OBJECT LESSONS AND STAGED IRISHNESS IN *DARBY O'GILL AND THE LITTLE PEOPLE*

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Upon its release in 1959, *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* prompted mixed responses. One anonymous reviewer praised it for its maverick use of "trick effects" and for Jimmy O'Dea's masterful portrayal of King Brian as "the most likeable and beguiling leprechaun yet to appear on the screen" (Anon. 87). However, this same reviewer also categorised it as a Disneyfied "excursion into American-Oirish fantasy," criticising it for "lay[ing] on the blarney with a trowel" and for the patently synthetic nature of its alleged Irishness (87). Since its release, the film has been held up as the gold standard of "Oirishness" by critics and filmmakers alike. For example, in his 2010 article, "When Disney met Delargy: 'Darby O'Gill' and the Irish Folklore Commission," Tony Tracy notes that the film has had an "enduring influence in shaping impressions of Ireland and the Irish as a romantic site of pastoral simplicity and premodern cultural practices," making it the epitome of "Hollywood's positioning of Ireland as whimsical rather than worldly reality" (44-45).[1] This commodification process is part of Tracy's delineation of the history of Walt Disney's meeting and subsequent communications with Dr Séamus Delargy of the Irish Folklore Commission. Tracy parallels the two, calling them "charismatic and visionary leaders professionally dedicated to gaining recognition for folk narrative in modern culture albeit in strikingly different contexts: Disney a highly creative exploiter of disparate narrative traditions in the global medium of the movies; Delargy the state-sanctioned director of the national folklore collection" (46-47). During their consultations, despite Delargy's repeated efforts, Disney could not be deterred from condensing Irish folklore into a film about leprechauns, and *Darby O'Gill* was the product of this preoccupation.

This chapter pinpoints the significance of this fascination with leprechauns, linking it to a trajectory of staged/screened Irishness. While *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* incorporates many Stage Irish tropes, I argue that it also engages with and problematises these stereotypes through the figure of King Brian and other folkloric objects catalogued in the throne room scene of the film. The precedent for treating *Darby O'Gill* as a site of resistance can be located in its source text, Herminie Templeton Kavanagh's *Darby O'Gill and the Good People* (1903). Here, Kavanagh addresses controversial issues such as sterility and barrenness, grief, and the clash between folklore and theology, even going so far as to stage a debate between the parish priest, Father Cassidy and King Brian Connors, King of the Good People, on the na-

1 Notably, the casting director for John Sayles's *The Secret of Roan Inish* used the acronym "DOG" for Darby O'Gill as an indicator for actors that tended to portray stage Irishness (Chanko, qtd. in Tracy 44).

ture of good and evil. The truce between the two is only established by engaging with politics and culture, with the two agreeing that Daniel O'Connell was the greatest man who ever lived, Tom Moore the greatest poet, and Owen Roe/Brian Boru tying as the greatest warriors (Kavanagh 50-51). Nevertheless, the focus of this chapter is Disney's film adaptation, *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*, for its emphasis on leprechauns, within the context of post-war Irish-American sensibilities, and the objects in the throne room (absent from the novel), all of which I argue are integral to the film's screen-Irish identity.

Positioning *Darby O'Gill* within a Stage Irish discourse, this chapter begins with a discussion of the roots of the Stage Irishman. Starting with an overview of the appearance and accoutrements of the stock character in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, I move through the politicisation of these types in the nineteenth-century figures of the "Fenian" and the "Paddy," as seen in caricatures, vaudeville and the music hall. I then examine the "Stage Gael" as a response to these types that tried to channel the ancient idealism of the Celtic past, which in turn provides the context out of which the leprechaun emerges as "the default icon of Irish culture" (Rogers 146). The nature of this default is assessed more particularly in the Paramount animated short "The Leprechaun's Gold" (1948), whose producers, like Disney, approached the Irish Folklore Commission, but fabricated a much less sensitive reading of Irishness that uncomplicatedly recycles stereotypes of Stage Irishness. By contrast, *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* also utilises tropes such as romanticised landscape, music, jigs, the Stage Gael, and the "Paddy," but the figure of the leprechaun destabilises these concepts by placing Darby in the position of being subservient to the Celtic past in the same way that Stage Irishness was used as tool to legitimise Victorian oppression. Finally, delving more deeply into Disney's attempted creation of what I refer to as a "stage folklore" – as seen in the film and its promotional materials – this chapter demonstrates that Disney's misreading of nationalist objects in the throne room, when interpreted alongside the leprechaun, causes these mythical objects to be sterilised by the very creatures the film seeks to anthologise.

Staging Irishness: From Stock Character to Leprechaun

"Stage Irish" is a representation of Irishness that finds its roots in seventeenth-century drama, but which soon after evolved into a stock character.[2] As Declan Kiberd writes: as early as the 1600s, "the rudimentary image of the Stage Irishman had been formed: he wore trousers, drank endlessly, swore wildly, and spoke a broken

2 See Graves's "Stage Irishman Among the Irish" and Bartley's "The Development of a Stock Character I: The Stage Irishman to 1800" for more particular stereotypes associated with the stage Irishman. Graves, discussing Dion Boucicault's precursors, describes the inherited types from Theophrastian and Plautine comic characters – i.e. "The Surly man, the Boor, the Patron of Rascals […] the old man, the trucky [*sic*] servant, the braggart soldier" (31) – while Bartley's breakdown is more particular to what he describes as its three stages of development from 1587-1800 (438-45).

but colourful brand of English, salted with Gaelic exclamations" ("Fall" 21). A century later, the character had acquired some props to make him more recognisably Irish, just in case his drinking, clothing, and Gaelicisms were not sufficient markers: "now the character invariably carried a shillelagh under his arm, ate potatoes as a staple diet and frequently appeared with a pig in close attendance" (Kiberd, "Fall" 21). The figure itself was meant to be derogatory, "his hobnailed boots and knee breeches, his swallow-tailed coat and shillelagh, his poteen in his pocket and 'begorra' on his lips" (Graves 36), articulating an Irishman who performed buffoonery through costume, speech, animals, and objects. These four categorisations develop further in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and will be the coordinates for my later analysis of Stage Irishness in *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*.

