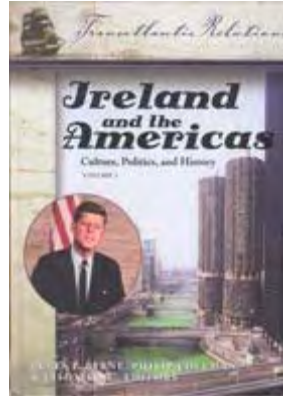


Reviews

**James P. Byrne, Philip Coleman and Jason King's (eds.),
Ireland and the Americas: Culture, Politics and History**

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Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO Inc. (2008). 967 pages. Three volumes.
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Reading the three volumes that make up the encyclopedia *Ireland and the Americas: Culture, Politics and History* is both motivating and stimulating because of its interesting and comprehensive treatment of the relationship between Ireland and the Americas. The work is edited by James P. Byrne, Philip Coleman & Jason King, and forms part of the *Transatlantic Relations* series edited by Will Kaufman. As the title promises, the book's innovative approach considers Ireland's relationship with the entire continent of America and not just with the United States of America.

Thus on the one hand the work creates a greater understanding of the connections between the Americas and a number of European countries. On the other hand, and this is what concerns us here, this new encyclopedia draws a distinction between Anglo-American relations and those between Ireland and America. Since these relations have for a long time been analysed from a perspective that tended to globalise and see them as homogenous, the differentiation made

here represents a great contribution to socio-historical, political and cultural studies. The book begins with a retrospective review which sets out from the voyage of St. Brendan the Navigator, on his mythological passage to the American continent in 550 AD, and goes right through to today.

Among the earlier material that can be linked to this work is *The Encyclopedia of Ireland*, published by Yale University Press in 2003 and edited by Brian Lalor (see review by Maureen E. Mulvihill in *The Irish Literary Supplement* for autumn 2004). Unlike *Ireland and the Americas*, Lalor's encyclopedia has few entries on the Irish in Latin America, if we base our calculation on the total number of pages (1218). Another notable difference between the two is that in Lalor's work an important element is the variety of colour pictures that accompany the text and provide an important visual appeal. By contrast, the ABC-CLIO work is mostly focused on the development of content and equal treatment of each of its subjects.

Another significant previous work is *The Encyclopedia of the Irish in America*, published by the University of Notre Dame (1999) and edited by Michael Glazier. But except for the relations between USA and Ireland there are no entries associated with other American countries. It even ignores the business expansion that came about as a result of the efforts of William Russell Grace (1832-1904) in both Peru in 1850 and throughout the rest of South America.

The organising principle of the *Transatlantic Relations* series revolves around the construction of an approach that examines the state of affairs on both sides of the Atlantic. As the editor points out in his preface, the goal goes beyond a historical analysis over time and pushes boundaries to areas not previously considered, such as gender, race, migration/immigration, and the field of culture in general. The open nature of the work allows the possibility that other experts may undertake further research, provide fresh contributions, or initiate dialogue that may arrive at new conclusions and identify new avenues of exploration.

As previously stated, *Ireland and the Americas* is divided into three volumes, each with approximately the same number of pages. The layout of the cover and body is noteworthy in terms of the quality of paper and design. The choice of font is appropriate and can be read with ease. The cover format is relevant in terms of presenting the contrast between the old; in the photograph of a boat that could represent the arrival of the first Irish immigrants to North America, and the modern, the image of John F. Kennedy and the port of Chicago, its water dyed green to celebrate St. Patrick's Day. As a caveat, one might regret the total absence of any other visual reference to the rest of the Americas.

One of the strengths of this encyclopedia is the fact that it is divided into three volumes of medium size and weight, allowing them to be handled with ease. Similarly, one should highlight the publication of the encyclopedia in electronic form (see website of the publisher: [\[clio.com/products/overview.aspx?productid=109783\]\(http://www.abc-clio.com/products/overview.aspx?productid=109783\)\) which has the advantage of faster searches because it is a format which permits immediate access. In turn, each volume is intertwined with the others through cross-linking of information, which both speeds up searching as well as subsequent readings. As to its internal layout, this work has a table of contents that is repeated in the three volumes, thus facilitating access to the various entries. Likewise, the first volume includes a thematic index divided into central themes and ideas that allows for rapid location of information. The table of chronologies between Ireland and the Americas is both practical and user-friendly, bringing the reader quickly to the time period where the most significant developments in all fields of culture in the Irish-American relationship are presented, be they in art, history, socially, politically or geographically. It would have been desirable to include an index of authors, since the contributors comprise a large number of experts and scholars. Having such a list would give greater visibility to their names and doubtless attach more prestige to the work itself, encouraging the kind of dialogue, as one of the prefaces puts it, which should exist between the actors and creators of culture. At the end of the third volume a general index is added that includes the main entries and the list of illustrations.](http://www.abc-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

The black and white photographs (96 in total) of people, places, pictures or other images, are relevant because they enlighten the reader without diverting attention from the main focus. Notwithstanding this, it could be said that searching in the general index is not particularly fast. On the other hand, the distribution of information in three columns alphabetically is a success. Similarly, the provision of bibliographic references in columns immediately below the text entries, facilitates the reading of the data, as well as the immediate location of related references in other sections of the encyclopedia.

