

# Irish Migration Studies in Latin America

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Travel Writing: Encounters within and through Irish and Latin American spaces



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# **Irish Migration Studies in Latin America**

**Volume 8, Number 4, August 2015**

**Society for Irish Latin American Studies**

## **Travel Writing: Encounters within and through Irish and Latin American spaces**

Sinéad Wall and Laura P.Z. Izarra, Special Issue Editors

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**Cover image:** Lamport & Holt Art Nouveau Brochure for South America Service. Published in New York C 1912, it describes the delights of Brasil, Uruguay and Argentina and the "V"-Class vessels on the service, the Vestris and Vandyck. Fraser Darrah Collection

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## Introduction

### Travel Writing: Encounters within and through Irish and Latin American spaces

Sinéad Wall and Laura P.Z. Izarra

The premise for this Special Issue of the *Journal of Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* is to explore how the geographical spaces and peoples of Ireland and Latin America are depicted in the narratives by authors, migrants and travellers from both sides of the Atlantic. The shifting borders of what constitutes a migrant or a traveller are reflected in the difficulties in delineating exactly what ‘travel writing’ is. Jan Borm (2004) employs the term travel literature in an attempt to define the parameters of travel writing.<sup>1</sup> He argues that rather than a travel genre as such, there are travelogues, which are predominantly non-fictional and travel literature, which is an overall thematic category that includes both fiction and non-fiction. This division is mirrored in the present publication with articles which demonstrate the role of both the fictive and referential.

The selected texts show how travellers and migrants adjust their understanding of other cultures, peoples and places to new perceptions and learning experiences. Travel-as-displacement and travel-as-freedom are two extremes in the literature scale; narratives of the exotic intertwine with narratives of *authentic* encounters where the imperial rhetoric of superiority is counterpoised by a self-reflective and interrogative discourse, which discloses cultural prejudices on both sides, the traveller’s and those of the peoples they encountered. On the other hand, a less explored subject on the resonances of travelling texts in the foreign land and back at home triggers a new critical perspective that helps to understand the process of configuration of a cultural identity in a diaspora space.

Travels and travelogues have multiplied in contemporary times. Though volumes on the Irish diaspora worldwide, and in Latin America in particular, as well as travel writing about Ireland have become increasingly prevalent in the past fifteen years, criticism on Irish travel or migrant literature, or even textual travels, representing cultural encounters is slower

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Borm (2004) ‘Defining travel: On the travel book, travel writing and terminology’, in Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs (eds), *Perspectives in Travel Writing* (Aldershot: Ashgate), pp. 13-26

to emerge. However, the review of *New perspectives on the Irish Abroad: the silent people?* is in fact a pertinent addition to the existing criticism.<sup>2</sup>

This Special Issue endeavours to address this gap in the Latin American contact zones focusing more in Argentina and the Caribbean as well as to anticipate not only the function of travelling texts but also the criticism of contemporary narrations of migrant experiences in Ireland by both Irish writers and migrants themselves.

Since the seventeenth century there have been various Irish encounters within Latin American spaces, ranging from: Irish tobacco planters, such as Phillip Purcell, in Brazil in the early 1600s; Irish engagement in the early nineteenth century Wars of Independence in South America; the Irish-led San Patricio battalions involvement in the Mexican-American War of 1846-48; and nineteenth-century Irish settlement in Argentina - one of the major Irish settlements outside of the English-speaking world. While many diasporic subjects did not narrativise their experiences in travel book form, there are many newspaper articles, memoirs, travelling texts and, increasingly, private letters and papers which help to shed light on Irish encounters within Latin American spaces. In the late twentieth century, the nature of these encounters changes from that of travel and migration to travel with the express purpose of exploring the contact zone, Irish authors journey to Latin America and depict different types of encounters. Chile as contact zone is portrayed in accounts by writers such as Dervla Murphy's 1983, *Eight Feet in the Andes* for example, and Brian Keenan's 2000 *Between Extremes: A Journey Beyond Imagination*. Likewise, Cuba is the subject of both Carlo Gebler's 1988 *Driving Through Cuba* and Dervla Murphy's *The Island that Dared: Journeys Through Cuba* from 2010. Latin American encounters within Irish spaces on the other hand, are a relatively recent phenomena, more specifically, centred around the economic boom or so-called Celtic Tiger of the late 1990s and early twenty-first century. Once a nation of emigrants, Ireland has seen an unprecedented in-migration, changing the nature of many of Ireland's small towns and exposing communities to new ideas, languages and cultures.

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<sup>2</sup> See Glenn Hooper's 2000 account, *The Tourist's Gaze: Travellers to Ireland 1800-2000* which contains a full list of other works about travel to Ireland. Cf. *Tourists with Typewriters. Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* by P. Holland and G. Huggan (2000) who examined contemporary travel writings seeking to occupy a middle ground "between travel writing as a more or less elaborate textual performance (Butor) and as an economically sanctioned activity, a circumscribed material practice (Pratt)" (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press). Within the London-Irish diaspora space for example, see Tony Murray's 2012 *London Irish Fictions: Narrative, Diaspora and Identity*. In relation to Latin America, see the *ABEI Journal*; *JIMSLA*; Edmundo Murray's *Devenir irlandés. Narrativas íntimas de la emigración irlandesa a la Argentina (1844-1912)* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2004); Helen Kelly's *Irish "Ingleses". The Irish Immigrant Experience in Argentina. 1840-1920*. (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009); Laura Izarra's *Narrativas de la diáspora irlandesa bajo la Cruz del Sur*. (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2010).

The theme of this Issue “Travel Writing: Encounters within and through Irish and Latin American spaces” seeks to open up debate around how these encounters are constituted within what Mary Louise Pratt has defined as ‘contact zones’, that is ‘social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination-like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today’.<sup>3</sup> What concerns this publication then, are the narratives or artefacts that emerge from the clash of cultures, how the traveller perceives themselves and how they are perceived. The first two articles focus on encounters within late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Argentina in the literary journalism and travel writing of William Bulfin. In a comprehensive overview of the life of Bulfin, Colum Kenny draws upon *The William Bulfin Papers* held in the National Library in Dublin to offer a portrait of a prolific and well-travelled writer. He outlines Bulfin’s journey from Birr, Co Offaly in 1884 and subsequent travels around Argentina and his travel sketches which he had published in *The Southern Cross* newspaper; his becoming editor and owner of it; his return journey to Ireland in 1902 to write the travel book *Rambles in Eirinn* and finally, his trips to New York in 1904 and 1909 to meet publishers and Irish nationalists. The results of Bulfin’s encounters and writing from within multiple contact zones are varied and his writing is often inscribed with a sense of exilic wandering from a lost homeland in keeping with Bulfin’s staunch cultural nationalism. The second article by Sinéad Wall, concentrates on Bulfin’s writing for *The Southern Cross* and examines how he attempts to ‘materialise’ diaspora space within the pages of that publication. Rather than the contact zone as cultural space, she utilizes Avtar Brah’s concept of diaspora space, that is ‘the intersectionality of diaspora, border and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes’ (1996: 188) as a starting point from which to explore how Bulfin’s travel sketches materialise a sense of national imaginings, allegiances and landscapes.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst *The Southern Cross* newspaper served the interest of many of the rural Irish settlers in Buenos Aires province, its rival in the capital itself was *The Standard*, owned and edited by the Dublin-born Mulhall brothers. Michael Mulhall was accompanied in his travels around Latin America by his wife Marion and Mariano Galazzi’s article analyses their travels and in particular, the writing of Marion Mulhall. He explores the readership for her two Latin American travel books, *From Europe to Paraguay and Matto-Grosso* (1877) and *Between the Andes and the Amazon* (1881) as well as her chapter on the Irish in South America for the resoundingly nationalist text, *The Glories of Ireland* (1914).

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<sup>3</sup> *Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992: 4)

<sup>4</sup> *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996: 188)

The concept of travelling texts or textual travels is exemplified in “Translated Irelands Beyond the Seas” where Laura Izarra shows how those texts published in newspapers read by the community, such as *The Southern Cross* and *Fianna*, shaped the diasporic identity of the Irish in Argentina in the beginning of the twentieth century.

In contrast to the travel writing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the second section of this Issue focuses on travel fiction and the literary representations of the Irish in Latin American and Caribbean writing as well as exploration of the Brazilian community in the west of Ireland through ‘story telling’ performances, highlighting the importance of narrative in how we render ourselves and others as subjects. Douglas Glynn’s article analyses how Irish mothers and fathers are depicted in literatures of the Caribbean and Latin America through a range of texts from 1965 to 2004. Aisling McKeown on the other hand, turns the prism to Irish shores and analyses Irish space as a contact zone for Brazilian migrants. Her article on ‘story-telling’ and ‘re-telling’ echoes Avtar Brah’s analysis of the role of narrative in diaporic communities and her assertion that multiple journeys “configure into one journey via a confluence of narratives as it is lived and re-lived, produced, reproduced and transformed through the individual as well as collective memory and rememory [and] is constituted [...] in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively” (1996: 183). McKeown’s article then, explores this element of travelling tales. It is clear that migrant stories of travels and experiences in Ireland are only beginning to be told. To complete the spectrum of cultural encounters on the other side of the Atlantic, the review of Alex Hijmans’ book of photographs and essays, a Dutchman living in Brazil and writing in Irish, closes this issue.

The contemporary experience of distant travel, whether it is labour migration, tourism or travelling texts, becomes a counterpart of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries textual and scientific travels by explorers, adventurers or migrants. Today, large numbers of people and texts are on the move producing a new ethnographic writing which needs to be explored from both the traveller’s and the reader’s perspective. There is a growing awareness of the poetical and political contexts (national and transnational) of the literary travel narrative. This Special Issue is just one step in this journey that hopefully will be taken up by writers and critics elsewhere.

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*Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*

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## From Buenos Aires to Belfast to Brooklyn: William Bulfin's rambles in literary journalism.

Colum Kenny<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This article addresses the international literary journalism of William Bulfin (1864-1910), an Irishman who became editor and proprietor of *The Southern Cross* in Buenos Aires and a chronicler of daily life. He penned evocative impressions of Argentina and Ireland for *The Southern Cross* and for influential publications in Ireland and the USA. His tales from the pampas evoke the realities of immigrant life and the ways of the “gauchos”. His later tour of Ireland resulted in a best-selling book. His readers included James Joyce in Italy, whom Bulfin had met and described anonymously. Bulfin wrote to rouse people to a heightened sense of place. His voice was that of a journalist speaking to and of cultures in transition, and for a broad readership. He did not permit genre or format to constrain his ambition, and his body of work challenges any narrow definition of travel writing.

**Keywords:** William Bulfin; *The Southern Cross*; journalism; the Irish in Argentina.

William Bulfin (1864-1910) was a writer for whom journalism and literature were two sides of the same coin. The currency in which he traded was the celebration of cultural distinctiveness or specificity, whether describing his rambles in his native Ireland or depicting life as an immigrant on the pampas of Argentina. His readership ranged wide among the Irish diaspora and beyond. Bulfin’s vocation challenges any assumption that literature and journalism fall neatly into two distinct categories. While some writers choose one medium over the other, there are those for whom writing itself is the medium and for whom the format or genre is secondary or incidental. Their literary talents enhance their journalism, while their journalism informs their creative efforts. William Bulfin was such a person.

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<sup>1</sup> Colum Kenny is Professor of Communications at Dublin City University, Ireland. He is a member of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, a founding member of the Irish Legal History Society and a columnist with Ireland’s *Sunday Independent*. His latest book, *An Irish-American Odyssey: The Remarkable Rise of the O’Shaughnessy Brothers* was published in 2014 by the University of Missouri Press.

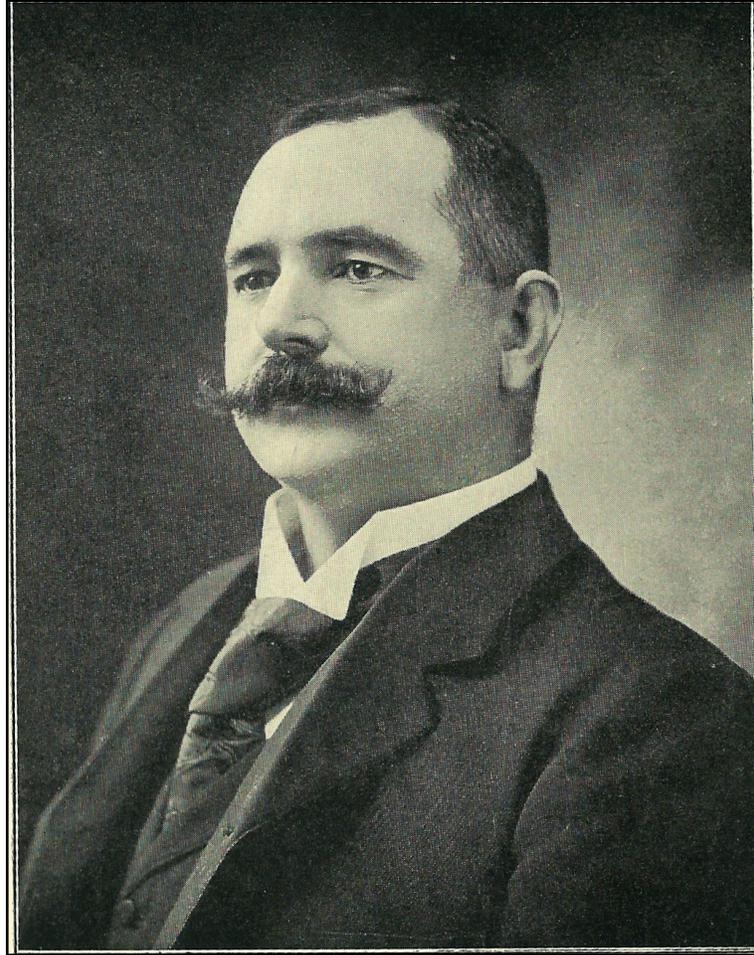


Fig 1: William Bulfin about 1900. Frontispiece, *Rambles in Eirinn*

Bulfin was a popular man and of striking physique, but he died of pneumonia aged just 47. His talents as a journalist were recognized in his own lifetime, although he never achieved the level of literary recognition for which he yearned. He was invited by a London publisher to write a volume of tales about Argentina for a series on colonial societies, and was asked by the editors of the great *Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1907-1912 to contribute to it the key essay on Latin America and that on Argentina (MS 13,817 (2)).<sup>2</sup> He had his stories published in successful New York magazines such as *Everybody's* and the *World's Way*.

Bulfin's body of work has something of the nature of the Latin-American *crónica* about it. His descriptions of the pampas and of Buenos Aires, and

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<sup>2</sup> Bulfin wrote neither piece in the end. Boxes of his papers in the National Library of Ireland (NLI MSS 13,804-13,823) are partly unsorted and uncatalogued. So some manuscript numbers given below are approximate.

later of Ireland as he found his home country on his return journeys, fall into what has been described as “a somewhat unstructured genre that combines literary aestheticism with journalistic form” (Mahieux 2011:1). Bulfin was by no means the only journalist whose ambitions tended towards the chronicle (González 1993: *passim*). Arthur Griffith, an influential politician and editor in Ireland during the first decades of the twentieth century, had a high regard for Bulfin and is said to have believed that the latter could be a future leader of Sinn Féin (Kelly 1922: 690). Griffith himself is frequently described as “the father of Sinn Féin,” a party that later became the driving force for Irish independence, so his judgment of Bulfin was no idle compliment. In 1909 Bulfin rejected overtures to become vice-president of that party, but he wrote for a short-lived daily edition of the eponymous *Sinn Féin* newspaper and Griffith authorized him to act and conduct arrangements for it on Bulfin’s visit to the United States that same year (MSS 13,810 (12) and 13,811 (1)). Griffith’s opinion of some verses that Bulfin published pseudonymously in the *Boston Pilot*, that these were “excellent” (MS 13810 (12)), is less persuasive than was his political judgment.

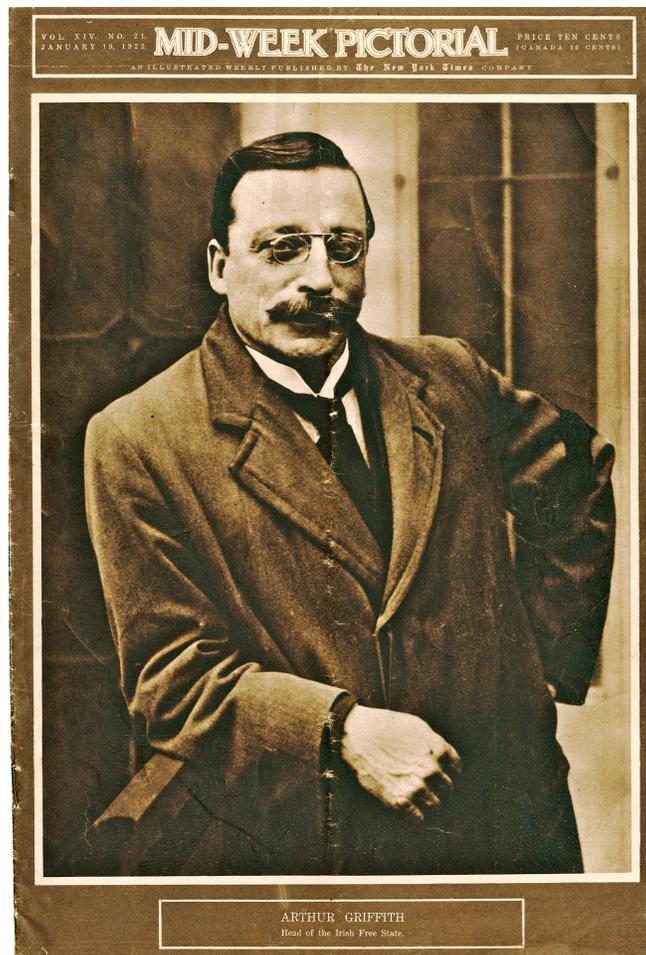


Fig. 2: Sinn Féin’s Arthur Griffith (*New York Times*, 1922)

Bulfin emigrated to Argentina in his early twenties. He was one of a steady stream of people who in the late nineteenth century made the long journey from Ireland (Kelly 2009 and Murray 2006: *passim*). At first he worked on a ranch, in countryside beyond Buenos Aires known as “La Pampa” or “The Camp”. The editor of some of his South American tales later wrote that, “The open plains of the pampas appealed to his adventurous spirit, and the experience affected him profoundly, providing him with a wealth of literary material. In his spare time he began writing—sending his stories and articles to a small Irish-owned newspaper published in Buenos Aires, *The Irish Argentine*” (Bulfin, ed. Clancy: 8). His stories chronicled daily life as he witnessed it, even if the dialogue was reconstructed or imagined. Thomas Murray (1919: 145) has written that Bulfin’s descriptions were in a “well-known humorous vein, with plentiful ornamentation and sometimes, perhaps, what would seem too generous coloring, but there is no invention, no over-drawing, in the picture.”

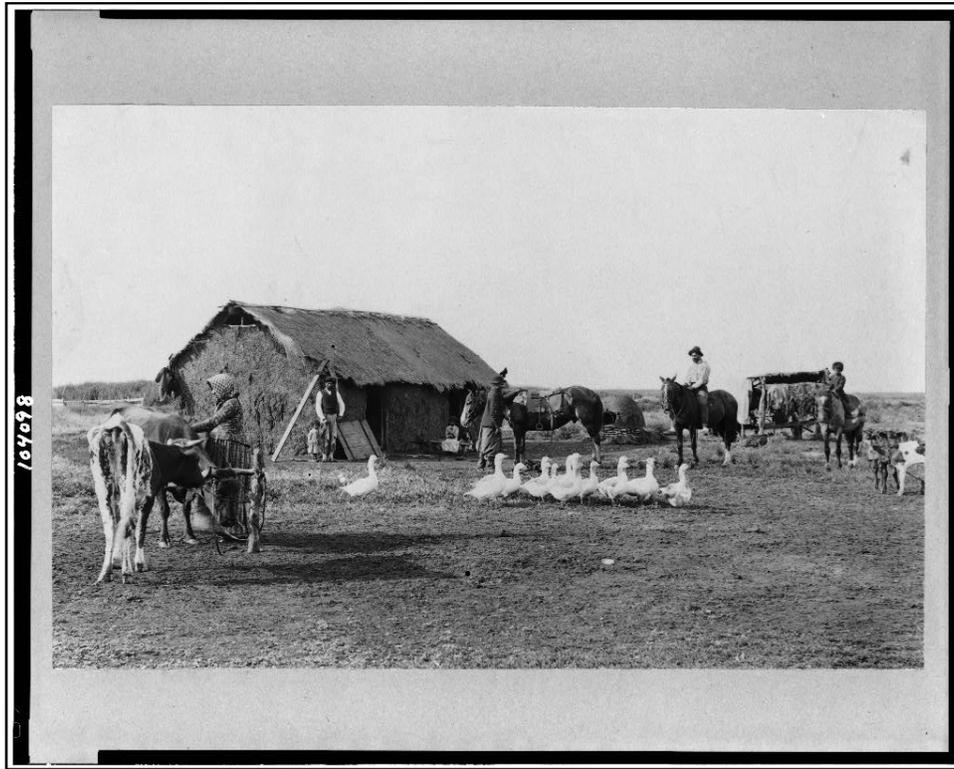


Fig. 3: An immigrant’s home, Argentina (courtesy US Library of Congress).

Moving from the pampas into Buenos Aires in 1889 he found work in less romantic circumstances, being employed by a furniture importer while continuing to write. In 1892 he joined the staff of the *Southern Cross*, a

weekly newspaper for the Irish in Argentina that was then owned by Michael Dineen. It had been founded in 1874 by a Catholic priest, Patrick Dillon, which fact was noted before 1896 below its masthead. However, on 3 January 1896 its then editor wrote “This is not a religious paper, nor the church organ. The *Southern Cross* is perfectly independent”. And that included political independence, as Bulfin later explained (*Southern Cross* 27 Jan. and 3 Feb. 1899).

During the 1890s Bulfin wrote for a local directory an account of Fr Anthony Dominic Fahey’s earlier work with Irish immigrants in Argentina. He based it partly on “a conversation which some of the old hands will still repeat to you.” Referring to this account in 1919, Murray thought “no writer that I have any acquaintance with has so genuinely entered into the spirit of camp-life, and so accurately and sympathetically described it as Bulfin” (Gran 1899: 504; Murray 1919: 139-146, 189-95, 495-6). In 1898 Bulfin succeeded Dineen as proprietor and chief editor of the *Southern Cross*, in which capacity “he was a leader of thought and progress of the Irish Argentine community” (Condon et al. 1910: 157). He became well enough known for a letter to reach him from New York that had been addressed to him only at “Buenos Aires, S.A,” as he wrote to J. O’Hara Cosgrave on 1 July 1903 (MS 13817).

# THE SOUTHERN CROSS

TWENTY-FOURTH YEAR—No. 9.      BUENOS AIRES, FRIDAY, MARCH 4, 1898.      FOUNDED 1871.

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Fig. 4: *The Southern Cross* (front page, March 1898, Contents refer 'Che Buono').

