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## 'Seanachie to the New World': Seumas MacManus and the Transatlantic Appeal of Irish Local Colour

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From the late 1890s onwards, Donegal writer Seumas MacManus was a frequent contributor to leading American periodicals and was often listed alongside noted American local colour writers. Moreover, the first books he published in America were immediately successful. MacManus rooted his work explicitly in Donegal and its *seanchaí* tradition, and in the United States in particular his works were positioned as representative of an authentic Celticity. But why did MacManus's work translate so readily to the American market? And what were the contexts that engendered the success of his stories and books? Using reviews, profiles, promotional materials, letters, and MacManus's self-presentations, this article explores how his work contributed to the construction and commodification of a transatlantic sense of Irishness rooted in local colour conventions. It concludes that the American reception of his work demonstrates how apparently local formations of regional identity garnered transatlantic attention not only as a function of their exoticness, but also as a result of the instrumentalisation of domestic literary conventions that generated conceptual links between localness and universality.

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## Introduction

From his first visit to the United States in 1898–9 onwards, the Donegal revivalist author, folklorist, and activist Seumas MacManus, at the time still largely unknown in the country, became a frequent contributor to leading American periodicals. Magazines such as *Harper's*, *Century*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Outlook*, and *McClure's* featured MacManus's Donegal folk tales, local colour fiction, and verse. Published in quick succession, collections of his stories, such as *Through the Turf Smoke* (1899), *In Chimney Corners* (1899), *The Bewitched Fiddle* (1900), and *Donegal Fairy Stories* (1900), sold well, were widely reviewed, and often went through multiple American editions. As MacManus became an established name, magazines also began to solicit his opinions on Irish politics, history, and culture. Charles Fanning suggests that *The Story of the Irish Race* (1921) 'is probably on more Irish–American shelves than any other title' (Fanning, 2000: 400n20). Indeed, MacManus's fame itself soon became a marketing instrument: Funk & Wagnalls, who published *The Red Poocher* in 1903, promoted him as 'the present-day Prince of Irish Storytellers' (see for instance their advertisement in the November 1903 issue of *Pearson's* (1903)).

While many of his books were also published in the United Kingdom and Canada, and his work had indeed already garnered acclaim in the UK and Ireland, 'it has been in the United States that he has had his best success and what may be termed his decisive success', as one American journalist observed in *The Critic* (Armstrong, 1899: 732). MacManus's rise was so precipitous that merely a year after his entry into the American market, the *New York Times* stated that '[p]robably no author of recent times has achieved greater and more sudden popularity as a genre story teller than Mr. McManus' (*New York Times*, 1900). The *Boston Home Journal* (generally not admirers of his work) remarked caustically that he was 'appearing to rather disgusting monotony in the magazines just now' (*Boston Home Journal*, 1899a: 286), a success, they later complained, that might serve 'almost to discourage native writers' (*Boston Home Journal*, 1899b: 11). Indeed, a mere four years after his first United States publications, the *Overland Monthly* could assert that 'Seumas MacManus has made his name a household one in the United States and in fact in all English speaking communities' (*Overland Monthly*, 1903: 461). As a writer and lecturer, MacManus had become so well-known that in 1911 the *New York Times* reported on his New York wedding to his second wife, Catalina V. Páez, granddaughter of the first president of Venezuela, which was attended by a range of prominent United States citizens (*New York Times*, 1911: 9).

Moreover, MacManus's literary fame was enhanced by the lectures he delivered around the country on Irish life and letters, following in the footsteps of wildly popular Irish writers such as Oscar Wilde and W. B. Yeats, as well as other leading cultural

figures such as Douglas Hyde, founding president of the Gaelic League, who toured the United States to promote the revivalist cause and solicit donations. As such, there was a readymade market for his lectures (see Butler, 2018). Letters in the Seumas MacManus Papers at the National Library of Ireland suggest that he came to rely on his lecture tours to supplement his income from writing. In a letter sent from Atlanta, he informs Catalina about an engagement that was cancelled because of an error made by the organiser, which resulted in a significant loss of income (31 March 1913, Seamus MacManus Papers, National Library of Ireland (SMP) Ms 35,135(1)). MacManus meticulously collected press notices of his lectures (see for instance SMP Ms 33,669/F), which in turn were mined for quotations to be used in promotional leaflets and prospectuses, examples of which can be found in the Seumas MacManus Papers.

Even as MacManus himself became increasingly cosmopolitan, moving in transatlantic circles of *littérateurs* and other notables, towards his audience he continued to identify as a simple Irishman from Mountcharles, a few miles from Donegal town. The vast majority of his work was set in County Donegal and sought to derive authority from explicit claims to locodescriptive and (auto)ethnographic fidelity. Banking on his image as a native representative of the Donegal peasantry at the heart of his stories, the prolific MacManus quickly became a reliable purveyor of a highly marketable brand of Irishness that was balanced precariously between stage Irish stereotypes and the Gaelic revivalist acclamation of premodern Irish cultures.

But why did MacManus's work translate so readily to the American market? And what were the contexts that engendered the success of his stories and books? Despite his long career, his popularity on both sides of the Atlantic, and his influence both as a writer and as a revivalist organiser and activist, MacManus has not been the subject of a great deal of academic research, and his success in the United States literary market in particular has received hardly any scholarly attention. Yet, as I show in this article, the circulation, marketing, and reception of MacManus's earliest American publications provide a highly instructive case study in the transatlantic construction of Irishness and the international appeal of local colour. Using reviews, profiles, and promotional materials, as well as MacManus's self-presentations in prefaces, interviews, and letters, I demonstrate that the very aspects that appear to define the local specificity of his regionalist writings were key to their international appeal, especially in the United States. The author's Donegal Irishness stimulated his popularity in a market ravenous for local colour fiction. This genre involved narratives representing specific regions or locales, usually rural, with an emphasis on purported authenticity and featuring particular character types and the use of local dialect, centring 'communities defined by the proximity and familiarity of their members and the durability of

their commitments to one another amid modernity's expanding networks' (Joseph, 2007: 3). MacManus's work depended on and contributed to the commodification of a transatlantic Irish ethnotype that was premised on regionalist constructions of authenticity. The American reception of his work demonstrates that apparently local formations of regional identity garnered transatlantic attention. This interest was not only a consequence of exoticism, but also the result of the instrumentalisation of domestic literary conventions that had the effect of creating an intimate relation between locality and universality in the dissemination of MacManus's writing.

