

Conscience as Compass: Creative Encounters between Ireland and Latin America

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Such reminders of our past links are important. They provide a well of potent memories: memories of joint struggles and aspirations, of hopes shared and dreams waiting to be taken up again – a well from which we can draw as we seek to respond to the challenges of our own times. Indeed, I believe that the best part of our past lies in those emancipatory promises whose trajectory was interrupted, but which continue to offer themselves to our present, begging to be realised. The sediment of those possibilities imagined, but yet to be realised, is what remains after the water of memory has been drawn.

(Higgins 2017)

In 2017, more than one hundred years after the Easter Rising, President Michael D. Higgins travelled to Latin America on a state visit. His journey recalled, literally and symbolically, the journeys of the many other Irishmen and women who made a similar crossing over the last two centuries. In his speech, quoted above and included in full in this special issue, President Higgins alludes to the shared memories and joint struggles of the peoples of Ireland and Latin America. This issue of *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* considers the power of shared memories and the importance of ethical solidarity in the lives and creative work of activists, artists and intellectuals – individuals drawing on the healing potential and emancipatory promise of this “well of potent memories”.

The centenary of the 1916 Rising has provided an opportunity to reflect on the unfulfilled promise of that revolutionary moment and on the trajectory of the Irish state since its foundation. It has encouraged debate about the failures, both imaginative and practical, of the state in treating all its children equally. It has also prompted a reconsideration of Ireland’s place on a global stage and its relationships with other regions, peoples and governments. In the context of

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Latin America, there were many cultural and intellectual interventions and while most are beyond the scope of this short overview, several events are particularly noteworthy.

President Higgins's official visit to Latin America intersected with and highlighted some of the most significant interventions of the centenary period. In the weeks prior to his departure, he opened "The Irish in Latin America" exhibition, curated by Margaret Brehony, in University College Cork. This exhibition focuses on various confluences and commonalities between the two contexts, raising awareness of the contribution of the Irish diaspora in Latin America and of shared histories of colonialism, revolutionary struggle and subsequent independence (DFA 2016). This touring exhibition was first launched in Mexico City (October 2016). Having opened in Havana, Cuba in February 2017, further launches are planned in Guadalajara, Mexico; Bogotá, Colombia; and Lima, Peru.

Another international touring exhibition was attended by the president and by Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, this time in Lima, Peru.³ A series of framed panels of text and supporting photographs interrogated the darker side of global capitalism and modernisation. Under particular scrutiny is the extractive rubber industry that devastated people and communities of the tropical regions of South America and sub-Saharan Africa in the period 1880-1914. This unfathomable tragedy devastated indigenous populations and those communities along the Amazon continue to struggle with the aftermath of this brutal imperialism, and also with its current incarnations. This exhibition also retrieved into view the humanity of Roger Casement and his searing critique of imperialism and savage capitalism. His investigations revealed the violent abuse perpetrated against communities of the Amazon region and his report provides a chilling record of that genocide. The exhibition was complemented by a Brazilian edition of *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* edited by Angus Mitchell and Laura Izarra, translated by Mariana Bolfarine, and with a preface by President Michael D. Higgins. As is evident from the recent monograph entitled *Colombia's Forgotten Frontier: A Literary Geography of the Putumayo* (Wylie 2013) and the impressive published proceedings from a conference held in Bogotá – *El Paraíso del Diablo: Roger Casement y el informe del Putumayo, un siglo después*, (Sampedro et al. 2014), Casement is now integral to the *Biblioteca Sudamericana*.

The Society for Irish Latin American Studies hosted its most recent conference in Havana. The theme of the conference was *Island Relations: Ireland, Cuba and the Latin World*. President Higgins, on the first state visit by an Irish president to Cuba, delivered a keynote address at the conference at the Colegio Universitario San Gerónimo entitled: "Ireland and Cuba: From a past of complex struggles and solidarities to a future of shared possibilities". Other speakers included the writers Colm Tóibín, Joseph O'Connor, Orsola Casagrande, and Pura López-Colomé. Also in attendance was Michael

³ Before Lima, this exhibition was hosted in Centro Universitário Maria Antonia, São Paulo, 4 May-26 June 2011; Casa de América, Madrid, October-November 2012; Palau Robert, Barcelona, 1-14 October 2013; County Library Tralee, 24-26 October 2013.

McCaughan whose most recent book *Coming Home: One Man's Return to the Irish Language* (2017) fuses his many years reporting from the frontiers of South and Central America with his rediscovered love for the Irish language.

In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon wonders how we can act ethically toward human and biotic communities that “exist beyond our sensory ken”, particularly when immediate corporate and consumer demands are elevated above the consequences of the long-term, slow violence against human health and the earth’s biosphere (2011: 15). He notes that “it is a pervasive condition of empire that they affect great swathes of the planet without the empire’s populace being aware of that impact – indeed, without being aware that many of the affected places even exist” (2011: 35). In the early twentieth century, Roger Casement’s investigative reports destabilized this ideological system of denials, apathy and dissembling; no longer could governments or wealthy shareholders say they were unaware of the suffering and exploitation that underpinned their wealth and privilege. Casement’s radical interventions continue to reverberate and inspire; as articulated by President Higgins in his keynote address in Lima, they are “a compass for all of us”. And Casement’s interventions are not the only such touchstones for artists and activists. As is evident from Ronan Sheehan’s contribution below, reflecting on *The Crane Bag* special issue on Ireland and Latin America (1982), individuals such as Paolo Freire, Rigoberta Menchu, Oscar Romero and Pablo Neruda profoundly moved and influenced Irish intellectuals and artists throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. Indeed, this notion of torchbearers traversing time and space, guiding us towards more ethical futures is strikingly realised by each of the contributors to this collection; these essays demonstrate the rich potential of creative encounters for healing trauma, for social and political “conscientization”, for expressing solidarity, and for finding a way to overcome the monumental challenges and injustices that confront contemporary Ireland and Latin America.

Irish intellectuals continue to look to Latin America as a source of critical consciousness and debate regarding issues such as uneven development or the resolution of historical trauma. For example, Joe Cleary’s analysis of Ireland’s social and political challenges in the twentieth century is enabled by the work of Brazilian cultural theorist Roberto Schwarz and his argument that “the experience of incongruity” is what often links colonial societies (2003: 24). Schwarz’s thesis is that the imposition of liberal European ideology on a society experiencing the realities of the slave trade, clientelism, economic dependency and poverty creates an effect of dissonance and distortion. It is this sensation of “incongruity” rather than particular systems or a specific set of practices that link societies that have undergone colonisation. Thus, in the context of Ireland, the task for critically engaged intellectuals is to investigate the “discrepant ways in which Irish political and cultural life, which were obviously shaped and textured by wider European developments, were at the same time over-determined by the country’s dependent socio-economic composition” (Cleary 2003: 24). Certainly, while Ireland often represents itself as globalized, modern and integral to transnational financial markets, the last decade has shown the state’s vulnerability to underlying dependencies and the residual legacies of its colonial status: from the stark images of IMF

representatives arriving in Dublin to the whispered reports of rendition flights passing through Shannon Airport, or in the reluctance to pursue multinational corporations for tax owed while public services creak under the effects of austerity. However, despite commonalities, Cleary insists on the heterogeneity of experiences and imaginaries of indigenous and colonized peoples around the world. David Lloyd also argues for differential analyses that avoid a positivistic catalogue of similarities between diverse contexts; rather he suggests that the similarities between former colonies often manifest themselves in what he terms “the subalternity effect” (1999: 77), and that the agency of the subaltern can emerge and disrupt the dominant historical discourses thereby challenging narratives of progress and enlightenment. From this perspective, it is the very heterogeneity of social imaginaries at work in disparate settings (such as Ireland and Latin America) that is important and that provide opportunities for transnational solidarities and connectivity.

Lloyd argues that the “actual formation of colonial societies takes place precisely within the uneven encounter between a globalizing project founded in and still legitimated by Europe’s delusion of universality and the multiple and different social imaginaries at work in colonized cultures” (1999: 3). Such a position enables his later analysis that draws connections between “national Marxist” thinkers such as the Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui, the Algerian Franz Fanon and Ireland’s James Connolly who resist rather than pass through capitalist modernity (2003: 345). Similarly, connections could be drawn – across time and space – between the radical educational philosophies articulated by Patrick Pearse in *The Murder Machine* (1916), Paulo Freire in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) and Augusto Boal in *The Theatre of the Oppressed* (1993) as they seek to nurture personal reflexivity and critical thinking in action. All three sought to combat the debilitating effects of educational systems and civic cultures which both encouraged passivity and devalued the distinct social imaginary and cultural milieu of the student, citizen or activist. As our societies confront issues around climate justice, the economics of toxic pollution, war and the resulting mass migrations, growing inequalities and increasing corporate power, all occurring in an era of distractedness and increased surveillance, the need for a critical pedagogy remains urgent. Decrying the short-termism of much political and economic thinking, Mary Robinson recently concluded that “Our future security and prosperity depends not on the strength of our borders or the size of our armies, but on the depth of our education systems and the extent of global access to water, food and electricity” (2017: 5-6).

It is the multiple and different social imaginaries in existence and under siege in Bolivia, Peru and Argentina which so impacted Roger Casement and Ena Dargan whose writings are discussed in this volume. The indigenous worlds they encountered forced them to confront the reality of unequal global power relations and their own understanding of Irish social and political issues. And, as elucidated by Ann Laura Stoler in her concept of “duress”, imperial traces continue to impact upon and determine relations of power and exploitation in the contemporary moment (2016). Past abuses shadow contemporary power dynamics; certainly, the struggles of indigenous peoples mutate but persist during this high age of neoliberalism. According to Global Witness, the

international NGO that investigates links between natural resource exploitation and human rights abuses worldwide, at least 577 environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs) were killed in Latin America between 2010 and 2015 (Birss, 2017). These deaths are the result of ongoing confrontations between EHRDs and the international business interests which seek to appropriate land and exploit natural resources despite the damage to local communities and the environment. Indigenous peoples have been on the frontline of these battles against unrestrained capitalism. Contested notions of development are at the centre of these struggles with EHRDs refusing a definition of progress based on the exploitation and elite control of resources such as gold, oil, wood and water. Many of these conflicts are under-reported, largely due to the representational bias in mainstream media against ecological violence or the brutal realities of resource extraction. Yet these clashes are part of an escalating global confrontation between the environmental justice movement and the apparatuses and force of neoliberal capitalism: consider the Mundurucu tribe protesting a potentially devastating plan to build a network of 49 dams in the Brazilian Amazon, or contemplate the struggle of the Wampis and Awahun people to halt the pollution from the gold mining industry and from the North Peruvian Oil Pipeline which has had a series of toxic leaks in recent years. The indigenous peoples at the centre of these struggles suffer both the long-term consequences of industrial pollution, ecological degradation and forced migration, but also the immediate and shocking violence of intimidation and assassination: for example, in 2016, Berta Cáceres, a Lenca woman and 2015 Goldman Prize Recipient, was murdered for her activism in Honduras (Fig. 1); as the co-founder of the National Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), she had been to the forefront of a successful movement to prevent the construction of a mega-dam in opposition to (and without consulting) the indigenous people who were to be affected. What these cases demonstrate is the manner by which imperial power dynamics and practices linger and continue to haunt these regions.



Fig. 1. Indigenous Lenca women protest against the murder of Honduran activist Berta Cáceres in 2016. (Photograph: Orlando Sierra/AFP/Getty Images.)

Several of the contributors to this issue engage with the plight of indigenous peoples: David Lilburn in his print 'Putumayo', Michael D. Higgins in his keynote address in Lima, and Deirdre Brady in her discussion of Ena Dargan's account of her travels across Latin America. This latter essay by Deirdre Brady constitutes an important act of cultural retrieval as Dargan's travel book, *The Road to Cuzco: A Journey from Argentina to Peru*, is relatively little known. A blend of memoir, history and travelogue, the text (published in 1950, but reflecting on a journey undertaken in the 1930s) was introduced by Salvador de Madariaga, the Spanish intellectual and historian, and featured several photographs by Martín Chambi, the Peruvian photographer often compared in terms of his creative instinct to Diane Arbus or Sebastião Salgado (See Fig. 2). Dargan's text is suggestive of the important political and intellectual connections of its author. For example, Brady notes Dargan's friendship with Cecilio Guzmán de Rojas, the extraordinary Bolivian painter whose works feature the indigenous peoples of Aymara. The image, *Cristo Aymara* (1939), on the front cover of this special issue of *IMSLA* was chosen as a stunning example of Guzmán de Rojas' art. It was in the 1930s that Guzmán de Rojas advised Dargan to travel to Oruro for carnival and it was there that she witnessed the performance of the folk play, *The Death of Atahualpa*. Later, they met again in London when Guzmán de Rojas was travelling in Europe. These encounters between Guzmán de Rojas and Dargan reveal something surprising and compelling about Irish and Latin American intersections in the 1930s and 40s. A concern for the plight of the pre-Colombian world and the *pueblos indígenas* is evident in Dargan's descriptions and in her impressive selection of images. Brady's retrieval of Dargan's fascinating text highlights the possibility for further research and projects of cultural retrieval on Irish women in Latin America.

David Lilburn's print "Putumayo" directly responds to the trail of testimony and reports revealing the atrocious practices of the British-owned Peruvian Amazon company in the early twentieth century. This story destabilized Western sensibilities, the concept of imperial progress and the very notion of imperial civilisation in the years preceding the First World War. Lilburn's oeuvre is marked by his engaged gaze; his maps are characterised by a series of visual and textual fragments, frequently orientating the spectator and encouraging his audiences to make connections between the extractive economy, the suffering of the poor, the abuse of indigenous peoples, and the comfortable consumer lifestyles of the affluent West. Lilburn layers memories and juxtaposes discrete, but related, images: the resulting temporal and spatial disruptions create crevices where unacknowledged histories can be intuited and partially encountered. Map-making was conventionally deployed by imperialists and venture capitalists to control territory, natural resources and indigenous communities; by shifting the axis of such mapping practices, Lilburn exposes fissures in the epistemology and temporal structures of the neoliberal present.

Finding a way to process and heal the trauma of growing up in Belfast during a period of protracted conflict is the theme of Lorna Shaughnessy's essay *Migrating Myths: From Greece to Nicaragua, Mexico and Ireland*. It was while on sabbatical in Nicaragua in 1993 that Shaughnessy, through her engagement with literature written by women in the context of the Central American

revolutions of the 1970s and 1980s, began to creatively work through her personal experience of childhood during the Irish Troubles. In particular, the political engagement and poetry of Michèle Najlis was influential. Shaughnessy's essay here considers the way that classical mythology enables contemporary poets – including both herself and Najlis – to write about public, social subjects such as political violence, the displacement of peoples, the betrayal of revolutionary ideals, and the suffering of the innocent. Identifying the imaginative bonds of empathy which connect women poets from these diverse contexts, Shaughnessy concludes by highlighting the need to acknowledge, communicate and transform the traumatic past so as to prevent its reoccurrence.

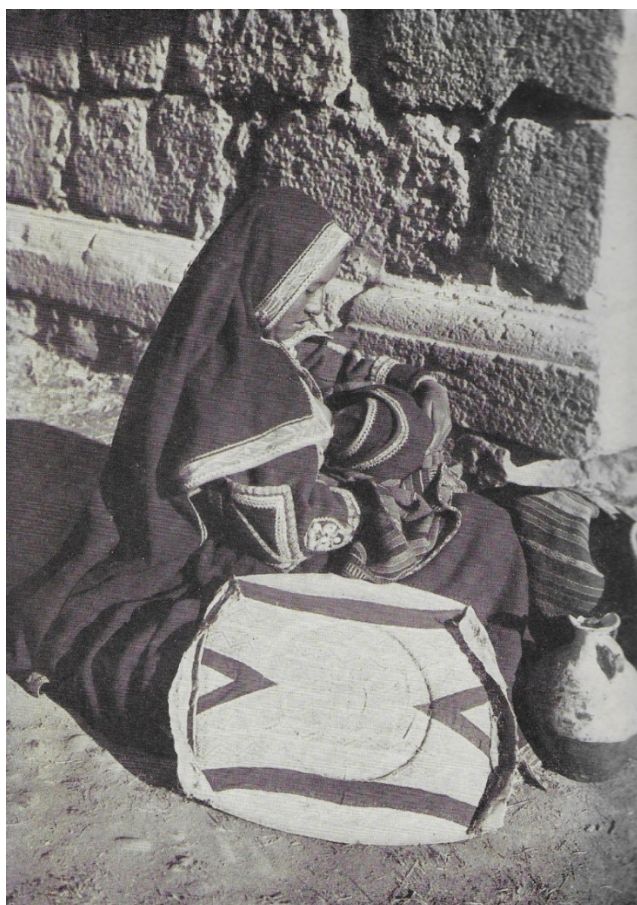


Fig. 2. Quechua woman breastfeeding her infant. Photograph by the celebrated Martín Chambi, another leading artist in the Indigenous Movement, and included as an illustration in Ena Dargan's book *The Road to Cusco: A Journey from Argentina to Peru* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1950).

The importance of Latin America as an emancipatory intellectual and emotional space for Irish activists and artists is also evident in Ronan Sheehan's reflection on *The Crane Bag* special issue on Ireland and Latin America that he edited in 1982. This special issue was a manifestation of Irish intellectuals' engagement with developments in Liberation Theology, with Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and with the artistic achievements of writers such as Mario Vargas Llosa, Gabriel García Márquez and Jorge Luis Borges. In Ireland, this was a complicated and dark period of economic, social and

political unrest; Sheehan's special issue must be considered within this context. The Irish contributors reveal a profound emotional and scholarly connection with Latin America. Their collective engagement demonstrates the potential of the "shared sediment of possibilities" (Higgins 2017); it also reveals the deep transnational empathy and solidarity that emerges and becomes possible when activists and writers connect across spatial and temporal boundaries.

In "Only Connect: Irish Women's Voices, Latin America and the Irish Women's Writing Network", Kathryn Laing presents a critical overview of recent scholarship on Irish women and the literary interfaces between Ireland and Latin America at the turn of the twentieth century. Situating this scholarly field in the context of broader developments in the study of Irish women writers and in new methodologies and platforms that enable this research, Laing identifies several areas for further investigation and her contribution here initiates a conversation about the potential for contemporary collaborations and scholarly exchange. As co-founder of the new *Irish Women Writers Network 1880-1910*, Laing is particularly well placed to introduce this platform for sharing information, finding collaborators, identifying relevant archives and resources, and highlighting research opportunities. Surely such nascent connections will be tremendously enabling for a new generation of scholars researching women travel writers, immigrant or diasporic artists and activists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Michael D. Higgins's keynote address in Lima in 2017, the transcript of which concludes this collection of essays, foregrounds the "manifold bonds of solidarity between our peoples – both experienced and imagined". Decrying anaesthetised cultures of political apathy and insatiable consumption, President Higgins highlights the immense challenges to be faced in addressing climate change, untempered capitalism and human rights violations. Echoing several of the other contributors to this volume, he emphasises the importance of engaged activism and transnational solidarity; he highlights the role of ethical witnesses, transcending temporal and spatial boundaries, revealing our interdependency and our common concerns. Concluding, he returns to the theme of memory, to its role in repairing grief and in imagining and creating a different future. This speech reflects many of the concerns and themes of his presidency, as articulated in his recent book *Why Ideas Matter: Speeches for an Ethical Republic* (2016) and in the President of Ireland's Ethics Initiative (2014-15).

The special issue celebrates the role of conscience and ethical awareness in guiding Irish engagement in and with Latin America; such interactions are both practical and imaginative. The exchanges, described here, transverse geographical, historical and artistic categories in liberating and transformative ways. What is evident from the contributors to this volume is the role that Latin America itself has played in providing a compass for Irish artists and intellectuals: from the investigations undertaken by Roger Casement to Ena Dargan's descriptions of the Quechua people; from the women poets of Central America such as Michèle Najlis to the short stories of Jorge Luis Borges; from the proponents of "conscientization" and critical pedagogies to

the practitioners of a theology of liberation; from the peoples' movements of the 1960s and 70s to the contemporary activism of indigenous groups and Environmental Human Rights Defenders. These creative encounters provide a blueprint for relating ethically to each other and to our natural environment, an alternative map for helping us journey onward.

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The Road to Cuzco: An Irish woman writer's journey to the 'navel of the world'

Deirdre Brady¹

Abstract: Although it was not published until 1950, Ena Dargan's travel book *The Road to Cuzco: A Journey from Argentina to Peru* (1950), was set in the 1930s. The book documents her journey from Buenos Aires (Argentina) to Cuzco (Peru), the ancestral home of the Incan Empire; an area once known as 'the navel of the world'. Her aim is to seek out and observe the ways of the Indians, expressed through their customs, dances, music and architecture, in order to see how much they have remained unchanged and how much they have been influenced by Europe. In so doing, she stumbles upon a series of folk plays performed in Oruro (Bolivia), which recall the events which led to the Spanish colonisation of Latin America during the sixteenth century. The principal play, *The Death of Atahualpa*, long thought lost and sought after by scholars, is told in the Quechua dramatic tradition and performed by the native Indians during Carnival. Dargan's recording and retrieval of the much-coveted manuscript of the play, ensures her a place in Quechua literary history. Furthermore, her travel account is an important intervention by an Irish woman writer and situates Dargan as an intellectual whose life and work requires further study.

