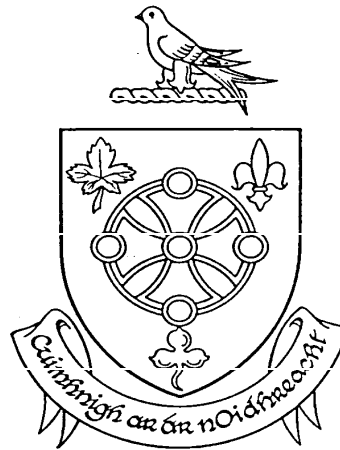


# AN NASC

D'Arcy McGee Chair of Irish Studies  
Saint Mary's University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia



*In this issue:*

The Canadian Association for Irish Studies Conference 2004  
An interview with Irish poet Roddy Gorman  
"Donnchadh Ruadh Mac Conmara:  
Poet at the end of the Old Gaelic world and at the edge of the New World"

Volume 16, Summer 2004

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Michael J. Miller

**AN NASC** was established as a link between the Chair of Irish Studies and those who are involved or interested in promoting Irish Studies and heritage in Canada and abroad. It also seeks to develop awareness of the shared culture of Ireland, Gaelic Scotland and those of Irish and Gaelic descent in Canada

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# Céad Míle Teanga / A Hundred Thousand Languages

Sandra Dyan Murdock

The Canadian Association for Irish Studies (CAIS) 2004 Conference, “*Mother Tongues: The Languages of Ireland*”, hosted by Saint Mary’s University May 26-29, 2004, successfully gathered into one long weekend the roots and shoots and tendrils of Ireland’s linguistic diversity, from medieval literature to modern globalism. Presenter Aodh Ó Coileáin cited globalism’s challenging of “the historic, binary opposition of Irish and English,” and indeed the variegated nature of language in Ireland’s past, present and future highlighted at this conference would gladden the hearts of linguists while rattling the narrow perceptions of public hostilities and archaic debates.

Beyond the typically wide scope of papers, the greatest thrills of the conference lay in the calibre of the presenters (many leaders in their fields), and in the intimacy of the atmosphere that allowed for the interaction of graduate students and non-academics with renowned literary artists and scholars. Halifax’s *Bookmark* bookstore representatives were on hand, providing attendees with a selection of presenters’ publications – a welcome opportunity for North American residents.

Implicitly illustrated in this conference’s deconstruction of Irish communicative media is the perception that language is descriptive of not just the structure and impulses of human speech and silence, but the interactions of actions and images themselves, prior even to the interpretation thereof. Thus, language is the descriptive alpha and omega of topography, genres, cultural imports and exports, social progression and stasis, historic interpretations and the revisiting thereof, and of personal, community and cultural negotiation.

As we can sometimes forget in Canada that linguistic presence extends beyond French and English, there is the analogous situation in



Ireland (already referred to) of more to the linguistic picture than straightforward Irish and English. Both national languages have regional and social dialects within ever-shifting boundaries; some have traveled far with their emigrant speakers; there is Ulster Scots and Shelta; there is the influx of newcomers’ mother tongues; there are past influences such as Nordic languages. Questions raised varied from the problem of translating dialects, the potential inadequacies of second language acquisition programs, perennial debates over authenticity, efforts to use language to legitimize rather than antagonize distinctness, and how to reshape perceptions through the imaginative revisiting of traditional boundaries and inequalities.

The following is but a selection of presenters, with humble apologies to those not included:

Michael B. Montgomery, from the University of South Carolina, spoke about Ulster Scots, a regional dialect stemming from the Lowland Scots, which currently aspires to the status of language. He separated the linguistic issues from the political, aside from the mention of its recognition in the Good Friday agreement, focusing more on the cultural and linguistic strengths and handicaps. One is struck by the apparent situational similarity of marginalization between Ulster Scots and the local North Preston dialect, long derided as “broken English.”

Writer Éilís Ní Dhuibhne explored writing in and about Irish and how the language informs her subject matter and literary form. She asks

and answers the question “Why write in Irish?” with a refreshing *laissez-faire*. Noting the agreed upon greater practicality of writing in English, she dexterously upends the matter with the rejoinder “What has practicality to do with it?” Ní Dhuibhne is a writer who combines academic curiosity with artistic wonder. Reading from her Orange Prize 2000 shortlist novel, *The Dancers Dancing*, she compares the amorphous boundaries of adolescent identity with the notion that linguistic identity shifts according to perceptions.

Michael Cronin, Director of the Centre for Translation and Textual Studies at Dublin City University, tackled the language kaleidoscope of modern Dublin, showing that immigration is the slipstream of language movement. His talk reminded both Irish and Canadians that blinkered engagement in dual official language debate ignores the ever-increasing multilingualism already present in our urban centres. In fact, the presence of sixty-three mother tongues in Dublin seems shocking; one wonders the tally for Montreal or Toronto. That the new World Radio One in Dublin currently offers limited broadcasting in twelve languages is nothing short of inspiring. Alternatively, while Irish second language acquisition is available to newcomers (at least in Galway), English acquisition is based on London TEFL texts, their cultural context veering off to the wildly irrelevant in terms of Irish socialization.

Ken Nilsen, our neighbour in Celtic Studies at St. Francis Xavier University, followed the emigrant journey of the Irish language into Canada, which culminated in a near-complete integration. Because literary evidence is relatively scarce, the detective work pushes farther afield where clues to the language’s presence can be gleaned from historical references to communities and their activities. One such string he is currently pursuing is the evidence of the Gaelic League in Canada.

Addressing the sustainability of the Irish language in Ireland was Peadar Ó Flatharta of Dublin City University, VP of the European Bureau

for Lesser Used Languages. He spoke of the debatable successes of the Irish language revival, prompting the question of whether or not language maintenance is truly amenable to government policy.

From Halifax’s Mount Saint Vincent University, Katherine Side related the clearer success of a women’s group in a rural Northern Irish community. This group used photography to initiate a unifying dialogue over the traditional religious boundaries of the locality.

Following on the themes of translation and transplantation, conference attendees received optional tickets to the first Canadian production of Martin McDonagh’s *The Lonesome West* by Halifax theatre company Angels & Heroes. Due in part to the pendular variability of directorial interpretation, performance reception in Ireland has, in turn, been much varied. Tonal possibilities range from the tragic to the absurdly comedic. With typical Maritime aplomb, this performance energetically stretched the gallows humour just shy of fraying.

Regarded as on the cutting edge of modern Irish poetry is Belfast poet Gearóid Mac Lochlainn. Reading from his 2002 bilingual collection *Sruth Teangacha/ Stream of Tongues*, the impact of his performance was palpable. His gift for sound and rhythm redoubles the strength of his word craft, allowing his art to most fully explore language as the combination of sound and meaning.

