

Isn't it well for ye.?

the book of Irish Mammies



*'I hope now you didn't use
the good scissors for that'*

*'Are you sure that
wasn't you? It came up on
the phone. "Missed Call" it said'*

*'Don't throw out that bit
of string at all, it might
come in handy
for something'*

'Is that a new stain?'

*'I thought I heard a
mouse last night'*

*'Are THOSE the
jeans you're wearing?
Ah why don't you
put on your nice ones?'*

the twitter sensation @irishmammies

COLM O'REGAN

About the Book

A BOOK if you don't mind! And him with a degree and a job and all.

Everyone should have an Irish Mammy. She's never short of advice, a kind word and a cup of tea (making sure to scald the teapot first, of course).

Bring the coat anyway. If it's too hot you can take it off.

Comedian Colm O'Regan explores the phenomenon of the Irish Mammy and what she might say about everything from the 'new mass' to the cardinal sin of not owning a cough bottle and the importance of airing clothes properly. The global influence of the Irish Mammy, through history, science, politics and literature, is undeniable. Did you know, for instance, that Hamlet had an Irish Mammy?

So if you're an Irish Mammy, have one, know one or suspect you might be turning into one, this book will act as your guide. But be aware that though this book might *think* it knows it all, it doesn't, only Mammy knows it all.

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Introduction

This book is a celebration of the phenomenon of the Irish Mammy.

It started life as a Twitter account called @irishmammies. If you don't know what Twitter is, don't worry; that's not what this book is about. One way to describe Twitter is as the online equivalent of graffiti on the wall alongside a fairly busy secondary road. If you've time you'll see it, but if you're not on that road you'll never see it. And you won't miss much.

I set up a Twitter account to relay some of the things that Irish Mammies say. They're not necessarily words of wisdom - just words of living from my own mother and other mothers I have witnessed in action. Within hours of the account's inception, these little snippets - 140 letters or fewer in length - were being re-tweeted (the Twitter equivalent of he-said-she-said) around the place. Over the course of the next few months, thousands of people started to follow @irishmammies. ('Follow' is Twitter parlance for 'sign up to read what she has to say'. There's nothing messianic going on here.)

Across the world, emigrants thinking of their own Mammies at home, people who had met an Irish Mammy and others who suspected they were turning into one latched on to the @irishmammies Twitter account and became very fond of her.

So now there's a book.

It's not the first exploration of the Irish Mammy and neither will it be the last but, hopefully, it's an enjoyable

one.

Not everything the Irish Mammy says and does in this book will mean all things to everyone. There are of course many different types of Irish Mammy, but whatever the variations are, you'll recognize some things. This is a woman who more than likely will have spent some time on a small, rainy island in the Atlantic, with the nights drawing in, worrying about damp clothes and unaired beds, feeling the lift from a stretch in the evenings, making and drinking gallons of tea with neighbours and family (being sure to scald the teapot), ordering children down off a wall for fear they'd break their neck, being surprised by prawn cocktail, and having the pavlova.

She has re-addressed countless letters to a variety of locations around the world. She knows far more than her children give her credit for and often wonders what's keeping them at all.

Now she's in a book, so call in if you're passing, but be sure to ring ahead.

Colm O'Regan

A Word from Irish Mammy

When he said he was doing a book, I got an awful land. You know, he had a good job, a degree and all, and he threw it all up to go into I-suppose-you'd-call-it the entertainment business, but sure anyway all we can do is support him. As long as he's happy, that's the main thing. But isn't it fierce hard for the young people now? I don't know where they're all going to get jobs, the-Lord-save-us.

He gave it to me to read and I flicked through it all right, but I haven't had time to read it in detail, to tell you the truth. We've been very busy: Himself with his hip, and then we're both booked in to have our teeth cleaned tomorrow, so I don't know when I'll get a chance.

The bit of it I saw seemed grand, though I don't know are some bits an exaggeration? But sure there's always going to be a bit of exaggeration in these things for the entertainment value, I suppose.

