

The Guise of Irishness: Irish Ethnographic and Folkloric Paintings from a European Perspective, 1880–1930

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Abstract

Late 19th and early 20th-century Irish painting has often been interpreted against the background of the Gaelic Revival and the cultural nationalism flourishing at that time. Though this framework of interpretation is indisputably relevant, the influence of European trends on this artistic output should not be underestimated: contacts were numerous between Irish painters and their European counterparts. Young Irish painters were often trained abroad so that their art bears the double imprint of French ethnographic painting and the Northern landscape or genre scene. The development of folklore studies, ethnography, and regionalism throughout Europe largely shaped the interest in the West of Ireland which in turn fuelled nationalism. National iconography, associated with the so-called Irish School of Painting, was born out of a European-wide trend. Naturalist depictions of folklore, particularly regional costumes, abound in many European artworks. Ethnographic paintings in Ireland should therefore not be considered solely from an Irish perspective.

Keywords: Ireland – 19th – 20th – Europe – ethnographic painting – cultural nationalism – regionalism – costume – artistic education

Résumé

La peinture irlandaise de la fin du 19e et du début du 20e siècles a fréquemment été interprétée dans le cadre du renouveau celtique et du nationalisme culturel qui marquent cette époque. Bien que cette perspective d'interprétation soit indéniablement juste, l'influence des mouvements européens sur cette production artistique ne doit pas être mésestimée. Les contacts entre les peintres irlandais et leurs homologues Européens étaient en effet nombreux. Les jeunes artistes irlandais allaient se former à l'étranger et prenaient la peinture ethnographique française et les paysages ou scènes de genre des Écoles du Nord pour modèles. De plus, le développement de l'ethnographie et du régionalisme dans toute l'Europe explique

l'intérêt pour l'Ouest de l'Irlande qui alimentera le nationalisme. L'iconographie nationale, associée à ce qui est parfois appelé l'École Irlandaise, naît donc d'un courant européen. Les représentations naturalistes du folklore et la représentation des costumes régionaux abondent en effet dans l'œuvre de nombreux artistes européens. La peinture ethnographique qui s'épanouit en Irlande doit donc être comprise dans une perspective internationale.

Mots-clés : Irlande – Europe – 19e – 20e – peinture ethnographique – nationalisme culturel – régionalisme – costume – formation artistique

The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century witnessed both the development of political and cultural nationalism in Ireland and other European countries, as well as the emergence of ethnography (Ó Giolláin). From the 1850s onwards, new scientific and artistic representations of the peoples of the earth were widely circulated and exhibited.¹ Throughout Europe, there was a widespread interest in rural areas and traditions, as well as in ethnographic painting. Ireland was not immune to this trend; some painters were eager to “rediscover and reclaim distinctly Irish subjects” (Steward 1999: 18). As a matter of fact, “literary and visual artists were attracted to the West of Ireland in their search for a new means or language to express a positively empowered cultural Irish identity in art” (Martin, 2003: 31). The Irish portraits or genre scenes from that period have regularly been analysed from the vantage point of cultural nationalism. Art historian Marie Bourke argues that

since the late nineteenth century artists had become increasingly attracted by the landscape and lifestyle of the West of Ireland because they felt it reflected a relatively unchanged pattern of life linked to an ancient Celtic era. Artists discovered that by using imagery associated with the West in a new and inventive manner, they were able to develop a body of work that looked distinctively Irish (Bourke: 2000).

Paintings by Irish artists Aloysius O’Kelly (1853–1936), Walter Osborne (1859–1903), Harry Jones Thaddeus (1859–1929), Paul Henry (1877–1958), Seán Keating (1889–1977), as well as by the English painter Charles Lamb (1893–1964) or other, less-known painters with a taste for the West of Ireland² do partake of the Gaelic revival and cultural nationalism (Steward, 1999; Dalsimer, 1993). Though works by these artists may be either academic or influenced by impressionism and post-impressionism, their subject-matter emphasizes Irish folklore and local customs.

Irish art history has long emphasized Irishness and separatedness in an effort to enhance national visual culture and establish the specificity of an Irish school of painting. The painters previously mentioned were indisputably committed to Irish nationalism. The connections between the rural values promoted by Irish nationalists and the artistic depiction of the West have been widely evidenced (Kennedy, 2003; Murray, 2013; Bhreathnach-Lynch, 2007; Cusack, 2001). Julian

¹ 19th-century visual culture extensively disseminated images of exotic populations. Fairground attractions, colonial exhibitions, postcards, commercial or scientific prints, photographs, paintings and the decorative arts documented or theatrically enhanced the diversity of physical features, customs and costumes. The proliferation of such representations accounts for the large appeal that exoticism exercised upon the population. For a wider perspective on the visual representation of otherness, see Vanessa Alayrac and Claire Dubois, Pascale Blanchard et al., Elizabeth Edwards, and Noémie Etienne.

² For example Augustus Nicholas Burke (1838–1891), Nathaniel Hill (1861–1934), Harry Scully (1860–1935), or Lilian Lucy Davidson (1893–1954).

Campbell’s “Irish artists in France and Belgium 1850–1914”, which focuses on the Impressionists, is an exception (Campbell, 1984) in that it stresses continental influences.

The Irish artworks produced at the turn of the century were indeed markedly shaped by European art and culture: many Irish artists came into contact with European masters in London, Antwerp, or Paris, where art schools of international repute welcomed foreign students; they travelled to continental Europe or Oriental countries offering exotic scenes. Besides, they could see continental art at home. Sir Hugh Lane, who exhibited his collection of modern European paintings in Dublin in 1904, was satisfied that “the Irish school could only emerge in rapport with the central thrust of European painting” (Dawson, 1993: 27–30). These opportunities for artistic exchanges suggest that a national, or nationalist, reading of Irish artistic outputs from that period is restrictive and that a larger perspective must be adopted.

Many canvasses, more particularly ethnographic ones, should be seen as a synthesis between Irish and European cultures. As a matter of fact, artistic movements such as primitivism, or exoticism, which were well known to Irish painters, played a key role in the depiction of the Irish landscape and people. The interest displayed by some artists in everything rural, traditional, and indigenous as a bulwark against colonial culture must also be read in the light of a European interest in folklore and ethnography. Throughout Europe, the interest in the people and its authentic voice which was initiated in the 19th century had political ramifications as folklore, which burgeoned as a cross-European scientific curiosity with a romantic bent, was tied to discourses on nationhood and nationalist claims (Baycroft and Hopkins, 2012: 2–3). In this paper, we intend to show that the highly detailed portrayal of folk and traditional costumes as identity-markers characterizes many European portraits from the period under scrutiny. The realistic depiction of the local scenes and costumes that the painters observed in the West of Ireland owes much to European cultural and artistic genres or trends, whether it be the Northern genre scene or the ethnographic painting which became fashionable from Northern Europe to Spain. This tentative overview of Irish art in a European perspective will hopefully open up new horizons for interpretation. It is premised on a comparative methodology which is gaining new ground in art history (Dekoninck and Delforenne, 2000: 281–300).

