

## A Folkloristic Approach to Irish Surfing Narratives: Readings of an Irish Surflore

---

**Résumé.** Cet article explore les expressions culturelles des surfeurs de la côte ouest irlandaise. Sur la base d'un large corpus rassemblant récits de vie, descriptions journalistiques et œuvres photographiques, filmiques et illustratives, un concept est présenté : celui de *surflore* ou folklore moderne propre aux surfeurs. L'interprétation folklorique permet d'emprunter des concepts et méthodes à la discipline des études des folklores et de mener une analyse approfondie des informations fournies par la description ethnographique et des phénomènes narratifs mis au jour. Un outil méthodologique spécifique a été élaboré et mis en œuvre à des fins de classement, identification et interprétation du matériau recueilli : l'index *surflore*, présenté ici. Des suggestions sont émises quant aux fonctions du surflore identifié et de sa transmission, qui participent au développement d'une esthétique et de marqueurs identitaires singuliers à la pratique irlandaise du surf.

**Mots-clés.** Irlande, folklore moderne, culture surf, surflore, pratiques expressives, récit

**Abstract.** This paper explores the translations into images and words of the experience of surfing in Ireland through film work, photography, published accounts and stories collected from first-hand interviews. It presents how, in the course of the research, a distinct modern folklore was identified and defined: an Irish *surflore*. The folkloric interpretation of the research material allows to borrow concepts and methods from the field of folkloristics and to design and implement an index as a system of classification specific to that material. It also drives the analysis of the narratives collected by allowing organization and in-depth examination of their characteristics and themes. This paper presents the index, and suggests further implications of the folkloric perspective on the research material, particularly in relation to the subject of transmission and dissemination of findings.

**Keywords.** Ireland, modern folklore, surf culture, surflore, narratives, storytelling

## Introduction

There is a wave in county Clare, past the Cliffs of Moher Experience Visitor Centre and the safe viewing pathways, a wave that breaks at the bottom of the 200-metre vertical drop of the Cliffs. When the swell, tide and winds align, the wave breaks to perfection, allowing itself to be surfed by a handful of local chargers who have learned its lines and its ways, and by international big wave surfers lured by the reputation of Ireland's "legendary gem"<sup>1</sup>. An "intimidating"<sup>2</sup> slab wave, Aileen's is a "ruthless" big wave spot that in the last two decades has contributed to putting Ireland on the surfing map. The wave has been named Aileen's, after the headland where it breaks:

A dense library of Celtic myths is associated with the Cliffs of Moher and the most fabulous of them all gave the cliff face at Aill Na Searrach (the "Leap of the Foals") its name. It was there that seven foals, believed to be the guise of the Tuatha De Dannan had taken after St Patrick introduced religion to Ireland, became disorientated by the bright sunlight after hiding out in the Kilcornan Caves and galloped over the cliff face. The wave became Aileen's<sup>3</sup>.

That a name bearing such symbolic and historical meaning and rooted in Ireland's heritage of myths and legends should be given to a wave and go on to become a legend of its own within the big-wave, cold-water surfing world is what led me to start a research project exploring the relationship between traditions and "modern" folklore, cultural and social practices and identity formation. The research was started in 2017 and completed in 2021 within a Ph.D. programme in collaboration between Bordeaux Montaigne and Rennes 2 universities, France. Its aims were to identify and interpret the singularities of Ireland's surfing community, with a particular focus on the surfers of the west coast stretching from west Cork to Donegal. Relying on an ethnographic approach based on observational participation, a corpus of film work, photography and published accounts was gathered alongside stories collected from first-hand interviews of surfers conducted along the western Irish coastline. Analysing those verbal and visual translations of the experience of surfing in Ireland allowed for an ethnographic portrait of the Irish surfing community to emerge. This initial description then helped determine those surfers' distinctive identities as Irish idiosyncratic reformulations of the global practice of surfing.

This paper presents the main findings of the research as they relate to those points. It first presents how, in the course of the research, a distinct modern folklore was identified and defined: an Irish *surflore*. The folkloric interpretation has allowed to borrow a set of concepts and methods from the field of folkloristics to facilitate the study of the research material. Designing

---

1. "Aileen's: the treacherous slab wave of the Cliffs of Moher". *Surfer Today* <<https://www.surfertoday.com/surfing/aileens-the-treacherous-slab-wave-of-the-cliffs-of-moher>>, accessed on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020.

2. *Ibid.*

3. DUGGAN, Keith, *Cliffs of Insanity, A winter on Ireland's big waves*, Transworld Ireland, 2012: 67.

and implementing an index as a theoretical model has indeed driven the analysis of the narratives collected by structuring them, allowing for in-depth examination of their characteristics and themes. This paper presents the index, and suggests further implications of the folkloric perspective on the research material, particularly in relation to the subject of transmission and dissemination of findings.

### *Locating Irish surflore*

One fundamental take-away of the findings in the early stages of the research has been that the specificities of Irish surfing seem to lie, first and foremost (and quite unsurprisingly) in the geographic and climatic singularities of the environment. As an island exposed to the North Atlantic, Ireland boasts some of the best big wave locations in Europe, to be found on the western coastline. Aileen's and Riley's in county Clare and Mullaghmore in county Sligo are three of the most famous waves that have made the reputation of Ireland as a big wave spot and have now been attracting surfers from all over the world. The circumstances for those waves to break are mostly met in winter time, when the weather conditions on the Irish coastline can be harrowing, making surfing those formidable waves a rough and humbling experience that impacts the surfers' bodies, minds and communities in a number of ways. The second characteristics that I contend have made Irish surfing a very distinctive practice are the representations of surfing in Ireland. What is quite distinctive in the representational elements collected in the course of the research is to be found in the textuality and orality of the stories as well as in the visual elements of representation. These have guided the interpretation of surfing in Ireland as a cultural hybrid of the global practice of surfing<sup>4</sup>.

This in turn led to the consideration of the material collected as an expressive body of culture encompassing oral and written accounts, films, photographs, paintings and illustrations, and as a rich and singular cultural construct in the making. Considering this material as the expressions of a culture – the Irish practice of surfing –, a theoretical model was elaborated drawing from the research methods of folkloristics which helped identify and define this material as a folklore. All those stories indeed share “knowledge or learning held in common”<sup>5</sup> by the Irish surfers' community, and they fit the many definitions that have been given of a folklore as, *e.g.*, a body of knowledge “learned by word of mouth, participation, and demonstration”<sup>6</sup>.

---

4. See in particular the work of Anne Barjolin-Smith and her analysis of Florida's surf culture and its expressions as a cultural hybrid of the global practice of surfing. BARJOLIN-SMITH, Anne, *Ethno-esthétique du surf en Floride: impact des relations esthétiques entre surf et musique sur le marquage identitaire*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Montpellier 3 (France), 2018.

5. BRONNER, Simon J., *Folklore. The Basics*, London, Routledge, 2016: 2.

6. *Ibid.*: 4.

This expressive body of culture, here referred to as “surflore”, is passed on from one generation to the next, and is renewed creatively through stories retold, photographs and films shared during festivals and online (on 21<sup>st</sup> century storytelling platforms), and re-enacted. It can even be seen as a revived or updated form of earlier forms of folklore (here, sea lore, fishermen’s tales). “Surflore”, from surf films and photographs to paintings and written or oral narratives, is to be distinguished from what is commonly called “surf culture”: the Irish surflore encompasses the various expressions of the culture and practice of Irish surfing which has been described in the ethnographic portrait<sup>7</sup>. Surflore, therefore, is to be understood as a “mirror” of the Irish surfing culture<sup>8</sup>.

