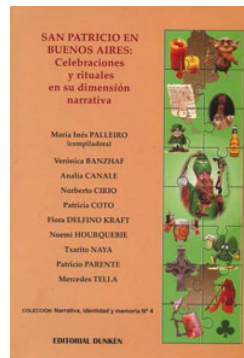


**Review of San Patricio en Buenos Aires:
Celebraciones y rituales en su dimensión narrativa,
edited by María Inés Palleiro**

By Irina Ionita *



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As an original collection of essays dedicated to the analysis of St. Patrick's Day in present-day Buenos Aires from a general perspective of socio-cultural anthropology, *San Patricio en Buenos Aires* is a significant book which is likely to become a reference work for further studies in this field.

Furthermore, this book represents an excellent starting point in this direction, including an array of articles and a 'multiplicity of converging, diverging, and juxtaposing viewpoints about the figure of St. Patrick and the Celtic world to which he is traditionally linked' (13). These perspectives include and follow shared principles like the 'artistic performance, the expressive form, and the aesthetic and cognitive response that draw on traditions rooted on social contexts' (13).

This is the fourth volume of the *Narrative, Identity and Memory* collection, and it is dedicated to 'the study of different discursive modes of memory building, with a particular focus on the narratives understood both as discourse mode and cognitive instrument for experience articulation (Bruner 2003)' (11).

Ethnic and Religious Celebrations

In order to contextualise this review, it is necessary to explore a brief history of St. Patrick's Day celebrations in Buenos Aires

According to Thomas Murray, the first recorded St. Patrick's Day celebration in Buenos Aires was in 1843, and it 'took the form of a dance at Walsh's Tea Garden, [1] which lasted all night and was attended by some one hundred merry-makers' (Murray 1919: 125). However, the author recognises that the function of that year was not the first of its kind in Buenos Aires. Maxine Hanon came across the first news about this celebration in the *British Packet* newspaper as early as in March 1829: 'St. Patrick's day on the 17th. inst., was duly commemorated by various private individuals of this city, natives of Erin's Isle, although no public entertainment took place. The flag of old Ireland floated from the top of Mr. Willis's Naval Hotel (Irish Jemmy's) [2] and its occupants seemed to have no other thought but to honor the day' (Hanon 2005: 70). The fact that *Irish Jemmy* was Protestant and his guests were indistinctly Catholic or Protestant suggests that the common Irish origin of the people celebrating St. Patrick's Day in that early period was more important than their religious background.

In 1830, the *British Packet* commented that St. Patrick's Day 'did not go off so dryly as last year. [...] Captain O'Brien, of the Chili brig Merceditas, in the inner roads, displayed the flag of that republic from his vessel; and there were several private parties, in which every honour was paid to the sainted day' (Hanon 2005: 70). In addition to Willis and Welsh, other organisers of the Irish festivity at that time were Edmund Kirk and Patrick Fleming. In 1833, Welsh had sixty guests in his tea garden, and three other parties were organised by Kirk and others. The

British ship *Iris*, captain Pagan, and the Argentine *Domingo*, captain O'Brien, hoisted Irish flags and the paper commented: "This year Saint Patrick cannot complain that his sons in Buenos Ayres did not honour his [relics] and memory' (in Hanon 2005: 70, my translation).

In 1837, the celebration at Edmund Kirk's house was chaired by the Irish priest Fr. McCartan, [3] and drinks were offered in honour of William IV, Princess Victoria - 'the hope of Ireland and the Empire' - Daniel O'Connell, General Juan Manuel de Rosas, and others. Addressing the public, Fr. McCartan praised Princess Victoria as 'she is imbued with liberal sentiments; and upon the prolongation of her life are fixed the hopes of peace, justice and prosperity for your native land, and the tranquillity of the Empire. [...] The Government of His Excellency General Rosas has been attended with the most beneficial results, that is, it has produced public order, and given security to property and life, where all had been heretofore anarchy, confusion, and bloodshed. Such a marked change for the better is exceedingly creditable to the head and heart of His Excellency, whose health I have now the honour to give' (Hanon 2005: 70).

