

“The education of the work-girls”:
Evaluating Dún Emer’s educational objective through the
literary & visual material of Leabhar Dún Éimire

Ella Sloane



‘Group of the members of Dun Emer Guild and Dun Emer Industries’, 1905. TCD MS 11535/7/3.

Established in 1902 by Evelyn Gleeson, in partnership with Susan (Lily) and Elizabeth Corbet Yeats, Dún Emer translates to the fortress of Emer, after the wife of the mythological epic hero Cú Chulainn. According to Irish mythology, Emer was renowned not only for her beauty and wit, but also for her skill in needlework and aptitude for the domestic arts,¹ making her a fitting namesake for this newly formed, female-run craft enterprise who wished 'to find work for Irish hands in the making of beautiful things'².

In 1903, Gleeson set out the aims and ideals of Dún Emer in the enterprise's first prospectus. The document highlights the centrality of female employment and education to Dún Emer's objectives at a time when Irish women did not yet have a right to vote and rarely entered the workforce, instead being expected to fulfil their domestic duties as wives and mothers. The prospectus states that: 'The education of the work-girls is also part of the idea, they are taught to paint & their brains and fingers are made more active and understanding; some of them, we hope, will become teachers to others, so that similar industries may spread throughout the land.'³ Dún Emer was indeed successful in this aim; as Gifford Lewis points out, records show that many of the so-called 'work-girls' received brief periods of training before leaving to teach the craft they had learnt under Dún Emer's employment.⁴

This paper intends to examine the predominance of this feminist aim of the venture in its operations through an analysis of Dún Emer's surviving annual scrapbooks known as Leabhair Dún Éimire. Leabhair Dún Éimire are a testament to the Yeats sisters and Gleeson's

¹ N. G. Bowe, 'The Irish Arts and Crafts Movement (1886-1925).' *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, 1990, p.174

² Dún Emer Prospectus, Papers of Evelyn Gleeson, Trinity College Dublin, Department of Manuscripts, 1903, 10676/1/5

³ Dún Emer Prospectus, TCD MS 10676/1/5

⁴ G. Lewis, *The Yeats Sisters and the Cuala*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994, p.61

mutual dedication to the education and creative enrichment of young Irish women. Tracking the evolution of Dún Emer in the early years (1903-1905), prior to its separation in 1908, these carefully curated scrapbooks paint an intimate picture of the characters at the heart of the organisation. Elizabeth Corbet Yeats is noted as the editor of the three books, and each one is filled with insightful contributions from many of the women who worked there, including the three founding members. Dún Emer's trainees were offered classes in Irish, taught by the writer Susan L. Mitchel, and they were instructed in the dramatic arts by the Fay brothers, who were among the founders of the Abbey Theatre; art classes were also held by Elizabeth.⁵ The influence and results of these lessons are clear in the impressive poetry, prose and art contained in the annuals and the frequent integration of the Irish language into these works.

From its inception, Dún Emer and the later emerging Cuala Press endeavoured to have an exclusively female workforce.⁶ The initiative was originally conceived by Gleeson, who had a background in weaving and textile design. As a suffragette, Gleeson advocated for women's ability to live independently and believed that seeking rewarding employment was crucial in doing so.⁷ This idea was central to her conception of Dún Emer, which sought to train young Irish women in various areas of craft production: namely weaving, printing and embroidery. Gleeson was acquainted with the Yeats sisters through their involvement in the Irish Literary Society in London and invited them to join her in founding the enterprise; soon after, Dún Emer was born. Gleeson managed finances and led the weaving department, whilst Lily and Elizabeth took charge of the embroidery and printing aspects of

⁵ C. Daly, 'Women of the Cuala Press', <https://www.tcd.ie/library/manuscripts/blog/2020/12/women-of-the-cuala-press/>, Accessed 10 October 2023.

⁶ A. Griffith, 'Elizabeth Corbet Yeats: Dun Emer and Cuala Presses and Irish 'Art Printing', 1903-40'. In *Women in Print I: Design and Identities*. Ed. Artemis Alexiou and Rose Roberto. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2022, p.198

⁷ Griffith, 'Dun Emer and Cuala Presses and Irish 'Art Printing'', p.198

the business, respectively. Lily Yeats had honed her embroidery skills through training at Kelmscott under May Morris, the daughter of renowned British textile designer William Morris. Through their acquaintance with the Morrises, Elizabeth also benefited from the opportunity to witness the inner workings of Kelmscott Press.⁸ She later refined her knowledge through a short course in hand-printing with the Women's Printing Society in London, which was then associated with the women's suffrage movement. The Yeats sisters and Gleeson evidently shared a devotion to the advancement of women's rights through engagement with the literary and arts and crafts movements and this shines through most potently in the annuals they worked on collectively.