In this regard, MacManus's work problematises traditional understandings of the cultural operation of regionalism. The local colour movement in the United States has been regarded as typically projecting what Stephanie Foote calls a 'nationalizing rhetoric' that 'constructs a common national past for readers concerned with national matters' (2001: 9, 6). Construed thus, regionalist writing reflects, as Foote observes, 'the late nineteenth century's anxieties about national identity and citizenship in an era marked by social and political upheaval', including industrialisation, westward colonisation, mass immigration, and other bellwethers of modernity (2001: 3–4).<sup>1</sup> In recent years, however, scholars such as Philip Joseph, June Howard, and indeed Foote herself have defined local colour writing in more dynamic terms, which resist the totalising dichotomy of nation and region that is often figured as a hierarchical relationship between centre and margin. Instead, they propose a dynamic and relational perspective that eschews linear scalarity and, in Howard's words, 'focus[es] on the connections between local color writing and locations beyond the region' (Howard, 2018: 21).

Recent research by Giulia Bruna and Margu rite Corporaal on Irish and Scottish local colour fiction further expands such cosmopolitan understandings of the genre by highlighting the transnational contexts of its production, distribution, and reception (Corporaal, 2020b; Bruna, 2021). Indeed, while rural Donegal as imagined in MacManus's oeuvre and its reception showcases the conservatism that frequently characterises popular constructions of the region in national and indeed diasporic contexts, its transatlantic popularity underscores that local colour writing as an historical phenomenon should be understood in dynamic terms, beyond the elementary opposition of nation and region.

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<sup>1</sup> I follow June Howard in not distinguishing explicitly between local colour and regionalist writing, as the terms have mostly been used interchangeably to describe the same brand of what she describes as 'place-oriented fiction' (See Howard, 2018: vii, 16; Bruna, 2021: 308).

### Seumas MacManus's Tales and the American Market

In his first years on the US market, the stories MacManus contributed to periodicals mostly fell into two adjacent categories (the collections of these tales that were subsequently published by leading presses such as McClure and Doubleday generally follow this distinction). In the first category, MacManus wrote local colour stories about Donegal that purport to convey a realistic if humorous portrayal of the people among whom he grew up. Many such tales feature character types and themes that would be instantly recognisable to readers of nineteenth-century Irish fiction, and indeed reviews often categorise MacManus's work as similar to that of Samuel Lover and Charles Lever, described in an overview of the Celtic Revival as 'both typical Irishmen in their social qualities and high animal spirits' (Ford, 1906: 773). Critics regularly describe MacManus's work as 'rollicking', a term that, as James Murphy notes, is commonly associated with Irish fiction and frequently applied to Lever's oeuvre in particular (2011: 38). Indeed, while MacManus's narratives tend to emphasise their local provenance, the character types they feature often read as generically Irish, though some tales are more regionally specific. Tales that are obviously set in Donegal or Ulster include 'The Boyne Water', which details the way a mixed Catholic-Protestant couple seek to maintain peace in their household with regard to sectarian matters, and 'The Quad-dhroop-eds', which pokes fun at Ulster's Orange Lodges. (Both are collected in *Through the Turf Smoke* (1899)).

In addition to such stories, MacManus wrote versions of Irish folk and fairy tales. While these narratives are set in a semi-mythic Ireland and often have supernatural elements, many of them are actually hibernicised versions of familiar fairy tales, such as 'The Black Bull of the Castle of Blood' from *In Chimney Corners* (1899b), which is a retelling of the 'Bluebeard' tale. A number of critics remarked upon this: as the *New York Times Saturday Review* observed, 'Some of them are merely old tales retold. Some, indeed, though Irish as Irish can be, clearly are developments of Old-World tales, of examples of folk-lore as ancient as the narratives of Scheherazade' (*New York Times Saturday Review*, 1899b: 155). The *Literary World* discerned in MacManus's stories 'the motifs of the old fairy tales with which the nurseries of all time have been familiar' (*Literary World*, 1899: 456). Concerning such templates, the *Saturday Evening Post* concluded that 'Mr. MacManus has smartened them up a bit and tricked them out in a modish Donegal brogue' (*Saturday Evening Post*, 1899: 624). Summarising MacManus's oeuvre to date in a profile published in the *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, the critic Elbridge Colby commented that 'the reader of these collections is struck with the similarity of them to our fairy tales', noting that '[a] great many of the narratives are merely plots to which Irish characters have been added' (1914: 38). However,

these reviewers generally did not consider this to be objectionable; as the *Saturday Evening Post* opined, ‘Stories, unlike mutton, are none the worse for being warmed up’ (*Saturday Evening Post*, 1899: 624). Rather, this lack of originality underscored for them the universality of folk culture and by that token the significance of its survival in the outer reaches of Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

Its reception demonstrates that MacManus’s work found favour at the intersection of two contemporary literary vogues. His success can partly be accounted for by the fact that his entry into the American market occurred at a time when Celticism was in the ascendant, and ‘[t]he fairy and folk dimension had ... become established as a money-making publishing area’ (Fanning, 2000: 173). MacManus’s tales first appeared in a literary ecosystem that had been primed by the success of earlier and contemporaneous advocates for Irish cultural self-reinvention, including W. B. Yeats and Douglas Hyde. As Stephen G. Butler notes, on several occasions, MacManus and Yeats happened to tour the United States at the same time (2018: 51–2). There was a thriving market for American editions of Irish local colour fiction by authors such as Jane Barlow and Shan F. Bullock, as well as for Irish Revivalist works by authors such as Yeats and Synge. Charles Fanning points out that American-produced Celticist writing also sold well, as demonstrated by the success of the Boston-born, Irish-American poet Louise Imogen Guiney (2000: 166–9).

MacManus’s emergence, moreover, coincided with the rise of the Gaelic League, and he energetically advocated for the League and its writers in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Among other things, as Catherine Morris notes, MacManus’s efforts ‘played a vital role’ in the American promotion of the influential journal *Shan Van Vocht* and its editors, Alice Milligan and Anna Johnston (Ethna Carbery) (Morris, 2012: 80). In 1901, MacManus married Johnston, but she died at age 37, less than a year after their wedding. Following his wife’s tragic death, the heartbroken MacManus ceaselessly promoted her work, and American reviews of early editions of her very successful posthumous collection *The Four Winds of Eirinn* (1902), and indeed of some of MacManus’s own works, regularly highlight their connection and his advocacy of her work.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> MacManus also wrote a number of Irish-American tales, such as ‘When Myles Maguire Melted’ in *The Bewitched Fiddle* (1900), a loose rewriting of Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* that uses St Patrick’s Day rather than Christmas to convince an Irish-American industrialist to loosen up, abandon his profit-driven mindset, and once again embrace his roots by celebrating St Patrick’s Day. However, such tales are mostly a footnote in MacManus’s larger project to supply US readers with Irish fictions.

<sup>3</sup> For a general discussion of the Gaelic Revival in the United States, see Ní Bhroiméil (2003).