We do not know the details of these celebrations. In 1839, there were seventy people who dined, toasted, sang and danced up 'till Aurora, envious of the enjoyment of such much sublunary pleasure, speeding the pace of her spirited steeds, came forth' (Hanon 2005: 70). About thirty years later, when reading a letter from John Pettit of Australia and formerly from Buenos Aires, 'Mrs. Kirk [...] told of the many St. Patrick's day dinners they had had together and how when she would speak of what they should have, he would say "never mind old woman, give them plenty of fish and potatoes"' (Sally Moore to John James Pettit, 25 October 1866, in Murray 2006: 94). The following year, on 17 March 1840, the celebration went public when a band played *God Save the Queen* through the streets of Buenos Aires

From the mid-1840s, when Irish migration to Buenos Aires was significant compared to migration from other countries, nationalism became a frequent topic in the celebration of St. Patrick's day. In 1844, Queen Victoria and Governor Rosas were proposed in the toasts. However, there were also drinks in the honour of 'Daniel O'Connell, Ireland's Liberator and the Repeal of the Legislative Union between Great Britain and Ireland', 'the principles proclaimed by the Volunteers of 1782', [4] 'Ireland for the Irish and the Irish for Ireland', 'the U.S. of America - the generous asylum of persecuted Irishmen', 'the sympathisers with the wrongs of Ireland, in every part of the globe', and 'Admiral William Brown - he has proved himself by his undaunted courage in a hundred combats, a true son of Erin' (Hanon 2005: 71).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, at the same time that St. Patrick's Day marches were held in New York and other locations of the Irish Diaspora, the festivity was also celebrated in Carmen de Areco, San Andrés de Giles, Capilla del Señor, Lobos, Venado Tuerto and other Irish settlements of the provinces of Buenos Aires and Santa Fe. In addition to the nationalist speeches and symbols, the religious character of the celebration was emphasised by the Irish Catholic chaplains, who from that time became the main organisers and leaders of the Irish communities, at least in the rural areas. Protestant elements were avoided and the Irish-Argentine press focused on the connections between the saint and Catholic Ireland. Sometimes the celebration coincided with the opening of chapels in areas of Irish settlement, Killallen in Castilla (1868), St. Brigid's in Rojas (1869), St. Patrick's in Capitán Sarmiento (1870), Sts. Michael and Mel in San Patricio (1870), the parish church of Venado Tuerto (1883), and Las Saladas in Navarro (1898). On 17 March 1875, many of the women attending the mass at the San Nicolás de Bari church of Buenos Aires were 'displaying green ribbons and feathers'. Later at the dinner in Hotel de la Paix, many men wore 'green rosettes and shamrocks in their hats', and 'the dining salon was most tastefully decorated: the green flag of Erin, the flag of England and the Argentine flag were gracefully hung at the head of the hall'. This was 'the first time in twelve years that St. Patrick's Day in Buenos Aires was celebrated in a befitting manner' (*The Southern Cross*, week of 17 March 1875 in *The Southern Cross: Número del Centenario*, pp. 9, 100).

It was on Sunday, 17 March 1912, that the saint's day was celebrated in Luján Basilica with a national gathering of almost all of the Irish communities in Argentina. From that time, whenever St. Patrick's Day falls on a Sunday, there is a crowded reunion in Luján which is emblematic of the ethnic and religious character of the festivity. 'On the 17th, St. Patrick's day, Mrs. O'Loughlin, Julia, Laura, Lawrence and I went to Luján for the pilgrimage. There was a great crowd there' (Memoirs of Tom Garrahan in Murray 2005: 130).

The celebration has evolved from a national reunion in the nineteenth century to a religious festivity in the first half of the twentieth century to a social gathering today.

