

The Language and Literature of the Irish in Argentina

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Abstract: This is a brief account of what happened to the language of the Irish migrants who left their territory and established themselves in Argentina, the curious way they protected their identity by preserving the English language which was not their own, and how fluctuations of the Irish Language reflect the ups and downs of their slow integration into Argentine society. The second part refers to Literature. First in Irish-English and gradually in Spanish, the Irish and their descendants – William Bulfin, Kathleen Nevin, Benito Lynch and Rodolfo Walsh, among others – created a corpus of what can be called “Irish-Argentine Literature.”

An expanded Spanish version in book-format will be published in Buenos Aires next year.

The story of thousands of Irish people who had to leave their land on account of social and economic crises and because of the Great Famine (1845-1849), and therefore emigrated to England, United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand is well known. The same cannot be said of those who opted for a far-off country named Argentina. Formerly a Spanish colony, Argentina had much to offer: work, large areas of land and the Catholic religion. Language was the only serious obstacle: Spanish is the official language in Argentina and most of the population of Italian and Spanish ancestry.

In spite of this, nearly 350,000 Argentines now claim to be directly or indirectly linked with Ireland. So when Jorge Luis Borges said that Argentines are nothing but exiled Europeans he was probably also thinking of those Irish immigrants.

How did they relate with other nationalities in the South American melting-pot? What happened to their language? What about their literature? These are the questions I shall now try to answer.

Although Irish names can be traced back to the Spanish colonisation period (16th century), the beginning of this story is to be found in the unsuccessful British invasions of 1806 and 1807, the first one commanded by the Irishman William Carr Beresford, and the second by John Whitelocke. After the defeat, Irish mercenary soldiers stayed on in what was called the Virreinato del Río de la Plata. Some of them translated their surnames: Queenfaith became Reynafé; Campbell, Campana and McGowan, Gaona, just to give a few examples. This gives one an idea of the Irish immigrants' attitude towards their adopted land.

By 1820 there was a reasonably important Irish community in Buenos Aires, and this was just the beginning of the process. Letters, *The Standard* newspaper propagating the great opportunities Argentina was offering to European immigrants, the Irish chaplains in Buenos Aires, and the Great Famine in Ireland did the rest. According to Korol and Sábato¹

10,500/11,500 Irish people went down to Argentina (including those who took the wrong steamer, thinking they were going to the States). In brief, it is considered that, by 1890, about 75,000 Irish were living in Argentina, mostly in Buenos Aires and a few of them to the south of Santa Fe. These numbers should be considered carefully because at that time Irish and English people were all registered as being "British" without distinction.

Father Anthony Fahey (1804-1871), a Dominican, was the indisputable leader in the organisation of the Irish colonies in Buenos Aires and his role can be compared with that of Moses Hirsch in relation to the Jewish Community in the Argentine Republic. An apostle, organiser of the Irish chaplains, founder of important Irish-Argentine institutions, a hard-working labourer, a social adviser, and even a matchmaker, Father Fahey has been recognised as the true Patriarch of the Irish settlers in the Argentine Pampas. In his difficult work he was helped by a wealthy, insufficiently recognised Irish-Protestant called Thomas Armstrong, in whose house he lived.

He persistently urged his people then residing in the city, to move out to the camp, where remunerative employments were easily obtained. The city was not the most suitable place for them. They were mostly from the central counties of Ireland, more accustomed to rural life than to their actual occupations.²

He was able to distinguish who could and who could not take advantage of the possibilities offered by the new country. By comparing the following two letters, quoted by James Ussher in his book on Father Fahey, it is possible to see how the Irish Patriarch dealt with people:

1. Would to God that Irish emigrants would come to this country, instead of the United States. Here they would feel at home; they would have plenty of employment, and experience a sympathy from the natives very different from what now drives too many of them from the States back to Ireland. There is not a finer country in the world for a poor man to come to, especially with a family. Vast plains lying idle for the want of hands to cultivate them, and where the government offers every protection and encouragement to the foreigner. (p. 57)

2. Should any young men of respectable connections ask you for letters to come out here, tell them from me it is a bad country unless they bring out some capital. Labourers and men of capital can do well, but no other class. The want of the Spanish language is a terrible drawback on all young men. (p. 58)

As usually happens with small communities in strange or adverse territories – I am thinking of the so-called "Gauchos Judíos,"³ established in the Argentine Entre Ríos Province in 1899 – the Irish started working in isolation from the native residents and around the Catholic Church: they had their own chaplains, schools, clubs and libraries. Most of them worked as shepherds and sent their children to Irish-Argentine boarding schools or tried to manage with preceptors (Irish, American or British). The curious thing was that they preserved their unity by relying on the English language which, in fact, was not their original one.