The Dún Emer Industries and Cuala Press have rightly received significant praise and critical attention, as have their founding members, particularly the Yeats sisters, for their seminal role in the Irish private press and arts and crafts movements. In July 2024 the second Yeats Sisters symposium was held, which, alongside the development of the Cuala Press Project in Trinity College Dublin, has prompted renewed interest in and national media coverage of both organisations.⁹ The focus of most research to date has remained on the longer-lasting independent project of the Yeats sisters, rather than the initial enterprise shared with Gleeson. The following chapters aim to highlight the largely overlooked figures of Dún Emer through a critical analysis of the literary and visual material in the *Leabhair Dún Éimire*, focusing primarily on the enterprise's main educational objective. The annuals have yet to be explored in depth, remaining largely overlooked in existing research despite their enlightening contents. Although few female authors were published by Dún Emer Press,

⁸ Griffith, 'Dun Emer and Cuala Presses and Irish 'Art Printing'', p.199

⁹ See articles published in The Irish Times: <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/2023/03/11/the-often-forgotten-yeats-sisters-lily-and-elizabeth/>, <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/2023/07/14/appreciating-evelyn-gleeson/>

these three scrapbooks contain a rich archive of female literary work and are evidence that its founders actively encouraged their young workers to express themselves through a variety of creative media.

From the press to fancy dress: Examining life at Dún Emer through poetry

The Arts and Crafts movement, of which women were the driving force, is said to have brought about ‘a temporary reversal of long-standing assumptions about gender roles’¹⁰. Central to this movement, which flourished in Ireland between 1886 and 1925, was the formation of guilds and collectives of craftspeople, many of whom were run entirely by women. The Dún Emer Guild and Industries, located in Gleeson’s house in the Dublin suburb of Dundrum, provides a strong case study for this.

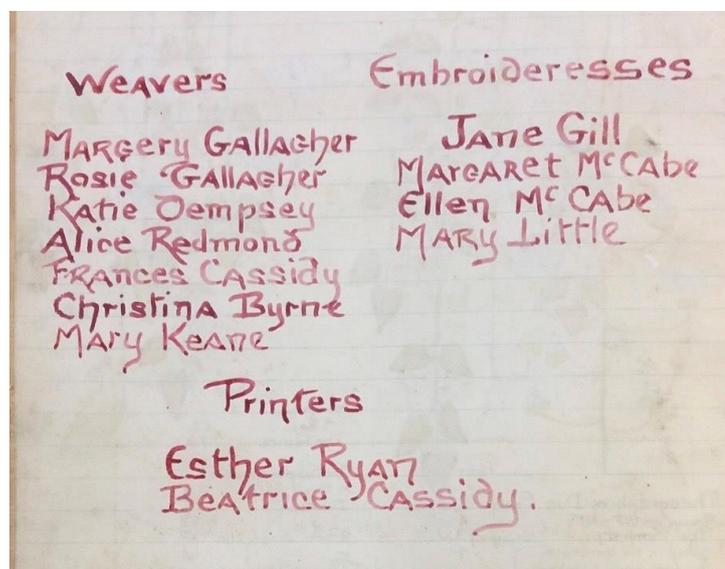


Figure 1 Employee register, TCD MS 11535/7/1

Dún Emer employed girls and young women, some only in their early teens, who having just finished school were offered career opportunities despite their lack of prior training and skills. According to the Leabhair Dún Éimire, the business grew steadily; ‘in 1902 there were 13 girls employed, and by 1905 there were 30’.¹¹ A comparison of the employee registers found in the first pages of each book shows that many of the original hires

¹⁰ V. Kreilkamp, *The Arts and Crafts Movement: Making it Irish*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. p.17

¹¹ Daly, ‘Women of the Cuala Press’

remained loyal to the business for several years; Esther (Essie) Ryan, the first printer to be taken on board by Elizabeth Yeats in January 1903 at fourteen years old, even worked under Dún Emer and later Cuala Press until her death in 1961.¹² The inspiring journey of these women affirms the value of the educational programme and training they received from Gleeson and the Yeats sisters in those early years at Dún Emer. This chapter will explore a selection of original poems from *Leabhair Dún Éimire* which capture the close-knit community of personalities involved in the enterprise and highlight the empowering educational ethos that underpinned the day-to-day experiences of the original work-girls. These illuminating sources have remained unexamined by researchers despite the growing interest in the founding members of Dún Emer and later Cuala Press.

