

An Island Called Brazil: Irish Paradise in Brazilian Past

Geraldo Cantarino

*On the ocean that hollows the rocks where ye dwell,
A shadowy land has appear'd, as they tell;
Men thought it a region of sunshine and rest,
And they call'd it "O Brazil – the Isle of the Blest".*

From the poem *Hy-Brazil, The Island of the Blest*,
by Gerald Griffin (1803-1840) in Walsh (1998)

Abstract: *What is the origin of the word "Brasil"? Is there any relation between the naming of the South American country Brazil and the Otherworld place of Hy Brasil – an imaginary island, born in the Celtic mind and cherished in the west of Ireland as an earthly paradise? Does the presence of this phantom island in medieval maps, before the discovery of Brazil by the Portuguese in 1500, have any special hidden meaning in the history of cartography? To try to answer some of these questions, embarked on a journey in search of the enchanted island of Hy Brasil, that inspired poets, charmed seamen and tricked cartographers for 500 years. The result of this investigation is the book, Uma ilha chamada Brasil – o paraíso irlandês no passado brasileiro, which gathers many different references scattered throughout space and time about this island. This article is a summary of the book, which was published in October 2004 by Mauad Editora, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.*

The Brazil of Ireland

Where does the name *Brasil* or *Brazil* come from? The answer seems to be on everyone's lips. Following the definition of the German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, it comes from *brasa* and is associated with the reddish colour of *brazilwood*

(*pau-brasil*, in Portuguese), a dye-wood tree commonly found on the Atlantic coast of South America at the time of its European discovery in the sixteenth century. But if we try to investigate further the origin of the word *brasil*, we will find various and unclear paths ahead. Which is the right one? The *Houaiss Dictionary*, considered to be the most comprehensive dictionary of the Portuguese language, tells us in its 2001 edition that the “etymology of this toponymous” (i.e. the word from which this placename is derived) has been the object of the most varied hypotheses. The dictionary then goes on to list no less than sixteen possible explanations for the origin of *brasil* – the word, not the country name. Among them, one stands out: *brasil* could have its origin in the Irish language, more precisely in *Hy-Brazail* or *Hy Brasil*, an ancient island of the Atlantic Ocean.

It must be said that this possible explanation is not well known among Brazilians and it certainly not what we were taught in school or find in the majority of history textbooks. This precise point was highlighted by Roger Casement, an iconic figure in the Irish nationalist movement, while serving as a British consul in Brazil. In 1908, Casement delivered a lecture entitled *Irish Origins of Brazil*, in the city of Belém do Pará, in the Brazilian Amazon region, to a small, mainly commercial, English-speaking community. After his opening line – “The name Brazil is probably the sweetest sounding name that any large race of the Earth possesses” – Casement states very clearly his point of view:

Strange as it may seem, Brazil owes her name not to her abundance of a certain dye-wood but to Ireland. The distinction of naming the great South American country, I believe, belongs as surely to Ireland and to an ancient Irish belief old as the Celtic mind itself (Mitchell and Cantarino 23).

Casement blamed the historians writing for the English-speaking world, who dealt with American discoveries, saying that they failed to trace the origin of the name. To them, believed Casement, “Ireland was a name that denoted a land steeped in poverty and ignorance”. The historian Angus Mitchell, who found and brought to light the lecture *Irish Origins of Brazil* among Casement’s manuscripts at the National Library of Ireland, reinforces this idea:

Casement argued that there had been a deliberate forgetting of the significance of ancient Irish civilization. Irish culture had been dismissed by historians, just as African and Amazon Indian culture were dismissed by the mind-set of his own day (Mitchell and Cantarino 11).

At the end of his lecture, Casement summarises his opinion:

That Brazil owes her name to Ireland – to Irish thought and legend – born beyond the dawn of history yet handed down in a hundred forms of narrative and poem and translated throughout all western Europe, until all western Europe knew and dreamed and loved the story, and her cartographers assigned it place

upon their universal maps, I think has been made clear enough in the forgoing article (Mitchell and Cantarino 28-29).

Casement's words triggered my investigation and sent me on a journey to find out more about the possibility of another explanation about the name of my country.

In Search of Hy Brasil

What is Hy Brasil? Legend tells that somewhere off the coast of Ireland there was an island, always covered by intense fog and only seen on very rare occasions. Every seven years, the fog would fade away, revealing the entire enchantment of this fabulous land. Mountains, green fields and a glowing city were briefly visible. This Celtic land was home of fairies, magicians and wizards. Legends and myths of ancient Ireland had many references to heroes that, attracted by this fantastic vision, launched into the sea in search of this magical land. Anyone able to touch the island would achieve eternal life in a delightful paradise. But every time they approached it, the island disappeared again below the sea.