They did not intermarry and they had a very low opinion of the "natives." Far from social activities, camp duties provided an essential solitude. Alcohol was an escape but the foundation of a family appeared as a natural and positive option. (By the way, it may be

argued that solitude, together with linguistic isolation has been determinant in the formation of a melancholic and usually pessimist literary expression). The family therefore became the first guardian of the Irish-English language and Irish culture. Gaelic words used to appear intermixed within their English-Irish speech, and the settlers' English was the variant they had spoken in Westmeath, Wicklow, Wexford, Cork, Longford and Tipperary. Later on they started incorporating not only Spanish words but expressions belonging to rural Argentine slang. Thus it was that the Irish contributed towards the constitution of that Spanish dialect which is the Argentine language. From another point of view it is clear that fluctuations of the Irish-English language reflect the ups and downs of their slow integration into Argentine society.

As time went by, people started to change. See this letter published by *The Hiberno Argentine Review* on 14 December 1906:

Among the Irish-Argentine community many parents there are, who get a school master to teach their children, or will send them to a school where they will receive all instructions in the English language, and probably learn the history and geography of Ireland; but they will not receive one single lesson in the National language, much less be instructed in the slightest degree in the history or geography of the land of their birth.

This is a great mistake, a mistake which the child will regret in after years, and even may be the cause of its failure. For a proper education in the language and history of one's country will always be a help to satisfy our necessities, and very often is the cause of success in life. (...)

It is not my intention in the foregoing to approve or disapprove of the actions of parents or of those who manage the institutions, but it is simply my desire to reiterate the opinions already sincerely expressed that the children are Argentines, and should therefore be educated principally in the language etc. of their country, and instil into their minds a holy love for the land of their birth, and secondly for that of their fathers and forefathers, for if they don't first learn to love their own country, much less will they love that of their parents, and therefore they will not be in heart either Argentine or Irish.

A. McHana

The following is a list of texts commonly used in Irish-Argentine institutions up to the beginning of this century, a legacy that had much to do with the formation of more than one generation of Irish-Argentines: *Imitation of Christ*, *How to Converse with God*, *Voices from Purgatory*, *The Catholic Girl in the World*, *Life of St. Paul of the Cross*, *Life of Don Bosco*, *Life of St. Patrick*, *Royal Readers* (Christian Bros. School Books), poems by Alfred Tennyson, Thomas Moore, William Wordsworth, Oliver Goldsmith, and novels by Charles Dickens and William Thackeray. From the pulpit or from a horse, Catholic Priests were always controlling books and habits. The severe admonition published by *The Hiberno Argentine Review*, relating to the danger that certain readings implied is an example:

His Grace Most Rev. Dr. Walsh
Archbishop of Dublin
On Objectionable Literature

Infidel works and tracts, and immoral (sic) poetry and romances, which (sic) undermine faith, darken the understanding, and corrupt the heart, should be carefully excluded from Christian homes. Heads of families should prevent their children from reading newspapers or periodicals containing irreligious or immoral matter. (...)

The results of this, among those who were tempted by literature, were various although fundamentally similar. On theological questions, the following lines, taken from a reader's letter, reveal a common behaviour in relation to the so-called unquestionable dogmas:

In your last issued appeared an article on «New Theology». Pardon me, Mr Editor, but I think it was too high for us camp people.

Plunket's catechism is good enough for us. An Irish yarn, or camp story, to make us laugh on Sunday afternoon is what we like.⁴

In 1845 an Irish immigrant from Westmeath started keeping a Diary he gave up in 1864. Edited by Eduardo Coghlan in Spanish in 1981, *Andanzas de un irlandés en el campo porteño* (*The Customs and habits of the country of Buenos Aires from the year 1845 by John Brabazon, and his own adventures*) is not only the first important document on the struggles of the Irish trying to improve in the Argentine "camp" but a work of true literary value. In spite of spelling and construction mistakes and the translator's free version, Brabazon, an Irish-Protestant (a fact that Coghlan seems to ignore) gives a powerful account of his subject. Accurate descriptions and comic or tragic situations are wisely presented in an amusing narrative rhythm.

