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"Fáilte": Dublin’s Gaelic "Welcome"

by Gabi Kupitz
Juvenile Literature Cataloger/Manuscripts Processor
Brigham Young University

In July 1995, I attended The Children’s Literature New England Institute at Trinity College in Ireland. To know Ireland, specifically Dublin in my case, is to experience a bit of heaven. In and around Dublin, music, literature, history, architecture, and narrow cobble-stone streets abound. The landscape is a patchwork of green. Beautiful grasses, trees, and clover dot the rolling waves of terra. Walls of layered stone, wooden fences, and lush-green hedges serve as demarcations of property. Salmon thrive in hundreds of rivers and streams which welcome the angler. Golfers favor the area’s many picturesque courses. Shopaholics have modern "malls" and quaint shops in which to leave their currency. The trendiest apparel and the most wonderful old-fashioned woollen goods and linens are in supply. Even the non-shopper is easily lured into delicious bakeries where scones, jam cakes and soda breads tease the senses with their fresh-from-the-oven warmth and folksy hearty appeal to the palate.

Numerous bookstores support the reading habits of one of the world’s most literate populations. These shops proudly carry the titles of Ireland’s literary luminaries among whom are Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, George Bernard Shaw, Samuel Beckett, and W.B. Yeats. In fact, the Irish are so enamored by their literary heroes that paper currencies carry their likenesses and statues in their honor dot public parks, buildings, and sidewalks. Works by non-Irish writers are also found. Many titles are also featured in paperback to make them especially affordable. This trend towards accessibility and affordability contributes to the high Irish literacy rate.

Books written for and appealing to children and young adults have their own unique bookstore displays. Here again, titles tend to be sold in paperback. Two British favorites who are currently writing for young people are Susan Cooper and Alan Garner. The literary institute I attended featured Cooper, Garner, and a wonderful potluck of writers for children: Nancy Farmer, Gregory Maguire, Pat O’Shea, Katherine Paterson, Erik Christian Haugaard, Jill Paton Walsh, Ashley Bryan, Sarah Ellis, Ethel Heins, Paul Heins, John Langstaff, Betty Levin, John Rowe Townsend, Mary Rayner, and Madeleine L’Engle. While most of these writers may not be household names, they are renowned in literary circles as contributors of award-winning stories!

Institute participants were mailed a reading list prior to the Dublin experience (see Appendix A). I became reacquainted with Katherine Paterson’s Jacob Have I Loved; Madeleine L’Engle’s A Wrinkle In Time and The Young Unicorns; and Susan Cooper’s The Dark Is Rising series, Tam Lin, The Selkie Girl, and The Boggart. In addition, the reading list, with "Writing the World:
Myth as Metaphor" as the theme, was an avenue to explore writers I had never read before. Now, through personal acquaintance with the person and the material, I enjoy recommending books whose readership should include more children, young adults and adults. In fact, one book on the reading list connected me to a group of institute affectionados at the JFK International Airport in New York City.

British writer, Sylvia Waugh's book, *The Mennyms*, was on the reading list. I found the book in paperback and took it along as a "light" addition to my carry-on luggage. I felt that after rapid-reading so many books, this little paperback would be ideal to read on the plane. I started reading it on my Salt Lake City to Denver flight. I picked it up again on the Denver to JFK flight after surviving turbulence over the Rockies and Denver's infamous luggage-system fiasco. The Aer Lingus terminal at JFK can be easily spotted because on the tails of all the airplanes are shamrocks. At the Aer Lingus gate I settled down to finish reading *The Mennyms*. No sooner had I opened the book when a personable lady asked if my destination could possibly be an institute on children's literature at Trinity College. She held up a copy of Mollie Hunter's *A Stranger Came Ashore*, another reading list selection. While other passengers were watching flight monitors or reading newspapers, we were the only two reading children's books. Before long, a whole group of people came to the gate carrying luggage and their last minute read—a title from our extensive reading list.

*The Mennyms* was not finished with me nor I with it. I put the paperback and my carry-on luggage on the X-ray belt before boarding. Hurrying to pick everything up at the end of the belt, I reached for my paperback and realized that it was not *The Mennyms*. A lady behind me told me in a gruff voice that it was her paperback I had snatched away. My mistake. I apologized and hoped we wouldn't be seated next to one another. Of course we were. Now *The Mennyms* became a tool for my apologies, introduction, and conversation. Ms. Roosevelt from Long Island, New York and I became friends, and we talked and talked. She was on her way to Dublin as a yacht judge representing the United States at a weekend international regatta. Interesting, how a book about a family of dolls could be such fabulous reading and such an interesting people connector.

During the next week, literature for children drew me into Dublin. The cab driver got to hear about the institute and pointed out the literary sights: statues, pubs, homes, and haunts of Dublin's finest. The staff at Trinity College knew of the institute and made everyone feel welcome. My curiosity to explore other libraries led me to explore Berkeley Library. A kind staff member showed me various departments in that library. He led me through the tunnel connecting Berkeley Library to the Old Library, home of the *Book of Kells*, one
Children’s Book and Play Review 3

of the world’s most beautiful illuminated manuscripts. Written and painted on vellum around A.D. 800, it contains the text of the Gospels in Latin. "Kells" is the name of the monastery where the manuscript is purported to have been written. It was subsequently stolen, and upon discovery, was taken to the monastery at Kells in the year 1007. In the seventeenth century it was presented to Trinity College (Trinity 10). Since the Copyright Act in 1801, Trinity College is "a legal deposit library" receiving books, maps and periodicals from publishers in Great Britain and Ireland (Fox 10).