According to Barry Cunliffe (2001), Professor of European Archaeology at Oxford University, Hy Brasil is considered to be the most intriguing example of all the legendary islands of the Atlantic, said to lie not far off the west coast of Ireland, so named and placed on charts from the fourteenth century:

The legend goes back much further, probably into pre-Christian times, appearing first in the seventh century in the Irish text known as "The Adventure of Bran Son of Febal", which tells of Bran's visit to this Other World island supported on pillars of gold where games are played, people are always happy, there is no sorrow or sickness, and music is always to be heard – truly a land of the blessed. (13)

Peter Berresford Ellis, author of several books and dictionaries about the Celtic world, also confirms that the Irish mythology and old chronicles contain many stories of Hy Brasil, dating a thousand years before the Portuguese discovery of Brazil. Berresford Ellis explains that the term *Hy Brasil* derived from the Old/Middle Irish, around the tenth century. *Hy* is a variation of *í*, which means *island* and that is why we also find the form *I-Brasil*, or the Island of Brasil. The word *Brasil*, argues Berresford Ellis and many other authors, comes from the root *bres*, meaning mighty, great, beautiful, which gives origin to the name *Breasal*, a god in Irish mythology. This explanation is used by many Irish authors to support the argument that the country Brazil was named after the Irish origins of the word and not from the well established brazilwood version.

Although not common knowledge, this claim is not totally unknown in Brazil. Recent books, such as the new approach to the history of Brazil executed by Eduardo Bueno (13), have mentioned Hy Brasil. In the past, the Irish legendary island generated

heated debates among Brazilian historians. The most complete work so far about it can be found in the book *O Brasil na lenda e na cartografia antiga*, by Gustavo Barroso, published in 1941. Barroso, the first director of the National Historical Museum in Brazil, believed in a parallel development of the two concepts – the legend of Hy Brasil and the dyewood tree – until the name Brasil Island and the name brazilwood were merged together in a definite geographical term. After explaining and documenting the two separate roots, Barroso stated that we were entitled to ask ourselves: “What do Brazilians prefer: that the name of its own nation signify Blessed Land, Fortunate Land, Land of the Blest, or refer solely to a ordinary and utilitarian commerce of a dye wood?” ([19-]16)

Possible Origins

What is the origin of Hy Brasil? Although Hy Brasil is essentially a Celtic tale, it finds echo in old Atlantic legends that portray lands of great delight and pure immortals, where it is always spring and flowers never die. Ancient Greek poets were probably the first to describe the so-called Happy Islands, Blessed Islands or Fortunate Islands. This dreamlike place was supposed to be out there, somewhere, in the uncharted waters of the Atlantic, beyond the “Pillars of Hercules”, the Strait of Gibraltar. But the idea of the Islands of the Blest is very old, and it was probably born of the Egyptians, who believed that after disappearing on the horizon, the sun would carry on radiating life in distant lands, where everyone would be very welcome after death. Hy Brasil also finds some parallel with the famous Atlantis, described by the Greek philosopher Plato as a large island with powerful kingdoms that sunk beneath the waves after a major cataclysm. For its similarity, Hy Brasil is sometimes referred to as the Irish Atlantis.

Like its counterparts, the speculation about whether Hy Brasil had its origin in a real island ignited the imagination. For the writer Graham Hancock (2002), Hy Brasil is a “topographical ghost”, another example of islands inundated in the Ice Age. For Hancock, Hy Brasil is evidence of a coastline exposed to the surface of the sea almost 12,000 years ago. After Hy Brasil was swallowed by the waters, its existence was perpetuated through tales, legends and secret cartographical records.

SeaPeople

One can argue that the legends about islands that disappeared in the deep sea, like Hy Brasil and Atlantis, have common characteristics with the Phoenicians, a seafaring race of Semitic origin. In this case, the tales of fabulous islands would have started from imprecise reports or narratives with the intention of hiding the Phoenician’s true commercial interests. For Professor Cyrus Gordon (1971), Hy Brasil is a typical Phoenician name. According to his studies, the word *brasil* would be related to *BRZL*, which in Ugaritic and other Semitic languages means iron. The question now is, was there any connection

between Celts and Phoenicians? A hypothetical encounter between the two races remains unclear.

