarian researchers and critical approaches. It is these broad perspectives which ensure that investigations will not only continue but will generate other investigations, resulting in new insights for scholars and students interested in the receptionist aspects of Irish theater and the discovery of unusual vistas for further dedicated explorations of the field.

⁶³ Kvéder, Bence Gábor: The Witness, the Silenced, and the Rebel—Women in Search of Their Voice: Female Characters in Brian Friel's *Translations* and Anne Devlin's *Ourselves Alone*, *FOCUS: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies*, XI (2018), 18.

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PART IV



LITERARY TRANSLATIONS

ÍR BALLADÁK ÉS DALOK (IRISH BALLADS AND SONGS)



Translated by
JÚLIA LÁZÁR

Júlia Lázár (1960) has published four volumes of poetry, *Fingerprints* (1988), *Unknown* (2001), *Still* (2011), *Stoneface* (2016) and numerous translations of prose and poetry from English. Authors she has translated include Sylvia Plath, E.M. Forster, George Orwell, Salman Rushdie, Janet Malcolm, Susan Sontag, Toni Morrison, W.B. Yeats, Louis McNeice, Robert Graves, Carol Rumens, Ted Hughes, Walt Whitman and H.D.

Several of her poems appeared in English language anthologies, including *Poetry Wales* (vol. 38, no 3) and *Cencrastus* (Issue 81, 2005) and also in ones published in the US, Greece, Italy etc. As a poet she has represented Hungary on a Hungarian Reading in Scotland twice. In 2018 she was invited to the event 'Ted Hughes Translated, Shropshire and London, 23-29 October 2018' by Arvon Foundation. The same year some of her poems, translations and an essay appeared in *Modern Poetry in Translation* (No 3, 2018).

She has been teaching English language, literature, literary translation and creative writing for 28 years at schools and universities in Hungary.

She is a board member of the Hungarian Translators House Foundation and the winner of Zoltán Attila prize.

IRISH BALLADS AND FOLK SONGS IN TRANSLATION

Without these traditional pieces there would be no modern (Irish) literature. It is a real adventure to go back in time and translate the concise, dramatic words of an unknown age and a hardly known ancient language. Nevertheless, characters, emotions and dramas coincide with our twenty-first century phenomena and are surprisingly modern.

Folk songs and ballads exist in many variations, and they were usually sung, which meant an extra challenge for the translator, who used available ballad collections like the *Faber Book of Ballads* and other sources.

These seven pieces constitute a selection from a wider collection being elaborated on. Showing an everchanging pattern, like in a kaleidoscope, the songs are all very different, music, texts and even titles existing in variants

as they were passed down orally from generation to generation. *Finnegan's Wake* gave the title to the famous work written by James Joyce. It is a comic folk ballad, but there are also street songs, laments and even the so called "unofficial anthem of Dublin", Molly Malone is conjured. To create a singable version and not to lose the poeticism, drama or humour, which makes these pieces popular even today, is an almost impossible venture, but worth trying.

ÍR BALLADÁK, DALOK

Finnegan „ébredése”¹ (*Finnegan's Wake*)

A Walkin utcában lakott
Finnegan, ez a furcsa ír.
Malterosvödörrel ballagott
Munkába a szépszavú úr,
Hogy biztosabban tántorogjon,
Mert a whiskyt nem vetette meg,
Reggelente a munkaundor
Ellen kortyolt épp eleget.

*Trallala, hát a táncra fel,
Dobban a láb és reng a far,
Megmondtam nektek, áll a bál,
Finnegan virrasztása van.*

Egy reggel Tim túlzásba vitte,
A feje zúgott, reszketett,
A létra dőlt, fejét betörte,
Hazavitték a tetemet,
Szép tiszta gyolcsba becsavarva,
Kiterítették, várta ágy,
Lábához egy nagy whiskysflaska,
Fejéhez hordó sör dukált.

¹ *Finnegan's Wake*: ír kocsmadal, amely James Joyce utolsó regényének címét adta. A „wake” virrasztást és ébredést is jelent. Magyarul a könyv lefordított részletét *Finnegan ébredése* címen publikálták. Az ír–amerikai ballada először New Yorkban, 1864-ben jelent meg nyomtatásban. A whisky szó a skót gael *uisge beatha* vagy az ír *uisce beatha* (mindkettő ejtése kb. „iskibáha”) szóból ered, jelentése: az élet vize. Zene: https://youtu.be/bRXWwZ74Qe8?si=sMpUGNebAxGa_vjf (Utolsó letöltés: 2025. november 10.) The Dubliners: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qstUxos2cBs> (Utolsó letöltés: 2025. november 10.)

Felesége a virrasztáson
Így lett a helyzet kulcsa,
Teát kínált, süteményt tálon,
És pipadohányt whiskypuncccsal.
Biddy O'Brien sírni kezdett:
– De ritka az ilyen szép hulla!
Jaj, lelkem Tim, miért is kellett...
Paddy McGee: – Ó, te nagy nulla!

Patty O'Connor hozzátette:
– Biddy! – mondta – befoghatod!
Mire Biddy jól szájba verte.
Hogy elterült, padlót fogott.
És akkor kitört a háború,
Nő a nő, férfi férfi ellen,
Bunkósbot diktált, szomorú,
De verekedni kezdtek menten.

Mickey Maloney elhajolt,
S egy elzúgó whiskyüveg,
Bár célpontja a feje volt,
Tim testére szórt permetet.
Hát nem felült?! Ettől föléledt,
Jó Timothynek nyomban fölhorgadt,
Szólt: – Az ördögbe is, még élek,
Istennyila sújtsa a holtat!

*Trallala, hát a táncra fel,
Dobban a láb és reng a far,
Megmondtam nektek, áll a bál,
Finnegan virrasztása van.*

Brian O Linn²

Brian O Linnen nadrág se volt,
helyette birkabőrt fogott,
a szőre benn, a húsa kinn,
így finom és hús, mondta Linn.

Brian O Linn jó ing helyett,
A szomszédnál egy zsákra lelt.
A nyakán meghúzta, micsoda csín,
fodornak nézik, mondta Linn.

Brian O Linn kabátra vágzott,
a szomszéd bak bőréből vágott,
hónaljban kecske szarva mint
két pisztoly áll ki, mondta Linn.

Brian O Linn kalap helyett
egy ócska régit keresett,
lyukas fent és a szélein,
majd jól szellőzik, mondta Linn.

Brian O Linn cipőbe bújna,
rákpáncélba csúszik az uja,
majd két osztrigát szétlapít,
csillogó csat lesz, mondta Linn.

Brian O Linn-nek kell karóra,
Csuklóján egy szép kerekrepa,
fog hozzá egy tücsköt, ami
tiktakol, ha kell, mondta Linn.

Brian O Linn ajtaja szellő,
tőzeg a pad, a tető felhő,
ugrik egyet, úszhatna lenn,
micsoda lak lett, mondta Linn.

² *Brian O Linn*: ír utcadal a XVIII. századból, de valójában a még sokkal régebbi (1548) skót gyerekdal, a *Tam O'Lin* újabb változata. Tam vagy Tom O' Lin a gyerekdalban nem más, mint Hüvelyk Matyi. Zene: https://youtu.be/zbpcx7N8Pa8?si=C0irB_qEQqOG-NYN (Utolsó letöltés: 2025. november 5.) <https://soundcloud.com/fionnuala-maxwell/brian-o-lynn-sing-along> (Utolsó letöltés: 2025. november 5.)

Egy nap Brian asszonyt akart,
Anyá és lánya vihart kavart.
Vetkőzni kezdtek, hullt az ing,
viszem mindkettőt, mondta Linn.

Linn, felesége és anyósa
egy ágyba bújtak, csupa ócska
rongyba. – Ne féljete, enyém a kín,
ti takartok be – mondta Linn.

Linn, felesége és anyósa
együtt léptek a rozzant hídra,
le is szakadt, zuhant a team,
– A víz hazavisz! – mondta Linn.

Carrigdhoun³

Egy ír hajadon panasza (*The Lament of the Irish Maiden*)

Carrigdhounban a hanga zöld,
Ard-na-Lee-re ragyog a nap,
mélyzöld ág alvóra hajol,
Own na Buidhe-nek csókot ad.
Boldog nap volt, május, tavasz,
Ma már álom hava,
Donald nekem esküdözött,
Kincsem, nem válunk el soha.

Carrigdhounban a zöld se zöld,
Ard-na-Lee fölött szürke ég,
Dühödten fut a sok patak,
Táplálja Ard-na-Lee dühét.
A szél nyög csupasz fák között,
Átfúj rajtam, úgy süvít,
Magam vagyok, mert itthagytok,
A sólymom, vele szíveink.

³ Carrigdhoun, vagy eredetileg: „The Lament of the Irish Maiden”, *Egy ír hajadon panasza*, a szerző a corki Denny Lane. 1691-ben, Sarsfield parancsnoksága alatt a jakobita ír sereg a franciákhoz menekül („vadlibák vonulása”). A dallamot Percy French dala, a „The Mountains of Mourne” ihlette. Zene: <https://youtu.be/grF7LpWYnG4?si=LJUrwTNRNN-sbGeO> (Utolsó letöltés: 2025. november 5.)

Áprilisi zápor, májusvirág
A nyarat visszahozza majd,
De hova tűnt el az idő?
Bátor Donalddal elszaladt.
Van még esély, a franciák:
Bourbon-liliomot visel,
Megyek, hollóhajú Donald,
Hű marad hozzád a szívem.

A fekete bársonyszalag⁴

Szép kisváros, a neve Belfast,
Mesterséget tanulni jó.
Átélttem annyi boldog órát
Semmi máshoz nem fogható.

De megtörtént a balszerencse,
A földemről messze sodort,
Egy sötét bársonyszalag láttán,
Elhagytam barátot, rokont.

A lány szeme csillogó gyémánt,
Fényes királynői alak
És vállára hulló hajában
Egy fekete bársonyszalag.

Épp a Broadwayn sétáltam végig,
Nem maradtam volna soká,
Ki mászt hozott eléem a jó sors,
Pont szembejött velem a lány.

⁴ Eredeti címe: *The Black Velvet Band* (Roud 2146), hagyományos népdal, éneklék Írországból, Ausztráliában, Angliában, Kanadában és Amerikában. A becsapott fiatalembert Ausztráliába küldik kényszermunkára, gyakori büntetés volt ez a XIX. századi Angliában. Egy lapos változatban is terjedt. Éneklé a *The Dubliners*, Harry Cox népdalénekes változata alapján. Zene: The Dubliners: https://youtu.be/4MTP_fCtOv8?si=UEomUXbCBq9iXkWx (Utolsó letöltés: 2025. november 15.) Harry Cox: <https://youtu.be/x-nLAdGVTjM?si=A0UjPCkK3mxv-QJ7> (Utolsó letöltés: 2025. november 15.)

Szőke volt, ragyogó szépség
Hajló nyaka szép hattyúnyak.
És vállára hulló hajában
Fekete bársonyszalag.

A lány szeme csillogó gyémánt,
Fényes királynői alak
És vállára hulló hajában
Egy fekete bársonyszalag.

Sétáltam tovább a szép lánnyal,
Üzent huncut tekintete,
Hogy elment mellettünk egy férfi,
De ő aztán elbánt vele.

A zsebéből egy aranyórát
Csent el, amit kezembe tett,
A szalagra gondolva mondtam,
Így hozzá sosem férhetek.

A lány szeme csillogó gyémánt,
Fényes királynői alak
És vállára hulló hajában
Egy fekete bársonyszalag.

Másnap reggel várt már a bíró,
Álltam az esküdszék előtt,
Édes fiam, mondta a bíró,
Világos, mi történt előbb.

Hét évig szolgál büntetésből,
A földjétől jó messze ott,
Egy sötét bársonyszalag láttán
Elhagy most barátot, rokont.

A lány szeme csillogó gyémánt,
Fényes királynői alak
És vállára hulló hajában
Egy fekete bársonyszalag.

Balzsamfű⁵

Zsenge, szép lányok jöjjetek,
Ti bimbók, nyiladozzatok,
Vigyázzatok, a kertetek
Maradjon érintetlen ott,

Hol balzsamfű nő, drága kincs,
Egy férfi sem lophatja el.
A balzsamfűnek párja nincs.
Annyi emlék felé terel,

Ha balzsamfűre gondolok,
Ízeket érzek, illatot,
Neki egy buja tengerész,
Balzsamfűért rózsát adott.

A rózsza sosem hervad el,
S bár hitte, őrzi balzsamát,
Helyette emlékezni fog:
Egy férfinak engedte át.

Zsenge, szép lányok, jöjjetek,
Ti bimbók, nyiladozzatok,
Vigyázzatok, a kertetek
Maradjon érintetlen ott,

Hol balzsamfű nő, drága kincs,
Egy férfi sem lophatja el.
A balzsamfűnek párja nincs,
A vég felé majd így terel.

⁵ Címváltozatok: *A Sprig of Thyme, The Seeds of Love*. Forrás: <https://lyrics.lyricfind.com/lyrics/foster-allen-a-bunch-of-thyme> (Utolsó letöltés: 2025. november 10.) https://www.irish-folk-songs.com/a-bunch-of-thyme-lyrics-and-chords.html#google_vignette (Utolsó letöltés: 2025. november 10.)

Balzsamfű ága⁶

[énekelhető változat]

A kertemben balzsamfű nőtt,
Virágzott a nap és az éj,
Átmászott egy legény, a falon át bejutott
Mindet elvitte az a legény
Mindet elvitte az a legény.

Azt mondták, de szép ez a lány,
Szebbnek akartam látszani,
Testem tejben fürdettem, selyem a ruhám,
A hajamban balzsamfűág,
A hajamban balzsamfűág.

Vörös rózsabimbó fakad,
De virágot nem ad nekem,
Szakasztottam rügyét, sebzett, folyt vérpatak,
Fűzfára tévedt a szemem,
Fűzfára tévedt a szemem.

A fűzfa úgy hajladozik,
Az ága is nekem üzen,
Ölelő karja kúszik, szerelmesem szorít,
Elvitte a balzsamfűvet,
Elvitte a balzsamfűvet.

A kertemben balzsamfű nőtt,
Virágzott a nap és az éj,
Átmászott egy legény, a falon át bejutott
Mindet elvitte az a legény
Mindet elvitte az a legény.

⁶ Zene, 1953. <https://youtu.be/MvZTLOseMc0?si=8Hf9wj5Yu6Soq7PH> (Utolsó letöltés: 2025. november 10.)

**Kevin Barry:
Meghalt Írorszáért, 1920. november elsején⁷**

Hétfő reggel Mountjoy börtön
Magas akasztófáján
Fiatal életét áldozta
A szabadság oltárán.
Tizennyolc nyarat ért meg,
Mégsem tagadta senki,
Büszkén feltartott fejével
Készült halálba menni.

Még mielőtt megjött a hóhér,
Bárhogy kínozták mások
– Brit katonák akarták tudni
A társai nevét –, csak állt ott,
Mondták, hogy legyen áruló,
Vagy meghal, de ő hallgatott,
Kevin Barry nem szólt, vagy
Mindenre nemmel válaszolt.

Nyugodtan állt vigyázásban,
Míg anyjától búcsúzott,
Az anyaszív úgy összetört,
Hogy szó nincs rá, nem is volt.
Az ügynek áldozta magát
Kevin, és ment, mert kellett
Mosollyal várta a bitófát
Mert a hazáért mindent megtett.

Vén Írországnak újabb mártír,
Új áldozat a Koronának
Hiába a brutális törvény,
Ők nem engednek a halálnak.
Ők, a Barry-féle legények,
Könnyen meg nem ijednek,
És az ország szabad lesz,
Mert érte maradnak ilyenek.

⁷ 1920. november elsején akasztották fel a tizennyolc éves orvostanhallgatót, amiért részt vett egy hat brit katona halálát okozó akcióban. Halála előtt megkínozták, de nem árulta el a társait. Az írek szabadságharcának egyik első mártíra lett. Zene: <https://youtu.be/PQb2r8dInR0?si=qQGLD4xMDeyPGUhk> (Utolsó letöltés: 2025. november 5.)

Molly Malone⁸

Dublin városa szép,
Csinos lányból van elég,
Ott láttam először Molly Malone-t,
Tolt egy kis taligát
Végtelen utcákon át,
Kiáltott, kagylót, élő kagylót, tessék, ohó!
Élőt, élő, ohó,
Élőt, élő, ohó,
Kiáltott, kagylót, élő kagylót, tessék, ohó!