Our three days hit a comfortable climax with the performance of highly regarded traditional singers Len Graham and Pádraigín Ní Uallacháin. Later that evening, conference participants assembled at a local pub which serendipity had pre-stocked with a group of local youths informally gathered in song with traditional Irish instruments. Before the singers bid final farewells, Len took up a song, quickly hushing the chatty atmosphere. We were left to wonder had the musicians any inkling that the strange man in their midst was one of Ireland’s greatest folksingers.

Because language can more frequently separate communities, we may forget that it is the primary unifying trait among humans. The conference addressed the regional and cultural divisiveness of language and types of language, but also how the schisms we create can be bridged by this unique trait. Through language we create a multitude of accessibilities, whatever the medium, whatever the subject. It is the marker

of meaning, the means by which we negotiate our identities and explore our personal and public distinctness within our increasingly overlapping communities, beginning with the self, on to the home, to our towns and cities, our nations and beyond. Through sound and silence we communicate; by listening we understand. Thanks, then, to all conference speakers, and thanks to all who listened.



*Shown here at the opening of CAIS 2004 (l to r): Pádraig Ó Siadhail, Chairholder, D'Arcy McGee Chair of Irish Studies, Dr. Cyril J. Byrne, C.M., Coordinator, D'Arcy McGee Chair of Irish Studies, The Right Honourable Jamie Muir, Minister of Education for Nova Scotia, and Dr. Terrence Murphy, Vice-President, Academic and Research, Saint Mary's University.*

# History and Our Story

*Pádraig Ó Siadhail*

*Charitable Irish Society of Halifax St. Patrick's Day Banquet, 2004*

“History is more or less bunk.” So declared Henry Ford, American automobile maker and the son of Cork immigrants. Ford was not alone in casting doubts on either the accuracy or the efficacy of an official or accepted version of the past. One could pull together from various sources, and not just Books of Quotations, quite a range of cynical comments about this word history. Ambrose Bierce, the American satirical writer, defined history as “An account mostly false, of events mostly unimportant, which are brought about by rulers mostly knaves, and soldiers mostly fools.” The American Catholic churchman, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, noted that in regards to history: “The British never remember it; the Irish never forget it; the Russians never make it and the Americans never learn from it.” My own favorite quote about this word history comes from an anonymous Irish monk from the twelfth century. While taking a break from transcribing *Táin Bó Cuailgne* (The Cattle Raid of Cooley), the greatest saga in the Irish tradition, the monk doodled on the side of the manuscript: “But I, who have written this history or rather fable, do not give credit to much of it,” he declared. “For some things in it are the tricks of demons and others the figments of poets; some things are plausible, others not; and some are there for the entertainment of fools.”

Traditionally, the emphasis has been on military and political histories but there have always been other forms: such as hagiography, the lives of the saints, which was less concerned with historical accuracy than in promoting the cult of and veneration to the saint. As such, plagiarism and copyright were non-issues and there was widespread borrowing of material from

one saint's life to the next. It is the case that one of the stories most closely associated with St. Patrick, that of the banishing of snakes from Ireland, was in fact lifted from the biography of a continental European saint and adapted to the life history of Patrick. It is St. Brigid, in many ways the female equal of St. Patrick in the Irish tradition, who provides the best example of hagiography as make-it-up-as-you-go-along history. It is a matter of record that St. Brigid's biography is the oldest extant life of an Irish saint. Unfortunately St. Brigid never existed and was in fact the Celtic pagan goddess, Brighid, who with the arrival of Christianity into Ireland, was promptly repackaged in a sanitized form and venerated as a Christian saint.

Closely linked into hagiography is folk history: stories of dubious historical accuracy, which attached themselves to real historical characters. The St. Patrick whom we honour today is likely the synthesis of two different historical non-Irish born missionaries: Palladius, sent to Ireland in 431 AD, and Patrick the Briton who arrived somewhat later. Many of the stories in the folk tradition deal with St. Patrick's conflicts with the Druids, representatives of the old pre-Christian religion, and we see Patrick miraculously drawing on the power of God to defeat the diabolical doings of the Druids. In the Irish tradition, the saint comes equipped not just with crozier, Bible, bell and vestments but also with the power, conveniently borrowed from the Druids, to put curses on his or her opponents. Whatever about such worthy adversaries as the Druids themselves, a not infrequent target of these saintly curses were the tavern keepers of Ireland who watered down the drinks that they sold.

Daniel O'Connell, the famous Irish politician from the first half of the nineteenth century closely associated with the successful campaign for Catholic Emancipation and the failed campaign to Repeal the Act of Union between the United Kingdom and Ireland, provides probably the most entertaining example of a real historical figure about whom a vast array of folk history developed in his own life time. It was said that one could not throw a rock over a stone wall in his native Kerry without hitting one of O'Connell's illegitimate offspring. In reality, there is little historical basis for such a story: what we have here are traits of attractiveness to woman and virility of immense proportions being attached to a hero figure. I should add, just in case I offend anyone here – and, more to the point, get hit by a curse from St. Patrick – that there is no evidence in the Irish tradition of a transferal of these specific traits from the saintly Patrick to the secular Dan O'Connell.

While we immediately equate history with the past, David A. Wilson's recent wonderful book, *The History of the Future*, charts the beliefs of – and please excuse the clinical terminology – the kooks and crackpots who announced publicly that they could foretell the future, especially the exact moment when the world would come to a screeching stop. Amongst the cast are various Irish characters, including the 6th century saint, Colm Cille or Columba, to whom copious numbers of dodgy prophecies are falsely attributed. While it is comfortingly redundant to note that all the kooks and crackpots have been wrong so far, it is a sobering thought that just one of them needs to be right. The law of averages favours the kooks and the crackpots.

In our own time, we have seen the emergence of social and cultural histories, of attempts to be inclusive and to fill in the Hummer-wide gaps left by traditional narratives. One manifestation of this change is the challenge even to the use of the word history, viewing it as a loaded agenda-driven term and suggesting as a replacement the term 'herstory.' Personally, I

have no objections to such a replacement. Everyone deserves a turn at marginalising and victimising others. (I just pray, by the way, that you all can see how firmly my tongue is embedded in my cheek. Otherwise, I prophesize that my lucrative career as an after-dinner speaker will come to a screeching stop tonight!)

It is not his-story or her-story or their-story that I wish to focus on here tonight but our-story, that of the Irish in Nova Scotia. When Terry Donahoe, President of the Charitable Irish Society, contacted me several months ago about addressing you on this special occasion, he mentioned that he had noticed on the Chair of Irish Studies' website that we are working on a data base of Irish immigrants into Atlantic Canada and a history of the Irish in Nova Scotia and that I might wish to use this opportunity to bring you up to date with the progress of these projects. The immigration database is the brainchild of my colleague, Cyril Byrne. It is a massive and ambitious undertaking and I'll let Cyril talk to you about it on another occasion. But Terry's query about the history of the Irish in Nova Scotia got me thinking about the whole subject of history and explains if not excuses my musings so far tonight which are in the way of an introduction to what I really want to say – which, you'll be glad to hear, will only take a few minutes. (I promised Terry that if I went on for more than 20 minutes, he was free to call security – or set off the fire alarm. I hear that they are still trying to catch the culprit from last year.)

