

ACIS Newsletter

Published for the American Committee for Irish Studies

Frank O'Brien, Editor

Hollins College, Virginia, 24020

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ACIS/MLA

Frank L. Kersnowski will be the discussion leader for the joint meeting of ACIS and MLA. Conference 46 will be held from 8:45 to 10:00 a.m. in room 5 of the Palmer House, Friday, 29 December. See previous Newsletter for additional information.

VISITING PROFESSORS PROJECT: IRISH AMERICAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE

Mr. Tomás Mac Anna, producer and director for the Abbey Theater, is one of the people available for a one year appointment through the offices of the IACI. Mr. Mac Anna has directed plays of Lorca, Brecht, and Behan and he has written several works for radio, television, and theater production. Those wishing further details on the conditions of Mr. Mac Anna's appointment should write the Cultural Institute at 683 Osceola Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota.

WORKS COMPLETED/IN PROGRESS

The Hardy Festival in Dorchester, England next summer, presided over by the Rt. Hon. Harold Macmillan, will have two vice-presidents: J. O. Bailey, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and ACIS member Harold Orel. It will be a major national cultural event, as those things go, with Benjamin Britten, Peter Pears, plays, movies, lectures, and the like. Harold Orel is re-writing parts of a monograph on Yeats in the 1890's and hopes to complete it soon.

Frank Kersnowski's bibliography of Irish writers is to be sent to the University of Virginia to be considered for publication there under the auspices of its Bibliographical Society.

Daniel J. Murphy, 50 Haverstraw Road, Suffern, New York, has just finished a transcription of the letters of Lady Gregory to W. B. Yeats. During a year in Ireland on a Guggenheim, Mr. Murphy also made many notes on the Gaelic, Agriculture, and Co-operative Bank movements, mostly for the years 1897-1905, and the participation of Moore, Yeats, Lady Gregory, George Russell, Horace Plunkett, Hyde, Maud Gonne, and others. Mr. Murphy would be very interested in corresponding with those who are working in the general area of Bibliography in Irish Studies; he feels that a great deal still needs to be done with primary source materials in order to bring them up to some adequate working level. See next entry.

INFORMATION REQUEST

"I am attempting to gather information on the whereabouts of Irish language manuscript material in public or private collections in North America, with a view to the eventual publication of a catalogue of this material. Would anyone having access to or information about relevant items kindly write me."

Stephen M. Agli
Conant Hall 39A
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

Mr. Agli's project is being done under the guidance of Professor Charles Dunn of The Celtic Department and the Houghton Library manuscript division at Harvard. In his letter Mr. Agli noted that Mr. Pádraig de Brún of The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies is also concerned with the cataloguing of Irish manuscript material. Mr. de Brún is currently devoting his efforts to cataloguing material in private collections in Ireland. Mr. de Brún hoped that some co-operative American effort could be mustered.

CHANGES IN ADDRESS

Your editor requests that you keep informing him at Hollins as well as the secretary of ACIS of any address change and a change in affiliation. As the membership grows the clerical operation grows in tedious complexity, and your cooperation is a great help. It saves ACIS considerable postage outlay.

IRISH GOVERNMENT GIFT

The Irish Government through the kind offices of the Hon. Frank Aiken has presented St. John's University, New York, with over 250 volumes of Irish historical material. The government gift includes minutes and the record of the debates in the Dáil. Mr. Sam Fanning of St. John's was instrumental in obtaining this gift. Mr. Fanning has just instituted a new and extended course in Irish history at St. John's. Details of the syllabus will be published in a subsequent newsletter.

SUBJECTS FOR ACIS MEETINGS

Your editor encourages you to forward to the executive members of ACIS any topics which you feel could be considered for future ACIS meetings. Bob Rhodes and Gilbert Cahill at the University State College in Cortland would still like to receive suggestions of topics for the forthcoming Annual Conference in May. For your convenience any topic suggestions can be forwarded to the Newsletter editor at Hollins. As was said at the last Annual Conference it is far fairer to all the membership to consider topics early when possible so that the most qualified speakers can be solicited.

PROGRESS OF ECONOMY REVIEWED BY TAOISEACH

The Taoiseach, Mr. John Lynch, reviewed the progress of the economy and the outlook for the immediate future; in the course of a speech delivered in

September, he said:

"In 1967, I am happy to say that we are making progress towards a more satisfactory growth rate while at the same time preserving reasonable equilibrium in external payments. In the first six months of 1967, retail sales rose by 6% compared with a rise of only 2% in 1966. Production in transportable goods industries in the first quarter rose by 9%. Building and construction also show a marked recovery. It is as yet too early in the year to be precise about the size of the overall growth rate in 1967, but at this stage it seems likely to be in the region of 3% to 3½%.

"The fact that the current expansion of domestic activity is being achieved in conditions of reasonable external equilibrium is mainly due to a large expansion of exports which rose by almost one-fifth in the first eight months of 1967. Imports also rose considerably - by 8½% - in the first eight months of 1967 but this is to be expected, and provided exports are also expanding, is in itself an indication of progress, since we rely so much on imports for raw materials and capital goods for our industries. The net result is that the import excess for the first eight months of 1967 is 10% less than it was for that period in 1966.

