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'An Irish Problem': Bilingual Manoeuvres in the work of Somerville and Ross
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In August 1901, Edith Somerville and Violet Martin attended a Petty Sessions court in Carna, Co. Galway, by invitation from the Resident Magistrate, W. MacDermot and, fellow magistrate, local hotelier J. O'Loughlen. According to Martin Ross's diary for 15 August, 'Johnny O'Loughlen drove Edith and me, with three other female visitors, over to Carna, for the Petty Sessions there. There was only one case, of the drowning of a sheep, but J. O'Loughlen and W. McDermot worked it for an hour and a half for all it was worth.' Edith Somerville's diary entry for that day records going 'with three other women', driven in a wagonette, to Carna Petty Sessions: 'They are held in a sort of converted cowhouse. Only 1 case about a sheep, maliciously drowned. Our host and the R.M. the only magistrates, they stage managed the case to perfection.'¹ Over the following month, the two cousins worked their recollections of the encounter into an article entitled 'An Irish Problem', published, for a fee of twenty pounds, in the conservative journal *National Review* and soon after included in their 1903 essay collection *All of the Irish Shore*.² Writing of the collection in a letter to their literary agent James Pinker in 1903, Martin Ross described it as 'one of the best' stories included.³

Somerville and Ross's portrayal of the bilingual courtroom's social and linguistic intricacy is not only the occasion of wry humour but also a valuable instance of a still neglected aspect of their relation to the language movement, namely the authors' representations of bilingual practice. Recent biographical and critical studies have cast light on the use of Hiberno-English dialect in Somerville and Ross works and on their ambivalent attitudes to aspects of the Revival movement, including the Gaelic League.⁴ However, a further significant consequence of the large-scale language shift in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Ireland – i.e. the necessary existence of a societal bilingualism, however transitional in nature – is rarely made the object of thematic enquiry in readings of Somerville and Ross, or of other Irish literature more generally. A fuller appreciation of the appearance of bilingualism in their work suggests, in turn, the need for more dynamic models of linguistic change in Irish cultural studies which can attend to the politics and practice of language use as mobile repertoires and creative manoeuvres rather than as markers of one or other monoglot ideology.

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'Conversation raged on the long flanks of the mail-car': so the essay 'An Irish Problem' begins.⁵ The mail-car occupants include various loquacious travellers in lively narrative combat – 'Among the swift shuttles of Irish speech the ponderous questions and pronouncements of an English fisherman drove their way' (p. 178) – and in their midst the two narrators 'sitting in silence, Irish wolves in the clothing of English tourists' (p.177). From the outset, cultural misreadings and misinterpretations abound: 'Doubtless we were being expounded as English tourists, and our great economic value to the country was being expatiated upon' (p.179). The 'privileges' and uses of a narratorial disguise

as 'English tourists' are not without frustration: 'yet, to the wolf, there is something stifling in sheep's clothing; certainly, on the occasions when it was discarded by us, a sympathy and understanding with the hotels was quickly established. Possibly they also are wolves.' (p.179)

While awaiting a change of coach, the narrators chance upon 'Petty Sessions day in Letterbeg', held in a 'thatched and whitewashed cottage that stood askew at the top of a lane leading to the seashore' (p.181). The court representatives comprise two magistrates, a clerk, an interpreter, and District Inspector of police, with the defendant and plaintiff receiving particular narrative scrutiny:

Close to us stood the defendant, Sweeny, a tall elderly man, with a long, composed, shaven face and an all-observant grey eye: Irish in type, Irish in expression, intensely Irish in the self-possession in which he stood, playing to perfection the part of calm rectitude and unassailable integrity.

Facing him, the plaintiff lounged against the partition; a man strangely improbable in appearance, with close-cropped grey hair, a young, fresh-coloured face, a bristling orange moustache, and a big, blunt nose. One could have believed him a soldier, a German, anything but what he was, a peasant from the farthest shores of Western Ireland, cut off from what we call civilization by his ignorance of any language save his own ancient speech, wherein the ideas of to-day stand out in English words like telegraph-posts in a Connemara moorland. (pp.182-3)

In comparison with other contemporary descriptions, Somerville and Ross's characterization of the monoglot Darcy contains a number of distinguishing features: his apparent youth and vitality, the relativity accorded to the dominant culture, 'what we call civilisation', and the vividness of the simile for cultural change, wherein the impact of modernization retains a regional incongruity. The defendant Sweeny, in contrast, with 'a sister married to a stationmaster and a brother in the Connaught Rangers' is keen to emphasise his lack of need for an interpreter: having 'as good English as anny man in this coort' (p.186). It quickly emerges that both magistrates, 'Dochtor' Lyden and the shop-owner Heraty, are also highly competent in Irish: as Mr Byrne the local schoolteacher testifies, 'the Bench has as good Irish as I have myself, and better' (p.184). In this company, the only monoglots are thus the Irish-speaking plaintiff Darcy and the English-speaking narrators:

'The law requires that the thransactions of this coort shall take place in English,' the Chairman responded, 'and we have also the public to consider.'