The news that I have to relate to you about the history of the Irish in Nova Scotia is both negative and positive. Let's take the negative bit first. Apart from the trojan pioneering work done by a few figures – there are always dangers in naming names but Terry Punch's contributions on Irish Catholics in Halifax and Brian Cuthbertson biographical studies of Richard James Uniacke and Bishop Charles Inglis are prime examples of the good work completed so far – the fact is that we, the Irish in Nova Scotia, have singularly failed to initiate a project which would culminate

in a history of the Irish in this province. This failure is especially galling when you consider the work that has been done in the other Atlantic Provinces: two histories of the Irish in Newfoundland, one in English, the other in Irish, published in the last five years; the Peter Toner edited volume of essays on the Irish in New Brunswick; and the soon to be published history of the Irish on Prince Edward Island by Brendan O'Grady. I am not here to point fingers – for no better reason than the fact is I'd have to point it at myself first – but it is surely time that the Chair of Irish Studies, The Charitable Irish Society and An Cumann/The Irish Association of Nova Scotia with other interested bodies and individuals rectified this situation.

Talk is both easy and cheap: as is obvious from the fact that we list this project on our web site but have never managed to get it off the ground. I could list a whole slate of reasons cum excuses why we have not managed to do so – ranging from the fact that I'm not a historian by training and my own interests are primarily language and literature-oriented to that Cyril has spent years of his life fund-raising for our programme – but the single most important one is, I believe, that there is no one around either within the university or without who is willing to take on and to coordinate this project. For such a project to happen, one or two people must step forward and dedicate their time and energy to sussing out who is out there in Nova Scotia or beyond – from university professors to graduate students and from amateur genealogists to literature buffs – who have done, could do, or would do work on some aspect of the Irish in Nova Scotia, to contacting these people, to piquing their interest in the project and arranging to bringing these people together at a conference or symposium. The aim would be eventually to produce a book on the Irish in Nova Scotia. This book could never claim to be an exhaustive history for as my introductory comments suggest no history can ever be more than a version of what might have happened.

History is only bunk if you buy into the argument that it tells the truth. Instead what I envisage would be a volume of essays featuring topics as varied as: studies of immigration patterns; biographical sketches of important figures from the likes of the Uniackes and O'Connor Doyle to Aileen Meagher; discussion of literary works with a Nova Scotian Irish connection; an outline of the contributions by members of the different Christian denominations and other religions in areas such as education and healthcare; and accounts of Irish communities and organizations.

The range of possible topics is quite long. And it is in that fact that the good news lies. There is no shortage of areas to explore. The field is wide open. And I would like to illustrate this point by referring quickly to three examples that have piqued my own interest.

The first is the Self-Determination for Ireland League of Canada and Newfoundland. This was the umbrella organization established during the summer of 1920 to rally support for the cause of Irish political independence, a cause not favoured by the political establishment of the time in Canada. Branches of the League were set up in Halifax, Antigonish, and Sydney. One of the meetings organized by the branch in Halifax in September 1920 drew more than two thousand people. Over 275 applied to join the League branch in Antigonish, that well-known bastion of the Irish. Over 300 applied to join the League branch in that other well-known Irish-bastion, Sydney, where it was reported that the League's initial meeting drew not just the Irish but Scots. In other words, in the summer of 1920, with war raging in Ireland, people in Nova Scotia were both keenly aware of events in Ireland and sufficiently motivated to organize. No serious work has been done on the Nova Scotia League branches, on profiling its membership, on the overlap, for example, between its members here in Halifax and those of the Charitable Irish Society and the other big Irish organization at the time, the Ancient Order of Hibernians; on the growth of the League during the period



1920-21 and its demise once the Truce and Treaty came in Ireland in the second half of 1921. The local papers of the time contain a fair amount of information but the local branch here produced a regular newsletter and someone out there may have a full run of it and the League's minutes. There is a grand little project out there for someone to take on.

The second example I wish to use to illustrate the work that could be undertaken relates to the AOH, the Irish Catholic benevolent society, the Ancient Order of Hibernians. Over the years I have come across elderly people here in Halifax who mentioned family connections with such branches as the Emmett Division that had rooms on Quinpool Road. But when I was in the Provincial Archives a few years ago and was poking around as is my wont, I came across a file of material which relates to the Redmond Branch of the AOH which was active from around 1913 to 1926 in New Glasgow. It is no doubt a sign of my own ignorance but I always presumed that New Glasgow was full of Scottish Presbyterians. They are lovely people in their own right of course but don't seem to be natural recruits for an Irish Catholic organization. The questions start flowing then. Who founded the branch in New Glasgow? Who were its members? How does the New Glasgow branch fit into the broader history of the AOH in Nova Scotia, including Halifax? To the best of my knowledge, no one has worked or is working on a history of the AOH in Nova Scotia.

The final example I have is that of the Ulster-Scots Presbyterians in Nova Scotia, the ones who planted the townships of Londonderry, Truro and Onslow in the 1760s after the expulsion of the Acadians and whose arrival is outlined in J. M. Murphy's book *The Londonderry Heirs*. The major figure behind this new colony was Colonel Alexander McNutt, who was described by one historian somewhat uncharitably as "a highly persuasive, distinctly untrustworthy Ulster immigrant to North America ... a fertile liar." Others have questioned McNutt's very sanity,

suggesting, to use the sort of analogy favoured in our own times, that he was one nut short of a full cluster! Recently I have become quite interested in McNutt's exploits, achievements and failures for two reasons. One is personal. McNutt drew quite a number of the members of this new Nova Scotia colony from the Lagan region, just west of my native Derry, on the borders with Tyrone and Donegal, a good farming district which had been heavily planted by Lowland Scots a century or so earlier. My father died last summer and it was just in the final months of his life that he confirmed something that I had only suspected in the last few years, that his own mother was a Presbyterian who had roots in the Lagan district. As such, I may well have lots of long lost distant, and preferably wealthy, cousins up around Truro.

The second reason I am interested in the Ulster-Scots is their peculiar position in the history of this province. While Nova Scotia likes to present itself as a second Scotland on this side of the Great Pond and a whole industry has sprung up around the arrival of the 'Hector' at Pictou in 1773 signalling the arrival of the Scots in Nova Scotia, this was ten years after McNutt's Ulster Scots landed here. However, the Ulster Scots barely get a mention in the history of Scottish migration to Nova Scotia. The first link in that chain of migration is now the missing link. And that gives us the opportunity to reconnect these Ulster Scots planters with our story, that of groups from Ireland from a wide range of different backgrounds and experiences who have enriched and continue to enrich Nova Scotia by our presence and our contributions.

