

Mapping Gaelachas: Signifying Irish-American ethnic identity in the dialect tales of Martin Dooley

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In an introduction to *That Most Distressful Nation: The Taming of the Irish American* Senator Daniel P. Moynihan states, in most definitive terms, that:

It is, or ought to be, clear that there is no possibility – not the most remote – that a distinctive Irish identity can be re-created in the United States. ...But there is no need for the re-creation of a distinctive ethnic identity. *It is enough to hope that the Irish experience, as that of others, may become part of the American sensibility.*

In looking at the dialect tales of Finley Peter Dunne's Martin Dooley character, this paper will examine how, contrary to what Senator Moynihan believes, the "Irish experience has become part of the American sensibility" *because* a distinctive Irish identity, as an ethnic identity, has been re-created in the United States. By examining how, in Dunne's creation of a transnational Irish-American community in Bridgeport, Mr. Dooley introduces and inculcates an Irish sensibility – *gaelachas* – into the American cultural tradition, I hope to show that an Irish-American community, as ethnic, not only existed in America but helped define what it means to be "American."

Essentially what I seek to do in this paper is to re-discover the lyricism of Mr. Dooley's voice as the procreator of an Irish-American ethnic community whose identity has to be understood as a transatlantic cultural experience, contingent on both its Irish traditional signifiers and on the tangibility of its American reality.