



Ar an gCoigríoch:  
Migration and Identity in Twentieth-Century  
and Contemporary Irish-language  
Literature

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Journeys abound in modern and contemporary Irish-language writing, whether the focus of the narrative is internal migration, emigration, return migration or simply a modern travel experience. This should not be surprising, as there is a close relationship between physical dislocation and the processes of linguistic minoritisation which made modern Irish-language discourse in general a discourse of cultural displacement. What may be surprising, however, is the range of perspectives on migration represented by Irish-language authors and the wide range of genres employed to represent Irish emigrant and diasporic experience. Drawing on a selection of materials from the anthology *Ar an gCoigríoch: Díolaim Litríochta ar Scéal na hImirce*,<sup>1</sup> this essay will demonstrate how Irish-language literature on migration represents a rich diversity of individual voices and experiences. While there is evidence to support Kerby Miller's contention that the dominant perception of emigration among western Irish-speaking communities in the post-famine period was that of involuntary exile,<sup>2</sup> many Irish-language autobiographical and fictional accounts complicate this interpretation. Migration and emigration are presented as being perceived and experienced differently depending on individuals' particular positions within families or communities. Attitudes towards emigration in Irish-speaking communities vary over time and are influenced by political developments, the destination of the migrant, the permanency or otherwise of the migrant experience and the individual response to personal or family circumstances. This essay will draw on a number of key texts to explore how migration and emigration have been imagined, experienced and analysed by twentieth-century Irish-language authors. The essay will focus in particular on various aspects of the relationship between linguistic, cultural, regional and national identity.

Many early twentieth-century migration narratives present late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century emigration as an integral part of life on the impoverished western seaboard. As Kerby Miller has pointed out, this was a period of increased commercialisation of rural life in western Ireland, when 'social relationships became more instrumental and migration became a societal and familial imperative'.<sup>3</sup> Connemara-born Máirtín Ó Cadhain (1906–1970), one of the most renowned twentieth-century writers of fiction in Irish, in his classic short story 'An Bhliain 1912', captures this reality by focussing on the emotional drama of the American wake from the perspective of a Connemara mother and, to a lesser degree, that of her eldest daughter. The mental map of a native Gaeltacht community is presented as incorporating overseas destinations like South Boston or Springfield, Massachusetts rather than Irish urban centres of population such as Dublin or Belfast. While the inevitability of emigration is accepted in a spirit of sad resignation by the adult and elderly, it is eagerly anticipated by the young, for whom the American trunk is a symbol of deliverance and hope:

Ag ceiliúr faoi Mheiriceá a bhí na mná óga. Ag ceiliúr faoin saol a bheadh acu abail a chéile ar fad i South Boston go gairid, mar ba dhual do chine arbh é tronc Mheiriceá a n-aingeal coimhdeachta, arbh í an long imirce a réalt eolais agus arbh í an Fharráige Mhór a Muir Rua.<sup>4</sup>

*The young women were chattering about America. Chattering about the life they would have together soon in South Boston, as was natural for a race whose guardian angel was the American trunk, whose guiding star was the emigration ship and whose Red Sea was the Atlantic.*

An Ghealchathair an t-achar ab fhaide ó bhaile a bhí Máirín riamh. Ach ba sheanchas faoi Mheiriceá an chéad bhia sa sliogán di. Ba ghaire go fada do chomhláir a tuiscena agus a samhlaíochta South Boston, Norwood, Butte Montana, Minnesota, nó California ná Baile Átha Cliath, Belfast, Wexford, ná go fiú is áiteacha nach raibh thar chupla míle ar thaobh an Achréidh den Ghealchathair. Fuineadh agus fáisceadh a saol agus a smaointe as cáil Mheiriceá, as saibhreas Mheiriceá, as siamsa Mheiriceá, as fonn cráite a dhul go Meiriceá . . . Agus ainneoin go raibh cumha uirthi an baile a fhágáil anois, níor chumha é gan an gliondar, an dóchas agus an t-iontas a bheith ina orlaí tríd. Faoi dheireadh thiar bhí sí ar thairseach na Bruíne Draíochta . . . Farráigí uafásacha, slata seoil, soilse greadhnacha, sráideanna ar dhath an airgid, daoine cróna a raibh loinnir an daoil ina geneas, ag cur in éagrúth cheana féin uirthi gort, sliabh, carraig agus caoláire.<sup>5</sup>