### *Structuring and classifying the surflore: the surflore index*

The term “narratives” is used here to refer to the visual works collected (films, photographs and other visual arts), written published accounts as well as interviews of surfers conducted among a representative sample of the Irish surfing community on the west coast of Ireland<sup>9</sup>. Here particular attention is paid to the processing of first-hand oral accounts which relied on precise, methodical transcription into written words of the contents of the stories told. Taking notes of changes of tones, exclamations, pauses or hesitations in the narratives when those were delivered during interviews was critical to preserve the orality of the stories as they were told. This was also done so as to allow for further analysis, *e.g.* comparisons of theme variations for instance, or further examination of elements of language and rhetoric.

Qualitative analysis followed the transcription stage, with the singling out of the main, substantial motifs from the corpus of stories. Differences were noted down, as were variations in the account of similar stories. An example of recurrent motifs or themes shaped by them is that of the inner journey that surfers experience through their practice; others include gender relations, the quest for more waves or the “call for adventure”, for more sensations, or for the fulfilling of those existential needs intrinsic to humanity. The theme of the battle is particularly prominent – the battle against elements, bigger waves, an elusive fear threshold, or one’s own inner struggles that are either subdued or emphasized in the water. These themes have been found beyond the collection of oral narratives throughout the corpus. Given the growing amount of interview recordings and narratives collected (published sources or visual arts), early

---

7. CAREY-PENOT, Frederique, *Récits, images et marketing des territoires du surf en Irlande: lectures mythopoétiques d’un surflore irlandais*, Ph.D. dissertation, Universities of Bordeaux Montaigne and Rennes 2 (France), 2021: chapters 3 and 4. Accessible online at <<https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-03624412>>.

8. DUNDES, Alan, in BRONNER, Simon J. (ed.), *Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes*, University Press of Colorado, 2007: 55.

9. CAREY-PENOT, *op. cit.*, 2021: 92-128.

enough in the analysis process the need was felt for a practical method to classify them so as to facilitate the study. With the material now defined as a folklore, borrowing from the methods of folkloristics to do so then seemed all the more relevant. The theoretical model designed for this research consists in a classification index, *i.e.* a system of organization and analysis of the material specifically created for the purpose of identifying surflore narratives through themes and tale type numbers.

This “surfloric” index draws from well-known existing classification systems used in folklore studies such as American folklorist Stith Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*<sup>10</sup> and from the Aarne-Thompson-Uther index of international folktales<sup>11</sup> (also referred to as the ATU Index). What is meant by “motifs” here is the repeated narrative building-blocks to be found in traditional folk tales and narratives<sup>12</sup>. The purpose of such indexes was to facilitate the collecting, study and preservation of traditional folk narratives. Despite some of their flaws they have been praised in folkloristic circles as very valuable tools, whose accessibility and convenience have provided the basis of the index of Irish surflore narratives<sup>13</sup>.

### - *Motifs*

In the same way as the ATU Index, the surflore index aims at identifying, classifying and numbering the traditional themes of the oral, written and visual narratives collected among surfers along the Wild Atlantic Way in the course of this research. Each narrative was structured into stories which were assigned a name and numbered in order of appearance. For example, in big wave surfer Ollie O’Flaherty’s interview, stories are referred to as “Ollie, 1”, “Ollie, 2”, etc. Motifs were identified within the narratives during the early analysis stage of the overall corpus of material and assigned a number within the classification. This implied structuring the index in broad categories of themes (25 in the current form of the classification), which were then declined into various subcategories to include developments and variations. Stories, or entries in the index, are first organized by an umbrella topic. An extract of

---

10. THOMPSON, Stith, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, 6 vols, revised and enlarged edition, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1955.

11. UThER, Hans-Jörg, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*, 3 vols., Suomalainen Tiedakatemia, Helsinki, 2004.

12. In the context of the index, Thompson has defined motif as follows: “A motif is the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition. In order to have this power it must have something unusual and striking about it.” In THOMPSON, Stith, *The Folktale*, University of California Press, 1977 [1946]: 415.

13. Alan Dundes (among other folklorists), while openly criticizing the Indexes, acknowledged their value even beyond its application to comparative studies: “the indices constitute two of the most valuable tools in the professional folklorist’s arsenal of aids for analysis”. DUNDES, Alan, “The Motif-Index and the Tale Type Index: A Critique”, in *Journal of Folklore Research*, 34(3), Indiana University Press (JSTOR 3814885), 1997: 195–202. Accessed online on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019: <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3814885>>.

the surfloric index is presented below as an example: category 9, titled “The Surfer’s Journey”, is divided into eleven sub-categories to include the following developments:

- 9.1: “Introduction”;
- 9.2: “The call to adventure”;
- 9.3: “The mentor”;
- 9.4: “The helpers”;
- 9.5: “The companions”;
- 9.6: “The quest: hunting for waves, travelling”;
- 9.7: “Adventures along the way”;
- 9.8: “Ordeals along the way”;
- 9.9: “Lessons learnt along the way”;
- 9.10: “Achievements”;
- 9.11: “The ultimate fight/death and resurrection”.

Each category can be subdivided into multiple sub-categories to accommodate further developments or variations. For instance, motif 9.6: “The quest” is sub-divided into five developments: motif 9.6.1: “Hunting for waves around Ireland”, motif 9.6.2: “Discovering new waves”, motif 9.6.3: “Tales of goose chases”, etc. Within each category, stories are classified in alphabetical order – in the example mentioned, the stories are named after the wave they refer to, and then organized alphabetically.

## **9. THE SURFER’S JOURNEY:**

### **9.1 Introduction:**

#### **9.1.1. Presenting oneself:**

= *Byrne, 1; Cross, 1; Olga, 1; Tom, 1, 2; Ollie, 1; Reid, 1; Adam & Ellie, 1; Ahern, 1; Shambles, (1), 2; Murphy, 1, 19; Josh, 1, 2; Giles, 1; Ian, 1, 7*  
 = *Barry Britton, Made in Ireland ep. 3; Noah Lane, Made in Ireland ep. 3; Barry Mottershead, Made in Ireland ep. 3*

#### **9.1.2. The ordinary world & the trigger / the initiator:**

= *Cross, 2 (holidays); Olga, 2 (a break up), 3; Adam & Ellie, 2, 21; Ahern, 11; Murphy, 2; Josh, 5, 6, 7, 8, 21, 22, 23; Giles, 2, 3, 4; Ian, 2, 3*  
 = *Barry Britton, Made in Ireland ep. 3*  
 = *CAVEY, 2012; DUGGAN, 2012 (Fergal Smith)*

### **9.2. The call to adventure:**

= *Shambles, 1*

#### **9.2.1. First memorable wave:**

= *Rory, 2; Cross, 3; Adam & Ellie, 6; Shambles, 5; Murphy, 3; Josh, 9; Giles, 5; Ian, 4*

#### **9.2.2. The call: serendipity:**

= *Rory, 1 (finding a board); Shambles, 18*  
 = *Cavey, 2012 (Reader’s Digest, the Britton brothers’ boards)*

### **9.3. The mentor:**

= *Byrne, 3 (older brothers); Ollie, 2 (uncle); Reid, 2 (father); Adam & Ellie, 21; Josh, 6*

