



SS Royal Mail Steam Packet arriving at Baía de Guanabara, from *Lembranças do Brasil. As capitais brasileiras nos cartões postais e álbuns de lembranças*. Ed. João E. Gerodetti & Carlos Cornejo. São Paulo: Solaris Edições Culturais, 2004.

## Translated Irelands Beyond the Seas

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the concept of travelling texts, or textual travels, considering the transnational and translational function of a culture of survival (Bhabha 1995). The aim is to show how those texts and travelling symbols shaped the identity of the Irish diasporic community in Argentina at the beginning of the twentieth century and its contemporary resignifications.

**Keywords:** travelling texts; Irish identity; diasporic narratives.

Irish Latin American travel writings and travelling texts<sup>2</sup> enlighten the process of cultural encounters as well as the construction of other Irelands and Irishness beyond the seas. Travel narratives, either fictional or referential, resemble diasporic literary narratives because they generally describe not only historical facts that have provoked the movement of a people but also reveal strategies of a culture of survival which the anglo-Indian cultural critic Homi Bhabha (1995) has defined as transnational and translational.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the process of survival is tightly linked to the geographical movements of the people, to the various economic and political transactions operating between the country of origin and the host country, and to the distinction “between the semblance and similitude of the *symbols* across diverse cultural experiences – literature, art, music, ritual, life, death – and the social specificity of each of these productions of meaning as it circulates *as a sign* within specific contextual locations and social systems of value.” (*ibid.* 49). In these transactions, different cultures

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<sup>2</sup> I refer to both kinds of texts, either the ones authored by travellers and diasporic subjects or those published in Ireland and in Latin America and travelled to and from across the Atlantic (what could configure a ‘cultural diaspora’).

<sup>3</sup> Homi Bhabha explains that a culture of survival is transnational because it is “rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement” and it is also translational because it calls the attention to “*how* culture signifies or what is signified by *culture*.” (48).

already present in the diaspora space<sup>4</sup> come into contact and are in a continuous process of translation in order to keep their cultural heritage and survive as minorities in an adopted country.

However, not only the travellers' writings register the history of Irish and Latin American encounters and strategies of a culture of survival. I would like to call the attention to another kind of process which is the result of textual travels that migrate back and forth. If we consider Mousten & Locmele's research on knowledge representation, texts travel through translation, adaptation and replacement into corresponding or new contexts (p.63); their reception depends on the undersanding and purpose they have in those new locations. Thus, texts travel across languages and geographical borders and help to keep the bonds with the land of origin, either in the past or in present times. Textual travels play an important function in the construction of an Irish diasporic identity and in the process of understanding the transformation of Irishness across cultures.

Travel narratives and textual travels reveal not only an aesthetics of experience but also the construction of a transnational and transdisciplinary knowledge of signifying "Irelands" across physical boundaries. My aim here is to illustrate the transnational and translational processes of representations of a "New Ireland" in Argentina through various aesthetic resignifications of Irish travelling texts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>5</sup>

Ireland was a land of migration in the past and has become a diaspora space nowadays. Historical, social, political and economic facts have pushed away many of its inhabitants since the Famine but also attracted many others (even returnees) mainly during the period of the Celtic Tiger. Before I discuss the effects of some nationalist travelling texts in the Argentine context of the early twentieth century, I'll look to the past and deconstruct the source of Irish migration through the imaginary of other textual travels.

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<sup>4</sup> Avtar Brah's *Cartographies of Diasporas* (1996) defines it as a space where foreigners and natives interact, a space which is the intersectionality of diaspora, border and the politics of location.

<sup>5</sup> The origin of the name of "New Ireland" came from an Irish community in Wednesbury, England, gathered around Father John Montgomery in the 1840s, which was called by the press "Little Ireland". In the 1840s and 50s the Irish residents were victimized politically and religiously and they were vulnerable to attacks during periods of economic depression. So, Montgomery began to take practical measures to assist his parishioners to emigrate to Brazil. *The Universal News*, on 15 February 1868, announced that the Irish colonies settling in Brazil would be called "New Irelands" as they would be part of a net of self-sufficient Irish communities abroad (Marshall 2005. 60-61). In 1875, Great Britain prohibited the emigration and settlements in Brazil due to the poor conditions that previous emigrants suffered in the country).

