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*This issue is dedicated to the
loving memory of K.P.S. Jochum
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In Memoriam Thomas Kinsella (1928-2021) Dublin, Turin, Philadelphia

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Abstract:

In remembering Thomas Kinsella in this obituary, the author has dwelt on a little-publicized event of the poet's life, the granting of an honorary degree by the Turin University on 9 May 2006. The occasion is seen as a belated homage to a poet who had not always received his due in the past and as a harbinger of the full recognition that was to be granted to him in the succeeding years. By analysing his Acceptance Speech, the poem he read at the ceremony and the informal conversations that took place at the time, the author identifies some important concerns that would emerge in Kinsella's *Late Poems* that dwell on ageing, taking stock of one's life, understanding and belief.

Keywords: Ageing, Beliefs, Irish Poetry, Reception, Thomas Kinsella



Thomas Kinsella (1928-2021). Courtesy Irene De Angelis

Thomas Kinsella, one of the most prominent twentieth-century Irish poets, died in Dublin on 22 December 2021, at the age of 93 bringing to a close a year that had also bereaved the nation of other great literary personalities such as Brendan Kennelly, Seamus Deane, Denis Donoghue.

He did not get a state funeral (nor would he have wanted one) but at the secular ceremony that was held at the Victorian Chapel, Mount Jerome Crematorium, he was mourned by the highest civil and literary personalities, including President Michael D. Higgins, while the local and international press gave great prominence to the event. *The Irish Times*, for one, collected and published tributes and memories from his most important fellow-writers¹. Poetry was read during the function. The music by Seán Ó Riada, Bach and Mahler had been carefully chosen by the poet himself for the major role these composers had played in his poetic production. Listening to it must have evoked with great immediacy such masterpieces as *A Selected Life*, *Vertical Man*, or *Fat Master*. It was a moving and subdued ceremony, with a strong emotional input, befitting the way Kinsella had lived and presented himself to the world through a production which avoided, as Tubridy had written, “the generalisation or the grand gesture” (2001, 1).

1. *Thomas Kinsella's Reputation at Home and Abroad and His Position in the Irish Canon*

Kinsella's production, which earned him such an accolade, can hardly be put in a nutshell. His poetic production, which over the years had grown in complexity, was profound, innovative and challenging and engaged the attention of eminent critics. He had also written popular and accessible poems which had made him well-loved by the general public. He had awakened strong emotions with his political satire. His scholarly contributions had breached the great gap between Ireland's past tradition and the present. He had introduced innovations in the publishing field. As Maurice Harmon said in the speech he made in University College Dublin, at the award to Thomas Kinsella of the Ulysses Medal on 16 June 2008: “The integrity of his remarkable career is confirmed in the two sides of his work, the translations from the Irish language and the significant and singular achievement of his own poetry”. All these achievements justify the words with which President and poet, Michael D. Higgins, hailed him as “a truly remarkable man with a special grace”, “of a school that sought an excellence that did not know borders” (Doyle 2021).

The decade and a half that preceded his death saw public honours piled upon honours through which Ireland, and Dublin especially, recognized the greatness of their son. In 2007, he was made a Freeman of Dublin because, as the Lord Mayor said at the time, “his pride in his home city [...] [had] shone through his work” (*ibidem*). Kinsella's poetry was, in fact, often likened to James Joyce's prose for its sense of place. His 2006 publication, *A Dublin Documentary*, a memoir, a collection of period pictures and a poetry book, is an original and moving tribute to his native city.

The public celebration of his life and work at the Gate Theatre on 27 July 2007 brought together a great number of his contemporaries who honoured him with a reading of his poetry. Presenting the Ulysses medal to Kinsella on 17 June 2008, Maurice Harmon, one of the ma-

¹ Martin Doyle, the day after the announcement of Kinsella's death, put together for *The Irish Times* a collection of short personal obituaries: “Thomas Kinsella: President Higgins and fellow writers pay tribute to a great poet”. The contributors were John Dean, Geraldine Dawe, Thomas McCarthy, Colm Toibin, Peter Sirr, William Wall, Hugh Maxton, Lucy Collins, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, John McAuliffe, Adrienne Leavy, Conor O'Callaghan, David Wheatley, Theo Dorgan, Peter Fallon.

for interpreters of his poetry, emphasized the stoic approach to life to be found in his works: “Although burdened with a keen awareness of impermanence and mutability he has engaged creatively with the forces that threaten human relationships, achievement, and existence itself”.

In 2018, both University College, Dublin (his *alma mater*) and Trinity College, Dublin, awarded him an honorary doctorate paying tribute to the excellence of his poetry as well as to his contributions to the understanding of the Irish literary and linguistic heritage. His 90th birthday was celebrated at Mansion House, the official residence of the Lord Mayor of Dublin, with a ceremony in which several fellow poets read from his works. Plaques were placed on his childhood home in 2018 and in 2019 at the public primary school he had attended, the Inchicore Model School. This was to be his last public appearance, marking the persistence of the dialectical move between past and present which is one of the trademarks of his poetry. In 2019, receiving the Bob Hughes Lifetime Achievement Award, he joined the Irish Hall of Fame. On the day of his death, flags flew half-mast in several institutional loci of Dublin. Ireland had realized it had lost a true master and Dublin, the writer who, after Joyce, had best celebrated it.

This kind of recognition had not always been accorded to him. After an initial enthusiasm over Kinsella’s early achievements when fellow poet, John Montague, as early as 1968 had hailed him as “the most accomplished, fluent and ambitious poet of the younger generation” he was somehow marginalized and overshadowed by several other equally eminent poets, as the Nobel Prize, Seamus Heaney, for one. As O’Callaghan wrote, in the last decades he was “scarcely anthologised, unheard of by two generations of British and American poets, unread by one generation of Irish poets apart from those early formal lyrics on the Leaving syllabus” (Doyle 2021). David Wheatley, also a poet, titled his *Guardian* review of the new edition of *Selected Poems* as “The Dethroned God” (2007).

The neglect was a cause of bitterness to the poet who, in an interview (his last) with Adam Hanna, complained: “My books still tend to go unreviewed” (Hanna 2018, 70). Kinsella attributed the neglect to the hostility that the publication of *Butcher’s Dozen* (1972) had awakened in England especially, but also in some sectors of his readership at home². This was not the only reason. His absence from Ireland was the principal cause of his semi-eclipse from the literary life of the country. Kinsella spent most of his mature life between the United States (Carbondale and Philadelphia) where he was teaching and Dublin (or, later, Wicklow County) where he also maintained a residence³. “It was a dual arrangement [that] lasted until my retirement,” he said jokingly to Adam Hanna, playing on the title of his prose work *The Dual Tradition* (Hanna 2018, 71). Commuting and long absences certainly robbed him of visibility while a generation of younger poets, many of them from Northern Ireland, filled the space. Moreover, Kinsella, unlike many other poets of his generation, was reluctant to give public readings that would have promoted his work.

These, on the whole, are contingent reasons. The real one, ironically related to his greatness, was the stylistic change that followed his move to the States. The fragmentation of the style,

² In the note Kinsella appended to the 2022 reissue of *Butcher’s Dozen*, he comments that while this poem may be well-loved by Irish nationalists, it damaged him: “A regrettable longer term effect has been the loss of friendships and the rejection of my work by English readers” (Kinsella 2022, 33).

³ Kinsella moved to The United States in 1963 on a scholarship to complete his translation of the *Táin*. In 1965, after giving up his career as a civil servant, he became Poet in Residence at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. From 1970 to his retirement, he was professor of English at Temple University, Philadelphia. Eventually, he designed for Temple a course on the Irish tradition which took place in Dublin and allowed him to spend more time in his native city. Even after retirement, the couple continued residing in Philadelphia. It was only after his wife Eleanor’s death in 2017 that the poet moved permanently to Dublin, near his daughter, Sara.

together with the density of the content, are probably what robbed him of his readership even while these same elements attracted admiration and awe in the critical world. From being a challenging but well-loved poet, Kinsella had become “difficult” although he always denied the difficulty of his style.

It is not surprising, then, to see that the first reactions to Kinsella’s death in the Irish press, while paying lip service to the complexity and depth of his poetry, concentrated especially on aspects of his production that are not the most representative of his style and interests (admittedly important, however, since they made him a household name). *Poetry Ireland’s* first reaction to the news of his death is rather reductive: “Among his most noted works were the *Táin* (1969), *Butcher’s Dozen* (1992) and *Mirror in February* (1962)”⁴. This leaves out all the post-1962 creative career in which we find the highest examples of his poetic production, more than worth mentioning in spite of their not being “noted” by the man in the street. Equally belittling is the announcement of Kinsella’s death in *The Irish Times* which bears the following title: “Thomas Kinsella, one of Ireland’s finest poets and renowned for *Butcher’s Dozen*, has died aged 93”.

Butcher’s Dozen (1972) is, indeed, by far his most popular work, although it is totally out of line with the rest of his production. And yet, most Irish people (nationalist and non) actually identify Kinsella with this political pamphlet written in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the event, Carcanet reissued the broadside with the author’s concluding remarks which were to be his very last piece of writing (the book was published shortly after his death):

Butcher’s Dozen was not written in response to the shooting of the thirteen dead in Derry. There are too many dead on all sides. The poem was written in response to the Report of the Widgery Tribunal [which whitewashed the British soldiers who, on 30 January 1972, had killed thirteen peaceful marchers in the Bogside area of Derry, Northern Ireland]. In Lord Widgery’s cold putting aside of truth, the nth in a historic series of expedient falsehoods [...] it was evident that we were very close to the operations of the evil real causes. (Kinsella 2022, 33)

In his final evaluation of what prompted him to write a modern *aisling* (a version of the ancient dream poems) in doggerel, we can see that the anger had not subsided up to his last days of life, although he recognized that the poem in “its kinetic impurity” was alien to his style. “I couldn’t write the same poem now” (*ibidem*).

Besides its continuing popularity, *Butcher’s Dozen* is also important because it was on this occasion that the poet established his own Peppercanister Press which was to become so important for his career, influencing the way he composed⁵. The reissue of *Butcher’s Dozen* is actually numbered Peppercanister 30 and Kinsella oversaw the text and design of the volume in the last months of his still productive life.

⁴ Quoted by <<https://www.poetryireland.ie/news/poetry-ireland-deeply-saddened-by-death-of-poet-thomas-kinsella>> (05/2022).

⁵ The Peppercanister Press was founded in 1972 in order to allow the immediate publication of the broadside, since “[t]he pressures were special, the insult strongly felt and the timing vital” (Kinsella 2022, 33). From then on, for several years, the Press (thus called after the nickname of a nearby church), was operated from the home of the poet who would personally set and print the booklets himself. In 1987 the Press was taken over by Dedalus Press. The pamphlets contained either a long poem (often an occasional one, such as the two elegies for Seán Ó Riada and the one written on the assassination of President Kennedy), or a gathering of a few poems, loosely connected. When he had a sizeable number of Peppercanisters he would collect them in a volume. The pamphlets were a sort of draft publication. “In the long run”, says Badin, “this form of publication also influenced Kinsella’s way of composition. [...] sequence-writing became his ruling mode of composition” allowing him to become freer, more daring, less dependent on the demands and tastes of magazines, commercial publishers or readers (1996, 9).

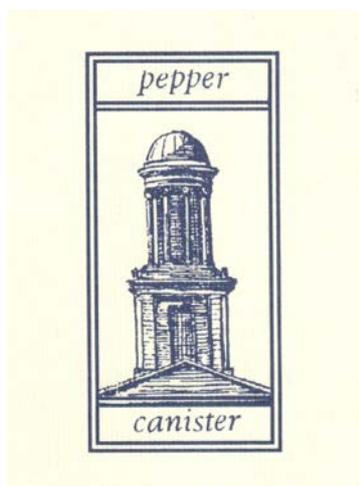


Figure 1 – The Peppercanister Logo

Two other texts, almost as famous in Ireland as Kinsella's satire, are the poems "Mirror in February" and "Another September" which for thirty years (1969 to 2000) were required reading for the final school-leaving examination⁶. Indeed, many Irish people nostalgically associate Kinsella with their school days, as appears in many of the obituaries.

2. *The Turin Honorary Degree: An Overdue Recognition of Kinsella's Merits "from the outer world"*



Figure 2 – Thomas Kinsella, Doctor honoris causa, University of Turin, 9 May 2006.
Courtesy Irene De Angelis

⁶ When Kinsella heard he was on the Leaving Cert he exclaimed "I must be dead." He was the only living poet to be included in the examination programme contained in the anthology called *Soundings* and his poems were generally appreciated although considered difficult. Due to popular demand, *Soundings* was republished in 2010 demonstrating the affection former students nourished for the anthology.

It would, indeed, be a daunting enterprise to list all of the poet's achievements. This has been done competently and with passion in numerous volumes and essays – much too many to list in a footnote – by Irish, American and international scholars who have examined all aspects and phases of his oeuvre. People reading this obituary are certainly all too familiar with the titles of glory of this great Irishman who, as early as 1968, had been hailed by fellow poet, John Montague, as “the most accomplished, fluent and ambitious poet of the younger generation” (1968) and as “a Titan” by David Wheatley in his review of *Selected Poems* (2007), “The Dethroned God”. There is little new to be said about such a multi-faceted genius.

There is, however, a little-publicized event of Kinsella's life, the granting of an honorary degree by the Turin University on 9 May 2006 (a harbinger of the many honours to come), that might have escaped the attention of his admirers. The “Acceptance Address”⁷ the poet delivered at the time contained many interesting seeds that were developed in the succeeding years, giving rise to *Late Poems*. “Marcus Aurelius”, the poem Kinsella read on that occasion (actually, it was his daughter, Sara, who did the reading), gives us a hint on how Kinsella, himself a (former) civil servant⁸, thought his poetry might be received:

[H]e kept a private journal, in Greek, for which
he is best remembered. Almost certainly
because it engaged so much of the baffled humane
in him, in his Imperial predicament:

accepting established notions of a cosmos
created and governed by a divine intelligence
--while not believing in an afterlife;

proposing exacting moral goals, with man
an element in the divine intelligence
--while pausing frequently to contemplate

the transient brutishness of earthly life,
our best experience of which concludes
with death, unaccountable and black. (Kinsella 2013, 23-24)

Like the Emperor's Greek journal, Kinsella's *Late Poems* deal with the themes of civic responsibilities, the “brutishness” of life, ageing and death, and they face the afterlife and the divine in a similar stoic bent of mind.

This obituary, then, will not dwell on the themes and qualities of his poetical and scholarly production (which are, however, briefly analysed in the two speeches of encomium which were delivered at the ceremony and are here reprinted in an Appendix) but will focus principally on some of the concerns that emerged on the occasion of his visit in Turin that reappear in full force in the publications that followed it. The work of his final two decades may be read as a long and profound parting address and there was, indeed already, a tone of parting in the final words of Kinsella's “Acceptance Address” which, emphasized the solitude (whether chosen or

⁷ The “Acceptance Address” was included in Kinsella (2009, 124-130).

⁸ Kinsella spent nearly twenty years as a civil servant in the Irish Land Commission, dealing, as he said in his interview with Adrienne Leavy, “with living history” (2011). He then moved to the Department of Finance, where he served as personal secretary of T.K. Whitaker, an influential economist who was responsible for the programme of economic expansion. He finally resigned when he was offered the opportunity to teach literature in the United States.

imposed) in which his efforts had been deployed: “And now not to end on too questionable a note, I would like to repeat how important it is that one’s best efforts, in solitude, over the long term, can sometimes bring a response of great value, like this, from the outer world” (Kinsella 2009, 130).

The acknowledgement of the Irish poet’s stature in the fields of poetic creation and of the scholarly and poetical retrieval of the fractured tradition of Irish culture was occasioned by the happy coincidence that two members of the Turin Faculty had been keen admirers of his oeuvre. Melita Cataldi, the Italian translator of the *Táin*, has, like Kinsella, contributed to spreading knowledge about the dual tradition of Ireland through scholarly work and translations from the Irish. As for the author of the present essay, she has been a long-time follower of Kinsella’s poetic achievement since the days of her doctoral dissertation. But even more than the object of her studies, Thomas Kinsella, as well as his wife Eleanor, became friends and she cherishes the memory of the welcome she received in Philadelphia and Dublin and, of course, of the poet’s generous help in her interpretations and translations of his work.

The occasion of the conferral of the degree, however, transcended the exertions of the promoters. Several Italian academics contributed translations of his poems to be gathered in a book, *Omaggio a Thomas Kinsella*, that was offered to the poet at the end of the ceremony⁹. The gesture illustrated the wide respect his oeuvre had elicited in the Italian scholarly milieu as appears from the numerous translations of his poetry into Italian and his presence in the Advisory Board of *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies (SIJIS)*¹⁰.



Figure 3 – Book cover of *Omaggio a Thomas Kinsella*. Courtesy Trauben Edizioni

⁹ The volume gathers the poet’s “Acceptance Address”, the two *Laudatio* and an anthological choice of poems by Kinsella with parallel translations by eleven Italian scholars: Giorgio Melchiori, Donatella Abbate Badin, Rosangela Barone, Melita Cataldi, Carla DePetris, Riccardo Duranti, Valerio Fissore, Alessandro Gentili, Francesca Romana Paci, Giovanni Pillonca, Giuseppe Serpillo.

¹⁰ Kinsella’s poems have been often translated into Italian. Among the most important translations, Riccardo Duranti’s pioneering edition of eight poems in the 1976 issue of *Almanacco dello Specchio*; Donatella Abbate Badin (1996), *Thomas Kinsella “Una terra senza peccato”: Poesie scelte di Thomas Kinsella*; Chiara De Luca (2009), *Thomas Kinsella Appunti dalla terra dei morti* and *Thomas Kinsella La pace nella pienezza, Poesie scelte, 1956-2006*. Kinsella is also strongly present in such Italian anthologies of Irish Poetry as *Rosa di Macchia. Antologia della poesia irlandese dopo Yeats*, a cura di Alessandro Gentili (1992).

The days of the Kinsellas' stay in Turin were also memorable for the enlightening conversations that were exchanged which touched on many subjects but, principally, on the poems he was working on and on such timely topics as ageing, the past, memory and, markedly, "belief and unbelief," to borrow the title of his then-forthcoming Peppercanister pamphlet. The memory of those conversations sheds light on Kinsella's final poetic publication, *Late Poems* (2013), which gathers the work he produced after his visit to Turin and which was, as usual, first made public in the form of Peppercanister pamphlets¹¹.

3. *A Kinsella Memento*

As a memento of Kinsella's passing away, the family let mourners have two broadsides which, not surprisingly, tie in with the spirit of those remembered conversations. The first one contains only a lapidary verse, written shortly after Eleanor Kinsella's death (4 May 2017):

Nearing the centre / Hide nothing.¹²

The second reproduces the original of the poem "Prayer I" (from *Belief and Unbelief* [2007]) written in the shaky but still elegant handwriting of an old man and which is here reproduced with the parallel Italian text of Melita Cataldi's translation:

"Prayer"

In a disordered and misguided community
It is the accomplished and the more fulfilled
Who are to be found to one side,
unwilling to take part.

Dear God, let the mind and hearts
Of the main body heal and fulfil
And we will watch for the first sign
Of redemption

a turning away

from regard beyond proper merit,
or reward beyond realneed,
toward the essence and the source.

"Preghiera"

In una comunità sviata e confusa
sono i realizzati e i più appagati
che troveremo in disparte,
restii a schierarsi.

Mio Dio, che le menti e i cuori
di quel grande corpo siano risanati e appagati
e noi saremo attenti a cogliere il primo segno
di redenzione:

un declinare
l'omaggio oltre il giusto merito
o la ricompensa oltre il reale bisogno
volti all'essenza e alla sorgente.
(trans. by Melita Cataldi)

We like to interpret this gesture from the family as an invitation to contemplate the poet's stoic approach as he was "nearing the centre" – significantly not the end but the core of existence, the middle point between being and non-being, the moment when the meaning (or lack of meaning) of existence is finally revealed. "Prayer" too concerns one's turning away from

¹¹ The pamphlets included in *Late Poems* are: No. 24, *Marginal Economy* (2006), No. 26 *Man of War* (2007), No. 27 *Belief and Unbelief* (2007), No. 28 *Fat Master* (2011), No. 29 *Love Joy Peace* (2011).

¹² The broadside was originally printed for the ceremony that took place on 10 May 2018 at Mansion House to celebrate Kinsella's 90th birthday.

mundane concerns “toward the essence and the source,” tentatively suggesting that there may be a source to which one might return. These two final tokens of Kinsella’s poetic thought also intimate possible approaches to that conclusive moment. “Hide nothing” challenges to be sincere in revealing one’s naked self with its shortcomings, hesitations, doubts and contradictions. “Prayer” is an invitation to stand “to one side / unwilling to take part,” and to refuse to seek “regard [...] or reward”. This detached, ironic attitude, which is so distant from the prophetic stance elderly poets (such as Yeats) often adopted, appears repeatedly in Kinsella’s *Late Poems* (2013), which contain, as Clifton surmised, “the only thing that matters, the moment of moral knowledge” (2007).

4. *Late Poems: Ageing and Understanding*

In the long conversations (indeed an informal interview) on his early production and on his present endeavours which marked the short stay of the Kinsella family in Turin, the theme of ageing was often approached. It was a theme that resonated strongly among the Turin intelligentsia after the publication of their *maitre a penser*, Norberto Bobbio’s own acceptance address, *De Senectute*¹³. In talking with Kinsella, it was surprising to note how the minds of these two great thinkers were moving along parallel tracks regarding the issues that concerned both the poet and his hosts with such urgency: old age¹⁴. Bobbio reminds us that old people “prefer to reflect on themselves and turn in on themselves where, according to St. Augustine, truth is to be found.” (2001, 6)¹⁵ and he recommends that, since the time ahead is so short because “old age doesn’t last long [...] you have to use your time not for making plans for a distant future that is no longer yours, but in trying to understand, if you can, the meaning of your life or the lack of it” (12)¹⁶.

Bobbio’s original Italian words, “il senso o il non senso della tua vita”, correspond exactly to the words Kinsella had used in his interview with Andrew Fitzsimons in 2004: “making sense or no sense of existence”, which he indicated as being the “plot” of the poetic production of his seventies and eighties (Kinsella in Fitzsimons 2004, 75). Throughout his career, however, Kinsella had written poetry with this same purpose which was expressed variously as “search for order”, “significant data”, “structure”, “patterns”, in other words, comprehension. Early on he had told Philip Fried he was trying to “elicit order from significant experience” (1988, 17) and he had used almost the same words in his 1993 interview with Badin (Badin 1996, 200); in the 2004 interview with Fitzsimons, he confirmed his purpose: “[T]he most we can hope to achieve is some kind of understanding. Looking into the process and making what sense we can; extracting order if possible; assembling some sort of structure to resist the effects of time; with the power to articulate, connecting the generations” (Kinsella in Fitzsimons 2004, 76).

¹³ Norberto Bobbio (1909-2004) was a highly influential Italian philosopher of law and politics. *De Senectute*, his acceptance speech for an honorary degree at the University of Sassari, was translated into English by Alan Cameron as *Old Age*, 2001. All English quotations from *De Senectute*, unless otherwise stated, are from Cameron’s translation, while the Italian quotations are from the Einaudi edition of his essays (1996).

¹⁴ The ideal encounter between Kinsella and Bobbio, in other words, the coincidences in the thought of two ageing intellectuals debating in their final writings the questions of faith, scepticism and the meaning of life, is the subject of Donatella Abbate Badin (2018) from which parts of this section are drawn.

¹⁵ “Il vecchio rimane indietro, [...] si ferma, o perché non ce la fa o perché preferisce riflettere su se stesso, per tornare in se stesso, dove, diceva sant’Agostino, abita la verità” (Bobbio 1996, 21).

¹⁶ “Ma proprio perché [la vecchiaia] dura poco impiega il tuo tempo non tanto per fare progetti per un futuro lontano che non ti appartiene più, quanto per cercare di capire, se puoi, *il senso o il non senso della tua vita*” (my emphasis; Bobbio 1996, 29).

The concern for order or understanding took the poet on a journey “back to the dark / and the depth that I came from” (Kinsella 2013, 52) or in search of a “personal place” which can give its radiance back “to the darkness of our understanding” (Kinsella 2001, 283). This sort of understanding which originates in the past becomes particularly important in old age when the backward look is imperative. This is the gist of the poem titled “Prayer II”, the companion piece of “Prayer I” (the poem chosen by the family to remember Kinsella):

That the humours settling
hard in our hearts
may add to the current
of understanding.

That the rough course
of the way forward
may keep us alert
for the while remaining (Kinsella 2013, 63)

The wish that the process of ageing, in spite of its shortness (“the while remaining”), roughness (“the rough course / of the way forward”) and hardening of the heart (“the humours settling hard in our hearts”) may add to the current of understanding and keep us “alert” and alive is in line with the urgency expressed by Bobbio regarding the need to understand because of – and in spite of – the shortness of residual time. For both old men understanding is the key to ageing fruitfully and responsibly. Indeed, it is “the substance of a life,” as Kinsella said in the Turin acceptance address, inviting the audience to view his career as a life “expressed with understanding as best one can” (Kinsella 2009, 127).

It is a commonplace that “old folk, time’s dotting chronicles” (Shakespeare, *2 H IV*, 4.3, 138), live of memories which they incessantly rehash. Bobbio, in an ideal dialogue with Kinsella, writes: “When you are old, and what is more, feeling old, you cannot suppress the temptation to reflect on your own past” (2001, 80)¹⁷. What makes both Kinsella and Bobbio different from the average rambling old person, however, is that the process of remembering is carried out with the aim of taking stock of one’s whole life in front of its impending end. Delving into the past is just another tool, leading to comprehension, which the two ageing thinkers adopt.

The past, whether personal, national, or mythical, had always been important in Kinsella’s poetry, even when he was young, but is especially so in *Late Poems* in which we find compositions, such as “Blood of the Innocent,” where the artist, bearing in mind not only his personal understanding but the transmission of it to future generations, affirms:

we should gather in each generation
all the good we can from the past,
add our own best and
[...]
leave to those behind us
[...]
a growing total of Good (adequately recorded). (Kinsella 2013, 20)

The concern of the transmission of the past with a view to the present and the future is evident also in the aptly named “Songs of Understanding”:

¹⁷ “Quando si è vecchi, e per di più anche invecchiati, non si riesce a sottrarsi alla tentazione di riflettere sul proprio passato” e fare “un bilancio non è facile” (Bobbio 1996, 163).

Reclaiming out of the past
 all the good you can use,
 and all the good that you can
 and offer it all onward (29)

The search for ‘good’ – a term that in *Late Poems*, substitutes the concepts of “order” and “structure” of the past – may mean acceptance, peace, in other words, realising “That the life-form as we have it / is inadequate in itself; but that / having discovered the compensatory devices / of Love and the religious and creative imaginations” (21) one has reached understanding for oneself and the generations to come and added a sense to what one has been doing. As Badin has commented:

The search is incremental, including new material, and, at the same time, cyclical as it embraces the past. Its final purpose is that of reviewing and recording his findings transmitting them to the generations to come. Therefore, Kinsella, cannot be catalogued as a griever of times past, as many old people are: the past is present for him, lively and to be used. Its loss is not bemoaned and its retrieval celebrated not only as a personal gift but as a contribution to the community. A cyclical taking stock of past concerns and experiences is the hallmark of Kinsella’s late poetry. (2018, 67)

Old people do tend to repeat themselves, and Kinsella’s late poetry intentionally proposes similar situations, characters, and thematic concerns as in the past, using internal quotations from his own poems and even rewriting them. The presence in his oeuvre of pairs of poems bearing the same (or a slightly modified) title¹⁸ does not occur because of a lack of something new to say but because he wants to return to the past, to his own words, in a new spirit, close, at times, to a mystical view of the world or at least to a position of acceptance and peace. Being like the moth of “Novice” that belongs to a “species that sucks and swallows / only while it is growing; that cannot eat / once it reaches maturity” (2013, 51) does not mean that a poet cannot feed on what he “ate” earlier in order to produce something new and valuable. There is a continuous refining and simplifying, in search of new answers to the old, familiar questions. Taking stock of one’s life consists mostly in starting from the memory of the past and proposing new solutions knowing that “[t]he search for meaning and order will always be provisional” as Adrienne Leavy (2014), points out in a review of *Late Poems*. In Kinsella’s own words, bearing in mind “what has been done before, by the same few human types, with slight variations” (2009, 127) seems to be one of the possible benefits of old age. But with a difference: it is now done in the awareness of “last matters”.

5. Beliefs and Scepticism

This awareness prompts the poet to try once again to give an answer to questions asked before even through a tentative approach to religion, as the title of one of Kinsella’s recent publications, “Belief and Unbelief” suggests. Most of the poems comprised in *Late Poems*, together with those distributed by the family, are to be read as “songs of understanding”¹⁹ as well as “songs of memory”. Moreover, they should be interpreted *sub specie aeternitatis*, or rather “since expectations of eternity are doubtful in Kinsella’s universe”, we should read them, in Badin’s words, “under the perspective of an ending, in other words, [...] *in substantia nostrae mortalitatis*” (2018, 76).

¹⁸ “Into Thy Hands” (2011) is also the title of a poem in *Moralities* (1960). “Elderly Craftsman at his Bench” (2011), answers “Worker in Mirror at his Bench” from the collection *New Poems* of 1973.

¹⁹ “Songs of Understanding” is the title of one of the poems contained in Peppercanister 24, *Marginal Economy* (2006) (Kinsella 2013, 28).

The theme of death itself, however, is almost absent in *Late Poems* although, as Theo Dorgan wrote in his eulogy, the earlier and mature work “can best be read as a quarrel with the great injustice of death, and few poets in the English language have sustained so long an argument with that injustice, so prolonged an empathy with mortal creatures, as Kinsella did” (Doyle 2021).

The explanation for the avoidance of the topic of one’s individual end is simple. There is little to say about it, as Bobbio explains, apart from expressing fear about the way and the time it will happen or entertaining hopes of an afterlife. In his poetry, the stoic Kinsella rarely complains about declining powers nor does he give voice to fear, privileging memory and reinterpretations of the past over meditations on death. He does, nonetheless, gingerly deal with the question of an afterlife.

Critics have debated the relationship between scepticism and faith in the poet’s last years, which, as Catriona Clutterbuck suggests, “is one of symbiotic interaction” (2008, 245). To Andrew Fitzsimons’ question about whether he still believed in God, put to him in his 2004 Interview, Kinsella answered: “From the imagined vantage point distant overhead, it would be very difficult. And yet there is a drive to make things happen down there. And when you push back into the past, into the first microsecond of time, physics and poetry intersect in a kind of religion” (Kinsella in Fitzsimons 2004, 76). On the other hand, Andrea Byrne in an article in *The Independent* quotes the Irish poet as saying: “I believe now, with a certain nervousness, that you simply go back from where you came from which is nowhere. We are phenomena, we are biological freaks, we simply come to the end of a given ordeal and go back to nothing” (2009). This endorses the opinion of Maurice Harmon who maintains that “the presence of meaninglessness in the world and this awareness underlies all his recent work. [...] *Godhead* measured the Divine and found it wanting. *Marginal Economy* faced the truth that there is no redemption from outside. *Belief and Unbelief* that if there is no expectation, there is less disappointment” (2012, 14).

Total belief in another form of life cannot be accepted by a confirmed agnostic, such as Kinsella was. The disbelief in an afterlife, however, does not exclude forms of religiosity and the sense of the divine. As Kinsella was walking the last stretch of his long life, there were some signs of his searching for the consolations of faith after refusing for several decades to see God as a source of understanding and meaningfulness. He often used, although gingerly, more explicit terms such as Belief, Faith, God and referred to the symbols of Christianity as in the poem reproduced in figure 4, “Trinity” from *Godhead* (Kinsella 2001, 336).

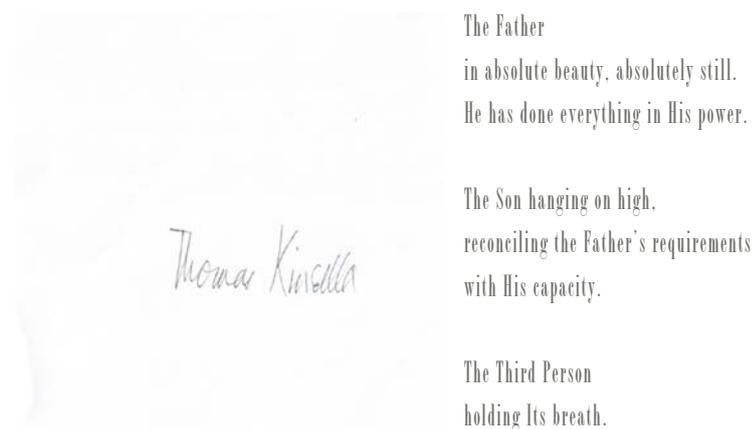


Figure 4 – Thomas Kinsella, “Trinity” from *Godhead*.
Courtesy Donatella Abbate Badin

The presence of several poems bearing the title of “Prayer” (as well as of others with titles suggesting religion) makes one suspect that Kinsella, while he was engaged in taking stock of his life, was also examining the possibilities of the divine.

Naming *Godhead* one of the Peppercanister sequences (1999) signals the importance the issue of divinity had acquired for him at that stage of his life, while the binary opposition of *Belief and Unbelief* (2007) emphasizes his wavering position. As for *Prayers* I and II, “the growing doubts and certainties of that lifetime are trying to live together” as Kinsella said at the Gate Theatre ceremony (Tubridy 2008, 234). Other forms of faith are given a possibility and John F. Deane rightly sees some of these poems as “ ‘prayers’ to an unnamed but guiding force behind nature and human being” (2007). There is a sense of acceptance although, in Harmon’s opinion, “understanding, even partial, is the most we can hope for” (2012, 14). In his two final publications, *Fat Master* and *Love Joy Peace*, the speaker gives voice both to the temptation and the refusal to believe.

It is true that in “Love Joy Peace”, the final poem of the homonymous sequence and of the last published collection of poems, Kinsella rejects the answers offered by traditional religions:

That the select only, the chosen few,
should enter effortless into the Kingdom
to meet a Maker wasteful on high
as in His worldly works.
Unacceptable. (Kinsella 2013, 89)

That same final poem, “Love Joy Peace”, however, also contains what even Harmon concedes is “a statement of personal faith” (2012, 14): “Grace” (in other words a sparkle of divinity, an inkling of the meaning of life) may be communicated by art – music and poetry especially. “I rest my faith in the orders of earthly genius” he writes, naming Michelangelo, Picasso, Mozart, Bach, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson. Grace also takes other forms, the “routine” of the “lone artificer” and, in line with what he wrote in the past about sex and love, “desire [...] Joy of the flesh / Saying all it can of love”. Through these avenues, one may finally obtain “Peace and nothingness of the last end” (Kinsella 2013, 89-91). The disbelief in a Christian view of life and afterlife, in fact, does not close the door on other forms of religiosity and the sense of the divine.

In later years, Kinsella changed his views about the possibility that art could be a form of religion. In a 1993 interview with Badin, he had been categorically negative. To the question “Has poetry become a substitute for religion?” he had replied: “Religion [...] has disappeared totally. I don’t see any room for it. Poetry has no connection with the religious impulse” (Badin 1996, 199). In 2004, however, he communicated to Fitzsimon: “At a time like the present, when religion has more or less vanished, poetry can almost act as a substitute” (Kinsella in Fitzsimons, 74). Thus, while poetry or art in general are his final speculative version of religion, the object of art may become a kind of prayer or sacrificial offering.

Kinsella’s beliefs and scepticism were fittingly epitomised in the already mentioned poem named after Marcus Aurelius, the statesman and philosopher who, like the poet, “had access to the bureaucratic world as well as the sensual, a figure that was alienated and involved at the same time” (2009, 128) and best incarnated the stoicism that mostly governed Kinsella’s vision of life and the world.

By distributing the two broadsides containing samples of Kinsella’s late poetry that offered glimpses of belief, the family may have wanted to counter such alternative statements of Faith as in “Love Joy Peace” or the stoic position of a poem such as “Marcus Aurelius” and suggest

the interaction between doubt and faith which troubled the poet especially in his last years, thus giving a special meaning to the secularism of the funeral ceremony.

Whether Kinsella found a glimmer of faith or not, in *Late Poems* he seems to have reached a level of understanding and peace contrasting with his earlier production. It would be fitting to remember him as he asked readers to remember Bach in “Reflection” from *Fat Master*: an elderly artist “retiring homeward” but still questioning his beliefs and his achievements and grateful for the “minimal understanding” he has reached:

I pray You to remember me, as I retire
Homeward across a darkening Earth,

And still curious at my contaminated conception,
Not convinced that my existence
Might ever have been of relevance
[...]

but thankful, on the whole, for this ache
for even a minimal understanding. (Kinsella 2013, 74)

This “minimal understanding” in Kinsella’s view is the only thing one can achieve by the backward look, the cyclicity in one’s thoughts and works, the attempt to give fresh answers to old questions, in other words by the process of ageing.

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Appendix

Figure 5 – Kinsella with members of the Faculty of the University of Turin.
Courtesy Irene De Angelis

Laudatio by Donatella Abbate Badin

Many years ago – I don't even dare to say how many – I was on a train taking me from Washington to Philadelphia where I was to meet a distinguished Irish poet, Thomas Kinsella. The supervisor of my doctoral thesis had arranged the meeting and the two were waiting for me at the station. Trains, however, as we Italians know, stop at times in the open countryside. Mine, although American, did. The minutes were passing and I was growing increasingly restless. To calm myself, I picked out of my briefcase a recently published book by Kinsella, bearing the anodyne title of *New Poems*. It was nothing like what I had read before by him: a totally new experience.

I had known and appreciated the works that from the late 50s had made Kinsella famous in Ireland and the United States and which had earned him the professorship at Temple University in Philadelphia and the title of Poet-in-Residence at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

I had developed a taste for Kinsella's sombre poetry in which I could detect a strong opposition between the perception of "dislocation and loss" that dominate, in his eyes, both the personal and the public planes of existence and the "positive counter-moves" of love, and of the creative act. His was a rigorous brand of poetry, built around a confrontation with darkness, disorder, suffering – represented by deaths and diseases but also by the economic policy of the government, the Troubles in the North, all forms of injustice, and especially the divided soul of an Ireland that had lost touch with its past. The brief moments of light in the poetry of those years were only a prelude to a new cycle of gloom.

The first phase of the poet's literary production was organized along the axes of order/disorder and structure/fragmentation. This was evident both thematically and mimetically, in other words through formal structures of order such as stanzas, rhymed and unrhymed (he favoured Dante's *terzina*), anaphoras, repetitions and listings which are characteristic devices in Irish poetry.

“Poetry is a tool for eliciting order from experience” (Fried 1988,17), in short, was the poetic tenet of the early Kinsella I was familiar with. *New Poems* did not fit this frame. No paradigmatic “fabric of order” could be found in the fragmentation, the apparently shapeless architecture, the many experimental aspects of this open work with which I was confronting myself. The hermeticism of the poems I was reading for the first time made the moments of waiting fly by, so much so that I didn’t realize that the train was an hour late.

As I advanced in my feverish reading, I realized that the two semantic axes around which themes and images of Kinsellian poetry coalesce, chaos and structure, also supported these new poems. Except that the exploration was no longer transversal, but vertical. There was a movement downwards, an immersion in the depths in search of the roots of being. To take up the title of the sequence of poems that formed the heart of the volume, *Notes from the Land of the Dead*, the new poetry mimicked a descent into the land of the dead, the world of the unconscious for Jung. I was soon to discover the strength of the Jungian influence in *New Poems* as well as in subsequent volumes. Kinsella even claims to have carried out a self-analysis through poetry. The search for individuation and the knowledge of the ego is conducted at several levels – biographical, genetic, historical and mythical. Kinsella moves freely and without apparent logical and temporal links from one level to another, from the conscious to the individual and collective unconscious, from childhood memories to historical ones and above all to ancestral ones. The assimilation of the latter into a poem that fathoms the evolution of the psyche constitutes, indeed, the most relevant peculiarity of Kinsella’s mature poetry. The mythical method of Kinsella was, however, very different from Joyce’s: it made use of a mythological substratum that escaped me.

As the train was entering the station, I had become fully aware of the importance of meeting the author of a project in continuous development, a complex work in progress, extraordinarily rich in references to the present and the past that would continue to stimulate and engage me in the years to come. As it came to pass.

Kinsella had waited patiently for me and patiently answered my questions, starting a clarifying dialogue that was to last until today. The full extent and scope of his work of recovery and assimilation of the Irish heritage that was the basis of the extraordinary construct of his poetry were fully revealed to me only when many years later I arrived in Turin and was lucky enough to share an office with prof. Melita Cataldi, an enthusiastic expert in ancient and modern Irish literature, to whom I now give the floor so that she can illustrate the importance of Kinsella with regard to tradition.

Laudatio by *Melita Cataldi*

It would be wrong to Thomas Kinsella if this laudatio expressed in two voices meant that in him the two aspects of his artistic activity of poet and translator were dealt with separately. The opposite is true: Kinsella is a poet in his own right when he translates the literary heritage of his country from Irish; but, on the other hand, the profound assimilation of that heritage, which took place through translations, is the root and foundation of his poetic production. That great and stubborn work he carried out on early medieval epic prosimetric texts and over a thousand years of Irish poetry – suggested his themes, stylistic features and forms.

In a poem written after completing the translation of *The Táin*, which was done over ten years, Kinsella says he faced that long effort conscious of “enriching the present / honouring the past”. Honouring the past is an act of devotion and understanding: it means bowing down with patience and humility to it, aware that the past is part of us; but at the same time this

bowing down is an act of *responsibility*: it means feeling the duty to re-take possession of what one has been deprived of, an experience which, if it was traumatic for the Irish, is to some extent inevitable for all of us. The sense of loss, the awareness of discontinuity, of the fragmentation of what can be preserved of the past are distinctive features of the modern sensibility. And that past – retrieved and made living again – “enriches the present” not because it puts new goods on the cultural market, but because it revives in us as a model full of potentiality.

Today, by giving Thomas Kinsella an honorary recognition, we also intend to honour that literary heritage which he – perhaps more effectively than anyone else in Ireland, with the spirit of a poet rather than that of a philologist – has made accessible, vivid again, and more fully appreciable.

When translating the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, a masterpiece of the early medieval epic, Kinsella reflected on one of the themes that are most close to his heart. In the clash between the hero Cú Chulainn and the heterogeneous army of Queen Medb, between those who even in the conflict try to enforce certain rules and those who continually transgress them, Kinsella was able to encounter the myth of the perpetual conflict between destruction and persistence, shapelessness and form, chaos and order. Similarly, in the large medieval pseudo-historical compilation *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (Book of the Invasions of Ireland) he found material to reflect on the theme of successive invasions and assimilations: the constitution of a unity and its dissolution.

He basically emphasized the same theme when he anthologized and translated, in 1981, *An Duanaire 1600-1900. Poems of the Dispossessed*, the Irish poetic production of the centuries of the progressive dismantling of the Gaelic literary culture under the English rule, at the time when the bardic poets and their heirs tried to resist through the exercise of poetry and reflected in verse on the concepts of loss and deprivation. In the careful survey of Irish poetry (both in Irish and English) made with his powerful *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, stand out the short monastic lyrics of the eighth century, the golden age of early medieval literature, sometimes preserved only because the texts were annotated on the margins of the Latin codices that those monks were transcribing and studying. This is often classified as “poetry of nature”, but it is at the same time, “poetry of culture” because the two dimensions meet and intertwine in it. When, at the end of his anthology, among many contemporary Irish poets, Kinsella includes himself, he chooses a lyric of only 10 lines, crystalline, almost elementary, in which the echo of the poetry of those laborious glossators resounds clearly. In fact, the title contains the word “a gloss”.

It is said of a little bird that, on a branch beyond the window where the poet is working, swallows a red berry, shakes a few drops from its wings and disappears towards a stormy sky. Under the copper light of that sky, the pages on which he is writing appear brighter and the poet bends over them to work with renewed dedication. The last words – “and over them I will take / ever more painstaking care” (2001, 130) – seem to evoke an eminent quality of this great modern poet: painstaking means “accurate, meticulous” but it contains the idea of “taking pain upon oneself”: it alludes to the acceptance of a hard artistic effort which is at the same time an ethical commitment to tradition. Kinsella says he feels gratitude towards those scribes: thanks to them, only those fragments of the ancient Irish culture have been preserved. Similarly, we are grateful to him, the poet, for continuing – bowing down over his papers like an amanuensis – that task, thus recreating comparable beauty in his translations.

Exploring Digital Literature and Humanities in Ireland

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Arianna Antonielli and Samuele Grassi



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Exploring Digital Literature and Humanities in Ireland

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Introduction

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The 12th issue of *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies* is aimed at exploring the development of Digital Literature (DL) and Digital Humanities (DH) in and about Ireland, and it therefore contributes to shedding light on the multiple ways in which Ireland has related to DL and DH in the past and continues to do so in the present. How has the turn to “digital” been addressed in Ireland within literary, artistic, scholarly and publishing fields? In what ways has DH been practiced and developed in Ireland and in Irish Universities? What is the role that DH play in the study and teaching of Irish literature both in Ireland and abroad? How have issues of authorship and reading been modified in and by the digital environment?

Prompted by these questions, as guest editors of this issue we wanted to offer an overview of various computational and digital approaches to Irish literary, linguistic and cultural studies, as well as the various theoretical, epistemological, methodological and historical aspects of DH in Ireland. The current issue provides an occasion to showcase DH projects and/or methods that include digital tools in the interrogation of Irish Literature and Culture, and/or those which combine linguistics, literature and culture.

The section opens with “Introducing the Digital Humanities in Ireland Landscape Report Dataset”, by Michelle Doran, which presents an insider’s perspective on the newly formed UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association and the relevant Network. Through an Open Science Frame-work (OSF) repository this cross-country initiative is going to map the Digital Humanities across Ireland as a two-phase Landscape Report. A recollection of the aims and objectives of the project is integrated into a discussion of possible future directions that will contribute to the inquiry into this growing field of research.