¹ Deirdre Brady currently teaches at the University of Limerick having completed her PhD in 2014. Her research focus is on Irish literary coteries of the mid-twentieth century. In 2015, she published an essay entitled "Modernist Presses and the Gayfield Press" in *Bibliologica*. She is currently writing a monograph for Liverpool University Press entitled: "Literary coteries and the Irish Women Writers' Club (1933-1958)", and her article entitled "'Writers and the International Spirit': Irish P.E.N. in the Postwar Years" is scheduled for publication in *The New Hibernia Review* in autumn 2017. Her research interests include Irish female print culture, women writers, private printing presses and the history of the book in the twentieth century.

Cousin Inca (to Pizarro and his men)

“Oh red-bearded soldiers with the long necks. I have come to know you and you also wish to know me.”

Pizarro:

“What are you saying, Barbarian?”

Inca Cousin:

“Oh my lord! Do not be angry.”

Pizarro:

“Why do I talk with these brutes whom I cannot understand? And they cannot understand what I say to them either.”²

(Dargan 1950: 65)

Ena Dargan’s travel book, *The Road to Cuzco: A Journey from Argentina to Peru* (1950), is a blend of memoir, history and travelogue of Latin American culture, witnessed by the author as she travels along the ancient trade route of the Incas and the conquistadors. Her journey takes the reader from Buenos Aires (Argentina) to Cuzco (Peru), through the tablelands of Argentina to La Paz (Bolivia), with a diversion in-country for the Oruro Carnival, and then on to the viceregal town of Sucre. While in Bolivia, she goes to Potosí and Catavi the “mining town ‘*par excellence* of America”’, and makes her way in a lorry to the fertile valley of the Yungas crossing over the snow-topped peaks of the Andes through treacherous road conditions – an experience she would later describe in the Irish journal *Studies*, as “terrifying” (Dargan 1951: 112). Her description of the landscape and the ways of the indigenous population – their cultural mores, oral histories and architecture – is told in an empathetic way, and it represents an important contribution to Irish travel literature.

At the time of publication, *The Road to Cuzco* received much attention, including commentary from Spanish intellectual and historian, Salvador de Madariaga, who wrote the preface to the book. In it, de Madariaga laments the many misconceptions and false concepts that have developed about the history of the South Americas for “who was going to go there and find out the truth of the matter”. He suggests that “An Irish person should be an ideal interpreter between English and Spanish cultures”, privileging the perspective of the ‘other’ or postcolonial subject in recording the story (Dargan 1950: 7). Furthermore, de Madariaga claims that Dargan’s role as a mediator and interpreter of Latin American life is enhanced by her Irish and female identity: “This book has therefore the advantage of being written by an Irish woman on Spanish life and history for an English-speaking public” (8). Certainly, Dargan’s observations about Latin America, and her connection of ideas, religious practices and geographical topography with Ireland are significant and

² The two Incas – “Cousin Inca” and the “Inca Cousin” – appear to be two different characters in the play, *The Death of Atahualpa*, which Ena Dargan witnessed during her travels.

original. Throughout the book, she expresses her own ideas of nationhood and culture, and she draws parallels between the conditions of the lives of the Indians and the Irish. Her Irish identity is also useful when negotiating the necessary visas and permits for travel within the area. She carries an Irish passport, “issued by the authorities of *Éire*”, and her diplomatic connections (she works for the British Cultural Institute in Buenos Aires) ensure easy access to the myriad of embassies, consulates and police departments she visits along the route (92).

The book, published in London by Andrew Melrose Publishers, was marketed in English-speaking countries, including Ireland, Britain and the United States of America. In the prestigious New York-based journal, *Foreign Affairs*, the book received high praise. Henry L. Roberts, writing in the magazine lists *The Road to Cuzco* in his “Recent Books on International Relations” describing it as “An account of a journey from Buenos Aires, across Bolivia to Cuzco in upper Peru, told with skill”, a compliment not extended to many in the magazine (Roberts 1951: 335). The book is promoted alongside other travel books on South America, including Frances Toor’s *Three Worlds of Peru* (1949), and William Russell’s *The Bolivar Countries: Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela* (1949).³ Other contributors to the issue included then Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida, foreign diplomat Sumner Welles, and explorer and international relations expert, John F. Teal, Jr.⁴ In Britain, Dargan promoted the book by giving talks on Incan culture, including a lecture at St Anne’s House, London, on the organisation of the Incan empire pre-Spanish colonisation, and a talk to the Irish Literary Society on “Ladies of Latin America” (Candida 1951: 5). In Ireland, after the publication of her book, she received widespread attention in the newspapers and periodicals of the period, including *The Irish Times*, and *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* (Candida, 20 October and 17 November 1950; Macken 1950).

Moreover, her achievement as a first-time author did not go unnoticed in the Irish national press: “To have written a book for the first time is an achievement in itself, but to receive an award for a first work is something that does not happen to an author” (Candida, 17 November 1950: 5). Another article in *The Irish Times* referred to Dargan as an “intrepid traveller in the South Americas” and claims that *The Road to Cuzco* was written as background for another book, *Bright is the South*, which was “now with the publishers and should be out fairly soon” (Candida, 20 October 1950: 7). To date, no account exists of this book, although records exist of two other Dargan publications. In 1959, she published a book, *The Holy Ghost*, focusing on the sermons of St John of Avila (Dargan 1959). In 1966, she translated French liberal writer Georges Cattai’s book, *Saint Bernard of Clairvaux* (Cattai 1966). Dargan’s fascination with religious subjects permeates much of her work. In *The Road to*

³ Readers of *Foreign Affairs* are offered the chance to purchase these books from the list, ‘post free’, if published in the United States. Although Dargan’s book was published by Andrew Melrose London Limited, it is likely that readers could order directly from *Foreign Affairs*, but not ‘post free’.

⁴ The same edition features on the board of editorial advisors, the Deputy Director of American Central Intelligence (later the Director) and the future President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Cuzco, she frequently comments on the rituals and rites of the Indians, and the fluidity with which the native Indians seamlessly incorporate Pagan and Christian rituals “with complete impartiality” (Dargan 1950: 21).

Dargan’s ability to access leading publications and public spaces underscores the influential networks within which she circulated; yet, surprisingly, little is known about the author. Notwithstanding this, some clues as to her background can be found in the committee reports of writing groups based in Dublin City. The records of the writer’s group, Irish P.E.N., confirm her nomination to the club by the detective-story writer and biographer, Sheila Pim, in 1950 (Irish P.E.N. 1935-2004).⁵ As a member of this internationally minded club, Dargan took an active role: representing P.E.N. at the International Congress in Edinburgh in 1950, in London in 1951 and in Paris in 1952.⁶ She also gave a talk at one of their ‘at homes’ in 1954, on the subject of radio, and her name appears in the archives of Radio Éireann, Ireland’s national broadcaster. In addition, her membership of the professional writers group, the Irish Women Writers’ Club, suggests an influential literary milieu and one with close connections with international feminist and peace organisations.⁷ Her role in promoting women travelling as adventurers and explorers, a stated aim of the international women’s movement, must have appealed to the internationally minded writers club, and the progressive elements within the club.⁸ For her achievement, she was awarded their prestigious literary prize, the Book of the Year, for *The Road to Cuzco* in 1950.⁹

In the book, Dargan sets off from Retiro train station in Buenos Aires to La Paz with a “motley company” of individuals, each exploring the Americas for different reasons: a Spanish professor of law; a few North Americans; a couple “lately escaped from Hitler’s Europe, he Bolivian and her Belgian”; a “sprinkling of miners, Germans and Czechoslovakians; and, lastly, my Irish self” (Dargan 1950: 19). As the train speeds across the Argentinian tableland, where the “climate is cruel”; and living conditions harsh, Dargan is captivated by the colourful landscape: “the subtle blending of umber browns, creams and pales-washed greens of the stringy grasses and plants”. She catches sight of

⁵ P.E.N. stands for poets, essayists and novelists, though its catchment was later extended to include editors, translators and others. It was founded in London in 1921. P.E.N.’s aim is to promote friendship, freedom of expression, international goodwill and intellectual cooperation amongst writers. The archives of P.E.N. Ireland are held in the National Library of Ireland.

⁶ Sheila Pim, was also a fellow member of the Women Writers’ Club. For more on the Women Writers’ Club, see Brady (2014).

⁷ It is worth noting that many of the prominent members of the Women Writers’ Club were involved in international affairs. For example, Sybil le Brocq, a prominent member of the Women Writers’ Club, played a leading role in the Irish branch of the League of Nations. Another member, Rosamond Jacob was secretary of the Irish branch of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) for over ten years. Helena Swanwick, former editor of *Foreign Affairs*, was also involved in the WILPF (Vellacott 1993 and Ashworth 2008).

⁸ Previous recipients of the Book of the Year award included Elizabeth Bowen, Dorothy Macardle and Kate O’Brien.

⁹ According to Catherine Clay, the ability of women to travel was a “defining feature of the period between the two world wars”, particularly for British women writers (Clay 2006). Dargan, as an employee of the British Cultural Institute in Buenos Aires in the 1930s, can fit into this category.

occasional villages with “slanting roofs thatched with wiry *paja brava* laid over the stems of cereals”. In the villages, women squat in the doorways, men lean against the walls, and children play nearby, “the oranges, browns and verdant green of clothing toned in with each other and with the hues of the earth” (20). On their houses, which are “devoid of the most elementary comforts”, a cross hangs, “with little tiny objects representing the instruments of the passion of Christ, Inca divinities, or the Spanish bull, symbol of fecundity” (21). Describing the diet of the natives as “monotonous”, she notes their dependency on certain foods – the potato, once cultivated by the Incas – and quinoa, or *cañawa*, the grain “the poorer people take”. Meat intake is rare, as animals are too valuable and dairy consumption is non-existent. Only the chewing of coca, “a real philosophers food” relieves the monotony of their diet, fatigue and thirst; it is rare to see an Indian “whose cheek is not bulging with leaves” (23). Despite the harshness of life, and the lack of education and opportunity, Dargan posits that the “intercommunication between the Indian and nature” is so powerful, that “he rarely leaves” (22). She comments on the “agelessness” of the regions, where “man and his doings are dwarfed to ant-like significance”, eking out a bare existence in “this immensity of space” (28).



Fig. 1. Indian woman on the Bolivian Tableland (Photographer: Bell. From: Dargan, Ena, *The Road To Cuzco: A Journey from Argentina to Peru* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1950.)

As they arrive in La Paz, Dargan and the other passengers rush to the window of the train to see the “hundreds of yellow lights cut the velvet blackness in a circular cluster of stars” (29). Here the “indomitable spirit of conquistadores” is evident in the architecture of the city where houses were constructed in the style “they had known in their native land” (31). Now in decay, the project of restoration of this viceregal city is hampered by the topography, as the Bolivian indigenous painter Cecilio Guzmán de Rojas explains to Dargan: “La Paz, unlike other towns, cannot keep on growing in size. The mountains will see to that” (31). On the tour of the old city, Dargan visits the church of San Francisco, where the imprint of “pagan America” is discernible in the

ornamentation on the stone façade (33). The district around the church is swarming with activity: “the tiny shops – open to the street – are a tumble of gaily-striped blankets, rugs, embroidered tapestries, and shawls all spun by Indian hand” and served by stony-faced *Cholas*, females wrapped in their brightly coloured shawls (32). It is here in La Paz that the stark divide between the two classes is most obvious and is described using colonial tropes: the descendent of the Spaniards, the upper-class Bolivian creole, “conscious of his superiority” and in contrast, the Indian, “solid and unmoving as his own Andean rock” (37). Dargan notes that, “there are practically no intermediate stages” (37).



Fig. 2. Indians in La Paz, Bolivia (Photographer: Bolivian Tourist Board. From: Dargan, Ena, *The Road To Cuzco: A Journey from Argentina to Peru* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1950.)

Taking the advice of Guzmán de Rojas to “Go to Oruro for carnival!”, Dargan takes the train to the town where she stumbles across the performance of a series of old folk plays, *The Conquest of the Spaniards* (46). It is here that Dargan observes the influence of the Spanish conquerors and their impact on the spectacle of Carnival: “Here carnival came, stepping in strange hieratic dance, weighted in Incaic ornament, glowing with the sombre richness of old Spain” (50). The scene is likened to a Grimm fairy tale, the spectacle of the *Cholas* in witch-like hats – that bring a “final touch of sorcery to this evocation of fairy wand and magic spell” and the “cult of the devil” evident in the dances of the largest group, the *comparas*, who pay homage to the “old black gods, Supay” (53). They dance about in silver brocades around the serpents’ pole: “There were several hundred of them [*comparas*] and they fairly burst with vitality...Wherever they went they were accompanied by their own particular band, playing their own Devil’s march” (54). Dramatic entertainment comes in the form of a series of folk plays, performed by native Indians, resplendent in elaborate costumes.



Fig. 3. Inca King: Folk-play at Oruro Carnival (Photographer: Ena Dargan. *From*: Dargan, Ena, *The Road To Cuzco: A Journey from Argentina to Peru* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1950.)

One performance in particular stands out. Describing it as the principle play, *The Death of Atahualpa* recreates the moment of the conquest of Peru by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century, which led to the downfall of the Incan Empire and to colonisation by the Spaniards. Performed in Quechua (the language of the Incas) and Spanish (representing the Spanish conquistadors), a device that “brings out the mutual incomprehension of the two races”, the plot relays the miscommunication between the two leaders, Atahualpa, the Inca King, and Pizarro, leader of the Spanish conquistadors. Dargan’s account of the performance, and subsequent retrieval of the manuscript, long-thought lost by scholars, is a valuable contribution to Quechua literary history, and one acknowledged by scholars, including Hernando Balmori and Michael T. Taussig (Balmori 1955; Taussig 2010). Subsequently, in 1955 Balmori published the play in its original form, adding an introduction and translating the play, but crediting Dargan.

In the play, the Inca King sends his cousin to find out what the “red-bearded soldiers” want in his dominion. The Spaniards hand him a letter from the king of Spain, but the Incas do not understand the significance of the white “maize-leaf [paper]” and interpret this as a sign of war (63). Following a short victory by the Incas, Pizarro sends a priest with a Bible to explain the Holy Trinity. The priest asks the Inca King to surrender to his Christian god. The Inca King (who had never before seen a book) considers himself as the son of a god, and rejects this “symbol of an alien creed”, striking it to the ground (64). In response, an angry Pizarro advances and slaughters the king. When he dies, the queen and all the remaining Incas lament his death and curse the invaders and

their greed: “All that is gold and silver let it be hidden in the heart of the mountain and let our people give them none” (66). In the play, Pizarro returns to Spain, where he is condemned to death for killing the Inca King, and disobeying the orders of the Spanish king. Although this version of events is, according to Dargan, part fantasy and part history, she is struck by the “tragic pathos” of this performance: heightened by a passionate portrayal of the Inca King, the lavish costumes and the “word-perfect” players who wear masks throughout the play (66).



Fig. 4. Dancers at Oruro Carnival (Photographer: Ena Dargan. From: Dargan, Ena, *The Road To Cuzco: A Journey from Argentina to Peru* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1950.)

If this play projects the old Inca spirit, as Dargan suggests, it also camouflages deep-rooted anti-Spanish feeling. The performance reminds Dargan of W.B. Yeats and his experiment with Noh theatre. She refers to and critiques Yeats's version of masked drama as less authentic, yet acknowledges the value of masks to convey meaning: “Where Gordon Craig's theories and the Yeats' productions at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin had failed to convince me, this carnival taught me the value of masks” (69).¹⁰ The masks used during the Oruro festival were so realistic that Dargan comments that “one forgot they were not human” (69). The use of devices such as dance, music and masks in performance are techniques often used in folk plays. According to Yeatsian scholar Margaret Harper, “They [masks] have been so used in a number of

¹⁰ Gordon Craig was an English stage-designer who used the Japanese Noh techniques such as light, dance and music to upset the realist framework of the proscenium stage.

cultures and over many centuries. In the modern West they often have a resonance of antiquity or cultural alterity, as signs of the primitive or the ancient” (Harper 2007: 58). As Harper suggests, masks are dual in nature: they hide the human faces behind them affording some protection through anonymity or free those faces from “the burden of self” (58). They are used to conceal personality or the intent of the wearer. In doing so, masks allow the performer to transcend their own physical appearance and to literally take on a new identity. According to Dargan, in the plays at Oruro, masks are used in a practical manner by the actors to hide their own personalities and “keep the character intact” throughout the lengthy hours and days of festivities and dancing (Dargan 1950: 69). Indeed, in the colonial past, they were considered so disruptive by the authorities, that when *The Death of Atahualpa* was performed, it was felt that “no Spaniard was safe” (71). The anti-Spanish feeling stirred up by the Indians when these plays were performed on feast days was so threatening to the Spanish authorities that such performances were prohibited (71).¹¹

Stylistically, the author documents her journey through historic facts interspersed with political and social commentary in a style which could be described as literary reportage. As David L. Eason states, “they [reporters] make sense out of events by telling stories about them” (Eason 1981: 125). In a review in the Irish Jesuit periodical, *Studies*, Mary Macken describes Dargan’s writing as “very skilful” with a “more than usually good blend of report and traveller’s tale” (Macken 1950: 232). This literary technique is effectively used by Dargan throughout her book, enhanced by photographic records (many taken by Dargan herself) and anecdotes which foreground the rich cultural traditions, the hazardous voyage and the abundant beauty of her surroundings. Thus, as she descends down the Andes “at break-neck speed”, to the valley of the Yungas, she describes her terrifying experience and the beauty of her landscape in elegant prose: “the great surfing mountain-torrents swept past black hunks of rock that stood firm amidst the white froth of foam, and thin trickles of liquid glistened their way down the fresh green slopes like long silver strings” (Dargan 1950: 94). Despite the bad roads, the dearth of available transport, and protests from the British legation, Dargan is rewarded with the sight of the fertile valleys where the coca plant or “green gold of Yungas” has been produced since the days of the Inca (95). Here, the contrast in the lives of the indigenous Yungas community and those on the tableland is most stark. The Yungas landscape is fertile and bursts with foliage and vegetation, “coffee plants abounded, the berries still green for the most part”: exotic life, “flamboyant birds, and butterflies the span of your fingers”: and sensory experiences such as sampling the apple banana which is “pink inside, tasteless, and as hard as stone”(100). At her hotel, she meets a “colony of refugees, mostly Jewish, from Germany and Czechoslovakia” who are voluntarily “marooned” in the Yungas, away from civilization (104). Here in the hotel, run by the Europeans, a song in German arouses a feeling of nostalgia for Ireland,

¹¹ It is stated by Dargan (upon consultation with Professor Clemente Hernando Balmori) that these performances were banned sometime after colonisation by the Spaniards. This information is based on the “testimony of a Spanish traveller, Señor Sobreviello Narcisso y Barcelo” (Dargan, Ena, *The Road to Cuzco: A Journey from Argentina to Peru* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1950), p. 71).

prompting her to reflect upon the circumstances which brought the refugees to this area: “What a strange gathering we made, all of us from far-off Europe drawn together by chance”, reminding the reader of the world events which led them to take refuge in this remote corner of Latin America (105).

Her next stop is Sucre, “four times a capital city”. Here the city glistens in the sun, as “white, clean and glistening, it looks as if it had been freshly washed and is drying in the sun”, and where the viceregal architecture is at its finest (108). Here, too, is where the Spanish Inquisition had its headquarters. Like Oruro, performance rituals are an important part of the yearly calendar, and the most “treasured possession” is the heavily jewelled image of the Virgin of Guadalupe (112). After viewing the visual spectacle of the eight-day festival of the Little Mother of Sucre: “their bowing to and kissing the ground”, she questions if “the Indians know whether they are honouring Mary, the mother of God or their own Pacha-mama, Mother Earth, who hides all power in her bosom?” (113). The fascination with Pagan and Christian rituals and the Indian zeal for superstition, is also evident in the nearby town of Potosí, one of the oldest viceregal towns, associated with “big business” (137). Here, Dargan relays the story of Spanish silver and the prosperity which the silver mines once brought to the town. The magnificent churches, monasteries and elaborate mansions, now neglected, prompt her to criticize the greed of the “silver-grabbing spirit” that founded Potosí and continued to exist in modern business: “The mines are owned by foreign capital and the output therefore goes abroad” (142). In Potosí, the “dun-coloured, calcined earth” makes her physically sick, and she continues her journey to its modern counterpart in Catavi (144).



Fig. 5. The Virgin of Sucre (Photographer: Ena Dargan. From: Dargan, Ena, *The Road To Cuzco: A Journey from Argentina to Peru* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1950).)

Dargan's journey to the tin mines of Catavi captures a critical moment in the history of the mines in the 1930s; just two decades before nationalisation in 1952. As she enters the mines, she notices the altars dedicated to the Pagan and Christian deities: one a shrine to the Virgin with flower and candles, "rigged up by the men themselves, who stop before them to pray on their way to work": another, hidden away, to the devil Supay, "where candles burn without flowers, and miners give gifts to satisfy the devil" (171–172). Michael Taussig explains the importance of these icons, even to modern-day miners: "they hold the power of life and death over the mines and the lives of miners, who conduct rites of sacrifice and gift exchange to the spirit represented by the icons" (Taussig 2010: 143). To the miners, these rites are essential to ensure their safety conditions and a continuation of the supply of tin (144). Like Oruro, Dargan suggests a sense of timelessness about the place. The sorting room is likened to a "witches hall", with *Cholas* and their white hats, "using their magic skill" to sort out the ore from the mines (Dargan 1950: 172). Even the physical terrain has a sense of the mystical, for Dargan. As she leaves Catavi for the city of Cuzco, she speeds across the depths of a ravine where the mountains are "crowned seemingly with mediaeval turrets and ancient fortress walls, but they were all merely freakish contortions of the Andes" (173). A lake appears flashing "the brilliant green of Irish grass under trees. As a result it looked positively uncanny" (173).