By the nineteenth century, the Stage Irishman had been adapted to several media beyond plays: early modern depictions of him in prose as a "wild Irishman" had evolved into the brutish, rebel-rousing "Fenian," just as the humorous figure had become the simianised "Paddy." This "dual image" appeared in Victorian caricatures (Hayton 31), but also in the form of music hall and vaudeville acts.[3] While "Stage Irish" tended to be a comically inflected (if pejorative) depiction, the staging of Irishness in the later nineteenth century carried political connotations that "vindicate[d] Victorian repression" and suppression of the Irish with reference to Home Rule and the Land War (Hayton 5). In British and American newspapers until the late 1880s, cartoons involving "Paddy, the Irish peasant" showed him to be "lazy, credulous, excitable, and irrationally hostile to lawful authority" while his counterpart, the "Irish rebel or Irish-American Fenian was depicted with more brutish features. At best he had a more pronounced jaw and at worst he appeared as an ape-like or completely dehumanised figure, signifying his degraded nature" (De Nie n.p.). By the turn of the century, the pig became a staple in caricature, and was used to represent politicians and Ireland alike: "The pig represented Ireland's status as an agricultural, rustic and backward nation, as well as the Irish peasantry's supposed indifference to filth and muck" (De Nie n.p.).[4] This is also when the leprechaun made his first appearance in caricatures, with the three representations of politicians Carson, Redmond, and O'Connor in *Punch* from 1910-1911, pictured as wearing "the standard 'Paddy' outfit" but with pointed leprechaun ears (Finnan 428).

3 See for example Kibler's "The Stage Irishwoman," where she describes sketches such as "The Irish Servant Girls"/"The Stage-Struck Maid." Other critics who discuss vaudeville and music hall acts include Mollenhauer (for the musical element), Flynn, and Malcolm and Hall.

4 See for example Michael De Nie's "Pigs, Paddies, Prams and Petticoats: Irish Home Rule and the British Comic Press, 1886-93"; L. Perry Curtis Jr.'s *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*; Soper's "From Swarthy Ape to Sympathetic Everyman," and William Jenkins's "The Toronto Irish and the Cartoons of the *Evening Telegram* 1910-1914."

While the pig did not make it onto the music-hall stage, the simianised gait, the peasant costuming, the alcohol, the shillelagh, and the addition of a clay pipe did. The American counterpart to the music hall, vaudeville, showed "'Paddy,' the immigrant Irish man" as "uproarious and uncouth, in contrast with the plodding German and the stingy Jew" (Kibler 8). The emphasis on his immigrant identity showed how "the stage Irishman occupied the role of ethnic Other, a comic inversion of genteel Anglo-American masculinity reinforcing the popular opinion that the Irish were incapable of assimilation into modern American civilisation" (Flynn 123). As part of the act, the character was also known to perform an Irish jig, a fast-growing stereotype of performed Irish identity, since "no dance was more closely associated with Ireland than the jig" (Mollenhauer 374). The jigging leprechaun, wearing this same garb and dancing to "The Fox Chase" will return in *Darby O'Gill* as a key signifier of Stage Irishness.[5]

One final representation of Irishness that is relevant to the analysis of *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* that will follow is that of the "Stage Gael." In the wake of the Irish Literary revival, and Yeats and Lady Gregory's proclamation that "Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of ancient idealism" (Gregory, qtd. in Dean 72), the Celt and the numinous (elderly) peasant also came to be a marker of staged identity. As Kiberd writes, the "Stage Irishman gave way to an equally spurious stereotype, the Stage Gael, the long-suffering mystical peasantry of the west so beloved of Yeats and de Valera" ("Fall" 32).[6] The Stage Gael glorified the Irish peasant – whose primitivism seemed to confer upon him an innate understanding of ancient legends and folklore, Gaelic, and a knack for the oral tradition – as well as the surroundings of the "scenic landscape, Gothic ruins and romantic ruins of Boucicault's glamorised countryside" (Kiberd, *Inventing* 498).

After the establishment of the Irish Free State, the Stage Gael was extended into the prevalent image that Ireland wished to convey of itself to Americans in particular, in what Carol Taaffe refers to as de Valera's "cultural propaganda" agenda:

> In September 1945, Éamon de Valera made clear to his Heads of Missions that cultural propaganda should now be a priority – not only to protect Ireland's independence, he said, but to correct false ideas about the Irish people that had been disseminated worldwide to justify British mistreatment of the country. An official later handed the propaganda brief looked grimly on the prospect of university exchanges and badly attended lectures; he dreaded the interference of provosts and museum directors. There were better ways, he advised, 'to "put Ireland over" on the "plain American people." (n.p.)

5 See Mollenhauer for historical examples of the performance of the jig and its significance as an identity marker (377).

6 See also Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland*, specifically the chapter, "Flann O'Brien, Myles, and *The Poor Mouth*" (497-512) for a more thorough critique of the Stage Gael, a term which is derived from a letter from Brian O'Nolan to Sean Casey (498).

Earlier, in 1943, as an extension of this "cultural propaganda" that would particularly appeal to Americans, de Valera had also put forward an image of an "ideal Ireland" in his famous "The Ireland that we dreamed of" St Patrick's Day broadcast. This image consisted of "a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with sounds of industry […] whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of old age" (de Valera n.p.). Thus, the coordinates of the Stage Gael alongside de Valera's pastoral Celticism gave rise to the rolling green landscapes and idyllic village typical of "heritage films" as well as the cultural capital of the Celtic past as recounted by elderly storytellers around the fireside.[7]

By the late 1940s, another folkloric figure emerged as a stand-in for Ireland not on stage but on-screen: the leprechaun. The heretofore "solitary, cross, busy little figure on the periphery of the Irish fairy world" (Taaffe n.p.) metamorphosed into a symbol of the ancient, pre-Christian Celtic past, of rural Ireland, of wiliness and bartering, of mystical powers, and of superstition. However, it is not completely clear at what point the leprechaun became "the default icon of Irish culture" (Rogers 146), particularly in the United States. Although the leprechaun had appeared in *Punch's* political caricatures at the turn of the twentieth century, as previously mentioned, and, in 1890, was characterised as "the best known among the solitary fairies" by Yeats in *Fairy and Folktales of the Irish Peasantry* (qtd. in Barton, "Glocca Morra" 28), by the middle of the twentieth century, he ceased to be a mildly mischievous cobbler and came to be "associated with sentimental or stereotypical visions of the country" (28). Critics such as Carol Taaffe, Ruth Barton, Diane Negra and James Silas Rogers have traced the rise of the leprechaun in post-War America as well as its cultural implications in film and advertisements. Both Taaffe and Rogers link his popularity to James Stephens' *The Crock of Gold* (1912) and the wish fulfilment of capitalism, demonstrating this influence on musicals/films such as *Finian's Rainbow* (1968). Barton further argues that both *Finian's Rainbow* and *Darby O'Gill* were integral in "establishing the templates for the function of the leprechaun in cinema" (29) before the leaping leprechaun was replaced by the vengeance narrative of the *Leprechaun* horror franchise.[8] However, the source text for *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*, Herminie Templeton Kavanagh's *Darby O'Gill and the Good People* (1903; serialised 1901-1902), predates Stephens' text by a decade. In it, Kavanagh only dedicates one story in the collection to the wish-granting leprechaun – giving other aspects of folklore, such as the banshee, the come-hither, the changeling, the Cóiste Bodhar, the Omadhaun, etc. equal treatment – and it is Disney's adaptation of the text that transforms the Good People and their King into jigging leprechauns.