Emerald Isle

Despite its complex origin, it is extremely interesting to observe that the legend of Hy Brasil managed to travel through time and its vision was registered in several accounts. In 1188, the medieval historian Giraldus Cambrensis includes in his work about the topography of Ireland, to the king of England, references to a “phantom” island among the islands of the Irish coast (Wales 1982). In 1684, while describing the region of Connaught, Roderick O’Flaherty (1846) tells that from the Connemara coast and from the Aran Islands an enchanted island called O’Brasil became frequently visible. In fact, some Irish authors argue that Hy Brasil is a submerged land of which Aran Islands are reminiscent (Coghlan 1985). Travelling through Ireland, also called Emerald Isle due to its green fields and valleys, I visited the Aran Islands on the west coast and realised that the story of Hy Brasil is still alive among its inhabitants.

The belief in this imaginary island was very much sustained by Irish mythology, considered to be one of the richest in Europe. In the *Book of Invasions*, a twelfth century collection of tales and narratives with a central role in the mythology and folklore of Ireland, we learn about *Bres*, or *Bress*, and later *Breas*, one of the first leaders of the *Tuatha Dé Danann* (People of the Goddess Danu). The name, as mentioned before, means beautiful, powerful and serves as the root of the word *Breasail*. According to Peter Berresford Ellis,¹ when the People of the Goddess Danu, the ancient gods and goddess of Ireland, were defeated by the Milesians, they left immediately to Hy Brasil. In this context, the island could be seen as the Island of Bres. We also find *Bresal* as the High King of the Celtic world and the island of Bresal was known as the place where he used to establish his court every seven years. Hy Brasil is also compared to *Tir na nÓg*, the Land of Eternal Youth, one of the most popular legends in Ireland.

Religious Meaning

In the transition from paganism to Christianity, Hy Brasil took on another meaning. The Celtic ideal of the island of the Other World – a place with all good things, a land of the eternal youth, an environment of dreams and fantasies – is incorporated into the concept of an Earthly Paradise.

It was in search of this Promised Land that the Irish monk St Brendan, also known as the Navigator Saint, would have embarked on his fabulous adventure in the sixth century. (Severin 1996) With St Brendan, we find the fusion of the Celtic idea of a land of eternal life in the West with the Earthly Paradise and the Promised Land, mentioned in the Bible. The land allegedly discovered by St Brendan became associated

with Hy Brasil. The paradise, which for many years lived in pagan dreams, was finally found by the holy man. That's why the island is also called Hy Brasil of St. Brendan.

Presence in Maps

The story of St Brendan traversed Europe and became well known even in isolated monasteries, like the ones in the north of Italy, visited by Irish monks. It was probably from there that the idea of an Earthly Paradise discovered by the Navigator passed on to nautical charts and medieval maps designed by Italian cartographers.

The first known cartographical appearance of the Island of Brasil was in 1325 and the last one was probably in 1870. This means five hundred and forty five years of mystery. Why did it take so long for the island to disappear from the maps? One detail pointed out by researchers is that the Island of Brasil is depicted for a long time in the same cartographical position. Although it appeared in some nautical charts among the Canary Islands, Azores, Madeira and even on the coast of Canada, the island was mostly faithful to its position to the west of Ireland. The book *Antique Maps* by Carl Moreland and David Bannister (1993) gives a brief account of the island's presence in maps in its chapter *Myths and Legends on Old Maps*:

Where better to start than by looking at the mythical island of Hy Brazil which appeared out in the Atlantic to the west of Ireland in charts as early as 1325, in the famous Catalan Atlas dated 1375 and, subsequently, on numerous maps for the next zoo years, including Waldseemuller's map of the British Isles issued at Strasburg in 1513 and its later editions. It was also shown on Toscanelli's chart dated about 1457 which was said to have been used by Columbus on his first voyage. [...] It is hard to believe that as late as the eighteenth century seamen were still seeking these islands, and so often had Brazil been "sighted" that geographers were reluctant to abandon the possibility of its existence; in fact it was not finally removed from British Admiralty charts until the 1870s.

Discovery Era

Once anchored in maps, mythical islands like Hy Brasil were no longer the uncertain target of trivial adventure and became the destination of more experienced explorers. In case it really existed, the island would be strategically positioned on the route to lands beyond the sea and could be used as a stopover for resting and for collecting fresh water during long journeys. It could also be seen as a land in its own right to be conquered and colonised. Therefore, Hy Brasil entered the Era of Discovery.

According to Fridtjof Nansen in *Northern Mists* (1911) a great ship belonging to John Jay Jr. set off from Bristol towards the *insulam de Brasylie*, in 1480. After two months at sea, they returned to Bristol without finding Hy Brasil. In the following year,

two other ships, *Trinity* and *George*, left England in search of the Island of Brazil, but also returned unsuccessfully.