(...) we went up to a boarding house that was kept by a man by the name of Michael Heavy where we were met by my brother and other friends from the old country. That night one of the young fellows invited me to the theatre, but brought me to a diferent (sic) place to a house of bad fame, were I was surrounded (sic) by young ladys (sic); as my friends disapierd (sic) and left me alone without knowing the language, I began to get a little scared; and I gave them all the cash I posest (sic) not knowing what it was worth, as brother Tom changed the little money I brought out.

In spite of adversity, optimism pervades the whole book, even when the author refers to crime episodes. He changes when he alludes to that characteristic and despicable South American figure, the dictator. His writing actually coincided with the bloody dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1835-1852). Although Irish camp people liked him because he defended them from the Indians, Brabazon appears surprised at the way the famous tyrant enslaved lives which were naturally free.

Brabazon's work concerns people of different social and cultural backgrounds. Thus he refers to moving episodes like the murder of his wife and sister-in-law, and to an *estancia* run by people of various nationalities: French, German, English and natives. He distinguishes "natives" from European immigrants but his memoir is not Manichean: drinkers, gamblers and ungrateful Irish are also shown in this book which can be considered a *Bildungsroman* in the sense that the "hero" searches for wealth and, at a deeper level, identity.

The author clearly refers to language difficulties but, being an optimist, he makes an effort. His papers are full of Spanish words not always properly written. Curiously realistic and optimistic at the same time, the book proves that each of us has at least one story to tell: our own.

In 1861 Edward T. Mulhall (1832-1899) founded *The Standard*, the first English paper in South America. Mulhall was Irish but his newspaper was not devoted to the Irish Community; according to *The Hiberno-Argentine Review* it was “a splendid English commercial newspaper” (5 April 1907) and, indeed, you could find ads like this one:

Wanted, at once, a young nursemaid of smart appearance who must either be English or speak English correctly, to look after child of one year. Irish nursemaids need not apply. Salary \$60 per month. Apply at Calle Rivadavia 3391. (7 January 1912).

Due to their strong Irish accent, the Gaelic words threading through Irish-English, and the neologisms frequently employed by immigrants it was considered that theirs was not “pure English”. (Many years later urban Irish-Argentines – mostly working in American or British companies – were only too well aware of this. That is why, in order to gain promotion at work, they accepted being called “ingleses.”)

By way of example, it may be interesting at this point to examine some Irish-Argentine words, idioms and typical expressions adopted by the so-called Irish-Porteños;⁵ although not exclusively coined by them, such phrases gave rise to what may be called *Irish-Porteño slang*.

a) Words:

1. “Nap”: member of the Italian Community (abbreviation originating in “Naples”);
2. “Gushing”: (from “Gush”: talk with excessive enthusiasm) member of the Spanish Community;
3. “Turk”: member of *any* Arabian community;
4. “Russian”: referring to Jews of *any* origin;
5. “Camp”: (from the Spanish word “campo”): countryside;
6. “Department”: instead of “apartment” or “flat”;
7. “Mopa”: mope. Also: “mopazo” (augmentative);
8. “Grip”: Flu;
9. “Buck”: Young Indian or Negro;
10. “Bucktoes”: according to William Bulfin, “(. . .) is the colloquial Irish-Argentine way of alluding to citizens of Gaucho Stock”. (Bulfin: *Tales of the Pampas*, p. 217).

b) Idioms:

1. Interrogative form with a typical Argentine tip (vocative): “What, *che?*”;
2. Spanish words interpolated within English-Irish speech:
 - “I’m afraid the food won’t *alcanzar*”. (Be enough);
 - “He is not moving, for the *momento*” (“for the time being”);
 - “That book is no good. Throw it into the *basura*”. (waste-bin);
 - “Tickets for the *asado* (barbecue) can be obtained at. . .”
 - “Love and kisses from Susie, for *Papa, Mama* and Charley. Mind yourself. *Chau*” (Bye). (From a family letter dated 23 March 1953);

- "(. . .) and if a mix were to take place before the lambs were *señalled* (stamped) there would be no telling what the consequence might be. (Bulfin, p. 231);
- «*Que* (*qué*/what a) man! (Bulfin, p. 245);
- "Don't be a fool and *aprovechar!* (take advantage of).