As it was pretty certain that we were the only persons in the court who did not understand Irish, it was borne upon us that we were the public, and we appreciated the consideration.' (p.185)

In 1901, the year of Somerville and Ross's visit to the Carna court, the census figures for the province of Connaught recorded a total of 245,580 Irish speakers (38% of the population of the province), of whom 12,103 were Irish-speaking only, and 401,353 non-Irish speakers; the figures of Irish speakers in the county of Galway for 1901 being 108,870 or 56.5 per cent of whom 9,442 people (or 4.9 per cent) were recorded as speaking Irish only.⁶ The use of an interpreter was not uncommon, or unneeded, in turn of the century Ireland; as Nicholas Wolf has noted, 'in 1894 the national registrar of petty sessions clerk could report to Chief

Secretary John Morley that 109 of 606 petty sessions districts in the country still made provisions for interpreters.⁷ And ‘while the language of the courts was English’, as Niall Ó Ciosáin observes, ‘plaintiffs, defendants and witnesses were allowed give evidence in Irish through an interpreter, even when they were not strictly monoglot, a right confirmed by the Queen’s Bench in 1856.’⁸ Surviving Crown Office papers for 1893 include a series of ‘interpreters papers’ for County Mayo, detailing the applications by twelve different male individuals for the position of interpreter in Mayo County Court.⁹ The applicants’ letters, with some accompanying letters of reference, indicate varying standards of literacy in English and a variety of declared competences in Irish: the 60-year old Patrick Hughes declaring ‘I have a thorough knowledge of the Irish language and can write it down with facility as well as knowing it conversationally’; another (Luke Loftus) ‘I can speak Irish since I was fourteen years of age I can also read Irish and stand an examination if required’. Writing of another applicant, the 25-year old John Kane, a butler’s son, his referee J.F. Rutledge noted that it was ‘very unusual to get a man of his age so thoroughly well up in Irish’.

The case in question in ‘An Irish Problem’ concerns a demand by the plaintiff Darcy for compensation ‘in the matter of a sheep that was drowned’ (p.183). As the questioning proceeds, the ‘unctuous’ court interpreter – ‘small, old, froglike in profile, full of the dignity of the Government official’ (p.183) – becomes the main target of humour through his delivering of a series of imprecise translations:

‘Now,’ said Mr Heraty, in a conversational tone, ‘William, when ye employ the word ‘gorsoon,’ do you mean children of the male or female sex?’

‘Well, yer worship,’ replied William, who, it may incidentally be mentioned, was himself in need of an interpreter or of a new and complete set of teeth, ‘I should considher he meant ayther the one or the other.’

‘They’re usually one or the other,’ said Doctor Lyden, solemnly and in a stupendous brogue. It was the first time he had spoken; he leaned back, with his hand in his pockets, and surveyed with quiet but very bright eyes the instant grin that illumined the faces of the tapestry. (pp.183-4)

And William’s wavering between the use of masculine and feminine gender for the offending dog serves to further the joke: “It appears,” observed Dr Lyden serenely, “that the dog, like the gorsoons, was of both sexes.” (p.185)

Later misunderstandings arise from the confusion of English and Irish homonyms ‘gown’ and ‘gamhain’ (calf), while the Irish word ‘ullán’ – a crucial distinguishing feature of the dead sheep – defies the interpreter’s powers of translation, until a formal definition is finally proffered by the teacher Byrne (‘a plume or a feather that is worn on various parts of the sheep’s back, for a mark, as I might say, of distinction’, pp. 186-8). Finally, the mistranslation of Darcy’s account of his mother’s injury – ‘a stone fell on her and hurted her finger, and the boot preyed on it, and it has her desthroyed’ – marks the comic demise of the translator’s reliability:

William’s skinny hand covered his frog-mouth with all a deserving schoolboy’s embarrassment at being caught out in a bad translation.