Pádraig Ó Macháin recollects the development of and the role played by the Irish Script on Screen (ISOS) in his article, “The Digitisation of Irish Manuscripts: Beyond and Beneath the Visible Image”. ISOS remains Ireland’s first manuscript digitisation project, borne of the collaborative work of scholars and experts whose major effort has allowed to read Irish using the potentialities of the digital humanities. It remains a powerful and invaluable platform, as the author comments, “to explore what lies beneath” images inside archives.

Sarah Corrigan in her “Incrementally Does It: New Perspectives and New Opportunities in Early Medieval Digital Humanities” focuses on the digital humanities and early medieval textual analysis, taking a lead from a project she coordinated a few years ago. In particular, the essay builds on two workshops as part of the project, and in addition to reporting on those, it seeks to capture the complexities and newfound challenges of doing research on early medieval writing within the digital environment(s).

Jeneen Naji and Michał Rzeszewski’s “Digital Poetry as a Dublin City Data Interface” considers the idea of “place” alongside the connections of digital humanities and human geography, exemplified in the digital poem *The River Poem*. The purpose of their investigation is to produce an alternative set of meanings of the experience of place among contemporary subjectivities, whose experiences shift across the analog and the digital as part of their everyday life. In the process, their rich experience and its visualisation are meant to think differently with traditional virtual geographic environments (VGEs) as research method and as object/tool.

In his “Reading Republican Murals in Northern Ireland: Archiving and Meaning-Making” Tony Crowley critically asks to what extent the digital can be useful for understanding complex and fraught histories, pasts, and memories. His reflection on an online archive of the murals of Northern Ireland 1979-2021 he compiled presents us with the challenge of looking at and investigating the images inside the archive and being able to grasp the complexities of their meaning. The regime of the visual and its “representation” is further interrogated through the gathering of a wide number of pictures displaying the graffiti.

Finally, the last piece of the collection is an interview to Barry Houlihan, archivist and lecturer at the National University of Ireland, Galway, whose work on the social-cultural history of Irish theatre and new means/media includes two recent volumes, *Navigating Ireland’s Theatre Archive: Theory, Practice, Performance* (ed. 2019, Peter Lang) and *Theatre and Archival Memory Irish Drama and Marginalised Histories 1951-1977* (2021, Palgrave). In the interview piece, Houlihan provides an original and challenging account of the interrelationships of theatre studies and digital humanities via a rethinking of the archive.

We want to acknowledge and to show our gratitude to the work that all contributors to this special issue dedicated as they sent us their literary, theoretical/methodological essays, and/or case-studies, at a time when the past-present-future of the pandemic was/is far from behind us, and in the midst of the pressure to carry out increasing workloads and commitments inside academia. This issue is dedicated to their passion and their vision for research that always insists on pushing the boundaries of the real and the possible.



Introducing the Digital Humanities in Ireland Landscape Report Dataset*

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Abstract:

The UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Network was jointly funded in July 2020 by the Irish Research Council (IRC) and the UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) under the ground-breaking Collaboration in Digital Humanities Networking Grant Scheme. The joint aims of the Network were to: a) undertake research and consultation towards the implementation of a permanent UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association; and b) to develop a clear roadmap for collaboration in the field between the two countries. An ancillary objective of the Irish Network members is to provide an up-to-date evaluation of the role and scope of Digital Humanities in Ireland, both past and present, to facilitate longer-term thinking about Digital Humanities so that we might optimise future developments in the field, including the nascent UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association. To that end, the respective partners are developing a Digital Humanities in Ireland Landscape Report. The research informing the Landscape Report will be delivered in two phases. The initial phase took place between March and September 2021 and comprised the identification via desk research, collection and collation of data pertaining to Digital Humanities entities in Ireland. The second phase of the data gathering/collection exercise entails the presentation of the preliminary dataset to the wider Digital Humanities community for input and suggestions. To that end, we have created an Open Science Framework (OSF) repository¹. This contribution introduces the Digital Humanities in Ireland Landscape Report dataset, its methodology and primary sources and offers some preliminary observations and analysis. It concludes with some suggestions for potential use cases and further directions for the dataset.

Keywords: Digital Humanities, Ireland, Irish Research Council, Landscape Analysis, UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Network

* First and foremost, I am grateful to Nicko De Guzman for the initial data collection and for his consummate professionalism in completing the task. I am grateful also to Jennifer Edmond for supervising this work during my maternity leave and to each of the Network members for supporting the Network activities in my absence. In particular, I would like to extend my thanks to Irish Network members Orla Murphy and Justin Tonra and to the UK co-PIs Jane Winters and Charlotte Tupman. This work was supported by the Irish Research Council under the ground-breaking 'UK-Ireland Collaboration in the Digital Humanities Networking Grant'.

¹ <<https://osf.io/bvmkd>> (05/2022).

1. Introduction and Background

Digital Humanities is not some airy Lyceum. It is a series of concrete instantiations involving money, students, funding agencies, big schools, little schools, programs, curricula, old guards, new guards, gatekeepers, and prestige. It might be more than these things, but it cannot not be these things. (Ramsay 2013, 240)

Irish DH is its own DH, made so by the peculiarities of an Irish academy which is in many respects considerably different to its international counterparts, and so we should problematise it in its own right. (O’Sullivan 2020, 4)

In July 2020, the UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Network was jointly funded by the Irish Research Council (IRC) and the UKRI’s Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) under the ground-breaking “UK-Ireland Collaboration in the Digital Humanities Networking Grant”. The joint aims of the network were a) to undertake research and consultation towards the implementation of a permanent UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association; and b) to develop a clear roadmap for collaboration in the field between the two countries. The network comprised eight third-level institutional members from across Ireland and the United Kingdom, each with an established track record of research and teaching in Digital Humanities, and with specialisms in a range of disciplinary and methodological areas central to the field².

Between December 2020 and November 2021, a series of five online events – four workshops and a final congress – were conducted to build consensus around the key concepts of sustainability, inclusivity, training, advocacy and career progression. Each meeting generated its own publicly accessible output detailing the respective event’s highlights and setting forth key findings and recommendations. At the time of writing (April 2022), three of the four workshop reports are available, with the fourth under review and the network is in the final stages of drafting its three-year *Roadmap for the UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association*, under the guidance of UK Co-PI Prof. Jane Winters. These outputs constitute a wealth of information relating to the current state of the art of our international Digital Humanities community and further details are available in the references section of this piece.

It is well-documented that Digital Humanities (or *the* Digital Humanities) is both “varied and local”³, and that one’s geographical location will more than likely impact upon the individual perception of the field (for example, School of Advanced Studies 2017; Matres, Oiva, Tolonen 2018; Toscano, Rabadán, Ros *et al.* 2020; Treasure 2022). As James O’Sullivan argues in his history of the Digital Humanities in Ireland, “While scholars tend to belong and contribute to international communities of praxis, doing DH in one place might look very different to doing DH somewhere else” (Toscano, Rabadán, Ros *et al.* 2020, 1). That each of the five key concepts are not equally relevant to each country was recognised from an early stage of the network’s activities (Gambell, Gooding, Hughes *et al.* 2021, 13). Indeed, during the network’s second workshop on Digital Humanities and advocacy, the value of a UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association was called into question when Andrew Prescott somewhat provocatively argued that the UK participants should instead focus on the formation of a national network designed to address their specific needs (as discussed in Gambell, Gooding, Hughes *et al.* 2021, 13). Of

² The full list of project members and participating institutions can be found on the Network’s website (<<https://dhnetwork.org/team>> (05/2022)).

³ Edmond Jennifer, in conversation, 16 March 2021.

course, the two are not mutually exclusive and it is entirely possible for national communities to advocate for their needs whilst also engaging in international collaborations (as Prescott is no doubt aware).

It goes without saying that an important issue to consider in developing an Irish Digital Humanities network – either in isolation or in collaboration with our UK colleagues – is the size and shape of the region’s Digital Humanities community both actual and potential. To that end, the Irish Network members partners are developing a Digital Humanities in Ireland Landscape Report. In recent years, Digital Humanities in Ireland has been the subject of several research papers and reports. Studies have focused on the history of the field in the last three decades (O’Sullivan, Murphy, Day 2015; O’Sullivan 2020); national capacity development for Digital Humanities research (Keating 2014; Smeaton, Collins, Harrower *et al.* 2015); and the potential impact of Digital Humanities on the Innovation Ecosystem (Byrne, Schreibman 2015). These studies contribute to a macro perspective of Irish Digital Humanities. It is hoped that the Landscape Report will both complement and supplement these studies through the establishment of an empirical perspective on Digital Humanities in Ireland both past and present, to facilitate longer-term thinking about Digital Humanities to optimise future developments in the field, including the nascent DH Association. A further objective is to provide recommendations to aid the IRC to develop their strategy for funding future Digital Humanities research.

The research informing the Landscape Report will be delivered in two phases. The initial phase took place between March and September 2021 and comprised the identification via desk research, collection and collation of data pertaining to Digital Humanities entities in Ireland (key definitions will be discussed in further detail presently). The second phase of the data gathering/collection exercise entails the presentation of the preliminary dataset to the wider Digital Humanities community for input and suggestions. The present piece has the joint aims of introducing the dataset which formed the foundation of the report and of offering some preliminary observations and analysis. It focuses on the themes of identity and identification of Digital Humanities entities. Whilst these questions are not necessarily unique to Irish Digital Humanities, the collation of a dataset pertaining to Digital Humanities in Ireland does allow us to offer a uniquely Irish perspective.

2. *Conduct of Research*

Our research was funded by the IRC and has as one of its primary objectives the provision of information to aid and support collaborations in the field of Digital Humanities between Ireland and the UK. We therefore captured details of Digital Humanities entities which were either wholly or partially based in Ireland and not Northern Ireland, unless they were affiliated with an Irish Digital Humanities entity (e.g. partners in research projects or networks). This position is not intended as a political statement. Rather, it is simply a response to the fact that such activities constitute part of the UK Digital Humanities landscape and should be documented as such. In alignment with the UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Network, the definition of Digital Humanities employed in our study is broad and inclusive. We understand Digital Humanities to exist on a spectrum and to include the application of digital methods to humanities problems, the engineering and maintenance of digital tools, products and infrastructures, theoretical interventions into the relationship between digital technologies and human culture, and participation in the formal field of Digital Humanities via domain specific publications and conferences⁴. Further, as the wider Network held as one of its objectives the

⁴I would like to extend my thanks to my network colleagues and associates Zeena Feldman, Paul Gooding, Órla Murphy and James Smithies for allowing me to use this description of Digital Humanities which was collab-

engagement and inclusion of communities beyond academia, including Research Performing Organisations (RPOs), Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAMs), and the arts and creative industries as well as other industries and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), our research aimed to capture all relevant activities insofar as it was possible.

At present, the study identifies and defines eleven different Digital Humanities entity types as follows (in alphabetical order):

DH_Fellowship	A funded research and training programme at any level.
DH_Programme	Formal credit-bearing degree and certificate courses at any level. For the purposes of the report, the emphasis is on the award and individual modules are not listed. Entities which do not explicitly refer to Digital Arts and/or Digital Humanities may be listed provided that the overall curriculum and objectives are in line with those of Digital Arts and Humanities counterparts (i.e., a combination of digital project building, technical skills and digital culture and theory).
DH_Training	DH training entities are less formal than DH programmes, e.g. workshops, summer schools or seminars. They often relate to practical application of a specific tool or technology, they are often one-off in nature and, for the most part, they are not credit-bearing or associated with a formal curriculum.
GLAM	Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums. Referring to both physical and digital entities.
Professional_Body	A formal organisation which “maintains an oversight of the knowledge, skills, conduct and practice” of a particular profession or occupation. This includes Research Performing Organisations (RPOs).
Research_Centre	More formal than research units and have a wider research mandate. They usually involve activities beyond the scope of a single Faculty and/or involve university resources. They have an on-campus office or similar physical presence.
Research_Group	The most informal entity type. They typically consist of three or more individuals at the same institution who are engaged in or want to pursue a common area of research. Research groups do not require an organizational structure, dedicated physical space on campus, or funding.
Research_Institute	The largest and most formal of all research entities and conduct research into a number of related or different areas of study. They have a definite on-campus presence such as an office.
Research_Laboratory	Similar to a Research_Centre, they usually involve activities beyond the scope of a single Faculty and/or involve university resources. They have on-campus facilities. Noting the differences between Art and Humanities and scientific laboratory spaces, the dataset included any entity that self-identified as a lab(oratory) under this heading.

oratively formulated during a number of conversations throughout early 2021.

Research_Project	We recognise the diversified and complex nature of Digital Humanities research projects. A typical Digital Humanities project will apply digital methods to humanities research data (analogue and digital). However, this is not a hard and fast rule. We include in our list projects which belong to the Critical Digital Humanities and which may not produce a digital output beyond project publications.
Research_Unit	More formal in nature than research groups. They may include members from multiple institutions or organisations and have a broader research focus. In contrast to research groups, research units require an organisations structure and/or dedicated space and/or funding. These units are often organisationally part of their host institution and are subject to institutional management and control.

Insofar as the information was applicable and available, for each enlisted entity we recorded details of the entity type; URL; host institution name; host institution location name; host institution location type; sector; start date; end date; funding type; funding agency; funding scheme; funding amount; contact; role (of contact); discipline (of contact). In addition to recording the URL for each entity, the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine was used to preserve the main webpage on which the entity is described at the time of that the entity was added to the dataset.

3. *Relevant Data Sources*

In addition to reviewing the relevant literature and manually searching for and gathering information from online sources, one non-public document and two publicly available databases were used to compile our list.

UK-Ireland Collaboration in the Digital Humanities Workshop, 22-23 October 2019, Delegate Pack:

The delegate pack for the scoping workshop convened in Dublin by the IRC and the AHRC in advance of the Collaboration in the Digital Humanities Networking Call listed the details (name, institution, position) and provided brief bios of 31 delegates from Irish institutions with a self-declared interest in the Digital Humanities.

DRAPier Database (Digital Research and Projects in Ireland)⁵:

The now-defunct DRAPier interactive database provides access to an inventory database of Irish Digital Humanities projects surveyed between 2009 and 2013 by the staff of similarly defunct Digital Humanities Observatory (DHO) in conjunction with the Humanities Serving Irish Society Consortium (HSIS). The DRAPier project listed projects that met each of the following criteria:

- the project was affiliated with a higher education or cultural institution on the island of Ireland, or a higher education or cultural institution outside of Ireland that had created digital resources focusing on Ireland or Irish studies;
- the project involved digital arts, humanities, or humanities/science interdisciplinary re-

⁵ <<https://www.ria.ie/research-projects/archive/digital-humanities-observatory/drapier>> (05/2022).

search and;

- the project was mandated to produce, or have produced, substantially extant digital content or deliverables.

Therefore, caution must be exercised when drawing conclusions about the state of Digital Humanities in Ireland during the survey period. As has been noted elsewhere, “these rigid criteria provide a significant limitation in order to recognize successful and delivered projects in a small sector as opposed to speculative or aspirational endeavours” (O’Sullivan, Murphy, Day 2015).

IRC Awardees Database⁶:

Launched in 2012 and operating under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills, the IRC funds excellent research across all disciplines, via individual awards. Its Awardees’ Database⁷ was also a rich, albeit restrictive and somewhat problematic, resource. Digital Humanities awards are dispersed over a wide range of disciplines and because of the way the IRC have indexed the awardees, Digital Humanities is not well represented in the database. For example, *Beyond 2022: Ireland’s National Memory*, the precursor to *Beyond 2022: Ireland’s Virtual Record Treasury*, a flagship collaborative Digital History project is listed under Business & Management with no reference to Digital Humanities. Often, the researcher had to rely on local knowledge of the Digital Humanities landscape for this database to be of use.

4. Preliminary Observations and Analysis

Determining what to include and what to exclude from a list such as this is an interesting exercise when exploring what it means to be a practitioner of Digital Humanities at a time when “all humanistic studies are mediated by technologies” (Keating 2014, 22). To paraphrase John Keating, a prominent member of Irish Digital Humanities community, if you are doing humanities now, you are doing humanities digitally. Whilst the big-tent approach suited our purposes, there must be an awareness that data collected and visualised may or may not reflect how entities label or identify their work with or as Digital Humanities. As Keating argued in relation to Irish Digital Humanities in 2014, “Our perspectives on digital humanities – and our opportunities for funding – are inherently complicated, if also enriched, by this difficulty in tying down a shared understanding” (23). The challenges of identifying and defining Digital Humanities have similarly impeded other national surveys. For example, in their empirical study of Digital Humanities in Spain, Toscano and his co-authors note that the community of scholars in Spain working in the Digital Humanities is undoubtedly larger than the community of scholars who identify as digital humanists. They continue that “problems with defining digital humanities multiplies the difficulties in assessing whether a project or a researcher should be included in the final dataset” (Toscano, Rabadán, Ros, *et al.* 2020, 2).

A subject of much discussion was which digitisation projects should be included in the dataset. A recent report by another of the IRC-AHRC-funded Digital Humanities Networks, A Digital Framework for the Medieval Gaelic World, has highlighted what the authors refer to as an “underlying truth” (Stifter, Cnockaert-Guillou, Färber *et al.* 2022, 5) that Digitisation and

⁶ <<https://research.ie/awardees/>> (05/2022).

⁷ <<https://research.ie/awardees/>> (05/2022).

Digital Humanities are not the same thing. And whilst it may be difficult – if not impossible – to pin down the latter, it may be useful to determine which criteria need to be met before objects in the former category, that is digitised research objects, fall under the umbrella of Digital Humanities. This challenge is not new, in 2013 Dot Porter made a similar argument regarding digital scholarly editions, writing that the scholarly community needed to ensure that there are clear definitions regarding “digital” vs “digitised” editions. However, whilst the digitised object may not itself constitute a Digital Humanities entity, the surrounding infrastructure and the context in which it was created may form a vital part of the Digital Humanities landscape. There is certainly more involved in a digitisation project than merely cranking up the “digital photocopier” (Prescott 2015). Digitisation is not a neutral exercise, particularly when it comes to decisions regarding which materials to digitise and to make available. The difficulties in assessing whether a digitisation project should be included as part of the dataset are further complicated by the fact that methods of digitisation of primary source materials often form part of Digital Humanities curricula. Therefore, digitisation is itself considered a core function of the Digital Humanities. Conversely, a 2017 Landscape Report of Digital Humanities Research Teaching and Practice in the UK found that certain digital skills “such as digital imaging and database technologies” (School of Advanced Studies, University of London, 9) were considered essential to work in the GLAM sector, rather than specific to Digital Humanities. In the end, inclusion was determined based on a digital resource: a) self-identifying as Digital Humanities; and/or b) being identified as Digital Humanities either directly or indirectly by a third party; and/or c) being affiliated with another Digital Humanities entity (this was particularly the case for library special collections).

Thus far, the study has resulted in a sample set of 248 individual entities distributed as follows: 2 DH_Fellowship, 36 DH_Programme, 8 DH_Training, 15 GLAM, 4 Professional_Body, 8 Research_Centre, 10 Research_Group, 4 Research_Institute, 3 Research_Laboratory, 141 Research_Project, and 17 Research_Unit⁸. Although a full analysis on the implications of the data has yet to be performed, a few clear patterns emerge in the dataset. The overall impression is one of a dynamic Digital Humanities community that is both established and emerging. The number of Digital Humanities entities has increased sharply over time. Beginning in 1991 and growing steadily for the first two decades, activity has accelerated in the last ten years. Developments in recent years have been dominated by the formation of research units (in the form of research networks) and research projects, with almost all of the vast majority of Digital Humanities work occurs within Higher Education Institutions. However, our dataset also supports a view of Irish Digital Humanities as both intersectoral and international. Our survey identified 75 national institutions associated with the 248 entities distributed as follows: 1 National Broadcaster, 1 Not-for-Profit Organisation, 1 Professional Network, 1 Public Body, 1 Strategic Partnership, 1 Voluntary Organisation, 2 SMEs, 5 Registered Charities, 5 RPOs, 14 Government Bodies, 17 GLAMs, and 26 HEIs. Beyond the 75 Irish institutions, we identified a further 215 international institutions linked to Irish Digital Humanities entities: 151 based in EU member states; 48 based in the UK; 6 located in non-EU European countries; 3 in the USA; 2 in Canada and 1 in Asia, South Asia, East Asia, Australia and South America respectively.

One of the most encouraging observations of our survey thus far is the embeddedness of Digital Arts and Humanities education in Irish HEIs⁹. We identified 36 Digital Arts and

⁸ This dataset remains a living document. The figures presented here are drawn from Version 2, deposited 10.05.2022, <<https://osf.io/bvmkd/>> (05\2022).

⁹ Additional information specific to DH_Programmes was recorded on a separate spreadsheet, <<https://osf.io/bgdu8/>> (05\2022).

Humanities programmes: 21 Digital Humanities and 16 Digital Arts (in the sense of creative arts)¹⁰. Of the 36 entities, 17 contained the terms “digital humanities”, “digital arts”, “digital arts and humanities” or “digital culture” in their titles. 16 DH_Programmes are at undergraduate level (3 BSc and 13 BA) and 20 are at postgraduate level (2 Cert, 3 MSc, 3 PhD, 5 Dip, 7 MA/MPhil). All 16 of the former appear to be ongoing and 15 of the latter are still available. Taught degree-awarding programmes in Digital Arts and Humanities are presently available in 6 Irish Universities (National University of Ireland Galway, National University of Ireland Maynooth, Technical University Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, University College Cork, University of Limerick), and 7 Institutes of Technology (Dundalk Institute of Technology, Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology) with a diploma or certificate in Digital Methods and Data Literacy taught by prominent members of the Irish Digital Humanities community being offered at University College Dublin. One sixth of the DH_Programmes in our dataset award science qualifications (i.e., BSc or MSc), the remaining qualifications are in the arts and/or humanities.

Considering both the objectives of the Landscape Report and the nature of Digital Humanities work generally, funding is obviously an important remit of the dataset. At the time of writing, we are still deciding the best approach to this information. The following are some headline figures. Of the 141 Research_Projects we were able to ascertain funder information for 127 entities. Of the remaining 14 entities, 3 were student projects and funding information was not considered applicable. In terms of count (i.e., the number of projects funded), the most significant Irish funder of Digital Humanities research is the IRC, with 30% (42) of Research_Project entities being either fully or partially funded by this funding agency. The funding amount was not available for over half of these entities (75). Financial information is particularly limited for entities funded by Irish funding agencies, and it is difficult to say what – if any – meaningful information can be derived from the data as it stands. For example, it would be valuable to know the total IRC contribution to Digital Humanities focused research and to assess how it compares to the contribution of other funding agencies. Information relating to EU-funded projects is more readily available through the CORDIS website. Over one fifth (29, 22.83%) of the Research_Projects with funder information received EU project funding including 6 prestigious European Research Council grants with a total EU contribution €11,358,419.

With this discussion in mind, and considering the aforementioned challenges encountered when using the IRC Awardees database as a data source for this type of study, we would suggest a number of changes to how the IRC might better represent their various funded projects and activities, including details of the IRC contribution. Whilst we recognise that the amorphous nature Digital Humanities means that it is unlikely that all activities that we might consider to be Digital Humanities or Digital Humanities adjacent would be labelled as such, details such as “Project Objectives” would certainly help when attempting to identify relevant activities.

5. Conclusion and Further Directions

The study of the landscape of a diverse and multimodal field such as digital humanities is not a straight-forward task. As with any survey, there are many things not represented, overrep-

¹⁰ The difference in the total figures can be accounted to by the fact that one entity, the PhD in Digital Arts and Humanities at National University of Ireland, Galway, is labelled as both Digital Humanities and Digital Arts.

resented, or underrepresented and I have attempted to highlight these limitations throughout this contribution. As it stands, the dataset is skewed towards the humanities and Trinity College Dublin. It is hoped that input from the Digital Humanities community will counteract many of these shortcomings. To that end, we have created an OSF repository¹¹.

The immediate application of this data is a resource for the Digital Humanities in Ireland Landscape Report. However, we hope that this dataset will be of use to those who might also want to study the landscape of Digital Humanities either locally, nationally or internationally. At the very least, the records of the webpages for the various entities provide a snapshot of how Irish Digital Humanities is represented at the time of writing. Ideally, the dataset will serve as resource for members of the Irish community by facilitating enhanced networking and collaboration.

In conducting this research, the dual challenges of identification and definition have repeatedly emerged. Digital Humanities entities are difficult to find if you don't know where to look. Whilst the various funding authorities could certainly do more to facilitate this kind of research, there is need for an inventory specific to Digital Humanities research and activities. The development and maintenance of a comprehensive information base about the Irish Digital Humanities landscape would support the optimal use of existing and more considered development of future resources and advance the state of the art. Integration of this information by decisionmakers would aid better strategic planning and enable a coherent and strategy-led approach to future research policy and funding. Further recommendations regarding the shape and size of such a database and whose remit it fall under will be made in the final report.

Irrespective of what data is collected, how it is collected and by whom, it is evident that Irish Digital Humanities is presently thriving, and a regional Digital Humanities Association would be a welcome addition to the landscape of Digital Humanities in Ireland.

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The Digitisation of Irish Manuscripts: Beyond and Beneath the Visible Image

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Abstract:

This paper outlines the indebtedness of current digital capture, processing and display of Gaelic manuscripts to scholarly innovators and pioneers of the nineteenth century. It then reviews highlights of the deep-digitization project, Irish Script on Screen (<<http://www.isos.dias.ie>>), which was launched in 1999 and continues today. It is shown how current developments in spectroscopy and multi-spectral imaging allow us to complement and build upon traditional digital techniques and display.

Keywords: Lithography, Manuscript Digitization, Multi-spectral Imaging, Photozincography, Spectroscopy

The digital revolution is a relatively recent phenomenon. Yet digital representation and communication are now so all-pervasive, in all their facets, that it is difficult for many of us – not just the digital generations born in the 1990s and the 2000s – to imagine how society coped in the pre-digital era. The comparison with the effect of the advent of moveable type to the West in the fifteenth century is valid, though the speed at which digital technology has advanced has been much greater than that of the printing-press.

With regard to digital reproductions of the written word, it would be wrong to view those representations as a complete break with what went before. As is well known, printed books replicated the style, layout and format of the manuscripts that preceded and that remained in parallel with them until well into the early-modern era. It is worth remembering, for example, that the array of fonts available to today's computer user and document creator is merely a reflex of the scripts of medieval times. Despite their apparently sudden and disruptive nature, all revolutions are to varying extents informed by and derivative of what went before, and their lineage is generally traceable.

In the case of the digitisation of Irish manuscripts this lineage encompasses early efforts to reproduce in print the written word

exactly as it is found in form and appearance in any given source. In the context of the Gaelic manuscript tradition, we can trace this shared motivation back to representations of the Gaelic alphabet and manuscript contractions in early printed books, particularly in the font sponsored by Elizabeth I, from which the first book in Gaelic typeface was printed in 1571 (Ó Kearnaigh 1571). As regards the facsimile reproduction of Gaelic manuscripts, whether individual passages, pages or whole books, there is an important continuity in evidence from the late eighteenth century down to the twentieth century¹. The employment of the latest technological innovations – lithography in particular – is a feature of this continuity. Such facsimile reproduction was at times accompanied by diplomatic transcripts of some of the ‘specimens’ of Gaelic script, beginning with the pioneering work of Thomas Astle (1784, facing p. 128) and continuing in the nineteenth century with the work of scholars such as Eugene O’Curry (1861, 649-664 with plates).

Facsimile reproduction took a significant leap forward in the 1870s with the publication of lithographic reproductions of three of the great vernacular manuscripts of the late medieval period: *Leabhar na hUidhre* (1870), the *Leabhar Breac* (1872-1876) and the *Book of Leinster* (1880). These facsimiles were produced by the Royal Irish Academy, initially under the supervision of John Gilbert but after a breakdown in his health the work was supervised by Robert Atkinson. The work of transcription and calligraphy for these facsimiles was carried out by one of the last of the traditional scribes, certainly the last capable of reproducing the script of the medieval manuscripts. This was Seosamh Ó Longáin, of the famous Cork family of poets (Ó Conchúir 1982, 149-158; O’Neill 2018, 161-174), whose work on the facsimiles was described by Standish Hayes O’Grady as “noble monuments of Irish penmanship” (O’Grady 1892, xxvi). Ó Longáin’s scribal work for the facsimiles was symbolic of the transition that was now occurring from script to print in the Gaelic tradition, and that would become absolute in the short space of a few decades after this.

Contemporary with these facsimiles was the work of John Gilbert for the *Facsimiles of National Manuscripts* series, in this case the *National Manuscripts of Ireland*, published between 1874 and 1884. Printed on elephant paper and using the reproductive technology of photozincography developed by the Ordnance Survey, this project reproduced, over five parts, images of sample pages of manuscripts from all eras and traditions of the Irish manuscript – monastic, secular, Anglo-Norman, personal and public – most in their actual size. These images were accompanied by commentary, transcriptions and translations. For the transcription and translation of Irish-language material, Gilbert was again indebted to Seosamh Ó Longáin.

The *Facsimiles of National Manuscripts of Ireland* was an enormous undertaking, and while photographic reproductions of Gaelic manuscripts would soon follow, and would continue into the twentieth century, nothing could match the breadth of scope and scholarship in Gilbert’s work. When one considers his extraordinary multi-volume output in other areas – for example, the history of Dublin (Gilbert 1854-1859) or the narrative of the 1641 ‘rebellion’ (Gilbert 1882-1891) – one must wonder at how such a figure could be largely forgotten today. There are very good reasons for regarding John Gilbert as the forefather of Irish manuscript digitisation.

1. *Irish Script on Screen (ISOS)*

ISOS was Ireland’s first manuscript digitisation project, and having passed its twentieth anniversary, it can now lay claim to being one of the longest-running projects of its type in

¹ A comprehensive list of pre-1913 publications is given in Best 1913, 63-67.

the world. It drew its remit from the statutory obligation of the School of Celtic Studies at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies to investigate, edit and publish extant manuscript material in the Irish language. Building on the techniques and expertise developed by Dr David Cooper at the Celtic Manuscripts project of the Bodleian Library in the 1990s, ISOS was in its planning stages in 1997 and 1998, led by Professor Pádraig de Brún. The project launched in 1999 under the directorship of the present writer, when the first fully digitised manuscript to go on display was the twelfth-century Book of Leinster² – one of the three manuscripts that had been reproduced by Seosamh Ó Longáin over 100 years earlier. This was followed shortly afterwards by *Leabhar na hUidhre*³, the oldest manuscript to be written entirely in Irish (c. 1100) and the first ever Gaelic manuscript to be facsimilised completely. With the digitisation of *Leabhar na hUidhre*, the lineal connection between ISOS and the nineteenth-century pioneers, Seosamh Ó Longáin and John Gilbert, was secured.

The project uses a 5 x 4 view-camera with a digital back. Manuscripts are scanned at a resolution of 600dpi. Both camera and manuscript are positioned on a specially adapted book-cradle, for minimum handling, optimum calibration and maximum capture capacity. The object of the project has always been the high-resolution digitisation of Gaelic manuscripts, cover to cover, and their display, free of charge, on a dedicated website. Though technology is at its heart, from its inception it was intended to be scholar-driven at all times, which had important consequences for everything from target-selection to quality control. Philosophically, the project's vision was one of the liberation and the democratization of learning as it applied to primary sources for Gaelic literature. In its early days ISOS was regarded as innovative and pioneering, though viewed as disruptive (before that became a positive quality) by funding agencies and a small minority of scholars. The impact that ISOS had on scholarship was immediate, however, and was to grow exponentially over the following years as content continued to be added. In common with all digital technology and resources it has now become a fact of life, to the extent that acknowledgements to ISOS in presentations and publications are now regularly omitted.

A history of the evolution of the ISOS project is of interest in its own right, as a window on early digital activities and attitudes in Ireland and among Irish scholars and academic administrators, and it also has something to contribute to the story of the digital revolution worldwide⁴. Those who worked on the project over the first ten years were ever conscious of the pioneering nature of the work in which they were engaged, as manuscript after manuscript came to life in digital format. When the “alarums and excursions” of the initial stages had passed, and the project eventually came to be recognized as a core-funded activity of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, new targets continued to excite and impress as their codicological, palaeographical and textual properties were captured.

The work of the project was and is collaborative. Partnerships were created between ISOS and repositories that had significant holdings of manuscripts. This included the libraries of the Royal Irish Academy, the National Library of Ireland, Trinity College Dublin, and the National University of Ireland. Partnerships external to Ireland were also created, particularly with the

² Trinity College Dublin (TCD), MS 1339, <www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/TCD/TCD_MS_1339/english/catalogue.html> (05/2022).

³ Royal Irish Academy (RIA), MS 23 E 25, <www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/RIA/RIA_MS_23_E_25/english/catalogue.html> (05/2022).

⁴ A framework for such a history is laid out in Ó Macháin 2010a.

National Library of Scotland and, latterly, with the Royal Library in Brussels⁵. Entered into in the true spirit of enquiry and mutual benefit, these partnerships are crucial to the achievement of the goals and the realisation of the vision of ISOS, and have served the project very well over the years.

Each new digitised manuscript was a highlight in itself, as though we were seeing these books for the first time, which in some respects was true. They were certainly being seen in new light, and the benefits to scholarship and to the wider public were immediate. While the precious pre-1600 Gaelic vellum tradition was given priority for digital targeting from the start, paper manuscripts were also included in the programme when the opportunity presented itself. Two of these stand out today for their uniqueness and also for the contribution that their digitisation made to scholarship and public appreciation.

One of these is the book known as Elizabeth's Primer⁶. It is a slight yet elegant oblong manuscript of twelve folios measuring 126 x 168 mm. It is also an eloquent book as it contains an appeal for and description of the Irish language, and is thought to have been prepared for Elizabeth I for her visit to Cambridge University in 1564. The author was Christopher Nugent (1544-1602), Baron Delvin, who was one of a cohort of Irish students at the University at the time. Its creation occurred in the wider context of Elizabethan policy of violent antagonism towards the Irish people and their language, coupled with the precarious position of the author and his family in Co. Westmeath, an Anglo-Norman family immersed in Irish culture as patrons and practitioners and yet expected to uphold loyalty to the Crown (Ó Macháin 2012). The digitisation of this manuscript by ISOS was yet another link with John Gilbert, who had reproduced six pages from it in 1882 (Gilbert 1874-1884, IV.1, xxxiv-xl, Item XXII). The Primer was digitised by ISOS in early 2011 and, in addition to being displayed on the project website, the images were used for the creation of a facsimile of the book that was presented – with no sense of irony – to Elizabeth II during the historic royal visit to Ireland in May 2011.

The Primer had been in private possession until 1999, and the second paper manuscript to be mentioned here remains in private possession. This is the Book of the O'Connor Don, a manuscript written at Ostend between January and December of 1631⁷. At 826 pages, it is the single most important source for the major Gaelic literary genre of the late middle ages, bardic poetry⁸. It is also symbolic of the depth of literary activity among the exiled Irish in the Low Countries in the first half of the seventeenth century. The scribe of the Book was an Irish soldier, Aodh Ó Dochartaigh, and his patron was Captain Somhairle Mac Domhnaill; the same combination is found in another manuscript, *Duanaire Finn*⁹, written at Ostend four years earlier, which was preserved in the Franciscan library at St Anthony's College, Louvain, the centre of much of the literary activity among the exiles¹⁰. Probably more than any other digitised manuscript, the capture and display of the Book of the O'Connor Don in digital format in 2008 demonstrated the true spirit of the ISOS project, as the manuscript and its contents were immediately accessible by everyone, having previously been only available in photostat form in two libraries, or by appointment with its owners. The digitisation of the Book of the

⁵ A full list of collaborating institutions can be seen here: <www.isos.dias.ie/english/index2.html> (05/2022).

⁶ Farmleigh House, Dublin. Available at: <https://www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/MARSH/Irish_Primer/english/catalogue.html> (05/2022).

⁷ Clonalis House, Co. Roscommon. Available at: <https://www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/CLON/CLON_The_Book_of_the_O_Conor_Don/english/catalogue.html> (05/2022).

⁸ See description and discussion by many authors in Ó Macháin 2010b.

⁹ University College Dublin MS A 20 (b).

¹⁰ <www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/UCD/UCD_MS_A_20/english/catalogue.html> (05/2022).

O’Conor Don in turn generated an amount of scholarly activity, particularly in the work of published transcriptions, which, whether acknowledged or not, crystalized the impact of the ISOS project on Irish scholarship.

The Irish manuscript tradition is divided between the vellum tradition of the full-time professional scholars, who functioned until the Elizabethan conquest made it impossible for them to do so; and the part-time scholars writing on paper during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries¹¹. As stated already, manuscripts of the vellum tradition formed the core targets of the ISOS project at its foundation, with the intention, now being pursued, of moving into the paper collections when the capture of the vellum targets had been completed. It is in the context of these vellum manuscripts that we can now speak about developments post-digitisation.

Building on the experience of ISOS, and now outside of that project, since 2019 the current writer has been pursuing research enquiring into the materiality of the vellum manuscripts: their make-up, the vellum itself and the inks and pigments employed in writing the texts. This has involved going beyond single-format digitisation and establishing a protocol that uses Multi-Spectral Imaging (MSI), X-Ray Fluorescence analysis (XRF), and Fourier-Transform Infra-red spectroscopy (FTIR), combined with traditional codicological and palaeographical methodologies. This work has been made possible by an Advanced Laureate research-grant from the Irish Research Council, which has allowed collaborative partnerships to be created with scientists in the Tyndall National Institute, Cork, and the Library of Congress, Washington¹². Partnerships have also been formed with repositories such as the library of the Royal Irish Academy and the National Library of Ireland.

While this research is on-going, and in many respects is still at a relatively early stage, some benefits can be seen already. These promising advances are best explained by linking the work to some of the highlights of the ISOS project among the vellum manuscripts.

2. *The Stowe Missal: the Preparation of Vellum*

In 2001, Irish Script in Screen digitised the Stowe Missal¹³, an eighth-century composite manuscript with ninth-century additions¹⁴. At 13.5 cm in height, this book is regarded as belonging to the category of Pocket Gospel, relics of the early Church in Ireland that were distinguished by their portable nature and visualised as being carried from church to church by their owners or users (McGurk 1956; Ó Riain 2009). The manuscript contains the Gospel of St John, prayers and litanies for the mass, all in Latin, and, exceptionally, a tract on the mass in Irish, one of the earliest examples of prose in the Irish language.

Many medieval Gaelic manuscripts only reached the sanctuary and security of a library in relatively modern times; prior to that their history was one of endurance and survival, and quite a number never made it past the seventeenth century, during which time it is estimated that the greatest loss of books took place (Ó Corráin 2011-2012). Beyond the fact that it contains a reference to St Maol Ruain, which is interpreted as aligning it with the ascetic traditions of the Monastery of Tallaght and elsewhere, little if anything of the early history of the Stowe Missal

¹¹ For an excellent overview of the tradition see O’Neill 2014; the interface between vellum and paper is addressed in Ó Macháin 2019.

¹² <www.inksandskins.org> (05/2022).

¹³ RIA MS D ii 3.

¹⁴ <www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/RIA/RIA_MS_D_ii_3/english/catalogue.html> (05/2022).

is known, except for one point. That is, that in common with other significant books, it was enshrined within a reliquary – a *cumhdach* or bookshrine – in the eleventh century, confirming its status as a revered object. The shrine was commissioned by the abbot of the monastery of Lorrha, Co. Tipperary, and paid for by a local lord, with the names of two powerful overkings also inscribed on the box (Ó Riain 1991).

We know that the shrine was refurbished in the fourteenth century, but after that we hear nothing of either it or the missal until 1735, when it was discovered in its *cumhdach* (reliquary) at the castle of Lackeen, Co. Tipperary, five miles from Lorrha (O’Rahilly 1926-1928). Although this tradition has since been called into question (Sharpe 2015), it is known that the manuscript subsequently came into the possession of the Dukes of Buckingham at Stowe, England, and was sold with the rest of the Stowe manuscripts to the Earl of Ashburnham in 1849, before being returned to Ireland in the 1880s by the British Government as part of the Ashburnham collection. The Missal is held in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy, while its reliquary has become part of the collections of the National Museum of Ireland.

As was the case with so many other books, up until the digitisation of the Stowe Missal a complete view of this unique relic of the liturgy of the early Irish Church had not been available. In addition, the details of the reliquary that housed the manuscript from the eleventh to the nineteenth century were known only from black-and-white sketches and photographs. ISOS was able to rectify both situations in that, while digitising in the Royal Irish Academy, the reliquary was delivered to our work station by staff of the National Library of Ireland, thus enabling the shrine to be photographed also, and the book to be placed within the reliquary for the first time in over a hundred years. A photograph on the ISOS website records this historic, if temporary, re-unification¹⁵.

Current research allows us to go beyond the visible images of this manuscript and to begin to look at what lies beneath the words and sentences. A simple example will suffice to illustrate this point and to show its application to manuscript history in general. A familiar feature of the preparation of all skins for writing was the scraping of the hair and flesh sides. There is no vellum manuscript that does not bear the signs of this scraping, generally in areas such as the margins that have not been written on. To begin to assess and measure such marks a view beneath the writing needs to be obtained. In the case of the Missal, the vellum and ink respond well to MSI analysis towards the infrared end of the spectrum, producing information as illustrated (Figure 1), revealing the extent of the scrape marks and presenting us with a view of this eighth-century Missal prior to writing¹⁶.

¹⁵ <https://www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/RIA/RIA_MS_D_ii_3/small_jpgs/149.jpg> (05/2022). The results of this digital success were first publicised by the present writer and Colin Dunn (digitiser) at the Roscrea Spring Conference, April 2002.

¹⁶ The potential of infrared photography for the investigation of early-Irish manuscripts was demonstrated many years earlier by Françoise Henry (Henry 1960, Plates I, IV, VI).

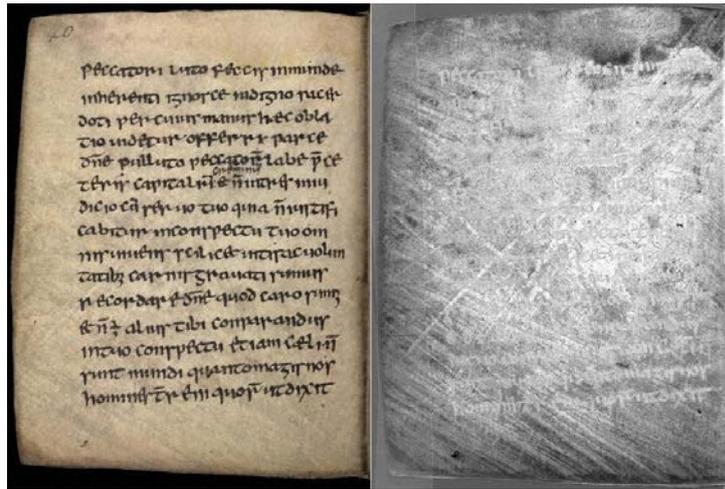


Figure 1 – RIA MS D ii 3 (The Stowe Missal), f. 31v, visible image (ISOS) and MSI (Dr Fenella France)

3. *The Book of Uí Mhaine: Seeing Behind the Stains*

In the years 2001 to 2003 ISOS made available high-resolution digital facsimiles of a number of manuscripts rightly regarded as numbered among the Great Books of Ireland (Anon. 1967). The Stowe Missal and *Leabhar na hUidhre* have already been mentioned. Also worthy of mention are significant manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, such as the Book of Ballymote¹⁷, the *Leabhar Breac*¹⁸ and the Book of Lecan¹⁹. These manuscripts shared the common feature of being *seanchas* manuscripts, that is manuscripts containing anthologies of texts, both prose and verse, that were regarded as constituting the matter of Ireland. These are texts such as origin legends, place-lore and etymology, pseudo-history, genealogies, hagiography and biblical and classical literature. The manuscripts also had in common that they had all been facsimilised previously, Ballymote (the first Irish manuscript to be photographically reproduced) and the *Leabhar Breac* in the nineteenth century, the Book of Lecan in the twentieth²⁰. In contrast to the pocket-size of the Stowe Missal, these are large manuscripts that challenged the ability of ISOS to digitise them at 600dpi, with camera and cradle just managing to achieve the necessary depth of field, which would not be a challenge today with the inclusion of blending features in processing software and the development of alternative large-format digitising hardware.

These three fourteenth- and fifteenth-century books, therefore, were Great Books in extent, content and dimensions. A fourth manuscript, the Book of Uí Mhaine²¹, dated to *c.* 1390, was also digitised by ISOS in 2002²². At 42 cm in height, this manuscript is one of the largest sur-

¹⁷ RIA MS 23 P 12.

¹⁸ RIA MS 23 P 16.

¹⁹ RIA MS 23 P 2.

²⁰ *Leabhar Breac* (Dublin 1872-1876); *The Book of Ballymote* (Dublin 1887); *The Book of Lecan* (Dublin 1937).

²¹ RIA MS D ii 1.

²² <www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/RIA/RIA_MS_D_ii_1/english/catalogue.html> (05/2022).

living Irish manuscripts, making its digital capture one of the highlights of the work of ISOS. It takes its current name from the fact that it was compiled towards the end of the fourteenth century in the interest of the Í Cheallaigh, lords of the territory of Í Mhaine in east Galway and south Roscommon. It shares many of the features of the contemporary books referred to already, including the fact that prior to digitisation it had already existed in printed facsimile²³. It is, again, a *seanchas*-manuscript, but is distinguished from the other manuscripts by the fact that, although only half of the manuscript survives today, its 157 leaves are remarkable for the variety of texts that they contain, particularly in the area of traditional poetry (Ó Macháin forthcoming).

The manuscript presents an anthology of virtually all varieties of poetry that were held in regard by the learned classes in medieval Ireland: place-lore, genealogical and synchronistic verse, gnomic verse, narrative verse, religious verse. When more intact than it is today it also contained a copy of the great Fenian prosimetrum, *Agallamh na Seanórach*, but this text is now missing. The Book of Uí Mhaine also contains the earliest collection of bardic poetry to survive in a *seanchas*-manuscript, including poetry by Giolla Brighde Albanach and Muireadhach Albanach Ó Dálaigh, two thirteenth-century poets whose fame would endure.

