IACI FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT SCOTT SPENSER 
RETURNS FROM NUI GALWAY

I have been honored to be this year's American Irish Cultural Institute Visiting Research Scholar at NUI Galway's Centre for Irish Studies. My time in Galway was much too short, though I hope it marks the start of a vital ongoing relationship. While in residence, my plan was to craft my recent dissertation, "The Piper Calls the Tune: How Uilleann Bagpipers Averted Obsolescence through Technology, Networks and Community" into a publishable manuscript, and to add an in-depth Galway focus in parts of the project with local ethnographic and archival materials. Upon arrival at the Centre for Irish Studies, I cleared my publications roster by first finishing off a manuscript on early folk song collectors, The Ballad Collectors of North America: How Gathering Folksongs Transformed Academic Thought and American Identity (Lanham MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2011), and finishing the entries “Transmission” and “Bagpipes” for the Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland (a project hosted by the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama, and scheduled for publication by UCD Press in 2012). Fergus Fahey, Institutional Repository and Digitisation Librarian at the NUI-G James Hardiman Library, was absolutely vital to the ballad collectors project - digitizing multiple manuscripts from tattered paper sources and magically processing them into malleable computer files.

My research project is intended to shed light on the ways in which uilleann bagpiper players in Ireland (and later around the world) have saved a once-dying tradition. My archival digging has pointed to an ongoing dedication by pipers to gathering and sharing cultural information, repertoire and knowledge though any means necessary, or any technology available. Much of my research has looked to the turn of the 20th century during which the numbers of pipers and pipemakers were dwindling, and especially to the moment in which the remaining tradition bearers gathered to form Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, and subsequently Na Píobairí Uilleann. Echoes of those early days and efforts are still heard throughout the piping scene, as people gather information, form communities, and actively share their knowledge in order to ensure the continuance of the tradition. My time in Galway was intended in part to document recent efforts in this local region and plot the area's historic impact on the larger piping world. Archival trips to Na Píobairí Uilleann (The Uilleann Pipers' Club), Taisce Cheol Dúchais Éireann (Irish Traditional Music Archive), and visits to Malachy Moran at the archives of Raidió Teilifís Éireann have allowed great background information and unpublished documents related to this singular cultural movement.

My fieldwork was informed and guided by a number of wonderful, talented and open musicians in the Galway area. Concertina player Tim Collins and fiddler Deirdre Ní Chonghaile are old friends, native guides, and fantastic academic colleagues. They have been significant agents in the overwhelming draw to Galway. Harpist Úna Ní Fhlannagáin opened doors and made introductions, and many of the most fruitful discussions on my research topic took place with pipers at sessions she hosts. I am indebted to Áras Na NGael, which boldly hosts a weekly session as Gaeilge, attracting some of the most wonderful musicians - all of whom have been very tolerant of this Yank flutist with modest skills and too many questions. Musicians at the sessions in Tigh Neachtain, the Crane, O'Connor's and Murty Rabbitt's have also been eager to assist this project. I owe a debt of gratitude to Tommy Keane, a legendary piper and board member of Na Píobairí Uilleann, who has been generous with his time, music, and opinions. In addition, piper and master carpenter Paul Campbell guided me to many of the younger generation of unsung pipers in the Galway area.

My research has greatly benefitted from a number of colleagues at the Centre for Irish Studies, and will continue to benefit from their wisdom in future. Upon arrival I was invited to join the Meitheal discussion group and Ómós Aite - the Space/Place reading group. Discussions with Méabh Ní Fuarthain, Vereena Commins, Therese MacIntryre and Tim Collins will guide my research for years to come. My daily hallway conversations took fantastic turns with Nessa Cronin, Leo Keohane, Deirdre Ní Chonghaile and Lillis Ó Laoire, and insightful questions and discussion during and after my invited seminars, papers and guest lectures have opened new dimensions to my work. I have been very lucky to have been associated with
such a vibrant center and dynamic scholars. I also have Louis de Paor to thank for allowing me this wonderful opportunity, and Nessa Cronin and Samantha Williams for making it happen.

Galway has become my favorite city, despite the odd climactic phenomenon of freezing fog and the constant dismal rain. One of my most inspiring moments on this trip was assisting Úna Ní Fhlannagáin and the Galway-based musical trio Triúr (www.triur.net) develop promotional materials. Recording in a damp, inadequately coal-fired Áras Na NGael, and having to occasionally pause the tape as the rain loudly pelted the skylights - just hours before flying home from Shannon - brought out the best of collaborative art and tradition in musicians and friends. This is about as good as life gets. A video of this event can be found at http://vimeo.com/19994829. Academic papers, photos of my trip and of musical adventures in Galway and excursions with the NUI Galway Hiking Club can be found at http://web.me.com/scottbspencer/.