'I beg yer worships' pardon,' he said, in deep confusion, 'but sure your worships know as well as meself that in Irish we have the one word for your finger or your toe.' (pp.191-2)

Nor are the police representatives present exempt from judicial ridicule: the comic revelation that the sheep's 'twin sisther' had been recently sold to the police at Dhulish leads to an invitation to the two RIC men present to testify as to its 'nutritive qualities', and to the hasty escape of 'two tall and deeply embarrassed members of the R.I.C.' from the courtroom (p.195). Nearing the story's end, the narrating voice wryly remarks, 'In Ireland a point can often be better carried by sarcasm than by logic' and, proving the point, the sardonic commentary by Dr Lyden is ultimately the more successful mode of interrogation: "'We may assume, then," said Dr Lyden amiably, "that the sheep walked out into Sweeny's end of the lake and drowned herself there on account of the spite there was between the families.'" (p.189)

When, at the essay's close, the narrators clamber into the departing mail-car to take their place 'among the inevitable tourists', their eavesdropping resumes:

The tourists spoke of the vast loneliness, unconscious of the intricate network of social life that lay all around them, beyond their ken, far beyond their understanding. They spoke authoritatively of Irish affairs; mentioned that the Irish were 'a bit 'ot-tempered,' but added that 'all they wanted was fair play.'...

Never will it be given to them to understand the man of whom our friend Sweeny was more than a type. How can they be expected to realize that a man who is decorous in family and village life, indisputably God-fearing, kind to the poor, and reasonably honest, will enmesh himself in a tissue of sworn lies before his fellows for the sake of half a sovereign and a family feud, and that his fellows will think none the worse of him for it.

These things lie somewhere near the heart of the Irish problem. (pp.197-8)

An 'intricate network of social life' is indeed revealed by the preceding ethnographic study, in an essay which offers to demonstrate and elucidate to its readers an Irish 'problem' beyond the ken of the occasional tourist; yet the closing judgements also serve to consolidate a narrative distance occupied by the amused but ultimately censorious (monoglot) observers.

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Somerville and Ross's 1910 essay 'The Anglo-Irish Language', based on a review of Patrick Weston Joyce's *English as we Speak it in Ireland*, provides their most extensive commentary on the subject of English in Ireland. The essay opens with the identification of Ireland's complex linguistic history:

It would be as easy to coax the stars out of the sky into your hat as to catch the heart of a language and put it in a phrase-book. Ireland has two languages; one of them is her own by birthright; the second of them is believed to be English, which is a fallacy; it is a fabric built by Irish

architects with English bricks, quite unlike anything of English construction.¹⁰

This theory of language evolution underlines the mobility of linguistic transfer and its ability to cross (at least some) class boundaries:

Gentlemen and peasants began to speak the same language, borrowing one from the other; the talk of the men of quality, bred in the classic tradition, enriched the vocabulary of the peasants, while the country gentlemen, themselves Irish speakers, absorbed into their English speech, something of the vigour and passion, the profuse imagery and willful exaggeration that are inherent in the Gael.¹¹

On the other hand, the authors also recognize clearly the Anglicizing force of upward social mobility: 'His [Joyce's] harvest is reaped, as is but natural, among the peasants and the poor people of the towns; each upward step in the social scale is a step further from the Irish language and its enormous influences.'¹²

Nicole Pepinster Greene's fine essay on 'Dialect and Social Identity in *The Real Charlotte*' reveals how, by 'manipulating their knowledge of social and regional Hiberno-English dialects', Somerville and Ross 'delineate subtle differences of class and personality, thus characterizing language as a representation of social identity'.¹³ In addition to giving close attention to Somerville and Ross's most acclaimed novel, her work also usefully returns their non-fictional commentaries on the use and abuse of Hiberno-English (in 'the Anglo-Irish Language' cited above, or in Martin's 'Children of the Captivity') to critical analysis. While biographical studies of Somerville and Ross refer in passing to their learning of Irish, archival evidence provides more detailed information as to the timing and duration of their language learning. In the early months of 1897, Edith and Violet (then on a visit to Drishane, the Somerville home) had Irish lessons taught by a Mrs Ward; the lessons were begun by Edith and her sister Hildegarde in February and they were joined by Violet Martin on March 17. The lessons continued regularly, on average twice a week, until May. Somerville and Ross, along with Hildegarde, occasionally describe giving 'ourselves an Irish lesson' (e.g. 26 March), using, on the advice of Douglas Hyde, the grammars written by Eugene O'Growney, professor of Irish at St Patrick's College Maynooth.¹⁴ Martin would appear to have become the more able and enthusiastic learner: on 9 April Edith refers to a 'very difficult Irish lesson' whereas Martin on the same day records that 'we all knew our lessons very well'; Edith also records she and her sister alternately being 'put in the corner' for the poor standard of their dictation (13 and 15 April). The session of lessons ended in mid-May and would appear not to have been renewed.¹⁵ The Queen's archive includes a number of Irish language exercises from the period – as Rauchbauer notes, 'probably in V.M.'s handwriting', as in the images in figure 1 and 2 below.¹⁶