But among these attempts, one of them had a great achievement. Taking his ship even further west, the navigator John Cabot or Giovanni Caboto, probably from Genoa, officially discovered, in 1497, the island of Newfoundland, on behalf of the English crown, establishing the first step for the British settlement in Canada. Inspired by Columbus, Cabot's main objective was to discover a short cut to the Indies, but also expected to find Hy Brasil on his way.

On 25 July, 1498, the Spanish minister in London, Pedro de Ayala, writes to the Catholic Kings of Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella, reporting the British effort in searching for Hy Brasil or the island of Brasil.

I think Your Highnesses have already heard how the king of England has equipped a fleet to explore certain islands or mainland which he has been assured certain persons who set out last year from Bristol in search of the same have discovered. I have seen the map made by the discoverer, who is another Genoese like Columbus, who has been in Seville and at Lisbon seeking to obtain persons to aid him in this discovery. For the last seven years the people of Bristol have equipped two, three [and] four caravels to go in search of the island of Brazil and the Seven Cities according to the fancy of this Genoese. The king made up his mind to send thither, because last year sure proof was brought they had found land.²

The Portuguese, who knew well the Canadian coast, rich in codfish, also claimed the discovery of Newfoundland. It is quite impressive to observe the simultaneity of the facts. (Kurlansky 1999) While Pedro Álvares Cabral prepared his caravels that would lead him to the discovery of Brazil, in 1500, Portuguese seamen were navigating in a sea full of fish on the route to Hy Brasil. We have every reason to believe that the Portuguese were aware of the stories of the Island of Brazil. Could we find here any fundamental connection to the naming of Brazil? Who, in the end, gave the name Brazil to what is today the largest country in South America? Certainly, it was not Cabral, who called it *Terra de Vera Cruz*, or the *Land of the True Cross*. The Portuguese king, Dom Manuel I, changed it to *Santa Cruz*, or *Holy Cross*. The popular name *land of brazil* was adopted by those who crossed the Atlantic back and forward with their ships loaded with brazilwood, the first product to be extracted commercially from the newly discovered Portuguese colony.

Art and Literature

The legend of Hy Brasil had such a strong presence in the oral tradition and folklore of Ireland that there were many artistic manifestations to try to reproduce this environment of beauty and happiness. Poets, musicians, painters and writers used their creativity to reconstruct, in one way or another, what could not be reached in a real world. Art became the best portal to get to Hy Brasil.

The painter Patrick Collins gave his version as *Hy Brazil*, a minimalist painting from 1963 which is part of the collection of the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, in Dublin. Another painter, Jack B. Yeats, brother of the poet W. B. Yeats, preferred a more colourful image to illustrate the island in the painting *A Race in Hy Brasil*, from 1937. The island also inspired many musicians and in 1980 was exceptionally highlighted in the cantata *Hy Brasil*, composed by Jerome de Bromhead and performed by the Culwick Choral Society.

But among all forms of representation of the legend of this island, it was in literature that Hy Brasil found its true expression. There are many references to the island in poems, novels and old manuscripts, including works by famous Irish writers. W. B. Yeats, for example, reproduced Gerald Griffin's poem, *Hy Brasil, The Isle of The Blest* (probably the most famous poem on Hy Brasil), in his book *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, published in 1888. James Joyce, in his complex work *Finnegans Wake*, published in 1939, makes reference to the Promised Land of St Brendan and creates the neologism *Kerribrazilian*, a combination of the adjective *brasilian*, related to Hy Brasil, and the name of the Irish county of Kerry. The association of the island and the navigator monk also appeared later in *High Brazil Brendan's Deferred*. Researching in an old second-hand bookshop on the banks of the river Liffey, in Dublin, I found Hy Brasil in the book *Christopher Columbus*, by Louis MacNeice (1944), a script for a radio play broadcast in 1942 by BBC radio.

The story of Hy Brasil was the starting point for the creation of new narratives of many other authors from different nationalities. The island appears, for example, in *The Laughter of Peterkin – A Retelling of Old Tales of the Celtic Underworld* (Sharp 1927), published in 1897 and signed by Fiona Macleod, the pen name of the Scottish writer and poet William Sharp, who mentioned it as a place of rest, happiness and eternal youth. In the following year, the American writer Thomas Wentworth Higginson describes the dream of a boy in *Kirwan's Search for Hy-Brasil*, published in the book *Tales of the Enchanted Islands of the Atlantic* (1898). In 1955, the island appeared in the book *Red Knights from Hy-Brasil*, written by Christine Savery, a story about a group of red haired children pretending to be the knights of Hy Brasil, the land of eternal youth. In 1987, it appears again in *My Lady of Hy-Brasil*, a collection of dark stories by Peter Tremayne, pseudonym of Peter Berresford Ellis. More recently, in 2002, the novel *Hy Brasil*, by Margaret Elphinstone from the University of Strathclyde, in Glasgow, narrates the story of a writer, who has to write the first travel book about Hy Brasil, as if the island existed today somewhere in the Atlantic.

