



Banc Ceannais na hÉireann  
Central Bank of Ireland

Eurosystem

**Address by Governor Patrick Honohan  
at book launch, January 31, 2012**

Ta an-áthas orm bheith anseo libh i dTeach Newman tráthnóna chun an leabhar *Miraculous Plenty: Irish Religious Folktales and Legends* le Seán Ó Súilleabháin a sheoladh agus ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil le Ríonach Uí Ógáin ó Chnuasach Bhéaloideas Éireann as cuireadh a thabhairt dom déanamh amhlaidh.

Mar is eol daoibh, is dócha, foilsíodh an bailiúchán scéalta seo i dtosach i 1952 agus, leis an aistriúchán seo atá á sheoladh inniu beidh fáil anois ag lucht léitheoireachta níos leithne air - idir lucht léinn idirnáisiúnta agus an gnáthphobal thar lear, rud atá tábhachtach i bhfianaise na gcosúlachtaí atá le feiceáil idir scéalta béaloidis na hÉireann agus scéalta béaloidis idirnáisiúnta. Is ársa iad na nascanna idir Éire agus an Eoraip, nascanna atá ar chinnlínte na nuachtán inniu agus gach lá le deanaí.

Creideann gach duine sa seomra seo gur gné thábhachtacht d'oidhreacht an phobail é an béaloideas agus is léir ón taisce líonmhar scéalta a caomhnaíodh go raibh an-éileamh ag muintir na hÉireann orthu tráth.

Le blianta fada anuas ta sárobair déanta ag Comhairle Bhéaloidis Éireann, an Cumann le Béaloideas Éireann agus Cnuasach Bhéaloideas Éireann i

gcaomhnú na scéalta béaloidis. D'uireasa na hoibre sin, is ar éigean a bheadh scéalta den sórt seo ar marthain inniu.

Cad a cheapas féin faoi na scéalta? Sa réamhrá ar a leabhar *Scéalta Cráibhteacha*, dúirt Seán Ó Súilleabháin: "it should not be difficult for anyone who follows the tale to learn the lesson involved. The language is straightforward with no half-truths or hidden meanings" ach ní mór dom féin a admháil go raibh mearbhall orm tar éis roinnt de na scéalta seo a léamh! I gcás cuid díobh, bhí deireadh an scéil sroichte agam agus mé fós ag fanacht leis an 'punch-line'! Ach is dócha gur léir don lucht éisteachta ag an am na ceachtanna a bhí le baint as na scéalta seo ó tharla go mbídís cleachtaithe orthu agus seans go mbíodh leaganacha éagsúla den scéal ar eolas acu.

Bailiúchán de scéalta cráifeacha atá sa leabhar seo; scéalta atá tagtha anuas chugainn ó ghlúin go glúin. Bhain tábhacht ar leith leis an diagacht agus leis an deabhóid i stair agus i gcultúr na hÉireann, rud a fheictear go soiléir ní hamháin sa traidisiún béil ach i litríocht na tíre chomh maith, ag dul siar go dtí filíocht na mbard. Ba bhéas leis na filí proifisiúnta leas a bhaint as scéalta cráifeacha nó apalóga ina gcuid dánta freisin. Bhíodar san ar aon dul leis an exemplum a bhí i réim ar an Mór Roinn le linn na meánaoiseanna. Bhíodh teagasc morálta i gceist leis an exemplum de ghnáth, faoi mar atá i gcás na scéalta sa leabhar seo. Leagtar béim ar bhuanna na Críostaíochta sna scéalta seo -an fhlaithiúlacht, an chatharnacht, an diagacht srl.

Sna scéalta seo, feicimid go gcuirtear nithe atá as riocht nó nithe éagóracha ina gceart arís. Cé go bhfuil blas na meánaoiseanna ar a bhformhór díobh, is scéalta iad a oireann don lá atá inniu ann. Chomh maith le sin feicimid -- i bhfilíocht na bhfilí gairmiúla agus sna scéalta seo ar aon – téamaí cosúil leis an bhfiachas, an oibleagáid agus an éiric idir lámha - téamaí atá fós ábhartha sa lá atá inniu ann agus muid ag tagairt do chúrsaí eacnamaíocha. Gan amhras, tá leanúnachas le feiceáil.

I should say a few words in English. After all, we are here to launch the English translation of a book which first appeared in Irish not long after I was born. The translation by Bill Caulfield is indeed a fine job: reads well and rings true colloquially.