"External reserves in August amounted to £272 million, an all-time record figure. While we are not yet in a position to estimate precisely the net capital inflow in 1967, it is quite clear that this record figure for external reserves could not have been achieved without a substantial net capital inflow. Our confidence in the underlying soundness of the economy is, therefore, shared by foreign investors who are obviously willing, despite competing demands in other countries, to stake their money on our future development prospects.

"The present favourable economic climate should be an encouragement to our own businessmen to think in terms of increasing investment with a view to raising productivity and expanding capacity. I know that there is uncertainty in the minds of businessmen about the outcome of our EEC application and the likely timing and conditions of entry and for this reason some businessmen might be tempted to postpone investment plans. But there can be no real uncertainty about the ultimate elimination of our tariff barriers and the need to prepare now for conditions of free trade. The Free Trade Area Agreement with Britain provides for the gradual reduction and eventual elimination of tariffs. This is not, therefore, a time to adopt a 'wait-and-see' policy."

Editor's note: The Irish pound was devaluated at the same time and at the same rate as the English adjustment in mid-November.

GOVERNMENT GRANT FOR LANGUAGE CENTER

The language center at Gormanston College, Co. Meath, is to be given formal status by the Irish Government. It will become the Institúid Teangeolaíochta na hÉireann (Language Institute of Ireland). The Institute will be under the patronage of the Department of Education and will receive an initial grant of £16,000 from the Department. It will conduct research into teaching methods, teacher training, the psychological and sociological problems of language learning, and the general aspects of applied linguistics.

The Institute will grant facilities to teachers to learn one or more of about

twelve languages including Irish, English, Dutch, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Icelandic, Norwegian, Hebrew and Danish. This should enable young adults to acquire a basic knowledge of a language in about 200 hours. A student entering a secondary school would be taught a language in three years.

PAPERS

"Poetry in Contemporary Drama" will be the topic of the Modern Drama Conference at the Midwest Modern Language Association meeting in Cincinnati, October 17-19, 1968. (The general meeting theme will be "Poetic Theory/Poetic Practice.") The chairman Professor Marilyn Gaddis Rose, Stephens College, invites twenty-minute papers not only on verse drama but also on drama which is poetic in a broader sense. Papers must be submitted to the chairman by May 15, 1968. Any member of the Midwest Modern Language Association is eligible to submit a paper.

REPRINTS OF IRISH PLAYS

DePaul University through a grant from the estate of Mr. Eugene F. O'Riordan, has begun a series of reprints of scarce and out of print plays written by dramatists in the early years of the Irish theatre movement. Volume I in the Irish Drama Series is The Heather Field by Edward Martyn; Volume II in the series has Maeve by Martyn and The Last Feast of the Fianna by Alice Milligan. George Moore's The Bending of the Bough is scheduled as the next of the reprints. Mr. William J. Feeney is editor of this worth while project. The first two volumes contain, aside from the text, generous introductions to the plays and the history of their production, rather detailed footnotes, and a bibliography of secondary texts relating to the play in question: "The purpose of my project is to make available inexpensive and reasonably scholarly editions of plays which otherwise might be obtainable at only a few libraries or in special collections; so that students might be enabled to study, eventually, the Irish theatre movement in its entirety rather than knowing it only from the works of acknowledged master writers." Volume I is \$1.25; Volume II is \$1.50. Please address requests for the reprints to Professor Feeney.

IACI: IRISH FLIGHTS

The June 18 - August 24 flight is about half filled according to the Institute. See previous Newsletter for details.

Days of Fear. By Frank Gallagher. (Cork, Ireland: The Mercier Press, 1967. Pp. 117, 6 shillings.)

Nearly forty years have passed since Frank Gallagher's Days of Fear was first published. There are still a good number of survivors from the period who remember Ireland's desperate fight for freedom in the aftermath of the first World War; and there are others who have only a vicarious knowledge of these times. For both groups, Gallagher's brief book affords an informative and eloquent transcript of the dialogue between a tortured mind and a resolute conscience. According to the sub-title, the account is a diary of a hunger strike: it is much more.

Though sometimes overly dramatic, Gallagher's fine prose style serves to enhance the mood of a powerful and moving drama which took place in Mountjoy Jail, Dublin, April 5-14, 1920. The cast included British government officials, prison wardens, and a group of more than fifty Irish political prisoners. When the latter elected to go on a hunger strike until granted release or treatment befitting prisoners of war, they precipitated a ten day ordeal which gained world-wide notoriety. It is in the vivid portrayal of human endurance that the author adds further dimensions to what otherwise could have been simply another prison journal. Metaphors and religious symbolism become important instruments in laying bare the romantic nature of an Irish nationalist.