### **9.4. The helpers:**

#### **9.4.1. Family:**

= *Byrne, 4; Reid, 3; Adam & Ellie, 4, 9*

#### **9.4.2. One-time guides:**

= *Adam & Ellie, 6*

### **9.5. The companions:**

= *Reid, 7; Adam & Ellie, 5; Josh, 23*  
 = *CAVEY, 2012; DUGGAN, 2012*  
 = *FLANAGAN (Ill. 72)*

### **9.6 The quest: hunting for waves, travelling:**

- 9.6.1. Hunting for waves:**  
 = Tom, 26; Rory, 12; Ian, 12 (*the dopamine lottery*)  
 = CAVEY, 2012 (*surfaris*) ; DUGGAN, 2012 (*Mickey Smith & Fergal Smith*)  
 = CAVEY: *first surfari*, 1966 (Ill. 2)
- 9.6.2. Discovering new waves:**  
 = Shambles, 11  
 = DUGGAN, 2012 (*Mickey Smith*)
- 9.6.3. Tales of goose chases:**  
 = Byrne, 39
- 9.6.4. Hunting abroad – travel accounts:**  
 = Byrne, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 22; Rory, 12
- 9.6.5 Coming back home from each adventure = outlooks on the homeland upon returns:**  
 = Rory, 12; Byrne, 38; Ollie, 7; Josh, 5  
 = SMITH, Fergal, 2019 (TED talk)
- 9.7. Adventures along the way:**
- 9.7.1. First board(s):**  
 = Shambles, 18; Giles, 11; Olga, 2, 3
- 9.7.2. Earning a nickname:**  
 = Shambles, 18
- 9.7.3 Competing:**  
 = Tom, 5, 6; Ollie, 5, 6; Reid, 4, 5 (*first comps*); Adam & Ellie, 14, 15; Murphy, 4; Giles, 14; Byrne, 9, 10, 17, 18, 19, 20
- 9.8. Ordeals along the way:**
- 9.8.1. Obstacles:**
- 9.8.1.1. Fear:**  
 = Olga, 4, 20; Adam & Ellie, 11, 12; Shambles, 7, 8; Josh, 16
- 9.8.1.2. A disability:**  
 = *Liquid Therapy*
- 9.8.1.3. Comfort zones:**  
 = Ollie, 6; Josh, 17
- 9.8.2 Wipe outs:**
- 9.8.2.1 Common wipe outs and injuries:**  
 = Rory, 25; Cross, 7, 8; Reid, 10  
 = SMITH, Mickey, 2010  
 = SMITH, Fergal, 2019 (TED talk)  
 = DUGGAN, 2012
- 9.8.2.2 Over the falls: serious accidents and injuries:**  
 = Rory, 14; Tom, 12; Ian, 9; Shambles, 8  
 = Carve, 2019a ; MCGOLDRICK, 2016a  
 = DUGGAN, 2012 (*Fergal Smith at Teahupoo and Cloudbreak*)  
 = SMITH, Fergal, 2019 (TED talk)  
 = Barry Mottershead (BONYTHON, Ill. 76); Shambles's rescue from Riley's (Ill. 77)
- 9.9. Lessons learnt along the way: “embracing the wipe out”: surfing’s lessons:**  
 = Rory, 11, 3; Tom, 15; Olga, 7, 8, 10  
 = DUGGAN, 2012 (*Fergal Smith*)  
 = SMITH, Mickey, 2010  
 = SMITH, Fergal, 2019 (TED talk)
- 9.10. Achievements:**  
 = Reid, 15, 16; Adam & Ellie, 7; Giles, 17  
 = DUGGAN, 2012 (*surfers’ and bodyboarders’ portraits*)
- 9.11. The ultimate fight / death and resurrection:**
- 9.11.1. The big fight:**  
 = Ollie, 25  
 = LOCK, Jason, 2020 (*Maguire’s big wave at Mullaghmore, Oct. 2020*)
- 9.11.2. The hero’s symbolic death:**  
 = Shambles, 7, 8; Ian, 9  
 = DUGGAN, 2012 (*Fergal Smith*)  
 = Fergal Smith's Moy Hill Farm (TED Talk)

**9.11.3. Resurrection:**

= *Fergal Smith's Moy Hill Farm (TED Talk)*

When variations of the same story coexist, letters are used to refer to variations of the same tale, following Thompson's structure of his Motif Index. For example, currently two variations of a story coexist within motif "18.1.1. "Pioneers – famous wave discoveries", *i.e.* "18.1.1. Lissadell A" and "18.1.1. Lissadell B":

**18. Secret waves and treasures:**

**18.1 Tales of secret waves** = *Byrne, 40; Cross, 29*

18.1.1 Pioneers – famous wave discoveries = *Rory, 20; Tom, 3; Ian, 14* ("the Mickey Smith era")

18.1.1 LissadellA = *Rory, 18*

18.1.1 LissadellB = *Byrne, 39*

18.1.2 Ireland's still secret waves

**18.2 Treasure hunting – quests**

18.2.1 Motivations = *Rory, 19*

**18.3 Keeping vs sharing secrets** = *Cross, 30; Ian, 17*  
= *SMITH, Mickey, 2011 (Carve: "Thicker than water")*

In one version, the interviewee stated that the wave was found by a handful of young surfers by following the older surfers that were keeping it secret by borrowing a plane to chase them (Lissadell A). Two older interviewees later corrected that version, stating that the flight expedition failed to reveal the spot, which the young surfers discovered a few days later whilst driving (Lissadell B).

In addition, distinctions are made within the entries between the different sources of narratives. Those include:

- oral accounts collected during interviews;
- the literary works of the corpus (novels, biographies and autobiographies);
- press references (online surf specialized articles, or mainstream newspapers);
- online conferences or podcasts;
- film work (long features and short surf edits);
- actions and initiatives of organisations such as NGOs and charities;
- the photographs, illustrations, paintings or architectural works collected in the corpus (each image is identified with a number and referenced in an illustration index).

- *Tale types*

Further structuring this index, the surfloric motifs and narratives have been classified into four types relating to four overall themes and types of storytelling. These have emerged at a later stage of the analysis, allowing to group the narratives into four broad tale types. Each of the types points towards the various functions that the narratives it includes seem to serve. The four tale types of Irish surfloric narratives identified so far are as follows:

- The first category, “Historical tales: surfing in Ireland, the then and the now”, encompasses the narratives of motifs 1 to 8 that tell the history of Ireland’s relationship to the ocean and of Ireland as an “island nation”. Those narratives also tell of the history of the development of surfing in Ireland (Ireland as a “surfing nation”), of present-day issues related to surfing around the island, and of future developments of the practice. Examples of present-day issues are the re-appropriation and incorporation of surflore and of the Irish “surfer hero” myth by brands or local and national authorities within management and marketing strategies with a view to enhancing the tourism sector’s offer, and thus boosting the generation of income from national and foreign visitors. Those narratives also include the politics of Irish surfing and other issues relating to infrastructural, associative and environmental needs either nationwide or in local surf spots.

The narratives classified into that first category all pertain to a historical approach and seem to bring a sense of history to the practice of surfing in Ireland. Placed within a past that unfolds chronologically, the development of Irish surfing is told through its various stages, either by its actors or from distanced narrators, while rooting itself within modern, present-day concerns that allow perspectives to emerge for its future developments. The narratives of the first type thus decidedly place surfing within Ireland’s social, cultural, economic and environmental landscapes and history as a shared culture in its own right, with its own past, present-day issues and evolutions. They serve, in reference to Joseph Campbell’s definition of one of the four main functions of mythology within human society, what may be termed a sociological function: “validat[ing] and support[ing] the existing social order, mythologies [...] confirming that order and enforcing it by reflecting it into the stories themselves”<sup>14</sup>.