The following are Irish-English sentences with a Spanish structural basis:

- "Give me with Jane" (Instead of "Put me through to Jane");
- "How do you feel?";
- "Well". (*Fine*);
- "Peter got down from the bus" (instead of *got off*);
- "What happened to the old man?
Then I'll tell you (And not "I'll tell you *later*");
- Adaptation of the Spanish way of ending sentences with the rhetorical question: no?:
How do you do? It is a nice day, *no?* (Nevin: *You'll Never Go Back*, p. 123).

c) Spanglish: a rather funny combination of English and Spanish mostly used by Puerto-Ricans and sometimes by Argentine bilingual (Spanish-English) speakers:

- *Tipear*: to type.

d) Transferred errors:

- *Actually*: meaning "at present" (in Spanish you say "*actualmente*");
- *Suggestion*: meaning "insinuation" (in Spanish you say "*sugerencia*").

e) Gaelic words:

- "*Musha!*" (interjection) Sometimes meaning acceptance of a situation;
- "*Gossun*": Originally not exactly Gaelic but French (*garçon*): boy.

Other weekly newspapers devoted to the Irish-Argentines were *The Hiberno Argentine Review*⁶ absorbed by *The Argentine Review*, *Fianna* and *The Southern Cross*.

Founded in 1875 by Patrick Dillon, *The Southern Cross* was and still is the true paper of the Irish-Argentine people. Published initially in English, later on as a bilingual paper, it worked and works as a kind of a thermometer of the relations between the Irish descendants and the rest of the country.

At a time when it was still considered shameful to marry "natives," "naps" or "gushings," the social events section altered certain surnames to render them more acceptable:

Lamberti » *Lambert*

Ruiz » *Rice*

References to language fluctuations and Irish-Argentine customs are frequent in *The Southern Cross*:

The Indians are coming!

The Indians again. The savages have made an inroad by Pedernal near the Fortín Mercedes, as far as the estancia of Mr. Legarsa.

A diligence with seventeen passengers narrowly escaped falling into the hands of the wild children of the Pampas. They have taken away a large number of mares

and horses. Commandeer Berrante has gone in pursuit. (15 April 1875).
Mrs Lucy M. de Carey, has returned to her home in Carmen de Areco, after leaving her children, Margie, Lucy and Tessie in St. Brigid's College. (6 July 1956).

A very touching ceremony was witnessed recently in Lugones 2068, when very Rev. Simon Histon, P.P. of St. Patrick's, Belgrano, assisted by Fr. Lancelot Carrol, consecrated to the Sacred Heart the home of Mrs Norah Dunne de Fussari. (6 July 1956).

Argentines and Irish

The Porteño daily *Tribuna*, on the occasion of publicising a Bazaar organized by the Ladies Irish Beneficent Society, after giving details of the forthcoming event, goes on to say:

"The Irish, from the day they step upon the molehead, by their industry, integrity and affable manners, cause themselves to be respected and beloved. The Irishman does not come amongst us to grasp at whatever is within his reach, and, having gained it, take the next steamer back to his native land.

No; the Irishman settles down for life, buys a comfortable home, marries, brings his children up in the country and lives and dies in the land of his adoption. It is a rare occurrence to see a rich Irishman leave the country. (. . .) (9 September 1875).

(Compare the above text from the *Tribuna* with these bitter, anonymous lines, from an oral refrain:

This is my last Hesperidina⁷
And thanks God my last propina⁸
To hell with Argentina
I shall never come back again!)

About Modern Ballroom Dances

(Complaining about what another reader had written about the tango:

(. . .) Referring to the "tango" there are several ways of dancing it. The modern tango, when danced without "corte" or exaggeration by decent ladies and gentlemen in respectable Irish Argentine circles is far different from what was danced by the half naked savages years ago. I am positive that the "tango" of today has neither a step nor figure that bears resemblance to the old "criollo" dance; all that it has to connect it with the savages is the name.

A.M.M. tells us where the "tango" originated, and the course it followed, down to the present day; but he does not say a word about the changes it underwent since its origin. He gives the shocking impression that it is danced today in all saloons, exactly as it was danced by the Indians long ago. (. . .)