I throw out these three examples as ones which, I believe, are worthy of further study. Of course, I'm conscious that when I start heading for the exit presently I may well be button-holed by people who will tell me that such and such a person has just completed the definitive work on one or all of my three examples. I will stand corrected. However, my main point will still be valid: there is so much to be done to tell the

story of the Irish in Nova Scotia.

In conclusion, let me make one further point. It is said that St. Patrick earned a special dispensation from God that on the Day of Judgement it would be St. Patrick and not the Good Lord Himself who would pass judgement on the Irish people. The implication is that Patrick would be more favorably disposed to us than would be the Almighty. And no doubt, our patron saint will forgive us a lot. But as he prepares to welcome us in through the Pearly Gates, he might just stop one of the Nova Scotia contingent. "One small final question," he'd say. "What exactly did you do to tell the story of your people ... of our people?" Keeping in mind the saint's armaments, especially his bag of curses, I'd recommend that one should at all costs avoid blandly spouting the quote attributed to the French jurist and political philosopher, Baron Montesquieu: "Happy the people whose annals are blank in history-books." It would probably be wise to have with you the insurance policy of a volume of essays about the Irish in Nova Scotia. And it would make great reading too up above.



## Sandra Dyan Murdock Wins Multiple Awards

*Sandra Dyan Murdock, pictured above with John G. Riley of the Charitable Irish Society of Halifax. Sandra graduated with a Major in Irish Studies from Saint Mary's University in May 2004. She has been the recipient of a number of recent awards: the Larry Lynch Memorial Scholarship sponsored by the Charitable Irish Society of Halifax in November 2003; the O'Brien Medal for Irish Studies from Saint Mary's University at Spring 2004 Convocation; the Ireland Fund of Canada's Graduate Scholarship, August 2004; and a graduate studies scholarship from Queen's University of Belfast. Sandra will be beginning her M.A. in Irish Studies at QUB in October 2004.*

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# Cultural Cartography

Sandra Dyan Murdock

If God is in the details, then Michael Cronin's *Time Tracks* (2003) describes a modern Irish pantheon. Underscored as "scenes from the Irish everyday," its ten short chapters span the stuff of day-to-day from childhood to adulthood, all in the context of the Irish life. Cronin digs beneath the headlines and tourist traps of public Ireland to pay poetic tribute to the overlooked idiosyncrasies of the real, secret Ireland. Leave off the day trip to Blarney, the seminar on political conflict resolution, and do not, under any circumstances, look for the leprechaun.

The book opens with the anecdote of a visitor to Dublin at lunch with his Irish hosts and colleagues. He is bewildered to discover that the conversation had detoured to a gleeful deconstruction of Irish biscuits (cookies, to many of us). From here, the reader is off, riding shotgun down memory lane, hugging the corners of props, subplots and backdrops.

Michael Cronin the academic knows his way around culture(s) and translation. Director of the Centre for Translation and Textual Studies at Dublin City University, he has authored such influential works as *Translating Ireland* (1996) and *Translation and Globalisation* (2003). While *Time Tracks* eschews the scholastic suitcase and travels light with a backpack of reminiscences, its reflections – of a particularly urban everyday, it must be noted – result in an inspiring and informative translation of Irish life into the vernacular of modern culture.

Chapters crossover such deceptively mundane details as telephones, buses and haircuts, to the weightier matters of biscuits, books, pubs, and the perennial vying between tea and coffee. Cronin's poetic prose (for how else shall I describe a book with the phrase "the Brownian motion of chickpeas"?) combines careful wordings and

critical reflections descriptive of the subtle impacts of these accessories to life on our identities and interactions. The tone invites a sympathetic delight in nuance. Combined with a masterful use of the second person, the reader is spun into an easy trance of memory.

The cultural context that could bar the uninitiated (read: not Irish) reader becomes instead a game tackled with childhood aplomb of matching memories and translating nouns ("bicycles with stabilisers"? – Oh, I get it! Training wheels).

The conjuring of parallel experience is where the translation most effectively commends the collective sharing of multiculturalism. For each Irish tribute, the reader summons from his/her own background a comparable offering. The chapter traversing the Irish Ice Age, where central heating serves as cruel misnomer, will find, for instance, a sympathetic reader in any Canadian who grew up with economically-minded parents, and engender the wry sharing of the secret truth that Hell, in fact, is freezing cold.

Oral fixations become the tokens of propriety and social mobility: family and personal product choices the totems of personal mythologies. The reader simultaneously experiences the Irish parallels of his/her own life. Cronin's *Marietta* and digestive biscuits recall images of graham crackers and *Saltines*. Down another side road, a guest's seemingly casual appraisal of her host's biscuit selection summons the sleepover's freedom from Mom's ascetic breakfast menu, the sweet-tooth let loose in a world where *Honeycombs* and *Froot Loops* reign supreme, and *Cheerios* and *Corn Flakes* cower in the dark back of the pantry.

Approaching the poignant worldview of *The Hockey Sweater* is a scene in the first chapter,

(still biscuits, yes, but as Cronin on page one writes: “Sweet dreams are our key to memory.”)

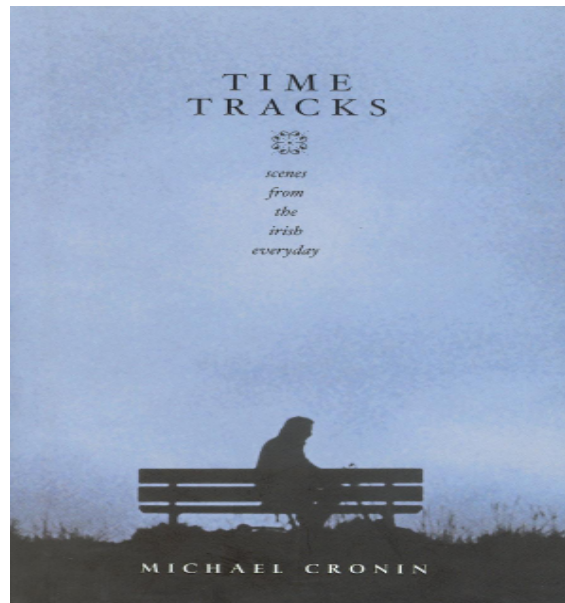
A friend in school had an aunt who worked in the Jacob’s factory in Tallaght and he seemed possessed of a special grace, an infant llama, the cover of his Tupperware lunchbox pulled away to reveal the secret treasure of Coconut Creams, Lemon Puffs and Club Milks. Like mendicants scurrying after the sahib’s taxi, we courted him and flattered his interest in racing cars (Yeah! Jackie Stewart! Yeah!) in the hope that some of his family fortune might make its way into our own lunchboxes. He had, however, all the canniness of a Renaissance prelate and though we heard many tales about the opulence of the court of W. and R. Jacobs, we remained obstinately outside, cursing our parents’ career choices and fingering with disdain the Calvita-filled triangles of white bread and the greasy surface of the Granny Smith.