Fig. 6. In the Patino tin-mines (Photographer: Ena Dargan From: Dargan, Ena, *The Road To Cuzco: A Journey from Argentina to Peru* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1950.)

As she approaches Cuzco, she catches a glimpse of Lake Titicaca and the “slim, graceful boats the Indians make from the reeds that grow around its shores”, and wonders if the Incas would recognise the city of the sun, where only traces of the empire remain – in the residences which lie over the hills, in the nearby city of Machu Picchu (178–179). In Cuzco, once the social, political and intellectual centre of the Incan empire, there is much to see of the two traditions. The great cathedral, “the largest and most magnificent in South America”, is built upon the site of the Palace of Huiracocha Inca. The vast Plaza de Armas, with its colourful arcades and seventeenth-century houses, is a “gay motley of blue and coral and yellow and green, with wooden balconies of every known size and kind” (190–191). Both worlds are reflected in the architectures of the churches, in the palaces: “Over great nail-studded doors flanked with stone pillars are their coats-of-arms [*Conquistadores*] adorned many of them with busts of knights, lions’ heads, serpents, and exotic animals (Inca influence), monograms of the Virgin and emblems of the Passion” (202). What is left of these two civilisations lingers on the walls and in the foundations of the city, beside and beneath the remains of the viceregal town erected by the Spanish colonisers. The effect, according to Dargan, is a “jarring discord” (207).

Dargan’s reflection on the story of the Incas and the Spaniards – “all the failure, all the tragedy, all the glory of Spain’s conquest of Peru” – is a revealing document of its time and place. That Dargan took the opportunity to explore the complicated terrain, was, in the words of de Madariaga, “no small trouble” (7). Her experiences along the route, the retrieval of the long-lost manuscript, the hazardous territory, and the melting pot of refugees, scholars, artists and native Indians she met along the way, provide an interesting response to what she encountered. The text remains a testimony to her keen observations and courageous journey as an Irish woman travelling through the vast regions of Latin America to the “navel of the world”.

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Putumayo

David Lilburn¹

'Putumayo', drypoint, watercolour, Chine collé,

Abstract: The centenary of 1916 provided a moment for reconnecting with the fault lines of history. Roger Casement’s investigations of atrocities in the Amazon awakened the world to the savage potential of untrammelled capitalism. With “Putumayo”, the intention was to assemble some of the critical images from the tragedy underpinning the indigenous experience at the hands of savage capitalism. The notes, presented below, help explain the background to “Putumayo”, a unique print that was exhibited in the Royal Hibernian Academy Annual Exhibition 2016 and is now in a private collection.

1 David Lilburn is an Irish artist, printmaker and occasional publisher. He studied history at Trinity College Dublin, and art at the Scuole Istituto Statale D'Arte, Urbino, and Limerick School of Art and Design. He lives in Limerick. His work, including many public commissions, often involves the concept of 'mapping'. His print *"Farther Away and Nearer Still"* was commissioned for the *'1916 Ireland in Contemporary Art'* exhibition (2016). His latest series of prints *'Killaloe'* was launched at the Killaloe Chamber Music Festival in June 2017. For more on his current and previous projects, exhibitions and awards, please see: <http://www.davidlilburn.ie/>

*Pleasantries we exchange
over the wrapping of purchases
obscure the knowledge of causes:
no butcher without butchery.*

(“The Usurpers Habit”, Ciaran O’Driscoll, 2001)

‘Putumayo’ is a retelling of the story of Roger Casement’s work investigating the list of horrific abuses of the indigenous people by the corporations and their employees that controlled the rubber trade, specifically by the Peruvian Amazon Company (PAC). For centuries indigenous people had been forced into unpaid labor by waves of extractive business. The PAC became notorious because it was registered in Britain in 1908 and had a British board of directors and numerous stockholders benefitting from this savage form of capitalism, thereby directly implicating British individuals in this abusive system of resource extraction. The operation was directed by the rubber baron, Julio Cesar Arana, who exacted ruthless control over his workers, subjected them to near starvation, severe physical abuse, gratuitous murder and systematic violence that included the rape of women and children by the station managers. The American anthropologist, Michael Taussig (1986) coined the phrase ‘space of death’ to describe the arena of this extreme form of colonial capitalism that the communities of this area had to endure.

In recent years, some understanding of this appalling tragedy has started to re-emerge, especially among those communities who were devastated by this moment of violent invasion. After decades of silence, surviving members of the traumatised communities are starting to tell their ancestral stories as a way of drawing attention to the continuing cycles of exploitation that determine their daily lives. On the wall of the old rubber station in La Chorrera, in the very building where the PAC once had its headquarters, there is now this very graphic mural depicting the remembered past (See Fig. 1).

For several years I had been aware of this desperate tragedy that has such a powerful resonance for the Irish because of the intervention of the Irish revolutionary, Roger Casement. To mark the centenary of both his Amazon voyages in 1910 and 1911, and of the 1916 Rising, and as a way of recovering our connection to this tragedy, I charted the story as it appeared to me.



Fig. 1. Detail of the mural, *El Grito de los Hijos del Tabaco, la Coca y la Yuca Dulce* by Rember Yahuacarni, a painter and writer from the Huitoto community, a people whose cosmos was particularly devastated by the operations of the Peruvian Amazon Company (Yahuacarni 2014).

Using drawing, some collaged images and hand-written texts, the print highlights a list of elements which I associate with the story; thus, this piece creates a sort of simple map which alludes to imperial maps, and most notably ‘Imperial Federation – map of the world showing extent of the British Empire 1886’, which included decorative symbolic images of conquest. Imperial maps – such as this one – were instruments of power and control, facilitating the naming, abstraction and domination of those being mapped (See Fig. 2). Yet there are ever opportunities for counter-mapping, a process of developing alternative narratives and repositories of information and representation. Mapping is a way of talking, about places, stories and events. Maps, to paraphrase Jim Savage (2007), can operate through many ‘voices’: combining the diagrammatic with the pictorial, words with imagery, the idea of the expressive work of art with the idea of the scientific map; they can refer to the past, present and future; they can create fresh ways of seeing and provoke new meanings in contemporary debates.

Many of the issues highlighted by Roger Casement’s work in Putumayo – human rights abuses, cruelty and environmental degradation – are issues still relevant and urgent today. They include the struggle of the international Human Rights movement to end impunity for the perpetrators of human rights violations and the need to link environmental and human rights consequences in our understanding of the costs implicit in the production of goods and services in today’s global economy and the transnational supply chain.



Fig. 2. Imperial Federation League world map showing the full extent of the British Empire at the time published for the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in 1886. (Cornell University – PJ Mode Collection of Persuasive Cartography.)

Julio César Arana was never prosecuted. He moved effortlessly and luxuriously between his properties in London, Europe and South America. Despite the scandal associated with Casement's investigation, Arana went on to have a successful political career. He was elected a senator and died in Lima, Peru in 1952, aged 88.

Casement was hanged, aged 51, in Pentonville Prison in London on 3 August, 1916.

Included in the picture are:

- a 1966 Irish 5p stamp, commemorating Roger Casement
- a photograph of Julio Cesar Arana;
- a Peruvian stamp
- many images drawn from photographs taken at the time:
 - indigenous people chained together
 - the body of a young girl
 - the face of a young girl
 - Casa Arana, a company building
- a galleon
- a clown
- a journal
- A diagram of a section of the South American Continent and the Amazon River
- An early twentieth century motor car
- Images of indigenous people before the coming of the rubber company as imagined

by a nineteenth century European artist
The Union Jack
A pith helmet
Various symbols
Some text including:
The symbol for a battle, crossed swords, and 'the rubber trade' (reversed)
'The Putumayo atrocity'(reversed)

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Migrating Myths: From Greece to Nicaragua, Mexico and Ireland

Lorna Shaughnessy¹

Abstract: Michèle Najlis is a Nicaraguan poet associated with the Sandinista Revolution; her 1991 collection of poems *Cantos de Ifigenia* (*Songs of Iphigenia*) has had a deep and lasting impact on my academic and creative work. This article analyses the political context in which Najlis' poems were written, and examines how she deploys the mythical narrative of Iphigenia's sacrifice to communicate the mood of disillusionment and despair that followed the defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990 elections, particularly for women activists. It explores the ways in which this mythical narrative has served as a vehicle to explore themes such as war and betrayal, comparing Euripides' plays, *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, Najlis' *Cantos de Ifigenia*, and some of my own poetry and 2017 theatre piece, *The Sacrificial Wind*.

My interest in Greek mythology began in Managua, Nicaragua, in 1993. That year, I spent four months of a sabbatical in Mexico and Central America, reading and learning about literature written by women in the context of the Central American revolutions of the 1970s and 1980s. Peace processes or attempts at reconciliation were underway in Northern Ireland, Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador at the time, and I was interested in hearing the viewpoints of women activists and artists. A group of female poets closely associated with the Sandinista Revolution were of particular interest, among them Gioconda Belli, Vidaluz Meneses, Michèle Najlis and Daisy Zamora. In addition to their literary activities, they had all been active participants in the revolution and had held administrative posts under the Sandinista Governments of the 1980s. At the first *Congreso Internacional de Literatura Centroamericana* (International Conference of Central American Literature; CILCA) in Granada, Nicaragua, in February 1993, Najlis read from her collection of poems, *Cantos de Ifigenia* (*Songs of Iphigenia*) (Najlis 2015). She spoke memorably about feelings of personal and collective failure that dominated the mood in Nicaragua in the years following the electoral defeat of the last Sandinista Government in 1990. Najlis's poems express an acute awareness of the sacrifices made for the revolution, particularly by women. I was moved and intrigued by the ways in which she employed the figure of Iphigenia, the mythological princess of Argos, to embody those sacrifices.

I have always been fascinated by the question of where we write from. Early-life experiences can have an enormous impact on the choice of subject matter

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for any writer. I was a child when the ‘Troubles’ broke out in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s, and I lived there through the difficult years of the 1970s and 1980s. At no point in my life did I make a conscious decision to write about conflict, either in my poetry or academic research, but there is no denying its presence in both. It found ways of seeping into my work when I starting writing poetry in the late 1990s, perhaps because the Peace Process was under way at the time; perhaps because ten years of living outside the North had given me sufficient distance; or perhaps because becoming a parent impelled me to reflect on my childhood. The Troubles came into my work, then, in a variety of ways in different poems. Some were inspired by memories of personal or familial experiences. Others were more surprising. For example, I did not expect to find a connection between events in Northern Ireland and Greek tragedy. Twenty years ago I did not know very much about the classics, but in my quest for ways to write about public, social subjects, such as political violence or betrayal, I have found, like many writers before me, a rich source of metaphor in classical mythology.

A poem from my first collection that brings together politics and family relationships is ‘Antigone’. The poem is dedicated to Jean McConville, one of Northern Ireland’s ‘Disappeared’, who was abducted and shot by the Irish Republican Army (IRA), leaving ten children, most of whom were taken into care. At the time I wrote the poem, her eldest daughter was leading a campaign to find her mother’s body, and those of other members of the Disappeared. Her actions called to mind the mythical Antigone’s defiance of her uncle, King Creon, when she gives her dead brother the burial rights the King has forbidden.

Antigone

*You have dishonoured a
living soul with exile in the tomb. (Sophocles)*

In memoriam Jean McConville

The last time I saw you, daughter,
you were coming back from the shop;
you didn’t even drop the messages
and only broke into a run
after they bundled me into the car,
the shopping clutched to your breast.
Rumour seeps onto the streets
like poisonous gas, corrupting the dead.
My memory, buried alive,
scrapes at earth and stones
with nails that keep growing.
Alive and still unheeded,
your requests always untimely
in the ears of important men. Too young
you learned about the silence of the grave,
looking down for signs.

And my bones lit up the dark soil
 like a portentous constellation
 neither I nor my children can read.
 Antigone, speak to us now,
 raise your voice above
 the trite moralities of the Chorus.
 We know the price we have paid,
 can you tell us what it is
 we have bought?

(Shaughnessy 2008: 43)

Sophocles' *Antigone* is a play that has been used in many political contexts over the years to explore the nature of tyranny and resistance, including versions by: Jean Anouilh in Vichy France in 1944; Tom Paulin in Northern Ireland in 1995; Miro Galan in Croatia in 1990, to name but a few (Steiner 1984). In my academic work, I have become very interested in the potential of classical figures to act as archetypes of resistance and dissent. However, I am drawn more to the ambiguities of Euripides' characters than the certainties of those of Sophocles. Euripides' characters are much more slippery; they constantly shift position and it is difficult to pin down the playwright's own point of view. Having said that, *The Trojan Women* is a play that is today generally read as expressing anti-war sentiments, and many characters in his other plays oppose militarism. This is undoubtedly related to the fact that he lived through the protracted Peloponnesian Wars (431–404 BCE) and witnessed the decline of Athenian democracy in their wake. Indeed, there is a tradition that Euripides lived out the last years of his life in voluntary exile. In another poem from my first collection, I imagine him as a war-weary old man writing letters to the people of Athens from Macedonia. The young girl the poem alludes to is Iphigenia, the subject of the play written late in his life, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, which dramatizes the events leading up to King Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter to Artemis to gain favourable winds for the campaign in Troy.

The point I wish to make is that while the poem is not about me, or my experiences of living in a period of conflict, those experiences gave me a 'way in' to this subject matter; they meant that it was not difficult for me to imagine the perspective of an old man who had seen too much death, and who had grown tired of patriotic jingoism.

Euripides Writes to his Pupil from Exile in Macedonia...

Rain-sodden sparrows peck
 the last spilt seeds from my doorstep,
 my bones ache from the damp.
 I wish I could summon
 in my heart such courage
 as I penned in the young girl's mouth, who,
 knowing the winds would not change
 for any miracle or sacrificial blood,
 that men would set a thousand sails
 against their better senses,

laid bare her neck to the knife
and shamed the House of Atreus.

(Shaughnessy 2008: 44)

The sacrifice of Iphigenia as told by Euripides and many other artists is a profound example of the triumph of militarism over all other public and personal values. According to the myth, after Helen and Paris's departure for Troy, Helen's husband Menelaus persuades his brother Agamemnon to assist him in the pursuit of his rapt wife. The Greek nobility gather their fleet in Aulis, ready to set sail – not just to recover Helen, but to wage war on the wealthy city of Troy – when a stillness descends. Frustrated by the ongoing absence of wind and conscious of unrest among the troops who follow him in expectation of the rewards of victory, Agamemnon consults the Oracle. He learns that Artemis bears a grudge and will not send winds for his fleet unless he sacrifices a member of his own family, his eldest child, Iphigenia. In some versions of the myth, such as Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, the sacrifice is relayed in all its brutality, with a vivid description of the young girl being dragged to the altar screaming for her father's mercy. This is the version preferred by some contemporary authors and dramatists who wish to convey the shocking nature of Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice his own child to military ambition (Tóibín 2017). Analogies can be drawn between the story of Iphigenia, the decline of Sandinista ideology and the Sandinistas' electoral defeat of 1990. Two protagonists whose political leadership grew from their military roles in *Frente Sandinista para la Liberación Nacional* (Sandinista National Liberation Front; FSLN) were the Ortega brothers, Daniel and Humberto. Like the mythical brothers Menelaus and Agamemnon, the Ortegas contributed greatly to the domination of civic life by militarism. The Sandinista electoral campaign of 1990 highlighted Daniel Ortega's war record as he was characterised as the '*gallo*' or 'fighting cock', and the discourse of the party's campaign was relentlessly militaristic. Regardless of whether Ortega and his campaigners were aware of the degree of war-weariness in the country, or whether they genuinely believed that victory in the Contra War was possible, they failed to provide the kind of leadership that would win the 1990 elections.

Like Euripides' plays, Michèle Najlis's *Songs of Iphigenia* is critical of the glorification of war and the militarization of the state; the poems question the nature of ongoing, fruitless sacrifice, particularly in relation to the women's movement. Women's interests were promoted to an unprecedented degree by the Sandinista Governments of the 1980s. However, many feminist aspirations met insurmountable obstacles: the Contra War swallowed up much of the country's gross national product; and there was trenchant opposition from both the Catholic Church and sectors of the FSLN to social reforms that would penetrate the domain of the family. Analyses of political participation by Nicaraguan women in the revolutionary period have tended to place emphasis on economic participation as the exclusive marker of the extent and nature of Nicaraguan women's mobilisation in the late 1970s (Mason 1992; Reif 1986). I have argued elsewhere that other factors also contributed to the extraordinary radicalisation of women at this time (Shaughnessy 1995). One such factor that is fundamental to any understanding of Sandinista ideology is religion, as Catholic iconography informed many modes of political action and activism, particularly during the insurrection of the 1970s. *Sandinismo* tapped into two deeply rooted affirmations

of the value of self-sacrifice in the Catholic consciousness. The Christian narrative of collective redemption through individual, Messianic sacrifice had been deepened in the collective consciousness through Che Guevara's paradigm of the 'new man'. In addition, the association of self-sacrifice with motherhood was already deeply embedded in the population's psyche by centuries of Marian iconography.

Women had played key roles in the revolution, both as military participants and political activists, and expected to play a central rather than peripheral role in post-revolutionary Nicaragua. However, the need for ongoing self-sacrifice continued to be a dominant social message throughout the Contra War of the 1980s. Women were excluded from military participation in this war from 1983, but the ongoing practice of self-sacrifice by women – whether as activists, in Sandinista Government positions or in their own homes – comes under scrutiny in Najlis's use of the story of Iphigenia's sacrifice in her poems. The escalation of the Contra War in the 1980s made Nicaragua an increasingly militarised state, with 'the defence of the Revolution' its primary aim (Kapcia 1994). A combination of war-weariness, disillusionment and a sense of betrayal is captured by Najlis in her poems, as she questions the militarist imperative that again and again leads to sacrifice that brings little gain:

*¿Qué viento agita las velas de mis naves
Mil veces incendiadas y mil veces renacidas
En las playas de mi Troya invencible?*

(Najlis 2015: 110–111)

What wind stirs the sails of my ships
A thousand times burned and a thousand times reborn
On the shores of my invincible Troy?

In '*Ifigenia en Moriah*' the fact that the sacrificial victim is specifically feminine is clear in the gender concordance of 'todas' in the Spanish:

*Mis hermanas dijeron: 'Vemos el cuchillo
pero quién será el cordero?'
'Todas somos el cordero', contesté.*

(Najlis 2015: 124)

My sisters said: 'We see the fire and the knife
But who will be the lamb?'
'We are all the lamb', I replied.

And again in '*Canto sacrificial*' the sense of inevitable defeat by militarism is evoked using Iphigenia's sacrifice:

*Y pues no es mía la Gloria de Afrodita
saliendo de las aguas,
convídamme, Ifigenia, a tus bodas
rituales con la muerte
para que el viento sople –*

*uan vez más – las velas
de aquellos que nos inmolan.*

(Najlis 2015: 116)

Not for me the Glory of Venus
rising from the waves,
invite me, Iphigenia, to the rite
of your marriage to death
so the wind may blow
once again – the sails of those
who always put us to the torch.

Many rights and guarantees for women had been won under the Sandinista Governments of 1979–1990, but the militaristic power structure of a political party that had evolved from a guerrilla fighting force had the effect of silencing dissent. The Sandinista women’s organisation *Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza* (the Luisa Amanda Espinosa Association of Nicaraguan Women; AMNLAE) — named after the first female combatant to die in the guerrilla campaign against the dictator, Anastasio Somoza García — gradually lost touch with its base. In part this was due to the immediate demands of the war effort, but was also due to the blurring of party and state institutions. By the mid-1980s, far from feeding into the policies of the FSLN from the bottom up, AMNLAE had become another top-down party channel. Given the context of the Contra War, many women activists did not express publicly their criticisms of the party on this and other issues, for fear of appearing disloyal. However, the feelings of betrayal and disillusionment that contributed to the Sandinista’s defeat in the 1990 elections are captured in Najlis’s poems in the metaphor of Iphigenia’s fate. Lured to Aulis by her father, Agamemnon, with the promise of marriage to the hero Achilles and the beginning of a joyous new life, Iphigenia discovers when she arrives that this has all been a ruse, and that she will be sacrificed to aid the Greek campaign against Troy. Burdened by the responsibilities of becoming the head of the household in the absence of partners and fathers, and of work, activism and the grief of losing loved ones in a second decade of conflict, many Nicaraguan women shared the sense of despair expressed in Najlis’s lines: there seemed to be no end to sacrificial winds to fill the sails of armies, and no end to the ‘collateral damage’ they would cause.

