

Shine Bright LLCE Cycle Terminal

File 20 The Irish art of exile

How to Be an Irish Emigrant: 'Be born in Ireland. Leave.' p. 230

Be born in Ireland.

Leave.

Not for England,

for the love of God, they'll only claim you as their own.

Go somewhere different enough like

Canada, Australia, Thailand

or Mars if you have to.

That said,

if the far side of town isn't far or exotic enough,

what's your problem?

Come home, often.

Suddenly be really into trad music,

Dublin slang and tourism adverts.

Smile at familiar flags but

be sceptical of those hanging outside pubs.

Pronounce three and tree differently,

otherwise expect the number nine

when you ask for a small forest.

Avoid London. It will feel too much like home. [...]

Ciarán Hodgers, *Cosmcartography*, 2018

American fascination p. 231

The narrator remembers a holiday trip in Connemara where he met an old Irish lady who had lived in the United States.

America was a great country, she explained. A person would see Chinamen and black men and Indians and Jews and Mexicans and people from all over the whole world in America. And as for the Irish! Well, there were people from every county, from every parish¹ and town in Ireland in America. There were more Irish people over there than there were in the whole of Ireland, she told me. I would have to go to America myself when I grew up, she said, because Ireland was a very small place to live. Ireland was a good place, she continued, 'and, of course, it's our own place' but it was an interesting thing for a young person to see life as it was lived in a big country, and she was glad that she had once had the opportunity to spend time in America. Living in a big country, with plenty of space, was good for people, she said.

I was breathless with excitement listening to this old lady. In those few moments, the balance of Ireland tilted² in my mind. I stopped seeing Ireland as a place which revolved around Dublin, and I began to see it as a place which revolved around America. The map of the world shifted³, too, in my childish imagination. No longer just off the coast of Britain, Ireland was now just off the coast of Massachusetts. To be honest, I still think of it a bit like that. And I suppose seeing Ireland a bit like that is what this book is all about.

From that night on, I was captivated by America. When we came home from our holidays in Connemara I watched American television programmes and American films with a new and ferocious interest. The sweeping plains around the Bonanza ranch, the urban avenues through which Starsky and Hutch raced in pursuit of cunning⁴ and wild-eyed ne'er-do-wells⁵, became as important to me as the roads and avenues of the south Dublin housing estate⁶ where we lived. I hung an enormous map of America on my bedroom wall. I would look at it every morning when I got up, trying to learn how to pronounce the strange and glamorous names of American cities. [...] My bedroom became an America to me. My own private America. I

thought there was nowhere in the world as beautiful as this fabulous and distant land.
[...]

I suppose I began to associate America with success. Because to make it in Ireland was then – and is now – to make it in America. Every single family in Ireland has in its history people who emigrated, to England, or Canada, or Australia. But the uncle who made it in America, now he was the guy people really got worked up about.

Joseph O'Connor, *Sweet Liberty*, 1996

1. *paroisse*
2. *pencher*
3. change
4. *rusé*
5. lazy and irresponsible people
6. residential district

A new start p. 233

1958. A young Irishman is keen to see the world and escape from his back-breaking life. At the moment, he is working in England.

With a toss of a coin¹ you chose between Canada or Australia. Canada, the coin said, so you travelled home on the Princess Maud² with Mick Carey and Charlie Ryan, for the American wake. They insisted. They were headed for New York. You'd travel with them that far. You had a week before you'd set sail.

On one of the last afternoons, you walked along the hedges of the fields you knew so well. You loved the land and hated it, too, for breaking your back with the stones you picked and the beet³ you thinned, for the ache in your legs from the miles you walked behind the plough⁴, for the cold that went through you many a winter out there in the field, you wishing you were inside at the fire warming your feet. [...]

You sat down and looked all about you, at the bright green young corn, and the sceac bushes dressed in lace; at the smoke coming from the cottages in thin grey curls, the kettle on the hob/ Sing peace into his breast, you remembered, Yeats. Even though you hated school, nearly every long minute of it, you liked the poems. Memorise every detail of the scene in front of you as if it's a poem, you told yourself, every line. [...]

Your going-away party was a blur of whiskey and stout⁵. The craic⁶ was mighty, the singing and the recitations, reminders of how many and how long Irish men and women had been leaving their own land. Threads of tunes ran one into the other, refrains of Mother Ireland, ochón, ochón, Éire mo chroí, until the night ran into day and the old men had far-away looks in their eyes. You wondered which bit of Ireland's tragic history they were thinking of. But there was a humming in your gut, too, pure excitement that the old men wouldn't understand. You were bursting to go, to see the world. But to admit this would be to betray your country, your people, these old men.

Besides, you'd be coming back, wouldn't you?

It was an old boat, and the passage rough and uncomfortable. You had more than a week of the Atlantic, and your fill of long-life food, what you could keep down. You were looking for it the whole way, New York, but when you set eyes on the Statue of Liberty with her arm in the air in greeting, you weren't ready. New York. The masses of people coming, people going, all shouting and pushing, all in a great big hurry.

Paula McGrath, *Generation*, 2015

1. *en tirant à pile ou face*
2. ferry going from Great Britain to Ireland
3. *betteraves*
4. *charrue*
5. dark beer
6. entertainment (Irish word)

Home thoughts p. 234

Eilis¹, who left Enniscorthy in Ireland to live in New York City, has been serving food to Irish workers at a Christmas party organised by Father Flood. He starts speaking.

“I don’t want to interrupt the proceedings,” he said, “but we’d like to thank a nice girl from Enniscorthy and two nice women from Arklow for their hard day’s work.”

There was a round of applause.

“And, as a way of thanking them, there’s one great singer in this hall and we’re delighted to see him this year again.”

He pointed to the man whom Eilis had mistaken for her father. [...]