*Time Tracks* does not hunker down to the comforts of childhood nostalgia, but like a hare, zigzags across chronologies, as the title suggests. There is more than the product placement effect of watching a movie filmed in a city you once lived. Just as important as these details are the author’s reflections on the human negotiations around the props of the everyday that complete the picture. The chapter on pubs transcends the stereotypical tour and touches the pulse of personal progressions within these settings. From the tipsy youth’s hero’s journey down the barstool, to the toilets and back again, to the necessarily two-dimensional pub friend, to the lull of the single beer on a holiday pitstop into bygone days before it was your kids at the next table wolfing their crisps and Cokes, Cronin is the empathetic chronicler of life’s little

pleasures and pangs.

While definitely recommended reading if dating an Irish national, this little book’s triumph is its evocation of multiculturalism’s richest hue, the delight in the sharing of cultural moments of individual lives. It is a raucous game of Do You Remember...? accolades bestowed on the most arcane, most almost forgotten detail; it is the intimacy of a late night conversation with a new romantic interest.

The initiated may object to the Dublin-centricity of the book, but that would be to mistake the content for the message. A Canadian equivalent by a Toronto author could spark some grumblings about exclusivity over homage paid to the Spadina bus. There is no regional or cultural snobbery, however, just the simple fact that in the exploration of collective experience someone must speak first. Cronin cleverly proves that while our greater differences may separate us, it is in the scenes of the everyday that we are united. In the details we find ourselves and one another.



*Time Tracks: Scenes from the Irish Everyday*  
Michael Cronin (Dublin: New Island, 2003)

## Donnchadh Ruadh Mac Conmara

Poet at the end of the Old Gaelic world and at the edge of the New World

*A paper presented in the lecture series Seminario Annuale di Storia  
Atlantica, University of Genova, 2 April, 2004.*

Cyril J. Byrne, C.M.

The subject of this talk Donnchadh Ruadh Mac Conmara, an Irish poet who lived between 1716 and 1810, nicely links together Ireland, Italy and Newfoundland in a number of interesting ways. Born in Cratloe, Co. Clare, Mac Conmara's life stretched through the whole of what has been called in Ireland "the bad century" when Gaelic Ireland became virtually invisible to those who controlled her political and public life. So invisible in fact that Lecky, in his voluminous history of Ireland in that century, makes no mention of those whom Elizabeth I in her time referred to as "the mere Irish." Jonah Barrington, Ireland's Chief Justice at the end of the 18th century, is reported as saying that he expected by the end of the century that an Irish papist i.e., Roman Catholic would become as rare as a native American on the banks of the Potomac. Thus, a young Irishman such as Donnchadh had no prospects for civil advancement or a career. The Penal Laws against Roman Catholics made it seem possible that Barrington's expectation alluded to above would be achieved.

Donnchadh and many hundreds of young Irishmen in that century saw the continent of Europe as the place where their ambitions might have some possibility of fulfillment with a career in one of the many army brigades established by the "Wild Geese," Irishmen who had fled from Ireland in the aftermath of the defeat of the Stuart King James at the Boyne, at Aughrim and Limerick. The other possible career was in the Church, which managed to survive in Ireland by virtue of educational opportunities available on the European Continent to young Irish aspirants to the Priesthood. The Irish Continental Colleges were established in the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries by various European crowned heads. At these seminaries with locations from Lisbon to Prague young men were trained as priests to go back to Ireland to maintain the religion, which now served as the rallying point for the suppressed Irish nation.

It is believed that Donnchadh made his way to the Irish College in Rome – at least that is what tradition in Ireland maintains. Part of that tradition suggests that he was expelled for some unnamed malfeasance which we can guess at from what we know of his behaviour from his own account of himself in one of his poems – "drinking, raking and playing cards!" In any case, he made his way back to Ireland and established himself as a schoolmaster in Sliabh gCua, in the Comeragh Mountains of West Waterford commonly referred to as "the Powers' Country." It was while there that he became a practitioner in the new popular vein of Irish verse.

The most important part of the cultural decline of Gaeldom, which had begun as early as the 16th century, was the destruction of the Gaelic order's reliance on poets as the glue which bound Irish tribal units together. These poets claimed an almost godlike status equal to that of the king or chief – the *Ollamh* or chief poet maintained the various rituals associated with the king's or chief's sovereignty. They crafted praise poetry for the aristocracy and maintained the tribal lore and genealogies. In that sense they were superior to the sovereign, claiming the power to deprive the extant chief of his rule if he should rule badly. Descendants of the ancient Druids they were a power to be feared and reckoned with, and it may have been the

very thing which led to their demise once the invaders from Britain created the circumstances for the Gaelic aristocracy to opt out of the older order for the new one where poets had no power.

The verses these poets made for the tribes and for the chiefs were sophisticated and intricate in their construction – something else which leant itself to the poet’s mystique and power. It is speculated that when the decline of the poetic order began, especially in 17th century Ireland, the language and poetic forms were archaic and not well appreciated by the ordinary people. “The Plain People of Ireland” as Myles Na Gopaleen called them had probably turned away from or were never familiar with the antique world of the Gaelic aristocracy and the poetic basis on which it existed. The poets who formerly were patronized with gifts of land and money as well as pride of place now found themselves sharing the bleakness of the new Gaelic world, having to work with their hands for a living instead of sharing the wealth and prestige of their patrons.

In this world Donnchadh Ruadh and his fellow *filí* found themselves needing to make a living for themselves and their families but marked by some of the mystique of the older makers. They could still make up a mocking line or a sharp belittling jibe, which made them feared by anyone of the newer ranks of the Gaels – the strong farmers and merchants who had replaced in some fashion the former aristocratic order. These poets would hold courts of poetry – gatherings of poets who would display their art and songs in a more down at heels version of the earlier poetic schools. The subject matter of these poems came from the world they lived in; although they would quite often throw off some well trinked out lines in Irish or Latin to outshine the efforts of one of their fellow poets.

Donnchadh worked as a schoolmaster, at which trade his biographer John Fleming suggested he was not particularly well suited because parents frequently chose other masters in preference to Donnchadh. He appears to have

gotten on quite well with the gentry in the area between Dungarvan and Carrick-on-Suir. Some of the gentry, the Duckett family, for example, although of English descent and Protestant in religion had married into the older Gaelic families – the Powers of Corraghmore and the MacGraths of Sliabh gCua – and had become strongly attached to the Gaelic language and Irish tradition. To one of the Ducketts, James, Donnchadh addressed a set of begging verses dated 1759 when Donnchadh had gotten himself in trouble with all his neighbours and supporters. The poem parallels the older aristocratic attitudes, praising James Duckett in this fashion:

“A uasail dil shuairc den mhír as aoirde  
Ó’s dual duit is tú as uaisle ’sas aoibhne.”