Hy Brasil is also present in old newspapers published in Dublin, such as *Ireland's Own*. In its edition of 12 August 1903, the island is mentioned in the article "A Lost Atlantis or an Early Irish Navigator", about the journey of St Brendan. The edition of 13 August 1932 tells us in the article "The Shore of Connaught" that the Irish people from the Connaught region are always looking out towards the *brasilian* horizon. And in the edition of 9 November 1946, Crawford's article "A Shadowy Land off Donegal, Waterford and Antrim – the Miracle in Ireland" describes the natural phenomenon that from time to time can be seen on the coast of Ireland.

Another periodical worth mentioning is the *Irish Penny Journal*. In the book that gathers a collection of its editions, published in Dublin, in 1841, we find the fascinating tale “A Legend of Clare”, about the kingdoms of O’Brassil and Kylestafeen. This is a dramatic story involving the beautiful daughter of the king of O’Brassil, Corgeana, and the two brothers, Fahune and Niall, heirs to the throne of Kylestafeen.

But none of the stories about Hy Brasil had the impact of the wonderful book that became a bestseller in 1675 in England and can be read today in the rare book section of the British Library, in London. *O’Brazile, or the Inchaned Island: Being a Perfect Relation of the Late Discovery, and Wonderful Dis-inchantment of an Island on the North of Ireland*, is the publication of what seems to be a real letter allegedly written by William Hamilton, in Ireland, to his cousin in London, reporting the final discovery and disenchantment of the island of O’Brasile. It describes how a group of people found the island after a thick fog and how they broke its spell by lighting a fire. According to Professor Isabel M. Westcott (1958), from the University of Swansea, in *Seventeenth-Century Tales of the Supernatural*, the book of *O’Brazile* is another brilliant fiction carefully constructed by the writer Richard Head, marking a change in the literary style of the time. Another fascinating work attributed to Richard Head is the book entitled *The Western Wonder or O’Brazeel, an Inchaned Island Discovered*, published in London in 1674, which presents different accounts of the appearance and disappearance of this mysterious island.

Apart from providing entertainment, the story of the Island of Brasil, or simply Hy Brasil, was used to reinforce the Christian doctrine. I saw this in an extremely rare text, also kept in the rare book section of the British Library: *Voyage to O’Brazeel, or the Submarine Island – Giving a Brief Description of the Country and a Short Account of the Customs, Manners, Government, Law and Religion of the Inhabitants*. This precious work of sixty-four pages is a literal transcription from 1752 of the Irish manuscript of Manus O’Donnel. The original does not indicate the date, but it was probably written during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, between 1558 and 1603. The manuscript, as summarised in the title, is the description of a fantastic journey to O’Brazeel, a submarine island that sank off the coast of Ireland. Below the waters, enclosed in a type of huge bubble, there was a small country – a land of virtue and Christian faith – and happy people.

Another incredible reference is a fascinating medical manuscript that became known as *The Book of the O’Lees* or *Book of the Island of O’Brasil*, probably from the fifteenth century and kept today among the rare documents of the Royal Irish Academy, in Dublin. Written in Irish and Latin, the book is apparently a translation of old medical treatises and lists the cure and treatment for several diseases. But the amusing fact about this book is that it was used by a certain Morogh O’Ley, in the seventeenth century, who claimed that he was taken mysteriously to the Island of Brasil in 1668 where he received the book and the recommendation to not open it until seven years had passed. After this period he opened the book and realised his ability to treat all sort of human illnesses, although he never had any training to do so, and everything was attributed to his “journey”

to Hy Brasil. For some Irish historians, Morogh O'Ley probably inherited the book from his family and after some professional misfortunes started to use the book as a way of living.

As well as the famous poem by Gerald Griffin quoted briefly at the opening of this article, Hy Brasil was the inspiring muse of many other poets, as we can see in the selection in the appendix.

