

# The Schumpeterian and Universal Hero Myth in Stories of Irish Entrepreneurs



G A R V A N   W H E L A N \*  
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## ABSTRACT

As part of a mapping of the current state of entrepreneurship in Ireland, this paper explores the presentation of three Irish entrepreneurial stories. It is argued that entrepreneurial stories reflect the universal hero myth and the Schumpeterian emphasis on the achievements of the individual entrepreneur. An analysis of the presentation of stories in the popular media of three successful and well-known Irish entrepreneurs suggests that the recurring themes of the universal hero myth are found in the stories of Irish entrepreneurs. However, it was established that while the stories of the entrepreneurs studied emphasised the achievements of the individual, in the sense of the Schumpeterian hero myth, it was complemented with an appreciation of the importance of teamwork for business success. The paper concludes by suggesting that policy-makers can use the hero myth to encourage entrepreneurial activity, but in doing so they should emphasise the main character's ordinary background and how it *could* indeed be anyone.

**Key Words:** Entrepreneurship; Ireland; Schumpeter; Hero; Myth; Stories.

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## INTRODUCTION

There is evidence to suggest that entrepreneurship has a high degree of popular support in Ireland and that such support has contributed to increased levels of entrepreneurial activity in Ireland (Fitzsimons et al., 2004). Reports of recent years support the view that entrepreneurs in Ireland are perceived as 'local heroes' in recognition of the important role that they play in creating wealth and employment (Goodbody, 2002). This has not always been the case. Historically, the regard for entrepreneurship as a career option has been relatively low (O'Farrell, 1986), and Irish entrepreneurs were viewed with jealousy as newly rich 'upstarts' (Ardagh, 1994). However, as the economy has grown begrudgery towards successful entrepreneurs in Ireland has diminished (McCarthy, 2000). Indeed, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor indicates that entrepreneurs now have a higher status throughout the island of Ireland compared with many other developed countries, including the United States (Fitzsimons et al., 2004).

Increased popular support for entrepreneurial activity may reflect the increased media coverage of entrepreneurs and, in particular, of entrepreneurial success stories. Entrepreneurial stories are considered important because reported accounts of heroic individual innovations may act as a stimulus to latent entrepreneurial activity (Cooper, 2000). In areas where there appears to be less popular support for entrepreneurs, such as Northern Ireland (Fitzsimons et al., 2005), it is not uncommon for policy-makers to advocate the profiling and promotion of 'success stories'. For example, government policy for the promotion of enterprise in Northern Ireland places the task of changing attitudes and culture as a top priority; as part of this strategy, stories of successful entrepreneurs will be promoted as role models (Morrison and Scott, 2003). Using content analysis of newspaper articles on entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom, Nicholson and Anderson (2005) found evidence to support their contention that British entrepreneurs were portrayed 'as giants' in 1989, but by 2000, 'they were discovered to have feet of clay' (2005: 153). In Ireland, the opposite appears to have occurred: hitherto entrepreneurs were previously demonised but more recently they have been celebrated (Goodbody, 2002).

Why do stories of entrepreneurs attract attention in popular media in Ireland? How are stories of entrepreneurs presented in the Irish media? In what way might the presentation of an entrepreneur's

story influence how entrepreneurs are understood in society? This paper seeks to address these issues by presenting an analysis of the stories of three Irish entrepreneurs. The authors believe that analysing and interpreting the stories of entrepreneurs is an important part of the process of mapping entrepreneurship in Ireland. It can help in the understanding of how entrepreneurs are perceived by society, and how the entrepreneurial story can be used to encourage innovative activity. Furthermore, such an investigation will provide a benchmark for comparing the presentation of Irish entrepreneurs against their standing at future points in time. It should also allow the comparative analysis of Irish entrepreneurial stories to be evaluated against narratives from other countries. The paper proceeds as follows. First, the paper clarifies the meaning of the terms 'Schumpeterian' and 'universal hero myth'. This entails the identification of common and recurring themes from both narrative frameworks. The paper then critiques this vision of individual endeavour, and considers an alternative viewpoint encapsulated in Reich's (1987) phrase 'the team as hero'. Following that, the paper outlines the issues relating to the methodological approach. This involves examining the stories, as portrayed in the popular media, of three well-known Irish entrepreneurs, and seeking to identify elements of the Schumpeterian and universal hero myth therein. The case studies presented are based on a review of publicly available sources of biographical material. In doing this the authors draw on methods used by researchers from other countries who have written on the pervasive role of mythic themes in entrepreneurial narratives (e.g. Nicholson and Anderson, 2005; Ogbor, 2000). A discussion of the three cases is presented in terms of the recurring themes from the Schumpeterian and universal hero myth. The paper concludes by considering the implications of the analysis for policy-makers and others concerned with the portrayal of entrepreneurs in Ireland.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **The Schumpeterian Hero Myth**

The Schumpeterian hero myth is a romantic vision of the entrepreneur as a great individual who carries out acts of innovation that are

vital for economic development (Casson, 1990). Schumpeter asserts that entrepreneurs are unique individuals insofar as they engage in a special type of conduct that is 'accessible in very unequal measure and to relatively few people' (1934: 81). Schumpeterian entrepreneurs carry out new combinations and are prepared to step outside the 'boundaries of routine where many people can go no further' (p. 80).