Irish artists abroad: contacts and influences

In the late 19th century, the artists teaching at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art (DMSA) or at the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA) were well-travelled painters or sculptors eager to sensitize their students to European modernism. From 1877 onwards, after the state took over the DMSA, “Irish painting gradually came under the influence of continental art” (Turpin, 1997: 188). Other Irish institutions promoted European connections: from the 1920s to the mid-40s, the Dublin Painters’ Society aimed at encouraging artists whose art reflected contemporary world movements (Cahill, 1999: 36) and at transmitting a Parisian heritage. 19th-century Irish artists first learned their trade in Ireland, where art schools were comparatively provincial and under-funded (Rooney, 2003: 25), before they perfected their training in European capitals—London, Paris, Antwerp—famous for their artistic traditions or innovations. London was a stepping-stone to other European capitals (Rooney, 2003: 40). The artists who won the Royal Dublin Society Taylor Art Prize were able to travel and study abroad (Bourke and Edmondson, 2013: 8). Once they had completed their artistic education, Irish artists sojourned abroad or joined artistic colonies in Cornwall, Brittany, Etaples, or The Hague for instance in order to find new sources of inspiration. Rural places and the seaside offered them a direct experience of otherness while the presence of mentors in these remote villages legitimated their choices of subject matter.

The Dutch and Flemish schools of painting had exerted a tremendous influence in Europe since the 18th century. British art collections featured a high number of Dutch paintings which were cheaper than Italian or French works (Meadows, 1988: 138) and reproductions as well as engravings of Netherlandish art were available³ (Yeazell, 2009: 8). The Dutch genre scene therefore exerted a pervasive influence so that the interest in domestic scenes and household activities, the precise transcription of details of furniture and dress, the attention to local particularities, and the warm brown atmosphere that Irish works show must be perceived as inspired from the Northern schools. Besides Antwerp had long been a magnet for European art students.

James Brenan (1837–1907), who was trained in Dublin and London, spent many years in England before he started teaching at the Crawford School of Art, Cork, from 1860 to 1889, and at the DMSA, where he was appointed headmaster in 1889. He was “well-versed in international developments in the art world” (Cullen, 2012: 97) and his interior scenes bear the influence of Dutch realism. *Patchwork* (1891,

³ As the publication of the 9 volumes by John Smith suggests: *Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*, 1829–1842. The catalogue became a landmark in connoisseurship and a bible for art dealers and collectors.

Crawford Art Gallery⁴), portraying an old woman in a grim poorly-furnished cottage mending clothes by the fireside, is reminiscent of Dutch paintings such as Jozef Israëls’ interior scenes⁵. Israëls, who had studied at the Académie des Beaux Arts in Paris from 1845 to 1847 and whose paintings of fishing villages near Haarlem were very popular in London, painted scenes in many respects comparable to those by Brenan. The two painters use warm, Rembrandt-like chiaroscuros which mitigate the humbleness of rural life. Also influenced by the Scotsman David Wilkie and William Mulready, Brenan excelled in genre scenes, a style which inspired many young Irish artists, among whom his pupils William Orpen, Harry Jones Thaddeus, and Aloysius O’Kelly. Brenan’s genre paintings were widely exhibited at the RHA, which evidences the acceptability of contemporary rural scenes in public exhibitions at the time (Cullen, 2012: 97). In the 1890s, in Ireland as in other European countries, “painting folkloric themes for a dominantly bourgeois public, instead of creating increasingly out-of-date historical paintings became a good option”, Eric Storm observes (Van Stantvoort *et al.*, 2008: 162). Art from Northern Europe had long been an influence: in the 1850s, Frederic William Burton (1816–1900), who stayed in Germany, painted genre scenes in the West of Ireland in the manner of the Northern masters and Brenan was not the only Irish painter to display a Dutch bent. Having lived in the Netherlands for two years, Augustus Burke is likely to have transmitted his knowledge of Flemish art to younger Irish artists.

Helen Mabel Trevor (1831–1900) equally painted scenes influenced the Dutch realists. Her *An Interior of a Breton Cottage* (1892, NGI⁶), which betrays her sensitivity to misery, is imbued with Dutch realism. Walter Osborne, Richard Moynan (1856–1906), Roderic O’Conor (1860–1940), and Hugh Charde (1858–1946) studied under Charles Verlat⁷ at the Antwerp Academy, which, in the early 1880s, encouraged students to work from the costumed model rather than concentrate on the nude.

Throughout the 19th century, France exerted a growing influence on Irish art students for whom studying abroad was an indispensable experience. Most Irish artists studied at the DMSA and, subsequently at the RHA, the two schools offering

⁴ See the Crawford Gallery’s website:

http://www.crawfordartgallery.ie/pages/paintings/Soul_Beggars_19_no_menu.html (accessed 15 May 2015).

⁵ See *The Frugal Meal* (1876, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow), *An Unhappy Woman* (c. 1870, Newport Museum and Art Gallery) or *Mending the Nets* (c. 1870, private collection). On Israëls’ genre paintings, see Sorin Heller, “The Genre Fisherman Scenes – Realist Aspects”, in Heller, 2004.

⁶ NGI online collection:

<http://onlinecollection.nationalgallery.ie/view/objects/asitem/Objects@8941/o?t:state:flow=4be9c31e-84d1-462b-991c-b128586f8865> (accessed 15 May 2015).

⁷ Charles Verlat (1824–90), an eclectic Belgian painter and Orientalist who had been trained in Paris and had travelled to Egypt and Palestine, had an interest in local details and costumes.

complementary courses. Offering a freer atmosphere than its rival, and marked by a strong Breton influence in the 1880s, the RHA counted among its teachers Augustus Burke and Walter Osborne, both of whom had travelled to Brittany (Sheeney, 1883: 127–128). Burke had been one of the first Irish painters to reside there; he exhibited his Breton scenes at the RHA between 1876 and 1878. After his stay in Antwerp, Osborne briefly settled in Brittany before travelling to Spain, visiting Madrid and Toledo in 1895 (O’Byrne, 2008: 64). Through his teachings at the RHA in the 1890s and through the works he exhibited there from 1886 to 1903, he sensitized his Irish pupils to continental modern painting. Stimulated by the works of their much-travelled elders and the paintings exhibited at the academy, many art students went to France. Some of them embraced the realism of academism or naturalism, while others experimented with the impressionist and post-impressionist techniques.

