

# *How the Irish became “Gauchos Ingleses”: Diasporic Models in Irish-Argentine Literature*

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**Abstract:** Declan Kiberd argues that “postcolonial writing does not begin only when the occupier withdraws: rather it is initiated at that very moment when a native writer formulates a text committed to cultural resistance.” Paradoxically, the Irish who emigrated to Argentina, a former Spanish colony, may be regarded (as they may have regarded themselves) as colonised in the country they left, and as colonisers of their new home. Their case is one of the better counterexamples to the typical pattern of identities in most of the English-speaking destinations of the Irish Diaspora. Using William Bulfin’s *Tales of the Pampas* as primary document, in this article I search the identities represented in his characters. In *Tales of the Pampas*, Bulfin amalgamates the ambiguous acculturation of the Irish settlers with that of the “gaucho” (those cowboys of the South American pampas who almost literally lived in the saddle), as well as with the symbols of Gauchesca narrative. Evolving from colonised to colonisers during their initial settlement, the Irish in Argentina swiftly became ingleses. In the following decades, in order to join the local bourgeoisie they were required to be gauchos, and to show signs of their effective integration to the native culture, as seen by the Argentine elites. This explains why most of the successful Irish settlers gradually separated from the Anglo-Argentine mainstream culture and shaped their own community. A negotiation of identities among Irishness, Britishness, and Argentineness was always in place. I argue that these identities are not only unmoored in the emigrants’ minds but also manoeuvred by community leaders, politicians and priests. After reviewing the major milestones of the nineteenth-century Irish emigration to Argentina, the article analyses selected passages from the text, offers a version of how the settlers became Irish-Argentines, and elucidates some of the processes which created the new Irish-Argentine hybrid.

During the nineteenth century, 40-45,000 Irish-born persons emigrated to Argentina and Uruguay. Most of them settled in the lush and boundless land between

the City of Buenos Aires and Southern Santa Fe, and they worked primarily as shepherds and sheep-farmers. They were members of medium tenant families from the Irish midlands and Co. Wexford, though Dublin, Cork, and Clare were also well represented. They travelled from their homelands to Liverpool and from there to the River Plate as passengers on sailing ships up to the mid-nineteenth century, and on steamers thereafter. They were young and willing to work hard.

Once established, and for about a century, the Irish Argentines shaped a highly endogenous community, which on rare occasions encouraged its members to mix with the *natives* (though the English and affluent Argentines were fairly accepted). Led by the Irish Catholic priests and financed by the Anglo-Irish merchants in the City of Buenos Aires, it was a socially clustered and an economically self-sufficient community. Nearly one out of two Irish emigrants settled on a permanent basis in Argentina and Uruguay. Some of them managed to own their means of production, i.e., land and sheep, and they founded families which for three or even four generations kept the language, religious habits, and traditions brought from Ireland by their ancestors.

We know all this, and much more, about the Irish in Argentina. However, very little is known about the culture of these *gauchos ingleses*, the ideas that influenced their actions, and the principles they followed in their every day activities. What were their values? What models did they use to judge their own and others' behaviour? What ideology or ideologies appealed to them? What was their choice regarding certain identity oppositions like: Irish-English, Irish-Argentine, Catholic-Protestant, poor-wealthy, landowner-tenant, work-leisure, city-countryside, feminine-masculine? Besides their economic interests, how did they justify their participation (or the lack of it) in municipal, provincial, or national public life of their new country and in Ireland's political movements? In what form did their values evolve during the acculturation process in the larger society that received and accepted them? What *guiding fictions* (Shumway 1991) and *Oedipal paradigms* (Kiberd 1996) were conceived by the Irish in Argentina as the metaphoric symbols of their identity in a postcolonial topography?

According to Eric Wolf, "the world of human kind constitutes a manifold, a totality of interconnected processes, and inquiries that disassemble this totality into bits and then fail to reassemble it falsify reality. Concepts like "nation," "society," and "culture" name bits and threaten to turn names into things." The objective of this paper is to analyse Irish-Argentine literature in order to identify the leading cultural models developed by the Irish in Argentina, and to relate them to other Irish, British, and Argentine literatures, within the *totality of interconnected processes* which linked the emigrants to other communities in the global geography of the Irish Diaspora. On his turn, Declan Kiberd argues that "postcolonial writing does not begin only when the occupier withdraws: rather it is initiated at that very moment when a native writer formulates a text committed to cultural resistance". Paradoxically, the Irish who emigrated to Argentina, a former Spanish colony, may be regarded (as they have been generally regarded themselves) as colonised in the country they left, and as colonisers of their

new home. *Colonised* and *coloniser* change over time through the contacts with other cultures and through social mutation. Hence, there are conflicting values in Irish-Argentine literature, which make it complex to apply traditional critical models and require the development of a *diasporic* pattern of oppression, compensation, and contribution discourses, like the one proposed by Patrick O’Sullivan in his introduction to the *Irish World Wide* series (1992).

## **Irish-Argentine Literature**

Irish-Argentine literature may be placed in a web of bordering cultures. It has remote (albeit negative) links with the 1840s Young Ireland literary movement, as well as with the 1890s Irish Renaissance. Additionally, when considered within the *Southamericana* (or Anglo-South American literature), Irish-Argentine literature can be also regarded as a Minority Literature – or better, an (Irish) minority literature within another (British) minority culture. Is this minority literature representative of the typical Irish experience in Argentina? The answer could be in the affirmative, if Irish-Argentine literature is considered within this complex network of bordering cultures.

Irish-Argentine literature is the bilingual expression of a unique array of cultural values, including among others those related to gender, religion, land, home, and ethnicity. In order to establish their relative weight and their importance for the community, some of these values will be analysed in this article.

We wish to identify the new types of emigrant values created as a result of the Irish settlement in Argentina. These new values generate *new* human beings, not because of their physical, ethnic or psychological characteristics, but for the changing cultural models they formulate and follow. Taking disparate elements from their Irish heritage, and joining them with the Argentine post-colonial culture, immigrants and their families developed a unique set of shared values, which they would represent in Irish-Argentine literature.

But does such a literature exist? Certainly, as the editor of *The Buenos Aires Herald* notes, there is

an Anglo-Argentine literature. Not very strong, not very well known (and in some cases does not deserve to be), but there are some individuals who fit the classification of “British-Argentine” or, better still “Southamericana”, who are excellent and who have made their mark on the literature of a continent (Graham-Yooll, 1999, p. 205).