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Marguerite Merington’s review of *The Lad of the O’Friels* in the June 1903 issue of the *Bookman*: ‘[t]his review must not close without a mention of the wife to whose beloved memory Seumas MacManus dedicates it’ (1903: 405). The 1918 edition of *The Four Winds of Eirinn* includes a memoir by MacManus, which among other things, discusses the production of *Shan Van Vocht*.

Charles Fanning suggests that the rise of Celticism in late nineteenth-century America was partly a result of the gradual development of an Irish-American middle class, which allowed its members ‘the luxury of a purely literary self-definition’, even if this resulted in ‘unhealthy romanticizing of even the least attractive aspects of Irish life’ (2000: 170). In this regard, such Celticism was often imbricated with Catholic expressions of Irishness, and MacManus’s American market indeed comprised a significant Irish American Catholic component. As his long affiliation with the University of Notre Dame also suggests, he often availed of Catholic networks to promote his work and sell his lectures. Still, the success of his work cannot be explained as an exclusively Irish-American and/or Catholic phenomenon, even if in some of his prefaces he explicitly addresses Irish-American readers. While many Irish and Irish-American Celticist writers were published by Catholic Irish-American periodicals and publishers, MacManus published primarily in mainstream periodicals. His books were produced by leading houses such as Doubleday and McClure and were subsequently reviewed favourably in the same periodicals and in newspapers of record. Moreover, those reviews that are signed were mostly written by critics without Irish roots. While his first American volumes obviously had similar profiles, and indeed titles, to books like Barry O’Connor’s *Turf-Fire Stories and Fairy Tales of Ireland* (1890), MacManus was published by non-denominational mainstream publishing houses—unlike O’Connor’s work, which was produced by Catholic publisher P. J. Kenedy.

While the localised Irishness of MacManus’s work perhaps evoked a sense of home for those Irish-American readers invested in romantic constructions of Irishness, it also formed the foundation of a more general appeal as local colour fiction, circulating in an American, and indeed transatlantic, market for local colour writing. As I also outline below, MacManus’s work appeared in the US when local colour fiction, and regionalist writing more generally, was a wildly popular genre. The periodicals to which MacManus contributed were leading purveyors of the genre, and readers encountering MacManus’s tales in their pages would have found him cheek by jowl with leading local colour writers such as Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Octave Thanet, and Hamlin Garland.

Charting MacManus’s early publication history is complicated. Many of the stories that he published during his initial years on the American market, and thus large parts of the collections, had already appeared in Ireland and Britain in magazines and earlier collections such as *The Leadin’ Road to Donegal* (1895), *’Twas in Dhroll Donegal* (1897), and *The Humours of Donegal* (1898a). As such, there is variation between editions. The Canadian edition of *Through the Turf Smoke*, published by G. N. Morang in 1899, was identical to the US edition, with the exception of the foreword, which dropped the ‘To My American Readers’ address, and substituted (with a shoddily updated plate) ‘flag’

for 'Stars and Stripes'. The British edition only kept the title and the foreword, removing 'American' from the address. However, this edition actually contained the stories that were published in the USA in 1900 by Doubleday and McClure as *The Bewitched Fiddle*. The stories in this American edition of *Through the Turf Smoke* originally appeared as *The Bend of the Road* (1898b), published in London by Downey and Co. Similarly, *The Red Poocher* (published in New York by Funk and Wagnalls, 1903a) features a tale originally published in *The Humours of Donegal* (published in London by T. Fisher Unwin), while the 'apologia' in *The Bewitched Fiddle* recycles that collection's apologia (1900b).

Interestingly, the American edition of the apologia is signed 'Dún-na-nGall, Eire', while the British edition is simply signed 'Donegal', which suggests that MacManus was exaggerating the Gaelicism of his work for his American readership. The convoluted publication history, and such explicit nods to his US audience, demonstrate the extent to which MacManus and his publishers approached his work commercially, and show that he was not at all the rustic naïf that some critics, and indeed his autobiographical writings, suggest. Nor, for that matter, was MacManus merely a disinterested advocate of Ireland's oral culture; he was a wily operator, who sought to maximise the profit he could gain from his stylised Irish fictions by cultivating an advanced understanding of his key market.<sup>5</sup>

### Constructing Authenticity

Reviews of MacManus's books demonstrate that the terms on which his work was received in the US were largely those of local colour fiction. Central to his reception was not just an emphasis on the ostensible rural simplicity and authenticity of the characters and scenes he describes, but also a sense that MacManus's authority as writer and narrator was a function of his own biography. Indeed, the idea that a native is best placed to write about a particular region or locale permeates the reception of MacManus's earliest American publications. As the Catholic family monthly *Donahoe's Magazine* remarked in its review of *Through the Turf Smoke*, MacManus's 'identification of himself with the people he describes is the secret of the author's success; he has lived with them, shared their vicissitudes and their joys, and from this knowledge gives to the outside world a series of sketches true in detail, lovingly drawn, and free from the slightest touch of caricature' (*Donahoe's Magazine*, 1899: 513). The latter claim, however, does not stand up to scrutiny.

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<sup>5</sup> The translation history of MacManus's works mirrors some of these complexities. For instance, the Dutch/Flemish edition of his work published in 1922, *Bij het laaiende turfvuur* ['By the roaring turf fire'], has a title similar to his first American book, but is in fact a selection of tales published in the previous decades and translated by Arthur Coussens for a variety of Dutch-language periodicals.



Critics drew upon local colour commonplaces to situate MacManus, highlighting his connectedness to ‘the soil’—a signifier fraught with nationalist and regionalist connotations. As William Dean Howells, a key arbiter of American literary culture, famously stated, ‘literature must be native to the soil, affected, of course, by the culture of other lands and ages, but essentially of the people of the land and time in which it is produced’ (qtd in Nettels, 1988: 62–3). In such conceptualisations, as Mieka Erley writes, ‘[s]oil is the material index of “place” and “home”’ as well as ‘the site of traditional values and lifeways’ (2021: 1, 3). In regionalist criticism of the late nineteenth century, it thus functions as a shorthand marker for realism. Echoing such figurations of ethnic authenticity, *Life Magazine* stated that ‘Seumas MacManus has a right to be an Irish humorist, because he is a son of the soil’ (*Life Magazine*, 1899: 226) while in *The Critic*, Regina Armstrong praised the ‘quality of being near to the soil’ that she found in MacManus’s work, dubbing the writer ‘a little brother of the soil’ (1899: 733–4). According to an advertorial in the *New York Times Saturday Review*, even prominent politicians weighed in; as William Gibbs McAdoo, himself of Ulster descent, said of MacManus’s work: ‘it breathes the very spirit of the soil’ (*New York Times Saturday Review*, 1899a: 885).<sup>6</sup>

In an elaborate discussion of *The Lad of the O’Friels* (1903), *Bookman* critic Marguerite Merington frames MacManus’s work in prescriptivist terms:

... the literature that is apt to ring most true is that which is at once autochthonic and autobiographical in its sources of inspiration, where the local colouring, to use a detested modern phrase, is the essential colouring of the picture in which the chronicler employs romance, not as an end, but to illuminate the little happenings of life actual as he himself has lived it (1903: 404).

