

## Kirja-arvosteluja – Book reviews

**J. Carey, K. Murray, and C. Ó Dochartaigh (eds.), *Sacred Histories: A Festschrift for Máire Herbert*. Dublin and Portland, OR: Four Courts Press. 2015. 450 pages. Price €49.50. ISBN 978-1-84682-564-4.**

To say that Professor Máire Herbert is a scholar of distinction, without whom modern Celtic Studies (particularly in the areas of hagiographical and literary studies) would be much the poorer, is as vast an understatement as could be imagined. If that were the only aspect of her life and career that had been impactful on an entire generation of scholars, that would have been enough, and yet as all who have had the pleasure of meeting Professor Herbert know, she is much more than her impressive, influential, and extensive list of publications might amply indicate. She is a person who is as affable as she is intelligent, humorous as she is humble, and disciplined as she is delightful. All of those who have been fortunate enough to have been her students—the present reviewer included—have been impacted by her insights, enthused with her level of engagement, and touched by her kindness and generosity. Speaking personally, the present reviewer would not be the scholar that I am now without her example and intervention, though the fault for my many flaws

is entirely my own. It is thus fitting that another handsomely-wrought *Festschrift* has been produced by Four Courts Press in her honor, and *Sacred Histories* is a shining example of this type of volume.

Three of Professor Herbert's University College Cork Department of Early and Medieval Irish colleagues—John Carey, Kevin Murray, and Caitríona Ó Dochartaigh—are the curators of this collection of thirty-two essays (seven in Irish, twenty-five in English), plus the Irish poem “Duine dár lochra” offered by Seán Hutton. The contributors span generations of scholars and colleagues, including several of her students that have gone on to their own distinguished careers, and range from across the span of Ireland, Britain, Europe, and North America.

One often expects that in an anthology of this sort, the depth and quality of the pieces might vary, with some being better than others. The only characteristic, however, that distinguishes these assembled pieces from one another is not quality (indeed, all contributions are excellent), but instead subject matter. In this sense, the volume reflects the diverse interests and involvements of its honorand, and one can say with little hyperbolae that there is something of utility and interest for potentially everyone involved with the various disciplines of Celtic Studies in this collection. The variety of subjects

upon which pieces have been written includes several on poetry, from Old Irish (“Keening in the Poems of Blathmac” by Alexandra Bergholm) to *fianaigheacht* (“The Shield of Fionn: The Poem *Uchán a sciath mo rígh* in Leabhar Ua Maine” by Joseph J. Flahive) to bardic (“St Patrick and Antaeus: Two Bardic Apologues” by Margo Griffin Wilson; “*Tús na heagna omhan Dé*: Penance and Retribution in a Poem by Aonghus Fionn Ó Dálaigh” by Emma Nic Cárthaigh) to twentieth-century Irish (“*An t-éitheach; is an fíor?...?*: A Note on Two Late Poems by Máire Mhac an tSaoi” by Patricia Coughlan) as well as studies on examples from other periods (e.g. “*Comhar na mBan*” by Pádraig A. Breatnach; “*Pé ri bheas i gcoróin’: Seán Caoch Ó Cearbhaill agus an Tiarna Talún*” by Pádraig de Brún; “*Véarsai ó Oirthear Chorcai ar an nGorta a Lean Sioc Mór an Gheimhridh*” by Breandán Ó Conchúir). An especially intriguing piece is that of Katharine Simms, “O’Friel’s Ghost,” which discusses magical verses from RIA MS C iv 2 (466) that might potentially be by the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century poet Cú Coigriche Ó Cléirigh, and also includes one of the few personal anecdotes related to the volume’s honorand involving the author’s long-standing friendship with Professor Herbert extending back to their time at University College Galway.