Myths have a habit of migrating across time and space. Each myth houses its own set of archetypes that can be drawn upon when required. This is particularly true in what Paul Ricoeur has described as “boundary situations” such as war, when “the whole community is put into question”, a point I have considered elsewhere in relation to Najlis’s work (Ricoeur 1982; Shaughnessy 2012). For example, throughout the twentieth century, the story of Antigone was repeatedly employed as a political metaphor for resistance to authoritarianism. The story of Iphigenia, it appears to me, is often employed as a metaphor for collateral damage, the deaths of civilians (many of whom are women and children) in the interests of militarism. The seeds planted by reading Najlis’s *Songs of Iphigenia* in 1993 lay dormant for almost twenty years before they began to grow and bear fruit in my own poetry and academic

research. I have subsequently published work on Najlis's poetry (Shaughnessy 2012) and on the extraordinary poetic drama by Mexican writer Alfonso Reyes, *Ifigenia cruel* (*Cruel Iphigenia*) (Reyes 1959; Shaughnessy 2015a, 2017). I am fascinated by the political resonances of this myth for different writers at key political periods of transition or, to use Ricoeur's term, "boundary periods". Both these Nicaraguan and Mexican writers draw on the Iphigenia story in a post-revolutionary context. Both works display a rejection of militarism and the concept of military solutions to political problems; both reject the sacrifice of the most vulnerable (women and children) for the sake of military victory; both are infused by a sense of betrayal that is both individual and collective. My third collection of poems, *Anchored* (2015b) includes a section of poems entitled "The Injured Past" that revisit sectarian killings in mid-Ulster in the mid-1970s. The poems were inspired, in part, by the high quality of investigative journalism of the last decade and its revelations which had shocked me to a disturbing degree. I was shocked, not only by the hideous actions they revealed, but also by the fact they had remained hidden for so long. I deliberately placed this section next to my "Aulis Monologues", a series of dramatic monologues based on the sacrifice of Iphigenia, to stress the timeless nature of victimisation, political scapegoating and sacrifice. They are very deliberately positioned side by side, emphasising the continuing relevance of subjects such as betrayal and sacrifice in our political environment. Shortly after the book was launched, Galway-based director Max Hafler asked if I would expand on the monologues with a view to creating a stage performance. We worked with a cast of three on *The Sacrificial Wind* which was staged as part of the National University of Ireland, Galway, Arts in Action programme in November 2016 and the *Cúirt International Festival of Literature* in April 2017. The work is made up of a series of monologues by participants and witnesses to the sacrifice in Aulis. Here, two Greek foot soldiers give their perspective on the eve of the sacrifice:

- S1: Blame is a coin passed down from hand to hand:
 it starts off hidden in the fists of powerful men
 but like most things they want to be rid of
 it finds its way down here to the likes of us.
- S2: I'll give you an example. Helen takes off with Paris
- S1: - Good riddance I've heard some say –
- S2: But her husband, a powerful man, gathers the lords
 and all their ships, all prepared for war
 when out of nowhere an eerie stillness descends.
 We wait. Temperatures rise. We wait some more.
 Supplies run down. The men wager and squabble.
 Nature won't comply so Agamemnon sends Calchas
 to go find out the gods' true intentions.
 The priest comes back with sly and sinister counsel.
 Artemis bears a stubborn grudge, he says,
 there'll be no wind till Agamemnon pays a price
 with his own kin. I'll grant you

it's not a choice a man would ask to face,
but it was clear to all of us which way it would go.
Agamemnon was already itching to get out of Aulis,
in his own mind he'd waved to his family on the quayside,
he was miles out to sea and sailing for Troy.

- S1: Next thing, we hear the officers muttering -
'Years of loyal service ... No thanks ... Badmouthed
on the eve of a campaign', while Calchas drip-feeds
hints in high places, 'The men couldn't be trusted,
the anger meant for Troy could climax too soon,
all that frustration spurting out prematurely.
Who knows? They could even harm their own people.'
As if we couldn't tell friend from foe.
- S2: In the end it wasn't us who harmed our own.
Agamemnon had to pass on the blame,
couldn't be seen to make a free choice,
couldn't shoulder the guilt for his daughter's death.
- S1: So the coin passed down, hand to hand.
It was tarnished by the time it came to us,
the rank and file. It always is.
It turned our fingers black.

(Shaughnessy 2015b: 46)

Following Euripides' lead, I try to expose the gap between the professed aims of the Greek campaign against Troy (the preservation of Greek culture and its political system from destruction at the hands of barbarians), and the real motives driving it, whether conscious or not: the quest for power. The choice of form, where each character addresses the audience directly, giving their perspective on the events at Aulis, encourages a sense of audience involvement as we too become witnesses and onlookers. Our role in Iphigenia's sacrifice is argued forcefully by Agamemnon, who takes issue with his negative characterisation by Euripides:

Magic or moral high ground?
Time the playwright made up his mind.
He wants to keep the crowd happy
and still make them think, so he knocks them out
with his gimmicky goddess and expects them
to go home debating the deeper moral lesson of the tale.
He dresses me up as the villain of the piece
who slays his own child for blind ambition.
Not so blind. I've seen more blood than I'd like
but try as he might with his weasel words
to make the you hate me, you understand
what it is I have to do.
You know what happens to a conquered people
and you don't want it for your own.

So Calchas comes up with the perfect plan
that lets you off the hook: I let my child die
so you don't have to.

Child-killer?

You all know that and still you play along,
wave me off to war from the harbour wall,
me and every other soldier Greece will spew out
on seas, on plains and onto the pages of plays;
anything to keep the barbarian at bay.

(Shaughnessy 2015b: 56)

These final lines have gained a renewed resonance in the context of the recent migrant crisis in the Mediterranean. Like Euripides, Najlis and Reyes, I follow the version of the myth where Artemis intervenes and Iphigenia survives. But for what kind of life? The goddess transports her to Tauris, a strange country where she has no family and no history. Her memories are of a father and society that betrayed and chose to sacrifice her for the sake of military expansionism. There are survivors of violence and trauma the world over who live in a similar hell; not all survivors achieve peace. I have tried to capture something of the dilemma of migrants and refugees in Iphigenia's monologue from Tauris:

I miss my home. Thoughts of it bring a pain
that cuts deeper than the sacrificial blade.
I swallow back the bile that rises
when I think of Agamemnon, blink away
scalding tears when I recall my mother's face.
In my mind's eye I try to see only my home:
no family, no servants, no friends.
I walk through the empty rooms and courtyards
and touch each blessed object as I go:
the squeaking hinge of my bedroom door,
the little pewter cup cook used to give me
when I slipped into the kitchen
after quarrels with my sisters.

I don't understand what the birds are singing in this place,
I don't know what it is they are saying to me
and not one of them comes to my doorstep
when I scatter crumbs.
They will not share the little I have to offer.

The pictures of home in my mind will fade
and I don't know if that is good or bad.
I don't know if I want to hold onto them,
if they are the truth or a lie.

(Shaughnessy *The Sacrificial Wind*, unpublished)

Underlying these lines is another dilemma of our times: what do we expect the survivors of violence to do with their memories? Forget them? Or remember them? Sometimes survival is not enough.

Mythical narratives have the capacity to communicate traumatic experiences with emotive power and immediacy. They do not seek to create coherent argument; analyses will follow, after the story has been retold. In my creative and academic writing, I have discovered that there is pleasure and learning to be extracted from both processes: participating in the ongoing evolution of the tale as a writer, and interrogating its relevance to the world we live in today as an academic. In *The Sacrificial Wind*, Euripides explains to the audience the quandary he faces in writing his play, *Iphigenia in Aulis*:

Is there a right ending for a story like this?
Either way she's a slave to someone else's will,
a young girl, barely visible
in the bigger schemes dreamed up by gods or men.

(Shaughnessy, *The Sacrificial Wind*, unpublished)

The last lines in the play are his. Curiously, I found them in the poem I had written ten years previously “Euripides writes to his pupil from exile in Macedonia”. They invite the audience to find its own retellings of the myth of Iphigenia, and its own interpretations.

This war has lodged itself
in my memory and in my lungs
and nothing I write seems to dock
in the safe harbour of conclusion.
Take this sad tale where you will,
raise its anchor from my heart
and cast it adrift. Clouds
darken the horizon.

(Shaughnessy 2008: 44)

It is a dark ending. In hindsight, I suspect my fictionalised version of Euripides may be speaking for me when he poses the question: “Is there a right ending for a story like this?” I struggled to find the right tone, the right note, not wanting to gloss the tale with false hope, but rather to challenge the audience to reflect on the ongoing relevance of Iphigenia’s sacrifice and our part, as citizens of a *polis* in it. In this respect, Najlis’s poems are possibly truer to the spirit of Euripides than mine. Like Euripides, she acknowledges the horror and brutality of war, the collateral damage of the sacrifice of civilian lives, but like Euripides, she leaves space for forgiveness and reconciliation. In his play, *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, the tragedian dramatises the touching reunion of Iphigenia and her brother Orestes in Tauris. Iphigenia has been delivered from the sacrificial altar by Artemis but now she must serve the goddess as her sacrificial priestess and oversee the human sacrifice of any foreigners who intrude on the shores of Tauris. However, when her brother Orestes and his companion Pylades are brought to her to be sacrificed, she tricks the Taurian

king and they escape. Just as she was spared the sacrificial knife, she now spares her brother. Such is the constancy of her love of family that she is prepared to forgive the unforgiveable, and return to what remains of a dynasty and society that was prepared to sacrifice her in the pursuit of power and wealth.

*Ifigenia, en Táuride, seguirá salvando
fieramente a los que ama,
aunque de nuevo
setenta veces siete, ponga su blanco cuello
en el altar del sacrificio*

(Najlis 2015: 121)

Iphigenia, in Tauris, fiercely continues
to save those she loves,
even if again
seventy times seven, she will place her white neck
on the sacrificial altar.

However, unlike Euripides, Najlis does not present Orestes and Pylades' return to Greece as a happily-ever-after ending. The implication of the poem seems to be that while forgiveness is possible, there is no escaping self-sacrifice. Or perhaps, that love, by definition, will always demand it.

The myth of Iphigenia's sacrifice gives Najlis, like many writers the world over, a narrative structure within which to explore the complexities and dynamics of sacrifice in all of our lives, whether as members of families, communities or nations. It is a myth that seems particularly suited to the nature of warfare in our times, where the advanced technology of weaponry keeps civilian and military victims at a safe, anonymous distance. The Greek tragedians understood the power of bringing public issues home into the intimate and domestic environment; all of their kings and heroes are undone by family dynamics. For countries such as Nicaragua, Mexico and Ireland, countries that lived through internal conflict in the twentieth century, these tragedies continue to touch a raw nerve. I met Michèle Najlis in February 2017, when I returned to Nicaragua after twenty-four years. We had exchanged a few e-mails in the intervening years, and I had sent her the work I had published on her *Songs of Iphigenia*. The depth of feeling and communication that was instantly reignited between us when we met again is difficult to rationalise. I have no doubt it has much to do with our shared experiences of having lived through a period of protracted political conflict and our obsessive need to keep analysing this, as well as our endeavours as writers to not only communicate but in some way to transform those experiences. We both live in post-conflict countries that have not entered into formal processes for justice and reconciliation; deeply divided countries that are still haunted by past mistakes and injustices. Sadly, if Euripides' Iphigenia plays offer a glimpse of a world where forgiveness and divine intervention can lead to reconciliation and peace, our Nicaraguan and Irish Iphigenias suggest that although we may forgive and be forgiven, we still inhabit a political world that is prepared, consciously or not,

to sacrifice its children in order to justify its prevailing ideologies, and to present the ideologies and belief systems of others as 'barbarian'.

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A Blackthorn Stick for Borges: Reflections on *The Crane Bag*, Special Issue on Ireland and Latin America (1982)

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Abstract: Ronan Sheehan revisits his editing of a special issue of *The Crane Bag* (1982) on Ireland and Latin America. Beginning with his introduction to Spanish culture at school and his memories of football matches with Latin American Jesuit seminarians, he recalls the intellectual concerns that underpinned the issue which concentrated on the Theology of Liberation, Paolo Freire's educational praxis, contemporary politics and literature. Two personal memories are recounted: Nuala McCullough's recollections of Amando Lopez SJ (later martyred in El Salvador) and Sheehan's memory of his meeting with Jorge Luis Borges on Bloomsday, 1982.

My introduction to Latin America happened at school in the 1960s. Fr. Stephen Redmond SJ's course in Church History featured an account of the *Reducciones*, the mission his order had established in Paraguay in the eighteenth century. Gonzaga College SJ in Ranelagh adjoined Milltown Park, the Jesuit House of Studies, in Dublin, which in those days attracted a throng of students from different countries including many from Latin America. A corps of us teenagers drifted to the football pitches after classes to play soccer. The players were drawn from families who lived within walking distance of the school: us (the Sheehans), the O'Buachallas, the Feeneys, the Candys, the de Bhaldraithes, the McCulloughs, the Kennys and so on. Every so often we were invited to our neighbours pitch for a challenge match. On the Milltown Park side, Latin American students were to the fore-but there were Africans, Asians, Irish, and Europeans too. Contesting midfield with a Jesuit Pele was not easy. Sometimes our opponents communicated with one another in Latin. One phrase echoes down the years: "Da mihi pilum! Da mihi pilum! Give me the ball! Give me the ball!"

Joseph Veale SJ taught English, Religious Knowledge and Debating at Gonzaga in my time. To quote Bobby McDonagh (2017), the author of his entry in the *Dictionary of Irish National Biography* (DINB), "he was central to the

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conception and development of Gonzaga College as a school with exceptional academic standards, in which the emphasis, in practice as well as theory, was on education and expression rather than on examinations". Veale's article "Men Speechless" (1957) articulates his philosophy of education and constituted an important intervention at that time. To quote again from the entry in the DINB, Veale was "a teacher of exceptional insight, ability and dedication" and one whose "rare understanding of language, and his skill in using it, equipped a great many of his pupils with a greater ability than they could otherwise have had to analyse the spoken and written word, to evaluate ideas, and to express their thoughts effectively" (McDonagh 2017).

A key element in the strategy was that we should sit the Matriculation Examination in fifth year, leaving sixth year open to a range of possibilities. That era preceded the present era of the points system which determines entry to the university. In 1970/71, in sixth year, I opted for Spanish with John Wilson from whom I had previously learned Latin and Greek. John was an inspirational figure. He had played in goal for Cavan in the Polo Grounds, New York, in the 1949 All-Ireland winning team. In 1969, at the final Fianna Fáil election rally in O'Connell Street, Dublin, I had been amused to find my classics teacher acting as a kind of bouncer-or bodyguard-for Charles Haughey, Minister for Finance and star of the cabinet. John was first cousin of the West-Belfast priest, Des Wilson. The first couple of Spanish classes were taken up with his account of the loyalist attack on the Falls Road in West Belfast the previous summer.

Then it was over to Federico Garcia Lorca and the Spanish Civil War. John set me the task of translating a lyric of Lorca's which presaged the poet's own death at the hands of the Fascists:

Cancion de Jinete (Lorca 2001)

*Cordoba,
Lejana y sola*

*Jaca negra, luna roja
y aceitunas en my alforca
aunque saepe los caminos
Yo nunca llegare a Cordoba*

Song of the horseman,

Cordoba
Distant, solitary

Black horse, red moon
And olives in my saddle-bag
Although I know the roads
I will never reach Cordoba

The sinister, haunted mood goes a stage further in "Romance de la Guardia Civil Espanola" or "Ballad of The Civil Guard":

*Los caballos negros son,
Las herraduras son negras
Haben, por eso no lloran,
de plomo las calaveras*

Their horses are black
Their saddles are black
They have, which is why they do not weep,
Souls of leather

(Lorca 2001)

In June 1971 I left Gonzaga College, with Lorca planted firmly in my heart.

In 1975 I completed a BA degree in English and Latin at UCD, having published some short stories and reviews in *The Irish Press* and the college magazines. I teamed up with the group of young writers who formed *The Irish Writers' Co-operative*: Des Hogan, Neil Jordan, Fred Johnston, Steve McDonagh, and Peter Sheridan. Neil played saxophone in a band and he introduced me to the music of Bob Marley of Jamaica with his own version of “No Woman No Cry” (Bob Marley and the Wailers, 1973). And he introduced me to Latin American literature proper by lending me his copy of Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. I was enchanted by the stories of the several generations of the Buendia family and their magical-realist Colombian world.

At the same time I studied to be a solicitor and worked as an apprentice to my father. I met Bill Graham, the *Hot Press* journalist, who is believed to have brought U2 and manager Paul McGuinness together. I did some small piece of law work for Bill (now sadly deceased) and in return he offered me a ticket to the Bob Marley concert in Dalymount Park, Dublin, on, I think, September 1st 1980. Everybody danced. Everybody sang the songs. A Hailie Selassie banner dominated the stage. Bob Marley had an authentic spiritual power that seemed to well upwards from the soles of his naked feet. When he uttered phrases like “You can fool some of the people some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time”, he said it with a simple conviction and insight as if he had invented the line himself. It was as if you were listening to a disciple of Jesus – one who had walked with Jesus himself just yesterday.

I tried to put together a collection of short-stories. I read and reread the stories of Borges, the Argentinian master, whose metaphysical tales defy conventional literary analysis. Some stories, for example “The Theme of the Hero and the Traitor”, offered Irish connections (Borges 1944). More so his essay “The Argentine Writer And Tradition” in which Borges draws an analogy between the situation of Argentine writers – outside the mainstream of Spanish literature – and Irish writers, outside the mainstream of English literature (1951). At the start of his career he had wanted to produce emphatically Argentine literature. He dwelt upon the romantic, prairie experience of the gauchos and the colourful argot of the street people of Buenos Aires. It didn’t work. What it amounted to was tourist literature. The identity of Argentinians

should be expressed in terms of their universal experience: the manner of their living, loving, dying.

Neil Jordan's first book appeared in 1976. It was a short-story collection entitled *Night in Tunisia* which I am pleased to say I had a hand in publishing through *The Writers' Co-op*. Some people objected that he was getting rid of the Irish out of Irish culture. The title story is about a father-son relationship. Jazz, specifically Charlie Parker's classic "Night In Tunisia", is the motif which expresses the father's bringing forward of the son. A universal. Neil Jordan was thinking along the same lines as Borges.

I was fascinated by Mario Vargas Llosa's novel *Aunt Julia and The Scriptwriter* and its complex narrative structure (1976). A student in Lima (like myself, a law-student) gets work on a commercial radio station producing soap-operas. Aunt Julia, recently divorced, comes to stay with his family and he falls in love with her. The radio-station hires Pedro Camacho, a veteran scriptwriter, to help out with storylines. Every second chapter of the novel tells a story which appears to be quite unrelated to the main narrative which concerns the student and his effort to seduce Aunt Julia. All narratives converge towards the end. You realize that every second chapter is a story by Pedro Camacho.

I may have discovered Mario Vargas Llosa through reading a review of one of his books. Or it may have been through Neil. Forty years on, I'm not certain. But I am pretty sure that Neil was reading "Explosion in a Cathedral" (1972) or "The Lost Steps" (1998) by the great Cuban novelist, essayist and musicologist Alejo Carpentier before I read his "The Kingdom of this World" (1957). This describes the slave revolt in Haiti in 1796, so near and yet so far from the United Irish revolt of 1798.

The conventional novels of Europe and North America of the nineteenth century and of today offer characters who have a position in a well-defined society who progress through space and time in a linear fashion. Like many of their Latin American counterparts, many Irish people's experience is that of a colonized or post-colonialist world in which one's experience of life may not validly be expressed in terms of a linear progression through time and space within the parameters of a well-defined society. Thus the magical-realism of García Márquez, the multiple narratives of Vargas Llosa, the profound culture clash of Carpentier (French rationalism versus African animism) may all or each echo in the Irish psyche in ways in which the works of Anthony Trollope or Henry James might not. Thus Latin American literature may offer the Irish reader the delight of surveying a new territory, as it were, and also the prospect of surveying the old territory from a new perspective.

About 1976 my friend Richard Kearney returned to Dublin from postgraduate studies in Montreal and Paris determined that Ireland should have a cultural and political journal along the lines of the French journal *L'Esprit*. Mark Patrick Hederman OSB, Richard's mentor at Glenstal, became co-editor. I and five or six others formed an editorial board. As the project advanced at the rate of two substantial issues a year, beginning in 1977, writers, academics, journalists, politicians and artists came to support it.

The Crane Bag received a grant from the Arts Council of the Republic of Ireland and sponsorship, often intermittent, from various other sources. This covered the printer's bill and perhaps the cost of launching an issue. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland withdrew its grant when we published an interview with Seamus Twomey, then chief-of-staff of the Provisional IRA (Hederman, 1977). We had no money to pay contributors. The obvious limitations imposed by this factor were offset to some degree by the modest success which the journal obtained early on. It became a point of reference for Irish Studies throughout the world. The Department of Foreign Affairs promoted it in its embassies. Launches of particular issues might attract generous coverage in the newspapers. Frequently, columnists responded to the essays we published.

After ten issues – one hundred articles about Irish culture and politics – it was time to try something new. Richard supported my idea to bring out an issue about Latin America. The object would be to gain an insight into an aspect of the Latin American dynamic – one with an Irish inflection. Two currents of this excited me.

Firstly, the Theology of Liberation often expressed as the Catholic Church's option for the poor, meaning its choice to identify with the poor and their struggle. Secondly, Paolo Freire's praxis in education as articulated in his classic work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. At the core of this was the concept of "conscientization", meaning the development of a critical political awareness in tandem with literacy. In other words, a pedagogy of liberation.

In penal times in Ireland the Catholic Church had been committed to the cause of the Irish poor. In more recent times, some Irish priests had been involved with the political efforts of working class people, like the Jesuit Fr. Smyth who had supported the Dublin Housing Action Committee which I had been involved with in the late 1960s; or Fr. Eamon Casey who had worked for Irish emigrants in Britain seeking housing and employment. Paolo Freire's object to foster critical thinking through literacy in the South American masses echoed Fr. Veale's object of developing critical independence through teaching rhetoric in Gonzaga College. Both systems aimed to foster independent minds.

The Latin American issue benefitted from the work of Peadar Kirby, then writing for the *Irish Times*. He interviewed Helder Camara, Archbishop of Recife, who was closely identified with the Theology of Liberation. He contributed an essay which considered the lessons which the Irish church might draw from Latin America. He interviewed Paolo Freire. The issue opens with an essay by Peadar which describes the atrocious violence suffered by Rigoberta Menchu of Guatemala who some time later was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace.²

² From the Latin-American Issue *The Crane Bag* (1982) came the following four contributions from Peadar Kirby: a) "A Guatemalan peasant woman tells her story"; (1982: 4-6), b) "Interview with Archbishop Helder Camara of Recife and Olinda Brazil"; (1982: 24-27) c) "The Latin American Church: Lessons for Ireland"; (1982: 35-44) d) "Interview with Paolo Freire" (1982: 45-48).

