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Library Research Essay

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2026 Hesburgh Library Research Award Essay

In my fall 2025 University Seminar, Introduction to Irish Poetry, I studied a variety of Irish poets and their relationship with language, culture, and setting. For my final essay, I was asked to choose a poem by an Irish poet originally written in Irish and then retranslate it, using the language resources at teanglann.ie. I was also tasked with creating a traditional broadsheet to accompany the poem. Broadsheets, also called broadsides, were passed out in 20th century Ireland communities and highlighted a specific poem and related image. This project would not have been possible without the resources provided by Hesburgh Library. Their abundance of library collections, knowledgeable employees, print materials, and research databases helped me to craft an essay, translation, and broadsheet on Mairtín Ó Direáin's work entitled, "Translating a Memory: Cultural Loss and Landscape in Ó Direáin's 'Cuimhne an Domhnaigh'."

As a class, our University Seminar visited Hesburgh Library's Rare Books and Special Collections department. Here, Dr. Matthew Knight, the Irish Studies Librarian and Curator, presented various historical Irish anthology collections and broadsheets. He described the history of each piece and its significance in shaping Irish culture. I was inspired by the broadsheets produced by the Cuala Press (1908-1946), which Dr. Knight presented to us during class. In my project, I mimicked this style, recognizable by the large label reading "A Broadside," and a simple depiction of the poem and correlated image below.

During this visit, I also was first introduced to Mairtín Ó Direáin's work. In a previous class visit to the Rare Books and Special Collections department, we had studied the ways in

which historical Irish anthologies were physically put together, and all of Ó Direáin's pieces were ornately and meticulously designed, a factor which I was drawn to. The pieces held at the Rare Books and Special Collections department represent a range of Irish history, and their creation is closely tied to their cultural identity, a theme which I touched on in my essay.

After leaving this presentation, I found myself wanting to return to seek further inspiration for my paper. I used Aeon, the library's online registration and requesting system, to schedule an individual appointment with the Rare Books and Special Collections department. I was able to specifically request physical copies of broadsheets and anthologies I had noticed last time but wished to observe in greater detail. Student curators and staff showed me how best to preserve the state of the materials and where to find the information I needed.

Following this appointment, my professor asked our class to explore the books on the 8th floor of Hesburgh Library. On this floor, I was immediately enraptured by all of the works I found here. Not only were there countless resources on Irish language poets, but also books on German poetry, romance languages, art history and more. I compared the Irish language resources with those I had observed at the Rare Books and Special Collections department and determined which poem I would select for my paper. I eventually decided on Ó Direáin's "Cuimhne an Domhnaigh," located in the book *Selected Poems / Rogha Dánta* by Máirtín Ó Direáin. Because the Hesburgh Library provided this resource, I had a jumping off point for my paper: an initial translation of the Irish poem by Frank Sewell.

However, I was still in need of scholarly articles relating to my work, so I turned to the Irish Studies page of the Hesburgh Library's website. On this page, I discovered the Dictionary of Irish Biography and JSTOR, both of which proved to be very important resources in my research process. Using these resources helped me to better understand the depth of the poem I

was working with. This essay was not only about translation, but also about meaning and culture conveyed by Irish poems. The research I conducted using Hesburgh Library resources allowed me to examine Ó Direáin's background and motivations behind the poem. By understanding these features, I was better able to create a domesticating translation, making the Irish text feel as natural as possible in English.

The majority of my project was written in the first-floor reading room, where I like to sit at the tables by the window looking out at the Golden Dome – and where I sit now as I write. When I submitted my final essay, my professor commented that it was well-researched. As I reflected on this comment, I realized that it was all due to the resources provided by the Hesburgh Library. These assets, including the Rare Books and Special Collections department and curators, online databases, and floors of books from countless authors and backgrounds, broadened my perspective of what Irish poetry represents. Being able to physically touch the Broad­sides and read these anthologies, which often inspired political nationalism, gave me a glimpse into the world of those fighting for a greater cause: an independent Ireland. Although I was not there to experience this fight, it was this research and these resources that allowed me to interpret their struggles and successes and attempt to do justice to this movement in my writing.