Such comprehensive representation of poetry may be taken as reflecting the literary taste of the Ó Ceallaigh patrons, but they are also a function of the interests of the numerous scribes who worked on the Book (O’Sullivan 1989). Some of these were specialists in genealogy, others in the traditions of the lore of places, but over-riding them all was the main scribe, who signs himself Adam Cusin, whose penmanship is in evidence throughout the manuscript. He is one of two of the manuscript’s scribes whose name is known to us. The other is Faelán Mac an Ghabhann na Scéal, who uniquely wrote a stand-alone gathering for Muircheartach Ó Ceallaigh, Bishop of Clonfert and later Archbishop of Tuam²⁴. This gathering of four bifolia is the most ornate in the entire manuscript and speaks to the combination of scribe and artist in one person, for analysis suggests that Faelán combined these two talents that, in other manuscripts, were sometime allotted to separate individuals.

This analysis, primarily carried out using XRF technology, has enabled us not just to go beyond the visible images of Faelán’s gathering, but also to create a library of ink and pigment signatures for the Book of Uí Mhaine as a whole. One might add that we are also enabled to improve on the readings presented by the visible images. The Book of Uí Mhaine, in common with so many manuscripts of the vellum era, has suffered badly in places from the effects of water-damage, with dampness reacting with the collagen in the animal skin to affect the legibility of the book in many places. Using a data-analysis technique known as Principal Component Analysis (PCA) (Jolliffe, Cadima 2016), however, it is possible in many cases to enhance the MSI images and restore the text beneath these stains. One small example will suffice to illustrate the results.

In a narrative poem on the multiple talents of the great Irish God, Lugh Lámhfhada, occurring towards the end of the Book of Uí Mhaine as it survives today, one part of the margin is obscured by a stain that extends into the text, encroaching on the text of lines 155 v.26-33, obscuring parts of verses 15-17 of the poem. A diplomatic transcript of the text at this point is as follows:

²³ *The Book of Uí Maine* (Dublin 1941).

²⁴ RIA MS D ii 1, ff. 48-55.

adbul // flaitamnais mar thomles tlacht. ain[..
 Treidi flatha refreagra . gan omon gan imeagla
 agus oinmideacht. // gan lea[t]hbreath gid lu[..
 Treidhi airdrig luaiter lind. geilli nageimlib go grin[..
 alith . tath tuath agus sit coigrich. // brig agus [...]
 Coma 7 comdluth catha. treidhi gac urrig fl[..
 cudh is blad. iscosnam eirgach aenfear. // [...]
 Treidi rondaire iarnuair. airem coitchend ar lin slu

The metrical characteristics of the poem allow an editor of this text to make a confident guess as to the obscured portions of many of the words. As Figure 2 shows, however, PCA allows us to go beneath the stain and to remove any doubt as to the restoration, and to supplement the transcription from the visible images as follows:

adbul // flaitamnais marthomles tlacht. aines
 Treidi flatha refreagra. gan omon gan imeagla.
 agus oinmideacht. // gan leathbreath gid luach
 Treidhi airdrig luaiter lind. geilli nageimlib go grind.
 alith. tath tuath agus sith coigrich. // brig agus **bros**
 Coma agus comdluth catha. treidhi gac urrig **flatha**.
 cudh isblad. iscosnam eirgach aenfear. // **agh**.
 Treidi rondaire iarnuair. airem coitchend ar lin slu

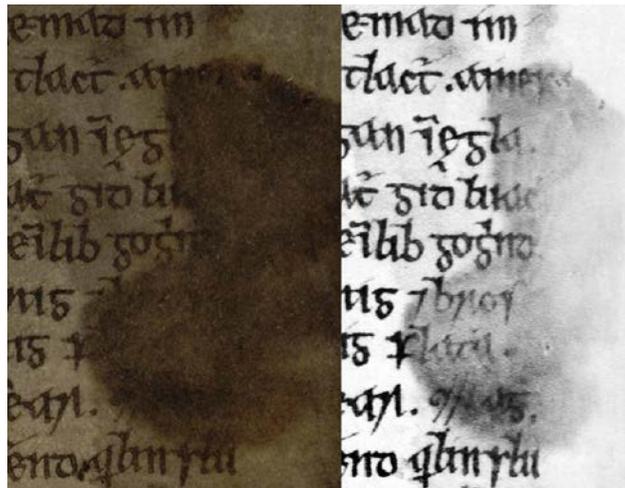


Figure 2 – RIA MS D ii 1 (Book of Uí Mhaine,) f. 155v26-33, visible image (ISOS), PCA (Meghan Wilson)

4. *The Book of Lismore: Fingerprinting Scripts*

The last Gaelic manuscript to be facsimilised as part of the process pioneered by Seosamh Ó Longáin and John Gilbert in the nineteenth century was the Book of Lismore, which was

published in facsimile in 1950²⁵. Together with the Book of the O’Conor Don mentioned earlier, at the time of its digitisation in 2010 this manuscript was one of a small number of very valuable manuscripts remaining in private possession, but in 2020 it was donated to University College Cork by its owners, the Chatsworth Settlement Trust, at the behest of the Duke of Devonshire.

The Book of Lismore is a vellum manuscript, written in the late fifteenth century in Co. Cork for the Lord of Carbery, Fínghean Mac Carthaigh Riabhach. If the Book of Uí Mhaine is distinguished by its eclectic anthology of poetry, the Book of Lismore is remarkable for its collection of tales, native and translated, religious and secular, many of which are linked by themes of kingship and by the element of the magical and the fantastic (Ó Macháin 2021). Among the codicological points of interest are the additions made to the manuscript by nineteenth-century scribes in Cork, following the discovery of the Book during the renovation of Lismore Castle, Co. Waterford, in 1814. The most prominent addition is the inclusion of a poem addressed to the Book by the Cork scribe Donnchadh Ó Floinn (*c.* 1760-1830), which he entered on a blank page at f. 157v (Ó Macháin, 2014, 236-237). Ó Floinn or his colleagues also coloured initial letters in parts of the manuscript and may have drawn some of them also. One of the central non-textual research questions pertaining to the Book, therefore, is to distinguish between initials that are original to the book and those that are nineteenth-century additions.

This analytical work has begun at University College Cork where we are using XRF to establish ink fingerprints for the nineteenth-century and fifteenth-century scripts using a triangulation process first developed by scientists in Berlin (Malzer, Hahn, Kanngiesser 2004). The initial results of this analysis are very promising. From just looking at the combined spectra for fifteenth- and nineteenth-century inks from two sampling areas, as shown in Figure 3, we can see a clear differentiation in terms of relative quantities of iron, and in the relative quantities of the trace elements copper and zinc. Spectra such as these should provide the basis for conclusive results as the research progresses. Again, without the preliminary, foundational digitisation provided by the ISOS project, this analysis would be much more difficult.

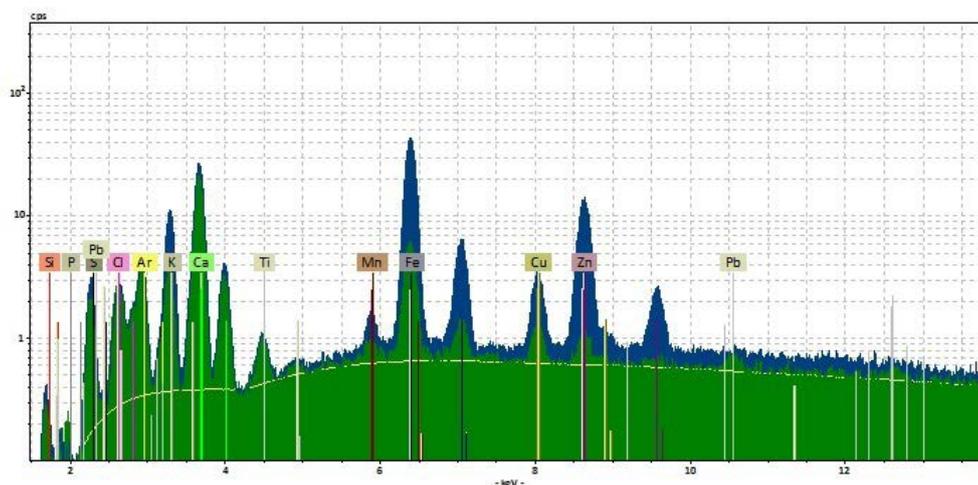


Figure 3 – Combined XRF spectra from the Book of Lismore: f. 132r (blue), f. 157v (green)
(Veronica Biolcati and Anna Hoffmann)

²⁵ *The Book of Mac Carthaigh Riabhach, otherwise the Book of Lismore* (Dublin 1950).

5. Conclusion

Irish Script on Screen was Ireland's first manuscript digitisation project and is still thriving today. It was begun when digitisation was in its infancy and it remains the only continuous deep-digitisation project in Ireland. It was not designed to present highlights among library collections, nor to create surrogates for fragile artefacts, though both of these features are of course incidental and important outcomes of the project. It was created by scholars as a service for their peers, or for anyone with an interest in Irish script or the ability to read that script. The simplicity and clarity of its objectives, and the fact that it was scholar-driven, ensured that it overcame many challenges – not the least being the conversion of the unconvinced – to become an essential tool for a broad family of Irish-language and Celtic scholars and enthusiasts.

Within a period of just over twenty years, ISOS has gone from the periphery to the centre of Irish-language scholarship, while, somewhat paradoxically, achieving a status of acceptance that renders it today more a commonplace than a novelty. This is partly the result of the worldwide digital revolution, and partly because many other digital resources are now available in the area of Irish-language studies, which means that ISOS is now very much *primus inter pares* in a suite of resources.

Such has been the pace of progress that in some respects ISOS can be viewed as a relic of the time in which it was created: this is soon to be addressed by its conversion to the IIIF standard. More importantly, the consistent quality of the high-resolution images forms a basis for further exploration of Gaelic manuscripts using other analytic technologies, the practical uses of some of which have been outlined here. It is a testament to the quality of the work of ISOS, and to the durability of the digitisation principles established by the project in the late 1990s, that we are enabled now to advance beyond the visible and use other technologies to explore what lies beneath the written text. Rather than being viewed as a development disconnected from the generation and display of the visible image, the present-day use of other technologies to investigate Irish manuscripts should be seen as an extension of a remarkable evolution that began in the nineteenth century with Seosamh Ó Longáin and John Gilbert, and continued through the twentieth century, culminating in the establishment of ISOS over a hundred years later.

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Incrementally Does It: New Perspectives and New Opportunities in Early Medieval Digital Humanities

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Abstract:

This article engages with the Digital Humanities as they relate to the field of early medieval textual analysis in Ireland. The starting point for this piece is the Irish Research Council New Foundations “Early Medieval Digital Humanities” Project, coordinated by the author in 2019. These workshops fostered discussion and collaboration between two IRC Laureate Projects, “Ireland and Carolingian Brittany: Texts and Transmission”, led by Dr. Jacopo Bisagni (Classics, NUIG), and “Irish Foundations of Carolingian Europe”, led by Dr. Immo Warntjes (History, TCD), and numerous international scholars and experts in the field of early medieval DH. In addition to reporting some of the outcomes and insights of this project, this article also offers a selective survey of ongoing work in this field.

Keywords: Computus, Digital Editing, Early Medieval Latin, Exegesis, Philology

Dans l'espace illimité que la technologie offre aujourd'hui à l'inscription,
il convient de suspendre la constellation changeante de l'écrit médiéval.
(Cerquiglini 1989, 114)

1. Introduction

This contribution to the present issue's call for an exploration of the development of Digital Literatures (DL) and Digital Humanities (DH) in Ireland focuses on a methodological process rather than on a specific area of research: the process of first identifying the digital methodologies and resources available to scholars of early medieval texts and manuscripts, assessing their utility to a given set of source materials and research questions, and finally identifying those that can pragmatically be integrated

into the scope of the research project¹. This topic may at first seem either overly specific (in that it reflects the needs of a specific project) or conversely, overly broad (in terms of DH practices); however, by performing this process as part of a peer-based forum, a multitude of both opportunities and obstacles were revealed that continue to be encountered by researchers engaging in DH in early medieval textual studies, and indeed, in many cases, by those beyond it as well.

The starting point for this narrative was the awarding of Irish Research Council (IRC) Laureate funding to two distinct but closely related research projects: “Ireland and Carolingian Brittany: Texts and Transmission” (IrCaBriTT), led by Dr. Jacopo Bisagni in Classics at NUI Galway, and “The Irish Foundations of Carolingian Europe – The Case of Calendrical Science (Computus)” (IFCE), led by Dr. Immo Warntjes in History at Trinity College Dublin. Though differing in their goals and approaches to their subject matter and sources, both projects are engaged in a detailed analysis of early medieval texts and manuscripts. As a result, the respective members of each team were eager to come together and collaborate. Against this backdrop, an additional opportunity arose with the 2018 call for the IRC “New Foundations” grant. This funding included a stream dedicated to “Knowledge Exchange for Impact” helping scholars at various career stages to collaborate and maximise the value of their individual expertise and experience. Coordinated by myself, a proposal was put together to this end, comprising four days of workshops incorporating technical training, seminars, and presentations.

Entitled “Early Medieval Digital Humanities” (EMDH), the programme for this successfully funded project consisted of two principal events: the first took place in TCD in March 2019, it began with Dr. Warntjes’s workshop on the history of calendrical science, of relevance to both projects, and was followed by one in which the developer of the *Classical Text Editor* software, Dr. Stefan Hagel, brought the participants through the varied functionalities of this specifically designed programme². The broad-ranging applications of the software include critical editing, but also palaeographical features, phylogenetic analysis, and TEI XML markup. The second event comprised two consecutive days of workshops and presentations hosted at the Moore Institute at NUIG in September 2019. On the first day, a series of workshops presented preliminary introductions to and training in the use of TEI XML, including the use of the oXygen XML Editor, the open access *Edition Visualisation Technology* software, and digital project planning³. This training was offered by Dr. Justin Tonra (English, NUIG) and Mr. David Kelly (Digital Humanities Manager, Moore Institute, NUIG). In addition, we were also fortunate enough to have in attendance Dr. Pádraic Moran (Classics, NUIG) and Mr Jean-Paul Rehr (Université Lumière Lyon 2, CIHAM) whose extensive experience offered invaluable insights and additional perspectives on TEI and the use of XML databases in particular. The second day was a discursive roundtable-style workshop. Each of the participants presented an aspect of their work to date or a current project in progress, often focussing on current and past challenges faced in their work⁴. Projects represented at the workshop included Dr. Evina Steinová’s *Innovating*

¹ First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Ms. Judith ter Horst, who assisted significantly in the design of this paper the development of several key ideas. I would also particularly like to thank Mr. David Kelly, Dr. Immo Warntjes, Dr. Jacopo Bisagni, and all of the participants of the “Early Medieval Digital Humanities” Project for sharing their time, expertise, and thoughts.

² <<http://cte.oeaw.ac.at/>> (05/2022).

³ <<https://tei-c.org/>> (05/2022); <<https://www.oxygenxml.com/>> (05/2022); <<http://evt.labcd.unipi.it/>> (05/2022).

⁴ The programme of presentations comprised Jacopo Bisagni (IrCaBriTT, Classics, NUIG), Sarah Corrigan (IrCaBriTT, Classics, NUIG), Paula Harrison (IrCaBriTT, Classics, NUIG), Judith ter Horst (IFCE, History, TCD), Tobit Loevenich (IFCE, History, TCD), Christian Schweizer (IFCE, History, TCD), Immo Warntjes (IFCE, History, TCD), Pádraic Moran (Classics, NUIG), Jean Paul Rehr (*de Heresi*, Université Lumière Lyon 2, CIHAM), Evina

Knowledge, Mr. Thom Snijder's *Computus.lat*, and Prof. Dr. Mariken Teeuwen's Marginal Scholarship Database. The "EMDH" Project as a whole was closed with a roundtable discussion of topics and themes raised throughout the various stages of the workshops. In addition to training in technical skills and software use, a key component of the "EMDH" Project was that it allowed practitioners in early medieval DH to learn from the experiences, both positive and negative, successful and unsuccessful, of their peers. As in the case of many projects in DH, much of the work that early medieval researchers are endeavouring to accomplish in the digital sphere is ground-breaking in some way, and there is often no one clear path forward, which makes it vital to learn from the endeavours and insights of those that have gone before.

This article is specifically concerned with the field of early medieval texts of the Latin West, for the most part sources written in what is now western Europe between 600 and 1000. As is explained below, it is notable that the analysis of medieval texts in both their material and cultural contexts is an area of research that calls out for engagement with DH tools and methodologies, as print editions and traditional approaches often fail to capture the nuanced complexity of these sources. Consequently, early medieval DH in Ireland has seen both advances in textual analysis through the application of and corresponding advances in DH, driven by the work of medievalists⁵. It seems vital to first set the context by beginning with an overview of digital developments in early medieval textual analysis and then moving on to discuss the work in progress.

2. *Why Early Medieval Latin Texts?*

Although almost thirty years old, Ziolkowski's (1996) history of the study of medieval Latin literature and the challenges that it presents remains deeply relevant today⁶. Pointing out that the inherent variation and unpredictability of manuscript transmission introduces a complexity not present in printed texts, Ziolkowski argues that these sources require a distinct set of considerations:

The richness of Medieval Latin literature in both form and content cries out for a corresponding wealth of knowledge and approaches. [...] Which methods we employ will depend upon the nature of the given text and our understandings of it. [...] Much of Medieval Latin literature languishes, either poorly edited or altogether unedited, and still more has been edited but has not yet been interpreted even rudimentarily. [...] If ever a rich lode of literature existed that awaited finders and appraisers, it is Medieval Latin. (Ziolkowski 1996, 529-531)

The reasons behind the fact that "much of Medieval Latin literature languishes" are numerous. Some will be encountered in the accounts of Irish DH projects below (section 3); however, some aspects of early medieval Latin texts, their complexities, and the obstacles they present to identification, let alone editing and thorough analysis, are best exemplified by the corpora of sources that are the focus of the "IrCaBrIT" and "IFCE" Projects: calendrical science, or *computus*, and biblical exegesis. Many of these texts are still suffering the fate that Ziolkowski describes, and due to the nature of their composition and manuscript transmission, a detailed understanding of them requires a wide range of approaches.

Steinová ('Innovating Knowledge', Huygens ING), Thom Snijders (*computus.lat*), Mariken Teeuwen (Huygens ING). See also Corrigan (2019).

⁵ Note, for example, the substantial reference to medieval studies research in O'Sullivan's (2020) review of the development of DH in Ireland.

⁶ A somewhat more recent survey is Hexter, Townsend (2012).

2.1 *Computus and Biblical Exegesis*

In the beginning, medieval calendrical science, or *computus*, the Latin term by which it is known, was primarily concerned with the calculation of the date of Easter for the purposes of the Christian liturgical cycle. Key components of *computus* were the science of time-reckoning and some specific astronomical mechanics, in particular the movements and changing appearance of the moon⁷. The complicated historiography of the study of *computus* is summarised recently in Bisagni's (2020, 3-4) contribution to the *Kathleen Hughes Memorial Lecture* series. Regarding the controversy surrounding the early medieval Irish calculation of the date of Easter, a topic widely debated in the Latin West, Bisagni (*ibidem*) notes that the documents behind this calculation only began to come to light in 1985, the first, *De Ratione Computandi*, published in 1988 by Walsh, Ó Cróinín (1988, 113-213). Furthermore, an additional two principal works of Irish *computus*, integral to the later development of computistical thought throughout medieval Europe, went undiscovered or unedited until much later: the *Munich Computus*, which was first recorded by Krusch (1880), but was edited by Warntjes (2010), and the *Computus Einsidlensis*, which was discovered by Warntjes (2005-2006) and is currently being edited by as part of IFCE.

The reasons behind the late discovery and edition of these works are perhaps best exemplified by turning to one of its editors: Warntjes (2010, CCIII) enumerates the challenges of editing the *Munich Computus*, many of which are commonly encountered by scholars of early medieval sources. To begin with, the text of the sole surviving witness has been highly corrupted by numerous stages of transmission and, aside from a few section headings, there is no internal division of the text or table of contents. Warntjes (2010) points out that the copyist was not only ignorant of the details of computistical concepts, but other errors indicate that they also worked very quickly. Finally, further confusion is caused by the incorporation into the main text of what were once marginal or interlinear glosses. The unique significance of this text makes it worthy of the effort of engagement, analysis, and critical editing; however, as one might imagine, many texts remain unidentified, incorrectly catalogued, and little analysed, let alone edited as a result of these kinds of challenges, and their potential significance remains unknown.

Another interesting case study demonstrating the sometimes random ways in which corpora of such complicated and understudied texts draw scholarly attention is that of early medieval exegesis. In a 1997 article, O'Loughlin points out three aspects of early medieval exegesis that have contributed to their significant neglect: they are frequently anonymous or pseudonymous, thus lacking the distinction of a named, potentially well-known author; much early medieval exegesis was concerned with the analysis and digestions of the extensive works of the Church Fathers in the early centuries of Christianity, often seeking to abridge these texts for teaching purposes; and finally many of these works are compilations or florilegia, gathering together important elements from authoritative works and lacking the prestige of a unified text⁸. Despite the fact that this phase in exegetical composition and its manuscripts remains integral to a full understanding of the intellectual culture of the early medieval period, and indeed that much original exegesis was also composed, the scholarly bias against this corpus meant that much of it remains unstudied.

⁷ See Warntjes (2016, 2017, 2021) for introductions to early medieval *computus*.

⁸ For excellent overviews of this phase of biblical exegesis and the commentary traditions see Stansbury (1999) and Van Liere (2014, 141-158).

One exception to this was brought about by the scholar Bernard Bischoff, whose article, “Wendepunkte in der Geschichte der lateinischen Exegese im Frühmittelalter,” (1954), discussed numerous anonymous exegetical works in which he identified what he referred to as “*Irische Symptomen*” (author emphasis), or symptoms of Irish influence⁹. These distinguishing features have since been the subject of both heated debate and much misuse – as O’Loughlin (1996, 94) states, the most problematic aspect of Bischoff’s “symptoms” is the tendency of scholars to interpret the presence of one or more of these as proof of a text’s Irish origins, without further investigation¹⁰. Regardless of any debate around the article and its reception, what is entirely unambiguous is that the catalogue of texts that Bischoff presented in the article has drawn an exceptional degree of scholarly attention, including the *Scriptores Celtigenae* subsidiary of the eminent *Corpus Christianorum* series of editions by Brepols¹¹. As Stansbury points out, “it not only provided a framework for studying an under-studied field, it also provided a roadmap for future scholars to begin working on previously unpublished texts” (2016, 119). Irrespective of the conclusions drawn on the Irish nature of the texts in question, the work that was accomplished as a result of Bischoff’s article has and continues to advance the field of early medieval exegesis as a whole.

2.2 Philology: the Old, the New, and the Digital

Central to the research on early medieval texts is what Ziolkowski termed “a philologically grounded eclecticism” (1996, 530). Philology is a term and a specialism with a long history, during which it has been esteemed, marginalised, rediscovered, and reinvented. Although over a decade old, Yager (2010) remains an excellent guide to the key milestones of the journey of philology as a linguistic and then textual analysis methodology across the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries¹². Fundamentally, Ziolkowski defined the philologist’s task as being “to ask intelligent questions of texts and to set texts into contexts” (2008, 290). Pollock described it even more broadly as the “discipline of making sense of texts” (2009, 934). In the context of early medieval writing, this can entail an astonishingly broad range of academic fields, including translation, linguistics, palaeography, and codicology, as well as theoretical approaches such as intertextuality and new historicism. The “philologically grounded eclecticism” that medieval texts call for requires the researcher to draw on any and every resource in order to elaborate the full meaning of the text and to fully appreciate its cultural and historical significance.

Philology is also integrally tied to the act of editing texts. Here a key point of contention is the nature and purpose of an edition: traditional editing still frequently seeks to tend towards the original Lachmannian archetype or to Bédier’s “best text”, seeking to find and publish for the reader a version of the text closest to the author’s “original”. This is at times possible; however, even in optimal cases, editorial bias can deeply influence the ultimate edited text. A deeply significant moment in the history of medieval textual analysis is Bernard Cerquiglini’s *Éloge de*

⁹ This article was reprinted in Bischoff (1966); and translated into English by O’Grady (1976).

¹⁰ For an excellent recent assessment of the issue, see Stansbury (2016).

¹¹ <<https://www.corpuschristianorum.org/ccsl-cccm-celtigenae>> (05/2022).

¹² The renewal of the discipline of philology is a phenomenon that appears to have peaked in the 1990s and early 2000. See De Man (1986). Two themed journal issues published in 1990 – *Speculum* 65, “The New Philology”, edited by Nichols (1990) and *Comparative Literature Studies* 27, “On Philology”, edited by Ziolkowski (1990) – assemble many significant contributions to this discussion. The continuation of this debate is evident in the 2014 collection in *Postmedieval* 5, 4, “Philology and the Mirage of Time”, edited by Warren (2014), and *Florilegium* 32, “Rethinking Philology: Twenty-Five Years after the New Philology”, edited by Canitz (2015). For a more popular treatment see Turner (2014).

la variante: Histoire critique de la philologie (1989), translated ten years later as *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology* (1999). Cerquiglini argued that, unlike printed texts, in the case of manuscripts the scribe was integral to the production of the resulting work, in their labour as copying but frequently also as intervenor, whether as editor, glossator, or commentator. This of course presents numerous challenges in print, beginning with how space-consuming it could potentially be and including the difficulties of presenting these variations in a coherent and useful manner; however, the digital medium is presenting new opportunities to accommodate this alternative conceptualisation of an edition. Cerquiglini takes pains to point out that this means far more than simply presenting the edition in a digital format:

It is less a question, therefore, of providing data than of making the reader grasp this interaction of redundancy and recurrence, repetition and change, which medieval writing consists of – and to do so according to the two axes that we have brought to light. Vertically, along the thread that leads through the work, it can bring back all the things that each noteworthy utterance constantly echoes but which modern memory no longer hears; the screen unrolls the infinity of memorable context. Horizontally, it can compare the utterances within a pertinent and chosen range of variants that are paraphrases of one another from one manuscript to the next, even indicating by some symbol or note what the characteristics of this relationship are. (1999, 80)

Like Ziolkowski, Cerquiglini emphasises the importance of retaining the complexities of medieval texts when working on them and presenting to a wider readership. What is intriguing from the perspective of someone working on anonymous compilatory works such as collections of exegesis is that Cerquiglini is for the most part discussing what would be considered conventional works of literature: when he comments that “one could say that every manuscript is a revision, a version” (37-38), he is referring to vernacular romance narratives, unified works with a coherent narrative. In the case of the computational and exegetical compilations discussed above, the components of the compilation are often fluid, increasing and decreasing in number and varying in arrangement from manuscript to manuscript, like structures built with Lego blocks that can be taken apart and reordered in new contexts and for new purposes. Furthermore, in these compilations the blocks themselves are also open to adaptation, rephrasing, and updating. In these cases, every variation is of integral importance to understanding the work, its significance, and its transmission.

Central to the recording and analysis of such variation is of course the ability to access the manuscripts in which they appear, which is now being made increasingly more feasible through projects across the globe working on the digitisation of manuscripts. In Ireland, this work is represented by the outstanding Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies “Irish Script on Screen” (ISOS) and the “Ogham in 3D” Project¹³. In the introduction to the very first issue of *Digital Philology: A Journal of Medieval Cultures*¹⁴, Nichols and Altschul provide an excellent summary of the state of early medieval DH a decade ago, a summary that continues to have relevance today:

Rare books, manuscripts, documents, and other resources are now available online for serious research – and increasingly so. Unlimited access does not simply affect the way we consult primary materials, however; to the extent it multiplies material available for consultation, it introduces issues of ‘data mass.’ Increased data, in turn, creates the opportunity to propose new research protocols, new questions,

¹³ <<https://www.isos.dias.ie/>> (05/2022); <<https://ogham.celt.dias.ie/>> (05/2022).

¹⁴ <<https://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/digital-philology-journal-medieval-cultures>> (05/2022).

new hypotheses, fresh ways of seeing; in short, new dimensions for philological inquiry. [...] It is our belief that the task of research will usher in the time when the digital humanities will ask radically new questions that can only be asked and resolved in digital environments. Today, digital media allows us to do the work we have done for generations in better ways; in time, digital environments will allow us to think beyond our current purview. (2012, 1-2)

The future of medieval DH lies in fully exploring the capabilities of the digital medium in order to capture and investigate the complete interconnected web of information offered by each word (and indeed image) in each text in each manuscript. As Cerquiglini puts it, “We would do well to hang the changing constellation of the medieval written word in the boundless space that technology offers inscription today” (1999, 80). The ultimate goal is to capture the complete ecosystem in which the text exists, to comprehensively record multiple contextual elements – work or image, text, folio, manuscript, codex, production environment, location – but to link each to the contextual elements of every iteration of the text, its sources, and instances of its reception.

A point that must be made is that the key to advancement is a distinction that Nichols and Altschul highlight, the distinction between the digitisation of and online access to manuscripts and texts, and the full potential of what the digital medium may have to offer those who seek to analyse and understand them. For example, in her concluding remarks, Yager declares Cerquiglini’s vision fulfilled “in the multiform possibilities of hypertext and quickly accessible database” and comments that “Ironically, however, computer analysis as an arm of philological enquiry and editing has come full circle, to a kind of neo-Lachmannian analysis. Cladistic analysis, which classifies biological species in a manner similar to Lachmann’s stemma, have given new attention to stemmatics” (Yager 2010, 1006). What Yager is referring to is the application of phylogenetics approaches to texts and manuscripts, as, for example, in the case of “The Canterbury” Project¹⁵. However, while this is indeed one aspect of computer analysis, even within that work, there is a huge amount of nuance, beginning perhaps with the fact that “not all phylogenetic analyses are tied to the assumption that a single ancestor is responsible for each extant copy and some copies are capable in principle of showing multiple affiliations” (Howe, Connolly, Windram 2012, 56). Furthermore, as illustrated by Tehrani and d’Huy’s (2017) work on phylogenetics and folklore, the applications of this analytical approach extend beyond the critical edition. This phylogenetic approach highlights the overlaps between a stemma mapping the transmission of medieval texts and network analysis.

In DH the lines between network visualisation and network analysis frequently blur, but even in simple network visualisations the outcome is often a different perspective and a new way of interrogating evidence. As information is digitised, quantitative data analysis is also making its way into humanities fields such as medieval studies, a fact exemplified by the collected essays in Kenna, MacCarron, MacCarron’s *Maths Meets Myths* (2017). As they summarise in their introduction,

Of course, we recognise that humanities scholars won’t accept a number that is churned out by an algorithm as an end in itself or as a definitive answer. Instead, the quantitative approach may provide a heuristic device to discover patterns, much as they do in the natural sciences. These have then to be considered in the manner that is appropriate for the field and for the questions being addressed. In other words, quantitative tools may supply some answers but humanities provide the questions. (2017, 3)

¹⁵ <<https://www.canterburytalesproject.org/my-project>> (05/2022), see, for example, the recent publication by Bordalejo (2021). In computus, this approach was employed by Lohr (2013).

The concepts behind network analysis have the potential to allow us to explore in entirely new ways the connections between the words of a text, its manuscripts, its scribes and readers, and more importantly the connections between all of these aspects of one text and those of its cohort of intertextual associates. Vast swathes of information about both intellectual activity and regional scholarly interactions remains buried in early medieval texts and the quest to find ways to reveal and interpret it continues.

3. *DH and Early Medieval Studies in Ireland*

In order to further explore these approaches and their issues, it is valuable to take a look at some of the work in this field recently undertaken and currently underway in Ireland. In his 2020 overview of the development of the field of DH as a whole in Ireland, O’Sullivan points out that much of the initiative has been in the digitisation and publication online of texts. Reflecting some of the needs of medieval scholars touched on above, it is intriguing to note that some of the earliest forays into DH were centred on medieval sources, the prime example being the “Corpus of Electronic Texts” or “CELT” Project based in UCC¹⁶. Begun in 1997, it now constitutes a searchable online database of over sixteen hundred Irish literary and historical documents, including medieval Irish texts published by the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies and the Irish Texts Society. As O’Sullivan points out, this online database of texts is indicative of the earliest waves of DH in Ireland, part of the process of both democratising literary and historical sources by making them freely available. However, one of the greatest achievements of digitalisation as a whole is the rendering of searchable huge libraries of texts, a process that has completely transformed literary studies in many ways. Projects like the “Chronicon Hibernicum” (ChronHib) in the University of Maynooth sought to combine the potential of digital analysis, statistics and linguistics¹⁷. The database at its foundation, Corpus PalaeoHibernicum (CorPH), is heavily annotated and provided the basis for the project’s work on a statistical methodology for linguistically dating Old and Middle Irish texts (Lash, Qiu, Stifter 2020, 1-2; Qiu, Stifter, Bauer 2018).

A project showing the expansive range of research activity that can flourish around a corpus of digitised texts is the Dictionary of Medieval Latin from Celtic Sources (DMLCS)¹⁸. The DMLCS is part of a Europe-wide initiative recording regional variations of medieval Latin¹⁹. From its inception, the project determined to produce a “permanent electronic database containing the whole corpus of Celtic-Latin literature from the period 400–1200 A.D.”²⁰. This corpus was first catalogued and then published by Brepols as the Archive of Celtic-Latin Literature (ACLL), complementing their existing database of online texts: Library of Latin Texts (LLT)²¹. In addition to this database and the ongoing lexicon, the DMLCS is also demonstrating the sort of complementary work that can emerge from long-term projects attached to such databases, including the “St Patrick’s *Confessio* Hypertext Stack Project”²² and the *Scriptores Celtigenae* subsidiary series already mentioned previously.

¹⁶ <<https://celt.ucc.ie/>> (05/2022).

¹⁷ <<http://chronhib.maynoothuniversity.ie/>> (05/2022).

¹⁸ <https://journals.eecs.qub.ac.uk/DMLCS/frameset_home.html> (05/2022).

¹⁹ Published to date are Harvey, Power (2005) and Harvey, Malthouse (2015).

²⁰ < https://journals.eecs.qub.ac.uk/DMLCS/frameset_ACLL.html> (05/2022).

²¹ The catalogue was published as Lapidge, Sharpe (1985). <<https://about.brepols.net/archive-of-celtic-latin-literature-acll/>> (05/2022).

²² <<https://www.confessio.ie/>> (05/2022).

Continuing on the theme of lexicography, it is notable that not only the sources themselves are being digitised and therefore made more widely accessible, but the same is also true of reference materials. An outstanding example of this in Ireland is the initial digitisation and then further development of the RIA's Dictionary of the Irish Language (Royal Irish Academy 1913-1976), covering entries from around 700 to 1700²³. Another example is housed in NUIG's Moore Institute Digital Lab: Dr. Mark Stansbury's "Early Latin Manuscripts" (ELMSS) Project²⁴. This site offers an easily navigable and searchable digital edition of E.A. Lowe's monumental *Codices Latini Antiquiores: A Palaeographical Guide to Latin Manuscripts Prior to the Ninth Century* (1934-1971), which vitally incorporates the illustrative images from the original volumes in addition to linking to the digitised manuscript where available. In addition to this data now being searchable, this project has advanced on the original publication in being able to incorporate corrections and updates where appropriate, and indeed integrating new research on these manuscripts through its "Collections".

In addition to the digitisation of existing reference materials, the digital framework has also supported the emergence of many new resources for medievalists, for example, the database of the "Monasticon Hibernicum" Project at Maynooth, which produced a catalogue of early Christian ecclesiastical settlements in Ireland from the fifth to twelfth centuries²⁵. The catalogue by the "Digital Framework for the Medieval Gaelic World" Project in QUB draws together the online resources available to scholars in the field, an indication of the proliferation of resources emerging internationally²⁶. Another recent reference catalogue produced by Dr. Padraic Moran at NUIG is "MIrA: Manuscripts with Irish Associations", a handlist of early medieval manuscripts (before c. AD 1000) relevant to the study of Irish book culture which has the outstanding advantage of using the Mirador manuscript viewer to enable the user to view the manuscript in question where available²⁷.

Moran's research has also dealt very substantially with the collections of glosses, in both Latin and Irish. Between his work on the "Early Irish Glossaries" Project at Cambridge and the publication of his print edition of *De Origine Scotticae Linguae* (also known as *O'Mulconry's Glossary*) (Moran 2019), Moran also worked on the "St Gall Priscian Glosses" Project along with Bernard Bauer and Rijcklof Hofman²⁸. This phenomenal resource allows the user to search and navigate the main text of Priscian's Latin grammar book and its glosses in a highly intuitive manner. In addition, it also links to the appropriate position in both the manuscript and the print edition of Priscian's work. This resource pulls apart the elements of the source – main text, glosses, manuscript medium – but does so in a way that increases the user's ability to view all aspects of each element, integrating the source material with the continuously developing scholarship.

The "Irish Foundations of Carolingian Europe" Project is using one area of intellectual culture in the early medieval Latin West to challenge the attribution of the entirety of this period's monumental intellectual developments to the Carolingian "Renaissance" of the late eighth and ninth centuries. Through a detailed study of *computus*, both in the century and a

²³ <<https://dil.ie/>> (05/2022).

²⁴ <<https://elmss.nuigalway.ie/>> (05/2022).

²⁵ <<https://monasticon.celt.dias.ie/>> (05/2022).

²⁶ <<https://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/ael/Research/ResearchinLanguages/imdorus/DigitalProjectsfortheGaelicWorld/>> (05/2022); <<https://monasticon.celt.dias.ie/>> (05/2022).

²⁷ <<http://www.mira.ie/>> (05/2022).

²⁸ <www.stgallpriscian.ie/resource> (05/2022).

half prior to the rise of Charlemagne and throughout the duration of the Carolingian period, this project is seeking to discover the extent to which intellectual activity throughout the Latin West, particularly in the Irish and Irish-influenced regions, but also Visigothic Spain, may lie behind the great advances in that field that were evident in the mainstream. The project comprises several distinct elements. The first is the critical edition of two key works, along with English translations and detailed commentaries: Mr Christian Schweizer is editing Dicuil's *Liber de Astronomia*, "Book of Astronomy" and Tobit Loevenich is editing the *Computus Einsidlensis*. Warntjes himself is working on a monograph synthesising the findings and conclusions of the project, and offering an assessment of the Irish impact on the discipline of *computus* in early medieval Europe.

A core element of the "IFCE" Project is the application of Object Oriented Cataloguing (OOC) to the data produced by the team. The development of the OOC framework is led by Dr. Warntjes and Ms. Judith ter Horst. International expertise will be accessed through a collaboration with Mr. Thom Snijders, the forerunner in the design and implementation of this methodological approach to this type of material²⁹. This approach to digital analysis and cataloguing aims to disassemble the collection so that each constituent element of each text can be compared to those of others, and the data can then be applied to identifying the ways in which the text was transmitted, and by inference the networks through which it travelled.

3.1 IrCaBriTT

The goal of IrCaBriTT is to interrogate newly discovered and existing manuscripts and textual evidence and to investigate how this impacts our understanding of the intellectual culture of early medieval Brittany and its interactions with its geographical neighbours, in particular Ireland, Britain, and Francia³⁰. The timeframe in question is roughly between 750 and 1000, a period known as the Carolingian age. The project comprises three components: the PI, Dr. Jacopo Bisagni is working on the detailed analysis and transmission of computistical texts as well as the broader perspective gained from the accumulation of evidence³¹. Central to this research is the use of diagnostic features – key phrases or concepts – that can be used to trace the transmission of ideas and textual units across the Latin West³². Early work has already been evidenced in *From Atoms to the Cosmos: the Irish Tradition of the Divisions of Time in the Early Middle Ages* (Bisagni 2020). The two other components of the project feed into this larger overview: Ms. Paula Harrison is working on a detailed study and edition of a substantial number of scientific excerpts of Irish origin that were included in the early ninth-century compilation *De Astronomia* (On Astronomy), in Laon, Bibliothèque Municipale, 422. My own research concerns the exegetical evidence at the heart of which is a compilation in the tenth-century Orléans, Médiathèque, 182, in which Bisagni (2018) identified five previously undiscovered glosses in Old Breton. This same compilation, though a distinct version, also appears in the twelfth-century manuscript, Reims, Bibliothèque Municipale, 395. My work involves a critical edition and detailed philological and palaeographical analysis of this work, uncovering what it and its manuscripts can tell us about early medieval Breton exegetical activity and the routes of transmission that products of the Breton literati took both into and out of Brittany.

²⁹ Snijders (2018); <<https://computus.lat/>> (05/2022).

³⁰ <<https://ircabritt.nuigalway.ie/>> (05/2022).

³¹ Manuscripts at the centre of the project are: Angers, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 476; Laon, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 422; Orléans, Médiathèque, MS 182; Paris, BnF, Lat. 6400B and Paris, BnF, Lat. 7418A.

³² Bisagni (2013-2014, 2017, 2021a, 2021b).

From the outset, a foundational element of IrCaBriTT's Project design was a comprehensive database of manuscripts with Breton connections. This element of the project has been successfully realised in the Descriptive Handlist of Breton Manuscripts, c. AD 780-1100 (DHBM), composed by Bisagni with contributions by myself and constructed by Mr David Kelly³³. Far beyond presenting simply a catalogue of existing manuscripts, this online resource offers a critical and up-to-date survey of manuscripts with both known and disproven Breton connections and the scholarship pertaining to them. The digital nature of the catalogue is integral to the DHBM's capacity to incorporate new findings as they emerge. The DHBM is foundational to the specific goals of all three of the "IrCaBriTT" Project components, but also provides an unparalleled resource for future research in the field of medieval Breton latinity and intellectual culture. Although both Harrison and I are aiming to produce conventional critical editions of the source material, there was a drive to find a way to the value of the palaeographical evidence. Following the investigations made during EMDH, it was decided that the best way to disseminate this was using EVT, which would allow us to present the manuscript images with a palaeographically annotated transcription. As part of his own work, Bisagni is using Cytoscape to work on a network of computistical manuscripts that captures both the textual and codicological connections between Breton computistical manuscripts and their analogues.

4. *Challenges and Responses*

During both the EMDH and wider conversations, it has become clear that there are several obstacles facing the full realisation of what DH has to offer medieval, and other humanities researchers. Some of these still stem from a view of DH purely as an auxiliary science or a means of dissemination. While databases, websites, and visualisation can indeed be excellent methods of disseminating research, they have the potential to catalyse a dramatic transformation of research practices. In order for this to be able to take place, however, the infrastructure must be present to facilitate it and for the most part this is not the case. Elements of this infrastructure that researchers have highlighted as obstacles include not having suitably specialised technical staff available within institutions or indeed the ability to budget for digital specialists of one type or another in funding applications. The success of IrCaBriTT's digital aspects is due in many ways to collaborations with colleagues both in NUIG and beyond, but they would not have been achievable without the collaboration of David Kelly, the Digital Humanities Manager of the Moore Institute at NUIG³⁴.

Any kind of permanent DH staffing is relatively rare while also being integral to the success and expansion of DH work in all fields, and of course as work in DH grows, so do the staffing requirements. In tangent with this is the long-standing concern that researchers have regarding the maintenance and hence sustainability of their projects, which as Kelly (2022) pointed out in a recent conference contribution is a concern shared by those working on the technical side of these projects. While making the datasets available through open access archives is good practice where possible, often the specific web interface comprises a significant aspect

³³ <<https://ircabritt.nuigalway.ie/handlist/>> (05/2022). The data is stored in a relational, MySQL database. The web application was built using the Laravel PHP Framework (<<https://laravel.com/>>, 05/2022). Data visualisation on the site is implemented using Leaflet (<<https://leafletjs.com/>>, 05/2022) for the map and HighCharts (<<https://www.highcharts.com/>>, 05/2022) for the bar charts. Data from the database can be downloaded as a .csv or .xml file or by accessing the data via a JSON API.

³⁴ <<http://www.davidkelly.ie/>> (05/2022).

of the project's value. If new DH research is aiming to be cutting edge, to constitute a step change in field, then the results of this labour cannot be viewed as fundamentally temporary, potentially with a shelf-life as short as that of the project funding. Alongside this permanence must come recognition: as more DH projects become less auxiliary and about dissemination and more the principal component and about publication, processes for acknowledgement and peer-review must follow. Some of the biggest advances being made in the field of DH involve the organisational and network connections being established among DH researchers within and beyond specific fields. Outstanding examples of this are the Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities (DARIAH-EU), for which Dr. Orla Murphy at UCC is the national coordinator, the UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Network, and of course the RIA's Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI)³⁵. These organisations, networks, and projects offer the means for greater strengths in support and communication among DH researchers, which in turn will hopefully lead to the systemic changes that need to come about to fully support the future of their work.

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³⁵ <<https://www.dariah.eu/>> (05/2022); <<https://dhnetwork.org/>> (05/2022), see for example outputs such as Gambell, Gooding, Hughes (2021); <<https://www.dri.ie/>> (05/2022).

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Digital Poetry as a Dublin City Data Interface*

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Abstract:

This paper explores placemaking as an interdisciplinary concept between the field of digital humanities and human geography. Literary placemaking techniques are used in a critical analysis to unpack methods of meaning making and uncover paths for future development of literary interfaces.