- The second type of narratives, “Personal experience narratives: of men and waves”, groups stories of motifs 9 to 14 telling of personal experiences of surfing Ireland’s waves. Generally, these are stories of the tellers’ introduction to surfing and their first memorable waves, of the themes of the inner journey, of heroes and legends of Irish surfing – whether heroes from the past or the present or legends in the making. One can also generally find revealing myth-building motifs and processes of legend formation at play in those narratives. Mythopoetical readings of those tales telling of “the journey”, for instance, allow to identify recurring motifs such as the intervention of initiators, helpers, companions or obstacles, the call to adventure, or quests and battles<sup>15</sup>. Those narratives are a shared pool of experiences and

---

14. CAMPBELL, Joseph, *The Masks of God, vol. 4: Creative Mythology*, Viking, New York, 1965: 4.

15. CAREY-PENOT, *op. cit.*, 2021. Borrowing from the methods of Pierre Brunel, mythopoetical readings of the heroic figure apparent in surflore narratives are presented in chapters 6 and 7 (328-82). The terms “mythopoet” and “mythopoetics” are here used to refer to the creation of myth through works of invention. The meaning is derived from the association of the terms “poet” and “poetics”, based on the Greek word “poïesis” referring to both invention and work, or “poïein” meaning “to create”, with the term “muthos” meaning any narrative

reflections on the practice, allowing for validation of one's achievements through the telling of the wave of the day or even validation of one's identity as a surfer, of one's accomplishment as an accepted member of the community. They also allow for guidance, with such tales being re-enacted in the water by the youth looking to follow their elders' moves, discoveries and apprenticeships and to improve their own levels of practice. They act, as it were, as a reservoir of tutoring, learning, educating oneself and others through stories and celebrations of the day-to-day experiences of the water, reflecting on and sharing the experiences.

Beyond the entertainment that the tales of this type provide, they seem to serve a primarily pedagogical function, guiding the receiver of the story for successful passage through the stages of their apprenticeship of their surfing life, and through the many physical and psychological challenges to be encountered in their learning. In that way, such narratives mirror the "pedagogical function of myths as guides for successful passage through the stages of one's life"<sup>16</sup>. As stories shared in order to maintain and diffuse the ways of the Irish surfers, they constitute the "living" material of the surfing practice that tells of its rituals and beliefs in its very own language.

- The third type of Irish surflore narratives, "Tales of waves: tales of the North Atlantic and of the waves of Ireland", encompasses narratives of motifs 15-20 featuring the Atlantic Ocean and Ireland's waves as the main protagonists. Waves are the primary recurring motif in all the surflore stories collected; they are the fleeting, transient, repeated but never quite the same territory on which the practice is at play and evolves, the primary canvas on which narratives are drawn. Therefore, their narrational significance alone, as well as the sheer number of stories referring to them as central motif called for a category of its own. These are tales of the waves of Ireland (behavioural descriptions, stories of their discoveries...) told through the prism of surfers' experiences, perceptions and imaginations. In these accounts, too, one can find myth-imbued representations, *e.g.* waves as beastly monsters to conquer.

The narratives of the third type seem to serve various functions. One may be called mapping: a sort of practical guide for surfers to know where those waves are, and understand how they work and how best to address them. Therefore, it may be argued that a connection to the pedagogical function of myths is apparent. These stories also bear markings of history, with stories of when and how they were discovered, named or first surfed, thus rooting the waves in

---

transmitted by word of mouth. "Mythopoeists" are thus, in essence, "creators of myth". The term "mythopoeist" itself can be traced back to Plato who, in a famous passage from the *Republic*, describes how Socrates, refers to poets with a compound past participle "muthopoios", naming them "myth makers". See GELY, Véronique, "Pour une mythopoétique: quelques propositions sur les rapports entre mythe et fiction", in *Silène*, Journal of the Centre de recherches en littérature et poétique comparées, Paris Ouest-Nanterre-La Défense, 2007. Accessed on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018: <[http://www.revue-silene.com/index.php?sp=liv&livre\\_id=90](http://www.revue-silene.com/index.php?sp=liv&livre_id=90)>.

16. CAMPBELL, Joseph, *Pathways to Bliss*, New World Library, New York, 2004: 9.

history, both past and present, and relating them to a sociological function. The stories also carry myth-building elements with, most strikingly, the personification of waves, which are given a name and even a personality transpiring through the use of qualifiers such as “mellow”, “gentle”, “aggressive” or “fierce”, or metaphors of awakening beasts: “it is awake”<sup>17</sup>. And so, while acting as a practical guide to Irish waves, the tellers of those stories also act as mythopoets<sup>18</sup>, creating a mystical aura around particular places and their waves and highlighting the singularity of Irish surfing. It is my presumption that such stories aim not only at understanding those waves but also at locating them within a mythopoetic *imaginarium*, following Mircea Eliade’s conclusion in his study of myths<sup>19</sup>. They can be viewed as establishing models for behaviour in relation to waves that require respect and humility, while providing explanations for quasi-religious experiences many a surfer will say they have encountered surfing such or such wave.

The stories of Irish waves of the third type of surflic narratives may also, indeed, be construed as surfers’ attempts to capture the absolute mysteries of life – what Joseph Campbell in his study of comparative mythology called “transcendent reality”<sup>20</sup>. This refers to experiences that cannot be translated into words or images but can be expressed beyond words, and pointed at by symbols and metaphors of the mythic language, whether visual (to be found in film work and photography) or in spoken or written words – what Joseph Campbell called “being statements”, or metaphors acting as statements that point beyond themselves into the transcendent. The metaphysical function of tales belonging to the third type of surflic narratives relates to a similar function that riding waves might serve. The idea that, through contact with the wave, surfers may access their own essence has been suggested by Anne-Sophie Sayeux<sup>21</sup> and furthered by Ludovic Falaix<sup>22</sup>, who in particular has shown how, through their experience of riding a wave, surfers are offered access to transcendence and to the *numinous* (the power or realisation of divinity), and thereby confronted to a mystery (*mysterium*) that is at once terrifying (*tremendum*) and fascinating (*fascinans*). For Falaix, surfing the wave can be interpreted and felt as the sensory experience of that mystery<sup>23</sup>. One can therefore argue that

---

17. Such qualifiers are plenty in Keith Duggan’s book (DUGGAN, Keith, *op. cit.*, 2012) as well as in articles from the online surf press, e.g. *Magiceaweed*. Surf brands also make use of such language and references – see for example the presentation page of the short film *Colosseum* (2017) on the website of the brand O’Neill: <<https://au.oneill.com/blogs/news/colosseum>>.

18. CAREY-PENOT, *op. cit.*, 2021: 410.

19. ELIADE, Mircea, *Aspects du Mythe*, Gallimard, Collection Folio Essais, Paris: 1988 [1963].

20. CAMPBELL, Joseph, *op. cit.*, 1965.

21. SAYEUX, Anne-Sophie, *Surfeurs, l’être au monde. Une analyse socio-anthropologique*, Presses universitaires de Rennes, collection des sociétés, Rennes, 2008.

22. FALAIX, Ludovic, *Des vagues et des hommes: la glisse au coeur des résistances et contestations face à l’institutionnalisation des territoires du surf en Aquitaine*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pau, 2012.