Merington echoes noted American proponents of local colour writing like Hamlin Garland, whose programmatic essay collection *Crumbling Idols* (1894) advanced the maxim that ‘[l]ocal color in a novel means that it has such quality of texture and background that it could not have been written in any other place or by any one else than a native’ (1894: 61). Indeed, Garland states, local colour writers and artists ‘are rooted in the soil’, and true local colour is ‘something more than a forced study of the picturesque scenery of a State’ (1894: 59, 61).

Key to the reception of MacManus’s sketches and folk tales was their construction of autoethnographic fidelity, as well as the author’s self-presentation as a modern-day

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<sup>6</sup> A well-recognised Irish example of the trope is the *Nation*’s slogan: ‘To create and foster public opinion in Ireland, and to make it racy of the soil’.

*seanchaí* who was channelling the ancestral lore of his native community, construed as a quaint people threatened but as yet untouched by modernity. Several of MacManus's books feature prefaces that seek to establish his credibility as a storyteller and Donegal Irishman. *Through the Turf Smoke*, first published in 1899 in New York by Doubleday and McClure, starts with an address 'To My American Readers' and sketches a stereotypical image of a Donegal peasantry as 'poor as paupers and hospitable as millionaires'. They are impecunious yet rich in other ways: 'But the wit, the imagination, the poetry, the virtues, the soul, of the most miserable amongst them the wealth of Cræsus couldn't purchase' (MacManus, 1899a: x). As per revivalist and, indeed, regionalist doctrine, the peasantry represent a culture under threat, and MacManus describes himself as someone who sat 'spell-bound' at the feet of the traditional *seanchaí* 'in his old time glory', and 'dreamt of one day faring forth and conquering worlds for myself' (MacManus, 1899a: x). Notably, the preface is signed 'New York, *Oichdhe Brighde*, 1899': written in the United States, but dated in Irish, the night before St Brigid's Day. The British edition, incidentally, is not dated, suggesting, again, that MacManus amplified the Irishness for his American readers.

*Donegal Fairy Stories*, published in New York by McClure, Phillips, & Co. in 1900, contains a bilingual dedication to 'the memory of those Gaelic shanachies who have kept alive for us ... the fine ancient tales of our race' (MacManus, 1900a: vii). The collection, moreover, sports an introduction that largely rehashes the main points of the preface to *Through the Turf Smoke*, similarly emphasising the longevity and purity of Donegal's oral culture: 'Tales as old as the curlew's call are today listened to around the hearths of Donegal with the same keen and credulous eagerness with which they were hearkened to hundreds of years ago' (MacManus, 1900a: xi). MacManus emphatically positions himself as the inheritor of the *seanchaithe*'s role but states that he desires to share Donegal's tales with 'a wider world and more cultured', so readers may 'for a few hours' recover the childlike simplicity and wonder that define 'our simple, kindly people' (MacManus, 1900a: xiii).

The 'Apologia' at the beginning of *The Bewitched Fiddle*, published by Doubleday and McClure in 1900, similarly thematises the contrast between modernity and tradition that frequently informed the Gaelic Revival but was also central to the craze for local colour fiction in the United States: 'in my Donegal, civilization wins but slowly, and the curse of optimism clings to our valley with the pertinacity of the silver mists' (MacManus, 1900b: vii–viii). In this view, Donegal is to be understood as a chronotope, defined by its non-normative relation to the temporality of modernity or, in nineteenth-century terms, 'civilization'. As June Howard asserts, this is typical of regional writing: 'The chronotope of regionalism entails an orientation to the past.

... In this literary space-time continuum, particular places figure previous eras' (2018: 35). In this sense, as Anne Boyd Rioux suggests, the region represents 'pastoral, rural, traditional, even explicitly anti-modern beliefs and ways of life' (2020: 323).

Indeed, on both sides of the Atlantic a similar regionalist image of Donegal had by this time been popularised by several high-profile authors, including the poet William Allingham. Prior to MacManus's arrival, Donegal already often featured in nineteenth-century Irish American novels with regionalist overtones. The introduction to Patrick Sarsfield Cassidy's verse narrative *The Borrowed Bride: A Fairy Love Legend of Donegal*, published in New York by Holt Brothers in 1892, for instance, prefigures MacManus's prefaces with its description of 'a fine, uncontaminated race' not yet disabused of the notion that stories about the *sídh*e have 'a solid foundation of fact' (Cassidy, 1892: 12, 11).<sup>7</sup> However, despite emphasising the apparent uniqueness of Donegal, newspaper critics discussing MacManus by and large do not cite such writers whose work focuses specifically on the county, even though Allingham—'our own Willie Alligam, born and bred in Ballyshanny, there beyond'—is the subject of a chapter-length conversation between characters in MacManus's *The Lad of the O'Friels* (MacManus, 1903b: 64–71).

By and large, critics unquestioningly accepted MacManus's regionalist constructions of a Donegal as a site outside, or at least not coterminous with, Victorian or Gilded Age figurations of progress and modernity, and readily echoed his language or quoted approvingly from the books' paratextual materials. For instance, discussing *Through the Turf Smoke*, *The Interior* paraphrases MacManus's remarks about civilisation, and concludes that his stories represent 'real children of nature' (*The Interior*, 1899: 339). In a profile published in 1906, by which time MacManus's fame appeared unassailable, the leading Catholic family magazine *New Catholic World* expressed the consensus that MacManus's tales showcase 'many of the good old Gaelic characteristics, unspoiled by so-called modern civilization' (*New Catholic World*, 1906: 429). In her profile in *The Critic*, Regina Armstrong claims that 'Donegal remains primitive', which has been crucial for MacManus's mastery of 'the story-teller's art' (1899: 732–3). Writing in the *Overland Monthly*, F. Marion Gallagher explicitly linked Donegal's reputation as a locus of tradition to the persistence of Gaelic in Ireland's north-east: 'About seventy thousand persons in Donegal speak the Gaelic tongue, and the old legends and beliefs, the old customs and folk-lore are there preserved almost intact' (1908—reprinted in

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<sup>7</sup> The introduction borrows explicitly from English author Dinah Craik's descriptions of Donegal. There is work yet to be done on the sources used for Irish American regionalist writing set in Ireland. Some authors, like Cassidy, explicitly cite their influences. For instance, in her novel *Maureen Dhu; or the Admiral's Daughter*, Mary Anne Sadlier lists some of the authors whose works appear to have inspired her representation of the Claddagh, including Anna Maria Hall and James Hardiman (Sadlier, 1870: 15).