Keywords: City, Data, Dublin, Interface, Poetry

1. Introduction

A sense of place is a characteristic or quality often discussed with reference to literature but also in human geography as a way of describing the process of placemaking or sense of attachment to place. Mundell (2018) explores literary placemaking through the eyes of the creator. She believes that creative writers face a unique challenge in that they must “imaginatively evoke textual place in a way that resonates meaningfully for a diversity of readers” (8). Mundell talks of how “places and stories are innately entwined” (x) and her paper *Crafting “Literary Sense of Place”: The Generative Work of Literary Place-Making* offers a model of “place-oriented experiential techniques” (POET) that lists five modes: *Retrospective Techniques*, *Immersive Techniques*, *Collaborative Techniques*, *Vicarious Techniques* and *Nebulous Techniques*. These modes, Mundell argues can be used to demystify and theorise the process of literary place making, and she (10) explains that creative writing is a literary form of place making. Could

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then these same techniques be similarly applied to a kind of “virtual placemaking” based on real geographical space such as those digital landscapes that can be found in Virtual Geographic Environments (VGEs)? Furthermore, can literary placemaking techniques be used to evaluate the creation process of digital literary texts? Also, can the incorporation of literary elements and techniques create digital texts that can act as a gateway or interface to meaningful, contextual, and embodied urban data experiences for citizens? This paper considers questions such as these through the use of a case study examination of *The River Poem* an extended reality (XR) digital poem that is one component of a larger interactive installation created by the Building City Dashboards research project called *Data City* that features a variety of digital city data dashboard technologies and solutions that include data visualisations projected onto 3D printed scale models of Dublin and Cork cities. The need for interfaces into city data is connected to the paradigm shift in city planning and the drive toward increased smartness, that permeates official urban strategies and development plans (Meijer and Bolívar 2016). Even if we do not necessarily buy into the smart city hype it is hard not to see the pervasiveness of digital technologies, logics and aesthetics in urban space and the whole discourse on cities (Aurigi 2016; Zubizarreta, Seravalli, Arrizabalaga 2016). Byte by byte digital layers of information have become constituents of the city as important as bricks and mortar (Graham 2013), which has some serious consequences on the way in which cities are governed and their everyday mobilities, spatialities, and the production of space itself (Crang, Crosbie, Graham 2007; Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011; Kitchin and Dodge 2011, Zubizarreta, Seravalli, Arrizabalaga 2016). Increasing numbers of sensors, meters and transponders regulate the heartbeat of the city (Coletta and Kitchin 2017). As city dwellers, we must therefore negotiate our interactions with urban space through the use of various intertwined interfaces from electronic tickets and smart cards, through mobile apps used for renting city bikes and cars, to urban dashboards (Mattern 2017; Young, Kitchin, Naji 2021). This is often a daunting task, given the forceful nature of sociotechnical imaginaries put forward by corporate actors, that shape the way we perceive our role as smart citizens (Townsend 2013; White 2016; Sadowski and Bendor 2019) and has been focused on technocratic nature of smart technologies, supporting neoliberal or even autocratic forms of governance (Datta 2018; Sadowski and Pasquale 2015; Luque-Ayala and Marvin 2016; Kitchin 2017). Notably, the digital technologies themselves also take part in the everyday urban spatiality (Leszczynski 2015) and even more importantly influence the practices of placemaking (Halegoua 2020). It is crucial to look at those processes beyond techno-deterministic narratives and into their human, social dimensions (Odendaal 2021). We, therefore, investigate the role of XR, narrative immersion and literary placemaking as a possibility of providing an alternative interface to the city data, that goes beyond the technological and utilizes the inherent place-based spatiality of interaction with urban spaces.

1.1 VGE and XR in Urban Planning

XR is an umbrella term for a broad spectrum of technologies that include, but are not limited to, augmented reality (AR), Mixed Reality (MR), and Virtual Reality (VR) (Cöltekin, Griffin, Slingsby *et al.* 2020). VGE was defined by Lin and Gong as “environments pertaining to the relationship between post-humans and 3-D virtual worlds” (2001, 2). They can also be described as explicitly geographical environments that provide the possibility of deeply embedded experience (Lin and Batty 2009), aiding the transfer of geographical knowledge (Lin, Min, Lü *et al.* 2013). From a practical point of view, XR often overlaps with the concept

of VGE (Chen, Lin, Lü 2017), and they are sometimes used interchangeably. VGE is a much broader theoretical framework – not all VGEs are created using XR technology, and not all XR solutions can be considered VGE, as they often focus mainly on visualizations. However, the combination of VGEs and XR is instrumental in urban planning (Batty 2008; Kamel Boulos, Lu, Guerrero *et al.* 2017). While the visualization of complex socio-environmental models with XR and VGE needs to be correctly designed to be beneficial (Voinov, Çöltekin, Chen *et al.* 2018), the potential rewards are promising. There are many examples of XR and VGE concepts being successfully applied for the management and planning of cities to provide access to places that cannot be reached in material space (Portman, Natapov, and Fisher-Gewirtzman 2015) or to allow interaction with objects that only exist as planned possibilities (Cirulis and Brigmanis Brigis 2013). Another use case is multisensory community planning platforms (van Leeuwen, Hermans, Jylhä *et al.* 2018) that help participatory processes. In Canberra VR based Esri City Engine has been used to visualize the effects of light rail development (Schubert 2017), and recently in London’s Square Mile new planning proposals can utilize a detailed digital twin model of Square Mile to gauge the potential changes (VU.CITY, 2020). It is well established then that VGEs are well suited for planning purposes (Lin and Gong 2001), and Chen and Lin (2018) identified “predicted and planned future geographic environments” (329) as one of the three main types of VGEs. Kitchin, Young, Dawkins (2021, 362) and Lin, Chen, Lü *et al.* (2013) outline that, urban planners believe that VGEs can be beneficial for strategic visioning, pre-planning and public consultation along with traditional planning practices. In this case, we can expect people with various backgrounds and with various knowledge to participate in processes that will involve VGE at some point, as virtual environments are increasingly perceived as one of the ways in which people can engage with modern cities’ dataspace (Dawkins 2017). Therefore, it is important to design semantically deep systems that will allow space for meaningful engagements, not only for people possessing technological and domain-specific knowledge to interact with the model, but also for people that can only involve themselves with VGE using place-based approaches that they use in everyday interactions with the material world. For example, Saddiqa, Magnussen, Larsen *et al.* (2021) outline the challenges of integrating open data into an educational system, namely that the availability of open data alone is not enough, in fact, the primary challenge is contextualising the data in a way that provides perspectives and potential uses for non-specialist users such as public-school teachers. To achieve this, developers and designers can employ XR environments that increase immersion and presence. The first term, otherwise known as system immersion (Slater 1999), can be understood as a semi-objective measure of the ability of a given visualisation to replace the real world with a virtual one. Highly immersive systems are believed to be able to induce the feeling of presence – “being” in another place and time (Minsky 1980; Slater, Linakis, Usoh *et al.* 1996; Konecny 2011). This in turn is helpful in providing spatial context that allows information to be processed in a more natural manner (Lü, Chen, Yuan *et al.* 2018) as embedded experience (Lin and Batty 2009). However, technological measures are but one way of inducing immersion and presence. It is perfectly possible to create them using text and narrative (Adams and Rollings 2006) or through entirely analogue media (Schubert and Crusius 2002). The *Data City* interactive installation and its *River Poem* component are interesting examples to discuss here as they offer exactly the type of contextual use of display of potential functionality that Saddiqa, Magnussen, Larsen *et al.* (2021) argue for.

2. Case Studies

The *Data City* interactive installation is an example of a spatially augmented reality (Bimber and Raskar 2005) that uses a projection mapping process and open city data. The model's physical dimensions are 3.5m x 2m which yield an accurate topographical representation of 28 sq km of the urban area at a scale of 1:2000, yielding a representation of 28 sq km of terrain in each model. The installation can be used to show air quality and noise levels, building use classifications, geodemographic analyses, AirBnB properties, historic maps, the Urban Atlas maps of urban land use and a simulation of Dublin Luas tram movements (BCD¹). The public exhibition was due to be staged in the summer of 2020 but due to Coronavirus pandemic lockdowns, it was instead staged privately and locally on campus at Maynooth University and documented and transferred online to the project's website². In *Data City* the user can examine projected data visualisations (Figure 1) onto a rigorously designed and developed 3D printed model of Dublin city developed by an interdisciplinary team of Geographers and Media Studies researchers.



Figure 1 – *Data City* 2021 Building City Dashboards

The River Poem is one component of the larger interactive installation created by the Building City Dashboards research project that features data visualisations projected onto 3D printed scale models of Dublin and Cork cities, which can be seen as an example of a spatially augmented reality (Bimber and Raskar 2011) that uses projection mapping process. *The River Poem* uses the same 3D printed model as *Data City* and so was developed to be accessed in tandem with the

¹ Available at: <<https://dashboards.maynoothuniversity.ie/>> (05/2022).

² <<https://dashboards.maynoothuniversity.ie/exhibition>> (05/2022).

Data City piece. It is an example of a digital text that is spatially situated in the same way that urban planning VGEs are but also incorporates some aspects of literary placemaking and multimodal communicative dimensions such as kinetic text and atmospheric audio. Characteristics such as these can be found in the field of digital humanities in born-digital literary texts such as electronic literature and its sub-genre of digital poetry. *The River Poem* is a digital poem made in collaboration with Maynooth University's Building City Dashboards research project, this poem projects snippets of text generated by the Generative Pretrained Transformer 2 machine learning algorithm onto a 3D model of Dublin City. The words themselves were generated by a GPT-2 machine learning algorithm that was trained on James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* published in 1939 is a narrative that is ideally suited to transposition to the digital medium because of its multilinear stream of consciousness style and its neologistic language. *The River Poem* intends to offer audiences an alternative approach to viewing the city by projecting words onto the Building City Dashboard's 3D model as seen in the image below (Figure 2) which is a screenshot from a low-resolution test video of *The River Poem*.



Figure 2 – *The River Poem*, 2019

Snippets of phrases were removed from the algorithm's output by the human authors and then placed in a spreadsheet. Python code in TouchDesigner software then randomly selects a new quote from the spreadsheet at specific intervals and places it into a queue. This queue forms a long string of text which is animated along a path that follows the route of Dublin's River Liffey. When a quote reaches the end of the path, it is automatically swapped out for a new random quote. Using texture instancing in TouchDesigner software kept processing power to a minimum and each letter is generated only once and instanced each time it is used in the long string of text. The path is also dynamic, as it can be edited in real time to fit into different scenarios (Figure 3).

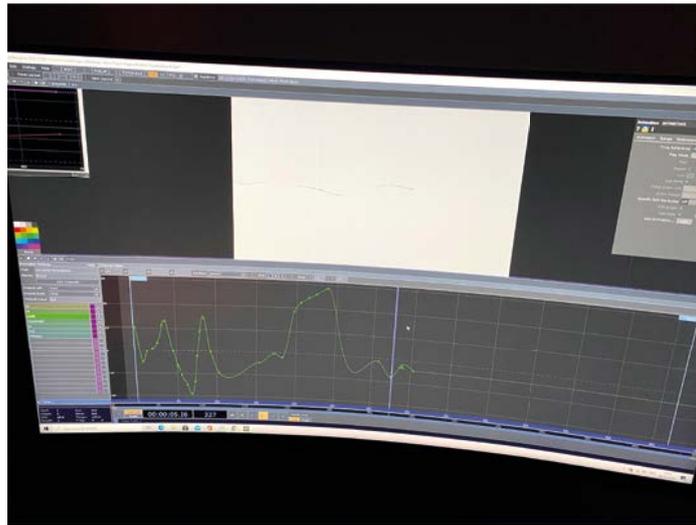


Figure 3 – Photo of *The River Poem* digital workspace, Building City Dashboards

The final output seeks to create a dynamic unique literary experience for each instance of play and explores notions of human versus machine agency and multimodal data communication within contemporary cityscapes. The original inspiration for *The River Poem* was cento poetry which is a kind of patchwork poetry that is composed of lines from other poems. However, the addition of the machine learning aspect has produced a contemporary literary artefact that calls into question the boundary between human literary expression and algorithmic agency. This paper proposes to examine the potentialities of digital texts such as *The River Poem* to act as interfaces to city data. The user in this instance can examine a rigorously designed and developed 3D printed model of Dublin city developed by an interdisciplinary team of Geographers and Media Studies researchers. The addition of kinetic text that draws on a well-known literary text mediated through the digital apparatus and algorithms combined with sound effects of running water and situated in a spatially accurate Dublin city representation can help evoke a sense of place for the user.

2.2 The River Poem as a Literary Interface

In all digital texts, the interface mediates the experience for the user, interfaces matter and are an important component of the meaning making process for the user. In this paper, we argue that viewing *The River Poem* as an interface to *Data City* can offer a path for future development of XR VGEs that incorporate humanistic elements in an embodied and meaningful manner to the benefit of their audiences. Ruberg *et. al* (2018, 110) point out that as feminist scholars they know well that computational tools are not apolitical, they have an impact, they structure meaning, and visualisations craft interpretation. As such an interface can be seen as a space in which meaningful embodied interaction takes place in a networked environment, or an interface can be seen as a component of a digital work in which case it operates more like an index to specific content (Drucker 2019, 3). This paper builds on Drucker's (2019) premises regarding interfaces by suggesting that *The River Poem*, a digital literary work in fact operates as an interface that draws the user in and through to *Data City* in order to provide a

space for structured, contextualised, and relativised meaningful interaction and understanding for a non-expert audience. Drucker (2019) refers to literary interfaces as interfaces for digital literature or electronic literature works. However this paper modifies this approach slightly to offer a work of digital literature as an interface in itself to open city data. Drucker (2019, 2) tells us that an interface can be narrowly defined in terms of onscreen features that unfold a text but more broadly defined as to include the user's embodied experience and relationships with not only the technologies, text, and networks they are engaging with but also, more broadly, the broader cultural conditions in which these interactions take place. Concurrently, Mundell (2018) cites Saunders (2010) plea to literary geographers to view writing as an embodied practice instead of simply examining the literary artefacts alone. Thinking about embodied experiences in the digital space in this manner can allow us to consider and take into account more broadly the entirety of the user's experience in a networked environment as opposed to restrictively only considering a singular artefact.

The human-computer interaction (HCI) term “embodied interaction” builds on Hutchby's concepts of technological affordances from his 2001 paper “Technologies, Texts and Affordances” and is also a useful term to use in the analysis of human meaning making in order to recognise the contextual, fluid and collaborative nature of meaning making in the digital realm (Naji 2021, 47). Embodied interaction is discussed by Paul Dourish (2004) as an approach from the field of human-computer interaction that is based on the understanding that “users create and communicate meaning through their interaction with the system (and with each other, through the system)” (*Where the Action Is* n.d.). In this paper, we suggest that *The River Poem* operates as a literary interface to the *Data City* piece that draws more explicitly on open city data. Participatory members of the public or smart citizens may not be able to accurately read a graph and identify meaning from the contents of a VGE; however, when spatial data is communicated through using literary placemaking techniques it can offer increased entry points for audiences and engagement potential. Digital poetry and literary interfaces can offer interactivity, nonlinearity and multiple entry points for users and can offer new spaces for perceiving and interacting with stories in spaces that would be otherwise out of reach (Barber 2016, 1). Furthermore, research on health data communication has concluded that “high interactivity in data visualization showed significant indirect effects on participants' attitudes toward policy change, only when presented with the highly interactive narrative” (Oh, Sally Lim, Copple *et al.* 2018, 1755). Similarly, Rostami, Rossitto and Waern (2018, 15) when discussing mixed-reality performances that used virtual reality and 360-degree video, concluded that allowing users to take a more active role in digital texts is what can make digital stories engaging and coherent rather than the completely immersive natures of technologies. Culturally driven, creative multimodal content can potentially move 3D graphs and static data visualisations beyond literal visual representations of geographic data and incorporate various dimensions of imagination and interaction that can embody the unique characteristics of a place.

3. Placemaking

Texts such as *The River Poem* have the potential to enrich citizen understandings of place and therefore contribute to more effective and engaged urban planning processes. The ability to extract individual narratives, locate them in space, and compare larger trends through content analysis, contributes to new perspectives on place and how people openly express their experiences of a place (MacEachren, Jaiswal, Robinson *et al.* 2011). This integration of qualitative, narrative-style data with spatiotemporal analysis and visual analytic affordances has encouraged a

new way of understanding place through the public expressions and interactions of social media and the concept of a Geospatial Web (Herring 1994). Digital texts such as *The River Poem* and *Data City* can potentially communicate information to a specific audience. In this instance, they are spatially located through being projected onto a printed 3D model and they are also interactive. In these projected spatially mapped digital texts, space and place are important, though we may find ourselves lost in virtual space we are still very much rooted in our bodies in a place. Ryan, Foote and Azaryahu note that the science and humanities use the terms space, place and “sense of place” in a number of ways (2016, 6). These terms are central to the work of geographers but also to writers and storytellers. In 2015, narrative theorist Marie-Laure Ryan alludes to the human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan’s celebrated concepts of both space and place as contrasting entities. Ryan explains that space is abstract, whereas place concerns itself with a “concrete environment invested with emotional value” (2015, 87-89). Similarly, interaction design researchers Harrison and Dourish (1996) choose to further differentiate between human concepts of space and place. Space, they suggest, relates to the structure of the world, the three-dimensional environment in which we inhabit. However, in their theory of place, they contrast cultural understandings with those which frame innate human-behaviour (Naji, Young, Stehle 2018, 3). Placemaking is one of the terms that can describe a set of social processes involved in creating the meaning of place (Sweeney, Mee, McGuirk *et al.* 2018; Ghavampour and Vale 2019). While it is a broad concept with many definitions (Courage 2020), often connected to the push toward democratization of spatial planning, it is also a crucial part of the individual spatial experience, helping create and re-create everyday lived geographies (Pierce, Martin, Murphy 2011). Digital technologies take an increasingly important part in this process in the form of spatial media, as we are accustomed to being able to share, create and change digital representations of place. At some point, this transforms into a more embodied digital practice that utilizes tools like social media and digital filters (Halegoua and Ghiyong 2021; Wilken and Humphreys 2021). It becomes clear then that place whether digital or analogue remains an important aspect of human identity and therefore there is value in considering how that sense of place, or placemaking, is crafted and expressed in digital spaces.

3.1 Digital Placemaking

Digital placemaking is a concept and practice in which the affordances of digital media are used to evoke a sense of place that offers an emotional attachment to a place that allows social actors to craft and express their identities. However, it is a practice that can re-emphasise existing inequalities and so it is important to consider a wide and varied practice of digital placemaking when possible, in order to offer an as wide and inclusive approach to a core societal impetus to evoke a sense of place (Halegoua and Polson 2021). In Halegoua and Polson’s introduction (2021) to their special issue on digital placemaking, they reference a variety of digital placemaking practices, many of which are hybrid, drawing on both digital and analogue space and practices. For example, the Afrofuturist hacked urban payphone called Sankofa Red (Stokes, Bar, Baumann *et al.* 2021) used the digital media tools of a Raspberry Pi computer, tablet, and speaker with an adapted piece of urban furniture and community-focused collaborative design practices. Sankofa Red is an example of a digital placemaking project that facilitated citizen engagement and intervention in urban planning processes. One example of its uses is when it helped a predominantly Black neighbourhood convert a car-centred street into a pedestrian plaza. Sankofa Red was also placed in an art gallery where it helped visitors from across the city record stories about race, and then in another iteration, it was placed in a predominantly white

neighbourhood where it facilitated an urban history game (Stokes, Bar, Baumann *et al.* 2021, 714). As long as the manner in which digital placemaking projects are designed using collaborative practices with communities just as the Sankofa Red project did, then digital placemaking projects that allow citizens to form a sense of place can facilitate meaningful interventions in urban processes for non-experts. Of course, in this instance, it is not only the “technical” aspects of digital media such as the Raspberry Pi computer, etc. That Sankofa Red used that, categorise it as an example of digital placemaking but also the potential for participatory user engagement is recognised as an affordance of digital media.

3.2 Digital Literary Placemaking

Digital Literary Placemaking not only draws on methods of digital placemaking (as discussed above in its use of the affordances of digital media) but also, as the name implies, draws on literary placemaking methods which we will discuss using Mundell’s (2018) framework. This paper uses Mundell’s (2018) process-based framework for literary placemaking as a method through which we can analyse in more depth *The River Poem* as an embodied space with meaning making potential. Mundell (2018) refers to geographers’ definitions of space as humanised (Tuan 1977, 188) and infused with emotional responses (Wilson 2003; Withers 2009). There is some crossover here with Drucker’s (2019) previously mentioned conceptualisations of interface as a networked space embodied with meaning as Mundell refers to geographer Canter (1997) who defines spaces as experiential and meaningful areas. The five place-oriented experiential techniques (POETs) that Mundell (2018) proposes are *Retrospective, Immersive, Collaborative, Vicarious, and Nebulous*.

To apply each of these techniques to *The River Poem* in order to evaluate its’ methods of production of literary placemaking and concurrently the depth of potentiality it offers for embodied and meaningful spatial and literary interactions, we will first begin with *Retrospective techniques*. These refer to the past and remembering and seek to exploit personal memories as powerful catalysts of meaning. In this instance, providing the 3D model of Dublin city will for most users, particularly Irish and even more particularly Dublin citizens, evoke a memory linked to specific places. Similarly, the nod or “recreation” of the Joycean form by the machine learning algorithm can also potentially evoke specific memories or nuances of the past for users, in this sense *The River Poem* does not fall short. Next are *Immersive techniques* that refer to direct encounters with place whereas *Retrospective techniques* referred to past places. Again, the 3D model will refer users to a geolocated place but not necessarily in the same way Mundell outlines when she refers to Australian writer Birch’s writing practice in that he would never write about a place without visiting it (Mundell 2018, 5). Mundell’s model is aimed at the processes of practice so in this manner, the authors of *The River Poem* have all (and some still do) lived in Dublin and so have memories of the place and direct encounters of the city. Next, Mundell (2018, 10) refers to *Collaborative techniques* that use shared or cultural understandings of place which can be seen in the way that *The River Poem* draws on Joyce’s literary work *Finnegan’s Wake* and of course then concurrently that most famous of Joyce’s works rooted firmly in Dublin city, *Ulysses*. It is interesting to note also that the urban furniture example of *Sankofa Red*, which was mentioned earlier in this paper with reference to digital placemaking, also evidences collaborative creation practices, however in a more participatory design sense which also operates on systems of shared cultural understandings. Next are *Vicarious techniques* that refer to the more empathetic affective aspects of a work that can offer employ point of view perspectives in literary narratives. It is this aspect that *The River Poem* does not appear

to engage with at all as its process of creation using the 3D printed model of Dublin city can offer a somewhat disengaged “god like” view over the city and so further thought on offering a point of view perspective in order to provide greater capacity for viewers to empathise might be useful here. Finally, Mundell (2018, 10) mentions *Nebulous techniques* which refer to the “*genius loci* (spirit of place)” (9) the imaginaries or more dreamlike, elusive content and aspects of a literary placemaking work. The digitised and abstract audio of water trickling in *The River Poem* can be placed in this category adding an atmospheric dreamlike dimension to the experience.

4. Reflections and Conclusion

This paper highlighted the growing trend of the use of VGEs and XRs and digital placemaking practices as a way of expanding the non-expert audience element in urban planning. This trend comes as a result of the recognised importance of allowing social agents the opportunity to contextualise data about their city and develop a sense of place of their surroundings as a way of communicating their identities and prompting more engagement in their localities. Interfaces were recognized as core components of digital texts and understood in this paper to represent a place for an embodied interactive experience that draws on texts, technologies, and social and cultural relationships as per Drucker (2019). The case study of *The River Poem* was described and analysed within a literary placemaking model (Mundell 2018) that allows a critical examination of literary placemaking techniques in the piece itself. We then argued that a sense of place is a quality traditionally evoked by artistic practices such as literary endeavours and human geography which is why a literary placemaking model (Mundell 2018) was used in order to explore the potentiality of digital poetry to act as an interface to a literary placemaking experience for Dublin city citizens in order to contextualise and engage with open data about their city. The increasingly popular practice of digital placemaking was also highlighted in order to contextualise digital literary placemaking as a potential emerging practice that offers many of the same benefits of digital placemaking and literary placemaking, namely allowing users the opportunity to reflect and contextualise data about their city as well as evoking a personalised sense of place. The application of Mundell’s (2018) POET techniques allows for a more thorough analysis of the process of digital creation and revealed a path for further development of *The River Poem* in order to increase its literary placemaking potentiality and become a more effective interface for Dublin city open data. The information uncovered by the application of Mundell’s (2018) literary placemaking techniques provided much needed data to shape the future development of *The River Poem* given the absence of rigorous user testing data due to Coronavirus restrictions and pandemic lockdowns. Namely, in order to maximise *The River Poem*’s literary placemaking potentiality so that it may engage citizens, it would benefit by employing *Vicarious techniques* that can offer specific points of view to draw out the empathetic qualities of a work. In doing so we have drawn attention to some extremely interesting examples of digital and literary placemaking such as *The River Poem* and *Sankofa Red* projects and discussed them from a creation and practice perspective rather than focusing only on the finished artefact which allows for a more nuanced and complex analysis of contemporary emerging practices situated in hybrid modalities of digital and analogue places that reflect more accurately the contemporary subjectivities of human kind. Hybrid analysis of these kinds is important as human subjectivities are increasingly situated in both modalities and the digital is reified even more legitimately into our everyday sense of identities however we are all as ever located in geolocated spaces.

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Reading Republican Murals in Northern Ireland: Archiving and Meaning-Making

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Abstract:

In this paper I will use my experience in compiling an online archive of the murals of Northern Ireland 1979-2021 to discuss the benefits and disadvantages of work in the digital humanities. I will argue that such a collection of visual materials from the war and post-war periods in Northern Ireland affords us the opportunity to assess major shifts in stance, policy and practice amongst unionists and loyalists, and nationalists and republicans. But I will also contend that although the archive itself can provide us with a rich set of materials, it cannot in and of itself give us their meaning. That task, I will conclude, depends on a set of traditional skills that long pre-date the digital order of things.

Keywords: Archive, Interpretation, Murals, Northern Ireland, Republican

1. Introduction

In this paper I will use my experience compiling an online archive of the murals of Northern Ireland 1979-2021 to reflect on a series of practical and theoretical issues relating to my work in the digital humanities. The *Murals of Northern Ireland* is based on some 15,000 of my own photographs of the murals; it is an open-access, fully downloadable collection which is hosted at the Honnold Mudd library in California¹. Each item in the archive contains full metadata, including a description of the image, its political affiliation, date and exact location.

My intention is to set out briefly the difficulties involved in constructing the archive, but to move to historical reading of the materials in order to reveal the opportunities that the collection brings. I will show how visual materials from the war and post-war periods in Northern Ireland afford us the opportunity to

¹ <<https://ccdlib.claremont.edu/digital/collection/mni>> (05/2022).

assess major shifts in stance, policy and practice undertaken by nationalists and republicans and unionists and loyalists. My claim will be that the archive provides historians and the general public with an invaluable resource through which Northern Ireland's past and present can be interpreted and evaluated.

That being said, I want to point to the limitations of my digital project through a reading of the development of republican muralism and its variable historical functions. Particular attention will be paid towards the end of the essay to a group of republican murals that appeared at a crucial point in the post-war period (1999-2002). What I hope to show is that, as with any archive, although the digital archive itself can provide us with materials, in a manner unimaginable only twenty years ago, it cannot in and of itself provide us with an account of their meanings. That task of meaning-making, I will argue, depends on a set of traditional skills that long pre-date the digital order of things.

2. Digitisation

I have been taking photographs in Northern Ireland for forty years (I began when I was 18). In the early days, I put a roll of film into the back of a camera, focussed, and clicked (each film allowed 24 or 36 shots). Given the expense of the film and its development, this usually meant one, perhaps two, images per mural, and thus the available technology had a direct impact on the number and type of photographs that I could take (these were not the only limitations – taking photographs in war zones was not always the easiest experience). By contrast, and for better or worse, once I started using digital cameras, it was possible in effect to take as many photographs as I wanted. But for twenty years or so, I used the photographic images (and later, slides) for teaching purposes in a contemporary Irish studies course. The images themselves were always of considerable interest to students and they enabled detailed discussion of a visual aspect of the war in Northern Ireland. The difficulties of using the materials in this format, however, are evident: photographs had to be passed around by hand, and slides required finding and setting up a projector (and showing the images in a darkened room).

While preparing a talk on the murals for the Center for Cultural Studies at the University of California Santa Cruz in 2005, a technician mentioned the possibility of “digitising” the collection (I had not previously heard the word). It all seemed a bit far-fetched to believe at that stage that the photographs taken over the previous twenty-five years could be turned into computer images viewable by anyone on the web. In any case, given that I was working at the University of Manchester at the time, it appeared impossible since the resources were simply not available there. That changed when I took up the Chair of Interdisciplinary Humanities at Scripps College, one of the colleges of the Claremont University Consortium in Southern California. Again, there was an element of happenstance involved: a chance meeting with the head of the recently formed Claremont Colleges Digital Library led to a discussion of the possibilities and an agreement to create the Murals of Northern Ireland Archive. Of course there was a great deal of preliminary work – administrative, theoretical and practical none of which would have been possible without the financial support of Scripps College and the patience, generosity, and technical savvy of the digital librarians and production assistants at the CCDL. There were various components to the work. First, the digitisation of the materials: the thousands of negatives, photographs and slides had to be turned into digital images of the right size and format (this was largely undertaken by Scripps students on paid research assistantships). Second, I had to master the intricacies of the software (CONTENTdm acquisition station), in order to upload the images. Third, and most important, I had to understand and work with the

standard international referencing programme for digital archives, the Dublin Core Metadata Elements system. This was the most tricky and time-consuming aspect of the entire process since the purpose of the metadata is to facilitate the discovery, use, management, and preservation of the digital resource, and thus it is separated into three commonly accepted types (with some overlap between them): discovery/descriptive metadata; structural metadata; administrative metadata. My role was (and remains) to supply the discovery/descriptive material, which is essentially the information displayed online to users of the archive (fully searchable through the CCDL interface as well as search engines). This requires, for each image in the archive, information categorised under fifteen “elements”: “title”; “creator”; “contributor”; “subject”; “coverage”; “description”; “publisher”; “date”; “language”; “type”; “format”; “identifier”; “source”; “relation”; “rights”. In fact during the compilation of the collection, it became necessary to adapt the categories slightly, but the basic structure has remained the same. Of course some elements are simply standard and repeatable (photographer, publisher and so on), while others are highly complex and difficult. Some “descriptions” – in the case of an intricate mural for example – can take a day. There are now some 15,000 images in the collection, which stands as major source for visual materials related to the war and peace in Northern Ireland. Updated on a regular basis, the archive has been used in doctoral research, television documentaries, textbooks and monographs, journal articles, and the British school curriculum.

When considering questions of digitisation, it is important to recall just how recently the technological advances that underpin it were developed. And in this regard, the history of words can be highly instructive. “Digital” as a noun is first recorded in the English language in the fifteenth century as the equivalent of “digit”, both meaning “a whole number less than ten”; its derivation lay with the Latin *digitus* (“finger”), hence *digitālis*, “of or related to a finger”. This fundamental meaning, based on the practice of counting with fingers, was used consistently for more than five hundred years within the numerical system that depended on the ten “digitals” (0-9) and their combined use in decimal notation. In the twentieth century, however, technological change forced linguistic change. The change affected word function: “digital” became an adjective from the 1940s on and referred to the use of numerical digits to represent information in computing and electronics; it appeared in popular usage only from the 1990s (“digital”, *OED*). A similar semantic shift affected the verb “to digitize”, which originally dates to the seventeenth century with the meaning of “to touch or manipulate with the fingers” (one of its senses was “masturbation”). The contemporary meaning of “the conversion of analogue data to digital form for storage or processing” dates from 1953, though again it became common usage only within the past twenty years or so (“digitize”, *OED*). It is worth noting the evidence that the language affords us in this regard since it reminds us that the digital world is, at best, no more than eighty years old. As it transforms our lives in rapid, unpredictable, and as yet under-theorised ways, that fact is worth remembering.

3. *The Murals of Northern Ireland*

The painting of murals in Northern Ireland is the longest continuous practice of political wall art. Beginning around 1908, it pre-dates the most famous tradition of political muralism – the Mexican work of Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros that began in the 1920s. From its inception until the 1980s, wall art in Northern Ireland was almost exclusively unionist in orientation and it originated in the early twentieth century Home Rule crisis that led to the partition of Ireland in 1921. Though there is no photographic documentation (the evidence derives from newspaper reports), the first murals represented

the key moment in the unionist historical imagination – the victory of King William III over James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. Based on Benjamin West’s painting “The Battle of the Boyne” (1778), versions of which circulated in popular culture (Loftus 1990, 24-25), this became the dominant motif in murals painted in working class unionist areas (figure 1), and indeed it persists today. There were, however, other topics in unionist and loyalist wall art. In 1922 the IRA killing of Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff and a Unionist M.P., provoked complex mural tributes, while later examples included recognition of the British nurse Edith Cavell, executed by the German military during World War One, the Somme, unionist heroes such as Lord Carson, and of course the British monarchy. Such murals functioned as what Nora has called “lieux de mémoire” (1989) and served to inculcate a specific version of history. They reflected the sectarian and majoritarian nature of Northern Ireland, captured in the words of James Craig, the Prime Minister, as “a Protestant Parliament and a Protestant State” (Craigavon 1934, 1095). And they contributed to the “visible sectarianisation of public space” (Jarman 2001, 3), part of the construction of a social order in which the Protestant and unionist community benefited legally, culturally, and politically at the expense of the Catholic and nationalist minority.



Figure 1 – King William of Orange, Templemore Street, East Belfast,
News Letter Monday 12 July 1937

Given the hegemonic control of public space exercised by the unionist majority, it is hardly surprising that Irish nationalists did not represent their own history, nor their political claims, on the walls. That changed, however, during the war that developed after the breakdown of civil order in 1969, though even then, it took a decade or so for murals expressing non-unionist views to appear in any numbers. They emerged, quite rapidly and significantly, as part of the political campaign around prison issues conducted by Irish republicans. In fact their appearance can be viewed as part of a desperate attempt to highlight the circumstances of the prisoners in the face of the concerted practice of formal and informal censorship of republican views in Britain and indeed Ireland. That effort began in earnest in 1979 when Bobby Sands, the public relations officer for the Blanketmen in the Maze prison, recognised that republicans “have failed to reach a broader base of support” and “therefore we have failed

to engage any active support outside of our immediate hard-core” (O’Malley 1990, 54)². For Sands, it was therefore clear that republicans had to “broaden the battle-field – nationally and internationally” in two ways: “one, we must make more people aware and engage their help. Two, to get these other people, we must organise our own people effectively and massively on the ground” (*ibidem*). This required new tactics, including the fielding of “an army of propagandists” who would conduct “a massive Paint and Poster Campaign” with the goal of creating “our own mass media” (O’Hearn 2006, 237). Republican murals formed part of that campaign, particularly during and after the 1981 Hunger Strike, and they became a crucial medium through which republicans countered censorship, constructed political hegemony in nationalist and republican areas, and conveyed their message to the wider world. Indeed the dual – internal and external – focus of republican murals shaped their form and content. The appeal to the broader Catholic nationalist audience in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Irish America, for example, informed the use of religious symbolism in many of the first murals that represented the Hunger Strikers (figure 2).



Figure 2 – Hunger Striker and Rosary, Rockmount Street Falls Road, West Belfast 1981

For the republican movement, the Hunger Strike brought mass support, and this served as a catalyst to involvement in electoral politics (this was a decisive turning point in the war in Northern Ireland). And just as the murals served republicans well during the Hunger Strikes, they were similarly deployed in the electoral campaigns upon which republicans (or at least Sinn Féin republicans) embarked in the 1980s (figure 3). One effect of the success of republican murals was that loyalists, whose long-standing tradition of muralism had largely declined during the 1970s, also recognised that the walls of Northern Ireland were crucial sites on which politics, history, and collective memory could be registered and propagated. This joint recognition of the possibilities that muralism offered, explains the appearance of an astonishing number of images over the past forty years or so (my own calculation is that the figure is somewhere between 15-20,000 murals). In a war which was about politics and propaganda as well as militarism, murals became an important weapon.

² For an account of the prison protest and the Hunger Strike, see Beresford 1987. Sands was the first of the ten republican Hunger Strikers to die.



Figure 3 – Vote Sinn Féin, Bond Street The Markets, South Belfast 1983

From the early to mid-1980s, murals became a familiar feature in loyalist areas, not least in a striking gallery of images in Percy Place, in the Shankill heartland (figure 4). Some of the images presented the traditional motif of King William at the Boyne, but others were significantly new in terms of semiotic composition, notably in their explicit reference to loyalist paramilitarism (figure 5). The profusion of images had a dual stimulus. First, there was a felt need to respond to the perceived success of the Republican muralists, who were, by this point, extending their repertoire politically and in terms of form (figure 6). Second, amongst working class loyalists, there was a clear sense that their political concerns were not being heard. This partly explains the repeated citing of paramilitary organisations, since this was a way of marking distance from mainstream unionism whose political parties ostensibly represented working-class loyalists, while in reality they disregarded their everyday concerns and realities.



Figure 4 – Loyalist mural gallery, Percy Place Lower Shankill, West Belfast 1984



Figure 5 – Loyalist prisoners, Percy Place Lower Shankill, West Belfast 1984



Figure 6 – An Phoblacht Republican News, Sevastopol Street Lower Falls, West Belfast 1982

Though this brief account addresses the origins of muralism – republican and loyalist – in the 1980s, it is impossible in this context to present a comprehensive reading of the murals from 1980 to the present (I am currently engaged in writing the history of the murals in monograph form). It is worth noting, however, that the murals in their entirety constitute a complex, changing, and fascinating body of public art that brings an added element to the understanding of the war in Northern Ireland and the relative peace that has followed. The range of the images is remarkable. On occasion the murals simply reflect the brutal horror of the violence. For example, the Warrenpoint attack in 1979, in which eighteen British soldiers were killed, is depicted in a celebratory republican mural designed to be seen by security force personnel (figure 7). While a loyalist mural hails Michael Stone, the perpetrator of a gun and grenade attack on an IRA funeral in which three were killed and sixty injured (figure 8). But there are also examples of dialogical engagement between the warring sides, such as Patrick Galvin's poem "Letter to a British soldier on Irish soil" (1972; figure 9). In addition, there are some

surprising murals (Northern Ireland is endlessly complicated). Thus in the arena of language politics, Gaelic has featured from the 1980s as a vehicle of Irish nationalism and republicanism (figure 10), while Ulster-Scots has been the preserve of unionism and loyalism from the 1990s (figure 11). And yet on a mural dedicated to the Red Hand Commando (a small but politically significant loyalist paramilitary group), the Gaelic slogan “Lamh Dearg Abu” appears, along with the (loose) translation “Ulster to Victory” (it means literally “Victory to the Red Hand”) (figure 12). And Gaelic mythology, associated since the late nineteenth century at least with Irish nationalism, has also been appropriated. Cú Chulainn, whose statue stands in the Dublin G.P.O., predictably features in Republican areas (figure 13). But, on the basis of his role in the defence of Ulster in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, one of the central narratives of the Ulster Cycle of Gaelic myths, he also stands as a heroic figure of the loyalist re-making of history, along with the Pretani (figure 14). Revisionism itself appears self-reflexively as a topic for the walls. Thus, challenging the debates within Irish historiography with regard to Irish nationalism, one mural depicts the figure of truth in front of the book of Irish history, while the mask of revisionism rests nearby. The image is framed above by a quote from the socialist republican Miriam Daly (executed by a Loyalist assassination squad): “History is written by the winner” (figure 15). Truth be told, there has been a good deal of revisionism over the past couple of decades, much of which has appeared on the walls. The Sinn Féin brand of republicanism, for example, has re-framed the war against the British state as a campaign to deliver equal status for Northern Irish nationalists (as opposed to the often-articulated goal of destroying Northern Ireland and forcing the British to concede Irish unity) (figure 16). Likewise, there are loyalist murals that depict their community as simply victims of a one-sided sectarian campaign of violence over some thirty years (rather than an active participant in a vicious war; figure 17). Indeed although the war may have ended, the conflict continues, as different versions of 1916 make clear (figures 18, 19).



Figure 7 – Warrenpoint, Rockville Street Falls Road, West Belfast 1981



Figure 8 – Michael Stone, Tavanagh Street The Village, South Belfast 1989

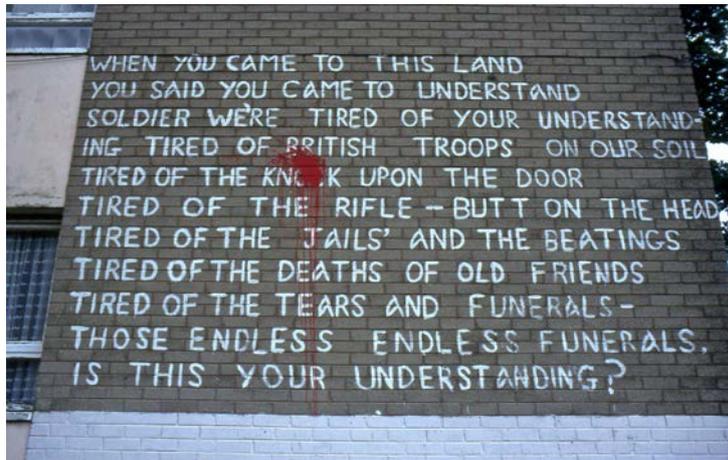


Figure 9 – Letter to a British soldier on Irish soil, Lenadoon Avenue Lenadoon, West Belfast 1981



Figure 10 – Ní Bheidh Síocháin Ann Gan Saoirse Republican mural, Shaws Road, West Belfast 1983



Figure 11 – Ulster-Scots, Templemore Street, East Belfast 1999



Figure 12 – Lamh dearg abu, Glenwood Street Shankill Road, West Belfast 1999



Figure 13 – Cú Chulainn, Lenadoon Avenue Lenadoon, West Belfast 1996



Figure 14 – Dalaradia Kingdom of the Pretani, Shore Road, North Belfast 2021

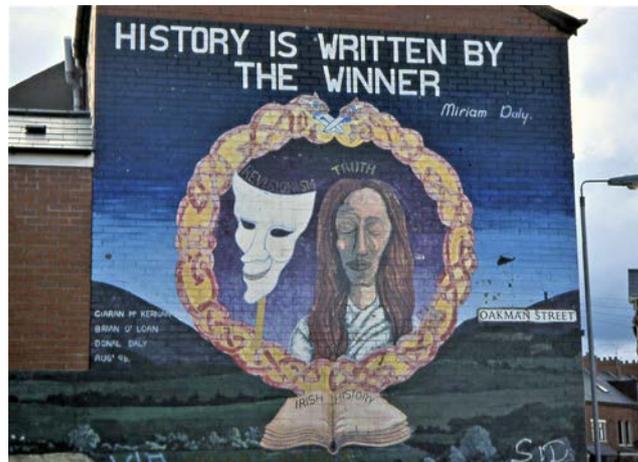


Figure 15 – Revisionism Republican mural, Oakman Street Beechmount, West Belfast 1996



Figure 16 – Republican revisionism, Divis Street Divis, West Belfast 1996



Figure 17 – Loyalist revisionism, Dundee Street Shankill Road, West Belfast 2002



Figure 18 – Republican 1916, McQuillan Street Falls Road, West Belfast 2016



Figure 19 – Loyalist 1916, Northland Street Shankill, West Belfast 2016

4. *Managing the Peace: Republican Murals 1994-2006*

When the IRA declared its first ceasefire in 1994, the response amongst nationalists and republicans was celebratory. McGlinchey, for example, in an important study of the origins and development of “dissident” republicanism, describes “a cavalcade of cars, including black taxis with tricolours hanging out of their windows, driving up and down the Falls Road, beeping their horns as an atmosphere of celebration and jubilation prevailed” (2019, x). In republican heartlands, there was “a feeling that a deal of sorts must have been done” (De Baróid 2000, 352). Indeed on both sides of the political divide, the same question arose: would the IRA really have ended its armed struggle if it had not achieved an agreement incorporating at least some of its goals? Though this question stimulated republican optimism and loyalist fear alike, it became apparent relatively quickly that “the ceasefire was a republican act of faith” (353), or at least a calculation that more could be gained by political rather than violent means at that point. For there was no deal between republicans and the British, other than that outlined in the joint Anglo-Irish *Downing Street Declaration* (1993), which was in effect that republicans would be invited to the negotiating table as long as they put down their arms.

Within the republican movement itself, the ceasefire was justified on the basis that republicanism was “entering into a new situation in a spirit of determination and confidence: determined that the injustices which created the conflict will be removed and confident in the strength and justice of our struggle to achieve this” (Irish Republican Army 1994). Given the suspension of the armed struggle, it followed that a new political imperative was required, as an internal republican discussion document produced in the summer of 1994 set out: “it is vital that activists realise that the struggle is not over. Another front has opened up and we should have the confidence and put in the effort to succeed on that front” (Cox, Guelke, Stephen 2000, 334). The decision to enter fully into constitutional politics was sealed by the republican movement’s commitment to *The Belfast Agreement* (also known as *The Good Friday Agreement*) in 1998, an internationally binding legal and political document which brought the war to an end. But the outbreak of peace brought with it a series of problems for mainstream republicanism. For although republican activists were assured that a new front had opened up, the republican constituency at large was less sure. Moreover, although most people welcomed peace, there were those too who wondered about the price that had been paid during almost thirty years of war. For if republicans had been willing to agree to an internal power-sharing settlement which guaranteed the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, then why – critics inside and outside the republican movement asked – had thousands of people died, and tens of thousands been injured, in a brutal and sustained campaign?

For Sinn Féin republicanism it was necessary that tangible political gains were evinced as rapidly as possible, and the disbanding of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and its re-constitution as the Police Service of Northern Ireland in 2001 was taken as an important advance. As was the early release of paramilitary prisoners under *The Belfast Agreement* (the last prisoners were released in 2000). But in general, republican involvement in what became known as the Peace Process was made difficult and slow because mainstream unionists refused to engage with Sinn Féin until the IRA had decommissioned its weapons. Decommissioning became a troublesome and complex issue for republicans, and it met with stiff internal resistance before the IRA finally put its arms beyond use in 2005. But the long delay in doing so, and the obstructionist tactics of unionism, meant that despite its electoral success in becoming the largest nationalist party, Sinn Féin and its republican base was frustrated politically, at least in terms of sharing power at a national level. Such frustration required management.