There are several aspects of this memoir which will be of particular interest to the behavioral scientist. Time seemed interminable to the prisoner whose dreary routine offered few diversions, and the monotony was only compounded by the absence of meal-time breaks. Sleeplessness posed an even greater enemy as Gallagher's mind was convulsed by wild speculations, haunting doubts, and occasional fits of madness: "If the mind took the fast as quietly as the body does, the whole thing would seem like a joke, there would be so little suffering in it . . ." (p. 55).

While the diary is not history it is, all the same, the fiber from which history's fabric is woven. Some entries are notably more significant and interesting than others, but one of the greatest values stemming from the product of the whole is in the understanding which it renders to what longshoreman Eric Hoffer would call the "true believer." Since dedication to the cause of Irish freedom often carried with it some sense of a higher morality, Gallagher, a deeply religious man, was only temporarily troubled by a visiting priest's condemnation of the hunger strike as deliberate suicide. Throughout the fast Gallagher reflected upon the political stakes at issue as one means of sustaining his courage. Describing the pity which he felt for the even more oppressed black man of the British Empire, Gallagher noted: "But, brothers of Africa, we whom you know not are making one empire weaker . . ." (p. 18). This little diary will endure as a classic among the literature on "The Troubles" in Ireland. In the present, the chronicle could also appeal to those who seek to combat injustice by means of passive, non-violent resistance.

Thomas E. Hachey

The Years of the Great Test, 1926-39, Francis MacManus (ed.), Cork: The Mercier Press, 1967. (The Thomas Davis Lectures, 1962)

This collection of half-hour radio talks demonstrates that the period 1926 to 1939, when taken on its own terms, was one of great positive achievement. The two major achievements were the development of a political structure which assimilated all but the most dissident shades of opinion into a parliamentary framework, and the attainment of sovereignty. The entry of de Valera's Fianna Fáil Party into the Dáil in 1927, the orderly transfer of power from Cosgrave and Cumann na nGaedheal to de Valera and Fianna Fáil in 1932, and the promulgation of the new constitution in 1937 are the major elements of the first story. The second begins with the 1926 Statute of Westminster with its ambiguous definition of the relationship between Great Britain and the dominions, continues through the progressive but legal abolition of the formal ties between Great Britain and the Irish Government after 1932, and culminates in Britain's 1938 cession of the Treaty Ports which made neutrality possible in 1939.

Not all of the essays in this volume bear directly on these two themes, but if political stability and sovereignty imply the consolidation of national institutions and attitudes, then all are quite relevant. The discussions by Kevin B. Nolan on Cosgrave's last administration, T. Desmond Williams on de Valera as a politician in power, David Thornley on the Blueshirts, Donald Nevin on the situation and contribution of the Labor Party, Nicholas Mansergh on external relations, and Vincent Grogan, S.C., on the constitution of 1937, have the most direct bearing on the main themes. J. L. McCracken's essay on the Ulster political scene offers an interesting counterpoint to developments in the Free State. Here too the consolidation of the power of a new regime was the most important development, but, unlike the Free State, the enhanced viability of the Northern government was not due to a reconciliation of dissidents, nor was it characterized by an orderly transfer of power. Such a development was impossible where the opposition desired not an alternative program but the dissolution of the state.

Other papers deal with national policy with regard to economics, public administration and education; these are by James Meenan, T. J. Barrington and Sean O'Cathain, S.J., respectively. Fianna Fáil's reconciliation to the Free State is paralleled to a degree by Terence de Vere White's description of upper-class Dublin society's adjustment to the new regime. A closer parallel exists between the inward-looking mood of Trinity College and the Catholics of Northern Ireland, as described by F. S. L. Lyons and David Kennedy. Francis MacManus makes Daniel Corkery's pronouncement on expatriation the starting point for his discussion of the literature of the period, illustrating the tendency towards the consolidation of an attitude regarding national literary orthodoxy. T. Desmond Williams concludes the volume with a survey which, while necessarily impressionistic, is quite effective.

Such a collection has obvious limitations. The essays are short and provide no more than an introduction to the period. Though they succeed as individual efforts, the total effect is scattered. To some extent this is inevitable when diverse topics are treated from diverse points of view, but a general lack of coordination has compounded the problem. The present volume would certainly have benefitted from more careful arrangement. For example, Mansergh's article on external relations and Grogan's on the new constitution are complementary and ought to be read together; yet they are separated by the two articles on Northern

Ireland which ought to be grouped with the essays on social life and the southern minority. The lack of coordination is easily illustrated by comparing the cover title, The Years of the Great Test, 1926-39, with the first sentence of Williams' concluding essay which says "Writers in the preceding fourteen papers have given their separate accounts of the years 1927 to 1937." This is simply carelessness. A final complaint is that a book which aims to provide a comprehensive view of the period ought to include a separate account of the Irish Republican Army. The book's title is apt, but the failure to describe and assess the revolutionary challenge to constitutional government makes it difficult to appreciate the significance of the test.