‘Nonsense Rhymes’ (Figure 2), contained in the first book, sets the scene by offering an overview of the dispositions of our cast of work-girls. This collection of witty limericks is very likely inspired by Edward Lear’s *Book of Nonsense*, indicated by the title. The poem’s speaker fondly describes the workers’ unique talents and characteristics, whilst also highlighting their sincere dedication to the training programme at Dún Emer.¹³ Consisting of twelve stanzas or rhymes, the poem is dedicated to every girl mentioned in the list of employees earlier in the book (Figure 1), apart from either Mary Little or Mary Keane. Although the third stanza refers to a ‘maiden called Mary’, it is unclear what section of Dún Emer she works for and therefore impossible to construe whether this is a depiction of Little (an embroideress) or Keane (a weaver). All of Dún Emer’s other eleven original employees

¹² Daly, ‘Women of the Cuala Press’

¹³ *Leabhar Dún Éimire*, The Cuala Press Business Archives, Trinity College Dublin, Department of Manuscripts, (1903), 11535/7/1/15-7

are easily identifiable in this poem, which offers a charming introduction to the atmosphere and sense of community fostered at this time.

The rhymes contain some interesting deviations from the spelling of their names as set out in the initial register. In some instances, this has been done in order to aid the strict AABBA rhyme scheme that runs throughout; for example, Frances Cassidy is shortened to France, allowing the poet to highlight her tendency to 'dance' across the workroom. In other stanzas, the variations appear to be less out of necessity and more likely an illustration of the bond that was beginning to develop between the women as they worked in close quarters. Esther Ryan, a constant presence in the Dún Emer and later Cuala Press, is first referred to as Essie in this poem, having initially been logged in the register as Esther. This nickname seems to have stuck from early on and hereafter, she is named Essie in the registers at the start of the following two annuals.

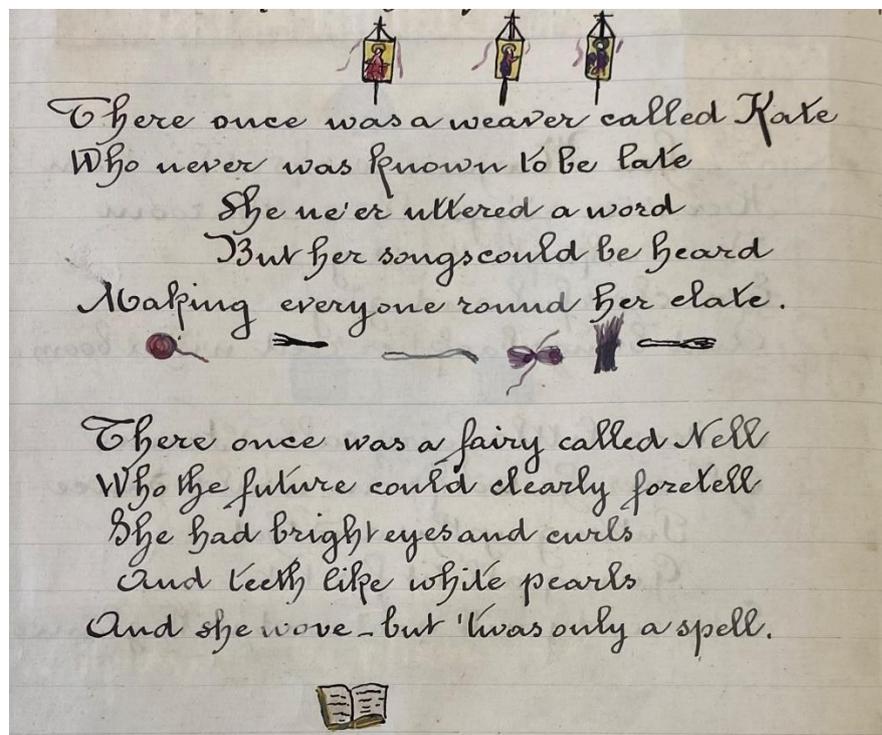


Figure 2 Excerpt from 'Nonsense Rhymes'. TCD MS 11535/7/1 p.16

In just over half of the rhymes, we are informed directly of the craft the named girls specialise in. The poet often takes the opportunity to praise the workers for their skilfulness when doing so: Jane ‘embroidered so well’, whilst Essie is ‘a printer of fame’ and Christine ‘works right well with fingers deft’. The girls are applauded for their intelligence and strong sense of routine, further demonstrating the value placed on female education at Dún Emer; Rose diligently ‘does sums and makes tea every evening at three’ and Kate ‘never was known to be late’. The poem portrays a lively scene in the workrooms, as many of the girls are prone to singing and dancing their way through the days at Dún Emer.