These unique individuals (by behaviour only, it must be stressed) who bravely go beyond these boundaries must overcome a number of difficulties. First, since they are venturing into areas outside the 'accustomed channels', entrepreneurs must deal with uncertain situations which may lead to failures and setbacks (pp. 84–5). Therefore, the individual who dares to embark upon the entrepreneurial journey must be prepared to make mistakes and to commit 'other kinds of errors than those occurring in customary action' (p. 85). Another difficulty outlined by Schumpeter refers to the special 'effort of will' required to conceive of the new combination 'as a real possibility' as opposed to 'merely a day-dream' (p. 86). A third difficulty is the reaction by the wider 'social group' against the individual 'who wishes to do something new' (p. 86). This will most likely be initiated by 'the groups threatened by the innovation' and can manifest itself in different forms of 'pressure on the individual' including 'social ostracism' (p. 87). However, the entrepreneur will overcome these adversities, and will even use the 'social opposition' as a stimulus to continue on with the 'special kind of task' or innovation (p. 87). In summary, Schumpeter views the entrepreneur as a unique individual who exercises the 'mental freedom' (p. 86) to conceive of a new way of doing things and is brave enough to follow this vision even if it means risking the possibility of failure and incurring the ridicule of other members of the social group – business or otherwise.

This romantic view of the entrepreneur as an individual hero in the world of business came to prominence in Europe and North America in the late nineteenth century (Kavanagh and O'Leary, 2004). Examples include the story of Henry Ford as a poor Irish immigrant who achieved business greatness through individual effort and the ability to organise others (Longnecker et al., 1999), and reports of the 'Thomas Edison-like drama of the lonely inventor

struggling for a breakthrough' (Weiss, 2003: 740). Historically, entrepreneurs in America have been held in high regard, and are often portrayed as heroes (Jackson and Brophy, 1986). Shapiro has remarked that this hero status for entrepreneurs is based on the mythic figure of the cowboy who was a loner and who focused on 'individual accomplishments' (1993: 57). Santarelli and Pesciarilli (1990) credit Schumpeter with highlighting the importance of individual effort and innovation for the economy. Schumpeter's works also provide the foundation for entrepreneurial narratives whereby individuals who overcome adversity against all the odds are portrayed as heroes (Swedburg, 1991).

### **The Universal Hero Myth**

What is the 'hero myth'? The term 'myth' is generally taken to mean a story containing imaginary or exaggerated events. In everyday usage the term has negative connotations. Leach notes that some use the word as if it meant 'false history', whereas the usual anthropological and cultural view is that myth is a 'sacred, traditional tale' (1970: 54–55). He claims that the idea that history is true and myth false is 'whimsical' and observes that any body of social tradition starts with a creation story, followed by tales of the adventures and achievements of its cultural heroes (Leach, 1970: 55).

Tales of heroic deeds have endured through the ages because the need for heroes is a 'fundamental part of the human condition' (Kavanagh and O'Leary, 2004: 124). They are communicated through stories that are 'told through the ages' (Moyers, 1988). Campbell (1949), in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, reports on the findings from his review of stories and myths from different countries and historical time periods. He noted that these stories contained similar, recurring themes and moral lessons 'valid for all of mankind' (Campbell, 1949: 19). Campbell used the term 'monomyth' to describe the basic repeating pattern found in myths that were 'timeless and multicultural' (Saxby, 1979: 175). Following on from this, and from Giambruno's observation that the story structure of hero myths is 'universal among human beings' (1997: 2), the term 'universal hero myth' is used to describe such stories in this paper.

In his *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, Jung (1990) asserted that there is a universal myth-making or archetypal level of

mind that he termed the 'collective unconscious' (1990: 66). Jung saw this as responsible for the underlying similarities between myths, visions, religious ideas, and certain types of dreams from various cultures and different historical periods. Bartunek (1984) has argued that hero myths dramatise the struggles that many people face and provide a cognitive schema that map one's psychological progress through life. This progress is exemplified in the ageless mythic tale of the hero's journey (Storr, 1973: 37).

The purpose of this 'ubiquitous myth of the hero's passage' is to provide a 'general pattern' or blueprint for dealing with life's difficulties and hazards (Campbell, 1949: 121). Campbell also explains that for the archetypal hero, symbolic rites of passage and the theme of a perilous journey are typical in such stories. The dangerous journey itself has three common motifs: *separation*, *initiation* and *return*. The initial call to adventure is usually precipitated by a chance circumstance and the most dangerous part of the journey may be overland or on water but fundamentally it is *inward*, into the deepest recesses of the self, where the demons of fear lie in wait. Then the hero emerges transformed, possessing the power to bestow great benefits on humanity. Upon return, however, he or she is faced by 'uncomprehending opposition' to the message before it is eventually accepted (1949: 217).