...  
“Ad’ choimirce téidhimse, a S[h]éamuis uasail  
aoird  
'S gur libhse gach céim, gach réim, 's gach  
buaidh  
san tír,  
Acht cuiridh i g-céill nach craobh gan chuaille  
sinn  
As cuideachta Ghaedhilge bhéar mar dhualgas  
díbh!”

“O dear pleasant chief of the highest race  
As is natural for thee, thou art the noblest and  
the fairest.” –

...  
“To thy protection I come, O noble, exalted James  
Seeing that thou hast every grade, every power,  
every virtue in the country;  
But make it known I am not a branch without a  
stock  
And Irish amusement I will give thee in return!”

The attitude is not at all dissimilar to that taken in a poem written many centuries earlier in 1316 by the poet Muireadhach Albanach Ó Dálaigh to the young Norman Lord Richard Mac William de Burgo from whom the poet was seeking protection against a charge of murder made against him.

Donnchadh may not have had murder charges made against him but his participation in less lethal but socially unacceptable behaviour got him in trouble. When he was living in the Decies

a number of the young bloods including Donnchadh drew lots as to which of them would attempt to elope with a local beauty named Mary Hogan.

The lot fell to Donnchadh and he succeeded in his scheme and eventually married Mary Hogan. Fleming his biographer got some of the details of Donnchadh's domesticity from a grandson of the marriage, so there was at least some fruit from the marriage. It is suggested he left her for a while and that her family gave him money to go beyond the seas. It may have been about this time, 1745, that Donnchadh went off to Newfoundland. The period between 1745, the year of the Jacobite rising in Scotland, and 1759 marks a hiatus in information about him in Ireland. Indeed, the holograph manuscript of his macaronic poem "As I was walking one evening fair" is dated 1745 and the poem's internal reference to the Young Pretender in France further bolsters 1745 as the beginning of the period Donnchadh was in Newfoundland.

The Newfoundland fishery was a veritable el dorado for the thousands of young Irishmen who went annually to work in Talamh an Éisc, the fishing ground, a name by which Newfoundland was designated in Irish. A young man who worked the season in Newfoundland would go out in the spring of one year, work through the summer and winter over to work the following summer and then go home with the fleet in the fall. He could carry home with him more than three times the earnings he could get as a farm labourer in Ireland. Indeed, many cases are on record of Irish young men spending as many as ten and more years in Newfoundland, and who returned to Ireland quite wealthy. One such was Richard Welsh of Ross in Wexford who started in Placentia, Newfoundland about 1746 and when he died there in 1774 is reputed to have left a fortune of \$100,000. We can be assured that no such wealth accrued to Donnchadh.

Donnchadh's poetic records contain three sets of verse whose subject matter was his sojourn in Newfoundland. There is the long poem *Eachtra Ghiolla an Amaráin* (the Adventures of

a Luckless Fellow), which describes an abortive, voyage out to Talamh an Éisc. The language of the second part of this poem is full of echoes of Aeneas's voyage to the underworld using a mixture of figures from Virgil's work and ones from the Irish Dream Vision poems popular in Ireland in the 18th century. One of these is Queen Eavul of the Grey Rocks, a mysterious and shadowy female sovereignty figure localized in the Province of Munster. Two other poems, one called *Aodh Ó Ceallaigh* written in support of a maligned friend of the poet's Hugh Kelly, and the other the macaronic English/Irish piece called *As I was walking one evening fair* which describes the roistering life Donnchadh lived in Newfoundland "drinking, raking and playing cards." There is a fourth poem *Bánchnoic Éireann óigh*, "The Fair Hills of Holy Ireland" a reworking of a traditional County Waterford song. The speaking voice in the poem is longing to be back in Ireland – indeed at the start of the poem the speaker says: "Alas! Alas! Why pine I a thousand miles away from the Hills of Holy Ireland" and later on he says of Ireland "Her barest rock is greener to me than this rude land" – a lament frequently uttered by those taking their first look at Newfoundland, popularly referred to as "the Rock"! It is quite arguable that Donnchadh wrote this poem of longing for Ireland somewhat more than the conventional thousand miles from home.

Donnchadh's Newfoundland verse makes an interesting travelogue of the voyage undertaken annually by thousands of young men from within a fifty-mile radius of Waterford city. In the *Eachtra* the speaker starts by complaining of his chronic penury and seeing as his only economic hope going overseas. He describes how his neighbours supplied him with the goods required for the sea voyage and for some period after his arrival. This is taken from Tomás Ó Flannghaile's translation of John Fleming's life of *Donnchadh*:

Do thug an pobul i bhfochair a chéilé  
Chum mo chothuighthe i g-cogadh nó i spéirlinn—

Stór nach g-cailfeadh suim de laethibh,  
As cófra doimhin a d-toillfinn féin ann;  
Do bhí seacht bh-fichid ubh circe gus eunla ann  
Le h-aghaidh a n-ithte chomh minic 's badh mhéin  
liom —

Cróca ime do dingeadh le saothar  
As spólla soille ba throime 'ná déarfainn,  
Bhí tuilleadh as naoi g-clocha de mhín choirce  
ghlain-chréitheartha ann  
Re driodar ná loisde 's iad croithte le chéile,  
Lán an bharraille do b'fhearra bhí in Éirinn  
De phrátaoibh dearga air eagla geur-bhruid' —  
Do thugas cag leanna ann do lasfadh le séideadh  
'S do chuirfeadh na mairbh 'na mbeatha dá mb'  
fhéidir —  
Do bhí agam *jackets* chomh gasta le h-aen-neach  
Agur léinteacha breaca go barraibh mo mheura,  
Leaba 'gus clúda i g-ciumhais a chéile  
Ceangailte ar dhróm mo thrónc le teudaibh—  
Bhí bróga istigh ann, bhí wig as béabhar  
Agus stór mar sin anois nach ndéarfad!

The people brought me, gathered together, To  
support me in war or battle — A store that a  
number of days would not affect, And a deep  
chest in which I myself could fit — There were  
seven score hens eggs and (eggs) of other fowls in  
it, to be eaten as often as I should like. A crock of  
butter that was packed with exertion, and a piece  
of bacon that was heavier than I could say — There  
was more than nine stone of oaten meal clean sifted  
with the scrapings of the kneading-trough all  
shaken together. A barrelful of the best in  
Ireland of red potatoes for fear of hard times  
— I brought a keg of ale that would brighten  
with the blowing, and that would put life into  
the dead if that were possible — I had jackets  
as neat as anyone (could wish), and check shirts  
to the tips of my fingers, bed and bedclothes  
bound (up) together (and) tied on the top of my  
trunk with cords. There were shoes within it,  
a wig and a beaver, and (other) store like that.

The huge chest the poem speaks of apparently  
stayed with Donnchadh the rest of his life. His  
grandson told the biographer Fleming that in later  
years he slept in this trunk and it was ultimately  
used as his coffin when he died.