From National Festivity to Dionysian Merriment

As well as the depth of its contents, *San Patricio en Buenos Aires* stands out for its copious bibliographical references and multi-disciplinary perspectives. The different authors offer both synchronic and diachronic angles of anthropology, sociology, literature, 'classic' history and history of religions, and linguistics. The book is addressed to readers with a specialisation in the above-mentioned fields, and it will be very useful for students of socio-cultural anthropology and history. However, the multidisciplinary approach offers a wide standpoint for the general reader interested in understanding St. Patrick as a Celtic symbol in the context of the Irish diaspora in Argentina

The introduction by María Inés Palleiro *et al.* sets out the theoretical framework, examining links with folklore and presenting different concepts. Among them are the folkloric performance (23) and Derrida's *arkebé* (25), as well as the recreation of traditions to support the construction of new messages from historical paradigms. Narratives are also positioned in a cognitive perspective, and the contemplation of rites from a performative and artistic point of view. Based on the Irish migration to Latin America, and more precisely to Argentina, an analysis of the commemoration of the bishop Patrick as patron saint of all the Irish, including (or particularly) those living in the diaspora. Both as a symbol of the Catholic church and as an ethnic epitome, Patrick becomes a justification for the identity rebuilding process of Irish emigrants. This process is performed through the liturgy - including the exemplary rhetoric and the inflexible structure - and at the same time through its antithesis, Celtic festivals and street gatherings with structural elements of medieval carnivals. Within the global and marketing context in which the space-time continuum stretches under the effects of the 'virtual Nation' (83), the street party becomes increasingly significant and visible.

The eight essays included in this volume focus on different aspects of memory and identity, with their heterogeneous approaches to performance through diverse discourses. The first contribution, by M. I. Palleiro, presents a comparative diachronic analysis of a medieval version of the European *Purgatory of St. Patrick*, and an oral version within the contemporary Argentine context. The following article, by V. A. Banzhaf, focuses on the development of Celtic and Christian cultures, as well as the diffuse border between history and myth in the various medieval versions of *The Purgatory of St. Patrick*. P. H. Coto de Attilio analyses the 'ideological context' of a personal history that emphasises the individual and group subjectivity of memory and identity. P. Parente studies the normative and exemplary narratives in Christian hagiography through two fairytales. In his article, N. E. Hourquebie covers the identity aspects of images representing Celtic fairies in tattoos, within the framework of social exclusion. The sixth essay, by N. P. Cirio, examines the reinvention of Celtic music as a ritualised practice, and its re-actualisation in the Argentine contemporary context. F. Delfino Kraft's chapter is dedicated to the two-fold discourse on alcohol consumption as a practice linked both to the celebration of St. Patrick's Day, and to exemplary Irish history, with reference to its negative effects. The closing piece, by A. Canale, revises the reinvention of tradition signifiers and of local identities in Buenos Aires, together with the street celebrations of St. Patrick's Day.

The articles are exposed with a lucid approach and include meticulous argumentation, in which the form corresponds to the content and the well-developed internal logic is by and large convincing. An excessive compulsion to present minor details and to include a great quantity of references resulted in a substantial work. However, this complexity may also be a weakness since sometimes the text moves away from the main objective. Therefore the introductory essay is occasionally crammed with detailed explanations, as in the section 'La celebración litúrgica del patrono de Irlanda en la Argentina' (42-46). As a particular element of the celebration, the mythic discourse (43) is indeed an important feature, though it may be excessive to dedicate one page to the contextual analysis of Eliade and Jakobson. The reader may lose focus with information that is certainly interesting but too specific for the book's objective. The same detail is apparent in the following pages (51), where the etymology of *enxemplo* is examined. This abundance of references and detail would be better positioned within the context of more specific and critical studies.