Then, would you believe, didn't the publishers say to me, 'Mammy, have you any words of wisdom at all for the readers?' Well, I wouldn't say I'm that wise now indeed. We all muddle through the best we can and there's far wiser than me around.

But whatever ye do, let ye bring the coat anyway. If it's too warm ye can take it off, but it'd be handy to have. You could get an awful cold this time of the year.

Mammy

I heard about this
all right...Is it any
good I wonder?

IRISH MAMMIES BOOK
The Twitter Sensation!



1

The Making of Her

She didn't lick it up off the stones.

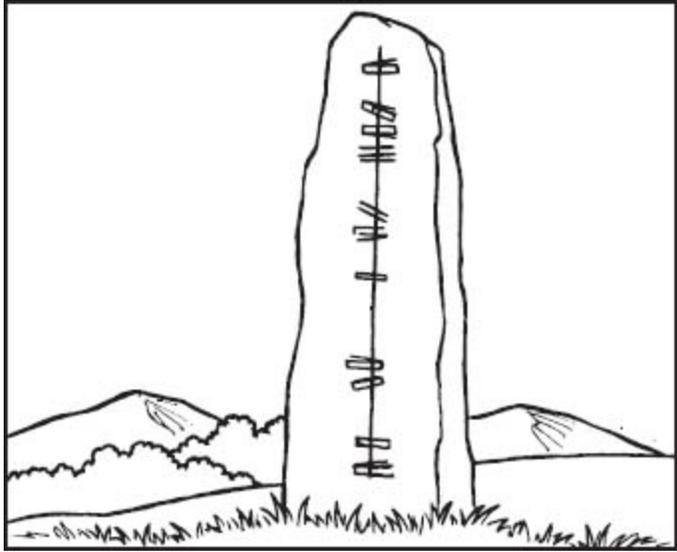


THE MAMMY WE know and love didn't just happen. She is the product of her origins and influences. But what are those origins?

Archaeological evidence is frustratingly rare, but in what little there is we can see some familiar depictions, as in this cave painting of a hot press in Altamira, which shows that the Irish Mummy's eternal fear of damp was at the centre of prehistoric life.



The ancient Irish Ogham script was believed to have originally been a representation of a washing line with clothes-pegs and was used by Irish Mammies to communicate drying conditions.



Translates as: 'A grand bit of drying out'

You couldn't believe half of it - the Irish Mammy in mythology



As is often the case where there is a lack of hard historical fact, the missing details are filled in by myth. There are competing theories of the origin of the Irish Mammy. Some say she is descended from Cessair, granddaughter of Noah, who was said to be the first woman to arrive in Ireland. This would make sense, as Mammy would always have had relatives in the Missions. The Fir Bolg - so named because they ate too quickly and got pains in their stomachs - came from Greece, but they seem unlikely ancestors, as Irish Mammy for some reason could *never* get any colour on the back of her legs. The Tuatha De Danann - the ancestors of traditional music groups - may also be a progenitor, but although Mammy was 'kinda musical' she never joined a band. That leaves the Milesians - descendants of a daughter of an Egyptian pharaoh. While Mammy would love a cruise, she would never be foolish enough to get involved in any pyramid schemes.

Or could the answer be found somewhere even more mysterious? Could Irish Mammies be the surviving rulers of the lost continent of Atlantis? Atlantis was said to be an idyllic land where peace reigned and the superior intellect and capability of the people had all but eliminated danger. This angered the gods of Atlantis, who, slighted by the fact that the people were 'gone too lackadaisical altogether', rained fire and flood upon the land. Some stories say that all were destroyed, but a little-quoted passage in the writings of Greek geographer Strabo hints there might have been survivors:

*And lo! The Atlantean sky and land both torn in two
And all were gone save one small boat with precious cargo.
Women, brave and indomitable,
Tissues in their sleeves just in case.
They sailed east into unknown dangers
And cried in one voice,
'Didn't I say this would happen?
Wouldn't you want to be fierce careful.'*

And thus Irish Mammies came to be.