Yours sincerely,
Hannah
(21 January 1921)

It should be remembered that there is a strong connection between the tango and the immigration process. This popular "Porteño" music is recognised for having been able to express the immigrant's solitude and melancholy. One of the most famous Argentine tangos – "¡Cómo se piania la vida!" (*The way life flies!*) – was written by an Irish-Argentine, Miguel Rice Treacy, whose pen name was Carlos Viván.

The Southern Cross usually accepted spontaneous literary contributions and most of them are more relevant to socio-linguistic studies rather than as literature. Picked at random, the short story entitled "Jim Kelly's Rancho. A Christmas Camp Story," written by a mysterious P.J.R., and published on 25 January 1935 (p.3) is a good example of what happened to the Irish-English language:

When Jim Kelly arrived from the old country he went straight to the camp and took up sheep farming with one of his well-to-do countrymen, who gave him a flock of sheep on interest. Jim worked for a number of years as third owner, and then struck out on his own; rented one hundred squares of camp, built a rancho for himself and was very successful as a sheep farmer. Being kind-hearted and of a jovial disposition, he always had a few of his countrymen hanging around at this rancho. These were mostly roving blades, generally known as "knockabouts." (. . .)

Kelly kept a peon,⁹ an Irish-Argentine, by the name of Dalton, who did all the general work about the place; but cooking was not in his line. (. . .)

Dialogues are full of rural Spanish words such as: "puchero," "pulperia," "mate,"¹⁰ and so on.

William Bulfin, born in Offaly in 1862, was the third editor of *The Southern Cross* and at the beginning of the century he published *Tales of the Pampas*, a singular collection of short stories related to the Irish-Argentine people working in the "camp."¹¹ Bulfin reproduces the Irish-Porteño way of speaking, which results in a comic mixture of English, Gaelic and Spanish. *His stories show that the Irish were doing with language what they had already done with their lives, namely they were trying to adapt it to their new situation.* In *Tales of the Pampas* we meet "gauchos," scamps, matchmakers, "cheenas"¹² and deserters like sailor John, "A Bad Character" who "was a knockabout, or camp *atorrante*"¹³ (. . .) sleeping wherever he falls, and invariably making trouble around the *pulperias*."

We may also be surprised by curious conversations:

I was talking with Francisco about the weather, and the price of hides, and one thing or another, when ould Domingo came in – he that lives over beyant by Johnny Leyden's wirin.

"Good mornin", gintlemin," sez he in Spanish, "how goes it, Miguel?" sez he to me.

"Purty well," sez I. "Have you any news?" sez I.

"No," sez he, "nothin sthrange, Miguel," sez he. I asked him to have a tot, and while the Gallego¹⁴ was fillin' it out for him, what do you think, he doesn't up and ask if the sailor was around the place. (From "A Bad Character," pp.20-21)

But, Mike, they sent me out with Castro. It wasn't my fault to go.

(. . .) If you're always stuck with the natives behind the galpon¹⁵ instead of attendin'

to your good name, you'll be sent with them, and you'll get into their ways, and the day'll come when the dickens a decent man in the country will have anything to say or do with you.

Mike was as good as gold, and meant well by me. But he failed to convince me. (From "Campeando," pp.164-165).

"The Course of True Love," the last story in the collection, distills the essence of the Irish experience in Argentina:

Spanish phrases and idioms have inflected the English which they habitually use; but the brogue of Leinster and Munster has remained intact. Spanish and Creole customs have, in a greater or less degree, insensibly woven themselves into their life; but they are unwilling to admit this, and their struggle to preserve the traditions of the motherland is constant and earnest. (p.207).

This is only the beginning of a love story built up by a matchmaker:

Stay at home, every one ov yez," he said, directing his command to Boxer, the senior dog; "stay at home now and mind your business. The flock'll be home at sundown, and mind yez don't go out on the rodeo¹⁶ to prevint thim from lyin' down. I'm going over to Joe Hagan's to give him a hand to coort that garrahalya¹⁷ he's afther, and I won't be back until late." (pp.208-209).

The girl is Julia Dooley and Brady advises Hagan:

Don't be goin' gabblin' an' makin an oncha¹⁸ of yourself whin we go over to Dooley's. (p.211).

But he is betrayed by his own excitement:

Tom and me came to ax yez for Julia. I have the house ready beyant, and I can go and see the priest any day (. . .) If yez give her to me, well and good; ef not, thez as good fish in say as ever was – I mane – no, I don't mane that – I mane that I want the girl – as I was tellin' Tom – and he sez to me – about it – "If it comes to that," sez he, and I say the same – "I don't care the bark of a dog whether I get the girl or not!" (p.225).