*Brightcity [i.e. Galway] was the farthest from home Máirín had ever been. But she had been nurtured from childhood on the lore of America. South Boston, Norwood, Butte Montana, Minnesota, or California, opened shutters in her understanding and imagination much more than did Dublin, Belfast, Wexford,*

*or even places only a few miles on the east Galway side of Brightcity. Her life and her thoughts were shaped and moulded by the fame of America, the wealth of America, the amusements of America, the agonised longing to go to America . . . And though she was lonesome now at leaving home, it was a lonesomeness shot through and through with hope, delight and wonder. At last she was on the threshold of the Fairy Palace . . . Tremendous seas, masts, blazing lights, streets the colour of silver, dark people whose skin gleamed like beetles, distorting for her already the outlines of field, mountain, rock and inlet.*

The Irish household, as represented in this and other texts, is a fractured one, as the emigration of the eldest child marks the beginning of a process of dramatic and rapid family break-up. Here we have a literary example of female chain migration.<sup>6</sup> Máirín will be staying with an aunt of hers in Boston and her sisters, Mairéad and Nóirín, have already begged her to send them their passage money as soon as she can. From Máirín's perspective, the story can be read as a narrative of maturation and independence, in which emigration is seen to accelerate and exaggerate the natural separation of the older and younger generation. Even before Máirín leaves home, a perceptible chasm has opened between herself and her mother – Máirín, dressed in her American clothes, is already elsewhere – making satisfactory communication of emotion impossible.

Moving now from fiction to memoir, another perspective on western Irish women's emigration is offered by Aran Island-born Máirtín Ó Direáin (1910–1988). In his account of boyhood on Inis Mór, *Feamainn Bhealtaine* (1961), he recollects his mother and other island women reminiscing about their various experiences as young women working in America:

*Ní raibh máthair clainne ar an dá bhaile nár chaith seal éigin i Meiriceá. Chloisinn féin cuid mhaith cainte uatha ar Boston, ar Dorchester, ar Woburn agus ar áiteanna eile tráth a mbídís cruinnithe cois tine.*

*Bhí an oiread eolais acu ar na cathracha céanna is a bhí acu ar Ghaillimh. Déarfainn go raibh agus níos mó. Ní bheadh eolas ar bith ag a leithéidí ar Bhaile Átha Cliath ná ar aon chathair i Sasana an tráth úd.<sup>7</sup>*

*There wasn't a mother in the two villages who hadn't spent a period in America. I used to hear them talking often when they'd be gathered around the fire of Boston, Dorchester, Woburn and other places.*

*They had as much knowledge of those cities as they had of Galway. I'd say they had and even more. The likes of them would know nothing of Dublin or of any city in England at that time.*

Here the women's emigrant experiences become the stuff of storytelling. They are presented as a mysterious or hidden aspect of their lives, incomprehensible to the young boy for whom the image of the emigrant ship is presented as a source of curiosity and wonder:

Ní raibh fhios aige cén sórt áit é mar Mheiriceá, cé go gcloiseadh sé a mháthair féin, a aint agus mná eile ag caint go minic air. Chloiseadh sé ag caint iad ar *Country borns* agus ar *Greenhorns* agus freisin ar dhaoine a dtugaidís *Shinamin* orthu . . . Chuala sé go mbíodh báid an-mhóra á dtabhairt sall ach níorbh fhéidir leis samhail ar bith a thabhairt dóibh ar mhéid. A' raibh ceann acu chomh mór leis an Muirbheach thíos? Chomh mór le baile? Chomh mór leis an oileán uile? Ní raibh a fhios aige.<sup>8</sup>

*He didn't know what America was like as a place, though he would hear his own mother, his aunt and other women talking often about it. He'd hear them speak of Country borns and of Greenhorns and also of people they used to call Shinamin ['Chinamen'] . . . He heard that very big boats used to bring them over but he had no mental image of their size. Was one of them as big as the sandbank down below? As big as a village? As big as the whole island? He didn't know.*