In the first chapter of *Deconstructing Ireland*, Colin Graham (2001) introduces Ignatius Donnelly's thesis with the purpose of recreating a variety of signifying possibilities of "Ireland". In his book *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* (1882), the Irish-American lawyer, politician and writer sets out to prove that the sinking of an entire civilization is geophysically possible and reconstructs this lost paradise of the Atlantis in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. He believes that Ireland, placed in the strategic geographical position, east of the legendary island, was "colonized at an early day by the overflowing population of Atlantis". He also refers to Saint Brendan and his mythologised attempts to find the mystical land of Tir na nOg, or the Americas, as a symbolical journey in search of his lost Atlantian origins. According to Donnelly, Ireland is not now the land of origin itself, but a place colonized by its inhabitants, and a place which must accept that those living on it have migration as their chief cultural and racial characteristic (Graham 22). Graham concludes that Donnelly's Atlantis "is a utopian space which cannot be produced, except through continually conceptualizing its own metaspace, and so his 'Ireland' is a Tir na nOg which is fated never to return and never to be arrived at." (Graham 23). Though Donnelly's thesis has no scientific support, Graham starts with this deferred utopianism in order to understand Ireland in its various layers of significations through modernization and industrialism as well as through "the mystical, the visionary, the exilic and the frankly lunatic redefinitions" (*ibid.* 24). Graham brings also the example of John Mitchel's utopian vision of Ireland as Hy Brasil that explains the emptiness of the past by the glory of the future ("the present moment is continually pulled forward and made weighty").<sup>6</sup> These texts travel across countries and fulfill the Irish imaginary in which nation and nationalism try to project the future in utopian schemes. Finally Graham analyses the production of Irish artist Seán Hillen who in 1999, published a book of "paper collages" entitled *Irelantis*. Fintan O'Toole in the Introduction to Hillen's work said that "Irelantis is contemporary, globalised Ireland, a society which became postmodern before it ever quite managed to be modern, a cultural space that has gone (...) But this Ireland is also everywhere and nowhere." Whether Hillen's *Irelantis* is future or past is unclear, since it is sometimes archaically Edenic as in his most famous picture *The Great Pyramids of Carlingford Lough*. Perhaps it could stand as a metaphor of Fintan O'Toole's (1998) statement that "Ireland dissipates into 'disappeared Irelands'. (...) Its coordinates, its

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<sup>6</sup> It's interesting to compare Mitchel's view with "the medieval writings that, on a symbolic level, had consecrated a powerful myth in the history of the great sea voyages, 'the so called Fortunate Islands, promised land, or blessed place, where perpetual spring and eternal youth reign, and where man and animals coexist in peace' (59), according to the Phoenician and Irish traditions." Hy Brazil, as designated by the Irish monks, was also the subject of a lecture written by Irish diplomat Roger Casement when he was British consul in Belém do Pará in 1907, when he referred to the Irish origin of the name of Brazil (See Izarra 2006).

longitudes and latitudes, refuse to hold their shape” (*apud* Graham, p.2). Meanwhile, I would like to add Hillen’s apocalyptic picture as a counterpart of this postmodern Eden, “The Island of Newgrange” and as an echo of Luke Gibbons’ prediction that “we are getting the last glimpse of a world that is lost” (*apud* Graham p.26). Graham concludes that *Irelantis* is a manifestation, somewhat ironic, of the ‘dreams’ which have been ‘floating out there’, a metaspace which is indisputably ‘everywhere and nowhere’ (p.26).



Fig. 1. The Great Pyramids of Carlingford Lough

After reading Graham’s reflections I asked myself, couldn’t the Irelands of the mind and those beyond the seas be seen as *transgressive utopianisms* along the lines of travelling texts that translate the knowledge of a history of ‘home’ (either the home of origin, Ireland, or the adopted land, Argentina) to understand the present? Utopia is, in a way, this mixture of ‘memory’ and ‘dream’ and I firmly believe that a critique, which illustrates its imperfections and the openended unresolvability of the heterotopias, would pave the way to understand contemporary Ireland in the light of the ‘disappeared Irelands’. In other words, Donnelly’s Irish-American view of Ireland makes emigration normal, makes Ireland a migrating

entity; Mitchel's nationalist utopia projects Ireland to the future; and Hillen's art is dealing with displacement in a world where all borders – political, cultural and psychological – are permeable (Graham p.26). Then, the interaction between the nostalgia of a past (which perhaps has never occurred like Donnelly's) and the future visions (which perhaps will never occur like Mitchel's and Hillen's) makes us focus now the narratives that represent the Irish in Argentina, the link with their motherland and the encounter with the non-English speaking culture.