Bulfin penned a humorous and self-deprecating account of his early involvement with the *Southern Cross*, including this explanation of how he acquired a distinctive pseudonym. He had submitted an early article for the *Southern Cross* above the pen-name “Cui bono?”, meaning “To whose benefit?” A typesetter changed this to “Che Buono,” which is an Italian expression meaning “tastes delicious”. This took Bulfin’s fancy and he came to use it regularly on his articles wherever published. It has been suggested more recently that the pseudonym is a mixture of the Argentinian-Spanish usage of “che” as an affectionate vocative (such as earned Ernesto Guevara his nickname among Cubans) and the single Italian word meaning “able” or “good” (*Southern Cross*, 6 Jan. 1899; Bulfin, *Pampas*, ed. Wilkinson, p. 8).

His journalism for the *Southern Cross* included regular colorful and substantial sketches of life in Buenos Aires that began in 1892 and ran for seven years. Other locations that he described included the seaside city of Mar del Plata and the Parana delta (12 Feb. 1897, 27 Jan. and 3 and 10 Feb. 1899). Seven long pieces on “Ballads Old and New” were based on a lecture he had delivered to the English Literary Society in the Argentine (Jan.-March 1898), while in an appreciation of Lewis Carroll over six columns he described that late author of *Alice in Wonderland* as “the greatest of English humourists and, after Swift, the most original of them all” (4 March 1898). In a piece scorning what he saw as the high self-valuation of citizens of his new country, Bulfin wrote modestly of himself that “the writer [Bulfin] came from the camp, and from being an *estancia* [ranch-]hand blossomed into a sort of journalist” (7 Jan 1898). He was willing to publish criticism of his own articles, for example regarding his piece on Rudyard Kipling’s “Recessional,” a poem celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria (6 Jan. and 10 March 1899).

While working as “a sort of journalist”, he continued to write in a manner that crossed from literary journalism into the genre of literature itself, on matchmaking for example (10 June 1898). He was ambitious to publish such accounts of daily life for a readership beyond Argentina. He submitted an article to *McClure’s* but that popular US journal rejected it, replying on 23 September 1898 that “We are so crowded with war material that only matter which fairly clamors for publication can get any chance at all” (NLI MS 13817 (1)). This was a reference to the Spanish-American War that had erupted that year. Coverage of the war by the *Southern Cross* itself included on 17 June a report on the US landing at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. In 1899 he proclaimed that he was giving up his Buenos Aires sketches after many years, but one finds him the very next month penning for the *Southern Cross* a vivid account of bullfighting in that city (17 and 24 Feb. 1899).

The *Southern Cross* described itself on its editorial page as “The leading weekly paper and best advertising medium in the River Plate” and its commercial success allowed it to run to twenty pages that included some fiction. He worked hard to sustain it, and surviving correspondence shows him preoccupied in subsequent years with many of the usual concerns of a managing journalist, both writing articles and acquiring new machinery while corresponding with contributors who were not always reliable, and being kept abreast of the behavior of a competitor. He had to fend off efforts by the “aristocratic” *Hiberno-Argentine Review* to poach his advertisers (MSS 13,816). For a while Bulfin also taught English literature at the Jesuits’ Colegio del Salvador in Buenos Aires. Bulfin wrote that he “had the chair of English, teaching a speaking and literary knowledge of the language through the medium of Spanish” (O’Kelly 1910; MS 13,811 (1)). Someone who later also taught a course in literature at that same college was Jorge Mario Bergoglio, better known today as Pope Francis.



Fig. 5: Colegio del Salvador, Buenos Aires. (where Bulfin taught literature)

When in February 1899 the publisher Thomas Fisher Unwin (1848-1935) personally contacted Bulfin as editor of the *Southern Cross*, the latter saw an opportunity to advance his own literary ambitions. Unwin wrote that he was planning a new series called “The Overseas Library” which was to consist of “colonial literature” and noted that, “A good newspaper is a centre of literary influence, and should attract and appeal to any literary talent in its neighbourhood.” The new series was intended to give “descriptions of colonial life true to the special local colour and

atmosphere of the district” and, for this reason, Unwin wanted “good writers who may create artistically truthful pictures of their surroundings.” Unwin concluded that, “Contributions of the above nature are cordially invited from your own office, and from your literary friends and a paragraph in your paper may help to draw out local response” (MS 13817 (2)).

Bulfin responded by insinuating himself as the sole author of that planned volume (MS 13817 (2) for his contract). It appeared in 1900 as *Tales of the Pampas*, consisting of eight tales out of thirteen submitted by Bulfin. They are “free and easy, broadly humorous stories of the rough life in Argentina, where Irish settlers are numerous. The contrast between Spanish and Hibernian character gives point to several of the tales” (Sturgis 1927: 7). Delaney suggests that, in them, “Bulfin reproduces the Irish-Porteño way of speaking, which results in a comic mixture of English, Gaelic and Spanish. His stories show that the Irish were doing with language what they had already done with their lives, namely they were trying to adapt it to their new situation” (Delaney 200: 138).

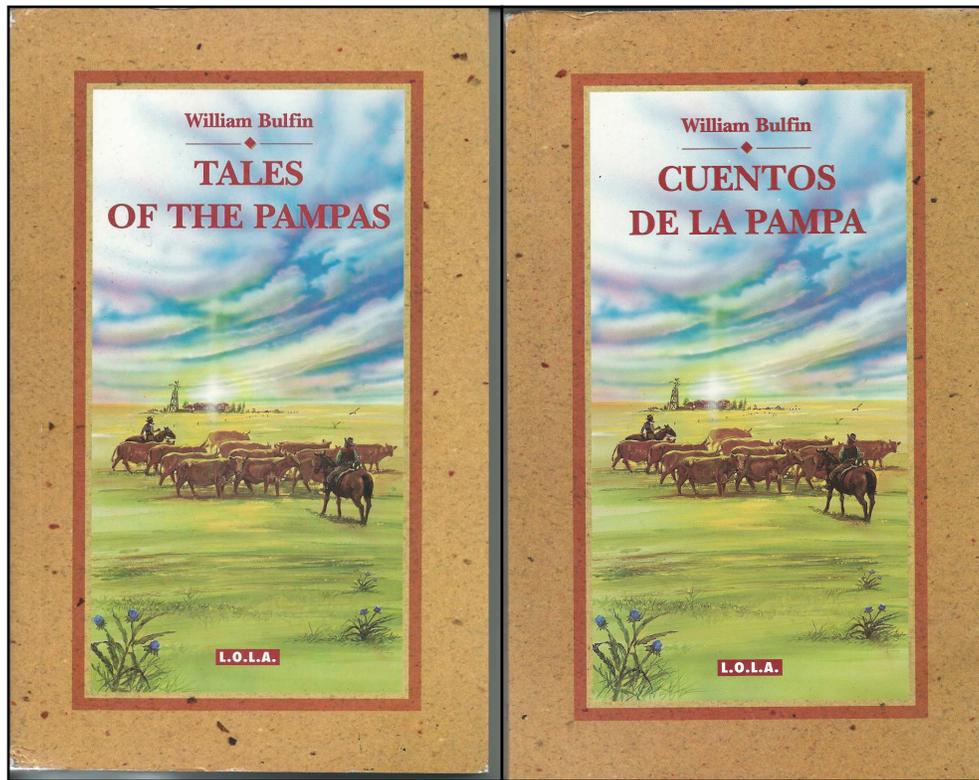


Fig. 6 & 7: *Tales of the Pampas* (front and back covers of 1997 edition, first dual language)

His friend Seamus MacManus thought that “that book is simply lost in the Overseas Library”, and it did not sell many copies. McManus added that his friend Catalina Paez, granddaughter of the liberator and first president of Venezuela José Antonio Páez, who was herself a writer and translator, had “never read any Spanish-American stories that pleased her” as did Bulfin’s *Tales of the Pampas* [MSS 13810 (5 and 21)].

Bulfin returned to Ireland in 1902 for a few months, again in 1904 for a year and a half, and finally in 1909 until his death. When visiting Ireland he was kept abreast of developments at his newspaper office in Argentina, and he dispatched articles and essays for publication in the *Southern Cross*. These were received warmly there, he being told in 1902 that his pieces were “redeeming the paper”. The break from his quotidian duties appears to have inspired him. He was assured that “...the articles and stories you sent us lately are some of the best you ever wrote. I understand that. Tis not easy to write literature at 1661 [Calle] Congallo [then the newspaper’s address]” (MSS 13,804 (3), 13,815).

Bulfin fostered Irish cultural activities in Buenos Aires, backing there an Irish bookshop called “Our Boys,” for example (MSS 13,815-6). At home and abroad, he actively supported the movement known as the Gaelic Revival, which promoted an interest in older Irish literature and in the Irish language and which stimulated a creative renaissance in Ireland itself. The biographers of Douglas Hyde, who was a leader of the Gaelic Revival and the future first president of an independent Irish state, have described Bulfin as his “friend”, and Hyde certainly thought Bulfin’s *Tales of the Pampas* “most delightful”. Complimenting the author, Hyde added that “I have just written a new play satirizing Trinity College [Dublin] which I should like you to see!” (Dunleavy 1991: 235-6; MS 13810 (14)).

Bulfin first met Hyde at a music festival (*Feis Connacht*) in Galway during a visit to Ireland in 1902. He was relishing their conversation when, to his irritation, the poet W. B. Yeats, interrupted them with a query about certain singing and did so “in a nervous, uneasy, troubled, pins-and-needles way that made you anxious about him in spite of your self” (*The Gael* (New York), Dec. 1902, 378-9 and Jan. 1903, p. 4, p. 124). Bulfin remained ambitious to further his own literary efforts and wrote to other publishers such as Doubleday in New York. His new tales began to appear in the United States, in *Everybody’s*, the *World’s Work*, *New York World* and the *New York Daily News*. In 1903 he told John O’Hara Cosgrave, managing-editor of *Everybody’s*, that, “I like to write stories. I am not depending on it for a living of course or I should starve” (MS 13,817 (2)).

Between 1902 and his death in 1910, Bulfin had more than one article published each year in *Everybody’s Magazine*, and a couple more in the *World’s Work*. These successful New York titles published both fictional and factual articles, including serious journalism, at a time when the distinction

between the genres was not as commercially determined as it later became. Bulfin wrote both types. Bulfin, for example, saw one of his tales of pampas life printed in an issue of the *World's Work* in which Rudyard Kipling's poem "The Islanders" made its American debut, while his straightforward journalistic analysis of present and future economic opportunities in Latin America was published by the same title just seven months later (Bulfin Feb. and Sept. 1902).

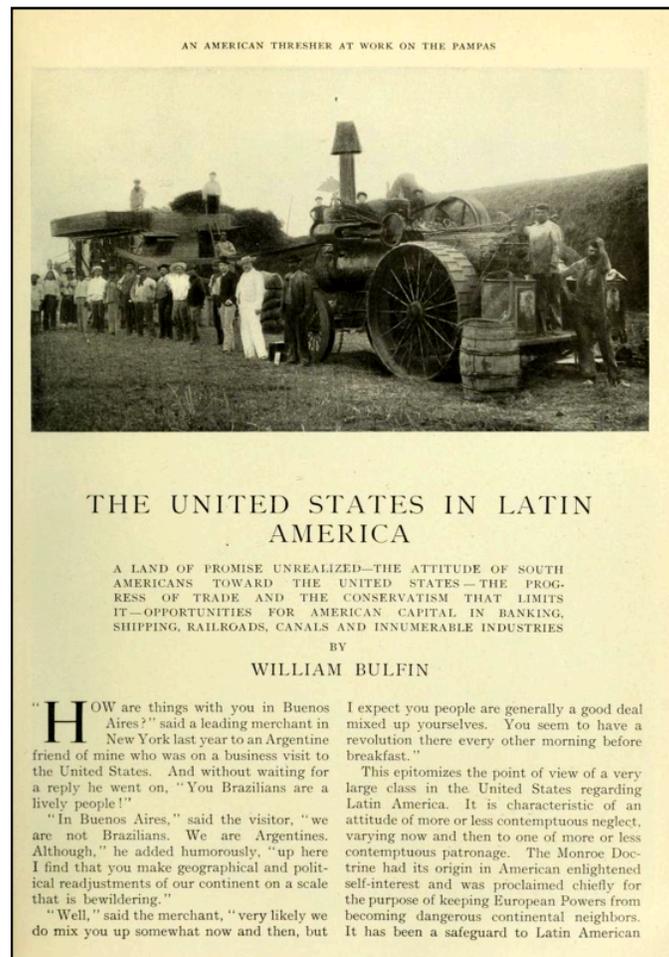


Fig. 8: Bulfin article on Latin America (from the *World's Work* 1902, USA)

It is notable that the *World's Work* identified itself on its title page not as journalism or literature but simply as "a history of our time". This slogan effectively framed its content as chronicle and analysis. Its editor had explicitly told Bulfin that the magazine did not publish history when rejecting in 1901 a retrospective piece by him entitled "Uncle Sam in South America" (MS 13,817 (1)).

The dual nature of these magazines is underlined by even a cursory

reading of *Everybody's Magazine*, which published more than a dozen tales by Bulfin. At the time *Everybody's* had established a reputation for “muck-raking” by well-known journalists such as Charles Edward Russell and Upton Sinclair. But *Everybody's* also prided itself on its fiction. In 1906, for example, it boasted a “Fiction Number – Best Ever”. This included stories by Jack London and O. Henry and a poem by Burges Johnson, humorist and professor of journalism at Vassar College, New York. It also included Bulfin's tale entitled “The betrothal of Juanita Casas: A gaucho story.”



Fig. 9: *Everybody's Magazine* New York (special fiction number 1906).

Like many writers Bulfin encountered disappointments, and one rejection related to his idea that he might pen for an American readership tales with a distinctively Irish flavor that would supplement those set in South America. Cosgrave, *Everybody's* Australia-born editor, replied,

You ask about Irish story telling. It seems to me you have a much better field in the Pampas, which is really fresh, and more

unconventional than the one afforded by the more familiar atmosphere of Ireland. Seamus MacManus has done so much of the latter these late days that I feel the opportunity is rather passed. No one else writes Pampas stories, — the field is your own. I should strongly advise you to work it (MS 13,817 (1)).

It may be that, whatever his pretensions to write literature, American publishers saw his short stories as belonging to the genre of “westerns”, adventures of cowboys that fired the popular imagination. He also tried to get articles published in Boston and Chicago newspapers. (MS 13810 (11))

His efforts to interest British and American publishers in a full-length novel entitled *A Man of the Pampas* were unsuccessful. Some publishers thought him unable to sustain a plot sufficiently. Others found fault with the genre. Paul R. Reynolds, an agent on Fifth Avenue, saw considerable merit in Bulfin’s manuscript but wrote in December 1902 that “a story which is placed in South America labors under some disadvantage. It is the same way with Australian stories. People over here don’t care much about Australia or Australian life. They don’t know about it and therefore have not much interest in it” (MS 13,817). For its part, Lothrop Publishing of Boston thought “Novels of a historical romantic sort have been supplied to such an extent that the public is getting tired of them” (MS 13,817).

Bulfin’s attempt to publish a novel set in Argentina failed, but his vivid sketches of Irish life that he penned subsequently during visits to his homeland were to constitute a monument to his talents. He intended these accounts at first solely for “certain Irish exiles”, as he recorded, but added that “literary men of Irish Ireland” urged him to publish them also in Ireland. The sketches celebrated his homeland but did not patronize his people. Written during a long odyssey by bicycle, they were part literature, part journalism and part tour-guide. Serialised first in Dublin papers and also in the *New York Daily News*, they were eventually gathered into a thick, little book, *Rambles in Eirinn*, published in both Ireland and the United States. It became an Irish bestseller and was reprinted many times (Bulfin 1907; Callan 1982; Geraghty 2009).

Although he was sympathetic to the contemporary Irish Ireland movement that promoted new industries and investment, Bulfin revealed on his rambles in Ireland a nationalist or romantic antipathy to the anglicisation and commercialization of Belfast that made him wonder when he visited that city “was I in Ireland” (Bulfin 1907: foreword and ch. 6; Murphy 2001). However, he was not overtly sectarian. While described as a “Catholic journalist” and made a papal “Knight of St. Gregory” for his services to his church, he appeared unconcerned by criticism that his *Southern Cross* had “given up its title as ‘organ of Catholic interests’” and he embraced Protestants such as his friend Douglas Hyde who supported the

nationalist cause (MS 13,810 (32); Anon 1904; *Irish Independent* 2 Feb. 1910).

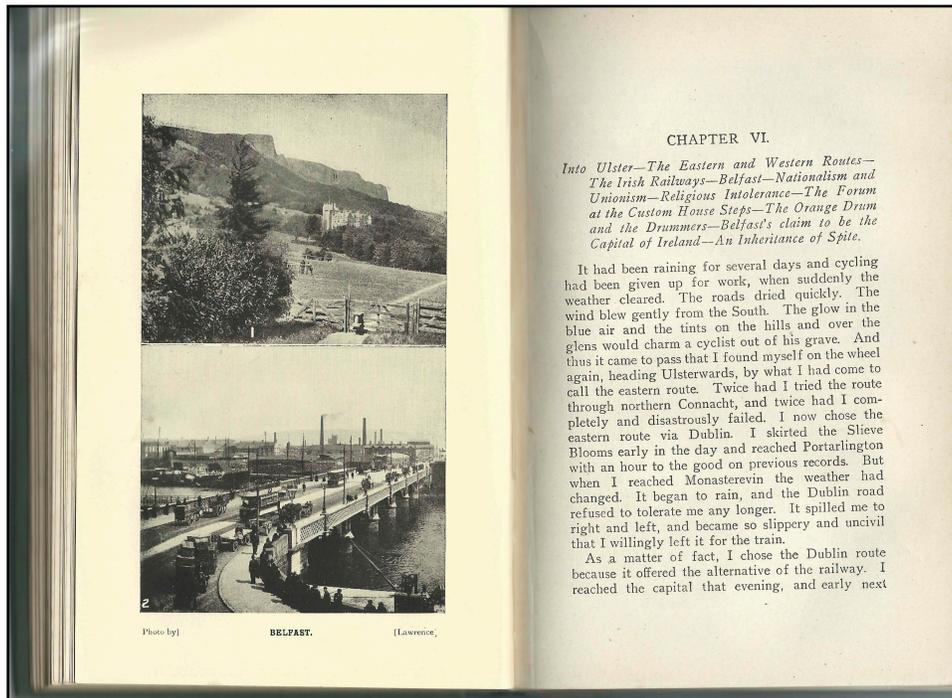


Fig. 10: An opening of *Rambles in Éirinn*

Passages relating to a pedlar whom Bulfin encountered while cycling in the Irish midlands, who insisted that he was not Jewish but Irish, were hostile towards Jews engaged in peddling and moneylending. He had earlier written that "The Jews with their Masonic literature and journalism prostituted France", thus indicating that he shared a prejudice common among European Catholics of his day. Yet he rarely gave vent to it in his work (Bulfin 1907: 307-9; *Southern Cross*, 3 Feb. 1897).

By chance his cycling trip through Ireland also brought him to a tower by the sea at Sandycove where three young men were staying for a few days and causing something of a stir in the neighbourhood. One was James Joyce, whose own visit to the tower that week was to inspire the opening sequence of *Ulysses*.

Bulfin described their encounter of September 1904 in his *Rambles in Éirinn*, which was largely published first as a series in Arthur Griffith's *United Irishman* and *Sinn Féin* papers:

One of them had lately returned from a canoeing tour of hundreds of miles through the lakes, rivers, and canals of Ireland [Samuel

Chenevix Trench/Haines in *Ulysses*], another was reading for a Trinity degree, and assiduously wooing the muses [Oliver St John Gogarty/Buck Mulligan], and another was a singer of songs which spring from the deepest currents of life [James Joyce/Stephen Dedalus]. (Bulfin 1907: 322-324; Mottolese 2008: 91-92)



Fig. 11: Sandy Cove tower, Co. Dublin (an old postcard).

When Joyce later lived in Italy he was a regular reader of *Sinn Féin*, which he arranged to have sent to him, and thus had a chance to read Bulfin in that paper. Writing from Rome during 1906 and 1907 he mentions “that Southern X [*Southern Cross*] chap, Señor Bulfin, who is I am assured an Irishman.” This Spanish form of address was used for Bulfin in Ireland (e.g. *Irish Independent* 23 Sept. 1907 and 2 Feb. 1910). Joyce was amused by Bulfin’s observations on modes of upper class speech at a “Union Jack regatta” in Galway, and noted how “Che Buono ... sneers” at an English tourist’s pronunciation of English while forgetting the peculiarities of Hiberno-English. Joyce himself describes “the American accent” as “really bloody fearful”, and it is unclear why these references to Bulfin have been thought “scathing” (Joyce 1975: 129, 145; Attridge and Howes 2000: 175).

Bulfin was a newspaperman who believed that he had more than one book in him. If journalism is literature in a hurry, as an old adage has it, Bulfin found time to write also a more conventional form of literature. Any journalism that Joyce wrote, on the other hand, was entirely incidental to his literary ambitions. Joyce was to spend years forging the style and content of his great novel *Ulysses* from the language and life of Dubliners whom he encountered in newspaper offices and other everyday locations.

The emerging modern style of James Joyce was very different from the romantic prose of William Bulfin. He visited New York in 1904 and 1909, meeting friends and speaking at Carnegie Hall. Before leaving for America in late 1904 he and Michael Davitt (1846-1906), the radical nationalist and leading Irish land agitator of the nineteenth century, “went to Bray [Co. Wicklow] and had lunch together and had a fine old chat.” Davitt gave him letters of introduction, including one to Patrick Egan, former US minister to Chile, and another to Patrick Ford, well-known editor of the *Irish World* newspaper in New York. Bulfin later wrote of these, “Never used any of them. Did meet Ford and Egan. *Did not* like either. I liked Davitt *much*.” (MS 13,810 (9), underlined by Bulfin in the original).

At Carnegie Hall in 1904 he spoke on Irish nationality: “The meeting was held at the invitation of the Gaelic League of the State of New York, and was characteristic of the intellectual movement which is being fostered at home and abroad by the best of the Irish...”, wrote one local observer. John Devoy, the old Fenian rebel requested a copy of his lecture for the *Gaelic American* and Bulfin sent him his notes. Bulfin had been hoping to undertake a more extensive lecture tour of North America in 1909, having rejected a suggestion that he apply for a chair of Spanish that was vacant in Dublin or take up the editorship of *An Claidheamh Solais* which had been edited by Patrick Pearse, or assume a leadership position in Sinn Féin. John Quinn, New York lawyer and great patron of the arts told him “Ireland needs men like you (Anon 1904: 4; MSS 13810 (9, 23, 28), 13,811 (1)). Returning to Ireland from New York William Bulfin fell ill and, “altogether unexpected” died of pneumonia (*Irish Independent*, 2 Feb. 1910). No discrete biography of Bulfin has been published, and his *Southern Cross* newspaper awaits a full study. The title is still being published today, although now mainly in Spanish (Farley 2014: 54).