Despite these faults and limitations the book fulfills a need in that it offers a positive evaluation of an era which has usually been regarded as a disillusioning aftermath to a heroic period of revolution. Building an effective new state wherein political liberty remains a reality is no small achievement; this is especially evident when one considers the very real distrust that existed between opposing political groups within Ireland and the general political climate of Europe in the twenties and thirties.

Martin Waters

Irish Wake Amusements. By Seán Ó Súilleabháin. (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1967, paperback, author's translation of 1961 Irish language edition, introduction, bibliography, index, 8/6.)

Irish Wake Amusements is a sourcebook which caters to different interests. It provides a fine survey of Irish Church attitudes for the historian, possible clues to Finnegan's Wake for the literary detective, and a wealth of information about games and popular religion for the comparative folklorist.

Seán Ó Súilleabháin's interest in the wake began, he tells us, in 1927, when he 'reddened' his pipe at a traditional wake in Co. Mayo. He has since "questioned many persons from different parts of the country who had knowledge ... of wakes in olden times." (p. 11) Ó Súilleabháin also has sifted a mountain of written sources, from Synodal Decrees of bishops to newspaper accounts. All this material he has divided into fourteen chapters - the last two containing his bibliography and index. The first chapter deals with changes which have taken place in the wake in recent times: Chapter IX describes the keening; Chapter X deals with Church opposition to wake abuses; Chapter XI considers the wake outside of Ireland; and Chapter XII speculates on the origin and purposes of wakes. Some of this material is, of course, overview, such as Chapter XI, but most of it, such as the survey of Synodal Decrees, is dependable and thorough.

The games, or amusements, are described in Chapters II through VIII and each chapter is devoted to a set of like games. I am not altogether satisfied with the descriptions; they are very dependent on the original sources, of course, but still they suffer at times from an irritating vagueness. Moreover, it is not always clear if the activities described are strictly wake games.

And at times, descriptions are not documented, although presumably one would find them in the Irish Folklore Commission where Ó Súilleabháin is Archivist. These are minor faults, of course, and do not detract from the value of the book as a fine reference work for which people in diverse areas of Irish study will be thankful. However, it is not a depth study of the wake itself - a cultural institution of considerable complexity at which, ultimately, games are only a sideshow. As Ó Súilleabháin has crystallized for us in his chapter, "The Origin and Purpose of Wakes and Their Amusements," we need to know more of the reasons and motivations behind the lively amusements, the feasting, "immoderate" keening, sex play and, in this context, the impact of death upon the sensibilities of the participants. Holistic accounts, such as the author's own in the Introduction, need to be collected from others describing specific experiences which then should be tied into detailed life histories. That such a work is feasible we can thank the extraordinary persistence of this institution in Ireland, the diligent collecting of the Irish Folklore Commission, and this excellent pioneer work. Even in Ireland, however, the wake only exists in attenuated form; such a work needs to be undertaken now while there are still people like Mr. Ó Súilleabháin who remember what it was like.

Magnús Einarsson-Mullarky

Sean O'Faolain: A Critical Introduction, Maurice Harmon.
University of Notre Dame Press, 1967.

Modestly but accurately called an introduction, Maurice Harmon's study of the writings of Sean O'Faolain is a genuine triumph of selection; in less than 200 pages he discusses practically all phases of O'Faolain's career. Harmon concludes, "In a period of about ten years he (O'Faolain) wrote his best novel, his two great historical biographies, most of his finest stories, and a host of intelligent commentaries on Irish life and letters." It is the product of these ten years, between 1936 and 1946, that Harmon evaluates in detail: Bird Alone, the biographies of O'Connell and O'Neill, and the stories familiar to most readers from The Finest Stories of Sean O'Faolain (1959).

Throughout his study, Harmon probes O'Faolain's infatuation and disillusionment with Ireland by applying a dictum that O'Faolain has taken from Flaubert: "The secret of masterpieces lies in the concordance between the subject and the temperament of the author." For O'Faolain, a prolonged struggle preceded this concordance, and his was no ordinary quarrel with Ireland. From youth, he was afflicted with the sorrows of Ireland; he moves, in Harmon's portrait, from an enraptured rebel, to a questioning and embittered nationalist, and finally to a European man of letters, but even in his disillusionment O'Faolain carries in himself all the maladies of post-revolutionary Ireland.

In Vive Moi, O'Faolain said he was so often paralysed by an "impotent rage" he could not transform his Irish conflict into literary material. But this love-hate ambivalence did spur him to a continuous flow of work according to a plan unusual for most Irish writers. In Harmon's terms: "It was typical of the rhythm of O'Faolain's output that he moved back and forth between short

story, novel and biography to find adequate ways of dealing with Irish life."

Harmon's critical skill is most apparent in the chapters on the short stories and three novels; here he uses deftly and without jargon his familiarity with Irish myth and cultural patterns and his knowledge of the techniques of fiction. Patiently and thoroughly he unfolds the complexity of such stories as "A Broken World," "The Patriot," "The Silence of the Valley," and "Lovers of the Lake." Harmon's analyses demonstrate convincingly that O'Faolain did develop a concordance between his subject and his temperament and a mastery of the short story. We are made fully aware of O'Faolain's blending of realism and romanticism, of his often subtle compression and elusiveness, of his telling application of irony and counterpoint. Harmon dissects a half-dozen of O'Faolain's stories with the attention generally reserved for Joyce's fiction or Yeats's poetry.