23. FALAIX, Ludovic, *Surf à contre-courant : Une odyssée scientifique*, MSHA – Maison des Sciences de l’Homme d’Aquitaine, collection Sports et Société, 2017: 31-2.

the telling of the stories and their re-enactment through surfing rituals give the surfer a sense of those mysteries as an experience, thus playing the metaphysical function of myths as identified by Joseph Campbell:

Mythological symbols touch and exhilarate centers of life beyond the reach of reason and coercion [...]. The first function of mythology is to reconcile waking consciousness to the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* of this universe as it is<sup>24</sup>.

- The fourth type of Irish surfloric narratives identified, “Surf island: tales of the elements”, gathers stories of motifs 21-25. These bring the surrounding elements to the fore and are tales of the winds, the tides, the seasons, the weather and the land. They touch on Ireland’s long ignored heritage as a sea nation<sup>25</sup> and bring old tales of fishermen, sea explorers and Ireland’s seascapes to life again. The stories of the fourth type all seem to revive Ireland’s maritime heritage, and to bring about a sense of pride in the island and its geographical attributes. What transpires from those narratives as well is a sense of identity, of belonging to a nation that is not just the land of poets and rebels and rural folk tales revived by Romantic imaginations, but also an island nation, when nations’ identities are being questioned in postmodern societies by individuals looking for other markers than nationalities to identify with<sup>26</sup>. As emerging traditions are being identified and mobility acknowledged as a primary factor in modern societies, cultural practices are today considered less as “remnants of the past” than “resources of living creativity and adaptation”<sup>27</sup>. Folklorists have highlighted “the ways that people [understand] the cultural coding of different situations and [can] attain and express different identities in their varied encounters of life”, and noted that individuals “construct their own identities based *upon* the creative manipulation of traditions”<sup>28</sup>. Being a surfer, being Irish and the pride derived from both identities transpire from most tales of the fourth type, thus serving a function akin to nation-building, asserting awareness, pride, humility and awe in relation to the natural surroundings, and the deriving sense of belonging to a distinct social and cultural group: a surfing nation.

Below is the general structure of the surfloric Index in its current form. The classification is still in the making: stories are still being collected and analysed, and new motifs and sub-entries are being identified and added to the system – a process which is expected to continue well beyond the Ph.D. dissertation.

---

24. CAMPBELL, Joseph, *op. cit.*, 1965: 4.

25. MACSWEENEY, Tom, *Seascapes*, Mercier Press, Dublin, 2008.

26. CAREY-PENOT, *op. cit.*, 2021: 427-41.

27. BRONNER, *op. cit.*, 2016: 11.

28. *Ibid.*

## **Irish Surflore Narratives Index**

### **· Type I: historical tales: surfing in Ireland, the then & the now**

#### **1. History of Ireland's relationship to the ocean:**

- 1.1. *Invasions, between myths/legends and history*
- 1.2. *Sailors and explorers*
- 1.3. *Fishing nation – a history*
- 1.4. *An “island nation”: recovering Ireland's sea heritage*

#### **2. History – surfing in Ireland “Back in the days...”:**

- 2.1. *“Dawn surfers”: the “forefathers” of Irish surfing*
- 2.2. *“Like gold” - first gear*
- 2.3. *“There is something wrong with them”: perceptions of surfers then*
- 2.4. *Promoting the sport*
- 2.5. *Against the stream: fighting for surfing*
- 2.6. *The rise of big-wave surfing in Ireland*

#### **3. Idiosyncrasies of surfing in Ireland**

- 3.1. *Along the Irish shores – an overview = maps of surfing hubs*
- 3.2. *The local populations of surfers: heroes of old, storytellers, local legends*
- 3.3. *Local idioms in the water*
- 3.4. *What's kept me here / surfing towns*
- 3.5. *The country & its people (“the vortex”, the country “choosing its people”)*

#### **4. Surfing's growth, changes observed: the positives**

- 4.1. *A positive economic boost*
- 4.2. *Surfing's contribution to the community*
- 4.3. *Surfing as a business, within political & economic contexts*
- 4.4. *Pushing the level of surfing*

#### **5. Surfing's growth in Ireland – issues:**

- 5.1. *Manners*
- 5.2. *Territories and localism*

#### **6. Whistle-blowing: changes needed & pinpointed by surfers & local initiatives:**

- 6.1. *Sewage & environmental care*
- 6.2. *Plastic & coastal/beach clean ups: whistle blowing & actions taken*
- 6.3. *Sustainable growth/production/consumption*
- 6.4. *Infrastructural improvements needed*
- 6.5. *Horizon gazers – surfers at the forefront*

#### **7. Marketing representations of Ireland as a surfing destination:**

- 7.1. *The market / people targeted*
- 7.2. *Branding / Irish surfing as a product*

#### **8. Social: genders:**

- 8.1. *“First Irish wahines”: a history of female surfing in Ireland*
- 8.2. *Being a woman in the line-up*
- 8.3. *Surfing with women*
- 8.4. *Men/Women's take on the ocean, wave riding and the politics of the sport*

### **· Type II: personal experience narratives: of men and waves**

#### **9. The surfer's journey:**

- 9.1. *Introduction*
- 9.2. *The call to adventure*
- 9.3. *The mentor*
- 9.4. *The helpers*
- 9.5. *The companions*
- 9.6. *The quest: hunting for waves, travelling*
- 9.7. *Adventures along the way*
- 9.8. *Ordeals along the way*
- 9.9. *Lessons learnt along the way: “embracing the wipe out*
- 9.10. *Achievements*
- 9.11. *The ultimate fight / death and resurrection*

#### **10. Surfing big:**

- 10.1. *Introduction to big-wave surfing*

- 10.2. *Motivations*
- 10.3. *“The fear thing”*
- 11. Personal experiences and visions of surfing:**
  - 11.1. *Personal definitions*
  - 11.2. *Favourite manoeuvres*
  - 11.3. *Passion vs addiction*
  - 11.4. *Game vs sport*
- 12. Boards & other gear:**
  - 12.1. *Boards presentation*
  - 12.2. *Favourite board(s)*
  - 12.3. *Board tales – board stories*
- 13. Life choices:**
  - 13.1. *Life decisions dictated by surfing*
  - 13.2. *Sacrifices & compromises*
- 14. Artists & surfers:**
  - 14.1. *Being seen*
  - 14.2. *Surfing as a creative performance, expression of the self*
  - 14.3. *Surfing / playing music*
  - 14.4. *Surfing and visual arts*
- **Type III: Tales of waves: the North Atlantic and of the waves of Ireland**
- 15. Memorable waves:**
  - 15.1. *From the past*
  - 15.2. *Of recent*
  - 15.3. *Friends’ waves*
- 16. Personal definitions:**
  - 16.1. *A wave*
  - 16.2. *A good wave / the perfect wave*
  - 16.3. *Surfing / bodyboarding*
  - 16.4. *Of waves and animals*
- 17. Tales of Irish waves:**
  - 17.1. *Favourite wave(s) in Ireland*
  - 17.2. *Tales of perfect waves*
  - 17.3. *The one wave that hooks you*
  - 17.4. *There is a wave... (tales of individual waves along the Irish coastline)*
- 18. Secret waves and treasures:**
  - 18.1. *Tales of secret waves*
  - 18.2. *Treasure hunting –quests*
- 19. Naming waves:**
  - 19.1. *Significant names*
  - 19.2. *Place names*
  - 19.3. *Drawing from mythology*
  - 19.4. *“For the craic”: “ridiculous” names*
- 20. Ireland’s heavy waves:**
  - 20.1. *Tales of big waves*
  - 20.2. *Heavy wave surfing legends (riders and rescuers)*
- **Type IV: Surf island: tales of the elements**
- 21. Of climate, earth and ocean (what’s special about surfing in Ireland):**
  - 21.1. *Seasonality*
  - 21.2. *The wait (for the right tide, swell and winds)*
  - 21.3. *Commitment*
  - 21.4. *Variety*
- 22. Tales of The Cold**
- 23. Tales of the winds**
- 24. Of tides and swells**
- 25. Of monsters and eadails (bounties): local sea and land lore**
  - 25.1. *Local tales of the sea, sayings, proverbs / lessons from the sea (fishermen’s wisdom)*

- 25.2. *Ocean magic*
- 25.3. *Monstrous waves: tales of fear*
- 25.4. *Bounties and rewards*
- 25.5. *History and legends of the land*
- 25.6. *A people shaped by the sea – and surflore*

So far, the index has allowed for the identification and the coding of common themes and features across all the narratives collected in the course of this research. While it does need improvement, it has been great help in facilitating comparative study of those stories, allowing convenient ordering of narratives and story motifs. A brief outline of some of the main narratorial characteristics of the surflore collected is presented in the following lines.