‘Nonsense Rhymes’ also sheds light on moments of tension that occasionally emerged in the workroom. The anonymous speaker exposes Jane’s inflated ego due to her apparently superior embroidery abilities, stating that she ‘looked on her friends with disdain’. Although included in a light-hearted manner, this snippet of information prompts one to reflect on the relationship dynamics at play within this compact team. It is already well-known that the relationship between the enterprise’s founding members could be fraught, and this was indeed a contributing factor to the eventual separation of Dún Emer’s industries.¹⁴ It is important to also consider how this tension may have infiltrated relationships between the younger staff members, most of which were working class and are likely to have relied upon the employment to help support their families. The power imbalance between these girls and their mature, middle-class employers would undoubtedly have led to competition between the workers’ who in their precarious position sought to prove their worth and superior abilities, as Jane has been recognised for early on.

¹⁴ K. E. Brown, ‘Gender and the decorative arts: Evelyn Gleeson and the Irish Cultural Revival’ In *Irish Women Artists, 1800-2009*. Ed. Éimear O’Connor. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010., p.81

Although overwhelmingly positive in their depiction of life at Dún Emer, the revealing poems contained in the scrapbooks sometimes point to an underlying tension between the work-girls. Another example of this can be found later in the same annual in the opening line of 'What the little Bird said': 'The little Bird said that a quantity of bitter tears were shed in the workroom over an unfounded rumour'.

The verses of 'Nonsense Rhymes' are separated by detailed miniature illustrations, primarily depicting the craft mentioned in the preceding lines. These illustrations include a series of looms, a dainty teapot followed by a line of other crockery, books which emphasise the educational ethos of Dún Emer, and materials such as needles and thread. The final illustration portrays a hanging banner 'where saints appear right gorgeously'. Although tiny, this is strikingly reminiscent of the most famous embroidery project undertaken by Dún Emer: The Loughrea Cathedral banners. Produced in 1903, the same year as this poem was penned, these banners were created by Lily Yeats, who embroidered the figures, and her assistants who worked the backgrounds of each, darning their 'cloth of gold'.

Further proof of the value placed on education and a mutual appreciation of the arts lies in the discovery that those who worked at Dún Emer were actively encouraged to view and carefully appreciate each other's creative projects, from literary works to the dainty painted illustrations included in the three annuals. This can be extrapolated from the first page of the 1905 edition which consists of a shamrock-adorned entry with the heading 'Voting List', divided into two columns: one dedicated to the 'best story or poem' and the other to the 'best painting' in the scrapbook. After each employee cast their vote, it was evident that a poem entitled 'The Dún Emer Fancy Dress Party' (Figure 3) was by far the most popular contribution – and it's no wonder why.

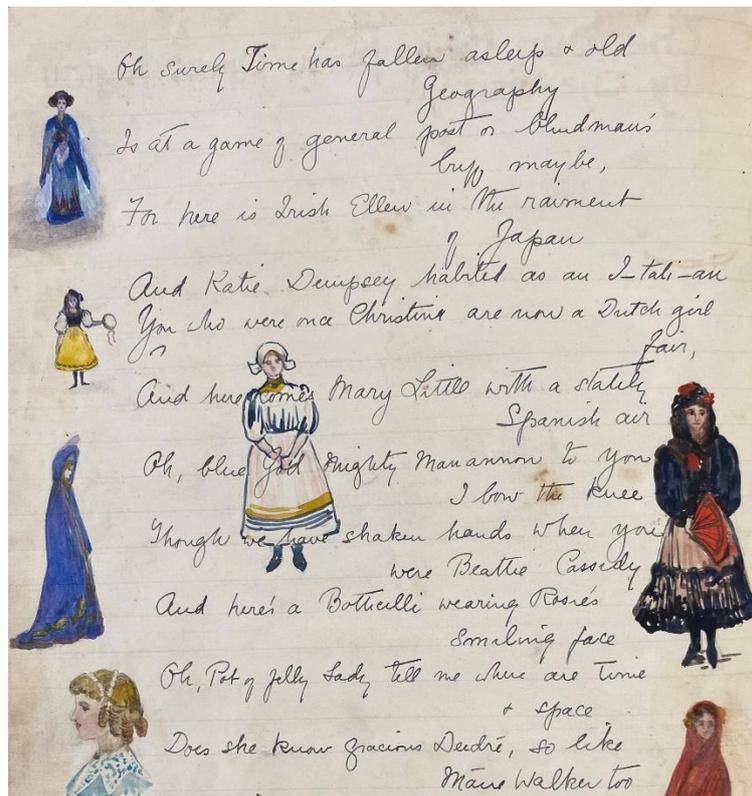


Figure 3 Excerpt from 'The Dún Emer Fancy Dress Party' TCD MS 11535/7/3 p.39

This elaborate poem offers an enthralling impression of the humour, imagination, and social lives of the workers. It depicts one of the enterprise's most colourful social events, and one which epitomises the founding members' dedication to broadening the educational horizons of Dún Emer's employees. This costumed event was organised as a celebration of the diversity of global cultures, with the poetic tone being one of awe, wonder, and appreciation at the transformative power of clothing. An unnamed 'visitor' to the party describes their surprise at the changed appearances of Dún Emer's usual company: 'I thought I knew Miss Gleeson and her maidens of the loom/ Miss Yeats and her embroiderers, & in the inner room/ the mystic ministers of ink, their captain tried and true.' Venturing further inside they find 'the great Tudor Queen', who was 'once Miss E. Yeats and wore a coat of green'.