In late 1912 Martin, now living at Drishane, resumed learning Irish. Her diary for Nov 30 refers to the 'Berlitz system of learning', filling 'my head up in half an hour' and includes the following entry: 'I went down to the Castle at 3 for an Irish class held by Carrie Townshend. Miss (Jem) Barlow, May Townshend and I were the class'.¹⁷ The classes continued on a weekly basis for the month of December, comprising 'Bock', Jem Barlow and May Townshend as 'the other scholars', and with Martin 'importing Cameron as a *scolaire* (scholar)' in mid December.¹⁸ On

30 December, Martin wrote: 'Cameron and I sole pupils. It lasted for two hours.' Edith Somerville did not participate in the classes and in a diary entry for 7 December referred teasingly to the '*Bann Usals* (bean uasals) having their Irish class – Martin, Miss Barlow, Bock and Miss Nurse May Townshend'.¹⁹

The timing of Martin's resumption of her Irish language studies was related to her involvement, along with Edith Somerville, Hildegard (Somerville) Coghill and Carrie Townshend, in the United Irishwomen movement (founded in 1910 by Horace Plunkett and others to improve rural women's welfare and education), and for which they received 'a castigation from the pulpit' while at church on Sunday 19 January.²⁰ On 19 February she records: 'I went to my Irish lesson with Carrie Townshend – and had the usual political discussion.' By now, however, classes were more sporadic with Martin at times the sole member, and they appear to have come to an end by March. On Sunday 11 May Martin records meeting 'Kendal C' (Edith's uncle, Kendal Somerville), rather on the warpath about Irish classes we imagine'.²¹ It is difficult to identify precisely the proficiency in Irish gained by Somerville or Martin during these periods; unlike Augusta Gregory, there is little or no evidence in their diaries of attempts to engage in conversation with Irish-speaking neighbours, for example.²² However, in the case of Martin, the resumption of lessons as late as 1912 suggests a continuing aspiration towards attaining some proficiency, and a commitment of greater tenacity than that of her immediate social circle.

A might give a reasonable contempt

Aníor up from below
Suair up. (active) upwards
Suair above

Anuair down from above
Siór down (active) downward
Siór below

Caí-bápp. A helmet - from Caí, a battle, & bápp, top or head
Clos-buailte. Printed - from clos, type, & buail, strike.
Deapbátaí. A brother - from deapb, real, & bátaí, brother.
Deapbáir - a sister (real) leat-marb. Half dead.
loba. Rotten - luacmar. Precious. luib-éort. A herb garden.
Naomta. Holy. Neamtaíbeac, Unprofitable. Neam, un, & táirbeac
profitable - Sarob, rich, fertile - Uball, an orchard, an orchard,
from Uball, an apple, & éort, garden - bápp, top - buail, strike.
Caí - a battle - Clos - Type, a nail - Deapb. Real - Duine. Person.
Éort. A field - leat. Half - luib. Looped - bent - luib. a herb
a plant - marb. dead. Neam. un, negative particle - Táirbeac.
Profitable - Uball. An apple.

bí ré luib. bí ré lob. bí ré leatmarb. Duine naomta.
leabap luacmar. leabap closbuailte. Uball maré asur uball éort
yabob. Uball éort asur luib-éort neamtaíbeac. bí cat-bápp air
an laoi. Deapbáir Deapbáir Deapbáir asur deapbátaí.
An laoi. An lá deus. Da' lá deus. An ceatáir. An cúigeat
mí deus. Fice cor. An ficeat fear. An dá eun asur an eun
ál. Acúigeat lá deus asur an ficeat mí. Deic mna' asur fice
fear. An fice fear.

Erat

A B G Δ E Z H Θ I K L M N X O Π R S T U V W
α β γ δ ε ζ η θ ι κ λ μ ν ξ ο π ρ σ τ υ φ χ ψ ω

figure 1: Ms 17,884 QUB – to get permission.

figure 2: Ms 17,884 QUB – to get permission.