A lány halaskofa,
Nincs ebben semmi csoda,
Apja és anyja is ebben a jó,
Tolták a taligát,
Végtelen utcákon át,
Kiáltva, kagylót, élő kagylót, tessék, ohó!
Élőt, élő, ohó,
Élőt, élő, ohó,
Kiáltva kagylót, élő kagylót, tessék, ohó!

De elvitte a láz,
Nem segített varázs,
Így halt meg az édes Molly Malone,
Szelleme taligát
Tol az utcákon át,
Kiáltja, kagylót, élő kagylót, tessék, ohó!
Élőt, élő, ohó,
Élőt, élő, ohó,
Kiáltja kagylót, élő kagylót, tessék, ohó!

⁸ Dublin nem hivatalos himnusza. Címváltozatai: *Cockles and Mussels, In Dublin's Fair City*. Első megjelenése: 1876, Boston, Massachusetts. A dal néhány eleme korábbi dalokban is megjelenik, ilyen az 1809-ben publikált *Widow Malone*. A kis halaskofa a feltételezések ellenére valószínűleg nemlétező személy, illetve sok hasonló nevű és sorsú lány létezhetett.

SHEILA ARMSTRONG: A ROSSZCSONTTÁNC (THE SKELLINGTON DANCE)¹

Translated by
ORSOLYA MARÓT

Abstract

The submitted text is a Hungarian translation of The Skellington Dance (A rosszcsonttánc), a 2022 short story by Irish contemporary author Sheila Armstrong. I translated said work of fiction as part of my translator portfolio, concluding my studies at Károli Gáspár University's specialized and literary translator program, in 2024.

The Skellington Dance gives an accurate reflection on both the global and societal hardships of today's way of life, as well as on the internal, personal struggles of the individual. The plot is set in the near, post-Covid future, where people are still noticeably tense and paranoid due to the shared trauma of the pandemic. Notwithstanding, the story focuses on the everyday routine of a young mother who feels responsible for her son having been born with a disability, as she was infected while pregnant.

The submission, furthermore, includes a commentary in Hungarian, regarding the challenges encountered during the translation process, primarily due to the cultural references present in the text – a number of everyday cultural phenomena are mentioned or alluded to in the short story, each still being present in the day-to-day life of the Irish, and therefore understood by the local audience without the need of an explanation. However, said cultural references would be hard to transfer into a Hungarian context, therefore they had to be replaced by alternatives, with no expense to the original work's style and imagery. The commentary aims to pinpoint the obstacles I encountered while working on the text, and to argue for the alternatives given.

KEYWORDS

Literary translation, contemporary Irish literature, short story, post-Covid world, commentary in Hungarian, cultural references, challenges in translation

¹ © Sheila Armstrong, 2022, The skellington dance. In: Sh. Armstrong: *How to Gut a Fish*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR²

Sheila Armstrong is a contemporary Irish author. Her short story translated below, *The Skellington Dance* – under the Hungarian title *A rosszcsonttánc* –, was published as part of her first collection of short stories, *How To Gut A Fish*, in 2022. The volume was nominated to the Kate O’Brien Award and the Edge Hill Prize literary awards. Armstrong’s first novel, *Falling Animals*, was published in 2023, and nominated to the RSL Ondaatje Prize literary award. Her works are published in Ireland, Great-Britain, and Australia, and are now available in over ten languages worldwide. *The Skellington Dance* is her first short story to be published in Hungarian.

Regarding Armstrong’s style, her narrative voice tends to have elements of surrealism and often invokes unsettling imagery. The short story below, however, differs from this pattern: it has a serious, emotional theme that touches the heart and moves the reader. The plot is set in the near future, which is still not free from the aftermaths of the Covid pandemic. The narrative follows a typical day of an ordinary family, whilst also revealing their past and the struggles they have been through so far. The second-person narration allows the readers to further put themselves in the shoes of the main character and get a glimpse of the hardships and emotional toll one has to endure while raising a disabled child. Moreover, the text paints a clear portrayal of overprotective parental behaviour.

SHEILA ARMSTRONG:
A ROSSZCSONTTÁNC

Egy kicsi sziluettet látsz az úszószeművegedre gyűlt párán át, ahogy a medence végéhez sétál és integet neked. Megemeled az öklöd és felmutatsz öt, szélesre tárt ujjat, kétszer, jelezve, hogy leúszol még tíz hosszt. A fiad bólint és visszafordul a kis barátnőjéhez, Roisínhez – még pont látod a mozdulatsor elejét, mielőtt bombát ugrana a vízbe.

A csobbanás keltette hullámok megbontják a tempód, ezért inkább átváltasz mellúszásra, kettéhasítva a vizet; hol alábuksz, hol feljössz, mint egy angolna, ami az ég felé tör. A légzésedre koncentrálsz, miközben összeérinted a hüvelykujjaid, és újra alámerülsz.

*

Tízéves korodban a többi lány folyton azzal szórakozott, hogy elfutottak előled, amikor közeledtél. Apukád autószerelő volt, és egy öreg, fehér kisbusszal

² Armstrong, Sheila: <https://www.armstrongsheila.com/about>, (accessed 18 February 2026).

furikázott, a többiek meg azt mondták, pedofil, de te azt se tudtad, mi az. Volt két bátyja, Paddy és Phil, akikkel nem találkozta túl gyakran, szóval azt mondtad a lányoknak, hogy *apukád* nem Paddy-Phil, csak a bácsikáid azok. A lányok erre sikítózni kezdtek, és szétszéledtek az iskolaudvaron, mintha copfos pókok lennének, amik a zseblámpád elől iszkolnak. Hiába próbáltad utolérni őket.

Egy születésnap zsuron az egyik gyerek anyukája kibérelt egy ugrálóvárat – ezzel meg is indult egy kész ugrálóvár-áradat, és a kilyukaszhathatlan monstorumok hamarosan ellepték a hosszú, forró nyarat. A lányok nevettek és addig pattogtak, amíg beszorítottak egy sarokba, te pedig megmakacsoltad magad, hátat fordítottál nekik, majd lekuporodtál. Nem voltál hajlandó visszavonulót fújni a biztonságos konyhába, ahol a felnőttek mindig dicsérték, hogy milyen jól nevelt vagy, és mennyire figyelmes ajándékot hoztál.

A többi lány nekiállt felmászni az ugrálóvár oldalára – régi stílusú darab volt, még tornyocskái és lőrésai is voltak –, és a tartópillérek megrogytak a súlyuk alatt. A műanyag mennyezet lesüppedt, és te csapdába estél egy elnyúló, tarka égbolt alatt, ahol a maradék levegőd is elfogyott egy kilégzéssel. A gyerekek csak ugráltak és ugráltak, miközben te sikítani akartál, hogy másszanak le rólad, de minden erődet lefoglalta, hogy lélegezni próbálj. Az égbolt, az igazi, csak egy-egy fehér villanásként tűnt fel, ahogy a tornyok hol meghajoltak, hol újra felágaskodtak. Úgy érezted magad, mint egy kilapított, égő papírcső. A rajzfilmek alapján számítottál rá, hogy a halál csendes és magányos dolog, de erről a rettenetes, vérvörös pánikról fogalmad se volt.

Amikor az egyik apuka végre észrevette a küszködésed, a keze egy másik dimenzió portáljából nyúlt ki, megragadva a bokád. Ott és akkor, a fűvön fekve, mindenki előtt kiszakadt belőled egy hatalmas, velőtrázó sikoly, és azt se tudtad, ki vagy, mi vagy.

*

Az öltözőben Shona és Roisín már végeztek a zuhanyzással. Meg akarod kérdezni Shonától, hogy emlékszik-e arra a zsurra. Úgy rémlik, mintha ő is az ugráló gyerekek egyike lett volna, vagy talán az ő szülinapi bulija volt, de attól félsz, váltig fogja állítani, hogy meg se történt, vagy hogy rosszul emlékszel. Kapkodva terelgeted Gideont a zuhanyzókhöz, hogy utolérjétek Shonáékat. Roisín nincs olyan magas, mint Gideon, pedig egy évvel idősebb nála; már nyolcéves. Látod, ahogy Shona diszkréten a kislánya elé tart egy törölközőt, amíg öltözik. Nem veszed magadra, a fiad meg nem is veszi észre. Legtöbbször a férjed, Art viszi a gyereket uszodába, de neki videókonferenciája van ma reggel, te pedig egyelőre nem vagy hajlandó hagyni, hogy Gideon egyedül menjen be a férfi öltözőbe.

Te már félig fel vagy öltözve, amikor a fiad még mindig a szárítkozással molyol, egyenként esik neki minden végtagjának a törölköző durva anyagával. A heg hosszan kígyózik végig a hátán, élénkrózsaszín csikként virít a zuhany

melege után, és az öltések nyomai mindkét oldalon végigkísérik a gerince tökéletesen egyenes vonalát.

A pulthoz ülsz haját szárítani, de a tükrök bepárasodtak, és nem látod tisztán a tükörképed. A fiad magára pattintja az új, rajzfilmfigurás alsónadrágját, büszkén mutatva Roisínnek, te pedig rászólsz, hogy siessen már.

*

A plexi védőfal mögött ülő úszómester lánynak dús, loknis haja van, mint egy régimódi játékbabának. A szemét vörösre csípte a klór, a hangja udvarias, de fáradt. Mégis, ahogy elhagyjátok az uszodát, rákacsint Gideonra, aki még befelé menet észrevette a lány csuklóján lévő Pikachu tetoválást, és megállt mesélni a Pokémon kártyagyűjteményéről.

Odakint az utcák félhomályosak, és meg lehet fagyni az alacsonyan úszó felhők alatt. A hajad még mindig annyira nedves, hogy egy-kettőre megdermed rajta a víz, és Gideon jó meleg sapkája sincs nálad, de még be kell vásárolnod, úgyhogy bebugyolálsz a gyereket a sáladba, és magad előtt terelve megindulsz vele.

Shona és Roisín pár percig veletek tartanak – egy utcával odébb várja őket a fuvarjuk. A fiad olyan vékony, mint egy szál gyufa, míg Roisín gömbölyded és kicsi – Shona még viccelődik is, hogy egymás mellett állva úgy néznek ki, mint a tízes szám. Roisín odasúg valamit Gideonnak, és jót kuncognak a titkon, majd szétrebbenek, amikor az útjukat állja egy közlekedési lámpa, hogy aztán tovább kacarásszanak a másik oldalon.

*

Mikor nyolc évvel ezelőtt megbetegedtél, büntudatod támadt, mert úgy érezted, te hoztad ezt a saját fejedre. Hiszen te akartál pihenni – a boltban nem volt nagyobb a forgalom, mint általában, de már belefáradtál a szövetek válogatásába. Naponta néztél azokat a riasztó Covid-statisztikákat a hírekben, és már szinte csábító volt a gondolat, hogy egy hetet ágyban tölts, és utolérld magad az összes sorozattal, amiről csak állítottad, hogy megnézted.

Még csak néhány hónapja jártatok Arttal, mikor összeszedted azt a nyirkos, makacsul rád csimpaszkodó vírust a buszon, egy köpködve beszélő férfitől. Art mégis meglátogatott, hozott neked rostos narancslevet és köhögés elleni szirupot, aminek olyan íze volt, mint az epres méznek. A kanapén feküdtél, és panaszkodtál, hogy olyan érzésed van, mintha egy kövér pasas üldögnél a mellkasodon, mire Art úgy tett, mintha a földre birkózná a képzeletbeli férfit. Mentőt is ő hívott végül, mikor összecsuklottál a fürdőszoba kövén, légszomjasan egy túl forró zuhany után.

Van rá esély, hogy várandós? – kérdezte a sürgősségi nővér a maszkja mögül, és már készültél válaszolni, de a torkodra forrt a szó, majd elkapott egy köhögőroham.

Annyira lázas voltál, hogy a kórházban töltött idő nagy része kiesett. Csak halvány emlékeid vannak valami kígyóról, borotvaéles pikkelyekkel, ahogy lesiklik a torkodon, meg arról az érzésről, mintha kiürítették volna a mellkasod, és a tüdőd két oldalt lógna az ágy lábánál. Legszívesebben meghaltál volna, de visszatuszkolták beléd a levegőt.

Amint képes voltál kimenni a mosdóba anélkül, hogy meg kellett volna állnod, ki is engedtek – kellett az ágyad másnak. Egy hétig nem bírtál beszélni, úgy fájt a torkod azoktól a csövektől, de minden ablakból sikítottak rád azok a járványplakátok.

Néha elmerengsz, hogy vajon akkor, a fertőző osztály légszomjas sötétjében, kezdett-e görbülni a fiad gerince – azzal a kis alattomos hullámvonallal, ami akkor jelent meg, mikor kúszni kezdett, de még csak a gyanú előszelét érezted. Aztán azt hitted, a képzeleted játszik veled, mikor először húzta magát ülő helyzetbe. Végül jött a felismerés, ami lassan, szürkén átölelt és rád telepedett, mikor a gyerek panaszkodott az első nap után az iskolában, amiért egyenesen kellett ülnie.

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A bevásárlóközpontban adsz Gideonnak egy saját listát, amiről kipipálhat dolgokat, de túl gyors hozzád képest, és mire észbe kapsz, már mindent megtalált, te pedig még mindig azon rágódsz, melyik lisztadagolót vedd meg. Csillámos nindzsa tortát kért a hetedik születésnapjára, a jövő hétre. Kijöttél a gyakorlatból, de azért megpróbálsz összehozni, amit tudsz, és reméled, ez kielégíti az igényeit, de úgylis tudod, hogy nem így lesz.

Roisín újabban lovagol, szóval most Gideon is lovaglóórákat kért ajándékba. Csakhogy egyik éjjel egy órán át lovasbalesetekről néztél videóösszeállításokat az ágyban, alávágott nevetéssel. A lovasok újra és újra leestek – koponyák találkoztak a betonnal, lábak csúsztak paták alá, vállak ugrottak ki a helyükről –, a hahota meg csak harsogott és gurgulázott. Felgyorsítottad a lejátszási sebességet, aztán megint lelassítottad, kielemezve minden esést, feltérképezve a csontok kicsavarodását. Végül Art egy horkantással felébredt, észrevette az arcodra vetülő halvány fényt, és elvette a telefonodat.

Egy idős hölgy tisztes távolból várja a polcoknál, hogy végezz, és közben türelmetlenül böngészi az árut. Gideon túl gyorsan fordul be a sarkon, de egy ügyes kanyarral megkerüli a nénit, mintha egy mágnes megegyező pólusai lennének.

Eszedbe jutnak a játszótéren menekülő lányok, és összeszorul a szíved a gondolattól, hogy a fiad már úgy hozzászokott ahhoz, hogy távolságot tartson másoktól, hogy a saját, képzeletbeli buborékjában él, és kezet mos, mielőtt megölelné a nagyapját.

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Azelőtt is láttad már az apádat sírni, esküvőkön vagy meccseken, de annyira sosem, mint aznap: a szeme megdagadt, és úgy szívárgott belőle a könny, mint a forró genny a sebből.

Gideon műtete akkor már hat órája tartott, és apád mindvégig nyugodt volt, tartotta magát, csak a testvéreinek írta meg, ha jött valami hír. Elbóbiskoltál a váróban Art vállán, csak egy pillanatra, mert előző éjjel semmit sem aludtál, vagy az utóbbi két hétben, vagy igazából mióta elvitted a fiad a gyerekkórházba, hogy vehessenek három deci vért a kis testéből.

Előtte elmagyaráztad neki, hogy ez egy csodálatos dolog – hogy saját magának fog vért adni, azért, hogy gyorsabban gyógyulhasson a műtete után. Gideonnak annyira tetszett a gondolat, hogy leveleket is írt a jövőbeli énjének, ecsetelve, hogy milyen az új pokémonos edzőcipője, és reménykedett, hogy mire ezeket olvassa, a legendás Pipaconch kártya már megjelenik.

Tudtad, hogy nem szabadna, nagyon nem szabadna, mégis elvette a leveleket a fiad búvóhelyéről, a lépcső alól, és elolvastad őket. Úgy sírtál, mint egy félkegyelmű, ott, a félhomályos előszobában, miközben Art átfogta a vállad, és olyan hangok jöttek belőle, mint amikor a tévében elmegy az adás, és csak a statikus zúgás marad.