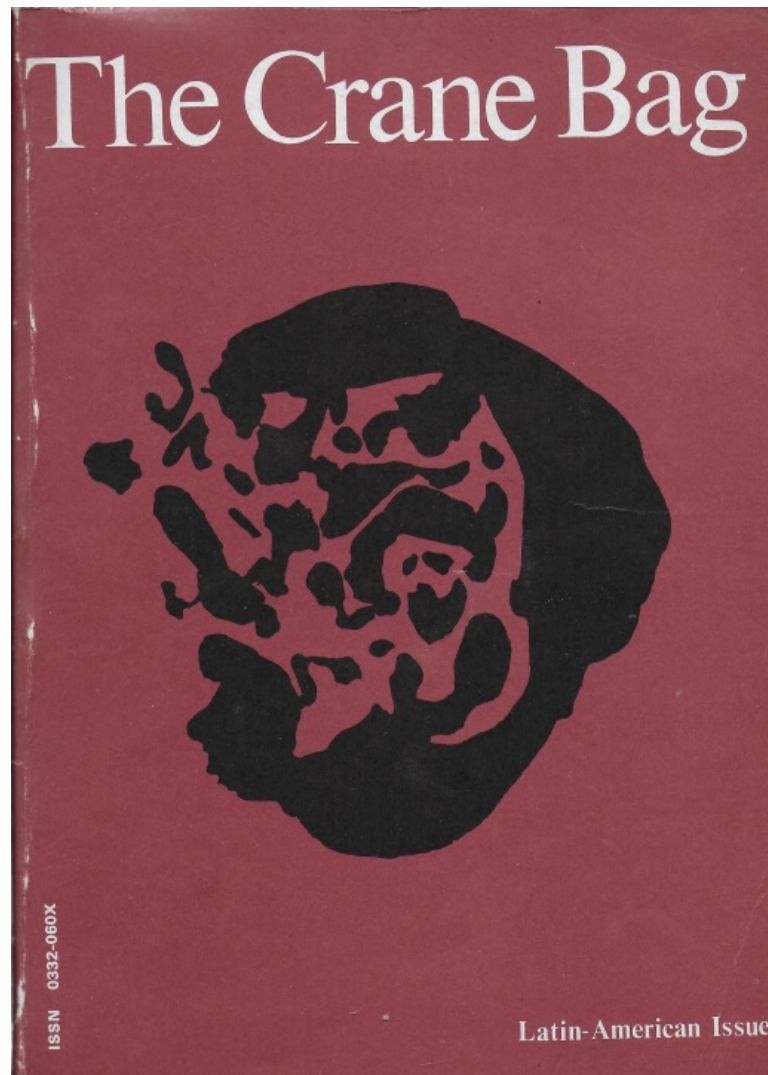


Fig. 1. Front cover of the special issue on Latin America of *The Crane Bag* (1982)

I interviewed Paddy Dundon, a Holy Ghost father (Sheehan 1982). He described his work in the towns and cities of Brazil and then in rural areas. He first associated with the well-off people, then with the poor. Being with the poor meant suffering with the poor: for Paddy, that was the starting point of the Theology of Liberation. It meant learning hospitality, openness, endurance, hope: all of these, plus Marxist economic analysis. In the vast, ever-expanding urban sprawl that was São Paulo, the traditional concept of the parish was outmoded. At that time, people came together to form small basic Christian communities. The priest helped the people in their struggle to survive – asking the mayor for water, for example. “You don’t start with a theory”, he said. “You do something and you reflect on it and then you go on again. You make your mistakes and you try to correct them. There must be presuppositions that are there undeniably. But you don’t start by saying I have truth. You’re working towards the truth. And sometimes you got clobbered” (Dundon, cited in Sheehan 1982: 29).

Fr. Joseph Stephen O’Leary of Cork, theologian, and diocesan priest, considered the challenge which the Theology of Liberation offered to Ireland

(O’Leary 1982). He argued that a stranger to the Latin American context could not understand the meaning of the Gospel for grassroots communities in their struggle for justice. One had to find an equivalent horizon in one’s own culture. The Theology of Liberation sent shivers down the spine of conventional theologians in the European and American academies who were accused of not taking the gospel seriously enough. No significant current of similar self-awareness had flowed in Ireland in the wake of the Vatican Council. The petrified power-structures which had refused the laity any effective voice in the affairs of the church had persisted. Yet the charisms of the Irish laity were still there, he wrote. Latin America hinted at how the shape of the Christian project might emerge. The word was a talent to be invested, a seed to be planted. Liberation Theology had suggested what was possible in Latin America. Who knew what it might have produced in Ireland?

Sally O’Neill of Trócaire (the official overseas development agency of the Catholic Church in Ireland) had been involved in a Paolo Freire-style conscientization project in Honduras. In the early 1970s she had been a nutrition educator. She had experienced the “extreme difficulties of implementing education for political action” in a country “where economic and social policies are explicitly directed towards the maintenance of the status quo” (1982: 49). O’Neill explained how state policies had included atrocious levels of repression and outright murder. She described how it had been a search for answers as to how to approach adult education in rural communities, blighted with understandably fatalistic attitudes, which led a team of Honduran women to Paolo Freire in 1971. Within six years they had built up a mass-movement of rural women whose level of organization and whose demands and concrete activities for change were to make a profound impact not only on their village communities but also on national institutions. To begin with, the group realised that only a village elite benefitted from the technical information provided by the state. So they gathered people who were representative of the poor. According to Sally O’Neill, on the first day of their leadership training-course, these women were incapable of lifting their eyes from the floor to report their own names. Within three months, using Freire’s method, these fifty women were literate and able to identify concrete situations of need and to articulate them. O’Neill’s piece, aptly entitled “Creating Critical Consciousness in Honduras” powerfully described Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed in action.

The importance and influence of Paolo Freire’s work was re-stated in three further contributions.³ Fernando Cardenal, Nicaragua’s Minister for Education, and Valerie Millar describe how Freire’s vision had been central to the revolution there. A massive literacy drive had been launched among the population (1982: 64-70). Also, within this issue, Mark Patrick Hederman (1982: 58-63) and Paddy Quinn (1982: 53-57) contributed Irish responses to *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, to detail which is unfortunately beyond the scope of the present essay. In addition to what I have already mentioned, in the opening section, Dermot Keogh wrote of peasant revolt in Guatemala in the

³ The in-text citations in the following three paragraphs refer to the contributions to *The Crane Bag* special issue on Ireland and Latin America (1982). Full titles for each contribution and authors are presented in Fig. 2, a screenshot of the issue’s contents page.

1930s (1982: 7-14). Colm Regan contributed an essay about the then influential Latin American economic theory – Dependency Theory – and its relevance to Ireland (1982: 15-20).

The literature section was the largest section in the issue. It comprised eight essays and the transcript of a discussion involving Richard Kearney, Jorge Luis Borges and Seamus Heaney (1982: 71-78). The encounter occurred in Richard's house in Donnybrook, Dublin on Bloomsday, the 16th June 1982. This was the centenary year of Joyce's birth and this Bloomsday was a festive day in Dublin. Borges had been the first to translate Joyce into Spanish. In addition to the discussion transcript, there was an essay about Borges by Arminta Wallace (1982: 79-83).

Contents	
A Guatemalan Peasant Woman tells her Story, <i>Peadar Kirby</i>	4
El Salvador 1932. Peasant Revolt and Massacre, <i>Dermot Keogh</i>	7
Latin American Dependency Theory and its Relevance to Ireland, <i>Colm Regan</i>	15
Statement delivered by Permanent Representative of Ireland in the Security Council on the Complaint by Nicaragua, <i>H.E. Mr. Noel Dorr</i>	21
<i>Theology of Liberation</i>	
Interview with Archbishop Helder Camara of Recife and Olinda, Brazil, <i>Peadar Kirby</i>	24
Interview with Paddy Dundon, <i>Ronan Sheehan</i>	28
Latin America's Theological Challenge, <i>Joseph Stephen O'Leary</i>	31
The Latin American Church: Lessons for Ireland, <i>Peadar Kirby</i>	35
<i>Education: The Work of Paulo Freire</i>	
Interview with Paulo Freire, <i>Peadar Kirby</i>	45
Creating Critical Consciousness in Honduras, <i>Sally O'Neill</i>	49
Education and the Transformation of Society, <i>Patrick Quinn</i>	53
Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, <i>Mark Patrick Hederman</i>	58
Nicaragua: Literacy and Revolution, <i>Fernando Cardenal and Valerie Miller</i>	64
<i>Literature</i>	
Borges and the World of Fiction, An Interview with Jorge Luis Borges, <i>Seamus Heaney and Richard Kearney</i>	71
Who is this Averroes Person and Where has he Gone? <i>Arminta Wallace</i>	79
James Joyce and the Spanish American Novel: A Preliminary Study, <i>Robin Fiddian</i>	84
Life Scripts — Aspects of the Maya in the work of Ernesto Cardenal and William S. Burroughs, <i>John Lyons</i>	89
Octavio Paz: Poet of the Stratosphere, <i>Ciaran Cosgrove</i>	97
The Earlier Novels of Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru, 1936-), <i>Teresa Thornhill</i>	102
A Note on Cesar Vallejo, <i>Clare McNamara</i>	106
The Theme of the Double: An Essential Element Throughout Garcia Márquez Works <i>S. Meckled</i>	108
Chile: The Culture of Resistance, <i>Manuel Riquelme</i>	118
<i>Response to 'Arts in Ireland' issue</i>	
Attitudes to the Visual Arts in Northern Ireland, <i>Slavka Sverakova</i>	122
Interview with James Coleman, <i>Richard Kearney</i>	127
Teaching Literature in Ireland Today, <i>Dermot Moran</i>	133
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Fig. 2. Contents page of the special issue on Ireland and Latin America of *The Crane Bag* (1982)

We published an essay by Robin Fiddian called “A Preliminary Study of Joyce’s Influence upon the Latin American Novel”, in which are mentioned Borges (Argentina), Octavio Paz (Mexico) Julio Cortázar (Argentina), José Lezama Lima (Cuba), Augustin Young (Mexico), Carlos Fuentes (Mexico) Guillermo Cabrera Infante (Cuba), and Fernando del Paso (Mexico) (1982: 84-88). There was an appraisal of aspects of Mayan culture in the writing of Ernesto Cardenal and William Burroughs (USA) by John Lyons (1982: 89-96). Ciaran Cosgrove of TCD wrote about the Mexican poet, Octavio Paz (1982: 97-101). Clare McNamara wrote about the poet César Vallejo (Peru), whose poem “Los Nueve Monstruos” President Higgins quoted in a recent speech in Lima (1982: 106-107).⁴ “The theme of the double” in the fiction of Gabriel García Márquez was discussed by Stephen Meckled of the University of Essex (1982: 108-117). The by then considerable Chilean refugee community in Ireland was represented by Manuel Riquelme whose essay “Chile: The Culture of Resistance” was illustrated by Ger O’Leary and translated by Eanna O’Broin and my sister Cathy Molloy (1982: 118-121). Teresa Thornhill considered the fiction of Mario Vargas Llosa (1982: 102-105).

In a brief editorial (See Fig. 3), I highlighted how “the Latin American experience demonstrates that it is helpful to consider culture in its broadest terms” (1982: 2). I stressed that the murder of Oscar Romero had made a strong impact in Ireland, not least because the event was covered by our own journalists: Anne Daly of RTE and Peadar Kirby of *The Irish Times*. I quoted Pablo Neruda’s famous poem “I am explaining a few things” about making the transition from a poetry that was romantic, nature and landscape-rooted to one that was politically engaged:

*Venid a ver la sangre
por las calles*

Come and see the blood
On the streets

(Neruda 1979)

Around this time, George Schulz, Ronald Reagan’s Secretary of State, visited Ireland. At UCD, Richard showed him the Latin American issue of *The Crane Bag*. He read the first few sentences of the editorial then pushed the issue aside in disgust.⁵ Some considerable time afterwards I travelled to Belfast to hear Mario Vargas Llosa read from his work. I presented him with a copy of the issue, hoping he might mention it somewhere. He never made any remark whatsoever, ever. Complete silence. I did not then know about his notorious rupture from García Márquez over Cuba. He would not have shared the views expressed in the editorial.

⁴ This speech is quoted in full in this current issue (pp. 72-86).

⁵ As recounted by Richard Kearney in conversation with Ronan Sheehan c. 1984.

Preface

In this issue *The Crane Bag* begins to look outside Ireland, a development we shall continue with our next issue "Socialism and Culture". In the past people have queried the inclusion in a cultural review of material that does not deal directly with poetry, fiction, painting, film or whatever. The Latin American experience demonstrates that it is helpful to consider culture in the broadest terms. Take the case of the celebrated Nicaraguan poet, Ernesto Cardenal. He is a priest, also a government minister. He played a part in the Sandinista revolution, formerly he founded and lived in a commune at Solentiname, a radical experiment in Christian living. His life and work, including of course his poetry, integrate matters we here consider under separate headings: literature, politics, education, theology and economics.

The murder of Oscar Romero made strong impact upon the consciousness of the Irish people. That impact was due in part to the fact that we had excellent coverage of the event from our own sources: the Radharc television crew, Anne Daly of R.T.E. and Peadar Kirby of *The Irish Times*. In communicating the nature of the conflict in El Salvador, their reports highlighted the work of Irish missionaries and of Trocaire, the third-world relief organisation. Since our own people and institutions are involved there, the El Salvador issue cannot be for us as remote as, say, Vietnam or Afghanistan. Our government supports the Franco-Mexican line rather than the American one. Bishop Eamonn Casey has publicly urged that we cut diplomatic relations with the U.S.A. while that country abets the slaughter of the poor. This is an unprecedented stand for a member of the Irish hierarchy to adopt. Taken together, these factors portend an ever-increasing Irish awareness, not just of El Salvador, but of the continent. We hope that this issue of *The Crane Bag* can serve that awareness.

The dominant political features of Latin America — the military governments, the wealthy elites, the repressed and impoverished masses — are in the main familiar. What may not be so familiar, and what the articles published here I think demonstrate, is that the repression of so many millions of people has been the source of the new and exciting developments in theology, economics, education and, largely though by no means exclusively, literature. The career of Oscar Romero, beginning as the private, almost aloof minister of orthodox devotionism and ending as outspoken critic of oppression and injustice, was foreshadowed by the career of the great Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. The early poetry of Neruda had to do with, in his own words "lilacs/and poppy-petalled metaphysics/and the rain repeatedly splattering/its words and drilling them full/of apertures and birds."¹ The Spanish Civil War moved him to join the Communist Party and become a poet who sought to address and articulate a public consciousness:

"And you will ask: why doesn't his poetry
Speak of dreams and leaves
And the great volcanoes of his native land?

Come and see the blood in the streets
Come and see
The blood in the streets
Come and see the blood
In the streets".²

Ronan Sheehan.

NOTES

1. Pablo Neruda. *I'm explaining a few things*. Trns. Nathaniel Tarn.
2. Op. Cit.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Versions of the interview with Freire and the article on the literacy campaign in Nicaragua have already appeared in *The Irish Times* and *Ramparts* respectively. They are reproduced here by permission of the authors. I would like to thank Ciaran Cosgrove, Peadar Kirby, Sally O'Neill and Ger O'Leary for their invaluable assistance in the compilation of this issue.

Fig. 3. Preface to the special issue on Ireland and Latin America of *The Crane Bag* (1982)

In 1989, six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her sixteen-year old daughter were murdered by Salvadorian army soldiers at their residence on the campus of José Simeon Canas, the Central American University (UCA El Salvador) in San Salvador. The soldiers involved were members of the Atlacatl Battalion, a rapid response counter-insurgency force created in 1980 at the US Army's School of the Americas, then located in Panama. The *New York Times* described the murdered priests as "leftist intellectuals". Their names are: Ignacio Ellacuria SJ, Segundo Montes SJ, Juan Ramon Moreno SJ, Joaquin Lopez y Lopez SJ, Amando Lopez SJ, and their housekeeper Elba Ramos along with her sixteen-year old daughter, Celina.



At Milltown Park, a monument commemorates the Jesuits and the two lay women (Fig. 4). Amando Lopez had studied there. Nuala McCullough, mother of one of the families I mentioned earlier as living within walking distance of the school, remembers him perhaps forty years on. He met the McCulloughs through a Spanish girl he knew who was working with them at the time as an au pair. They became friendly and he often visited. Nuala describes him as light-hearted and with a good sense of humour.

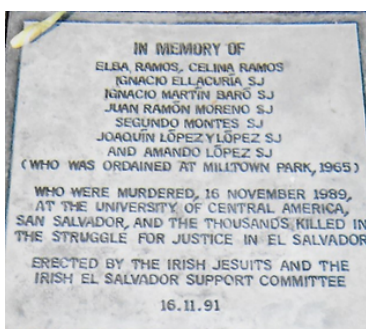


Fig. 4. Monument in Milltown Park, Dublin, commemorating the six Jesuit priests and two lay women who were murdered in El Salvador in November 1989; and a plaque in remembrance of Archbishop Oscar Romero, assassinated on 24 March 1980. (Photographer: Ronan Sheehan.)

When they went to Spain for a holiday, Amando insisted they stay in an apartment in Madrid belonging to his father. He gave their daughter a teddy-bear which she named Amando. He played football in the back garden with the MacCullough boys.⁶

It was Richard who introduced me to Borges when I joined the group that were doing the public discussion that Bloomsday in 1982.

“This is my friend Ronan Sheehan. He has just written a collection of short-stories”.

I felt like an undergraduate with a one-act radio play under his belt being introduced to Samuel Beckett as a playwright. Seamus Heaney, tongue-in-cheek, made some such remark to that effect, in a playful manner.

“Pleased to meet you,” said Borges. “I write short-stories too.”

⁶ Nuala McCullough remembers Amando Lopez SJ: Nuala McCullough in conversation with Ronan Sheehan, 2017.

He was modest, witty, and erudite; unbelievably erudite. Richard had at one time or another written about every Irish philosopher who had ever existed. Borges quoted from memory passages from pretty much all of them. He told us some scurrilous stories circulating in Buenos Aires portraying sexual congress between Galtieri and Margaret Thatcher.

Anne Kearney, Richard's wife, took photos. They hang upon my wall to this day. Especially treasured is the photo of the group that was there: Marie Heaney, Seamus Heaney, Richard, Borges, me, and Dorothy Walker.



Fig. 5. Dinner with Jorge Luis Borges (Dublin), 16 June (Bloomsday) 1982. Left to right: Dorothy Walker, Ronan Sheehan, Jorge Luis Borges, Richard Kearney, Kathleen Bernard Fitzpatrick, Seamus Heaney and Marie Heaney. (Photographer: Anne Bernard Kearney.)

I had a question I was determined to ask him. It concerned a reference to Tacitus, my hero of Latin prose.

“Senor Borges, in one of your stories you say that Tacitus records the crucifixion but does not perceive it...”

“Did I write that? I don't think I'm a very good writer you know. But maybe in sixty years trying I'm entitled to one or two good lines”.

He was blind. He collected sticks along whose surface he liked to run his fingers. We were due to give him a lift back to the Shelbourne Hotel, passing my flat in Leeson Park. I had an Irish blackthorn stick. Would he like that? He said he would be delighted to have it. So I got out of Richard's *Deux Cheveux*, walked into the flat and returned with the stick. I also brought a book of his, which he signed.



Fig. 6. Ronan Sheehan and Jorge Luis Borges, 16 June (Bloomsday) 1982. (Photographer: Anne Bernard Kearney.)

Richard guided him, holding the stick, into the hotel. That, I thought, is the last I see of the great Jorge Luis Borges.

Not quite. Some weeks later he was guest-of-honour at a literary festival in the north of England. The *Times of London* printed a photograph of him there. Gripping my stick.

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**“Only Connect”:¹
Irish Women’s Voices, Latin America
&
the Irish Women’s Writing Network**

Kathryn Laing²

Abstract: This essay offers a preliminary sketch of the recent critical attention given to Irish women and the literary interfaces between Ireland and Latin America (e.g. travel writers, immigrant or diasporic writers, and those who wrote ‘travelling texts’) at the turn of the twentieth century. This growing field is then situated in the broader context of new scholarship on Irish women’s writing, literary and otherwise, published during this period. It also introduces the Irish Women’s Writing Network, launched in 2016, and its potential benefits to scholars, and a consideration of the ways in which intersections and overlaps can be further explored and promoted, networks can be established, and conversations and cross-pollinations facilitated.

And so I lie, watching, now, the right-hand bank: which is Paraguay. It is indeed an Arcady, as my friend promised; all wild orange groves, and “bosky glens”. It looks soft. You can see the mist hang on distant forests and the hills are quite medieval, in their trackless pastoral. Endless and ancient, and waiting for the story to begin.

(Enright 2002: 159)

Of all the Irish women who travelled or migrated to, explored, or wrote about the life, landscapes and peoples of Latin America during the ‘long nineteenth century’, Eliza Lynch’s name is now the most resonant. Not a writer herself, she figured as both notorious and glorious in the contemporary legends around her life as the mistress of Francisco Solano López, son of Carlos Antonio López, president and dictator of Paraguay, whom he later succeeded. More recently, her life (1833-1886), which began in Cork and was shaped by the Irish Famine, emigration and exploitation before she became a powerful and influential, though always controversial, figurehead in Paraguay, has been

¹ The epigraph to E.M. Forster’s 1910 novel *Howard’s End* (London: Penguin, 1971).

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revisited and reimagined in film and print. Numerous biographies and Anne Enright's novel, *The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch* (2002), have illuminated this striking figure and, more broadly, the presence of nineteenth-century Irish women in Paraguay. This intersection between Ireland and Latin America was, of course, not the only one.