The upbeat poem goes on to paint a vivid picture of the variety of cultures on display, donned by our now familiar cast of workers.

For here is Irish Ellen in the raiment of Japan

And Katie Dempsey habited as an I-tali-an.

You who were once Christina are now a Dutch girl fair,

and here comes Mary Little with a stately Spanish air.

The founding members' ability to instil an appreciation for different culture's fabrics and fashion through a fun social occasion demonstrates their comprehensive approach to education; this poem illustrates that the girls were taught to understand cultures outside of their own, including ones which influenced their own textile work. In a later address to the Irish Literary Society on the development of a uniquely 'Gaelic art', Evelyn Gleeson showed a keen awareness of the influence other cultures on the work produced by Dún Emer, stating that 'we might take suggestions from other lands, especially perhaps the old Byzantine style with its Greek and Eastern influences.'¹⁵ This cultural awareness was evidently transmitted to her trainees through Dún Emer's educational activities.

The close analysis of 'Nonsense Rhymes' and 'The Dún Emer Fancy Dress Party' reveals an abundance of fresh perspectives on the atmosphere and culture of Dún Emer during its early years. These poems offer compelling evidence of the success of Dún Emer's primary educational objective as we see the value placed on the students' impressive work

¹⁵ E. Gleeson, 'Fragment of an Essay, probably 1907', Papers of Evelyn Gleeson, Trinity College Dublin, Department of Manuscripts, 10676/1/9.

ethic, individual strengths, and the broadening of their horizons through unique social activities.

The Irish Cultural Revival: A female perspective

Dún Emer's primary educational objective generated a convergence of the feminist and nationalist strands of its founding members' activism, causing the venture to act as a powerful vehicle for the Irish Cultural Revival. The nationalist aims of the enterprise are made clear in Dún Emer's mission statement which promises that: 'Everything as far as possible, is Irish: the paper of the books, the linen of the embroidery and the wool of the tapestry and carpets.'¹⁶ As a business, Dún Emer strove to platform traditional crafts in danger of being lost under British rule and to publish revivalist literature. This aim translated to the educational pursuits carried out at Dún Emer, as demonstrated by the contents of the *Leabhair Dún Éimire*, much of which is strongly influenced by Irish language and culture.

Evelyn Gleeson, in particular, was extremely active in circles concerned with the revival of Irish crafts and culture, as a member of nationalist organisations such as the Gaelic League and in her role as the first secretary of the Irish Literary Society in London, where she became acquainted with Elizabeth and Lily Yeats. During her time in London, Gleeson also became a member of the suffragist Pioneer Club, establishing a 'women's information bureau' in 1897 in an effort to 'raise the position of women, to open them to new avenues of influence and to provide them with wages as good as men's in the same kind of work.'¹⁷ These associations foreshadowed Gleeson's formative work at Dún Emer at the turn of the century, where she worked alongside co-founders Elizabeth and Lily Yeats to solidify women's place in the Irish Cultural Revival, whilst encouraging their female pupils to demonstrate agency and gain financial independence. As Karen E. Brown argued, these

¹⁶ Dún Emer Prospectus, 10676/1/5.

¹⁷ E. C. Paterson, 'Crafting Empire: Intersections of Irish and Canadian Women's History'. *Journal of Canadian Art History* 34, no.2, 2013, p.247

affiliations signify Gleeson's firm dedication to the role of 'the decorative arts in both cultural nationalism and the emancipation of women.'¹⁸

In an essay written for the Irish Literary Society circa 1907, Gleeson opined that mobilising visual and material culture could be equally effective in nationalising the masses.

Here then we stand on the verge of an immense question, – the problem whether it is possible to revive Gaelic ideas in our material surroundings...Something has to be done in this direction, chiefly owing to the Language Movement. But infinitely more could be done. And, of those Gaelic Leaguers I would ask, – Cannot one nationalise through the eyes as well as through the ears?¹⁹

At this stage, Dún Emer was already well-established and had indeed created products which nationalised 'through the eyes'. Gleeson herself connected the values of Dún Emer with Irish patriotism, also writing in this essay that she believed the girls she employed worked best when contributing to a national cause.²⁰ 'The people themselves must be interested in the work, enthusiastic, if possible, otherwise the scheme is a failure, not merely financially but educationally. This enthusiasm is aroused by appealing to local patriotism.'²¹ Here, once again, Gleeson stresses the importance of Irish culture and patriotism in the role of education in her industries.