Aloysius O’Kelly was admitted to the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1874. In the French capital, he studied under Jean-Léon Gérôme and joined the studio of Joseph-Florentin-Léon Bonnat. Gérôme was a demanding master whose academic realism and romantic orientalism tremendously affected the style of his pupils, among whom was O’Kelly (O’Sullivan, 2010: 19–21)⁸. The latter combined Gérôme’s detailed observation of costumes and Bonnat’s more naturalistic style, lively brushstrokes, and soft light effects. In 1876, like many young painters, O’Kelly stayed in Pont-Aven, Brittany, where, endorsing peasant realism, he painted his *Interior of a Church in Brittany* (c. 1879, NGI). When O’Kelly was in Paris, the city, home to the Impressionists, counted several Irish nationalists: “to be Irish, a radical, and an artist opened many doors in Paris” (O’Sullivan, 2010: 16)⁹. O’Kelly’s brother, James, who had spent some time in the French capital, was acquainted with Irish writers and artists. Among them was George Moore, who had befriended Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, and Edgar Degas as well as Emile Zola¹⁰. Like Moore, Harry Jones Thaddeus moved to Paris around 1880, where he studied at the Rodolphe Julian Academy, which was less selective than the Beaux-Arts. Students from many different countries enrolled at Julian’s (Rooney, 2003: 53), where the teachings were fairly academic and focused on drawing. Thaddeus also went to Pont-Aven, where Paul Sérusier, Emile Bernard, and Paul Gauguin were sojourning, and visited Cannes. Thaddeus, Burke, and O’Kelly followed the naturalism of Jules Bastien-Lepage, William Bouguereau, Léon Bonnat, and Jules Breton rather than

8 Works such as *Arnaut of Cairo* (1871, private collection), *Old Clothing Merchant in Cairo* (1866) or portrait of Bashi-Bazouks painted by Gérôme in the 1860s and 1870s influenced Aloysius O’Kelly’s orientalist paintings.

9 France was then considered the friend of Ireland and the nationalist cause was supported in the French press (O’Sullivan, 2010: 48).

10 Moore had been admitted to the École des Beaux-Arts in 1873 before he turned to literature.

more modern styles such as the cloisonnism¹¹. Irish painters experimented with various techniques among which naturalism.

At that time, Brittany attracted painters from France, America, Britain, and Northern countries, among which Sweden. Artists from different origins congregated in artistic colonies and came into contact. The Irish artists staying there were acquainted with British painter Stanhope Forbes, who had been trained in Brussels and Paris –in the atelier of Bonnat and at the École des Beaux-Arts. As to Thaddeus, who travelled extensively throughout his career, he was close to American painter Edward Simmons.

Thaddeus’ *Wounded Poacher* (1880–81, NGI) which harps on an Irish subject (for a detailed analysis see Rooney, 2003: 57–63), can be likened to peasant scenes by Jean-François Millet and Jules Breton. Courbet’s realism finds an echo in the works of Breton painter Victor Roussin (1812–1907) as well as in many Irish paintings, whether in works by Augustus Burke or in large compositions by Richard Moynan. The latter had studied in Antwerp before moving to Paris in 1885 to join the Académie Julian. The same luminosity bathes the scenes painted by Roussin, Moynan, and Burke. Though nothing evidences friendship between the Quimperlé-based artist Victor Roussin and Burke, the latter may have seen works by the French painter. Both shared an interest in children and village life. Besides, their works suggest a shared sensitivity to social realities.

Aloysius O’Kelly spent time in Pont-Aven, Concarneau, and Douarnenez, where Courbet and William Bouguereau, one of his masters, had spent some time¹². As Niamh O’Sullivan writes, “it was in Brittany that O’Kelly learned to reconcile a range of styles derived both from traditional and avant-garde art, in effect blending academic, realist, and plein-air elements into an innovative mode of rural naturalism” (2010:1). O’Kelly’s *Portrait of a Young Breton Girl* (undated, private collection) bears witness to the influence of Bonnat’s pleinairism and impressionism. The Irish painter was influenced by French academic paintings in the manner of Gérôme as well as by the open-air canvases of Lepage. As O’Sullivan argues “If Gérôme had come to Connemara, he could conceivably have painted O’Kelly’s *Seaweed Gatherers*”, (2010: 18–19).

11 Cloisonnist artists advocated the use of flat surfaces of plain colours separated by thick black outlines. Emile Bernard and Paul Gauguin are its most famous proponents. Gauguin, who stayed in Pont-Aven in the late 1880s, does not seem to have had an influence on Irish artists. Roderic O’Conor, who befriended Gauguin, is an exception.

12 The influence of Courbet is particularly visible in *Head of a Breton, Finistère*, exh. RHA 1885.

The influence of French impressionism on Irish artists has been widely documented¹³. Among the Irish artists trained in France in the late 19th century was Roderic O'Connor (1860–1940), who studied in Antwerp and Paris under Carolus Duran. O'Connor joined the artistic colony of Grez-sur-Loing and befriended Gauguin. Although he was familiar with the Parisian avant-gardes, he opted for an impressionist technique like Katherine MacCausland (1859–1928) and Frank O'Meara (1853–1888) who also stayed in Grez.

Though the Irish painters staying abroad were diversely affected by the styles and techniques of foreign artists, most of them were fascinated with regional particularities and the picturesqueness of costumes and vernacular architecture. When they visited the West of Ireland, many painters did so with fond memories of the time they had spent in Brittany, finding common cultural features in places equally immemorial and primitive¹⁴. The painters were attracted by the geographical and historical exoticism of these remote places. In fact, the Brittany that painters represented no longer existed as the region underwent modernization (O'Sullivan, 2010: 16). Similarly, the West of Ireland that some painters discovered in the 1930s was not as under-developed as some depictions suggest (Morisson, 2015: 125). Their experiences in Brittany incited Irish painters to view the West of Ireland with new eyes and fuelled their curiosity for local crafts and traditions. This is true of costumes and colours: interestingly, the Breton women portrayed by O'Kelly (in *An Interior Brittany*, 1853, for example) are dressed in red petticoats very much like those worn by Irish women in the West though the garment can also be found in the British Isles and in other European regions.

Continental connections remained numerous and crucial in the early 20th century. William Orpen (1878–1931) was trained at the Slade School in London. Back in Ireland, he revolutionized the teaching of the DMSA by emphasizing life-drawing rather than drawing from the antique and by devoting more importance to painting (Turpin, 1997: 190). Other Irish painters, such as Harry Scully, Lilian Lucy Davidson, or William Scott, perfected their training on the continent before settling in Ireland¹⁵. Scully's rural scenes betray the influence of Jean-François Millet and Jozef Israël while Davidson, like Grace Henry, painted Irish genre scenes in a post-impressionist style.

¹³ See Campbell, Goarzin, Leach, Puget.

¹⁴ The word 'primitive' is used in ethnographic accounts of the West of Ireland, even though not all texts endorsed the idea of a hierarchy among races. See Morisson, 2015.