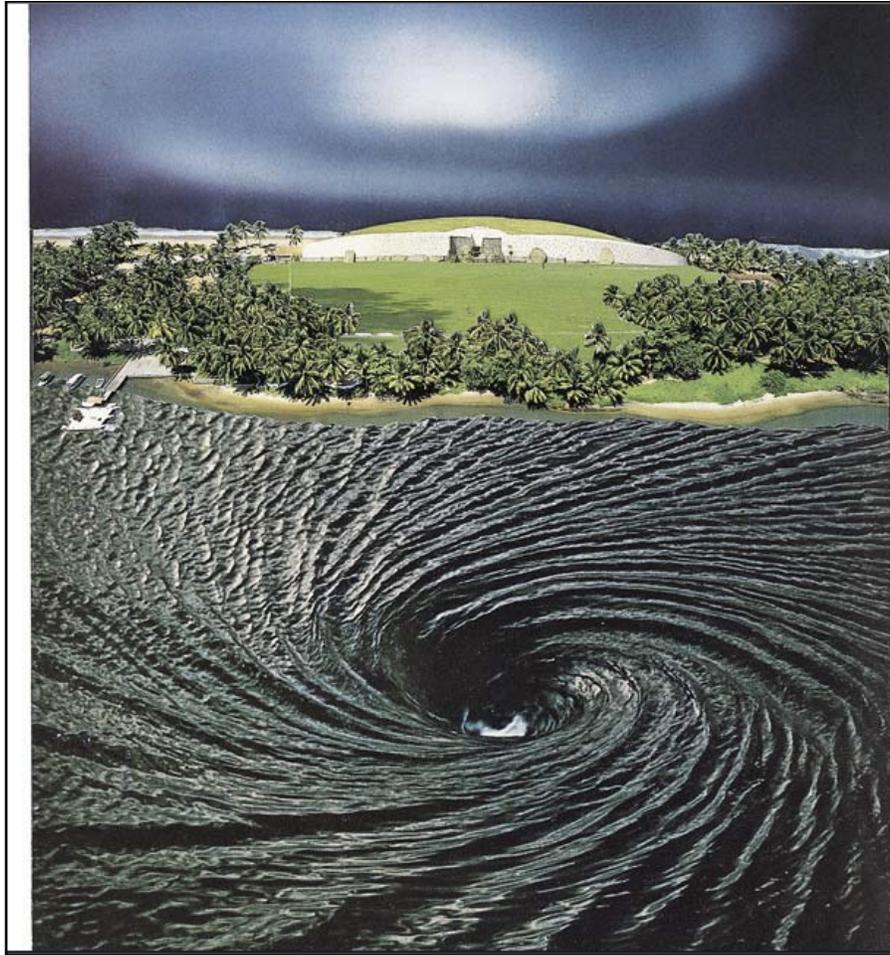


Fig. 2 The Island of Newgrange

The myth of perfection and the myth of return characterize the transgressive utopian thought of the diasporic subjects beyond the seas. Men go out into the void spaces of the world for various reasons. Some are travellers moved simply by a love of adventure, some have the keen thirst for scientific knowledge, some are drawn away from the trodden paths by the mysterious fascination of the unknown (Shackleton 1), and others are forced to leave their country and settle in other lands due to political,

economic or religious causes. As widely known, the main cause which provoked mass migration in Ireland was the nineteenth-century Great Famine. Many important Irish and non-Irish writers and artists represented the suffering of the ones who had to leave the country and those who remained. These texts crossed national boundaries and are being resignified still nowadays.

