D'Arcy McGee Chair of Irish Studies

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

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 Tain Bo 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. Brighid, 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. Brighid 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 aonflicts with the Druids, repre. 045 dif8d8a1ical

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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 Oille 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 Hummerwide 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 troj an 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

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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

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.



If God is in the details, then Michael Cronin'

(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

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' 15 Tc12 lot fell to5712 107.281me 16, s d

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 rámha: 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 eight eenth 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 arist ocratic 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 pius legend or not, Fleming records the tradition from James, youngest son of James Ban Power, that Donnchadh wept bitter tears of repentance for his apostacy. 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.

Sources:

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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

explored, for instance with "Do Phercy 's lain 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). 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

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 Tc >w & ar. 9w & t. 1 woke up in a sweat in the middle of the night Tc



Poor Ignorant Children

Irish Famine Orphans in Saint John, New Brunswick

Peter D. Murphy

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-- Scott W. See, Libra Professor of History, University of Maine

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