The same author maintains that “in Argentina, a country of immigrants, there is a sense of place, but millions of identities that lack definition” (Graham-Yooll, 1999, p. 205). This openness of definitions is what, on the one hand, calls for a more rigorous classification of diverse literary movements and authors, and on the other, allows a

constant change of motivations and aesthetics. From a cultural historical perspective (we have already mentioned the importance of Britishness among Irish settlers), it would not be inappropriate to classify Irish-Argentine literature within *Southamericana*. Additionally, since Irish-Argentine literature is not written only in the English language, we should be inclined to include bilingual works and others written in Spanish. Therefore, I would extend the concept of *Southamericana* to Spanish and Portuguese-written texts of authors from the British (English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh) isles.

There are two major cultural environments in which Irish-Argentine literature was born: the tumultuous history of the first half of the nineteenth century in Ireland, and the Argentine turmoil which led to the formation of stable republican institutions in the period 1820-1880. The political, social, and economic events in nineteenth-century Ireland, included among others the 1798 rebellion, a bloody uprising supported by radical Presbyterians, disgruntled Catholics and secular republicans, all of them inspired by recent developments in France” (Kiberd 1996, p. 20), the resultant Act of Union in 1800, Robert Emmet’s uprising in 1803, Daniel O’Connell monster meetings in the early 1840s and his Union Repeal movement, the desperation in the years of famine, the Fenian movement, and finally the Irish Renaissance, which evolved in the “revolution of poets” and ultimately in the independence from England in the 1920s.

The involvement of the Irish-Argentines in these events in Ireland varied from high interest to complete indifference. In general, there is primary evidence that the attitude was conservative and traditionalist, with the goal to safeguard the social institutions in place. Among the Irish movements, in 1842 the Protestant leader of “The Young Ireland”, Thomas Davis, founded *The Nation* newspaper with the help of Catholic friends, and gave the Irish people an idealist prospect of fighting for freedom “until Ireland is free, from the centre to the sea” (Kiberd 1996, p. 22). However in Argentina it is probable that at least a segment of the traditionalist Irish farmers who settled there did not share the vision of the Young Irelanders. For instance, Edward Robbins, from Clara, Co. Offaly (then King’s County), included in his memoirs that in 1848 “the young Irelanders attempted a revolution. I do not understand them, not did I then; they were mad, or traitors to their Country. I believed them then, and now, mad” (Robbins 1860, p. 10).

Nevertheless, later in the 1880s, the Land League movement in Ireland was generally approved in Argentina. “The great issue of the decade was land, a debate initiated ten years earlier by Gladstone’s first Land Act of 1870’ (Kiberd 1996, p. 23). The Land League had a positive impression in Buenos Aires probably because the sheep-farmers were more sensitive to the landownership debate, than to the more ambitious (and dangerous for a bourgeoisie) subject of total independence from England.<sup>2</sup>

Late nineteenth-century political progress in Ireland, like the Gaelic Athletic Association and its counterpart in Argentina, prepared the way for a Catholic Nationalistic discourse. In 1875, *The Southern Cross* was founded as a split of the Irish in Argentina against the *shoneen*, supposedly pro-British segments of the *Standard Group*. Later at the close of the century, authors like Michael Dineen, William Bulfin and Thomas Murray

aroused the nationalistic feelings of the community with their newspaper articles and historiography. Both in Ireland and in Argentina, the way was open for “a literary movement to fill the political vacuum” (Kiberd 1996, p. 25).

### **Short Stories with a Political Agenda**

William Bulfin (1863-1910) was born in Co. Offaly (at that time, King’s County). He was educated at Cloghan, at the Royal Charter School in Banagher, and at Queen’s College in Galway. In 1882, at nineteen, he emigrated with his elder brother Peter to Argentina. They worked in Irish-owned *estancias*, like John Dowling’s holding in San Antonio de Areco. In his spare time Bulfin began writing articles for a small Irish-owned newspaper, *The Irish-Argentine*, published in Azcuénaga, San Andrés de Giles, an area with a high density of Irish sheep-farmers.

In 1889, Bulfin moved to the city of Buenos Aires with his young wife, Anne O’Rourke, “who had been employed as a governess at the Dowling estancia”<sup>3</sup>. He then worked with furniture importer H. C. Thompson, taught English, and at the same time contributed articles to the Irish weekly newspaper *The Southern Cross*, then owned by Michael Dineen from Cork. “He signed his first article “*Cui bono?*”, meaning “To whose benefit?” The typesetter, for whatever reason, changed the name to “Che Buono”. The name, with the distinctly Argentine prefix of *che*, denoting affection and comradeship with the person so addressed and the Italian *buono*, meaning “able”, “fit”, “good”, delighted him and he used it all his life, always referring to himself as “Che Buono”, rarely as “William Bulfin” (Wilkinson 1997).

By 1892 he was employed full-time by *The Southern Cross*, and six years later he was its editor and owner. By this time, he was also contributing articles and stories to other newspapers, especially in the United States, such as the *New York Daily News*. In 1900, Fisher & Unwin in London published a collection of his Argentine stories, *Tales of the Pampas*. In 1902, he made one of his visits to Ireland, during which he toured the country on a seven months bicycle ride. Sketches of his travels appeared in *The Southern Cross* and in the *Daily News*, and were eventually published in book form as *Rambles in Eirinn*. Rarely out of print, *Rambles in Eirinn* “has its place among the most renowned travel books ever written about Ireland” (Wilkinson 1997).

He was passionately Nationalistic, and was considered “a vigorous defender of the rights of Irish Catholic immigrants and a proponent of the Irish language movement in Ireland. In 1906, four years before his death, he was made a Knight of St. Gregory by Pope Pius X for his work among the Irish community in Argentina” (Wilkinson 1997). He died in Co. Offaly in 1910, at forty-seven years old.

*Tales of the Pampas* is a collection of eight short stories about the Irish sheep farmers, mostly single, “living in isolation in the pampas, of ne’er-do-wells a little too addicted to drink and not enough to work, of matrimonial “matches” going hopelessly awry, of horseraces, gambling and near-fatal stabbings, of tragedy and death. Here too

were stories of gauchos and descriptions of the pampas written with an insight and a sensitivity that few *gringos* have equalled” (Wilkinson 1997).