7 For definitions of Irish heritage cinema, see Barton's "The Ballykissangelization of Ireland."

8 While Barton sees this as a template, Rogers instead sees *Darby* as "a decisive end to a literary tradition in which the leprechaun figure was employed in a nuanced, dialogic, and transgressive manner" (Rogers 147).

Nevertheless, the leprechaun does become a metonymy for Stage Irish folklore: just as the Irish on stage are distilled into stock characters, so too is the mysticism of Ireland refined into the single figure of the leprechaun. Dressed similarly to the Stage Irishman with his breeches, green swallow-tailed coat, distinctive hat, pipe, and shillelagh, the not-so-elusive leprechaun has become part of everyday narratives about Ireland in greeting cards, breakfast cereals, advertisements, and films that propagate existing, wrongheaded reflections of perceived Irishness – particularly with the emphasis on the pot of gold. As Diane Negra writes in "Consuming Ireland: Lucky Charms Cereal, Irish Spring Soap and 1-800 Shamrock," the 1963 Lucky Charms Leprechaun, for example, is part of a campaign that "directly or obliquely package[s] Irishness for US consumers by deploying imagery associated with an American idea of what Irishness is" (Negra 77). This idea is completely removed from the original context of the leprechaun or Irish folklore more generally, turning him into "a type derived from the tradition of the stage Irishman" (80), but one that suits an American purpose through the representation of the experience of immigration,[9] with the pot of gold acting as a joker card for the American dream. It is this exact version of the leprechaun that finds its way into "The Leprechaun's Gold" (1948), which will be discussed below.

Paramount's Stage Irish Leprechauns in "The Leprechaun's Gold"

While Disney studios was collecting material from the Irish Folklore Commission (IFC) for their Irish film in 1946,[10] they encountered a competitor: the IFC was approached by a representative from Paramount Pictures, who wanted to consult with them regarding a planned project on Irish folktales. The Disney production executive, Larry Lansburgh, promptly wrote to dissuade Delargy from meeting with Paramount, cautioning him that the material might not be treated with the necessary sensitivity: "I feel that the Irish leprechaun and fairy theme is a very delicate subject and unless it is handled well, might tend to ridicule the tradition that your Folklore Commission has been trying so hard to preserve" (qtd. in Tracy 51). However, even without the consultation, Paramount nevertheless went on to create the animated short "The Leprechaun's Gold" in 1948, arguably treating the leprechaun theme exactly as Lansburgh predicted and providing a case study of the Hollywood iteration of the previously discussed Stage Irish tropes. In its ten minutes of running time, the film almost seems to be a checklist of Stage Irishness, covering the romanticised landscape, the leprechaun costumed as a Stage Irishman, potatoes, greedy landowners, impoverished peasants, cunning trickery, and a pig.

9 Negra further argues that while "ads recuperate the experience of immigration," this is a "transform[ation of] negatively valued difference into positively valued accommodation" (82).

10 For a full account of the exchange between Disney and Delargy, see Tracy.

The animated short sets the tone with its opening images of a twilit verdant countryside, peppered with backlit ruins and the voiced over narrative description of Ireland as "[t]he land of legend, of romance and ruins, of shamrock and shaman, of banshee and Blarney stone, where peat smoke from humble cottages, curves like magic mist high over the countryside" (0:38-0:54). After establishing the rural, idyllic setting, the scenery shifts to faeries dancing, and more specifically to the leprechauns in their "underground cobbler shops, making shoes to give to the poor" (1:15-20). The subtle change of the leprechaun's initial task of shodding the feet of all the faeries to a more altruistic purpose foregrounds later philanthropic actions, such as the youngest leprechaun trying to give up his gold to rescue a poor family from eviction.

As the cartoon focuses on the underground workshop, we see four elderly leprechauns sitting at individual desks, hammering in tandem, while a younger, red-haired, red-bearded leprechaun provides slapstick comic relief, as he clumsily collects the shoes and prepares the soap and water for the ritual washing of the gold. This young one, "Paddy," wears a green cap and his face is simianised. Next, they gather around the fire to taste the evening's meal, until Paddy exclaims in dismay, "Faith! But there's no potatoes in the stew!" (3:35-39). Paddy immediately runs to the newly washed gold with the intention of using their funds to buy some "spuds" (3:52), but the naïve, "daft" youngster (3:55), and by extension the viewer, is quickly enlightened about the "Law of the Leprechauns": "When a leprechaun gets caught, the rest of the clan must give up their pot of gold so's he can be set free. That's why we need our gold, and don't you forget it. And as for the spuds, sometimes the widow Leary leaves a few on her doorstep just for us leprechauns" (4:02-24). In this American fantasy of Irishness, the leprechaun's gold has ceased to be a wish-fulfilling treasure and has instead become ransom money; likewise, rather than use their income towards buying food, these miserly Irish stand-ins – "A leprechaun without his gold, is like a man without a soul" (3:03-08), one says worshipfully – are willing to take charity from the poverty-stricken, superstitious Widow Leary, who cannot even afford to pay her rent, but nevertheless remembers to leave four massive potatoes on her doorstep for leprechauns.

In addition to the potatoes, Paddy also witnesses the debt-collector, Mr Gambeen, trying to extract ten pieces of gold from the widow – who is huddled inside her sparsely furnished cottage, still wearing her shawl – and threatening to evict her at dawn. Presumably this is a reference to the exorbitant rents charged before the Land Act of 1881, which would have been part of the inherited historical memory of Irish-American immigrants. Paddy feels sorry for the Widow and her daughter Molly and notes that his pot of gold would benefit them greatly. To manipulate her at his own expense, he orchestrates his own capture; however, the sensible and suspicious Molly refuses to believe he's a leprechaun: "Leprechaun indeed! Get down with you and your blarney!" (6:40-46). Fortunately, Paddy has another trick: he pretends to be hurt and forces Molly to see him home.