While other critics have discussed Irish themes and protagonists in O'Faolain's writing, Harmon stresses a theme often overlooked -- O'Faolain's preoccupation with the fragmented and fully developed personality, an important affinity between O'Faolain and W. B. Yeats. This problem Harmon claims, is at the heart of O'Faolain's work: "How does one live creatively within a society that is restrictive and unattractive?" O'Faolain's study of haunted heroes in the early short stories, of the misfit heroes of the novels, and of the self-deceiving protagonists in his later work move his often intensely local studies into a main stream of modern literature.

Harmon treats all too briefly many problems that deserve more extended explanation: O'Faolain's essays on Irish politics, his short story criticism, his editing of The Bell, his travel literature, his minor biographies, his study The Irish, and his relation to other Irish writers. Perhaps it is time for an anthology of O'Faolain's essays on post-revolutionary Ireland. The comprehensiveness, the lucid, dispassionate prose, the fully annotated text and the complete bibliography generate the hope that Harmon's book will touch off a series of similar studies of living Irish writers.

Jim O'Brien

That attitude has changed, just as the wakes have changed. So have the customs. People today are very touchy about telling folkloric of wakes. Because when factions met in wakes, or when wake-games got out of hand, there didn't seem to be much of a feeling of reverence in mind. That's why people hold back information if asked about wakes, especially by a "rank" stranger - as I've been in many places.

But the fact remains that no matter how often, or by who the wakes have been denounced, the tradition behind them was older than Christianity. The ancient outlook over the dead had much in common with some of the religions of the Middle East: death at a ripe old age was not held to be an event for sorrow-making. I can recall at least three good, pious women saying to me in South Armagh: "Now I'm leavin' we stick on you an' Paddy." (That meant a solemn obligation, while Paddy was a pal of mine) "When I go," they said "be that time long or short - I don't want to wake to be a quiet one." The Lord pardon us if we needed pardon, for we see to it that their wakes weren't quiet ones anyway.

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Harmon's critical skill is most apparent in the chapters on the short story and the novel. Here he uses his own knowledge of the techniques of fiction, particularly in the chapters on the novel, to analyze the work of O'Faolain. He analyzes O'Faolain's work as a writer of the novel, and in all he has gathered near forty volumes of all kinds of tradition: from folk tales and customs and beliefs, to accounts of "every rural activity under the sun -- under the roof too, be it slate or thatch where the fireside and kitchen crafts took place." Because few of us have short wave radios and because cultural news from the North comes so infrequently even when we are in Ireland, your editor has decided to publish a few of his essays in this and subsequent newsletters.

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ULSTER FOLKLORIST

The following are from B.B.C. programs from the Northern Ireland Home Service prepared by Michael J. Murphy. Mr. Murphy has been collecting folk material for himself and for the Irish Folklore Commission for twenty years. His work has been done mainly in Ulster, and in all he has gathered near forty volumes of all kinds of tradition: from folk tales and customs and beliefs, to accounts of "every rural activity under the sun -- under the roof too, be it slate or thatch where the fireside and kitchen crafts took place." Because few of us have short wave radios and because cultural news from the North comes so infrequently even when we are in Ireland, your editor has decided to publish a few of his essays in this and subsequent newsletters.

"Wake and Wedding"

"I'd be around nine years old when I was at my first wake in Ireland: that was near Slieve Gullion in South Armagh. Since then I've been at wakes in every county between The Boyne Valley and The Glens of Antrim. Only last week in South Armagh I was told of a man who was "a good turn", a character if you wish. They wanted to know if I knew him. Know the man? Why, I'd helped to 'Marry Him Out' in a wake-game in the townland of Balnamatha over thirty years ago.

I'll come back to the 'Wake Game' in a moment because the customs of the wake on the dead have gone out so rapidly that some people think they belonged to the days of Finn McCool and The Cailleach Bearea. A wake is, of course, a vigil or watch over the corpse of the dead, kept by relatives and neighbours from the surrounding townlands. They usually ran two nights, and were held in the house where the person had died. I was at one wake in a barn and I've been at "open-air" wakes: these were held on a roadside near the graveyard on a person who, having died in England or Scotland, was, as they put it "bein' taken home." I remember when people thought it a scandal - almost a crime - not to take a corpse "home to be buried."

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First of all, other traditions had to be respected. When a person died all work in that townland ceased, sometimes in adjoining townlands. That was Christian respect. From an earlier code came practises affecting say, the gathering of milk for churning - "thickening" as they said: all this was poured out under a particular bush in the corner of the garden: "The Dead Bush" some called it, because the "Dead Bed", the tick on which a person had died, was taken out after the funeral and burned there. Burned, that is, if the wind was blowing away from one's townland and not into it; for the smoke, like the spilled milk, was supposed to contain much of the Spirit of Death. There was a belief that when one died in a townland, three might die.