Wilkinson suggests that Bulfin intended these stories to be read “not only by scholars, but by anyone and everyone who enjoys a good yarn.” However, we will see later that Bulfin was thinking of *anyone and everyone*, provided that his audience was primarily Irish, Catholic-Nationalistic, with strong attitudes against the English and looking down at what he considered inferior races. In addition to this, Wilkinson argues that “the Irish men and women in Bulfin’s tales of the pampas are between two cultures, having left one while not yet accepting – even resisting – the other.” The Irish-Argentine characters in these stories have not yet given their Irish culture away. Even if the narrator makes them work more sympathetically with Argentine natives, the characters feel uniquely different, and somewhat superior to *criollos*.

*Tales of the Pampas* is a good expression of the linguistic evolution of both English and Spanish amongst the Irish-Argentines. As Wilkinson remarks, phonetic marks were typographically represented by Bulfin (“wan” for “one”, “wance” for “once”, “tay” for “tea”, “yez” for plural “you”, “sez” for “says”. Wilkinson also observes that the “t” in the middle of a word is frequently thickened as in “sthraight” for “straight”, etc. while “d” at the end of a word is often pronounced as a “t”, such as “beyant” for “beyond”. “When”, “men”, “them”, etc. are written as they were pronounced (“whin”, “min”, “thim”). Some of the phrases are antiquated today, such as “for the nonce”, meaning “for the moment”, or “without”, meaning “outside”. In addition to the effect of Spanish phonetics on the original language spoken by the Irish settlers in Argentina, Wilkinson observes that “Bulfin delighted in the midlands brogue of his fellow countrymen’s speech, and he strove to reproduce it by his pen as it fell upon his ears” (Wilkinson 1997).

Wilkinson does not mention (yet there is a glossary with “Words of Irish origin” at the end of the English version), that there is an hyperbolic use of Irish (Gaelic) terms artificially mixed with the language of Bulfin’s characters: *begor(ra)*, *avick*, *bocaugh*, *oncha*, *pisherogue*, *sarra*, *arrah*, *garrahalya*, *bullabawns*, *thranee*, *smithereen*, and *alannah* are just a few examples of the supposed Gaelic language spoken by Irish settlers before arriving in Argentina. However, according to genealogist Eduardo Coghlan, except for some emigrants from Co. Clare, there were very few cases of his 4,348 emigrants from the Midlands and Co. Wexford who spoke Gaelic. Adding Gaelic to the English and Spanish linguistic mix depicted in *Tales of the Pampas*, was intentionally arranged by Bulfin to give the impression that the emigrants were genuine Celtic-Irish, not English.

Compared to Wilkinson’s somewhat naive view of Bulfin’s intentions, Laura Izarra argues that “Bulfin is more an observer than an agent in the process of “becoming” a “foreign native”: he is a foreigner completely adapted to the indigenous culture yet still in some respects feeling like a foreigner. Instead of creating diasporic cultural forms with a “new nationalist” concern towards the adopted land, his narratives show how encounters of cultures encode practices of accommodation and resistance to host

countries” (Izarra 2002, p. 6). Bulfin’s narrative “reaffirm the triumph of the Irish over the indigenous: exiles are ‘Irish in thought, in sympathy, and in character’ in a different society” (Izarra 2002, p. 6).

There is a double invention in Bulfin’s *Tales of the Pampas*. On the one hand, the Irish are represented themselves as opposite to the English. The diasporic milieu is ideal for this fictional process, since it provides a supposedly neutral atmosphere and elements that help to identify the original *Celtic* (non-Anglo Saxon) values. On the other hand, Ireland is imagined as an ideal homeland. Bulfin “struggles to re-construct the locality of his motherland for the Irish diasporic subject” (Izarra 2002, p. 7).

Izarra also asks “what might be the cultural significance of a world wide dialectic of diasporas?” It is not the intention of this article to answer her question in its broader sense. However, it would be beneficial to remark that the *dialectic* implicit in Bulfin’s stories rhetorically manipulates a certain effect in his readers, and that his narrative is connected with a Catholic-Nationalistic discourse in vogue in Ireland.

Bulfin is conscious of his own political mission, but particularly of his Irishness and of his ideological role within Irish Diaspora and at home. He wished to convince the Irish abroad to support the Nationalistic movement, and to raise the awareness of the Irish at home of their own identity.

Bulfin’s narrators intelligently disguise themselves under diverse shapes. In *The Fall of Don José*, during the initial camp gathering of gauchos, the third-person narrator describes the landscape of cattle hands after a hard day, their yarn with the cook Domingo, and his preparation of *asado*. The cook proposes a story: “I am sorry for your sake that I cannot give it to you as it fell from him in his graceful Spanish [...]. Who can aspire, above all, to catch even a gleam of it in any other language than Argentine Spanish? Let me therefore ask you to be indulgent with me while I try to give you the story of Don José as Domingo told it while we swallowed the roast. Here it is:” (Bulfin 1997, p. 116). The excuse for silencing the narrator is that the original language was not the one of the audience. Then Domingo begins telling his story in the first person (in English), since he is one of the characters of his narrative. At the end of the story, the initial narrator speaks again and comments briefly on Domingo’s anecdote. Consequently, in *The Fall of Don José* there are two narrators: the first one, omniscient, unintrusive, and mostly impersonal (only twice does the narrator say *I* just before giving the floor to the second one), and the second, Domingo, who has a restricted point of view of the group of characters. In this case, the use of two narrators suggests the aim of the author to assign greater omniscience to the Irish one. He is a foreign person, well educated, who appreciates the customs of the gauchos but who does not belong to their class.

A similar structure is used in *A Bad Character*, in which the leading narrator depicts the place, the characters Sailor John and Mike Horan, and their dialogues. Afterwards there is a transition: “and as to the rest of the story, let it be told by Mike’s words as we had it from his lips one day when a few of us were helping him to cure scab in his flock” (Bulfin 1997, p. 23). The omniscient third-person narrator appears only

once as the first person (*we*), with the purpose of giving the floor to the second narrator. Mike Horan is a naïve first-person narrator, with a restricted point of view of his story. In this case, the initial narrator does not interrupt at the end.