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In January 1897, Douglas Hyde and Edith Somerville corresponded on the topic of regional storytelling, with Hyde exhorting Somerville to support the collection of local stories but ‘not to discourage the people or shame them out of speaking Irish, for I am convinced that it is not for their moral or intellectual good to adopt – as nine tenths of the better classes do adopt – such an attitude.’²³ This comment would appear to have generated some ire in Martin Ross, as evidenced

in a surviving letter fragment: ‘... why he should accuse you of being one of the people who discouraged the Irish language. Tell him of *The Real Charlotte* when you get a chance.’²⁴ Given the acclaim given to the novel for its use of Hiberno-English, it is noteworthy that Ross views the novel as evidence of their defense of Irish; on closer reading, conversations in Irish can be glimpsed on a number of occasions in the novel, mostly in the household of Julia Duffy where Charlotte encounters ‘three old women... smoking clay pipes, and holding converse in Irish that was punctuated with loud sniffs and coughs’ and where conversation between Norry and Julia also takes place in Irish.²⁵ Bilingual communication is adroitly handled by Norry who moves between speaking Irish to the beggar Nance the Fool and speaking English to Francie (p. 109), while the inability to understand Nance’s ‘mouthings and mumblings of Irish’ marks Francie’s distance and alienation from an Irish-speaking realm which, in the novel’s dramatic denouement, is also the occasion of her fatal fall (p. 338). The most memorable instance of bilingual competence is of course that of Charlotte where her ability to understand Irish has the additional tactical advantage of surprise (and which it is tempting to read as a form of authorial wish-fulfilment given the biographical details cited above):

Mrs Lydon gave a laugh of polite acquiescence, and wondered inwardly whether Miss Mullen had as intimate a knowledge of everyone’s affairs as she seemed to have of Shamus Bawn’s.

‘Oh, they say a manny a thing –’ she observed with well simulated sanity. ‘Arrah! *Dheen dheffeth*, Dinny! *thurrum cussoge um’na*.’

‘Yes, hurry on and give me the coat, Dinny,’ said Charlotte, displaying that knowledge of Irish that always came as a shock to those who were uncertain as to its limitations.’ (p. 281)

References to Irish elsewhere in Somerville and Ross’s work are more occasional: phrases in Irish are rendered in their description of a visit to Aran in ‘An Outpost of Ireland’ in *Some Irish Yesterdays* (1906) and in their narrative account *Through Connemara in a Governess Cart* (1893). In the case of the latter, emphasis is placed on the narrators’ discomfort in not being able to exchange the most fundamental salutations in Irish:

Quite suddenly, out of the greyness, three men appeared, and as they passed us, one of them turned and said ‘Genoong i dhieri’, which, being translated, is ‘God speed you.’

We said feebly ‘Good evening,’ and it was not till we were nearing the hotel that my second cousin remembered that she should have answered ‘Ge moch hay ritth,’ which is the Irish method of saying, ‘The same to you.’²⁶

In these and other works, overheard conversations in Irish are marked more by noise and public torrent than secret dialogue: ‘the donkey-cart, which generally contained a pig, and an old woman screaming in Irish’ in *Through Connemara* (p. 128) or the ‘storm of Irish’ through which the process of disembarking takes place on Aran in ‘Outpost of Ireland’.²⁷ Monoglots make rare appearances in their fiction and non-fiction, with the exception of the character of Darcy in ‘An Irish

Problem' and a fleeting reference in the R.M. story 'Put Down One and Carry Two'.²⁸ Instead Irish-speaking characters in their writings are mostly bilingual, sometimes possessing a high level of competence in both languages deemed worthy of notice. One example is Martin's Connemara informant Anastasia in the essay 'At the River's Edge' who is illiterate and 'in all her sixty years had never been beyond the town of Galway': 'She was, of course, an Irish speaker by nature and by practice, but her English was fluent, and was set to the leisurely chant of West Galway; in time of need it could serve her purpose like slings and arrows.'²⁹ Responding to Anastasia's ease of translation from Irish to English, the narrator asks her 'what she thought of the Irish that was being taught now': 'Musha, I wouldn't hardly know what they'd be saying; and there's an old man that has great Irish – a wayfaring man that does be going the roads – and he says to me, "Till yestherday comes again," says he, "the Irish that they're teaching now will never be like the old Irish."³⁰

In the Irish R.M. stories we are told on a number of occasions that Philippa is learning Irish,³¹ a practice which is the subject of some gentle narrative humour tinged, through the point of view of Major Yeates, by what would appear to be direct authorial experience:

During the previous winter she had had five lessons and a half in the Irish language from the National schoolmaster, and believed herself to be one of the props of the Celtic movement. My own attitude with regard to the Celtic movement was sympathetic, but a brief inspection of the grammar convinced me that my sympathies would not survive the strain of triphthongs, eclipsed consonants, and synthetic verbs, and that I should do well to refrain from embittering my declining years by an impotent and humiliating pursuit of the most elusive of pronunciations. Philippa had attained to the height of being able to greet the schoolmaster in Irish, and, if the day happened to be fine, she was capable of stating the fact; other aspects of the weather, however remarkable, she epitomized in a brilliant smile, and the schoolmaster was generally considerate enough not to press the matter.³²

A much sharper satirical note is sounded in this story 'The Last Day of Shraft', where the subject of Irish learning comprises its comic centre. Philippa's elderly stepbrother, Maxwell Bruce – 'tall and thin, of the famished vegetarian type of looks, with unpractical, prominent eyes, and a complexion that on the hottest day in summer imparted a chill to the beholder' (p. 245) – visits the Yeates' household while undertaking a tour 'through the Irish-speaking counties': 'His mornings were spent in proffering Irish phrases to bewildered beggars at the hall door, or to the respectfully bored Peter Cadogan in the harness-room.' (pp. 243-4) A trip is ordained by Philippa to 'Hare Island', a 'place where the Irish language was still spoken with a purity worthy of the Isles of Aran.' The attraction of Hare Ireland is also literary: 'Its folk-lore was an unworked mine, and it was moreover the home of one Shemus Ruaidh, a singer and poet' as well as smuggler, 'of high local renown' (p. 244). Once on the island, the sounds of Irish are encountered by Yeates as 'hurling invective and personalities' (p.245) or as 'howling and droning' (p.250) and the absurdities of the language

enthusiast become even more apparent in Bruce's conversation with islander Mrs. Brickley:

I regret to say that I can neither transcribe nor translate the rolling periods in which my brother-in-law addressed himself to her. I have reason to believe that he apostrophized her as 'O worthy woman of cows!' invoking upon her and her household a comprehensive and classic blessing, dating from the time of Cuchulain.

Mrs Brickley received it without a perceptible stagger. (p. 246)

The upstaging of Bruce's expectations to record Irish 'of the purest kind', by stylograph, is finally achieved by the comic rendition of a song about Ned Flaherty's drake, recently composed, in English, and, in its ironic commentary on the assembled gathering, recognized by the narrator – though not by Bruce – as a 'startlingly appropriate requiem' (pp. 251-2).³³

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Humor, as Nicholas Wolf has recently shown in his groundbreaking study of language in nineteenth-century Ireland, is an 'unexpectedly dominant form used to express the experience of language contact in modern Ireland':

Of at least 450 documented allusions to the Irish language that can be identified among the oral interviews collected by the Irish Folklore Commission in the 1930s and 1940s, more than half consisted of jokes and humorous short stories centering on a foolish character whose mishaps in negotiating a world of two languages provided occasion for laughter.³⁴

And as he astutely notes, 'approaching these jokes as a formal site for renegotiation and reinvention of the status of the Irish language provides a first step in resolving this seemingly incongruous and lighthearted popular response to language contact' (89). Since, in formal terms, a key ingredient of language jokes is the deployment of 'two distinct, or incongruous, categories of understanding', verbal puns – for example the translinguistic homophones of 'gown' and 'gamhain' in 'An Irish Problem' – are an 'especially efficient' example because 'they enable two scripts to emerge from a single word' (pp. 95-96).

Various situations and objects of humour exist within the jokes examined by Wolf, including that of the Irish speaker in the courtroom, one of these effects being to highlight the line between 'Irish-speaking and English-speaking worlds' (p.102). Yet, as he persuasively argues, the more important division staged by language humour is 'between the monoglot characters in the jokes (both English and Irish) and the bilingual audience and joke tellers' (p.102):

Ultimately, the jokes offered neither Irish nor English as the triumphant language in these instances. Rather, these nineteenth-century jokes offered both languages as a spectacle to the only observers able to discern the absurdity in both conversations: the bilingual listeners.... Only bilingualism, joke tellers argued, guaranteed immunity from being tricked or caught unaware. (p.107).

More unusually, in Somerville and Ross's courtroom scene, the monoglot plaintiff retains considerable dignity – and, somewhat less so, the monoglot narrators – with the immediate target of ridicule being the officious Government interpreter

and the graver object being the bilingual defendant's attempted manipulation of the process of law.