¹⁵ Harry Scully, who first studied art in his native Cork, pursued his artistic training in London and Newlyn before he joined the artistic colony of Etaples in France. He travelled to Brittany, Normandy and Holland before he set up his studio in Cork. His works were exhibited at the RHA from 1893 to 1911. Lilian Lucy Davidson travelled to Cornwall and Sussex as well as to France, Belgium, and Switzerland (Cahill, 1999: 35). William Scott (1913–1989) stayed in Pont-Aven in 1938 and 1946.

Spain also attracted Irish artists. Orpen, who was familiar with modern French paintings, travelled to Madrid with Sir Hugh Lane in 1904, one year before he toured the West of Ireland. Patrick J. Tuohy (1894–1930) also spent time in Madrid and studied the Spanish master in the Prado. Seán Keating was also affected by Spanish culture. First trained in Limerick and Dublin, he is celebrated as “the painter who, more than anyone else, gave visual expression to Irish nationalism” (Dawson, 1993: 102) and described as the “brooding man of the West, upon whom the modern Ireland would be built” (McConkey, 1998: 33). In a richly-documented reinterpretation of Keating's career, Eimar O'Connor draws the portrait of an artist devoted to the nation and committed to the new Republic (2013: 14), but overlooks the influence of international artistic trends: foreign artists are hardly or very briefly mentioned (O'Connor, 2013: 48). Now, Keating was very interested in Spanish culture and politics and regularly travelled abroad. His fascination for Spanish folklore and arts is evidenced in several works, among which *El Prestigadore Despojade*, a portrait of Don Quixote (1918, Crawford Art Gallery). His wife, May Keating, had been educated in Spain and, like her husband, supported the socialist republicans during the Spanish Civil War. One may equally connect these Spanish canvases to those of Edouard Manet and William Orpen, Keating's mentor. Manet, whom Orpen admired as his *Homage to Manet* (1909, Manchester City Art Gallery) demonstrates, painted several Spanish scenes and visited Spain in 1865, two years after the completion of these canvases¹⁶. While Orpen was under the spell of Manet's use of black, Keating seems to have been more sensitive to the reds which he uses extensively¹⁷. Though the costumes in Keating's Spain-inspired paintings are more detailed than Manet's, showing much documentary precision, they betray the two painters' taste for fabric, textures, and patterns.

The multiplicity of direct contacts between Irish artists and their European counterparts shows that their works must be interpreted in a European perspective. Besides the works annually displayed at the RHA, the European paintings exhibited in Irish museums or galleries, or reproduced in illustrated or art magazines undeniably inspired Irish artists. The Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery acquired some works by Monet and Manet in 1905 (McConkey, 1998: 31) which complemented Sir Hugh Lane's collection of continental art; early 20th-century painters could not be ignorant of such works. The contacts which have been highlighted above account for the interest Irish artists showed in folklore and ethnography as the visual culture that thrived in Europe at the time was largely underpinned by primitivism and exoticism.

¹⁶ *Mademoiselle V. . . in the Costume of an Espada* (1862, Metropolitan Museum of Art), *Lola Valencia* (1862, Musée d'Orsay), or *Portrait of a Young Spanish Man in the Costume of a Majo* (1863, Metropolitan Museum of Art) were painted two years before Manet visited Spain, in 1865. The painter owned a trunk of Spanish costumes that he used in these portraits.

¹⁷ Charles Lamb equally admired Manet and the influence of the French master surfaces in his *Dancing at Northern Crossroad* (1920).

Ethnographic realism and nationalist revivalism: a European perspective

In a monograph devoted to Aloysius O’Kelly, Niamh O’Sullivan argues that O’Kelly’s “eclecticism was place-specific – naturalist in France, realist in Ireland, and Orientalist in North–Africa” (2010: 2). However, as Mickaël Vottero claims, while late 19th-century painting was extraordinarily eclectic, with painters displaying extreme stylistic variety, the subject matter favoured by the artists were much less varied (2002: 16). This applies to Irish artists who unreservedly adopted the genre scene, a topic which mediated their perception of different geographical areas. The development of the genre scene in the late 19th century followed the taste for picturesqueness, primitivism, and exoticism. The tradition of picturesque voyages and the development of ethnography through the 19th century had spurred artists to document, record, and depict the customs and crafts of distant rural populations. The cultural retrieval projects and revivals, which in Ireland developed at the time of the Ordnance Survey and the antiquarian endeavours of George Petrie and John O’Donovan¹⁸, emerged on an international scale. Irish folklore collecting was modelled on European models not in the first place as a national, or nationalist, enterprise: across Europe, popular culture became the basis out of which the people could be defined, differentiated, and classified. Ethnographic portraits circulated widely in numerous illustrated publications. The interest in folklore and the scientific or pseudo-scientific collecting endeavours incited artists to depict objects and costumes in a realistic way. This ethnographic drive ran parallel to a shift towards realism, as well as to a rediscovery of rural communities at a time when industrialization was perceived negatively (Ó Giolláin, 2000: 11–12, 29, 77). These trends were combined in Orientalist painting too. It is worth noticing that many artists painted ethnographic portraits or genre scenes inspired by European country-life before turning their gazes to more distant countries. In Ireland, the rediscovery of the Western Counties partakes of the Gaelic revival as well as of this European trend. For example, John Millington Synge’s revivalist account of the Aran Islands is underpinned by European primitivism (Veerandra, 2007; Carville, 2007; Morisson, 2015). In the same way, the images of the West of Ireland which were painted by Davidson, Keating, Lamb, or Henry, are indebted to European ethnography and ethnographic painting.

Ethnographic painting had come to fame in Paris and at the Académie des Beaux-Arts, thanks to Théodore Valerio who had travelled to Eastern Europe (Hungary and Slavic countries) and produced ethnographic drawings. Valerio’s works were meant to document “pure” populations who supposedly were uncontaminated by

18 See O’Halloran, C., “Negotiating Progress and Degeneracy: Irish Antiquaries and the Discovery of the ‘Folk’, 1770–1844”, in Baycroft and Hopkins, 2012, pp. 193–206.

migrations and contacts and who displayed distinctive cultures and traits. One of the first artists noticed for his ethnographic works was Jean-Léon Gérôme (Miller, 2010). In an article published in an 1868 issue of *La Gazette des Beaux Arts*, Emile Galichon identified Gérôme as “*un peintre ethnographe*” (Peltre, 2005: 151). The French master had a tremendous influence on Aloysius O’Kelly, his favourite Irish pupil: “even when O’Kelly deviated in subject matter and style from Gérôme’s teachings, they continued to share, admittedly with different results, an interest in ethnographic realism” (O’Sullivan, 2010: 18)¹⁹. O’Kelly’s Breton and Irish paintings both focus on peasantry. His artistic output, including his Orientalist canvases, reveals his ethnographic eye. Ethnologists, writers, as well as artists visiting the West of Ireland, the Blaskets or the Aran Islands, were attracted by the fact that these places were untouched by modern civilization. The landscape was unaltered by industrialization and the railway and the rural or insular ways of life were still traditional.