The exploration of literary connections between Ireland and Latin America during the long nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century has already been identified as crucial to understanding the diasporic culture and its identity formation, as Laura P. Z. Izarra and Patricia Novillo-Corvalán have outlined:

Another way of looking at the interface between Ireland and Latin America is through the Irish diaspora and their descendants, particularly in their contributions to literature, painting and music. [...] Indeed, the conviction that transcultural contact between different literatures, cultures and languages would give birth to, or encourage the formation of, an invigorated modern Irish culture lies at the centre of the historical exchange between Ireland and Latin America.

(Izarra and Novillo-Corvalán 2009: 134).

A glance through the contents list of this 2009 issue of *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, in which Izarra and Novillo-Corvalán's article appeared, gives a flavor of the enriching intersections, both past and present. For example, it lists topics such as James Joyce and Spanish literature, Joyce's *Ulysses* and Argentinian literature, and Marina Carr and her fascination with Spanish and Latin American literature.

Diverse scholarship on migration and the nineteenth-century Irish diaspora in various South American countries has drawn specific attention to the presence of Irish women in various capacities. The life of Cecilia Grierson, Argentina's first female doctor, and her professional achievements have been mapped, for example, along with numerous other Irish women who either migrated from Ireland or who were born in Latin America, first generation progeny of the diaspora (Barry 2008: 213-218).³ Ordinary women's voices and their perspectives have also been captured through their letters, a selection of which were published in Edmundo Murray's 2005 work *Becoming Irlandès: Private Narratives of the Irish Emigration to Argentina (1844-1912)*. These letters have since become the focus of a fascinating linguistic analysis of women in the context of Irish emigration (Amador-Moreno 2016: 77-95). Rediscovery and new readings of the lives and literary output of Irish women travelling to, and writing about and from, the Americas during the long nineteenth century and beyond have been stimulated by feminist and postcolonial perspectives, as well as readings informed by diaspora and migration studies.

³ The recovery and elucidation of the lives and achievements of numerous Irish women who settled or travelled to Latin America is a significant feature of *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*.

The aim of this essay is two-fold – firstly to offer a preliminary sketch of this rapidly developing field before situating it in the broader contexts of the burgeoning scholarship on Irish women’s writing, literary and otherwise, during the nineteenth century and at the turn of the twentieth century. Secondly, to introduce the recently launched Irish Women’s Writing Network and its potential benefits to scholars, and a consideration of the ways in which intersections and overlaps can be further explored and promoted, networks can be established, and conversations and cross-pollinations facilitated.

In recent years, Laura Izarra has identified the rich terrain of “Argentinian diaspora space” at the turn of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century in “Don’t Cry for Me Ireland – Irish Women’s Voices from Argentina” (Izarra 2010: 136). Mapping out “the various forms of literary representation produced by Irish immigrant women in Latin America”, she focuses on letters, travel narratives, sketches and memoirs, “the main forms used by women migrants to portray the effects of the new geographical, historical and political landscape on their psyche and on the social roles they performed in a non-English speaking country” (Izarra 2010: 136). In “Through Other Eyes: Nineteenth-Century Irish Women in South America”, she expands her reach from Marion Mulhall’s travelogue *Between the Amazon and Andes* (1881), the memoirs of Barbara Peart in *Tía Barbarita* (1932), and an autobiographical novel by Kathleen Nevin, *You’ll Never Go Back* (1946) discussed in “Don’t Cry for Me Ireland”, to representations of Irish women migrants in Brazil and Paraguay as well as Argentina (Izarra 2016: 59-69). Marion Mulhall (1847-1922), “a pioneer in writing about the Irish in South America”, her extensive travels across the continent and considerable body of travel writing has received further attention in Marion Galazzi’s “Thousands of Miles through Untrodden Lands” (Galazzi 2015: 39).⁴ Ena Dargan, a later but similarly hitherto neglected writer, who documented her travels from Argentina to Peru, features in Deirdre Brady’s essay, “The Road to Cuzco: An Irish woman writer’s journey to the ‘navel of the world’” in this current volume (11-24), expanding the vistas on Irish women writers who recorded their travels and experiences on the South American continent during the mid-twentieth century.

There were other Irish women travelers too. Protestant missionary Mary Geraldine Guinness (1865-1949; part of the evangelical wing of the Guinness family and later known as Mrs. Howard Taylor), made extended visits to missions in China and South America. She wrote several accounts of her experiences including *Peru: Its Story, People and Religion* (1909). The preface provides the specific contexts of the journey undertaken and recorded in this work:

The author of this book, Miss Guinness, a student of philosophy at

⁴ Marion Mulhall’s husband, Michael Mulhall, was also a significant figure as founder and editor of *The Standard* newspaper, a publication directed towards the English-speaking population of Buenos Aires. He was also the author of several books about South America (Galazzi 2015: 42).

University College, is a young lady of a family many of whose members have done noble service in the missionary cause. She has had unusual opportunities, during her sojourn in Peru of observing the conditions of spiritual destitution and the obstacles which hinder the spread of evangelical truth here. She has here collected and set forth her notes of travel in many parts of that singularly diversified and interesting country, and they make a most striking and suggestive work. She shows herself to be a keen and sympathetic observer of people and places, and to possess the faculty of vivid description.

(Guinness 1920: Alex Macalister, introduction, viii)

In her introduction to the travelogue, Guinness describes a violent storm on Lake Titicaca and concludes that despite this and many other dangers, in answer to the question, was it worth it, that – “Yes – a thousand times – to have come to know and love the wonderful land of the Incas” (Guinness 1920: xiii). Is there a current research project exploring the life and travels of Mary Guinness or other forgotten Irish women travel writers who traversed the South American continent?⁵ What glimpsed but unexamined literary allusions, connections and networks between Ireland and Latin America at the turn of the twentieth century await further illumination?

George Egerton’s (Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright, 1859-1945) residence in Chile is cited in biographies. Furthermore, in Egerton’s autobiographical novel, *The Wheel of God*, a trip to Chile is proposed to the central figure, Mary Desmond: “we’ll stop in Buenos Ayres, go on to Valparaiso” (Egerton 1898: 214). In fact, according to Iveta Jusová, Egerton’s connections to South America through a rich uncle, an admiral in the British navy and based in Chile, shaped her political perspectives in a distinctive and paradoxical manner:

Egerton managed to turn the only money the family seems to have received from the rich colonial uncle toward quite anticolonial (or at least antibourgeois) ends – she developed a loathing for religion and learned the German language, which would later enable her to discover Nietzsche (the arch-critic of bourgeois morality) long before his philosophy became known to English readers.

(Jusová 2005: 51)

South America features in other fiction by Irish women writers publishing during this period – *The Gadfly* (1897) by E. L. Voynich (1864-1960) and much more briefly in Hannah Lynch’s (1859-1904) enigmatic novel, *An Odd Experiment*, via the portrait of Miss Baruna, “a shallow, good-hearted type of girl of South American extraction” (Lynch 1897: 177). In *The Gadfly*, a political and geographical map of several Latin American countries is outlined through the adventure tales of the eponymous hero, following his flight and sojourn there:

⁵ See Russell (2017) for further biographical details, although there is no reference to her journey to South America here.

He rattled on, telling anecdote after anecdote; now of the Argentine war, now of the Brazilian expedition, now of hunting feats and adventures with savages or wild beasts. [...]

“It must have been a glorious life!” sighed Galli with naïve envy. “I wonder you ever made up your mind to leave Brazil. Other countries must seem so flat after it!”

“I think I was happiest in Peru and Ecuador”, said the Gadfly. “That really is a magnificent tract of country. Of course it is very hot, especially the coast district of Ecuador, and one has to rough it a bit; but the scenery is superb beyond imagination”.

(Voynich 1900: 182)

Are there other allusions, abbreviated or more extended, to specific countries or the continent more generally in the work of contemporaries of Egerton, Voynich and Lynch?⁶ Are there patterns or specific resonances to be traced? Are there other women’s voices, contributions from Ireland or from within Latin America more broadly during the long nineteenth century to be recovered, or are scholars already excavating further?

A reference to Alice Milligan’s article “The Emigration Question and Employment for Women”, published on 28 August 1903 in *The Southern Cross* newspaper (cited in Izarra 2010: 134), and a footnote in Catherine Morris’s article on Milligan, give a tantalizing taste of other possible avenues for exploration which may well already be under way:

‘Hero Lays’ was the first collection of Milligan’s poetry from newspapers. It was a project initiated and funded by Irish republican sympathizers in Argentina led by William Bulfin (1862-1910). Milligan remained in close contact with Bulfin (‘Che Bueno’) who actively supported the *Sban Van Vocht* from its inception in 1896. As editor and proprietor of the nationalist paper *The Southern Cross*, Bulfin was a central figure in the Irish republican movement abroad and remained an active supporter of Milligan’s work until his death.

(Morris 2003: fn. 28, 96)

Was Alice Milligan the only Irish woman writer whose work featured in *The Southern Cross*? Or did some of her contemporaries, who were also engaged in various ways in promoting the Celtic Renaissance and nationalist discourses feature? Laura Izarra’s discussion of literary narratives and Irish travelling texts published in nineteenth-century newspapers, including *The Southern Cross* and *Fianna* in Argentina or *The Anglo-Brazilian Times* in Brazil, provides a definite answer and a glimpse of further research possibilities (Izarra 2015: 65). In the

⁶ All three of these writers are striking for their unconventional lives, international travels and fiction. See O’Toole (2014) on Egerton’s migrations and transnational connections, and Binckes and Laing (2010) on Lynch’s “vagabondage” across Europe and travel writing. Of the three, Voynich (Ethel Lilian née Boole) remains the most neglected now in the context of scholarship on Irish women’s writing at the fin de siècle.

short-lived journal, *Fianna* (1910-1912), which aimed “to construct a collective narrative that kept the diasporic subject tied to their birthplace”, the inclusion of poetry by Nora Hopper (1871-1906) and Ethna Carbery (Anna Johnston McManus, 1866-1902) is intriguing (Izarra 2015: 67). What further treasures await discovery? How accessible are these newspapers, are they being digitised and in which archives might they be found? Were there other women poets or writers, other examples of women’s writing as ‘travelling texts’ in these publications?⁷ And what about contributions to other papers that flourished during this period: *The Standard*, for example, with its distinctively different political and religious allegiances and with which Marion Mulhall was particularly associated. Sinead Wall’s analysis of William Bulfin’s travel sketches develops our understanding of the history of Irish newspapers in Latin America. Specifically, Wall explores “the material effect of migration in the form of print culture and *The Southern Cross* newspaper” (Wall 2015: 28); in this essay, she offers a model or departure point for the analysis of Irish women writers who were published in newspapers and journals in Latin America during this period. From a different perspective, Giulia Bruna’s “The Irish Revival en Route: The Travel Writing of William Bulfin and Robert Lynd” argues that their travel writing “complicate[s] the geographies of activism of the Revival” (Bruna 2016: 162), provoking questions about how an engagement with Irish women’s voices of this period might further complicate these geographies.

Marion Mulhall’s travel writing and literary representations of South America, and the ‘travelling texts’ and Irish Nationalism of Nora Hopper, Alice Milligan, Ethna Carberry in *The Southern Cross* newspaper and *Fianna* journal, could have featured among the many writers under discussion at the Occluded Narratives: Researching Irish Women’s Writing (1880-1910) Symposium (Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, 2016). This event was twinned with the launch of the Irish Women’s Writing Network.⁸ Jane Barlow, Katherine Cecil Thurston, Ethel Colburn Mayne, L.A.M. Priestly, Alice Stopford Green and Hannah Lynch were just some of the writers whose works were considered in a variety of broader contexts – newspaper and periodical publication, women’s suffrage, trans-European cultural networks, travel writing, archives and the ‘digital turn’, Land War fiction and more.

So, who are these and numerous other women writers not listed who were published at the intersections of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? What did they write, why did they write, in what political, social and cultural contexts, and where did they publish?⁹ Where can one find their works? How does one teach them if texts are out of print? What does the retrieval of the stories of their lives and analysis of their *oeuvre* tell us about this period in literary history,

⁷ The concept of ‘travelling texts’ or ‘textual travels’ in this context has been defined as “those texts published in newspapers read by the community, such as *The Southern Cross* and *Fianna*, [which] shaped the diasporic identity of the Irish in Argentina” (Wall and Izarra (2015: 7).

⁸ <https://irishwomenswritingnetwork.com>.

⁹ The plenitude of women writers and the diversity of their writing has been made evident through the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, volumes 4 and 5, and in numerous studies of the Victorian period and early twentieth century, including James Murphy (2013), J.W. Foster (2008) and Rolf Loeber and Magda Stouthamer-Loeber (2006).

as well as print cultures and publishing histories? Travel writers, historians, botanists, novelists, short story writers and journalists, sometimes all and more, these women wrote from divergent political and religious perspectives, their subjects and settings were multiple. Crossing generic boundaries – Land War fiction, ‘New Woman’ fiction, travel writing, children’s literature, Nationalist poetry (to name a few), multi-topic contributions to newspapers and periodicals – the focus of their writing was not only on Ireland but it was international too. Europe, the United States and Canada, the South Seas, South America and Australia also featured in their fiction, journalism and travel pieces.

Theorising and practising acts of retrieval are not new. In “Writing Irish Women’s Literary History” published in 2001, Margaret Kelleher noted how: “The recovery of previously neglected writing by women from the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been one of the richest activities in Irish feminist literary studies”, and how new research had broadened the focus beyond poetry, fiction and drama to other genres (Kelleher, 2001: 5). After the publication of the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, volumes 4 and 5, in 2002 and more recently Mary Pierse’s five volume *Irish Feminisms 1810-1930* (2012), after the proliferation of scholarship in the wake of these groundbreaking volumes and the rapidly growing availability of databases that provide access to digitised resources, Margaret Kelleher’s observations remain pertinent almost twenty years on.

A glance at publications over the past decade gives an insight into the continuing diversity and innovation in this field of feminist recovery. New biographies and fresh angles on the lives of writers prominent during this period include, for example: Anne Jamison’s *E. Ö. Somerville and Martin Ross: female authorship and literary collaboration* (2016); Sonja Tiernan’s biography, *Eva Gore-Booth: An Image of Such Politics* (2012) and her edited collection of *The Political Writings of Eva Gore-Booth* (2015); Heidi Hansson’s *Emily Lawless 1845-1913: Writing the Interspace* (2007); and Catherine Morris’s *Alice Milligan and the Irish Cultural Revival* (2012). In *The Irish New Woman* (2013) Tina O’Toole draws attention to the defining role Irish women writers played at the *fin de siècle* experimenting in fiction with new identities and roles for women. Stories for girls and specifically the ‘New Girl’ fiction, a subgenre also dominated by Irish women writers of this period such as L.T. Meade, has also been foregrounded (see Susan Cahill (2014) and Beth Rogers (2014), for example). The shaping of girls’ education and thus the lives of Irish women during the nineteenth century is illuminated from another angle by historian Ciaran O’Neill in *Catholics of Consequence: Transnational Education, Social Mobility and the Irish Catholic Elite, 1850-1900* (2014).¹⁰ Women as historians in Ireland is a new area recently attended to in Nadia Clare Smith’s *‘A Manly Study?’: Irish Women Historians 1868-1949* (2006). In addition, Irish Land War fiction, a subgenre dominated by women writers of varying political affiliations has been given extensive coverage in a collection edited by Heidi Hansson and James Murphy, *Fictions of*

¹⁰ References to the colonial contexts and international nature of the pupils attending several of the Irish schools under discussion, including in Mexico and the South American sugar colony of Demerara, suggest further areas for research.

the Irish Land War and in several chapters in *Women Writing War: Ireland 1889-1922* edited by Tina O'Toole, Gillian McIntosh and Muireann O'Cinnéide (2017). In their edited collection, *Irish Women's Writing 1878-1922* (2016), Whitney Standlee and Anna Pilz introduce another array of writers, new angles on more familiar writers, including Katharine Tynan and Charlotte Riddell, while several lesser known writers are also featured (e.g. Ella Young and F. E. Crichton). George Egerton and Katherine Cecil Thurston have been considered in several contexts, including proto-modernist fiction, and the recent turn to rethinking the boundaries between Victorian and Modernist literature creates new spaces in which some of these turn-of-the-twentieth century Irish writers might be considered.

More recently, Matthew Reznicek explores *The European Metropolis: Paris and Nineteenth-Century Irish Women Novelists* (2017), expanding insights into the transnational and transcultural contexts in which many writers of this period wrote and flourished. However, Paris was not the only city where Irish women writers were able to carve out niches for their work. Already, the centrality of London to the shaping and publishing of writers such as Katharine Tynan and Charlotte Riddell has been explored by scholars, including Margaret Kelleher and Whitney Standlee, while Irish women's travel and diasporic narratives from within and beyond Europe's borders have formed the focus of multiple research projects and publications. The figure of the Irish female tourist and travel writer features in Raphaël Ingelbein's *Irish Cultures of Travel: Writing on the Continent, 1819-1914* (2016) and most recently in *Traveling Irishness in the Long Nineteenth Century* (2017) edited by Marguérite Corporaal and Christina Morin, while specific attention has been drawn to the extensive travel writing of women who traversed Europe or ventured much further afield. Beatrice Grimshaw's *oeuvre* is indicative. Exotic tales of adventure derived from her extensive world travels, including to New Zealand, Australia and the South Seas, and published in various formats have been considered most recently by Eve Patten and Jane Mahony (2017). As already noted, the records of Irish women travellers, Marion Mulhall for example, who explored and documented their experiences in South America have received specific attention in the contexts of the Irish diaspora in the work of Laura P. Z. Izarra and Mariano Galazzi. *Poetry by Women in Ireland: A Critical Anthology 1870-1970* (2012), edited by Lucy Collins, challenges and extends on earlier anthologies of women's poetry, including *The Field Day Anthology* (volumes 4 and 5) and Anne Colman's *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Irish Women Poets* (1996). Female dramatists of this period have also received renewed attention, most recently at the 2017 conference entitled "Irish Women Playwrights and Theatre Makers".¹¹ Despite this abundance of scholarship, areas for potential further or new research are plentiful, as James H. Murphy highlighted in his extensive survey, "How Feminist was Irish Victorian Women's Fiction" (2016), including women, art and artists, and the field of suffrage writing. Equally up to date, Julie Anne Stevens's *Two Irish Girls in Bohemia* (2017) offers the most recent investigation of intersections between Irish women's writing and the visual at the *fin de siècle*.

¹¹ <https://irishwomenplaywrightsandtheatremakers.wordpress.com>

Literary, historical, media studies, periodical studies and book history, travel writing, biography and life-writing, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, Irish writing and the diaspora, queer theory and kinship theory – such breadth, diversity and necessary multidisciplinary critical perspectives are the consequences in part of the ‘permeable boundaries’ of women writing at this juncture to which Heidi Hansson draws attention (2016). Generic boundary crossings were a particular feature of the publishing possibilities created by periodical culture, provoking a range of questions as to how their writing is read in periodical contexts. The digitisation of many, although not all, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century periodicals, has the potential to change scholarship, Hansson goes on to argue, but the limitations – availability, incompleteness, legibility – need to be comprehended too.

This ‘digital turn’ has revolutionised research possibilities, especially for scholars working on the most marginal and forgotten writers of the long nineteenth century. Out-of-print novels are now available on the Internet Archive website,¹² or through the HaithiTrust Digital Library.¹³ The Irish Newspaper Archives¹⁴ and The British Newspaper Archive¹⁵ offer a treasure trove of hitherto lost material, while other databases such as ‘19th Century UK Periodicals’ or ‘British Periodicals’¹⁶ provide scholars with the tools to search and retrieve hitherto inaccessible articles, short stories, images, cartoons and more. The study of Irish Women’s Writing at the turn of the twentieth century is one of these beneficiaries and the subject of Gerardine Meaney’s “Digital Methodologies and Irish Women’s Writing: Researching Katherine Cecil Thurston” (2016). Discussing the “dramatic increase in research and teaching opportunities in this period”, she, in turn, identifies various limitations of digital resources. Anne Jamison also alerts readers to these potentials and restrictions in an essay that foregrounds another groundbreaking digital project on the digitization of the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* that will be significant for scholars (Jamison 2017: 751-765).

The launch of the Irish Women’s Writing Network is timely then. It benefits from an abundance of riches, both in terms of the range and diversity of writers of the period, many of whom remain under-researched, and in relation to the pioneering scholarship that has stimulated new and exciting research in the field from a variety of perspectives. As Margaret Kelleher highlighted in her talk at the network’s first symposium, recent publications and the success of anthologies of Irish women’s writing (e.g. Gleeson 2015, 2016) suggest “we are in a better place as critics and teachers” and reveal a “palpable energy” in Irish writing, publishing and indeed criticism (Kelleher 2016).¹⁷

¹² <https://archive.org/>.

¹³ www.hathitrust.org/.

¹⁴ www.irishnewsarchive.com/.

¹⁵ www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

¹⁶ <http://gale.cengage.co.uk/product-highlights/history/19th-century-uk-periodicals-parts-1-and-2.aspx> and <http://proquest.libguides.com/britishperiodicals> respectively. Not all institutions subscribe to these databases.

¹⁷ Gleeson’s *The Long Gaze Back* was awarded the Best Irish Published Book of the Year at the Irish Book Awards in 2015.