According to the sociologists Vertovec and Cohen the diaspora is seen under three perspectives: as social form, as type of consciousness and as mode of cultural production. Generally, diasporic narratives as a social form represent forced displacement, victimization, alienation and loss. The sculpture work “Famine”, by the contemporary Irish artist Rowan Gillespie, is an example of this kind of diaspora representation in contemporary times. Roger Kohn describes the work: “Seven desperate emaciated figures, shadowed by a ravenous opportunist dog, stand silently on the quayside, near the Custom House alongside the River Liffey in Dublin”<sup>7</sup> (Kohn 86). They were placed where thousands of emigrants departed on board of “coffin” ships to an uncertain future in the new world after suffering the loss of their loved ones. The hyper-realism of the figures provokes an aesthetic experience of ‘the real’ that lies behind the symbolic and the imaginary of the Irish mind.



Fig. 3. Famine sculptures

<sup>7</sup> KOHN. *Rowan Gillespie Looking for Orion*, p. 86.

However, though the Famine moved thousands of Irish people to the United States and to South America, narratives of the first “New Ireland” settled in the Argentinean diaspora space are stories of success. Poems, sketches, travelogues, newspapers, diaries, letters and other autobiographic literary narratives reveal how Irish diasporic community creates, in the second half of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, a symbolic textuality as a “strategy of survival” to represent the transnational movement and to keep alive “a home away from home”, in other words, a “New Ireland” within a “new nation”. However, physical borders remained and were also recreated in the diasporic traveller’s mind in an endogenous Irish community in the pampas. Those texts of success (letters, newspapers, reports) travelled back to Ireland provoking a chained migration to the far lands of South America. They configured a type of consciousness in which the diasporic experience of victimization was counterpoised with the experience of compensation given by new opportunities in the foreign land. Supplementing traveller’s writings, textual travels have become an important means of understanding the various kinds of diaspora experience moving from the private level to the collective level, and consequently, in the end of the twentieth century from the local to the global.

Literary narratives and Irish travelling texts published in nineteenth-century newspapers such as *The Southern Cross* and *Fianna* in Argentina or *The Anglo-Brazilian Times* in Brazil, reveal the processes of transnationalism, cultural contact and cultural *translation* at an embryonic stage and in a symbolic level. In the first two newspapers, images of transatlantic movements are ‘translated’ into textual symbols that keep alive the utopianism of a Promised Land and a contradictory homing desire, which is not always a wish to return to a place of ‘origin’.<sup>8</sup>

Though both *The Southern Cross* (1875-present) and *Fianna* (1910-1912)<sup>9</sup> used the same image for celebrating the centenary of the first Argentine free government to represent the Irish arrival to the southern new land

<sup>8</sup> The analysis that follows was a short version of my article “Locations and Identities in Irish Diasporic Narratives” in *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, Vol 10, No. 1-2, 2004 and of a chapter from my book *Narrativas de la diáspora irlandesa bajo la Cruz del Sur* (Corregidor 2010, pp. 88-109).

<sup>9</sup> Padraic Mac Manus’s nationalist review *Fianna*, was first published in Buenos Aires on St. Patrick’s Day 1910. It was vehemently anti-British, referring to the ‘Empire of the Devil’ and, as pointed out by Oliver Marshall in *The English Language Press in Latin America* (1996), it issued warnings of British plans to seize the south of Patagonia (9 July 1910) and never missed an opportunity to attack the British occupation of the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands (17 March 1910). The paper disagreed many times with the also nationalist but older newspaper *The Southern Cross*, founded by Msgr. Patrick Joseph Dillon in 1875, over conservative elements in the Irish community and supported, for example, Irish girls’ education to become typists, shop girls and governesses because “it would be criminal to condemn young girls of our race to the most slavish and worst-paid occupations, like domestic service” (31 July 1913).

and a friendly interaction of the community with the host country, the editor of *Fianna* strived to construct a collective narrative that kept the diasporic subject tied to their birthplace. The opening page of *Fianna* displays the design of three ships sailing towards the horizon where the