Many European artists painted ethnographic genre scenes, which are characterized by the detailed representation of traditional costume or furniture, and an emphasis on distinctive racial features, as well as the timelessness of the scenes. Similar tableaux of rural life and traditions were painted throughout Europe. In the international fairs, reconstructed farm houses, cottages, or items of vernacular architecture from different European countries disseminated images of rural authenticity. These displays testified to, and fostered scientific and artistic studies of folk culture (Schwarz in Baycroft and Hopkin, 2012: 106–107). Displays such as traditional costumes, furniture, and wares, as well as paintings of interior scenes offered the same reassuring and enticing picture of rural bliss in an age of industrialization. In the same way as Pont-Aven and Brittany gradually turned into iconic places owing to the number of similar sights that were painted and the postcards that circulated, scenes from the West of Ireland and its string of islands became recurring motifs. Equally picturesque scenes were inspired by rural Brittany or Ireland, most of them finding their origins in Flemish art. Throughout Europe, the way of life, folklore, and daily chores of rural communities proved to be a source of inspiration for many artists, whether it be Spanish painters Ignacio Zuloaga (1870–1945) and Javier Ciga (1877–1960), Swedish artists Anders Zorn (1860–1920) or Fritz Mackensen (1866–1953), or Russian genre painters²⁰. In most of these images, peasant life and rural communities were idealized notwithstanding the quasi-ethnographic precision of the depictions. Neither the poverty of the villagers nor the hardships of their work are foregrounded in representations often imbued with romanticism. Jules

19 While Gérôme often found his inspiration in classical history and favoured a dramatic light adding much drama to his canvasses, O’Kelly painted scenes from rural Ireland in darker hues.

20 Outstanding exponents of Russian genre painting are Alexey Venezianov (1780–1847), Sergey Ivanov (1864–1910), and Pavel Fetov (1815–1852). For an analysis of the relation between Russian and European arts, see Rosalind Gray, *Russian Genre Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford University Press, 2000.

Breton's peasant scenes for example (*Washerwomen of the Breton Coast, Brittany Girl*, 1872, Tulsa Museum, Oklahoma, or *Peasant Woman Threading a Needle*, 1861, private collection), acquire a spiritual dimension. Among the subject matters most relished by these painters was the pastoral figure of the poorly-dressed young shepherdess epitomizing a romantic relation with and dependence on nature. One can indeed compare Augustus Burke's *Connemara Girl* (1865, NGI) to Théodore Valerio's *Little Shepherdess* (c. 1867, Walters Art Museum), Jules Breton's *La Glaneuse* (1877, Musée d'Orsay), or William Adolphe Bouguereau's *Young Shepherdess* (1885, San Diego Museum of Art). The countryside extending beyond these young women in picturesque costumes is free of dwellings and dislocated in time to underscore the simplicity of rural life. Worth noting is the fact that, in the four canvases, the working girls are going barefoot, which testifies both to their romanticized humbleness and their adaptation to country life. Offering a counterpoint to life in industrialized cities, such paintings praised the pastoral ideal regardless of the poverty which hit many rural areas. The idealisation of country life throughout Europe, as well as the emphasis on regional traditions or ways of life, has both allegorical and political undertones. As a matter of fact, in many ethnographic paintings, the rural landscape is depicted as a mythical homeland, whether it be the West of Ireland, the East of Finland, the mountains in Austria, or the plains of Hungary (see Ó Giolláin, 2000: 77–93).

The ubiquitous craving for ethnographic genre scenes and peasant realism can be explained differently according to the historical context in which the works were produced. The scenes may be a nostalgic reaction to industrialization, but they can also be keyed to nationalism, as is the case in Ukraine, Sweden, or Ireland²¹. Diarmuid Ó Giolláin underlines that “the wish to use folklore as a national resource when the nation does not have its own state comes from a context in which the putative nation has none of the trappings of nationhood and is little more than a province of a metropolis” (2000: 63). In his cultural approach to national thought, Joep Leerssen stresses the importance of cultural distinctiveness and its subjective, yet collectively accepted representation. The European scope of his analysis is grounded in the fact that, in the 19th century, nationalism spread throughout Europe as intellectual models circulated more easily (Leerssen, 2006: 20). The political, intellectual, and cultural interactions between European countries elaborating concepts and forms of nationhood which Leerssen underscores must also be assessed in the artistic field. Indeed, images and art heighten the collective perception of the national community or ethnicity by giving embodiment to ethnic cultures. Expanding on Anthony D. Smith's theory of ethno-symbolism, Athena S. Leoussi demonstrates that national art –i.e. “art made by artists consciously inspired by their own, ethno-cultural heritage of symbols, memories, myths,

21 For a European perspective on folklore and nationalism, see Ó Giolláin, chapter 3 “Folklore and Nation-building”, pp. 63–93.

values, traditions and natural environment, either in the form of their art, or in its content—often turned into ethno-history painting” (Leoussi, 2004: 147). The naturalistic or romantic representation of rurality and the peasant community by artists belonging to the elites, and the exhibition of such works in academies and Salons anchors the perception of nationhood in an authentic ethnicity epitomizing nationalist ideals (the homeland, the family, etc.). Folklore was interpreted as national tradition as, throughout Europe, “rustic popular culture was canonized into the very essence and bedrock of national identity” (Leerssen, 2006: 195). In their attempt to document the richness of indigenous cultures partly eradicated by a foreign model, folklorists reappraised provincial traditions and ways of life whether it be in Finland, Russia, Spain, Scotland, or Ireland. Because “nations are conceptual, emotional, abstract entities which may be associated with a state, but can only be grasped through their representations, [and] symbols” (Baycroft and Hopkin, 2012: 3)²², artworks play a role. Art exhibitions could serve the same function as world fairs though they reached a different and much smaller public. Indeed, “as part of the national self-image, folk culture helped to transform the construct of the nation into something that could be exhibited, grasped with more senses than just the one of seeing, and that people would recognize.” (Schwarz in Baycroft and Hopkins, 2012: 111). Ethnographic painting partook in this nation-building process and, through exhibitions and displays, ensured that folk culture found a place among high culture. Ethnographic artworks endowed with realism played a role in the elaboration of the national myth of a golden age which underpinned the nationalist revival and in the identification process. Throughout Europe, the revivalist idealization of peasant life and country life went hand in hand with the quasi-photographic realism of some paintings documenting folklore and local traditions. Although visual realism may substantiate the construction of authenticity in the nationalist imaging of “the people” it never precludes an ideological or artistic bias. Allegorical scenes revisiting the mother-and-child motif under the aegis of pastoralism were produced in countries undergoing nationalist revivals. There is an obvious resemblance between paintings by Bouguereau (*Young Mother Gazing at her Child*, 1871, Metropolitan Museum of Art), Léon Lhermitte (*La Soupe de l'Enfant*, 1888, private collection), O'Kelly (*Expectation, West of Ireland*, exh. 1881, private collection), Maurice MacGonigle (*Mother and Child*, 1943, Crawford Gallery), or Mackensen (*Der Saeugling*, 1892, private collection). In these works the iconographic motif is similarly treated as a connection is established between maternal love and rural life. All are examples of rustic devotion.