The William Bulfin Papers in the National Library of Ireland include a portion of his address at St Enda’s School, Dublin, and a typescript of his unfinished novel “Rose of the Eskar” that he set in Ireland and wrote in a conversational style (MS 13807). Here too among other documents are lectures and speeches delivered in Argentina on heraldry, the Gaelic genius, Ireland, old Irish romantic or heroic tales, Irishmen in foreign armies, slavery and servility, patriotism, the nature of men and women, Argentina and its capital, Latin America’s relationship with Spain, the Latin American church (including Irish clergy) and a sour essay about the fashion for opera in Buenos Aires. Bulfin was a cultural activist and an active author, an anti-colonialist who nevertheless was proud of the role played by Irish Catholic missionaries in Latin America. His inclinations were both literary and journalistic and the extent to which his work in either of these genres was distinct is perhaps less interesting than the fact that he deployed his talents in complementary ways to write about societies that were in transition.

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## Materialising Irish/Argentine diaspora spaces and transnational identities in William Bulfin's travel sketches for *The Southern Cross* newspaper (1891-1903)

Sinéad Wall<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** William Bulfin (1864-1910) left Ireland in 1884 to work and travel within Argentina for over twenty years, the majority of which he spent writing articles for the Irish-owned newspaper *The Southern Cross*. This paper considers how Bulfin's series of travel sketches constitute the relationship between mobility, materiality and the expression of a transnational Irish/Argentine identity. It also examines how Bulfin imaginatively constructs 'diaspora space' in his sketches or crónicas as well as how they bolster his attempts to extend the boundaries of Irishness and Irish national territory to incorporate the diaspora space of Argentina whilst simultaneously inscribing this space onto his travel sketches, 'In Eirinn', about his later journeys around Ireland. Drawing on a framework of Avtar Brah's notion of diaspora space this paper analyses the confluence of narratives that Bulfin produces for *The Southern Cross* and how his migration experience and identity is translated from one geographical location to another in addition to becoming part of the material culture which underpins this very experience.

**Keywords:** William Bulfin; travel sketches; *The Southern Cross*.

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On a recent research trip to the National Folklore Collection at University College Dublin the painting below, entitled *Emigrants at Cork* (1840) caught my eye as within its frame it captures the dual perspective and conflicting emotions inherent to nineteenth-century movement out of Ireland: that of voluntary departure versus forced exile.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand is a woman's smiling face possibly indicating a voluntary departure contrasted with that of a woman covering her head in a shawl. She may be forced to leave and hides her head as she finds it too difficult to look upon the landscape around her. The latter construction of departure from Ireland as exilic in nature resonates throughout nineteenth and twentieth century Irish discourse and becomes the master narrative of travel out of Ireland, erasing many accounts of voluntary and willing travellers. Exile as a signifier of difference became a crucial component of nationalist rhetoric as the nineteenth century progressed. Famine survivors worldwide were encouraged to view themselves as victims of English misrule. This narrative serves a dual purpose as it "absolves the emigrant of guilt and modernised traditional perceptions of emigration as exile [while it also] distinguished the Irish from other immigrant groups and reinforced the sense of themselves as banished exiles" (Ward 2002: 119). An interesting parallel to this painting is John Watson Nicol's 1880 painting depicting Scottish migration entitled *Lochaber no more* (the title from a traditional lament by departing emigrants and song which relates nostalgia for a lost homeland – Figure 2).



Fig. 1

<sup>2</sup> NFC 'Emigrants at Cork'. George Mounsey Wheatley Atkinson (1806-1884), attributed, c. 1840

In their introduction to the 2008 Special Issue of the journal *Mobilities*, “Material Worlds, Migrant Cultures”, Paul Basu and Simon Coleman analyse this painting and encourage reflection on what is “carried over by migrants as they form their new/old world in novel territories and contexts” (328). After discussing the suitcase and sheep dog, they turn to the “materiality of the unlooked-upon homeland that recedes from the departing ship: the mist-covered hills of home, thatched cottages by the shore, the stuff of romantic Highlandist iconography” – and they question how “in the absence of photographs, such once-familiar landscapes were remembered or recreated in exile” (317). With regards to Irish travel to Argentina one response to how not only the material contours and landscapes of the homeland are recreated and remembered but also how a non-material sense of identity is constructed within the new landscape is that they are “materialised” and given new form in diasporic narrative space, in this case within the pages of the Irish-owned newspaper, *The Southern Cross (TSX)* and in particular, William Bulfin’s articles within this newspaper. Rather than the material objects that the traveller/migrant takes with them then, this paper analyses an artefact engendered from within the host community or diaspora space itself, *TSX*, which materialises national imaginings, allegiances and landscapes.<sup>3</sup> Benedict Anderson (1991) has famously argued that the newspaper, along with the novel provides the technical means for “re-presenting” the kind of imagined community that is the nation – and that the reader of that paper is constantly reassured that the “imagined world” is visibly rooted in everyday life through its consumption by neighbours, being read on trams, in bars etc. In this article, the community imagined is a diasporic one and the newspaper under study serves as a narrative space to “bring into being” not only this community’s sense of self but also a “nation”/community of Irish diasporans.

Brah argues that a diasporic community’s identity “is constituted within the crucible of the *materiality of everyday life*; in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively”. (1996: 183). This materiality and the stories within *TSX* are consumed within the diaspora space itself and later re-consumed beyond this space in other households, in Ireland, the United States, the United Kingdom, India and South Africa for instance. *TSX* then exists as a mobile world in and of itself, “materialising” and bringing the diaspora space of Argentina to a worldwide diaspora community. This paper explores the material effect of migration in the form of print culture and *TSX* newspaper, and in particular considers how William Bulfin’s travels and experiences are written into the material culture of Irish emigrant life in Argentina through his article or “sketches”

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<sup>3</sup> Avtar Brah defines diaspora as “the intersectionality of diaspora, border and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes” (1996: 188).

for this newspaper. In order to contextualise his writing, I will first provide background to *TSX*, its readership and its circulation. I then turn to William Bulfin and how he constructs and materialises a transnational Irish-Argentine identity in his sketches for the newspaper. This article



Fig. 2

examines Bulfin's encounters with the various others he meets on his travels around Buenos Aires, in particular the figure of the *gaucho*. His sketches reveal an accommodation and empathy for *gaucho* culture, affinity for the Spanish language while at the same time offer signs of resistance to the host culture and society. I then go on to analyse Bulfin's return journey to Ireland and how Argentina and the figure of the gaucho are inscribed upon the national territory, "materialised" in his mediation of the Irish landscape and feed into his articulation of a distinct transnational Irish identity, that of the Irish-Argentine.

The first Irish newspaper in Argentina, *The Standard*, was established in 1861 (closed in 1959) by the Dublin born Mulhall brothers, Michael George and Edward Thomas. It was a four-page weekly, later a daily, originally published in English and French. It was perceived as an urban based, British-biased newspaper and Oliver Marshall notes that “the Mulhall brothers usually referred to themselves as English, championing the interests of the British community”. By 1875 they claimed they were shipping 20,000 copies of *The Weekly Standard* (1996: 15). *The Standard* became quite influential and “during the last quarter of the nineteenth century was one of the most quoted authorities on Argentina’s national and international affairs chiefly because of its perceived editorial neutrality, as it was published by Irishmen” (Marshall 1996: 15). The newspaper that established itself as a rival to *The Standard* and seemed to carry most weight with rural-based Irish immigrants was *The Southern Cross*. Set up by the Reverend Patrick Dillon in 1875, it was a Catholic and later, an Irish nationalist organ and Rev Dillon, addressed “26,000 Irish souls” in the newspaper’s first editorial on January 16, 1875. It published articles and stories about life on the grasslands (pampas) and in the city. It was only in 1964 that *The Southern Cross* assimilated the Spanish language and finally started to publish in Spanish, reflecting the eventual linguistic integration of the descendants of Irish settlers into Argentine society. The polarisation of the Irish community into broadly pro- or anti-British lines is reflected in the readership of both papers. *The Standard* contained extensive advertising for bank and shipping companies as well as employment pages for clerks and shop assistants, indicating it was directed at an urban readership, while the *TSX* advertised ploughs, medicines for cattle and horses as you can see from the hand-out. The motto of *TSX* affirms Irish commitment to Argentine society, though this commitment comes after religion and nationality. It states “we are, in the first place, Catholics, then Irish, and lovers and admirers of our new adopted country. We are liberal in politics, conservative in religion, respectful of the opinion of others and well-disposed toward all”. The newspaper’s founder, PJ Dillon, and subsequent editors wanted to declare their allegiance to their adopted country but only as a distinct Irish community. This would change under the editorial control of William Bulfin and move towards depicting an Irish-Argentine identity instead.

That *TSX* served a site for connecting with the worldwide diasporic community is attested to in correspondence between diasporans in Argentina, South Africa and the UK for example. There is evidence that *TSX* had a readership in Ireland among the communities of Westmeath and Longford, which were the source of the majority of Irish emigration to Argentina, though likely very small in number. Helen Kelly, for instance, notes that the newspaper was a source of information for distant family and friends and cites a letter from the Rattigan family who mention reading about a wedding in Buenos Aires in *The Southern Cross* (2009: 175).

The Bulfin family itself serves a microcosm for that readership. William's brother Robert was a member of the diaspora community in Birmingham and in a letter to his brother dated September 26, 1907 he writes "I get the *Southern Cross* every week and before time to properly digest it, some of the Irish are waiting for it, particularly the Sinn Féiners. But, I do not expect you will have many orders for it, the Birmingham Irish are notedly skinney". His brother Jack served in the army reserves, first in India and then in Cape Colony, South Africa and in a letter to William in February, 1898 he writes "I feel lost sometimes for a read of *TSX*. I got so used to its news and reading it in India and at home that I miss it more than you would believe. You will send it to me an odd time if you can". In Ireland, his brother Joe writes his thanks for receiving news from Argentina and the pages of *TSX*.<sup>4</sup> This artefact then, crosses multiple borders and even engenders nostalgia for its pages and news in the readers from outside the Argentine diaspora space. Part of this nostalgia and the attraction for many of its readers who have travelled beyond the national territory may lie in its depiction of the Irish community as unfailingly nationalist and exilic in nature, that sense of the "banished exile" encapsulated in *Emigrants at Cork* for example. William Bulfin's sketches and editorials for *TSX* played a major role in constructing the Irish community as such and it is to his writing that I now turn.

William Bulfin arrived in Argentina in 1884 and his years working and travelling around Buenos Aires province provided him with ample material to write his sketches about characters who are mostly unmarried Irish sheep and cattle herders or *gauchos*, living lives of isolation on the Argentine pampas. His sketches chronicle daily life on the pampas and in *porteño* society, recording their polymorphic qualities and are populated by a multitude of characters, from beggars and coachmen to accountants and bankers. Bulfin bears witness to life in the capital city and offers his readers advice about local customs and how to navigate the dangers and pitfalls.<sup>5</sup> His "Camp sketches" reveal an empathy with *gaucho* culture and, Irish assimilation of certain elements of that culture. Bulfin also links the nativist subject position to the Irish one, a position which is resisted at times by both Irish and *gaucho* inhabitants of the diaspora space. That Bulfin respected and admired the *gaucho* way of life is clear from his sketches, but that admiration is tempered by an ambivalence in both his narrative voice and subject position. There is a contradictory perception

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<sup>4</sup>From the William Bulfin Papers held in the National Library of Ireland. MS 13811(3).

<sup>5</sup>A few examples of the concerns of the community, according to Bulfin, can be seen in the following articles: "The *Cobrador* and his work" about debt collectors and the nature of the elite in Buenos Aires (1 Jan 1892); "Mr Larcher's cure – a medical and non-medical story of Buenos Aires" about the state of medical care (11 March 1898); "How police news is written" an excoriating account of how the native press reports crimes, in which he criticises the use of foreign words in their articles, making them long-winded and obtuse (15 April 1898).

of the *gaucho* in evidence throughout his stories. They are part of a racialised discourse where “attention is shifted to the forms in which class, gender, sexuality or religion, for instance, might figure within these racisms, and to the specific signifier(s) – colour, physiognomy, religion, culture etc – around which these differing racisms are constituted” (Brah 1996: 185). Bulfin’s sketches veer between establishing solidarity with the host country on the one hand, and upholding Irish difference from other nationalities on the pampas on the other. Examples of this contradictory attitude come through in three related stories, “Castro Telleth of Tavalonghi’s Horse”, “The Defeat of Barragán” and “Campeando”. The common thread is the search for some missing cattle.<sup>6</sup> In “Castro Telleth of Tavalonghi’s Horse” the Castro in question is a man who Bulfin shadows in the hope of learning something of his world. Castro was *capataz*, Bulfin’s immediate superior, and Bulfin describes him as “typical of his class – gaucho from head to heel and in every part of his body [...] a good-looking fellow despite his swarthy skin” (98). Castro’s skin colour is of note and establishes his difference to Bulfin. Establishing difference is not the only agenda in “Castro Telleth”. In this story Castro recounts how an Argentine horse made its way back from Italy to Argentina, which speaks to the ideology of return which informs the story. This return can be filtered through either the Irish or *gaucho* subject position. In keeping with his exilic discourse, Bulfin wants to remind the Irish on the pampas that the desire to return can be fulfilled. However, from the *gaucho* perspective, the return of the immigrant would mean the reduction of the threat to their way of life. Castro says of the horse: “How could he combat his desire to come back?! Impossible for him to stay away” (107). In the story, Castro elaborates upon the concept of *querencia*, which is “home, the home of the horse and the cow, just as one’s native land is home, just the same” (101).<sup>7</sup> By having Castro utter these words Bulfin demonstrates how closely *gaucho* philosophy reflects his exilic desire. Thus through this story, we see the desire for home compete with the possibility of belonging in Argentina and the borders of Irishness momentarily shrink back to those of national territory.

In “The Defeat of Barragán”, Bulfin again shifts emphasis and in this tale he depicts *gaucho* practices as something which might not be fully understood by an outsider. Barragán is an *alcalde*, a mayor who has abused his authority and the local people. Castro defeats him in a horse race and then proceeds to challenge him to a knife fight. When Bulfin enquires as to why Castro needs to fight, Castro replies that it is part of *gaucho* custom to repay insults but that “you don’t understand these things yet, or you

<sup>6</sup> All of Bulfin’s sketches were first published in *TSX* but a selection were published as *Tales of the Pampas* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1900).

<sup>7</sup>The Spanish *aquerenciar* means to get accustomed to something and *querencia* a place cattle are used to.

cannot see them as we see them” (141). There is evidence however, of slippage here, as Castro states that “you don’t understand *yet*”. I believe Bulfin is hinting at a possible shared understanding or at least a hope of one, which is at odds with his nationalist sentiment. Bulfin’s interaction with the native inhabitants of the shared diaspora space is seen to subtly destabilise his notion of identity as fixed and unchanging. Indeed, identity is adaptable and can take on foreign elements and characteristics without compromising a sense of Irishness. We see this illustrated in the last section of the tripartite story, “Campeando”, when Bulfin and Castro are still on the journey to find the missing cattle. In this story, Bulfin is rebuked by fellow Irishman Mike Lowrie, for spending too much time in *gaucho* company and becoming *gaucho* in his ways. Mike tells him “you’re getting too much of the country into you [...] galaventing round the seven parishes sucking mate and colloguering (mixing) with the *gauchos* [...] you’ll get a bad name for yourself” (164). Mike reiterates nationalist sentiment that no good can possibly come of assimilation and if Bulfin is not careful he could become corrupted by foreign ways and so risks being unwelcome or even unable to return to Ireland. Bulfin does not conform to this view however, and a clear indication of the transformation being wrought by his relationship and affinity with the *gauchos* is contained in his response to Mike’s criticism: “Mike was as good as gold, and meant well by me. But he failed to convince me” (164). Here Bulfin contests Mike’s restrictive perspective about the dangers and potential corruption brought about by interaction with the indigenous inhabitants of the shared diaspora space. Although Bulfin’s depiction of the *gaucho* contains ambivalences and contradictions, more often than not he links them to the Irish and represents the Irish choosing their company over other nationalities on the pampas.

In the summer of 1902 Bulfin returns to Ireland to settle his family at his ancestral home in Derrinalough, Co. Offaly. While in Ireland, he cycles around the country and writes about his return and travels for the readers of *The Southern Cross*.<sup>8</sup> Bulfin’s sketches of Ireland draw on many themes ranging from tourism and the deforestation of the land to the economy and the state of education. Throughout his sketches, his nationalist agenda and criticism of colonialism are foregrounded. However, sewn into his “combative anti-British nationalism” (Ryle 1999: 5) is his contestation of Ireland as the primary referent for identity construction and *Rambles* reveals a subject who closely identifies with the diaspora space and its inhabitants. Bulfin’s sketches serve as a link between the diaspora space of

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<sup>8</sup>The first sketch entitled “At sea” was published June 21, 1902 and subsequent sketches entitled “In Eirinn” were published over the following seven months. Due to popular demand his articles were then reprinted in nationalist Irish newspapers such as Griffith’s *The United Irishman* and the *New York Daily News*. The popularity of the sketches lead to its publication in 1907 as *Rambles in Eirinn*. I will hereafter refer to the narrative as *Rambles*.

Argentina and the Irish-Argentine community there and the bounded territory of the homeland. By writing Argentina into his travel sketches of Ireland, Bulfin attempts to construct a transnational Irish community and identity and extend the boundaries of Irishness to include this space. Ryle, in fact, argues that *Rambles* was integral in the construction of this identity and “was part of the cultural work which sought to bring [this] community into being” (1999: 115). The “imagined community” that Bulfin is addressing is the worldwide Irish diasporic community referred to at the beginning of the paper. Bulfin is at pains to reassure these diasporans that they have not been forgotten and would, in fact, be welcomed back to Ireland.

*Rambles* opens with the returned exile on the deck of a ship awaiting the first sight of “home”, setting the tone for the fulfilment of the fantasy of the “glorious” return and warm welcome that awaits all potential returnees. However, the paradigm of exile which encompasses this fantasy return is threatened by the very act of fulfilment, as the fantasy, “the operative engine of actively maintained exile, must remain unrealised [...] the exile must roam and pant to return but never actually achieve it” (Naficy 1991: 288). Thus Bulfin is in danger of undermining the exile status he has appropriated. To this end, Bulfin takes care to present himself and the diaspora community as exiles. In fact, in his preface to *Rambles* he fuses the Irish-Argentine community to an exilic status. He informs his readers that he wrote the sketches “more or less hurriedly, as opportunity offered, here and there on the road [...] with the sole object of sharing the writer’s thoughts and feelings with certain Irish exiles on the other side of the world”. In an inversion of the Oisín myth of journeying from Ireland to the magical land of eternal youth, Bulfin positions Ireland as the fantasy land: “it was going to be like a visit to fairy-land, before we reached Dublin at all; for like most returning exiles, we were up long before sunrise, watching...for the first glimpse of Ireland” (2). The dual nature of the voluntary/forced departure evinced in the painting *Emigrants at Cork* is carefully manipulated by Bulfin to depict a community which has retained its connection to the homeland and a continued desire to look upon that space.

In Bulfin’s references to Argentine diaspora space and its inhabitants, he evinces and solidifies a transnational Irish-Argentine identity. He achieves this through correlations in the topography of the diaspora space and that of the national territory in addition to traditional features of rural Irish culture, in particular oral culture such as songs and story-telling and even nostalgia for the diaspora space. An example of this can be seen in Bulfin’s reminders to the reader of the diaspora community’s allegiance to their Irish identity. When discussing a love song he hears on his travels, he notes “I have heard it sung in two hemispheres – by the winter firesides of Leinster and under the *paraíso* trees around the homes of the pampas” (22).

Here we see that memories of place and songs are linear – that is, there is a shared oral cultural tradition and the Irish diaspora community maintains and cherishes these links. That the shared culture is an oral one may speak to Bulfin’s lauding of the rural over the urban, as demonstrated in his *Tales of the Pampas*. The diaspora community of the Pampas were largely from rural Irish society and Bulfin is keen to show that this community has not erased its past and their traditions live on abroad. Bulfin repeatedly draws attention to Argentine landscapes in his sketches, now remembering and recreating these spaces in his travels in Ireland. Upon sighting the Curragh (a flat open plain of almost 5,000 acres/20 km<sup>2</sup> of common land in County Kildare, Ireland, between Newbridge and Kildare) nostalgia for Argentina enters his narrative, suggesting stronger ties to the diaspora space than an exile might desire. Bulfin muses:

I never see the Curragh without being reminded of the Pampas. It is very like a slice of a camp taken out of Arcifes or San Pedro. The land rises and falls in long and gentle undulations. There are no hills or vales, no hedges or walls – nothing but the shallow depressions and the billowy ridges [...] I ran into a flock of sheep [...] sufficiently large to be suggestive of a corner of the wide sheep runs far away. (190)

Here we see the Curragh displaced by the Pampas and Bulfin is now seeing Ireland through Argentina. This mediation of the Irish landscape through an Argentine one strongly suggests that Argentina has become crucial to how he perceives his environment and identity. Moreover, by deliberately tying the topography of Ireland to a landscape thousands of miles away Bulfin is striving to unite the diaspora community with the homeland in one communal diaspora space and in doing so extend the boundaries of Irishness beyond the national territory. This is not the only evidence of nostalgia for Argentina and how it has become crucial to how Bulfin renders himself as subject, potentially even displacing Ireland as “home”. On his travels he is asked where he is from and instead of laying claim to his Irish roots in Derrinalough, Offaly, he twice responds “south, seven thousand miles” (199, 414), revealing how integral Argentina has become to his concept of home as well as his identity construction. He is proud of not only his status as a returnee but also, it seems, of his adopted country.

Ultimately, though fiercely nationalist, Bulfin romanticises both Ireland and Argentina in his travels and actively promotes a transnational sense of Irishness, drawing the diaspora space into the national territory. His sketches reveal a diaspora subject who empathises with the indigenous inhabitants and who challenges the potentially corrupting impact of those inhabitants and their shared space. Within these narratives the exilic subject reflects practices of resistance as well as essentialising tendencies

with regards to identity. Nonetheless, what becomes clear is that the diaspora space can accommodate multiple forms of cultural identity and Irishness is re-shaped because of this. Bulfin re-imagines Irish identity as that in which the national territory is neither anchor nor primary referent for identity construction, instead extending it outward to encompass the myriad diaspora communities worldwide. His return journey to Ireland encapsulates various elements of his re-imagining. Though *Rambles in Eirinn* is Bulfin's ode to Irish Ireland, his experiences in the diaspora space are not forgotten. Indeed, they are written into his travels and, similar to how Bulfin expands the national territory of Ireland to include the diaspora space, his narration of the Irish landscape "materialises" elements of that same space.

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## “Thousands of miles through untrodden lands” The life and writings of Marion Mulhall

Mariano Galazzi<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Marion Mulhall (née Murphy; Balbriggan, Ireland, 1847 – Surbiton, England, 1922) was the wife of journalist and statistician Michael G. Mulhall. After their marriage, she moved with him to Buenos Aires, and accompanied him in his travels. She wrote several books and articles on the lands they visited, and on history and social issues. The aim of this article is to describe the main events of her life and of her experiences in South America, and to analyse her views on those lands, especially on the Irish immigrants.

**Keywords:** Marion Mulhall – Irish Diaspora – Argentina – South America – Travel writing

Marion Mulhall was an unusual kind of person. When *The New York Times* gave the news about the death of her husband Michael, it briefly added that “[his] wife, Marion Mulhall, is well known as a writer of books of travel and historical essays” (14 December 1900). But she was more than “a lady ... rushing into a field of literature more suitably reserved for men”, as she had described herself (Mulhall, M. 1877: Preface).