*Exploring the surflore: narratorial singularities of Irish surfing representations – the new seanachais.*

Once implemented, the surflore index helps drive the reading and analysis of the narratives. Here are highlighted some of the representational elements which, alongside the environmental characteristics of the practice, have been found earlier to be what makes surfing in Ireland a very distinctive cultural practice indeed. More particularly, the narratorial singularities of those representations have been the focal point of the analysis, which points to the function of storytelling embedded in Ireland's long-standing tradition of *seanachais*, the storytellers of old. Within the surflore, storytelling emerges as a powerful medium for the formation, expression and transmission of a distinctive cultural identity.

Some of the outstanding representational elements are verbal elements, as in when the stories have been collected through first-hand accounts during interviews. Others are visual, pertaining to the narrator's skill to build a visually expressive context for the story, which can be achieved through words in oral and written accounts as well as in stories which are told through the medium of painting, film or photography. All of those representational elements, whether verbal or visual, are narratorial as they relate to the narrator's storytelling skills, and touch upon one or several aspects. One of them is a tendency towards digression with, for example, lengthy descriptions of the geographical or historical backdrop of a particular story, or multiple references to other characters or anecdotes related to the main story. When found in the narratives, this tendency seems to indicate a keen effort on the narrator's part to establish a vivid context that the listener, reader or viewer may relate to or at least better visualize. Mostly this is to be found in oral or written accounts<sup>29</sup>.

Humour, too, has been found to be very characteristic of the Irish surflore narratives, which often display a very distinctive type of Irish humour, playing on irony or sarcasm and

---

29. See for instance CAVEY, Kevin, *How Green Was Their Wave: The Dawn of Surfing in Ireland*, Original Writing Ltd, Dublin, 2012.

on witty comments and puns. The stories offer numerous mentions of “craic”<sup>30</sup>, and generally it has been found that Irish surfers do like a little bit of craic and “banter”. Other examples include a grin or a witty caption under the picture of a barrel, or a joke playing on the expected cliché representation of Irish surfers, referring to the environmental singularity of Irish surfing (surfers shivering while putting on their wetsuits on a cold, frosty January morning) and turning it on its head (over-emphasizing the shivering and loud theatrical invitations to meet for a pint of Guinness after the session)<sup>31</sup>.

Another prevailing tendency to be found in the narratives – and one that is not exclusive to Irish surflore<sup>32</sup> – is one leaning towards dramatization, *i.e.* recounting events or depicting a scene in such a way as to bring out the excitement felt and the risks taken. The effects (whether intended or unintentional) of such tendency when it is found in the narratives are to elicit strong feelings in the audience by building a sense of tragedy or conveying images of heroism. One surfer told me about his near-death experience when he almost drowned while bodyboarding as a teenager: as he managed to get out of the water completely shaken and out of breath he collapsed on the sand, in front of his friends, next to the body of a dead bird<sup>33</sup>. The narrator’s emphasis on the visual power of the symbol of the dead bird makes for a very striking story. Accentuating contrasts in pictures is another way to convey dramatization of the power and formidability of the wave, the surfers’ skills or the surrounding landscape. Conor Conlon is a local photographer in Bundoran, county Donegal, whose stunning photography is often recognizable with his pushing of the darks and of the highlights, his accentuation of saturation and his occasional use of overlays<sup>34</sup>. Such effects bring out the dramatic and contrasting plays of light on the landscape and skies that are often grey, cloudy or stormy. Other photographers experiment with light and exposure to convey the sense of speed and unreal<sup>35</sup>. The use of black and white can also be very effective, with the pushed-up darks accentuating the size and depth of the waves. The work of Cornish photographer and waterman Mickey Smith, whose images of the west coast of Ireland have helped bring surfing fame to the island, are a case in point.

---

30. A definition of the term “craic” which is widely used in Ireland, can be found in *Cambridge Dictionary* (online): “Craic: Irish English (also crack): enjoyable time spent with other people, especially when the conversation is entertaining and funny”. <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/craic>>, accessed on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020.

31. CAREY-PENOT, *op. cit.*, 2021: 163-7.

32. Representations of surfers as heroes are in themselves not surprising: surfing is an individual, quite competitive sport which conveys notions of challenging the elements; therefore, the heroic narrative is quite present in most surfing cultures, as shown for instance by Tanis Thorne: THORNE, Tanis, “Legends of the Surfer Subculture: Part One”, in *Western Folklore*, Vol. 35, N. 3 (July 1976), Western States Folklore Society, 1976: 209-17.

33. CAREY-PENOT, *op. cit.*, 2021: 234.

34. An insight into Conor Conlon’s photography can be viewed on his social media pages as well as his website: <<https://www.cmpproductions.net/>>.

35. See for instance photography by Daragh Gorman, *aka* Lighthouse Industries, which can be viewed on his website: <<https://www.lighthouseindustries.ie/>>.

In Smith's photography the pushed-up darks often help accentuate the size and depth of the formidable waves, or bring out the dark and looming silhouette of the Cliffs of Moher in the background. Most of Smith's photographs are taken at the infamous spot Riley's, in county Clare, and in more than one the use of edited black and white emphasizes the dramatic outline of the cliffs, giving the impression of a dark magic oozing from the movements of the water on the slabs of rock and of rising waves against turbulent skies<sup>36</sup>.

Organizing the surflore within the index thus allows to facilitate comparative readings of narratives referring to similar motifs and/or using similar techniques. The analysis has been furthered by associating literary methods with other models borrowed from the study of myths. In particular, the mythopoetical model has been implemented with a focus on the heroic figure and its significance within the narratives; the model points towards some of the functions that a modern Irish surflore may serve within the community that generates it<sup>37</sup>. To further this description of the folkloric interpretation of the research material, we now need to take a look at the ways of transmission and re-creation of this modern folklore.