Aloysius O'Kelly's *Expectation* (1881) is correlated to the much-awaited independence of the Nation and the growing interest in the West as bearing the trace of uncontaminated Celtic culture. The very title of the work tells its political scope. Irish depictions of Mother Ireland under the guise of a peasant-Madonna

22 On the invention of traditions, see Anderson, B., 1983 and Hobsbawm, E. and T. Ranger, 1983.

figure, as exemplified by O’Kelly’s, or MacGonigal’s canvases, equally bring to mind depictions of Mother Russia during the Russian revival²³.

A synthesis between European ethnographic realism and Irish nationalism was operated by painters like O’Kelly. When he returned to Ireland after having lived in America, he advocated for an Irish school of painting. However, his famous *Mass in a Connemara Cabin* (NGI), often acclaimed as his masterpiece, was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1884, which proves how European this type of ethnographic genre scene was. O’Kelly’s ethnographic realism, which may be compared to Courbet’s (O’Sullivan, 2010: 89), nonetheless included new emblems for an emerging nation and emphasized the nobleness of Western people rather than the harshness of their lives²⁴. In *Feeding the Hens* (1880), ethnographic realism (illustrated by the Aran wickerwork, St Brigid crosses, baskets, and pots in the background) combines with an allegorical emphasis on hope and self-reliance. An impression of family bliss, plenty, and industry springs from the canvas which sings the praise of nationalist rural values (O’Sullivan, 2010: 97). Compared to paintings depicting the same scene (Walter Frederick Osborne’s *Feeding the Chickens* (1885) for instance, painted in an impressionist style), O’Kelly’s work seems to mingle European rusticity and local lore. *Seaweed Gatherers, Connemara* (1884), which portrays a proud-looking man followed by his wife, exemplifies the enmeshed national and international influences in O’Kelly’s work. Seaweed gathering is described as a distinctive activity of the Aran Islands²⁵ but there were many previous ethnographic and artistic descriptions of seaweed gathering in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Brittany.

Regional costumes: sartorial particularism, regionalism and exotification

In most of the above-mentioned works, the meticulousness with which the details of traditional costumes are painted is striking. Though the costume draws attention to regional identity, the interest it triggered was European-wide. Costumes have always played a crucial role in portraiture, but the interest in traditional costumes intensified in the late 19th, early 20th centuries with the development of ethnography and folklore. In ethnographic descriptions, regional dress is indeed a preeminent badge

23 Many Russian painters embraced a form of ideological realism fuelled by ethnological photography. See Musée d’Orsay exhibition, *A Quest for Identity: Russian Art in the Second Half of the 19th Century*, Paris, 2005 and catalogue, *L’Art russe dans la deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle*, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2005.

24 In a series of drawings for the *Illustrated London News*, he portrayed famished Irish peasants in the 1880s. These illustrations were later reproduced in the Land League publications. His commitment to anti-British activity in Egypt is a continuation of his fight against colonialism.

25 Niamh O’Sullivan notes that “in this painting, O’Kelly visually prefigured with astonishing accuracy the ethnographic accounts of Alfred Cort Haddon and Charles Robert Browne who visited the Aran Islands in 1893” (2010: 96). See also Morisson, 2015.

of identity. In regionalist painting, traditional costumes, vernacular architecture, typical landscapes, and specific local types become signifiers of identity. Costumes are represented faithfully in paintings by Aloysius O’Kelly, Walter Osborne, Seán Keating, or Charles Lamb as well as by foreign artists. Osborne took photographs of the people he met in Holland and France and used this photographic material as a source of inspiration for his paintings. Both his collection of photographs and his paintings testify to his interest in traditional costumes (Campbell, 2001). This interest was largely kindled by European ethnographic images and art as well as by salvage ethnography. As Eric Storm argues, in several European countries, regionalism was correlated with nation-building and provided the nation with local roots (Van Stantvoort *et al.*, 2008: 162). Angela Schwarz draws attention to the international dimension of folkloristic reconstructions which combine the national and the regional (Baycroft and Hopkin, 2012: 100). “Next-door-exoticism” (Schwarz, Baycroft and Hopkin, 2012: 101) and common cultural practices in the display of regional identities emerged throughout Europe. A concept of national culture was circulated between European nations (Löfgren, 1989: 21–22). In this context, many European painters delighted in painting traditional costumes²⁶.

Many Irish painters staying in Brittany seem to have been dazzled by the variety of costumes. Frederic William Burton’s Irish genre scenes, dating from the mid-19th century, already show how crucial the local dress and its colour are in the composition. In *The Aran Fisherman’s Drowned Child* (1841, ND)²⁷ and *A Blind Girl at the Holy Well* (c. 1840, private collection), the women’s red dresses give the paintings their structures and liveliness. Picture postcards of Breton dress were popular, as were ethnographic portraits of exotically-dressed foreigners. Henry Blackburn, an English antiquarian who toured Brittany in 1880, noted that “the distinctive costume, even in these out-of-the-way places, is a flickering flame, and (that) in a few years such scenes will have lost their character” (Orton and Pollock, 1996: 80). As Brittany got modernized, Henry Blackburn noted that costume was “the last stronghold of self-respect among the peasant” (O’Sullivan 2010: 181). This remark conjures up images of proud, traditionally-dressed islanders in Irish painting.

In Blackburn’s observations, much emphasis is placed on the colours and picturesqueness of the garments, suggesting a strong connection between ethnographic writing and painting. In Guéméné, he notes: “Here, the harmony of costume and architecture both in form and colour, strikes the eye at once, and we want nothing to complete the picture” (Blackburn, 1880: 166). Trevor refers to the “animate and inanimate paintability” of Concarneau (Rooney, 2003: 69).

26 One can name the Norwegians Jan Eckeneas and Erik Werenskiold, the Finn Akseli Gallen-Kallela, the Czech Ivan Mrkvicka, the Swede Anders Zorn, the Russian portraitist Natalia Goncharova, and the Spanish painter Ignacio Zuloaga, who, like many Irish artists, were all fascinated by native clothing.

27 See the NGI online collection:

http://www.nationalgallery.ie/en/Learning/Schools/West_of_Ireland_Paintings.aspx (last accessed 15 May 2015).