Writing on contemporary 'bilingual aesthetics' in the United States, Doris Sommer delivers the following powerful injunction against cultural occlusion of 'non-elite bilinguals':

It is time we noticed that working – and also underemployed – bilinguals sparkle too, and for similar reasons to elite codeswitchers. Both know the risks of language and the magic of making contact when communication could have misfired. With an exquisite consciousness of conventions, and a keen skepticism about what can or should be said, bilinguals develop the everyday arts of manoeuvring and self-irony.³⁵

Recent work in language contact, in particular by Jan Bloomaert, has argued for a new sociolinguistics of globalization, one 'of mobile resources and not of immobile languages'.³⁶ Bloomaert's work brings a welcome focus on 'a sociolinguistics of *speech* and of *resources*': 'of the real bits and chunks of language that make up a repertoire, and of real ways of using this repertoire in communication' (p. 173). Consequently, individuals' repertoires and linguistic resources are more accurately to be understood as 'truncated' or 'unfinished' (p. 197), rather than as static, given languages, since 'no one knows *all* of a language' (p.103).

Bloomaert's theories of changing language are positioned in the particular context of current globalization wherein a 'monoglot ideal' (which seeks to register its constituent language as 'natural, neutral, a-contextual and non-dynamic') is defied by the 'polyglot repertoire' of contemporary migrants (164-171). His observations, moreover, offer a useful conceptual vocabulary to recover the complexity, diversity and mobility of individuals' linguistic repertoires in historical periods of language change, such as that of nineteenth-century Ireland, wherein the eventual dominance of one language can be made to seem retrospectively inevitable and where a counter-history privileges a narrative of language revival over that of bilingual continuance. Viewed from this perspective, the writings of Somerville and Ross, located towards the end of a period of large-scale language shift and near the beginning of a cultural revival, offer some especially vivid portraits of 'mobile' speech and 'truncated repertoires'. In the case of 'An Irish Problem', they show a keen understanding of the comic possibilities offered by a bilingual scene featuring its participants' 'everyday arts of manoeuvring and self-irony', and provide a valuable reminder that early twentieth-century Irish society contained many bilingual members continuing to use Irish.

¹ Somerville and Ross's diaries record their spending three days in Cashel, Co. Galway (Wednesday 14 August to Friday 16 August 1901) as the guest of 'Johnny

O'Loghlen', proprietor of the Zetland Arms hotel in Cashel, having travelled by train from Ballinahinch to Recess, and then by car about five miles to Cashel. See MS. 17/874, Somerville and Ross Papers, Queen's University Belfast. My grateful thanks to Maura Farrelly and colleagues at Special Collections, QUB, for their expert assistance.

² Their diaries record their beginning the article on 9 September and sending to editor Leopold Maxse on 9 October; it was published in the *National Review* in early November; see MS. 17/874, Somerville and Ross Papers, QUB.

³ Letter from Violet Martin to James Pinker, 22 February 1903, Pinker correspondence, no. 3330-1, Manuscripts Library, Trinity College Dublin; reference provided by Julie Anne Stevens, *The Irish Scene in Somerville and Ross* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007), p.119.

⁴ See in particular Nicole Pepinster Greene, 'Dialect and Social Identity in *The Real Charlotte*', *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* 4:1 (2000), 122-37; Anne Oakman, 'Sitting On "The Outer Skin": Somerville and Ross's *Through Connemara in a Governess Cart* as a Coded Stratum of Linguistic/Feminist "Union" Ideals', *Éire-Ireland* 39:1-2 (Spring/Summer 2004), 110-135; and Ann McClellan, 'Dialect, Gender and Colonialism in *The Real Charlotte*', *Études Irlandaises* 31:1 (2006), 69-86.

⁵ E. Æ. Somerville and Martin Ross, 'An Irish Problem', *All on the Irish Shore* (1903: London, Calcutta, Sydney: Harrap, 1925), pp. 177-198; all further page references are given in the text. For an insightful reading of the 'problem of the picturesque' in the essay, see Stevens, *The Irish Scene*, pp. 118-126.

⁶ *The Census of Ireland for the Year 1901, Part II, General Report* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1902), pp. 575-6.

⁷ Nicholas Wolf, *An Irish-Speaking Island: State, Religion and the Linguistic Landscape in Ireland, 1770-1870* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014) p. 158.

⁸ Niall Ó Ciosáin, 'Gaelic Culture and Language Study', in Laurence Geary and Margaret Kelleher (eds), *Nineteenth-Century Ireland: A Guide to Recent Research*, (Dublin: UCD Press 2005), pp.136-169, p.150.

⁹ Crown Office Papers 1893, Mayo correspondence, Interpreters Papers: National Archives Dublin, IC-78-51.