The ending is a happy one; but this time what matters is the conjunction of different voices, the re-creation of a transplanted world aiming to establish its roots in a new land. Benito Lynch, a descendant of Patrick Lynch, Lord of Lydicam, Galway, who appeared in Buenos Aires in the 18th century, wrote short stories and novels, one of them considered a classic of Argentine literature.

Although written in a flat, sometimes awkward, style, *El inglés de los güesos*¹⁹ is a powerful story of love and the difficulty of communication, of solitude and tragedy. It also reflects the writer's love for the country, its gauchos and typical way of life.

An Englishman, Mr James, and a young native, Balbina, nicknamed "La negra,"²⁰ are the principal characters and, in spite of the fact that they are able to overcome the barri-

ers of language, this does not appear to be enough. Lynch imitates the way English people try to speak Spanish. Even when the resemblance is not always accurate, the parody works. In any case the writer takes advantage of the dramatic possibilities of the situation by creating moving and powerful dialogue.

Kathleen Nevin published a novel called *You'll Never Go Back*,²¹ in Boston in 1946, in which she gives an account of her mother's experience as an Irish immigrant in Argentina. The story includes a country or "camp" episode but it may be considered an urban novel since the principal characters are young girls who used to stay in town working as nursemaids, governesses or teachers until they married some wealthy compatriot who would then take them back to the camp.

The title refers to what they had gone for:

. . . just make some money as quickly as possible and go back and be independent.
(p. 26)

Most of them never went back and Nevin tells the initial story of a group of immigrants. The main difference between Nevin's writing and that of Brabazon and Bulfin concerns Nevin's attitude towards the "criollos":²² from the very beginning her characters are surprised and even scandalised at the natives' behaviour.

Narrated in the first person, the writer repeats what the Captain said to her as soon as they left Liverpool:

Now and then he protected me, and warned me against some dreadful men in Buenos Aires whom he called "the natives". He said they would be apt to fall in love with my fair hair and my Irish eyes, but I must on no account pay heed to them, because they were tough customers and low curs. (p. 12).

The fact is that it took the Irish-Argentines nearly two generations to start intermarrying. Nevin's report specifies that

(. . .) the native was a poor specimen, physically and morally, and that there was no hope for the country because it was not a British Colony. (p. 13).

These opinions are confirmed when the protagonist stops at a boarding house run by an old Irish lady:

(. . .) Life in this country has many snares and pitfalls; and the native, my dears, is not to be trusted. My first and last word to you must ever be: Beware of the native! I interrupted next, hoping that some light would be thrown on this mysterious subject.

But what's the matter with the natives, Miss Brady? What do they do?

You will understand in time, my dear child. Meanwhile the less you have to do with them, the better. My house, it gratifies me to say, is occupied exclusively by our own people! (p. 22).

This is a leitmotif in the book and no effort is made to understand the native. In addition, the storyteller marries a countryman and none of the rest have much to do with the

“criollos.” Nevin here differs from Brabazon and Bulfin, who do not consider natives a problem nor Argentina “a queer country” (page 27). But, just as Bulfin does, Nevin quotes the Irish-Argentine language in its anomalous voices:

Take the “basura”²³ out of that and not be stinking up the whole place. (p. 24)
Come to the sala²⁴ at once, please. (p. 33)
(. . .) but I didn’t know anything about ponchos²⁵ at that time. (p. 36).
“I’ll thank ya,” she said, “not to be wastin’ yer time nor soilin yer mind wid thrash while y’are in my sight” (. . .). (pp. 54-55).

Referring to a native woman who apparently fooled an Irishman, obliging him to marry her, we read:

She’s a cheena woman (. . .) with three children (God forgive him), one blacker than the other. (p. 135)

Notwithstanding constant allusions to the need to get rich quick, to dangerous natives and to Argentina as a strange and queer country, an optimistic view supported by the Catholic Chaplain (the only true authority), prevails in a sometimes superficially comic atmosphere and, in the end, the writer appears grateful to the country that welcomed her and her people.