Hy-Brasil Today

Although very old, the legend of Hy Brasil or of a fairyland that appears every seven years on the coast of Ireland still fires the imagination. Accounts of its presence can still be heard especially among the population of the west part of the country, a tradition that has been passed down through generations. A rich collection of different reports about Hy Brasil was gathered by the National Folklore Commission of Ireland, who undertook a nation-wide recording of local folklore between 1935 and 1971. This rich archive can be consulted at the Department of Irish Folklore, at University College Dublin.

Another extremely interesting aspect of this entangled story is the presence of the name Brasil in proper names, place names and family names in Ireland. In the telephone directory of the town of Tralee, in County Kerry, I found different variations of this surname that would leave any Brazilian very intrigued: Brassil, Brassill, Brazier, Brazil, Brazill, Brazzill. Even more interesting is to see those names on the front of shops, such as a small grocery called *Brassils Stores* in Tralee, or as the *Brassils Guest House*, a Bed and Breakfast in the village of Ballyheigue. According to the book *More Irish Families*, by Edward Mac Lysaght, *Brassil* or *Brazil*, or even *O Brazil*, are anglicised versions of the Irish surname *Ó Breasail*, mainly found in the counties of Waterford and Offaly. The name *O' Brasil*, according to Mac Lysaght (1982), already existed in 1308 and the name *O Bressyl* is even older, being recorded in 1285 in County Cork. This leaves no doubt of an Irish history for the name Brasil, totally independent of the South American country.

In summary, we can see Hy Brasil in at least three ways: physical, symbolical, and historical. The first one refers to an optical effect that projects an illusionary image of an island along the coast of Ireland. It is a kind of mirage generated by the reflection of solar light. This natural optical effect is interpreted as the physical representation of a ghost, with the help of popular imagination. While the phenomenon was used to provide fancy explanations, creating the legends, it was also used as concrete proof of the existence of an unreal, abstract world told in legends.

The second way to see Hy Brasil is through its mystical, mysterious and spiritual side. The island symbolised a land of eternal youth, earthly paradise, an idealised world, full of pleasure, eternal life and peace in the comfort of gods. It was a world that everyone would wish to live in now, or possibly go to after this life. In a country with a hard winter, with months of cold, rain and lack of light, dreaming about a place of sun and constant happiness was probably a survival technique for the people of the past. It is

interesting to observe that Hy Brasil represents a paradise that existed and sank, but that can come back any moment. The legend keeps the hope alive. At the same time that it refers to a tragedy, to the loss of a perfect state of things, it insists in telling us that this paradise can exist again, even if it is just in our dreams or imagination.

Finally, Hy Brasil can be associated with the history of the European maritime expansion. Was this magical land the island of Madeira, the Canary Islands, or the Azores archipelago? Speculating even further, Hy Brasil could represent evidence of an extremely old knowledge of the physical existence of lands that, through one way or another, disappeared from the surface of the sea. This island could also be evidence, or at least a very strong suspicion, of knowledge of lands on the other side of the Atlantic. Could Hy Brasil have been Newfoundland, in Canada, or a recollection of a more tropical reference, such as the sunny Caribbean or South American islands? The legend could have been born from accounts of ancient seafarers that somehow visited the West, enjoyed themselves with the wonders of these lands, and then returned to Europe to tell what they had seen. In this case, Hy Brasil would have been testimony to a pre-Colombian American enchantment. This indication of land beyond the sea was incorporated into the European maritime tradition, making the island appear in hundreds of medieval and renaissance maps. How can the presence of Hy Brasil in cartography be explained? Just an artistic interpretation or a real sign of land somewhere in the Atlantic waters? The collection of maps is of significance and the name *Island of Brazil* clearly printed insists on representing something more than a simple legend of the western Irish seaboard.

Whatever it is, Hy Brasil leaves as its heritage the eternal reminder to never stop dreaming.

Appendix 1

Love Consecrate

By Daniel Corkery

Touched by her triumphant lips,
O mouth of mine, now, now for song!
My visions, like frozen and famished ships,
Break from the ice of winters long,
And spy far on the ocean's rim
The peaks of I Bhreasail purple and dim.
[...] (Corkery 1921)

Hy Brasil

By I. F. Galwey

[...]
And now I steer by day and night
Across the changeful tide,
And ever shines the glorious Light,
To comfort and to guide;
And I know its radiance calm and pure
Beams from Hybrasil's shore,
Where those who to the end endure
Shall rest for evermore. (Galwey 9)

I-Breasil
By Ethna Carbery

[...]
But I move without in an endless fret,
While somewhere beyond earth's brink, afar,
Forgotten of men, in a rose-rim set,
I-Breasil shines like a beckoning star. (MacManus 63)