¹⁰ E. Æ. Somerville and Martin Ross, *Stray-Aways* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1920), pp. 184-192, p.184.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 185.

¹² *Ibid*, p.188.

¹³ Greene, 'Dialect and Social Identity', 124.

¹⁴ See MS. 17/874, Somerville and Ross Papers, QUB and Stevens, *The Irish Scene*, p.163.

¹⁵ See MS. 17/874, Somerville and Ross Papers, QUB. In the descriptive essay accompanying the catalogue, *The Edith Æ Somerville Archive in Drishane* (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1995), Otto Rauchbauer comments: 'It is interesting to note that E. Æ. S. and some of her relations (Hildegard and Violet Martin) did take up the study of Irish from February to June 1897'. He also notes that 'material in the Drishane Archive and elsewhere indicates that she enjoyed learning Irish with a Mrs Ward, but that she soon discovered her own limitations and gave it up'; see fn. 51, p. 184.

¹⁶ Rauchbauer, *The Edith Æ Somerville Archive*, fn. 51, p. 184; the O'Growney study books are held in the Drishane archive.

¹⁷ See MS. 17/874, Somerville and Ross Papers QUB. 'Bock' was Edith Somerville's first cousin, Elizabeth Somerville. Jem Barlow, cousin of writer Jane Barlow, moved to Castletownshend in late 1912 and later, following the death of Violet Martin, became a central member of Edith's spiritualist circle. Carrie Townshend and her husband Charles were committed supporters of the Gaelic League and friends of its President, Ellen (Lady) Desart; since Desart was also President of the Anti-Suffragists, Edith Somerville declined the Townshends' invitation to meet her in late 1912; see Gifford Lewis, *Edith Somerville: A Biography* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), p. 271.

¹⁸ Cameron Somerville was Edith's brother.

¹⁹ See MS. 17/874, Somerville and Ross Papers, QUB. This term, a mistranslation by Somerville into Irish of the plural form of 'noble woman', was used by her on a number of occasions to refer to the United Irishwomen; see Lewis, *Edith Somerville*, p. 265.

²⁰ See MS. 17/874, Somerville and Ross Papers, QUB. An entry by Martin for Monday refers to to a 'United Irishwomen' meeting in the Village Hall: 'Carrie T and I and five or six women there.'

²¹ See MS. 17/874, Somerville and Ross Papers, QUB.

²² See Maureen Murphy, 'Lady Gregory and the Gaelic League', in Ann Saddlemyer and Colin Smythe (eds), *Lady Gregory, Fifty Years After* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1987), pp. 143-63.

²³ Letter quoted in Rauchbauer, *The Edith Æ Somerville Archive*, p. 184.

²⁴ Gifford Lewis, ed. *The Selected Letters of Somerville and Ross* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p. 236.

²⁵ E. Æ. Somerville and Martin Ross, *The Real Charlotte* (1894: London, Quartet Books, 1977), pp. 59, 192; further page references are given in the text.

²⁶ E. Æ. Somerville and Martin Ross, *Through Connemara in a Governess Cart* (1893; London: Virago, 1990), p.122.

²⁷ E. Æ. Somerville and Martin Ross, 'Outpost of Ireland', *Some Irish Yesterdays* (1906; London: Nelson, 1916) p. 19.

²⁸ See E. Æ. Somerville and Martin Ross, *The Irish R.M. Complete* (London: Faber and Faber, 1928), p. 407.

²⁹ E. Æ. Somerville and Martin Ross, 'At the River's Edge', *Stray-Aways*, p. 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³¹ See for example 'Philippa's Fox-hunt'. in *The Irish R.M. Complete*, p. 82.

³² E. Æ. Somerville and Martin Ross, 'The Last Day of Shraft', in *The Irish R.M. Complete*, p. 243; further references are given in the text.

³³ See also the use of references to Irish as source of comedy in 'The Whiteboys' (*The Irish R.M. Complete*, pp. 294-308): in the story, a character's practice of shouting in Irish to the hounds is ultimately deployed to turn the tables on Flurry Knox who, by the story's end, having lost the hounds in question, employs 'Jeremiah Donovan to screech in Irish down the holes in the fort, for fear O'Reilly's hounds had no English' (p. 308).

³⁴ Wolf, *An Irish-Speaking Island*, p.84; further references are given in the text.

³⁵ Doris Sommer, *Bilingual Aesthetics: A New Sentimental Education* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004), p.6.

³⁶ Jan Blommaert, *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.180; further page references are given in the text.