

Emily Lawless and Botany as Foreign Science

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The primary goal of botanical science in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was to describe, categorise and define plants according to one of the many classification systems used. Despite its basis in subjectively selected criteria, system-building was perceived as an objective science and as soon as a classification method was adopted, it was considered universally applicable. Carl Linnaeus's Sexual System was structured and easy to understand and became one of the most widely used models. System-building and system-modification remained masculine enterprises, but collecting and classification were pursuits open to all, and botany was promoted as an edifying pastime for both men and women in the Enlightenment period. Linnaeus's System was disseminated throughout Europe in both the original Latin and in various translations, and circulated to a wider audience with the help of popular texts like botanical poems, dialogues and letters. The English versions that popularised the system, however, drew attention to the marriage metaphors Linnaeus used, and the sexual-political climate of the time required that women should be protected from sexualised language. Thus a need – or a market – arose for botanical texts addressed specifically to female users. Apart from being linguistically translated, the texts, or rather the knowledge they contained, needed to be put through a process of what Roman Jakobson terms "intralingual translation": a rewording where what might be construed as offensive language was removed (114). Alongside literal translations designed to be faithful to the original, a number of feminised adaptations of the Linnaean system therefore also appeared, initially written by men but increasingly produced by women writers (George 1-21). It could be said, then, that two types of translations were necessary to establish Linnaean taxonomy in Britain: linguistic translations from the original Latin to English and cultural translations from scientific botanical language to popular and what was regarded as feminised forms.

The most common understanding of translation is the process of changing a text from one language to another, but it can also be defined as "the expression or rendering of something in another medium or form" ("Translation"). The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the example of translating a painting into an engraving or etching, and in the case of written material, the other medium or form could be the translation of a scientific treatise into poetry or fiction. The process often involves transmitting metropolitan ideas to the conditions in the periphery, which draws attention to the cultural-political dimensions of the activity. Since no translation can be perfectly equivalent to the source text, the effort paradoxically accentuates the differences between the linguistic and cultural systems it is intended to erase. One effect of conveying information in a translated or alternative form may therefore be that the shortcomings of the original are uncovered. In the case of interlingual translations, the impossibility of exact equivalence is frequently noted as a problem. Intralingual translations, on the other hand, are not expected to be completely faithful to the original, and as a result they create spaces for variations, commentary and subversion. By remaining outside the norms of scientific writing, popular botanical works may expand the subject and include dimensions not normally found in a scientific text, such as subjective or emotional responses to the natural world.

Occasionally they also criticise aspects of the discipline that are felt to be ideologically wrong or culturally alien. Such textual strategies are particularly noticeable in nature diaries and garden journals where botanical knowledge is combined with life writing, spiritual reflections and cautious science critique. Most of these literary forms are associated with amateur naturalists, many of whom were women. Occasionally, however, the amateurish style masks or mitigates sharp social and political commentary, as in the case of the Irish writer Emily Lawless (1845-1913).¹ This article places Lawless in the tradition of women's popular science and investigates her strategic deployment of botanical studies to convey discontent with Ireland's colonial situation as well as express a proto-feminist critique of scientific knowledge.

The Hon. Emily Lawless (1845-1913) was the daughter of the fourth Lord Cloncurry, and grew up at Castle Lyons outside Dublin. She was one of Ireland's most well-known writers at the end of the nineteenth century, and published novels, short stories and poetry, as well as journal articles on Irish history and nature. Although she knew William Butler Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory and a number of other people associated with the Irish Literary Revival, she remained sceptical of cultural nationalism and supported Unionist politics. As a result, she has been placed outside the Irish literary canon in most literary histories, and it is only in recent years that there has been a resurgence of interest in her production. She attempted to write works that were national in sentiment but not politically nationalist and often used subjects from Irish history or Irish nature. Her views are frequently quite radical, despite her conservative political outlook, and she returns to the idea that Ireland is different and impossible to explain with the help of alien systems.