*The Monitor*, 18 July 1908). The University of Notre Dame's *Scholastic* waxed lyrical about the purity of MacManus's narratives, contrasting them with modern urban realism:

For the most part his writings in prose and verse reflect the quaint and pathetic folklore which he absorbed at the wakes, weddings and patterns in 'droll Donegal.' Happy for him and for his readers that the spiritual enters so largely into his work. He has nothing to do with the brutal materialism found among the very poor and vicious in great cities which too often furnish morbid story-tellers with an excuse to cry out their wares. The simple, almost sinless lives of his own people in the highlands of Donegal, their struggles, stories, smiles and sighs are his theme (*Scholastic*, 1904).

Such praise suggests that editors and reviewers believed that an authentic representation of the Donegal peasantry and true Celticity could be found in MacManus's work. The *Overland Monthly*, for instance, declared that 'Mr. MacManus's Irish men are real Irishmen,—not the article we are familiar with on the variety stage and in the funny papers' (*Overland Monthly*, 1899: 481).

Given, however, the sometimes comic nature of MacManus's tales, such claims strike a false note. MacManus's Donegal is often a world of familiar types rather than rounded characters, including the spalpeen, the roguish Irish peasant who is, as Joep Leerssen describes him, 'likeable, unruly, cute [in the Hiberno-English sense]; unpolished but charming, slightly mischievous but fundamentally unthreatening' (1996: 171). Indeed, the Irish bibliographer Father Stephen Brown noted in *A Reader's Guide to Irish Fiction* that 'at times the fun goes perilously near "Stage-Irishism"' (1910: 128). The *Dial* also noted the performative character of MacManus's Irishness, typifying his work as 'a rollicking bit of exaggeration, carrying it almost to the point of burlesque' (*The Dial*, 1900: 435). The *Literary Digest* also considered MacManus's work unrealistically cheerful. 'The book has the monotony of an eternally smiling face', the review states, asking why the Irish would emigrate in such numbers 'if there existed hamlets like that described by Mr. MacManus' (*Literary Digest*, 1903: 697).

Though generally appreciative of MacManus's significant exertions on behalf of the Gaelic League, some Revivalists in Ireland were significantly more critical of his work than American literary critics (O'Leary, 1994: 140)—both in public and privately. Around the same time as these reviews, Willaim Ó Riain (W. P. Ryan) expressed his misgivings about MacManus's international publications in a letter to Pádraig Pearse, explicitly claiming that MacManus consciously bastardised Irish folklore for his British and American markets (9 January 1903; Pearse Papers, National Library of Ireland MS 21,048/1/8). In a 1905 discussion of a play by MacManus, Louis J. Walsh, though on the

whole positive, highlights what he considers to be MacManus's main faults, including 'his bathos, buffoonery, and mean "stage Irishmanism"' (*The Leader*, 26 August 1905, quoted in O'Leary, 1994: 324). O'Leary suggests, however, that such criticism (though certainly valid to an extent) reflected broader debates about the role of English and Anglophone culture in the Gaelic Revival (1994: 140; see also Mathews, 2003, 92–112).

Dissenting voices notwithstanding, as a native from the community he describes, most American critics considered MacManus to be perfectly equipped to translate the region's *genius loci* to an American market ravenous for local colour writing, and reviews drew upon his heritage to validate his claims to authenticity. The review of *Through the Turf Smoke* in the June 1899 issue of *The Critic* compared MacManus to Irish local colour writers such as Jane Barlow and Shan Bullock ('faithful and friendly students of Irish life'), as well as other writers from 'the alleged Celtic renaissance' (*The Critic*, 1899: 367). In fact, the reviewer concludes that his work 'in certain ways comes nearer the true Celtic note' (not least because MacManus's tales are 'less weird and mystical than those of Mr. Yeats') (*The Critic*, 1899: 367). Reviewing MacManus's novel *A Lad of the O'Friels*, the *Yale Literary Magazine* emphasises, albeit rather patronisingly, the native authority of MacManus and other unnamed revivalist writers: 'It is not from any outside point of view that these men [sic] describe the inner life of that genial, childlike, irresponsible, altogether lovable race to which they belong; they love their people, and lead us to love them' (*Yale Literary Magazine*, 1903: 264). The reviewer barbedly adds, however, that this does not apply to 'the Irishman whom cities have spoiled'—that is, urban immigrants (*Yale Literary Magazine*, 1903: 264).

Critics adopted wholesale the ways in which MacManus suggested his participation in the community he chronicled. This included his frequent references to the *seanchaí* tradition and his efforts to situate himself in a long lineage of traditional Irish storytellers, as an interlocutor who mediated between English and Irish. John B. Smith and Lillis Ó Laoire suggest, however, that he 'was not a fluent Irish speaker' (2009: 53), and Mountcharles was not part of the Donegal Gaeltacht, despite what some publications, such as the *New Catholic World*, appear to suggest (*New Catholic World*, 1906). But his American reviewers seemed to relish the exoticism of the term *seanchaí*. Regina Armstrong's profile in *The Critic* carries the subtitle 'Shanachy of Donegal', and opens with the assertion that by describing the *seanchaí* in the preface to *Through the Turf Smoke*, MacManus 'has happily defined himself' (Armstrong, 1899: 732). This, Armstrong claims, is because of his background:

Donegal remains primitive ... It is practically shut off. Gaelic is still spoken there to a great extent and the old traditions are practised. The legends of a thousand years

have been transmitted by living lips to succeeding generations. It was at the feet of the neighborhood shanachy that Mr. MacManus so well learned the story-teller's art that in time he became the shanachy of Donegal—the best teller of tales within its confines (Armstrong, 1899: 732–3).

In its review of *Through the Turf Smoke*, the *Saturday Evening Post* bolsters MacManus's authority as a teller of Irish tales by observing that he has 'made quite a stir in his native land as a shanachy, or "teller of tales and singer of songs"' (*Saturday Evening Post*, 1899: 624). In a review of *The Bewitched Fiddle* (1900), the leading Gaelic Revivalist periodical in the United States, *The Gael / An Gaodhal*, typifies MacManus as 'this shanachy from the hills of Ulster' (*The Gael*, 1900b: 152). *Overland Monthly* similarly located him in this tradition, though they also remark that something is lost in committing oral tales to paper: 'even Mr. MacManus's literary ability must fail to make them as attractive as they would be beside the cottage-hearth, "through the turf-smoke," and out of the mouth of a real shanachy, or teller of tales' (*Overland Monthly*, 1899: 481). Incidentally, this tension reflects what Margu rite Corporaal has identified as a central paradox in Irish local colour writing: authors employed and promoted 'indigenous forms ... [while] having to rely on print cultures for disseminating local Irish cultures among Irish urban and global readerships' (Corporaal, 2020a: 226).