In the meantime, the four elderly leprechauns anxiously await Paddy's return, pacing and saying "Wirra, wirra," a Hiberno-English expression of concern, coming from the anglicisation of the Irish term for the Virgin Mary, *Mhuire* (OED, "wirra"). One of them mistakes Paddy for a mother pig and her two piglets, unexpectedly satisfying even this criterion of the Stage Irishman. As they amble by, he grumbles, "Well it sure looked like Patrick" (7:25-34). Molly and Paddy finally arrive, and Molly is given the cauldron of gold and a wheelbarrow, which she happily takes home to pay the mortgage. Unfortunately, she is spotted by Mr Gambeen, who, in his avarice, has raised the mortgage from ten pieces to the full pot of gold. Molly cries out against his thievery, but Paddy assures her that "Leprechaun gold never stays with them's that steals it" (8:58-9:03). The golden honey gold quickly turns into a swarm of bees and chases Mr Gambeen out of his house. Molly faithfully returns the gold since "the mortgage is settled" (9:40-43), and the short ends with Paddy revealing the bag of potatoes from his initial errand. The bag rips and covers the pot of gold with a dozen potatoes while all laugh uproariously. Paddy, at the centre of the image, is pictured as something between demonic and simian, though in keeping with the caricature-Paddy (as opposed to the Fenian), his features are "more chimpanzee-like than ape-like: in other words, they were cheeky and cunning rather than fierce and menacing" (Malcolm and Hall 145).

In this way, the animated short performs a number of facets of Irishness: its setting, stock characters, naming, costuming, potatoes, pigs, leprechauns, use of Irish English, and heavy brogues tick every box that would identify the short as Stage Irish. However, this representation of Irishness is not focused on authenticity so much as a perpetuation of stereotypes that reinforces marginalisation. Added to this, "The Leprechaun's Gold" also seems to be a moral tale, teaching its viewer that cheaters never prosper; kindness returns kindness; giving with a generous heart is its own reward; and blessed be the poor in spirit. Within this paradigm, the Stage Irishman, signified by the leprechaun, is a contradictory element that thrives even though he cheats, receives financial rewards for his kindness, succeeds through trickery, and prospers at the expense of the poor. This comic buffoonery embodies the playful spirit of performed Irishness, but also reinforces an ethnographic Othering of Ireland and, by extension, of the Irish in America.

Stage Irish and Stage Gael: The Dynamics of Subservience to a Leprechaun

While "The Leprechaun's Gold" seems to perpetuate every possible stereotype associated with Stage Irishness, the portrayal of Irishness in *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* is more nuanced despite its status as the "epitome of screen 'Oirishness'" (Tracy 44). On the surface, it is true to its movie-poster tagline, "A Touch O'Blarney, a Bit O'Romance and a Heap O'Laughter,"[11] which prepares the viewer for Irish

11 Other versions of the poster promised "A Touch O'Blarney, a Heap O'Magic, and a Load O'Laughter," "It's a wonderful world of Love, Laughter and Leprechauns," or a movie "Sparkling with Leprechauns and Laughter" but my focus is on the 1959 Buena Vista poster. For images of the poster – the one analysed above and subsequent post-

stereotypes with its joking conflation of Irish "O'/Ó" surnames with the preposition "of" as well as its use of the word "Blarney." The images on the poster similarly promise a cornucopia of staged Irishness, including a green-eyed, jovial Albert Sharpe as the comic Irishman; a mischievously grinning red-haired leprechaun king; Janet Munro as a green-clad Stage Irish colleen; two swarthy, dark-haired men, fighting; and folkloric highlights, such as the Pooka, the Banshee, the Death Coach, and jigging leprechauns alongside a fiddle-playing Sharpe. Alcohol is missing from the poster – though it features prominently in the film – but otherwise it aligns perfectly with what Kerr refers to as Hollywood's "'great lie' of Oirishness, which is that the Oirish are all lovable rogues with a twinkle in their emerald-green eyes who like a drink, a song, and then a bit of a fight" (44). While *Darby O'Gill* does perform Irishness to the point of parody, a closer inspection of tropes such as landscape, Darby as combined "Paddy" and "Stage Gael," music, and land ownership/poaching uncovers a power dynamic where Darby is subservient to King Brian.

The film opens with the "primitive picturesque" (Barton, "Ballykissangelization" 416) of the rolling green hills surrounding the village of Rathcullen, as the shawled Widow Sugrue minces towards the Gate House. The landscape tallies with the Hollywoodisation of the cinemascape of a non-industrial Ireland – calling to mind the Ireland of *The Quiet Man* (1952), which was also geared towards an Irish-American audience – even though "all the filming was done on two huge soundstages at the Burbank Disney Studio and at the Albertson and Rowland Lee Ranches in Southern California" (Sampson n.p.).[12] As Brian McManus notes, the film's Rathcullen is characterised by two edifices: "the church with an imposing spire which looms over the village and the public house, the Rathcullen Arms, which is recognisable from its beer barrels, lined up beside the wall," representing the centrality of Roman Catholicism and alcohol consumption in this construction of Irish character (McManus, Thesis 212). However, while the town seems to be divided between church and pub, I would argue that there is a noteworthy dichotomy between the village of Rathcullen and the ruin of the abbey that sits atop Knocknasheega (which in itself is a meeting of Catholicism and folklore, more reminiscent of Kavanagh's source material). These romantic ruins serve the purpose of mythologising County Kerry, connecting it to the heroic past and the mythic age of Ireland.[13] As Smyth observes, just "[a]s medieval ruins prompted

ers – see the photo gallery of the film's IMDB page: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0052722/?ref_=ttmi_tt> (29 June 2021).

12 Wade Sampson further describes the set and cinemascape: "The immense sets actually required the construction of a new soundstage at Disney [with] an entire village including a thirteen-foot Celtic cross in the town square. Many of the scenes of the village of Rathcullen were filmed on the lot, while all of the sequences set in the abandoned abbey were shot out at the Albertson Ranch. There was Second unit footage from Ireland, combined with matte paintings by Peter Ellenshaw that helped create the illusion of 19th century Ireland" (Sampson n.p.).