The fear that women would be offended by botanical terminology disappeared over the nineteenth century, but the stylistic features of popularisers like Priscilla Wakefield, Maria Jacson and Jane Loudon continued to influence women's botanical writing well into the twentieth century, with women more frequently employing a more intimate tone than the assertive, authoritative style associated with professional botanists. The gradual professionalisation of the science from 1830 onwards led to its masculinisation, and even though botanical nomenclature was no longer a problem for women botanists, their access to scholarly networks and publication channels remained limited (Shteir 153, 157). There are consequently few contributions from women in the Transactions and Proceedings of various naturalist societies in the nineteenth century. Instead, women's knowledge of horticulture, botany and other varieties of natural science found an outlet in hybrid genres like the nature journal, described by Mary Ellen Bellanca as "a potpourri of aesthetic, autobiographical, *and* factual discourse" (20) (original emphasis), or in what Beverly Seaton terms garden autobiographies, books where "the writer tells the life-story of his garden rather than of himself" (101).

According to Bellanca, the nature diary flourished from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth century (3), and Seaton dates the beginning of the garden autobiography as a genre to the 1850s, following the rise of the informal, intimate garden in Great Britain (101). Gardening and nature study were promoted as an escape from the pressures of urban life (Bell 473-74), and by the end of the nineteenth century it was possible to identify a "fashion for garden literature," with works mostly written by women ("Books and Authors" 765). Some of these texts mainly describe the year in a garden, such as the Hon. Eleanor Vere Gordon Boyle's (E.V.B.) popular *Days and Hours in a Garden* (1884) whereas others are intimate and subjective, like Mrs C. W. (Maria Theresa) Earle's *Pot-pourri from a Surrey Garden* (1897) and

Elizabeth and her German Garden (1898) by Elizabeth von Arnim (Mary Annette Beauchamp Russell). Emily Lawless's book *A Garden Diary 1899-1900* (1901) is an example of the more personal kind of garden writing, continuing a tradition that was described as "quaint" and genre-crossing even from the start:

Miss Emily Lawless is sure to write pleasantly and skilfully about gardens and garden thoughts and garden fancies, even though her *Garden Diary* (Methuen) may suggest recollections of a certain "Pot Pourri" from Surrey on the one hand and a certain "German Garden" on the other. She is discursive and reflective like Mrs. Erle [sic], and not without her affinities with the anonymous Elizabeth, and like both, she is inspired by the true garden enthusiasm. It is a quaint kind of literature, this of gardens; but in skilful hands like those of Miss Lawless it is a very pleasant kind. ("Reviews of Books")

The fuzzy boundaries of the genre sometimes make it problematic to find a place for nature and garden writing in literary studies. *A Garden Diary* includes astute advice and observations about growing habits and the problems of transplantation, but also philosophical digressions, comments on current affairs and personal reflections. Describing the practice of the diarist, Lawless writes that few "mediums of thought are equally fluid; few admit of greater variety; more diversity of mood; more ranging from topic to topic" (237-38). The rambling arrangement gives a deceptive impression of unorganised thought, but the work contains much solid information and scientifically sound observations. The text is thoroughly double-voiced, and Lawless moves between signalling her scientific knowledge by using Latin nomenclature, and foregrounding her amateur status by referring to plants by their English names. Many of the comments and digressions reveal a profound ecological awareness and a respectful attitude that does not regard the natural world as created for human use, but as something that exists alongside, and independent of human beings. The ecological perspective comes to the fore, for instance, in a meditation about weeds where Lawless concludes that these insignificant plants are the best protection against erosion:

Trees and bushes do much in this direction, but it is the little clinging weeds, which as gardeners we detest, and would so gladly annihilate: these crowfoots why not, by the way, crowfeet? with their crowding roots; these knotgrasses, these clinging bindweeds, it is such as they, backed by sea-spurreys, and bents, and by reeds and rushes innumerable, that do more to keep the waters of the globe in order, and to maintain dry land, than man, with all his dykes, dams, embankments, and such like accumulations, since first he began to strut or to caper over its surface. (24)

The whimsical comment about the plural "crowfeet" introduces a highly specific list of erosion-preventing plants, which diminishes the claims to authority in the passage. At the same time, Lawless boldly assumes the controversial political position of privileging the perspective of the natural as opposed to the human world, and dismisses humanity's attempts to control nature as inefficient in comparison with nature's own systems. Nature emerges as competent and practical, whereas humankind is presented as affected and coquettish, technological endeavours like dam-building imaginatively connected with capering escapades. The suspicious

attitude to technology links Lawless's valorisation of nature to widespread nineteenth-century fears about the ravages of industrialisation and the disappearance of untouched landscapes, as well as foreshadows the ecological attitudes of a later day.