Many of Professor Herbert’s significant contributions to Celtic Studies have been well illustrated in her published work regarding the historical and interpretive study of medieval Irish literature. Medieval literature, thus, is

well represented in this collection with articles on gnomic traditions (“*Ceasta Fhíthil’: Buaine agus Ilghnéitheacht na Gaoise i Litríocht na Gaeilge*” by Pádraig Ó Macháin), ecclesiastical charters (“Observations on the Book of Durrow Memorandum” by Edel Bhreathnach), scribal practice (“Murchadh Ó Cuindlis and *Aided Muirchertaig Meic Erca*” by Clodagh Downey), Irish and Scottish history (“*Cethri Primchenéla Dáil Ríata* Revisited” by Dauvit Broun), and genealogy (“*Maol Mhuire agus a Shinsear*” by Gearóid Mac Eoin) each receiving attention, as does legal terminology (“An Early Irish Category of Swindler: the *Mindach Méith*” by Fergus Kelly) and even Old English vocabulary (“Maidenhood, Mourning, and Old English *Meowle*” by Lisi Oliver and Andrea Adolphe). The influence of and connections between Irish literatures and those of medieval Wales (“The Dating of *Branwen*: The ‘Irish Question’ Revisited” by Kevin Murray), the Old French “Breton lays” of Marie de France (“*Yonec* and *Tochmarc Becfhola*: Two Female *Echtraí*” by John Carey), and classical connections and influences upon Irish mythological figures (“Leprechauns and Luperci, Aldhelm and Augustine” by Patrick Sims-Williams) and likewise Irish usage of classical analogues (“The Hectors of Ireland and the Western World” by Máire Ní Mhaonaigh) also have pieces dedicated to them. Further comment on two of these will be provided below.

An especially intriguing piece is that by Kay Muhr, “The *Paruchia* of St Lúrach of Uí Thuirtre,” which examines

placenames and actual cultic remains in physical locations in relation to the submerged cult of St. Lúrach (and various figures potentially derived from him) in several locales around the counties of Ulster. An exemplary study and edition (with full critical apparatus) of a short text is provided by Elizabeth Boyle and Liam Breatnach in “*Senchas Gall Átha Cliath: Aspects of the Cult of St Patrick in the Twelfth Century.*” Thomas M. Charles-Edwards’ piece, “*Táin bó Cúailnge, Hagiography and History,*” is also an extremely important one for those who are interested in narrowing down the date of composition for the great Old Irish prosimetric epic of the Ulster Cycle, to the point of this essay being a necessity for anyone considering this question in the future. These, and many others, will be estimated well worth the quite reasonable “price of admission” for this volume.

Given the importance of Professor Herbert’s monumental works on the study of ecclesiastical topics—including hagiography, apocrypha, and the history of Christianity in Ireland—several pieces address these topics as well in a diversity of fashions (in addition to this range of subjects being important to several pieces previously mentioned). Apocrypha’s importance for the early Irish church is discussed in Máirtín Mac Conmara’s “*De Initiis: Apacrafa, an Bíobla agus Léann Luath-eaglais na hÉireann.*” Old Irish lexicography in relation to church bells is examined in Próinséas Ní Chatháin’s “The Bells of the Saints.” Hagiography and hagiology—in relation to both native Irish saints as well

as Irish instances of or influences upon non-Irish saints—receives a great deal of attention in the pieces by Micheal Mac Craith (“*Na Taoisigh Ultacha agus an Veronica*”), Tomás Ó Cathasaigh (“On the Genealogical Preamble to *Vita Sancti Declani*”), Caitriona Ó Dochartaigh (“A Cult of Saint Thecla in Early Medieval Ireland?”), and Pádraigh Ó Riain (“Saint Cataldo of Taranto: The Irish Element in the Life of an Italian Saint”). In consideration of Professor Herbert’s superlatively important book *Iona, Kells, and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (1988; 1996)—a volume which was the present reviewer’s own first introduction to Máire Herbert’s erudition on this as well as so many other subjects—it is not surprising that the matter of Columban hagiography and the monastic *familia* of Colum Cille is also exhibited by several contributions already mentioned, as well as quite specifically in those pieces by Brian Lambkin (“Colum Cille and the *Lorg Bengánach: Ritual Migration from Derry*”), Jennifer O’Reilly (“Columba at Clonmacnoise”), and Katja Ritari (“Librán as Monastic Archetype”).

Positive commentary could be multiplied about every piece in this collection, while also allowing for the possibility of fruitful divergences of opinion as fodder for many further studies in the future. The present reviewer wishes to emphasize the former rather than the latter in the brief observations on two of the pieces that follow here.