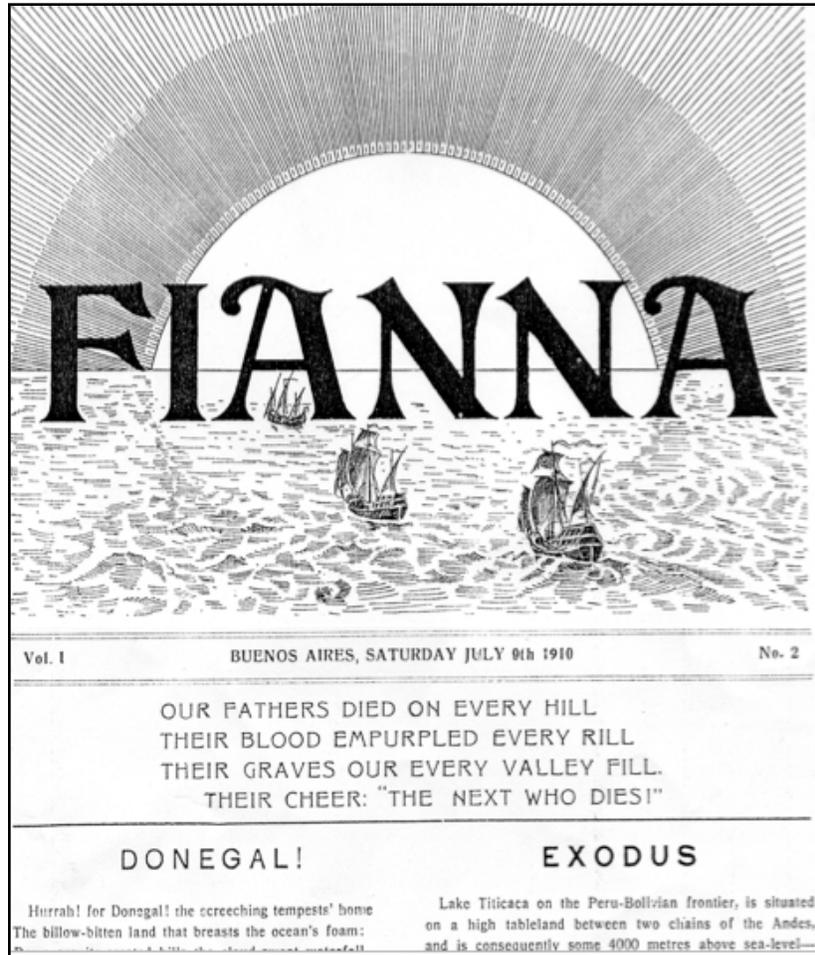


Fig. 4 *Fianna*

name of the paper appears written in large type with the sunset behind. It seems to represent the Irish movement towards the West where Hope lies. “Fianna” is the name for the utopian ‘new’ land where the ships go, thus moving the warrior spirit of the Fianna<sup>10</sup> to the west. Moreover, Irish consciousness is raised with patriotic nationalist fervour in short verses or chants that were printed in bold type below the image, such as “Our

<sup>10</sup> The word Fenian, when first used for an Irish Republican organization in the 1850s, was derived from *Fianna*, a legendary band of warrior heroes of the medieval stories *The Fenian Cycle*. Later, the Youth Organization that took part of the Dublin Rising of 1916 was also named after the ancient Gaelic élite guard.

Fathers died on every hill / their blood empurpled every rill / their graves our every valley fill./ Their cheer: “The next who dies!” (9 July 1910, N° 2). Or, “On Irish home descending, ‘Twas oft the tempest broke; / Those peaceful dwellings rending, mid flame and blood and smoke, / Our hallowed graveyards yonder swell with the slaughtered dead,/ O brothers pause and ponder – It was for us they bled!” (7 April 1911, N° 3). These travelling texts that recall the chants sung by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, play a variety of rhetorical purposes and turn into the editor’s main strategy to keep alive an open militancy and a strong attachment to Ireland and the Irish political cause, even from very far away.

But the opening image also contains ambivalence: the double significance of a reverse imaginary flow to motherland. Thus the visual and verbal modes of the text interact and could be reinterpreted in the opposite way: the ships are on the way back towards the sunrise and not the sunset and “Fianna” would be the mythic name of their motherland, or of the Youth Organization gathering the dispersed sons of Ireland to fight the English back. This visual resignification of the front page feeds nostalgia and the emotional effect of these poems discloses the main constitutive element of the diaspora pointed out by James Clifford (1997): diasporic subjects are “not here to stay”. Mitchell’s utopia of a nationalist Ireland has its echoes in the farther South Atlantic lands.