The notion that MacManus was a latter-day heir to the august tradition of the *seanchaithe* remained central to his US reputation in the decades following his first foray into the transatlantic market. Discussing the context of the 'Celtic Renaissance' in his early study of the movement entitled *Irish Plays and Playwrights* (1913), University of Pennsylvania professor and noted Irish literature specialist Cornelius Weygandt provides a somewhat dismissive overview of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Irish fiction, in which he characterises MacManus as 'as truly a shanachie as the old story-tellers that yet tell the old tales about peat fires in Donegal' (1913: 7). In his profile in the *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, Elbridge Colby frames MacManus as the representative of a dying literary tradition: 'Writing has become a vocation rather than an avocation; oral story-telling is a lost art. So it is in the rest of the world, but not among the cabin homes of Ireland' (1914: 35). He concludes that MacManus has carried this tradition across the Atlantic: 'He comes, his heart and mind filled with the spirit and legend of his race, to be *seanachie* to the New World', and proffers '[t]he mystic beauty and tender pathos of a nation of story-tellers, poetry and enchantment' (Colby, 1914: 40).

Later in his career, MacManus himself continued to market his work in the terms that he first outlined in the prefaces to his early books, as a report in *Scholastic* of a

lecture given in 1934 suggests: ‘Mr. MacManus disclosed that he has been a shanachie, or story-teller, since he was seven years old’ (*Scholastic*, 1934). After striking up a correspondence with the university’s President and Irish literature aficionado Father John Cavanaugh in 1905, he frequently lectured at Notre Dame (Blantz, 2020: 202) (practically identical reports of visits across three decades indicate that he had no qualms about recycling his material and his self-presentation as a latter-day *seanchaí*). This is also evident from his rather mannered third-person autobiography *The Rocky Road to Dublin* (1938), originally published in New York by Macmillan, in which he describes having been inspired in his youth by four local *seanchaithe*, and remarks that ‘[r]eviewers have dwelt upon the rhythm in the lad’s writings: From the old Shanachies he caught it, if it is there’ (MacManus, 1938: 113n2).

In addition to touting the pedigree of MacManus’s storytelling prowess, reviews and profiles of MacManus sometimes highlighted the fact that he had been a schoolmaster in his native Mountcharles. The schoolteacher was ‘one of the central figures in local-colour literature’ (Donovan, 2010: 6), and readily recognisable for readers of regional fiction on both sides of the Atlantic as a figure that ‘negotiates between provincial and metropolitan, between local and translocal knowledges’ (Howard, 2018: 51). A perennially popular local colour novel in the United States was Edward Eggleston’s *The Hoosier Schoolmaster: A Story of Backwoods Life in Indiana* (1913 [1892]), which remained popular decades after its original publication in 1871. However, unlike the teachers in many works of local colour fiction, MacManus was not an outsider ‘come to a rural locale to teach natives in the knowledges of modernity’, as Josephine Donovan typifies such characters (2010: 6). Rather, he was a local teacher turned internationally popular purveyor of folklore and local colour fiction. As such, he displays a sort of ‘double vision’: he translates the local knowledges of the premodern region for an audience disenchanted by the homogenising forces of (urban) capitalist modernity (Donovan, 2010: 2).

In this regard, MacManus conformed to what June Howard describes as ‘the topos of the teacher as insider and outsider, as mediator between different kinds of knowledge’ (Howard, 2018: 80). F. Marion Gallagher’s profile in *Overland Monthly* asserts that MacManus’s experiences as schoolmaster were crucial for his development as guardian of Donegal folklore, as ‘[t]hey afforded him rare opportunity to study his native place and to observe the traits of his neighbors at close range’ and enabled him to present them ‘through the medium of his books, to the world at large’ (1908). By contrast, though, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* suggests that MacManus’s storytelling prowess possibly affected his effectiveness as an educator, as ‘the scholars probably paid more attention to the stories he told them than to their books’ (*Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 1899).

Incidentally, in *The Rocky Road to Dublin* MacManus claims, with a quotation that he appears to have made up, that the *Plain Dealer*'s review was a dismissive piece of invective (MacManus, 1988: 209).

In an interview given to the *New York Times* following the American première of J. M. Synge's controversial *The Playboy of the Western World*, MacManus explicitly positions himself as a greater authority on Irish peasant life than Synge and Yeats:

I think I may say without egotism that there are very few who know our people, our people of the remote mountains and islands, better than I. ... Mine is the knowledge, not of the outsider who goes among them, filled with sympathy if you wish, like Yeats and Synge, but the truer, surer, soul knowledge of him who is one of them ... (1911: 11).

Claiming authority as the genuine article (a common topos, of course, in revivalist discourse, though MacManus's reasoning is partly justified), he forcefully rejects the 'gross immodesty and repulsive vulgarity' of Synge's 'Irish colleen', and claims that Synge's representation of Irish life is incorrect (1911: 11).<sup>8</sup> As the reviews and profiles discussed above demonstrate, critics by and large accepted MacManus's authority unreservedly.

### MacManus and Dialect Writing in the United States

Marguërite Corporaal observes that American reviews of Irish regionalist writing do not tend to 'draw analogies' with domestic local colour writers such as Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman (Corporaal, 2021: 55). Yet, while Scottish and Irish local colour writers are frequent points of reference in the American reception and marketing of MacManus's work, there is also a conscious effort on the part of reviewers, magazines, and indeed MacManus himself to frame his work as cognate with the work of popular American regionalists. The extent to which MacManus was seen as appealing to an American audience hungry for local colour can be seen in *McClure Magazine*'s 'Partial Prospectus for 1902', which lists him among 'Noted Short-Story Writers' that are 'testifying eloquently to the perennial power of literature' (*McClure's Magazine*, 1901). MacManus is the only marquee name not from the US or Canada. Most of the authors listed are local colour writers, including some of the most successful

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<sup>8</sup> Reflecting larger debates within the Gaelic Revival surrounding authenticity and who gets to speak, MacManus couches his criticism of the two writers in nationalist terms: although he speaks admiringly about Yeats's work, he no longer believes the poet to be 'an asset for Ireland to be proud of', as 'in the past year [he was] offered a pension by the British Government, and accepted it' (27 November 1911: 11).



names of the day, such as Booth Tarkington, Joel Chandler Harris, Francis Hopkinson Smith, Octave Thanet (Alice French), Hamlin Garland, and Sarah Orne Jewett.