On arriving in Brittany, Harry Jones Thaddeus wrote that “the villagers in their picturesque costumes provide the distinctive note so highly prized by painters” (O’Sullivan, 2010: 166). His *Market Day, Finistère* (1882, NGI), featuring a Breton woman in traditional costume, shows that costumes were a sign of wealth and a source of pride. As is the case in many portraits and ethnographic genre scenes, the composition is built around the costume: its structure –the combined items, fabrics, colours, patterns and folds– strikes the eyes of the painter since the large white collar and side lappets of the young woman is the most eye-catching element in the work. Thaddeus’s ethnographic portraits may be likened to some of Jules Breton’s paintings chromatically structured by the costumes (*Wounded Seagull*, 1878,

Saint Louis Art Museum or *Le Matin*, 1888, private collection). Bonnat was also interested in foreign dress and regional costumes, as was O’Kelly, “an acute observer of the variety and complexity of Breton dress” (O’Sullivan, 2010: 181). O’Kelly’s *Expectation, West of Ireland* and Bonnat’s portraits of Italian girls in costume (*Portrait of a Young Italian Girl*, 1882, Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg) reveal their shared interest in local dress. No detail in the fabric or regional decorative pattern is left aside. In Helen Mabel Trevor’s *A Morning Dream* (1881, private collection), produced during her stay in Brittany²⁸, similar attention is paid to the Breton costume and the traditional lit clos in the background. Another Irish painter fascinated with Breton dress, Thomas Hovenden (1840–1895)²⁹ portrayed a young couple dressed after the local fashion. *A Wayside Chat, Brittany* (1875, private collection) is a realistic regionalist painting in some respect similar to Seán Keating’s *An Aran Fisherman and his Wife* (c. 1914–20, The Hugh Lane, Dublin): despite obvious stylistic differences, in both works, the regional costume is associated with the vigour of youth and self-subsistence. Furthermore, like other ethnographic and regionalist paintings, *An Aran Fisherman and his Wife* is also an allegory (O’Connor, 2013: 116). In an essay on regionalist painting, Eric Storm describes this style as “neo-idealism” on account of the philosophical underpinnings of such works. As a matter of fact, many ethnographic paintings with a regionalist bias put to the fore the spirit of local peoples, their harmonious relation with nature, the adaptation of simple ways of life to the local environment (Van Stanvoort et al., 2008: 169). Though the work illustrates the self-sufficiency of the islands and traditional fishing activities, it also documents Western costumes in an ethnographic way. The west, more particularly the Aran Islands, being untouched by colonisation and protected from foreign influences was the place where a purely Irish culture could be revived. The Islands attracted many foreign visitors beguiled by the indigenous culture of the West perceived as pure. Yet, it is with European eyes that the visitors appraised the ethnographic authenticity of the West.

²⁸ Trevor (1831–1900), who attended the RHA and the Julian Academy in Paris, toured Brittany in the 1880s and 1890s. Some of her Breton works (like *The Fisherman’s Mother*) were exhibited in Dublin.

²⁹ A friend of Aloysius O’Kelly, Thomas Hovenden was born in Cork. He moved to New-York before staying in Paris and Pont-Aven in 1874.

There is little doubt that the fascination for Breton costumes which Irish painters developed in France affected their perception and depictions of the traditional Irish dress and encouraged them to “exoticize” the costumes of Connemara people. Central to the distinctiveness of Irish culture, the traditional costume was therefore perceived and pictured through European lenses. The same attention was paid to local dress in paintings inspired by life in Brittany, England or Ireland. Walter Osborne’s *The Ferry* (1890, private collection), painted near Rye, features an old woman in a shawl, looking like a Breton or a Connemara woman. In Roderic O’Connor’s *The Young Breton Girl* (c. 1903, NGI), the headdress is Breton, but the red shawl looks like an item of the Aran costume.

In ethnographic accounts of Aran life, the picturesqueness of the costumes is repeatedly mentioned. When he travelled to the Aran Island, Thomas H. Mason was enthralled by picturesque garments (Mason, 1936, 75–76) Walter Osborne was attracted to Galway because of “the quays and picturesqueness of the Claddagh women and their fish baskets” (Gwynn, 1943: 465). Charles Lamb, who had stayed in Pont-Aven and Audierne in 1926–27 and exhibited many Breton subjects at the RHA, paid particular attention to the traditional costume worn in the West, as can be evidenced by his *Reading the News or Dancing at a Northern Crossroad* (1920, NGI). In O’Kelly’s Connemara paintings (*Expectation, West of Ireland, Feeding Hens*, exh. RHA 1880, or *Seaweed Gatherers* for instance), the checkered patterns, jackets in homespun materials, sleeveless waistcoats, flannel petticoats, woollen stockings, headscarf, and the ‘pampooties’, i.e. sandals of cowhide, are highlighted (O’Sullivan, 2010: 97). The same costumes are painted by Charles Lamb or Seán Keating. Maurice MacGonigal’s *Mother and Child* (1943, Crawford Art Gallery) also features a woman in traditional clothes: her bright red dress and black shawl are traditional elements of the islanders’ costume. Equal attention is paid to shawls in Lilian Lucy Davidson’s *Fashions at the Fair* (c. 1940, NGI) and *Going to the Fair* (private collection). She renders the colourfulness of peasant clothes in a post-impressionist style aware that red skirts and decorated shawls emblemize rural Irishness. Painted in a similar style, Grace Henry’s *The Top of the Hill* (c. 1920, Limerick City Art Gallery) is structured around the red shawl worn by one of the three women portrayed. The patterns of the garment are enhanced as only the back of the woman is seen, as is the case in *Fashions at the Fair*. A comparison between Lamb’s *Dancing at the Northern Crossroad* and a very similar 1830 scene painted by Trevor Thomas Fowler, a now obscure painter who had trained in Paris and exhibited at the RHA, shows that while peasant costume in the early 19th century was untopographical, it became a century or so later the badge of regional and national identity.

In ethnographic texts and travelogues, both the Breton costume and the Irish one are nonetheless compared to more exotic clothing. While in Plougastel, Blackburn writes that some of the people “might be the descendants of Eastern races, wearing Egyptian or Phrygian head-dress, caps from Albania, embroideries from Greece,

and sashes from Arabia". (Blackburn, 1880: 86) Such remarks suggest that Brittany, the West of Ireland, Spain, Italy, Greece or Oriental countries equally appealed to painters fascinated by the richness and exoticism of traditional costumes. Exoticism surfaces in many ethnographic writings from this period and has tinged many visual depictions. To the eyes of travellers, the West of France or the West of Ireland seemed as remote as more far-flung countries. Blackburn describes Brittany as "*terra incognita*" (Blackburn, 1880: 128). Arthur Symons, whose writings on the Aran islands may have influenced John Millington Synge, noted that as he sailed back to the mainland, he felt as if he "had stepped out of some strange, half-magical, almost real dream" (Ross, 2009: 437). Synge himself wrote that he had encountered an "exhilarating strangeness and singularity" when among the peasants of Aran (Dalsmier, 1993: 208). In *The Aran Islands*, strangeness is constantly emphasized³⁰. When he landed on Inishere in the 1930s, Thomas H. Mason noted:

I was an Irishman coming from the east coast, but I could not help thinking that, although, geographically, I was still in Ireland, yet, to all intents and purposes, I might have been a thousand miles away from Dublin. At that time the currachs were strange to me; the men spoke Irish, they were dressed entirely in home-made clothes, woven or knitted from the wool of their own sheep, the features of the people were somewhat different from those on the mainland, and I felt that sense of wonder and interest which is common to travelers in strange places (Mason, 1936: 65).