This universal mythic journey is similar to the pattern of entrepreneurial behaviour identified by Schumpeter (1934). He observed that the fundamental difficulty faced by any person who is contemplating an innovative act 'lies *in the psyche*' of the individual entrepreneur (p. 86, emphasis added). This individual must overcome a fear of unknown situations that will arise as a result of stepping outside 'a boundary beyond which the majority of people' will not venture (p. 87). While Campbell was concerned with universal themes that can be identified in stories and myths from different cultures throughout the ages, Schumpeter's observations (unwittingly?) refer to those same universal themes in the context of economic and business behaviour in the Western industrialised nations in the early part of the twentieth century. From this, one could conclude that Schumpeter's insights pertain to the archetypal behaviour that follows a pattern identified by Campbell as the journey undertaken in the universal hero myth.

### **The 'Team' as a Hero?**

Schumpeter's conceptualisation of the heroic individual entrepreneur has popular appeal (Casson, 1990), and his influence on researchers in the field of entrepreneurship has been overwhelming (Blaug, 1996). Some writers have been critical of the widespread acceptance of the Schumpeterian view of entrepreneurship. Gibb claims that the 'pervasive ideology of the heroic entrepreneur' needs to be replaced with a newer paradigm for the teaching and researching of entrepreneurship (2002: 233). Others have pointed out that the vision of the lone individual hero may not be appropriate for a high-tech business environment that requires high levels of collaboration and teamwork (e.g. Cooney and Bygrave, 1997; Weiss, 2003). For this reason, the (early) Schumpeterian view of the entrepreneur with its emphasis on individual innovations has been labelled as 'myth' (i.e. as false history). This is partly justifiable since many innovations do take place in a team setting. In his later work, Schumpeter himself recognised that the majority of innovation was being carried out by 'teams of trained specialists' (1942: 132). Reich (1987) observed that firms operate in a global networked economy with greater emphasis on cooperation within and between groups. He proposed the concept of 'the team as a hero' as an alternative to the popular myth of the entrepreneur as a lone hero.

Based on the above literature it could be anticipated that stories of Irish entrepreneurs will contain extensive reference to the recurring themes of the universal hero myth, and as such will emphasise individual rather than team efforts. These recurring themes can be summarised as follows: (i) the hero's humble or obscure background; (ii) the hero's need to leave the group and embark on a journey; (iii) the hero overcomes adversity, setbacks and temporary failures; (iv) the hero takes on a formidable enemy, usually in the form of a giant; and (v) in the final stage of the heroic journey, the hero returns to popular acclaim and is honoured for individual accomplishments. This literature leads the authors to suggest the following propositions:

**Proposition 1:** *Stories of Irish entrepreneurs contain the recurring themes of the hero myth.*



**Proposition 2:** *Stories of Irish entrepreneurs emphasise great individual achievements rather than the contribution of the team.*

The next section outlines the research methodology used in exploring the stories presented.

### METHODOLOGY

This paper examines the stories of Irish entrepreneurs for evidence of the hero myth. Stories of entrepreneurship have been used by other researchers to provide evidence of the mythicising and romanticising of entrepreneurs, and of the status of entrepreneurs (Koiranen, 1995; Steyaert and Bouwen, 1997; Pitt, 1998; Ogbor, 2000). The approach taken here is to employ a theoretical framework, that of the Schumpeterian and universal hero myth, to analyse the published material on three Irish entrepreneurs. The hero myth represents a conceptual and descriptive framework which can be used to categorise, in summary format, multiple sources of data on a given entrepreneur's story. In using this particular framework the authors are in effect exploring if an analysis of the content of published material allows one to re-tell or reconstruct the story of each entrepreneur in terms of the universal hero myth, and if such stories emphasise individual or team elements. Such an analytical procedure represents a form of pattern matching between a theoretical framework and case material (Yin, 1994) in that it was predicted that a pattern of outcomes – recurring themes from the Schumpeterian and universal hero myth – would be present in the material to be examined.

The authors reviewed the published material on three Irish entrepreneurs. In choosing entrepreneurs to include in the study, examples were sought that would most likely be known broadly, and therefore could be considered as representative of the popular understanding of entrepreneurs in Ireland. Three entrepreneurs were selected for the study: Moya Doherty, Pádraig O'Ceidigh and Peter Fitzgerald. The three entrepreneurs were all prior winners of the Ernst & Young Irish Entrepreneur of the Year Award. This award recognises entrepreneurs who are 'driving, building, and sustaining the successful, confident, modern Ireland' (Ernst & Young, 2005). The award is presented annually on RTE, the state national



broadcasting television channel, and receives extensive coverage in print media as it is part-sponsored by one of the leading Irish daily newspapers. In choosing which prior winners to include, entrepreneurs were sought that represented some diversity in both business context and location throughout the island of Ireland. The entrepreneurs chosen operate respectively in the entertainment, airline and medical equipment business sectors, and are located in Dublin, Galway and Antrim (Northern Ireland).