In *A Garden Diary*, as in most of her nature writing, Lawless follows her women predecessors in making botanical knowledge and ecological principles accessible to non-specialist readers. She does not uncritically transmit received facts, but frequently utilises what was regarded as a feminised model of writing to create spaces in her text where she can question the categorisation activities that constitute the core of the discipline. In particular, she expresses her dissatisfaction with the inaccurate representation of Irish plant life in standard accounts. From the point of view of scientific botany, she is involved in a double and contradictory transmission activity where on the one hand, she uses a deliberately informal style to mediate botanical knowledge to lay readers, but on the other, continually criticises how the same knowledge has been applied to Irish conditions. In a similar way to how Elizabeth von Arnim uses her garden diary as a vehicle for proto-feminist ideas, Emily Lawless uses her nature writing to take part in cultural and political debates concerning Ireland's place in the United Kingdom and the nature and definition of knowledge.

Lawless was an amateur entomologist, botanist, geographer, geologist and marine zoologist, and published on all these subjects in book and article form.² Her interest in natural history is revealed also in her fiction, with the main character of her first novel *A Chelsea Householder* (1882) engaged in mothing, and the main character of her third novel, *Major Lawrence, F. L. S.* (1887) a Fellow of the Linnaean Society. Lawless took her nature study seriously and used Linnaeus's system of categorisation in her collecting activities, but she was more of a Darwinist than a Linnaean. In an article about North Clare she describes how an idea she presented regarding plant fertilisation in the area of the Burren was noticed by Charles Darwin ("North Clare" 605).³ She had wondered about the absence of honey-bees in the region and came to the conclusion that their role in pollination might have been taken over by a moth that is specific to the area. The hypothesis was published in what she describes as "the smallest of notes, in what was probably the smallest and quite one of the most obscure of natural-history periodicals," where Darwin saw it and wrote to her requesting further information (606). For Lawless, the letter represented "a minute but quite imperishable point of glory in an otherwise dim and unnoticeable Past" (606). She sent an essay on the subject to Darwin who thought it good enough to recommend that she should submit it for publication to the journal *Nature* (Ethel Romanes 58). She does not appear to have done so, but she continued to contribute observations of butterflies and moths to entomological journals and collected plant specimens on Clare Island for Alexander Goodman More for the second edition of the flora *Cybele Hibernica* (Praeger 390; Moore and More 193).

A number of references in the *Illustrated Natural History of British Butterflies and Moths* (1874) and a Letter to the Editor of *Nature* concerning the jellyfish Medusa show that Lawless possessed some knowledge of empirical methods of study as well as the scientific language needed to describe her observations:

While collecting some three weeks since on the south shore of Killary Bay in Connemara, I observed that out of a number of the common *Aurelia aurita* moving about in a rocky inlet below me, one was invariably accompanied by a small fish [. . .]. Occasionally the Medusa turned in its pulsations, so as to bring the umbrella undermost, when the fish would shoot hastily out, but the Medusa had no sooner righted itself, than the fish returned, and seizing its

opportunity, swam in between the marginal tentacles, and close up to the fringes of the actinostome, remaining distinctly visible through the pellucid disc. [. . .] Associations of a similar character have, I know, been frequently observed in the case of the Physalidæ and other Acalephæ, but not, so far as I am aware, in connection with this species. ("On a Fish-Sheltering Medusa" 227)

The Letter was published under the signature E. Lawless and met with some interest as well as some guarded criticism from George John Romanes in the following issue of the journal. Romanes was an expert on jellyfish and had discovered the presence of a nervous system in the Medusa through his experiments in animal physiology (Schwartz 139). In his comment he asked for a replication of the experiment: "it would be well worth while if Mr. Lawless could repeat his observation a sufficient number of times to exclude the supposition of the somersaults being merely fortuitous" (Romanes, "The Fish-sheltering Medusa" 248). As soon as Romanes found out that the observations had been made by a woman, he regretted his comments, however and wrote in a letter to Charles Darwin:

I am sorry I made the ungentlemanly mistake about Miss Lawless but I had no means of knowing. If I had known I should not have written the letter, because I am almost sure the movements of the Medusa were accidental, and my pointing out this source of error may be discouraging to a lady observer. (Ethel Romanes 60)

Romanes was of the opinion that because women's brains weigh less than men's, women should also be less capable of performing intellectual work, and published articles on the topic in the *Nineteenth Century* – a journal to which Emily Lawless also contributed (Schwartz 146-47). He accepted that women might emulate men in the field of fiction, but in no other creative or intellectual line of work (146). For Romanes, women were simply physiologically and intellectually inferior, although in fairness, his article only expressed the common attitude at the time (147). Even those of his contemporaries who accepted women's intellectual ability found it difficult to conduct a serious scholarly discussion with a woman since her sex, not her scientific knowledge, determined how she should be treated. Women's engagement in natural science was understood as a pastime to encourage but not as an activity that might lead to important discoveries. Their roles remained restricted also in amateur organisations such as local natural history societies and field clubs. In some cases, their presence was felt to be a distraction and in other cases it was thought to promote a harmonious atmosphere during club meetings, but they were rarely regarded as equal members (Finnegan 69). According to the rules of the Stirling Field Club in Scotland, for example, women could not vote until 1881 and were not allowed to serve as council members (69). Instead, they were encouraged to organise fund-raising activities and bazaars (69). The Irish scholarly network certainly included women, with an Irish flora written in 1833 by Lady Katherine Baily Kane (1811-1886) and the contributions of a number of women plant collectors acknowledged in the Preface to the *Cybele Hibernica*, but on the whole, women throughout the United Kingdom were limited to gathering samples (Colgan and Scully vii-viii). They could identify and categorise the material but were supposed to desist from scientific conclusions.

Romanes's condescending regret about asking for a more thorough investigation of the Medusa can be connected to the historical association between women and nature which supported the idea that women were unable to apply scientific principles (Merchant 1-41). In the case of botany, the fact that flowers were feminised and functioned as emblems of women in literature and art certainly limited women's scholarly authority: if women were themselves flowers, however metaphorically, they could not be expected to be able to be objective in their botanical studies or be considered equal partners in a scholarly discussion (Jackson-Houlston 96-97). Lawless challenges this routine identification of women with flowers when she describes the scarlet windflower as masculine:

Next to it in the order of flowering stands the familiar single scarlet *Anemone fulgens* [. . .]. What a presence the fellow has, to be sure! What a sumptuous colour – what a magnificent deportment is his! How he takes up the sunshine upon his damask petals and how, even on the dullest days, he seems to give us back our full journey's worth in the mere joy of being temporarily the neighbour of such a vision! I say *he* advisedly, because next to *fulgens* in the order of flowering stands the dimly tinted pale-blue *A. apennina*, as distinctly feminine in the good old-fashioned sense of the word as *fulgens* himself is distinctively the other thing.

Alas for bashfulness and feminine timidity in an age of push and eager competition! ("Florentine Gardens in March" 328-29)

As late as the end of the nineteenth century, referring to a flower as "he" was unusual enough to occasion comment, as illustrated in an anonymous contribution to *Notes and Queries*: "One curious innovation in this amuses us. She speaks of the familiar scarlet anemone in the masculine, and calls it a 'fellow.' We had always held that flowers were all feminine." Lawless describes both the *Anemone fulgens* and the *Anemone apennina* in essentialist gender terms and the gendering of the flowers should not be seen as evidence of a feminist position as the very conventional traits connected with the feminised blue anemone indicate. Nevertheless, she overturns the principle of automatically personifying flowers as women. Her masculinisation of the scarlet windflower suggests that gender designation, like any other form of classification, has to be based on individual qualities and underscores her criticism of an unquestioning division of the natural world into already-determined categories. Her description of the cyclamen is another instance where she deviates from the traditionally feminine flower image. In Erasmus Darwin's *The Loves of the Plants* (1789), the cyclamen is pictured as a tender, grieving mother who places her dead child in the grave:

The gentle Cyclamen with dewy eye
Breaths o'er her lifeless babe the parting sigh;
And, bending low to earth, with pious hands
Inhumes her dear departed in the sands.
'Sweet Nursling! Withering in thy tender hour,
Oh, sleep,' she cries, 'and rise a fairer flower!' (171)

Lawless, in contrast to Erasmus Darwin's weeping image, gives a very active role to the flowers when she describes them as almost the only plants capable of "acting as their own gardeners" ("Irish Memories" 7). Far from passively leaning over graves,

the cyclamen are "pushing their seed-vessels into the ground and covering them up with mould," doing their "own spading" (7). Such active, forceful imagery stands in obvious contrast to the conventional, female-gendered flower discourse of the nineteenth century and before.