With these two exceptions, all of the other six stories in *Tales of the Pampas* are narrated in the first person, by an omniscient and intrusive character who has a precise, albeit not central, role in the plot. Further, at the end of *El High-Life* the narrator calls himself “the narrator” to emphasise his different status, certainly better educated than the other characters (Bulfin 1997, p. 66). Likewise, in *The Enchanted Toad* the narrator parodies the journalistic style in a way that makes the reader think that he is well acquainted with newspapers and the press (Bulfin 1997, p. 44).

Throughout the stories, characters are a collection of diverse cultural backgrounds and origins, with disparate educational levels and professions. Among them we may find Irish rogues, Spanish noblemen, Scottish book-keepers, Galician shop-keepers, estancia hands of gaucho origins, and of course, Irish sheep-farmers. The narrator presents *bad* and *good* characters (according to his perspective), and in this appreciation there is no distinction of nationality or culture, except for the Irish.

In fact, all Irish characters are *good*, and even if they are *bad*, they are likeable folks. They can be “very unpopular” “dishonest,” or even a “liar” like Sailor John in *A Bad Character* (after whom the story is titled). The Sailor is “the biggest rogue in South America. He’d steal the milk out of St. Patrick’s tay if he got the chance” (Bulfin 1997, p. 33). Still, he is comic, he makes us laugh, and in dealing with him the narrator never switches from irony to sarcasm or objective criticism.

Another Irish character, Paddy Delaney, who is named by the narrator the *hero* of *The Enchanted Toad* is “not on very good terms with anybody,” a “lazy pig,” a “polecat,” “a pugnacious, reckless free lance, who had a born gift for getting into trouble and for getting other people to dislike him” (Bulfin 1997, p. 38). However serious are the sins committed by Sailor John and Paddy Delaney, for instance, malicious behaviour, deception, pillage, robbery, vagrancy, laziness, waste, and intemperance, both characters are freed at the end of the respective stories, and the only sentence they get is social isolation (a status to which they actually look forward).

In fact, characters portrayed as *bad* by the narrators never have Irish names, and they are treated in a completely different way from the Irish. For instance Barragan, a character in *The Defeat of Barragan*, is the typical *gaucho malo*, with whom the narrator cannot be sympathetic. Castro tells the narrator that Barragan, a corrupted town major in the countryside, has abused of his authority to send “my father in prison three years ago on a false charge. He struck a brother of mine last year. He insulted my *comadre*’s daughter at the shearing. He stole my best horse, or had it stolen, and counter marked it – my lovely *tordillo negro!*” (Bulfin 1997, p. 97). There is a fight and Barragan “never got well enough to ride a [horse] race or draw a knife again” (Bulfin 1997, p. 99).

There is moral discrimination by place of origin. According to Benedict Kiely, Bulfin’s construction of the pampas “was a curious world of foundations laid by imperial

Spain, and Ireland, and England, and everywhere, and meeting with the descendants of men who had roamed those plains before Cortez. Out on the pampas his preference was for the company of either the gauchos or the Irish, [...] both his own fellow-countrymen and the hard-riding Spanish-Indian cowboys” (Kiely 1948).

Discrimination is extended to certain people from Spain. Francisco, the shop-keeper in *A Bad Character*, is a “crooked ould Gallego.”<sup>4</sup> His hypocritical attitude is symbolised in his grinning to everybody, regardless of what he thinks about his clients. And at the end, it is the *Gallego* who frees the Sailor: “I suppose the Gallego let him [the Sailor] go” (Bulfin 1997, p. 33).

However, there is another Spanish character who is *good*, a young nobleman who escaped from scandal in his motherland and was sent to the pampas to change his life. In *El High-Life* there are positive attributes reserved for “the hero of this tale [...], Arturo” (Bulfin 1997, p. 52), who according to Benedict Kiely would have been a representation of Bulfin’s elder brother. El High “was so fond of running contrary to public opinion, so fully possessed by the spirit of contradiction, that he was always looking for points upon which to differ from you” (Bulfin 1997, p. 53). However, the narrator has a positive and sympathetic view of El High perhaps because of his noble origins. Nevertheless, he dies in a storm. *El High-Life* is the only tragic story on this book, and its resolution depicts the only loser, who is from Spain.

The other anti-hero is Don Jose, the cook in *The Fall of Don Jose*. He is not associated with a specific country of origin, but he is “a sweet villain, a very distinguished hypocrite” (Bulfin 1997, p. 120). In this case, there is a clear opposition between city and country, and the cook is from the city, from an urban culture. He “shrugged his shoulders in disdain if you spoke to him about a horse. He took no interest whatever in camp work. The Spanish he spoke was not camp Spanish; it had the twang of the town. He could neither ride like a Christian nor skin a sheep. All he was good for was cooking, when he felt in the humour, and dressing himself in clean socks and things regardless of expense” (Bulfin 1997, p. 117).

Don Jose is not respected because of his urban manners, as when he looks down upon the gauchos. Kiely quotes a 1902 passage, in which Bulfin reports that he “went to a certain railway station one afternoon to send a telegram to Buenos Aires, and while I was there the train came in. I do not know whether it was the engine, or a look at the passengers, or the roar and rattle of the wheels, or all of these things together, that set the wheels of memory revolving. The city life of student days came back, the city began to call. As I galloped home it struck me that the camp was not meant for me, after all” (Kiely 1948). However affectionate his regard for the camp, Bulfin’s views of the pampas and their inhabitants are those of an outsider, i.e., someone with an urban look who respects the countryside and its wilderness, but who recognises that he belongs to the city. This attitude may be connected with Argentine guiding fictions of the time among the landed bourgeoisie, in particular those which viewed local reality from an urban perspective.<sup>5</sup>

The personalities of characters and their relations in the *Tales of the Pampas* may be schematised by grouping the stories in the following way: a) a pair of Irishmen, with contrasting moral marks (*A Bad Character*, *The Enchanted Toad*, and *The Course of True Love*); b) Irish and Gaucho working together with equivalent status (*Castro Telleth of Tavalonghi's Horse*, *The Defeat of Barragan*, and *Campeando*); c) everybody against the (good or bad) hero (*El High-Life* and *The Fall of Don Jose*).