Who told you that?



Irish mythology is both a blessing and a curse for Irish women. On the one hand, it depicts a plethora of very powerful and influential women at the upper echelons of classical Irish society. On the other hand, as most Irish mythology was first transcribed by monks, strong women were treated with suspicion and aspersions were cast on their character.

Queen Meabh of Connacht is a good example of this. She is depicted in the *Táin Bó Cuailgne* as an ambitious and vain harridan who would sacrifice armies for the sake of her pride. But there is little about the other side of Meabh – no mention of her appearance in the smaller epic *Cuardach na Circe Doinne, Áille, Bige* ('The Search for the Lovely Little Brown Hen'), where Meabh notices that one of her best layers is missing and eventually finds her under a hedge.

Much is made of Cuchulainn killing the savage hound of Culann with a hurley and sliotar – *not a word* about the countless times Meabh brought the under-age lads to training or washed the jerseys.

The gender imbalance in much of Irish folklore is further seen in the Fianna Cycle. In the tales of the Fianna, women are generally portrayed as scheming minxes with voracious and quixotic sexual appetites. On the other hand, the Fianna were lauded for hunting, jumping over branches at forehead height or pulling thorns from their feet. Life for them was like a particularly long and destructive stag-party, often with actual stags. Little is mentioned of the women of heroic Ireland who ran the villages and

households, creating enough wealth for it to be sported away.

This historical travesty taught Mammy that most people are all talk, but someone still has to do the work.

That our foreign yoke



Like the mythology, the stories of Ireland's struggles against our nearest neighbour's 'visit' are similarly imbalanced. The focus is more often on battles, Spanish and French armies arriving in the wrong place in the wrong year or spies sneaking away to tell the English what time things were kicking off at. Mammy must have been there in the background, but her views are not recorded, which is a pity. What, for example, did Aoife MacMurrough's mother think of her daughter's marriage to Strongbow?



And so in the narrative of the nation, Mammy does not feature. But that does not mean the years of English rule have not had a profound effect on her in two ways.

1. The failure of countless rebellions taught the Irish Mammy not to expect too much from life, particularly when men were doing the organizing.

2. Visitors are all very well until they outstay their welcome.

Prior to the twentieth century, the Irish Mammy is not recorded as having taken part in much direct action against the English - apart from one celebrated case.

In January 1651, Cromwell's army was poised to take Bagenalstown in County Carlow. The army encircled the town and sent messages to the townsfolk to surrender. Given the experience of previous towns at the hands of Cromwell's soldiers, the situation looked bleak. The story is told that the soldiers were surprised by a lone woman striding forcefully to the encampment and delivering a dressing-down to their general - a Lord Earl Wrottesly De Vere Horchester - telling him she was very disappointed in his behaviour, that he was impressing no one, and not only was he letting everyone else down but he was letting himself down as well. The upbraided general was said to have felt such inexplicable guilt that he suspended the siege and marched away. The incident is commemorated in the ballad 'The Passive Aggression of Bagenalstown'.

The most famous Mammy of Irish Nationalism is Countess Markievicz, who defended the Royal College of Surgeons and wounded a British sniper, but there were other Mammies: Therese Foley, who braved shellfire to bring a cough bottle to rebels in Boland's Mills; and Rita Duggan, who held up an entire British gunship because those on board were making too much noise at this hour.

The Irish language



Although not spoken by the majority of Irish Mammies, the Irish language still contains strong clues about her personality and outlook. An Ghaeilge is a most beautiful and expressive language. Its flowing and versatile sounds have been employed to produce love poetry and descriptions of nature - but its phlegmatic consonants are also ideal for no-nonsense dismissals of messers and wasters.