Lawless's nature writing was for the most part published in literary and cultural journals and included in her fiction and poetry, and, like earlier women writers, she often employs a stylistic strategy that downplays her knowledge and authority. Her works abound with modesty markers, as when she describes some lime-loving plants and adds, in parenthesis, "(*calicole* is, I believe, the orthodox term)" (11). The deliberately uncertain statement produces the impression that she is not quite comfortable with scholarly terminology, despite the abundance of Latin plant names on the same page. A similar effect is produced by digressions that indicate that she is not in charge of her own text: "The space of paper which lies at this moment before me is dedicated to gardens; duty requires, therefore, that to gardens and gardens only the words upon it should be limited" (14). Since an authoritative tone is preferred in scientific writing, such stylistic tactics may easily be understood as signs of incompetence or at least an unscholarly attitude. George John Romanes, in contrast, signals his control and orchestration of the material: "Turning now from aquatic organisms to terrestrial, the body of facts from which to draw is so large, that I think the space at my disposal may be best utilised by confining attention to a single division of them" (Romanes, *Darwin* 221). Despite his intention to address "general readers" (vi), he frequently uses the same scholarly language in popularisations of his own and Darwin's ideas as in his scientific articles (Schwarz 135), as when he describes the lancelet:

It presents, however, a rudimentary backbone, in the form of what is called a notochord. Now a primitive dorsal axis of this kind occurs at a very early period of embryonic life in all vertebrate animals; but, with the exception of *Amphioxus*, in all other existing Vertebrata this structure is not itself destined to become the permanent or bony vertebral column. On the contrary, it gives way to, or is replaced by, this permanent bony structure at a later stage of development. Consequently, it is very suggestive that so distinctively embryonic a structure as this temporary cartilaginous axis of all the other known Vertebrata should be found actually persisting to the present day as the permanent axis of *Amphioxus*. (146)

When Lawless describes the lancelet her main purpose is to demonstrate the arbitrary and unstable nature of classification systems by highlighting how the discovery of the organism resulted in a new subdivision of the vertebrates since the lancelet could not be accommodated in the existing classes ("In the Kingdom of Kerry" 548). Romanes instead adopts a comfortably magisterial tone that accepts the classification of the species as an undisputed, albeit interesting, fact. Although phrases like "[w]ell, I have just said" (147) appear in the text they do not function to introduce an intimate voice, but emphasise his role as authority.

Compared with Romanes's stylistic choices, Lawless's self-conscious comments draw negative attention to her digressions as a lack of focus, but her integration of philosophical, literary, spiritual and psychological aspects may also be understood as a way to expand the parameters of nature study. Her digressive style would then function as an act of subversive translation that critiques the limitations of scientific

discourse from within. In *A Garden Diary* she suggests that the scientist may not be the only producer of knowledge about the natural world:

It has been often debated, and not perhaps very profitably, which of two types of men see deepest into that great arcanum of life which we roughly call Nature. Is it the Man of Science, whose business it is to chronicle what he sees and learns, but who must never travel half an inch beyond his brief? who must cling to fact, as the samphire-picker clings to his rope, and never for an instant relax his hold of it? Or is it on the other hand the Singer, who is only too ready to toss all fact to the winds, and to account it mere dust, and dregs and dross, so he can awaken in himself, and pass on to others, some hint, some passing impression, of what he would probably himself call the soul of things? Time was when the barrier between these two types was held to be an absolutely impassable one. We call ours a prosaic age, but it is certainly one of its better points, and a mitigation of that prose, that those barriers hardly appear to us so absolutely impregnable as they once were. (*A Garden Diary* 177-78)