Amikor kinyitottad a szemed a kórházban, apád arca már inkább hasonlított egy borfoltos asztalterítőre, kontrasztban a váró fehér falával. A félelem úgy tört fel belőle, mint a víz, amit egy medve ráz le a bundájáról, és a zárt szájú zokogása borzalmas, görbe alakzatokat rajzolt a fertőtlenítő szagú levegőbe.

Halk, finom sóhaj szakadt ki belőled, és lassan szétfolytál a széken. A levegő fokozatosan, egyenletesen áramlott ki a tüdődből, mint mikor leragasztod a szendvicses zacskót piknik előtt. Kicsit szomorú voltál, mert tudtad, hogy hamarosan sokkal nagyobb szomorúság fog előnteni – mintha egy szökőár hatalmas árnyéka vetült volna rád, és te nem tudtad megállítani, csak nézted. Aztán a pulóvered felgyűrődött a szék hideg műanyagtámlája mentén, ahogy belecsúsztál a padlón váró sötétségbe.

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Gideon nem tudja eldönteni, mit szeretne vacsorázni, szóval kész svédasztalt csinálsz neki: dinó alakú hajában sült krumpli, mirelit brokkoli, egy kis sajt és szójakolbászkák. A fiad séf módjára rendezi kompozícióba az ételt a tányérján, és kér a tetejére egy művészien kanyargó ketchup-csíkot. Tépsz egy szál petrezselymet az ablakpárkányról, és a tányér közepére helyezed.

Art kijön hozzátok, amikor végez a munkával, de nem ad neked puszit – reggel összevesztetek, de tudod, hogy éjjel úgyis hozzád fog bújni álmában. Vacsora után megnéztek egy rajzfilmet hármasan, utána pedig végigvitakozzátok az utat felfelé a lépcsőn, arról, hogyan tudnak a sárkányok tüzet okádni.

Art kitalált egy játékot, amit minden este eljátszanak Gideonnal lefekvés előtt. Ilyenkor kimész a szobából, mert ki nem állhatod, mégis minden alkalommal

végignézed a folyosóról. Art mindig megvárja, míg Gideon levetkőzik, majd eldobálja a ruháit a szennyekosár irányába, és kikészíti a pizsamáját az ágyra.

Most már csak a bőrödet kell kicipzároznom – mondja ilyenkor Art. Ezután összeérinti a mutató- és hüvelykujjait, és végigszántja Gideon műtét-hegének rózsaszín vonalát, a nyakszirtjétől a farcsontjáig, megállva az alsónadrágja gumijánál.

Gideon eljátssza, hogy kilép a bőrből, mint egy overálból, és úgy szökdecse, mint aki csontvázra vetkőzött.

Ők ezt csak rosszcsonttáncnak hívják.

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Még az uszoda öltözőjében, miközben felvette a fürdőruhát, Gideon elújságolta, hogy felfedezett egy trükköt. Shona éppen ráadta a karúszót Roisínre, de a te fiad csaknem uszonnyal született.

Anyu, lehet a víz alatt lélegezni a buborékokkal.

Egy percre becsusszantál a gyerekmedencébe, hogy Gideon megmutathassa neked. A víz meleg és sekély volt – csak a térdhajlatodig ért. A medence fala mentén sorakozó fúvókákból gyengéden áramlott a levegő, és a víz felszíne úgy pezsgett tőle, mint a magnéziumtabletta a pohárban.

Gideon ugrott egy hasast a vízbe, miközben Roisín sopánkodott, hogy dörzsöli a karját a karúszó. A fiad mélyebbre úszott, majd rászorította az ajkát az egyik fúvóka fémszelepére, és a kis teste még sápadtabbnak tűnt a tengerészkek csempe mellett. Az ujjaidat a combodba nyomtad, ellenállva a kísértésnek, hogy a víz alá kapj, és kiragadd onnan őt, magadhoz szorítva.

A fiadnak tempóznia kellett ahhoz, hogy víz alatt tudjon maradni, de ment neki: a kapálózó alakja a felszín alatt maradt, tíz, húsz, harminc másodpercig – és ekkor történt valami azzal a gombóccal, amit akkor nyeltél le, amikor megszületett: a gombóccal, ami összeszorult a torkodban, amikor a háziorvosok először ráncolta össze a szemöldökét; amikor a fiad kis keze elernyed a tiédben, ahogy az altatógáz hatni kezdett; amikor beteretled őt egy világba, ahol fémeszközök és fájdalom és könnyek várták.

Gideon keze végül lecsúszott a szelepről, és nem tudott időben visszakapaszkodni – a buborékok eltaszították, a medence túloldalára. Aztán a feje felszínre bukkant a kékségből, a szemére tapadt úszósapkával. Fokozatosan ült ki az arcára egy győztes mosoly.

UTÓSZÓ:

REÁLIÁK ÉS SZÓJÁTÉKOK A ROSSZCSONTTÁNC-BAN

Sheila Armstrong *The Skellington Dance* (A rosszcsonttánc) című novellája jól tükrözi a mai poszt-Covid társadalom problémáit és feszültségeit. Az olvasót nem

csak a valószínűsíthető személyes érintettség segíti abban, hogy belehelyezkedjen a főszereplő élethelyzetébe, de ezt lehetővé teszi a kevésbé megszokott, egyes szám második személyű narráció is, mely által úgy érezhetjük, mintha rólunk szólna a novella, és a karakter gondolatai a mieink lennének. A történet viszonylag hétköznapi nyelven íródott, kortárs mű, egyszerű cselekménnyel. Ennek ellenére jócskán akadtak a szövegben olyan elemek, amelyeket kihívás volt lefordítani, magyar kontextusban visszaadni. A jelen – mintegy utószóként szolgáló – esszében ezekre az elemekre, azaz a novellában fellelhető reáliákra és szójátékokra szeretnék kitérni, ismertetve az általam választott fordítói megoldásokat, és megindokolva ezeket.

Klaudy Kinga (2013) nyelvészprofesszor a következőképpen definiálja a reália fogalmát: „*Valamely kultúrára sajátosan jellemző jeltárgy vagy fogalom és annak elnevezése, amelynek a másik kultúrában nincs megfelelője, vagy más a konnotációja.*”³ Tehát kultúraspecifikus szavakat, kifejezéseket értünk reáliák alatt. A novella fordítása közben számos olyan fogalmat vagy leírást találtam a szövegben, amely a magyar kultúrában kontextusidegen lenne.

Maga az eredeti cím is értelmezhető reáliaként – a *skellington* szó ugyanis nem csupán a *skeleton*, azaz *csontváz* szóra utal, de popkulturális utalásként is él az angol nyelvű kultúrák köztudatában: Henry Selick *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (*Karácsonyi lidércnyomás*) című filmjében a főszereplőt Jack Skellingtonnak hívják, utalva ezzel arra, hogy ő maga egy eleven csontváz.⁴ A címet látva azonnal az említett filmre asszociáltam, és ezt az utalást szerettem volna a magyar fordításban is tükrözni. Ugyanakkor az író saját bevallása szerint az eredeti cím csupán „*részben utal*” a filmre, és inkább azt hivatott érzékeltetni, hogy a gyerekek gyakran másképp ejtenek számukra nehéz szavakat, mint például a *skeleton*.⁵ Tehát az eredeti szöveg inkább félrehallásra, szójátéokra hivatott utalni.

Lévén a magyar *csontváz* szó nem bonyolult, bizonytalan voltam azt illetően, hogyan adhatnám vissza ugyanazt a hatást, amit az angol nyelvű cím kelt. Eleinte a *csontváztánc* kifejezés használatát latolgattam, az -á hangok összecsengetése miatt, de végül arra jutottam, hogy ez nem adná vissza kellőképpen az eredeti szó játékoságát. Ezt követően a *csontitánc* címet adtam a fordított szövegnek, mivel a becézett forma – *csontváz* helyett *csonti* – sokkal inkább közvetíti a kifejezés mögötti gyermeki habitust, ámbár félrehallás helyett inkább rövidítést, becézést sugall.

Végül úgy döntöttem, a végleges címben – és a szövegben – *rosszcsontitánc* fog szerepelni, mivel ez a megoldás több szempontból is hasonló szerepet tölt

³ Klaudy Kinga: Nyelvi és kulturális aszimmetria a reáliák fordításában. In: Bárdosi V. (szerk.): *Reáliák – A lexikológiától a frazeológiáig. Értelmezések és fordítási kérdések*, Budapest, Tinta Könyvkiadó, 2013, 86.

⁴ Henry Selick: *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, Buena Vista International, 1993.

⁵ Az író e-mailjének parafrázisa angolról fordítva (személyes közlés, 2024. november 21.).

be, mint az eredeti kifejezés. Egyrésztől megőrzi a popkulturális elemet, lévén a fent említett film magyar fordításában Jack Skellington neve Rosszcsont Jack.⁶ Másrésztől, ámbár a *rosszcsont* szó nem utal félrehallásra vagy kiejtésbeli nehézségekre, a játékosan könnyed hangvétel megmarad, sokkal egyértelműbb a gyermeki természetre való utalás, ráadásul maga a kifejezés jól ismert eleme a mindennapi beszédnek is, ezáltal túlmutatva az olyan utalásokon, amelyeket csak szűk körben értenek.

A fentihez hasonló problémába ütköztem egy másik szójátékkal – pontosabban szóviccel – kapcsolatban. Mivel a *pedofil* szó angolul *paedophile*, a forrásnyelvi szövegben szereplő „Peter-file” félrehallás hasonlít az eredeti szóra. Az olvasó így könnyen megérti, hogyan hozta magát kínos helyzetbe a főszereplő, mikor gyerekként ki akart állni az édesapja mellett, és azt mondta, hogy csak a – Peter nevű – nagybátyja „Peter-file”.⁷

Angolul a félreértés javarészt a szavak hasonló hangzású végének – „-file” és „-phile” toldalékok – tudható be, illetve a szókezdő -p-nek. Magyar nyelven ezt főleg amiatt lett volna nehéz visszaadni, mert a szavak sokkal kevésbé csengenek össze, és nehezen találtam olyan megoldást, amely ne lett volna erőltetett. Végül jóformán teljesen átalakítottam a szöveg kérdéses részét: a fordításomban a főszereplőnek két nagybátyja van, Paddy és Phil, a kettenük nevét egyesítve – Paddy-Phil – pedig kapunk egy szót, ami hangzásában hasonlít a *pedofil*-ra. Kifejezetten szerencsésnek találom ebben a megoldásban azt, hogy a szavak közti áthallás nagyobb, mint az eredeti szövegben, illetve a *Paddy* meglehetősen elterjedt becézése a Patrick névnek Írországbán, ahol a novella is játszódik. Bár nem volt egyszerű alternatívát találnom az említett szójátéokra, némileg könnyített a helyzeten az, hogy tudtam, miből indulhatok ki – egy olyan magyar megfelelőt volt célszerű keresnem, amely egy nevet (illetve jelen esetben kettőt) mos össze egy erősen derogatív, negatív jelentésű szóval.

Ellenben sokkal nagyobb fejtörést okozott egy kifejezés, mindjárt a novella elején: mikor a narráció leírja, hogy Gideon „bombát ugrik” a vízbe. Bár a magyar megfelelőt ismerem, sokáig nem tudtam értelmezni, mit takar a „*bending into the beginning of a cannonball*”⁸ – a *cannonball* ugyanis szó szerint lefordítva ágyúgolyó. Mivel magyarul leginkább *bombaként* emlegetjük, ha valaki össze-gömbölyödik medencébe való ugrás közben, és az angol megfelelővel azelőtt nem találkoztam, eleinte nem jöttem rá, hogy az említett ugrást takarja a leírás. Tévétra vitt, hogy Gideonnak gerincproblémái vannak – vagy legalábbis voltak – a történet szerint: az a hamis benyomásom támadt, hogy a gyermek háta rohamosan görbül, mintha ágyúgolyót cipelne. Ez azonban logikailag

⁶ <https://port.hu/adatlap/film/tv/karacsonyi-lidercnyomas-the-nightmare-before-christmas/movie-1271> (Utolsó letöltés: 2025. október 29.)

⁷ Sheila Armstrong: The skellington dance. In: Sh. Armstrong: *How to Gut a Fish*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022, 29.

⁸ Ibid.

szembement azzal a körülménnyel, hogy Gideont már megműtötték, és azóta tökéletesen egyenes a gerince.⁹ Eleinte azt feltételeztem, a *cannonball* kifejezés ebben a kontextusban valamilyen játékot takar, amit a gyerekek – Gideon és Roisín – játszanak. Végül a *shockwave* (csobbanás keltette hullám)¹⁰ szó vezetett rá, hogy Gideon beugrott a medencébe, tehát a *cannonball* egyfajta ugrást jelenthet. A sejtésemet beigazolta egy, az ugrást illusztráló videó,¹¹ melynek segítségével rájöttem, hogy a *bombát ugrik* kifejezés a helytálló.

A legnagyobb kihívást mégis azok a kifejezések jelentették, amelyek leginkább ír kulturális kontextusban – vagy legalábbis nyugat-európai kontextusban – értelmezhetőek, míg a magyarban kevésbé.

Remek példa erre, mikor az úszómesterlány haját „régimódi ír néptáncos” (*old-fashioned Irish dancer*) frizurájához hasonlítja a narráció.¹² Amennyiben szó szerint fordítottam volna le a hasonlatot, a magyar olvasóközönség alighanem viszonyítási alap híján maradt volna, míg az ír kultúrát behatóan ismerők számára elegendő ez a leírás. Bár élhettem volna az idegenítés (*foreignization*)¹³ lehetőségével, megtartva az eredeti szóhasználatot, úgy döntöttem, célszerűbb, ha közérthetőbb képre cserélem. Ez utóbbi okból a – túlzott – honosítás (*domestication*)¹⁴ opcióját is elvetettem, mivel *magyar néptáncos*hoz (vagy egyszerűen *néptáncos*hoz) való hasonlítás összezavarná az olvasókat egy külföldön játszódó történet esetében, hacsak nem helyezem át a teljes cselekményt Magyarországra. Úgy vélem, a mai napig érvényes az a megállapítás, miszerint „[h]a szépirodalmi szövegek fordításáról van szó, akkor általában a honosítást tekintjük követendő stratégiának, hiszen a cél az, hogy a célnyelvi olvasóhoz minél közelebb kerüljön a szöveg”.¹⁵ Ugyanakkor az idézett szakember is rávilágít arra, hogy érdemes kerülni a végleteket¹⁶ ahelyett, hogy túlzásokba esnénk akár idegenítés, akár honosítás terén. Meglátásom szerint a novella cselekményének áthelyezése magyar kulturális kontextusba hasonló túlzást eredményezett volna, melyet nem tartottam indokoltnak, különösen a korunkra jellemző globalizáció mértéke és az információáramlás gyorsasága miatt. Egy általánosabb megoldás tűnt a legcélszerűbbnek, ezért fordítottam az említett kifejezést régimódi játékbabának, ami a novella szerzőjének tetszését is elnyerte.¹⁷ Bár a hasonlat maga nagyban eltér az eredeti szöveg szóhasználatától, a mögötte lévő kép

⁹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰ Ibid., 29.

¹¹ How to do a proper Cannon Ball. *YouTube*, Woodloch Resort, 31/10/2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzSrbA2Uu_Y (Utolsó letöltés: 2025. október 29.)

¹² Sheila Armstrong: The skellington dance. In: Sh. Armstrong: *How to Gut a Fish*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022, 32.

¹³ Lawrence Venuti: *The Translator's Invisibility*, London, Routledge, 1995.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Fischer Mária: Honosítsunk vagy idegenítsünk? Fordítási stratégiák a szövegszinttől a Terminusig. *Fordítástudomány*, 25 (1), 2023, 8.

¹⁶ Ibid, 9.

¹⁷ Személyes közlés, 2024. november 21.

körülbelül egyezik a forrásnyelvi utalással, mivel az ír néptáncához tartozó női hajviselet nagyon hasonlít egy játékbaba loknis hajára.

Még nagyobb dilemmát okoztak viszont a szöveg azon elemei, amelyek (a hagyományokon túlmutatva) az írországi mindennapok részét képezik, ezáltal pedig könnyen értelmezhetőek és ismerősek a helyi olvasók számára – ellenben összezavarják azokat, akik még nem találkoztak velük. Az ezekkel kapcsolatos kérdéseimet összegyűjtöttem és feltettem az írónak,¹⁸ aki sokat segített az értelmezésükben, a megfelelő alternatívák megtalálásában. Az esetek többségében az ilyen reáliáknál általánosító fordítást (generalizációt) alkalmaztam,¹⁹ mert a jelentés tágításával már könnyebb volt az adott fogalmat hazai kontextusba helyezni.