The anonymous poems, or those written by minor poets – such as Nora Hopper’s “Donegal!” (17 March 1910), or Rev Charles O’Donnell’s “The Spell of Donegal” (January 1912), or Oisín’s “Donegal!” (9 July 1910) – stand alone on the front page creating an emotional space where they become part of a dynamic relationship between experience, conscience and language. This symbolic space is marked by a strong attachment to homeland in order to awaken a desired return in the readers’ imagination. Other poems were signed with pseudonyms, such as Ethna Carbery, whose real name was Anna Johnston Mac Manus (1866-1902), wife of writer Seamus Mac Manus (1869-1959); or signed with names of Irish heroes which were celebrated by the nationalist cultural renaissance, such as Oisín, Conor Mac Nessa (remembered by the sagas *Tale of the Tain Bo Cuailgne* and *The Sons of Usnach*) and Cormac Mac Art (old king of Ireland with his reign in Tara). Thus, these travelling texts play the same function of other mechanisms used by their editors and writers to re-tell the same romantic story of loss, nostalgia and solidarity. A dream of return went along with this archetype. In this first stage of the transnational and translational process in Argentina, historical and geographical bonds became part of the mechanics of belonging rather than of ‘becoming’. However, as the sociologist Avtar Brah explains, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination, a place of no return (Brah 1996:192).

Traveling texts draw on cross-cultural communication and knowledge management. This knowledge representation is used strategically to raise awareness of the diasporic subject to be part of the nationalist movement and to find which actions he could take even from abroad. For example, William Bulfin created a branch of the Gaelic League in Buenos Aires and when he was the editor of *The Southern Cross* he printed without costs its news and propaganda being thus recognized by the *An Claidheamh Soluis* as the South American border of the movement for an “Irish Ireland”.

So, the second form of diaspora is a “type of consciousness”, i.e. a particular awareness describing a variety of experience, a state of mind and a sense of identity, which is marked by a *dual and paradoxical nature*. It is constituted negatively by experiences of discrimination and exclusion, or by the psychological effects of the separation from homeland and beloved relatives; and positively, by identification with a historical heritage (such as the Celtic civilization) or with contemporary world cultural or political forces (such as the nationalist movements at that time – the Fenians, the Gaelic League, the Irish Republican Brotherhood). J. Clifford refers to “loss and hope” as a defining tension of such diaspora awareness while Gilroy refers to the ambivalent expression “home away from home” or the dialectical “here and there” (1993). A visual example of this is Gillespie’s group of sculptures called “Migrants” (2006) which were installed in the newly created Ireland Park on the Toronto waterfront. The prominent figure of the man with outstretched hands at the front of the group sets the tone: arms raised to heaven giving thanks for the new born day – far from the agonies of home.



Fig 5 Migrants

Diasporic people are often confronted with divided loyalties to homelands and host countries. Once settled in the new land, they construct ties of

social relationships with the indigenous and other ethnic groups as a way to assert their own cultural identity and mark a space for their community. Thus the current debate on diaspora challenges the unifying discourse of “nation” focusing the dialectical experience of indeterminism in-between locations of residence and locations of belonging. Irish nineteenth-century communities struggled to construct ‘national identities’ through the reproduction of unifying narratives, which contain referential symbols of peoplehood.

How does it happen? *The Southern Cross* is also an example of the third form of diaspora: a mode of cultural production. Celtic symbols and designs from the *Book of Kells* are scattered throughout the pages (nowadays edited by Irish descendants). Similar to the functions of textual travels, these travelling symbols also became a commodity for spreading Irish culture abroad. Sharing the significance of a common symbol is a way of keeping bonds with a unifying past. Considering that 70 million Irish live around the world, it is important to distinguish the semblance and similitude of the *symbols* across diverse cultural experiences and the social specificity of the productions of meaning as they circulate *as signs* within specific contextual locations and social systems of value. In Argentina, the Irish immigrants fulfilled their nineteenth-century dreams of land, religion and nationality, the second triad pointed out by Fintan O’Toole when referring to the Irish social and cultural changes<sup>11</sup>: they became owners of large extensions of land, were prominent in sheep raising, they built up churches, hospital and religious institutions for the education of their children, and were supporters of the nationalist movements at home from abroad. Old Celtic symbols and names became the cultural codes that reflect the institutions and social processes.