The articles in this book are interesting, well documented and reasoned, though on the other hand their heterogeneity begs the question of what the connection is between them and the object of the book as represented in the title. Particularly, V. A. Banzhaf's 'El "Purgatorio de San Patricio" en versiones medievales: los cruces de una tradición' (119-136) is a good example of this. This essay is valuable and well-structured from the perspective of comparative literature of medieval texts. However, it is difficult to establish a connection to the rituals and celebration of St. Patrick's Day in present-day Buenos Aires. This is balanced by its accurate placing after the comparative article of M. I. Palleiro, which gives Banzhaf's piece a continuity and structural coherence within the book. The subsequent essay, 'Una pequeña historia: memoria e identidad en un relato personal' de P.H. Coto de Attilio (137-150), raises the same sort of questions. The analysis of certain healer practices - which would be better situated in a book about medical anthropology - covers a field study in the context of contemporary Argentina, but it is too distant from Saint Patrick as a symbol and his commemoration.

Nevertheless, the achievement of this multi-authored work is to reunite heterogeneous reflections on a concrete subject. The editor and the authors are to be congratulated for their accomplishment within the framework of anthropological research about the Irish Diaspora in Argentina. The problems of identity and memory, as well as the diverse discursive and performative expressions, are at the heart of Palleiro's collection. As mentioned above, it is necessary to consider her work as a point of departure for the multiple avenues of analysis and knowledge improvement.

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Translated by Edmundo Murray

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Notes

[1] Welsh [Walsh], Michael (ca. 1790-1847), mason, was born in Clonmel, County Tipperary. In 1819 Michael Welsh arrived in Buenos Aires with his wife Cecilia, *née* Bowers, and their daughters Brigid and Margaret. Welsh specialised in chimneys and stoves, and worked on improvements in the installations in *saladeros* (meat-curing plants), churches - like St. John's Anglican cathedral - and private houses. He also worked in Montevideo at different periods. His house in Viamonte and Cerrito was the location selected for numerous St. Patrick's Day celebrations and, in 1838 and 1841-1843 opened as a tea garden. Michael Welsh died on 24 July 1847 in Montevideo (Hanon 2005: 836).

[2] Willis, James (b. ca. 1790), publican, was born in County Kilkenny, and arrived in Buenos Aires in August 1816 with his son John Willis. By 1829, he owned the public house and naval hotel known as Irish Jemmy's, in the 25 de Mayo Street of Buenos Aires. He was one of the founders of the British Hospital in 1844 (Hanon 2005: 862). On 4 August 1829, James Willis married Mary Quin of Cork, Ireland, at the British Protestant Episcopal Chapel (Jeremy Howat, *St John's Marriages, 1828 to 1832*).

[3] The Catholic priest Michael McCartan (1798-1876) was born in Belfast and entered Maynooth in 1817 to study for the priesthood. He was ordained on 16 June 1821 by the Archbishop of Dublin Dr. Daniel Murray. McCartan had some disagreement with the bishop of Dromore, seemingly for political reasons. He wrote letters to the press criticising the bishop, and was banished to Nova Scotia. He travelled to England, North America, the West Indies and Chile, and arrived in Argentina in 1836. He was appointed parish priest in Concordia, Entre Ríos Province, from where he was banished for extreme political opinions. After that he ministered at San Roque Chapel of Buenos Aires. He then left Argentina and travelled extensively in South and North America, before returning to Argentina in 1862. He died on 23 June 1876 in Fr. Patrick Dillon's house [Murray 1919: 98-100].

[4] The Volunteers were an armed force in Ireland recruited in 1778-1779 originally to guard against invasion, but who soon took on a wider political importance as an expression of middle-class consciousness. The Volunteers supported the more militant patriots, and their Convention at Dungannon of February 1872 provided the starting point for the final, successful drive for legislative independence (S. J. Connolly, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, p. 581).