Sokáig bizonytalan voltam például a *bleeping smart-post*²⁰ (szó szerint: *sípoló okos közlekedési lámpa*) jelentésében. A zavaromat elsősorban az okozta, hogy a *post* szó nem csak póznát vagy lámpaoszlopot, de postát is jelenthet, így először valamilyen modern csomagküldő szolgálatra asszociáltam, amely viszont nem illett a szövegkörnyezetbe. Később jutott eszembe, hogy létezik olyan közlekedési lámpa, ami kattogással és sípolással jelzi a látássérülteknek, mikor biztonságos átkelni az úttesten. Eredetileg a fent említett szó szerinti fordítással éltem, de magyarul körülményesnek hatott a megfogalmazás, és a szerző is említette, hogy nem biztos abban, hogy ez a hivatalos megnevezése az ilyen típusú lámpáknak.²¹ Végül – az író tanácsa alapján és a saját belátásom szerint – egyszerűen *közlekedési lámpá*-nak fordítottam, mivel a hangjelzéssel működő lámpák nem annyira gyakoriak Magyarországon, mint például Írországbán, és a történet szempontjából elhanyagolható részlet a közlekedési lámpa típusa.

Hasonló kihívást jelentett a *yellow posters*²² (szó szerint: *sárga posztterek* vagy *plakátok*) fordítása, mert bár a kifejezést könnyű volt értelmezni, nem tudtam, milyen plakátokra célozhat a szöveg. Félrevezetett a sárga szín, illetve az a körülmény, hogy a főszereplőnek éppen nehezebbre esik a történet ezen pontján a beszéd – eleinte azt hittem, kiragasztható *post-it* cetlikre céloz a szerző, és esetleg azok segítségével kommunikál a karakter, írott üzenetek formájában. Az író válaszelevele világított rá, hogy sárga színű Covid-járvány plakátokról van szó,²³ amelyek a szükséges óvintézkedésekre hívták fel a figyelmet

¹⁸ Személyes közlés, 2024. november 21.

¹⁹ Klaudy Kinga: Bevezetés a fordítás gyakorlatába. Lexikai átváltási műveletek, 2. előadás. Villámfordítás Fordítóiroda, 2015. március 3. <https://villamforditas.hu/forditoiroda/248-lexikai-konkretizacio-es-generalizacio-2-eloadas> (Utolsó letöltés: 2025. október 29.)

²⁰ Sheila Armstrong: The skellington dance. In: Sh. Armstrong: *How to Gut a Fish*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022, 32.

²¹ Személyes közlés, 2024. november 21.

²² Sheila Armstrong: The skellington dance. In: Sh. Armstrong: *How to Gut a Fish*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022, 34.

²³ Személyes közlés, 2024. november 21.

a pandémia ideje alatt, és Írorszáiban sok helyen lehetett velük találkozni. Mivel Magyarországon kevésbé emblemikus az említett sárga plakát, egyszerűen a járványplakát megnevezéssel éltem.

Szintén a pandémiához köthető a *red figures*²⁴ kifejezés, amely szó szerinti fordításban vörös számokra utal – Írorszáiban piros számokkal jelölték a fertőzöttek számát a híradóban.²⁵ A célnyelvi szövegben *Covid-statisztikák*-ként fordítottam le a kifejezést.

Valamivel könnyebbnek bizonyult a kifejezetten angolszász vagy ír kultúrához kapcsolódó reáliák magyar megfeleltetése – valószínűleg azért, mert ezek nagy része nem volt számomra teljesen ismeretlen. Jó példa erre a *half-pint*²⁶ átváltása deciliterbe. Ehhez hasonló – ámbár szigorúan véve nem reália – a *fortnight*²⁷ kifejezés magyarázó fordítása: két hét.

A szövegben továbbá két sportot is említenek, melyek magyar kontextusban kultúraidegenek: a rugby – a *rugby-tackle*²⁸ kifejezés kapcsán – és a hurlinget²⁹; utóbbi az írek népszerű nemzeti sportja. Mindkét esetben általánosítottam a magyar fordításnál, azzal, hogy a jelentés egy részét kihagytam: a *rugby-tackle*-nél csak a *birkózást* (*tackle*) őriztem meg, a *hurling match* pedig módosult egyszerű *meccsre*. Úgyszintén a kihagyás³⁰ lehetőségével éltem a *Lucozade* márka esetében,³¹ lévén, hogy egy főleg Nagy-Britanniában és Írorszáiban ismert üdítőitalról van szó, hozzáadott vitaminokkal.³² Eleinte latolgattam annak a lehetőségét, hogy egy másik, Magyarországon is ismert márkával helyettesítem be a kérdéses szövegrészt (pl. *Hohes C*, *Happy Day*, stb.), de végül a konkrét márka megnevezése helyett egyszerűen *rostos narancslék*-ként adtam meg a fordítást, lévén ez a megnevezés általános, magyarázó és nem korlátozódik egy-egy országra.

Mivel a novella bővelkedik számunkra kultúraidegen, vagy nehezen értelmezhető elemekben, izgalmas kihívásnak bizonyult a fordítása; a megfelelő alternatívák megtalálásához kutatómunkát is kellett végezni, ami ízelítőt adott a fordítói munka nehézségeiből is. Összességében elégedett vagyok

²⁴ Sheila Armstrong: The skellington dance. In: Sh. Armstrong: *How to Gut a Fish*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022, 33.

²⁵ Személyes közlés, 2024. november 21.

²⁶ Sheila Armstrong: The skellington dance. In: Sh. Armstrong: *How to Gut a Fish*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022, 35.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 33.

²⁹ Ibid., 35.

³⁰ Klaudy Kinga: *Bevezetés a fordítás gyakorlatába*, Lexikai átváltási műveletek, 4. előadás. Villámfordítás Fordítóiroda, 2015. március 16. <https://villamforditas.hu/forditoiroda/250-jelentesek-kihagyas-a-betoldasa-4-eloadas> (Utolsó letöltés: 2025. október 29.)

³¹ Sheila Armstrong: The Skellington dance. In: Sh. Armstrong: *How to Gut a Fish*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022, 33.

³² <https://www.lucozade.com/> – A Lucozade hivatalos weboldala. (Utolsó letöltés: 2025. október 29.)

a végeredménnyel, és bár még bőven van hova fejlődnöm, úgy érzem, sok értékes tapasztalatot szereztem, miközben a szövegen dolgoztam.

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ÉILÍS NÍ DHUIBHNE: A WALESÍ PARTOK (THE COAST OF WALES)

Translated by
MARIANNA GULA

NEGOTIATING THE BOUNDARIES OF LIFE AND DEATH: SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE TRANSLATION OF ÉILÍS NÍ DHUIBHNE'S THE COAST OF WALES

In July 2025 Éilís Ní Dhuibhne was appointed Laureate for Irish fiction in recognition of her multifaceted literary career spanning fifty years. Having written across several genres (dramas, novels, short stories) for various audiences, in two languages, English and Irish, her creative writing often bearing the mark of her scholarly interest in folklore, Ní Dhuibhne's work constantly "negotiate[s] the boundaries of different worlds",¹ often from female perspectives. It has also crossed linguistic boundaries by having been translated into German, French, Dutch, Danish, Russian, Slovenian, Bulgarian, and Japanese, not yet, however, into Hungarian.

I have chosen to translate one of her short stories to introduce her into Hungarian culture, since this is the genre she feels most affinity for, a genre in which "poetry and prose merge," as she herself observed.² *The Coast of Wales*, a story negotiating the boundaries of life and death, was first published in *The Long Gaze Back: An Anthology of Irish Women Writers* (2015) edited by Sinéad Gleeson, and later became included in two different selections of Ní Dhuibhne's stories (published in 2017 and 2023 respectively) aiming to offer flashes of light into her creative trajectory and varied use of the form. Written on Sinéad Gleeson's invitation, the story – of a widow visiting her husband's grave in the cemetery – heavily draws on the author's lived experience, marking her effort to resume writing fiction a year after the shock of losing her husband, as she touchingly records in her *Twelve Thousand Days: A Memoir of Love and Loss* (2018): "My interest in writing fiction vanished completely, although I continued to read it [...] But the creation of fiction seemed trivial, like a pointless child's

¹ Éilís Ní Dhuibhne: Why Would Anyone Write in Irish? – Ciarán Mac Murchaidh (ed.): *Who Needs Irish?: Reflections on the Importance of the Irish Language Today*, Dublin, Veritas, 2004, 80.

² Munira H. Mutran – Patricia Aquino: Interviewing Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, *ABEI Journal* 18 (2016) 152. <https://doi.org/10.37389/abej.v18i0.3527>, (accessed 1 November 2025).

game. When, after a year, I took on commissions to write I tended to write autobiographically, about death, since everything else seemed irrelevant and insignificant.”³

When translating the text I kept a close watch on the laconic style, the matter-of-fact tone veiling and unveiling bereavement, trying to avoid both over- and under-stylization; as well as on the text’s enactment of a sensory intensification triggered by traumatic loss – its foregrounding of color, movement, shape and texture,⁴ often by means of non-standard word order and fragmentation. I have also tried to render the “sudden veerings”⁵ in style and tone the text performs, the filtering of pain through macabre humor; as well as the poetic effects created by alliteration, rhythm and lyric impressionism.

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ÉILÍS NÍ DHUIBHNE: A WALESÍ PARTOK

Átellenben a virágágyással, mely bíborvörös kankalinokkal és tökéletesen műfogsorrózsaszín tulipánokkal kápráztatja el a szemet, sárga anorákban hajol

³ Éilís Ní Dhuibhne: *Twelve Thousand Days: A Memory of Love and Loss*, Belfast, Blackstaff, 2018, 201.

⁴ This aspect is also highlighted in Luz Mar González-Arias: The Rituals of Mourning: Éilís Ní Dhuibhne’s “The Coast of Wales,” or Why It Is Important to Perform Grief, *Irish University Review* 54.1 (2024), 49.

⁵ Anne Fogarty: Preface to Éilís Ní Dhuibhne: *Midwife to the Fairies: New and Selected Stories*, Cork, Attic, 2003, xv.

egy nő a csap fölé. Míg ő kék öntözőkannáját tölti, kiskutyája várakozik – yorkie vagy scottie, valamelyik a bozontos „ie” fajták közül. A kutya meg se mukkan, ami jó, mert be se lehetne ide hozni. Türelmesen mered a csapra.

A csap egy betonpóznához van rögzítve, és szinte beleolvad a mögötte lévő kőbe és tejködös égbe. Épp ezért eddig észre sem vettem. Most viszont ennek a fekete kutyas hölgynek a sárga anorákja fényt derített rá. Mindig van mit tanulni, akárhányszor csak idejövök. Megtudtam például, hogy a cserepes virágok, melyeket gondosan elhelyezek az agyagban, nagyon gyorsan elszáradnak, legyen bármilyen esős is az idő. Pár naponta ki kell jönnie az embernek, hogy megöntözze őket. Azok, akik tisztában vannak ezzel, mindenféle okos kis tartós szerkezetet tákolnak össze: kőablakszerű tartályokat helyeznek a betontalapzatra, és szezonális virágokkal töltik meg őket. Könnyebb lenne, ha közvetlenül a földbe ültethetne az ember, de az szabályellenes.

Ennek az az oka, hogy ez egy gyepesített temető. Most tanultam ezt is: magát a terminust, „gyepesített temető”, és hogy ennek az a jelentése, hogy a sírokon fű nő. És hogy ezt a fűvet az önkormányzat emberei nyírják. Nyírják is rendszeresen mióta beköszöntött a tavasz, hat hete. Ezek a fűnyírók eltávolítanak a sírokról mindenféle dekorációt, ami nem engedélyezett – plüss macskákat például, vagy műanyag angyalkákat, Mikulásokat – és a kapu melletti nagy konténerbe hajigálják őket. Az elhervadt virágokat is kihajítják. Árgus szemekkel kell figyelned a növényeidet, ha biztos akarsz benne lenni, hogy a nyírók nem vetik őket azelőtt a konténerbe, mielőtt elpusztulnának. Ez a sok nyírás és hajigálás viszont azt jelenti, hogy a hely rendben van tartva. Napos időben szinte kellemes látvány, mármint miután hozzászokott az ember.

A vizet eddig flakonban hoztam magammal a hátizsákomban. Most meg kiderül, hogy nem is szükséges otthonról hordani. A víz nehezebb, mint amilyennek tűnik, ahogy a csapból csillan elő táncolva, akár a csillagok.

A temetőkert így fest: hatalmas lakónegyed, melyet főút szel ketté. Az úton akár autóval is lehet járni, és van is, aki jár, de szerintem ez nem ildomos, ahogy a tengerparton sem az. Ebből a főcsapásból zsákutcák nyílnak, vagy hús mindkét oldalon. Több száz nyílegyenes sírsor, a sírok szimmetrikus elrendezésben, akár a dobozházak, mindegyik előtt zsebkendőnyi gyepp. Igaz, a sírkövek közt van némi változatosság, akárcsak egy lakónegyed házai közt, de mint a házaknál is, a tervezési előírások itt is határt szabnak a sokféleségnek. A fejkövek nem lehetnek négy lábnál magasabbak, így minden fejkő egész pontosan négy láb magas – persze, hogy mindenki addig megy el, ameddig mehet. Ettől eltekintve valamennyi mozgástér engedélyezett, jóllehet minden sírtáblatervhez és sírfelirathoz a hivatalos szervek jóváhagyása kell. Nyilvánvalóan toleránsak; meglehetősen szokatlan sírköveket is látni. Igyekszik az ember kerülni az „ízléstelen” kifejezést a halállal kapcsolatban – ezt is most tanultam. Ne ítélkezz triviális dolgokat illetően (és hát minden triviális, ahhoz képest, ami ezen a helyen megy). De valahogy az arany feliratozású fényes kőlapokkal,

melyeken önelégült angyalok trónolnak, nem sikerült eddig megbarátkoznom. A fehér márvány szebb, még akkor is, ha olyanok rajta a mély érzések kifejezésére hivatott sorok, mintha country dalokból vagy az *Our Boys* „Vicces sztorik” rovatából plagizálták volna őket.

Élete gyönyörű emlék. Hiánya csöndes gyász.

Viseld gondját Tomnak, Uram, ahogy ő viselte gondunk. Sok-sok szeretettel és minél kisebb felhajtással.

A sima kövek a kedvenceim, az egyszerű szürke, ami, örömmel jelenthetem, az elmúlt négy-öt évben egész gyakori lett. (Egy temetőben könnyű lekövetni a divatot.)

Én is ezt rendeltem neked. A „vándorkő” fajtát, a természetes hatásút, ami illik egy olyan férfihoz, aki gyapjúszövetet viselt és hibátlanul beszélt írül, walesiül és skótnul. Azt hittem, ez az én választásom, de aztán rájöttem, hogy a legtöbb író és költő, tanár és kutató hasonló kövek alatt nyugszik. Egyetlen egyedi emlékmű van az egész helyen: egy kiterjedt rózsaszínes gránitlap, keskeny, akár egy pillangó szárnya. Név és dátum van csupán rávésve apró Times New Roman betűtípussal.

Az építész, aki a Belfieldet tervezte.

Hát persze.

Az igazat megvallva, nekem is rendben lenne egy ilyen. Egy magas modernista fejkő, ami úgy néz ki, mintha Finnországból importálták volna, jó drágán, vagy valami visszafogott jóízűségről tanúskodó kőedény. De az ilyen könnyű lenne másolni, és egyszer csak az IKEA lapraszerelt változatban kezdené kiszállítani az eredeti ár töredékéért. Tele lenne vele a hely.

Inkább megmaradok a természetközeli kinézetnél.

Veled ellentétben én pontosan tudom, hol és hogyan temetnek majd el (már ha nem egy repülőgép-szerencsétlenség végez velem vagy megölnék, felaprítanak, és sosem találják meg a testem). Egy szerény vándorkő alatt leszek a C soron, a St. Mark's elnevezésű részlegen, egész közel a falhoz és a régi ír anglikán templomhoz. Amikor először megmutatták a helyet, szépnek találtam az öreg templom harangtornyának és kőfalainak óvó közelsége miatt. A temető újabb negyede, St. Elisabeth's, egyáltalán nem szólított meg. Hatalmas sík mező, mely az Ír-tengerig elér csüggetegen. A temetkezési vállalkozó, aki buzdított, hogy gondoljam át alaposan a dolgot, mielőtt döntenék, felhívta rá a figyelmem, hogy idővel a St. Elisabeth's „kevésbé lesz kopár”. „Nőnek majd a fák”, mondta finom, illetve finoman ironikus hangon. Nem hagyja, hogy a halál kedvét szegje, és hosszútávon gondolkodik.