The encyclopedia opens with two prefaces. One is by the editor of the series, in which the dynamic nature of the transatlantic relationship is emphasised, and which sets as one of the

motivating principles that it 'transcend or at least challenge the boundaries of nation-region as well as those of discipline '(xiii). The other preface, by the editors of this encyclopedia, illustrates how the process of defining the Irish-American experience invokes an intense theoretical debate.

The introduction and the three subsequent essays in the first volume explain the scope of the encyclopedia. The first refers to the importance of the centuries-old relationship between Ireland and the United States of America. But it also mentions the fact that, while Ireland held longstanding connections with other nations in the Americas, they were not sufficiently documented and recognised as part of that link. Hence the significance of this encyclopedia in highlighting the many and varied contacts between Ireland and Canada or Latin American countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Paraguay. The idea that this book is trying to identify is clear in that it endeavours to discover the narrative thread by recognising notable personalities and relevant historical and social situations, as well as by collecting the memory of the common people, often forgotten or marginalised in the development of a nation, but who nonetheless help shape it anonymously.

In the essay devoted to relations between Ireland and Canada, Jason King begins by highlighting the characteristics of migration of the Irish to North America. Due to migrants' extreme poverty, an unfavourable political situation and antagonism exacerbated by religion, King argues that this movement of people has features of exile rather than of 'opportunity to improve one's social situation or material prosperity' (5). In short, this emigration was strictly a matter of necessity, its main objective being to preserve a set of religious and cultural values, then under serious threat. The famine that ravaged Ireland in 1847-1848 became an iconographic symbol present in the popular memory as well as in the literary imagination. Nevertheless, this issue has been subject to different interpretations over the years. There has been controversy about the real reason for the exodus to Canada, and the

matter remains the subject of historiographic analysis. Significantly, the author points to the fact that recently many writers try to minimise the famine experienced in Ireland as being at the heart of the migration process and turn to other factors, as well as pointing to the pre-1847 period which also saw the movement of people to Canada. All the above contributed to the problems and contention associated with many of the stereotypes of long-entrenched collective imagination.

In another sense, King refers to political behaviour of the Irish in Canada and the different settlement patterns related to their religious affiliation, giving clear explanations why the Irish Catholics chose to reside in urban areas, while Protestants are associated with the expansion of agriculture and rural ways of life. Regarding the cultural aspect, the author rightly stresses that while the information available is scarce, it may however allow a Canadian-Irish collective perspective to be reconstituted.

Another noteworthy contribution is the distinction that King makes between the literary production of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is particularly valuable because it establishes the importance of the relationship between literature and the life of the people of a country, as well as how the former documents and accompanies various social processes. In the same vein, the author highlights the various literary genres in both centuries; since literature is closely linked to changes in society, the preference for epic poetry, biographical prose or historical fiction, might thus adequately explain the relationship that he sees. Finally, the contribution of Irish writers to the canon of Canadian literature is historically significant, in that they helped define broader concepts of cultural and national identity in Canada.

In the introductory essay that follows, by Edmundo Murray, an interesting reflection on how historians recognise migration processes is made. The author refers to the processes of colonisation and post-colonisation that took place between the European and American continents, defining the links between Ireland and Latin America as "heterogeneous, fragmented and erratic '(15). Within Latin

America, he highlights the fact that Argentina, together with a few Caribbean countries, is one of the states that received a major wave of immigration and largely succeeded in retaining its immigrants. This pattern was not repeated in other countries where re-emigration occurred, a phenomenon which clearly shows the high mobility of the Irish population. The author is acute in his analysis of the immigration process to Latin America, as reflected in the historical accounts. He makes the distinction between epic narrative - which is presented from the perspective of the victim-immigrant, and the opposing view, which demonstrates the superior position of the Irish immigrant with respect to the native community.

The essay also objectively highlights the very different reasons which led the Irish to settle in Latin American countries. It mentions economic factors – flight from the Great Famine or the search for larger tracts of land than were available in Ireland, land which permitted some Irish to become 'ranchers' and large-scale livestock farmers. There were other no less important reasons of a religious or military nature.

The ability of Irish immigrants to adapt to all sorts of situations and environments is shown. Thus the author notes that in the last decades of the nineteenth century those immigrants who became landowners began to see themselves as part of the British community in Argentina, while those who were part of the middle and lower classes of rural workers remained loyal to their ideas of Irish Nationalism, nurtured in the religious and journalistic discourse of the period. Further, Murray describes how after a process that culminated around 1982 with the Malvinas/Falklands War, those of Irish ancestry in Latin American countries begin to see themselves as Argentines, Uruguayans, Brazilians or Mexicans of Irish extraction. At that point in time, most Irish descendants had lost the use of English as a first language and no longer perpetuated the traditions that their ancestors brought to the new continent. This situation took on new features in Argentina after the economic crisis of 2002, when a

number of Irish-Argentines began to seek permanent residence and employment in Ireland, once again demonstrating the group's ability to adapt to the vicissitudes and needs of the moment.