The house where the person had died became known, for the duration of the vigil, as "The Wake House." Old women and perhaps a few old men attended during the day. Some of the women were noted "keeney-ers" or "criers", or "rhymers" as they were called: that is, in a dirge-like chant they lamented for the dead person, remembered his or her good points and good deeds, and minimised the faults.

I heard the "keen" individually, by a single person, but I saw women, with hands joined across the corpse, chanting a prayer known as "The Seven Sorrows." That was in the day time. The real wake took place once darkness fell. As soon as you entered 'The Wake House' you touched your cap and murmured: "Lord 'a mercy on the dead." A plateful of clay pipes with tobacco was held out: you took one, touched your cap and murmured the prayer again. That's why these pipes came to be known as "Lord 'a mercy pipes." You might even have to take a pinch of snuff from another plate.

All the men and boys stayed in the kitchen, but women and girls went to the room where the corpse lay - unless it was "under-board" on the rungs of a table in the kitchen. Many such tables went on loan for wakes around the townlands: and I heard of one which used to creak mysteriously, so that the owners would say: "Aw how, who's for the road out now I wonder . . . ?" Tales are told of the corpse of a bent old man weighted with stones under the table. Someone pushes the stones off and the "dead man" springs up. I knew of a better one than that. An English-born lad, flaxen-haired, full of wonder at the wake, didn't want to be taken home by his father. So he was told to hide "in-inunder the corpse under board." He did. When no one called him out he thought it time to inquire. The corpse was an old man, so when a white head rose beside a few newcomers and asked: "Can I get up now?", you can imagine some of the cause of their leap across the kitchen.

So back to the 'Wake Games.' I took part in most of these, some of them quite simple like "My Man Jack": "Who Has The Button?": "Wrong Sow by the Lug": "Boot the Brogue" and many named like that. Others had a definite ritual, a play in fact, like the one I mentioned earlier: 'Marrying Out.' This was one of the more popular of games known throughout the country at one time, and known by various names. 'Marrying Out' is the South Armagh title.

Frankly, the game was a fertility rite, with a pagan origin - though not a soul of us knew that at the time, need I say. It was something we looked forward to at wakes and that was enough. To begin with, as in other games, a Master of Ceremonies was appointed. He was known as 'The True Priest', and some men were famous for their talents of wit and talk and sarcastic comment

at this game. I knew one who used to get letters to attend wakes miles from the home. He first of all ordered two men with leather belts to stand out. A chair was set in the middle of the floor. Then, if a shy fellow was known to "have a notion of" a girl in the room, he was literally hauled on to the floor. Then the girl was brought along and put sitting on the chair. She had to pick out another young man from the crowd. Each man had to sing a song, encouraged by whacks of the belts across the shoulders. Then 'The True Priest' taking the theme of each song as a cue, sized them up, often in biting satire, their supposed prospects as good or bad husbands of the girl. Supposing one song was: "The Mountains of Mourne", he'd be apt to sum up maybe like this:

"He talks about London, too. A helluva playboy that to be spliced to, an' him hoofin' it off to London to see the damsels with bells on their toes. The way he hoofed off from a certain lassie's gate yous all know when her oul' fella - here present - was known to mention matrimony. If he rusted once he might rust again like our oul' mare in a guttery gap when the notion strikes her . . ." And so on - but more mercilessly, and certainly much more earthy than anything I dare bring up!

All that's gone now: gone too are most of the customs practised at real weddings. But one survives here and there, and sometimes lands young fellows in court. This is the custom of "The Straw Boys" who gather about "a wedding house" on the night of the marriage. You may hear them referred to by other names, such as 'The Black Mob' in Tyrone. One set dressed up in traditional outfits made from straw covering them from head to ankles. The others simply blackened their faces. All were men who hadn't been invited: but they gathered in the "street" or yard, making much noise, perhaps playing a melodeon, and demanding drink and a share of the eatables. In later years they demanded money as well. If they were refused, 'The Straw Boys' burned their outfits in the street or at the gate-way: this was held to bring exceptionally bad luck on any marriage.

"Running with the Bottle" was a custom with a dash of clan pride behind it. Two men did the running, one appointed by the groom's well-wishers, the other by the bride's. As soon as the marriage had been solemnised in the church the two ran for the bride's home, where the feast was to be held. Two marked bottles of whiskey awaited them. They grabbed them and raced back to meet the bridal party, walking or riding home. The winner kissed the bride. Then toasts were drunk and the bottle was smashed against the ditch. If it failed to break into many pieces, that meant poor luck for the groom - if it were his man. Then the other was thrown. The pieces were supposed to foretell the health, wealth and number in the family - or none at all - and whether the groom or bride would die first.