The speaker in the poem strikes the  
conventional heroic posture, describing himself  
as being like one of the ancient Fenian warriors  
coming in to Waterford. Arrived in the town,  
Donnchadh took lodgings in a house where the

daughter of the house danced service to his every  
need whilst he awaited the arrival of a person  
called Captain Allen. Interestingly, Captain Allen  
is doubtless a reference to an actual historical  
figure Captain Higgate Allen who took a ship,  
*The Ross Trader*, annually to Newfoundland from  
New Ross in the 1740s. This ship and her Captain  
would have had to call in at Waterford on its way  
out to the New World. The poem records in detail  
the activities of Donnchadh and his fellow  
adventurers on the voyage to Newfoundland: their  
card playing, seasickness and loneliness for  
home. The family names of those on board  
authentically reflect their local Irish and  
Newfoundland provenance: Dower, Trehy, O'Leary  
and Flynn being names from Donnchadh's area  
which still have a strong presence in  
Newfoundland.

Donnchadh says he signed on as a clerk, and  
he may indeed have earned his living in this way.  
Certainly the macaronic poem *As I walked out  
one evening fair* tells us he was useless in a boat  
and calls to witness another Irishman Costello  
who was a boat's master in the fishery. Indeed  
Donnchadh's high jinks described in the poem  
has Donnchadh playing cards with a group of  
English soldiers whom he hoodwinks into thinking  
he is favourably disposed to them by praising  
the English king George in the English lines while  
cursing the same king in the lines in Irish and  
toasting Prince Charles Edward Stuart in exile in  
France.

The poem, which centres most on the actual  
process of fishing in Newfoundland, is called *Aodh  
Ó Ceallaigh*. It is a defence of Hugh O'Kelly  
whom the poem represents as having been  
defamed back in Ireland while he was out in  
Newfoundland. The defamation of O'Kelly  
consists of his being represented as a virtual  
slave in the fishery

... 'na mhangaire smáil —  
Lag, marbh san *stage* gan tapa 'na ghéig  
Ó tharraing an éisc 'san t-salainn de ghnáth  
As Sagsanach méath d'á lascadh ar a thaobh  
Ó bháthas go feur ...



a filthy pedlar, exhausted ...weak and lifeless on the stage, his limbs inert, from constantly dragging the fish through the salt, and a fat Englishman the lashing his body from the top of his head down to the ground...

However, the poem suggest a much more heroic standing for Hugh O'Kelly:

Is tapa do théidheann in *shallop* de léimAs na flaithis  
ag séideadh seachtmhain nó lá –  
As go mb'fhearra leis craosmhuir, gailshíon as gaoth  
As cranna d'á reubadh ná tarraing an rámh:  
A ghlaca ba threun ar *halyard* an *mainsail* taca as teud  
dá stracadh go clár –  
...  
'Se an faraire súgach do chaitheadh na púint  
Do scaipfeadh an lionn; 's do lagfadh an clár,  
Do chnagfadh san t-súil aon t-Sagsanach ramhar...

"He goes into a shallop with a vigorous leap while the heavens are blowing a week or a day ... his hands were strong on the halyard of the mainsail...He is the merry champion who would spend the pounds, who would distribute the ale...who would punch in the eye any fat Englishman"

The picture that arises is of an heroic figure, a fighter modeled on that conventionally described in the praise poetry of the earlier heroic age.

A very interesting aspect of the diction of this poem is the large number of technical terms from the process of making dried salt cod, once the staple sold in southern European ports such as Genoa, Leghorne and Naples. Words such as "stage," "barrow," "flake," "shallop" were all part of the jargon familiar to the Irish working in the eighteenth century fishery: however, when Fleming translated the poem nearly one hundred and fifty years later they had all disappeared from currency. For example, the word "flake" refers to a raised platform made of long pieces of wood crossed over each other and covered with evergreen boughs on top of which the wet salted fish were laid out to dry in the sun. Fleming supplied an absurd gloss for the word: "of the

flake or floe: a piece of ice detached from the ice flow."

As far as I know, these Newfoundland poems of Donnchadh's are among the first poems to treat the work culture in which Irish poets now existed. Although the poems deal with the culture of work, work is not regarded as an activity becoming a poet. Donnchadh depicts himself as, at best, mildly bemused by the possibility of working for a living and if he is to work at anything it will be at an appropriate bourgeois job of being a clerk. In the *Aodh Ó Ceallaigh* poem, Donnchadh defends Aodh from ever descending to the slave-like work of treating and curing fish. This was not activity appropriate for a hero. This attitude is one of the clear hangovers from the earlier aristocratic tradition where the poet lived as socially equal or even spiritually superior to his patron. However much Donnchadh and his fellow poets may have disdained working with their hands, the tactile and visual imagery of these poems suggests that Donnchadh may indeed have suffered from the galling of hands with the salting of fish and the backbreaking labour of turning fish on the flake. The earlier world of easeful living for the poet was as much a dream as was the world of the dream vision poem which suggested a return to power of the Catholic Stuarts from exile in France and the restoration of Gaels to a position of power and influence.

Donnchadh lived quite a long time after his return from Newfoundland. Fleming says that he spent the latter part of his life as a tutor to the children of his old patron James Ban Power in the parish of Kill. Fleming says that he collected accounts of Donnchadh from a grandchild of one of James Ban's children and was told that his mother's dowry was used to pay Donnchadh his stipend. Donnchadh had gotten his living from various sources including emoluments he collected from the Protestant church at Kilmacthomas. He was able to do this by conforming for a time to the Established Church, i.e., he became a Protestant to gain his livelihood

as a clerk. Whether it is a pious legend or not, Fleming records the tradition from James, youngest son of James Ban Power, that Donnchadh wept bitter tears of repentance for his apostasy. And that even though he is reputed as saying he would not bow to any priest after being expelled from the Irish College in Rome, James Power recalled that Donnchadh had reconciled himself with the church and made his confession to a young priest Fr. Roger Power, a relative of the Bishop of Waterford. Donnchadh's latter years were spent with his family in a state of blindness, appropriate for all poets since Homer, sleeping in his great deep seaman's chest he carried out to Newfoundland. He died in 1810, and as Fleming relates, he is buried in the churchyard of Newtown, near Kilmacthomas without even a stone to mark his grave. On the one hundredth anniversary of his death a monument to Donnchadh with an inscription in Irish and Latin was erected in the cemetery at Kilmacthomas. The consensus of his life and work from Fleming is that he was a great Latinist, and a Gaelic scholar who left the seed of Gaelic learning in County Waterford and on the borders of Cork and Kilkenny where later scholars such as James Scurry, William Williams and John O'Mahoney derived their Gaelic learning from those whom Donnchadh had taught.