As contextual information, we should complete this analysis of the characters by adding that there might be a connection between the *bad* characters in the *Tales of the Pampas* with certain people encountered by Bulfin in his *Rambles in Eirinn*. These people are bizarre, immoral, and cruel. He meets with them in Abbeyshrule, along the Inny's banks. They are tinkers, "puzzling people, [...] nomads, vagabonds, heirs of generations of wandering and disrepute." And he asks himself: "are they some remnant of the Firbolgs or degenerated Tuatha de Danann?" (Bulfin 1907, pp. 294, 299). And then there is the Jewish pedlar of Murtagh's Ruins, who "smiled an oily, cross-eyed, subtle smile of self-apology," and "with the abject vileness of the renegade who is false to his blood, he tried to heap obloquy upon the Jews and upon the Jewish race, the stamp of which was indelibly set upon his every feature" (Bulfin 1907, p. 307). Tinkers and Jews in *Rambles in Eirinn*, like some of the Spanish and gaucho characters in the *Tales of the Pampas* are invariably evil. Yet, the Irish are never represented in this way.

A long quote included by Thomas Murray in his account of the Irish in Argentina (probably published by *The Southern Cross*), is typical of Bulfin's representations of Ireland as homeland:

There! your day's work is done. Shake up the hay under your horse's head, give him a drink and go home to your hut; load that pipe of yours, sit down on the doorstep with your shoulder against the wall, and read up your curling wreaths of smoke and incense to the stars. If memory comes back upon you now, may it be pleasant! May it tell you of distant scenes where the cool breezes are whispering to the leaves of mighty elm or ash; where the woodbine peeps through the ivy around the gnarled hawthorn trunks; where the wild rose bedecks the hedges; where the larch spreads out its feathery branches, like a festoon of giant fern across the burnished glory of the sunset<sup>6</sup>; where the moss-grown old abbey ruin looks so solemn in the waning twilight; where the glad voices answer each other as the young folks scamper over the meadows; where the brook murmurs its eternal story to the overhanging willows and hedges, and where the gleam that steals through the hazels on the hillside and blinks at you across the valley comes from the fire, around which are seated those whose loving thoughts are going out to you in your exile.

Baa! It is only the bleat of the hungriest sheep in the corral, but it brings you back to your surroundings. [...] Heigho! It is terrible. But go to bed you sun-tanned exile; go to bed you unfortunate shepherd! (Murray 1919, p. 194).

For Bulfin, the notion of *home* is ideologically related to exile rather than to emigration. Irish settlers in Argentina are represented as those who were forced by English rule to leave their homeland, instead of people in search of better economic and social positions abroad. Yet, it is obvious that this manipulated view of emigration has problems. Many of the readers of Bulfin stories at the time, when they were published in *The Irish-Argentine* and *The Southern Cross*, would have reacted negatively to their own image as exiles, so the final reading would be ambiguous.

We should spell out two different types of emigration. In exile (*hegiran* model), the emigrant will consider the new country only as a temporary space and will make every effort to return home. In emigration (*diasporic* model), the emigrant will be open to adapting to the new country as his or her new home. In each case, memories of home will be construed in a different way. Of course this is not a bipolar scheme, but it helps to understand different migration models regarding the psychological relationship of the migrant with his or her homeland. This tension between the exile and his homeland is represented in the dialogue between Castro and the narrator of *Castro Telleth of Tavalonghi's Horse*, when they wander from place to place looking for fifty-five cows that are missing:

Because of the *querencia*, my friend. You know what it is? The *querencia* is home – the home of the horse and the cow – just as one's native land is home – just the same. I think our cows have gone towards home. They were reared on the San Lorenzo and, very likely, they grew homesick here. You do not believe it? Well, you will know the country better one day, and then you will see how soft-hearted cattle and horses are about home – how the *querencia* attracts them. It is a thing most strange, no doubt, but you will have observed that this camp life of ours is full of strange things, eh?" (Bulfin 1997, p. 72).

The implicit message is that a homesick feeling is not enough for the narrator's ethos. Like the animals of the pampas, in addition to the feeling it is necessary to go back physically to the *querencia*, home. In the narrator's view of the world, this is the natural way of things. Instead of lamenting the loss of our origins (*diaspora*), Bulfin prompts us to think of returning. Exile (*hegira*) is temporal and its aim is to go back home. This discourse perfectly matches the author's ideology regarding the problem of Irish emigration.

The characters of *The Course of True Love* "all are Irish in thought, in sympathy, and in character.

Exile has, of course, modified some of their idiosyncrasies and accentuated others. The wilderness [...] has taken the corners and angles off their Celtic mysticism. Spanish phrases and idioms have inflected the English which they habitually use; but the brogue of Leinster and Munster has remained intact.

Spanish and Creole customs have, in a greater or less degree, insensibly woven themselves into their life; but they are unwilling to admit this, and their struggle to preserve the traditions of the motherland is constant and earnest. [...] Old geniality is there, and [...] the inextinguishable humour of their race abides with them undimmed” (Bulfin 1997, p. 136).

Returning home, whether physically or psychologically, is the reason why the Irish characters in the *Tales of the Pampas* make efforts to continue being *all Irish in thought*.

Bulfin uses the gaucho as a symbol of *Argentineness*. For the first time in our series of analysed texts, the gaucho has a positive reading. This is a key innovation regarding other Irish Argentine authors like John Brabazon or Kathleen Nevin, for whom the gaucho is the feared other, a symbol of otherness. Previous descriptions of the native in general and of the gaucho in particular were frequently derogatory, and recorded the feeling of superiority of the Irish immigrants in Argentina during the 1830-1870 period.

The *Gauchesca* literature, initiated by Bartolomé Hidalgo in Uruguay and other poets in both sides of the River Plate, was made widely known by José Hernández’s successful *Martín Fierro*. This text strongly contributed to replacing the wretched image of the gaucho with a symbol of courage, national values, and race (which will be later transferred by the same author to representations of gaucho submission to the landed bourgeoisie).

In Bulfin’s logic, both the gauchos and the Irish shared similar circumstances. The spaces colonised by the English and the Spanish belonged to the Irish and the gauchos respectively. Courage was needed to recover those spaces from the colonisers. And it was precisely this courage that Bulfin chose to represent through characters, like the narrator of *El High-Life*, who says that “when a horse falls, a good rider should, in gaucho parlance, come off standing” (Bulfin 1999, p. 62). The main character of Castro Telleth of Tavalonghi’s *Horse*, is described in glowing terms:

A gaucho from head to heel and in every part of his body. He was still under thirty years of age, but had already made a name for himself in his own way. A good-looking fellow despite his swarthy skin, white toothed, slim, somewhat bow-legged while on the ground, but a living and superb picture when on horseback – such was Castro, the *capataz* or foreman of the cattle herding, my companion and immediate superior. What more about him? A good deal, but let his character grow upon you as it did on me. Mount, if you like, and come with us’ (Bulfin 1999, p. 71).