Ó Direáin's references to emigration in his memoir are particularly interesting when one considers that he is best known for his poetry of urban alienation, written from the perspective of an Irish-speaking intellectual cut off from his Gaeltacht island home in Dublin. As various critics have demonstrated, this island home becomes increasingly a place of the imagination rather than a living reality in Ó Direáin's later work, while Dublin is consistently presented as a place of loneliness and confinement.<sup>9</sup> The sense of community experienced by Irish emigrants in America eludes him, as it does west Kerry author Pádraig Ua Maoileoin (1913–2002), who, like Ó Direáin, spent all his adult life in Dublin. Ua Maoileoin describes his annual return home to Dún Chaoin like a pilgrimage to a strange place:

Is geall le hoilithreacht dom leithéid anois dul siar mar seo ar shaol atá imithe i ndearúd uaidh. Táim rófhada imithe as chun aon ní a bheith fágtha agam ach an macalla, mar táim rite isteach i saol eile le blianta fada. Cuimhne an linbh agus an ógánaigh atá fanta agam ar an seana-shaol, lán de rómánsaíocht agus de nóiníní samhraidh. Gach aon phictiúir a thagann chugham aniar daite le draíocht, ceo brothail ós cionn gach binne, agus gan aon ní fíor ina cheart, ach é mar do bheadh ceann des na póstaerí úd a chíféá go minic age stáisiún traenach d'iarraidh tu a mhealladh go dtí tír abhfad i gcéin.<sup>10</sup>

*It is like a pilgrimage for the likes of me now to return like this to a life that he has forgotten. I'm too long gone to have retained anything but an echo, because for a long time now I have become accustomed to another life. My memories of the old life are the memories of a child and a youth, full of romance and summer flowers. Every picture that comes to my mind from that place coloured with magic, a heat haze above each gable and nothing really ringing true, but as if it were one of those posters you'd see often in a train station trying to entice you to a faraway country.*

He compares himself to the Irish American returning home after thirty years, his worldview and his language transformed by his experience in a foreign land. He considers his own situation as an Irish speaker in Dublin to be more problematic in many ways. The emigrant of Gaeltacht extraction returning from New York may at least have had the benefit of an underground cultural existence that is more difficult to find in Dublin, where Gaeltacht migrants do not form a recognizable community or possess a cohesive group identity.

Migration narratives also raise questions about the role of kin and community in creating or destroying an individual's sense of belonging. For renowned west Kerry storyteller Peig Sayers (1873–1958), family life at home became increasingly uncomfortable for the dependent relatives within the household after the marriage of her brother Seán. This situation eventually led to twelve-year-old Peig having to leave her home and terminate her formal schooling in order to take up the position arranged by her father for her as a servant girl in Dingle.<sup>11</sup> One can infer from Peig's account of her teenage migration and her parents' acceptance of that migration, that her experience was not uncommon.

When family life had already been shattered by premature death, as was the case for the fatherless Donegal youth Míic Mac Gabhann (1865–1948), migration to Scotland was seen as an exciting adventure, while youthful emigration to America is depicted in the first instance as an escape from home and then as a form of reunion with kinsfolk and community on the other side. Mac Gabhann travels to America with two relatives, lodges with relations in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and remains among the Irish community when he travels west to Butte, Montana. It is only when recounting his journey north to Klondike that he comments on the breakdown of group solidarity when severe physical conditions result in individualistic responses and survival is achieved at the cost of the erosion of a sense of communal responsibility.<sup>12</sup>

Depictions of economic emigration in terms of liberation or adventure continue into the later periods and autobiographical and fictional examples by Gaeltacht writers such as Ger Ó Cíobháin (1928–2008), Maidhc Dainín Ó Sé (b. 1942) and Tomás Ó Cinnéide (1914–1992) present emigration to England or North America variably as inevitable, accepted or anticipated and not always permanent.<sup>13</sup> As would be expected in these accounts of Gaeltacht male emigrants' experiences of working abroad, one finds references to the social life of Irish immigrant communities in cities such as London, Chicago and San Francisco. In describing the Irish dance halls, the popularity of Irish music, the working man's Irish pubs and the celebration of St Patrick's Day, the sense of an Irish-language community is

strong and vibrant. Furthermore, various accounts underline the importance of a convivial social life as a necessary antidote to the harshness of the working and living conditions experienced by the Irish emigrants. While narratives of male emigration are more plentiful than female ones, literary sources do support the evidence presented by historians such as Pauric Travers that female emigration from Ireland in the first half of the twentieth century was motivated by a desire for freedom from the social and economic constraints associated with life in rural Ireland.<sup>14</sup>