Sinn Féin became the leading voice of constitutional nationalism post 1998, but conscious of the deep concerns of its activists and base supporters, which were exacerbated by the ongoing problem of unionist marches through nationalist areas, the party was aware that it had to broaden and strengthen. It thus sought to become the hegemonic social, cultural and political force in its heartland areas and beyond. This was achieved in a number of ways. Practically, party activists, through energetic and committed engagement, influenced or indeed directed organizations across the social field (from elected office to local community group). But ideologically, the party sought to forge hegemony through the inculcation of values, ideas, norms and practices in order to create a community with a broadly shared set of beliefs and attitudes that would translate into behaviour and responses in specific historical circumstances. Evidently, for such a project to succeed, these values and practices have to exist in some latent form within the community, but the key to hegemonic rule is to articulate them, to add to them, to disseminate them, and to bring people to the point of recognizing that this is the sort of community that “we” are. In that sense, the post-ceasefire and post-*Agreement* years were crucial for republicans and nationalists since their communal identity was no longer defined by being simply against the British state and the effects of its war machine. In the new context, a developed form of republican and nationalist identity needed to be articulated distinctly – as a particular type of community that embodied a practical stance with regard to its historical situation. Murals were an important medium – public, visually striking and durable – through which that identity was forged and represented.

One example of the way in which murals were used by republicans in this regard was the development of “the International Wall” on a long boundary wall of Andrews flour mill on Divis Street, West Belfast. After 2000, this site became (and remains) a canvas for murals that mainly, though not exclusively, articulate an internationalist outlook and sympathies³. This was not a new development, since republicans had sought to “internationalize the conflict” during the war. Post-war, however, the aim was different. There was still a desire to make links with radical causes around the world – for example, with Basque separatists (figure 20), and the Palestinians (figure 21). But the international perspective in these murals was more than simply an extension of provisional republicanism’s wartime attempt to make common cause with other radical political and military resistance movements.



Figure 20 – Basque separatism International Wall, Divis Street, West Belfast 2001

³ The International Wall (sometimes called the Solidarity Wall) was initially confined to Divis Street, but as that space filled up, the adjoining and longer stretch of wall on Northumberland Street (running from Divis Street to Beverly Street and divided by the Peace Line) also became a mural canvas.



Figure 21 – Palestine International Wall, Divis Street, West Belfast 2001

The key to understanding such murals is to put them in the context of the republican attempt to forge cultural hegemony in their own areas. In essence, the murals reflected and shaped political sentiment in nationalist and republican communities in the post-war period by enregistering their inhabitants as radically engaged citizens both at home and globally. As noted above, this was not a misrepresentation of communal feelings and attitudes since the values that lie behind them were latent within the community. But what the murals attempted to do was to channel and organize political sentiments in particular ways, thereby helping to construct a specific identity. This was a process with internal and external aspects. Internally, for those who viewed the images as part of their everyday experience, the murals implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) suggested that like others in the world, they had a just cause that could be fought for politically. Externally, for the increasing number of mural tourists (the International Wall has become one of Northern Ireland's main tourist sites, figure 22), the images characterized nationalist and republican areas as liberal, outward-looking and welcoming.



Figure 22 – West Belfast Taxi Tours International Wall, Divis Street, West Belfast 2002

If international murals were one means to construct communal hegemony, another was through the forging of collective memory. One way of doing this was through images that drew attention to distinctive cultural features such as Gaelic sports, music, the Irish language, mythology, and religion. Above all, however, the murals emphasized a shared history, and they did so by focusing on constitutive historical moments. For example, an ambitious and well-executed mural in Ardoyne (North Belfast) depicted an early nineteenth century hedge school (a native response to one of the provisions of the Penal Code which imposed educational restrictions on the Catholic and Presbyterian population, Dowling 1968, 22-26; figure 23). The class is set in a rural setting (a “Penal Law Education” notice is mailed to the tree) and framed by a message in Irish: “labhair an teanga Gaeilge liom” (“speak Irish to me”). The depredations of the Penal Code are also recalled by a slightly later mural in the same area representing a Mass Rock (a secret location where Catholic Mass was celebrated in defiance of legal prohibition; figure 24). Here a priest saying Mass is unaware of the approach of British soldiers; an inscription above the image declares: “is í an charraig seo ionad adhartha ar náithreacha áit ar cothaidh an creideamh do na glúnta a bhí le teacht” (“this rock was our ancestors’ centre of worship, where religion was preserved for the generations that were to come”). There is one event in Irish history, however, that serves as a metonym for the catastrophic effects of colonial rule within Irish nationalist cultural memory: the Great Famine of 1845-52. And the 150th anniversary was marked in a series of striking murals. In the Ardoyne gallery, for example, “An Gorta Mór” (“The Great Famine”) was a reproduction of a contemporary sketch – “Funeral at Skibbereen” – framed by a quotation from Seamus Heaney’s “Requiem for the Croppies”: “They buried us without shroud or coffin” (figure 25)⁴.



Figure 23 – Labhair an teanga Gaeilge liom, Ardoyne Avenue Ardoyne, North Belfast 1996

⁴ Heaney’s poem refers to the 1798 Rebellion, in fact, rather than the Famine.



Figure 24 – The Mass Rock, Ardoyne Avenue Ardoyne, North Belfast 1997



Figure 25 – An Gorta Mór, Ardoyne Avenue Ardoyne, North Belfast 1997

These murals evidently fostered a sense of communal identity that was designed to serve republican purposes. But as well as addressing a broad nationalist electorate, republicans were also assiduous in memorialising their own past, particularly after 1994. For example, the founding moment of Irish republicanism, the formation of the United Irishmen and the 1798 Rebellion, was commemorated in a mural at South Link in West Belfast. Incorporating the insignia of the United Irishmen – a harp with the motto “It is new strung and shall be heard” – the mural depicted the rebels, with pikestaves, marching against a background of Ireland’s lakes and mountains, with Celtic surround and dates recording the bicentenary (1798-1998); at the bottom lies an inscription in Irish – “Na hÉireannaigh Aontaithe” (“the United Irishmen”). To the right, marking the influence of the French Revolution on the rebels, a smaller mural heralds “Liberté Egalité Fraternité” (figure 26). After 1798, the 1916 Easter Rising was the most important date in the republican calendar and it was represented in a series of murals including an ambitious reproduction of Walter Pater’s “Birth of The Irish Republic” (figure 27).



Figure 26 – United Irishmen, South Link Andersonstown, West Belfast 1998



Figure 27 – 1916, Berwick Avenue Ardoyne, North Belfast 2002

With regard to commemoration, however, it was the prison struggle of the 1970s, and the Hunger Strikes in particular, that became the most familiar trope for republican muralists. Thus Ciarán Nugent, the first republican prisoner to reject the criminalisation policy by refusing to wear prison uniform, was represented in 2005 (figure 28). And the image of Bobby Sands, first painted on the side of the Sinn Féin offices on the Falls Road in 1989, took its iconic form in 2005 and was re-imaged in 2015 (it is probably the most photographed mural in Northern Ireland) (figure 29). Other individual Hunger Strikers were also remembered in murals, sometimes close to where they had lived – Joe McDonnell in Lenadoon, Kieran Doherty in Andersonstown, Raymond McCreech in Camlough (figure 30) – but more often than not, simply in republican heartlands across Northern Ireland.



Figure 28 – Ciarán Nugent, Rockville Street Falls Road, West Belfast 2006



Figure 29 – Bobby Sands, Sevastopol Street Falls Road, West Belfast 2011



Figure 30 – Raymond McCreech, Quarter Road, Camlough 2006

As noted earlier, republican commemoration sought to inculcate the notion of an unbroken tradition, stretching from the United Irishmen to the Hunger Strikers. Yet in the 1994-2006 period, it also sought to remember the more recently deceased (murals on both sides have very infrequently portrayed living figures). This was a relatively new emphasis and one that was first evident on a large scale not in murals, but in the construction of more durable memorials⁵. Dedicated to individuals or local sections of the IRA, these were attempts to set in stone the narrative of the heroic republican dead and to take it beyond its traditional location in the graveyard. They appeared across Northern Ireland, ranging from Crossmaglen (figure 31) to Cappagh (figure 32), and they came in several forms, ranging from commemorative plaques, to stone memorials, to large-scale commemorative gardens (figure 33). Memory was, to coin a phrase, made concrete.



Figure 31 – Burns Moley memorial, Ballyfannahan Road, Crossmaglen 1996



Figure 32 – Republican memorial, Cappagh Road, Cappagh 2001

⁵ One of the most striking aspects of the murals is the fact that, with a relatively few exceptions, they are not designed to be preserved over the long term, indeed “most are expected to have a short life” (Jarman 1997, 212).



Figure 33 – Garden of Remembrance, Falls Road, West Belfast 2001

5. *The Ballymurphy Murals*

I want to turn now to a set of commemorative murals produced in Ballymurphy in 2001-2002. The area of Greater Ballymurphy lies at the foot of the Black Mountain and at the heart of republican West Belfast, and includes the sub-areas of Ballymurphy proper, Springhill, Westrock, the Whiterock, Dermot Hill, New Barnsley, Moyard and Springfield Park. It is not a large area geographically (it can be crossed in less than half an hour), and it is bounded by republican areas to the south (St. James), south east (Beechmount), and west (Turf Lodge) though, significantly, loyalist Highfield lies to the north east. The district is a twentieth-century development, with the central “bullring” estate of Ballymurphy built during the late 1940s and 50s. It is predominantly a poor, working class area and during the war, three large British Army bases (Fort Henry Taggart, Fort Jericho, and Fort Pegasus) sat at its edges; a large, fortified police station now overlooks the area. Ballymurphy was the site of two massacres: between August 9th-11th 1971, during the introduction of Internment, British troops shot and killed eleven unarmed civilians, including a Catholic priest and a woman left to die in a field (the Ballymurphy Massacre; de Baróid 2000, 69-100); on the 10th July 1972, British army paratroopers killed five more locals, including another Catholic priest and a 13 year-old girl (the Westrock Massacre; de Baróid 2000, 122-135). In short, Ballymurphy was one of the focal points of the war in Northern Ireland, and many of its inhabitants fought back against British rule in a variety of ways, ranging from armed struggle in one of the republican organisations, to community organising against poverty.

During the war, Ballymurphy was an important location for many murals that reflected mainstream republican views (those of Sinn Féin and the IRA). An early Hunger Strike mural on Whiterock Road, for example (figure 34), hailed those who “hunger for justice”, while yoking the Catholic (the angel) and nationalist (the national flag and crests of the four provinces) people of Ireland to the republican campaign (the prisoner and armed volunteer): “Their hunger their pain our struggle”. Later, the dual strategy of armed struggle and political campaigning was reflected in two murals on the Whiterock and Springhill from 1988. In one, a cartoon captures the process by which an indifferent by-stander becomes politicised and joins Sinn Féin (figure 35); in the other, armed IRA volunteers stand behind the Irish Tricolour and



Figure 36 – Springhill Drive Springhill Ballymurphy, West Belfast 1988



Figure 37 – Loch gCál, Springhill Avenue Springhill Ballymurphy, West Belfast 1987



Figure 38 – Cáisc, Whiterock Road Ballymurphy, West Belfast 1991



Figure 39 – Oppose censorship, Springhill Drive Springhill Ballymurphy, West Belfast 1989



Figure 40 – Whiterock Road Ballymurphy, West Belfast 1994

Yet as a key republican area, the reaction of Ballymurphy to the IRA ceasefires, *The Belfast Agreement*, and the Peace Process that followed, was monitored closely, not least because there was considerable concern in the district among mainstream republican activists, members of older republican groupings such as the Irish National Liberation Army, and those affiliated with newer “dissident” organisations such as the Real IRA. And it is within this context that the appearance of the eight Ballymurphy murals in 2001-2002 has to be set. The series began with a commemorative mural to IRA volunteers Jim Bryson and Patrick Mulvenna on Ballymurphy Road (close to where they were both shot by the British Army in August 1973; figure 41). Unveiled on 3rd June 2001 by Gerry Adams (President of Sinn Féin, M.P for Belfast West, native of Ballymurphy, and brother-in-law of Patrick Mulvenna), the mural depicts Ballymurphy Road in the early 1970s. The image is dominated by a representation of the two volunteers on active service, Bryson with his trademark Lewis gun, Mulvenna with a rifle; to the side there are picture portraits of the two men, while in the foreground sits the jeep, emblazoned with

“Óglaigh na hÉireann”, used by the Ballymurphy IRA (de Baróid 2000, 122). The image is remarkable for the verisimilitude of its depiction of the bend in Ballymurphy Road, a child playing on a barricade, the ubiquitous dogs, and, significantly, the volunteers – represented in relaxed, civilian mode in the portraits, and engaged in armed activity in the larger picture. These are not masked gunmen but recognisable individuals (the representations are based on a photograph of the two volunteers; de Baróid 2000, 173), at home in the streets in which they fought. This use of realism was an important shift in republican muralism (only the Hunger Strikers had been portrayed in this way previously), in that it “humanised” IRA volunteers as “ordinary” men and women.



Figure 41 – Ballymurphy Road Ballymurphy, West Belfast 2001

A similar style was adopted in the seven murals unveiled a year later in Ballymurphy (on the 26th May 2002; figures 42-47), and the eight images bear significant common features⁶. In all of the representations armed IRA volunteers figure centrally, and in some the locations are recognisably in Greater Ballymurphy – Ballymurphy shops, Springhill Avenue, Ballymurphy Road. In six of the seven 2002 murals, local republican activists are also represented and named, including, in the words of Gerry Adams, “the largely unsung heroes – mostly women who remained unbroken and unbowed through decades of conflict. They are all there – along with the [volunteers] who they fed and sheltered, chastised and comforted, through a remarkable and unprecedented period of communal conflict” (Greater Ballymurphy Murals Project Committee 2002). This form of commemoration is important in its explicit rendering of the relationship between people, place and memory in this tightly-knit, working-class, republican community. Implicit in this entire set of murals is the belief that the faces of IRA volunteers, as neighbours, schoolfriends, and workmates – “ordinary people in extraordinary roles” – belonged on the streets in which they were born, grew up, and sometimes died⁷.

⁶ All of the murals were painted by Danny Devenny, Marty Lyons and Seany McVeigh.

⁷ In a report on their deaths, a fellow republican later described Bryson and Mulvenna as “ordinary young men in an extraordinary situation” (Relatives for Justice 2018, 25).



Figure 42 – Ballymurphy Road Ballymurphy, West Belfast 2002



Figure 43 – Glenalina Road Ballymurphy, West Belfast 2002



Figure 44 – Glenalina Road Ballymurphy, West Belfast 2002



Figure 45 – Divismore Way Ballymurphy, West Belfast 2002



Figure 46 – Glenalina Road Ballymurphy, West Belfast 2002



Figure 47 – Springhill Drive Ballymurphy, West Belfast 2002

Yet the appearance of these murals in 2002 begs the question as to why they were painted in this way in this place at just this moment. One answer is simply that local republicans wanted to remember their dead in a public, durable form. But then why murals (rather than memorials), and why in this particular form – with armed volunteers front and centre? This last question is particularly significant, given that mainstream republicanism had renounced the armed struggle when it signed up to *The Belfast Agreement* four years previously. The answer to this paradox (if peace, why guns?) lies with the problematic issue of IRA decommissioning, which repeatedly brought the Peace Process to the brink of collapse before the republican leadership agreed to begin to put its arsenal beyond use in late 2001 (a task that was completed in 2005). For if arms were to be decommissioned, the confident and emphatic message from the Ballymurphy murals was that the armed struggle had been justified, its proponents had been heroic, and it had been supported by the “ordinary” men and women of the area. In addition, the implicit message was that although the war had been necessary, it was time to put it securely in the past in order to move on. Nowhere is that clearer than in the mural that originally depicted IRA volunteers “Toddler” Tolan, Michael Kane, James McGillen, and John Stone, in a local safe house with two older women (named on a plaque as Kathleen McCullough and Elizabeth McGivern), drinking tea and eating sandwiches, rocket and launcher and rifles resting against the wall along with the utensils (figure 48). Within eighteen months, however, the image had been revised: Toner’s combat jacket was replaced by a suit and tie and his rifle had disappeared (though the rocket launcher and rifles remained in the kitchen; figure 49). And when the mural was re-worked in 2014, although Toner and the other volunteers still featured centrally, the image had become a celebration of republican activists as a Tricolour-waving band of “working class heroes” (figure 50). The only weapons in the image – pike and six-gun – belong to the past; the Republican phoenix now stands for peace – as represented by the twelve doves that constitute the political legacy of the twelve IRA volunteers who died on Hunger Strike in the 1970s and 80s.



Figure 48 – Ballymurphy Crescent Ballymurphy, West Belfast 2002



Figure 49 – Ballymurphy Crescent Ballymurphy, West Belfast 2004



Figure 50 – Ballymurphy Crescent Ballymurphy, West Belfast 2014

6. Conclusion: Archiving and Meaning-Making

The *Murals of Northern Ireland* archive is a rich resource which takes advantage of digital technology to present a set of complex materials in accessible and fully downloadable form. Anyone with an internet connection can summon up a collection of around 15,000 images that stretch across forty years, painted by people engaged in one way and another with the conflict in Northern Ireland as it moved from bitter war to the Peace Process that continues to the present day. It is a remarkable testament to the way in which digitization offers the opportunity to view texts that would otherwise exist only in limited form (if at all). In that sense, the archive can stand as representative of the transformation that the digital world affords us

as activists, scholars, and citizens, to record, store and access materials that might once have been the preserve of a few. We are fortunate to live in a period when so much of the past and present is available to us with such rapidity and ease. And yet, as I hope to have shown in the historical readings of republican murals rendered above, having the materials available to us and interpreting them are two different, though evidently related, issues. Without contextualization the murals may appear to be no more than ephemeral wall art; placed in political and social context, they become meaningful historical texts.

An archive is an archive; it is a repository of materials, shaped and forms in particular ways, whose meanings are not necessarily easily available. In order to make sense of those materials, murals in the case of *Murals of Northern Ireland* archive, it is necessary to apply the traditional skills of the humanities in an inter-disciplinary way. That is, to read the signs carefully, patiently, contextually, historically; to pay attention to detail and form; to grasp the significance of a single item in relation to a tradition; to grasp complexity and nuance. These are difficult matters and they require skilled practice in the arts of interpretation, for whatever it means to get a reading “right”, I know from my own research (and indeed teaching), that it is very easy to get things wrong when trying to understand Northern Ireland. As I have found on a number of occasions, sometimes an apparently complicated image can be understood in a relatively simple way, whereas a seemingly straightforward image requires sustained historical analysis. But in the end, given that we are the meaning-makers, the onus is on us to provide readings that do historical and political justice to the materials that we have at our disposal. I use the word “justice” deliberately, for the murals of Northern Ireland were produced in a war in which justice itself was at stake. It is appropriate therefore that when interpreting the materials pertinent to that war, we endeavour to produce interpretations that add to an accurate and responsible account. Archives furnish us with the goods; we have to do good with the materials to which they give us access.

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Q&A with Barry Houlihan



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Abstract:

The interview is aimed to reflect on the elusive nature of theatre and the archive(s) through discussing issues of research, memory, and navigating digital spaces of the archive(s). It does so by considering the work of National University of Ireland Archivist Barry Houlihan, whose career recently has developed across theatre history, archival studies, digital cultures, and history.

Keywords: Archival Studies, Digital Archive, National University of Ireland, Theatre

At the time when we started discussing a possible special issue that would investigate the state of the art in the digital humanities in Ireland, we felt such work would also allow us to rethink the places of production and the diffusion of (academic) knowledge, as well as the breaking of conceptual canons as they circulate and are (re)produced within cultural institutions, such as the university. The idea of an interview came about as we tried to capture the educational challenges and cultural-political import of “the turn to the digital” within Irish studies as our common shared interest and focus in this issue. The work of Archivist and Lecturer Barry Houlihan fit with our aims in many productive and important ways. Houlihan is one of a series of innovative voices – some of whom we have been lucky enough to gather for this issue – who have combined the shifting and evolving nature of their research to pave new ground within the previously unexplored territory of the digital humanities. In doing so, and as this interview illustrates, he has used previous knowledge and expertise in history and English literature to span issues of medium, content and contexts, the revolutionary potential of the digital embedded in research and archiving practices, and the shifting ideas of the archive(s) to explore cultural, social, and historical-political (re)sources. We are grateful for the time

* This interview article is the result of the collaboration between its co-authors and guest editors of the issue. However, should a distinction be made for institutional reasons: Arianna Antonielli wrote pp. 119-122; Samuele Grassi wrote pp. 123-125.

he dedicated to this interview and hope that his insights will inspire yet more scholars and practitioners to thread the paths and connections of theatre-archive-digital work.

AASG: You started out as an academic researching the field of theatre studies. Can you say something on the relationship between theatre studies and your socio-cultural approach to the archive?

BH: Sure, my undergraduate background was in History and English, and my interests always focused on the overlap between the two disciplines and the methodological questions that it raises, such as – how has cultural history been shaped by social change? Where are those intersections between State and Art more broadly and how has one been influenced by the other? After my M.A. in Archives and Records Management I worked as an Archivist at the National Library of Ireland, cataloguing the archive of Dublin's Project Arts Centre (PAC). For me, it was a formative experience. I was wholly immersed in the archive of a multi-disciplinary arts centre, which was (in the late 1960s) born out of a period of great social change in Ireland and which was also influenced by similar international theatre work of the time.

The history of PAC was, in a sense, completely parallel to the social and cultural development of contemporary Ireland. Here was theatre, film, music, and visual art, all under one roof, led by a young and innovative group of artists, all of which was reflective of a society in flux. It was avant-garde, punk, and dynamic, and the PAC archive documented this fascinating record of Irish theatre, Irish culture, as well as political and social issues, reflected in the programming of work that engaged with sexuality, youth culture, housing, Religious change and secularisation, emigration etc. I have always brought that approach into later research and teaching, seeking out a wider archive of modern Ireland, and being aware of how theatre is such a powerful record of the country. It is a wholly public act. We can read radical or subversive material in our homes but to go to plays of a similar nature is to be physically present. You are part of a live moment.

AASG: Theatre studies may seem to benefit from digital archives / archiving in prescient ways. Here one could mention, among others, the Irish Playography project. What would you comment on this?

BH: Digital archives and digital theatre archives(ing) have really transformed how live performance today, as well as past performance, is being considered, re-engaged, and documented. *Irish Playography* from the Irish Theatre Institute is one of those special projects that has transformed the work I am able to do as a historian and archivist of the theatre. The canon of Irish (Western) drama and literature, as a concept, has been roundly challenged in recent years, for all its biases and singleness regarding gender, race, ethnicity, class etc. "The Archive", as a broad concept, should also be challenged as one which can be limited. It can be limited to those works which have the privilege of being performed, works that were revived and re-performed again, works published, translated etc. Production databases, such as *Irish Playography*, are vital touchstones – an accessible dataset of who, what, when, where etc. Like any project it has some limitations, new Irish plays' first productions since 1904, but it is a critical starting point to begin asking questions of repertoire and production histories, interrogating the data, finding gaps, cultural blindspots, and omissions.

So much of what digital theatre projects and digitising of archives of Irish cultural studies material more generally enables scholars, artists, and the public to do is aid the discoverability

and visibility of neglected and overlooked histories. Performance history in an Irish context has traditionally been linked to a textual history, one of a playwright and a play that had overall authority. This has been re-calibrated to a great extent over recent years with new scholarship of performance itself. Terminology has shifted towards “theatre-makers” as a catch-all term, and in practice we see that with a more devised and collaborative process. None of which is all new of course! Thomas Kilroy wrote a hugely important manifesto essay in 1959, *Groundwork for An Irish Theatre*, which advocated for exactly that collaborative process. Theatre and performance history is in a way still catching up with that thought.

For me, digital theatre archives and digitised records of past performance have to be increasingly open access. Copyright and licensing will also make a full online archive impossible (and rightly so) but especially for those marginalised performance histories and for projects which can correct the biases of subjective record keeping, online and interoperable archives and databases can play a vital role in giving visibility and authenticity to those omitted from other “official” versions of the past.

AASG: In the volume you edited in 2019, Navigating Ireland’s Theatre Archive: Theory, Practice, Performance, you argue that archives are never complete. Indeed, several authors have tackled the issue of the gaps, breaks, and silences that are structural components in collecting and archiving materials and experiences. How does your work fit into this?

BH: To be honest, it may be at the very core of my work. I do believe no archive can ever be called “complete” as such. I find I am continually working against the grain of memory, in seeking out collections and archives of theatre, literature, and social history, which otherwise perhaps would not be preserved at all. Archives are “institutions” of their own – they have their own privileges and biases in terms of what records are collected, what records secure funding for preservation, cataloguing, and digitisation etc. Those structures of power should not control the historical record, but rather be fluid enough to encompass as broad a cultural and historical record as possible. I have argued elsewhere for an approach towards “national memory” as a term and concept, rather than a “national archive”. A national archive is often considered “official” and “authoritative”.

The archive of a people, a theatre, or a social/political movement, is none of those things, but rather an organic process of documentation of those things, a live archiving. I do not believe a passive stance or in the blind hope that an archive or records of a theatre will serendipitously survive and be preserved and accessible. Rather, a pro-active and responsive archival methodology, one that embraces digital and born-digital components, (such as oral history) can help remove those structural gaps and silences. Conversations also need to happen with artists and theatre-makers, as well as with audiences. In *Navigating Ireland’s Theatre Archive*, the process and thinking was, as the title intimated, a journeying, and I was fortunate to have such wide-ranging contributions from archivists, academics, playwrights, digital humanists, and others in that book all working at the intersection of technology, performance, and theatre-making.

AASG: More recently in your career, you have developed a growing interest in the digital humanities, broadly conceived. How did you start engaging more in depth with the digital humanities?

BH: The field and work of archival management itself is supported by databases containing masses of datasets, ensuring we maintain physical and intellectual control over a vast set of archives, which can vary in size from single objects to hundreds of boxes of manuscripts

and materials of all media. The main turn came around a decade ago when the scale of work and technology enabled the mass digitisation of high resolution surrogates, all tagged with accurate descriptive metadata, that enabled the sharing and discoverability of the digital object as well as the metadata. Also, rights management was key. Performance archives are incredibly complex in terms of literary copyright, photographic rights, recording licensing etc. Orphan works with no known provenance or owner/estate are also difficult to select for digital open access.

In reality, so much was supported by hugely diverse and collaborative partnerships. We were fortunate at NUI Galway to have a broad range of skillsets and interested parties all working towards the same goal – enabling scholarship, teaching, and research in new and innovative digital ways, and using the archive collections as a means to transform how theatre is studied, how theatre archives are accessible, but also how theatre is made. We had close working relations with academic staff at the O’Donoghue Centre for Drama, Theatre, and Performance, such as Professor Patrick Lonergan, archival consultants like Martin Bradley, Library management such as John Cox, cultural partners such as the Abbey Theatre, The Gate Theatre, Druid Theatre Company, and others, that enabled us to create (albeit on a steep learning curve) the platforms and workflows to digitise and manage access to singular item level to over one million digital items across our theatre collections.

AASG: Do you see any particular connections between theatre studies and digital humanities, or does your interest emerge out of a desire to cross-pollinate different disciplinary backgrounds?

BH: I think theatre, live performance and digital humanities are essential partners. The recent Covid-19 years of theatre closures also saw an interesting turn where some companies streamed digitised archive performances to keep a connection with their audience. Others created altogether new and live-streamed live performances via Youtube or via ticketed live online performances. The Abbey Theatre, Landmark Productions, Anu Productions all did that to great effect and now post-pandemic, we all will return to the live theatre but it does still raise interesting questions on global audiences, sustainability etc.

My growing interest and work in digital humanities stems from working on those projects and also working with and supporting students and researchers from around the world. Collaboration in scholarship and in supporting the use of digital archive materials in new performance work is so interesting to be part of. A further thread to my own research is digital performance and digital media within performance, and that is a whole other but connected area! So I have been more active in recent years in working to create new active artist-partnerships and archive the work of contemporary theatre companies, like Druid Theatre Company, Pan Pan Theatre Company, Corn Exchange Theatre Company, and the archive of designer Joe Vanek.

That intermediality of the archive is a fascinating battle against digital obsolescence. Working, for instance, on migrating hundreds of hours of performances from the Pan Pan Theatre archive, from the mid 1990s to present, has meant working with VHS, BETA cam tapes, mini-disc players, harddrives, floppy discs, DAT tapes, cassette tapes etc. All have some fragment of the live performance but all give a three-dimensional quality to the textual and photographic material in the physical archive.

AASG: Digital and technological developments and the rise of “theatre-makers” can be said to have shifted the provenance and classification of archival records. What would you comment on this, with particular reference to the Irish context?

BH: Theatre has been produced in a much more digitally collaborative and devised in the last decade, or even longer. I think a few companies and factors have been influential on that. The likes of Dead Centre theatre company have really transformed how technology and live digital performance have been used in theatre in recent years. Works like *Chekhov’s First Play* utilized headphones in such innovative ways while still drawing on archival records (the lesser known text and play of *Platanov*) and canonical figures, like Chekhov. Also *Hamlet* was a fascinating take on father/son relationships through the digital avatar of Shakespeare and his dead son. What works like this means in relation to classification and provenance, is a re-thinking around how a play exists and around how we document, capture, and preserve such work. Beyond, the ensemble devised work on text, movement, dialogue etc. is the vital work of sound design, video design, digital editors, who work to seamlessly combine and sync the digital elements with the live human presence on stage. The fields of metadata that we have used to document and classify records need to be updated to accurately capture the form and medium of the work, as much as the “where” and “when”. There is no singular text with many of these works, but even if there was, it can never exist, or later re-exist, without the correct knowledge of file classification and metadata to ensure the digital files are accessible into the future.

AASG: The archive is changing into a dynamic and self-reflective medium. In your view, how has the turn from the text-as-archive to hypertext (from emails to video, Apps, social network) transformed current approaches to performance theory and practice today?

BH: It has been a steep learning curve, from an archival perspective as much as anything. From a performance perspective it has enabled so much more in-depth dramaturgical preparation also. The term you describe, “hypertext”, is a really good one, as it reflects that digital journey, a searchable, omnipresent virtual world. It allows for remarkable new studies in voice, movement, choreography, design of set and costume etc. In the hypertext and hyperworld of the digital archive, we can see, here, and experience the now reanimated performances and assess how a line was delivered, how an accent sounded, how bodies moved on stage – even hear how audiences reacted. We get a sense of that also today through the social media world and record – audience video vox pops, video clips, comments, likes, shares, retweets etc. We can monitor the data of the performance in circulation through such online fora, and gauge public engagement/reaction etc. but ironically all these records are incredibly unstable in terms of a permanent archival record. Scholars such as Patrick Lonergan have written on theatre and social media and the instability of the online performance. Similarly, the online record of performance is far more at risk of loss over time than a physical record.

AASG: Your paper “Sound and Vision: Recovering movement, gesture and the actor’s craft from NUI Galway Digital Theatre Collections”, presented within the work of the DocPerform project, addresses “the archive of contemporary theatre” and “the contemporary theatre archive” as “two disparate things”, which we find a productive and provocative claim. Could you say something more on this?

BH: Yes, this was something I was encountering more frequently when working with current working companies on their archives and while also working on projects which involved large scale digitisation of more historic records. The “contemporary theatre archive” is a mix of all those things, both the current and the historical, one that is primarily a dataset of both digital objects and corresponding datasets and all range of media of material that may exist, from eighteenth century broadside to a twentieth century promptscript. This “contemporary theatre archive” is being actively shaped by research needs and performance theory. How is theatre and performance being researched? For example, are we interested in linguistic form in adaptation of European theatre? Or queer/LGBTQ[IA]+ identities in Shakespeare works? For these we need large longitudinal studies across many centuries and through archive material that could be held here in NUI Galway, Trinity College Dublin, The British Library, the Harry Ransom Centre etc. We need these digital collections and datasets to talk to each other, to be searchable, discoverable, and interoperable. There is no quick answer to that, it is an ongoing work across all disciplines of Digital Humanities.

For the flatter point, the “archive of contemporary theatre”, I see (and encounter) that as a different entity. That is the live and current archive of theatre and performance happening now and has happened last year and as will be performed next year. That is a multi-faceted and ever-changing body of work, but one I would also argue is rapidly disappearing. Material now sits between shared drives, commercial cloud stores, hosted/created/edited on proprietary software that needs licences to access etc. I am already seeing so much work of the last decade become obsolete and inaccessible. If we want (or hope) to have an archive of today's theatre to exist at all in 10/20 years, beyond what exists as a published text, or may temporarily exist on Youtube or Vimeo, intervention and dialogue is needed, between archivists, archive institutions, and with artists and theatre makers to ensure some standard practices are being used in terms of storage or deposit of records.

AASG: Do you view the internet as a new performance medium? What has improved and what has been lost, for instance, in the uncertain present/futures of the Covid-19 pandemic?

BH: The internet is perhaps the ultimate performance medium. Most of what we do online is a performance, from the social media identity we curate of ourselves, to the people and sites we engage with – it is all a projection of ourselves. But it is also a most unstable one. The horrific idea of “The Metaverse” that Mark Zuckerberg’s Facebook is slated to become, or the very real risk to freedom of speech should Elon Musk’s take-over bid of Twitter be successful, are warning signs of how performance of the self is being monetised for massive personal gain. This is data-washing – the algorithm that shows you all ads corporations want to sell you is a grim reality where you are the product on sale.

Elsewhere online, the internet did enable some semblance of connection to happen between theatres and audiences during the Covid-19 period of global lockdown. Some companies screened ticketed archive recordings of past productions, while others produced live performances, produced in empty theatres and broadcast to the world also by ticketed events. This generated some welcome revenue and was received as very positive by people with accessibility issues, so that should be really welcomed. There are many pros and cons – long-term and thinking of climate sustainability, is international travel/touring going to be effective in its current form? Can more live-streaming help? One risk is that only the larger theatres/companies in receipt of

State/public support can pay for such facilities to professionally record/live stream. The biggest challenge of all may be can that model sustain “liveness”? Will it keep an audience coming to the online theatre vs that of the physical theatre – I am not so sure.

AASG: To conclude, can you say something about the fundamental relationship between curation and preservation in the digital age, and what directions do you see it as heading towards?

BH: One challenge will be to control/manage the digital space as much as the digital object, and by that I mean, the labour of digitisation is now familiar to many/most of us working on archives and digital humanities. The greater and perhaps still broadly untested task is digital preservation. I have mentioned elsewhere the risk to current theatre records, born-digital materials etc. that I see as becoming less material and even more ephemeral in a digital space where storage is not endless and has a financial cost. Digital obsolescence is a major risk to curation and preservation. That is not a new phenomenon of course, but the range of media now being produced and used in performance is so wide-ranging, we need to be actively in the conversation with artists and theatres and advising and partnering on curation and preservation.

Also open-access is essential and will increasingly be so. This might clash with copyright/licensing, so again those active conversations will be key.

There is great potential for companies to grow their audience by maximising their archival process and materials. That does not have to mean *just* monetary gains, but wider cultural connections through education, training, public engagement etc. I would love to see theatre and performance be more embedded in schools and with younger people and in communities. Bring the special experience of the theatre directly to them. They consume culture and entertainment in a wholly different way – use the digital archive as the medium and vehicle and bring a new cohort and generation along.

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Miscellanea



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“The Island without Peace” Reporting the Irish War of Independence in *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere*

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Abstract:

The article investigates the coverage of the War of Independence in the visual and textual materials of *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere* to show why these publications kept a mildly pro-British stance on the conflict while voicing their concerns. These leading publications gave extensive coverage to the Irish struggle for national self-determination, in which members of the Sinn Féin party were depicted as a dangerous minority and Ireland was called “troubled” or “the island without peace”. My contention is that such representations were influenced by the editorial staff’s fears about the contemporary Italian socio-political situation, nationally and internationally. Therefore, the articles and illustrations on the conflict should be read not only within the framework of the periodicals’ usual concern for international politics, but also by considering the anxieties haunting the Italian intellectual elite at the time.

Keywords: *Corriere della Sera*, Irish War of Independence, Italian-Irish Relations, *La Domenica del Corriere*, News Reporting

1. The Irish War of Independence as Seen from Italy

In the transformative years of 1919-1923, Ireland commanded the attention of the Italian public opinion and media, with news stories of violence and injustice that aroused the indignation of many Italian commentators (Walsh 2006, 118; Pellizzi 2011, 57). Sympathies for the Irish cause were expressed by the press and at gatherings of the Italian parliament. *Il Popolo* openly supported the cause of Irish independence; as did the Catholic daily newspaper *L’Italia* and, up to the end of 1918, the influential *Civiltà Cattolica*. Several members of the Italian People’s Party proposed (aborted) motions to the Chambers for the recognition of the Republic of Ireland; groups of young

Catholics linked to the party of Don Sturzo promoted demonstrations in support of the Irish cause and translated and published reports on the violence perpetrated by British troops on civilians on the island (Pellizzi 2011, 57).

Yet, as Sinn Féin's envoy to Rome Sean O'Ceallaig admitted in his dispatches, Irish nationalists did not garner the sympathies of the most important Italian daily and illustrated periodical of the time. The escalating levels of violence in Ireland attracted the attention of the editorial staff of *Corriere della Sera* and of *La Domenica del Corriere*, and O'Ceallaig met their reporters and illustrators on numerous occasions, but failed to dispel the negative impression that the latter had of Sinn Féin's "rebels". He wrote to Diarmuid O'Hegarty, "*Corriere della Sera* has not been very friendly to us at any time and I had a bitter argument with Signor Croce, one of their chief editors – mostly about the attitude of Ireland during the war". In fact, even though there appears to have been "a distinct change in the tone of the articles and even of the news" on the Republican struggle in the autumn of 1920, the Milanese newspaper and its supplement kept a conservative, mildly pro-British stance on the conflict for its entire duration (O'Ceallaig 16 September 1920).

This relatively uncommon posture towards the Irish War of Independence deserves attention because it highlights an aspect of the Italian-Irish relations of the early twentieth century that is still underexplored. My article seeks to contribute to the existing scholarship on the international media's discussion of the conflict (Walsh 2006 and 2008; Madigan 2020; Zách 2020) and on the complex interactions that occurred between Ireland and Italy (Pellizzi 2011; Chini 2015 and 2016), as it investigates the reasons underlying the peculiar stance of *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere*. To this end, using the methodological tools of Critical Discourse Analysis applied to the language of news reporting (Haarmann and Lombardo 2009; Richardson 2008; Bednarek and Caple 2012), I explore their representations of selected key events: the First Dáil and the Limerick Soviet in 1919, Terence MacSwiney's hunger strike and the execution of Kevin Barry in 1920. Moreover, since it follows flows and connections across the Irish borders to trace links with Italy, the study adopts a transnational approach to the investigation of the War of Independence (cf. Whelehan 2015; Delaney and McGarry 2020), and helps to show that the events of the war had become the focus of Italian attention, because they were deemed part of a wide, international story and, as such, newsworthy and relevant for Italian audiences.

In particular, drawing on Chini (2015 and 2016) and Cefaloni (2019), I focus on the image of the Irish nation conveyed by the Italian publications and how journalists used Ireland as a proxy to voice and exorcise their fears over the contemporary Italian socio-political situation, nationally and internationally, as I argue that these anxieties had direct bearings on how the commentators of *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere* responded to the Irish War of Independence.

2. *Categorising the "Us" versus "Them"*

Founded in Milan in 1876, *Corriere della Sera* was the most widespread daily newspaper in early-twentieth-century Italy, which saw the advent of mass politics, rapid industrialisation, war interventions, the *Biennio rosso*, and the inception of Italian fascism. It was in these years that the forceful editor Luigi Albertini strove to turn the paper into something that was more than an organ of information – i.e., into an active factor shaping the events that transformed Italy (Licata 1976, v), as, with a circulation of over 350,000 copies among the ruling classes, *Corriere della Sera* could monopolise the formation of public opinion. This was evident when

Albertini and his newspaper spearheaded the campaigns for Italy’s entry into the Great War in 1915 (Sciarrone 2015, 132). Furthermore, by 1919, Albertini had cemented the position of *Corriere della Sera* at the centre of the national psyche, with the establishment of special extras aimed at a more popular readership, namely the illustrated Sunday supplement *La Domenica del Corriere*, in 1899, which, under the helm of Attilio Centelli, rapidly became the most successful weekly in the first half of the twentieth century, outselling its main major competitors *La Tribuna* and *L’Illustrazione Italiana*, with over 500,000 copies sold per week and a much larger estimated readership (Ginex 2007, 18-19).

Centelli and the illustrator Achille Beltrame made the conscious decision to favour visual communication when presenting the week’s facts to the Italian readers, with illustrations rather than photographs. It is worth noting that Beltrame’s illustrations were not accurate visual records of the events, as he did not chronicle them with the images, but reconstructions that were the result of his creativity and his stance on the subject (Ginex 2007, 19-23). Discerning what Beltrame emphasised visually is therefore of interest when trying to understand how the periodical’s staff wanted to communicate to Italian readers the events of the Irish War of Independence and came to frame thinking about the conflict in Italy.

Among Beltrame’s recurring subjects were royal visits, catastrophes, and military exploits – themes for which Ireland could provide a great deal of fodder. For instance, the revolutionary years saw covers devoted to the sinking of the SS *Lusitania* and people’s mourning for the drowned civilians (*Domenica del Corriere*, hereafter *DC* 7 June 1915), to the guerrilla warfare and British reprisals of the Irish War of Independence and Civil War, and even to “bad weather drama(s)”¹ (*DC* 9 December 1928). The Easter Rising received some attention too. Although most of the covers of 1916 celebrated the military feats of the Alpini on the Karst Plateau, the “glorious deaths” of Cesare Battisti and Enrico Toti, or featured images of crowds cheering soldiers to imply broad popular support for Italy’s participation in the war (Oliva and Beltrame 2012), the uprising in Dublin was not completely left out from the pages of either the illustrated periodical or *Corriere della Sera*, but, as everybody’s attention was drawn to the conflict, the riot was understood in the context of the Great War and communicated as a war-related event. Incidentally, the ways in which *Corriere della Sera* reported the event are of relevance within the scope of this article, because the same anxieties that informed the representations of the Easter Rising (anxieties about betrayals, the precariousness of the constitutional order, and the threats posed to national security) would later underpin the commentaries on the Irish War of Independence.

The Easter Rising received frontpage attention from *Corriere della Sera* on 26 April 1916, not because of any sympathy for the Irish nationalist cause, but because of its potential repercussions on the developments of the war and the alleged role of Germany in fomenting it. This was made clear in the headline “Attempted Landing and Riot in Dublin”, which foregrounds the temporal co-presence between Roger Casement’s ill-fated gunrunning and the rebellion to create the impression that the latter was the result of treacherous war machinations with Germany (cf. Chovanec 2014). Casement and the leaders of the Rising are portrayed as “traitors” to the Irish people for having conspired with Ireland’s wartime enemy. Casement was described in a way that expressed the journalist’s negative opinion of him, as he was called a “relentless enemy of Great Britain”, “renegade”, “unlikeable adventurer”, “recruiter in German prison camps of an imaginary regiment of Irishmen”, “who put himself at the service of Germany” (*Corriere*

¹ All translations from Italian into English are mine.

della Sera, hereafter *CS* 26 April 1916). These lexical choices encouraged the paper's readers to see Casement as a man whose obsession with British rule made him unable to differentiate fantasy ("imaginary") from reality, to the point that he deserted from his allegiance to Ireland ("renegade", "at the service of Germany"). In the same line, the insinuations that he fabricated his reports of the abuse of indigenous peoples in the Congo Free State and the Putumayo district in the Peruvian Amazon (*ibidem*) can be read as further attempts, in 1916, to discredit Casement and cast a shadow over his actions and beliefs. In its articles on the aborted landing, *Corriere della Sera* provided a harsh moral and political judgement of Casement rather than an accurate account of the military operation, to highlight the villainy of Casement's plans at a time when both Ireland and Great Britain were fighting on the same side as Italy, in the Great War².

The condemnation of actions meant to destabilise Italy's ally is likewise apparent in the writings devoted to the Easter Rising. As with Casement's representation, the notions of "excess" and "betrayal" inform the depiction of Patrick Pearse and his acolytes, here written off as "exalted" individuals and as "a minority of fanatics of the worst type [who] dared to put themselves at the service of Germany" (*CS* 26 April 1916; 27 April 1916). The epithet "fanatics of the worst type" removed all possibility that the uprising had the potential to be a legitimate protest: the accusation of fanaticism depoliticised the rebels' goals, as their sole purpose of being was thus reduced to an extreme ("fanatical") obsession with England. The reasons for the protest were also questioned with a series of remarks and lexical choices that clearly defined two opposite collective identities: on the one hand, the fanatical, treacherous minority of Pearse and Casement; on the other, "the vast majority" of Irish people whose "loyalty" to Great Britain was "beyond doubt" (*CS* 26 April 1916; 27 April 1916). Indeed, "the vast majority" of Irish people "keep away from the separatist movement and have contributed spontaneously, through the bloodshed of their sons, to the victories of the British Army against Germany" (*CS* 26 April 1916; cf. also 27 April 1916).

Here, one perceives that the events taking place in Ireland were not seen as strictly limited to the Anglo-Irish framework, as they had international repercussions throughout Europe, where self-determination for small nations was the subject of heated debates before, during, and *after* the Great War (Aan de Wiel 2020, 195). Indeed, one seminal event of the aftermath of the conflict was the Paris Peace Conference, where the Irish delegates called for the recognition of their self-proclaimed republic, and the Italian envoys put before the assembly their territorial claims to Fiume and Dalmatia. In particular, the Adriatic question was a key element of connection between Italy and the other European nations after 1918, that greatly influenced Italian attitudes towards foreign countries. Firstly, Italy wanted Britain to support its designs in the Adriatic, so Italian national publications like *Corriere della Sera* avoided publishing pieces that would alienate the sympathies of a powerful ally (cf. Chini 2015, 205). Secondly, the Irish fight for independence brandished before the eyes of the Italian people the spectre of the loss of territorial integrity and union, precisely on the days when delegations of Dalmatians reiterated at the Conference "the unwavering will of their constituents to be reunited with the Italian motherland" (*CS* 6 March 1919).