This is indeed a strong contrast with the narrators’ viewpoints in other authors, both in reference to natives and to the British. The shift – in accordance with Ireland’s nationalistic movements of the turn of the century – is towards admiration of the gauchos

and dislike of the English. However, there are still present ethnic differences, like Castro's *swarthy skin*. Skin colour is still an important marker, as when the narrator in *Campeando* observes that "a man surrounded by dogs and brown-skinned children" is distinctly a gaucho.

Furthermore, Castro describes Tavalonghi as a "hide-buyer in Lujan ten years ago and he made a fortune out of your countrymen, the sheep-farmers" (Bulfin 1999, p. 74). For the narrator, Irish Argentines are not gauchos. They are respected, they are valued, but they are *ingleses*. A possible reason for this is suggested in *The Defeat of Barragan: gauchos* "attitude belonged to no school of fence but their own. They had no rules to hinder them, no seconds to obey" (Bulfin 1999, p. 99), meanwhile there is a positive regard for British civilisation, even if it means subjection to the English.

Kiberd observes that "like Americans of the same period (1890s), the Irish were not so much born as *made*, gathered around a few simple symbols, a flag, an anthem, a handful of evocative phrases" (Kiberd 1996, p. 101). With the co-operation of the *gauchesca* imagery, the Irishness of the Irish settlers in Argentina is raised by Bulfin to its highest levels.

*Irlandeses* and gauchos are already able to work together and share basic things in life. In *Campeando*, the Irish/Gaicho pair discovers the whereabouts of stolen cows because "the brotherhood of gauchodom had asserted itself" (Bulfin 1999, p. 109). However, a fellow countryman warns the narrator that

you're gettin too much of the country into you, me boy – racin', and bettin', and helpin' the natives to cut each other to pieces, and galvantin' round the seven parishes, suckin' mate an' colloquerin' with the gauchos – that's all right while it lasts. But you'll get a bad name for your self, take my words for it (Bulfin 1999, p. 110).

A *good name* is important within the Irish-Argentine community. It is connected with potential improvements in social and economic position. Nevertheless, the narrator is not convinced by the isolationist discourse of his fellow countryman. The story concludes: "he failed to convince me" (Bulfin 1999, p. 110).

This attitude is a challenge to the accepted values of the Irish in Argentina, who considered segregation of their community from the larger society as the best strategy to maintain their customs and traditions. Bulfin accepts and supports the native as his companion in the struggle of the colonised (Irish or Argentines) against the coloniser (British or Spanish).

## **Becoming Irish Argentine**

The identity of the Irish in Argentina, together with their earnest beliefs, changed dramatically from the mid-nineteenth century, when they arrived massively in the River

Plate, to the present times. The negotiation of cultural values, both in Ireland and in Argentina had a strong influence on these changes.

Within the conceptual framework of *Southamericana*, Irish-Argentine literature emerged as a representation of the bilingual culture of the Irish immigrants and their descendants. In this culture, which includes Irish-Argentine journalism, a unique set of cultural values is represented. On the one hand, in most cases religion was not an inner force but an external resource for social networking. Its formal vehicle, the Irish Roman Catholic church, was a powerful institution which provided social coherence and recognition among settlers, as well as connections which helped immigrants to find a job, or even to meet a potential husband or wife. On the other hand, attitudes of ethnic cultural superiority were apparent among Irish Argentines, who by the 1870s were the largest constituent of the “British middle class, comfortable, insular and looked up to by the Criollo population, which Britons looked down on” (Graham-Yool 1999, p. 229).

William Bulfin’s *Tales of the Pampas*, one of the best texts of Irish-Argentine literature, is influenced by Irish Nationalism of the turn of the century. Depicting Irish sheep-farmers and labourers in Argentina, as well as native gauchos and other characters, Bulfin achieves his goal of uniting the Irish and the gauchos, both colonised people, against their colonisers. Bulfin uses several narrative strategies, which result in a natural coalition between gauchos and Irish. However, ethnical differences remain and subtle indications of the assumed superiority of the Irish are provided by the author as their “transubstantiation” from colonised to colonisers.

In *The Irish World Wide: History, Heritage, Identity*, Patrick O’Sullivan introduces the major discourses of the Irish Diaspora: “some studies of Irish migration are “oppression history” in its purest form.” He adds that we should be aware of “the limitations of that way of understanding the past – in particular that it conspires with the oppressor to let the oppressor shape our agenda.” “Then O’Sullivan suggests that in “compensation history” the studies focus on the “achievements of the Irish outside and inside Ireland in a glorified past,” and that this “provides compensation – or perhaps, I could better say, evidence. Evidence that “failure”, lack of achievement, or success, within Ireland, had not to do with some intrinsic inability within the group or the individual – as oppressors assert.’ Finally, as a result of a *continuum* by which “an oppressed people produce compensation history as one way of countering oppression [...], part of that compensation history will be contribution history,” i.e., how the Irish settlers in a territory contributed to the development and interest of that specific place. “That historiographic pattern (oppression, compensation and contribution) is, of course, particularly strong in studies of a migrant people, by a migrant people. They are often faced with prejudice and discrimination in their new communities, and need to prove that they can contribute, and have contributed, to the development of their new lands” (O’Sullivan 1992, p. xix).

Since the only recurrent complaint of the early Irish settlers in Argentina (1830-1860) against their English *oppressors* was the landlords’ lack of attention to the demands

of their tenants, the historiography and the literature of the Irish in Argentina lack the fundamental phase of *oppression history*.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, there is no major need for a *compensation history*, and therefore there should not be any *contribution history*. However, as a result of the analysis of Bulfin texts, we could classify his works as compensation discourse, because they frequently have the intention to narrate success stories of the Irish emigrants outside of Ireland. In addition to this, within the context of almost all later Irish-Argentine literature and history, we may conclude that it belongs clearly to the domain of contribution discourse.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of Irish-Argentine cultural values, the *continuum* mentioned by O'Sullivan works the other way around: departing from a strong contribution ideology, authors needed to create success stories and then to invent an oppression history. They would justify in this way their Irish identity as distinct from the native culture. The *invention* of history is a process intimately related with the construction of popular narratives, by which the resulting fictions guide the attitudes of significant portions of the society.