In 1947, the year after *You’ll Never Go Back* was published, a very young and gifted poetess published her first book of poems. Famous for the songs and stories she wrote for children, María Elena Walsh is a descendant of those who arrived with the 1880s immigration process: Irish, British and Spanish blood run in her veins, as we can see in the beautiful lines she created when trying to explain what Buenos Aires is:

Es un chico que piensa en inglés
y una vieja nostalgia en gallego.²⁶
(from “Vals Municipal”²⁷)

In 1990 she published a “memoir,” *Novios de antaño* (“Old Fashioned Sweethearts”). The last section – “Grandmother Agnes” – consists of a collection of family letters related to the life of Irish and British immigrants in Buenos Aires, during the eighties, the same period covered by Nevin in her novel, from which we discover hitherto unknown aspects of the process. Agnes reports that many newly wealthy Irish shepherds behaved like aristocrats and felt free to exploit their compatriots. She also says that, being a Protestant, it was not easy to overcome difficulties caused by her determination to marry a Roman Catholic. Alcohol, she assures us, is a damnation for the Irish and British. *The Standard* and *The Southern Cross* seem to have been the principal sources of consolation for this poor immigrant.

María Elena Walsh writes graceful and limpid Spanish, rich in original resources and techniques, as does her unrelated namesake Rodolfo Walsh (1927-77). An innovator in journalistic techniques – his *Operación Masacre* (“Massacre Operation”), published in 1957, nine years before Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*, is considered to be the first non-fiction novel –, a playwright and an excellent short-story writer, Walsh published four tales based on his experience as a pupil in an Irish-Argentine boarding school: “Irlandeses detrás de un gato” (“Irish chasing a Cat”), “Los oficios terrestres” (“Terrestrial Occupations”), “Un oscuro día de justicia” (“A Dark Day of Justice”) and “El 37” (“The 37”). In these stories school is

nothing but a microcosm of society. Walsh is ironic, critical and, ultimately, political, towards the Catholic Church (seen as a symbol of Power). Life is equated with suffering and, by using the language of the transgressor, he offers a profound view of solitude, injustice and pain.

In "El 37" he assures us that, in the two Irish schools in which he was a boarder, he was able to discover that there was amongst his fellow pupils a compulsion for seeking prestige, courage and strength. In the same story we are moved by an evocative portrait of his father, an emblem of (anonymous) defeated Irish immigrants:

It was Sunday when our father paid us a visit. We were allowed to go to the garden and sit on the grass. He opened a package and produced a piece of bread and salami which he shared with us. I felt he was hungry and that it was not just one day's hunger. He spoke of football, Moreno, Labruna, Pederera: both of us were fans of River Plate Club. I am not sure, but perhaps he spoke of politics. He was a radical.²⁸ The first bad word I learnt at home was uriburu.²⁹ Later on, fresco, pinedo, justo.³⁰ I believe that, in a way, I identified these names with the daily plate of semolina. We were happy for a while, although I saw him sad, anxious to hear that we were having a nice time. And, indeed, we were really having fun. Afterwards I learnt what they were going through. In fact he was smashed, unemployed.³¹

A promising writer, in 1977 Rudy Walsh – who wrote that memory is the only true cemetery – became a "desaparecido," another victim of the 1976 military dictatorship. A scholar and a former professor at Harvard University, Enrique Anderson Imbert belongs to a previous generation. Far from the concerns of immigration, his account of the Irish in Buenos Aires has an aesthetic purpose: the stories he wrote about the Irish-Argentines are characterised by the fantastic. The plot of "Mi prima May" ("My Cousin May") deals with a mysterious leprechaun; in "Patricio O'Hara, el libertador" ("Patrick O'Hara, the Liberator"), he compares Celtic mythology with that of Argentina, and in "Mi hermana Rita" ("My Sister Rita") he utilises Irish folklore to create a wonderful new tale. Anderson's writing represents the inevitable disappearance of the Irish-Argentines as a isolated community, and their communion with that curious and rich miscellany which is Argentine culture.

Other Argentine writers of Irish extraction are: Bernardo Carey, a short-story writer and a well-known playwright; Eduardo Carroll, poet and novelist; Alfredo Casey, poet, playwright and a translator of Pádraic Pearse; Eduardo Cormick, who was presented with a Prize from the Fondo Nacional de las Artes for a novel on Admiral William Brown, founder of the Argentine National Army; Teresa Deane Reddy, a writer involved with vernacular subjects; Guillermo Furlong, a Jesuit and historian who studied neglected aspects of Argentina's cultural history like the life of Thomas Fields, one of the first Irishmen ever to step foot in South America; Patricio Gannon, traveller and lecturer who reported his meetings with T.S. Eliot, Max Beerbohm, Pío Baroja and Bertrand Russell; Luis Francisco Houlin, a poet; Esteban Moore, poet and translator; Luis Alberto Murray, poet and essayist; Pacho O'Donnell, playwright and writer, and Ana O'Neill, a mystery writer.