Reviews and profiles also situated MacManus explicitly within this context. Quoting the *Chicago Chronicle*, *Current Literature* described MacManus as ‘the Irish Mark Twain’ (*Current Literature*, 1899), allowing readers to make sense of the Irishman’s work by relating it to Twain’s use of dialect and humour. Indeed, according to the British edition of the *Bookman*, Twain was one of MacManus’s favourite authors (*Bookman*, 1903: 164). A piece by Regina Armstrong from a series in the US *Bookman* on ‘the new leaders in American illustration’ also shows how MacManus was folded into the American genre. Discussing the work of artist Arthur I. Keller, Armstrong lists, in a single paragraph, some of the authors whose work he has illustrated, all prominent local colour writers or otherwise advocates of the movement: MacManus, Howells, Freeman, and Bret Harte. She singles out for praise the illustrations that Keller drew for MacManus’s stories in *Harper’s Monthly*: ‘as much of a feature as the stories themselves, and being so full of local colour as to make the author wonder how he got it!’ (Armstrong, 1900: 144). In the *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, Elbridge Colby asserts that the oral culture that feeds into MacManus’s work may be locally specific, but is nevertheless part of a wider cultural trend, found in regions of the United States and popularised by local colour writers such as Eggleston, Jewett, and Freeman: ‘in the secluded villages of the Hoosier State, in little old-fashioned New England towns, and many another placid and remote nook and corner of the continent there is real story-telling’ (1914: 35).<sup>9</sup>

MacManus’s prefaces and the convoluted publication history of his early books demonstrate that he consciously sought to position himself within the US market for local colour writing. While most critics seemed to accept MacManus’s suggestions that his work offered unmediated authenticity, unsullied by worldly considerations such as profit, *The Gael / An Gaodhal*, reviewing *The Bewitched Fiddle* (1900), explicitly noted that ‘[t]he manner in which these tales are presented indicates they have been prepared for American consumption’ (*The Gael*, 1900a: 357). MacManus was a shrewd literary operator, and following his initial American success, he consciously sought to cater to his American audience, and mobilise noted American writers to promote his work. He solicited endorsements from well-known authors such as Irvin S. Cobb, who supplied a quaintly stereotype-laden foreword to MacManus’s memoir *The Rocky Road to Dublin* (1938), and Hamlin Garland, who at one point visited MacManus in Donegal.

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<sup>9</sup> Promoting a particularly farfetched theory of kinship between Donegal and the United States, Patrick Sarsfield Cassidy argues that there are in fact links between the Tuatha Dé Danann and pre-Native American inhabitants of Ohio (Cassidy, 1892: 12). His verse novel *The Borrowed Bride* features a 54-page apparatus with explanatory notes expounding his theories about Ireland’s ancient past. Incidentally, in the first note he cites William Allingham.

Offering a copy of his latest book (presumably *Yourself and the Neighbors* [1914]) to his acquaintance, MacManus adds a handwritten postscript requesting a blurb: 'And I'll be doubly grateful, if you permit my publisher to quote a pithy sentence from yr. opinion' (8 September 1914, Hamlin Garland Papers (HGP) box 24, folder 38, no. 2709). Two decades later, MacManus sent Garland a copy of the newly published *Bold Blades of Donegal* with an almost identical appeal, asking for 'a sentence or two' that his publisher could use for promotional ends, 'in conjunction with a few other well known ones' (5 August 1935, HGP box 43, folder 2, no. 2709).

A key aspect of the appeal that MacManus's work had for American readers was his use of vernacular English. The use of Hiberno-English is an important feature of his constructions of Irishness, and critics not only highlighted the importance of dialect in his writings (generally referring to it as 'brogue'), but did so with reference to the popularity of dialect writing in the US more broadly, both domestic and imported. As Stephanie Foote remarks, '[r]egional fiction's most recognizable formal characteristic was its use of dialect to render the speech of regional speakers' (Foote, 2001: 3). From the Civil War onwards, dialect writing 'had achieved an unprecedented popularity in the United States' (Kersten, 2000: 92), and the American literary market was in thrall to what was described as 'the cult of the vernacular' (Jones, 1999: 1). MacManus's early fame was partly due to the fact that *Century Magazine* printed a series of his tales under the title 'Irish Stories' during the latter half of 1899. The magazine's editor, Richard Watson Gilder, was sometimes referred to as the 'high priest' of the 'cult' (Nettels, 1988: 65), and *Century* was one of the leading purveyors of local colour fiction. So too were several other magazines in which MacManus featured during his first year on the US market, such as *Harper's Monthly* and *Atlantic Monthly*, whose former editor, William Dean Howells, had been instrumental in defining the terms in which local colour writing was received in the United States.

The popularity of dialect writing during this period becomes apparent from 'The Dialect Store', a good-natured satirical piece by Charles Battell Loomis in the April 1897 issue of *Century Magazine*, two years before MacManus's stellar rise. It describes a dream of a visit to a shop on Fifth Avenue where 'quill-drivers' can purchase regional and ethnic dialects by the yard, from Hoosier to Southern American English, and from African American to French Canadian vernaculars (Loomis, 1897: 958–9). As Giulia Bruna points out, the piece not only pokes fun at the vogue for dialect writing, but also 'offers a snapshot of the transatlantic state of the genre' (2021: 314); several of the mentioned writers hail from Europe, including Jane Barlow, who would later be mentioned frequently in relation to MacManus's work. Travelling around Ireland a few years later, Loomis in fact had dinner with MacManus, 'whose Irish stories are

so well known in America', in Mountcharles, County Donegal (Loomis, 1909: 49). He subsequently described this visit in his travelogue *Just Irish* (1909), which also features a photograph taken by Loomis himself of MacManus in front of his cottage.

In her profile of MacManus in *The Critic*, Regina Armstrong concluded that 'the popularity of his work promises an addition to present literature and particularly to dialect literature' (August 1899: 734). As the *Overland Monthly*, another noted platform for local colour writing, observed in its review of *Through the Turf Smoke*, '[t]hey are for the most part clever sketches of peasant life, with enough Irish brogue to satisfy the most rabid dialect gourmet in America' (*Overland Monthly*, 1899: 481). The reviewer goes on to praise the authenticity of MacManus's characters: 'Mr. MacManus's Irish men are real Irishmen,—not the article we are familiar with on the variety stage and in the funny papers' (*Overland Monthly*, 1899: 481). This distinction is compared with the stereotypical representation of African Americans in American culture: 'just as the negro with his characteristic music, ideas, and manner of talking, is different from the distorted creature of the coon song' (*Overland Monthly*, 1899: 481). This shows how MacManus's work was subsumed into an American understanding of dialect writing. Interestingly, in its review of *The Red Poocher* four years later, the *Overland Monthly* again praises MacManus lavishly, yet suggests that he might want to moderate the brogue: 'MacManus ranks with Lover and Lever, and were it not for the continual presence of the dialect he would be just as enjoyable to all readers' (*Overland Monthly*, 1903: 461–2). The *Outlook*, too, thought that MacManus might be overdoing this feature, concluding that *Through the Turf Smoke* was written 'with some excess of dialect, but with vigor and originality' (*The Outlook*, 1899: 564).