The example of the Irish in Argentina is peculiar. They were colonised at home, and they were colonisers in Argentina. They were Irish at home, and they were English in Argentina. Kiberd distinguishes between Imperialism, "the seizure of land from its owners," and Colonialism, "the planting of settlers in the land thus seized." Britain did not need to seize Argentine land since the Argentine governing elite was vassal to her imperialist rule, and Argentina represented a primary strategic investment for British capital until World War I. Therefore, the *planting* of Irish settlers in Argentina was a natural process, sought by the Argentine bourgeoisie and supported by the British in Ireland.

Amongst the texts written by several Irish Argentines, most make no distinction between the Irish and the English. Furthermore, their view is that all English-speakers are English, and that *we* means English whereas *they* represents the natives of Argentina. When confronted with Argentine gauchos and natives, other narrators adopt a rectilinear English position, and *Irishness* is referred to as a geographic origin only, not a cultural perspective. In these texts, whether Irish or English, the narrator is always coloniser and the Argentines are always colonised. However, there is an apparent change in Bulfin's *Tales of the Pampas*. Its characters are either Irish or Argentine, but never English, and the narrators speak from a position against the English. The coloniser viewpoint has been displaced to the English, and now both Irish and Argentines share a common ground of colonised against the English and the native bourgeoisie. Complex class issues are interwoven with these changes.

Bulfin reacts against the Anglophile and Anglo-centred discourse that was popular amongst Irish settlers in Argentina and the native governing elites. For instance, in *Rambles of Eirinn*, when visiting the places where poets Oliver Goldsmith and Leo Casey lived in the Irish Midlands, he recalls that he "met several people along the roads who looked upon Goldsmith as a finer type of Irishman than 'Leo'" (Bulfin 1907, p. 314). However, he argues:

Casey loved Ireland better than Goldsmith did, and wrote about Irish things. That is why I say he is higher, as an Irish poet, than Goldsmith. Of course, he was not a great genius like Goldsmith, but he was an Irish singer, and Goldsmith was not. Goldsmith wrote for the people in England, mostly about English things, and Casey wrote for the people in Ireland, mostly about Irish things. True, Goldsmith's great poem is about an eviction campaign, and it is some of the most beautiful poetry that ever was written, but there is nothing in it to specially mark it as Irish. And, although there are many people who would tell you that Casey's poetry is not Irish either, because it is not written in the Irish language, still it is far more Irish than Goldsmith's – for "Leo" sang of Shaun O'Farrell and the Inny, and Derry, and Tang, and about Donal Kenny, and fifty other subjects that are Irish through and through, and that no one could mistake it for anything else, while "The Deserted Village" might be English or Scotch or Welsh" (Bulfin 1907, p. 316).

In his turn, Kiberds would agree with Bulfin in that "Oliver Goldsmith in *The Deserted Village* could, in a somewhat ironic manner, bring the consequences of rural clearances to the attention of his more sensitive metropolitan [English] readers" (Kiberd 1996, p. 16). There is some circumstantial evidence that Goldsmith's poem, published in 1770, was a favourite amongst Irish sheep-farmers in Argentina, particularly those from southern Longford and Westmeath<sup>9</sup>. A teacher and Republican patriot, John Keegan *Leo* Casey was born in the same area 76 years later, but was noted as a poet only in association with later Nationalism.

"Cultural colonies are much more susceptible to the literature of the parent country than are the inhabitants of that country itself" (Kiberd 1996, p. 115). The Irish who emigrated to Argentina in the first half of the nineteenth century were taught (at diverse levels) in English and Anglo-Irish literature. The toponymy of some of their holdings in Buenos Aires reflects their readings, like John Murray's *Auburn* estancia in Lincoln department, Buenos Aires. Furthermore, when considering Argentina as a cultural (and, during the largest part of the nineteenth century, financial) colony of the British Empire, we may verify that the Argentines were highly receptive and very sympathetic to English literature, culture, and values in general. In this environment, the Irish in Argentina produced a culture that would have been originally British in form and content, but was gradually de-anglicised by the turn of the century to reflect ideological changes in their Irish identity.

The Argentine governing bourgeoisie was the chief factor on bringing Irish, *ingleses*, settlers to Argentina. Alberdi, one of the key thinkers and creators of Argentine guiding fictions wrote that

Every European arriving in our country brings to us more civilisation in his customs [ [...] ] than lots of books of philosophy. Qualities that are not seen and

touched are not correctly understood. A good worker is the best catechism. If we wish to plant [in America] English freedom, French culture, the working habits of the peoples of Europe and of the United States, we need to bring living bits of them and settle here (in: Shumway 1993, p. 166)<sup>10</sup>.

Alberdi adds that “the English language, the language of freedom, industry and order, should replace Latin” in the education of Argentine students. “How we can receive the example and civilising action of Anglo-Saxon race without speaking their language?” (Shumway 1993, p. 167).

This admiration for European culture in general, and for the British in particular, is a result of an unresolved fear of the native culture. Not only the British visitors and representatives had a negative vision of the gaucho, but the local educated elites were also fearful of the gaucho’s way of living and eager to promote immigration from England as the best solution to make Argentina a British cultural colony. Traveller William MacCann in the late 1840s observed that “on the southern frontier in Tandil and Azul, Irish ditchdiggers commanded high wages because ‘few of their class come so far south, and the natives will never take a spade in their hands’” (In: Slatta 1983, p. 166). Slatta adds that “[Irish] immigrants and gauchos seldom competed directly for employment because the former did foot work and the latter mounted labor” (Slatta 1983, p. 167).

The negative myths about gauchos are key to understand the warm welcome that the Irish received in Argentina. Domingo Sarmiento was one of the most important authors who created guiding fictions for the consumption of the Argentine (and immigrant Irish) audiences. Journalist, educator, historian, political philosopher and practitioner (President of the Republic 1868-1874), Sarmiento “molded the thoughts and policies of the nation’s Europeanizing elite. [...] His most extreme and revealing commentary on the gaucho came in instructions to General Mitre in 1861: ‘Do not try to save the blood of gauchos. It is a contribution that the country needs. Blood is the only thing they have in common with human beings’” (Slatta 1983, p. 181).