The bucolic imagery and ornate Celtic patterns incorporated into the designs produced by Dún Emer's embroidery and weaving departments offers a visual counterpart to the literary landscapes of abundance created by celebrated writers of the Irish Literary

¹⁸ K. E. Brown, *The Yeats Circle, Verbal and Visual Relations in Ireland, 1880-1939*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2011, p.29

¹⁹ Brown, *The Yeats Circle*, p.31

²⁰ Brown, *The Yeats Circle*, p.33

²¹ Brown, *The Yeats Circle*, p.33

Revival, such as W. B. Yeats and George Russell, who were published by Dún Emer Press. As Marjorie Howes argues ‘these representations of Irish nature functioned as emblems of national potential and as rebukes to an English imperialism that had exploited, stolen, or crushed the land’s natural profusion.’²² Natural imagery can be seen extensively throughout the Leabhair Dún Éimire, demonstrating that an appreciation for the beauty of the Irish landscape was instilled in the pupils at Dún Emer. Many of the floral illustrations found in the scrapbooks and creative output of the enterprise are certainly of Morrisian influence, a result of the educational background of Evelyn Gleeson, Elizabeth, and Lily Yeats. In this way Dún Emer’s founding members repurposed the ideals and aesthetics of the English Arts and Crafts movement to vouch for Ireland’s natural beauty.



Figure 4 ‘Evening on Ticknock’ by Elizabeth Yeats, TCD MS 11535/7/3, p.37

The suburban location of Dún Emer — nestled at the base of the Wicklow Mountains (Figure 4), yet a stone's throw away from the bustling metropolis of Dublin City Centre — offered a unique setting for the guild which simultaneously imitated the idealised landscape

²² M. Howes, ‘The Arts and Crafts Movement and the Irish Cultural Revival’. In *The Arts and Crafts Movement: Making it Irish*. Ed. Vera Kreilkamp. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. p.52

of the West of Ireland and allowed the members to benefit from the hub of cultural activity on their doorstep. The 1904 instalment of *Leabhair Dún Éimire* contains a piece simply entitled 'Original Poem' which captures this environment in its opening stanza: 'Surrounded by mountains and valleys and rills,/ Dun Emer stands at the foot of the hills,/ With health and home comforts and fresh air galore,/ With amusement and fun. What could you have more?'²³ Intentionally or not, this setting was very influential on the collective consciousness of Dún Emer's female staff, infiltrating their personal art and literary work.

Although Evelyn Gleeson emphasised the importance of visual and material culture in her essay addressed to the Irish Literary Society, an ideal which has been understood as central to Dún Emer as a major participant in the Arts and Crafts movement, this does not mean that Gaeilge was neglected nor took a back seat in the everyday running of the guild – far from it. Dún Emer's employees actively demonstrated a passion for the Irish Language Movement of the early twentieth century, fostered by its founding members through regular classes and the guild's participation in the Irish Language Procession of 1905, recorded in the last page of that year's annual. A poignant reflection on the guild's demonstration of their commitment to promoting the Irish language reads as follows: 'Dún Emer Guild was represented at the Language Procession on March 12th. Our ivy-crowned maidens and white-coated boys²⁴ won general admiration and were a picturesque addition to that vast crowd expressing a nation's will with resolute quietude and perfect discipline.'²⁵ Furthermore, the final annual's 'Notes and News' section reveals the popularity of Irish

²³ *Leabhar Dún Éimire*, The Cuala Press Business Archives, Trinity College Dublin, Department of Manuscripts, 1904, 11535/7/2/77

²⁴ Although nearly exclusively female, Dún Emer's workforce also comprised of some male apprentices who were trained in book binding.

²⁵ *Leabhar Dún Éimire*, The Cuala Press Business Archives, Trinity College Dublin, Department of Manuscripts, 1905, 11535/7/3/88

language classes held at Dún Emer at the time, documenting seminal texts being studied by their diligent pupils. One such entry states: ‘Mr G. Hamilton came to give us Irish lessons – everyone joined and the classes commenced with 1st O’Growney Book and Ceachta Beaga. Later on the class became too large.’²⁶ These records offer valuable evidence of Dún Emer’s participation in the Irish Language Movement which have not been employed in the existing literature.