She was an Irish woman who married an Irishman, and who went with him to live abroad. She was a constant companion to her husband. She accompanied him in his travels and helped him in the writing of his books. In many ways, she was one of the supporting characters of history.

But at the same time she also played a leading role. She undertook difficult enterprises, from visiting remote lands to starting an orphanage. She was a writer who wrote on history, travel writing and social issues. She travelled extensively and wrote several books about the countries she visited. She was Irish, and was a pioneer in writing about the Irish in South America. She was British, and her books show her deep identification with British civilization. Her personality was well known and remembered. Her books, now almost forgotten, were praised in her lifetime.

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<sup>1</sup> Mariano Galazzi is a historian and translator from Universidad Austral, Buenos Aires. His field of research is the history of English-speaking immigrants in Argentina and the history of translation. He has published widely on the history of the Irish in Argentina.

The aim of this article is to try to describe these aspects of her life, and especially to follow her steps from Ireland to Buenos Aires, and around South America and other countries; and to analyse in her writings how she saw those lands and their inhabitants, particularly the Irish immigrants.



Fig. 1. Marion Mulhall “Colecciones Especiales y Archivos” of the Universidad de San Andrés (Argentina)

### **Family and marriage**

On 30 July 1868, *The Standard* of Buenos Ayres carried a short notice on page 3: “MARRIAGE. June 10, at Balbriggan, county Dublin, Ireland, by the Very Rev. Canon Keogh, P. P., Michael G. Mulhall, Esq., Editor of ‘The Standard’, Buenos Ayres, to Marion, eldest daughter of Edward Murphy, Esq., of Balbriggan”. Who was this woman who had married the editor of the newspaper?

Mary Anne, the daughter of Edward Murphy and Mary Jane Butler, was born in 1847, and was baptized in the parish church of Balbriggan on 5

November. In his book on Irish families in Argentina, Coghlan mentions “Edward Murphy, from Balbriggan, who died aged 80 on 24 June 1888, father to Mary Murphy, the wife of Michael Mulhall” (Coghlan 1987: 73).<sup>2</sup> He also mentions a sister of Marion’s, Cecilia, who in 1885 married Farifield Magrane in Buenos Aires (1987: 425).

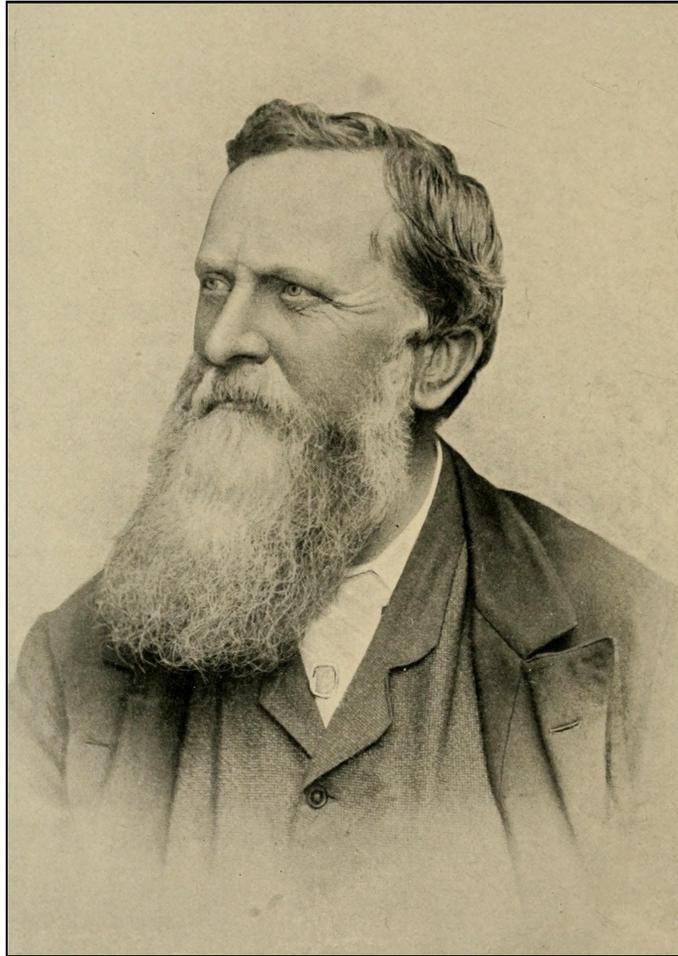


Fig. 2. Michael G. Mulhall. From *Explorers in the New World* (1909), p. iv. On the opposite page: “Dedication. / To the memory of the best of friends, / my husband.”

It is not known how Marion and Michael Mulhall met. In his youth, Michael (1836-1900), the son of a prosperous Dublin family, had started to study to become a priest, but later changed his mind and in 1858 went to Argentina, where his brother Edward had been living for some years trying his luck in agriculture. Michael does not seem to have liked working in the “camp” (as Irish immigrants called the countryside) and started to work as teacher. But later his life adopted a new course: on 1 May 1861 he founded

<sup>2</sup> “Edward Murphy, de Balbriggan, que falleció de 80 años de edad el 24.6.1888, padre de Mary Murphy, señora de Michael Mulhall”.

*The Standard*, a newspaper for the English-speaking population of Buenos Aires. The following February, perhaps as a way of obtaining funds, his brother Edward joined the new journalistic business.<sup>3</sup> The Mulhall brothers fully devoted themselves to their job (Murray, Th. 1919: 306-307). Gradually, *The Standard* consolidated and managed to survive the political and economic ups and downs of Argentina. In 1959, when it ceased publication, it was the doyen of Argentine newspapers.

Apart from editing the newspaper, both brothers also published several books. The best known is *The Handbook of the River Plate*, which was reprinted several times in enlarged editions. Michael also published other books on his own, including *The English in South America* (1878).

When Michael died, *The Southern Cross*, the weekly newspaper of the Hiberno-Argentine community, described him as “a mild Home Ruler of the old-fashioned type; but in political discussion as well as in other matters he was more timid than assertive, more prudent than convincing. Yet he was a very estimable man, and in private life he was most amiable, genial and always interesting” (14 December 1900: 14). Thomas Murray disagreed with his political ideas, but acknowledged that “none of the family, except Michael, seemed to be possessed of any real Irish spirit” (Murray, Th. 1919: 308). Such was Marion’s husband, and it is probable that she held similar political views.

### **An unforgettable woman**

After a short honeymoon in Killarney, Marion and Michael arrived in Buenos Aires. The War of the Triple Alliance or Paraguayan War (1864-1870) was in full swing, and two months later Sarmiento would succeed Mitre as president.

“My first impressions of this place [Buenos Aires] were unfavourable, owing to the difficulties that attended our landing” (Mulhall, M. 1881: 1): the ships did not get to the coast, which had to be reached on whale boats; some Italian bearers started to carry off their luggage without asking; the rain made all slippery or muddy; etc. However, she must have felt herself welcomed, for she mentions the great hospitality of the inhabitants (1881: 10).

She also seems to have made a good impression on the local population, and particularly on the English-speaking community. A few weeks after her arrival, Kate A. Murphy, a young Irish-Argentine, described her as “a young Irish lady[;] she is very beautiful and accomplished and naturally has created a great sensation here in B. Aires” (Murray, E. 2006: 106).

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<sup>3</sup> It is generally stated that both brothers founded *The Standard*, but the information on the first issues only mention Michael as its owner.

Marion not only caused a sensation on her arrival. Arthur Shaw, an Englishman who lived most of his life in Argentina, met her during the National Exhibition of Córdoba (1871); more than thirty years later, when he published his memoirs in 1907, he still remembered her vividly:

During the exhibition time I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Michael Mulhall .... Mrs. Mike, who accompanied her husband to our Fair, was the true type of the girl from (or for) Galway, besides being a very beautiful woman. I remember the effect of the hat of the epoch—stiff slouch shape, one side of brim horizontal and the other vertical with a feather. Oh, it was *divino*, as they say in Spanish. Put an e for an o, and it's English (Shaw 1907: 41-42).



Fig. 3. “City of Buenos Ayres” An engraving by E. Jennings, from *Between the Amazon and Andes* (1881), by Marion Mulhall; included also in *Buenos Ayres and Argentine Gleanings* (1865), by Thomas J. Hutchinson

But he was not the only one who did not forget her:

Amongst them [the Guaycurus] I am still remembered as the ‘Mujer Blanca’ [White Woman] who came to teach music; for unconsciously I gained this reputation by the Indians hearing me on board ... . I had a guitar, and every evening when the breeze blew the tormenting insects away, we had music on the quarter-deck. It would really seem I made some impression on them, for in the following year two German explorers, coming down from Bolivia, heard the Indians still talking of me (Mulhall, M. 1881, 182).

## Exploring South America

At the beginning of 1871, Michael and Marion survived the yellow fever plague that devastated Buenos Aires.<sup>4</sup> Soon afterwards, in the summer of 1871-1872, Michael made a trip to Brazil; his reports were published in *The Standard* and, expanded, in his *Rio Grande do Sul and its German Colonies* (1873). Marion went with her husband and, in *Between the Amazon and Andes*, tells the events on their way back through Uruguay. Shortly afterwards, they accepted the invitation to visit former President Urquiza at his estancia in Entre Rios.

Before, in May 1870, William Wheelwright had invited the couple to the opening of the railway in Cordoba. In November 1875, Michael and Marion also went to the opening of the stretch of the Andes Railway to Villa Mercedes; they went on to Mendoza, where they admired the Andes, particularly Uspallata and the Inca's Bridge (Puente del Inca). It was on this journey when they escaped certain death for some hours: they arrived at an inn whose inhabitants had all been killed by the Indians shortly before (Mulhall, M. 1881: 125). But the most daring journey was still to come.



Fig. 4. "Our canoe ascending the Cuyabà River" From *Between the Amazon and Andes* (1881)

<sup>4</sup> Marion related her experiences of the plague in chapter III of *Between the Amazon and Andes*: "The Plague at Buenos Aires" (pp. 28-44).

Much of Marion's married life entailed following her husband's steps; in a way that was normal for a woman in her times. But in 1876 it was she who took the initiative to make a journey to Mato Grosso (Mulhall, M. 1881, 152). The journey was very uncomfortable, but Marion was undaunted; one day, for example, when they still had to travel 600 miles that could only be done on a canoe, her husband warned her about the difficulties they would have to face in the remaining journey, "but the interest of exploring this *terra incognita* would not allow me to think of turning back" (Mulhall, M. 1881: 182; see also 1877: 86).

Marion spoke about this journey on several occasions, and she always highlighted the fact that it was a pioneering undertaking.

I was the first Englishwoman to penetrate the heart of South America, travelling for thousands of miles through untrodden forests, seeing the Indian tribes in their own hunting-grounds, visiting the ruined shrines of the Jesuit Missions, and ultimately reaching that points whence I beheld the waters flowing down in opposite directions to the Amazon and the La Plata... (Mulhall, M. 1881: v-vi; see also 212; 1877: Preface; and 1914: 243-244).<sup>5</sup>

Back in Asunción, Michael left his wife with some friends, and returned to Buenos Aires to attend some business. Marion used the month her husband was away to go round much of Paraguay. It was an important moment in her life, for she went to the Jesuit Missions, a topic on which she wrote several times (Mulhall, M. 1877: 105-111; 1881: 239-340; 1909: 240-313).

### **First books: civilization and barbarism**

Between 1877 and 1881 Marion published her first two books: *From Europe to Paraguay and Matto-Grosso*, and *Between the Amazon and Andes*. She mentions her visit to Paraguay and Brazil in both prefaces, from which it may be supposed that this trip was one of the main reasons that moved her to publish her experiences. The first book has a logical order, following her trip from Europe to South America (chapters I to VII), and then to Paraguay and the Mato Grosso (XI to XIX); only a small part is devoted to Argentina (VIII to X, and XX).

In her second book, published only four years later, there is a different perspective: her centre is Buenos Aires (chapters I to III), from where she visits Brazil (IV), Uruguay (V), and the Argentine provinces (VI to IX); and it is also from Buenos Aires that she starts her journey along the rivers (X) to Mato Grosso (XI), after which she speaks of Paraguay (XII). The Jesuit

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<sup>5</sup> Her husband also pointed it out in several times: Mulhall, M. G. 1876: 59; 1878: 470.

Missions had received a chapter in her first book; now they are dealt with in an Appendix.

What did she see in South America? What aspects of these lands reflected on her eyes?

Both books were published in London, and seem intended for a British readership. It is not surprising, then, that she spoke of herself as an “Englishwoman” or an “English lady” (1877: Preface, 51 and 103; 1881: v), instead of mentioning that she was Irish.

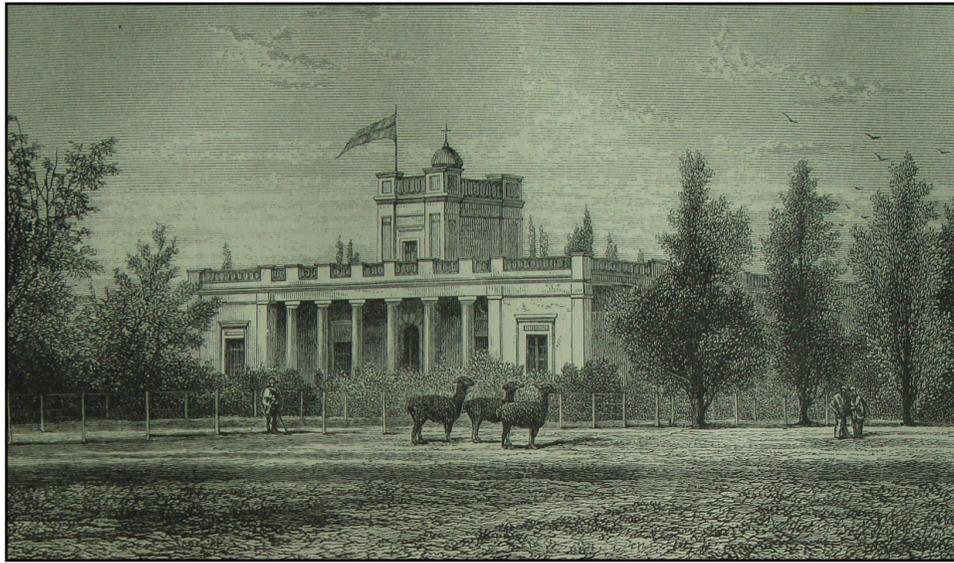


Fig. 5. “Mr. Shennan’s estancia near Buenos Ayres” From *Between the Amazon and Andes* (1881). It was later used again in “Erin in South America” (1908) with a different caption: “Mansion of an Irish settler near Buenos Ayres.”

In fact, “Englishness” was her usual point of reference, from the urban or rural landscape, to customs or historical events (for example, 1877: 54 and 64; 1881: 6, 98, 103 and 156). England was a synonym of civilization and progress, which are closely related to technique and entrepreneurship (for example, 1877: 50; 1881: 117). And for her even the natural wonders of the continent would be better used if they were in English hands: “I pictured to myself what English genius and enterprise would have made of this splendid watercourse [the Paraná]. I saw visions of vessels laden with the fruits of industry, instead of these great natural resources lying wasted” (1877: 56-57).

Civilization was an important category, and several comments about South America, and particularly about Argentina, may seem to show an uncivilised land where violence and insecurity prevailed. People living far away from cities or towns were at risk of dying violently at the hands of the Indians (1881: 93). But cruelty and violence were often experienced in

camp life too: “Whether owing to the frequent civil wars, or to the danger from Indian raids, the former proprietor [of the estancia], Mr. John Hannah, built the house like a fortress” (1881: 15-16). This violence also appeared in tasks unrelated to times of war or invasion, like when she speaks about cruelty towards animals in the branding of cattle and in the taming of horses (1877: 26).

Violence, however, was not only confined to the camp: “Buenos Ayres would be a much pleasanter place to live in but for one drawback, which no President or Governor has yet been able to remedy, namely the insecurity for life and property, to which, however, one gets accustomed after a time” (1881: 10), and devotes the following pages to stories of robberies and violent deaths in the city (10-13 and 16-17). But danger was not limited to Argentina: she also tells about dangers and deaths in Uruguay (for example, 1881: 66, 69 and 72).

Even the native population had a look that rose uncertainty and fear among foreigners. For Marion Mulhall, gauchos “are a lawless looking set” (1877: 23); they were “rude”, “semi-Bedouin semi-Indian” (1881: 21); and the boatmen on the Paraná, “bore some resemblance to Calabrian fishermen, only looking much wilder” (1881: 163).

Although in a different way, this sense of constant tension and discomfort was also felt at home. She liked how the houses looked like, but comfort was largely absent in the homes in these lands (1881: 3).

Solidarity among foreigners was of great help in order to survive. For example, when writing about her experiences of the epidemic of yellow fever, Marion Mulhall described the provisions that an English grocer and an Italian neighbour gave her and her husband, the available houses they learnt about from the American minister and an English blacksmith, etc. (1881: 34, 37-38). In those circumstances the British Hospital “was unfortunately closed against patients, as its constitution forbade the treatment of any infectious or contagious disease, but the physicians, chaplains, and directors did all they could for our country-people by visiting them” (1881: 40).

In spite of such an adverse context, in her comments Marion Mulhall suggests that the “English” adapted themselves to these lands and had been able to live a more or less comfortable life in the wild pampas, like in *Negretti*, Shennan’s estancia, where “within its gates we can forget that we are in the wilds of South America; surrounded by trees and gardens, where every European fruit and flower (as well as tropical) are to be found (...). Having every comfort of civilised life how happy the days pass!” (1877: 114).

And not only had they adapted themselves to the land, but also had become wealthy:

The Western Camps [of Buenos Aires] are indeed a modern Colchis, where thousands of Irishmen, who were as poor as the Argonauts when they landed, have since become some of the wealthiest men in South America. Besides these, there is a small number of ‘younger sons’ from England and Scotland who own large estancias or sheep-farms in different parts of the province. The sheep industry is chiefly in the hands of British subjects, and is of such magnitude that the flocks number sixty million head, and the value of wool annually exported ranges from five to six millions sterling, or two-thirds of the total products of the country (Mulhall M. 1881: 13).<sup>6</sup>

The civilized British, ultimately, faced a territory they saw as hostile and conquered the difficulties: they settled and prospered.

### Helping friends

As years went by, life in Buenos Aires continued normally. Michael divided his time between his work at *The Standard* and his studies on statistics, frequently contributing to foreign journals. In 1884 Michael published his most important work, the *Dictionary of Statistics*, which saw many editions. He made several trips abroad; it seems more than likely that Marion went with him most of times if not always, like in 1880 when she helped a friend of theirs.

Lionel Sackville-West (1827-1908), British minister plenipotentiary to Argentina (1872-1878) and ambassador to Spain (1878-1881), had had several illegitimate children with Josefa de la Oliva, a Spanish dancer known as *Pepita*. During his years abroad, the children had been left in a convent in France. Probably during a visit to Madrid, Marion and Michael went to pay a call to their old friend.<sup>7</sup> As they were Catholic, he asked them for help with his children, because he wanted to educate them in *Pepita’s* faith. Marion immediately offered her help: “Mrs Mulhall was ‘only too happy to do anything for them when she went over to England’” (Sackville-West, R. 2014: 58).

<sup>6</sup> According to Greek mythology, Jason and the Argonauts made an expedition to Colchis to get the Golden Fleece, the skin of a sacred ram.

<sup>7</sup> Sackville-West knew the Mulhalls from Buenos Aires. They had also met in Paraguay: cfr. Mulhall, M. 1881: 231-238.



Fig. 6. Marion Mulhall. Robert Sackville-West collection

She went to the convent school in Berck-sur-Mer, where three daughters were living, and took them for a time to her house in Sussex before they entered a convent school in London. During the trip to England, Marion spoke with Victoria, the eldest daughter. “She told me she had to say that my father and mother had never been married. It was a great shock and surprise to me” (Sackville-West, V. 1937: 156).<sup>8</sup>

The Mulhalls kept in touch with the Sackville-Wests, and even sent a gift when Victoria married her cousin Lionel Edward Sackville-West (1890).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The following year Marion also took the younger son from Paris to London; although she was asked to tell him about his illegitimate birth, but she refused (Sackville-West, R. 2014: 65 and 76).

<sup>9</sup> Victoria and Lionel were the parents of writer and garden designer Vita Sackville-West (1892-1862).

### More children in her life

In London, on 17 November 1885, Marion gave birth to a baby (*The Standard* 18 November 1885: 3). It was named Michael Oliver, after its father and St Oliver Plunkett, the Irish martyr. A few days after their return to Buenos Aires, on 25 March 1886, the baby died at Edward's house in Flores (*The Standard* 27 March 1886: 3).



Fig. 7. “Mrs. Marion Murphy de Mulhall” From *A Brief History of the Society of Ladies of St. Joseph* (1941), by John S. Gaynor

The death of their only child, born after seventeen years of marriage, must have been a terrible blow for them. But perhaps this sad event accounts for one of Marion's daring projects. After the tragic ending of the failed immigration project with the Irish settlers arrived on the *S. S. Dresden* (1889), the orphan girls were taken in by the Sisters of Mercy; but the boys had nowhere to go. Michael Mulhall rekindled the memory of Father Fahy and his project to found an orphanage for boys. It was

Michael's wife, Marion, who took this task in her hands, and "headed a group of ladies who boldly decided to found a school where the little boy-survivors from Napostá [one of the destinations of the *Dresden* immigrants] might be housed and clothed" (Gaynor 1941: 6).<sup>10</sup> The inaugural meeting of the Society of St Joseph was held on 17 April 1891 at the Irish Convent on Riobamba Street, and Marion was elected President. A house on Cochabamba Street was rented, and the Marist Brothers supplied the tuition. The Government offered money; funds were raised through raffles, benefit performances, etc. Marion kept her post until 1893.

### **Back to Europe**

In 1894 Michael stopped being the chief editor of *The Standard*. In that year, "owing to circumstances which are generally known by this time, he withdrew from the paper and went abroad" (*The Southern Cross* 14 December 1900: 14). Back in the Old World, the Mulhalls lived between Dublin and London, but travelled extensively. Since her husband was appointed chamberlain to the pope in 1896, they also spent several winters in Rome. In that year, Michael also travelled around Europe to collect material for a parliamentary committee that had to study the possibility of creating a department of agriculture for Ireland. It seems that she accompanied him because she mentions her visits to several cities in two articles on children's education she published in that year: "Girl's Technical Schools on the Continent" and "Boarding-out Workhouse Children".

In 1896 she also published an article on the "Celtic Sources of the Divina Commedia", and, two years later, another one on the discovery of America by Irishmen and others before Columbus. Before, in 1889, she had written about St. Patrick and the Monastery of Lerins. These were the results of the research she most likely undertook while accompanying her husband. Over the years, during his stays in different places, Michael worked at the Bodleian Library (Oxford), at the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris), and at the British Museum Library (London). When he was collecting material for his *Dictionary of Statistics*, he worked twelve hours a day in the British Museum (*The Standard* 13 December 1900: 4): probably his wife went with him on more than one occasion. In Rome, Marion was the first woman who was given papal permission to do research in the Vatican Library (Mulhall, M. 1909: ix).<sup>11</sup> Marion was granted a diploma by the Italian government for her *Between the Amazon and Andes*; she was also

<sup>10</sup> For the history of the orphanage, see also Mulhall, M. G. & E. T. 1892: 288.