Substantial media material was gathered on all three entrepreneurs. The search was restricted to recent accounts of each entrepreneur's story, including material from 1999 to 2005. This material was collected from the *LexisNexis* database and publicly available sources such as books, newspapers, magazines and websites. Extracts were organised around a chronological sequence of events. The specific sources for each case were as follows: *Moya Doherty*: Dodd (2001); Ernst & Young (2005); Fallon (1995); Garvey (2003); Noonan (2005a, 2005b); O'Conneide (2003); O'Connell (2002); O'Toole (2000); and Travers (2001). For *Padraig O'Ceidigh*: Aer Arann (2005); Electric News.Net (2005); Enright (2005); Ernst & Young (2005); McManus (2004); O'Mahony (2003); and Tierney (2003). For *Peter Fitzgerald*: Ernst & Young (2005); Fitzgerald (2004); McDonnell (2001); Mooney (2004); and Radox Laboratories (2005). The authors then familiarised themselves with this material through repeated reading of the collected information. Three chronological case histories of the entrepreneurs were compiled, as told through these secondary source materials. In choosing to present the case histories as chronological stories elements of the hero myth were allowed to emerge. The three case histories of the entrepreneurs are presented in the findings.

The method used to examine the propositions was biographical analysis of case histories. This approach has some inherent limitations. First, the case studies are based on information that can be manipulated and distorted (Morrison, 2001). The authors have interpreted published texts in their efforts to seek evidence of language patterns consistent with those of hero myths. This involved a certain amount of manipulation in that the data compiled on each entrepreneur was classified according to the structural themes and patterns previously identified in the literature. However, since the

material for the cases had been compiled from published texts, the interpretation of the material and the classification of the elements therein can be reviewed by other researchers. Identification of structural elements in stories is a useful way of analysing this type of material and lends itself to comparative analysis (Coffey et al., 1996).

Second, in common with other case study methods, there are issues relating to the validity of the findings. Case study research has been questioned on the grounds that the resulting theory is idiosyncratic (McCarthy, 2000) and cannot be relied upon since its small sample size leads to concerns regarding internal and external validity (Ryan et al., 1992). Internal validity refers to unreliability of the conclusions (if any) reached whereas external validity is concerned with whether the findings can be generalised to other contexts. Much of this disquiet arises from the lack of transparency in the way data is collected and the open-ended nature of the issues raised in the discussion of the cases (Saunders et al., 2003). By formulating theories into testable propositions, the authors sought to improve the validity of the research findings (Popper, 1972).

### FINDINGS: CASE STUDIES

The stories of the three entrepreneurs studied are presented below. These stories are constructed from the secondary material reviewed and are presented to illustrate how elements of the hero myth are common in the telling of the story of an entrepreneur. The purpose of each of these cases is to illustrate how the published material can be presented around the recurring themes of the universal hero myth.

#### **Case History: Moya Doherty**

Moya Doherty was selected, along with her business partner, John McColgan, as Ernst & Young Irish Entrepreneur of the Year in 1999 to honour their achievement in developing Riverdance. Moya, the daughter of two teachers, was born in Donegal, but grew up from an early age in Clontarf, Dublin. As a teenager she considered herself to be somewhat of a rebel. After completing school, Moya opted for a course in drama instead of attending university. She spent a year touring as an actor, and then she joined RTE, the state television

broadcasting company, as a production assistant. While she enjoyed the work in RTE she was never content as an employee in a large bureaucratic organisation. In 1982 she left RTE and moved to London, where she spent five years working in various roles for breakfast television in London. In 1987, Moya returned to RTE on a producer training course, which included a 2-year producer's contract.

In the same year Moya started Tyrone Productions, a small independent television production company, with John McColgan, whom she had met in London. However, competition for contracts in Ireland was intense and the first four years were very lean times for the new business. Both Moya and John teetered on the brink of giving up and returning to England. Moya and John started a family around this time. Moya found this period of her life very difficult, because she had two children under the age of two and was working very long hours. The couple struggled with the business until, in 1994, Moya was given the task of producing the Eurovision Song Contest final. The budget was tight, but she was determined to make an impact and channelled much of her energy into the interval act – a new piece of music by Bill Whelan and a troupe of Irish dancers led by two Irish-Americans, Jean Butler and Michael Flatley. With a story based on Irish myth and legend, it was a visual spectacle that embraced speed, sound and rhythm. The 7-minute interval act, titled 'Riverdance', brought the audience to their feet.

While John and Moya had no experience of large-scale theatrical performance, and she had no business training, they re-mortgaged their house to help fund the initial investment required to put the Riverdance show on the road. Moya expanded the original Riverdance piece into a 2-hour show and adapted it to suit an international audience. The Riverdance show proved to be very popular, but there were many problems along the way. For example, for the second run of the show in London Michael Flatley, the star attraction, withdrew, and Jean Butler, the other star, pulled ligaments in her leg the day before opening night. Riverdance had to survive opening night with neither of their headline acts. Furthermore, there was extensive litigation between Riverdance's original performers and the Riverdance show developed by Moya and John. Riverdance went on to become an Irish success story which has been universally

acclaimed. By 2005 it had been staged in twenty-seven countries across four continents and before a worldwide television audience of over 1.5 billion.