The institute introduced me to the wit of the Irish; the down-home food, including bakery goods, hearty soups, potatoes, vegetables, beef and chicken; the streets around Trinity marked "Look left", "Look right" in bold white paint to preserve life and limb of forgetful tourists and foreign students; and DART, Dublin Area Rapid Transport, which takes passengers from Dublin to Dun Laoghaire and points south along Ireland’s eastern coast and north to Howth. After the Dun Laoghaire to Enniskerry to Dublin trip, our institute personnel showed the movie The Secret of Roan Inish. I could now feel the fog, the ocean, the sadness in Cooper’s The Selkie Girl. The bus ride from Enniskerry to Dublin along winding narrow roads where buses and cars almost touch as they pass, where the landscape is green and wooded and lush, where churches and cemeteries are joined brought Robin McKinley’s Beauty, another reading list title, to mind.

On a beautiful, cool Saturday morning, I skipped breakfast to take some photographs before meeting an institute participant for our 9 a.m. rendezvous with the cab and our quick five-mile drive to the airport. Because it was early, the crowds from the night before were sleeping off their Guinness, and the streets were deserted. I took photographs of the "Look left," "Look right" street markings because they had preserved my life. I even found Bewley’s of Grafton Street. Established in 1840, it specializes in tea, handmade chocolates and scones, and is so mobbed by tourists during the week that I had not been able to find it until now. A tin of toffees and some scones to take back to the States made my discovery complete. My last purchase: The Irish Times from a street vendor whom I invited to Utah for the 2002 Winter Olympics. Crinkling his eyes, he invited me back to Dublin—next year. We’ll see.

My traveling companion asked if we could pick up one more passenger and so we stopped by Royal Surgeons. We drove past St. Stephens Green, a patch of green park with many statues of Dublin’s famous. It brought back memories of my first Saturday in Dublin when I had walked around that square twice while trying to find my way back to Trinity after having missed Bewley’s. The cab driver pointed out more sights on the way out of town. The row houses with their brightly painted doors and lace-clad windows flashed by. My two traveling companions and I talked non-stop about the magic of the institute: the
books we had read in preparation, the people we had met, and the cavernous dining hall in which we had eaten, sung and chatted. Kay from Texas, Peggy from the Library of Congress, and I parted at the airport. We left Ireland on different flights, but Ireland has not left me. "Céad míle fálta"— "one hundred thousand welcomes" is etched in memory.

I read Alan Garner’s The Owl Service on my Aer Lingus flight from Dublin to Shannon to JFK—signed and in paperback, of course.

"I am of Ireland
And the Holy Land of Ireland
And time runs on," cried she.
"Come out of charity,
Come dance with me in Ireland."

—William Butler Yeats

If you do opt for Ireland remember: Irish oatmeal; they speak English; fly Aer Lingus; Bewley’s on Grafton St. in Dublin; and "Look left," "Look right."

Works Cited


Appendix A

Writing the World: Myth as Metaphor

CLNE Reading List—1995

The following books, to be discussed in the core lectures, should be read before the opening of the institute. It is assumed that the participants have read *A Wrinkle in Time*, the Narnia books, Lloyd Alexander’s Prydian stories, and Susan Cooper’s *Dark is Rising* sequence, all of which are central to our theme.

Core Lecture 1

Nancy Bond. *A String in the Harp.*
Alan Garner. *The Owl Service.*
Diana Wynne Jones. *Fire and Hemlock.*
*Susan Cooper. Tam Lin.* Illus. by Warwick Hutton.
*Susan Cooper. Tam Lin.* Illus. by Warwick Hutton.

Core Lecture 2

Robert Cormier. *After the First Death.*
Rosemary Harris. *The Moon in the Cloud.*
Madeleine L’Engle. *The Young Unicorns.*
Penelope Lively. *The Voyage of QV66.*
Katherine Paterson. *Jacob Have I Loved.*
*James Berry. Celebration Song.* Illus. by Louise Brierley.
*Jane Ray. The Story of Creation.*

Core Lecture 3

Susan Cooper. *The Boggart.*
Carol Kendall. *The Gammage Cup.*
George MacDonald. *The Princess and the Goblin.*
William Mayne. *Hob and the Goblins.*
*Pam Conrad. The Tub People.* Illus. by Richard Egielski.
*Maurice Sendak. Outside Over There.*
6 Brigham Young University

Core Lecture 4

Nancy Farmer. *The Ear, the Eye and the Arm.*
Mollie Hunter. *A Stranger Came Ashore.*
Pat O'Shea. *The Hounds of the Morrigan.*

Recommended books which may be referred to in lectures or in discussion groups.

Peter Dickinson. *The City of Gold and Other Stories from the Old Testament.*
*Paul Goble. *Iktomi and the Buzzard: A Plains Indian Story.*
Ursula LeGuin. *The Tombs of Atuan.*
Geraldine McCaughrean. *Greek Myths.*
Doris Orgel. *Ariadne, Awake!.*
Mary Raynor. *Mr. and Mrs. Pig's Evening Out.*
Rosemary Sutcliff. *The Light Beyond the Forest.*

* Signifies picture books.