De mennyi időm van még?

A St. Mark's-ról jó kilátás nyílik a Dublin környéki hegyekre, melyek ma tojássárga színben pompáznak, még a tejszerű ködben is. Húsvéti tojás idő,

a természetben szinte minden sárgállik. A St. Mark's mellett szól a kora is, hogy a temető legrégebbi részében van, ahová már nem temetnek égetetlen tetemeket – nincs elég hely. Nekik, szegény csontvázaknak, nincs választásuk. A St. Elisabeth's-be kerülnek; vágjanak hozzá jó pofát és várják ki, míg a fák megnőnek. De hamvaknak kis urnákban még van hely a régi negyedben, csak azért, mert nem túl sok ember választja Dublinban a hamvasztást, és sokakat azok közül, akik mégis, sosem tesznek sírba – hamvaikat valami festői helyen szórják szét, ahová nyaralni jártak, vagy otthon a kandallópárkányon maradnak. A te hamvaiddból is van otthon valamennyi. Azt tervezem, hogy egy földnyelven szórom szét majd őket nem mesze onnan, ahol laktunk, mikor Anglesey-n nyaraltunk, ott, ahol majdnem mindenki walesiül beszél. De igazából jólesik, hogy a házban vannak, szóval valamennyit csak megtartok belőlük. Ez azt jelenti, hogy a hamvaid három különböző helyen lesznek. Nem tiltja semmilyen szabály; ez a szép a hamvakban. Egy testet nem lehetne felszabdalni és darabokban ide-oda temetni – csak nagyon kivételes esetben, például amilyen Daniel O'Connellé.

Ilyen gondolatokat egészségtelennek, sőt gusztustalannak tartottam volna valaha. Na meg rémisztőnek. Korábban. Az élet az élőké, volt a mottóm, még ha ennek nem is adtam hangot sosem, semmilyen formában. De most már mindig velem vannak a holtak gondolatban, és egészen kiművelt lettem sírokat és temetőket illetően. Létrehozhatnék egy online tanácsadó központot, még az is lehet, hogy belevágok, ha egyszer túl leszek a halálodon. Egész sok tervem van akkorra, amikor túl leszek rajta, amikor majd visszatér az energiám, és új életet kezdek, olyan emberként, aki elvesztette a férjét, de életben maradt. Özvegyként, hogy azt a szót használjuk, amit minden özvegy, akivel csak találkoztam – tele van velük ez a hely – ki nem állhat. Mindenki mondja nekem, hogy te is azt szeretnéd, hogy új életet kezdjek, hogy boldog legyek. Annyi, gondolom, biztos állítható, hogy nem szeretnéd, hogy folyton nyomorultul érezzem magam. Nem volt esélyed kinyilvánítani, mit részesítenél előnyben, de mások megteszik helyetted: be kéne szerezned egy kutyát. Hát nem szerencse, hogy olyan gyorsan történt? Egy masszázstól annyival jobban éreznéd magad! Csupa olyan dolog, amin jót nevetnének, magunk között, vacsora közben. Biztos vacsoráztunk vagy 14 000-szer együtt, szóval legalább 14 000-szer neveltünk egy jót; 28 000-szer? Többször. Annyira jó lenne veled vacsorázni csak még egyszer, hogy elmondhassak neked mindent, ami történt, hogy az összes reakciót megoszthassam veled: a felemelőket, az abszurdakat, és a közbeesőket.

Elég hosszúra nyúlna a vacsora, ha mindenről beszámolnék.

Jót akarnak.

A St. Mark's valójában nem annyira szép, mint elsőre gondoltam. A templom és a borostyánnal borított fal délután lefogja a napot, és ettől a sírunkra gyakran hideg árnyék vetül. Ma kivételesen délelőtt jöttem, és süt rád a nap. Kiveszem a hátizsákomból a műanyag flakont, és meglocsolom a lila virágot, a cineráriát, majd a fehéret, a krizantémot. Nem az efféle virágot szeretted,

én sem ezt szeretem, de ez volt az egyetlen dolog a virágboltban, ami elég egészségesnek nézett ki ahhoz, hogy legalább egy ideig túléljen ebben a temetőben. Meg is maradt, és egész jól néz ki itt a síron, aminek szüksége is van a sok virágra. A vándorkő még nem érkezett meg – a megfelelő gránittömbre várnak. Mintha a gránittömbök akkor gurulnának le a domboldalon, amikor kedvük szottyan. Azt gondolná az ember, hogy van egy állandó beszállítójuk. Egyelőre egy fatáblád van, a neved áll rajta, és a dátumok. Sokat segített, különösen az elején, amikor még nem emlékeztem, hol van a sír. Időbe telt, míg megjegyeztem, hogy Mary Byrne sírjánál kell balra fordulni, a sírnál, ami rögtön Enrico Cafolla zeneprofesszoré után jön – könnyebb megjegyezni, mint azt, hogy Mary Byrne, szeretett feleség, Anya és Mama. (A „nagy” szót sosem látni fejköveken.) Most már nem tévedek el.

Nincs elég víz a flakonban. A virágok élnek, de szomjasak. A krizantém fehér szirmai szalmaszállá válnak. A cinerária olyan erős királylila, annyira mélyre festett lila, hogy a keskeny, pengeélszerű szirmai sosem fognak megbarnulni, de kornyadoznak. Elhatározom, hogy elsétálok a csaphoz és hozok még vizet. Beletelik vagy tíz percre, míg oda és visszasétálok, de most már rengeteg időm van.

Ez is új. Korábban semmire sem volt időm. Az idő most végtelenül terül el előttem, mint a tenger odébb, a vasúton túl. De az óceán óriási kiterjedése illúzió. A horizonton túl ott van a part, még ha innen nem is látod. Wales. A föld, amit szeretek, mert szerencsét hozott nekünk. Négy év várakozás után ott sikerült elérnünk, hogy megfogadjon a gyermekünk, a beaumarisi nyaralásunk első éjjelén. Mindössze hatvanhat (tengeri) mérföldnyire van ide. Csak mert nem látod, nem jelenti azt, hogy nem is létezik. És közelebb van, mint, mondjuk, Ballinasloe.

Ahogy a csaphoz visszaindulok, újra szemembe ötlík a nő, akit korábban láttam. A nő a sárga anorákban. Egy sírnál foglalatostokodik. Kétségtelenül ő is özvegy, mint én, mint a legtöbb temetőlátogató, akiknek az egész élete azzal telt, hogy a férjükről gondoskodtak, és nem áll szándékukban most abbahagyni, csak azért, mert a férjük meghalt. Így kijárnak a sírokhoz, hogy kiszedjék a gázt, megöntözzék a virágokat, és újakat ültessenek. A sárga anorákos nő mindkét kezével érinti fejkövét, és beszél hozzá. Ahogy elhaladok mellette, hallom, mit mond: „Sandra eljött tegnap este, együtt vacsoráztunk, aztán megnéztük a *Fair City*-t. Annyira hiányzol, drága szívem.”

A kutyát sehol sem látom.

A csap.

Ott van a kutya, pórázával a betonpóznához kötve. Scottie, most már látom, emlékszem, mi a különbség. Fekete, az a hosszúkás, szkeptikus, skót fejű.

„Szia, kutyus,” mondom. „Engedd meg, hogy megöltsem vízzel ezt az üres gyömbéres flakont.”

Megnyitom a csapot, és összepréselem a flakon száját, hogy rá tudjam illeszteni a csapra. Nem jó ötlet.

Pont akkor halad át a kapun egy halottaskocsi, két fekete limuzin nyomában; majd kissé lemaradva hétköznapi autók sora. Néhányan a sarkon álldogálnak, tiszteletüket teszik, ahogy a halottaskocsi elhalad mellettük, és befordul a sarkon, a St. Elisabeth's felé tartva.

Valaha utáltam a halottaskocsi látványát. Lehangolt, ha szembejött velem egy az úton. De már nem félek tőlük azóta, hogy szembenéztem a halállal, megpróbáltam elhessegetni, és elvesztettem a csatát. Most már képes vagyok minden halottaskocsira szenvtelenül tekinteni, mert a tiédet követtem.

Ahogy a halottaskocsi fordul be a sarkon, ez történik. A műanyag flakon lepattan a csapról, és az erős vízsugár a kutyára fröccsen. A hirtelen hideg zuhanytól megriadva a kutya elszabadul. Nem lehetett túl szorosan megkötve. Elnyargal, a sárga anorákos nő felé.

És befut egyenesen a második limuzin alá, amelyben valószínűleg a távolabbi rokonok ülnek, akik ahhoz azért túl fontosak, hogy saját autóban jöjjenek. Én látom a kutyát, az összes ember, aki a temetést az oldalonról követi, látja a kutyát. Az egyetlen ember, aki nem látja a kutyát, az a limuzin sofőrje. Annyira pici a kutya, méretre akár egy jóltáplált patkány. Kutyákat nem lehet behozni a temetőbe. A sofőr nem számít rá, hogy elé fut egy.

Milyen rettenetes. Először a férjed, aztán a kutya.

Megfordult már ez a fejemben, kutyákkal kapcsolatban. Macskákkal is. A halandóságuk. Ha beszereznék egy kutyát, mint ahogy sokan tanácsolják, a kutya meghalna valamikor. És mire meghal, addigra megszeretem, jóllehet egy kutya nem képes egy férj helyét betölteni. Újra veszteséget élnék meg, csak máshogy. Könnyebben. De a veszteséget sosem könnyű megélni.

A halottaskocsi lassan siklik az úton a St. Elisabeth's felé. Az első limuzin befordul a sarkon és követi, majd a második limuzin is befordul.

A sofőr még mindig nincs tudatában, hogy áthajtott egy özvegy kutyáján.

De nem.

Nem. Minden rendben. A kutya jól van.

Az autó áthajtott felette és maga mögött hagyta, mint medúzát a parton az apály. Életben van, enyhe meglepetés látszik csak keskeny arcán. Nekiiramlik a sírok fölött, arrafelé, ahol a nő, akit szeret, és aki mindebből semmit sem észlelt, elmélyült beszélgetést folytat valakivel, akit szeret, de nem létezik.

Az állatok nem tudják, amit mi emberek tudunk.

Minden út szélén álló ember, magamat is beleértve, nevet, vannak, akik felszabadultabban, mint mások.

„Micsoda szerencse,” mondja valaki.

Rövid szünet. Ízlelgetjük a mindent átható megkönnyebbülést, és elgondolkodunk a megjegyzésen.

Banális, de milyen igaz, mint a legtöbb közhely. Sok múlik a szerencsén, kutyaszorítóban, ha élet-halál forog kockán.

Elzárom a csapot.

Majd felrúgom a flakont és hagyom, hadd folyjon rá a víz a bíborvörös kankalinokkal és tökéletesen műfogsorszínű tulipánokkal beültetett virágágyásra. Úgy döntök, hogy nem megyek vissza a sírunkhoz. Semmi értelme. Hacsak nem kap hamarosan esőt a hetyke cinerária és a megfáradt krizantém, amit magukba szívhatnak, semmi, amit én tehetek, nem fogja őket életben tartani.

A gyászolók megrázzák magukat, felidéznek, miért vannak itt, és elcsendesedve megindulnak az ösvényen, mely a St. Elisabeth's-hez, a vasútvonalhoz és az Ír-tengerhez vezet. A köd felperzselődött és csillámlik a víz, selyemkék a földhöz közel, mélysötét indigó, erőteljes tintacsík a horizonton.

Még mindig nem látni Walest. De ott van, annyi szent.

WILLIAM TREVOR: ÉDEN BÁR
(*THE PARADISE LOUNGE*)¹

Translated by
ZSUZSA CSIKAI

INTRODUCTION

William Trevor (1926–2016) was born in Mitchelstown, County Cork. He earned his university degree in History from Trinity College Dublin. In 1952, he moved to England with his wife. He published numerous novels and short story collections, and received several awards, including the Hawthornden Prize and the Whitbread Book of the Year Award. His novel, *The Story of Lucy Gault*, was nominated for both the Man Booker Prize and the Whitbread Fiction Prize. In 2002, he was knighted for his services to literature. Trevor was a member of Aosdána, the Irish Academy of Arts and Letters. The short story *The Paradise Lounge* (*Az Éden bár*) was first published in London in 1981, in the collection *Beyond the Pale*.

William Trevor is one of my favorite Irish short story writers. Among his many works, “The Paradise Lounge” particularly captivated me when I first read it. It is an intimate, delicately written story in which the reader gains insight into the innermost experiences and thoughts of two women.

WILLIAM TREVOR:
ÉDEN BÁR

A bárszéken ülő idős nő mozdulatlan volt, mint egy szobor. Talán azért ilyen kifejezéstelen az arca, gondolta Beatrice, mert ha mozdulatlan, nem látszik annyira, mennyire öreg. Az arc – a szem és száj is – pazarul volt sminkelve, pirosító és egy kevés illatos púder simította ki a ráncokat. Az állát megemelve tartotta, olyan szögben, hogy megfeszüljön az alatta lévő bőr. Ősz haja rövid volt a kis fekete sapka alatt, mely a régi idők divatját idézte, akárcsak a szűk fekete szoknya és a fekete bársony blézer. Úgy nyolcvan éves lehet, gondolta Beatrice, talán nyolcvankettő-nyolcvanhárom.

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– Azért még jól érezhetjük magunkat – mondta Beatrice barátja, mire Beatrice abbahagyta az idős nő tanulmányozását. – Ugye, Bea?

Bea odafordult. A férfi téglaszínű arcának közelségétől és a szemében bujkáló mosolytól ajka megremegett. Úgy tűnt, mosolyog ő is, de valójában könnyeinek visszafojtása tűnhetett örömmek. – Igen, hogyan.

Házasok voltak, de nem egymás házastársai. Beatrice laza nyári öltözetet viselő barátja ötvenes évei elején járt, már nem volt vékony, de testesnek sem volt mondható. Beatrice harminckét éves volt, kistermetű, feketehajú, kék farmer ruhát viselt. Mély rozsdabarna szemét – sok-sok évvel azelőtt édesapja írta le így – napszemüveg takarta. Akkoriban színésznő szeretett volna lenni.

Így lesz a legjobb – mondta a barátja, – talán már századszor azóta, hogy aznap kora délután beültek az autójába. A viszonynak vége volt, elhárult a családjukat fenyegető veszély. Azért utaztak ide, hogy elbúcsúzzanak egymástól.

– Igen, tudom, hogy így lesz a legjobb – ismételte Beatrice.

A bárnál ülő idős nő lassan a kalapjához emelte a kezét, ujjaival óvatosan megérintette. Majd lassan leereszkedett a kéz, és felemelte a koktélos poharat. Skarlátvörös ajka nem volt formátlan, de az évek erősen megrongálták a valaha tökéletes vonalakat. Ajkai összepréselődtek, mint egy rózsabimbó. Kudarcs – gondolta Beatrice, miközben az idős nőt szemlélte, végül is kudarc lett a viszonyukból. Már nem is volt szerelmes a férfi, és a férfi sem szerette már őt egy jó ideje. Az, hogy búcsúnak nevezték, csupán szépítette a dolgot: egy titkos, bűnös hétvégére jöttek, már nem maradt semmi, ami miatt ennél több lenne.

Sajnálom, hogy nem tartott tovább – mondta a férfi – és sajnálom Glengariffet.

– Nem érdekes.

– Akkor is sajnálom.

Beatrice már nem nézte a bárpultnál ülő idős nőt. A férfi mosolygott, ismét könnyeit rejtgetve, de azért is, hogy az lássa, nincsen benne rossz érzés. Miért is lenne?

– Hiszen legalább voltunk Glengariffben is – ezt persze nem gondolta komolyan, hiszen amikor ott jártak, majdnem lebuktak. Beatrice a nővérét használta alibinek arra, hogy elutazik otthonról – a nővére, aki most már jó ideje tényleg beteg volt, egy farmon élt, ahol nem volt telefon, és ez Beatrice szempontjából tökéletes volt.

– Soha nem foglak elfelejteni – mondta a férfi, nagy, napbarnította kezét hirtelen Beatrice-ére téve. Homlokán lüktetett egy ér, az ér mellett egy sor szeplő futott végig, öt apró folt a téglavörös bőrön. Télen alig lehetett észrevenni.