### *Sharing the surflore and dissemination of findings*

Folklores are far from being static cultural phenomena. Quite on the contrary, they appear to be flexible, movable expressions and traditions which are shared in multiple ways and through multiple media throughout time (through generational processes of transmission) and space (particularly thanks to the mobility of cultural materials). One characteristic of folklore is that it is shared, and needs to be shared for it to thrive. As essential as the forms in which a folklore expresses itself, therefore, are its ways of transmission. Folklorists agree that although traditions may be transmitted through institutional means (*e.g.* formal education), they mostly tend to move in other, less formal ways such as individual practices, small group teachings or more indirectly through symbolic representations<sup>38</sup>. Among some of the ways in which Irish surflore is being shared within the Irish surfing community and even beyond the Irish borders and surfing culture, one can mention the sharing of stories among surfers coming out of the water, or at festivals hosting screenings of surf films<sup>39</sup>. Social media play a significant part in

---

36. Mickey Smith's photography can be viewed on his website: Mickey Smith: <<http://www.mickeysmith.ie/>>.

37. CAREY-PENOT, *op. cit.*, 2021: 328-82.

38. This is particularly reflected in Jeffrey Alan Mazo's opposition between the Saxon compound words "folclār", which refers to shared knowledge and know-how and is at the origin of the modern compound "folklore", and "böclār", meaning learning from books. See MAZO, Jeffrey Alan, "A Good Saxon Compound", in *Folklore* 107: 107, in BRONNER, *op. cit.*, 2016: 2.

39. Such festivals as the late Shore Shots festival, or Bundoran town's Sea Sessions are examples of places of exchange and transmission of the Irish surflore. CAREY-PENOT, *op. cit.*, 2021: 303-15.

the transmission process, with online video platforms and personal Facebook or Instagram sharing accounts, videos, photographs and other arts. The surflore is also shared through the various media used by marketing agencies to promote the coastline, or by sports brands, surf schools or even banking services; those frequently play on symbolic representations so as to elicit strong feelings and action (a purchase, a subscription...) among the viewers<sup>40</sup>. Such ways of transmission mostly concern visual works – films, photographs, paintings or illustrations – however they do not, or rarely, involve written or oral narratives. Below are some of the ways in which the oral narratives accounts collected during the research are being shared in the process of dissemination of the findings, highlighting how academic work may in effect contribute to the folkloric transmission process within the Irish surfing community and beyond the Irish borders and surfing culture.

### - *Writing and publishing*

Comparative written publication has been considered from the start for the sharing of surflore narratives, and has been done partly in the Ph.D. dissertation that has resulted from this research. Examining the stories collected so far, initially the next step following interviews has indeed been to transcribe them so as to offer the most accurate rendering of what has been shared. Noting down pauses, hesitations, exclamations, idioms and manners of speech aims to transcribe as faithfully as possible not only the contents of the stories, but also the manner in which these have been told to convey the idiosyncrasies of language, to be later analysed linguistically. Publication of a selection of these transcripts in the appendixes of the Ph.D. dissertation has therefore allowed to share narratives in a vivid way, offering a rich, colourful insight in the culture, in the same way as the press articles, novels and autobiographies that have been published in recent years relating to Irish surfing<sup>41</sup>.

### - *Videography*

Creative videography is another method considered for the sharing of the narratives collected: association with Irish film production company Pockets Full of Water Productions<sup>42</sup> has led to the designing of a documentary series entitled *Daoine na Mara – People of the Sea* to

---

40. CAREY-PENOT, *op. cit.*, 2021: 424-7 and 535-8.

41. For instance, CAVEY, Kevin, *op. cit.*, 2012; DUGGAN, Keith, *op. cit.*, 2012; or the numerous articles published by surfer Seamus McGoldrick on online surf website *Magicseaweed*, among which: MCGOLDRICK, Seamus, 2014, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c.

42. Social media: <<https://www.facebook.com/pocketsfullofwater/>> and <<https://www.instagram.com/pocketsfullofwater/?hl=en>>.

support and share the findings and analyses<sup>43</sup>. The series is structured around the identification of narrative weaves that reflect the comparative examination carried out in the analysis. Video recordings of the interviews replace the written transcription of the stories, and the addition of surf footage of the interviewees, as well as footage captured along the Irish coastline and selected on the basis of the editor's creativity, help references, visualizations and mental images.

Such an outlet for the transmission of the surflore also relies on the editor's interpretation of the stories and their artistic license in combining the stories together with the addition of footage. Adding to the voices of the storytellers, this may be seen at best as poetic additions; at worst, it may be viewed as distortions of the imaginary that is rendered through the narration of the stories. To this may be opposed the view that such a creative project does on the contrary play on the idea that folklore and the surflore tradition are "intertwined with creativity or expressive culture"<sup>44</sup> and accepting of individual artistic expression and reinvention. *Daoine na Mara – People of the Sea: a documentary series* may thus be seen as a subjective, creative channel for the sharing and re-invention of the Irish surflore, as do many of the surf films and edits that have been flourishing on online streaming platforms and that often criss-cross references to other works while voicing their own distinctive narratives<sup>45</sup>.

*- Podcasting: Daoine na Mara – Tales from the Green Shores<sup>46</sup>: dematerialized ways of surflore transmission*

In the course of this research, the decision was made to also share the surflore material collected as a podcast series, *i.e.* "a program (as of music or talk) made available in digital format for automatic download over the Internet"<sup>47</sup> and available for online listening or for download on a social platform such as Soundcloud, Podbean, Spotify or Buzzsprout, to name but a few. A few arguments may be made to support the choice of podcasting in the sharing of surflore interview-sourced narratives when considering issues of accuracy and faithful rendering, one being that uploading and storing audio files on such platforms has now been made very accessible, as has their downloading. It also appears to be an easy way to store the material online creatively, with the editing process being considerably reduced as it only involves audio editing, *i.e.* basically trimming interferences or noises out, skipping parts that digress too far off the topics considered. Even if editing choices are made, those are minimal, and the audio document thus produced remains faithful to the narrator's orality as changes of tones,

---

43. The title "Daoine na Mara" means "people of the sea" in Irish Gaelic. The choice of borrowing from the Gaelic language was made in reference to early Irish folklorists' endeavours to safeguard Irish Gaelic cultural heritage.

44. BRONNER, *op. cit.*, 2016: 21.

45. CAREY-PENOT, *op. cit.*, 2021: 493-505.

46. Podcast *Daoine na Mara – Tales from the Green Shores* accessible at <<https://soundcloud.com/frederique-pnt>>.

47. Definition: <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/podcast>>.

exclamations, laughter, hesitations are preserved. In addition, podcasting platforms usually allow to post descriptions of the content and to present a structure of the stories told, *e.g.* in a table of contents, organized in chapters. This option has been selected for the *Daoine na Mara* podcast, with indications of the timing for each chapter so that listeners can move straight to the stories they would prefer to listen to, allowing for a convenient listening experience similar to reading when the table of contents of a book is available. Indexes of the people, places and topics mentioned may also be added to offer a clear overview of the narratives presented and their motifs and facilitate analysis when required.

Another argument to be made in support of podcasting oral surfloric material relates to the networking and interactional facilities offered by the platforms, which have made it easy to share on the most widely used social media networks such as Facebook and Instagram. This allows for publicity and visibility, thus aiding the process of diffusion and, in effect, transmission of the folklore. Comment boxes are also available to allow listeners to post their remarks or share their own stories in relation to those shared in the programme, potentially adding to the collecting process. One may finally argue that the sharing of folklore – *surflore* in this instance – through the format of the podcast seems appropriate in that it recreates the intimacy of the fireside storytelling sessions of olden days. By sharing the narratives as audio files, the listener only relies on the voices heard to guide their reception, understanding and visualization of the stories narrated in a way that is arguably more evocative than videos (which may lead to passive viewing or require multiple viewings when a voice-over narration added to the images may distract attention). Bearing in mind, therefore, the idea central to the study of modern folklores that networks are a key “social basis of folkloric communication”<sup>48</sup>, storytelling in the age of digital communication may not so much have disappeared as relocated itself from the firesides of olden days to the realm of online forums, podcasts and social posting.