At first glance it may appear as if Lawless views the scientific attitude as masculine, but the use of "man" in the passage is generic, for human, rather than a reference to men in particular. Nevertheless, the idea of a 'Woman of Science' would probably have been alien to her, as well as to most of her contemporaries. Her mediation rather concerns two possible approaches to nature study and the possibility of combining them. In her nature writings Emily Lawless constantly returns to the idea that there is a metaphysical dimension to knowledge that remains out of reach for conventional science but is accessible to those who keep an open mind. Her view of knowledge production is democratic, with the specialist on an equal footing with the interested amateur. Before Nature, she writes

there is no superior, and no inferior. Geologist, botanist, zoologist, horticulturist beetle-hunter, stone-breaker, weed-picker, crab-catcher it matters not what we call ourselves, or what others call us, so long as it is herself alone we follow, she receives us all alike. Within those imperial and open-doored halls of hers all rapidly find their own level; all may speak to her on occasion face to face; all present their own credentials, and all are accepted by her with the same serene, the same absolutely indifferent toleration.

It is not even as if her greater secrets were reserved for the wiser and the more erudite of her followers, and were withheld from those that were less erudite, for the same partial revelations, the same profound concealments, seem, so far as can be ascertained, to be allotted to all alike. (239-40)

Making a case for alternative ways of studying and interpreting the natural world is a way for Lawless to create a place for herself in the field of natural science, but it is also an epistemological claim about the nature of knowledge. If it is equally possible for the amateur as for the trained scientist to discover facts about nature, there can be no universal scientific models that determine how knowledge should be organised, only arbitrary conventions. Although presented as a quiet reflection on the relationship between nature and the nature lover, Lawless's comment amounts to a challenge directed at professionalised science and its exclusions.

Nevertheless, the Letter to the Editor of *Nature* shows that Lawless regarded herself as capable of taking active part in more rigorous, conventional scientific study. She was passionately interested in the plants and insects of the Burren region and contributed to a fairer description of Irish flora and fauna by reporting sightings of moths and collecting plant specimens. A concern for the local characterised most natural history societies in the late nineteenth century, and their primary goal was normally to collect and display local flora and fauna as a complement to the larger collections in the Natural History Museums (Finnegan 64). A local collection was a source of pride and an expression of independence, and showed a community's investment in science and progress. Unlike most members of the local societies, however, Lawless was not content with simply labelling plants, insects and molluscs according to accepted criteria. Her brief contributions to scientific journals and projects generally adhere to scientific conventions, but in her literary works she expresses her dissatisfaction with the application of imported taxonomical models in Ireland. In particular, she questions the importance of external criteria for classification purposes and calls for a situated knowledge that is concerned with the local and particular. Her position can be compared to what Donna Haraway describes as a different kind of objectivity that is about "specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility" (582-83). Knowledge produced in this particularised manner cannot be subordinated to a universal, disembodied system.

One example of the rejection of global knowledge systems occurs when Lawless refuses to accept the current theory explaining the presence of so many subtropical plants in County Kerry because it fails "to fit entirely into *all* the facts of the case" ("In the Kingdom of Kerry" 545). Scientific botany was firmly established in Ireland by the 1820s, but Irish botanists used the British model of dividing the country into botanical localities and depended on British floras for identification (Synnott 173, 178). As a result, Irish plants were categorised according to models developed elsewhere but were not themselves used to develop the classification system – as opposed to the discovery of the lancelet fish which changed the classes of the Vertebrates. "More has been written and investigated about one single English county than about the whole of Ireland," Lawless writes, which means that the rules governing the subject are determined by conditions in England whereas Ireland remains a passive object of study ("In the Kingdom of Kerry" 552). Plants that are more common in Ireland than in England are therefore called English species, as Lawless notes in a description of a bog in the Irish west:

With a little pains, all the British species may be found hereabouts – viz., the round-leaved sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*), common on every marsh and boggy moor in the kingdom; the long-leaved (*Drosera longifolia*), more local, but still not uncommon; and the so-called English sundew (*Drosera anglica*), which name, by the way, is decidedly a misnomer, it being a very much less common plant in England than in either Scotland or Ireland. ("An Upland Bog" 422)