In the articles covering the Easter Rising, the binary oppositions "the many vs the few", "the sensible vs the unsensible" and "the loyal vs the disloyal" attested to the fears of the Italian

² The judgement on Casement, which was the subject of numerous articles until 1921, was certainly exacerbated by the discovery of the Black Diaries on the "moral deviations that made him odious" (*CS* 11 August 1959), documents that, nonetheless, the paper never explicitly mentioned during these years. As interesting as this reticence (at least in my opinion) is the fact that the veracity of Casement's reports was not contested when they first came out (cf. *CS* 7 December 1903; 18 July 1912).

journalists, who dreaded the emergence of subversive forces and did not look favourably at a weakening of Britain. And a comparable mix of anxieties informed the pieces featured in *Corriere della Sera* at the time of the Conference, when the paper's commentators ventured to ingratiate Britain by affirming,

Italy's contempt for dealing with arguments that are unpleasant to her friend England, and for being unjust towards a very noble race which, if it exerts the imperial power even where national law does not demand it, makes its own fortune resonate for the benefit of all humanity. (CS 6 March 1919)

This *captatio benevolentiae* is also indicative of the authors' admiration for Britain as a stronghold against the advancement of forces hostile to liberal interests, precisely when Italy was unsettled by subversive agitations.

The end of the Great War did not bring peace to Italy. Social struggles, and political and paramilitary violence continued for many years after November 1918 as a bird's-eye survey of the covers of *La Domenica del Corriere* in the years 1918-1920 shows. On 10 November 1918, the periodical finally celebrated the end of the war and many of the following covers provided visual accounts of Remembrance Days or the celebrations for the anniversaries of Italian victories on the battlefield. But such images of unity, of people bonded by mourning or joy, were soon replaced by covers that exposed the deep cracks in the country's political and social landscapes in the post-war years. The era of the Italian liberal State was coming to an end and the new phase of the *Biennio rosso* was commencing (cf. Lyttelton 2005; Gentile 2005). This implied a shift in the aesthetics and subjects of the periodical's illustrations, as social conflicts started to be represented using different aesthetic codes, and as targets of abhorrence (Ginex 2007, 88). Beltrame depicted the strikes in Milan as "painful and distressing spectacle[s]" (DC January 1920), because public services no longer worked, chaos reigned, and public order was imperilled by laziness and a lack of discipline (DC 25 January 1920).

Towards the end of 1919, the commentators of *Corriere della Sera* similarly condemned these episodes, which were portrayed as attempts to sabotage the country, as the strikes and socialist activities across Italy were often presented as threats to both bourgeois social order and national values (Licata 1976, 193; Benvenuto 2000, 449; cf. also Lyttelton 2005, xii). Take for instance the following passage about a strike of railway workers:

How could the Italian railway workers, who often demonstrated their self-denial and patriotism during the war, want right now, when they are fighting against another terrible enemy, disorganisation and famine, to show themselves to be unfit for their duty and unable to understand that, with the suspension of indispensable services, they put the life of the nation at stake for an insignificant return. (CS 13 July 1919)

What was particularly frightening for *Corriere della Sera* was the idea that undemocratic powers could take advantage of the situation which was characterised by unfocused rebellion and a general mood against the State and the ruling classes, who constituted its readership (cf. Levy 2007). The articles on the social struggles of the *Biennio rosso* often revealed an overriding fear of subversive forces and their authors' anxieties about the difficulties of the Italian government and constitutional force to restore order and security. *Corriere della Sera* was not immune to the fear of the "Red Menace", nor did it hesitate to criticise Gabriele D'Annunzio's military operations in Fiume in 1919 (cf. Ledeen 1977), as they could become sources of social instability. The radicalisation of rhetoric and action was dreaded. Until 1922, *Corriere della Sera* and Albertini had called not only for law and order and the preservation of the Liberal

State, but also for the continued exclusion of “subversive forces” from the *Statuto* (Devendittis 1976, 625). Apparently, the editor even hailed the onset of Fascism as a “santa reazione” (“holy reaction”) to the illegalities of the *Biennio rosso* (Benvenuto 2000, 449).

My contention is that these fears were projected onto the Irish situation. The staff’s mistrust of the “agitators” reverberated in the articles that recounted the earlier months of the War of Independence, the most defining moment of which was the first assembly, on 21 January 1919, of the revolutionary unicameral parliament of the Irish Republic, known as the First Dáil. *Corriere della Sera* immediately reported the news, publishing a long series of articles that subtly pressed into the reader’s mind the idea that the Sinn Féiners were inept radicals, that were potentially dangerous because of their inability to foresee the consequences of their actions, whereas the British authorities came through as pragmatic peacekeepers. As a norm, the paper’s commentators avoided explicit value judgements about the morality and competence of the parties involved, but their stance on the Irish situation and its protagonists may be gathered from the words used to describe them, the contrasts and apparently neutral passing remarks, which provide the backbone for the pieces published in the winter of 1919.

For instance, in “How Ireland’s Independence Was Declared by the Sinn Féiners” (CS 23 January 1919), the author devoted a lot of attention to an aspect that may seem trivial; he did not focus on the contents of the proceedings of the very first meeting, but on *how* they were delivered. We are informed that the proceedings were held wholly in the Irish language, although English was “the only language understood and spoken throughout the country”, and that “the motions in Gaelic were understood solely by a tiny minority among the participants”, to the point that some of them had to fall back on a “rusty” French to intervene (*ibidem*). These factual details might seem innocent. However, they actually convey the idea of a minority of radicals who were stuck in the past (there were few fluent Gaelic speakers in early-twentieth-century Ireland) and oblivious to the needs of most people. Moreover, their use of the ancient language was described as “not pragmatic” and based on an anachronistic bias against the language of “the usurpers”. Thus, in the reconstruction of the event provided by *Corriere della Sera*, the message to the Free Nations for the international recognition of Irish independence sounded (albeit correctly understood) untimely, exaggerated (“to the bitter end”), and far-fetched, as it was based on a supposed popular consensus recognised by Sinn Féin alone, as “the land-owners and farmers, who used to be the overwhelming majority of the assemblies of the old nationalist party, did not intervene” (*ibidem*). How could the Sinn Féiners take the reins of Ireland in the troubled post-war era?

Interestingly, to prove that their scepticism was justifiable, the Italian journalists also made instant use of articles published by the Irish press on Sinn Féin. In the article featured on 25 January, the Italian correspondent C.C. (presumably Carlo Camagna)³ advanced his narrative through the voices of the *Irish Independent* and the *Freeman’s Journal*, which defined the party’s programme as unrealistic and, as such, “deleterious to the ambitions of our cause” (CS 25 January 1919, 2), because it called for “ridicule” of the Irish people (*ibidem*). However, while the Irish commentators only concerned themselves about how Sinn Féin’s initiatives might hinder the attainment of national autonomy, C.C. voiced his suspicion that the party’s political initiatives were not only farcical and deleterious for the nationalist cause, but also a threat to stability in Ireland. His scepticism bordered on fear when he realised that the “excess” of Sinn

³ Carlo Camagna was the paper’s permanent correspondent in London, who also covered news from Ireland, which he possibly visited on a number of occasions. Overall, *Corriere della Sera* had multiple sources on Ireland, ranging from the international press (for example, the *Freeman’s Journal* and *The Times*), to the Stefani Press Agency, which collaborated with both Reuters and Agence France-Presse.

Féin's claims and activities may foment radicalism and unrest in the country (in point of fact, these were "the dangerous aspects of the Sinn Féin movement" (*ibidem*). According to C.C., the only reason why there was no "disorder" was to be ascribed to "the wise moderation of the English authorities, who refrained from any form of coercion and recalled their sentries used to watching Dublin City Hall" (*ibidem*). Here, gross dichotomising can be detected in the words and phrases used to describe the British authorities and the Irish radical nationalists, as negative language ("ridicule", "dangerous", "to the bitter end", "minority", "not pragmatic") was associated with the Sinn Féiners and their words and deeds, to differentiate them from the "valiant", "wise" British. These polarised characterisations of the British authorities and Sinn Féin's delegates gave the impression that the former would be able to mediate between opposing views and restore order in case of trouble. However, the less politically experienced Sinn Féiners were not expected to rise to the situation.

Incidentally, on other occasions, it was implied that the significant difference between Sinn Féin and the British authorities was due to the level of respect the two sides accorded to the democratic institutions and to their attitudes towards the recognition of fundamental human rights. This was the case of the article "The Irish Republican Assembly and the Attitude of the British Government" (CS 22 January 1919); as can be seen, a form of dualism was already highlighted by the headline. Here, the actions taken by the British authorities were construed as righteous and aimed at protecting the right of freedom of speech and protest, as the journalist lingered on the British "liberal" treatment of the situation, writing that:

the new minister for Ireland, Macpherson, arrived in Dublin yesterday and his first act was the abolition of the ordinance prohibiting public meetings. The Republican Assembly will therefore be able to meet without violating any law since under the normal regime nothing prevents free citizens of the British Empire from expressing their opinions and aspirations in public. (*Ibidem*)

In contrast, the rectitude of Sinn Féin is questioned in the passing remark that "34 Sinn Féiners elected to the House of Commons have been convicted of political crimes, and 3 have fled to the States" (*ibidem*).

Following the same path, in a subtly evaluative comment, it is said to be "curious" that the "two delegates de Valera and Griffith are imprisoned in England for their relations with Germany during the war" (CS 23 January 1919). The author was referring to the arrest, in May 1918, of 73 of the most influential leaders of Sinn Féin and Irish Volunteers, because of their participation in the so-called "German Plot", namely an alleged plot between the Irish radicals and the Germans during the Great War with a view to an insurrection in Ireland (Denton 2007, 122). Here, the author did not question the truthfulness of the accusations (whether or not they were British fabrications), but focused on their consequence, namely the status of de Valera and Griffith as convicts: labelling the two politicians as such identified them as criminals, or at least as individuals of dubious ethics. The "curiosity" reported by *Corriere della Sera* was, in fact, a commentary that contained a negative evaluation, even though there was no explicit, harsh criticism. The use of the label "delegates" may appear to be neutral, but it was not, because the reference to the status of de Valera and Griffith as elected politicians could potentially imply a negative opinion of *all* of the Sinn Féin delegates, who belonged to the same party and shared the same convictions about Ireland as the two inmates (cf. Bednarek and Caple 2012, 235)⁴.

⁴ Elsewhere, de Valera was labelled the "Spanish native son", perhaps with the intention of casting doubt on the motives of his Irish nationalist aspirations (CS 3 April 1919).

The allusion to the Great War, too, is worthy of analysis because it contributed to the portrayal, in negative terms, of the start of activities of the Dáil and of Sinn Féin. It may also remind us of the commentaries on Roger Casement and Patrick Pearse, as it suggests the existence of treasonable relations during the war that put into question the reliability and patriotism of the current Sinn Féin leaders. Another commonality between this and the pieces on the Easter Rising is the focus on the theme of loyalty, which is expounded in the conclusion and which can be read as implying approval of the Irish who did not oppose the Union. In the conclusion, the author lingered on a group of Irish war veterans' singing *God Save the King* in another hall of Mansion House, while the inauguration of the Dáil was going on: it is stated that they had fought "bravely" at Loos and had been taken prisoners by the Germans, indicating that, as POWs, they never tried to establish a connection with their jailers to improve their lot, but remained loyal to their country. Again, the values of bravery and loyalty are contrasted with treachery (CS 23 January 1919).

But observing that many Irish people still supported the Union or deemed Sinn Féin's project unfeasible did not dispel the idea that the vocal minority of Sinn Féiners represented a threat to socio-political order. For all his emphasis on the loyal Irish ex-servicemen and the silent majority of people at the gatherings of the First Dáil, the author acknowledged that there was a fracture among the Irish people, which might widen over time; this was pointed out in the conclusion of the article, in which it was said that both the war veterans and the Sinn Féiners were applauded with "equal fervour" by the mob when they left Mansion House (*ibidem*).

With the wisdom of hindsight, we may argue that the journalist was right, as the sporadic hostilities of early 1919 made way for an ever-intensifying cycle of violence in the following months (Madigan 2020, 99; Hopkinson 2002, 67-68). And when the fears of disorder became a reality, there was a shift in the way that *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere* reported the events of the Irish struggle. The Ireland of January 1919 did not only command less than later events prominence, in terms of front-page and top-of-news coverage, but the ways the news was structured and written about also changed. Sweeping narratives showed Italian readers what war meant in urban landscapes, as the readers were provided with salient accounts of episodes of guerrilla warfare. Typical of war writings (cf. McLoughlin 2011, 22), these were full of references to wounded and dead bodies, physical symptoms, deafening noise, and images of destruction. The report on the assassination of Colonel Smyth, in July 1920, was emblematic, as this act

put the city of Cork in serious turmoil, and today in the streets real battles have continued between soldiers and ex-servicemen, civilians, and policemen; 3 civilians and one soldier were killed, and 40 people wounded, some of them dying. The streets of Cork are continually crossed by armed patrols, trucks loaded with soldiers and armoured cars. The activity of the Sinn Feiners is no less serious and, therefore, no less dangerous. [...] The whole city thundered continuously with gunshots. (CS 20 July 1920)

Readers were made to see the destruction brought on the city of Cork and hear the deafening noises typical of warfare ("the whole city thundered"). They were also reminded that this was an ordinary spectacle ("continually"; "continuously"), one of the many incidents of a guerrilla war that caused material devastation and loss of life on both sides and among civilians. And for this reason, i.e. because of the magnitude of the violence, the Italian journalists then started evoking the Great War in their reports and commentaries about the conflict in Ireland in a new way.

Take for instance the caption to the cover illustration of *La Domenica del Corriere* on 12 December 1920, where the outlines of the events were presented using references to the Great War and sensationalised language. Beltrame could no better communicate the scale and type of violence of the Irish guerrilla fighting than by establishing parallels with what had happened in the years 1914-1918. It was reported that "the methods of the Great War" had again been

brought to life in “Ireland, which is troubled” by “the civil war”: “in the streets of Dublin: the advance of a column of rebels is stopped by an armoured car, by launching smoke bombs” (DC 12 December 1920). The very use of the term “Great War” was at the same time evocative and politically potent, as the experience of the conflict was still very vivid in the memory of the Italian readers, with its imagery that was the epitome of destructive warfare. Applying the term to the Irish situation meant making a sensational statement and a reference to a period of unprecedented violence. Equally interesting was the use of the adjective “troubled”, which suggested the pervasiveness and magnitude of the violence. Indeed, in the same issue, a photograph captured an episode of “the Irish War”. The caption reads:

This is how the British themselves defined the series of bloody troubles that continue to afflict the Emerald Isle. Here, in our photograph, the appearance of a Dublin street after one of the many clashes between police and Sinn Féiners: two rioters and a guard are lying on the ground. (*Ibidem*)

In the passages quoted, we can also appreciate the shift in the representation of the Sinn Féiners: from farcical politicians of dubious ethics, they were now “rioters” and “no less dangerous”. The events of the Irish War of Independence were thus integrated into a wider narrative that was meant to expose the threat posed by the insurgents and mass movements. Indeed, at the time, the staff of *Corriere della Sera* and of *La Domenica del Corriere* were gathering and serving up stories of atrocities from all over Europe, to stir their readers’ fears of subversive forces and rebellious mobs; hence, I do not think it was a coincidence that the article and photograph devoted to “the Irish War” were accompanied by a lengthy reportage on what was happening “In Lenin’s Tragic Russia” (*ibidem*). Here, the readers’ fears were deliberately aroused by tales and images of people being buried alive, of torture chambers, and of the final statements made by a woman condemned to death, which were reminiscent of a Poe-esque gusto for gory details (“the walls are bespattered with blood” (*ibidem*)).



Figure 1 – “Methods of the Great War that Civil War Brings to Life in the Troubled Ireland”, *La Domenica del Corriere*, 12 December 1920. This image is reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Ireland, PD C73

The Sinn Féiners were now painted in a blacker hue. At first, Sinn Féin's "subversive" attitude and deeds worried *Corriere della Sera* because they emboldened those extremists in the masses who saw the general atmosphere of unrest in the country as an opportunity for action. For instance, the Italian commentators acknowledged that the leaders of the ill-defined "Irish Republic" – the term is usually written between inverted commas to imply scepticism about Sinn Féin's political project (cf. CS 3 April 1919) – had no control over those rebellious masses, who had no interest in the national question but were acting for their own reasons. This is evidenced in this passage:

The working-class and agricultural masses, stirred up by the tenacious and skilful propaganda of agitators whose doctrines aim to subvert the social order rather than to obtain a simple change of political regime, declare themselves in solidarity with the Sinn Féiners – just nominally, as, in reality, they further an activity of a very different nature that gives rise to serious bloody events, such as the premeditated murder of two policemen in the central square of Tipperary, which took place two days ago. (CS 25 January 1919)

Yet, as time passed, the situation got worse, and the unrest caused by the Republicans' recklessness made Ireland vulnerable also to the deleterious influences of foreign, subversive forces. *Corriere della Sera* suggested that Bolshevik Russia was trying to garner Irish support against Great Britain by abetting the Republican movement: in March, the paper announced that "by 1 March, the Bureau of Propaganda in Moscow had spent 300 million rubles", of which "50 million had been spent to fuel the revolution in Ireland" (CS 6 March 1919). Here, the newspaper gave credit to the allegations of conspiracy between the Republican movement and the Russian Bolsheviks, made by the British official publications of the period, to politically isolate the self-proclaimed Republic in the international context. Clearly, this propagandistic strategy proved effective with the editorial staff of *Corriere della Sera*, for whom the very term "Bolshevism" had already become synonymous with chaos and danger.

Italian journalists voiced their contempt for the fact that some Irish trade unionists openly preached "Bolshevism" (CS 3 April 1919), and expressed relief after learning about the demise of a general strike in Limerick, the one that followed the death of the IRA man and unionist Robert Byrne. *Corriere della Sera* devoted a lot of attention to the story of the establishment and demise of the Limerick strike, which was clearly deemed newsworthy and relevant for the Italian readers; after all, Italy was then troubled by a succession of general strikes, which were "messy affairs involving chaotic rioting" (Levy 2007, 150). The mobilisation of the citizens of Limerick was construed negatively as a serious threat to the established economic and social order, as "the workers" (*Corriere della Sera* presented them as an unnamed collective) formed a sort of "soviet" that "rules the roost" in the town. These workers took on the role of democratic institutions, as they "order", "forbid", and "issue money". To make matters worse, Sinn Féin intended to "take advantage" of this and the other rebellions (CS 1 February 1919; 3 April 1919) – a scheme that, in the eyes of the Italian journalists, further proved the hostility of Sinn Féin leaders to democratic institutions, and that these leaders were a menace to national and international stability.

Conversely, the British government came to stand out as a stronghold against the chaos and disorder threatened, and at times caused, by Sinn Féin, the Unions, and the Bolsheviks in Ireland and around the world. The *Corriere della Sera* commentators voiced their hope that the British authorities, who were still "relatively immune to contagion [...] by Bolshevism" (CS 6 March 1919), could restore peace on the Island and national and international security. Here, we may appreciate the difference between *Corriere della Sera* and many other Italian periodicals of the time. Chini (2015, 204-206) observed that Britain's refusal to support Italy's territorial claims

over Dalmatia and Fiume ultimately led the Italian nationalist and Fascist press to embrace the Irish War of Independence as a righteous fight against an oppressive imperial power. However, *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere* did not. The contributors of the former expressed their dissatisfaction at how Britain was dealing with the Italian-Yugoslavian contention over the Adriatic islands (cf. CS 5 April 1919; CS 24 April 1919), but this did not turn into open hostility against the British authorities or support for the Irish cause. A weakened Britain was very worrying in the “bitter and agitated” world of the time, and Britain’s loss of authority was only in danger of “fuelling new fires, after so much destruction” (CS 6 March 1919).

Nevertheless, I believe that the “anomaly” of *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere* emerged most distinctly in their treatments of episodes that caused savage indignation all around the world, which I explore in the next section.

3. *Highly Emotive Stories and the Pro-British Stance of Corriere della Sera and La Domenica del Corriere*

In the history of the Irish revolution, we can pinpoint two very emotive episodes that received worldwide attention from the press, which occasionally led to a more sympathetic understanding of the Irish calls for independence. Here, I am referring to the unfortunate fates of the Lord Mayor of Cork, Terence MacSwiney, who died in Brixton Prison on 25 October 1920, after seventy-four days on hunger strike, and of the young IRA man Kevin Barry.

The description of MacSwiney’s physical decline and death dominated headlines all over Ireland and abroad in the autumn of 1920, as the nationalist organisations and press made every effort to ensure international media coverage of his story, presenting him as a martyr to British oppression in order to cause outrage (Ferriter 2010, 200). To win the hearts and minds of the European public, attention was drawn to MacSwiney’s suffering body, perhaps on a cue of the Lord Mayor himself, because he might have been aware that the mass circulation of accounts of his sufferings might influence the world’s perception of the Irish (Reynolds 2002, 538). This was a good intuition, because the story of the starving Lord Mayor struck a chord with European readers, making MacSwiney “a temporary international icon” (Ferriter 2010, 200). Grace Neville (2001) and Maurice Walsh (2006, chapter 3), among others, have demonstrated how the extensive coverage of this major story in France and England unsettled the nerves of many readers, and enabled them to develop a more nuanced view of the Irish question.

Between August and October, MacSwiney’s story commanded similar prime space in the Italian press, as all of the main publications featured a succession of lengthy articles that made the lot of the Lord Mayor an ongoing concern in the minds of the Italian readers. National newspapers reacted with a lot of emotional engagement, sometimes also exploiting this story to vent anti-British sentiment. For instance, on 29 August 1920, Benito Mussolini wrote the article “MacSwiney Agonises. Long Live the Irish Republic!” for *Il Popolo d’Italia*, in which he praised the hunger strike as an act of “superb stoicism” and declared Italy’s support for Republican Ireland. “The Italians,” he wrote,

for reasons of justice and interest, cannot deny their solidarity with the Irish. Ireland has the right to live independently, and as a republic. [...] We like to hope that the dying Mayor of Cork will at least hear the echo of the auspicious cry that comes from our hearts: ‘Long live the Irish Republic!’. (Mussolini 1920)

Like its counterparts abroad and at home, *Corriere della Sera* gave extensive press coverage to “the Tragedy of the Lord Mayor of Cork” in the Autumn of 1920 (3 September 1920), continually publishing hard news reports and updates that were of particular interest, as they provided a very

distinctive voice on the Irish question and, at the same time, appealed to both the emotions and reason of its readers. The language used to describe the Lord Mayor's physical decline was designed to inflame the passions of the reader – inevitably, the strong competition for the public's attention led to “sensationalism” (Sciarrone 2015, 133) – but, at the same time, the play on emotions was tempered by extensive, dispassionate passages in which the journalists examined the socio-political consequences of MacSwiney's imprisonment. The news stories on MacSwiney were delivered with a clear angle mirroring the newspaper's conservative and pro-British stance on the Irish question and the editorial staff's anxieties that these events could further exacerbate the tense Irish situation.

First, MacSwiney's story was recorded in detailed pieces characterised by the extensive deployment of emotive vocabulary, which conveyed the drama of a suffering, trapped body that was once vital but was now in pain. The headlines, “The Tragedy of the Lord Mayor of Cork” (CS 3 September 1920), “The Vitality of the Lord Mayor of Cork” (CS 9 October 1920), “The Sacrifice of MacSwiney” (*ibidem*) focused on the prisoner's body and state of mind, turning the dry, day-by-day chronicle into a pathetic story that constantly swung between hope and despair. Passages like “although the rumour went out this morning that the Lord Mayor of Cork is dying, his condition remains unchanged” (*ibidem*) dragged readers into a gripping narrative that almost made them eyewitnesses of MacSwiney's struggle between life and death. The Italian commentators realised the immense impact that tales of brutality against MacSwiney could have on the public's imagination and, hence, provided stories that focused on the “torment[s]” caused by “brutal force-feeding and many sleepless nights” (CS 15 September 1920), like appalling descriptions of how the Lord Mayor “was forcefully made to swallow” food while he had fainted (CS 21 and 22 October 1920). At the same time, hope was fuelled by the news that similar tales had generated such passionate interest in many readers that they petitioned for MacSwiney's reprieve and demanded the Crown intercede with Lloyd George (CS 27 August 1920; CS 28 August 1920; CS 3 September 1920; CS 7 September 1920; CS 10 September 1920). Their attempts were always thwarted by the Prime Minister's refusal to do so (CS 31 August 1920).

Readers' despair and astonishment were also deliberately aroused by selecting pieces of information that categorised the story as extraordinary, and by reporting on the emotional response of MacSwiney's relatives (his wife and sisters) and the people of Cork. Pathos was intensified in the references to the MacSwiney women, who strenuously defended the dying man against any accusation levelled at him by the British authorities. With a determination that was to characterise each of their moves, they shouted at the coroner examining MacSwiney's case that the prisoner “had worked for Ireland throughout his life” and that his death was “the sacrifice of life for freedom” (CS 28 October 1920). Moreover, the Italian correspondent did not fail to mention that the MacSwiney women also suffered pointless ill-treatment when the British authorities forbade them to meet the Lord Mayor before his imminent death; the statements “following the doctors' opinion, his wife was not allowed to enter the cells; her sister was not even allowed to go through the prison gate” (CS 26 October 1920) seem to have been designed to garner the sympathies for the Irish cause of the readers of *Corriere della Sera*.

One may even venture to argue that the paper had changed its stance on the Irish question, but that would be a mistake. And the words “sacrifice” and “tragedy” should not mislead us into thinking that *Corriere della Sera* honoured MacSwiney as a martyr to his convictions, who kept alive the idea of freedom against a tyrannical Britain in a sort of David-Goliath confrontation. Even the reporting of this tragic story was subject to the convictions and anxieties of the Milanese editorial staff.

The Italian journalists noted that public opinion and many British MPs were indignant about the mistreatment of the Corkman, and stated their concern that Lloyd George would

further antagonise Irish public opinion with his refusal to concede a reprieve (CS 9 September 1920); however, this information was not used to vent anti-British sentiment. The Italian observers drew on the British press to gain insights into the conduct of the British authorities: for instance, in September, they qualified their analyses by stating that, according to the political commentators of *The Times*, "the government's refusal to release the Mayor of Cork [wa]s justifiable only with its policy in Ireland" (CS 2 September 1920). Building on this statement, they later pointed out that the reasons underlying Lloyd George's decisions were reasonable ("if the government had surrendered, it would have lost" (CS 26 October 1920), and also dared to discredit MacSwiney by claiming that "it is evident that those who go on hunger strike thereby make a combined effort to make it impossible to indict them, because legally it is impossible to judge them if they are physically unable to show up in court" (CS 9 September 1920). In short, the government was not held to be primarily responsible for the Lord Mayor's agony.

Arguably, the aim was to avoid any validation of what MacSwiney did and represented: from the point of view of the Italian commentators, MacSwiney might have made the ultimate sacrifice displaying "stoicism worthy of the ancient heroes", but his publicised death would only fuel a deadly cause – "the cause that knows all the lamentations and all the hatreds, that neither forgets nor forgives" (CS 26 October 1920).

On this point, I believe that the authors resorted to the tropes and language of sensationalism in a bid to evoke an emotional response in the readers that played not only on pathos but also on fear, as the factual details were selected for their potential to convey an atmosphere of tension that may soon result in dreaded open conflict. The accounts of the three funerals of MacSwiney (cf. Reynolds 2002) and the journey of his coffin from Brixton to Dublin and then to Cork are dramatized descriptions of the physical scenes, as the lexis and imagery there deployed convey "a sense of intensity" (White 1997, 108), in order to suggest potentially escalating emotions and tension. The commentators of *Corriere della Sera* defined "the transport of MacSwiney's body to Cork" as "dramatic" because, at a certain point, the British soldiers who were watching over the coffin found themselves face-to-face with the Volunteers, who wanted to take the casket into their custody (30 October 1920). There was a divide between the British soldiers and the Irish people.

The passages in which the narrator lingered on the crowds that had arrived at the Dublin and Cork harbours to mourn their fallen hero were emblematic: in Dublin, there was "an immense procession" and "all the Irish mourners [...], kneeling on the pier, first recited the prayer for the dead, then intoned the *De Profundis*, when the steamer passed in front of them" (*ibidem*); similarly, in Cork, the silence was broken by "the chaplain shouting his blessing to the dead man", and there gathered "an enormous crowd" and "cripples and invalids asked to be carried before the coffin" (31 October 1920). These details, which appealed to the senses of sight and hearing, conveyed the idea that the Irish had formed a collective cohesion in their mourning, whose resentment (as *Corriere della Sera* suggested) had been fed by the news of the mistreatment of MacSwiney and of the state-executed reprisals against unarmed civilians (CS 27 October 1920). The Italian newspaper thus shifted its focus to the consequences of the Lord Mayor's gesture; because of it, tensions in Ireland had reached their breaking point and Ireland was on the verge of "an imminent disaster" (CS 26 October 1920).

The same discursive and narrative patterns can be detected in the (limited) press coverage of the sentencing and execution of Kevin Barry. For the most part, his story unfolded while MacSwiney was in the final stage of his hunger strike, as Barry was tried by general court-martial on 20 October 1920 and was condemned to suffer death by hanging seven days later. Only at this point did his case attract the attention of *Corriere della Sera*, which made some passing

references to the story that are worthy of analysis, despite their brevity, as they highlight the newspaper's stance on the Irish situation.

The earliest reference appeared in a tight piece on MacSwiney's funeral, in which it was reported that the wife of Lloyd George had been "personally asked to intercede with her husband" (CS 31 October 1920). The journalist noted that the appeals had been issued on the grounds of Barry's young age and the exceptional nature of the sentence, as "no death sentences have been carried out in Dublin for political crimes, since 1803" and "the youth of the accused is invoked as a reason for grace" (*ibidem*). *Corriere della Sera's* emphasising of the reasons for the appeals may lead one to think that, in this instance, the paper had veered towards compassion for the young rebel. Yet, again, the author managed to provide a more pro-British view on the matter, by referring to those "English newspapers"⁵ that had pointed out that, although young, Barry was a peer of the victims – "of the three killed, one was 19 years old, and the other two were barely twenty" (*ibidem*).

Corriere della Sera returned to Barry's story the day after his execution, in the article "A Fenian executed in Dublin. One Inspector and five officers killed" (CS 2 November 1920). The title emphasised the dualism that shaped the structure and tone of the whole piece, in which the elegiac tones of the opening gave way to the dry account of riots in Ireland of the conclusion, and the personal drama of the young IRA man was ultimately inserted into a broader, collective narrative of violence. At once, the reader's attention was drawn to *two* facts, as the very first line read that the day before had been "another black day in Ireland", not only because "the 18-year-old student Kevin Barry" had been hanged despite the attempts to obtain a reprieve for him, but because of the "rebellious acts and corresponding reprisals" that had taken place "in various parts of Ireland" (*ibidem*). Many appeals for amnesty had indeed been received in late October from prominent politicians and opinionmakers from across Europe, but Barry's fate had been sealed and *Corriere della Sera* moved on to describe the final moments in the rebel's life, appealing to the visual, the auditory, and the tactile to drag its readers into a narrative full of pathos. The correspondent reported that Barry had been calm and composed, and had gone "bravely" to his death, making a strong impression on the Catholic priest summoned for the last rites, who "burst into tears" when recounting it to the press. Sadness then re-echoed in the Rosary recited by the "large crowds" that had amassed outside the prison gates at the very time of the execution (*ibidem*).

Focusing on the priest's and mob's reactions, on Barry's countenance, and on the acoustic and visual details seemed to link this story to those concerning MacSwiney's funeral, which had been duly reported on by *Corriere della Sera* a few days earlier. It also appeared to dovetail with the image propagated by the Irish nationalist press, which described Barry as a gallant boy who had made the ultimate sacrifice for his country and people (Doherty 2000, 224). Yet there are differences in the portrayals of these icons of Irish nationalism throughout the pages of the Italian paper, which never surrendered to unchecked nationalist propaganda. Barry may have faced his imminent death bravely, climbing onto the scaffold "with a secure gait and not shaking" (CS 2 November 1920), but this did not make him a martyr; the term "sacrifice", which dominated the headlines of Ireland's nationalist newspapers (Doherty 2000, 224) was never used by the Italian journalist to refer to the IRA rebel, as the latter had been identified first and foremost as being responsible for a terrible crime and the true cause of his punishment. In loaded language that dispelled any characterisation of Barry as an innocent idealist,

⁵ Here, the Italian journalist was presumably relying on the conclusions of a conference held by Mr. Bonar Law, which was reported on by all of the major British press agencies (Doherty 2000, 223).

the young student was presented as “guilty of participating in the murder of three British soldiers” for which he had to hang. Likewise, the label “Fenian” used in the title pressed into the reader’s mind the association of Barry with the dynamiters who had threatened British rule in the nineteenth century and the leaders of the Easter Rising, who had been called “Fenians” in the articles of April 1916 (CS 27 April 1916; 30 April 1916). So, the use of the term in this context was intended to evoke images of violent acts of resistance carried out by a small band of radicals, and its attribution to Barry further dismantled the perception of the boy as a martyr who had been victimised by the British authorities. The contributor to *Corriere della Sera* did not give credit to the allegations of British ruthlessness against Barry, as justice had run its course. Britain’s policing of the Barry affair was depicted as the government’s reaction to the threat posed by a group linked to subversive ideologies.

As with the story of MacSwiney’s hunger strike, Barry’s execution was deemed newsworthy and construed negatively for the consequences it had on the socio-political status quo (Bednarek and Caple 2012, 20). Comments were soon made about how these events contributed and were related to the persistence of violence in Ireland. In the second half of “A Fenian Executed in Dublin. One Inspector and Five Officers Killed” (CS 2 November 1920), the journalist focused on the “Fenian attacks” following the execution, which, in turn, gave rise to reprisals by the Army and the RIC. The tone of the conclusive section contrasted sharply with that of the former, because the attacks were reported in a concise, matter-of-fact way, with no concessions to inflammatory or emotional language, and the narrative pathos was replaced with the harsh reality of the numbers. The reader was left pondering the difference in the number of casualties on the two opposing sides: “the Fenians announce but just one dead”, whereas “one Inspector and five police officers have been killed” among the opponents (*ibidem*).

Corriere della Sera gave an account of Barry’s death within the construct of its own perception of the Irish situation, as the article may be integrated into the larger depiction of Ireland as the “Island with no peace” (DC 12 December 1920; 20 March 1921). A few days later, the journalists went on describing what was happening in Ireland (i.e. “The Irish Tragedy”) as a succession of “horrors” typical of “a warfare scenario” (CS 5 November 1920; CS 10 November 1920), and, over the next months, the magnitude and dreadfulness of the situation were increasingly established with references to the atrocities perpetrated by the Germans in the Great War. This was not peculiar to *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere* alone. The Irish Secretary Sir Hamar Greenwood had to spend much of his time in the House of Commons deflecting questions about Black and Tans on the rampage, who were often likened to the Huns by Greenwood’s opponents and part of the public opinion (Walsh 2006, 107). And when, in April 1921, some MPs referred to the undisciplined British soldiers as “slaughterers of children”, the Italian journalists could not but recall that “‘slaughterers of children’ had been one of the most common epithets attributed to the Germans during the war” (CS 21 April 1921). This remark could have been further extended by the author of the article to highlight that domestic public opinion was attacking the government for adopting the methods of terrorism the “Huns” had inflicted on Belgium in 1914, and therefore casting a shadow over the mishandling of the situation on the part of the British authorities (cf. Madigan 2020). And yet, the subject was left under-explored and the article closed on a mildly positive note that swung the pendulum from despair back to hope: “it is announced that a *super partes* Committee has been set up. It will conduct an inquiry into [...] the Irish situation to reach a peaceful solution of the conflict” (CS 21 April 1921).



Figure 2 – “A War Spectacle, the Island without Peace”, *La Domenica del Corriere*, 20 March 1921. It depicts war planes circling down on IRA men. This image is reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Ireland, PD C80

Corriere della Sera did not conceal the fact that the hesitant and punitive policy of the government had outraged part of British and international public opinion, but simultaneously highlighted the conciliatory intentions of Lloyd George and his cabinet, as well as their efforts to pacify Ireland. Headlines such as “Consensus and Critiques on the Peace Project” (CS 1 October 1920), “Meeting in London about Ireland” (CS 2 October 1920), “American and British Solutions for the Irish Situation” (CS 5 October 1920) recurred at that time. Arguably, information about the peace efforts was of relevance for Italian readers, who were then witnessing similar outbursts of violence within their national borders. On the same page as the headline “The Irish Tragedy” was the account of a bloody fight between fascists and socialists in the streets of Verona. In this, gory details were selected for atmospheric impact and may have reminded readers of the violence of both the Great War and the Irish conflict, as the reporter wrote about “invaders”, “pools of blood”, and “mutilated bodies”, including “truncated” hands (CS 5 November 1920). In Italy, too, the readers of *Corriere della Sera* expected the authorities “to take strict measures to maintain public order” (CS 5 November 1920).

Arguably, in describing the violent aftermaths of MacSwiney’s and Barry’s deaths, *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere* voiced their fear that the British government would not be able to put an end to this unrelenting violence, that reprisals would continue indefinitely with spiralling costs in casualties and destruction on both sides, and that the very same horrors would take place in Italy. Ireland came to represent what Italian commentators hoped Italy would never become: the latter might have seen Ireland as a window into the future of their own country if public order were not restored, and have projected their fears onto it.

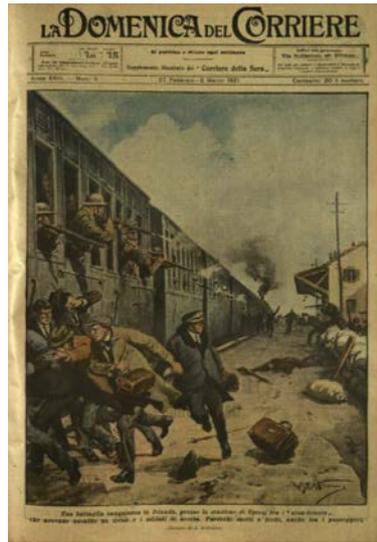


Figure 3—“A bloody battle in Ireland, at Upton station, between the Sinn Feiners who had attacked a train and the escort soldiers”, *La Domenica del Corriere*, 27 February 1921. This image is reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Ireland, PD C77

As this essay has tried to show, through a close, historically-informed reading of the primary sources, reactions to the Irish situation in the visual and textual materials of *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere* were affected by a series of palpable fears about the future of Italy; on the one hand, the two publications kept a moderately pro-British stance and avoided publishing pieces that would alienate the sympathies of a powerful ally and stronghold of liberalism; on the other, anxieties concerning internecine threats to socio-political order led the editorial staff to brandish Ireland as a kind of negative touchstone and to show, in very graphic terms, how quickly violence could slip its chains. Hence, when the prospect of peace receded into the distance, in the last few months of 1920, Ireland became an “Island with no peace” and “The Island of Terror”. The latter epithet was first featured in an emotionally charged article of 24 November, “Ireland – The Island of Terror. Another Day of Killings” which, through an extensive use of the language of sensationalism, depicted Ireland as a place where violence had become ordinary. Reprisals and fights were neither temporally nor geographically isolated events, as “reports of ambushes, of assassinations, and of fires come from all over Ireland” (CS 24 November 1920).

No one could consider themselves safe in Ireland. Nor could people in Italy, who had to make every effort to avoid suffering the same plight as the Irish.

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“I thank God that I have been in the very big push for the motherland”: The Role of Violence and Society in the Correspondence of IRA Commander Liam Lynch

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Abstract:

This article is a thematic examination of the Irish Republican Army’s (IRA) relationship with both violence and social issues in the War of Independence (1919-1921) and Civil War (1922-1923) through an interrogation of the writings of Irish republican leader Liam Lynch (1893-1923), specifically, looking at Lynch’s understanding of the role of violence, social issues, and his crucial role in Civil War. Lynch went from a position of local leadership in the Cork and then Munster IRA in the War of Independence to one of national leadership by going on to become Chief of Staff of the whole IRA in the Civil War, before dying in combat in April 1923. Lynch was a highly religious and shy man but who also displayed a much remarked devotion to the republican cause, together with a natural gift for organisation. In contrast to his quiet and sensitive persona though, throughout his revolutionary career Lynch consistently called for an escalation of violent measures and often envisaged both military and social solutions which were never fully thought out and if implemented could well have done more harm than good. Issues around the dynamics of violence have recently been explored by Gemma Clark and Brian Hughes, while Gavin Foster has added further layers to our understanding of class conflict in the civil war but this article is the first systematic analysis of these issues from the perspective of the leading IRA figure during the latter stages of Ireland’s revolution. The article argues that while Lynch’s organisational talents and devotion are unquestionable, he lacked the leadership skills necessary in the civil war and often envisaged impractical solutions based on what was often his still local or regional rather than national viewpoint, or inability to consider the ramifications of his ideas. The article contends that an exploration of Lynch’s perspectives reveals much about revolutionary activism and of the War of Independence and Civil war era IRA. The article hopes to further the understanding of the motivations of activists during the revolutionary period, the ramifications of the implementation of political violence together with the interplay and tensions within the republican movement between social issues and the national question.

Keywords: Irish biography, Irish revolution 1916-1923, Local History, Society, Violence

1. Introduction – Lynch’s Life

The career of Irish war of independence and civil war IRA leader Liam Lynch (1893-1923) represents some of the points of

interest together with contradictions that helped define the Irish revolution. Lynch was a man of great devotion, patriotism and idealism but also of brutality and frequent impracticality. He was pious, considerate and rather quiet but who also proved increasingly willing to implement greater ruthlessness to achieve his goal of an Irish Republic. Lynch was a senior figure in the IRA: an organisation whose use of violence, motivations and social attitudes have been closely scrutinised in extensive levels of academic scholarship. Lynch's own long correspondence from 1917 up until his death provides historians with an interesting insight into not only his personality and leadership methods. These letters also give insight into Lynch's own views on issues so carefully analysed by historians such as the use of force and social questions: which in turn reveals much about the motivations of his generation. This piece is not intended as a biography but rather as a thematic attempt to contextualise and explore issues related to violence and society through the prism of Lynch's own contemporary writings. Lynch was a frequent letter writer to both his military and political colleagues and family: the material on which this piece is based on, comes from the deposited papers of his colleagues and sometimes enemies Richard Mulcahy, Ernie O'Malley and Moss Twomey at the University College Dublin (UCD) archives and a smaller collection entirely made of his own correspondence in the National Library of Ireland.

Lynch deserves such analysis due to his significance for the period and because he was one of the most divisive figures of the era, thanks largely to his tenure as leader of the anti-Treaty IRA in the Civil War (1922-1923) for which he is best known. Though he is primarily identified as a civil war leader, that position only came about thanks to years of tireless dedication to the Irish republican cause from 1916 onwards.

He was born in Angelsboro, in County Limerick, where he enjoyed a quiet rural childhood, followed by a period working as a clerk in the town of Fermoy in north Cork (Ryan 2012 [1986], 21-27). He was originally sympathetic with the constitutional nationalism of John Redmond's Irish Parliamentary Party, however, the Easter Rising of April 1916 had a profound effect on Lynch. Lynch, like many people of his generation in Ireland, experienced a "Road to Damascus" conversion thanks to the Rising, which resulted in a newfound commitment to the Irish Republic: a commitment which would remain with him until his death from wounds at the hands of Free State soldiers in 1923 at the age of only 30.

His earliest biographer Florence 'Florrie' O'Donoghue, who had served as Intelligence Officer for the Cork No.1 Brigade, would write in 1954 that Lynch's opposition to the Anglo Irish Treaty of 1921, which resulted in his going into direct conflict with his superiors in the IRA and Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), was driven by a sense of "duty" to the Republic, and that Lynch had effectively decided as early as 1916, he would "live under no other law" (O'Donoghue 1954, 193-194) than that of the Republic. Indeed, it is this loyalty to the Republic, which is crucial to understanding Lynch.

Lynch quickly became a full-time activist with the resurgent Irish Volunteers in Fermoy (Ryan 2012 [1986], 25-27). Through hard work, diligence and an unquestioning devotion to his cause, together with a penchant for organisation, he enjoyed a meteoric rise through the ranks of the Volunteers. Like many other Volunteers he became known to the Crown force, and lived on the run for most of the conflict. For men such as Lynch this new life resulted in a precarious existence, and in the words of one of his colleagues spurred on greater levels of resistance as "we had to be active" simply to stay one step ahead of the crown forces and avoid arrest¹. Within a short space of time, he was appointed Officer Commanding of the Fermoy

¹ Thomas McEllistrim, MSP, MS 34, REF840.

Battalion, before being promoted to Officer Commanding of the 2nd North Cork Brigade area, which encompassed all of north Cork. His meteoric rise in the IRA, was also matched by a quick ascent up the ranks of the more clandestine Irish Republican Brotherhood.

Lynch, despite being born in Limerick, spent most of his life in North Cork, an area which he strongly identified with and preferred to operate in. It was perhaps this sense of identification with the local, which as will be seen throughout each section of this article, hindered his leadership abilities as he was rarely able to envisage how his orders and intentions would manifest outside both his own immediate concerns and locations.

Nonetheless, despite his decidedly north Munster outlook, he readily accepted positions of national leadership. Thanks to his organisational skills and proactive and aggressive attitude, Lynch's reputation grew to the extent that by the spring of 1921, in the context of an escalating conflict between the IRA and British crown forces, he was appointed overall commander of the newly formed 1st Southern Division. This division comprised of all IRA units in Cork, Waterford, parts of west Limerick and Kerry. IRA organisational strength and resistance to British rule was strongest in these counties between 1919-1921 so, in effect, Lynch had been put in charge of the most active and aggressive IRA units in the entire country.