'The Bride's Cake' is often an elaborate set-up today: but it was once a plain oaten cake. As soon as the bride returned home after her marriage, she was given a taste of salt, then oatmeal, and then the oaten 'Bride's Cake' was broken on her head. As in the smashing of the bottle, it was a good omen if it broke into many pieces. Girls and boys scrambled for the pieces: placed under the pillow, the cake was supposed to charm one into a dream of the future husband or wife. A testy mother-in-law too, might toss the heather besom down the floor - to see, as some tell, whether the "new woman" would step over it or lift it. But, like the rice flung as confettie is thrown now, all these practises represented symbols of fertility and fruitfulness.

Tales are told everywhere about all these beliefs. The besom was thrown after a man going out with a match-maker to seek a woman's hand. I heard of the after-math of such a match and wedding. The bargain was: So much of the girl's "fortune" or dowry upon marriage, the remainder when the first son was born. Well, there was a houseful of girls in that family (and there are beliefs about how the sex could be changed too!) One night however, the father-in-law was wakened by a thumping on the room window: "It's there .. it's there," came the voice of the son-in-law from outside.

"What's he sayin'?" says the old man's wife.

"Never you mind what he's sayin'," says the old man. "But rize an' scrape the bottom of the chest: for he's back for the scrapins he left on the hob."

The poor man, in other words, was looking for his money, and there wasn't much left by then to give anyone."

"House and Stackyard"

"I've been in houses built on the drop of a hat. I mean that literally, though tradition of course had more than a hand in it. The reason was that when people one time had to build a house, they first of all had to make sure it was going to be lucky. They had to find out if any secret "pad" or pathway crossed the site. They could, for instance, offend our old friends, the fairies, by building across one of their paths: Or, if they so believed, people were afraid of disturbing a soul "Putting in its Purgatory" as they said, before entering heaven.

How many times have I heard an old man say when a stranger complimented him on his age and health: "Ah, it's harmless all the good I can do now. But I'm better off shortenin' me time here in the corner nor to be on top or in under the butt of a skeeag bush" - the Hawthorn usually.

To avoid disturbing souls said to be "as thick as the thorns", and to keep off other "dead men's pads" and the paths of the Fairies, the people had several ways of finding out. One was to let the old man on a windy day throw up his hat. If it landed on the site they'd selected, well and good. If not, they built their house where the hat "lit" or landed. Again, when a site had been chosen, little heaps of stones were set up. If these were undisturbed in the morning, they went ahead with the building: if not, they picked a site nearby and tried again.

Countless tales are told of people who defied the old beliefs and built houses where they chose. Usually the stories tell of strange noises and disturbance - "the whole place a-wrackin'" as the phrase often puts it. Or there are tales of bad luck - misfortune that is - cattle dying or being killed mysteriously, peculiar accidents happening. There are, of course, the familiar Fairy stories of such houses: how the fairy woman is shown hospitality and given food. She's told of the misfortunes happening to the family and their

stock. And she tells them the house is built across their path: that the dish water being thrown out is running down on them, and so on. The house is moved, or a door is closed and opened on the other side, and all is well.

The tale of new houses being knocked down at night has something of a classic origin behind it. When St. Patrick was building his first church in Armagh, a strange bull each night knocks down the building done during the day. In the end, St. Patrick has to find Usshen, last of the Fianna of Finn; the saint restores his former strength to Usshen who fights the bull and kills it and then sleeps in a cloak made from its hide.

Some strangers might think that all our houses were built on the drop of a hat - scattered in valleys and glens and on hillsides as white as cockles cast from a mighty hand. Don't we sing sentimental songs and ballads about them: The little mud cabin, the roof thatched with straw; the turf fire boils the pot, I see it still - and all the rest. The real fact is that the isolated house has been in such sites for about a hundred-and-fifty years only: the tradition was to build houses in "clusters" as some called them. You'll also hear names like "Clachans" and "Closes" and "A Town of houses" or "Bahwins": all these meant a small village cluster.

Landlords dispersed the clusters. At the same time they broke up the old rundale system; land was redistributed and tenants had to build stone ditches up and down and not diagonally - "on a scow" - across a hill. When an old man talks of "the makin' of the straight marches", this is the time he's talking about, shortly after the beginning of the last century.

The new house was built according to a traditional pattern: an even older instinct planned where the outhouses and furniture in the dwelling-house must go. Nothing of worth was put out of sight or out of touch. The dwelling-house and out-houses, byre, stable and pig-stye - pig-craw as some call it - were either all in one line or the out-houses were in a kind of semi-circle or rectangle facing the front of the kitchen; like an old time bawn in fact, built for protection as well as convenience. You can still notice this pattern surviving today. Even the midden or dung-hill was within sight. It represented wealth of course. Many a time a man bragged, or was complimented, on his "helluva great donkil o' dong." It spelled renewed life for the land of course and on days of noted witchery, like May Day, springs of Rowantree or Mountain Ash, or the decorated May Bush of hawthorn, were set in the dung-hill - all to ward off evil influences.