In 1997, Moya and John became involved in another venture, Radio Ireland, a new national radio broadcasting station. The investment in radio got off to a bumpy start. They were the front members of the consortium that won the licence to be a national broadcaster but, in its first incarnation, Radio Ireland was a commercial and critical failure. The investors were called on a number of times to invest more. The schedule was changed, new presenters were hired and the station was re-launched as Today FM. The ratings increased. In total, Moya and John invested €3 million in this venture, and five years later they sold their shares to Scottish Radio Holdings for €17 million.

Moya Doherty has won many awards and accolades over the years. She has been named *Veuve Clicquot Business Woman of the Year*, the *Sunday Business Post* named her as one of the leading role models for women achievers, and she has been bestowed with honorary doctorates. While she has received financial rewards for her ventures, she measures success on a different scale. Moya claims that the most satisfying part of her career is the enjoyment she gets from being involved with a team that works well together, regardless of the size of the project.

### **Case History: Pádraig O'Ceidigh**

Pádraig O'Ceidigh was selected as the Ernst & Young Irish Entrepreneur of the Year in 2002 for revitalising and then growing an 'island-hopping' aircraft travel service into a new market space and developing a business model to deliver a 'regional superhighway' aircraft travel service in Ireland. Pádraig O'Ceidigh came from a working class background in rural Ireland. At the age of ten, the Connemara-born Pádraig was picking periwinkles from a beach in Spiddal and travelling to Galway to sell them to fish exporters. From an early age, he learned to work hard and graft for any kind of rewards and, in hindsight at least, it was probably obvious to those who knew him in his younger days that he would become an entrepreneur. After secondary school Pádraig attended university in Galway, completed a commerce degree and then worked for a

period with KPMG accountants. In his early twenties he took a career break and went teaching for approximately ten years.

In the 1980s he started to study law at night and he then set up his own legal practice in 1992. In May 1994 he became part owner of Aer Arann, a Connemara-based airline that served the three Aran Islands (which are popular tourist destinations off the coast of Galway). At that time the airline was running at a loss, Padraig had no track record in the airline industry and the industry was considered highly competitive, with a large number of failures in the preceding ten years. With an acute sense of its business potential, Padraig steered Aer Arann from its situation as a small Irish domestic carrier to its current position as one of the fastest growing regional airlines in Europe. It had a turnover in excess of €80 million and passenger numbers of nearly one million in 2004. The airline operates over 500 flights per week across six Irish, seventeen UK and two French routes. From its tiny origins, Aer Arann is now competing for business with Aer Lingus and Ryanair. Following the takeover of CityJet by Air France in 2003, and the collapse of JetGreen in 2004, Padraig is now the 'last man standing' when it comes to small Irish airlines.

Padraig O'Ceidigh attributes the success of his company to its culture of using cross-functional teams in formulating policy and strategy. He involves the teams in all main decision-making points. He states that the teams are very focused and supportive of each other, that everybody in the company has a passion for success, and that the company's ethos is based on openness and flexibility and a commitment to continually improve customer service. Padraig O'Ceidigh has also started a number of other businesses. For example, in 1995 the Irish-speaking Padraig set up *Foinse*, which became one of the best-selling Irish language newspapers. He is also the owner of a printing company, Clódóirí Lurgan Teo, which is based in Connemara, as well as a local summer language school.

As a testament to Aer Arann's achievements Padraig O'Ceidigh was named Ernst & Young Irish Entrepreneur of the Year 2002. Other awards include Best Regional Airline as voted by the Irish Travel Agents' Association in 2002 and Best Online Services Award 2003 presented by the Air Transport Users' Council of the Chambers

of Commerce of Ireland, and the ERA Bronze Airline of the Year Award 2004.

### **Case History: Dr Peter Fitzgerald**

Dr Peter Fitzgerald was named as Ernst & Young Irish Entrepreneur of the Year in 2004 in recognition of the international success of his company, Randox Laboratories, a business that specialises in medical diagnostics. Randox Limited is a private company (Peter Fitzgerald owns 98 per cent of the shares) with annual revenues of £48 million and 450 employees in Ireland and another 120 worldwide. Peter Fitzgerald was born in south Antrim, and he attended school in Lisburn. He went to university in Glasgow where he graduated in 1973 with a degree in biochemistry. After that, he completed a Ph.D. in the National Institute of Medical Research in London. He was very keen on medical research, as he wanted to help improve medical healthcare. He returned to Northern Ireland to Queen's University in Belfast where he carried out research on multiple sclerosis and other medical conditions.

Peter always had an urge to create something and to improve society. While working as a researcher, he looked around for ideas on how to start a business that would help improve healthcare and contribute to society by generating employment. In 1982 he came across an area of the medical field called diagnostics. He set up a small laboratory in the back of his parents' house in a building that was previously used as a stable and hen house. Peter started on a very small scale. Working in the evenings and at weekends, he developed his first products. They were evaluated at the local hospitals and they performed well. Peter decided to go into business full-time and started a company called Randox Laboratories Limited.