Sometimes, MacManus's use of brogue was linked with Finley Peter Dunne's extraordinarily popular Mr Dooley stories, which were written in the voice of an Irish immigrant publican in Chicago. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, Dunne was one of the most popular and highly paid authors in the United States (Dietrich, 2020: 85), and Mr Dooley represented the type of shrewd Irishman with a thick brogue that also features in many of MacManus's tales. The *New York Times* suggested that '[t]he very favorable reception given by the public to the inimitable Mr. Dooley's philosophizings on peace and war and Mr. Seumas MacManus's capital book of short stories ... has served to turn fresh attention to Ireland' (Francis, 1899). Amusingly, this pairing also features in the instructions for 'A St. Patrick's Day Party' in *The Good Housekeeping Hostess* (1904), which advises the reader to '[s]end the invitation in the brogue, with which Mr. Dooley and Seumas MacManus are making us familiar, on a paper cut like a shamrock leaf and shaded a delicate green' (Chandler, 1904: 294–5).

A frequent non-American point of reference in reviews of MacManus's fiction is Scottish local colour writing, yet this reference is also usually connected with the American vogue for dialect writing. The *Yale Literary Magazine* opens its review of *A Lad of the O'Friels* with a reference to the popularity of Scottish regionalism: 'Not many years ago a wave of Scotch literature swept over the country. This has now receded, or almost receded, and an Irish wave bids fair to follow it' (*Yale Literary Magazine*, 1903: 263). According to the *Churchman*, with its use of brogue, MacManus's work filled a gap in the American market also because of the influence of Irish America:

It has always been a matter of some surprise to us that in these days of dialect stories, when many readers seem to prefer any off-shoot of our speech to pure English, and even characters who are expressly said to speak Gaelic are made to talk to us in Highland Scotch, that the Irish, which is perhaps more familiar than any other among us, should be relatively neglected (*The Churchman*, 1899: 370).

In reviews of *Through the Turf-Smoke* in particular, J. M. Barrie's local colour tales are regularly cited. However, the similarity in the phrasing used by many reviewers (variations on 'MacManus is doing for his native Donegal much the same service that J. M. Barrie did for Thrums') suggests that they simply adopted a locution from the promotional material distributed by Doubleday and McClure, the book's American publishers.

In their review of *The Bewitched Fiddle*, the revivalist newspaper *The Gael / An Gaodhal* recommends MacManus's 'stock of material', which is 'entirely novel and refreshing to the American palate', to readers who are growing bored of 'the gloomy humor and unpronounceable dialect of the Kailyard philosopher' and readers of assorted British and Continental adventure and romance novels (*The Gael*, 1900b: 152). Highlighting the transatlantic dynamics of MacManus's regional tales, the reviewer distinguishes between readers from Irish backgrounds and American readers; the latter welcomed MacManus's work as 'a novelty, ... as they would welcome in these days of folk-lore study and scientific exploration of peasant psychology, anything that would give them an insight into a hitherto unknown region' (*The Gael*, 1900b: 152). Though commending the book's 'humor and a spontaneous flow of odd dialect', the reviewer admonishes MacManus for resorting too frequently to negative stereotypes (*The Gael*, 1900b: 152). As a native of the region he depicts, MacManus is advised to be more mindful of the market for which he is writing, lest he give the 'non-Irish public' a wrong impression:

we would deprecate the constant introduction of the whiskey-bottle. That unfortunate object is waved aloft enough in so-called Irish fiction, written by alien pens,

and can well be dispensed with, by one wishing to give a really pleasant picture of his countrymen to the world (*The Gael*, 1900b: 152).

Like *The Gael*, the *Yale Literary Review* also links MacManus's US popularity to the waning appeal of Scottish regionalism, particularly the 'host of unworthy imitators' that followed the 'men who inaugurated the fashion' and 'brought the Caledonian dialect and life into disrepute' (*Yale Literary Magazine*, 1903: 263–4). While celebrating MacManus and the current vogue for Irish regionalism, the reviewer wearily observes that '[u]ndoubtedly, history will repeat itself in regard to the dialect and life of the Emerald Isle' (*Yale Literary Magazine*, 1903: 264). In other words, the demands of the American literary market will eventually affect the authenticity of local colour writing but, until that happens, American readers alike can delight in the comedy and purported authenticity of MacManus's constructions of the Irish region and his use of Donegal brogue.

### Conclusion

In her profile in *The Critic*, Regina Armstrong declares that the Donegal peasantry, portrayed in MacManus's works, 'are so primitive that they are cosmic' (1899: 734). Like many other readers of regionalist writing, she found in local colour writing such as MacManus's a degree of universality and authenticity that she considered lacking in modern urban life. Indeed, as Elsa Nettels points out, William Dean Howells believed that regional features such as dialect not only 'revea[l] the distinctive features of a particular society or culture', but are also 'a means of uniting people of different cultures':

His idea of realism rests on the conviction that people are bound to each other by their humanity, that in the speech and manners of a particular class or group are revealed universals of human nature. "What is true to humanity anywhere is true everywhere." To be true to one region is to be true to "human experience everywhere" (Nettels, 1988: 67–8).

As the reception of MacManus's Donegal narratives in the United States demonstrates, Irish local colour writing was instrumentalised to carry such universal resonance. Recognising the popularity of local colour in the United States, MacManus promoted the remote county as the locus of an unadulterated folk culture whose significance transcends national borders, an estimation readily adopted by literary critics. As such, the American public not only read MacManus for the entertainment value of his fictions and folk tales, or the transatlantic performance of a vernacular Irishness

that had been made increasingly popular by the transatlantic operations of the Gaelic revival. In common with American local fiction, they also embraced MacManus's stories because they were seen as representing something to which modern urban America could no longer lay claim. As Margu rite Corporaal has argued, '[l]ocal colour fiction is implicated in cultural transactions that cross borders and (re)codify genre in a transnational network of texts, audiences and identities' (Corporaal, 2021: 56). The early reception, marketing, and self-presentation of Seumas MacManus's work in the United States is a highly instructive example of this dynamic.

Despite his popularity in the United States, which lasted decades, and his influential role in promoting nationalist organisations such as the Gaelic League—and indeed causes such as revivalism and Irish independence more generally—today, MacManus is little more than a footnote in most narratives of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland and its diaspora. However, as this article has shown, he deserves renewed critical attention. With his regionally defined constructions of Irishness that tapped into familiar representational traditions and revivalist tropes, as well as his shrewd positioning within a transatlantic literary marketplace, Seumas MacManus exemplifies key mechanisms by which Irishness was constructed, commodified, and distributed in transnational contexts.

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