If one is to look for tragic representations of emigration as involuntary exile, one finds such depictions in fiction more than in Irish-language memoir. The early classic text here is the novel *Deoráocht* (1910)<sup>15</sup> by Galway author Pádraic Ó Conaire (1882–1928), who himself spent over ten years in London. Here, an Irish-speaking economic migrant in London, Micil Ó Maoláin, is knocked down by an automobile in a street accident that leaves him disfigured and disabled, his only consolation being the gold he received as compensation money. Disillusioned and alienated from his home and kin, he squanders the money and becomes a performer in a travelling freak show, whose owner turns out to be an Irish man and where kinship ties do not protect the individual from exploitation of the worst kind (Alf Trottan/Fear Beag Buí, owner of the show, exploits his own obese daughter as much as he does the disfigured Micil). He is befriended by Mayo-woman and Irish speaker Mag Mhór, but his only sense of community is to be found in the Irish ghetto ('Éire bheag') or in the bars frequented by sailors, vagrants and other disappointed and disaffected Irish emigrants. Is *Deoráocht* an anti-emigration novel, a political and moral allegory, or is it a partly realistic depiction of actual conditions for the Irish in turn-of-the-century London? The critical consensus suggests that it is a combination of the above, incorporating various levels of alienation,<sup>16</sup> just as Ó Conaire's famous short story 'Nóra Mharcais Bhig'<sup>17</sup> can be read as a melodramatic depiction of the fate of a young rural Irish woman fleeing to London after rejection in love (and it is strongly hinted that she is pregnant), or as an anti-emigration short story with a strong moral message. *Deoráocht* illustrates Edward Said's definition of exile as 'the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home'.<sup>18</sup> Adrift in London, the exile is unrecognised and unrecognisable also when he returns to his native Galway. Micil's only natural community in the end is the nomadic, homeless and nameless community of beggars and social outcasts he encounters in London's public parks. Nóra Mharcais Bhig's fate is not dissimilar. When she returns home after years of dissipation in London, Nóra initially tries hard to fulfil the role of the dutiful daughter and the successful returned emigrant.

However, when Nóra's alcoholic tendency becomes apparent, her father Marcas immediately banishes her from her home and community and sends her back to England, the country that, according to him, had brought about the moral downfall of his only daughter. It is worth noting that the subtitle 'a true emigration story' featured in *An Claidheamh Soluis*, where this short story was first published in 1907.

While a novel like *Deoraíocht* will always hold a literary and aesthetic interest for readers, there is no ambiguity whatsoever as to the motivation behind anti-emigration texts such as the novelette *An Cneamhaire* (1902)<sup>19</sup> by Úna Ní Fhaircheallaigh (1874–1951) and the much-produced play *An Deoraidhe: Dráma i n-Aghaidh Imtheachda thar Sáile* (1906)<sup>20</sup> by Lorcán Ua Tuathail (1870–1909), two turn-of-the-century texts where readers and audiences are warned of the falsity of the embellished accounts of successful emigrants. The image of the emigrant or the returned emigrant as physically and morally weakened is typical of early twentieth-century anti-emigration literature.<sup>21</sup> Examples occur in Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An tOileánach* (1929) where Tomás's brother is shown to be worn out from his labours in America, from which he returned penniless and the daughter of Ó Criomhthain's neighbour is depicted as well-off, well-clad but physically failed after her seven years 'i dtír an allais'.<sup>22</sup> Máirtín Ó Cadhain's short story 'An Taoille Tuile'<sup>23</sup> is a masterly portrayal of how ten years working as a servant girl in New York has deprived the central character, Mairéad, of the physical capacity to carry out the kind of work demanded of a young married woman in a maritime economy and the effect this shortcoming has on her relationship with her husband, kin group and community. Her sense of identity is severely tested as is her hitherto unwavering belief that to reject all that America offered and to return with a dowry to Connemara to marry the man she loved was the best option for her. In a similar vein, the novel *Éan Cuideáin* (1936)<sup>24</sup> by Pádraic Óg Ó Conaire (1893–1971) shows how difficult it is for the Canadian wife of a returned emigrant to integrate with the west of Ireland community among whom her husband grew up. In their depiction of return migration, these literary texts are particularly valuable for the insights they provide on an under-researched aspect of migrant identity and of migration history.