It was a tough time to start a business in Northern Ireland, as 1982 was one of the worst years of the Troubles, with bombings and shootings taking place almost every week, and a political process that was in stalemate. His colleagues at Queen's University thought he was mad to leave a safe, secure position in order to start up his own company. When he approached government agencies for assistance, they were very reluctant to help since he had no knowledge about starting his own business. Peter had already spent his own

savings and his parents' money in developing the new products. He approached a number of banks for a loan, but was turned down on the grounds that he had no profits or cash-flow. Furthermore, he had no assets to offer as security. Eventually he came across a bank manager who believed in what he was trying to achieve. Peter received a £30,000 unsecured loan. His next task was to find customers. He received very little support from organisations in Northern Ireland in the early stages. Peter later reflected that 'often a prophet is never accepted in his own land'. In England, it was difficult to convince hospitals that a small company in the outback of County Antrim in Northern Ireland could manufacture and deliver quality clinical diagnostic products. He travelled throughout Ireland looking for business. The hospitals in the southern part of Ireland and those in Scotland and Wales were more supportive. Gradually he grew the business as customers came to realise that his products were technically superior and could be delivered faster. In the past twenty years, the company's average revenue growth has been 60 per cent per annum.

Peter is aware that his success means that multinationals such as Roche, Abbott and Bayer will see him as a potential takeover target. However, he is confident that with self-belief, hard work and teamwork, his company will prevail over his major competitors. In so doing, Peter will have achieved his twin goals: improving medical healthcare and making a contribution to society by creating wealth and jobs in Northern Ireland.

Dr Peter Fitzgerald's success has been recognised by a series of awards – he is a four times winner of the Queen's Award for Export Achievement; in 2003, on behalf of Randox, Peter accepted the MacRobert Award, which is the UK's most prestigious engineering award (other finalists for the prize included Rolls Royce Plc); and in 2004 he was named Ernst & Young Irish Entrepreneur of the Year.

## DISCUSSION

The first proposition of the paper was that the stories of Irish entrepreneurs would contain the recurring themes of the universal hero myth. Having reviewed published material of three Irish entrepreneurs, and summarised these in the three case studies outlined



above, it has been shown how these cases, which are drawn solely from published accounts of the stories of these entrepreneurs, contain the elements of the universal hero myth. Evidence was also found that in telling their stories, and in the telling of their stories by others, references were made to events and outcomes that illustrate that the entrepreneurial story is frequently retold in terms of the Schumpeterian and universal hero myth. Indicative elements from these stories are presented and categorised under the themes found in hero myths, for each of the three entrepreneurs, in Table 1.

In terms of the entrepreneurs' background, stories of two of the entrepreneurs, Padraig O'Ceidigh and Peter Fitzgerald, emphasise how they came from obscure backgrounds. Padraig O'Ceidigh tells how he was reared on a small farm in Galway, illustrating his upbringing with reference to 'picking and selling periwinkles' as a youngster (Electric News.net, 2005). Peter Fitzgerald also makes use of the 'humble background' metaphor by pointing out that his company started out in a converted stable/hen house at the back of his parents' house (Fitzgerald, 2004), though he came from what could be described as an ordinary but comfortable middle-class background (Mooney, 2004). The 'obscure origin' image is also found in his story in the emphasis that is frequently placed on the rural and isolated location of his business (Randox, 2005). Moya Doherty also came from what could be described as a reasonably comfortable middle-class background, though the telling of her story often suggests that she was somewhat of an 'outsider' in her choice of study (drama) which it is suggested was an atypical choice when compared to her socio-economic peers (O'Toole, 2000).

The second common theme in the hero myth is the hero's need to leave the group and embark on a journey – what Schumpeter describes as the decision to 'swim against the stream' (Schumpeter, 1934: 78–79). The story of each of the entrepreneurs tells how they left secure and comfortable jobs to start their businesses. Moya Doherty tells how she had a yearning for independence, that she was 'a bit of a rebel' and that she could not be 'a corporate person' (Fallon, 1995). Padraig O'Ceidigh tells how he moved from secure professional jobs in accountancy into teaching, and then how he left teaching to start his legal practice, and eventually became involved with Aer Arann and a number of other ventures (Enright, 2005).

Table 1: The Hero Myth in Stories of Irish Entrepreneurs

Themes	Moya Doherty	Padraig O’Ceidigh	Dr Peter Fitzgerald
The hero’s humble or obscure background	Daughter to two County Donegal teachers ‘Somewhat of a rebel’	Working class background in rural Ireland: ‘picking periwinkles from a beach in Spiddal and travelling to Galway to sell them to fish exporters’	Remoteness of Northern Ireland Starting the business in a hen house/stable
The hero’s need to leave the group and embark on a journey	Choosing a course in drama instead of attending University Leaving RTE and moving to London	Leaves accountancy, then leaves teaching, and then leaves his legal practice	Leaving Queen’s University’s ‘safe, secure position’ to start his own company Seeking business outside Northern Ireland: ‘a prophet in his own land is never accepted’

(Continued)