<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the first registration of women researchers are of 1915, and Marion is not among them; however, it is possible that, being perhaps a special permission by Leo XIII, her visit was not recorded.

a member of the Academy of Arcadia for her book on Dante's Celtic sources (Noailles 1970: 131).

### **Michael's death**

On 2 November 1900, *The Southern Cross* published a letter written by Marion Mulhall in which she said that her husband's prediction of the United States census had been extremely precise. "This shows how very precise and accurate statistical science may prove in skilful hands" (7 December 1900: 15). She had always supported and defended Michael, and she continued to do so at his death-bed.

In September 1900, the doctors had advised Michael to leave Rome. Three months later, on 13 December, he died at his residence in Killiney, near Dublin. According to *The Southern Cross* he "died a most edifying death" (14 December 1900: 14). There were several condolences for the passing of a "thoroughly good man in every sense" (*The Standard* 13 December 1900: 4).

Marion, who had not led a quiet life when married, did not face her widowhood as a period of inactivity. In the following years she published two books: *Explorers in the New World* (1909) and *Beginnings, or Glimpses of Vanished Civilizations* (1911). In this stage of her life she also published two articles on the Irish in South America.

### **Marion's texts on the Irish in South America**

The editors of *The Glories of Ireland* (1914) wanted their book to reflect the importance of Irish culture and heritage in their country and abroad, and they asked Marion to write about the Irish in South America. Marion had written an article on the same subject, entitled "Erin in South America," published in *The Irish Rosary* in 1908.

This one had been a short but complete article, illustrated with several photographs and engravings. In it she had used some information already mentioned by her husband in *The English in South America* (1878). But for the second article she used it to an even larger degree, copying paragraphs almost verbatim. To use her husband's book was an intelligent choice. When he published his book, Michael had already a long experience of life in the region and knew many of the British arrived on the shores of the River Plate after independence. Apart from touring widely in Argentina and other countries, his work in *The Standard* had provided him with connections in the native society and kept him very up to date about news. If we add to this his interest in statistics, we can say that *The English in South America* had the special value of having been written by one of the better informed members of the British community.

Marion shared largely this privileged position of her husband. Although she came to the region ten years after her husband, she also met many English-speaking immigrants from previous waves. She does not mention her husband's book as the source for her articles; this is more remarkable in the case of the second one, copied almost word by word in some paragraphs. Apart from the fact that she had inherited the rights on his works, she had had a lot to do with it, as they usually assisted each other with their writings. Marion herself explicitly acknowledges this in her *From Europe to Paraguay and Matto Grosso* (1877), published a year before *The English in South America*, when she refers to her "notes of travel, in which I must confess some assistance from my husband, who gave me his notes to compare with mine" (1877: Preface). Perhaps something similar happened, but the other way about, with Michael's notes on the British in the southern cone.

Marion copied from her husband's book, but with some changes, like making explicit mention of the Irish origin of several characters that her husband had called "English" or whose nationality he had not mentioned. She also made some adaptations: not only the readership was American, instead of British, but also Michael's comments on his contemporaries had to be rephrased to refer to a previous generation.

It is worth noting that much of Marion's text—as had happened before with Michael's on the "English"—mostly refers to what had happened in Argentina, and specifically in Buenos Aires. This is not surprising since the Mulhalls lived there and this country received the largest number of Irish immigrants in South America.

According to "The Irish in South America", the Irish in Argentina had been extremely successful: "The number and wealth of the Irish *estancieros*, or sheep-farmers, in Argentina have never been exactly ascertained, but after the old Spanish families they are the most important" (Mulhall M. 1914: 239). This optimistic view on the prosperity of the Irish immigrants in the River Plate may seem incomplete as Marion Mulhall does not mention the fact that only some of them had become rich, while most had either left the country or become part of a discrete middle class. But she seems to have been aware of this when in her article "Erin in South America" she had given—alongside the heroic lives of Admiral Brown and Father Fahy—a bleaker outlook on life of the shepherds on the pampas: "The life is rough and solitary enough ... and all this for very low wages, for the days of sheep on halves have passed" (Mulhall, M. 1908: 812-813). This first article was written for an Irish publication, and she might have wanted to discourage emigration from that country to Argentina. "The Irish in South America," on the other hand, was for a book entitled *The Glories of Ireland*, which, according to the editors had as one of its purposes

“to give the Irish and their descendants solid reasons for that pride that we feel for their race”: there was no place in it for negative views.<sup>12</sup>

It should be kept in mind that, although one of them is, in the end, a revised text of some parts of *The English in South America*, Marion’s two articles are the first texts that specifically address the issue of the Irish in Argentina, and were published before *The Story of the Irish in Argentina* (1919), the classic book by Thomas Murray, who in turn also includes several references to Michael’s book.

### **Death and legacy**

Marion Mulhall died on 15 November 1922, in Surbiton, in the south-west of London.

The world had changed a lot during her life. World War I had affected the entire globe and the lives of many people. The British Empire, although still large and powerful, was beginning to show some signs of weakness. In her native land, the Irish Free State was giving its first steps and the Civil War was in full swing. Argentina, a place she had first known when it was in its initial steps towards institutional organization and economic development, was one of the richest countries and “the world’s breadbasket.”

In *Between the Amazon and Andes*, Marion Mulhall had written: “I give these Sketches to the public with the hope that they may call attention of more learned travellers to a quarter of the world that so well repays the trouble of exploring” (1881: vi). In a world that has changed a lot more since her death, her texts remain a testimony of other times, with the personal touch of an author with a great knowledge of the presence of her nationals in that “quarter of the world” in which she spent much of her life.

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<sup>12</sup> Perhaps for the same reason she omitted other less “edifying” stories, like the S. S. *Dresden*. It is interesting the fact that in 1957 *The Southern Cross* published “The Irish in South America” serialized between 26 July and 6 September; this could perhaps be interpreted as an acceptance of its contents or approach by part of the Irish community in Argentina more than forty years later.

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## Translated Irelands Beyond the Seas

Laura P. Z. Izarra<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This paper discusses the concept of travelling texts, or textual travels, considering the transnational and translational function of a culture of survival (Bhabha 1995). The aim is to show how those texts and travelling symbols shaped the identity of the Irish diasporic community in Argentina at the beginning of the twentieth century and its contemporary resignifications.

**Keywords:** travelling texts; Irish identity; diasporic narratives.

Irish Latin American travel writings and travelling texts<sup>2</sup> enlighten the process of cultural encounters as well as the construction of other Irelands and Irishness beyond the seas. Travel narratives, either fictional or referential, resemble diasporic literary narratives because they generally describe not only historical facts that have provoked the movement of a people but also reveal strategies of a culture of survival which the anglo-Indian cultural critic Homi Bhabha (1995) has defined as transnational and translational.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the process of survival is tightly linked to the geographical movements of the people, to the various economic and political transactions operating between the country of origin and the host country, and to the distinction “between the semblance and similitude of the *symbols* across diverse cultural experiences – literature, art, music, ritual, life, death – and the social specificity of each of these productions of meaning as it circulates *as a sign* within specific contextual locations and social systems of value.” (*ibid.* 49). In these transactions, different cultures

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<sup>2</sup> I refer to both kinds of texts, either the ones authored by travellers and diasporic subjects or those published in Ireland and in Latin America and travelled to and from across the Atlantic (what could configure a ‘cultural diaspora’).

<sup>3</sup> Homi Bhabha explains that a culture of survival is transnational because it is “rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement” and it is also translational because it calls the attention to “*how* culture signifies or what is signified by *culture*.” (48).

already present in the diaspora space<sup>4</sup> come into contact and are in a continuous process of translation in order to keep their cultural heritage and survive as minorities in an adopted country.

However, not only the travellers' writings register the history of Irish and Latin American encounters and strategies of a culture of survival. I would like to call the attention to another kind of process which is the result of textual travels that migrate back and forth. If we consider Mousten & Locmele's research on knowledge representation, texts travel through translation, adaptation and replacement into corresponding or new contexts (p.63); their reception depends on the undersanding and purpose they have in those new locations. Thus, texts travel across languages and geographical borders and help to keep the bonds with the land of origin, either in the past or in present times. Textual travels play an important function in the construction of an Irish diasporic identity and in the process of understanding the transformation of Irishness across cultures.

Travel narratives and textual travels reveal not only an aesthetics of experience but also the construction of a transnational and transdisciplinary knowledge of signifying "Irelands" across physical boundaries. My aim here is to illustrate the transnational and translational processes of representations of a "New Ireland" in Argentina through various aesthetic resignifications of Irish travelling texts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>5</sup>

Ireland was a land of migration in the past and has become a diaspora space nowadays. Historical, social, political and economic facts have pushed away many of its inhabitants since the Famine but also attracted many others (even returnees) mainly during the period of the Celtic Tiger. Before I discuss the effects of some nationalist travelling texts in the Argentine context of the early twentieth century, I'll look to the past and deconstruct the source of Irish migration through the imaginary of other textual travels.

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<sup>4</sup> Avtar Brah's *Cartographies of Diasporas* (1996) defines it as a space where foreigners and natives interact, a space which is the intersectionality of diaspora, border and the politics of location.

<sup>5</sup> The origin of the name of "New Ireland" came from an Irish community in Wednesbury, England, gathered around Father John Montgomery in the 1840s, which was called by the press "Little Ireland". In the 1840s and 50s the Irish residents were victimized politically and religiously and they were vulnerable to attacks during periods of economic depression. So, Montgomery began to take practical measures to assist his parishioners to emigrate to Brazil. *The Universal News*, on 15 February 1868, announced that the Irish colonies settling in Brazil would be called "New Irelands" as they would be part of a net of self-sufficient Irish communities abroad (Marshall 2005. 60-61). In 1875, Great Britain prohibited the emigration and settlements in Brazil due to the poor conditions that previous emigrants suffered in the country).

In the first chapter of *Deconstructing Ireland*, Colin Graham (2001) introduces Ignatius Donnelly's thesis with the purpose of recreating a variety of signifying possibilities of "Ireland". In his book *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* (1882), the Irish-American lawyer, politician and writer sets out to prove that the sinking of an entire civilization is geophysically possible and reconstructs this lost paradise of the Atlantis in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. He believes that Ireland, placed in the strategic geographical position, east of the legendary island, was "colonized at an early day by the overflowing population of Atlantis". He also refers to Saint Brendan and his mythologised attempts to find the mystical land of Tir na nOg, or the Americas, as a symbolical journey in search of his lost Atlantian origins. According to Donnelly, Ireland is not now the land of origin itself, but a place colonized by its inhabitants, and a place which must accept that those living on it have migration as their chief cultural and racial characteristic (Graham 22). Graham concludes that Donnelly's Atlantis "is a utopian space which cannot be produced, except through continually conceptualizing its own metaspace, and so his 'Ireland' is a Tir na nOg which is fated never to return and never to be arrived at." (Graham 23). Though Donnelly's thesis has no scientific support, Graham starts with this deferred utopianism in order to understand Ireland in its various layers of significations through modernization and industrialism as well as through "the mystical, the visionary, the exilic and the frankly lunatic redefinitions" (*ibid.* 24). Graham brings also the example of John Mitchel's utopian vision of Ireland as Hy Brasil that explains the emptiness of the past by the glory of the future ("the present moment is continually pulled forward and made weighty").<sup>6</sup> These texts travel across countries and fulfill the Irish imaginary in which nation and nationalism try to project the future in utopian schemes. Finally Graham analyses the production of Irish artist Seán Hillen who in 1999, published a book of "paper collages" entitled *Irelantis*. Fintan O'Toole in the Introduction to Hillen's work said that "Irelantis is contemporary, globalised Ireland, a society which became postmodern before it ever quite managed to be modern, a cultural space that has gone (...) But this Ireland is also everywhere and nowhere." Whether Hillen's *Irelantis* is future or past is unclear, since it is sometimes archaically Edenic as in his most famous picture *The Great Pyramids of Carlingford Lough*. Perhaps it could stand as a metaphor of Fintan O'Toole's (1998) statement that "Ireland dissipates into 'disappeared Irelands'. (...) Its coordinates, its

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<sup>6</sup> It's interesting to compare Mitchel's view with "the medieval writings that, on a symbolic level, had consecrated a powerful myth in the history of the great sea voyages, 'the so called Fortunate Islands, promised land, or blessed place, where perpetual spring and eternal youth reign, and where man and animals coexist in peace' (59), according to the Phoenician and Irish traditions." Hy Brasil, as designated by the Irish monks, was also the subject of a lecture written by Irish diplomat Roger Casement when he was British consul in Belém do Pará in 1907, when he referred to the Irish origin of the name of Brazil (See Izarra 2006).

longitudes and latitudes, refuse to hold their shape” (*apud* Graham, p.2). Meanwhile, I would like to add Hillen’s apocalyptic picture as a counterpart of this postmodern Eden, “The Island of Newgrange” and as an echo of Luke Gibbons’ prediction that “we are getting the last glimpse of a world that is lost” (*apud* Graham p.26). Graham concludes that *Irelantis* is a manifestation, somewhat ironic, of the ‘dreams’ which have been ‘floating out there’, a metaspace which is indisputably ‘everywhere and nowhere’ (p.26).



Fig. 1. The Great Pyramids of Carlingford Lough

After reading Graham’s reflections I asked myself, couldn’t the Irelands of the mind and those beyond the seas be seen as *transgressive utopianisms* along the lines of travelling texts that translate the knowledge of a history of ‘home’ (either the home of origin, Ireland, or the adopted land, Argentina) to understand the present? Utopia is, in a way, this mixture of ‘memory’ and ‘dream’ and I firmly believe that a critique, which illustrates its imperfections and the openended unresolvability of the heterotopias, would pave the way to understand contemporary Ireland in the light of the ‘disappeared Irelands’. In other words, Donnelly’s Irish-American view of Ireland makes emigration normal, makes Ireland a migrating

entity; Mitchel's nationalist utopia projects Ireland to the future; and Hillen's art is dealing with displacement in a world where all borders – political, cultural and psychological – are permeable (Graham p.26). Then, the interaction between the nostalgia of a past (which perhaps has never occurred like Donnelly's) and the future visions (which perhaps will never occur like Mitchel's and Hillen's) makes us focus now the narratives that represent the Irish in Argentina, the link with their motherland and the encounter with the non-English speaking culture.

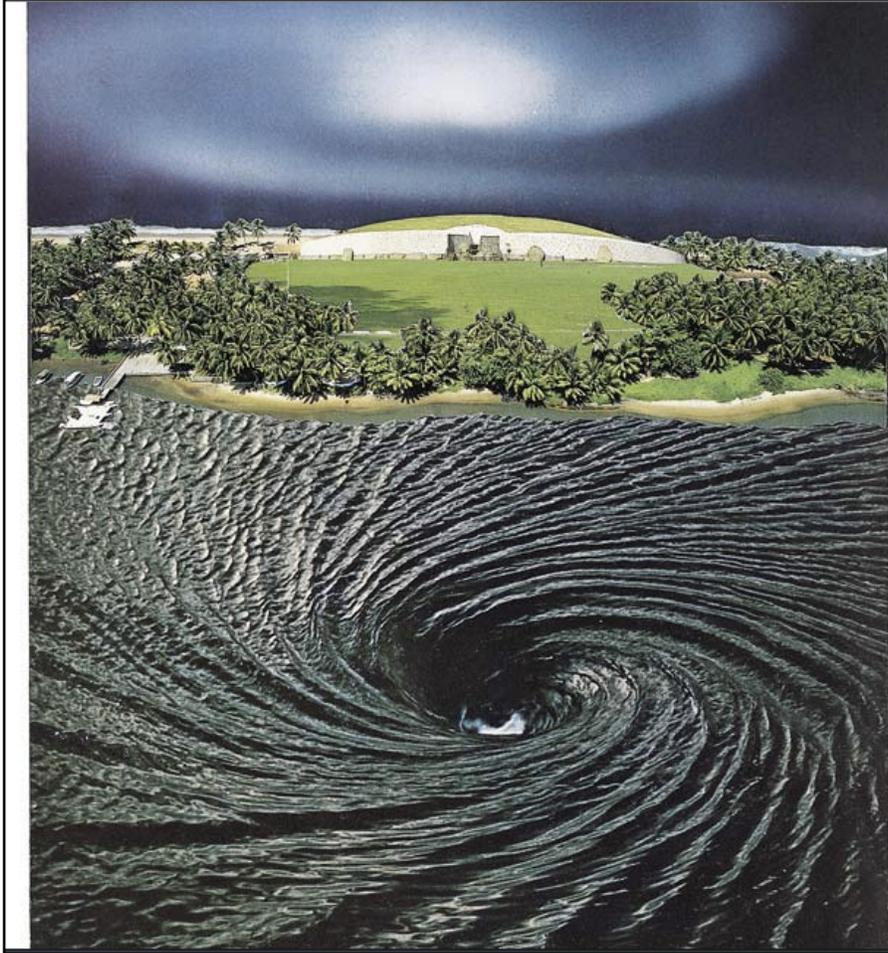


Fig. 2 The Island of Newgrange

The myth of perfection and the myth of return characterize the transgressive utopian thought of the diasporic subjects beyond the seas. Men go out into the void spaces of the world for various reasons. Some are travellers moved simply by a love of adventure, some have the keen thirst for scientific knowledge, some are drawn away from the trodden paths by the mysterious fascination of the unknown (Shackleton 1), and others are forced to leave their country and settle in other lands due to political,

economic or religious causes. As widely known, the main cause which provoked mass migration in Ireland was the nineteenth-century Great Famine. Many important Irish and non-Irish writers and artists represented the suffering of the ones who had to leave the country and those who remained. These texts crossed national boundaries and are being resignified still nowadays.

According to the sociologists Vertovec and Cohen the diaspora is seen under three perspectives: as social form, as type of consciousness and as mode of cultural production. Generally, diasporic narratives as a social form represent forced displacement, victimization, alienation and loss. The sculpture work “Famine”, by the contemporary Irish artist Rowan Gillespie, is an example of this kind of diaspora representation in contemporary times. Roger Kohn describes the work: “Seven desperate emaciated figures, shadowed by a ravenous opportunist dog, stand silently on the quayside, near the Custom House alongside the River Liffey in Dublin”<sup>7</sup> (Kohn 86). They were placed where thousands of emigrants departed on board of “coffin” ships to an uncertain future in the new world after suffering the loss of their loved ones. The hyper-realism of the figures provokes an aesthetic experience of ‘the real’ that lies behind the symbolic and the imaginary of the Irish mind.



Fig. 3. Famine sculptures

<sup>7</sup> KOHN. *Rowan Gillespie Looking for Orion*, p. 86.

However, though the Famine moved thousands of Irish people to the United States and to South America, narratives of the first “New Ireland” settled in the Argentinean diaspora space are stories of success. Poems, sketches, travelogues, newspapers, diaries, letters and other autobiographic literary narratives reveal how Irish diasporic community creates, in the second half of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, a symbolic textuality as a “strategy of survival” to represent the transnational movement and to keep alive “a home away from home”, in other words, a “New Ireland” within a “new nation”. However, physical borders remained and were also recreated in the diasporic traveller’s mind in an endogenous Irish community in the pampas. Those texts of success (letters, newspapers, reports) travelled back to Ireland provoking a chained migration to the far lands of South America. They configured a type of consciousness in which the diasporic experience of victimization was counterpoised with the experience of compensation given by new opportunities in the foreign land. Supplementing traveller’s writings, textual travels have become an important means of understanding the various kinds of diaspora experience moving from the private level to the collective level, and consequently, in the end of the twentieth century from the local to the global.

Literary narratives and Irish travelling texts published in nineteenth-century newspapers such as *The Southern Cross* and *Fianna* in Argentina or *The Anglo-Brazilian Times* in Brazil, reveal the processes of transnationalism, cultural contact and cultural *translation* at an embryonic stage and in a symbolic level. In the first two newspapers, images of transatlantic movements are ‘translated’ into textual symbols that keep alive the utopianism of a Promised Land and a contradictory homing desire, which is not always a wish to return to a place of ‘origin’.<sup>8</sup>

Though both *The Southern Cross* (1875-present) and *Fianna* (1910-1912)<sup>9</sup> used the same image for celebrating the centenary of the first Argentine free government to represent the Irish arrival to the southern new land

<sup>8</sup> The analysis that follows was a short version of my article “Locations and Identities in Irish Diasporic Narratives” in *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, Vol 10, No. 1-2, 2004 and of a chapter from my book *Narrativas de la diáspora irlandesa bajo la Cruz del Sur* (Corregidor 2010, pp. 88-109).

<sup>9</sup> Padraic Mac Manus’s nationalist review *Fianna*, was first published in Buenos Aires on St. Patrick’s Day 1910. It was vehemently anti-British, referring to the ‘Empire of the Devil’ and, as pointed out by Oliver Marshall in *The English Language Press in Latin America* (1996), it issued warnings of British plans to seize the south of Patagonia (9 July 1910) and never missed an opportunity to attack the British occupation of the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands (17 March 1910). The paper disagreed many times with the also nationalist but older newspaper *The Southern Cross*, founded by Msgr. Patrick Joseph Dillon in 1875, over conservative elements in the Irish community and supported, for example, Irish girls’ education to become typists, shop girls and governesses because “it would be criminal to condemn young girls of our race to the most slavish and worst-paid occupations, like domestic service” (31 July 1913).

and a friendly interaction of the community with the host country, the editor of *Fianna* strived to construct a collective narrative that kept the diasporic subject tied to their birthplace. The opening page of *Fianna* displays the design of three ships sailing towards the horizon where the

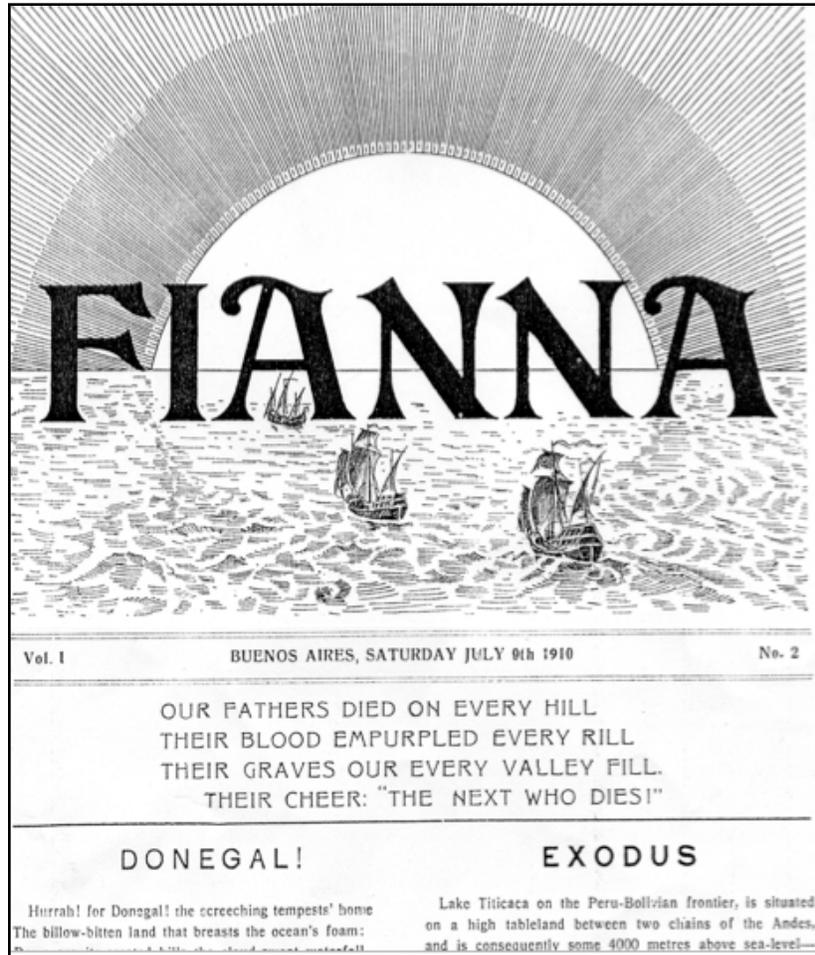


Fig. 4 *Fianna*

name of the paper appears written in large type with the sunset behind. It seems to represent the Irish movement towards the West where Hope lies. “*Fianna*” is the name for the utopian ‘new’ land where the ships go, thus moving the warrior spirit of the *Fianna*<sup>10</sup> to the west. Moreover, Irish consciousness is raised with patriotic nationalist fervour in short verses or chants that were printed in bold type below the image, such as “Our

<sup>10</sup> The word Fenian, when first used for an Irish Republican organization in the 1850s, was derived from *Fianna*, a legendary band of warrior heroes of the medieval stories *The Fenian Cycle*. Later, the Youth Organization that took part of the Dublin Rising of 1916 was also named after the ancient Gaelic elite guard.