Figure 5. ‘Atá an bhó bhreagh ag an tobar’, TCD MS 11535/7/1, p.10

The conscious integration of the Irish language into the daily lives of those who worked at Dún Emer can also be seen through the frequent use of Gaelige in the titles of short stories and poems, as well as a series of carefully illustrated Irish phrases, included in the Leabhair Dún Éimire. These phrases were largely concerned with farm animals and often accompanied by playful illustrations designed to enhance the readers’ understanding of their meaning. Examples include: ‘bó mór ins an leuna’²⁷ (a big cow in the meadow), ‘asal

²⁶ Leabhar Dún Éimire, TCD MS 11535/7/3/82

²⁷ Leabhar Dún Éimire, TCD MS 11535/7/2/79

óg'²⁸ (young donkey), and 'atá an bhó bhreagh ag an tobar'²⁹ (the beautiful cow is at the well). (Figure 5)

On top of promoting the Irish language at Dún Emer, the work-girls were also encouraged to have an awareness of indigenous Gaelic games and sports. The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), founded in 1884, not long before the conception of Dún Emer, played an important role in the Irish Cultural Revival. Games such as Gaelic football, handball, hurling, and camogie became popularised by the association. The influence of the GAA can be seen in the *Leabhair Dún Éimire*, which includes an entry in appreciation of camogie entitled 'Camógeacht le Grá' (Figure 6). The significance of this prose piece has been overlooked by existing scholarship and, until now, the connection between Gaelic sports and Dún Emer's ethos has not been scrutinised. Penned by weaving pupil Christina Fanning in Dún Emer's 1905 annual, only a year after the establishment of The Camogie Association, 'Camógeacht le Grá' enthusiastically declares it 'a most exciting and interesting game', describing the thrill of both watching and playing in detail.

²⁸ *Leabhar Dún Éimire*, TCD MS 11535/7/2/79

²⁹ *Leabhar Dún Éimire*, TCD MS 11535/7/1/20

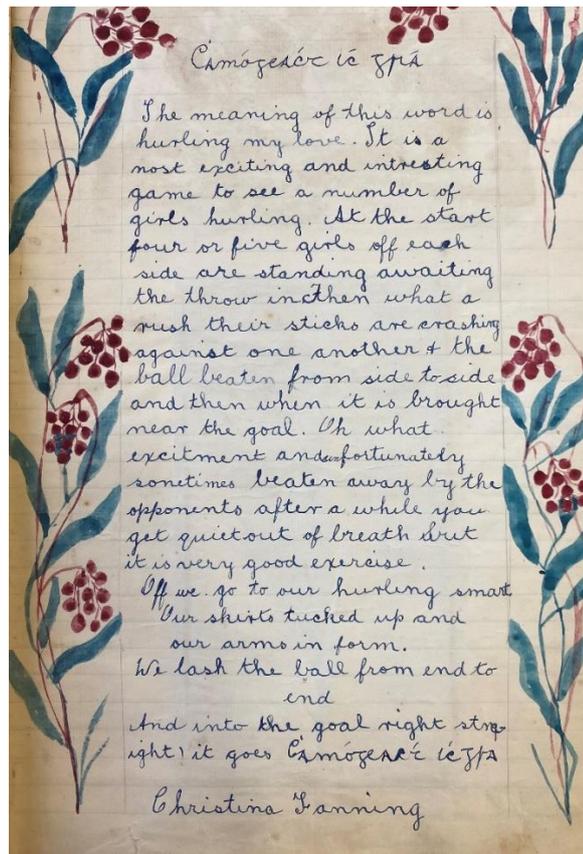


Figure 6 'Camógeacht le Grá' by Christina Fanning, TCD MS 11535/7/3 p.60

Fanning depicts the 'rush' experienced when you enjoy camogie, using words like 'crashing' and 'beaten' to portray the physically demanding nature of the game: 'Then what a rush, their sticks are crashing against one another and the ball beaten from side to side...' She continues 'After a while you get quiet [quite] out of breath but it is very good exercise.' The inclusion of such a new and novel Gaelic game in one of the three Dún Emer annuals demonstrates their female community's shared appreciation for and involvement with various aspects of the Irish Culture Revival. Camogie was unique in the sense that it was a sport designed exclusively for women, whereas games like Gaelic football were, and remain male-dominated. As Ríona Nic Congáil puts it, 'A feminist imperative appeared in camogie

from its inception: its founders declared that women, no less than men, were entitled to participate in sports to further their physical potential.³⁰

In her paper on 'Gaelic Feminism and the Rise of Camogie', Nic Congáil outlines the interlinking feminist and nationalist ideals of camogie stating that 'the ethos of this new sport, camogie, reflected its founders' desire to provide alternatives to female domesticity and to envision a classless activity that would foster skills, leadership, and administrative roles for women; it would facilitate new female communities, and persuade women to work toward a common goal.'³¹ Interestingly, these ethos are strongly aligned with those of the founding members of Dún Emer; therefore, it feels very fitting that one of Evelyn Gleeson's mentees would welcome the sport with open arms, writing passionately about its benefits.