There is some foundation for Lawless's annoyance since the long-leaved sundew is mentioned in the first report of Irish plants in print, How's *Phytologica* 1650, but despite such early reports of geographical distribution, *Drosera anglica* became the recognised name (Synnott 157-58). The first British floras generally mention Irish plants only when they were rare or unusual, and an overall description of the Irish

flora did not appear until Caleb Threlkeld's *Synopsis Stirpium Hibernicarum* 1726 (163-65). The model for the first edition of *Cybele Hibernica* (1866) was Hewett Cottrell Watson's *Cybele Britannica* (1847-59) and the British manner of organising the material continued to be influential (173). Lawless was not the only one who reacted to H. C. Watson's scant references to Irish plants, and there were several attempts to correct the balance, such as Robert Lloyd Praeger's *Irish Topographical Botany* (1901) and a number of regional floras (Lysaght 448). There were also some attempts to correlate Gaelic plant names with Linnaean terminology or even coin new Irish-language names that followed the Linnaean system to imbue scientific activities with a sense of patriotism (450-52). Given her extensive criticism of classification models and methods developed outside Ireland, it is noteworthy that Lawless does not comment on the need to retain Irish plant names nor emphasise other aspects of plant lore. One reason may be that the Irish language was highly politicised at the end of the nineteenth century, and although Lawless's botanical activities were grounded in a deep national feeling, it might have been difficult to reconcile the use of an Irish terminology with her Unionist outlook.

One of the problems of organising the plants into groups according to their preferred habitats, as Lawless sees it, is that Ireland is geographically different so that areas that can hardly be described as mountainous in terms of height above the sea may be mountainous by virtue of their other qualities. This is also corroborated by the plants that grow there. Describing the Burren, she writes:

Where else, save among mountains, do we find ice-planed rocks and toppling crags the rule, and our everyday agricultural earth a thing that exists only by sufferance, and is for the most part neatly tucked away into clefts beneath our feet? Where, again, save among mountains, are silenes and saxifrages, *Gentiana verna* and *Dryas octopetala* the vegetation of whole tracts; while buttercups and daisies, dandelions, docks and nettles are interesting botanical rarities, which require some looking for? No, the measuring tape is all very well in its own place, but its place, somehow or other, does not seem to be here! ("North Clare" 607)

Sam George shows how indigenous botany, and particularly the study of plants growing close to home, became a way for women to engage in scientific activity in the eighteenth century (7). Emily Lawless takes the concept one step further by repeatedly emphasising how Ireland is misrepresented in the current models of description and arguing that indigenous botany is a project of national importance, centrally concerned with questions of national pride and identity.

Botanical study was, however, not a priority in nineteenth-century Ireland where Catholic emancipation, tensions between tenants and landlords and the struggle for Home Rule were much higher on the agenda (Synnott 159). Botany was an elegant pursuit, connected to the Protestant gentry, and was politicised by its association with a group increasingly viewed as an extension of the colonising power (Lysaght 441). The concerns of the cultural revival of the late nineteenth century were to recover the Irish language, retrieve folklore and develop intrinsically Irish literary forms, but natural history was only very marginally included. There was a sense that botany was an alien science whose usefulness for Irish conditions could be doubted, but a more important reason was probably that the biases of linguistic, historical and literary accounts were easier to recognise and consequently more important to remedy. Lawless's position, in contrast, is that natural history is every bit as biased as cultural

expressions in the case of Ireland, and she suggests that the way plants and insects have been labelled is to a great extent a manifestation of colonial thinking:

Our whole authorised flora is indeed to my mind an exasperating piece of business, and I can never help wishing that if it was going to be so inadequate, its inadequacy had at least taken less provoking and unlooked-for lines. With regard to two of its departments I feel a positive sense of personal grievance. Our own mountains, and our own sea! To be told that we lag behind England – flat, prosaic England – in the number of our “mountain” or “highland” plants is already sufficiently trying, but when it comes to being gravely assured by Mr. Watson that out of what he calls his “Atlantic type” we have but a miserable thirty-four plants, to Wales and England’s sixty-two – Well, I can only say that I consider such a statement to be an outrage! Are we going to put up with such an invasion of our few prerogatives? Can any patriotic, any commonly self-respecting Irish botanist accept for a moment so palpably prejudiced and hostile a judgment? Let us, I say for my part, *not* accept it. Arise, botanic Celts, and glut your ire! Let us have an entirely new botany, based upon an entirely new system and classification, and let not the name of the hostile and anti-Irish botanist be so much as named in it! (“North Clare” 607)