Fathers died on every hill / their blood empurpled every rill / their graves our every valley fill./ Their cheer: “The next who dies!” (9 July 1910, N° 2). Or, “On Irish home descending, ‘Twas oft the tempest broke; / Those peaceful dwellings rending, mid flame and blood and smoke, / Our hallowed graveyards yonder swell with the slaughtered dead,/ O brothers pause and ponder – It was for us they bled!” (7 April 1911, N° 3). These travelling texts that recall the chants sung by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, play a variety of rhetorical purposes and turn into the editor’s main strategy to keep alive an open militancy and a strong attachment to Ireland and the Irish political cause, even from very far away.

But the opening image also contains ambivalence: the double significance of a reverse imaginary flow to motherland. Thus the visual and verbal modes of the text interact and could be reinterpreted in the opposite way: the ships are on the way back towards the sunrise and not the sunset and “Fianna” would be the mythic name of their motherland, or of the Youth Organization gathering the dispersed sons of Ireland to fight the English back. This visual resignification of the front page feeds nostalgia and the emotional effect of these poems discloses the main constitutive element of the diaspora pointed out by James Clifford (1997): diasporic subjects are “not here to stay”. Mitchell’s utopia of a nationalist Ireland has its echoes in the farther South Atlantic lands.

The anonymous poems, or those written by minor poets – such as Nora Hopper’s “Donegal!” (17 March 1910), or Rev Charles O’Donnell’s “The Spell of Donegal” (January 1912), or Oisín’s “Donegal!” (9 July 1910) – stand alone on the front page creating an emotional space where they become part of a dynamic relationship between experience, conscience and language. This symbolic space is marked by a strong attachment to homeland in order to awaken a desired return in the readers’ imagination. Other poems were signed with pseudonyms, such as Ethna Carbery, whose real name was Anna Johnston Mac Manus (1866-1902), wife of writer Seamus Mac Manus (1869-1959); or signed with names of Irish heroes which were celebrated by the nationalist cultural renaissance, such as Oisín, Conor Mac Nessa (remembered by the sagas *Tale of the Tain Bo Cuailgne* and *The Sons of Usnach*) and Cormac Mac Art (old king of Ireland with his reign in Tara). Thus, these travelling texts play the same function of other mechanisms used by their editors and writers to re-tell the same romantic story of loss, nostalgia and solidarity. A dream of return went along with this archetype. In this first stage of the transnational and translational process in Argentina, historical and geographical bonds became part of the mechanics of belonging rather than of ‘becoming’. However, as the sociologist Avtar Brah explains, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination, a place of no return (Brah 1996:192).

Traveling texts draw on cross-cultural communication and knowledge management. This knowledge representation is used strategically to raise awareness of the diasporic subject to be part of the nationalist movement and to find which actions he could take even from abroad. For example, William Bulfin created a branch of the Gaelic League in Buenos Aires and when he was the editor of *The Southern Cross* he printed without costs its news and propaganda being thus recognized by the *An Claidheamh Soluis* as the South American border of the movement for an “Irish Ireland”.

So, the second form of diaspora is a “type of consciousness”, i.e. a particular awareness describing a variety of experience, a state of mind and a sense of identity, which is marked by a *dual and paradoxical nature*. It is constituted negatively by experiences of discrimination and exclusion, or by the psychological effects of the separation from homeland and beloved relatives; and positively, by identification with a historical heritage (such as the Celtic civilization) or with contemporary world cultural or political forces (such as the nationalist movements at that time – the Fenians, the Gaelic League, the Irish Republican Brotherhood). J. Clifford refers to “loss and hope” as a defining tension of such diaspora awareness while Gilroy refers to the ambivalent expression “home away from home” or the dialectical “here and there” (1993). A visual example of this is Gillespie’s group of sculptures called “Migrants” (2006) which were installed in the newly created Ireland Park on the Toronto waterfront. The prominent figure of the man with outstretched hands at the front of the group sets the tone: arms raised to heaven giving thanks for the new born day – far from the agonies of home.



Fig 5 Migrants

Diasporic people are often confronted with divided loyalties to homelands and host countries. Once settled in the new land, they construct ties of

social relationships with the indigenous and other ethnic groups as a way to assert their own cultural identity and mark a space for their community. Thus the current debate on diaspora challenges the unifying discourse of “nation” focusing the dialectical experience of indeterminism in-between locations of residence and locations of belonging. Irish nineteenth-century communities struggled to construct ‘national identities’ through the reproduction of unifying narratives, which contain referential symbols of peoplehood.

How does it happen? *The Southern Cross* is also an example of the third form of diaspora: a mode of cultural production. Celtic symbols and designs from the *Book of Kells* are scattered throughout the pages (nowadays edited by Irish descendants). Similar to the functions of textual travels, these travelling symbols also became a commodity for spreading Irish culture abroad. Sharing the significance of a common symbol is a way of keeping bonds with a unifying past. Considering that 70 million Irish live around the world, it is important to distinguish the semblance and similitude of the *symbols* across diverse cultural experiences and the social specificity of the productions of meaning as they circulate *as signs* within specific contextual locations and social systems of value. In Argentina, the Irish immigrants fulfilled their nineteenth-century dreams of land, religion and nationality, the second triad pointed out by Fintan O’Toole when referring to the Irish social and cultural changes<sup>11</sup>: they became owners of large extensions of land, were prominent in sheep raising, they built up churches, hospital and religious institutions for the education of their children, and were supporters of the nationalist movements at home from abroad. Old Celtic symbols and names became the cultural codes that reflect the institutions and social processes.

Travelling narratives back in Ireland either silenced or transformed their history of oppression and failure at home into heroic deeds in the South American country resulting in a chain migration to the new land, as explained above. However, the flow of migration stopped when the SS. Dresden arrived in Buenos Aires in February 1889 with more than 1700 immigrants, the majority of them Irish, who didn’t find a place to settle and some of them died due to the poor conditions they had to face.

The contemporary counterpart story is that in early twenty-first century, with the world economic crisis that strongly afflicted Argentina, the Irish descendants took part of Ireland’s inward migration. Keeping a strong link with the land of the ancestors with the revival of old Celtic symbols, Irish descendants were motivated to apply for Irish citizenship and to migrate to

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<sup>11</sup> Finan O’Toole refers in his article “Irish Society and Culture in the Twenty-First Century” to four triads: 1) Silence, cunning and exile 2) land, religion and nationalism 3) sex, drugs and rock n’ roll 4) wealth, conflict and migration in the process of their cultural identification (*ABEI Journal* 2009).

the land of their ancestors or the European Union for better opportunities of jobs. Thus the underneath ideological project of the Irish community in Argentina which has been for many years a celebratory process of compensation and contribution in their search for a Promised Land, as it is seen in the cover of the special number of the centenary edition of *The Southern Cross*, has corroded. During the Celtic Tiger, wealth has been the official imagery of Ireland and the country has been perceived as the land of better opportunities. Therefore, her symbolic representation is magnified and Argentina is nearly erased when the *Southern Cross* celebrated its 125 years of existence.



Fig. 6 and 7 Southern Cross

In the last decades of the twentieth century, this Celtic revival within their community is contested with an ironic rewriting of that celebratory past. The Irish-Argentine writer Juan José Delaney, writing in Spanish, does this ironic twist in his novel *Moirá Sullivan*, or in his short story “The Founder”, where the utopia of a New Ireland is founded in the camps of Argentina. “The insolit and temerary project that could have only been conceived in Dublin’s tavern” (37) was inspired on Thomas More’s *Utopia*, but it was difficult, though not impossible to modify reality from literature and Timothy Heduan went to Bahía Blanca, to start his “Irish dream”. He knew “it would have been better to go to an island not only to follow the model but to avoid contaminations.” At least “he tried to sow the first seeds of an ideal society” getting married to a rich widow, owner of lands. The story ends saying that “Timothy Heduan wanted to found an

exemplary city and he ended founding a home, more or less worthy of an ideal society. This wasn't little." (44).

I would like to conclude recalling Rowan Gillespie's sculptures which resignify contemporary Ireland through the Famine and Migrancy in the turn of the twentieth century, and associate them to Fintan O'Toole's 'disappeared Irelands'. There is a connection between the individual/collective trauma and a socio-historical process of going through. The economic and social crisis in post-Cold War era has provoked a "globalization of poverty" and famine as well as emigration. Therefore, Gillespie's figures portray not only the victims of the Irish Great Famine but also "the unacceptable global starvation that haunts us all" (Kohn 95); not only mass migration but also the economic migrants and refugees of today. The cross-reading of the Irish travelling texts and symbols, diasporic narratives and Gillespie's sculptures from an actual world perspective brings the meaning of the Famine, eviction and emigration to a turning point and shows how they shaped the diasporic identity of the Irish community in Argentina to be vividly apprehended in its contemporaneity.

Literature of the Irish diaspora and travelling texts written in different temporalities translate the Irelands beyond the seas in order to fight against three historical national beasts – oppression, famine, and migration – in both turn of the centuries. Travelling texts build up a space of mutation for the human mind and act as a transgressive utopianism. They question the concept of "borders" which were related only to a physical geographical space and raise issues of cosmopolitan openness in our times. Transnational movements create translational spaces in the search for understanding future dreams everywhere and nowhere. In the contemporary world, the mythical journey to Tír na nÓg, to the utopian Promised Land, is not possible unless the dream of walking towards it. Is it Atlantis, Irelantis, Hy Brazil? Latin America? Ireland? ... Travelling texts translate this endless quest into words. In the end, everybody is on a long, long way back 'home'.

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## Transamerican Readings of Diasporic Irish Parentage

Douglas M. Glynn<sup>1</sup>

### *Abstract*

The aim of this study is to explore and analyse the ways in which ‘Irishness’ in the literatures of the Caribbean and Latin America is represented and performed in a relatively broad corpus of literary works. To this end I discuss four fictional texts, Francisco Goldman’s *The Divine Husband*, Erna Brodber’s *Myal*, Zoé Valdés’ *I Gave You All I Had* and Roldfo Walsh’s *Irish boys after a cat*, which, when reading their respective Irish characters from a transamerican approach, seem to establish a paradigm of classic stereotypical representations of the diasporic Irish mothers and fathers and ‘Irishness’. I therefore elaborate upon theories of diaspora space and offer my understanding of literary ‘figures’ to observe and comment on the problematic outcomes of such representations. I argue that the perceived paradigm among these texts subsequently allows for further studies of their principal characters who are the hybrid offspring of diasporic Irish parent figures.

**Key words:** Irishness, diaspora, transamerican, figure, stereotypes

### *Introduction and framework*

“No experience has been more native to Ireland than leaving it” Terry Eagleton whimsically remarks in his *The Truth about the Irish* (Eagleton 1999: 105). Resulting from centuries of diaspora, there has arisen a perceptible strain on the ideologies of identity and belonging in the Irish community. Frank Manista, for example, strongly questions what it means to be Irish in the world now and who determines the meaning of being “Irish” (Manista 2006: 268). This is evidenced further as the Irish appear as part of the

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national and fictional imaginaries of numerous countries in the Caribbean and Latin America. However, as Laura Zuntini de Izarra states, “Irish immigration to South America [and the Caribbean] has been studied from few historical perspectives and very little has been done to trace contemporary Irish literary diasporic voices in this geographical location” (Zuntini de Izarra 137: 2001). Indeed, in order to “trace” these Irish voices of representation we must begin with “Irish readings” of texts that may not immediately seem to lend themselves to such a distinct and highly specialised analytical approach. To allow for this type of broader reading and comparative analysis I incorporate what Ariana Vigil calls a ‘transamerican<sup>2</sup>’ approach to literature which “privileges the realm of thought and creativity” (Vigil 2013: 193). Vigil expands upon Ralph Bauer’s notions of ‘American hemispheric studies’<sup>3</sup> by looking past more limited regional interactions to those which represent transamerican spaces and transnational individuals “whose lives form an experiential region within which singularly delineated notions of political, social and cultural identity do not suffice”.<sup>4</sup> Such a “cosmopolitan polyglot way of working with literature” (Gillman 2008: 329) permits comparative, cross-cultural and multilingual readings of fictional literature with more extensive implications in the fields of both literary and Irish studies. My transamerican readings and discussion of the diasporic Irish address how specifically diaspora has influenced in the construction of a more extensive definition and representation of Irish identity or ‘Irishness’. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall argues that “identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation (Hall 1997: 4). Thus, I underscore and highlight the function of these representations as performances in terms of diasporic Irish identity. To this end, I read these diasporic identities in what Avtar Brah calls “diaspora space” which hosts “not only...diasporic subjects but equally...those who are constructed and represented as ‘indigenous’” (Brah 1996: 16). In order to comment on the diasporic Irish in terms of a paradigmatic literary category, I emphasize the role of these individuals as ‘dislocated’ subjects whose identity has been constructed from new ‘(dis)locations’ and various attempts at enmeshing themselves with those represented as “indigenous” or “Others”. Similarly Peter Childs reminds us that, “diasporic identities work at other levels than those marked by

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<sup>2</sup> Vigil as well notes that, in contrast to “hemispheric frameworks” which are “often linked to developments toward continental integration under NAFTA”, the “transamerican approach can better account for non-state-sanctioned interactions” (ibid).

<sup>3</sup> The “hemispheric turn” in American literature, as Ralph Bauer claims, “has manifested itself in virtually all the subdisciplines of American literary and cultural studies” (Bauer 2008: 235). This is to say that ‘American’ no longer represents the United States-centered imperialist mode of study but rather it now seeks to include Caribbean and Latin American cultures and literatures within a single yet broader field of study.

<sup>4</sup> Moya, P.M.L. and R. Saldivar, *Fictions of the Trans-American Imaginary*, Modern Fiction Studies, Baltimore, 2003, cited in A. Vigil, *The Divine Husband and the creation of a transamericana subject*, New York, Latino Studies, 2013, pg. 193.

national boundaries” (Childs 2002: 52). Like Brah within her concept of diaspora space, I too see several important insights that Gloria Anzaldúa’s theorisation of *borderlands* and, more specifically of its inhabitants, can provide this study (Brah 1996: 198). Anzaldúa proposes that these individuals are “the prohibited and forbidden...the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome...the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the “normal”” (Anzaldúa 1987: 25). Many of these fundamental characteristics of *borderlands* subjects are paralleled in the “hostile depictions of the Gaelic Irish as uncivilized” (Garner 2004: 72) which go as far back as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> More recently, Hellen Kelly has approached such representations of the diasporic Irish in terms of ‘deviancy’. She claims that “‘deviancy’ in its variant forms has become, therefore, the most accessible and fruitful approach to assessing levels of integration amongst Irish immigrant communities” (Kelly 2009: 128). Amongst the categories she assesses we find “mental health, disorder, crime and, above all, drunkenness” (ibid). These, along with other deviancies like infidelity, unruliness and immorality, have perpetuated a negative concept of the diasporic Irish as non-functional members of society and, more importantly here, as errant parents.

### ***Trying to ‘figure’ out the Irish***

Additionally, it is important to define briefly my concept of the term ‘figure’ which I understand as a multifaceted category with relevance to my readings of the diasporic Irish. My specific use of ‘figure’ is informed by the Random House online English dictionary, which in the twenty-second entry defines it as a “phantasm or illusion”. Even though this definition is rather archaic and has fallen into disuse, it is still possible to assert that the word ‘figure’ can represent an entity that exists in two worlds, that of the living and that of the dead, and in neither at the same time. Concordantly, in Spanish the word *figura* (literally ‘figure’) is defined by the DRAE<sup>6</sup> in the fifth entry as a “thing which represents or signifies another”.<sup>7</sup> As such, a ‘figure’ can be understood as indeterminate, nearly imperceptible yet present or, ‘phantasmagorically’ betwixt. Bearing this in mind, I underscore this phantom like displacement as analogous to the fundamental elements of diasporic subjects and/or *borderlands* inhabitants. I therefore consider this ‘figuring’ of the diasporic Irish as a vital correlative factor in my reading of them from a transamerican perspective.

<sup>5</sup> As Jill Sheppard notes, during their initial displacement to Barbados in the mid-seventeenth century “the trouble they caused the authorities in the next few decades” (Sheppard 1977: 12) was the criterion for their status as disruptive and unruly.

<sup>6</sup> “Diccionario de la Real Academia Española” or the *Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy*, the definitive authority on the Spanish language.

<sup>7</sup> “Cosa que representa o significa otra”.

### ***Diasporic Irish Parentage; a paradigm of deviance and absence***

Using the aforementioned theoretical framework I offer my analyses of four fictional texts: Francisco Goldman's *The Divine Husband*, Erna Brodber's *Myal*, Zoé Valdés' *I Gave You All I Had* (*Te di la vida entera*<sup>8</sup>) and Rodolfo Walsh's *Irish boys after a cat* (*Iralndeses detrás de un gato*).<sup>9</sup> I have ordered the list in this fashion to examine in tandem the two works written in English which portray Irish fathers against two texts originally written in Spanish that depict Irish mothers. Each author employs the diasporic Irish figure paradigmatically in the role of parent to the respective protagonist in their work, therefore, I argue that these representations are intrinsically linked to stereotypical or stock concepts of 'Irishness'. Through my transamerican readings I ask; "In what ways have the diasporic Irish as parents been represented in fiction throughout the Caribbean and Latin America?" However, what can transamerican readings or, more specifically, "reading the Irish" reveal about these individuals that would otherwise remain unexamined and inappreciable? What role does 'Irishness' play in their representations by each author? I look to demonstrate that despite differences of each author's nationality and cultural/temporal context, the Irish characters they have created are imagined as objectionable, morally deviant figures whose presence replicates an unfavourable, stereotypical and grim portrait of the diasporic Irish figure.

### ***Diasporic Irish Fathers***

Declan Kiberd, in his chapter on *Fathers and Sons: Irish-Style*, detects a leitmotif of the "unreliable, inadequate or absent" Irish fathers in the works of "second-rate" Irish writers in their representations of Irish father-son relations (Kiberd 1995: 127-130). It would seem, however, that this leitmotif has become more a paradigm in the transamerican context, one not limited to the writings of Irish authors nor strictly to Irish fathers and sons but one that also informs non-Irish authors' writings on Irish fathers and their hybrid offspring. Goldman's epic novel, *The Divine Husband*, portrays an Irish-American father Timothy Moran whose "surname apparently revealed [his] Irish origin" (Goldman 2004: 122). Traveling from New York to Guatemala circa 1860, his diasporic Irishness is represented as 'troublesome' and breaking with the confines of the 'normal', which simultaneously demonstrates his 'abnormal' and reprehensible behaviour:

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<sup>8</sup> All citations and references to Valdés' work are taken from the English version translated by Nadia Benabid, 1999. For the original Spanish version see: Valdés, Zoé, *Te di la vida entera* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> All translations of Walsh's text are mine. For original Spanish text see corresponding endnotes.

“So Timothy Moran had fallen in love with an Indita...over whom [he] lost his head and heart and even, one could say, eventually his life...By his scandalous behaviour in Amatlán, Timothy Moran had turned his wife, Elsa, into the subject of awful ridicule and humiliation. Having abandoned her in the most public way, he was spied going about everywhere with his pretty little aborigine, who was soon pregnant. Just days after the infant girl was born, Mrs. Elsa Moran committed suicide...the mood in the town turned violent against Mr. Moran. Many of the white foreigners and criollos vowed to kill him, in order to make an example of him. So Timothy Moran and his family fled, not immediately into the mountains but to Mazatenango...until the truth caught up with him and then he did flee into the mountains” (Goldman 2004: 181-182).

An *‘atravesado’*<sup>10</sup>, Moran crosses borders and is continually persecuted by “white foreigners and criollos” because he exemplifies the deviant, disturbing comportment so readily associated with the Irish. In exile while “intending to start a coffee farm [and having] barely even begun to clear the land” he is abruptly killed “from a mule kick to the stomach” (Goldman 2004: 19). His morbid or, for some, ironically just dismissal from the novel reproduces the traditional “anti-Irish prejudice” of which Michael Hayes warns (Hayes 2006: 82). Subsequently, it is only through his daughter’s, María de las Nieves, vague recollections and dialogues with other characters that Moran and his ‘Irishness’ continue to appear throughout the narrative in vilifying terms. In one instance she is explicitly asked by Mack Chinchilla, one of her love interests, about her father who she claims is “a New York Irishman...of some sort of another” (Goldman 2004: 311) despite recalling earlier that “he’d been born in New York, he was a Yankee” (Goldman 2004: 122). In response Mack “would repress his [negative] feelings about the Irish of New York” (Goldman 2004: 311), something which Goldman’s incarnation of Cuban poet José Martí does not. He aims his animosity of the Irish at a “red-haired, bloody-kneed walker, who keeps falling because he is more asleep than awake, poor man, he is surely Irish.” This prompts him to inquire if Moran was “a black-haired Irishman, or a red-haired” to which María de las Nieves replies, “castaño, or chestnut, and Martí said, “The red-haired ones tend to be the roughest”” (Goldman 2004: 445). Though his novel is, as Vigil suggests, quite readable as “transamerican literature” because it merges voices from North and South, Anglo and Latino (Vigil 2013: 191), Goldman clearly replicates the unchanging stereotypes of the

<sup>10</sup> Term used by Anzaldúa in her discussion of *borderlands* subjects meaning a “troublemaker” or “one who crosses”. Translation mine.