³⁰ R. Nic Congáil, "'Looking on for Centuries from the Sideline": Gaelic Feminism and the Rise of Camogie'. *Éire-Ireland* 48, no. 1&2, 2013, p.180

³¹Nic Congáil, 'Gaelic Feminism and the Rise of Camogie', p.170

By analysing the wealth of literary and visual material contained in the Leabhair Dún Éimire, one can clearly see the dedication of Dún Emer's founding members to the guild's educational objective. Leabhair Dún Éimire reveal the feminist and nationalist aims which permeated the education, and therefore the creative output, of the young women who were taken under the wings of Evelyn Gleeson, Elizabeth Corbet Yeats, and Lily Yeats during the period of 1903-1905, whilst also illuminating many yet uncelebrated personalities of the enterprise. Close readings of original poems such as 'Nonsense Rhymes' and 'The Dún Emer Fancy Dress Party', which have remained unaddressed in existing research, paint a vivid picture of the guild's largely forgotten characters, the 'work-girls', revealing that they, like their better-known employers, also had colourful personalities and a remarkable talent for their respective crafts. These poems enlighten our understanding of the invigorating social activities and daily routines followed by Dún Emer's staff during this period. My examination of Leabhair Dún Éimire also highlights the impressive engagement with core tenets of the Irish Cultural Revival such as their practice of Gaeilge and recorded enthusiasm for indigenous sports like camogie. To better understand the success of Dún Emer's educational objective, further archival research could seek to uncover the professional lives of the girls who made their start at Dún Emer and investigate to what extent the nationalist and feminist elements of their education here defined their futures. We know that some remained loyal to their respective mentors following the 1908 separation of the industries. Roy Foster comments that '[w]orking at Dún Emer became a way-station, almost a rite of passage, for many women involved in nationalist cultural enterprises'; it would be valuable to compile research on this network.³²

³² Brown, 'Gender and the decorative arts', p.79

Reference list

Bowe, N. G. 'The Irish Arts and Crafts Movement (1886-1925).' *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, 1990, Pp. 172–85.

Brown, K. E. 'Gender and the decorative arts: Evelyn Gleeson and the Irish Cultural Revival' In *Irish Women Artists, 1800-2009*. Ed. Éimear O'Connor. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010. Pp. 71-83.

Brown, K. E. *The Yeats Circle, Verbal and Visual Relations in Ireland, 1880-1939*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2011.

Daly, C. 'Women of the Cuala Press'.

<https://www.tcd.ie/library/manuscripts/blog/2020/12/women-of-the-cuala-press/>

Published December 14, 2020. Accessed 10 October 2023.

Falvey, D. 'Neglected reputations: The forgotten Yeats sisters, Lily and Elizabeth'

<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/2023/03/11/the-often-forgotten-yeats-sisters-lily-and-elizabeth/> Published 18 March 2023. Accessed 17 October 2023.

Gleeson, E. 'Fragment of Essay for Irish Literary Society, probably 1907'. Papers of Evelyn Gleeson, Trinity College Dublin, Department of Manuscripts, TCD MS 10676/1/9.

Griffith, A. 'Elizabeth Corbet Yeats: Dun Emer and Cuala Presses and Irish 'Art Printing', 1903-40'. In *Women in Print I: Design and Identities*. Ed. Artemis Alexiou and Rose Roberto. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2022. Pp. 195-218

Howes, M. 'The Arts and Crafts Movement and the Irish Cultural Revival'. In *The Arts and Crafts Movement: Making it Irish*. Ed. Vera Kreilkamp. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. Pp. 45-56

Lewis, G. *The Yeats Sisters and the Cuala*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994.

Ní Bheacháin, C. 'Appreciating Evelyn Gleeson'

<https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/2023/07/14/appreciating-evelyn-gleeson/>

Published July 14 2023. Accessed 15 October 2023.

Nic Congáil, R. "'Looking on for Centuries from the Sideline": Gaelic Feminism and the Rise of Camogie'. *Éire-Ireland* 48, no. 1&2, 2013, 168-90

Paterson, E. C. 'Crafting Empire: Intersections of Irish and Canadian Women's History'.

Journal of Canadian Art History 34, no.2., 2013, 243-67.

Leabhar Dún Éimire (1903-1905). The Cuala Press Business Archives, Trinity College Dublin, Department of Manuscripts, TCD MS 11535/7/1-3.

Dun Emer Prospectus (1903). Papers of Evelyn Gleeson, Trinity College Dublin, Department of Manuscripts, TCD MS 10676/1/5.