Irish American Vernacular English

The Big "Butter an' Eggman," The King of Teas (Jass, Heat), & The Sacred Secret Tongue of the Saol Luim (Slum, World of Poverty)

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Saol is an Irish word meaning "world, lif," and "a state of existence." An saol na saol is "the age of ages." Saol síos is "a world or life eternal." Saol luim is the "world of poverty, dispossession, and nakedness."

The word "Lom" in the Old Irish texts dates back to the 6th century in its literate form and describes the lom (nakedness) of living trees whose bark has been stripped off by a great wind. The word Lom in Irish is always "barren, naked, bald, shorn, thin, lean, spare, scarce, poor and penniless." It is an Irish noun, adjective, and verb of "stripping away" and violent dispossession. (Dineen, pp. 673-674, O'Donaill, pp.798-800, MacBain, Sec. 24, pp. 8-9)

In 1688 the English attempted to silence the Irish national instrument - the harp. Irish songs, it was said in 1683, had become ‘the doleful lamentations of a conquered people’. Early in the eighteenth century the bardic contests and poetic meetings - the sessions (seisiún) - were suppressed by the Penal Codes. "Having robbed the oppressed of land, the oppressor then banished their language, music and poetry. The result was a 'hidden Ireland' expressing itself in a foreign language, acting outside the law." (1) (The Hidden Ireland, Daniel Corkery, Dublin, 1925)

The Irish language was outlawed from the Schools of the Poets and the castles of the Irish chieftains to the shacks (teach) and shanties (sean tí) of the landless poor and then, in times of famine and war, to the boozing kens. joints (díonta) and slums (saol luim) of London's St Giles and Seven Dials, and the divesand blind tigers (baill aindiaga: unholy evil places) of New York's Five Points.
One of the earliest appearances of the old Irish words saol luim as the new English slang term "slum" is in the lexicon at the conclusion of the Irish journalist Pierce Egan's early 19th century English best-seller, *Boxiana*. Fittingly, it is in the back of the book that the "slum" first appears in English as a "back slum," defined by Pierce Egan as a "low neighborhood."

Egan's flash prose dazzled England's early 19th century flash talking bohemian swells (sóúil, sóghmáil, comfortable and luxurious) and upperclass "coneys" (conáí, prosperous, successful) with its pitch perfect evocation of the vibrant slang of London's demotic underworld. Egan dubbed the fanatic aristos and well-heeled fans of the boxing world "the fancy" (fianaisí, witnesses, observers) who descended into the slum (saol luim) to watch the poor at play and on display and mimic their colorful secret speech (caint).

The Irish-born Egan was fluent in both standard English and the early 19th century hybrid Irish slang of the boxing ring, gambling den and boozing ken. Not surprisingly, given the overwhelming Irish population of England's first saol luim, the Seven Dials and St. Giles, much of the English "slang" that emerged from its back alleys and back streets was the Irish dialect of the London poor. What the English labeled thieves' cant, the Irish called caint (speech).

The secret Irish "slang" of the English underworld, spoken by the "vagabounde" gamblers and crooked dice tricksters of mid-16th century Tudor England, was the same language spoken by the Big Shot (Seod, Big Chief) racketeers (reacadóirí, sportive characters, dealers), sure-thing tricksters, and penny-ante grifters (grafadóira, grubbers and scroungers) of early 20th century New York.

The "cony" (fear conaí, wealthy, rich man) of Gilbert Walker's 1552 pamphlet, *A Manifest Detection of Diceplay and the Art of Cony-Catching* and the swell (sóúil, comfortable or wealthy) of the fianaisí (observers) of the slumming London sporting world of Pierce Egan's 1812 book, *Boxiana*, were merely different Irish monikers (names) for the same dude (dúid, dúd, or dúdaire, a rubber-necker, dolt, eavesdropper, stupid person, numbskull).

The 16th century English Conaí was the ancestor of the early 20th century American sách úr (fresh well-fed fellow) that Roaring Twenties' Bootlegger (buidelaí gar, local bottlers) Honky Tonk (Aingíocht a Tharraingt, Evil Attraction) Irish Nightclub Queen Texas Guinan christened the "Big Butter and Eggman."

"Big" Bodair an Aicme án: Big Debauchee of the Noble Class.

Every night at the El Fey Club, Texas shouted out her signature line of "Hello, Sách úr!" to some new Big "Bodair an Aicme án" (upperclass playboy) in the audience, while the playwright George S. Kaufman wrote a play in the Butter and Eggman's name and even Louis Armstrong, the King of Jazz (Teas, heat, excitement, high spirit, and passion) sang out that famous fat-cat's moniker in a 1926 hit song.

**Big Butter And Eggman**

Transcribed from vocals by Louis Armstrong and May Alix, recorded Nov. 16, 1926 [pnm://ra1.technoir.net/TechNoir/jazz/songs/louie/hot5/bigbutter.ra](pnm://ra1.technoir.net/TechNoir/jazz/songs/louie/hot5/bigbutter.ra) uses real audio

May Alix:
I want my butter and egg man,
From 'way out in the west.
'Cause I'm getting tired of working all day;
I want somebody who wants me to play;
Pretty clothes have never been mine,
But if my dream comes true,
The sun is going to shine;
'Cause I want my butter and egg man...

Louis Armstrong:
Now, mama, I'm your big butter and egg man!
...Now listen, baby...
I'll buy you all the pretty things that you think you need
'Cause I'm your Big "Bodaire an Aicme án"
From 'way down in the South...

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