Irish and stocks Moran's character with "other personal artefacts, [such as] a burlap sack filled with bottles of Irish whiskey" (Goldman 2004: 19). Moran ostensibly exemplifies what is known as an "Irish Traveller" or "tinker" (Harper 1973: 101-102). These "Irish Travellers" or "tinkers" immigrated to the United States in the 1840's escaping the starvation of the Irish Potato Famine...settled in upstate New York...[and] moved south where they specialized in horse and mule trading" (ibid). From a broader view, Goldman arguably reproduces what Hayes asserts is "the negative stereotyping of Irish Travellers which became dominant in the public discourse of the latter part of the twentieth century in particular can arguably be viewed as an extension of a deeply inculcated anti-Irish tradition, a more extreme version of the anti-Irish "Othering" tradition which existed during the centuries of British colonization" (2006: 82). Hence, Moran, under this reading, reaffirms centuries-old stereotypes in two distinct diaspora spaces, Guatemala and New York, while concurrently existing as an 'in-between figure' in his daughter's obscured memories.

Through *Myal*, principally set in Morant Bay, Jamaica from 1913-20, Brodber offers us "Ralston O'Grady, one of those Irish police officers whose presence the authorities must have felt, kept the natives from eating each other" and his daughter Ella, protagonist of the novel; the "half black, half white child... the poor little pickney" (Brodber 1988: 6-7). From the beginning of the narrative "poor pink O'Grady, dissonant as a skinned bull" (ibid) shows signs of falling into the stereotypical paradigm, like Moran, as an immoral and soon-to-be absent father. Quickly Mary Riley, his Jamaican housekeeper and "wife's...belly drew attention to O'Grady. He and it became a sign of misbehaving Irish policemen and O'Grady was transferred to where Mary knew not" (Brodber 1988: 8). Yet, as Shalini Puri elucidates, the events in O'Grady's life are narrated in the passive voice which implies a lack of authorship by O'Grady over his own actions which "are inscribed in a larger text" (Puri 1993: 105). Just as with Moran, O'Grady is portrayed as incapable of controlling his 'sexual whims' and is punished for breaking social and moral norms. His "misbehaving" and improprieties with a 'savage local' are deemed 'perverse' and morally inexcusable. Within the diaspora space of Jamaica under English colonial administration, as Puri points out, "O'Grady is not absolutely powerful: indeed his Irishness limits his position...to one of functionary" (ibid). Similar to Moran, O'Grady's judgment falls upon him from other "whites", namely the British. Deepika Bahri comments on the racialization of the Irish by the English and impels us to consider the "difference of the difference" in terms of their "whiteness" (Bahri 2003: 61). For Bahri, the concept of "whiteness" as defined by the colonial British served as a categorical tool with which to separate themselves from the Irish and justify oppressive and imperialistic acts and reforms upon them. Bahri exemplifies this point by elucidating several difference indicators commonly used on the Irish: language, behaviour, or visual

markers unrelated to colour such as their “bad habits”, like laziness and drunkenness, and “lifestyle”, meaning poverty and “mischievous practices” (ibid). This type of pseudo-racialized discourse sought not only to emphasize the righteousness of the conquest of a clearly ‘inferior’ race but also to perpetuate pre-established negative stereotypes of the Irish. In assessing Brodber’s novel *Ulrike Erichsen* attests to the contrary that “Brodber very deliberately avoids setting up any of the well-known binaries like...colonizer/colonized” and therefore evades as well “the trap of racial stereotyping” (Erichsen 2002: 90). However, by not considering O’Grady’s ‘Irishness’ in a larger cultural context and taking into account the long tradition of stereotypical representations of the Irish, is not the opposite exactly what has happened? Has Brodber simply imitated the negative English colonial discourse of the Irish via O’Grady within a new diaspora space? We can also question if Goldman has recurred to similar stock representations of the ‘unwanted Irish Travellers’ to construct Moran. Because O’Grady is swiftly removed from the narrative, as a ‘figured’ Irish parent he becomes irrevocably equated to a symbol of abandonment and absence. For him, further exile is the only resolution to his disruptive presence; for Moran it is death. As such, both are ‘figured’ as initially present then quickly evanescent. Like Moran who, along with his ‘Irishness’, continued to exist as an ambiguous phantom in María de las Nieves’ memories, O’Grady is as well recalled in distorted terms. During her time in Baltimore, Ella modifies elements of her father’s past and tells Selwyn, her husband, that he “succumbed to a tropical disease” (Brodber 1988: 43). In erasing her father’s scandalous conduct Ella rewrites O’Grady’s story (along with her mother’s and her own<sup>11</sup>). Now resembling even more Moran, O’Grady is re-imagined as the victim of an untimely demise and rendered ‘half-dead’ (alive in her reality yet dead in her imaginary), therefore enhancing his phantasmagoric state.

### ***Diasporic Irish Mothers***

Given their eerily similar representations, Moran and O’Grady both embody diasporic Irish fathers as invariably deviant and absent when read against one another. Yet, can the same be said for diasporic Irish mothers? How do they ‘figure’ into this paradigm of diasporic Irish parentage? The leitmotifs or clichés of Irish fathers elucidated by Kiberd suggest that those of Irish mothers would have little or no similarity. Indeed, the cliché of the “over-intense, clutching relationship between mother-and-son” (Kiberd 1992: 127) in Irish literature, as he puts it, shares little with the relationships of diasporic Irish mothers and their offspring in transamerican readings save one commonality: Kiberd underscores that Irish “women sought from their sons an emotional fulfilment denied them

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<sup>11</sup> Ella lies that her mother is Irish, not Jamaican, thus making herself “to be full Irish girl” (Brodber 1988: 43).

by their men, and that suggests that their husbands had failed as lovers” (Kiberd 1992: 129). It is not so much in the search for ‘emotional fulfilment by their sons’ that we shall find a point of comparison with diasporic Irish mothers but in the failure of their husbands as lovers and the consequences of their often dissolute pursuits for emotional fulfilment from unfamiliar ‘others’ which results in the negation and abandonment of their children.

Valdés’ novel, *I gave you all I had*, presents the protagonist Cuca or simply known as “the Girl,” (Valdés 1999: 3-4) whose mother is a “Dubliner by birth [who] left that city when she was two” (ibid). Cuca’s maternal grandparents are also Irish immigrants, much like ‘Irish Travellers’, that “had come to Cuba with...high hopes of making a killing in the horse meat trade” (ibid). Although the author offers a brief yet selectively detailed migratory family history emphasizing her Irish heritage<sup>12</sup>, she conspicuously omits many particulars of Cuca’s mother, her name most strikingly. By referring to her only as ‘Cuca’s mother’, Valdés veils her in nameless anonymity which she attempts to offset by employing in her figure stereotypical diasporic Irish elements and behaviour; “Her [Cuca’s] lady mother — she of the stormy red hair and the sea blue eyes — felt compelled to resume her forgettable career as an actress or a soliloquist. She ditched her Chinese husband, the Girl’s father, took up with an eighteen-year-old, and bade them all a good out-of-sight, out-of-mind” (ibid). Like Moran and O’Grady, Cuca’s mother is equally unable to suppress her own sexual desires and yields to them. However, her morally deviant sexuality seems to stem from different motives. Though under highly scrupulous circumstances, both Moran and O’Grady do become devote spouses until they are ‘disappeared’ and ‘figured’ into spectral entities. Thus, any motive for their departures comes from the external and is not self-enacted. Conversely, as previously noted, the Irish mother would seek emotional fulfilment due to a deficiency in her husband, meaning her motives are developed internally and manifested outwardly. As a diasporic Irish figure, Cuca’s mother looks to realize herself outside the familial sphere by chasing after her self-indulged fantasies, both professional and sexual. In abandoning her family she demonstrates active control over her actions while also rejecting her functionary title as ‘Cuca’s mother’ in search of an identity as an inimitable individual. Her decision to go through the ‘confines of the normal’ is a conscious one which shifts her into the realm of the betwixt and flickering. The impact of such a sudden and jolting withdrawal reverberates in Cuca who is left “lavishly hungry for affection. A mother’s love most of all” (Valdés 1999: 8). To this point Nanne Timmer emphasizes that in many of Valdés’ works “the

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<sup>12</sup> The reader is only told that Cuca’s father is a “Chinese cook, [who] had journeyed from Canton to Mexico. There he changed his name and traveled on to Cuba to strike it rich” (Valdés 1999: 3).

identification with, and separation from, the mother is crucial” (Timmer 2013: 198). As we have evidenced in Moran and O’Grady, the diasporic Irish figure necessarily passes into a phantasmagoric state, only to have their ‘Irishness’ haunt and confound their offspring’s lives in various manners. The one lasting remnant of her mother’s ‘Irishness’ is alluded to in Cuca’s “way of sashaying down a street...bobbing back and forth between Irish passion and Oriental patience” (Valdés 1999: 36). It is not in her-own words or memories but rather through the omniscient narrative voice that her mother’s ‘Irish passion’ lives on within her. Expressed in this way, Cuca is unaware of this shadowy trace of “Irishness’, which is all that remains of this nameless diasporic Irish mother.

The first story in Walsh’s “Irish series”, *Irish boys after a cat*, presents a young boy known as El Gato (the Cat) whose mother is originally from Cork. Nonetheless, we are only privy to her surname; O’Hara. The lack of a first name serves to ‘figure’ her as incomplete, only “half-here”, though slightly more ‘complete’ than Cuca’s unnamed mother but equally betwixt. Similar to Cuca’s mother, O’Hara deserts her child by leaving him at a Catholic school for poor Irish children and Irish orphans. “Upon bringing him she gave birth to him for a second time, cutting the bloodless umbilical cord like dry a branch, she got him off her back forever” (Walsh 1965: 88).<sup>13</sup> She then becomes “without explanation...the whore of the town, but a pious whore, a true Catholic whore...” (Walsh 1965: 91-92).<sup>14</sup> Like Moran and Cuca’s mother, O’Hara is guilty of infidelity, allowing the memory of her husband to be “trampled by the men that followed” (ibid).<sup>15</sup> Again, it is promiscuity which violently ruptures the family. As Walsh “penetrates the most nightmarish zones of violence”<sup>16</sup> (Lago 1991: 61), both physical and mental, he maintains focus on the brutal nature of the Irish mother-hybrid son relationship. Although El Gato shows some grief while his mother separates herself from him, he later, without any affection, openly labels his mother “a whore” (ibid). As David Viñas points out, O’Hara is illustrative of “the blurry mothers... (those which are loved and shitted upon)”<sup>17</sup> (Viñas 2005: 171) who are often present in Walsh’s stories. Curious, then, that Moran, O’Grady and Cuca’s mother as well could all fit into this category of blurred ‘figures’, once loved but now muddied in shame because of their deviant and

<sup>13</sup> “...que al traerlo lo paría por segunda vez, cortaba un ombligo incruento y seco como una rama, y se lo sacaba de encima para siempre”.

<sup>14</sup> “...sin explicación, se volvió la puta del pueblo, pero una puta piadosa, una verdadera puta católica...”.

<sup>15</sup> “...su memoria pisoteada por los hombres que siguieron...”.

<sup>16</sup> “...Walsh cale en las zonas más pesadillescas de la violencia”.

<sup>17</sup> “...las madres borrosas...(a las que se ama y en las que se caga)”.

immoral behaviour. Now phased into absence, O'Hara's 'Irishness', like that of the other three diasporic Irish parents, has become a looming element in El Gato's understanding of himself and the diasporic Irish in general. As he is about to meet "the people of his race [his classmates], the one to which his father did not belong and to which his mother was nothing more than a discarded thread. He feared them intensely, like he feared himself" (Walsh 1965: 89).<sup>18</sup> Due to the fact that O'Hara has seemingly been cast out from the Irish community, the residual 'Irishness' in her son is a damaged commodity. The fear that takes hold of El Gato is the symbolic result of the waywardness of his mother which creates the inability for her son to comprehend and embrace his Irish heritage. Since O'Hara is a diasporic 'figure', any meaningful link for El Gato to his 'Irishness' is deeply frustrated by the illusory substance of her character. In sum, O'Hara, like Moran, O'Grady and Cuca's mother, is written into a *borderland* which is defined by these diasporic Irish, the 'troublesome' and 'half-dead' who exist purely as ones who are remembered because they are impossible to be forgotten.

### ***Conclusions***

'Irishness' in the literary works discussed in this study has been represented as a confluence of stereotypical elements that are readily recognizable and would seem to persist from both within and without these diasporic Irish figures. I have demonstrated that their depictions necessarily reflect sexual and moral deviance, resulting in compulsory absence. Consequently, each diasporic Irish figure is transformed into a "phantasmagoric" entity, leaving behind only vague hints of 'Irishness' in their respective hybrid offspring. I have claimed that there exists an overarching paradigm among these representations of the diasporic Irish despite their relatively brief and minor roles in each narrative. These findings open the possibility of further analyses of the Irish offspring protagonists in the texts discussed here, exploring how 'Irishness' echoes in their representations.

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<sup>18</sup> "...la gente de su raza, a la que su padre no pertenecía, y de la que su madre no era más que una hebra descartada. Les temía intensamente, como se temía a sí mismo...".

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## Travelling Tales: *Stories of a Yellow Town* and the Brazilians in Gort

Aisling McKeown<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This paper explores the potential of theatre to facilitate tolerance and understanding between a host country and its migrant communities. It investigates how the ‘verbatim’ theatre form is employed by a duo called The Gombeens to tell the stories of the Brazilian and Irish residents in the west of Ireland town of Gort, Co. Galway. The Gombeens also draw on the Irish oral tradition and its use of stories to rationalise and foreground the experiences of daily life, so that the traditional storytelling form takes on a contemporary resonance in representing Ireland’s multicultural reality. The power of their portrayal of both migrant and Irish stories is a consequence of their engagement with the audience and the verbatim style of their storytelling. The paper assesses the value of this form of theatre as a means of exploring the migrant condition, illustrating its capacity to convey the negative as well as the positive experiences and presenting the audience with some uncomfortable truths.

**Keywords:** The Gombeens; theatre; Brazilian community in Gort; migration.

There it is, this Irish village on the edge of the Burren that has become an extended suburb of a city in central Brazil. If there was ever a statistic that captured the suddenness, the extent and the occasional surrealism of the immigration into Ireland at the turn of the twenty-first century, it is this one (Hegarty 2009: 187).

*Stories of a Yellow Town* is a storytelling performance that reflects the arrival and experiences of Brazilian migrants in the Irish town of Gort, Co. Galway from 1999 onwards, and its impact on migrants and local people alike. Created and performed by Miquel Barceló and Jonathan Gunning, a Majorcan-Irish duo who call themselves The Gombeens, the performance

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provides a snapshot of the migratory experience at a particular place and time in Irish history. This virtually entirely white and Irish west of Ireland town almost doubled in population to reach approximately 2,700 in 2006, at the peak of Brazilian inward migration. Initially recruited to work at the town's meat factory, the migrants also branched out to work in other sectors. Although more than half of the migrants had returned to Brazil by 2009 partly as a result of the economic downturn, the impact of their presence and the fact that approximately 400 Brazilians have settled in Gort for the long-term, have changed this west of Ireland town permanently.<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 1. Miquel Barcelo and Jonathan Gunning (The Gombeens)  
Photograph: Joe O'Shaughnessy 2009

Drama has always been at the forefront in reflecting changes in Irish society, while the oral storytelling tradition has historically been a feature of Irish community life. Although the social and cultural conditions that encouraged and nurtured the storytelling tradition have altered significantly, there is still an appetite for the performed story. Barceló and Gunning (2010) explain that “as an intercultural duo, we’re attracted to that aspect of modern life [migration] and all the different stories that go with it – stories of arrival, departure, love and heartache”. *Stories of a Yellow Town* was created over a six-month period during which Barceló and Gunning recorded and transcribed verbatim the stories told by Brazilian

<sup>2</sup> For an insight into the lives of the Gort Brazilians who returned to Brazil, see David McKechnie’s *Irish Times* article, “Gort still reverberating to the samba beat”, 3 July, 2014 <<http://www.irishtimes.com/sport/soccer/international/gort-still-reverberating-to-the-samba-beat-1.1855994?page=1>>, accessed 3 Nov 2014.

migrants and local Irish residents in Gort. The piece was first performed in March 2009 at Cúirt International Literary Festival in Galway, and has subsequently been performed in a variety of venues around the area, ranging from town halls and arts centres to pubs and peoples' homes. The intimate nature of these venues is instrumental to The Gombeens performance, the local resonances adding authenticity to the portrayal of the Brazilian migrant experience and rooting it in a recognisable reality for the audience. Gunning (2010) sees a direct link between their Gombeens performance and the old oral tradition, explaining that in *Stories of a Yellow Town* he and Barceló "tell stories that carry a cultural weight just as the traditional travelling storytellers used to. We see ourselves as modern bards or social clowns". The Irish *seanchais* (storytellers) of old narrated tales of past glories as an escape from the far from glorious realities of daily life. However, as George Zimmerman notes, their stories were also "a means of ordering and making sense of actual experience through the awareness of analogies and the magnifying, or systematizing, of what was so far only half-perceived" (2001: 470). In the same way, the stories told by The Gombeens place the migrant experience in Gort centre stage, articulating and drawing attention to the realities of the situation for the people of Gort as a whole.

The Gombeens' production can be regarded within the context of the increasing number of Irish theatre companies that are experimenting with new forms of theatrical representation and creating "a space for the stories of people on the margins as well as those in the centre" (Trotter 2008: 177). *Stories of a Yellow Town* reflects the actual experience of social change in a small community by combining the traditional storytelling form with the modern form of verbatim theatre (also known as documentary theatre). Verbatim theatre is a description coined by Derek Paget in 1987 and distilled in the following explanation by playwright Tony Robinson:

[verbatim theatre is] a form of theatre predicated upon the taping and subsequent transcription of interviews with 'ordinary' people, done in the context of research into a particular region, subject area, issue, event, or combination of these things. This primary source is then transformed into a text which is acted, usually by the performers who collected the material in the first place. (Cited in Holdsworth and Luckhurst 2008: 202)

Early verbatim practitioners in the UK such as Peter Cheesman in the 1970s and 1980s and contemporary practitioners such as Alecky Blythe approached their work from a similar perspective. Their particular concern was and continues to be that of preserving "local idiom, tics of speech and linguistic markers" (203). It is precisely this emphasis on reflecting the spoken word authentically that makes verbatim theatre a

distinctive dramatic form, and The Gombeens choice of this form reflects their desire to render the migrant experience as authentically as possible. They do not alter the recorded stories syntactically or grammatically when performing them, frequently breaking off mid-sentence or leaving statements incomplete as in natural speech. Hence, their description of *Stories of a Yellow Town* as “the voice of the people of Gort” (2010) is justified. While the performance is in English, there are occasional lapses into Portuguese and Irish, reflecting the evolving hybrid vocabulary of the community, and indicative of its developing intercultural nature. Interestingly, there is an historical precedent in Gort itself for this authentic rendition of speech. Lady Augusta Gregory, a key exponent of the Literary Revival, noticed the peculiarities of the Hiberno-English spoken by local people and when collecting stories from them, replicated their dialectical and idiomatic phrasing in her work (Zimmerman 2001: 331-332).

Michael Billington describes how, “in a world drowning in opinion [...] verbatim theatre offers us the bracing stimulus of fact”, adding that “if we now accept it as a genre, it is not only because it offers necessary information. It is also because it can move and stir us as profoundly as any fiction” (2012). Alison Jeffers comments on the popularity of verbatim theatre in projects involving refugee or asylum seekers in the UK and cites Carolyn Nordstrom’s reference to Roland Barthes’ claim that “in the act of listening, the listener can begin to understand the existence of those who speak” (cited in Jeffers 2006: 7). The extent to which *Stories of a Yellow Town* facilitates understanding between its Irish audience and the Brazilian migrants whose stories are recounted is evident from the response of both communities. Gunning (2010) describes how, until The Gombeens recorded their stories, the Brazilian community in Gort thought “they should keep their heads down, survive and go home”. However, the positive audience reception of *Stories of a Yellow Town* has changed the Brazilians perception of themselves because, as Gunning (2010) explains, “they *know*, they’ve come to realise that their stories are important [...] they are valued, and they’re delighted that we want to talk to them”. The value of the performance to the Brazilians themselves is made clear in an incident described by Barceló:

When we read out one of the scripts early on, one of the wives of the characters was there. She loved it and at the end she said “Now I can see things that my husband didn’t tell me. Now I can see things from the distance and I can see the effort he made in coming here”. (Barceló: 2010)

In addition to telling stories from the Brazilian perspective, The Gombeens also perform those told to them by the Irish inhabitants of Gort. While the

dislocation experienced by the Brazilian migrants is understandable, the local Irish population also experienced a sense of disorientation as a consequence of the changing social and cultural landscape. Many families have lived in Gort or its environs for decades, with ancestral connections going back centuries, and some find “the nature of their relation to place ineluctably changed, and the illusion of a natural and essential connection between the place and culture broken” (Gupta and Ferguson cited in Duyvendak 2011: 14). The performance therefore brings their concerns to the stage and, importantly, reveals that over time mutual understanding overcomes wariness in the local Irish population as a result of the direct interaction of the Brazilian and Irish communities.

### **The Performance: Style**

A key element of The Gombeens’ performance is the level of their engagement with the audience. This is a feature of verbatim theatre whereby “the classic proscenium arch convention of the ‘fourth wall’ collapses [..], and the actors speak directly to the audience and acknowledge audience reactions” (Jeffers 2006: 3). Discussing the dynamic between The Gombeens and their audience, Gunning (2010) distinguishes their performance from that of mainstream theatre companies that “generally perform in the confines of theatre spaces and stick to critically acclaimed scripts”. Barceló and Gunning begin their performance by addressing the audience directly, explaining the context in which *Stories of a Yellow Town* was written. After the performance, they ask for feedback and welcome questions. The stories they include in their repertoire vary according to their audience – if they are performing for children for example, they will select stories accordingly. Occasionally, they will record and add new stories to the performance.<sup>3</sup> Jeffers raises the point that the audience can forget that there is such a selection process at the heart of a verbatim play, describing verbatim theatre as “a lesson in suppression; more material is recorded than can ever be used. It is manipulated, crafted and edited to create an effect” (Jeffers 2006: 6). Selection of certain stories for performance in *Stories of a Yellow Town* does not entail suppression of others, but rather a foregrounding of those that are most relevant for a particular audience. Stories not told to one audience will potentially be told at another performance, so that Jeffers point about editing for effect is

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<sup>3</sup> In an interview with the Galway Advertiser newspaper about a performance of *Stories of a Yellow Town* at the Nuns Island Theatre in Galway in October 2014 (as part of Barboró International Children’s Art Festival), Gunning explained that they have added a new story to their performance. He added that “Barboró gives us the opportunity to perform to children of the generation that first encountered a multicultural Ireland. With this show we want children to get excited about real stories and their power to enchant. We do not underestimate the capacity of children to engage with emotions”. See Kernan Andrews, “The Gombeens - reliving stories of ‘Little Brazil’”, available at <<http://www.advertiser.ie/galway/article/72658/the-gombeens-reliving-stories-of-little-brazil>> [accessed 3 November 2014]

valid. However, her use of the terms ‘suppression’ and ‘manipulation’ are problematic as they imply a dishonesty at the heart of verbatim theatre that is not the case in *Stories of a Yellow Town*.