Referring to Sarmiento’s *Facundo*, Nicholas Shumway remarks the irony of “a text so innovative as literary discourse [that] denigrates native Argentina and supports an imitative submission to foreign cultural models” (Shumway 1991, p. 180). The pattern followed by the Argentine governing elites since the 1860s, and particularly during the prosperity period of 1880-1915, was to secure the regime of

an educated and Europeanizing elite based in Buenos Aires. The purpose was to build an European-modelled society in Argentina, [...] to promote an economy of *laissez faire*, primarily restricted to the affluent segment that owned the means of production, to create spectacular material progress promoted by foreign investment, to incur in external debt and the consequent loss of national sovereignty, and to show continuous contempt towards the urban and rural poorest classes, which resulted in the intention of “improving” the ethnic melting

pot through the introduction of immigrants from Northern Europe (Shumway 1991, p. 181).

Shumway describes the *guiding fictions* created in nineteenth-century Europe, which “encouraged the French to feel like French, the English to feel English, and the German to be German. [At that time] the idea of nationality was essential in Europe. With the end of the *Illuminati* and the arrival of Romanticism, the ideas of universal brotherhood were replaced by an emergence of nationalistic attitudes, with which individual countries asserted their particular ethnic, linguistic, and mythic marks” (Shumway 1991, p. 19).

In South America, before the individual independence processes of each country commenced, there were no national identity myths that linked their inhabitants with a shared ideology. In Argentina, the name of the country itself is a “a paradox: the country was named after the silver mineral, which was not available, meanwhile the element that was abundant (a potentially spectacular agricultural production) was neglected during almost three centuries” (Shumway 1991, p. 25).

The *gauchesca* literature, from its pioneer Bartolomé Hidalgo (1788-1822) to his best disciple José Hernández (1834-1886), provided a literary and symbolic mythology that was appropriate as Argentine guiding fictions from the last decades of the nineteenth century to date. “Seldom appreciated in life, the gaucho became the embodiment of Argentine character as the nation’s thinkers and leaders reconstructed the past to suit twentieth-century political needs” (Slatta 1983, p. 180).

By joining *gauchesca*, Irish-Argentine literature contributed to create the myth of the gaucho as a symbol of Argentineness. At the same time, it evolved from the sphere of Britishness to a newly created Irishness. This creation of Irish-Argentine *guiding fictions* can be perceived as an invention of Irish Argentina, a cultural *no space* that was necessary to fill with convenient imagery in order to avoid losing control over the growing Irish-Argentine community. The Irish priests of the Roman Catholic church were primarily responsible for this invention of Irish Argentina.

Kiberd quotes Deleuze and Guattari to define a minor literature, “a literature written in a major language by a minority group in revolt against its oppressors:

... A major or established (i.e., imperial) literature follows a vector that goes from content to expression. Since content is presented in a given form of content, one must find, or discover, or see the form of expression that goes with it. If something conceptualizes, it will express itself. But a minor, or revolutionary literature begins by expressing itself and doesn’t conceptualize until afterwards” (in: Kiberd 1996, p. 117).

Deleuze and Guattari in *Milles Plateaux* developed a theory of becoming, which I consider relevant to the study of the changing mind of Irish immigrants in Argentina, and perhaps for every migratory process. For the Irish settlers in Argentina, it was not

enough to be Irish. During their settlement and acculturation to the larger society, they had to become Irish, *devenir-Irish*, i.e., undergo and command a process by which they departed from a status and arrived at a different one. This *devenir* not only changed the Irish, but also the English and the Argentines in connection with them.

Within this process of becoming Irish, it would be misleading to consider Irish-Argentine literature without its relations to the literary, cultural, and social frameworks in England, Ireland and Argentina. At the same time, those frameworks operate within the more general cultural patterns in place in Europe and in the Americas, which have a great degree of *contagion* themselves. Becoming Irish-Argentine involved for the emigrants undergoing several cultural, social, and economic transformations, which of course have not ended. In their *devenir-Irish* Argentines, they began negotiating values associated with Britishness, they acquired higher levels of Argentineness, and they ultimately experienced (and are still experiencing) a process of becoming Irish.

Nowadays, some scholars estimate that four to five hundred thousand Argentines claim Irish ancestry. The way this ancestry is claimed is significant for the study of Irish-Argentine culture. The activity of Irish-Argentine social institutions, schools, media, family history groups, heritage centres, and researchers both in Ireland and in Argentina will be beneficial to their members and other communities only if they manage to avoid the ideological manipulation of some of their own institutions. The elucidation of cultural values and representations will pre-empt this manipulation, and will also stimulate the study of neglected aspects of Irish-Argentine culture.

## Notes

- 1 University of Geneva, Switzerland, and Irish Argentine Historical Society (edmundomurray@irishargentine.org).
- 2 By the end of the nineteenth century, in addition to their new properties in Argentina, a good number of the Irish settlers and their families still had tenant rights in Wexford and the Midlands.
- 3 Bulfin's biographical data are taken mainly from Susan Wilkinson's introduction to *The Tales of the Pampas*, 1997. At the end of the introduction, Wilkinson mentions that she is "indebted to information given to me by the Bulfin family in Ireland, especially Anna McBride White and Jeanne Winder."
- 4 During the nineteenth-century shop-keepers in rural areas of Buenos Aires were frequently immigrants from Catalonia. However, in Argentina all Spaniards were, and still are, labelled *Gallego* (often with a derogatory implication).
- 5 cf. among others, Domingo F. Sarmiento, *Civilización y Barbarie* (1845).
- 6 None of these trees are native species in Argentina, but they are abundant in the Irish Midlands.
- 7 *Murphy to Murphy*, 20 June 1865: "I am thinking the longer people stays in that country [Ireland] the worse for themselves, as things is getting still worse every day, and I am quite satisfied that there is no change of laws or nothing else likely to be made that can be of any benefit to the tenant farmer, as there will be always some gap left open by which the Landlords will be able to keep the tenants nose to the grinding stone" (Private Letters from John James Murphy in Argentina to his brother Martin in Kilrane, Co. Wexford).

- 8 For instance, Eduardo Coghlan's title of his genealogical catalogue is "El Aporte de los Irlandeses a la Formación de la Nación Argentina" (1982), in clear reference to the contribution of the Irish immigrants to their receiving country.
- 9 Verses of the poem are quoted freely in emigrant memoirs.
- 10 My translation.

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