Lynch's 1st Southern Division denounced the Anglo-Irish treaty of December 1921 before any other individual or organisation. However, throughout the Spring of 1922, through contacts in the Irish Republican Brotherhood, of which Lynch was now one of the most senior and important members based outside of Dublin, and despite his loyalty to the Republic, he worked tirelessly to prevent the widening split in the republican movement. In doing so, he opposed the less conciliatory anti-Treaty IRA executive based in the Four Courts, in favour of working with the pro-Treaty elements.

Despite these efforts after civil war broke out and the collapse of anti-Treaty resistance in Dublin, he rose further to become Chief of Staff of the IRA, making him the *de facto* leader of the anti-Treaty resistance in the civil war. Once the civil war started, he abandoned his more conciliatory stance and refused any moves towards seeking a ceasefire or compromise with the Free State, instead preferring to maintain his steadfast commitment to the Republic.

Florrie O'Donoghue who had served as Intelligence Officer for the Cork No.1 Brigade, would write that Lynch's opposition to the Treaty, which resulted in his going into direct conflict with his superiors Michael Collins and Richard Mulcahy, was immensely difficult as, despite his loyalty to the Republic, he was also a firm believer in adhering to the IRA chain of command, and a believer in military discipline (O'Donoghue 1954, 193-194). Throughout his revolutionary career, we can see this manifesting in a clear gift for military organisation and belief in following orders. In this, Lynch is in stark contrast to other IRA leaders such as Tom Barry, who were driven more by initiative and taking advantage of situations rather than sticking to structures.

By the spring of 1923, his hard line stance was resented as unrealistic and damaging by many other senior figures on the anti-Treaty side. Figures who went on to have long and successful careers in southern Irish politics such as Éamon de Valera, Frank Aiken and P.J. Ruttledge considered that the civil war was a lost cause and new measures were now necessary to sustain the republican movement. Lynch was killed in action in April 1923 in County Tipperary. His death paved the way for the end of the conflict, and allowed these more conciliatory elements to take over the IRA and declare a ceasefire with the Free State. Many of these more conciliatory voices went on to form Fianna Fáil, and had long and distinguished careers as constitutional politicians.

Lynch's career was unique in that, through sheer force of will, he moved from a position of local leadership to one of national leadership. For someone without a pre-1916 record in

separatist politics, his rise can reasonably be described as meteoric. His career bears some resemblance to that of his colleague Ernie O'Malley, who like Lynch did not have a pre-1916 record but would go on to be a leading figure in both the 1919-1921 conflict and civil war.

Since O'Donoghue's 1954 publication, a number of other historians have examined Lynch's life and work, has elicited strong feelings often based on either sympathy or dislike. For instance, Meda Ryan's useful *Liam Lynch: The Real Chief* published in 1986, shows a deep admiration for his life and work describing him as having led the IRA in the civil war "fearlessly", and that he never had any feeling of "malice" towards old comrades now turned enemies (2012 [1986], 236; 248). Ryan's book is a useful introduction to his life but as a short narrative and sympathetic biography it allows room for a more thematic analysis of Lynch.

On the other hand, he has also been depicted as the demagogue of anti-democratic Irish republican militarism. Tom Garvin, Professor Emeritus of Politics at UCD, in his 1996 influential *1922: The Birth of Irish Democracy* described him unapologetically as "profoundly anti-democratic and authoritarian" and these sentiments he espoused "dominated" the politics and actions of the anti-Treaty movement in the civil war – which Garvin characterises as a largely regressive force (1996, 148). Lynch in many respects is key to Garvin's overall theory of the anti-Treaty side being made of anti-democratic militarists fighting against the democratic wishes of the people as represented by the nascent Free State, as Garvin contends. This reading has however been criticised as simplistic and undermining anti-democratic and militarist elements within the Free State (Regan 2013).

The late Canadian historian Peter Hart (1963-2010), while a highly polarising figure and one whose conclusions on questions relating sectarianism and his methodology sparked intense debate and criticism (Regan 2013), also wrote in depth on Lynch. Hart provided an interesting analysis of Lynch in terms of his motivations and as a man, and one that seems to chime more with a more sympathetic reading of his life. In 1998 in his landmark, but controversial, analysis of the Cork IRA, Hart wrote, in fascination, and more than a little sympathy that:

Lynch was possessed by a sense of mission and by revolutionary ardour and remained so until his death in 1923. Many IRA men ascribed him as being 'like a priest' in his attitude and manner. He was an exceedingly shy man and 'it must have cost him a big effort to start appearing in public'. However, Lynch's utter commitment drove him to take a lead in organising the Fermoy area. When he died he was chief of staff of the entire IRA. Lynch made himself a leader out of the force of his own convictions. (1998, 205)

For Hart, Lynch was a man who possessed a simple desire to free Ireland, and this alone sustained him. Instead of either demonising or lionising Lynch as hero or villain, this article seeks to understand Lynch the man in terms of his beliefs, his motivations and his intentions. In recent years much research has focused on the IRA's relationship with violence – particularly arson, intimidation, alleged sectarianism, and the murder of civilians as spies and informers together with their relationship with social issues particularly on issues connected to class and their relationship with civilians. Accordingly, this article considers Lynch's views on these issues. The article first looks at his private personality before exploring his aggressive but often impractical views on the use of violence, his equally not entirely practical views on social question before finally looking at his failure of leadership during the civil war, and poor understanding of how that conflict developed.

In recent scholarship on issues around violence, Gemma Clark and Brian Hughes have explored these issues within the prism of a particular incident or area rather than from an individual perspective (Clark, 2014; Hughes, 2016). The study of individual leaders and their approach to violence is not without precedent however. Lynch's colleague Michael Collins's

attitude to violence has recently been explored by Anne Dolan and William Murphy (2018), but studies of how regional IRA leaders considered these issues are relatively uncommon.

Hughes, Clarke, Dolan and Murphy have set high and effective metrics, but looking at these issues from new angles, such as that of a regional leader in both the 1919-1921 and 1922-1923 conflicts, can also prove useful and highlight previously unexplored avenues. Hart Lynch was emblematic of his overall reading of the IRA, as being politically noncomplex. Hart's reading of the IRA and their motivations was that it all quite simply coalesced around a desire to free Ireland. In this political paradigm other considerations had a limited role. Hart wrote that whether in 1920 or 1922 the IRA "wanted to fight for Ireland [...] but they did not want to run Ireland" (Hart 2003, 97). He famously described the IRA of the period as a-democratic rather anti-democratic (198).

This is not to say that Lynch was somehow not politically motivated – joining and fighting for the IRA between 1918 and 1923 was by definition a highly political act. However, like many republicans of his generation, Lynch's politics effectively amounted to an embrace of physical force republicanism alongside a strong distrust of electoral politics. In his letters Lynch, as will be demonstrated, is largely uninterested or even resentful of the counter republican state being created by Sinn Féin which he saw as a distraction from the national struggle. This is not however an endorsement of Hart's conclusion on this issue: joining and fighting for the IRA, whether in 1920 or 1969, was an inherently political act, so "apolitical" is perhaps an oversimplification. Rather, Lynch was representative of an element of the continuing Irish republican tradition which is largely *suspicious of electoral politics* and which contends physical force alone is necessary to secure full national independence.

Hart's reading was, as said, uncomplicated which can be interpreted as a simplification. Hart wrote of the Cork IRA that they simply considered themselves, and indeed wanted themselves to be, "the hard working and respectable heart of the nation" (Hart 1998, 142). The IRA according to Hart, for all the issues around killings and violence, appears to have been preoccupied solely by an unadulterated nationalism rooted in rural respectability, almost gleefully unaware of issues beyond the national question; but as will be shown, Lynch's correspondence reveals that he did occasionally consider issues not strictly linked to the national question, which in turn brings up Lynch's views on issues not strictly connected to the national question.

Recently, conceptions of the revolutionary period regarding social issues not connected to the national question have been changing, particularly in regard to the civil war. Gavin Foster's meticulously researched *The Irish Civil War and Society* being case in point (2015, 51). Anti-Treaty supporters and activists, Foster observes, tended to be more economically deprived, and represented a potentially revolutionary social movement. Foster in conclusion contemplates the social "revolution that could have been" if there had been a more unified front on the anti-Treaty side that embraced a broader political front (142). Indeed, the more left leaning elements of the anti-Treaty side, embodied particularly in the role and work of Liam Mellows, have been emphasised recently and in preceding decades (Greaves 1971; McNamara 2019).

Lynch's own role and views as the leader of the IRA in the civil war, regarding both the more socially orientated analysis of the IRA and debates around violence, however, has not been addressed in recent studies. His correspondence with other IRA officers and private letters show he was willing to employ increasingly brutal measures to achieve his goal. They also show how he was not entirely militaristic and did have some concept of addressing social concerns. The article does, however, argue that in relation to these issues his judgement was often flawed or not fully thought out.

Lynch was someone rooted in his own local area – Lynch's views and intentions were accordingly often so fixed in the local that he rarely fully considered national implications. The

article concludes by looking at how this attitude proved particularly disadvantageous in the civil war, when he more generally seems to perhaps have lost his sense of judgement.

Rather than focusing on what was written about him after his death, the source material for this article is made up of reference to Lynch's own contemporary letters and directives drawn predominately from four collections. *The Letters of Liam Lynch* (1917, 1920-1923, MS 36, 251) and Joseph McGarrity papers (MS 17) both housed in the National Library of Ireland, the Moss Twomey papers (P69) and Richard Mulcahy Papers located in the archives of University College Dublin. *The Letters of Liam Lynch* is a particularly small collection of 28 letters predominately addressed to Lynch's brother, Father Tom Lynch, and Joseph McGarrity, and was compiled by Florrie O'Donoghue as part of his research for his 1954 biography of Lynch and then donated to the National Library of Ireland. This small collection is particularly useful in charting Lynch's early career in the Volunteers from 1917-1919 and for his reflections on the conflict as it began to escalate in early 1920. These letters to Father Tom Lynch, are also used to chart Lynch's own emotional and religious life, which Lynch reflected on in these letter in conjunction with political developments. As 1920 progressed and the conflict intensified however, Lynch found less time to write to his brother and began to predominately correspond with other IRA officers. Accordingly for the military elements considered, this article analyses Lynch's letters to the IRA Chief of Staff Richard Mulcahy, in the latter's papers, for the 1920-1921 period, and various letters and directives to IRA officers under Lynch's own command in the papers of IRA leader Moss Twomey's papers for the 1922-1923 period. During the Civil War, Lynch also began a correspondence with Joseph McGarrity, the leading figure on the anti-Treaty side in Irish America, and these letters are also analysed in the 1922-1923 section as they are invaluable in charting Lynch's increasingly unrealistic analysis of how the civil war was progressing.

Scholars should be grateful for the fact that the Irish Revolution is easily one of the most well documented struggles for national independence not least thanks to the recent release and now digitization of the Bureau of Military History (BMH) files and Military Service Pensions (MSP) records. However, both of these bodies were set up to create a state approved history of the revolution in the case of the former, and as a means for veterans of the period to create a verified record of service for financial support in the case of the latter – allowing for exaggeration, self-indulgence and settling of old scores in both. Regardless of this however, this article is primarily interested in analysing and contextualising Lynch through his own contemporary writings, rather than considering reflections produced on him by others after his death. Accordingly, an emphasis is placed throughout contemporary documents he himself produced. There are however exceptions such as reference to C.S. "Todd" Andrews' excellent *Dublin Made Me* which gives perhaps the most nuanced and emotionally complex description of Liam Lynch, in term of Lynch as a man and not just as a revolutionary soldier, and is therefore referenced throughout.

It is perhaps first necessary to briefly consider his private life and how it contrasted so strongly with his revolutionary life.

2. *Personality and Religion*

Dublin IRA man C.S. Andrews, who acted as Lynch's adjutant in the civil war, wrote perhaps the most moving and vivid description of Lynch in his autobiography *Dublin Made Me*, first published in 1979. Andrews looking back at Lynch believed him to have been a straightforward man with a rustic vision of Ireland:

He seemed to regard farming as the ideal mode of life for an Irishman. Like most of the other leaders of the IRA, he gave little thought to economics. His aim in life would, I think, have been the 'frugal comfort' of which Dev(alara) long, long afterwards, spoke so feelingly as the economic norm to which Ireland should aspire. (2001 [1979], 291)

Andrews also viewed him as having possessed a particular type of innocence. He was, according to Andrews, "not only without guile but also unconscious of it in either his opponents or his friends" (287). During the Civil War, Andrews believed Lynch's innocence manifested in only being able to understand what he saw as the betrayal and brutal tactics of his former comrades as being the result of a literal "diabolical influence" (291).

Much of his correspondence to his family confirms this reading and suggests his having an approach to activism sustained by a deep religious faith. In a letter to his brother Father Tom Lynch, to whom he was deeply attached, in June 1920 he wrote "I thank God that I have been in the very big push for the motherland ... say a few prayers for me some times that I may be able to do my duty to God + country. I am after breaking my rimless glasses"².

The reference to prayers, the motherland and breaking his glasses implies a piety, patriotism, and perhaps a certain innocence that goes along with Andrew's view of him. The description of breaking his glasses is case in point; he was "after" breaking his glasses, suggests mild annoyance rather than, for instance, complaining about the difficulty of how he as an active guerrilla fighter, might get a new pair. His religiosity is evident in the conclusion to another letter written at much the same time, again to his brother "I hope that you and all the family will enjoy the Easter Holiday, sorry that I must miss you this time"³.

Throughout his life he could also be magnanimous and kind even towards the men who killed him. On his deathbed, one of Lynch's last wishes, allegedly, was to thank to the "boys", in the Free State Army, who after shooting Lynch carried his mortally injured body down from the Knockmealdown hills to a bed in a nearby farmhouse (Ryan 2012 [1986], 237). If true, this reveals a remarkable generosity of spirit in the midst of a particularly brutal civil war.

For all his mild-mannered niceties or innocence, he could also be, perhaps unsurprisingly for someone so deeply religious, more than a little priggish. Indeed, throughout his public life a certain pietistic asceticism is evident. In May 1920, just as the level of violence in the 1919-1921 conflict was beginning to become more intense, he was horrified that the Fermoy horse races were going ahead when "local volunteers were in prison"⁴. Under his direction, the IRA managed to stop the races. However, the enterprising and mysterious Michael Lynch, an IRA leader from outside of the Fermoy area (and no relation to Liam), appeared and somehow managed to let the races proceed, with the help of other less puritanical members of the Fermoy IRA. This was much to Liam Lynch's chagrin. He fumed "It is clear that he [Michael Lynch] ridiculed the movement in the eyes of the people"⁵. Lynch obviously believed in maintaining a certain level of decorum during an IRA hunger strike, but here his concerns about horse racing can also be interpreted as reflecting a dislike of gambling which is so intrinsically linked to horse racing. Not to mention British military and ascendancy connections with horses.

This ascetism, austerity or perhaps even self-denying aspect is evident in other aspects of his life. Strict abstinence from alcohol or temperance was not uncommon within the IRA in this pe-

² Liam Lynch to Tom Lynch, 28 June 1920, NLI, MS 36, 251/11.

³ Liam Lynch to Tom Lynch, 31 March 1920, NLI, MS 36, 251/8.

⁴ O/C Cork No.2 to C/S, 24 May 1920, MAI, CP A/0495.

⁵ O/C Cork No.2 to C/S, 24 May 1920, MAI, CP A/0495.

riod. During the truce, between July 1921 and the outbreak of Civil War, Lynch wrote to Richard Mulcahy, IRA Chief of Staff, that he believed that if hostilities were resumed with the British, the IRA should close all “pubs”⁶. By the civil war, when he was in overall charge of the IRA, he issued an order that “In the future cases of drunkenness, boisterous conduct while under the influence of drink [...] will be dismissed from the army”⁷. Admittedly, particularly during the Truce, problems with IRA men over-indulging in drink were common, nonetheless, this order has a rather Spartan tone⁸.

The vision of Lynch so far is of an uncomplicated, religious but also rather innocent man. Andrews wrote that “he had little opportunity to acquire a broad knowledge of men or affairs” (2001 [1979], 305), suggesting he knew little of the world beyond Ireland. There is no evidence of him having ever left Ireland, but this was not uncommon for men who did not emigrate.

Meda Ryan does mention his having a fiancée, Bridie Keyes who he met at an Irish language class in 1917, who he seemed to be able to catch up with occasionally when time allowed (Ryan 2012 [1986], 39).

What we can ascertain so far, is that Lynch was seemingly quite a gentle and modest individual, however the sentiments he expressed so far in his letters, and in Todd Andrews’ recollections, are of a man who expressed feelings of devotion, duty and temperance all of which can be seen as also informing his sense of duty, and discipline as a leading figure in the IRA.

3. Lynch and Violence

If he was innocent in his personal life, he was certainly not in his revolutionary life. Lynch acted in a senior military capacity for a guerrilla army in two brutal conflicts, a brutality he readily encouraged. Since Hart’s 1998 publication, questions around the nature of violence, arson and alleged sectarianism have been debated and disputed by historians of the revolution (Hughes 2016; Clark 2014). Interestingly, most of the discussion has focused on ground level acts of violence from which the national IRA leadership were at a remove. On one level, this is highly logical as the IRA as a guerrilla army was sustained by local initiative, and its leadership had, at best, a tenuous control over its most active guerrillas. But still, it might now be necessary to consider how figures in leadership positions, within the IRA, considered issues around the killing of civilians and arson, and here Lynch’s rhetoric proves revealing.

The measures he called for in the latter stages of the 1919-1921 conflict, reveal if not guile then a willingness to encourage a drastic escalation to the conflict. In reaction to initial and largely low level IRA activity throughout 1920, the crown forces operated an unofficial reprisal policy of arson on the homes of alleged IRA supporters, and people with no links to republicanism. The violence of the crown forces was also usually more violent, larger and long drawn out than the IRA action it was in response to. In fact, such incidents were often not even in reaction to an IRA incident, but entirely unprovoked (Earls FitzGerald 2021, 139).

In retaliation by 1921 the IRA began a counter campaign of killing civilians deemed to be spies, and the burning of property belonging to people believed to be in sympathy with the crown forces. Both arson and the killing of spies was implemented most aggressively by the Cork IRA, while in much the rest of the country – particularly Connacht and Leinster – this kind of violence was uncommon.

⁶ O/C 1st Southern to C/S, 2 November 1921, UCDA, P7/A/28.

⁷ C/S to O/Cs all Division: General Order No.4, 24 August 1922, UCDA, P69/25.

⁸ C/S to O/Cs all Division: General Order No.4, 24 August 1922, UCDA, P69/25.

Lynch not only believed in this policy, but believed it needed to be stepped up. In May 1921 Lynch wrote to IRA General Headquarters (GHQ) in Dublin suggesting that for each republican prisoner shot by the crown forces in response “we shoot one local loyalist, Prominent Freemason”⁹. Notably, he does not mention that they be shot for having *actually acted* against the IRA, rather a critical historian could suggest that here he is suggesting that the political or even cultural identity of simply being a loyalist or unionist justified an individual’s execution. Indeed, another critical reading might suggest that Loyalist and Freemason were thinly veiled reference to Protestants. However, Lynch never seems to have made an openly sectarian remark, which perhaps supports the belief that Peter Hart’s view of the IRA as being partially motivated by sectarian feelings cannot be fully substantiated (Earls FitzGerald 2021, 217). Indeed, another interpretation could be that he was simply referring to political loyalty rather than religious denomination. Whatever his actual intentions were, however his suggestion of giving local IRA commanders what seems to have been a free hand to execute anyone who came under suspicion, could have resulted in a blood bath. This, in turn, could have been highly damaging to Sinn Féin government’s efforts to ensure the IRA were Ireland’s legitimate armed forces, against the murderous gangster image of the IRA then being presented by British propaganda. But this is perhaps the first instance of Lynch lacking the vision to see the ramifications of his ideas and solutions.

His rhetoric around arson is also noticeably similar. Lynch believed that the escalation of arson produced the needed results. He noted that in the Cork No.2 IRA brigade, his own stronghold, the IRA had been burning a loyalist house for every republican house burned “with the result that the local loyalists approached the enemy authorities immediately asking them for God’s sake to stop reprisals”. Lynch suggested that this policy be extended to a national level¹⁰.

Though he was sometimes unclear about how far he believed these measures should be extended, he often came back to this idea when the conflict was at its most intense in the spring of 1921. In May 1921 he again wrote that the “enemy seems inclined to burn out every house (of those in sympathy with the republican movement), we may as well have our share of it” seemingly suggesting burning every loyalist house¹¹. Interestingly, Lynch came back to this concept of burning numerous “loyalist” houses, at least twice in his correspondence in the spring of 1921. Suggesting that he was committed to the idea and that at the height of a brutal guerrilla conflict he was oblivious to large scale concerns these acts would have and was primarily concerned with more immediate short term advantages.

On one level, if these measures of largescale execution of known loyalists and burning of their property had been implemented it would have decreased civilian or “loyalist” co-operation or potential co-operation with the crown forces but, more importantly, it would have been irrevocably damaging in the longer run. Sinn Féin propaganda had consistently used arson, and other acts of violence, conducted by the Black and Tans as tangible evidence of British misrule, it also allowed the Black and Tans to be depicted as invaders and further validate Sinn Féin’s claims for independence. If the IRA began to engage in widespread indiscriminate arson and shootings of anyone believed to have been a “loyalist”, it could well have again acted as a major boon to allow British propaganda to portray the IRA as a criminal rather than military force.

Similarly, in areas where IRA activity was limited, it was unreasonable to advocate for Volunteers to begin engaging in arson and shooting of spies. Such actions would have only brought down the wrath of the crown. Indeed, it was the fear of such reprisals that often-discouraged

⁹ O/C 1st Southern Division to C/S, 4 May 1921, UCDA, P7/A/20.

¹⁰ O/C 1st Southern Division to C/S, 4 May 1921, UCDA, P7/A/20.

¹¹ O/C 1st Southern Division to C/S, 20 May 1921, UCDA, P7/A/21.

IRA units in quieter parts of the country from engaging in military operations of any kind (Earls FitzGerald 2021, 134). Though, it is important to contextualise Lynch's remarks. He was also clearly reflecting a concern for those suffering at the hands of the crown forces and he believed the burning of loyalist homes would stop the suffering of the nationalist population.

But his pre-occupation with the advisability of arson persisted into the Truce of 1921 which again shows a lack of awareness of larger political sensibilities. In November 1921, at the very height of the Treaty negotiations and during the uneasy truce between the crown forces and the IRA, Lynch fearing that Lismore Castle in County Waterford was about to be occupied by the British military, asked Richard Mulcahy, the then Chief of Staff of the IRA, permission to burn it¹². Lynch wrote that

we fear Lismore Castle will be occupied by the enemy [British Army] in the near future, we got this information from a family reliable source and at present owners are auctioning off all of their property. We are fairly certain of definite information a few days before this is occupied, can you give permission to have this building burned.¹³

Mulcahy was more careful, writing "by the terms of the truce the destruction of a castle would not be permissible"¹⁴.

In an already tense situation, in which stand offs between the IRA and crown forces were creating a fear of a breakdown in negotiations, the burning of Lismore Castle would have only made matters worse if not even have precipitated a resumption of fighting. Lismore Castle was the Irish country seat of the staunchly unionist Cavendish Dukes of Devonshire who were part and parcel of the British establishment as Liberal party leaders. The advisability of burning the castle at that moment seems more than a little foolhardy.

During the Civil War, as Chief of Staff, he was eager to call for the same methods that had been used in the previous conflict. In August 1922, in the early stages of the civil war, the IRA published a general notice that declared they had no "desire to interfere with individuals holding opinions opposed to them" but that any person who conveyed information to the Free State forces "prejudicial to the safety of our forces will be regarded as spies, and will be liable to the same penalty meted out to informers previous to the truce July 1921"¹⁵. This is referring to the IRA's controversial policy of executing civilians they believed to be spies between 1920 and 1921.

Similarly, in the civil war he began calling for press censorship, issuing the following instructions to all IRA commanders:

As almost the entire press is at present used as the medium of enemy propaganda, you will see that the "Irish Independent", "Freeman's Journal", "Irish Times", or any other hostile newspapers are prevented from being brought into your area are for sale or circulation. Any which are brought in should be seized and destroyed.¹⁶

Lynch's Adjutant General also issued the following instruction to all commanders:

¹² O/C 1st Southern Division to C/S, 2 November 1921, UCDA, P7/A/28.

¹³ O/C 1st Southern Division to C/S, 2 November 1921, UCDA, P7/A/28.

¹⁴ C/S to O/C 1st Southern Division, 4 November 1921, UCDA, P7/A/28.

¹⁵ Irish Republican Army, Public Notice, 28 August 1922, UCDA, P69/25.

¹⁶ C/S to O/Cs all Divisions: Operation order No.7 – Destruction of hostile newspapers, 7 August 1922, UCDA, P69/25.

You will order any local representative for the hostile home or foreign press that they are cease forwarding reports on any matters relating to the I.R.A. on the present war. If they to comply with this order you will have them expelled from your divisional area.¹⁷

From a military perspective the crisis necessitated such measures and this is an example of Lynch considering national implications. However, in the civil war these calls for harsh treatment of informers and the suppression of the freedom of the press would have been detrimental to anti-Treaty side. The anti-Treaty movement was already unpopular with many and struggling to assert its democratic credentials against the relentless demonisation from the propaganda of the Free State. Such measures would have done the movement no favours and again could have been easily exploited by enemy propaganda. The IRA between 1919-1921 had not tried to suppress the press either.

This represents a pattern seen throughout his revolutionary life of showing a lack of concern for broader political concerns, in favour of potential short term military gains. This sometimes could affect his judgement regarding the people for whose independence he was fighting.

4. Views on Civilians

Indeed, this foolhardiness and desire for increased violence is made more interesting if we examine his views not strictly connected to fighting for the Republic, but connected to society more broadly, beginning with his views on Irish civilians.

It was not uncommon for IRA Volunteers, particularly after the signing of the Treaty in 1921, to express a desire that the Republic should be maintained at all costs. Humphry Murphy, the *de-facto* leader of the Kerry IRA, gave an example of this train of thought, when he told a meeting of the Kerry Farmers Union in July 1922 that:

If the provisional (Free State) government continue to fight with English guns, English bullets and shells, English armoured Cars and the Ex-Soldiers of the English army... I am certain they are going to fail as the Black and Tans failed, because the war did not come properly until it came to Cork and Kerry. We will defend every town to the last. You will have towns in ruins and famine finishing those who have escaped the bullet. We will stop at nothing, and we are going to win even if it takes years. (Murphy in Doyle 2009, 112-113)

Murphy's rhetoric may seem extreme but it was not that unusual. As the civil war dragged on into 1923, Liam Lynch famously went so far as to describe the people of Ireland "merely [as] sheep to be driven anywhere at will" (Lynch in Garvin 1996, 46). At this point, the civil war for republicans was coming to an ignominious and tragic end, so it is possible that Lynch made these comments in despair or haste rather than from deep reflection, but this was far from an isolated remark.

A frustration towards those who did not contribute fully to the republican war effort, for instance, was a complaint he often made. It is also crucial to note that such sentiments were expressed by Lynch long before the grim days towards the end of the civil war. During the Truce, in October 1921, he reflected that:

¹⁷ Adjutant General to O/Cs all Divisions: General Order No.5 Press representatives and correspondents, 25 September 1922, UCDA, P69/25.

During the war (1919-1921) it was only in a few instances ... that levies had to be insisted on, and people paid it freely. The situation is certainly different now during the Truce times in areas where some of the population have not developed a war mind – on the other hand a peace at any price group of Shoneens – and who put a few pounds before the Nation’s honour and Freedom. Such an attitude as adopted by these people would not win us freedom.¹⁸

In his correspondence, he would frequently come back to this theme of the lack of support during the previous conflict. In March 1922 he wrote his brother “During the war I remember at one time in the next area where it was next to impossible to find a bed to his own”¹⁹.

It is in regards to this issue that his localism is particularly evident. Lynch wrote that unlike the rest of the country “when people here [in Cork] realised there was a war on that they were part of the Irish nation they paid up freely”²⁰.

This is perhaps an example of how Lynch’s pride in Cork could reach exaggerated or unrealistic proportions. After the arrest of Séan MacEoin, County Longford’s proactive and aggressive IRA leader, Lynch reflected that “Cork will have to fight alone now” (Lynch in Hanley 2010, 15). Cork, undoubtedly, possessed the most aggressive IRA units, but Lynch’s comments here seem to disregard the work of IRA units in Limerick, Kerry, Tipperary, let alone Dublin or units in Connacht who were becoming increasingly pro-active and aggressive, particularly in the Spring of 1921 (Townshend 2013, 293).

It is wrong to characterise Lynch’s attitude as entirely dismissive of civilians though; for all his hostility towards those non-active supporters of the IRA, his correspondence also shows interesting more semi-sympathetic or even metaphysical approaches to non-active supporters of the IRA. In October 1921 he wrote that “furthermore we realised we were fighting for them [non-active supporters] as well as for active supporters even if they [the non-active supporters] did not realise”²¹. Here, he seems to almost echo an understanding, similar to that often expressed in the post-revolutionary period of Irish republicanism. Ruairi Ó Braidaigh an IRA Chief of Staff in the 1950s and 1960s and President of Provisional and then Republican Sinn Féin, and a great admirer of Lynch, for instance believed that there was only ever a small minority who would fight to free Ireland. However, Ó Braidaigh also felt that actually most Irish people *did want* complete separation, and could sometimes be moved by events such as 1916 or Bloody Sunday, but that these feelings rarely resulted in mobilisation or activity and that it was therefore up to a relatively small number of IRA volunteers to in effect fight on behalf of the people (Hanley 2013, 452).

On this occasion, Lynch makes a rare conciliatory gesture to non-republicans, but he was usually uncompromising on such issues. This brings us on to how Lynch approached or considered social issues, not strictly linked to the use of force.

5. *Social Issues*

Lynch produced a memorandum “Civil population in war time” on 24th November 1921, which envisaged an almost total war type scenario if hostilities with Britain were resumed. Writing that martial law should be “declared on our side when enemy declared it on theirs”

¹⁸ O/C 1st Southern Division to C/S, 27 October 1921, UCDA, P7/A/29.

¹⁹ Liam Lynch to Tom Lynch, 6 March 1922, NLI, MS 36, 252/24.

²⁰ O/C 1st Southern Division to C/S, 27 October 1921, UCDA, P7/A/29.

²¹ O/C 1st Southern Division to C/S, 27 October 1921, UCDA, P7/A/29.

and “If hostilities are resumed the whole support of the civil population should be organised behind the army”²².

He then brought up a familiar theme: contempt for the non-military sides of Irish life. “We must admit that all civil organisation, County Councils, District Councils, Urban Councils, Corporations, Urban Councils, Sinn Féin clubs and all other organised bodies were an absolute failure during the last phase of hostilities”²³. Considering the success made in establishing the counter-state through 1919-1921 thanks to the efforts of W.T. Cosgrave, and in establishing Sinn Féin dominance in local government and Austin Stack in establishing a separate republican judiciary, Lynch’s remarks here seem unnecessarily harsh and narrow minded (Townshend 2013 121-126) – his views even seem to represent a lack of awareness of the non-military elements of the republican state building project.

It is important to stress that he was not unconcerned with the fate of normal people, and in this memorandum he envisaged a system to aid poorer people affected by the conflict:

Distress in towns is likely to become very serious in next war and a definitive machinery is necessary, even to the extent of removing those in distress to country district(s) where they would be cared in twos and threes by well to do people ... Employers could give a certain allowance to employees who have gone in active service and give a definite promise of re-employment at any later time.²⁴

So far, Lynch has appeared to be militaristic, capable of making situations more volatile and dismissive of anyone who did not share his politics. But curiously here, Lynch envisaged an elaborate and perhaps characteristically impractical system whereby wealthy rural dwellers would have to house victims of the crown forces, and employers needing to make guarantees of continued employment to their employees. This suggests an egalitarian approach of equal distribution where the wealthy would need to care for those who suffered on account of the conflict, and more broadly that the wealthier needed to carry their full burden if hostilities resumed.

As established earlier in the view of a scholar like Hart, Lynch and his colleagues were pre-occupied solely with freeing Ireland rather than running it. However, the last document would suggest Lynch was actively contemplating ways to alleviate the distress that would be caused by fighting for Ireland. But does this document suggest his having more of an advanced social vision?

Which now begs the question as to whether Lynch held left wing or egalitarian views alongside his dedication to the Republic: Lynch’s closest friend Michael Fitzgerald, who he knew during his early days with the Fermoy Volunteers in 1917-1919, was an activist with the radical Irish Transport and General Workers Union together with the Volunteers – demonstrating that Lynch almost certainly came into direct contact with labour issues (Hart 1998, 146). Fitzgerald was arrested in October 1919, after an attack on British troops in Fermoy led by Lynch. Fitzgerald would die on hunger strike in October 1920. Lynch’s concerns for horse racing going ahead when there were republicans in prison, must have been influenced by the fact that his friend Fitzgerald was then on hunger strike.

Lynch’s links with Fitzgerald may have been exaggerated on following Lynch’s death by anti-Treaty propagandists in order to strengthen his connections with martyrdom and heroic sacrifice to the cause. Whatever else knowledge of the connection between the two spread fast. In 1923 Dan Breen, or his ghost-writer, wrote in *My fight for Irish Freedom* in suitably emotionally charged language:

²² O/C 1st Southern Division to C/S, 27 October 1921, UCDA, P7/A/29

²³ O/C 1st Southern Division to C/S, 27 October 1921, UCDA, P7/A/29

²⁴ O/C 1st Southern Division to C/S, 27 October 1921, UCDA, P7/A/29.

When Liam fell in battle on the Knockmealdown on 10 April 1923, his last request was to be buried with Michael Fitzgerald in Kilcrumper. 'Place me near my loyal and faithful comrade, Michael Fitzgerald,' he asked. And there those two faithful soldiers of the Republic lie side by side. (1989 [1924], 106)

Lynch however does not seem to have been affected by Fitzgerald's trade union activism. Indeed, In the Autumn of 1921, when the cessation of hostilities was resulting in an upsurge in trade union agitation, he expressed an obvious frustration with trade unions:

There are instances especially in Waterford where I.T.G unions organisers are antagonistic to Ireland's National demands and more drastic action has been taken by us for less offences. We cannot let any civil organisation interfere with the Army, especially at a time when Enemy is taking desperate efforts to crush us. My experience is that certain organisations try to put labour before freedom, this may go on for some time but even their own individual members will not stick this.²⁵

His remarks here, again reflect his belief, expressed earlier, that most people, seemingly regardless of class, were potential supporters of the IRA. However, it also clearly echoes a view held by Fenians and dating back to the late 19th century that political issues not linked to the national question such as trade union activism, and the land question, were distraction from the all-important national question (Townshend 1983, 319). It has also been suggested that for many of Lynch's generation the belief existed that once the British were removed from Ireland class harmony would emerge (English 2006, 301). This attitude may well have informed Lynch's apparent hostility to trade unionism.

Lynch's view that all sections of society needed to rally behind the army and put aside sectional interests was not uncommon among republicans of this period (Laffan 1999, 258). In the early stages of 1920, as a result of the declining influence of the Royal Irish Constabulary, an upsurge in agrarian agitation occurred which Sinn Féin and the IRA responded to by trying to mediate between landowners and tenants and landless rural labourers. Nonetheless, IRA volunteers, particularly in County Kerry, often operated in favour of landed interests, indeed since the 19th century agrarian agitation was seen by many republicans as a distraction from the more important national question (Earls FitzGerald 2021, 73).

However, issues particularly around land agitation became a particular problem for Lynch during the Civil War. The Civil War created a strange hybrid of new political rhetoric created from chaotic conditions in which old certainties were challenged and new loyalties and identities were created. Gemma Clark in her 2014 work *Everyday violence in the Irish Civil War* demonstrated the frequent occurrence of the use of arson against big houses and other forms of intimidation, often over land, during the Civil War. Clark notes that such acts of violence were the product of class tensions often motivated by historical and sectarian grievances. Clark's notes it is often impossible to establish whether those behind these acts of arson were in the anti-Treaty IRA or opportunistic largely agrarian agitators (98-154).

The sheer frequency of arson together with increasing land agitation, prompted a fear of social collapse among certain Free State government ministers in the later stages of the Civil War, particularly Kevin O'Higgins and Patrick Hogan. Hogan and O'Higgins created and put into effect a Special Infantry Corps of elite troops, within the army, to break up land agitation, strikes and suppress other forms of "outlawry". Gavin Foster considers that O'Higgins' belief that Special Infantry Corps represented the most valuable branch of the army, "highlights how important members of the government believed the force to be and how seriously they took the forms of social conflict it was designed to suppress" (Foster 2015, 130-133).

²⁵ O/C 1st Southern Division to C/S, 13 October 1921, UCDA, P7/A/34.

Historical discourse on the Irish Civil War is, in keeping with the nature of civil wars, divided. The “democrats vs dictators” narrative as espoused by Garvin (1996), has been challenged, often on the basis of the Free State’s conservatism and frequent circumvention of the rule of law. The counter argument of the Civil War as a type of counter-revolution in which a conservative bourgeois elite, as epitomised by Kevin O’Higgins, destroyed the actual revolution, exists in opposition to the “democrats vs dictators” narrative (Regan 1999).

Similarly, as noted earlier, Gavin Foster has added further layers to this counter-revolutionary narrative by emphasising the considerable class tensions that existed during the Civil War, and how it manifested in pro-Treaty contempt for the anti-Treaty activists who were condemned for their apparent lack of social worth and low standing in society (2016). Roy Foster has also recently suggested that for many of the “revolutionary generation” the personnel, background and mentalities of the Free State government looked “uncomfortably close to Home Rule” as they lacked any type of republican vision or idealism and took on the manners of the British (2014, 285).

The conservatism of the Free State side however, did not result in the anti-Treaty side embracing more radical social politics. The arson and land agitation occurring at the time was being picked up on by some in anti-Treaty movement as something with which the IRA should identify with more, and that it was a sentiment the IRA could galvanise for their benefit. Revolutionary anti-Treaty radicals like Peadar O’Donnell and Liam Mellows called for the division of larger estates. Historian Michael Hopkinson, however, has noted they were the “lone voices” in the anti-Treaty movement (1988, 91). O’Donnell and Mellows spent the Civil War in prison, so it could be argued that had they been at liberty they may have been in a greater position to influence the conflict. However, they would have *inevitably* encountered opposition from their more conservative colleagues – like Lynch. In the early stages of the Civil War Roddy Connolly, son of James, approached Lynch’s headquarters; Connolly advised Lynch that the only way to beat the Free State was to establish a republican government in Cork and implement the socialist Democratic Programme of the first Dáil. Lynch was not interested in Connolly’s proposals (Ryan 2012 [1986], 185). Again, perhaps suggesting a fairly non-complex Hart like vision of Lynch as a typical non-politically complex IRA man.

However, at other times Lynch’s reaction to such issues may be interpreted as more complex. In his most intriguing directive, to Liam Deasy, who had replaced him as head of the 1st Southern in September 1922, Lynch considered ways in which to deal with the emerging land agitation crisis:

What are your views on the advisability of we confiscating demesne lands, and ranches immediately as we had been doing last May when the truce intervened. We should begin by taking over estates which are some distance from enemy bases so that it would be quite impossible for him to protect these people or reinstate them.

You could start by taking over 10 or 12 estates in the 1st Southern, say places like Kingston’s, near Mitchelstown. The problem must be tackled some time, and I hold that the settlement of the fighting men on the land should be made a condition of a peace which may be made.

If we decide on this policy we should guard against giving the “land hunger” a fresh start, as it may divert a good deal of attention away from the fight for independence. This would apply particularly to the west.²⁶

²⁶ C/S to O/C 1st Southern Division, 1 September 1922, UCDA, P69/25.

This is easily equally one of Lynch's most intriguing but also difficult to interpret directives, and as such is worthy of close analysis. In the first paragraph, he suggests the necessity of confiscating larger farms and making sure Free State forces would not be in a position to "reinststate" the original owners – suggesting he envisaged stripping the wealthy of their wealth. He then goes on to suggest "the settlement of the fighting men on the land" as a condition of peace. Lynch here is quite clearly outlining a belief that anti-Treaty IRA men, "the fighting men", be awarded for their service by being awarded these large tracts of land in any potential peace settlement. However, he then goes on to raise concerns about a new rise in "land hunger" if this policy is introduced, and that it could divert attention away from the struggle for independence, particularly in the west of Ireland – where land problems were most acute. There appears to be two potential interpretations here.

On the one hand, it could be interpreted as suggesting that IRA veterans be granted land but that the ramifications and technicalities of such a scheme could prove complex and result in an upsurge in "land hunger" among IRA men fighting over the exact nature of the new allocations of land. And that Lynch feared that this would become a distraction for IRA men from their main role as fighters for independence. If the Civil War had been won and independence achieved, and with the new republican dispensation being in a position to allocate land surely, would not the national question have been resolved? This consideration leads to the next interpretation.

The second reading is that the "land hunger" Lynch feared "in the west" would be as a result of landless labourers engaging in agitation in reaction to IRA men being awarded land. Land which the poorer rural dwellers felt they had more of a claim too. His suggestion that there would be a need to "guard against" land hunger, could even be interpreted as suggesting he thought it could be necessary for IRA to protect their new holdings from land hungry agitators by force of arms.

However, the document is in itself vague and Lynch may well have been expressing not fully developed ideas. But regardless of his intent, it is again a typically impractical document as the settlement of IRA veterans on viable plots of farm land would have proved difficult to administer. And both the wealthy and poor of rural Ireland could well have been resentful and resisted such a scheme. However, as said, the uncertain wording of this directive make it difficult to be certain of his exact intent.

Lynch's belief in the break of larger farms and the holdings of the residual Anglo-Irish ascendancy was a common theme in this period. Indeed, the idea of breaking up landed estates was even a sentiment shared by his opponents. Emmet Dalton, who commanded Free State troop in Cork noted that the officers under his command envisaged "hunting all the old ascendancy out of the country and dividing up their estates amongst the despoiled relatives now alive"²⁷. In fact, since the late 19th century various commissions had been set up to facilitate land redistribution, whose work as the Land Commission continued in independent Ireland. Lynch was unique in considering that the redistributed land should go primarily to the IRA though.

Lynch's judgement seems often to have wavered. Like many republicans of his time he was wary of land agitation (Séan Moylan, BMH, WS, 838) or trade union activism as distracting from the struggle for the Republic, but also clearly felt for poor people who suffered as a result of the conflict – and that the wealthier should make more allowances to share the burden. Nonetheless, together with the burning of Lismore castle, his suggestion of the need for massive land redistribution in favour of IRA veterans at the successful end of the Civil War was Lynch

²⁷ Intelligence report on Cork, G.O.C Cork to C/S, Adjt General, Director of organisation and Director of intelligence, 18 November 1922, UCDA, P17a/164.

at his most impractical and clearly unable to see national implications of such an idea. He may simply have only been envisaging how such a scheme would play out in his own north Munster stronghold, rather considering how it manifest nationally.

However, his idea expressed in the last document that the anti-Treaty IRA would come out as winner of the Civil War, moves on finally to Lynch's unrealistic vision of how the conflict was progressing.

6. Lynch's Leadership in the Civil War

The outcome of the Civil War was initially not a foregone conclusion. The late Michael Hopkinson demonstrated that at the earlier stages of the conflict the anti-Treaty side had more men, equipment and controlled more territory than the nascent Free State, who had few outposts outside of Dublin (Hopkinson 1988, 127). Lynch was aware of this and on 29th July he issued a directive to all units in which he wrote that "we hope to have made control towards complete control of west and southern Ireland" (Lynch in Ryan 2012 [1986], 175). In those few weeks in the summer of 1922, Lynch was in control of an IRA who had more influence and capabilities than ever before – enough capabilities to defeat the Free State.

Despite the fall of the Four Courts and O'Connell Street garrisons in Dublin in the early stages of the conflict, Lynch was still in effective control of most of the south and west of the country. However, he never made any concrete efforts to follow up on these tactical advantages by going on the offensive: instead he moved his headquarters to his own traditional north Munster stronghold, where he would continue to be based until his death (with some intervals elsewhere), and let any advantages drain away while the Free State took the initiative. By the end of August 1922, the IRA had lost all the territory they had previously controlled.

Indeed, in the summer of 1922 Lynch for all that his concerns were often military, however, his tactical ability or the quality of his military thinking can be best be described as limited. Lynch's former colleagues turned opponents; Richard Mulcahy and Michael Collins had launched a simultaneous offensive of troops by both land and sea. Lynch was attacked in his front at Limerick and Tipperary and in his rear by sea-based troop landings in Cork and Kerry. A similar picture developed on his Connacht front. By August, all the various IRA garrisons had been driven back into the hills. Lynch was not that dispirited as he advocated for the guerrilla tactics which had previously worked so well for the IRA (Townshend 2013, 416).

The conflict then descended, with a few exceptions such as in Kerry, into a low scale conflict. The Free State's decision to execute republican prisoners, decreasing morale and a lack of widespread popular support meant the anti-Treaty side possessed no reasonable chance of success after the Autumn of 1922, a fact DeValera had long since recognised (Ryan 2012 [1986], 216).

Yet for all this, it is at this point that Lynch's rhetoric becomes increasingly focused on both the practical military situation improving for the IRA and the *inevitability* of victory. He wrote to Joe McGarrity, the leading anti-Treaty figure in Irish America, in December 1922 that "The home situation generally is very satisfactory, and generally is immensely improving from week to week [...] the people in the country are now in the same position as in the last war"²⁸. Similarly, he wrote to McGarrity as late as February 1923 that:

²⁸ Liam Lynch C/S to Joe McGarrity, 21 December 1922, NLI, MS 17, 455 (1).

The general situation here up to a few days ago was most satisfactory, and were it not for the Deasy incident, which Moylan will explain to you, I am sure we would have matters all our own way within a few weeks. Owing to this incident it may take us some time to recover from it, but I am certain all will be right again.²⁹

Liam Deasy, a close associate of Lynch, had been captured by Free State forces and avoided execution by publicly calling on all remaining anti-Treaty units to surrender (Hopkinson 1988, 230-232).