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## Interview with a Poet: *Rody Gorman visits Saint Mary's University*

*Sandra Dyan Murdock*

Rody Gorman is a wordsmith. To be an artisan requires both delight in and proficiency with one's choice of medium, and these traits are ones which Rody has in abundance. He is a poet in Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and English, and has worked with expanding Scottish Gaelic terminology to keep the language up to date with globally advancing technology. Born in Dublin in 1960, currently residing on the Isle of Skye, Rody is fluent in three languages, a typically European achievement that inevitably impresses those of us who struggle with our own nation's two official languages. A bursary from the Scottish Arts Council delivered this writer into our midst in November 2003, as part of a Maritimes' reading tour.

Hoping to squeeze a few minutes of his time between interviews, I met up with him at Saint Mary's University's Irish Studies Department. I was more successful than I had dared to hope, managing to abscond with two hours of his time during which we discussed his work in the Celtic languages, his career as a poet, and the triadic relationship between individual, poetry and minority language.

I wanted to talk about the poet's relationship with language in the broader context of minority and majority languages following on the commonly demanded apologies by the English speaking community of those writing in Celtic languages. Irish poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill wrote an essay for the *New York Times Book Review*, on her choice to write in Irish, wryly citing her own mother's bafflement over her daughter's language choice (which seems an improvement over the more common skepticism towards poetry as a career move). The choice is inherently one of identity. For a poet, that identification can be intensely personal, for his/her use of language is far more visceral than the function of communication, which can tend to be more

political.

Rody readily admits that his use of the Celtic languages is born of necessity, rather than choice. "I don't see it as a choice," he says,



Rody Gorman

and describes his poetry's languages as an "organic" response to functioning in a Celtic language environment. Working in a linguistic environment that he describes as both "natural", referring to the Gaelic speaking community on Skye, and "unnatural", referring to the professional creation of a database of Gaelic technical terminology, was an experience that he feels "coalesced" with a longstanding interest in poetry, leading inevitably to poetic experimentation in the Celtic languages. He claims a freedom of movement between Irish and Scottish Gaelic that is enviable, eschews any need to dedicate himself to a specific language, and instead embraces the languages in his innate love of words. His dabbling in the Manx language illustrates his literary motivations: as a personal challenge, he undertook the construction of a Manx haiku.

Inevitably, however, politics become entangled in the Celtic writer's pursuits, and he/she must face the realities of the publishing world. In Ireland, there are publishing houses that do publish exclusively in Irish, but they have no counterparts in Scotland, where Scottish Gaelic literature must be translated into English. This is entirely due to national politics. Though he translates his own work where necessary, Rody maintains an apolitical stance as much as possible, a stance that is perhaps belied by some of his poetry, wherein the topic of language status and ideology is sometimes implicitly

explored, for instance with “Do Percy ’s Iain Mac a’Phearsain/For Percy and Iain Macpherson”, in part a lament for the passing of two native Gaelic speakers ([http://www.hi-arts.co.uk/dec03\\_feature1d.htm](http://www.hi-arts.co.uk/dec03_feature1d.htm)). The bilingual content in much of his work carries its own message of communicative necessity. It matters a great deal how one perceives the relationship between personal ideology and political stance, but it matters even more how others perceive the politics of your personal ideology. Douglas Hyde, too, maintained political apathy, yet his work in the Gaelic League is credited by Patrick Pearse as the genesis of the Irish Revolution. Nonetheless, the relationship between the writer and his work, and the relationship between the work and its audience is critically distinct. Rody’s claim of being “almost apathetic to Gaelic as a political subject” is not a dismissal of its political relevance, but rather a necessary focus on his personal relationship with the crafting of his work. Let the politics follow where they will.

He is rather more involved with the negotiation of his identity as a poet than as a poet of Celtic languages, and is not yet entirely comfortable with the professional epithet. Recounting several humorous exchanges, including a conversation with an officer of Canadian Immigration—an event few of us tend to find humorous—he is clearly far more at ease with his linguistic identity than with his professional identity. When asked his business in Canada, he is obliged to explain the concept of a reading tour. I can only imagine declaring oneself a poet to the impassive face of Canadian Immigration as no small feat of courage. With self-effacing grandeur Rody produces his Irish passport to me, defying me to find the word poet in any of its pages, in contrast to a certain poet he mentions as having proudly inscribed his profession on his own passport.

Rody describes his writing as the play of words and images, and denies that his work involves “making pronouncements” or “propounding ideologies.” This is perhaps

indicative of naivete, but if so, it is refreshingly charming. Writing without an agenda is writing for the sake of writing. There is a purity of purpose here that is admirable, and if politics must attend on it, then it can only serve to hearten the cause of minority languages. During the Gaelic Revival, it was often espoused that one person’s effort to learn the Irish language would do a far greater service to the language and culture than any dozen token Irish salutations. Today, when artistic achievement can be as beleaguered as any minority language, even one poet whose minority language writing is instinctive is a laud to the work of the Gaelic Revivalists and the linguistic/literary domain which they endeavoured to create. For every naysayer of poetry and of Celtic language success, there is one such as Rody Gorman. It has been achieved that a writer may take for granted his/her minority language of choice, and work from the heart with the same instinctive freedom as one writing in English, French, or Spanish, with no need to apologize or explain.

Thanks, in conclusion, to Rody Gorman for his time, and for using his resources to keep up the connections between the Celtic language communities and literary communities on both sides of the Atlantic.

As a postscript, I would like to mention the recent publication of *An Guth*, an Irish and Scottish Gaelic poetry anthology edited and compiled by Rody Gorman. In an interview by Peter Urpeth in the *Highlands & Islands Arts Journal* website, ([http://www.hi-arts.co.uk/mar04\\_interview.htm](http://www.hi-arts.co.uk/mar04_interview.htm)). Rody describes the anthology as a much-needed outlet for Gaelic poetry. A second edition is already in the works. Perhaps it is appropriate to express here the hope that we can look forward to finding *An Guth* in the Saint Mary’s University library?

## **Bàbag**

Rody Gorman

Dh'fhairich mi nam fhallas an corp na h-oidhche.  
Thug e ùine mus tàinig  
E steach orm dè bh' agam ann am fìrinn.

Dè bho Dhia  
Thug air Bàbag  
Nach do thog duine bho chionn fhada  
Glaodh a-mach mar sin  
Gu h-ìseal am broinn a ciste?

## **Barbie**

I woke up in a sweat in the middle of the night.

It was a while before  
I realised what was actually taking place.

What in the name of God could make Barbie  
that nobody  
had picked up for a long time  
start to cry  
like that from the bottom of her chest?



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# Poor Ignorant Children

## Irish Famine Orphans in Saint John, New Brunswick

*Peter D. Murphy*

“Bad and all as we were we often wished we never seen St. John,” lamented an Irish Famine survivor. Fifteen thousand Irish refugees arrived in Saint John, New Brunswick, in 1847 alone. In *Poor Ignorant Children*, Peter Murphy charts the fate of Irish orphans in a strange unwelcoming land.

Peter D. Murphy, a Halifax-based historian and genealogist, is the author of *Together in Exile* (1990).

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