13 This notion is explored more fully by Smyth in relation to Boucicault's use of Bartlett's *Scenery and Antiquities* for his stage design: "Central to Boucicault's set design is a

meditation on the lost world of pre-Commonwealth Irish culture, this 'fairy architecture' suggested the remains of a mythical age" (356). By inserting this legendary and folkloric past adjacent to sites of drinking and religion, *Darby O'Gill* already locates the Stage Irishman alongside the Stage Gael. This comparison is seen even more clearly in the subtle adjustments that are made to Darby O'Gill's performance of Irishness as both "Paddy" and "Stage Gael." He is still an affectionate version of what Graves classifies as "a stage Irish-man 'full of wisdom and heart' […] who has been sentimentalised to the point that his flattery and cheating, his laziness and drinking, are seen not as irreparable flaws but as minor imperfections on a basically moral character" (35).[14] However, his elderliness, his closeness to the faerie folk, and his insistence that the townspeople uphold superstitions related to them puts him in the position of "the ignorant Irish peasant lout of English caricature" who has been "reframed as an idiot savant with a magical channel to a natural and supernatural reservoir of knowledge and spirituality" (McIlroy 369). Thus, Darby as "Paddy" also embodies the ancient idealism of the "Stage Gael."

While one could interpret this combination as consummate Stage Irishness, this performance of Irishness nevertheless contains elements of subversion. A frequent complaint is that the Irish are willing to "play Paddy or Biddy for the amusement of their [British] superiors" (Kiberd, *Inventing* 93), that they are somehow compelled to perform Irishness for an oppressor. However, Darby O'Gill offers platitudes and flattery to the British landowner, Lord Fitzpatrick – who benevolently jokes that Darby "retired about five years ago" but neglected to give his notice (4:20) – and appears gullible and diffident to Father Murphy as a representative of the Catholic Church. However, the points at which he is literally being forced to perform are in his interactions with King Brian. Even when he is first kidnapped by the leprechauns, Darby's resentment at the King's lack of gratitude for his having spread the gospel of the Good People is palpable:

> Who tells all the stories about you […] and who makes the women watch where they're throwin' their wash water when you and your lads are out walkin' invisible? […] And who makes the men tip their hats respectful to every swirl of dust? […] So you've put the come-hither on me, that's how you pay me back, you ungrateful little frainey. (25:58-26:20)

To each of these assertions of loyalty, King Brian responds placatingly, "You do, Darby," before finally congratulating him "You, you've done grand" (26:15). But for all his allegiance and devotion to ancient rituals and the tenets of the Gaelic revival, the reward Darby receives is that he has been lured to his death and cut off from being

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notion of the Irish landscape as a monument to a lost, heroic civilisation, an idea threaded through the text of Scenery and Antiquities" (355).

14 In this case, Graves is referring specifically to Boucicault's Stage Irishman. The extent to which *Darby O'Gill* incorporates the Stage Irishman as Boucicauldian "roguish hero" has been explored by McManus in his thesis, where he examines how Darby O'Gill, as a term, has come to be a negative "cultural signifier" for Irish identity (6, 43-50).

able to see his family or friends again. When the good people become angry at his perceived ingratitude, Darby bellows "They better watch what they're saying. I speak Gaelic too!" (26:32-35), thus weaponising his knowledge against the ancient past that he has previously honoured.

Darby's sense of oppression becomes clearer when he pretends to be resigned to stay, and King Brian calls on him to perform for him. When asked if he wishes to play the harp – which has been identified by both through lines from Thomas Moore as "the harp that once through Tara's halls, the soul of music shed" (25:24-31) – Darby would rather this symbol of the seat of Irish self-governance remain as silent as it is in Moore's melodies and play his fiddle instead. Even here, he is thwarted: he is denied his own violin and instead forced to play "the Stradivarius," which King Brian brags "was presented to [him] by the emperor of the Italian fairies in 1700" (27:44-50). The Stradivarius is a famously resonant violin, and King Brian's namedropping is likely meant to highlight the impressive rarity of the instrument and by extension Darby's ignorance in preferring his own inferior fiddle. However, the interaction in which Darby mutters "I'd rather have me own" (27:50) while King Brian condescendingly offers what he perceives to be a better-quality alternative, echoes the patronising mockery of the Stage Irishman's desire for self-governance in Victorian periodicals' caricatures. The Victorian response to the Young Irelander Rebellion of 1848, for example, was to infantilise and bestialise the simian Ireland next to the British lion, with the caption "One of us MUST be put down"[15] – "putting down" aligning with babies or animals being put to sleep (euphemistically or not), subjugation, and the quashing of insurrection. The violin's Italian origin is also significant, given the controversial history of Roman Catholicism in Ireland and the unionist fear that Home Rule would be "Rome Rule" if the Bill passed. Thus, one could read this scene as the Stage Irishman, who has previously performed constructions of Irishness for the British and the Roman-Catholic Church, now as Stage Gael, becoming an on-demand performer for his ancient past. And, this performance will be enacted with an Italian instrument that has been thrust upon him rather than his own violin.

When he takes up his instrument, Darby transforms the violin into a fiddle and plays "The Fox Chase," a traditional Irish jig. As previously stated, the jig was incorporated into vaudeville acts as being representative of Irishness: "it is the jig, in 6/8 time, which has long been prominently representative of Irish dance and music" (Mollenhauer 374). The fact that this jig incites the leprechauns to mount their miniature horses and go hunting also introduces another dichotomy of subservience: namely, that of hunting and poaching and, by extension, claims to land ownership.

Poaching is raised as an issue earlier in the film when Lord Fitzpatrick gives Michael MacBride a tour of the grounds and instructs him in his duties as groundskeeper: "I

15 See the *Punch* archive for this image and other examples of condescension in the periodicals: <https://punch.photoshelter.com/gallery-image/Ireland-Cartoons/G0000tcWkXyP4OHo/I0000c1E5Q7ELdBI> (29 June 2021).

can't afford an army of caretakers for the little use I have of the place, but I don't like to see the weeds higher than the summer house" (13:09-12). Already, the appearance and dynamic of Lord Fitzpatrick as a "John Bull"-type British landowner who rarely visits his Irish estate is set. When MacBride notices a rabbit snare and a dead rabbit, Lord Fitzpatrick warns: "Ah, that's a thing I want you to put a stop to. Old Darby couldn't catch a poacher if he tried. Like enough he helped to set the snare. Now I don't want any bad feeling between the townspeople and me. I like 'em, mind you, and so will you, but don't like 'em too much" (13:18-27). While poaching has been romanticised, the harshness of the Night Poaching Act of 1828 and the Game Act of 1831, which led to the sentence of transportation, contradict this occupation as inconsequential.[16] Although Darby's role as alleged poacher is treated indulgently by Lord Fitzpatrick and Michael MacBride, the questioning of legitimate claims to land ownership is highlighted by the portrayal of the leprechauns as a group of hunters on horseback, while Darby as poacher is stealthily setting snares at night. Lord Fitzpatrick owns the land, but the leprechauns have an ancient claim to the land: in this sense, Darby's poaching places him, comparatively speaking, in the same servile position to the leprechauns as it does to Lord Fitzpatrick, since he is stealing in either case. Worse, King Brian goes so far as to frame Darby as a poacher by posing as a rabbit to the visible eye inside Darby's game bag. Instead of speculating that Darby might be poaching, as is the case with Lord Fitzpatrick, King Brian's response to Darby's refusal to comply with his authority (i.e. making his three wishes) is far more insidious, as there could be very real consequences for the criminal activity of poaching.