It is the Irish *seanfhocail* - wise old sayings - that best encapsulate the wisdom of Irish Mammies and serve as reminders that we could have done with some more of that wisdom in recent years. The main point of most *seanfhocail* is that happiness is fleeting and there's surely some misfortune around the corner (a bit like the end of an episode of *EastEnders*). They are best exemplified by the saying '*Bíonn gach duine go deas go dtéann bó ina gharraí*' (which directly translates as 'Everyone is nice until a cow gets in their garden' or 'It's all fun and games until someone loses an iris.')



Translates as 'Breeding breaks out through the eyes of a cat' or 'The father was the very same.'

Whatever her origins, history or influences, the Irish Mammy is very much a figure of the present - and now we need her more than ever.

2

There's No Place Like It

Where is the comrade of that sock, I wonder?



Definite articles



SOME IRISH MAMMIES work exclusively in the home; some don't. Regardless, for the smooth running of the house, all who live and originate there need to know that, like all states, it needs order. And for order, you need rules. *Bunreacht an Tí* - The Constitution of the House - guarantees these rules are adhered to. Without it, there is chaos.



ARTICLE 1: While you're under this roof ...

The Constitution is a guideline, but the final arbiter in all matters is Mammy. Her jurisdiction in this role can comprise, but not exclusively so, the following areas:

- 1.1 In the matter of whose turn it is to have the bath, please note: no right to a bath has

been enshrined in the Constitution, and all bathers have responsibilities in this matter, specifically in the question of usage. Though it may not be stated explicitly, it is understood she did not mean for you to take *all* the hot water.

1.2 Who among a pair of quarrelling children is perceived to be whining and who has a legitimate claim to another biscuit.

1.3 Citizens are also instructed not to mind what their father has said, he shouldn't have said that at all without consulting Mammy and, furthermore: we'll see.

Where a situation occurs which has not been explicitly mentioned in the main provisos of Article 1, Mammy may also instigate any proceedings whose justification is based entirely on the Memorandum of Understanding appended to this document; commonly known as the 'Because I said so' clause.

ARTICLE 3: Make sure you put it back where you got it now.

Citizens of the household have the right to make use of all handy things, provided such objects which by common consent are agreed to have a Safe Place shall be returned to that Safe Place once the period of usage has reasonably expired. The list of handy things comprises, but not exclusively, scissors, the Sellotape, the remote control, the charger for the mobile, the yoke for straining the tea and your father's Nice Pen.

ARTICLE 7: I hope you didn't use the good scissors for that.

The house provides for the scissorial needs of all its occupants, but this is contingent on 'fair usage' of aforementioned scissors. Fair usage means using the bad scissors for cutting paper and sausages; the good scissors are to be reserved primarily for cloth and hair. The sewing scissors are to be accorded similar respect and may attract even greater sanction if misused. Certain allowances will be made if the bad scissors can be demonstrably shown to have gone missing, but it is expected that a reasonable effort is subsequently made to locate the bad scissors - particularly as their absence may be due to a contravention of Article 3.

ARTICLE 8: Are you still in the sitting room? ... You're not. Well, if you wouldn't mind turning off the lights. We're trying to keep the bill down.

The electricity is an essential utility for occupants; however it must be exploited sensibly. Where it is patently clear that there is no need at all for all these lights, the lights are to be turned off. Provided it does not contravene Article 24: *You'll ruin your eyesight reading in this bad light.*

ARTICLE 23: Hold on to that, it might be useful for something.

It is acknowledged that within the house not all objects will have a usefulness that is obvious to all residents and guests. But that is *no* reason to throw them out. That was the piece of string for your father's glasses. Mammy has her system and wishes you wouldn't go moving things.

ARTICLE 27: There's no point in leaving that here, sure we won't eat it.

It is the right of every Mammy and Himself to broaden their palate at precisely their own pace. Mammy undertakes to treat with civility the introduction of out spicy foods at inopportune moments; however, she reserves