“That man,” Miss Murphy whispered to Eilis, “has made LPs².”

When Eilis looked up the man was signalling to her. He wanted her, it seemed, to come and stand with him. It struck her for a second that he might want her to sing so she shook her head, but he kept beckoning and people began to turn and look at her; she felt that she had no choice but to leave her seat and approach him. She could not think why he wanted her. As she came close she saw how bad his teeth were.

He did not greet her or acknowledge her arrival but closed his eyes and reached his hand towards hers and held it. The skin on the palm of his hand was soft. He gripped³ her hand tightly and began to move it in a faint circular motion as he started to sing. His voice was loud and strong and nasal; the Irish he sang in, she thought, must be Connemara Irish because she remembered one teacher from Galway in the Mercy Convent who had that accent. He pronounced each word carefully and slowly, building up a wildness, a ferocity, in the way he treated the melody. It was only when he came to the chorus, however, that she understood the words—“Má bhíonn tú liom, a stóirín mo chroí”⁴—and he glanced at her proudly, almost possessively, as he sang these lines. All the people in the hall watched him silently. There were five or six verses; he sang the words out with pure innocence and charm so that at times, when he closed his eyes, leaning his large frame against the wall, he did not seem like an old man at all; the strength of his voice and the

confidence of his performance had taken over. And then each time he came to the chorus he looked at her, letting the melody become sweeter by slowing down the pace, putting his head down then, managing to suggest even more that he had not merely learned the song but that he meant it.

Colm Tóibín, *Brooklyn*, 2009

1. /ˈaɪlɪf/ 2. music albums 3. hold 4. “And if you are with me be with me, oh love of my heart”

Recalling home p. 235

The Lake Isle of Innisfree

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles¹ made;
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive² for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade³.
And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer⁴, and noon a purple glow⁵,
And evening full of the linnet's⁶ wings.
I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

William Butler Yeats, *The National Observer*, December 13, 1890

1. sticks and rods 2. *ruche* 3. clear space in a forest 4. pale light 5. warm light
6. small bird

Art People: Willie Doherty imagines Ireland

Northern Ireland native Willie Doherty says, “There isn’t an authentic Ireland. Those ideals are just as legitimate as the ones I grew up with living in Derry.” *True Nature*, Doherty’s video installation at the Renaissance Society, explores American perceptions of Ireland, which he says are informed as much by family storytelling traditions and the movies as by the tourism industry.

Doherty visited Chicago last August and conducted about a dozen interviews with Americans of Irish descent, eventually selecting three of them to make up three-quarters of the sound track to *True Nature*. [...]

The voices form a counterpoint¹ to the video images, shot by Doherty in Ireland and Chicago, which are projected on five ten-foot-tall screens. Lush green scenery melts into² views of Lake Shore Drive; an airplane flying overhead alternates with turbulent ocean waves.

True Nature addresses a phenomenon that used to perplex Doherty. About ten years ago, when he started exhibiting his work in this country, he noticed that Irish-Americans tended to show unmitigated³ enthusiasm for what were largely bleak, ominous⁴ images of their ancestral home. Doherty found that being Irish gave him an “inherent authenticity” in their eyes, a talisman that made them “suspend their critical faculties.” [...]

For Doherty, both America and Ireland are “places that exist solely in the imagination.” When he takes out his camera, he’s not looking for something new or different but rather for “images that are referential to other images” from the movies and TV.” [...]

Mark Swartz, *chicagoreader.com*, March 11, 1999

1. contrast 2. fuse with 3. total 4. dark and gloomy

Why James Jones had to leave Dublin to find himself p. 236

Joyce's exile was the catalyst he needed to produce the books for which he is famous. He once said that: "When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by¹ those nets."

And it was in the act of fleeing those nets – of heading to Trieste and Zurich and Paris – that Joyce could write about Dublin. There are many reasons why you should read *Ulysses* and many reasons why it is an extraordinary novel. But perhaps one of the key reasons why it is so important is that this novel, which revels in² the minutiae³ of day-to-day life in Dublin, was the product of a truly cosmopolitan – and truly European – imagination. It was an imagination that found itself by moving out into the world.

Ian Walker, *The New European*, June 23, 2017

1. *traverser à toute vitesse* 2. enjoy 3. small and often not important details

Merging cultures p. 236

Irish Australian Song Library

Kev Carmody's father was Irish and his mother Aboriginal from the Murri people in Queensland. He grew up on a cattle station¹ near Goranba in the Darling Downs area of South Eastern Queensland

Kev commented "My background and my grandparents and parents' was stock² work. Droving³, mustering⁴, branding etc. through the 1950s to the early 1970s. Music was around the campfire, the lounge room, the kitchen and the pub.

"The indigenous oral tradition fitted perfectly with the Irish oral tradition. The key thing was everyone could have an input⁵ into the music. No-one was excluded. If you couldn't sing or play an instrument you could say poetry. The communal presentation of culture through music was paramount. For many years, the two populations shared a common position at the bottom of the colonial social ladder."

"The storytelling and music and dance were the way we transmitted our traditions from generation to generation. This is common with the Irish tradition as well. Because all this historical knowledge was so large, individuals and groups were entrusted with the custodianship⁶ of rituals, songs dances, and stories."

As the 19th century progressed, working-class Irish and Aborigines often found themselves working together on the properties of the big landlords. Conditions were bad for the Irish but the Aboriginal farm workers received by far the worst deal, many of them being little better than slaves. Kev Carmody drew on this experience for his bestknown song "From Little Things Big Things Grow" with Paul Kelly.

Dr Enda V. Murray, *irishaustraliansonglibrary.irishassociation.org.au*, 2016

1. large farm **2.** *bétail* **3.** leading **4.** gathering **5.** contribution **6.** protection