Whether to King Brian or to Lord Fitzpatrick, Darby's subservience to the authority of both over the land is equally shackling. In the case of Lord Fitzpatrick, he is easily replaced on the whim of the landlord and is lucky to be given two weeks to vacate the Gate House that he has occupied for at least twenty years. In the film, it is unclear what year exactly *Darby O'Gill* is meant to take place – the set is described as "nineteenth-century" (Sampson n.p.) and Kavanagh's *Darby O'Gill and the Good People* was published in 1903 – but one can assume that if the Land War has not yet happened, this type of behaviour was part of their justification. Darby's property is not his own, though he can now move to "the old McCarthy cottage," which needs a "new thatch" and Katie's reward is that "she can have first call with the cleaning" of the Manor House whenever the Lord comes to town (13:47-14:51). Even when considering his wishes, Darby knows better than to wish for "a grand big house on top of a hill, as big as the castle at Cong"; this would be a trap because you would require "servants" and "money to run the house": "There you'd be with a big house in your hands, as big as a church, and you the poorest church mouse in it" (1:13:35-54). In

16 Speaking of poachers in the eighteenth century, William Savage describes how rather than starving peasants, it was most often violent poaching gangs who "descended on an estate to take large amounts of game to sell," thereby robbing landowners of their valuable partridges, pheasants, hares, and deer, and causing the issue to become "a class war" a century later (Savage n.p.).

other words, Darby has learned to manage his expectations, as seen from his three wishes from an earlier encounter with King Brian: "Me first wish is that you'll grant me health. […] Me second wish is a small wish indeed, but it means a lot to me. I want a big crop of potatoes. […] And me third wish is for the crock of gold" (8:30-50). Things go awry when Darby gets greedy and wishes for more pots of gold for his friends; otherwise, his humble wish for health, potatoes, and one crock of gold for himself would have been manageable.

The desire for a "big crop of potatoes" feeds into the stereotype that the Irish subsist on potatoes, but the agricultural wish would be especially resonant within the folk memory of Irish-American viewers whose families might have emigrated to America because of the Famine. However, the fact that leprechauns have the ability to grant a good crop of potatoes suggests the disturbing possibility that they might have had the power to prevent the Great Famine from occurring and that that calamity might not have been a simple potato blight. This implication is supported by King Brian's threats, should Darby harm him:

> Do that, and you'll have a scourge that'll make the potato famine look like a Sunday regatta. […] Your cows will die of the black leg and your sheep of the red water, and in every cradle in town there'll be a changeling! [...] I'm the one that keeps my kingdom in order, and all the unpleasant spirts of the night will run wild unless you wish your wish and let me go. (1:00:34-59)

King Brian's warnings involve starvation, agricultural failure, the death of livestock, and depopulation, all of which were results of the Great Famine and direct contributors to the strained post-Famine relations between Britain and Ireland. If this curse could be purposefully deployed, then the ancient Irish "landowner" is far more frightening and oppressive in his threats against rebellion than the British. Taken together, these depictions of Stage (or screen) Irishness demonstrate a troubled relationship with expected roles. Darby plays the comic buffoon for the British landowner and the Church, but in his role as Stage Gael, we see him forced to "play Paddy" for an ancient king who is meant to symbolise Irish independence.

Other stock characters are similarly rendered problematically, though not necessarily because of King Brian. Darby's "Paddy" counterpart, the "burly, bellicose, reckless, and recalcitrant" Fenian (Flynn 131), is also distorted in the form of Pony Sugrue. Pony is established from the beginning as a violent, pugilistic character. Within the first five minutes of the film, his mother brags to Lord Fitzpatrick that Pony has "whipped" every man in the parish (5:20). The subversion, however, is that Pony's brutishness is not turned against the British empire, but rather his own people: he physically threatens the pub-owner; he heckles Darby during his storytelling; he is violent with Katie's other suitors; he refuses charitable acts to Father Murphy; he makes bestial chicken noises when he assumes Darby's "leprechaun" is Lady Fitzpatrick's prize hen; and he physically overpowers Michael MacBride to set him up to lose his position. The revolutionary Fenian, who was meant to illustrate the "monstrous horror" of the Irish who were too uncivilised to be granted independence (Mal-

colm and Hall 144), has been replaced with a man who not only eschews his independence but is actively conniving for servitude to a British master. Pony Sugrue's mother is also represented as a scheming "witch" against whom Katie O'Gill should be wearing her "holy medal" (46:29-34), rather than the usual epitome of "feminine sacrifice and morality" of Irish motherhood (Kibler 19). Likewise, the "colleen" Katie, is not a "Pretty Irish Girl" looking for marriage and children, despite it being the theme song of the film. Instead, she resists settling down until she is supernaturally punished into submission by nearly being killed by a Púca (and a Banshee), and by being slut-shamed in her sleep by a leprechaun: "Courtship is it? And marriage the bone and sinew of the country? What would you call a girl who'd keep her lad dangling through pure selfishness or sinful dalliance? I know what I'd call her. I'd call her a …" (1:04:04-17). King Brian's denunciation of Katie's "sinful dalliance" aligns unexpectedly with Christian ideals of purity, given that he is a representation of ancient idealism.

Focusing principally on stock characters, the depiction of the "Paddy," the "Stage Gael," the colleen, and the Fenian are all subject to the power dynamics of subservience. In the case of Darby as both "Paddy" and "Stage Gael," the leprechaun represents a destabilising element, removing the colonial dynamic and making Darby subservient to his own Irish tradition. As will be seen, this relation is further complicated by Disney's representation of patriotic objects and staged depictions of folklore.