Fig. 2. The Gombeens performing *Stories of a Yellow Town*  
Photograph: Liam Carroll 2013

In the course of their performance, The Gombeens training in mime is evident in the subtlety of movement that denotes their representation of their various characters. This physicality also incorporate key components of storytelling, in their “ways of sitting and standing, movements of hand, head nods to reinforce words, facial expression, eye contact to involve a listener into the story” (Zimmerman 2001: 492). Set and props are kept to a minimum so that the audience’s attention is on the words being spoken. The performance begins in an empty space, apart from some suitcases stacked on top of each other, signifying arrival/departure. On top of the stack are a melodeon and a small guitar. Barceló and Gunning enter and play the instruments, singing an Irish folk song about emigration, “Muirsheen Durkin”. A change of character is indicated by an item of clothing such as a shawl (female shopkeeper), a coloured beret (Brazilian

female translator), a grey, dishevelled wig (middle-aged builder/employer), young Brazilian men (black baseball caps, worn the right way round to denote sensible, hardworking character, or back to front to denote younger high-spirited characters). Achieving the right balance between humour and gravitas is key to The Gombeens technique, because, Gunning (2010) says, “if we over-perform, then suddenly people are no longer listening to the story, they’re thinking about how funny this woman is or whatever, so it’s the *words* [my italics] that are important”.

### **The Performance: Stories**

The Gombeens tell the *Stories of a Yellow Town* through the voices of two Irish characters, Margaret, the local shopkeeper and Mick, a local builder, along with a range of Brazilian characters including construction workers, factory employees and translators. Many of the stories focus on the similarities between the Brazilian and Irish residents of Gort, by reflecting on experiences common to both groups. The stories of the character of Margaret recount her efforts to find common ground with the Brazilian customers who come into her shop. Describing the local people’s initial reaction to the Brazilians, Margaret admits to a retrospective embarrassment at the excitement generated by their perceived exoticism:

The people that arrived first lived uptown, so they used to pass down every morning down to the meat factory. And we were so excited about seeing them. [...] we’d be at the door waiting to see them passing by and we thought it was great. We had actually seen them. And I just think it is so silly now ten years later, that we’d do such a thing [...] We actually were in awe of them to be honest. (*Stories of a Yellow Town*, ‘Margaret’ 2009: 3)<sup>4</sup>

As she subsequently points out, the frequent interactions that took place in the contact zones of her shop, workplaces and sporting events allowed both the Brazilians and the Irish to develop an understanding of each other. The sense of the Brazilians’ exoticism became less prevalent as their engagement in the life of the local community increased. As a result, they became less peripheral and more central to the life of the town. Similarly, Mick’s interactions with his Brazilian employees reveal what they have in common rather than how they are different:

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<sup>4</sup> In all subsequent quotes from the script, *Stories of a Yellow Town* will be abbreviated to *SOYT*. The name in quotation marks indicates which character is speaking, or the story from which unnamed characters’ quotations are taken. There is no published script and quotes are taken from a working copy given to me by Barceló and Gunning. As discussed in this paper, The Gombeens add to script as they transcribe new stories so that it is not a ‘fixed’ but an evolving document.

Just because you're born in Brazil, I don't think you're any different than if you're born in [fucking] Ballyfermot, where I was born, or Holland or London. It doesn't matter, you know? (*SOIT*, 'Mick': 4)

Despite the fact that both the Brazilian and Irish communities experienced a sense of displacement, the stories recounted to and subsequently performed by The Gombeens in *Stories of a Yellow Town* indicate that for many of the Brazilians, what Kwame Appiah terms 'rooted cosmopolitanism' has taken place, so that they are "attached to a home of [their] own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people" (Appiah cited in Duyvendak 2011: 31).

This relationship to the new place, however, took time to establish. Many migrants experienced a sense of dislocation on their initial arrival in a town devoid of familiar structures and spaces. In one of the stories, a young Brazilian man discusses his disappointing first impressions of Gort:

I have been hearing about Gort for two and a half years before I really moved to Gort. And then, I was even thinking 'Oh! is gonna be yellow town with Brazilians flags everywhere'. I was expecting that type of vision. Even, Brazilian pub or Brazilian restaurant, all that stuff. And...but it wasn't like that, no ,no. (*SOIT*, 'Yellow Town': 1)

We are used to rice and bean every day. But we could hardly find rice and bean in the supermarket because they just brought a small packet. So the first one get to the supermarket will get all the food, all the rice and bean. The others will be left with none. After that they get used to the Brazilians so they would have plenty of rice and bean for us. (*SOIT*, 'Beginnings': 1)

As the above extracts indicate, and as Olivia Sheringham discusses in her study of the Brazilian community, the availability of Brazilian food central is to the migrants' sense of home and belonging. This desire to create spaces "to accommodate the consumption preferences" of the Brazilian community and thereby help them to feel more at home in Gort resulted in the opening of two shops selling foodstuffs imported from Brazil (Sheringham 2010: 69). A Brazilian hairdressing salon provided another familiar and social space in which to establish a home away from home. Aside from the indoor spaces of consumption and entertainment, the geography of Gort was unsettling for the migrants, and highlighted cultural differences in the social usage of space. As a migrant himself,

Majorcan Barceló (2010) can relate to this dilemma, explaining that “it’s difficult; there are no places where people can gather. Of course you don’t have the outside here because of the weather. But the Brazilians here in Gort and all over Ireland, reclaim the outdoor space”. Creation and negotiation of indoor and outdoor spaces for social interaction between Brazilians has been instrumental in the creation of a sense of belonging, giving migrants the confidence which ultimately facilitates interaction with and integration into the broader Irish community.

Interaction between the two communities initially arose within the work environments that were the pull factor for the Brazilian migrants who came to Gort. Originally recruited to work in the town’s meat processing plant, over time migrants found employment in other sectors including construction. The Gombeens perform a story told by Mick about a Brazilian employee of his building company whose work ethic reminded him of the Irish emigrant labourers of his generation:

We take our lunchtime from one to half one. Not one to two minutes past one. “Sit down Jose, I’m going to have a cup of fucking tea”. They want to work every day, they want to work every day, but I don’t want to work every day, five days is enough. Jose de Silva was always on about that, he’d say “It’s not good enough. You should work Saturday”. (*SOYT*, ‘Mick’:1)

Mick goes on to describe an encounter in his local pub where an Irish construction worker berates a couple of his fellow Irishmen when he hears them criticising the Brazilians for ‘taking their jobs’:

I drink in Carroll’s and there was one or two lads there and they was talking about the Brillo-pads. That’s what they were calling them, you know. And “Taking our jobs!” this one fella said, and a block layer turned round and he says “What are you talking about, taking your jobs? You never come in Monday. You were missing Friday, and you wanted me to pay you for both days? Taking your jobs! You don’t have a fucking job, you don’t want one”. There was a lot of answering back. Which was good, you know. (*SOYT*, ‘Mick’: 3)

What emerges from The Gombeens’ performance of this story is the refusal of Irish employers to tolerate racist behaviour in relation to the Brazilians whom they perceive to be dedicated and hardworking. The defence of the Brazilian workers by the block layer, highlighting the lack of commitment of some of their Irish counterparts, reinforces Mick’s earlier

story about the Brazilian work ethic. In drawing attention to the contrasting attitudes of Irish migrants of earlier generations who had to leave Ireland to find work with the more complacent attitude of the current generation that has not had to emigrate, this scene evokes parallels between Ireland's emigrant workforce of the 1950s in particular and the current Brazilian migrant workforce in Ireland. The story also highlights the failure of Irish historic memory to inform Irish responses to contemporary migrants in Ireland and the defensiveness that arises amongst certain Irish people in response to the perceived threat of the 'other'. Such a response raises questions about the effect of Ireland's postcolonial legacy on Irish identity, constructed as the country set about establishing itself as a nation free of the 'others' who had oppressed it.

While this story raises questions of tolerance, another concerning employment combines humour and pathos in relation to the scenarios that can arise as a result of linguistic misunderstandings. With echoes of the experience of Irish construction workers in London, Brazilian men not employed on a long-term or contract basis congregate in the town square each morning, hoping to be selected by employers who drive through looking for short-term or daily labourers. The procedure for hiring is mutually understood so that verbal exchanges are minimal. A story featuring one such exchange however, told to The Gombeens by a Brazilian woman who worked as a translator at the meat factory, is comically told and performed:

They used to stop here in the square and collect people for work. I remember one morning, in 2003, I was walking in the street. There was about ten Brazilians there and a postman stopped the car and one of the Brazilians get into the postman van, and the postman was saying to him, "No, no no, I'm not looking for work, I just stopped here to deliver..." "No, I go with you!" "No, No, No!" "No, I go with you!" And I was crossing the street and the postman knew me, and he knew that I could explain to the guy. I get there and I say "What are you doing there?" (*o que você está fazendo lá?*) "I go to work, it's my time, it's my turn" (*Vou trabalhar, é o meu tempo, é a minha volta*). I said "No, he's not collecting people, he's just delivering letters, he's the postman" (*Não, ele não está prendendo pessoas, ele está entregando somente cartas, ele é o carteiro*). That was something really funny, someone sit on your car and you say "No, No" and then "No, I go with you!" The only thing he could say was "I go with you." He just want to go to work. (*SOYT*, 'Mariza': 1)

Even the Brazilians who do have work continue to rely to an extent on the support network within the Brazilian community. During a gruelling spell in hospital where he contracted the bacterial infection MRSA while

recovering from an accident at the farm where he worked, one young Brazilian tells the story of how the visits and support from his Brazilian friends helped him through:

All the Brazilians that I know here I meet here, and I have only good things to say about them. Cause, we come to here with one dream, to make a better life for ourselves, the family, and look for a new life. I come with one dream and the friend the same dream, they find space to help me as well you know, the never left me alone, always someone coming. “Oh, how are you doing? How you are? Are you good? Do you need some things? Is one year and a half like this and one year and a half the friends always by my side, you know. (*SOYT*, ‘Guilherme’: 1)

The experiences related through the stories are not all positive; many deal with the problems of bureaucracy and unscrupulous employers. Another story concerns the paranoia of an Irish woman living next door to a Brazilian household. A Brazilian man describes how she rings the police when they have a loud party, convinced that they are terrorists and eventually she moves out of her house. Some migrants tell stories of having to return to Brazil through necessity rather than choice. One story told by Mick describes his disappointment when Jose, a hard-working Brazilian employee, has to return to Brazil because his wife cannot find work in Ireland.

Nevertheless, even with all the concerns of daily life, the stories told by The Gombeens in *Stories of a Yellow Town* convey the sense that Gort has settled into its new community makeup. A mutual understanding has developed as the Irish townspeople get to know the Brazilians as individuals, where they have come from and their reasons for coming. Margaret, pre-empting the future hybrid community, peeps into the pram of a Brazilian customer’s new baby and remarks, “Aren’t you gorgeous? An Irish baby” (*SOYT*, ‘Margaret’, 4). Her conferring of Irish nationality on the child is indicative of an increasingly inclusive attitude whereby the Irish-born children of the first generation Brazilian migrants are regarded as equal citizens of the local community and by extension, the nation. *Stories of a Yellow Town* operates therefore on number of levels. It reflects the evolving understanding between the Brazilian migrants and the Irish residents of Gort, while also validating the migrant experience of the Brazilians in their own eyes. The nature of the performance facilitates the audience’s understanding of the Brazilians’ situation by engaging with them directly and drawing parallels between the Irish and Brazilian’s experiences of economic migration.

Fig. 3. Miquel Barcelo and Jonathan Gunning (The Gombeens)



Photograph: Joe O'Shaughnessy 2009

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## Reviews

Review of Mícheál Ó hAodha and Máirtín Ó Catháin eds., *New perspectives on the Irish Abroad: The silent people?* Lanham, Md.; Toronto: Lexington Books, 2014, 166 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0739183717

Cangbai Wang<sup>1</sup>

Ireland is one of the countries in the world (alongside China and India, for example) that has a long history of emigration and a large diasporic population. Ireland's history and society, however, are often studied within a nationalist framework and in an isolated manner. The existence of its historically-formed and sizable overseas communities in addition to the inter-connection of Ireland with the rest of the world, including its diasporic population, have not been given adequate attention. As Ireland is increasingly integrated into the global economy and transformed from a traditional emigrant country to an emerging immigrant country itself, it is vital to rethink and remedy those territorial-bounded historical and epistemological paradigms which are no long able to explain many new issues that Ireland is facing today. This edited volume is a timely and excellent response to this social and academic challenge. By giving voices to the silent diasporic subjects who are invisible in the mainstream narrative of Irish history and by foregrounding the nexus between Ireland and its large diaspora in time and space, it inscribes 'transnational' firmly onto national narratives, and opens up new discourses on ethnicities, identities, belongings, homes, citizenship and nation-building in academic debate about Ireland and beyond. Methodologically, this book demonstrates the value of oral history scholarship and archival analysis in unveiling migrant subjectivities and memories.

The two editors successfully draw together nine very different but equally engaging chapters that provide stimulating, accessible and varied snapshots into the experiences, emotions and identities of the diasporic Irish. This edited volume is split into two distinct yet overlapping parts, each of which has its own analytical focus and corresponding methodological approach. Part one, 'Voices', consists of five papers. Despite varying in context and writing style, they all attempt to address the core question of how to '*remember the forgotten or silent voices of the emigrant generation and create an opportunity for them to be heard again*' (p. 15) through innovative engagement with oral history materials. In the opening chapter, Bernadette Sweeney details an oral history project on the Irish in Montana, and demonstrates

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how through recording, archiving, and performing oral history narratives of Irish-Americans in Montana it has enhanced awareness of Irish migrant history and fostered closer connections between overseas Irish communities and Ireland. Bill Tobin demonstrates the power of memoir-turned-autobiographical novel in bringing to life family migration history and his memories of childhood as a second-generation immigrant in New York; drawing on in-depth interviews with eight Irish sisters who went to France between 1940 and 1960, Gráinne O'Keeffe-Vigneron reconstructs largely forgotten lived experiences and complex subjectivities of Irish females in a French religious order; in their chapter Stephen Moore and Paul Darby shift their focus to the role of Gaelic sports in forming '*a home away from home*' (p. 69) for Irish diasporans in cosmopolitan London, and discuss the interplay between the development of the GAA abroad and Irish domestic politics manifested at different periods of time since the turn of twentieth century; finally, by using 'conversation' as a means of data collection and analysis, Sarah O'Brien brings our attention to the taboo topic of horrors in the turbulent 1970s Argentina and shows how the present-day Irish-Argentine community's sense of nationhood is still haunted and affected by political disputes in the past.

If the chapters in part one help articulate in one way or the other individual and collective voices and memories of the subaltern and oppressed diasporic subjects, part two, 'Places', maps the study of the Irish diaspora onto a truly global context. It starts with Barry Crosbie's fascinating chapter that looks at the unique role of the Irish, being '*colonizer*' but also '*colonized*' at the same time (p. 100), played in British expansion. It brings to light the distinctiveness of imperial migration of the Irish to India in sharp contrast to Irish movement to so-called 'White settlements' such as North America, not only in terms of dissimilar patterns of migration but also the global impact of the Irish diaspora on negotiating '*competing demands of Irish nationalism, British imperialism and Indian welfare, demonstrating the Irish ability to simultaneously contest the empire and accelerate change from within*' (p. 112). Jason R. Myers's paper highlights the vital role of Irish cultural elements and practices, via the media of music, sports, language and so on, in sustaining Irishness among Irish immigrants in Chicago despite the declining interest in Irish politics after its independence in 1922. In his chapter, David Convery makes a strong and convincing argument about the necessity to study Ireland's history beyond a national framework. The largely unknown and heroic stories of Irish internationalists participating in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) '*is but one example of the inter-connectedness of Ireland with the rest of the world and an illustration of the depth of illuminating history we can discover if we shift perspective to view Ireland in its proper international context*' (p. 141). The final chapter of this book by Juan José Delaney surveys representative literary texts created by Irish-Porteños in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Argentina to illustrate the ways in which Irish immigrants gradually integrated into the

host society and culture while at the same time trying to preserve their own heritage and tradition in the linguistic realm and in everyday life. While papers in part one share a methodology of oral history in making who were invisible visible and unheard heard, papers in part two are united by down-to-earth engagement with and enthusiastic interpretation of archival documents, such as newspapers, memoirs and migration literature as historical/linguistic texts in representing Irish diaspora in a global context and over time.

The rich diversity of the Irish diasporic experience and the fluidity of their ethnic and cultural identities brought about by this book is truly amazing and inspirational to anyone who is interested in the study of migration and globalization. As a whole, it provides the reader with a kaleidoscope of voices, images and stories of people coming from various walks of life, be they miners, railway workers, nuns, colonial/imperial administrators, revolutionary internationalists, Irish-Porteño, and living in diverse geographical and temporal spaces, ranging from Montana, New York, Chicago, to France, London, Spain and to Argentina and India. Coming from an academic background of the study of China and the Chinese diaspora, the reviewer is amazed by the interesting differences and unexpected similarities between Irish and Chinese diaspora experiences, and excited by the many theoretical questions shared by the study of these two major diasporas. As the editors aptly argue, this book 'constitute(s) a new and exciting articulation of Irishness and, indeed, a fresh way of articulating human experiences' (p. ix).

This excellent volume is of great interest to specialists working on Irish diaspora, and will be a useful reference book for postgraduate and undergraduate students studying Irish history and transnational migration in general. It opens up many exciting avenues for future research. How, for instance, to conduct research of transnational migration across diasporic spaces in comparative perspectives? And how to further conceptualise key issues emerging from this book, such as gender, class, ethnicity, home and abroad (if this distinction ever exists) in relation to transnational mobilities, through interdisciplinary-oriented research and based on dialogues with anthropologists, sociologists and cultural study scholars in this field.

Review of Hijmans, Alex. *Splancanna ó Shaol Eile*, Cois Life, Dublin, 2013, ISBN 978-1-907 494-37-6

Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh<sup>1</sup>

There is a common perception that Irish language writing is confined to the island of Ireland. Thankfully, there are exceptions. Pádraig Ó Siadhail is a prose writer based in Nova Scotia in Canada; Tomás Mac Síomóin is a poet and writer living in Catalonia in Spain; and the poet Derry O’Sullivan has lived in Paris for many years. Alex Hijmans, however, is particularly exceptional in that he is a Dutch national who writes in the Irish language from his base in Salvador, Brazil where he works as an international correspondent.

Hijmans moved to Galway in the West of Ireland at the age of twenty. There, he learned Irish and went on to spend twelve years working in various Irish language media. Cois Life have previously published three works by him: a collection of short stories entitled *Gonta* (2012), a novel, *Aiséirí* (2011), and *Favela* (2009), an account of life in a poor suburb of Brazil. In many respects, this latest work, *Splancanna ó Shaol Eile* (‘Glimpses of Another Life’) has much in common with *Favela* as it deals with the *fiordhaoine* – real people – of Brazil, rather than a sanitized, Tourist-Board approved version of life there.

*Splancanna ó Shaol Eile* contains 100 photographs and accompanying short essays by Hijmans. These images, he tells us, are deliberately not postcard perfect and were taken during a six-year period between late 2006 and late 2012. The essays were written in response to the pictures, rather than the other way around. The intention here is to suggest the integrity of the work, although one imagines that at least some of these photographs were premeditated in order to portray a specific aspect of the country. This sense of self-consciousness works both ways, such as when the indigenous couple in Olivença who insist on putting on their traditional dress for the photograph, rather than the jeans and t-shirts that they usually wear. The political aspect of this costume change is not lost on Hijmans. There is an echo here of Synge’s experience on the Aran Islands, where the Islanders wish to be photographed in their shop-bought ‘Sunday Best’, rather than their homespun garments that were of interest to the photographer. The

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‘authenticity’ of such photographs is marred by the desire of the subjects to be portrayed in a specific way.

The reader’s attention is drawn to the diversity within Brazil, such as disparate religious beliefs and regional identities, and the various indigenous peoples in this vast country. Some of the most memorable photographs are of Afro-Brazilian rites and rituals, such the *Tambor* parade through the streets of São Luís where the children dress up as the Three Kings, and the rebirth or initiation ceremony of the *Candomblé*. The goddess of the sea, Iemanjá, is offered roses on the second of February, as well as jewels and lavender water, to petition for her protection.

In a primary school established by the indigenous tribe, Tupinambá-de-Olivença, the young pupils are trying to learn the language spoken by previous generations. This prompts Hijmans to draw a (justified) parallel with the Gaelscoil movement in Ireland. This is not the only occasion where Hijmans contextualizes Brazilian life for his Irish readership: the importance of the aforementioned Iemanjá day is compared to the Pattern Festival on Inis Mór. A country town in Rio Grande do Norte is about the same size as Tullamore, Co. Offaly, though the climate is dramatically different. The Irish references act as a nudge and a wink to the reader who will instantly recognize them.

The most interesting pieces have a political dimension: a picture of a favela in São Paulo which was being cleared to make way for a new stadium before the 2014 World Cup. In the lead up to the World Cup last year, local people anticipated earning extra income by selling traditional food around the stadia. FIFA rules, however, dictate that street sellers are not permitted within a two-kilometre radius of the venues. The forthcoming Olympic Games in 2016 will bring further crowds of tourists, though it is uncertain what the poorer communities will gain from the ‘legacy’ of the Games.

Occasionally, the images reveal the darker aspects of Brazil’s colonial past, such as the uneasy disclosure that the impressive church of Saint Francis of Paola was built by slaves, or that the *pelourinho* was used as a post where slaves were publicly flogged. In a book that aims to portray a faithful impression of Brazil, these grim details, by necessity, had to be included.

The lighter topics covered in this book, such as travel and food, provide a good balance to the more somber musings. The various subjects flow together in a natural progression and overall unity that indicates a keen editorial eye.

The language used throughout this book is informal and accessible, and the Portuguese is incorporated in a natural manner with native terms being explained through Irish. For the reader who is not entirely

comfortable reading in Irish, the attractive photographs are beneficial and the short essays are inviting, rather than intimidating. There is certainly an appetite for such travel literature in the Irish language; the Irish language reader, like any reader, is excited by the prospect of ‘visiting’ another country, albeit virtually. Hijmans, then, is broadening the horizon of Irish language writing, like Frank Reidy in *Ó Chósta go Cósta* (Cló Iar-Chonnacht, 2009), Cathal Ó Searcaigh, *Seal i Neipeal* (Cló Iar-Chonnacht, 2005) and Gabriel Rosenstock, *Ólann mo Mhiúil as an nGainséis* (Cló Iar-Chonnacht, 2003).

The reproduction of attractive coloured photographs is of high quality and is deserving of praise. It is not an oversized coffee table book, however but a regular sized book in landscape format.

The intention is to provide us with *splancanna* or ‘glimpses’ of Brazil, but particularly of an alternative Brazil, a more ‘authentic’ impression than what we commonly see through tourism campaigns. Hijmans is successful in this aim and his essays explain the context of each photograph. The difficulty inherent in ‘glimpses’, of course, is that, occasionally, the reader wants more information than is provided in the book. Be that as it may, this book is a wonderful introduction to life in Brazil through the eyes of a European who has made his home there. *Splancanna ó Shaol Éile* is a welcome addition to Irish language writing and we look forward to future work from Alex Hijmans.