John Carey’s piece, “*Yonec and Tochmarc Becfhola: Two Female*

*Echtraí*,” takes an interesting approach to comparing Marie de France’s *lai* and this under-appreciated Irish tale in consideration of Professor Herbert’s work on gender in various published works. Rather than taking the “sources and analogues” approach, as has so often been done (and overdone) in the past in relation to Old French (as well as other medieval) and Irish literatures, Carey’s piece instead examines thematic resonances between episodes in these two works. More of these sorts of studies would be useful to explore in the future, not only for their own sake but also—as Professor Herbert’s work has repeatedly demonstrated—to see what such thematic resonances might have meant or reflected as *causa scribendi* in their own historical contexts. It is interesting to put this piece in dialogue with a recent article by a younger Celticist and Old French specialist, Matthieu Boyd, “The Ring, the Sword, the Fancy Dress, and the Posthumous Child: Background to the Element of Heroic Biography in Marie de France’s *Yonec*” (*Romance Quarterly* 55.3 [Summer 2008], pp. 205–230), as the Celtic dimensions of so much medieval literature remains unacknowledged and unappreciated by the wider range of scholars specializing in these other literatures. This is certainly a large theme, and one too extensive to detail further in the present context, but it is also one that can begin to be usefully addressed by this and other studies presented in this volume.

Patrick Sims-Williams’ “Leprechauns and Luperci, Aldhelm and Augustine”

illustrates a fascinating set of propositions extending from a 2012 article by Jacopo Benigni on the etymological connections between leprechauns and the *Luperci* sodality in ancient Rome, including their aquatic associations and their connection to (at least in Roman learned tradition) the werewolf cults of Arcadia in Greece, particularly as reflected in Augustine’s supremely influential *De Civitate Dei*. Alas, the present reviewer has not been able to see Benigni’s article yet, but wonders if an important piece of this puzzle in favor of such a connection is not to be found in medieval Irish accounts of the Túatha Dé’s characteristics not only including lycanthropy but also the ability to travel beneath the sea, as reflected in various texts (see the present author’s *Werewolves, Magical Hounds, and Dog-Headed Men in Celtic Literature* [Lewiston, NY, Lampeter, and Queenstown: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010], pp. 238–240, 248–249), but also the account from Ovid and others that the flood sent by Zeus and which only Deukalion and Pyrrha escaped occurred just after Lykaon, the Arcadian king and cannibal who offended Zeus, was turned into a wolf for his transgressions (*ibid.*, pp. 144–147).

The quality of this *Festschrift* is inestimable, and the potential utility of the studies offered therein will stimulate extended discussions into future decades of the disciplines of Celtic Studies. The ongoing work of Celtic Studies scholarship attempts to do nothing less than this, and to provide further avenues for consideration rather

than to definitively pronounce upon any particular subject once-and-for-all. It is therefore entirely appropriate that the articles offered as chapters in this tome in honor of Professor Herbert will perform that function, just as Professor Herbert's own work has done for all of her students and colleagues, and will continue to do *in saecula saeculorum*.

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**S. Rowbotham.** *Rebel Crossings. New Women, Free Lovers, and Radicals in Britain and America.* London, New York: Verso. 2016. 502 pages. Price £25, \$34.95. ISBN 978-1-7847-8588-8.

In her latest book, well-known historian of feminism and radicalism Sheila Rowbotham focuses on the physical and metaphorical journey of six radicals, five of whom crossed the Atlantic searching for liberty, equality, and themselves. In changing their personal lives these rebels attempted to change society. Through case studies their stories are conceptualized as both individual and group experiences and divided into three parts: Hopes, Quests, and Echoes. Helena Born (1860–1901), Miriam Daniell (1861–94), Robert Allan Nicol (1868–1956), William Bailie (1866–1957) and Gertrude Dix (1867–1950) emigrated from Britain to the United States. The sixth person was

American-born Helen Tufts (1874–1962), who was influenced by Helena Born and her views on radicalism, and American writers Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau.