– Én sem foglak elfelejteni téged.

– Drága, egyetlen Bea – mondta a férfi – mintha visszatértek volna a kezdetekhez.

A bár egy félhomályos, négyzet alakú helyiség volt, benne elszórva az asztalok, az egyik volt az övék. A hamutálcák Guinnessst, a poháralátétek Heinekkent reklámoztak. A két ablak kopott üvegén átsütő napfény a whiskey borostyán

fényéhez hasonló csillogást varázsolt. A bárpult mögött üvegek színes sora csillogott – az italos üvegek fejjel lefelé, mérő edényeikkel együtt tarkabarkán megkészsereződtek a zsúfolt tükörben. A mintás szőnyegre csikkek égésnyoma és mindenféle folt rajzolt további mintákat. Éden Bár – egy emelkedett pillanatban így nevezte el a bárt a jelenlegi tulajdonos nagyapja. A hotel mahagóni halljából nyíló ajtón még mindig ott volt a tábla a bár nevével. Beatrice barátja habozott, mert a hely egyáltalán nem tűnt ígéretesnek: „Keegen Vasúti Hotel” egy kisvárosban, ahol még egyikük sem járt. Majdnem továbbhajtottak, de a férfi fáradt volt, és a nap is a szemébe süttöt vezeték közben. Jó lesz – mondta Beatrice, hogy megnyugtassa.

A férfi a bárhoz vitte a poharaikat, csengetnie kellett, mert a pultos már tíz perce eltűnt valahova.

– Szép esténk van – biccentett oda a bárszéken ülő idős nőnek, akinek sikerült úgy is jeleznie egyetértését, hogy arcának egyetlen izmát sem mozdította meg. – Még egyszer ugyanezt kérnénk –, mondta a férfi a pultosnak, aki elnézést kért az eltűnéséért, mondván, hogy egy csapot kellett megjavítania.

Amikor egyedül maradt, Beatrice sóhajtott egyet, majd levette a napszemüvegét. Nem volt szükség erre a búcsúra – nem volt szükség rá, hogy még egyszer utoljára pizsamában lássa a férfit, vagy hogy vele szemben üljön vacsoránál, majd a reggelinél, és beszélgessenek – mindez korábban természetes volt. „Egy utolsó kaland”, így fogalmazott a férfi, de Beának egy törött dob jutott eszébe, amit valaki püföl, hogy kihozza belőle a hangot, ami már eltűnt. Hogyan jutottak ide? Itt vannak szombat este az Éden bárban, a Keegen Vasúti Hotelben egy dombos kisvárosban, ahol szemét akadt fenn a Keresztény Testvérek kerítésén: hogyan lehet ez a vége annak, ami köztük volt? Most, hogy búcsúznak egymástól, a férfi már csak valaki más férje – a szerető elillant.

– Hát, nagyon ócska a csapunk – magyarázta a pultos, – ha a fene fenét eszik, se tudom beszerezni a betétet.

– Igen, az elég nehéz meló tud lenni.

– Ezt a feleségemnek is elmondhatná, uram.

Az italok kifizetve, a tranzakciónak vége. Az idős nő poharába is újabb gin és martini került, Beatrice ismét őt nézte. Figyelte, ahogyan cigarettára gyújt, mint egy zombi.

Miss Doheny-nek hívták az idős nőt: valaha gyönyörű volt, de soha nem ment férjhez. Minden szombat este a Maldrum házaspárral találkozott az Éden bárban, pár órán át beszélgettek az elmúlt hét történéseiről, pletykáltak és megbeszélték a világ dolgait. Miss Doheny mindig korábban érkezett, húsz percig üldögélt a bárpultnál egyedül, megivott néhány extra pohárral, amire nagy szüksége volt. Mielőtt Maldrumék megérkeztek, átült a sarokban lévő asztalhoz, mivel Mrs. Maldrum ott szeretett ülni.

Ritkán fordult elő, ha ilyenkor mások is voltak a bárban. Előfordult, hogy később megtelt valamennyire, de hatkor, a barátai érkezése előtt mindig egyedül

az övé volt a hely. Francis Keegan, a hotel örököse, aki egyben a pultos szerepét is betöltötte, sok időt töltött valahol hátul, hol ezt, hol azt kellett intéznie. De ez nem volt gond, hiszen miután köszöntek egymásnak, és váltottak pár szót az időjárásról, amúgy sem volt miről beszélgetniük. Miss Doheny szeretett a bárpultnál üldögélni egyedül, néha belepillantott a tükörbe, nézte, ahogyan visszatükröződnek a dolgok, feltéve, ha nem a saját arcát látta tükröződni. De most kellemesnek találta a változatosságot, hogy végre vannak más vendégek is.

Miss Doheny kétszer pillantott Beatrice-re, és egyszer a vele lévő férfire, és sejtette, hogy tilosban járnak. Néhány párbeszéd-foszlány elért hozzá a bárón keresztül, meg sem próbálták lehalkítani a hangjukat, hiszen az öregek legtöbbször amúgy is süketek. Dubliniak voltak, akiknek nem egészen az volt a kapcsolatuk, amit Francis Keegen a vendégkönyvbe beírt. A modern kor engedélyezte a bűnüket, mindenféle megjegyzés nélkül: a hotel előtt parkoló világosbarna autó is arra utalt, hogy vágyaik kielégítése hétköznapi, elfogadott dolognak számít.

Milyen más volt minden 1933-ban! – merengett Miss Doheny. Jól gondolta, hogy akkor volt ő annyi idős, mint most a sötét hajú lány. 1933-ban a házasságtörés, válás és a világosbarna autók inkább Amerikában és Angliában voltak szokásban, itt csak olvastak ilyesmiről, mert mindez idegen volt attól, amit már akkor az ír életmódnak kezdtek nevezni. „Katolikus Írország – mondogatta akkoriban Horan atya – tisztességes katolikus Írország.” A kifejezés homályos volt, mégis volt jelentése: a felemelkedő nemzet kereste az oszlopokat, amire építkezhet, és végül a szentség és az ír nyelv mellett tette le a voksát – természetes választás az adott körülmények között. „Egy bizonyos fajta nő az izonyos undort testesíti meg” – mondogatta Horan atya. A kifestett nők Clancy Mozgófilmszínházában – hang bevezetve 1936-ban – olyan lények voltak, akik szörnyű figyelmeztetésül szolgáltak. Jezabel-nők – így nevezte őket Horan atya, és hozzátette, hogy soha nem lett volna szabad engedélyezni a mozgófilmszínház létezését sem. Ha most Horan atya besétálna a Keegen Vasúti Hotelbe, az Éden bárba, miután negyed évszázada már a sírban fekszik, nem hinne a szemének: két házasságtörőt és a nyája egyik tagját látná, aki nem törődik a kifestett nőket szidalmazó szavaival. Mert Miss Doheny harmincöt éve minden szombat este eljött az Éden bárba, át a városon, elsétálva az 1789-es hősök emlékműve mellett, végig az élesen kanyargó Castle úton. Vasárnaponként újra végigmegy ugyanezen az úton a misére, oda és vissza. Se hideg, se eső nem tántorította el soha attól, hogy elmenjen a misére és eljöjjön a hotelbe, betegség sem gyakran kínozza. Azt, hogy az évek múlásával egyre erősebben festette magát, teljesen természetesnek tartotta – az adott körülmények között.

Miss Doheny kifejezetten otthon érezte magát az Éden bárban. Meldrumék tavasszal és nyáron növényeket hoztak neki, vagy metélőhagyma- és petrezselyemcsokrot, néha virágot. Nem azért, hogy viszonzozza valamivel a kedves gesztust, hanem mert egyszerűen jólesett neki, Miss Doheny is néha hozott

nekik egy üveg dzsemet, ha éppen azt készített, vagy egy pár vajas kekszet. Karácsonykor viszont ünnepélyesen ajándékot adtak át egymásnak. Karácsonykor Francis Keegen feldíszítette a bárt, a hotel hallját és az éttermet. Egyszer az évben, áprilisban a hotel éttermében bált tartottak, ami egybeesett a helyi lóversennyel, és a városban azt beszélték, hogy Francis Keegen annyit keres azon az egy estén, hogy abból a bevételből elvan a következő tizenkét hónapban. A hotel valahogyan elketyegett áprilistól ápriliséig, néhanapján egészen megélénkült a bár, amikor valamilyen rendezvény zajlott az étteremben, de soha nem történt olyan önfeledt költekezés, mint ami a lóverseny napjára volt jellemző. Néha utazó kereskedők szálltak meg a hotelben rövid időre, kockáztattak és bevállalták Mrs. Keegen főztjét, ami a legjobb esetben is szerény volt mind ambíció, mind pedig az eredmény tekintetében. Ezek a férfiak esténként a bárpultnál ültek, sört ittak, és Francis Keegennel beszélgettek. Néha Mrs. Keegen is felbukkant később, és elkortyolgatott egy pohár gin fizzt. Lompos teremtés volt, ősz haja lógott, papucsban járt. Férje stílusban és viselkedésben is illett hozzá, lilásvörös arcszíne arról tanúskodott, hogy elkötelezett híve a bárpultja mögül árult termékeknek. Igénytelen, jószándékú pár voltak, akiket a városban szerencsétlennek tartottak, mivel házasságukból nem született gyermek. Emiatt a Keegen Vasúti Hotel családi vállalkozásként a végét járta, ami talán helyénvaló is, hiszen a nevét adó vasútvonalat már 1951-ben megszüntették.

Mennyire irigylem őt! – gondolta Miss Doheny. – Milyen szerencsés, hogy ilyen könnyű világban él, senki nem ítéli el, mert szeret egy férfit. Miss Doheny számára helyesnek tűnt, hogy egy valós szerelmi viszony helyszíne az Éden bár, és hogy ezt senki nem kérdőjelezi meg. Francis Keegan tökéletesen tisztában volt vele, hogy a férfi és a nő nem házasok, de Horan atya papolása épp olyan áporodott volt, mint a fel nem takarított egérürülék. A szentség, ami a nemzet születését kísérte, végre elkezdte levedleni első szűk bőrét. Felszabadulás! – mondta ki magában a szót csodálattal Miss Doheny.

Sétáltak egyet a városban, még túl korán volt a vacsorához. Jó néhány bolt nyitva volt még, zöldségesek próbáltak megszabadulni a napok óta fonnyadó káposztától, amit a hétvége után már nem lehet majd eladni, nyitva voltak patikák és édességboltok is. „Kevin Ryan – legjobb Hifi a városban” kitett egy hangfalat az üzlete feletti ablakba, szombat esti zene harsogott – punk harmóniák, majd egy tenor előadásában a „Kelly a killane-i legény”. Minden ízlésnek megfelelték.

A keskeny utcákon bedugult a forgalom. Asszonyok válogatták a zöldségesek áruját, mostanáig vártak az árleszállításra. Frissen borotvált férfiak surrantak be a kocsmákba, fiatal srácok és lányok lézengtek a Redmond Kávéház előtt és az 1798-as emlékmű lábánál. Két kutya verekedett kedvetlenül a Bank of Ireland kapuja előtt.

Beatrice és a férfi megkérdezték, merre van a vár, majd felsétáltak a Várhegyre. A „Vár Autószalon” mögött, mondta a gyerek, akit megkérdeztek, és már

ott is voltak, egy borostyánnal benőtt romnál, ami leginkább egy tehénistálló maradványaira emlékeztetett. Hullámlemez zárta el az egyik boltíves bejáratot, rajta szakadt poszterek reklámozták a Calor gázt és egy rockbandát, a Duffy Cirkuszt, a Fine Gaelt és a Keegan Vasúti Hotelt életben tartó éves lóversenyt. Az épületeket lebontották ezen a területen, az emeletes panelházak építése még épp csak elkezdődött. A protestáns sírkert gondozatlan volt, „Új helyre költöztünk a Wolf Tone utcába”, hirdette egy plakát a Kastély Autószalon ablakában, mindenhol szemét szanaszét.

– Nem igazán fotótéma – mondta a férfi, és könnyedén felnevetett. – Szégyenletes, hogy néznek ki ezek a városok.

– Az itt lakók már észre sem veszik, gondolom.

– Akkor talán fel kéne ébredniük.

Amikor a férfi először látta Beatrice-t –, így mesélte később –, azon kapta magát, hogy magában azt mondja, őt kellett volna feleségül vennie. Egymás mellett ültek, és a vacsora utáni kávé mellett beszélgettek egy közös ismerősük házában. A férfi arról beszélt, hogy az ír kötélbizniszben tevékenykedik, szinte viccet csinálva ebből, ilyen volt a stílusa. Egy héttel később az autója megállt Beatrice mellett a Rathgar utcában, ahol Beatrice élt, mióta férjhezment. „Akkor jól láttam, hogy te vagy az”, mondta a férfi, de később bevallotta, hogy kikereste a férje nevét és címét a telefonkönyvben. „Gyere be egy italra”, invitálta Beatrice, és persze bement. Beatrice két gyereke is otthon volt, a férje is megjött.

Visszaindultak a városközpontba, Beatrice a férfi karjába kapaszkodott, amikor lefelé ereszkedtek a meredek utcán, amit korábban megmásztak. Felerősödött a szél, lehűtötte az esti levegőt.

– Olyan régen volt – mondta Beatrice. – Az életem nagy része azóta történt meg, hogy azon a napon először bejöttél hozzánk.

– Tudom, Bea.

Bea különlegesnek és kedvesnek látta a férfit akkor, és egyszer, amikor az rámosolygott, azon kapta magát, hogy elfordította a tekintetét. Nem volt boldogtalan a házassága, csak unta a monotonitást – a főzést, a gyerekek és a ház ügyeinek intézését. És bár vonakodott beismerni, az volt az érzése, hogy nem értékeli eléggé, és hogy évek óta nem kap igazi szeretetet.

– Ugye nem bántad meg? – kérdezte a férfi, miközben lelépett a járdáról, ami a Redmond Kávéház előtt még mindig emberekkel volt tele.

Beatrice lehalkította a hangját, hogy a férfi ne hallja jól, hogy azt mondja, nem tudja biztosan. Nem akart hazudni, és nem volt biztos benne, mi az igazság.

A férfi bólintott, feltételezve, hogy Bea megnyugtató választ adott. Régebben biztosan nem hagyott volna annyiban egy ilyen elharapott mondatot.

Miss Doheny már nem a bárpultnál, hanem egy asztalnál ült Meldrumékkal, amikor Beatrice és barátja visszatértek vacsora után az Éden bárba. Mrs. Meldrum éppen részletesen mesélte unokahúga, Kathleen múlt vasárnapi

látogatását. – Rengetegett hízott, – tudósított, majd elmesélte, hogy Kathleen újonnan szerzett férje három órán keresztül ült az asztalnál anélkül, hogy egy szót is szólt volna. Hatalmas vagyona van a szárazárubizniszből, unalmas, de jószívű férfi.

Miss Doheny hallgatta. Különös, de gondolatai még mindig a két vendégnél időztek, akik éppen visszatértek a bárba. Hallotta korábban, ahogy a lány azt mondja, jólesne egy séta a városban, és amikor körülbelül egy órával ezelőtt Meldrumék megérkeztek a bárba, hallotta a férfi hangját a hallban, így arra gondolt, biztosan az étterembe mennek éppen. A vacsora biztos nem volt finom, Miss Doheny gyakran hallotta, ahogyan panaszkodnak Mrs. Keegan főztjére. De a vacsora minősége a legkevésbé sem számított a párnak, ebben biztos volt.

Mrs. Meldrum hangja tovább folytatta: Kathleen első házasságából született négy gyereke mind felnőtt, már kirepültek, szerencséje volt, hogy az életének ilyen késői szakaszában sikerült beházasodnia egy jól menő szárazárubizniszbe. Mr. Meldrum félrebiccentette a fejét, vagy bólintott, és néha-néha szelíden ellentmondott a feleségének, helyreigazította a tényeket, kordában tartva felesége memóriáját. Ősz hajú, nagyon magas és vékony férfi volt, tweedzakót viselt, arca pengeéles, ősz bajusza gondozott. Dohányzott mialatt ivott, pontosan tíz percet hagyva az egyik cigaretta elszívása és a következő meggyújtása között. Mrs. Meldrum jóval alacsonyabb volt a másik kettőnél, kerekded, telt alakja volt, szemüveget és fekete kalapot viselt.