In spite of the humorous tone, the outburst expresses a very real frustration with foreign taxonomical systems and the problem of their application in Ireland. In her view, the discipline of botany has been insufficiently translated from a cultural point of view. The result is a situation where, as Michael Cronin describes it, the “commercial and technological needs of standardisation from the centre” are in conflict with “notions of cultural suitability on the periphery” (96). But to demand an entirely new botany is hardly practical, and since Lawless uses both the Linnaean system and Watson’s English flora she tacitly acknowledges the necessity of a common language. At the same time as she criticises Linnaean taxonomy and English-made rules of botanical study she continues to transmit standardised knowledge in popular form. These contradictory activities can usefully be understood as an instance of what Cronin terms “translation ecology,” or a practice where minority language users control what, when and how texts are translated into and out of their languages (167). Translation from a dominant culture to a minority culture may easily be seen as an act of oppression, as Lawless’s criticism of Watson’s inadequate plant groups exemplify, but translation from the minority to the majority may function as a kind of appropriation where linguistic and cultural material from the periphery is simply subsumed to the formats of the metropolis with the result that its uniqueness is lost. The result is a double bind where ethical translation becomes virtually impossible. As Gayatri Spivak points out, however, it is impractical to endlessly “defer action until the production of the utopian translator” (399). Since communication is the goal of any meaningful translation activity, some common ground needs to be established and this requires translation traffic that moves in several directions, regardless of the access to power of the knowledge-producing communities. In a translation ecology, Lawless’s contradictory practices exemplify how the decision of how and what to translate and how to relate to the translated text does not require faithful transmission of an original but is based on negotiation, subversion and pragmatic choice.

Discussing American women's nature writing in the nineteenth century, Karen Kilcup wishes to demonstrate a "synthetic vision" which makes these women "more likely to regard nature in the context of gender politics or struggles for amelioration than as a separate political or cultural concern" (46). Although Lawless signed "An Appeal Against Women's Suffrage" in 1889 and can hardly be regarded as a feminist, it makes sense to read her meditations on a different kind of science in the light of turn-of-the-century gender debates.⁴ It also makes sense to view her stylistic strategies and choice of unscholarly genres as effects of late nineteenth-century gender codes that denied her access to the professional world of science. Her nature writing is a site of negotiation, where the Woman Question, Irish Home Rule, established scientific models and unconventional paths to knowledge collide. She seems to advocate a partial perspective where knowledge is locally produced, but in the end, she accepts the need to use standard terminology, despite its shortcomings. Using Linnaean taxonomy and British plant recording models in Ireland may not be ideal, but it is practical, and using popular forms to transmit new ideas about knowledge is a way to avoid open confrontation with the scholarly establishment. As in any translation and negotiation situation, her contradictory ideas do not fuse and form a new whole, but the traces of both positions – or language systems – are simultaneously present in her texts.

Notes

1. Personal, reflective nature writing should not be understood as a female genre in essentialist terms, but rather as the opposite end of the spectrum from the ideal governing scientific treatises, a genre which was almost exclusively used by men in the nineteenth century.

2. See, for instance, "An Addition to Mr. Birchell's List of 'The Lepidoptera of Ireland,'" "Florentine Gardens in March," "Irish Captures in 1870 and 1871," "Irish Memories – West and East," "Some Mothing Memories," "Two Leaves from a Note-Book," "An Upland Bog." Lawless's interest in nature studies is apparent in most of her writing, however, not only in texts directly concerned with botany etc.

3. Lawless does not mention Darwin's name in the article, but refers to her correspondent as "a great, nay greatest, zoologist; greatest of our age one may surely say, without fear of contradiction, of any and of every age" (605). In the 1860s and 1870s Darwin was working on questions to do with plant fertilisation, publishing *The Effects of Cross- and Self-Fertilisation in the Vegetable Kingdom* in 1876. His letter to George John Romanes where he mentions an essay on plant fertilisation written by Lawless also suggests that he was the letter-writer (Ethel Romanes 58).

4. Lawless's name appears on page 786.

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