The kitchen would have a half-door, and small windows. The half-door kept out draughts and fowl wandering the "street" or yard: the small window kept out thieves and, later, meant that less had to be paid in Glass Tax. If, by the way, in an old house you notice a window-pane with a "Bull's Eye", giving imperfect vision, well, no tax had to be paid on such windows. You'll even see a few of these on Rathlin Island: they came from the old glass-works at Bally castle.

All very unhealthy, insanitary, lack of enough air we say today. Maybe so. But remember that half-door - and air and wind blowing over it directly into a kitchen. And remember that people spent most of their time working out of doors anyway. The old-time houses I've been in may have lacked many amenities, but few of them suffered - even in winter with a blazing turf fire,

from a lack of fresh air! Mats woven from platted straw used to be hung as a drape behind doors to provide a draught screen: and I've heard of times when whins, or gorse, were used as well. You'll still see whins platted through a wooden or iron gate to keep hens out or cattle from straining the bars. It makes one recall ancient days when such doors and protection must have been used in wattle-fences around the forths - the original farm-houses.

Inside the kitchen, too, the dresser with its shining delph and polished tin-ware, had to be set along a wall facing the fire: it was unlucky to have it facing towards the door, just as it was for good luck that the churn-staff, stuck in a bush in the hedge, had to face the door. Most of the harness, too, was kept in the kitchen. The collar always hung on an iron peg in the side of the "brace" - that's the bell-mouthed canopy of the chimney which drew up the smoke. The collar certainly had to be kept dry but as well, it was looked on as being, as one man told me: "A wee thing gentle": that is, having supernatural power. Certain lone bushes are still said to be "gentle", or a field or a rock; a hare is gentle, so is a salmon. Tales are told of them speaking with human voices, just as The Gentle Bush bled when someone cut it.

For all that, I'm not sure why it was held that a horse-collar should be "gentle." But it is a fact that the collar was used as a cradle for the first-born in a man's family; I've seen that myself. And I've heard of the collar being used in a fertility practise as late as the 1920's. A man in a childless marriage had in fact to wear the horse's collar around his neck - but that's a story that'd take me further down the kitchen than I'd better go! Collars and harness woven from platted straw and rushes were used too: I was very lucky in finding a Tyrone man who made sets of these for the museum.

One could tell much about every article in the house: the settlebed - I've slept in them too: the Hanging Dresser, which survives now in a phrase of belittlement of some man usually: "He's an oul' drimin-dru of a hangin' dresser . . ." In other words, non-committal, not forthright, indecisive and all the rest. The Hanging Dresser hung on the walls on iron spikes. Chairs, forms, and Creepie-stools, even tables: those tables with the exceptionally strong rungs from leg to leg, these were so made to hold crocks and to wake the dead: when the corpse was "Under-board", they meant it rested on these rungs, under the table.

There's much one has to skip, but I can't overlook the roof. This, when it was of thatch, had a folklore of its own. It's said that the Irish thatched roof was one of the best in Europe. Maybe so, but it was an expensive roof that required periodic attention: unless you thatched with flax. But flax was more inflammable than straw, and straw for real thatching had to be threshed with a flail: a threshing machine crushed and slit the barrel of the straw and, as they said "let the drop leak through."

I've threshed with flails in my time, but never in a stack-garden or "haggard" as we'd say in South Armagh. This threshing went on all winter one time; in the "haggard" or stack-garden if the weather was suitable, but more often in a barn. Out in the field or haggard, you used a "deck of boards": or you lifted off a barn door and used that instead. It was hard, swift and dangerous work: two threshers faced each other, and if you missed the rhythm of a beat, your partner's "soople" could gash you on the forehead.

Since the days of Finn McCool tales have been told of threshers and their

flails. I heard of one about fellows threshing to "win a woman" - as they put it. The best thresher was to get the girl in marriage. Her father was the judge, and every thresher had to catch as many flying grains or "pickles" of corn, in his mouth, as he could. Well, some put down three sheaves on the "deck", others four, and flailed hell out of the sheaves, trying to catch whatever pickles flew from the blows of the flails. Up came a boy the girl had "a strong notion of". She whispers to her favourite: "Now yeh boy yeh: Two sheaves an' a clean deck." - Clean of piled-up seed she meant. He won the girl, because seed spurted from the hard board of the "deck" under the blows of the flail.

The stacks used to be built to suit the threshers, and they were supposed to finish one in a day. The stack sat on a circle of a stone - "A butt" as we said - with whins on top. Some stacks had an air-funnel up the centre: you simply built the sheaves around a narrow sack of straw, pulling it up as the stack got higher. The practise was kept up by some farmers even when threshing-mills displaced the flail.

I was loosing sheaves on a threshing-mill at such a house, and my grandfather had climbed up a stack to pitch to me. He pitched the cap of the stack from a ladder till he "found footing" for himself and climbed on top. And then - one moment he was there - next he was gone. His hat lay where he should have been but I could see a pitchfork and a hand, from the centre of the stack, holding "death's grip" on the centre of the fork. The mill made sound, but it was nothing to the sound coming out of the air-funnel in that stack from my grandfather - and the sound wasn't folklore - or in prayer either!"