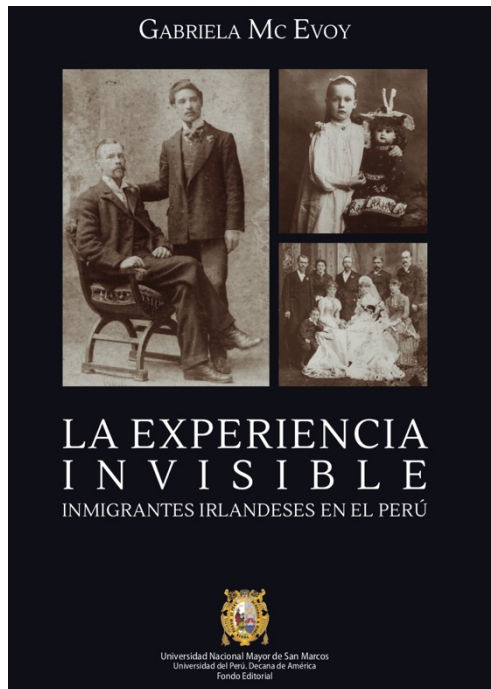


Reviews

**Gabriela McEvoy, *La experiencia invisible. Inmigrantes irlandeses en el Perú*, Fondo Editorial de la Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Lima, Peru, 2018, 256 pp.**

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This fascinating study is a great read. It adds significantly to the burgeoning list of publications about ethnic communities throughout Latin America. Gabriela McEvoy, Professor of Spanish at Lebanon Valley College, Pennsylvania, USA, has produced an opus which expands on her earlier research work on the same topic.<sup>1</sup> This stylishly written and produced work confirms what Jonathan Swift has to say about style as being “proper words in proper places make a true definition of style”. It stands out for the extensive and skillful use of primary source archival material: unpublished private family letters; documents; birth, marriage and death registers; as well as now long forgotten newspapers.

Five succinct chapters discuss the presence of Irish immigrants and their insertion into Peruvian society. McEvoy’s intention is to reconstruct part of that Irish history in Peru, which began in colonial times and continued during the nineteenth century. Those Irish

immigrants who arrived between 1849 and 1853 (in the immediate aftermath of the Famine) correspond fundamentally to a proletariat diaspora; working class in the broadest sense, some of them undoubtedly unable to either read or write. For many, the myth of return home to Ireland existed only in their imagination – a chimera. For the many, the truth was the impossibility of returning home. This topic, often mentioned *en passant* about the Irish in Argentina, has never really been explored in any great detail but has been touched on at a tangent by two contemporary historians, María Eugenia Cruset<sup>2</sup> and the late Sinéad Wall.<sup>3</sup>

The presence of Irish immigrants and their insertion into Peruvian society is the central theme in McEvoy’s study, despite the fact that this immigration was small in size and for many a failed

<sup>1</sup> Gabriela McEvoy, “Irish Immigrants in Peru During the Nineteenth Century”, *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, Vol.7, No.4, November 2011 and “El valor de los archivos en los invisibles irlandeses”, *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, Vol. 8, No. 3, July 2014, 28-40.

<sup>2</sup> María Eugenia Cruset, *Construyendo la patria desde lejos: Irlandeses y vascos en Argentina (1862-1922)*, Ediciones Lauburu, Universidad de La Plata, Buenos Aires, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Sinéad Wall (1973-2016), *Irish Diasporic Narratives in Argentina: A Reconsideration of Home, Identity and Belonging*, Peter Lang Publishing, 2017.

project. Further, while a significant group of Peruvians proudly affirm their Irish roots, there is a greater number of Irish descendants in Peru than mentioned in this book. Some of these descendants lack concrete evidence of their Irish patrimony, their key history has been lost, and others are not mentioned owing to McEvoy's editorial decision to focus on a few representative figures. The Irish-Peruvian immigration remains an enigmatic one.

The migration experience puts an immigrant in totally unexpected situations and, in the unknown context, the immigrant seeks adaptive strategies and practical solutions that permit survival. While life for the first generation of individuals revolves around work activities, for the second generation education becomes all important, as McEvoy's work makes clear.

Personal and private letters carry family news across physical borders and create invisible links. Letters are a symbol of separation and family *rapprochement*, a duality which creates a communication channel facing sentiments of separation and loss of family which the immigrant leaves behind. Correspondence, now all the more important as the modern day "technology contact", email, has in many instances replaced hand written and/or typed letters. The letters that McEvoy reproduces in the study provide an insight into daily life, obstacles faced, and group preoccupations in a determined time and space. Maybe, as is often the case, this sense of loss is best expressed by a poet, as in the words of Franco de Vita.<sup>4</sup>

"Foreigner"<sup>5</sup>  
You who left one morning  
without knowing where you were going,  
A name, an address, on a ship to America  
wrapped in an overcoat, a kiss for Angelica.  
You who left all  
Thinking it was just a dream  
A tear on the face of those who loved you so much.

While *La experiencia invisible. Inmigrantes irlandeses en el Perú* examines the life and work of many anonymous Irish migrants, it also carefully investigates in particular other individuals such as John Patrick Gallagher O'Connor and William Russell Grace, who would become successful in business and the professions—self-made men. W. R. Grace, regarded by many as a pirate in Peru, was an innovator who availed of commercial conditions and his feel for business, making his fortune on Wall Street.

The Irish immigrant did not enjoy full liberty in a receptive society due in great part to the work contract which brought him and could not be broken. Labourers had to serve on a *hacienda* for seven years with an annual wage of £13 per year, plus food and lodging. Religion was important to the Irish, and Gallagher's plan included for a Catholic priest who would receive a salary, and food and lodging, although the same conditions applied to him as to others, i.e., a fine and penalties for leaving the *hacienda*. But there would be no chaplain (like the legendary Dominican Fr Anthony Fahy in Argentina) to minister to the Irish in Peru.

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<sup>4</sup> Francisco de Vita is a Venezuelan Latin Grammy award-winning singer-songwriter.

<sup>5</sup> *Extranjero* – Edward Walsh Spanish/English translation.

One of the great strengths of *La experiencia invisible. Inmigrantes irlandeses en el Perú* are the six tables with details of deaths, age at death, and informants of death, extracted from the registers of the British Cemetery, Callao (volumes 1 to 11, covering the years 1837 to 1961), as well as marriage details and kinds of work engaged in. These registers provide a wealth of detail.

Three minor corrections or points of information should be noted. “*la ciudad de Glanworth*” (40) – Glanworth is not a city but rather a small town with an approximate population of 1,350 off the Dublin/Cork highway between Fermoy and Kilworth; “kitchen soups” (47) – both collocation and history dictate this should read as “soup kitchens”. Thomas Duggan (100) – the last Irish person to be buried at the British Cemetery, Callao, in 1961, was Archdeacon Thomas Duggan, famed World War I and World War II military chaplain. His remains were exhumed in 1963, and transferred to the St James Society language school at Cruzpatambo, Cienaguilla. In 2004, they were again exhumed and reinterred in El Buen Pastor, El Porvenir, Trujillo (the first church built by the Cork Mission in Peru).

I read and reviewed this book at home in Bogota, Colombia, and while doing so remembered a memorable visit to the Grace hacienda at Cartavio many years ago. I knew nothing about Grace, but one of the salient aspects of this book is to locate Grace timewise in the Peruvian context, paint the background and describe who he really was and what he did. There is no doubt that this small opus is now an integral component of the canon of Irish Latin American literature – that specialised collection of books, narratives and texts central to an understanding of the existential reality of the Irish as a national group living and working within a Latin milieu and Spanish-speaking people.