The aims of the network then are to attract interested readers and scholars (established, early-career and postgraduate) working across disciplines on Irish women's writing (in its broadest terms), and between nations and continents. It also aims to extend existing dialogues between scholars and continue conversations that began at the 2016 symposium, to harness this momentum and connect scholars and the plethora of new research that is interdisciplinary and international. Still in the early stages of development, the network offers a repository for information, links and latent conversations. It is a digital forum, a virtual space (i.e. the network's website with its regularly updated blog page, its Facebook page and Twitter account), facilitating material and knowledge exchange and where newly recovered material and new approaches can be shared. Researchers frequently accrue photocopied or scanned articles, images or snippets of interesting information that are curiosities but not necessities to their own projects, but that might provide crucial links for other researchers' work. Through the Irish Women's Writing Network, further networks and research projects can be initiated that are international and multidisciplinary via conference panels and at conferences, co-researched and co-written projects and publications.

The network encourages and invites ideas for new types of research and collaborations, contributions to its blog page highlighting relevant research, recently launched research projects, conferences, etc. Interested parties can join the network through its membership link¹⁸ and can include details on their current research, publications as well as contact details for networking. An archive page is under development where useful archival sources and digital links will be listed and regularly updated. The network encourages researchers to contribute to this in addition to informing it of relevant forthcoming publications, conferences and other events – “only connect”.

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**“When the gaze must not be averted:
The testament for humanity in the universality of
Roger Casement’s humanitarian vision”**

President Michael D. Higgins¹

Canciller Luna Mendoza, embajadoras, embajadores, distinguidos invitados, amigos y amigas,

Es para mí un honor y un placer estar aquí en Perú, en esta hermosa e histórica ciudad de Lima. Quiero agradecer al Canciller Ricardo Luna Mendoza sus amables palabras de presentación, a la Doctora Scarlett O’Phelan Godoy por su valiosa presentación histórica, y a todos ustedes por su calurosa acogida. Esta es la primera visita de un Presidente irlandés a Perú, y espero que esta visita contribuya a profundizar los lazos de amistad entre nuestros dos países.

It is my great pleasure to start what is my third visit to Latin America as Irish President, here in Lima, the capital of Peru, a country which harbours so many expressions of civilisations, so many cultural and natural treasures. The struggles, aspirations and achievements of the peoples of this continent are ones that are connected to so many of the Irish in exile and their descendants.



Fig. 1. President Michael D. Higgins delivering his keynote Address at the Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Lima, Peru, Thursday 9 February 2017.

¹ This is the transcript of the keynote address delivered at the Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lima, Peru, Thursday 9 February 2017 by President Michael D. Higgins.

I remember vividly my own first visit to Peru, in 1988. I was one of a small group of Irish parliamentarians who were on our way home from Santiago de Chile, where we had observed the historic Chilean referendum of 1988 that put an end to the military regime of Augusto Pinochet. As the first international observer to arrive in Chile, I became known as “*Observador Uno*”, and Ricardo Lagos allocated me to Punta Arenas, where I witnessed the *Plebiscito*.

In Lima I stayed in “*El Monton*” with the Columban fathers, an Irish missionary society who have been present in Peru since 1951 and who, in those years of the late 1980s, were doing their best to support communities of the poor and those families affected by the economic policies of the day.

Three decades on, so much has changed in Peru, and across the continent. As the pendulum has swung away from military dictatorships towards different forms of democratic inclusion and participation, millions of women, children and men have been lifted out of poverty. Literacy rates for both men and women have increased. Latin American countries have led the way in introducing in their respective national constitutions innovative provisions to protect the natural environment.

Those three decades have also witnessed a progressive increase of political, cultural, academic, scientific and commercial exchanges between our two countries, Ireland and Peru. I was delighted to learn from His Excellency Claudio de la Puente Ribeyro, as he presented his credentials to me in November of last year, that Peru will soon open an embassy in Dublin. Today it is for me an honour to be the first President of Ireland to visit the Republic of Peru. I very much hope that such expressions of political goodwill can contribute to strengthening the warm friendship that exists between our two nations. I hope that we will, together, open meaningful avenues for cooperation, and build novel, and much needed, solidarities – of a global, regional and bilateral kind – for the shared future of our peoples on what is our beautiful but fragile planet.

It is, of course, on this continent that an old wisdom existed, built on the connection between ecology, social existence, modes of economic subsistence, music and belief systems. The recent international commitments on climate change and sustainability will thus represent for many South Americans, and especially in Peru, a recall of an old symmetry upon which an insatiable colonisation was destructively visited.

Los Irlandeses somos parte de esta historia, como víctimas y también como participantes del sistema colonial, que tejó muchos de los lazos transatlánticos entre Irlanda y América Latina. Nuestros antepasados a su vez participaron en el proceso de descolonización del continente, y las huellas de estos vínculos históricos se encuentran en todas partes de América Latina, también aquí en Perú.

It is always very moving for Irish visitors to this beautiful continent to encounter monuments, buildings and streets with names that bear testimony to the past experiences and contributions of Irish people in these lands. Those names are often those of Irish people, who, after the conquest of Ireland by

Britain, came to Latin America through the transatlantic networks of Europe's Catholic monarchies, and notably through the Irish brigades in the Spanish army.

Many of those Irish people spent their lives soldiering or trading abroad on behalf of the Catholic powers of continental Europe, often harbouring the hope that those powers would, one day, intervene to free their homeland from British rule, or, for some, that the military experience they had gained would prove useful in undoing colonising dispossession and achieving independence. For most it was, too, an exercise in achieving self-worth and recognition in an atmosphere where they were not perceived as lesser.

One such man was Ambrosio (Ambrose) O'Higgins, to whose burial site I had the opportunity of paying my respects on my way here this afternoon. Born in Ireland's County Sligo, Ambrosio O'Higgins arrived to the Spanish Americas in 1756. After several years spent as an itinerant trader, he enrolled in the Spanish Imperial Service and he undertook what was a huge achievement at the time, namely the crossing of the Andes Mountains on a mission to establish a reliable postal service between the colony of La Plata on the East and the "Capitanía General de Chile."

This was a harrowing journey for the Irishman, carried out in the midst of winter. Having courageously and successfully completed his mission, Ambrosio O'Higgins exercised various eminent administrative and military functions, before he eventually became Viceroy of Peru. Ambrosio O'Higgins' contributions to Peruvian life included a number of decrees which, although they stopped well short of adequate recognition of indigenous rights, or did not envisage full independence, were, in the context of their times, innovative and progressive.

Many of the fellow Irishmen of Ambrosio O'Higgins and their descendants would of course become involved with a host of uprisings and nationalist movements throughout Latin America and the Caribbean – in Mexico, Chile, Bolivia, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Cuba and, of course, Peru – as thousands of Irish men enlisted in the patriot armies campaigning against Spanish rule between 1817 and 1824.

Ambrosio's own son – Bernardo O'Higgins – did not just play a prominent role in the Chilean independence movement, he also participated in the liberation of Peru. The story of Bernardo's youth, travails and achievements, of how he did, in his turn, undertake an incredible crossing of the Andes from Mendoza into Central Chile, and of his life ended in exile on the Peruvian side of the Andes, is one of immense courage and endurance. We can think, too, of John Thomond O'Brien, from County Wicklow, who fought alongside General José de San Martín, or of Daniel Florence O'Leary, a native of Cork who was aide-de-camp to Simón Bolívar and has remained an important figure in the national memory of Venezuela and Colombia.

Importantly, Irish and Latin American people were also united by bonds of imagination, a mutual sympathy for their respective struggles for freedom.

Indeed, at the same time that a sense of distinctive nationhood was taking shape in Spain's American possessions, in the early nineteenth century, Irish patriots were challenging the colonial relationship between Ireland and Britain, thus allowing for multiple solidarities to be forged between Irish and South American nationalists.

Those manifold bonds of solidarity between our peoples – both experienced and imagined – are documented in a fine exhibition entitled “The Irish in Latin America”, which I had the pleasure of opening two weeks ago in Ireland, and which will be displayed next week in Cuba, and later in the year here in Peru (DFA 2016).

Such reminders of our past links are important. They provide a well of potent memories: memories of joint struggles and aspirations, of hopes shared and dreams waiting to be taken up again – a well from which we can draw as we seek to respond to the challenges of our own times. Indeed, I believe that the best part of our past lies in those emancipatory promises whose trajectory was interrupted, but which continue to offer themselves to our present, begging to be realised. The sediment of those possibilities imagined, but yet to be realised, is what remains after the water of memory has been drawn.

The man whose memory I want to evoke for you this afternoon, Roger Casement, was the bearer of such a promise of a better world, with its necessary accompanying human rights and the recognition of human dignity as the source of those rights. His vision, built on experiences in Africa, Latin America and Ireland, was of a non-exploitative civilisation, in which the abuses tolerated by the law of the strongest would have no place, in which each nation would be enabled to shape its own destiny, according to its particular history and culture – and of a civilisation in which the dignity and the rights of indigenous peoples, including their right to live peaceful and harmonious lives in their ancestral lands, would be respected.

Roger Casement's voice is one that continues to echo today with Irish and Peruvian people, and beyond, with all of us who inhabit this vulnerable and profoundly interdependent world – a world in which the issue of indigeneity is arising again, as we witness, once again, the destructive activities of extractive industries, but also as new hopes are forming in the wake of the recent agreements on climate change and sustainable development.

Roger Casement's voice is the voice of an Irishman whose awareness of his own identity as a member of a colonised people enabled him to forge bonds of empathy, first with the enslaved rubber workers of the Belgian Congo, and then with the brutalised Indigenes of the Putumayo region. It is also the voice of a sensitive observer whose deep regard for the particularities of small cultures and indigenous ways of life was the wellspring for his defence of the universal values of justice, freedom and human dignity.

This combination of influences, and deep instincts of the heart too, in Roger Casement's gaze, its universalism and concern for the particular in the space

and time of peoples is what continues to speak to our humanity, across the decades and the distances between continents.

This engaged gaze and this courageous, uninhibited voice are a compass for all of us, academics, activists, administrators, diplomats and policy makers as we endeavour to craft in our respective countries development paths that will enable all of our citizens to flourish.

My hope is that today's evocation of the life and work of Roger Casement may also become a grounding inspiration for energetic and deepened relations between Ireland and Peru, and become a driver for the expanding spheres of our cooperation and mutual interest.

Indeed the figure of Roger Casement has already been a source of inspiration for the great Peruvian writer and Nobel Laureate, Mario Vargas Llosa, as evidenced in his *El Sueño del Celta* (2010), a captivating fictional biography that retraces the complex journey of a man who was at once an Irish revolutionary, an outstanding but contrarian diplomat in the British Foreign Office, and one of the great humanitarians of the turn of the last century.

In 2012, I had the pleasure of welcoming Mario Vargas Llosa to *Áras an Uachtaráin*, the home of the President of Ireland, to mark the translation of his novel into English, as *The Dream of the Celt*.

In December 2015, as we, in Ireland, were getting ready to commemorate the centenary of the Easter Rising of 1916, a milestone on the road to Irish independence, I presented Mario Vargas Llosa with the Presidential Distinguished Service Award, a distinction usually reserved to people of Irish descent, in recognition of his contribution to casting a light on Roger Casement's courageous campaigns in defence of human life and the rights of the disenfranchised.

If Roger Casement's voice continues to call out to us, it is probably in part because the times he lived through were ones that have profound resonance with our own. Often referred to as the "first globalisation", it was an era when an insatiable capital moved freely across the globe, when vast territorial expanses were opened up to industrial exploitation, with devastating impact on what had been complex civilisations, and when the flow of goods circulating within and between Europe's huge colonial empires increased dramatically. It was a time, too, of great migration, which saw tens of millions of Europeans leave the old continent to seek their fortunes in other hemispheres.²

The turn of the twentieth century was also marked by Europe's rapid industrial boom and a race for extractive rubber resources that resulted in the violent transformation of extensive swathes of latex-bearing tropical forest in the interior regions of Africa and Latin America.

² It is estimated that roughly 60 million people left Europe during the period 1860-1914.

This was most intensely felt by the indigenous people living along the basins of the two largest rivers feeding into the Atlantic: The Congo and the Amazon. Indeed, the globalised networks of European commercial expansionism, and the associated process of internal colonisation in the new South American Republics, were predicated upon a system of enslavement and exploitation of the local populations, of which the so-called "Congo Free State" and the frontier region of the north-west Amazon, were two hubs.

As Angus Mitchell, whose research on Casement's notebooks and photographic record has been an invaluable contribution, has put it:

Market demand for rubber resulted in the violent invasions and transformation of extensive regions of tropical forest, which were quickly turned into slave kingdoms.

(Mitchell 2010: 14)

Angus Mitchell identifies three struggles in Roger Casement's formation, one in Africa, one in South America and one in Connemara, the Typhus epidemic, and it is the connection of these three experiences that gives him his concept of, and commitment to, indigeneity.

Roger Casement was a witness to the crimes perpetrated in both regions. But he was never a passive witness. He did not avert his gaze from those atrocities committed in the pursuit of profit and greed, yet rationalised in the name of progress and civilisation. And it is important, today, that we recall the detail of those sombre aisles of global history, a history in which we all share.

Having worked for the British Foreign Service in Africa for just over a decade, Roger Casement embarked, in 1903, on a journey by steamboat to remote areas of the Upper Congo, where he gathered convincing evidence that the collection of rubber in the territory under the direct control of King Leopold of Belgium was widely associated with extortions of taxes, forced labour, murder and mutilation of the enslaved natives, and an overall depopulation of the area.

It was a system of cruelty and oppression that worked for the personal benefit of King Leopold and his favourite concessionaires. Casement's report on his findings, published as a White Paper in 1904, provided a "formidable indictment" of a colonial architecture based on the crudest violations of human rights. This report, combined with Casement's influence with key opinion makers of his day, contributed to a galvanising of international pressures that eventually led to a reform of the administration of the Congo.

A few short years later, still working for the British Foreign Office, Roger Casement arrived in Brazil where he was appointed to the position of Consul. In 1910, he embarked on a voyage to officially investigate allegations of crimes being committed by a large rubber company operating in the Putumayo area, on the border between Brazil, Peru and Colombia. Headed by Julio César Arana, this company, which was originally called "Casa Arana", had by then

been transformed into the “Peruvian Amazon Company”, partly funded by British capital and with headquarters in London.

According to Colombian anthropologist Juan Alvaro Echeverri, the impact of the Casa Arana regime on the Putumayo Indians, whom it coerced into collecting wild rubber and running the rubber stations, was enormous (Echeverri 2010, pp. 49-64). The region's Indian population was reduced to perhaps less than a tenth of its size between 1900 and 1930, and the Indians' social, political and ceremonial organisation was very severely shattered. This raises an immense issue in terms of the ethics of memory. How, and by what means, with what intentions, should descendants of such indigenous peoples remember, recall, heal themselves, and prepare for a future not crippled by the past? Dr. Echeverri's work is a real contribution on such an issue.



Fig. 2. President Michael D. Higgins (centre) and Irish Ambassador to Mexico Sonja Hyland (extreme right), meet with *caciques* from the Putumayo. (From: *El Tiempo*, 15 February 2017.)

As in the Congo, Roger Casement was a witness to those crimes committed in the depth of the tropical forest. Once again, he chose not to avert his gaze from the exploited, mutilated, tortured, raped and starved bodies of the enslaved people. He mobilised all the means at his disposal to document and put a halt to those atrocities – not just by using his pen and influence, but also by painstakingly compiling witness statements, writing letters, organising hearings in London, and arranging meetings in Washington, but also by taking photos and sending them, annotated by his own hand, to people of influence around the world. Those photos, of which some of us have just seen a sample in the exhibition currently on display in the Centro Cultural Inca Garcilaso, contributed to ensuring that the Putumayo would not remain a “sealed book” for Casement's contemporaries – or indeed for us today.

There was, by then, in his maturing moral vision, not just determination in Roger Casement's letters. If I may quote from Roger Casement's own words – words that indicate the profoundly empathetic interest he took in the Indigenes of the Putumayo:

All that was once his [the Indian's] has been taken away from him – his forest, his home, his domestic affections even – nothing that God and Nature gave him is indeed left to him, save his fine, healthy body capable of supporting terrible fatigue, his shapely limbs and fair, clear skin – marred by the lash and scarred by execrable blows.

His manhood has been lashed and branded out of him. I look at the big, soft-eyed faces, averted and downcast, and I wonder where that Heavenly Power can be that for so long allowed these beautiful images of Himself to be thus defaced and shamed.

(Mitchell 1997: 335)

Roger Casement *continúa describiendo a los caucheros y sus acólitos*:

One looks then at the oppressors – vile cut-throat faces; grim, cruel lips and sensual mouths, bulging eyes and lustful . . . and it is this handful of murderers who, in the name of civilisation and of a great association of English gentlemen, are the possessors of so much gentler and better flesh and blood.

(Mitchell 1997: 335)

The report which Roger Casement completed for the Foreign Office was published as a parliamentary Blue Book in July 1912 and contributed, once again, to exposing the brutal oppression of rubber workers in the depths and darkness of the ransacked tropical forest. This publication stirred diplomatic circles and public opinion worldwide, causing the collapse of Arana's Peruvian Amazon Company the following year.

Roger Casement's official reports on the Congo and the Putumayo are not the only written sources in which he registered the sinister underpinnings of the global capitalist system of his day. The journal kept by Casement during his time in the Amazon is a further, more directly-written account of what he was witnessing, and thus provides an invaluable source from which to grasp the workings of a predatory system rooted in the appropriation of natural resources without any regard for the rights and life of the indigenous people within that ecosystem.

Angus Mitchell, who edited Roger Casement's Amazon Journal – and to whom, I repeat again, we owe a huge debt of gratitude for his research of many crucial aspects of Roger Casement's work – has shown how this journal throws light onto the mechanisms of colonial exploitation, “showing the criminal interdependencies which facilitate the instruments of fear, violence, secrecy and intimidation to subjugate and divide indigenous society” (Mitchell 2010, p. 16).

According to Angus Mitchell, not only does this Amazon Journal express Roger Casement's uncompromising interrogation of colonial reality, his outrage at the atrocities committed by the local taskmasters and, by association,

their commercial accomplices back in London, but it also demonstrates a deep-seated interest in indigenous culture that was rooted in Casement's own, and somewhat idealised, conception of Irish native culture.

In 1913, Roger Casement began to establish a connection between the fate of the Amazon indigenes and the plight of Connemara islanders who were suffering from an outbreak of typhus. Such identification of "Irishness" with indigeneity can be interpreted as integral to the formation of a wider anti-colonial awareness in the revolutionary Ireland of the early twentieth century.

That wider anti-colonial awareness had found expression, for example, in the establishment by historian Alice Stopford Green, Douglas Hyde, and a few others, of an Irish African Society, and it also expressed itself during the first decades of Irish independence, through Ireland's advocacy on behalf of colonised peoples in such fora as the League of Nations or the United Nations.

To this day, the defence of human rights, the fight against global hunger, and a commitment to disarmament and international peace remain cornerstones of Ireland's foreign policy.

The significance of Roger Casement's observations is recognised by contemporary anthropological writing. For example, Michael Taussig, Professor of Anthropology at Colombia University, in his now classic study of the "culture of terror" and "space of death" created by the rubber barons in the Putumayo river area of present-day Columbia, has also referred to Casement's tendency to equate the sufferings of the Irish with those of the Indians, and to see in the pre-imperialist history of both a culture more humane than that of their "civilising" masters (1984, pp. 467-497). After all, Casement himself had written of how his insight into the sufferings of the Congo's enslaved rubber workers stemmed from his own capacity to look at their tragedy – I quote:

with the eyes of another race – of a people once hunted themselves, whose ... estimate of life was not of something eternally to be praised at its market 'price'.

(Letter to Alice Stopford Green, 20 April 1907: NLI MS10,464)

Roger Casement's sensitivity to the plight of the Indigenes – a sensitivity rarely found indeed in a person of his epoch and upbringing – was thus unquestionably informed by his sense of his own identity as an Irishman. This experience of inhumanity in the colonial periphery did, in turn, reinforce Roger Casement's commitment to Ireland's ancient Gaelic culture and the cause of Irish freedom. This complex set of experiences, moral convictions and emancipatory aspirations finally drove him to articulate a full-blown rejection of the values and assumptions of free-trading empire he had willingly and diligently served for many years.

Roger Casement was at the peak of his career and reputation, having been knighted by King George V, when he resigned from the British Consular

service, in 1913. His involvement with the plans for an armed rebellion in Ireland, in the midst of World War I, led to his eventual capture, trial for high treason, and execution by hanging in the early morning of 3rd August, 1916, in London's Pentonville Prison.

Queridos Amigos,

Roger Casement has rightly been described as one of the founders of the modern human rights discourse. A worthy successor to outstanding figures from previous centuries, such as Bartolomé de Las Casas or Antonio Vieira, he championed the rights of indigenous peoples and the principle of the irreducibility of human dignity before such concepts came into widespread usage.

Those are the figures History remembers – compelling voices who dared to speak up against the misery generated by the ruthless commercial practices of their time. Voices that still speak to us, across the centuries. For me, it is the capacity to go to the root of the assumptions that justified the system that distinguishes Roger Casement. “Assumptions-testing” must be at the core of pluralist scholarship in any progressive system, not to speak of democracy.

At this beginning of a new century, the fundamental questions Roger Casement raised about power and human rights, about the rights of indigenous communities, and about the rules guiding foreign policy, development strategies and international trade – those questions continue to challenge and unsettle us but to which for too many people if I might borrow Pope Francis' phrase, “we have become anaesthetised”.

I will, if I may quote one last time Casement's own words – words he couched on his way back from the Putumayo, and words that resound powerfully, I believe, with our present ensnarement within a distorted, hyper-financialised version of capitalism. Roger Casement asked:

Has our modern commercialism, our latter-day company promoting – whose motto would seem to be that a Director may pocket the proceeds without perceiving the process – no part in this enterprise of horror and shame?