None of the rebels, as named by Rowbotham, were particularly well-known. Historians of socialism and anarchism referred occasionally to Helena, Miriam, Robert, and William. Gertrude Dix, as the author of two novels *The Girl from the Farm* (1896) and *The Image Breakers* (1900), was appreciated as a 'new woman' writer and Helen Tufts was known in the history of women and the American right by a statement given in 1928. Helen, who became Helen Tufts Bailie, was a member of an organization called the Daughters of the American Revolution and was excluded from it after revealing a blacklist, including liberals and leftists. Apart from this incident all six were mainly part of networks, outside the mainstream movements. Helena Born, originally from a wealthy family living in Devon, emigrated from Bristol to the United States in 1890. In Bristol, during the late 1880s Helena established a close relationship with Miriam Daniell, became a socialist, a supporter of strikers and settled in the slums. Helena's political radicalism developed alongside a feeling of crushed individuality, experienced by her as a middle-class woman. In her view, society, its worn out customs and conventions restricted individuals. In America Helena lived on a ranch in California, became a member of the Boston Walt Whitman Fellowship and continued with anarchism. One

of Helena's inspirations was Edward Carpenter, who challenged gender divisions and searched for the aesthetics of simple life, stone floors, sandals, and vegetarian food.

Miriam Daniell, originally from a shop-keeper's family in Bristol, was in turn an artist, a poet and a socialist. Her story became intertwined with that of Robert Allan Nicol, whom she met during visits in Edinburgh before divorcing her husband Edward Tuckett Daniell, after an unhappy marriage. In 1889 Robert left Scotland and moved with her to Bristol. Robert started studying medicine at Edinburgh University but never graduated from it – something he later regretted. In Edinburgh of that time the debates for Home Rule in Ireland had short-lived parallels in Scotland, where interest in Celtic culture was growing, and although not mentioned in the book, in Norse heritage as well. Trade unions were active and women were campaigning for suffrage, higher education, housing reform and even birth control. In the context of 1889 also books such as *The Evolution of Sex* appeared and these were empowering for those who had abandoned Christianity but experienced unexplainable guilt. Miriam and Robert published a pamphlet *The Truth about the Chocolate Factories or Modern White Slavery, its Cause and Cure* challenged ideas of working men, who had the right to “live, breathe and act like men” to fulfill their duties to God and Humanity (Rowbotham 2016, 55). Even the title was a provocation and echoed Annie Besant's famous article about the match women, ‘White Slavery in

London’, published in her magazine *The Link* in 1888. In America Miriam Daniell wrote articles, poems, and allegorical stories for Benjamin Tucker's journal *Liberty*. Robert Allan Nicol was, similarly to Miriam, inspired by anarchism and alternative forms of spirituality.

American-born Helen Tufts never knew Miriam and Robert: her contact with them on a spiritual level was enabled by her connection and friendship with Helena Born. She kept an extensive diary and was self-consciously documenting, editing, and gathering information since 1886 until finally typing it in the 1950s. For the five rebels from Britain the outcomes of emigration were somewhat different, but in thinking about society they were similar. Helena Born was a supporter of left politics in which individual expression was important. William's family, the Bailies were a Northern Irish Presbyterian farming family with Scottish roots. As a worker William was earning enough to buy second-hand books and cheap tickets to the theatre. In Northern Ireland, politics and religion were debated by his fellow workers and both Catholics and Protestants. His father had resigned from the Orangemen's Lodge because he disliked sectarianism. The visit of Henry George, the American author of *Progress and Poverty* (1879) stimulated William's interest in radical ideas. Just before leaving Belfast for Scotland he read *Art and Socialism* by William Morris. In America, like Miriam and Robert, William also joined individualist anarchist circles around *Liberty*. The all-consuming interest of Gertrude Dix's

parents was the Anglican church and leaving home and turning her back on a close-knit family was relatively unusual for young women at the time. Raised in a religious home, Gertrude later struggled to explain to her children her religious upbringing. After emigrating she became famous as an avantgarde writer in both the United States and Britain. All six were combining their personal development with societal involvement, especially in socialism and anarchism. As the two wings of radicalism diverged towards the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century for later radicals it was becoming difficult to combine them.

Author's approach to the six radicals or rebels as a group is unusual: if regarded as a group, their migration included Bristol, Dunfermline, Edinburgh, Belfast, Manchester, London, Massachusetts, and California. Obviously, there were many connections and circumstances where their paths crossed, but there was also a lack of connection or association. As evidence was often scarce, the historian was inspired to create new connections not only between the deeds of the individuals, but also between the relations and emotions they might have experienced. From being less-known in history writing they received personal and social biographies and became an interacting group, as a reality and as a construction.

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