Travelling narratives back in Ireland either silenced or transformed their history of oppression and failure at home into heroic deeds in the South American country resulting in a chain migration to the new land, as explained above. However, the flow of migration stopped when the SS. Dresden arrived in Buenos Aires in February 1889 with more than 1700 immigrants, the majority of them Irish, who didn’t find a place to settle and some of them died due to the poor conditions they had to face.

The contemporary counterpart story is that in early twenty-first century, with the world economic crisis that strongly afflicted Argentina, the Irish descendants took part of Ireland’s inward migration. Keeping a strong link with the land of the ancestors with the revival of old Celtic symbols, Irish descendants were motivated to apply for Irish citizenship and to migrate to

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<sup>11</sup> Finan O’Toole refers in his article “Irish Society and Culture in the Twenty-First Century” to four triads: 1) Silence, cunning and exile 2) land, religion and nationalism 3) sex, drugs and rock n’ roll 4) wealth, conflict and migration in the process of their cultural identification (*ABEI Journal* 2009).

the land of their ancestors or the European Union for better opportunities of jobs. Thus the underneath ideological project of the Irish community in Argentina which has been for many years a celebratory process of compensation and contribution in their search for a Promised Land, as it is seen in the cover of the special number of the centenary edition of *The Southern Cross*, has corroded. During the Celtic Tiger, wealth has been the official imagery of Ireland and the country has been perceived as the land of better opportunities. Therefore, her symbolic representation is magnified and Argentina is nearly erased when the *Southern Cross* celebrated its 125 years of existence.



Fig. 6 and 7 Southern Cross

In the last decades of the twentieth century, this Celtic revival within their community is contested with an ironic rewriting of that celebratory past. The Irish-Argentine writer Juan José Delaney, writing in Spanish, does this ironic twist in his novel *Moirá Sullivan*, or in his short story “The Founder”, where the utopia of a New Ireland is founded in the camps of Argentina. “The insolit and temerary project that could have only been conceived in Dublin’s tavern” (37) was inspired on Thomas More’s *Utopia*, but it was difficult, though not impossible to modify reality from literature and Timothy Heduan went to Bahía Blanca, to start his “Irish dream”. He knew “it would have been better to go to an island not only to follow the model but to avoid contaminations.” At least “he tried to sow the first seeds of an ideal society” getting married to a rich widow, owner of lands. The story ends saying that “Timothy Heduan wanted to found an

exemplary city and he ended founding a home, more or less worthy of an ideal society. This wasn't little." (44).

I would like to conclude recalling Rowan Gillespie's sculptures which resignify contemporary Ireland through the Famine and Migrancy in the turn of the twentieth century, and associate them to Fintan O'Toole's 'disappeared Irelands'. There is a connection between the individual/collective trauma and a socio-historical process of going through. The economic and social crisis in post-Cold War era has provoked a "globalization of poverty" and famine as well as emigration. Therefore, Gillespie's figures portray not only the victims of the Irish Great Famine but also "the unacceptable global starvation that haunts us all" (Kohn 95); not only mass migration but also the economic migrants and refugees of today. The cross-reading of the Irish travelling texts and symbols, diasporic narratives and Gillespie's sculptures from an actual world perspective brings the meaning of the Famine, eviction and emigration to a turning point and shows how they shaped the diasporic identity of the Irish community in Argentina to be vividly apprehended in its contemporaneity.

Literature of the Irish diaspora and travelling texts written in different temporalities translate the Irelands beyond the seas in order to fight against three historical national beasts – oppression, famine, and migration – in both turn of the centuries. Travelling texts build up a space of mutation for the human mind and act as a transgressive utopianism. They question the concept of "borders" which were related only to a physical geographical space and raise issues of cosmopolitan openness in our times. Transnational movements create translational spaces in the search for understanding future dreams everywhere and nowhere. In the contemporary world, the mythical journey to Tír na nÓg, to the utopian Promised Land, is not possible unless the dream of walking towards it. Is it Atlantis, Irelantis, Hy Brazil? Latin America? Ireland? ... Travelling texts translate this endless quest into words. In the end, everybody is on a long, long way back 'home'.

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