Hy Bràsil
By William Sharp

I heard the voice of the wind among the pines.
It was as the tide coming over smooth sands.
On the red pine-boles the sun flamed goldenly out of the west.
In falling cadences the cuckoos called across the tides of light.
In dreams, now, I hear the cuckoos calling across a dim sea of light, there where
a sun that never rose nor set flames goldenly upon ancient trees, in whose midst
the wind goes sighingly, with a sound as of the tide slipping swift over smooth
sands.
And I hear a solitary voice singing there, where I stand beside the gold-flamed
pine-boles and look with hungry eyes against the light of a sun that never rose
nor set. (Sharp 1897, 150)

I-Brasîl
By William Sharp

[...]
There's sorrow in the world, O wind, there's sorrow in my heart
Night and day:

So why should I not listen to the song you sing to me?
The hill cloud falls away in rain, the leaf whirls from the tree,
And peace may live in I-Brasíl where the last stars touch the sea
Far away, far away. (MacLeod 455)

The Finding of Hy Brasil

By William Larminie

[...]
So, mocked by glimpses of a glorious time,
Long have I gazed far into Eirë's past;
But now at length on the enchanted strand,
And those evasive splendours, more sublime
Than dream, the potent fire-spell has been cast;
Lo! on Hy Brasil's long-sought shores I stand. (Larminie 85)

The King's Cave

By Alfred Perceval Graves

Rash Son, return! Yon shores that dazzle
With glowing pleasaunce, glittering plain,
And crystal keep is not Hy-Brazil,
But some false phantom of the main.
And you bright band thy vision meeting,
Their warbled welcome hither fleeting –
Oh, trust not to their siren greeting,
Oh, wave not, wave not back again!
But veil thine eyes from their entreating,
And list not their enchanting strain!
[...] (Lancashire 1908)

Hy-Brasil

By Henry Kendall

[...]
But beyond the halls of sunset, but within the wondrous west,
On the rose-red seas of evening, sails the Garden of the Blest.
Still the gates of glassy beauty, still the walls of glowing light,
Shine on waves that no man knows of, out of sound and out of sight.

Yet the slopes and lawns of lustre, yet the dells of sparkling streams,
Dip to tranquil shores of jasper, where the watching angel beams.
But, behold, our eyes are human, and our way is paved with pain,
We can never find Hy-Brasil, never see its hills again;
Never look on bays of crystal, never bend the reverent knee
In the sight of Eden floating – floating on the sapphire sea!
(Kendall 1880)

Romance of Meergal and Garmon

By Robert Dwyer Joyce

[...]
It was the purple sunset when the breeze blew warm and bland,
And they saw a shore beyond them by its breath of fragrance fanned,
And within a heavenly harbour under hills serenely grand,
They have moored that boat of wonder in Hy Brasil's golden land.
[...] (Joyce 304)

Cider

By Paul Muldoon

[...]
I want you to bring me down to the estuary.
At low tide we might wade out to an island,
Hy Brasil, the Land of Youth
[...] (Muldoon 1977)

Appendix 2



Map of British Isles. Portolano produced by Grazioso Benincasa, in Venice, Italy, in 1473, showing the Island of Brazil as a big red circle near the coast of Ireland.
 (BY PERMISSION OF THE BRITISH LIBRARY; Record Number: 21045; Shelfmark: Egerton 2855; Page Folio Number: f.8)

Notes

- 1 Ellis, P. B. [Letter] London, 17 December 1999 [to] Cantarino, G., Mickleham. 2f. The letter provides information about Hy Brasil.
- 2 *Dispatch of Pedro de Ayala, the Spanish envoy in London, to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella in Spain, dated London, 25 July, 1498.* Reproduced from H.P. Biggar, editor. *The precursors of Jacques Cartier 1497-1534: A Collection of Documents relating to the Early History of the Dominion of Canada.* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau) 1911, 27-29. 5 April 2005 <<http://www.heritage.nf.ca/exploration/ayala.html>>.