[The Aranas] found English men and English finance prepared without question to accept their Putumayo ‘estates’ and their numerous native ‘labourers’ at a glance, a glance at the annually increasing output of rubber. Nothing beyond that was needed. The rubber was there. How it was produced, out of what hell of human suffering, no one knew, no one asked, no one suspected. Can it be that no one cared?

(Mitchell 1997: 504)

Can it be that, nowadays, no one cares about that most dangerous of all immunities, the immunity sought once again by morally irresponsible, but powerful, commercial interests in sectors such as mining, oil drilling and

logging? Can it be that no one objects to industrial strategies predicated upon the seizure of land and the appropriation of natural resources, notwithstanding the rights of those whose ancestors were caretakers of the forests and the great rivers, and who are dependent today on those resources to preserve their particular ways of life? Can it be that no one wishes to recall the names of those environmentalists and indigenous activists who are murdered year after year in the name of greed and a new rush to the forest, this time for gold, and oil, and gas, and minerals, and exotic timber?

Let us not, dear friends, avert our gaze from sites of plunder, exploitation and degradation. Let us not abandon any of our communities, however remote they may be from centres of power, to raw economic forces. Let us draw, instead, on the best of our scholarship, on the best of our science and technology, and on our citizens' abiding capacity for mobilisation to imagine, defend, and implement new solutions for the future of the forest and its indigenous communities. Let us build on the real possibilities that exist for new forms of international and regional cooperation, so as to craft, together, a more just international order.

I am not suggesting that this is an easy task. Issues of development are extremely complicated matters, requiring complex balancing of choices between the generation of material wealth, the urgency of the needs of poorer citizens, and the long-term imperatives of environmental sustainability and the rights of indigenous people.

We know, however, that the current patterns of distorted trade, insatiable consumption and inordinate extraction of natural resources are not sustainable. Not only is it urgent, but it is necessary, and possible, to devise alternative models of development. It is possible for governments to demand of companies that they respect their ethical and legal obligations. It is possible, and crucial, to protect the rights to land of indigenous peoples and subsistence farmers, including the women among them. As the great Peruvian poet, César Vallejo, said: "*Hay, hermanos, muchísimo que hacer*" (1939).

Yes, there is, brothers and sisters of this vulnerable planet, very much to do. And there are, also, many reasons to be hopeful. In pursuing our immense task of reconstruction for this new century, we are fortunate to be able to rely on public support for that rich framework of human rights to which Roger Casement made a pioneering contribution.

Further, in their efforts to protect the rights of indigenous people, governments can build on a robust national, regional and international legal corpus, from the emblematic study of the United Nations' Special Rapporteur, José Martínez Cobo in 1972, to the important consultation mechanisms enshrined in the International Labour Organisation's *Convention 169*, down to the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the tenth anniversary of which we will celebrate this year. These are instruments we must all work to see put in action.

Much can be achieved, too, within the new framework for Global Sustainable Development, which comprises several targets specifically dedicated to indigenous people, and on the recent advancements secured by the global climate talks.

The Peruvian government has led the way in that regard, by reiterating, at several junctures during those negotiations, its commitment to preserving a total of 54 million hectares of forest and to reducing its rate of net deforestation to zero by 2021, while also committing to increasing the area of land titled to indigenous groups.

There are so many promising initiatives in-the-making on this continent. I am thinking, for example, of the suggestion of creating a vast protected area of biological and cultural diversity connecting the Andes, the Amazon and the Atlantic, a corridor for humanity now and in the future, in which the indigenous people and their traditional knowledge would play an important role.

Leaders from all over the world can draw inspiration from such an example of cooperation between eight countries, that builds on existing projects, programmes and transboundary agreements and re-articulates them within the wider framework of the new Sustainable Development Goals and its related climate agenda.

I believe that the global discussion underway on climate and the environment presents indigenous communities with a historic opportunity to make their voices heard. As Eduardo Galeano put it in an interview from 2001:

[Indigenous people] have suffered the seven plagues of Egypt, and many more. But they have perpetuated traditions coming from their ancient times; and these voices from the past speak to the future of all humankind.

(Manrique 2001)

Indigenous communities, from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, find themselves on the frontline of global climate change; I want to extend, on behalf of the people of Ireland, my sympathy to all those who have suffered in Peru from the recent floods. The ongoing discussions on the future of our planet present all of us with an important opportunity, and a responsibility, to rethink our relation to our natural environment.

These invitations constitute a challenge to the dualist and insufficient intellectual constructs bequeathed to us by Western philosophy, that might have led to the separation between culture and nature, between mind and matter, between the spiritual and the bodily. Old patterns of wisdom, embodied skills, and vernacular knowledges, if recovered, can offer some healing of those harmful separations as we seek to return the human to a meaningful place *within* nature, and to articulate a new ethic of responsibility binding together all those, human and non-human, who dwell on earth.

Finally, much hope and inspiration can be derived from the processes of memory healing currently underway amongst indigenous communities who are the descendants of those who were brutalised by the Arana regime. Colombian anthropologist Juan Alvarro Echeverri, to whose work I have referred earlier, related the story of a group of Muinane Indians, comprising both elders and youths who, in 1993, undertook a journey back to their ancestral lands in what is now called the district of Matanzas, but used to be known to the Indians as “Hill of the Wild Cacao Tree” (Echeverri 2010).

This region has been part of Colombia ever since the 1920s, when Peru ceded to Colombia the territories north of the Putumayo River. In the early 1990s, most of the Muinane elders were the children of those who had directly suffered slavery and slaughter, and they had never been back to that area where the malocas [longhouses] of their forbears rested abandoned.

What comes across in the words and invocations – addressed by those Muinane elders to the spirits of their murdered ancestors believed to be still inhabiting the area – are not thoughts of revenge, not even a willingness to recall the detail of the unspeakable crimes they suffered, but a generous and forward-looking desire to heal amputated memories by introducing the ancestors to their beautiful descendants – “the bones of their bones” – and by nurturing the immense potential for life embodied in that generation of educated, resourceful and interested young people.

As one of our most valued Irish poets, Derek Mahon, put it just a few years ago:

It is now time to go back at last
Beyond irony and slick depreciation
Past hedge and fencing to a clearer vision
Time to create a future from the past

(Mahon 2016)

Amigos, may we, like the Muinane, discard for all time the “basket of darkness” encountered by Roger Casement in the Putumayo, and like the Muinane take from the “basket of life” and sow, together, the seeds of a new ethics for our times – the ethics of caring, nurturing work carried out in responsibility and joyous celebration for the sake of future generations.

Muchísimas gracias.

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Leon Ó Broin, *The Irish Abolitionist. Richard Madden and the Subversion of Empire*, Translated and Edited by Mícheál Ó hAodha, Dublin, Nuascéalta, 2014, 483 pp.

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Juan José Delaney¹

Leon Ó Broin (1902–1990) was known as a short-story writer, playwright and essayist, and also as the editor of *Fáinne an Lae* (the bilingual journal of the Gaelic League). Having already published two other biographies (*Parnell* [1937] and *Emmet* [1954]), his account of Richard Madden – an Irishman who, as a British colonial administrator, fought against slavery and became a human rights crusader – was published in 1971. Madden, who lived between 1798 and 1886, was also a prolific writer and an altruist concerned with the deep, controversial, and historic troubles and difficulties that his native country went through, including the Great Famine (1845–1852). This biography of Madden, originally written and published in Irish, has been recently translated into English and edited by Professor Mícheál Ó hAodha.

A biography, by its very nature, is always shaped and limited by its author's point of view. Although sometimes Manichean, Ó Broin's vision of Madden and his days is a convincing one, revealing his effectiveness as a writer. While faithful to the original work, the English translation has changed slightly in tone, becoming a book that is read with the same interest and expectation devoted to a good novel.

According to renowned Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, a reliable biography should include contributions and insights from the relatives and friends of the central subject. Since such a thing is occasionally impossible, it can happen that, by focusing on the subject of the biography, the writer loses perspective and overpraises his/her words and deeds, which in turn affects how the subject is viewed in relation to contemporary actors. Though Ó Broin is not completely free from this restraint, his footnotes and a selected bibliography are useful in successfully contextualizing Madden in relation to key figures in his life.

Ó Broin's chronological account stresses the formation of Madden's character during his education and shortly thereafter, the trials and tribulations of his struggle to find his place in the world, and his vocation. Accounts are given of how Madden became a doctor after studying medicine in Paris, Naples and London, his travels from 1824 to 1827, and his appointment as a surgeon in London until 1833 when he was employed to oversee the Abolition of Slavery Statute in Jamaica. In fact, after joining the Anti-Slavery Association in London, Madden took various posts, not only in Jamaica (which he left in 1834 following a quarrel with planters), but in Havana (1836-1840) and Australia

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(1847). In 1843, when jobless, he accepted an offer to become the Portugal correspondent for the *Morning Chronicle*. In each country, he not only encountered opposition (e.g. to the abolition process and attempts to redress the exploitation of settlers in Australia) but also internal and external enemies (e.g. manifesting themselves as death threats when he was a journalist in Portugal). Remarkably, he also found time to write and publish fiction, essays and reports of his experiences as a traveller, always on the move. Despite certain personal doubts and failures on Madden's behalf, the biographer proves that Madden's empathy and commitment to the human condition never waned. To illustrate this narrative, statements are substantiated by generous quotations generally taken from Madden's letters, essays, poems or memoirs.

The apparent aim of presenting Madden as a hero seems to move the writer to engage in partial or simplified interpretations of the facts that marked his subject's life, although copious editor's notes expand and illuminate the narrative. In more than one way, Richard Madden (his character and his works) anticipates and paves the way for that Irish giant of oppressed peoples, Roger Casement (1864-1916).

Ó Broin's writing is particularly eloquent when it portrays Madden through his actions. We see this when he deals with the Catholic Church in relation to slavery in Cuba; in the way he managed the situation that arose in the infamous slave ship *Amistad*, in August 1839; in his relationship with fellow abolitionist Lewis Tappan; and in his awkward unsuccessful encounter with the American President Martin Van Buren. In this context, in Chapter 10, the longest and probably most striking part of the book, by telling the story of the Irish in Australia within a web of political and religious intrigues, Ó Broin shows who Richard Madden really was, and his depth of character as a true humanitarian. Moreover, realistic descriptions (such as the one concerning a family being evicted from their cabin in Bantry, County Cork), reveal Leon Ó Broin as a powerful man of letters.

In the context of the Repeal Movement (1840s), the biographer writes:

Madden found himself caught up in these revolutionary rumblings when he gave a speech at a public dinner in Dublin shortly after his return from West Africa. Any Irishman who was familiar with oppression in his own country had a duty to do whatever he could to do away with tyranny in foreign lands also, he said. This statement reflected his personal philosophy on life, where there was no distinction made between love of country and love of humanity. The Irish and Black Africans were two races that found themselves in a similarly downtrodden position, in Madden's view. (2014: 177)

Curiously, there is no systematic assessment of Madden's contribution to literature. If we have to judge his work from what is quoted by Ó Broin, Madden was a minor poet (his name is ignored in *The Mercier Companion to Irish Literature*, published in 1998). Ó Broin writes: "Madden once said to Aubrey de Vere that he had never written a dozen lines of true poetry in his life and this was an assessment with which most of the literary critics of his day concurred"

(2014: 198). The fact is that he was the author of *A Twelve Months Residence in the West Indies* (1835), *The Island of Cuba* (1849) and *The History of Irish Periodical Literature from the end of the 17th to the Middle of the 19th Century* (1867), among many other books. It seems that *The United Irishmen, Their Lives & Times*, in seven volumes (1843-1846), stands as his literary legacy, although “The *London Times* gave an accurate account of Richard Madden’s life in its obituary page with no trace of hyperbole. Of all the books he had written the *Times* correspondent praised *The Life and Martyrdom of Savonarola* (1854) for its style and historical interest and *The Connexion of the Kingdom of Ireland and the Crown of England* (1845) as historical research that was as useful a tool then as it had been when first published” (2014: 420). Regardless of our estimation, the biographer explains how, in a slow but self-confident process, Richard Madden entered the last segment of his life engaged in religious meditation and in the ineffable realm of words.

Formerly limited to an Irish-language readership, it is thanks to Mícheál Ó hAodha’s efforts in completing such a scrupulous translation that this work is now accessible to a broader readership.

Beyond mere entertainment, those who read biographies to gain insights into the human condition or an interpretation of reality will not be disappointed by Ó Broin’s work on the days and nights of Richard Madden. Ó Broin illuminates his subject – who is relatively unknown, especially in America where he did a great deal of his humanitarian work – as a compelling, independent, rich and plural personality.

Reviews:

Timothy Fanning: *Paisanos: The Forgotten Irish who Changed the Face of Latin America*, Gill Books, Dublin, 2016, 280 pp., 16 pages of illustrations

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David Barnwell

This book consists of 18 chapters. These cover a lot of the standard topics in this field – the Irish Legions, the San Patricios of the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), a wide cast of characters from Chile's Bernardo O'Higgins to Simón Bolívar's aide-de-camp Daniel Florence O'Leary. Fanning concentrates on the great men, the generals and the politicians. And men they are in the main, since the only women given any attention are Eliza Lynch, the mistress of the President of Paraguay, and the Argentinian victim Camila O'Gorman (Lynch to my mind is treated with more sympathy than she deserves.) The coverage of the 'great' figures will make Fanning's study attractive for readers with little grounding in the subject, but one of the merits of the book is that it fleshes out stories of other figures often mentioned in the literature of the Irish in Latin America, but who rarely get more than a sentence or two in these histories. These are familiar names to those of us with an interest in the field, but our knowledge of these figures usually peters out after two or three sentences. They are what one might call the second rank—not *próceres* such as Admiral Brown, Daniel Florence O'Leary or Bernardo O'Higgins, but rather men such as Pedro Campbell, Thomas Charles Wright, Arthur Sandes and others. Fanning does us a great service in adding to our knowledge of such figures and making their stories available in one volume. Quite a few such individuals have been covered or at least mentioned in articles in IMSLA (indeed the author recognizes his debt to the SILAS materials).

Quite a lot of the early book is rooted in Spain. Fanning starts for some reason with a fairly long section on Richard Wall, eighteenth century diplomat and minister in the Spanish government. Wall is of course an important figure, but his relevance to Latin America is never made clear. Similarly, extensive coverage is given to José María Blanco White, another person who, as far as I know, never set foot in Latin America. Others will disagree, but in my view Wall and Blanco White are external to the focus of this book. Nevertheless, I did find very interesting Fanning's introduction of a figure I knew little about, namely Bernard Ward, Monaghan-born economist, and his efforts to adopt the (Royal) Dublin Society model to Spain.

It is really only in Chapter Three that the author engages with Latin America. This is where he narrates the story of Meath-born Alexander O'Reilly, commander of Spanish forces in eighteenth-century Cuba and Louisiana, providing an excellent essential biography of this controversial figure. From O'Reilly we move on to Ambrosio and Bernardo O'Higgins, John Devereux

(veteran of the Wexford Rebellion who later came to command, mostly from afar, an Irish legion in Venezuela / Colombia), Francis Burdett O'Connor (an officer under Bolívar who later became associated with Bolivia) and an array of other personalities. The narrative ranges wide, from Mexico to Chile, from the Andes to the Caribbean. Fanning operates a fairly elastic definition of Irishness, accepting both the native born, such as Ambrosio O'Higgins, as well as those several generations removed, such as Camila O'Gorman. No one can come away from the book without an appreciation of the richness and diversity of the experience of Irish-born people and their descendants in Latin America.

In his introduction, Fanning states that Brazil "requires its own separate study". That decision is the author's prerogative, but I believe it is mistaken. Brazil may be a huge country, but the Irish involvement in Brazil is not that huge. It is quite amenable to inclusion in a book such as this. It is disappointing and puzzling that Fanning offers no account of General William Cotter's expedition to Brazil in 1827. Cotter, an officer of the Imperial Brazilian Army recruited several thousand people in Munster—men, women, children, soldiers and settlers—to travel to Brazil. Ostensibly, they were to be given land to settle, in return for light military duties. As is the norm in Irish forays into Latin America, the reality was quite different, and the aspiring colonists found themselves penniless and landless. The Irish 'soldiers', using the term loosely, mutinied in Rio de Janeiro and the rebellion was only put down by native forces after quite vicious street-fighting. This expedition bookends that of Devereux in the north of Latin America, and the outcome was, if anything, worse. The episode surely warrants inclusion in a book such as Fanning's. Another lacuna, less problematic perhaps, is the neglect of Irish settlement efforts in Mexico. In the late 1820s and early 1830s, *empresarios* such as James Power were behind projects to import Irish settlers from Waterford and Wexford into that part of Mexico around what is today Corpus Christi, Texas. We will never know how that community would have developed, as the course of Texan history was changed by the secession from Mexico in 1836.

In recent years, there has been a welcome development of the historiography of Irish interconnections with Spain and Latin America. One impediment to such studies has been the fact that few Irish historians are proficient in foreign languages, and of those who sufficiently master a foreign language to conduct research in it, that language is rarely Spanish. Hence it is a pleasure to add Timothy Fanning to the small number of Irish historians who are equipped to come to grips with original materials in Spanish. He has used a wide range of sources, from archives in both Spain and Latin America. He has also availed of the standard classic military accounts, such as those of Alfred Hasbrouck and Eric Lambert. Fanning is familiar, too, with the recent work of Mathew Brown, the English researcher who has added greatly to our knowledge of the participation of foreign volunteers in the wars of independence in Gran Colombia. He uses Brown to good effect in his account of an inglorious episode for the Irish, the murder by an Irish supporter of Bolívar of the wounded anti-Bolívar General José María Córdova, near Medellín, Colombia.

The book offers interesting descriptions of the kinds of men who undertook the long journey to Latin America to become officers in one or other of the

armies in the field. Many of them were professional soldiers, demobilized following the Napoleonic Wars. This officer class was both Protestant and Catholic – indeed relations between the two traditions were good. They devoted much of their free time, of which there was a lot, to drinking and gambling. Usually these habits had been entrenched during the long sea voyages from Europe. Alcohol and gambling make a dangerous combination, and there are several recorded cases of pistol duels on board ship. Whether from the swaying off the ship decks or the effects of drink, such encounters produced far more hits than misses. Fanning is not as strong—perhaps the sources are poorer—in describing the rank and file, though here and there he does offer interesting information. For instance, he has details on men recruited for Bolívar in 1818 by the Irishman Colonel James English. These were predominantly from the east and north of Ireland. A large number of trades were represented, especially textile workers, and a few of the men were quite advanced in years, into their late 40s at least.

Fanning's book throws out interesting pointers for more specialized topics of future research. One fascinating element that he alludes to is the presence of agents and spies of Spain in Ireland, who were working to disrupt popular support for the Latin American independence movements. The topic represents surely an attractive topic for a PhD student. Indeed there are many matters that merit further enquiry. What one might call the Irish end of the migration, be it the process of recruitment for Devereux and Cotter, or for the 1820s Texas settlements, is a rich field for further investigation. And what links survived between the Irish in Latin America and their native country? As is well known, Admiral Brown paid a visit to his native Mayo during the Famine, but such a return to Ireland was probably a rarity. Only in Argentina does it seem that links with the homeland were preserved.

Indeed, Irish emigration to Argentina is the most researched element of Irish migration to Latin America, yet Fanning's treatment of the topic seems a little impoverished. For instance, he never mentions Thomas Murray's *Story of the Irish in Argentina*, a century after its publication still by far the best source on Irish life on the nineteenth century pampa, or indeed Irish daily life anywhere in Latin America. Fanning's focus is, as was mentioned, on the great actors on the public stage. Thus he covers the military exploits of Admiral Brown in far more detail than the day-to-day life of Irish sheep farmers. That is his choice, and one should not criticise an author for not writing a book that he did not set out to write. Yet, surely, there is another book to be written, which recounts the daily grind far away from the battlefields and military leaders, and chronicles such things as the interactions of Irish soldiers and settlers with the local population, with Indians, with other foreign settlers and with the alien landscape of Latin America itself. Fanning may well be the man to write such a book.

The overall production standard of *Paisanos* is admirable. It is attractively laid out, with a good number of illustrations. The control of Spanish names and place names is excellent; almost all are printed with their appropriate *tildes*. There are a few errors nevertheless; on page 214, Fanning has Father Fahy warning new arrivals about the “inequities” of Buenos Aires. Given what we

know about Fahy, the word should undoubtedly read “iniquities”. And in a footnote on page 250, from the *Archivo de Indias*, we have “Tómas O Gorman, solicita carta de nativaleza”. The written accent on the first word is definitely misplaced, but I am also very dubious about the word “nativaleza”. It appears to be a misprint for ‘naturaleza’. Given the often disparate and recondite sources that Fanning marshals, these rare slips can be overlooked. As regards the Spanish language sources, it is regrettable that Fanning nowhere, in text or footnotes, cites the original Spanish. All is translated to English. It may well be that this was at the behest of the publisher, but the failure to cite in the original does take away from the scholarly quality of the book. There surely was no reason why the English translation could not have been given in the main text, with the Spanish version in the footnotes, or vice versa.

A couple of years ago I was assigned a college course to teach, entitled “Ireland and the Hispanic World”. My first thought was to look for a general text that I could build my lectures around, one that covered all the essential ground but left room for some further graduate-level input. I found no such text, and so had to confect the readings for my course from disparate and sometimes rather inaccessible materials. Were I to be set the same task in the future, I would have no hesitation in setting Tim Fanning’s *Paisanos* as a central text. We have been waiting a long time for such a book, one that brings together in a readable fashion many important elements of the wide sweep of Irish interaction with the Americas.

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