Emerging from early twentieth-century nationalistic anti-emigration sentiment is the culturally motivated post-independence depiction of Gaeltacht emigration as post-colonial failure. Using emigration narratives as the focus of the critique, certain texts make causal links between physical displacement and the kinds of cultural displacement associated with language shift and language loss. Seosamh Mac Grianna (1900–1990), writing in 1925, refers to the haemorrhage of emigration from Gaeltacht regions:

Is iad na Gaeilgeoirí is mó atá ag imeacht. Anois nuair atá an uile dhuine a bhfuil Gaeilge aige de dhíobháil go crua ar an tír, tá cainteoirí maithe ag imeacht agus á slogadh sa Ghalltacht.<sup>25</sup>

*It is the Irish speakers more than any other group that are leaving. Now when everyone who has Irish is badly needed in the country, good speakers are leaving and being eaten up in the Galltacht [English-speaking community/region].*

This kind of critique is most marked when referring to 1950s emigration to Britain and includes both the accounts of actual Irish-speaking emigrants, such as Donall MacAmhlaigh (1926–1989) and of commentators (of Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht background) who saw emigration as an index of the economic and cultural failings of the postcolonial state. In his autobiographical account *Dialann Deoraí* (1960) MacAmhlaigh describes the crowd on the ferry from Dún Laoghaire thus:

Tá an bád bán luchtaithe síos le daoine. A mbunáite mar mé féin cheap-fainn, ag filleadh tar éis na Cásca. Cuid eile a n-aithním orthu gurb í an chéad uair ag dul anonn dóibh í. Dornán beag de mhuintir Chonamara ar thaobh mo dheasóige ag stealladh Gaeilge . . . Nach álainn a bhreathnaíos Dún Laoire agus na sléibhte taobh thiar de? Tá an caladh lán de bháid bheaga seoil agus de ghleoitheoga geala agus de churacha adhmaid. Le lucht na sócúlachta iad sin, leis an dream a fhanas.<sup>26</sup>

*The emigrant ship is laden down with people. Most of them like myself, I'd say, returning after the Easter. Others I can tell who are going over for the first time. A small group of Connemara people on my right spouting Irish . . . Isn't Dún Laoire and the mountains behind it looking beautiful? The harbour is full of small sailing boats and bright little yachts and wooden rowing boats. They belong to the comfortable classes, to those who are staying behind.*

He takes up this theme in his 1986 novel *Deoraithe*,<sup>27</sup> where the character Niall becomes the conduit for his own attitude to Gaeltacht emigration, which echoed that of Mac Grianna.

Máirtín Ó Cadhain, who was a political activist and Gaeltacht rights campaigner as well as an accomplished prose writer, was bitter in his condemnation of the state he deemed responsible for the emigration of the 1950s. In a 1953 newspaper article, he reacts angrily to the scene on a ferry boat of west of Ireland emigrants on their way to England:

Aithním gurb ó Iarthar na hÉireann formhór na ndaoine seo ar an mbád. Is dream iad nár smaoinigh ariamh ar dhual nó nár dhual dóibh an imirce. Is cóir do na daoine a fhéadas fanacht buíochas le Dia a thabhairt, na himirceánaigh a bheith chomh neamhsmaointeach sin . . . Cuimhním ar na himirceánaigh seo a chaithfeas an oíche ina suí, ag bréagadh a gcuid leanbh, nó ag suirí i gcúinní cúnga neamhdhoicheadh. Fiafraím díom



féin cé an fáth nár imíos-sa freisin: nár imíos ar mo chéad phosta a chailleadh dom, nó ar theacht as príosún. Is fada mé á thuiscint go bhfuil Éire básaithe. Ní leigheasfaidh scéimeanna sláinte rud atá fuar marbh . . . Céard atá dlite ag Éirinn uaimse? Do Shasana nó do Mheireacá ba chóir mo dhílseacht-sa a bheith ag dul. Ar shochraide gaoil liom i bPortland Maine tá gairid ó shoin, bhí dháréag col ceathracha dom, seacht nduine fhichead de chol cúigearachaí, sna déaga agus dá fhichead de chol seisearachaí! Do na fir chaocha agus bhacacha agus bhodhra is fiú a bheith dílis d'Éirinn. Ní call d'aon duine dá dteaghlighsan dul ar imirce!