Woks Cited

- A Lost Atlantis or an Early Irish Navigator. *Ireland's Own*. Dublin: 12 August 1903.
- Barroso, G. *Nos bastidores da História do Brasil*. São Paulo: Melhoramentos, [19_].
- _____. *O Brasil na lenda e na cartografia antiga*. Rio de Janeiro: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1941.
- Bueno, E. *A viagem do Descobrimento: A Verdadeira História da Expedição de Cabral*. Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva, 1998.
- Casement, R. *Hy-Brazil, Irish Origins of Brazil*. Belém do Pará: [1907 or 1908]. Manuscript in The National Library of Ireland. Dublin: n. MS 13,087 (31).
- Coghlan, R. *Irish Myth and Legend*. Belfast: Appletree Guide, 1985.
- Corkery, D. *I Bhreasail: A Book of Lyrics*. London: [?], 1921.
- Crawford, S. "A Shadowy Land off Donegal, Waterford and Antrim: the Miracle in Ireland". *Ireland's Own*. Dublin: 9 November 1946.
- Cunliffe, B. *Facing the Ocean: The Atlantic and its People*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Elphinstone, Margaret. *Hy Brasil: A Novel*. Great Britain: Canongate, 2002.
- Galwey, I. F. *Hybrasil and Other Verses*. Dublin: George Herbert. London: Hamilton and Co, Simpkin, Marshall and Co and James Nisbet and Co, 1872.
- Gordon, C. H. *Before Columbus – Links Between the Old World and Ancient America*. London: Turnstone Press, 1971.
- Hamilton, W. *O' Brazile, or the Inchanted Island: Being a Perfect Relation of the Late Discovery and Wonderful Dis-Inchantment of an Island on the North of Ireland*. London: William Crook, 1675.
- Hancock, G. *Underworld, Flooded Kingdoms of the Ice Age*. London: Penguin Books, 2002.
- Head, R. (Attributed.). *The Western Wonder or O Brazeel, an Inchanted Island Discovered*. London: [?], 1674.
- Higginson, T. W. *Tales of the Enchanted Islands of the Atlantic*. [?]: Norwood Press, 1898.
- Joyce, J. *Finnegans Wake*. London: Penguin Books, 1992. 18 Jul. 2004. <<http://www.trentu.ca/jjoyce/fw.htm>>.
- Joyce, R. D. *Ballads, romances and songs*. Dublin and London: James Duffy, 1861.
- Kendall, H. *Hy-Brasil. Poems and Songs*. 1880. 18 July 2004: <<http://sailor.gutenberg.org/etext97/phknd10.txt>>.
- Kurlansky, M. *Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World*. London: Vintage, 1999.
- Lancashire, I., ed. *The King's Cave. The Irish Poems of Alfred Perceval Graves: Countryside Songs, Songs and Ballads*. Dublin: Maunsel, 1908. Reproduced from the English Poetry Full-Text Database published by Chadewyck-Healey Ltd.

- Larminie, W. The Finding of Hy Brasil. *Glanlua and Other Poems*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co, 1889.
- Mac Lysaght, E. *More Irish Families*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Irish Academic Press, 1982.
- MacLeod, F. [William Sharp]. *Poems and Dramas*. London: William Heinemann, 1910.
- MacManus, S., ed. *The Four Winds of Eirinn: Poems by Ethna Carbery*. Dublin: M. H. and Son, 1906.
- Macneice, L. *Christopher Columbus*. London: Faber & Faber, 1944.
- Mitchell, Angus and Geraldo Cantarino. *Origins of Brazil*. London: Pamphlet produced by the Brazilian Embassy in London, 2000.
- Moreland, C & Bannister, D. *Antique Maps*. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1993.
- Muldoon, P. C. *Mules*. London: Faber and Faber, 1977.
- Nansen, F. *In Northern Mists – Artic Explorations in Early Times*. London: William Heinemann, 1911.
- O’Donnel, M. “A Voyage to O’Brazeel: or, the sub-marine island”. *The Ulster Miscellany*. Dublin: [?], 1753.
- O’ Flaherty, R. *A Chorographical Description of West or H-Iar Connaught –1684*. Dublin: The Irish Archaeological Society, 1846. Reprinted by James Hardiman.
- Savery, C. *Red Knights from Hy-Brasil*. London: [?], 1955.
- Sharp, W. *Hills of Dream: Mountain Songs and Island Runes*. Edinburgh: Patrick Geddes & Colleagues, 1897.
- _____. *The Laughter of Peterkin*. London: William Heinemann, 1927.
- Severin, T. *The Brendan Voyage*. London: Abacus, 1996.
- The Irish Penny Journal*. Dublin: Gunn and Cameron, 1841.
- Tremayne, P. *My Lady of Hy-Brasil*. Hampton Falls: Donald M. Grant Publisher, 1987.
- Wales, G. *The History and Topography of Ireland*. London: Penguin Classics, 1982.
- Walsh, T. F. *Favourite Poems We Learned in School*. Dublin: Mercier Press, 1998.
- Westcott, I. M. *Seventeenth-Century Tales of the Supernatural*. Los Angeles: University of California, 1958.
- Yeats, W. B. *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*. New York: Dover Publications, 1991.