Author's Reply

This summary managed to capture the fundamental aspects of our research into St. Patrick's Day in Buenos Aires from a synchronic and diachronic perspective. We would like to emphasise that the distinctive feature of this research was its placement within a human resources training programme, dedicated to Training in the Process of Folk Tradition Research (EPIF), based at the Folk Tradition Section of the Anthropology Institute of the University of Buenos Aires, headed by Ana María Dupey. I was in charge of co-ordinating this programme under Ana María Dupey's supervision and with the valuable advice of Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, of Cork University. In this inter-disciplinary programme, young graduates and advanced students carried out a general investigation, which had as its starting point a field research ethnographic paper based on an initial theoretical framework which I had established (Palleiro 2004) and reformulated for the specific study of Ireland's patron saint. In this framework, the performance of social belonging in a context, the communicative dimension and the aesthetic elaboration of folk events were taken into account. In the general research, Verónica Banzhaf worked on aspects relating to medieval sources referring to the figure of the patron saint of Ireland, between history and legend. Patricio Parente surveyed and analysed the street celebrations in the urban context of Buenos Aires, and I, with the help of Flora Delfino Kraft

and María del Rosario Naya in field research, analysed aspects relating to the liturgical celebration. For her part, Mercedes Tella focused on the analysis of the advertising and marketing generated around the celebration and Flora Delfino Kraft focused her interest on examining the debates surrounding this celebration on the internet's virtual fora.

On the basis of this general research, those who took part in the programme also developed individual articles, the thematic focal points of which were highlighted with great incisiveness by the author of the summary, and consulted with qualified researchers and specialists in various issues linked to the narrative construction of identity and memory, such as Analía Canale, Norberto Pablo Cirio, Patricia Coto and Noemí Hourquebie. These experts, using St. Patrick's Day and Celtic culture in Buenos Aires as a basis, contributed their research on, respectively, the Buenos Aires' carnival and *murga*, [1] Celtic music, the oral narratives of migrant communities and the micro-narratives of body tattoos.

Diarmuid Ó Giolláin's prologue deserves special mention and highlights the two-fold local and global dimension of St. Patrick's Day, which functions both as an emblem of identity configuration for the Irish community and as a symbol of its opening to a transnational dimension which includes, in his own words, 'the Boston police band as much as the Killarney boy scouts and the revellers in Retiro.'

Ana María Dupey's incisive preliminary commentary is also worth highlighting as it stresses the framework of our work on St. Patrick's Day in Buenos Aires within an opening up of the disciplinary field of folk studies to diverse aspects and manifestations.

It is also worth giving special mention to the reading made by Alejandro Frigerio, expert researcher in ritual anthropology, who, at the paper's presentation, linked our research on St. Patrick in Buenos Aires with issues such as the celebration of St. Patrick associated with the cult of the *orixás* in Afro-Brazilian culture.

A large part of these aspects were identified and highlighted with great incisiveness by the author of the summary, who we thank for her careful reading of our paper and her pertinent framework within studies on Irish migration, paying special attention to the excellent work of Edmundo Murray, whose legitimisation of our paper is of great importance for our research group in Argentina.

The warm support of the Irish community in Argentina deserves our gratitude, particularly that of Kevin Farrell, President of the Federation of Irish Associations in Argentina, of Teresa Deane Reddy from the Irish newspaper *The Southern Cross*, of the priests Eugenio Lynch, Thomas O'Donnell, Ambrosio Geoghegan, Pablo Bocca and Carlos Cravea, and of Maradei de Morello, from San Antonio de Areco, who gave us the initial contacts to begin our work in that area.

All of these contributions resulted in our paper, with its framework of studies on Irish culture at international level, thanks to the authors and editors of this summary, who contributed valuable observations based on personal experience and knowledge, allowing us to redefine not only the paper but also the new research we are carrying out, focusing on the theme of belief.

María Inés Palleiro

Translated by Annette Leahy

[1] A form of popular musical street theatre performed during carnival