Faraor nach dá fágáil go brách atáim! B'fhearr liom san áit a bhfuil mo chine agus mo theanga . . .<sup>28</sup>

*I can see that most of the people on the boat are from the West of Ireland. They are a people who never gave thought to whether or not they should be emigrating. Those who can stay should be thankful to God that the emigrants are so unreflective . . . think of these emigrants who will spend the night sitting, soothing their children, or courting in narrow but unbegrudging corners. I ask myself why I too did not leave: why did I not leave when I lost my first job, or when I was released from prison. I've long thought that Ireland is dead. Health schemes will not cure something that is dead . . . What does Ireland deserve from me? My allegiance should be to England or to America. At a relative's funeral in Portland Maine recently, there were twelve first cousins of mine, twenty-seven second cousins and more than fifty third cousins! Allegiance to Ireland is only of value to those who are blind, crippled and deaf. None of their family members is forced to emigrate! It is a pity that I am not leaving forever! I'd prefer be in the place where my people and my language are.*

Journalist Dónal Foley (1922–1981), from the Ring Gaeltacht in County Waterford, focuses in his article 'Oíche na hImirce' on poignant images of emigrants in transit.<sup>29</sup> Socialist politician Joe Higgins (b. 1949), from the west Kerry Gaeltacht, recalls the annual image of groups of young teenagers waiting for the minibus to take them to the ferry ports to go to England and claims that such sights moulded his socialist political vision.<sup>30</sup> Part of this critique of emigration is a tendency to focus on the lives of marginalised, destitute or desperate Irish emigrants. Thus bilingual novelist and short-story writer Risteárd de Paor (1928–1970) in his memoir *Úll i mBarr an Ghéagáin*<sup>31</sup> describes an incident on a suburban train in Birmingham involving a drunken, confused and out-of-control Irishman, while Connemara-born author Diarmaid Ó Gráinne (b. 1950) focuses on the lives of marginalised Irish emigrants, including Irish-speaking patients in a British mental hospital.<sup>32</sup> Certain motifs are recycled again and again, becoming clichés of Irish emigration: the battered suitcase, the stingy landlady, the greedy contractor, the cruel foreman, the unhealthy food and niggardly rations, the hobnail boots, the park benches, the heavy drinking, the shared beds.<sup>33</sup>

Negative depictions continue into the eighties and appear regularly in the Connemara song tradition where one finds a fusion of the emigration ballad and nostalgic country-and-western themes of loss and longing.<sup>34</sup> Negative images of emigration are to be found in the work of younger writers also and certain literary depictions are particularly gloomy: the stories of desolation and desperation set in London in the short story collection *Sráid Sián* (1986)<sup>35</sup> by Micheál Ó Brolacháin, for example; the image of Connemara emigrant Patrick Conneely in the poem sequence 'Páidín' by Áine Ní Ghlinn (b. 1955), where he is depicted as sleeping rough in the doorways of London shops, lying to his family at home, borrowing money to sustain the myth of emigrant success.<sup>36</sup> An interesting aspect of the emigration theme in Irish-language literature is that it appears in the work of writers with diverse experience of Irish emigration. Ní Ghlinn did not have personal experience as an emigrant, for example, while Ó Brolacháin was born in Warrington, England, to an Irish father and an English mother and was brought up in Southampton and Dublin. Emigration to London was part of the youthful experience of poet Cathal Ó Searcaigh (b. 1956) whose early poem 'Miontragóid Chathrach', republished in his 2000 collection *Ag Tnúth leis an tSolais*,<sup>37</sup> depicts a young Irish-speaking gay man wandering the streets of London alone in search of love, companionship and sex. On the other hand, it is through the tragedy of the suicide of a young Belfast man in London that Belfast poet Gearóid Mac Lochlainn (b. 1966) depicts the experience of the Irish emigrant in the metropolitan centre in the poem 'Paddy', where he situates the Irish experience in the context of other post-colonial immigrants in post-imperial Britain.<sup>38</sup> While there is a diversity of accounts, based on place of origin in Ireland and destination abroad, there are few success stories, few literary accounts of satisfactory emigrant experiences, despite the fact that during this period of recession in Ireland, emigration was the only chance of economic success available to many young Irish people and many of them were successful.