A vendégek most Drambuie whiskey-t isznak, észrevételezte Miss Doheny. A férfi tréfálkozott valamin, valószínűleg a vacsorán, a lány nevetett. Nehéz lett volna megmondani, miért volt annyira egyértelmű, hogy nem férj és feleség. A lány arcán volt valami mélabú, de erről a mélabúról nem sok minden derült ki. Önmagát is meglepve, Miss Doheny elképzelte, ahogyan átmegy a báron, és odamegy hozzájuk. Hallotta, ahogy azt mondja a lánynak: „Ugye tudod, milyen szerencsés vagy? Őszintén mondom, nagyon szerencsés vagy, gyermekem!” Ismét a lány felé pillantott, és egy másodpercre találkozott a tekintetük. Már majdnem kimondta a szavakat, de aztán meggondolta magát, mert amennyire csak lehetett, szerette mozdulatlanul tartani az arcát.

Beatrice hallgatta a társát, ahogyan próbálkozik, hogy vidámmá tegye a helyzetet. A város és a hotel – és különösen az étel, amit nemrégien elfogyasztottak – együttesen jól tükrözték a hangulatot, amit a végső búcsú már eleve megalapozott. Beatrice ismét arra emlékeztette magát, hogy nem igazán azért vannak itt, hogy elbúcsúzzanak egymástól, hanem hogy még egyszer utoljára házasságtörést kövessenek el. Most is élvezni fogják, mint mindig, de ez az élvezet nem ugyanaz lesz, mint amit a korábban köztük lévő szerelem inspirált. Lehetett volna úgy is, hogy nem jönnek ide, hogy elegánsabban búcsúznak el, de az, hogy itt vannak a nevetséges elnevezésű Éden bárban, most valahogy mégis helyénvalónak tűnt. A hálósobában, ahol a rutinszerű szenvedély aktusa

lezajlik majd, kopott volt a tapéta, a fürdőszobában a lapos rózsaszín szappant már használta valaki. Bűnös hétvége, gondolta ismét Beatrice, mert a szerelemtől megfosztva csak a csalás és a hazugság káosza maradt meg, és ez a még mindig tartó, túl hétköznapi vágy. Beatrice nővére, aki lassan haldoklott a farmon, keserű bizalmasává vált, és most már soha nem fog megbocsátani neki. Ma este, egy vidéki szállodaszobában a kötélgyártó meg megkapja, amit akar tőle, és ő is megkapja majd, amit ő akar tőle. Meztelenek lesznek, és összekeveredik az izzadtságuk.

– Attól féltém, elsétál az a steak – mondta a férfi jókedvűen – mint egy cipőtalp!

Beatrice hirtelen úgy érezte, részeg, és még részegebb akart lenni. – Igyunk még! – mondta, a poharát megemelve.

Elkapta a sarokban lévő asztalnál ülő idős nő tekintetét, és egy pillanatra megérezte, hogy Miss Doheny valamit mondani szeretne neki. Különösnek találta, hogy egy ismeretlen idős nő mondani akar neki valamit, mégis egészen biztos volt benne, hogy így van. De ekkor Miss Doheny visszafordult, és ismét a másik idős nő szavaira figyelt.

Amikor megitták az italukat, melyeket Beatrice barátja nemrég hozott, otthagyták az asztalukat és felültek két bárszékre, és Francis Keegan hallgatták, aki arról mesélt nekik, hogyan élénkül meg a hotel minden évben áprilisban a lóverseny idején. Mrs. Keegan is felbukkant a férje mellett, és elmesélte, hogy egyszer valami bohém alak szabadon engedett két rekesznyí naposcsibét, amiket letett valaki pár órára a hotel halljában, és hogy amikor az öreg Packy O'Brian meglátta, ahogyan a csibék bukdácsolva repkednek felfelé a lépcsőn, azt hitte, ez már a delirium tremens kezdete. És az is megtörtént – jóval Mrs. Keegan ideje előtt, amit nem győzött hangsúlyozni –, hogy Jack Doyle és Movita szálltak meg a hotelben, és csak a buli kedvéért Jack Doyle kiugrasztott egy nászutas párt meztelenül az ágyukból, és felkergette őket egészen a Kastély-hegyre. Még néhány pohár ital és Beatrice már nevetett. Most, hogy Francis Keegan és felesége arca jólesően lebegett a szeme előtt, már nem volt olyan erős a kilátástalanság érzése. Amikor a három idős ember felé nézett – rajtuk kívül csak ők voltak a bárban –, az ő arcuk is lebegett.

A vékony idős férfi odajött a bárpulthoz a következő kör italért és cigarettáért, biccentett és rámosolygott Beatrice-re, majd mondott valamit az időjárásról. „Mr. Meldrum” –, mondta Francis Keegan, mintegy bemutatva a férfit. „Jó estét”, – üdvözölte Beatrice.

Beatrice társa ásított, azt sugallva, hogy már mehetnének lefeküdni. Beatrice nem vette észre. Poharát Francis Keegan felé tolta, a pénztárcájáért nyúlt, kijelentve, hogy ez most az ő köre lesz. – Mindenkinék egy pohárral! – mondta, és érezte, hogy amikor Keeganék és a három idős ember felé intett, majdnem elveszítette az egyensúlyát. Kuncogott. – Na, ez tényleg az én köröm – mondta akadozva, és ismét kuncogott.

Mrs. Keegan újabb történetet mesélt, most Artie Loganról, egy kereskedelmi utazóról, aki egyszer nagyon berúgott a szobájában, és annyi teát és vajaskenyeret rendelt fel magának, hogy a hotel összes teáscsészéje és kistányérja nála kötött ki.

– Köszönik a meghívást – adta át Mr. Keegan az üzenetet, amikor visszajött a három idős vendég asztalától.

Beatrice feléjük fordult. Mindhárman őt nézték, az arcuk még mindig kicsit elmosódott volt. Poharukat Beatrice felé emelték. – Sok szerencsét! – szolt át hozzá az idős férfi.

És ebben a pillanatban Beatrice ráeszmélt. Egyik arcra a másikra nézett, mosolygott, hogy lássák, fogadja a jókívánságot, és úgy tűnt neki, hogy az arcok és ruhák és a három magasra emelt pohár elmosódott sokaságából kiemelkedik az igazság. Bólintott, és nézte, ahogyan az arcok elfordulnak. Soha nem lett kimondva: a szerelem, ami ott lebegett, soha semmilyen módon nem lett kinyilvánítva, felfedve. Ebben a klausztrofóbiás kisvárosban, itt, ebben a bárban egy végtelenül sóvárgó, néma szenvedély parázlott, ami döbbenetesen más volt, mint az ő azonnali viszonzásra találó szenvedélye.

A részegség kódén keresztül Beatrice ismét az idős társaság asztala felé nézett. A háta mögött Keeganék hangosan nevettek, a férfi, akit valaha annyira szeretett, szintén hangosan nevetett. Furcsának hallotta a nevetést, mintha valahonnan a távolból visszhangozna, és egy pillanatig úgy érezte, hogy nem is tartozik ide, úgy érezte, hogy csak a két idős nő és az idős férfi tartozik ide, az Éden bárba. Az idős nő szerette a férfit, és a férfi némán viszonzta ezt a szeretetet. Molett, szemüveges feleségének soha nem volt oka arra, hogy úgy érezze, elárulják, nem társult a szerelemhez szégyen és büntudat. Nem használták fel éveken keresztül egy testvér haldoklását. És nem voltak kapkodó délutánok a Rathgar úton, lehúzott redőny mögött, nehogy a szomszédok gyanakodjanak, sem rendrakás a hálószobában, mielőtt a gyerekek hazajönnek az iskolából. Egyetlen ölelés sem történt.

És mégis, a szerelem, mely már olyan régóta tart, most már ki fog tartani a sírig: nem is kellett végig gondolnia, Beatrice tudta, hogy így van. Az idős nőnek volt oka rá, hogy szépsége maradványát ápolja, a férfi is okkal viselte elegáns zakóját. Milyen csodálatos! – gondolta Beatrice még mindig az asztalnál ülő három embert figyelve mereven: a feleség, akit nem csaltak meg, kedélyesen csacsog, míg a másik kettő, akik valóban összetartoznak, beburkolózik kettejük varázslatos világába.

Milyen csodálatos, hogy semmi nem lett tönkretéve: Beatrice el akarta ezt mondani valakinek, de nem volt kinek. A Rathgar úton gyerekei apjuk mellett ülve a tévét nézték. A nővére még az év vége előtt meg fog halni. Milyen kegyetlennek tűnt mindez, ahogyan most tisztán látta maga előtt a bevetett ágyat és a nővére fonnyadó arcát. El akart futni, vissza az időben, akkor talán lenne ereje nemet mondani a szerelmének azon az estén, amikor először találkoztak.

Miss Doheny hazafelé sétált, keresztül a sötét városon, megszokott alakja volt a szombat estéknek. Minden olyan volt most is, mint mindig: ott ülni, közel a férfi mellett, akinek az ujjai között himbálódzó cigarettából füst szállingózott. A lány mostanra már egészen máshogyan került közel a férfihöz, aki szintén valaki más férje. Mint a filmekben, a ruhájuk szétszóródva hevernek a szerelemhez bérelt szoba padlóján, csak a szuttogásuk töri meg néha a csendet. Könnyek folytak le Miss Doheny aprólékos gonddal kisminkelt arcán, ahogyan szinte mindig, amikor szombat esténként hazafelé sétált az Éden bárból. Nehéz volt néha megállni, hogy ne sírjon, amikor arra gondolt, hogy még az ő életében eljöttek a könnyű idők, gúnyolva elrejtett/elfojtott szerelmének kínzó fájdalmát.

OEIN DEBHAIRDUIN: MIÉRT BOLYONG A HOLD (WHY THE MOON TRAVELS)



Translated by MÓNICA FERENCZ
Edited by ZSÓFIA CSUTI

INTRODUCTION TO THE HUNGARIAN EDITION¹

Travellers, as the general population of Ireland call us, Mincéirí or Pavee as we call ourselves, are a traditionally nomadic, indigenous ethnic minority group from Ireland.

There are around fifty thousand Mincéirí in Ireland, so we make up around 1% of the population. Mincéirí refer to the general population as settled people. Up until the 1960s, we lived reasonably peacefully alongside settled people, most of us moving seasonally and in line with traditional festivals, living in tents and wagons. Music, song and storytelling were and remain a very important part of our cultural identity. Our main occupations were trading and crafts, but with increased industrialisation and the introduction of plastics, most Mincéirí lost their means of making an independent income and the State began to view us as a burden and a problem to be solved, rather than a people to be celebrated.

In 1963 the Report of the Commission on Itinerancy was published which called for the forced assimilation of the Mincéirí and led to a whole host of state-supported policies including the criminalisation of nomadism, stricter procedures for holding a market licence and restricting animal ownership, especially of horses. The state failed to make appropriate alternative accommodation available for Mincéirí and introduced segregation in the education system.

As a result, conditions for Mincéirí have worsened, leading to an enduring crisis in the community. Because of unemployment, poverty and systemic discrimination, life expectancy among Mincéirí is starkly lower than in the general population in Ireland. To put that in context, middle age for 50% of Mincéirí is just 19 years old.

There have been three significant developments in recent years: the formal recognition of Traveller ethnicity by the Irish government in 2017; the inclusion of our language, Gammon Cant, on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural

¹ Oein DeBhairduin: *Miért bolyong a hold – Ír nomád népmesék*, Budapest, & Kiadó, 2023.

Heritage in 2019; and the slow introduction of Traveller culture and history in the school curricula. While the first two are largely symbolic, the third holds a real opportunity to influence positive connection between Mincéirí and the general Irish population, of which we've always been and remain a part.

Despite hardship and injustice, we hold a strong sense of pride in our identity and cultural connections. Mincéirí are considered by many to be the custodians of the elder practices indigenous to Ireland and this role remains sacred to us. Storytelling continues to be a method and means of processing both trauma and joyful connections to culture. This collection, *Why the moon travels*, includes some of the well-shared tales of *mo geels*, my people.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally there are three primary aspects to the telling of our tales. First, they are contextualised in the moment and space in which they are shared. Second, they are told as entertainment, which is considered just as important as the life lessons they transmit. Third, they are always presented as truthful and real.

These stories are among the many I carry. They did not come to me fixed in the language of our storytelling; they have lost and gained in many ways. Like all traditional tales they are meant to grow and change with the visions of the teller. They are alive as much as we are alive, they journey as much as we journey and, being among the tales of a nomadic people, they have certainly travelled far. Care has been taken to keep the core points and events in line with the original as far as I can recall.

These stories were recorded around kitchen tables, over cups of tea, stolen hours and bursts of early-morning activity. For Travellers, these tales may be a reminder of the beauty and the ever-present voice of our ancestors and a call to once again share the tales we have inherited. To the wider world, may this book be another crack in the wall that all too often divides us. May we each live a life worth retelling.

MIÉRT BOLYONG A HOLD

~ *Ain olomi ludus misler* ~

Apám a folyosón állva, a lámpa borostyánszín fényében, félúton a fivéremmel közös szobánk és a nővéremé között, egy csésze teával, és talán egy cigarettával a kezében, régi történetekkel ringatott minket mély álomba. Ezeket ifjúkorában hallotta öregektől és fiataloktól, akik minden estét újra és újra elmondott meséikkel töltötték meg a tábortűz körül. Sok vándor számára a történet ajándéka

együtt jár a továbbadás felelősségével, hisz az el nem mondott mesék a feledés homályába vesznek.

Egyik oka annak, hogy újra és újra elmeséljük ezt a történetet, hogy emlékeztessen bennünket, vándorokat arra, hogy a világ részei vagyunk, ahogy a világ pedig a vándorok része. Ha az ember sehol nem találja a helyét, akkor az efféle mesék mindig segítenek kapcsolódni a gyökereihez.

Ez is egy olyan népmese, amit apám lefekvéskor mesélt nekem. Rövidebb, mint a legtöbb hasonló, és habár keserédes, mindig megmosolyogtat.

*

Réges-régen, még a Föld ifjúkorában, a Hold csupán egy égbe foglalt korong volt, csendes és mozdulatlan, és a nappaltól kölcsönzött fényével az éj sötétjében úton lévőköt vezette, biztosítva, hogy ne tévedjenek el, járjanak akár közel, akár távol hajlékuktól. Alkalmanként azonban, pletykás nyelvek szerint, a Földre látogatott, és mikor így tett, gyönyörű nő alakját öltötte magára. Elbűvölő lett és csábító, rideg és erős, maga a világosság, aki mindig jóságos a földi halandókkal. És állítólag, amíg a Földön járt, beleszeretett egy *Mincéir*be.

A *Mincéir* alacsony volt, vékony és szikár, és egyetlen olyan vonása sem volt, ami bármennyire is emlékeztetessé tette volna azok számára, akikkel találkozott. Ennek ellenére az emberek tekintete melegséggel telt meg, amikor csak meglátták. Mivel nem volt ő sem Nap, sem csillag, titkos ragyogása kimondatlan szavakban és alig észrevehető mozdulatokban fejeződött ki.

Egy éjszaka ahogy hazafelé igyekezett a városból, ahol egész nap kéményeket tisztított, úgy döntött, egy mezőn átvágva lerövidíti az utat, hogy hamarabb hazaérjen. Habár sietősek voltak a léptei, szeme hosszasan elidőzött a Holdon. A Holdat átjárta sóvár tekintete, és az égitest, engedve a köztük kialakuló vágnak, leereszkedett az égből, és a fénylő gömb helyett lassan ragyogó nő alakját öltötte magára. A *Mincéir* megrémült, és futásnak eredt, mire a Hold dúdolni kezdett, és ugyan a szavak ismeretlenek voltak a férfi számára, a dallama kedvesnek és hívogatónak hangzott. Visszafordult hát, és ekkor látta meg őt a maga valójában: hogy nem csupán a Hold, hanem egy gyönyörű nő.

Szépséges és vad volt, meleg és elég kihívó ahhoz, hogy még a csillagokat is lebűvölje az égről. Megeskette, hogy titokban tartja találkozásukat, hisz halandó embernek nem lehetett viszonya az örökkévalóság teremtményeivel. A Hold ettől kezdve az éj csendes leple alatt havonta egyszer a Földre látogatott, hogy találkozhasson a *Mincéir*rel. Mindig egy fürge patak partján találkoztak, és a víz csörgedezése ilyenkor szerelmük morajlását visszhangozta. Napok, hónapok, évek teltek el, de a kor alig hagyta rajta a nyomát a férfin – az idő megtorpan azon halandók számára, akik az örökkévalósággal érintkeznek. Míg a körülötte élők mind beadták a derekukat az enyészet erejének, a *Mincéir* épphogy öregedett.