Object Lessons and Stage Folklore

In addition to stock characters, the stage in *Darby O'Gill* is also occupied by folkloric objects that become part of its performance of Irish identity. Over and above the leprechaun – who had already attained a status of Stage Irishness in the early 1900s when politicians such as Carson, Redmond, and O'Connor were represented as leprechauns in the pages of *Punch* (Finnan 428) – Disney brought to life an entire cast of what I call "stage folklore" in *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*. Much like the Stage Irishman, Disneyfied stage folklore plays to the ancient idealism of the Stage Gael. Despite the folkloric research that went into the film, including visits to Ireland, Delargy's itineraries and "the research carried out on [Disney's] behalf," all of which "suggests that Disney was committed to a film that accurately and respectfully reflected folk beliefs and their place in Irish life" (Tracy 54), the result reflected fundamental misrepresentations of Irish heritage and the folkloric uncanny. For example, rather than a portent, the Banshee became a bringer of death, who could seemingly be battled away with fire or a stick; the Púca, traditionally a shapeshifting goblin that favours the horse form, was now a menacing, murderous, strobe-lit version of Darby's horse, Cleopatra; the Cóiste Bodhar, a ghostly carriage with a headless horseman; and King Brian Conners, a cooperative leprechaun who could be convinced to star in a Disney picture as himself, and who also uses his trickery to help a friend (i.e. tricking Darby into nullifying his death by making a fourth wish).

In their production of *Darby O'Gill* and its advertising campaign, Disney Studios went to great trouble to turn their stage folklore into stock folklore through perpetuation. The promotional materials leading up to the release of *Darby O'Gill* included a piece called "How I Met the King of the Leprechauns" in the *Walt Disney Magazine* and a one-hour special on the TV-show *Disneyland* called "I Captured the King of the Leprechauns.*"* In both pieces, Disney repeatedly emphasises his half-Irishness (despite the ratio being closer to a quarter, given that he has one Irish grandparent) and recounts the leprechaun lore that was passed down to him:

> Being half Irish myself, I learned about the Leprechauns of Ireland while I was still a small boy on our farm at Marceline, Missouri. I began to believe in Leprechauns then, because some of my relatives had pretty convincing stories to tell about the magic powers of these Little People, and the tricks they could play when angry. […] Most Irish in the old country respect Leprechauns. They leave food out for them at night, to keep them happy, and are careful not to disturb old forts and other ruins these wee folk guard as their very own. They are particularly careful not to throw water across any of the tiny paths Leprechauns leave in the grass, because Little People hate water, and there is no telling what sort of mischief they will be up to if they get their feet wet. (Disney, qtd. in Sampson n.p.)

Disney uses these promotional spots as opportunities to educate his viewers regarding Irish folklore. For example, in the above excerpt, he reveals the practice of leaving out food for the leprechauns and animistic respect for the invisible fairy world.[17] In this way, he lends authenticity and sensitivity to his future iterations of the leprechaun, while also portraying a romanticised transplantation of Irish culture in America that nonetheless sets the stage for an "eternally unchanging" (Negra 89) Ireland that will be recognisable and accessible for those with Irish heritage.

The famous TV-special, "I Captured the King of the Leprechauns," sees Disney interviewing actor Pat O'Brien – "because there's nobody more Irish than Pat O'Brien" (1:09-15) – and asking him to talk about leprechauns and other creatures of faerie folklore: "You're full Irish so I thought you could tell me about these little people" (3:00-:05). Pat O'Brien then takes Disney on a tour of his room, showing him his collection of shillelaghs; the leprechaun statue that guards it; the boxed away pipe that his uncle claimed to have picked up when a leprechaun left it behind in shock; and a book that contains the tale of the O'Brien family Banshee and shows the Cóiste Bodhar (both of which are illustrated with the same images that appear in *Darby O'Gill)*. O'Brien also sings Disney a song about leprechauns that his grandmother taught him, claiming the oral tradition is more valuable than anything that could be

17 This preoccupation with leprechauns is also present in a children's book from 1955 called *Little Man of Disneyland*. There, Disney alleges that a leprechaun named "Patrick Begorra" inhabits an orange grove and is woken from his slumber during the building process for Disneyland. Goofy, Donald, and Mickey then take Patrick Begorra in a helicopter to the Disney Studios in Burbank and show him the plans for Disneyland and ask for his cooperation in not making any mischief. Patrick agrees on the condition that he be allowed a "'wee snug house' of his own in a private place in Disneyland that was 'out of sight, hidden away' but children would be encouraged to look for it" (Sampson n. p.).

read in books: “you can learn more about leprechauns from this [song] than you can from all the high-falutin’ books in the world” (3:38).

Walt Disney asks questions along the way and O’Brien corrects his wrong assumptions.[18] For example, when Disney categorises the banshee as “the old fairy lady that wails and carries on when somebody dies,” O’Brien corrects him three times: “No no, before. Before they die. She warns you about death *before* it happens” (5:04-12).[19] After his seemingly impromptu lesson, O’Brien assures Disney and his viewer, “Banshees, death, coaches, headless coachmen, the Irish love it all” (6:46-57), effectively opening the folkloric repertoire to include more than just leprechauns. Nevertheless, the conversation returns to leprechauns as he convinces Disney to cast real ones (which Disney awkwardly interprets to mean “midgets” at first), as “only a leprechaun can play a leprechaun” (7:16-26).

The next segment of the special sees Disney going to Ireland to capture the King of Leprechauns and convince him to star in his film. He begins with a visit to an archivist, who tells him the origin story of the leprechauns through allegedly illuminated manuscripts (as told by Kavanagh in *Darby and the Good People*; illustrated by Disney). During the consultation, the special depicts a twee Ireland, especially when the archivist unboxes a leprechaun coat that has been “mailed in by Mrs Macread” (10:20), one of many received reports of leprechaun sightings from the general public. Disney stubbornly insists that he wants to capture the King, as he “believe[s] in starting from the top,” so the Irish scholar refers him to Darby:

> Well, we do occasionally hear about King Brian. The last report came in from County Kerry. There’s an old seanchaí (Walt: shana-key?) – seanchaí, a traditional storyteller – this one is very good I believe. … in the town of Rathcullen … his name is Darby O’Gill … he’ll tell you about King Brian if anyone can. Just one thing to remember, Mr Disney. Whatever he tells you, it’s true. (14:26-15:00)

Here again, Walt Disney is using Irish terminology and his slow (slightly incorrect) repetition of “seanchaí” puts him in the position of being educated, but also someone who is trying to add this vocabulary to his viewer’s lexicon. At the same time, he is putting himself in the position of an Irish-American viewer who is far removed from his heritage but nevertheless qualified to catch the King of the Leprechauns.