More recent Irish migration narratives present more positive images of personal journeys, more or less freely undertaken. This change can be accounted for by the increased mobility associated with contemporary globalisation, as well as the personal factors which assist or restrict processes of integration or acculturation. The Columban missionary Pádraig Ó Murchú (b. 1944), in his autobiographical account *Idir Dhá Shaol* (1989), for example, accepts his sojourn in Korea as part of life's journey and he is happy in the belief that one can never re-travel the same road:

Níl sé meáite agamsa an t-aistear san a dhéanamh siar go dtí radharcanna agus fuaimanna cneasta Chorca Dhuibhne mar nach fainleog ná bradán mé. Níor cheart do dhuine dul siar ar an mbóthar a tháinig sé. Is duine

mé atá ag dul i dtreo an lae amáirigh agus cuireann ruaig na mblian isteach ar gach rud ar chláir na cruinne.<sup>39</sup>

*I do not intend making that journey back to the sights and gentle sounds of Corca Dhuibhne because I am not a swallow or a salmon. A person should not go back on the road that he has travelled. I am someone who is going in the direction of tomorrow and the onset of years affects every thing on the face of the earth.*

When his father dies at home in Kerry, his adopted community – or the community that have now adopted him – arrange a three-day wake, thus creating an environment of communal support, as if they were an extended family, facilitating the grieving process for a deceased parent on the other side of the planet. One gets the sense that Ó Murchú is at home in the world and at ease with himself no matter where he is physically located.

For the central character John Paul in the novel of gay youth *Sna Fir* (1999)<sup>40</sup> by Micheál Ó Conghaile (b. 1962) the journey to Dublin is socially and sexually exciting and liberating, despite his close attachments to his home place and community in Connemara. The challenge for John Paul is to achieve a satisfactory accommodation between his identity as defined by his place of origin and the kinds of identity construction made possible by his migration to the city.

For academic and novelist Pádraig Ó Siadhail (b. 1958), based in Nova Scotia in Canada, his sense of identity is defined by dual allegiance and the reality of living ‘between two countries’:

“Isan bhFrainc im dhúscadh dhamh/ In Éirinn Chuinn im chodladh,” a scríobh Pádraigín Haicéad sa seachtú haois déag. Tuigeann tú dó. Rud fisiciúil is ea é a bheith idir dhá thír. Tagann tú. Imíonn tú. Filleann tú. Fágann tú. Thar aon rud eile, rud síceolaíoch is ea é. Baineann tú le dhá áit. Uaireanta, ní bhaineann tú le ceachtar acu. Den chuid is mó, bíonn tú go fisiciúil ar an choigríoch agus tú ag tabhairt faoi ghnáthchúraimí an lae, ach do mhothúcháin is do smaointe a bheith fite fuaite leis an fhód dúchais.<sup>41</sup>

*“In France while I am awake/ In Ireland in my sleep” were the words of Pádraigín Haicéad in the seventeenth century. You empathise with him. It is a physical thing when you are between two countries. You come. You go. You return. You leave. More than anything else, it is a psychological thing. You belong to two places. Sometimes, you don’t belong to either of them. For the most part, you are physically abroad as you apply yourself to your ordinary daily duties, but your emotions and your thoughts are inextricably linked to your native sod.*

Referring to Thomas D’Arcy McGee’s assertion that late nineteenth-century Irish Americans were ‘camped but not settled in America, with

foreign hopes and aspirations, unshared by the people among whom they live', Ó Siadhail describes himself as a camper, for whom certain issues are just not as important as they are for the native population, even if he is married to one of those natives. His experience is complicated by the fact that he is an Irish-language writer who speaks Irish to his Canadian-born son. Though he is not in any sense nostalgic, his ties to home are stronger because of this linguistic attachment:

Ach nach mithid duit féin éirí as a bheith ag campáil is fréamhacha buana a chur síos anois? D'fhéadfá saoránacht Cheanada a fháil faoin am seo. Ní laghdódh sé sin puinn ar do dhílseacht do do dhúchas ar aon dóigh phraiticiúil. Ach tá bac síceolaíoch ort nach féidir leat a mhíniú go sásúil, mura bhfuil sé san fhúil agat a bheith i do champálaí choíche. B'fhéidir gurb é do chuid oibre. Bíonn tú ag plé le hÉirinn achán lá, ag múineadh ranganna, i mbun scaothaireachta, ag soláthar ainmneacha breátha Gaelacha do dhaoine faoi choinne a bpáistí, a bpúisíní is a bpúcán. Tá tú trí mhíle míle ón áit mhallaithe is gan aon éalú agat uaithi. Agus, in ainm Dé, tá tú ag féachaint le scríobh i dteanga nach raibh ach an leathghreim agat uirthi an lá ab fhéarr riamh sa bhaile is nach labhraíonn tú ar aon leibhéal ard anois.<sup>42</sup>

*But isn't it time for you to give up the camping and to put down permanent roots now? You could have Canadian citizenship by now. That wouldn't in any practical way take from your commitment to your native land. But you have a psychological block that you cannot explain properly, unless it is in your blood to be a camper always. Maybe it's your work. You are dealing with Ireland every day, teaching classes, holding forth, providing famous Gaelic names to people for their children, their kittens and their sailing boats. You are three thousand miles from the wretched place and you can't escape from it. And, for God's sake, you are trying to write in a language that you had only half a grasp of at the best of times at home and that you don't speak at any advanced level now.*

The situation is complicated further by the fact that the emigrant's children are also living between two worlds:

Ar fhilleadh ar Halifax daoibh le déanaí, chuir tú ceist ar an ghasúr: An maith leat a bheith abhus anseo arís nó arbh fhéarr leat a bheith ar ais sa Spidéal? Is féarr liom anseo é, ar seisean. Ní hionann dúchas an champálaí is dúchas an tsaoránaigh. Ní hionann dóchas an athar is dóchas an mhaicín.<sup>43</sup>

*When you returned to Halifax recently, you asked the boy: Do you like being here again or would you prefer to be back in Spiddle? I prefer it here, he said. The natural affinity of the camper is not the natural affinity of the citizen. The hopes of the father are not the hopes of the son.*

Will contemporary transport and communication technologies alter the reality of life for individuals and communities living between two

countries? Academic and commentator Torlach Mac Con Midhe is decidedly post-modern in his depiction of exile in the era of the internet. Mac Con Midhe employs the metaphor of the hypertext to describe the patterns of communication and affiliation associated with bilocation and interculturality: ‘Feictear domsa go bhfuil saol an deoraí ag éirí an-chosúil le hipirtéacs. Feicim rud “anseo” i saol amháin a chuireann rud eile “ansiúd” i gcuimhne dom, déanaim “cliceáil” aigne air, agus tá mé ann.’<sup>44</sup> [‘I think the life of the exile is becoming very much like hypertext. I see something “here” in one life which reminds me of something else “there”, I “click” on it mentally and I’m there.’] When the trauma of displacement is replaced by the freedoms and excitement of mobility, migrants may become travellers and travel literature may come to replace the narratives of involuntary migration and dislocation: ‘Cosúil le lucht siúil, b’fhéidir, nílim ar mo shuaimhneas in aon áit amháin, ach ar turas, ar cuairt timpeall.’<sup>45</sup> [‘Like the travelling people, maybe, I’m not comfortable in any one place, but on a journey, a round trip.’] There is growing evidence that this is now happening, with an ever-growing number of travel books in Irish coming to replace the memoirs and fictionalised accounts of Gaeltacht emigration.

As long as present states of mobility and global connectivity pertain – and of course there is no certainty that they will or that they should – then the metaphor of hypertextual relations may be particularly relevant and offer a new approach to Irish migration and to Irish migration studies. Whether minoritized languages and cultures can be strengthened by the kinds of communication possible in diasporic communities that are virtual networks rather than physically contiguous communities remains to be seen. Up to recently the prospect of witnessing an Irish-language literature of the diaspora seemed improbable, yet the number of publications in recent years by Irish-language authors living abroad and by authors of Irish extraction who have learned Irish abroad, would indicate that this is now a real possibility. With the increased popularity of travel writing and the regular publication of travel accounts by Irish-language writers, we may now be witnessing the beginnings of a new literary movement in which the experience of mobility, interculturality and transnationality may be the norm and the concept of home as a stable place of origin or return increasingly questioned.

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