## *Conclusion*

The folkloric interpretation of Irish surfing narratives as a *surflore* allows to borrow a set of concepts and methods that help organize and structure the accounts and representations of Irish surfers. Designing and implementing the *surfloric* index has been essential in the analysis of the research material in that the classification has allowed to bring out the most striking characteristics and idiosyncrasies of the Irish surfing lore. Furthering the exploration based on the index, other methods of analysis can be carried out. For example, mythopoetical readings of the narratives have been presented that point out the elements of myth at play in the sur-

---

48. BRONNER, *op. cit.*, 2016: 24.

flore and trace the development of a distinct myth of an Irish surfer hero<sup>49</sup>. More broadly, the folkloric perspective allows to open a conversation about the functions that a modern myth such as an Irish heroic surfing myth may serve both within the community that generates it and within the Irish society at large which is, whether directly or indirectly, meant to absorb it. Among those functions, education and guiding within the learning of the practice are prevalent, as is the metaphysical interpretation<sup>50</sup>. Surflore narratives of the second and third types, for instance, which heavily borrow from a reservoir of symbolic images (*e.g.* the hero *versus* the monster), may indeed be understood as surfers' attempts to capture the mysteries of life and the power or realisation of divinity<sup>51</sup>.

What also needs to be highlighted in conclusion is the pivotal role of the surflore examined in identity formation. This role is strongly related to how the lore is shared within and beyond the community, *i.e.* via modern ways of communication, which can be seen as a displacement of the ancient tradition of storytelling. Besides traditional processes (direct oral accounts from one person to another, written accounts), now the stories are also shared online via posts, photographs, films, artistic endeavours, podcasts which have replaced the fireside of olden days. Seen through the modern lens, the folklore of surfers, in Ireland as well as in other surfing nations, appears as the rich and fertile ground on which a community of practice and experience lives, celebrates and thrives and where the foundations of its distinct identity as a surfing people can be found. Folklore, then, must be viewed as a definite part of the contemporary world and research must continue to highlight "its place in the formation of identity within plural, complex societies<sup>52</sup>".

*Frederique Carey-Penot*  
*University of Rennes 2*

---

49. CAREY-PENOT, *op. cit.*, 2021: 370-411.

50. CAMPBELL, *op. cit.*, 1965: 4.

51. FALAIX, *op. cit.*, 2017: 31-2.

52. BRONNER, *op. cit.*, 2016: 6.

## Bibliography

- BARJOLIN-SMITH, Anne, *Ethno-esthétique du surf en Floride: impact des relations esthétiques entre surf et musique sur le marquage identitaire*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Montpellier 3 (France), 2018.
- BRONNER, Simon J. (ed.), *Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes*, University Press of Colorado, 2007.
- BRONNER, Simon J., *Folklore. The Basics*, London, Routledge, 2016.
- CAMPBELL, Joseph, *The Masks of God, vol. 4: Creative Mythology*, Viking, New York, 1965.
- CAMPBELL, Joseph, *Pathways to Bliss*, New World Library, New York, 2004.
- CAREY-PENOT, Frederique, *Récits, images et marketing des territoires du surf en Irlande: lectures mythopoétiques d'un surflore irlandais*, Ph.D. dissertation, Universities of Bordeaux Montaigne and Rennes 2 (France), 2021. Accessible online at <<https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-03624412>>.
- CAVEY Kevin, *How Green Was Their Wave: The Dawn of Surfing in Ireland*, Original Writing Ltd, Dublin, 2012.
- DUGGAN, Keith, *Cliffs of Insanity, A winter on Ireland's big waves*, Transworld Ireland, 2012.
- ELIADE, Mircea, *Aspects du Mythe*, Gallimard, Collection Folio Essais, Paris: 1988 [1963].
- FALAIX, Ludovic, *Des vagues et des hommes: la glisse au coeur des résistances et contestations face à l'institutionnalisation des territoires du surf en Aquitaine*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pau, 2012.
- MACSWEENEY, Tom. *Seascapes*, Mercier Press, Dublin, 2008.
- SAYEUX, Anne-Sophie, *Surfeurs, l'être au monde. Une analyse socio-anthropologique*, Presses universitaires de Rennes, collection Des sociétés, 2008.
- THOMPSON, Stith, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, 6 vols, revised and enlarged edition, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1955.
- THOMPSON, Stith, *The Folktale*, University of California Press, 1977 [1946].
- UThER, Hans-Jörg, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*, 3 vols, Suomalainen Tiedakatemia, Helsinki, 2004.

## Articles

- DUNDES, Alan, "The Motif-Index and the Tale Type Index: A Critique", in *Journal of Folklore Research*, 34(3), Indiana University Press (JSTOR 3814885), 1997: 195–202. Consulted online on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019: <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3814885>>.
- FALAIX, Ludovic, *Surf à contre-courant: Une odysée scientifique*, MSHA – Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, collection Sports et Société, 2017.
- GELY, Véronique, "Pour une mythopoétique: quelques propositions sur les rapports entre mythe et fiction", in *Silène*, Journal of the Centre de recherches en littérature et poétique comparées, Paris Ouest-Nanterre-La Défense, 2007. <[http://www.revue-silene.com/f/index.php?sp=liv&livre\\_id=90](http://www.revue-silene.com/f/index.php?sp=liv&livre_id=90)>, accessed 17/04/2018.
- THORNE, Tanis, "Legends of the Surfer

Subculture: Part One”, in *Western Folklore*, Vol. 35, N. 3 (July 1976), Western States Folklore Society, 1976.

### **Online Press**

- MCGOLDRICK, Seamus, “The History of Mullaghmore”, *Magicseaweed.com*, 13/06/2014: <<https://fr.magicseaweed.com/news/the-history-of-mullaghmore/6480/2014>>, accessed on 9/12/2018.
- -----, “Breaking Your Femur at Rileys is Potentially Fatal”, *Magicseaweed.com*, 18/04/2016 (2016a): <<https://magicseaweed.com/news/breaking-your-femur-at-rileys-is-potentially-fatal/8912/>>, accessed 12/03/2019.
- -----, “Living the Life of Mully with Dylan Stott”, *Magicseaweed.com*, 9/05/2016 (2016b): <<https://fr.magicseaweed.com/news/living-the-life-of-mully-with-dylan-stott/8945/>>, accessed 3/03/2018.
- -----, “Danny Dangerous, the Unsung Hero of Heavy Irish Surfing”, *Magicseaweed.com*, 29/07/2016 (2016c): <<https://magicseaweed.com/news/danny-dangerous-the-unsung-hero-of-irish-surfing/9222/>>, accessed 2/03/2019.
- *Surfer Today*: <<https://www.surfertoday.com/surfing/aileens-the-treacherous-slab-wave-of-the-cliffs-of-moher>>, accessed 3/05/2020.

### **WEBSITES**

#### **Online dictionaries**

- <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/craic>>, accessed 21/05/2020.
- <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/podcast>>, accessed 02/06/2020.

### **Artists**

- Conor Conlon: <<https://www.cmpproductions.net/>>.
- Daragh Gorman, *aka* Lighthouse Industries: <<https://www.lighthouseindustries.ie/>>.
- Mickey Smith: Mickey Smith: <<http://www.mickeysmith.ie/>>.
- Pockets Full of Water Productions: <<https://www.facebook.com/pocketsfullofwater/>> and <<https://www.instagram.com/pocketsfullofwater/?hl=en>>.

### **Podcasts**

- *Daoine na Mara \_ Tales from the Green Shores*: <<https://soundcloud.com/frederique-pnt>>.