Admittedly, the costume emblemizes culture distinctiveness but is also the repository of an international rusticity and the trigger for exoticism. Whether they toured the West of Ireland, Brittany, or more southern countries, most writers and artists experienced a pleasure provoked by a similar contemplation of difference and diversity, which is precisely what Victor Segalen identifies as the exotic (Segalen, 1978: 100). The Aran islands are likened to Eastern countries in Synge's book: "the low flame-edged kiln, sending out dense clouds of creamy smoke, with a band of red and grey clothed workers moving in the haze, and usually some petticoated boys and women who come down with drink, forms a scene with as much variety and colour as any picture from the East" (Synge, 1906: 33). A later traveller, Ian Dall compares the Araners in broad-brimmed hats to Spanish muleteers (Dall, 1931: 123). Repeatedly, the authenticity initially tied to the construction of folklore and visual realism overlaps with the exotification of European others (Carville, 2007; Morisson, 2015). Though it was often directly observed or photographed for their personal collections by European artists, the traditional costume is partly

³⁰ Synge was struck by "the strange beauty of the women" (Synge, 13), the "strange simplicity" of the people, or their "peculiar charm" (Synge, 56).

an invented tradition. While Osborne's photographs testify to the poverty of the sitters, often shot in tattered clothes, his paintings tend to brighten up the plight of rural communities. There are many artistic contrivances in artworks which abound in ethnographic details.

Owing to the theatrical staging of folklore and traditional costumes in his works, Keating's canvases display similarities with those of Spanish portraitist Ignacio Zuloaga (1870–1945), who settled in Montmartre in 1888 and exhibited in London, Brussels, New York and Paris in the 1890s³¹. Though there is no evidence of a contact between the two artists, the stylistic and iconographic resemblances between their works suggest that a pan-European fascination with regional costumes and identity existed. Keating's early works evidence his interest in clothing and folklore. In several self-portraits, he portrays himself costumed as an Aran man, a Spaniard, or an Oriental (*Self-portrait in an Arab Costume*, undated, private collection). The Dublin School of Art was situated near museums which "provided admission to a colourful wardrobe of costumes and props" (O'Connor, 2013: 49). Keating's interest in costumes may also have been fuelled by ethnographic portraits. Being close to J.M. Synge, he must have read the writer's ethnographic books. In *Men of the West*, the sartorial details of the pampooties, shawls, and crios (hand-knit belts) are combined with nationalist propaganda. The artist was interested in photography and many of his paintings were made after staged photographs showing him or his friends and relatives in costumes: *In the Dublin Mountains* (c. 1919–20, private collection), portraying his wife in a Western dress, or *Good Evenin' Miss* (1921, private collection) are based on photographs. Keating faithfully painted the pattern decorating the shawl but enlivened the colours in the painting, using vermilion for the dress, scarf and crios. As O'Connor argues, "the style and atmosphere of the work had more to do with Irish theatre at the time than with the reality of life on the islands" (127). It is in a strikingly similar manner that Spanish painter Zuloaga stages his traditionally dressed characters. Both painters enhance the details of regional costumes and place the figures in a picturesque landscape epitomizing national identity.

Charles Lamb's *Dancing at Northern Crossroads* testifies to the influence Keating exerted on his pupil. Lamb travelled to the West in 1919, following the advice of his close friend, Pádraic Ó Conaire, whose interest in folklore he shared. As Marie Bourke notices, not all the costumes painted by Lamb are normally worn by Connemara people³². As evidenced by photographs, people in the Congested

³¹ A friend of Auguste Rodin, during his five-year stay in France, he met Gauguin and Toulouse Lautrec. Though Zuloaga was a nationalist, his interest in folk traditions brings to mind Keating's depictions of Irish traditions.

³² Bourke observes that men seldom wore red waistcoats while women would wear the red petticoat as their main skirt. She argues that "the artist was not yet familiar enough with western habits and customs to be aware of refinement of detail". Lamb may have conformed to Synge's ethnographic descriptions of red petticoats.

district wore patched clothes and tattered dresses. The red garments painted by Lamb, who did not aim at realism, were most probably inspired by previous representations. Similar scenes painted by the Swedish artist Anders Zorn's (*Midsummer Dance*, 1897), or the Spanish painter Javier Ciga (*Sokadanza*, 1914) suggest an overarching idealization of village life. Local specificities dissolve into a pan-European allegorization of rural traditions and dress. Throughout Europe, regional costumes are either exotified or beautified as they reflect distinctiveness and epitomize the richness and subtlety of local traditions in the face of a hegemonic high-culture which is that of the colonizers. While the costumes are brightened up and theatrically lit in many canvasses, they are suffused with a quasi-photographic sense of authenticity.

Conclusion

Because it has long been essential for Ireland to present its heritage, culture, and arts as the expression of a distinct people, the European training and inspiration of many Irish artists from the late 19th and early 20th centuries has tended to be under-assessed. The European connection of Irish impressionists or cubists has often been highlighted to evidence the modernity of Irish art. However, as this paper has tentatively suggested, most Irish artists received some artistic education abroad and found their inspiration in foreign models. The ethnographic genre and artistic regionalism which developed throughout Europe provided a major source of inspiration for young Irish artists committed to cultural or, in some cases, political nationalism. Distinctively Irish scenes contributed to constructing the nation by reviving local folklore and traditions. These scenes were nonetheless filtered through European eyes. Regionalism, nationalism, internationalism should therefore be reconciled for Irish art history to be more deeply anchored in a broader art history. David Hopkins' concluding remarks in "Folklore beyond nationalism" seem relevant to the analysis of Irish art: "If the wicked fairy of romantic nationalism stood as one godparent to the infant folklore, so did the benign fairy of internationalism, and the legacy of the latter would also flower in the twentieth century, for example in the League of Nations' Commission des Arts et Traditions Populaires" (Baycroft and Hopkins, 2012: 392). The nation-state should not indeed be the primary concept underlying the analysis of Irish art as regional, national and continental expressions of ethnicity and belonging interacted and overlapped.

Abbreviations

DSMA	Dublin Metropolitan School of Art
NGI	National Gallery of Ireland
RHA	Royal Hibernian Academy

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