Napjai izgatottan teltek, alig bírta kivárni az éj leszálltát. Olyan helyeken vert tanyát, amelyet nem árnyékoltak magas fák, és felhőtlen éjszakák iránt

imádkozott, hogy minél többször láthassa szerelmét. Sátra ponyváját nyitva hagyva aludt, hogy bármikor feltekinthessen az égre, vagy megnézhesse a Hold tükörképét a csillogó folyóban.

Idővel úgy felemésztette a szerelme utáni epekedés, hogy szinte teljesen eltűnt az életéből minden öröm, és az egykor oly visszafogott *Mincéir* hetvenkedni és hencegni kezdett. Egyik este a kocsmában, barátai körében elmesélte, hogyan választotta őt szeretőjévé és társává a gyönyörű holdleány.

Barátai persze nem hitték el a történetet, és mindenáron be szeretne volna bizonyítani nekik, hogy igazat beszélt, így amikor elérkezett a Hold legközelebbi látogatásának időpontja, a *Mincéir* elbűjtatta a barátait a folyónál, egy magyالبokor mögé, hogy vethessenek egy pillantást szerelmére. A Hold azonban, aki kortalan bölcsességével mindig tisztában volt azzal, mikor figyelik, rájött, hogy átverték, és leleplezte a bokrok mögött leskelődő barátokat. A *Mincéir* árulásától úgy megdöbbsent és elkeseredett, hogy elfordult szeretője halandó ölelésétől, visszatért az égbe, és a végtelen sötétség semmijébe rejtőzött.

Az összetört szívű *Mincéir* hiába szölongatta az eget, a Hold többé szóra sem méltatta. Továbbra is szeretne ugyan a férfit, és tudta, hibája ellenére ő is viszonszereti, de miután szerelmükre fény derült, már nem lehetnek egymáséi.

Ettől kezdve nem ül a Hold változatlanul egy helyben az égen, hanem minden este óvatosan előbújik, hogy felkutassa, ki az, aki szeretheti őt, és akit ő is viszonszerethet. Minden egyes alkalommal csalódik, bánatosan elfordítja fejét, és visszatér a végtelen semmi magányába megpihenni, mígnem gyászának élességét eltompítja az a mély erő, mely benne lakozik, hogy újra reménnyel telve tekintsen a Földre. Azon este óta bolyong a Hold éjszakáról éjszakára az égen.

*

Ez a történet többek között a bizalom törékenységeire emlékeztet engem, és az emberek velük született szeretetvágyára.

INTERVIEW WITH OEIN DEBHAIRDUIN
(INTERJÚ OEIN DEBHAIRDUINNAL):
“ALL HUMAN BEINGS HAD MIGRANT ANCESTORS;
WE SIMPLY CONTINUED THE TRADITION.”



Interviewed by
ANNA SÁNDOR, 24.Hu¹

INTRODUCTION

Irish Travellers once journeyed the countryside in brightly painted wagons; today they struggle with the state over caravan sites. Recent genetic studies have clarified some aspects of the group’s obscure origins, but their stories reveal far more about their culture—stories that are now available in Hungarian translation, as well. We interviewed Oein DeBhairduin, author of the collection *Why the Moon Travels*, about Irish Travellers, the nomadic way of life, and the power of storytelling.

Bare-knuckle boxing, a baby-blue caravan, and Brad Pitt rattling off lines in an incomprehensible accent: one of the sly rogues of *Snatch* is Mickey, who in the film lives on the margins of society in poverty, is troublesome and dangerous, yet stands tightly united with his friends and relatives. In Guy Ritchie’s cult movie, Mickey is repeatedly referred to as a “gypsy”, even though he is in fact an Irish Traveller—an immediate example of the misconceptions surrounding this nomadic ethnic group.

“I completely understand when foreigners have no idea who we are, since even those living on our own island don’t really know us or our customs very well. Moreover, the information they believe they know about us doesn’t even come from us,” says the 39-year-old Oein DeBhairduin, whom we interviewed on the occasion of the Hungarian publication of his collection of Irish Traveller folktales titled *Why the Moon Travels*.

Guy Ritchie was not exaggerating, however, about how important bare-knuckle boxing is to Irish Traveller identity: it’s worth looking at the 2011

¹ The Hungarian version of the interview can be found at <https://24.hu/kultura/2025/01/13/traveller-nomad-mesekonyv-interju-irorszag/>.

Irish documentary *Knuckle*, which presents the conflict between three rival Traveller families. Professional boxers of Traveller heritage have also competed successfully at the Olympics and world championships, such as Tyson Fury, who defeated Wladimir Klitschko in 2015.

At the same time, Irish Traveller culture is far richer than this and goes beyond the stereotypes held by society, as well as beyond the well-known housing, employment, and healthcare problems Travellers face in Ireland. With his book, Oein—a storyteller, herbalist, and human rights activist—set out to counterbalance the superficial image formed about his people. *Why the Moon Travels* is particularly noteworthy because it is the first book about Travellers written by an Irish Traveller and illustrated by an Irish Traveller.

WE CONNECT TO PEOPLE, NOT TO PLACES

A fox crying out in the voice of a woman in childbirth, a gigantic fish eye swelling until it shatters into stars, a grieving husband transformed into a yew tree, bees battling giants: Irish Traveller stories are imbued with a deep knowledge of and respect for plants and animals, as well as a strong attachment to sacred places and to members of the community. Supernatural or otherworldly realms blend into one another alongside our natural reality. As Oein writes in the foreword to the volume, his people move along the boundary between the old and modern Éire (the Irish name for Ireland), connected to both, and in this way, they have preserved songs, folktales, and craft practices from the distant past.

The ethnic group that calls itself Mincéirí is Ireland's indigenous minority, officially recognized by the state since 2017 (in Irish they are called *lucht siúil*, meaning “walking people”, and in English, Irish Travellers). Their language, Gammon Cant—derived from Irish and English and known to linguists as Shelta—has been listed as part of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage since 2019. The volume includes Gammon expressions, along with a glossary at the end. There are approximately fifty thousand Irish Travellers, about one percent of Ireland's population. Most live on the island of Ireland, but they can also be found in Britain and the United States.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the Mincéirí's origins is how deeply they are obscured by the mists of history. Researchers have proposed several theories:

- Based on similarities in lifestyle and culture, some have suggested that the nomads emerged from a mixing of the settled Irish population and incoming Roma groups.
- Others have maintained that their ancestors were forced onto the road during the great famine of the 18th or 19th centuries.

- The upheavals caused by the Cromwellian campaign (1649–53), the Anglo-Norman invasion (1169–1240), or the 16th-century Tudor conquest may also have been triggers.
- They may even be bearers of Celtic, or possibly pre-Celtic, traditions and ways of life.

Some of these theories are not mutually exclusive, as researchers consider it entirely plausible that people joined already nomadic groups in several waves over time. Since this is a relatively closed community that has not mixed extensively with majority society—and given that on an island like Ireland, major population influxes over the past one or two millennia are well documented—recent genetic research has added nuance to the picture. A 2017 study definitively ruled out Roma origins for the Mincéirí and concluded that Irish Travellers separated from the settled Irish population centuries earlier; based on the findings, researchers suggested this may have occurred during the notoriously brutal Cromwellian campaign. However, in a 2011 study, researchers from the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin (RCSI) and the University of Edinburgh argued that the split happened more than a thousand years ago. As an example, they noted that the Mincéirí differ genetically from settled Irish people to roughly the same extent that Icelanders differ from Norwegians.

“The problem with these theories is that they often have hidden motivations behind them. The government promoted the idea that the Mincéirí were survivors of famine and political turmoil in order to portray us as failed members of society in need of assistance, rather than recognizing our culture and history,” says Oein, who, as head of an educational centre and a member of several Mincéirí councils and movements, has also played an active role in ensuring that knowledge about Travellers is included in the Irish curriculum. Regarding origin research, he is concerned about genetic essentialism:

“Our communities are diverse, and the idea that someone can be identified based on their genetics is not only problematic but potentially dangerous. Still, at least the state has recognized us.”

As for themselves, they believe they have always been on the move, with others sometimes joining them and sometimes leaving. “When I’m asked where I come from, I can say where I was born, but I belong where my people are. That might be Galway today, but Dublin tomorrow. We connect to people, not to places. Many mistakenly believe that humans have always been tied to the land. Historically, that’s not true: nomadism is far more natural to humanity. If it weren’t, we would all still be living in Africa. So, the ancestors of all people were wanderers; we have simply continued that tradition. The question of origin is not especially important to us. We are much more concerned with where we are now and where we are headed.”

EVERY OTHER 19-YEAR-OLD IS HALFWAY THROUGH LIFE

In the past, most Irish Travellers lived in wagons or tents, moving from fair to fair, trading goods, playing music, making tools as tinsmiths, and taking on various kinds of work. Travellers tend to marry young and typically live in large families, with an average of four, five, or six children. Considering the folktale collection, it is also interesting that their relationship with the transcendent is a fascinating blend of institutional religion and archaic beliefs. “Most of us identify as Roman Catholic, but this is interwoven with non-Christian practices. There is a strong reverence to the divine feminine, a Great Mother figure, which connects with the Virgin Mary. Our old name for God is *Gaibhne*, which can be traced back to a Celtic smith god. This even has a linguistic dimension: for example, we don’t say the world was ‘created,’ but that it was ‘forged.’ Some people build altars for their dead; we believe in the otherworld, in blessings, and many fear the evil eye.”

The fundamentally peaceful coexistence of the Mincéirí with the “settled” population lasted until the mid-20th century. Due to industrialization and the spread of plastic, many lost their livelihoods, and the state increasingly saw Irish Travellers primarily as a problem. In 1963, it ordered the assimilation of the Mincéirí into the majority society. The nomadic way of life was criminalized, while no adequate housing or stopping sites were provided. Ownership of animals (especially horses) was restricted, regulations on market trading were tightened, and segregated education was introduced in schools.

“Barely twenty years after the Holocaust, Charles Haughey, then Minister for Justice, referred to the anti-nomad measures as a ‘final solution’ and set up a committee without a single Traveller member,” says Oein.

Deteriorating living conditions and state interventions aimed at assimilation led to familiar consequences and a prolonged crisis within the Irish Traveller community, both nationally and internationally: unemployment, poverty, early school leaving, health problems, and a dramatic decline in life expectancy. “Today, the median life expectancy among Irish Travellers is 39 years, which means that every other 19-year-old is halfway through their life.” According to Oein, this is closely linked to housing conditions: “If an average Irish family rents public housing, they may receive a home with a kitchen, living room, and bathroom. If an Irish Traveller rents public property, they are given a patch of ground for their caravan, which, under current laws, they can lose quickly and easily. The travelling lifestyle is therefore highly risky; the law keeps constant pressure on those who insist on remaining nomadic.”

Discrimination against Irish Travellers remains an everyday reality, including:

- being refused entry to shops or pubs,
- online hate speech,

- physical or emotional abuse based on identity,
- not being called to job interviews because of their address,
- protests by settled residents against the establishment of Traveller sites,
- bullying of Traveller children at school.

Amid these hardships, Oein believes that stories are tools of survival for the Mincéirí. “Our stories protect us like armour. They are not only beautiful; they connect us and help preserve our identity in a world that wants to assimilate us. They help us process our traumas and experiences, offering advice, guidance, strength, and hope in times of trial. Beyond entertaining us, they also express our deep spiritual connection to the natural environment, since a gentle animism is part of who we are.”

WE ARE ALL MADE OF STORIES

“My father was a professional storyteller, a *Seanchaí*. You cannot give yourself that title—the community bestows it upon you if you were proven worthy of it. A *Seanchaí* is not simply a teller of tales, but someone who plays an important role in preserving Mincéirí culture and identity,” Oein explains. His father, Owenie, often appears in the personal, introductory notes that precede the individual stories. In them, Oein fondly recalls the many everyday situations in which he encountered a particular tale: how his father would pause while digging a ditch, or while at the doctor’s office, or in the middle of repairing a car, to tell the story that came to mind in response to the moment. This is how we, too, learn what spiders have to do with the red thread many Irish Travellers wear around their wrists, or who shared with them the secrets of medicinal herbs.

“I learned storytelling from my father, along with many stories. He never told them the same way twice; it’s a misconception that a story has a single true or original version. In oral tradition, stories are flexible; they constantly change and evolve, entering into dialogue with the audience through the *Seanchaí*. As a storyteller, you must understand that you become part of the story’s history, because you have altered it. And you must always honour the person you heard it from by mentioning their name.”

The living nature of these stories is reinforced by the book’s illustrations, created by Irish Traveller graphic artist Leanne McDonagh. Unlike the medieval-style clothing and historical settings often seen in folktale books, her characters are depicted with contemporary hairstyles, wearing shirts, jackets, and other modern attire.

There is, of course, a certain internal contradiction in the fact that Oein has recorded in a book of stories that traditionally belong to oral culture. “When you write something down, it shifts from being *a* story to becoming *the* story.

In a sense, you settle it, you fix it in your own interpretation and style. It's important to be aware of this even when we read older recorded tales, such as the great cycles of myths and legends, because the same thing happened to them. At the same time, the birth of *Why the Moon Travels* was influenced by the fact that Irish national collections contain a great deal of material about us, photographs, research, recordings, most of which does not come from us, the Travellers, but from settled people. They presented and contextualized our culture on our behalf. And while many identify us only with our problems, here are these stories that have given me so much since childhood. I wanted to show how much beauty they contain, and through them, the richness of our culture as well".

ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND TRANSLATORS

ALBERTI, GRÉTA KATA received her bachelor's degree in 2024 from the Faculty of Humanities at Eötvös Loránd University, where she majored in English and American Studies. During her studies, she was introduced to Irish culture, literature, and film studies, which became central to her academic interests. She wrote her thesis on the representation of children in the 2022 feature film *The Quiet Girl* (*An Cailín Ciúin*) and in selected short films, a project she now intends to repurpose for this submission. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in English Studies at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary.

CSIKAI, ZSUZSA (also known as ZSUZSANNA) is Assistant Professor in the Department of English Literatures and Cultures, Institute of English Studies, University of Pécs, Hungary. Her research focuses on the politics of translating and adapting works by Chekhov, and other Russian authors for the contemporary Irish stage. Her broader academic interests include Irish culture, Irish drama and short fiction; translation studies, and adaptation studies; teaching language, and culture through literature. She has published widely on literary translation, adaptation, and translator training. Her literary translations include contemporary Irish short fiction by Sineád Morrissey, and Anne Enright, as well as Brian Friel's play *The Yalta Game*. She is head of the Irish Studies Research Centre at University of Pécs and oversees the specialized translation postgraduate programme at the Institute of English Studies, University of Pécs.

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FEKETE-NAGY, FANNI is an independent researcher of contemporary Irish poetry. She has defended her doctoral thesis entitled *Biblical Allusions and Catholicism in Contemporary Irish Women's Poetry* at Eötvös Loránd University in the spring of 2025. She teaches undergraduate courses as an external lecturer at ELTE and at Pázmány Péter Catholic University. She is also a literary translator and recipient of the Babits Mihály scholarship for literary translators.

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HARTVIG, GABRIELLA teaches at the University of Pécs. She published *Laurence Sterne Magyarországon, 1790-1860* ([Laurence Sterne in Hungary, 1790-1860], 2000) and *The Critical and Creative Reception of Eighteenth-Century British and Anglo-Irish Authors in Hungary: Essays in Intercultural Literary Exchange* (2013). Her papers have appeared in various journals including *The Shandean*, *The AnaChronist*, *Translation and Literature*, and *HJEAS*. She has contributed chapters on the reception of Sterne, Ossian, and Swift in Hungary to the series "The Reception of British and Irish Authors in Europe". Her main area of research is the eighteenth-century British and Irish novel and Reception Studies.

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ZÁCH, LILI is Senior Lecturer at the Department of English Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. She completed her PhD at the National University of Ireland, Galway in 2016, exploring the formulation of Irish national identity, which formed the basis of her monograph, *Imagining Ireland Abroad, 1904–1945: Conceiving the Nation, Identity, and Borders in Central Europe*, published by Palgrave Macmillan (2021). Currently her research focuses on the interconnectedness of the human past and the complexity of identities across the European borders – through the lens of cakes (Food History) and laughter (Humor Studies).

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