This brief survey leads us to certain conclusions:

- a) language was the main handicap in preventing the Irish from integrating quickly into Argentine society;
- b) in order to organise themselves and maintain their unity the Irish tried to preserve the English language which, in fact, was not their own. Consequently, Gaelic played an insignificant role in the process;

- c) a parallel in the fluctuations of the Irish-English language can be found in people's slow integration. This is clearly revealed by the regular literary works published by *The Hiberno-Argentine Review*, *Fianna*, *The Argentine Review* and *The Southern Cross*;
- d) first in Irish-English and later on in Spanish, the Irish and their descendants created a *corpus* of what may be described as Irish-Argentine Literature, which has been largely disregarded by Argentine and Irish scholars alike;
- e) most members of the Irish-Argentine community are now fully bilingual. For descendants of the original Irish settlers English became a second language, and their writers have been concerned with the ups and downs of the South American country to which their forebears emigrated, a country which is still seeking its own identity.

Notes and Works Cited

1. Korol, Juan Carlos and Sabato Hilda: *Cómo fue la inmigración irlandesa en Argentina*. Buenos Aires, Plus Ultra, 1981, p. 48.
2. Ussher, James M.: *Father Fahy*, Buenos Aires, 1951, p. 49.
3. "Jewish Gauchos". "Gaucho": Pampas man (*Appleton's New Cuyás Dictionary*).
4. *The Hiberno Argentine Review*. 19 April 1907, p.9.
5. "Porteño(s)": of or pertaining to Buenos Aires or Puerto de Santa María (Appleton's).
6. On January 25th, 1907, a literary competition, subject to certain conditions, was announced by this magazine: "1st. Competitors must write in English or Irish and be born in Argentina. (. . .) 5th. Competitors must select from among the following subjects: 1st. Past, Present and Future of the Irish in Argentine Community. 2nd. Father Fahy and his work. 3rd. Admiral Brown. 4th. Robert Emmet. 5th. Woman Suffrage. 6th. The coming Pilgrimage to Luján."
7. Argentine liquor made from oranges. Patented in 1864 by M. S. Bagley.
8. Bribe.
9. A servant boy or hired man (Bulfin).
10. "Puchero": typical Creole stew; "mate": South American tea. *It's matty*, "Eliza explained, "made like tea. You suck it. Laws don't look at it like that, Miss Connolly! (Nevin, page 28); "pulperia": a country shop or store, a shebeen. (Bulfin).
11. In 1910 Alberto Gerchunoff, a Jewish immigrant from Oriental Europe, published *Los gauchos judíos*, an account of the Jewish Immigrants in Argentina. In intention and conception, both works are alike.
12. Anglicised version of the rural word "china," which means "young Creole girl,"
13. Scamp.
14. Gushing. Properly an inhabitant of the Spanish Galicia County.
15. Shed.
16. Rodeo: "A bare and trampled space in front of a corral where sheep are allowed to stand before being shut in. Rodeo also means the place where cattle are rounded up. (Bulfin).
17. (Gaelic). Colleen, young woman, girl.
18. (Gaelic). Female fool.
19. A near translation to this untranslatable title may be: "The British Paleontologist".
20. The Black One.
21. NEVIN, Kathleen: "You'll Never Go Back". Boston, Bruce Humphries, Inc., 1946, 226 pages.
22. Creoles
23. Rubbish
24. Hall
25. (. . .) "a kind of cloak or shawl with a hole in the center for the head to go through (. . .). (Bulfin).
26. "It is a boy who thinks in English / And old Spanish nostalgia".
27. "Municipal Waltz"
28. Argentine political party, representative of popular and immigrant interests.
29. José Félix Uriburu. Head of the 1930 military coup, inaugurator of Argentina's lengthy and disgraceful period of alternating democratic and military governments.
30. Note that sportsmen's surnames are written, as usual, with capital initial letters, while those referring to politicians and the military are not.
31. *Caras y caretas*, Number 2210, May 1984, page 7.