Table 1: *(Continued)*

Themes	Moya Doherty	Padraig O’Ceidigh	Dr Peter Fitzgerald
The hero overcomes adversity, setbacks and temporary failures	The early years of Tyrone Production ‘teetered on the brink of giving up’	Aer Arann is making losses prior to involvement of Padraig	1982 was a bad time to start a business in Northern Ireland due to the Troubles
	Running the new business and starting a family	Padraig is the ‘last man standing’ when it comes to small Irish airlines	Government agencies reluctant to support his business but Peter uses own and parents’ money, and then finds a banker to back his firm
	Difficulties in staging show, e.g. surviving opening night with neither of the headline acts  The radio station venture		Overcomes customer reluctance to deal with small start-up from Northern Ireland

*(Continued)*

Table 1: (*Continued*)

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Moya Doherty</b>	<b>Padraig O'Ceidigh</b>	<b>Dr Peter Fitzgerald</b>
The hero takes on a formidable enemy	Successfully challenged the 'old guard' of the European Broadcasting Union	Aer Arann competing with Aer Lingus and Ryanair. A small Irish domestic carrier grows to be one of the fastest growing regional airlines in Europe	Describes multi-national competitors (Roche, Bayer, etc.) as 'dinosaurs'. Claims that his company will 'prevail' over these larger firms
The hero returns to popular acclaim and is honoured for individual accomplishments	Ernst & Young Irish Entrepreneur of the Year  Veuve Clicquot Business Woman of the Year; the <i>Sunday Business Post</i> named her as one of the leading role models for women achievers  Awarded honorary doctorate by NUI Maynooth and by the University of Ulster	Ernst & Young Irish Entrepreneur of the Year  Member of judging panel for the National Small Business Awards  Guest on Ireland's leading television talk show	Ernst & Young Irish Entrepreneur of the Year  Queen's Award for Export Achievement  MacRobert Award for engineering excellence

Fitzgerald (2004) recalls that his colleagues could not understand how he could leave a 'safe, secure position' in a university to establish a new firm. He also remarked that he had to travel out of Northern Ireland to generate sales, citing 'a prophet is never accepted in his own land' (Fitzgerald, 2004).

The third common theme in the hero myth is that the hero overcomes adversity, setbacks and temporary failures. Moya Doherty recalls how she had to make sacrifices along the way, how they 'teetered on the brink of giving up', the difficulties in staging a live performance, and how the failure of Radio Ireland was at first 'dismal' but is now seen as 'a great learning experience' (Noonan, 2005b). Padraig O'Ceidigh is described as 'the last man standing' in the small- to medium-sized airline category by the *Irish Times* (a leading daily newspaper in Ireland), thus evoking an image of one who has battled successfully against enemies and adversaries (McManus, 2004). Peter Fitzgerald tells of his difficulties in convincing hospitals that a high-tech firm from rural Northern Ireland could deliver quality products on time (Mooney, 2004).

The fourth common theme in the hero myth is that the hero takes on a formidable enemy, usually in the form of a giant. This is not a strong theme in the story of Moya Doherty, though there is a reference to 'a contest within a contest' when she 'fought very hard' against the 'old guard' in the European Broadcasting Union in a successful effort to scrap the 'antiquated' telephone-based voting system for the Eurovision (Travers, 2001: 26). In contrast, the stories of both Peter Fitzgerald and Padraig O'Ceidigh emphasise on a number of occasions how their companies competed against larger organisations. For instance, writing in the *Sunday Business Post* (an Irish Sunday newspaper), Catherine O'Mahony hints at a 'David versus Goliath' scenario when she summarises the growth of Padraig O'Ceidigh's company: 'from its tiny origins, Aer Arann is now competing for business with Aer Lingus and Ryanair' (O'Mahony, 2003). Peter Fitzgerald speaks of 'endeavouring to sell our products *against* multinational organisations such as Roche, Abbot and Bayer' (Randox, 2005, emphasis added). He describes them as 'dinosaurs' who are not responding quickly enough to changing market conditions and he predicts that his company 'will prevail' over the larger multinationals (Fitzgerald, 2004).

The fifth common theme in the hero myth is that in the final stage of the heroic journey, the hero returns to popular acclaim and is honoured for individual accomplishments. The entrepreneurs selected for this study had received such recognition and it is therefore unsurprising that their stories contain references to such accolades. Frequently the context of the story is the presentation of an award, and the award partly explains why the entrepreneurs received widespread media attention. That said, references can be found – in many news stories about these three entrepreneurs – to not only the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award, but also to other awards and accolades that the entrepreneurs or their firms have received.

The second proposition argued that stories of Irish entrepreneurs emphasise great individual achievements rather than the importance of teamwork. The choice of entrepreneurs studied meant that the paper focuses on stories of individuals who have been recognised for their outstanding individual achievements, though in the case of Moya Doherty the award was to both herself and her partner John McColgan. However, the primary interest is the telling of the stories in the media: do the stories told by, and of, these entrepreneurs emphasise the individual achievements or do they recognise the role of a wider team?