The rest of the film features Disney easily capturing a leprechaun and requesting the King’s cooperation. Long sequences are interspersed from *Darby O’Gill* that feature characters or objects from Irish mythology (i.e. the throne room sequence described below). To convince the King to join him, Disney informs him that he is half-Irish, thereby asserting his entitlement to the collective folk memory of Ireland.[20] Although

18 Disney’s interactions here and later with the archivist are similar to those laid out by Tracy in “When Disney Met Delargy.”

19 Unfortunately, the film had finished production, so there was no correcting this mistake.

20 According to McManus, the Disney archive also contains photos of King Brian’s life in California, “relaxing in a miniature deck chair,” “negotiating the terms of his contract,” etc (Thesis 290-91). Taaffe, McManus, and Tracy discuss “I Captured the King of the

this promotional material was clearly intended to hype the film, it also served the purpose of reiterating the same folklore and animations that appear in the movie, thus making Irish mythology (beyond leprechauns) more accessible to a non-Irish audience when they view the film.[21]

In addition to establishing the key points that would make up the expanded stage folklore of *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*, Disney also incorporates iconographic Irish "objects" in his film. These are showcased when Darby enters King Brian's throne room inside of Knocknasheega:

> — Well Darby O'Gill, 'tis pleased and delighted I am to see you again! […] Sit down, man. Over there! Drop the lid man. It's only an old chest full of jewels. We took it from the Spanish ships when the Armada was wrecked on our coast. Ship's gun too. […]
> — And the throne?
> — By all the goats in Kerry, do you think I'd sit on a Spanish throne? This once belonged to Fergus mac Leda, ancient High King of all Ireland. […] And over there, the gold cup of Cormac. And here's the sword of Brian Boru, who drove out the Danes. And over there you see the harp.
> — Don't tell me it's 'the harp that once through Tara's Hall the soul of music shed.'?
> — Aye, it is that same. (24:24-25:38)

Much like "I Captured the King of the Leprechauns," this scene also seems to have the didactic aim of giving lessons about meaningful objects from the heroic sagas of Ireland's Celtic past. The "old chest full of jewels" and the "Ship's gun" are pilfered from the Spanish Armada when they were shipwrecked along the Irish Coast in 1588, during the Anglo-Spanish War. This was a fraught time for Ireland, as it also came in the wake of the Tudor Conquest and the "Anglicisation of Ireland" (Hayes-McCoy 183). Fergus mac Leda's throne, Cormac's cup, and Brian Boru's sword are all heroic relics of historic and legendary Kings and High Kings of Ireland.[22] Cormac's cup, which is the only icon not given any explanation in the film, was magical in that "if a lie be spoken over it, it will immediately break in pieces, and if a truth be spoken it will be made whole again" (Rolleston n.p.). The Harp of Tara is a symbol of Ireland; it was housed in Tara, the seat of the Ancient High Kings of Ireland and later became a symbol of Irish independence.

Leprechauns," and Disney's cooperation with the Irish Folklore Council (and Séamus Delargy) in much greater detail.

21 It should be noted that the intended Irish-American audience, at whom the film was principally aimed and marketed, had troubles understanding the Irish accents of the predominantly Irish cast and the interspersed, non-subtitled lines of Gaelic were inaccessible to the non-Gaelic-speaking viewer. Thus, when the film was re-released in 1969, it was dubbed over in a more accessible American-English and the Gaelic was similarly translated and dubbed; even the music originally sung by Sean Connery and Janet Munro was replaced with a track sung by Brendan O'Dowda and Ruby Murray (Sampson n. p.).

22 Fergus mac Leda was King of Ulster not all of Ireland, therefore the throne could not be that of the High King of all Ireland. I am not sure if there is a purpose to this mistake.

These patriotic objects tell stories of magical artefacts, Irish unification, and victory in the face of adversity. However, just as he destabilised the role of the oppressor in the performance of Stage Irish characters, so too does the King of the Leprechauns nullifies the significance of these objects. Knocknasheega is a place that is inaccessible to the average Irish person. As such, these relics of ancient heroes have been usurped by the leprechauns to be used decoratively and frivolously: King Brian dances a jig on Fergus mac Leda's throne, which in itself is a staging of Irishness; the leprechauns leap and climb all over the cannon, sit on the harp and slide down its strings, and jump into Cormac's cup, treating it like a swimming pool. These mystical objects are rendered into everyday furniture and playgrounds. The fate of "the harp that once through Tara's Hall the soul of music shed" from Thomas Moore's *Melodies* is that it will continue to hang silently; the legendary thrones will remain forever unoccupied (except by an elusive, jigging leprechaun); riches unspent; and swords unused from within the leprechaun's throne room. In other words, these sacred objects will be used decoratively, disrespectfully, and inaccessibly, turning them into stage "props" on a false cinematic set that is constructed in America. As such, by placing these objects within Knocknasheega, Disney's attempt to pad his stage folklore with evocative mythical objects has the reverse effect of being invalidated by the exact creatures, the leprechauns, he seeks to anthologise.

Conclusion

Darby O'Gill and the Little People has generally been dismissed by critics as "the peak of an American popular culture tradition of representing leprechauns, and Irishness more generally as inane" (Rogers 146). However, while *Darby O'Gill* incorporates clichéd tropes such as romantic landscapes, the Stage Gael, the "Paddy," the "Fenian," a throne room full of nationalist objects, and folkloric creatures in its construction of Irish identity, I have argued that a further analysis of these elements demonstrates that the film is not necessarily an uncomplicated "epitome of screen 'Oirishness'" (Tracy 44), especially as compared to contemporaneous productions such as Paramount's "The Leprechaun's Gold." Rather, the triangulation of ancient idealism, British landowners, and the Church are rendered problematic by the subtext of Darby being subservient to all three. Similarly, Disney's misreading of folklore and the misrepresentation of patriotic items in the throne room leads to an implied nullification of an independent Ireland. Irish cinema critic Harlan Kennedy has asked: "Is Ireland a land at all, in the sense of a self-determining country and culture or is it a product of everyone else's perceptions?" (24). *Darby O'Gill* answers this question to a certain extent through its depiction and undermining of Stage Irish conventions: on the one hand, it is an American projection of a rural idyll populated by leprechauns, banshees, peasants, and comic buffoonery; on the other hand, these same stereotypes are subverted, with leprechauns deconstructing the system on which Stage Irishness is built.

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