Let me just briefly continue the theme of parallels between the world of many of the folkloric stories in this book and the way in which the events of the last four years in our financial system and economy have unfolded themselves before an unsuspecting public.

Sudden reversals of fortune, arbitrary and lengthy periods of distress, mysterious strangers offering advice which is received with a mixture of hope and scepticism, and rewards for good behaviour -- all of these are grist to the mill of the traditional storyteller as fully exemplified in this collection *Miraculous Plenty*. Is the mysterious stranger a good angel or a devil; is the figure of authority hardworking and god-fearing, or lazy and feckless?

If I couldn't always detect the rationale in the stories for all of the twists and turns, I am sure that the same is true of many Irish people today observing with wonder each tortuous step along the road to recovery.

In contrast, the scholars of the folklore centre can doubtless decipher and deconstruct even the most intractable of the stories in the book. Likewise, of course, from where I sit, Ireland's evolving situation in the crisis fits into an intelligible pattern which, despite its uncertainties and imponderables, has many features familiar to students of the *Art of Strategy* – to use the title of a book I have recently been looking through to refresh ideas I first encountered in UCD many decades ago when I was first studying economics here.

Irish policy makers, from the perspective of game theory, have been faced with a complex range of possible actions and face not only some immutable

realities – such as the need to put the public finances to rights – but also considerable and evolving uncertainties, as well as a set of counterparts, many of them supportive, but each with their own set of interests, not always fully aligned with those of Ireland. In this environment, Irish public servants and the elected representatives of the Irish people must proceed carefully with a view to maintaining as much freedom of action to take advantage of the opportunities that arise spontaneously in ways that are partly but only partly predictable and which can also be partly, but only partly created through ingenuity.

Time will tell whether we have done as well as possible in this sphere. It has certainly been our goal, and so far I like to think we have not done too badly over the past couple of years in balancing the need for prompt and decisive action while keeping options open in the face of what has been a fairly inexorable but drawn out denouement of an inherited situation whose revealed gravity has fairly consistently proved, so far, to be at the unfavourable end of the range of possibilities.

Presumably the *Scéalta Cráifeacha* of this volume were intended to impart improving lessons to the listeners. There is no doubt that what has happened to Ireland as a result of the errors of the property boom has been as devastating as any of the misfortunes that have occurred to the characters in the book's stories from folklore. Improving lessons have thus been learnt today also; lessons that will not be forgotten and will stand to the Irish people as we begin to recover the confidence and self-esteem that helped drive the Irish economy's solid success in the 1990s before the property bubble took over.

Overall, the fiscal and competitiveness adjustment is certainly happening, and the economic contraction has been arrested, though a sustained and vigorous upturn remains some time away.

Nobody could be happy with the scale of public debt that has been accumulated as a result of the bank failures and the reluctance to envisage losses being imposed on bank creditors. Although the increase in debt made Ireland vulnerable to the loss of market confidence, it is worth noting that the net running cost to Ireland of servicing the bank-related debt has so far been less than it might have been, because of the way it has been financed. (Indeed it is fair to say that the scale of fiscal adjustments undertaken to date would all have all become necessary even in the absence of the bank-related debt.) Continuing to optimise policy in this area is something that is receiving close attention.

Much of this work involves dealing with powerful external forces. The characters in the book are often helpless in the face of stronger external forces, and so it may often seem to us as we work our way out of the difficulties. But it is also important to realize that there is much scope for domestic choice in this process of climbing back towards full employment, repairing balance sheets and realigning the national cost and competitiveness structure.

Of course there is little or no choice so far as the overall level of government borrowing is concerned -- it is hardly fair to simply state that the Troika is limiting this deficit; after all, without the financial support from the Troika the Government would not have been able to phase the deficit reduction as gradually as is being done.

But within the overall magnitudes such there is scope for alternative decisions. To take just one topical area, Ireland itself chooses to what extent the necessary reductions in the salary cost of public services is achieved by way of reducing numbers (whether through early retirements or otherwise), and to what extent by adjusting some pay scales. And there are many such choices which will influence the speed of economic recovery and the evolving nature of society.

The world described by folklore is generally one full of unexpected hazards, and I need hardly remark that the economic future today is not without hazard, to say the least. But overall, it is clear that market confidence, badly knocked since the bank guarantee and its aftermath, has been seeping back. As the storyteller might put it, de réir a chéile, tháinig feabhas ar an othar agus, i ndeireadh na dála, d'éirigh sí slán ón ngalar.