Moya Doherty is accorded iconic status when she is described as ‘Queen of the Dance’ (O’Toole, 2000), and Noonan headlines a profile of Doherty with the phrase: ‘Moya’s Midas touch’ (2005b). It is widely acknowledged that Moya Doherty provided the inspiration and motivation for Riverdance (e.g. Dodd, 2001; O’Toole, 2000) and, in so doing, she carried out the Schumpeterian act of innovation by combining the elements of Irish dance, tap dancing, flamenco and other artistic traditions to produce Riverdance. In 2005 the *Sunday Business Post* listed Moya Doherty as one of the top two role models for Irish women achievers (Noonan, 2005a). However, Moya herself refers to the importance of her collaboration with John McColgan, and she maintains that she derives most satisfaction from coordinating the many elements of a project into a coherent completed show (Noonan, 2005b). So while the story of Moya Doherty emphasises her individual accomplishments, she also refers to importance of a wider team in her success.

Padraig O'Ceidigh is typically portrayed as a 'local hero', and has been described as a 'High Flying Entrepreneur' in the local Galway press (Tierney, 2003), where his achievements are commented upon favourably. At a national level, Padraig was one of the invited key speakers at a conference with the theme 'Being Brave in Business', organised by the Marketing Institute of Ireland (Power, 2001). In August 2005, Padraig appeared as the main guest on Ireland's leading television talk show (the *Late Late Show*). The introduction to the show noted that '*he dreamed the impossible dream*' and made that dream come true because '*he runs*' the world's fastest growing regional airline (RTE, 2005, emphasis added). Also in 2005, Padraig was a judge on the panel for the National Small Business Awards organised by the Small Firms' Association. However, in explaining his success Padraig O'Ceidigh tells how he incorporated the concept of teamwork into his style of management and claims to use cross-functional teams in key business decisions, including those at a strategic level (Enright, 2005).

In a similar vein, various commentators have praised Peter Fitzgerald for the phenomenal growth of Randox Laboratories (e.g. McDonnell, 2001; Mooney, 2004). In the stories there is very little evidence of Peter Fitzgerald's individual heroic status. This may be due to the collaborative nature of developing new products in the medical diagnostics business, or possibly because of his reticence regarding personal publicity (*Business Eye*, 2004). Peter Fitzgerald credits the success of his company to the extraordinary efforts of his staff and cites 'team building' as an essential part of a successful business start-up (Ernst & Young, 2005).

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper examined the stories of three Irish entrepreneurs based on material published between 1999 and 2005. The authors sought to identify the themes of the universal hero myth in these entrepreneurial stories. They also examined the data for evidence of the Schumpeterian hero, with its emphasis on the entrepreneur as an individual, as opposed to the more modern emphasis on the team as a hero (Reich, 1987). It was found that the stories of the three entrepreneurs from different parts of the island of Ireland are



generally consistent with the structure of the universal hero myth, but with less weight attached to Schumpeterian individual accomplishments in some of the stories. This may be due to a growing recognition of the importance of teamwork in a complex business environment. The stories of the three entrepreneurs each tell of people who perceived themselves as coming from ordinary or humble origins, of choosing to leave the group and swim against the stream, of overcoming adversity, and perhaps of taking on, and beating, a larger foe. The heroes additionally received recognition for these achievements.

The Schumpeterian hero myth (based on recurring themes from the universal hero myth) views the entrepreneur as an economic hero who carries out individual acts of innovation. This romantic vision of the entrepreneur appears to be central to popular understanding of entrepreneurs in Ireland. There is some evidence from the data in this paper to suggest that the story has been updated to include references to the importance of teamwork. A view of entrepreneurship that blends individual acts of innovation with the necessary collaboration of other parties is recognised in the stories. In the stories these other people include business partners, family and bank officials. The support provided by these parties was recognised by the entrepreneurs as playing an important role in the entrepreneur's individual achievements.

One interpretation of the hero myth is that it is only the special, chosen few who possess the extraordinary set of personality traits required to achieve success. However, another interpretation that takes into account the various elements of the hero myth is to view these stories as a roadmap for a journey that anyone could embark upon, to a greater or lesser extent, provided that they had sufficient determination to overcome the various obstacles that are encountered along the way. This is why hero myths emphasise the main character's ordinary background; it *could* be anyone. As Campbell noted, in the mythic journey the hero 'ventures forth from the world of common day' (1949: 30).

The deep-rooted need for heroes is reflected in the words of Yeats: 'children play at being great and wonderful people' (1904: xv). Mythic stories about heroic individual innovators can have a positive influence on entrepreneurship provided those telling the

stories of entrepreneurs are aware of the constituent elements of the mythic story and which aspects should be emphasised. This might be particularly important in Northern Ireland as there is evidence to suggest that popular culture does not encourage entrepreneurial activity (Fitzsimons et al., 2005). If government agencies wish to promote increased entrepreneurial activities through the use of role models and the publication of their stories, then they should be aware of the enduring popularity of the great individual as hero myth. For example, any misleading aspects of the myth, such as the misconception that it takes a person with unique personality traits to become an entrepreneur, should be downplayed in promotional material. On the other hand, the notion that many successful individuals started from relatively modest backgrounds and learned to treat initial failures as temporary setbacks are constructive aspects of the hero myth. The tales of individual achievement can be complemented by emphasising the importance of teamwork and collaboration. These features of a successful venture should be highlighted in the stories that publicise entrepreneurs as role models.

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