The last of the introductory essays, by James P. Byrne, refers to the links established between Ireland and the United States and expresses the importance migration processes have had in the relationship between these two countries in all its manifestations: emigration, immigration and re-emigration.

Byrne argues that while the unofficial history of the arrival of Irish to the United States may have started a thousand years before the discovery of America, the first record is dated 1492. The political, economic and religious motives that animated this diaspora are similar to those found in other countries (i.e. religious tolerance and land to settle and work). A very interesting fact is that at the beginning of the twentieth century there were more Irish in the United States than in Ireland itself.

Contrary to the views expressed by those authors who refer only to the Great Famine as an almost exclusive cause of the Irish diaspora, Byrne cites causes covering the periods before and after the famine. The first is characterised as an era of distancing and differentiation between Protestant and Catholic immigrants. The essay highlights the fact that even when Catholics belonged to a group who were slightly more successful than those who arrived after The Great Famine, they were nonetheless subjected to discrimination by the native inhabitants and as a consequence considered as 'others'. The author clearly shows how the post-famine immigrants who arrived in the United States gradually gained privileges within the host community, arising out of their involvement in demonstrations against waves of Chinese immigrants and their entry into the political arena. He also points to the processes of assimilation occurring at the turn of the twentieth century which would continue until after the Second World War.

The last decade of the twentieth century and the first of the twenty-first witnessed new

changes in relations between the two countries. The author offers a clear evaluation of the inversion of the traditional pattern of emigration, as Ireland became a land of immigrants rather than emigrants, and redefined its relationship with the United States, one now based on strong social, political and economic links. Finally, Byrne explains how, due to interaction in the fields of technological, chemical and telecommunications knowledge, the concepts of being Irish, being American and being Irish-American are reversed and redefined.

The explanations and ideas outlined in the introductory essays relating to the connection between Ireland and the Americas are expanded on in the various footnotes. This encyclopedia allows the reader a more in-depth treatment of topics than does a dictionary, and these can be supplemented by readings of articles, essays, etc., cited in the references that accompany each entry.

In his Introduction the series editor outlines the constraints of encyclopedias and of this one in particular, for relations between Ireland and America are constantly being redefined. We believe that rather than as a limitation this should be taken as an interesting motivation to continue the task that has been commenced. Indeed, far from it being merely a small 'step forward' to include relations with countries like Canada, Brazil and Argentina, and to a lesser extent with countries such as El Salvador and Colombia, the work offers an important contribution to the study of the Irish influence in other parts of the world and vice versa. We agree, however, that the entries for some other countries in the Caribbean and South America are scarce and sometimes non-existent; this is one of the possible areas of future development. This should not be taken as a negative criticism of the work but as a challenge and an invitation for researchers who may be conducting further studies in this field. Another issue that could be considered in the future would be that of gender, inasmuch as the work reviewed shows a certain imbalance between the relative contributions of women as a main

theme in Latin America and indeed generally the approach to gender is limited.

Noteworthy successful features include the entries relating to the relationship between Ireland and Argentina over the past three centuries, mostly written by Edmundo Murray, who effectively outlines the cultural scene, literature and Irish Argentina. There is mention of well known personalities in the field of literature in Argentina, from the nineteenth century writer William Bulfin, to Benito Lynch, Kathleen Nevin, Rodolfo Walsh and Maria Elena Walsh, just to mention perhaps the most well known. These authors are studied today in public schools throughout the country, and to these may be added other contemporaries such as John Joseph Delaney, whose latest publication dates from 1999. Murray's outline of the literary situation in Argentina is clear and precise and invites the reader to follow the trail of the authors cited, since they are given more space and more extensive and detailed information is provided in individual entries. For example, we note the article on Maria Elena Walsh, which we found very enlightening, comprehensive, and truthful. It highlights the free, rebellious and subtly confrontational spirit of the writer towards the powerful totalitarian regimes in Argentina of the sixties and seventies.

It also cites situations involving people in the political arena such as the reference to Ernesto "Che" Guevara, José Luis Baxter, and the armed conflict over the Falkland / Malvinas Islands. And other relevant entries are dedicated to the actions of Thomas Armstrong, a businessman and active economic advisor of the nineteenth century in Argentina, Kathleen Boyle, founder of St. Patrick's College in Buenos Aires, an educator who was famed for her innovative ideas in the field of foreign language education, and Father Anthony Dominic Fahy, whose mission was to create an English-speaking Catholic community in Argentina in the nineteenth century. All these references constitute only a sample of the information in this comprehensive work.

Finally, by calling seriously into question the rigid concepts of nation and region, and the

strict division between the disciplines, this encyclopedia, in our view, becomes a significant contribution to the field of interdisciplinary studies. This makes it all the more enriching and required reading for students, teachers and

researchers alike in different fields of knowledge within the area of Irish studies.

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Notes

1 Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Human Sciences, National University of La Pampa, Argentina. This review is dedicated to Doctor Laura Izarra of University of São Paulo, who introduced us to the study of Irish emigration to Argentina.

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Author's Reply

The editors accept this review and do not wish to comment further.

Jason King