Perhaps, is this in fact where we see Lynch at his most political or *even* manipulative? Was he recognising that Irish America would be vital to the survival of the republican movement, and in fact feeding McGarrity false information to make the chances of receiving aid greater? The answer appears to be no: as in both private and public correspondence for audiences at home and abroad he stuck to the same message.

In his last written message to all officers and men under his command he announced “I am certain that if we stand united that victory is certain, and that in a short time” (Hopkinson 1988, 238). Again, this may have been a case of simply trying to be pragmatic, to boost morale, encourage greater resistance, unity in the ranks, or indeed for propaganda purposes to show that the IRA were still active. Such more pragmatic concerns may have influenced his thinking but he seems to have always earnestly believed in such pronouncements.

He had in fact been writing variants of the same idea for months – including to his own family, which suggests he earnestly believed in inevitable victory. On 28th October 1922, he privately wrote to his brother that “We are absolutely confident that the Free State is beaten” (Ryan 2012 [1986], 200). This, admittedly, was at a time before the execution policy of anti-Treaty prisoners had been so ruthlessly implemented but still when any practical advantages for the anti-Treaty side were negligible. Also, why would he lie or exaggerate to his own brother? Surely Father Lynch had other sources of news other than his brother’s letters. The tone in this message is also remarkably close to that of other messages such as that to McGarrity or in messages to the men under his command. Perhaps, here is a good example of him being without guile or capable of manipulation if in both private and publicly his views were effectively the same.

He was also not surrounded by flatterers reinforcing his flawed vision of inevitable victory – rather he was under increasing pressure to end the conflict. However, he refused to alter his position (Townshend 2013, 446). Indeed, it appears that Lynch believed that the fortunes of the war could be reversed if IRA efforts, then being made to purchase artillery in Germany and America, were successful (Hopkinson 1988, 236-237).

While the arrival of several pieces of artillery for use by the anti-Treaty side may have altered the dynamics of the conflict slightly it would hardly have resulted in the Free State – suing for peace. The Free State army already having sufficient artillery. Perhaps, Lynch continued to take succour from the results of the previous conflict and earnestly believed that the Free State, like the British, would ultimately be worn down and come to terms. But here Lynch’s logic could not have been more wrong. The British in 1920-1921 clearly had to eventually come to some form of terms with the Dáil Government – as the legitimate representative of the majority of the Irish people – and they also had options: the British were not fighting for their very survival. Not so for the Free State – who were fighting to maintain the existence of their new state. In 1922-1923 the Free State, for all the problematic issues of having been created under the threat of force, was also now considered as legitimate by most Irish people. Lynch, may have been a case of a general fighting the last war.

²⁹ Liam Lynch C/S to Joe McGarrity, 5 February 1923, NLI, MS 17, 455 (5).

When things were at their worst on 10th April 1923, and under increasing pressure to end the conflict from within the IRA, Lynch on route to a meeting of the IRA executive to discuss ending the conflict, was shot and mortally wounded by Free State soldiers on the slopes of the isolated Knockmealdown Mountains in County Tipperary.

7. Conclusion

Lynch occupies a curious position in Irish revolutionary history mainly due to his role in the Civil War. Though he did his utmost to avoid the Civil War of 1922-1923, he is attributed with almost singlehandedly being responsible for its unnecessary longevity. For all this, he is probably not as well-known as anti-Treaty left wing theoreticians such as Liam Mellows or Peadar O'Donnell, let alone next to his comrade turned opponent Michael Collins. Indeed, there are striking parallels between Lynch and Collins.

Like Collins, he died young, and with Collins, and Richard Mulcahy, he formed part of an IRA triumvirate that acted as the effective *de facto* head of the IRA between 1919-1921. Like Collins he was capable of violent rhetoric, and called for acts of extreme violence – the murder of civilians deemed spies, press censorship etc. He also led the military side of his movement in the Civil War. But while Collins was tall and broad, boisterous, convivial and often couth, on the other hand, Lynch was shy, quiet, tall and skinny, and rarely drank. It is hard to imagine him swearing. Collins' name is recognised outside of Ireland, while there are many people in Ireland who have never heard of Liam Lynch. One might say this is because Lynch does not have a 1996 blockbuster film about his exploits, but it might also simply be the case that he was not as dynamic or charismatic a figure.

That is not to say that Lynch was not a clearly a very accomplished man. Without any formal military training he rapidly rose through the ranks to become the commander of the IRA, he also was an effective organiser and administrator. His fellow Cork man Sean Moylan thought he was a simple pen pusher and not a soldier (Hopkinson 1988, 12), but Lynch was under fire several times – he was mortally wounded in combat. He successfully led the IRA party that captured the arsenal at Mallow barracks (O'Malley 1936, 212-217). Lynch through most of the years 1919-1923 also lived a precarious existence on the run for a cause to which he was genuinely devoted. As a national military leader, he was lacking though. In the summer of 1922, his troops had the potential to change the outcome of the Civil War, but he never seized the moment. He did nobly try and prevent the war, but once it started he remained seemingly genuinely committed to the belief in the final republican victory – but did little to ever try and make that victory a reality.

Bill Kissane has argued that in civil wars “the intensity of conflict is a reflection of the importance the actors attach to the issues dividing them” (2016, 6). And as we have seen from his declaration that he would “live under no other law”, the issue of maintaining the Republic is intrinsic to understanding Lynch, particularly in the Civil War, and explains the “intensity” of his feelings in the Civil War. But it is important that the depth of his commitment did not materialise into effective leadership.

If we look back, he clearly possessed a personal innocence, but his political actions also seem to have stemmed from an innocence that fed into unrealistic and potentially damaging expectations. In the 1919-1921 conflict he called for the widespread executions and use of arson against anyone who disagreed with the IRA, he wanted to burn castles during the 1921 truce, in the Civil War he envisaged a future Ireland in which IRA men would be settled on larger farms without thinking of the ramifications of this policy, and finally, despite; all evidence to

the contrary both publicly and privately, he earnestly believed as late as the spring of 1923 that the anti-treaty IRA were winning the Civil War.

History and what should evaluate all sides of him rather than either simply castigate or uncritically celebrate him. On the one hand, while his critics should recognise that he was clearly a man of energy, talent and integrity, his defenders should also recognise the validity of criticism of him.

He was perhaps finally a person who had responsibility thrust upon him thanks to the unique times in which he lived; a responsibility which he could not entirely master or control. Lynch is key to understanding both how the 1919-1921 conflict and subsequent 1922-1923 Civil War developed, and the motivations and world view of the republicanism of his time. Simultaneously he was no great military strategist, leader or even planner. His analysis on many issues was simply incorrect and either made things worse or could have made things worse. Perhaps, the latter points are crucial as these elements were crucial for a republican victory in the civil war, and these were the key features he lacked.

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The Belfast Pogrom and the Interminable Irish Question

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Abstract:

This article re-examines the British establishment's crucial role in partition, arguing that it rested on imperial considerations and, indeed, that the character of the resultant "Orange State" punctures liberal assumptions about twentieth-century Britain. It counters much of the prevailing historiography on what nationalists call the Belfast pogrom, identifying it as the pivotal episode in the genesis of Northern Ireland, during which the Ulster Unionist leadership – with near unconditional state support – effectively purged Belfast's labour market of Catholics and Protestant socialists to create an Orange economy that served as the material basis for a half-century of Unionist rule. The piece concludes that loyalist ideology represented a fusion of inherent colonial-settler identity and derived racist and imperialist concepts then permeating metropolitan discourse and widely embraced across the post-war European Right.

Keywords: Belfast, Partition, Pogrom, Socialism, Unionism

On its centenary, a convergence of constitutional instability and long-term demographic change has left Northern Ireland facing an existential threat. Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) hubris in aligning with Tory Eurosceptics culminated in Boris Johnson throwing Ulster Unionism under a Wright Bus to facilitate the Brexit deal that underpinned his landslide 2019 election victory. Students of Irish history might have predicted such betrayal: only the Tory Right can abandon Unionism without fear of recrimination. In his famous Lord's speech, after the Anglo-Irish Treaty, Edward Carson lamented: "What a fool I was. I was only a puppet, and so was Ulster, and so was Ireland, in the political game that was to get the Conservative Party into power" (Lewis 2006, 231).

Ironically, the current Conservative Party's *weltanschauung* has seldom been closer to Ulster Unionism with Enoch Powell's restless spirit resurrected from its Ulster purgatory to haunt the Tory soul. Interestingly, a century ago, Unionist one-party rule

emerged from a similar constellation of right-wing forces. The creation of what R.F. Foster euphemistically described as Britain's "truculent and idiosyncratic offshoot" holds up a cracked mirror to an uncomfortable legacy of colonialism and racism (1988, 528-529). The British state sowed dragon's teeth in 1921, with Lloyd George admitting that "our Ulster case is not a good one" (Phoenix 1994, 225). Nevertheless, the highly selective reading of Britain's role in modern Ireland that infuses liberal thinking fails to acknowledge the reactionary and imperialist coalition that imposed partition, through which Ulster's Unionist leadership – with near unconditional state support – established a half-century of Orange supremacy.

In line with McVeigh and Rolston, this article argues that partition restored the historical "default position on controlling Irish Catholics – repression and hyper sectarianism" (2021, 212-213). The racist violence underpinning partition represented an especially intense variation of a more general policy of reprisals implemented by Britain across the island at the time. The central irony was that, by degree, British rule prior to partition "had softened its anti-Catholicism" and "attempted to secure legitimacy through *incorporating* rather than repressing the Catholic majority" (232). In addition, British-backed Orange revanchism operated "in a world in which democracy was beginning to undermine more archaic forms of legitimacy" (208). Therefore, a newly-minted and manufactured "Protestant majoritarianism made Northern Ireland more like a 'Herrenvolk democracy' – in the manner of apartheid South Africa" than an integral part of twentieth-century Britain (212).

At its very inception, Northern Ireland was baptised in blood. Around Belfast the conflict differed significantly from that between British forces and the IRA elsewhere across Ireland: while in the south violence overwhelmingly affected combatants, conflict in the north-east was characterised by indiscriminate sectarianism. O'Halpin and Ó Corráin's study of deaths from the Easter Rising until 1921 provides a civilian fatality figure in Antrim of 85%, while the same indicator in the two most active southern counties (Tipperary and Cork) ranges from 28% to 34% (2020, 1112). Indeed, "other than intercommunal violence in Derry" (O'Halpin, Ó Corráin 2020, 13) and Belfast, they concluded that it was "impossible to assign sectarian or ethnic motives as the primary reason for individual killings between 1916 and 1921" (39). Following Belfast's mass expulsions in July 1920, mobs drove 23,000 Catholics from their homes, and 50,000 left the North by early 1923 (Phoenix 1994, 251). Between July 1920 and October 1922 in Belfast, Kieran Glennon has identified 498 killings, including 266 Catholic and 181 Protestant civilians, or 90% of all fatalities (2013, 263). As Catholics comprised only a quarter of the population, in real terms, they were around six times more likely to die. The expulsion of 10,000 workers (mostly Catholics but including Protestant trade unionists) from the city's shipyards and engineering works on the first working day after the annual Twelfth of July holiday is widely recognised as the spark that lit the bonfire (Parkinson 2004, 21). Here the consensus ends, however.

Northern Ireland emerged from the resolution of three interwoven dilemmas, with the pogrom effectively severing Unionism's Gordian knot. First, the entire project relied on maintaining unity despite the Belfast-dominated Ulster Unionist Council's (UUC) acceptance of six-county partition under the 1920 Government of Ireland Act (GOIA). This decision effectively breached the 1912 Solemn League and Covenant and, as UUC member and Orange Order leader, James Stronge, put it, threw unionists in Cavan, Monaghan, and Donegal "to the wolves with very little compunction"¹. Secondly, Ulster Unionism then imposed its own

¹ Stronge to Montgomery, 12 March 1920, Public Record Office, Northern Ireland (PRONI), D627/435/9.

discipline within the Protestant working class, by crushing the nascent labour movement under the pretext of a refusal to tolerate the “infiltration” of republican politics into Ulster. Thirdly, the reorganisation of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) provided the means to this end, a strategy consummated in formal incorporation into the new state through the Ulster Special Constabulary (USC).

A misplaced and ultimately apologetic historiographical consensus strains to absolve the Unionist leadership of responsibility for the expulsions and resulting violence. Parkinson, for instance, identifies “a dearth of evidence” that the UUC sponsored a “systematic programme of sectarian attack” (2004, 31), insisting that “despite the virulence of political speeches, there was no ‘grand plan’ involving senior politicians” (308-309). Indeed, some historians portray Unionist leaders as prisoners to their own extremists. Arguably, these positions rely on a failure of logical inference, an unwillingness to countenance the implications of leadership responsibility, an inability to develop a full picture of the forces at work (particularly the three dilemmas already identified) and a misreading of the leadership structure, the roles of Carson and – more significantly – Richard Dawson Bates.

1. Unionist Leadership and the British Radical Right

The UUC laid the foundation for the Protestant state. Founded in 1905 by James Craig, the first northern prime minister, the council emerged from demands by Belfast’s commercial elite for a provincial movement with greater independence from British Toryism (Kennedy 2005). The UUC also consolidated Belfast’s domination of Unionist politics, with its secretary, Dawson Bates, the future northern Minister of Home Affairs, the “master mechanic” of the political “machine” located in Old Town Hall, who “had all the threads of a complex network of organisation in his hands” (McNeill 1922, 112). Such was Bates’ importance, that, in November 1919, Craig asked the British cabinet if he could see the, still secret, partition plans, as Bates “knew the mind of Ulster almost better than anyone else” (Cabinet Conclusions, 11 November 1919)².

Carson’s appointment as leader in 1910 relied on his oratorical skill, and on his ability to access the corridors of power thereby exerting pressure on executive policy. In fact, leaving aside propaganda events and UUC executive meetings, Carson spent very little time in Ulster. As Ronald McNeill admitted in relation to the pre-war campaign against home rule:

A political campaign [...] could not be a success [...] however effective the oratory, unless the arrangements were based on good organisation. It was by general consent a triumph of organisation, the credit for which was very largely due to [...] Dawson Bates [...] Carson himself very wisely paid little attention to detail, happily there was no need for him to do so, for he had beside him in Captain James Craig and Mr. Bates two men with real genius for organisation [...] [Bates] always knew what was going on in out-of-the-way corners, and where to turn for the right man for any particular piece of work. (McNeill 1922, 111-112)

Carson constructed policy with an eye to influencing government and expected Bates to manage consent and organization: as he wrote himself: “it is by unity alone that we can expect to maintain our position in the councils of the state and enforce our policy of obtaining for

² The National Archives, Kew (TNA), CAB 23/37/3.

Ulster all that is thought essential”³. A proper understanding of this structure indicates that Carson and more specifically Bates orchestrated violence in 1920.

Curiously, the extant historiography barely touches on the reactionary nature of Carsonite politics. After a legal career spent defending notorious landlords, attacking trade unions, justifying imperial aggression, and prosecuting Oscar Wilde, while in parliament, Carson opposed a reduction in miners’ working hours, disempowered trade unions, faced down ameliorative land legislation, protected the Anglican establishment, and opposed democratisation and franchise reform. During a 1912 Poor Law debate, he advocated that “the able-bodied paupers if well conducted might be placed in labour colonies, if ill-conducted in detention centres” (Bell 1976, 37-38). The student of Irish history will struggle to find any sustained treatment of the reactionary character of the British ruling class.

After the war, Lloyd George’s coalition claimed it had no selfish interest in Ireland. Yet above any other individual, Lloyd George was politically indebted to Carson (Stewart 1981, 107), and the very same Tories who had challenged parliament’s sovereignty, openly supported the Curragh Mutiny and funded the Larne gunrunning in 1914 dominated his government (Jackson 2004, 133-134). While in office, they enforced partition through legislation and financial subsidy for Belfast’s massive security apparatus. In 1924, England and Wales had one police officer for 699 people, Scotland one for 751, while Bates had under his command one gendarme for every 160 inhabitants (Ellison, Smyth 2000, 30). In fact, paramilitary police served to consolidate the Orange economy, and the state’s eventually permanent suppression of British civil liberties under the 1922 Special Powers Act constituted perhaps the defining peculiarity of the one-party administration. The rationale was clear: the British political elite supported partition to subvert home rule and, failing that, to render any independent Irish state a virtual possession.

During the Buckingham Palace Conference of 1914, Lord Milner advised Carson to “stick out for the six counties as a minimum,” although he added, “There is no particular virtue in counties [...] as long as the excluded area is one solid block”⁴. Milner had previously formed the Ulster Union Defence League to rescue “the white settler colony of Ulster from submersion in a sea of inferior Celts” (Murray 2011, 31)⁵. Milner’s chief ally in this venture was Walter Long, the former leader of Irish Unionist MPs before Carson’s appointment. Long’s parliamentary committee drew up the plans for six-county partition, which led to the 1920 GOIA. James Craig, himself a junior minister, informed Long that Unionists could not control, and did not want, nine counties (Cabinet Conclusions, 19 December 1919⁶; Ferriter 2015, 294). Again, this policy revolved on an imperial pivot, which operated globally. Despite his crocodile tears post-Treaty, Carson had settled on six-county partition since before the war.

Carson’s connection to and familiarity with race patriots such as Milner had significant implications for Belfast. In his introductory letter to Carson, requesting “a straight and confidential talk” in December 1913, Milner impressed that Ulster’s position “goes very deep with me”⁷. Milner claimed that Ulster’s “uprising of unshakeable principles and devoted patriotism, of loyalty to the Empire and to the Flag,” had stirred him from political retirement as it went

³ Carson to Bates, 21 April 1919, PRONI, D1327/18/19.

⁴ Milner to Carson, 21 July 1914, PRONI, D1507/A/6/40.

⁵ Carson later privately opined that Irish Catholics were “really far from civilised” and that “the Celts have done nothing in Ireland but create trouble and disorder” (Hostettler 1997, 307).

⁶ TNA, CAB23/18/17.

⁷ Milner to Carson, 9 December 1913, Bodleian, MS 40/204-5.

“far deeper than ordinary party struggles” and required much more “than mere talk”⁸. Both men played crucial roles in Lloyd George’s appointment as prime minister in December 1916, and Carson apparently sought to transfer Milner’s racist populism to Ireland. While Milner funded the British Workers’ League (BWL), which “endeavoured to mobilise patriotic labour and counter the growing appeal of the Labour Party to the working class” (Stubbs in Linehan 2000, 44), Carson sat on its executive and saw in the social imperialist body a blueprint for Unionist hegemony over labour politics. As a leading historian of the movement observes, “the term ‘National Socialist’, if it had not acquired a special meaning in Germany, would be a fair summary of the opinions propagated by the League and its periodical at this period” (Douglas 1972, 537). Within this context, Carson developed his own new unionism, which included the promotion of the Ulster Unionist Labour Association (UULA) operating under the thumb of Dawson Bates, while J.M. Andrews – mill owner and future prime minister – chaired this supposed labour organisation, whose four MPs then formed a group with the National Democratic Party (the BWL’s new name) at Westminster.

Carson’s reasoning also reflected changing conditions in Belfast, where the independent trade union movement was beginning to present a formidable challenge to Unionist hegemony over the Protestant working class. Attempts by socialists to protest conscription in central Belfast in April 1918, for example, led to violent scenes and spurred the re-emergence of the Belfast Protestant Association (BPA). The BPA had been founded by Arthur Trew, “the spokesman of the Tory working man” to combat trade unionism at the turn of the century (*Voice of Labour*, 20 April 1918). Inspired by Milner and the BWL, Carson sought to equip Ulster Unionism for the democratic age by bringing the BPA into the official party fold under UULA auspices. The UULA carried out the pogrom of July 1920. As a result, the Unionist leadership violently enforced its provincial hegemony in anticipation of the GOIA, marking indelibly the polity that emerged from the ashes. In effect, a strange hybrid of Orange ideology and the wider post-war British radical Right became deeply embedded in the congenial *modus operandi* of the new Northern Ireland state. Moreover, the imperial elite connived in this process, as Ulster Unionism reflected many of its own prejudices and strategic priorities.

2. *The Khaki Election and Belfast General Strike*

In 1919, “the *annus mirabilis* of prosperity, employment in linen reached 90,000 and in shipbuilding, 30,000 [a ten thousand increase on the 1914 figure]” (O’Connor 1988, 173). Under these favourable conditions, trade union militancy flourished, including a distinctly socialist current. While strike activity and economic demands appeared general, socialism remained strongest among the “unskilled”, particularly female textile workers⁹, who voted consistently for the Belfast Labour Party (BLP), a largely anti-partitionist and independent socialist grouping that objected to the Irish Labour Party’s decision to abstain from the 1918 general election and backed the British Labour Party’s call for self-determination in a unified Ireland (O’Connor 2011, 118). The BLP made headway because the social reality for thousands of northern workers undermined the “myth” of Protestant prosperity and progress, which “concealed many lags in social development; the exploited underclass of linen lasses, the marginalised Catholic workforce, or the subsistence waged labourers in agriculture, which remained the north’s chief industry”

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ For analysis of unskilled female mobilisation and links to the BLP, see Mac Bhloscaidh (forthcoming).

(O'Connor 1988, 172). In the 1918 general election, the BLP secured an average of 22% in four predominantly Protestant constituencies, and while their opposition to Carsonism "did not make them nationalists [...] it certainly made them anti-unionist" (Morgan 1991, 250).

In response, the Unionist leadership promoted the UULA, which proclaimed itself: "a distinctive entity in the Loyalist movement in this country," with "its origin in the brain of the greatest patriot and one of the greatest men this country ever saw – Lord Carson" (*Belfast Newsletter* [BN], 20 January 1922). As early as October 1918, Bates wrote to Carson warning of the BLP threat¹⁰. At Carson's insistence, four UULA members stood as official Westminster candidates. This much-vaunted new unionism represented, in part, a response to the Representation of the People Act. Carson, the UULA's first President, told members that "revolutions go on whether you like it or not. It is idle for anyone to suggest that the war has not brought about a great revolution" (BN, 14 July 1918). Yet, the UULA would act as a bulwark against those "trying to set labour against capital and capital against labour" (*ibidem*).

At a rally for Samuel McGuffin, UULA candidate in Shankill, Carson laid the foundation for the subsequent attack on labour and republicanism. Echoing BWL rhetoric, McGuffin claimed that "the cooperation of employer and employee, the capitalist and the worker" (BN, 6 December 1918) represented the best means to resolve labour issues. Carson, who doubted "how far a great part of the increased enfranchised electorate had been politically educated," claimed that "the world was upside down" (*ibidem*). He ridiculed socialists for criticising Ireland's role as "a partner in the greatest Empire the world has ever seen" (*ibidem*) and claimed that the BLP candidates disguised their Irish nationalism to secure unionist votes under false pretences. He then railed against the 1916 Rising, the "worst act [...] perpetrated by a treacherous and perfidious people" who "stabbed us in the back [...] while we fought a world war for freedom" (*ibidem*):

Sinn Féin was contesting every seat in Ireland, and I believe they have already had 26 unopposed returns. What does that mean? ("Bolshevism.") You are about right [...] The whole thing [Irish republic] is trash, but at the same time it is one of the most dangerous propositions ever put before the people so guided by sentiment as the people in the South of Ireland are. What are they coming to Ulster, to Belfast for? [...] [There was] never a greater insult offered to this great Imperial province when they put a Sinn Feiner forward to contest every seat. (BN, 6 December 1918)

In any event, McGuffin won easily, but a quarter of the electorate voted for the anti-sectarian socialist, Sam Kyle, suggesting that many trade unionists rejected the UULA's social imperialism. Carson, nevertheless, had characterised labour and republicanism as an unholy alliance within a global Bolshevik conspiracy bent on the Empire's destruction. This trope justified the subsequent pogrom, but in the period after the 1919 general strike, the BLP only consolidated its appeal among a significant minority of Protestant workers.

The Belfast 44 hour or general strike of January 1919, which involved 60,000 people, at least demonstrated "that workers wanted a shorter working week, were not fooled by the economic and political arguments of the employers, and showed massive solidarity", which "was not threatened at any stage by communal tensions" (Morgan 1991, 246)¹¹. Bates had little doubt that the strike "leaders are practically all Sinn Feiners, who have taken advantage of some of the rank and file"¹². He also claimed that almost a quarter of strikers were "out and

¹⁰ Bates to Carson, 8 October 1918, PRONI, D1507/A/28/43.

¹¹ Indeed, the strike's leader, Charles McKay, appears to have been a Scottish-born Catholic as the 1911 census only lists one 36-year-old, Pattern Maker from Pottinger.

¹² Bates to Craig, 31 January 1919, PRONI, D1507/A/29/7.

out socialists"¹³. In relation to the strike, Henry Patterson criticises the tendency to portray "every economic conflict" as an opportunity for the working class to "see through" Orange ideology, concluding that "Unionist politicians in no way were clear-headed manipulators of ideology" (1980, 111). Apparently, Bates did not fear Russian-style revolution, but a repeat of "the Belfast riots of 1886 between the Protestant workers and the police," with "the cunning bourgeoisie and its political representatives" mere "caricatures of reality" (115).

This represents a strange reading of the sources. At the end of January 1919, Bates wrote that "after consultation with a few of us", Colonel R. H. Wallace, the Orange County Grand Master, actually "drew up a manifesto". Bates counselled against overt Unionist party intervention to avoid a situation where workers might feel "let down"¹⁴ and he feared that if Hackett Pain (the local British military commander and former UVF leader) intervened, workers would be "so embittered with the Authorities that they would join hands in a universal strike for the whole of Ireland [...] the consequences of which would be very far-reaching"¹⁵. The Orange manifesto, therefore, would permit "the decent men to secede from the Sinn Fein Bolshevik element"¹⁶. Bates enclosed a leaflet linking the republican movement to a global Bolshevik conspiracy, seeking to invade Ulster under a Labourite cloak. The Unionist leadership undoubtedly lent credence to these paranoid conspiracies. One Fermanagh Unionist warned Bates of an "organized movement [...] to overcrowd the city of Belfast with rebels". Young Catholics were "being sent to the city [...] instructed to attain work [...] especially in the shipyards then they are to create discontent among the workers". This "class of man" was apparently at the bottom not only of the Belfast general strike but Red Clydeside as well¹⁷. Elsewhere, Craig privately wrote to warn Lloyd George that "the Rebel plans are directed towards the establishment of a Republic hostile to the British Empire [...] working in conjunction with Bolshevik forces elsewhere towards that end" (Parkinson 2004, 37). In this respect, Unionist analysis mirrored conspiracy theories about Ireland propagated by the British extreme Right from the Primrose League to the British Fascists (Douglas 1997, 58; Hendley 2001).

Likewise, the Wallace manifesto blamed the strike on malcontents who had "taken advantage of a Trade dispute to bring discredit on the fair fame of Belfast". Obviously in an allusion to the BLP, the manifesto continued that this group, "smarting from the defeat they have suffered recently at the General Election", sought to manoeuvre Belfast working men "into a position from which in a short time they might find it very difficult to withdraw"¹⁸. Rather than passive observers, Unionist leaders co-ordinated a strike response based on the apocalyptic analysis of the viceroy, Lord French, and their own apparent weakness vis-à-vis the popularity of the strike committee's demands during the post-war boom. Indeed, Bates sent James Craig a précis to that effect from Hackett Pain so that he could understand the situation "at a glance"¹⁹.

In the wake of the strike, Carson outlined the three strands of Unionist strategy in a letter to Bates: the soft power of Unionist propaganda would be backed by the muscle of the UULA and the UVF. The way Bates dealt with each demonstrates how leadership and policy operated. Firstly, Carson returned to the issue of placing "our organizations on the thoroughly

¹³ Bates to Craig, 1 February 1919, PRONI, D1507/A/29/8.

¹⁴ Bates to Craig, 31 January 1919, PRONI, D1507/A/29/7.

¹⁵ Bates to Craig, 1 February 1919, PRONI, D1507/A/29/8.

¹⁶ Bates to Craig, 1 February 1919, PRONI, D1507/A/29/8.

¹⁷ Eames to Bates, 28 January 1919, PRONI, D1327/18/15.

¹⁸ Orange Order Manifesto, January 1919, PRONI, D1507/A/29/9.

¹⁹ Bates to Craig, 1 February 1919, PRONI, D1507/A/29/8.

democratic basis". He advised that Bates should "take care [...] that all classes and all views are thoroughly represented and all our local organizations". Carson then regurgitated the radical Right's conspiracy, concluding that "our separatist opponents are working diligently both here and in America with a view to harnessing to their cause various elements of unrest in order to influence public opinion at home and abroad in favour of the policy of what is called an independent Ireland". Carson, therefore, directed Bates to "establish an active propaganda department". He concluded by proposing the reorganisation of the UVF, since "we should not shut our eyes to the serious condition of affairs existing in the south and west of Ireland", since "the leader of the majority of the Irish people" demanded a Republic. De Valera's

undisguised threat [...] in the event of Ulster's refusal to abandon her loyalty to the King and her citizenship in the British Empire must bring home to each of us the necessity of being prepared for all eventualities. I have myself but a little trust in politicians or political parties in relation to Ireland and [...] in the last resort it will be found that we must rely upon ourselves, this I believe we are prepared to do.²⁰

While the revolutionary potential of the Belfast working class should not be over-estimated, neither should we downplay Unionist disquiet at the growth of socialism. By June, Bates warned that "the Labour question is becoming acute in Belfast and the North of Ireland", before concluding that "we have got to face this sooner or later"²¹. He subsequently urged Carson to strengthen the UULA as "many of the unions [...] are controlled by officials who hold Home Rule views," a situation, which "leads the younger members of the working class to Socialist i.e., extreme, organisations run by the ILP [BLP] where they are educated in views very different to those held by our body". Bates warned that "if nothing is done the association will die, because its members will feel that it is not sufficiently progressive to meet an admittedly felt want". Interestingly, he praised "the vast bulk of thinking Employers, and those who have the interests of the Empire at heart", who realised that UULA advocacy had a "most beneficial" effect²². Bates' letter reflected similar concerns from grassroots UULA members that "some steps should be taken to enrol the younger members of the community who are liable to be influenced by opponents of the cause"²³.

During the summer of 1919, the UULA and the Ulster Ex-Servicemen's Association (UESA) contacted Carson, through Bates. Already UULA president, Carson became UESA vice-president. The correspondence clearly suggests that both groups wanted to discuss matters better left to personal and private conversations rather than the written record. The UULA asked Carson for "a private conversation with you at a time during your visit that would be most opportune" and again "for a few minutes' private conversation"²⁴. While the UESA argued that "if I had a private interview with you, I could explain more in person than in writing"²⁵. While Carson's ill-health stopped the meetings, around the same time, James Craig advised UVF gunrunner, Fred Crawford, to temporarily postpone his efforts. The Unionist leadership clearly shared grassroots concern for secrecy:

²⁰ Carson to Bates, 21 April 1919, PRONI, D1237/18/19.

²¹ Bates to Captain Craig, 18 June 1919, PRONI, D1507/A/30/3.

²² Bates to Carson, 30 June 1919, PRONI, D1507/A/30/12.

²³ Scott to Bates, 27 January 1919, PRONI, D1327/18/15.

²⁴ Thompson to Carson, 26 September 1919, PRONI, D1507/A/31/20-1.

²⁵ Watkins to Carson, 24 July 1919, PRONI, D1507/A/31/45-6.

When Peace is signed it will be for you to consult Dawson Bates and take whatever action the two of you deem judicious, but under no circumstances should either Sir Edward Carson or myself be implicated – we should know nothing whatever about it. I could talk more freely on this subject, but you will read between the lines.²⁶

The UULA's Aims and Objects provide partial insight into their intentions, which included “getting employment for discharged and demobilised soldiers”, by attempts to “counteract and fight Sinn Fein organisations. Which are at present doing all they can to keep our men out of, and their own in employment”. They further emphasised the importance of “harmony between Unionist Employers and workers”, hoping that a branch be “established in every town and village in Ulster”. Interestingly, they also proposed to

start something in the nature of an Ulster Trades Council. The difficulties foreseen in this are that if this question were brought forward at Branch Meetings of Trade Unions there would be a complete rupture and the Sinn Fein element would likely break away and join the ITGWU, or perhaps, the “Big Union Movement”.²⁷

By September 1919, the UULA had identified the issues of ex-servicemen's jobs and Sinn Féin's “infiltration” of Belfast as key to establishing Unionist hegemony over labour relations. The UESA and UULA constituted the dominant groups in the mass expulsion of Catholic and Protestant socialists the following summer. By that stage, the initial post-war boom had collapsed, wrecking labour's favourable bargaining position, and facilitating a reactionary counterattack: the scarcity of work operated as a powerful lever for imposing political discipline. Nevertheless, while the Unionist leadership had long recognised the need to tackle trade unionists, the delicate issue of six-county partition precluded direct action until the summer. In short, Bates had to secure acceptance and the consequent betrayal of Unionists in the three border counties before dealing with labour in Belfast.

3. The 1920 Elections and Six-County Partition

In January 1920, the general strike's anniversary provided organised labour with another opportunity to demonstrate its support. This time, however, the introduction of proportional representation for local elections greatly improved BLP prospects. Indeed, Unionists quickly recognised PR's potentially disastrous effect “as far as the Belfast Corporation is concerned”²⁸. Belfast Labour secured twelve seats and matched its average share of the vote from the 1918 general election, even securing 20% in the predominantly Catholic Falls ward. Apparently, a politically conscious, anti-sectarian constituency existed, whose emergence reflected the massive upsurge in trade union activism. Patterson argues that the BLP's vote merely represented “municipal politics with a vengeance” and that “the minority of Protestant workers who voted for the Labour candidates had not revolutionised their politics” (1980, 119-120). Nevertheless, their loyalist opponents had spent a year portraying them as a republican Fifth Column. This time the UULA's James Turkington faced off against Kyle in Shankill, his speech leaving little to the imagination:

²⁶ Craig to Crawford, 16 June 1919, PRONI, D640/7/3.

²⁷ UULA's Aims and Objects 1919, PRONI, D1507/A/31/22.

²⁸ Robinson to Bates, 30 June 1919, PRONI, D1327/18/15.

Sinn Feiners, Socialists and Bolsheviks were going about today asking the people for their suffrages [...] There was a game going on, and socialists were running candidates in all the divisions of Belfast – men [...] pledged to a republic [...] He wanted to draw the attention [...] to the condition of the countries, which [...] had republics of late, and he did not think they would be satisfied with it [...] With regard to the wages question, the socialists had opposed the granting of a living wage to the police, whom they had been fighting, and slaughtering throughout the country [...] to terrorise them in order that they could have a workers' republics in Ireland and rule Belfast, but that would never be. These people had also denied a living wage to the teachers because Sinn Feiners wanted education to be in the hands of the priests. In conclusion, he said he was out against revolution, Bolshevism, and rampant Socialism [...]. (*BN*, 9 January 1920)

Faced with a free choice, thousands of Protestant workers ignored the Sinn Féin blood libel and labour candidates consistently outpolled their UULA opponent. Turkington and his UULA running mate secured less than five hundred votes against Kyle's poll-topping 2,082, with another BLP candidate returned with transfers after securing five hundred first preferences. Typically, unionist voters chose official candidates over the UULA. A resilient working-class politics had demonstrated itself impervious to a year of black propaganda; the ensuing loyalist backlash would assume more bellicose form. Nevertheless, the delicate passage of six-county partition at Westminster and within Ulster itself precluded direct action in the immediate aftermath of Belfast labour's "big stride", where official Unionist candidates barely secured the majority of first preferences in the Party's stronghold (*Irish Times*, 19 January 1920)²⁹.

While Carson still pledged privately as late as 1919 to "stand by our covenant in letter and spirit"³⁰, in reality, he had marked six counties as his irreducible minimum in any partition settlement as early as 1913. Indeed, he had previously told a leading Tyrone Unionist that "our policy should be that, in the event of it being found that devolution was a necessity, we demand a subordinate parliament for Ulster"³¹. Similarly, both Bates and Craig had quietly welcomed permanent six-county partition³². Even before the Khaki election, James Stronge claimed that Bates, "like some others [...] is too exclusively Belfast in his views", yet Stronge "reconciled" himself "to the idea of partition", since "if we have no friends south of the Newry Mountains, it might be better to draw the boundary line there and be frankly 'West Britons' and not Irishmen"³³. The Tyrone UVF leader, Ambrose Ricardo, recalled how, in 1916, Craig "talked to me for an hour about his six-county scheme. I told him I believed he had gone mad!"³⁴. Ricardo could not fathom Craig's enthusiasm as, for him, the Covenant rested on equal imperial citizenship for everyone in Ulster, Catholics included, while the abandonment of border Covenanters and the construction of a partisan one-party government were anathema. Indeed, many unionists apparently shared this perspective, which suggests that the discriminatory administration that eventually emerged relied heavily on elite or "inner circle" machinations. As a British Cabinet official visiting Belfast in January 1920 noted:

Most of the people [...] were of the opinion that the whole of the province would be excluded; but on the other hand, the people in the inner circles hold the view that the new province should consist

²⁹ Identifiable "Unionist" candidates, including the UULA's 4,699, gained 49,773 first preferences out of 89,031 votes cast. The BLP secured 12,768, the Nationalist Party gained 10,758, while Sinn Féin received 7,120.

³⁰ Carson to Bates, 29 September 1919, PRONI, D1327/18/24.

³¹ Carson to Montgomery, 15 August 1919, PRONI, D627/434/53A.

³² Montgomery to Willis, 15 June 1916, PRONI, D627/429/35.

³³ Stronge to Montgomery, 10 May 1918, PRONI, D627/434/11.

³⁴ Ricardo to Montgomery, 11 April 1920, PRONI, D627/435/28.

of the six counties, the idea being that the inclusion of Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan would provide such an access [*sic*] of strength to the Roman Catholic Party, that the supremacy of the Unionists would be seriously threatened. Further with Home Rule not a vital issue, there is a real danger that on certain questions the Unionist Labour Party in Ulster might vote with the Roman Catholics.³⁵

Carson's correspondence with Bates bears this out. Carson identified the question of six-versus nine-county partition as "the most difficult and critical one which has yet arisen and fraught with consequences for Ulster and [...] Ireland in the future of such a character that any hasty or too ill-considered action is to be deprecated. I earnestly hope therefore that all our friends will keep an open mind". He then outlined the wider imperial implications of six-county partition, which rested on "not merely local or personal interests" but also on Unionists doing their "best for the United Kingdom and the Empire as a whole"³⁶.

The UUC's acceptance on 10 March 1920 threatened to split Ulster Unionism. Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal loyalists naturally felt betrayed. Ricardo resigned in "anger & disgust" and claimed that "Carson on 10th fell from the pedestal that many had placed him on"³⁷. Elsewhere, he criticized "the narrow Belfast clique" and claimed to speak for "a strong minority of loyalists" who wished "to prevent the Covenant being torn up"³⁸. This led to much empty soul-searching. Yet, as UUC delegate, John Gunning-Moore, wrote privately, "the whole question of 'breach of Covenant' turns upon numbers [...] the whole nine will be such a rickety parliament that it must [almost] at once be absorbed into the Dublin one"³⁹. Another UUC delegate, Barry Meglaughlin, argued that

if the nine counties are included within five years there will be a nationalist majority and this work has commenced already into a much more serious extent than most people imagine. There are funds provided in different centres for the purchase by nationalists of properties in or about the several towns of Ulster and even already nationalists from the midlands, south and west are being drafted in to such an alarming extent that even with the six counties alone, we would have to be constantly on the watch. It is asked by some of our people what is to prevent us doing to the same, but I know from bitter experience that we cannot do so; we have not the power of the Church behind us to force our people to come... as you know the other side have 100 to every one of ours in the south and west on whom to operate.⁴⁰

Indeed, Unionist leaders living on the "right" side of the border recognized Carson's "considerable triumph" in getting Tyrone and Fermanagh "included in the Northern Pale" and that, "if the whole thing is thrown back into the melting pot again, we may be the sufferers"⁴¹. A minority, however, shared the opinion of one female UUC delegate "who no longer wish[ed] to be a member of a Council who deliberately and shamelessly broke the Solemn League and Covenant [...] It may have been expedient and statesmanlike to break it – it was not honourable"⁴². In May, an emergency UUC meeting, attended by Carson, voted by 390 to eighty against the extension of the northern parliament's authority to nine counties. Clearly, in terms of the acceptance of six over nine-county exclusion, the ultimate decision was "not a question ethics and honour, but a question

³⁵ "Report on visit to Ireland, January 1920", 4 February 1920, TNA, CAB/24/97.

³⁶ Carson to Bates, 26 January 1920, PRONI, D1237/18/24.

³⁷ Ricardo to Montgomery, 8 April 1920, PRONI, D627/435/23.

³⁸ Ricardo to Montgomery, 11-21 April 1920, PRONI, D627/435/28-47.

³⁹ Gunning Moore to Montgomery, April 1920, PRONI, D627/435/57B.

⁴⁰ Meglaughlin to Craig, 8 March 1920, PRONI, D1327/18/27.

⁴¹ Montgomery to Gunning Moore, 26 April 1920, PRONI, D627/435/58.

⁴² Hamilton to Bates, 15 March 1920, PRONI, D1327/18/27.

of arithmetic"⁴³. James Craig made his own position clear: "the six counties are the citadel of Ulster Unionism. If we are unable to hold the outposts, must we refuse the offer of the undisturbed position of the citadel? [...] The Covenant cannot be construed as a compact for suicide"⁴⁴. Where room for a functioning democracy existed within this arrangement appeared as a moot point.

The supremacism underpinning six-county partition reflected Lloyd George's attempts to consolidate Ulster Unionism's position, while crushing the developing IRA campaign across the island in 1920. Having secured acceptance of six-county partition, the Unionist leadership initiated a clamp down on all political dissent. This campaign received ideological cover in widespread outrage at perceived republican savagery in the south and west. While the actual statistics of the conflict and the legitimacy of Sinn Féin's mandate for a republic undermine such rhetoric, its efficacy appeared obvious, or "claims of their opponents' atrocities were exaggerated but the propaganda value of such stories was immense" (Parkinson 2004, 18). Unionists watched on aghast as the IRA wore down the global hegemon in asymmetric guerrilla warfare, not least because of republican infiltration of the military and police. From the Unionists' perspective, the massively disproportionate reaction to southern violence in the summer of 1920 and the subsequent security clampdown and systematic discrimination under their rule appeared reasonable to a community wedded to the idea of Empire, anxious about their place in it and convinced of their natural superiority to Irish Catholics. At every step, the coalition government matched loyalist instincts. Yes, Tory opposition to home rule and then Irish independence was expedient, but it operated within a definite imperial and supremacist framework, or, as Bonar Law confided to Lloyd George's secretary in January 1920: "coercion was the only policy", as "the Irish were an inferior race" (Fanning 2013, 247-248). K.O. Morgan has described the coalition's policy of reprisal as "the blackest chapter [...] in any theatre, a monument to ignorance, racial and religious prejudice, and ineptitude" (1979, 139). When questioned about reprisals in parliament, Churchill refused to grant a republic to "a miserable gang of cowardly assassins like the human leopards of West Africa" (Bew 2016, 99). Such assumptions underpinned a very hot summer in Belfast.

4. *The Pogrom*

The defeat of socialism in Belfast rested on direct masculine action by a loyalist aristocracy of labour, for "unlike their southern colleagues, northern craftsmen had no need of an alliance with labourers to secure their bargaining power" (O'Connor 1988, 168). Skilled workers in the shipyards and engineering fused "craft exclusiveness and sectarianism", wherein two-thirds were highly skilled, affiliated to British-based craft unions and enjoyed a major advantage in pay over non-skilled workers (168-170). The UULA and UESA used the developing IRA guerrilla campaign to excuse the mass expulsion of Catholic and socialist workers from the city's main industrial centres. Despite elision by many historians, political Unionism, including Carson, inspired, directed, and reaped the reactionary dividends.

On 18 June 1920, the UESA sent Carson a telegram, pledging by "all means in our power to restore law and order in Ulster"⁴⁵. After violence between the IRA and a combined force of UVF and military in Derry, "Belfast shipyard workers had telegraphed Carson asking him to mobilise the UVF and take revenge" (Farrell 1982, 26). The UULA then arranged a meeting

⁴³ Montgomery to Stronge, 5 May 1920, PRONI, D627/435/72.

⁴⁴ James Craig *et al.*, Ulster and Home Rule: Six Counties or Nine, 25 May 1920, PRONI, D1327/18/29.

⁴⁵ UESA to Carson, 18 June 1920, PRONI, D1507/A/35/33.

with Carson through Bates over the Twelfth, apparently to discuss the GOIA⁴⁶. Having spoken privately to the UULA, Carson then delivered an incendiary speech at the Twelfth field in Finaghy, despite his own disdain for a medium akin to “the unrolling of a mummy. All old bones and rotten rags” (Gailey 1996, 85). Warning against Sinn Féin attempts to “penetrate Ulster”, by the “insidious method” of “tacking on [...] the Irish Republican question to the labour question”, Carson claimed that “these men who come forward posing as the friends of labour care no more about Labour than does the man on the moon”. He concluded: “we in Ulster will tolerate no Sinn Fein [...] we will take matters into our own hands [...] And these are not mere words. I hate words without action” (*BN*, 13 July 1920).

Some historians dismiss Carson’s intervention as “irresponsible rhetoric, a measure of his failure as a political leader” (Morgan 1991, 267), claiming that there is no evidence “that he was exhorting loyalists to wage war on Sinn Féin by attacking the labour movement” (*ibidem*). This analysis rests on an erroneous distinction between the BPA and the UULA. Nevertheless, each individual Morgan identified as a UPA leader also held a prominent role in the UULA (267-271). This elision serves to obscure Bates and Carson’s links to the pogrom. Others have chosen to downplay UUC “wire-pulling” and “plots”, while simultaneously acknowledging that the UULA acted “to ‘purify’ the labour movement in Belfast” (Patterson 1980, 126; 140). Elsewhere, Bew claims that “shipyard workers took matters into their own hands and expelled Catholic workers and ‘rotten Protestants’ [...] Craig sent wary signals of support to angry Protestant workers but was fully aware of the dangers” (2007, 402). In fact, Bates arranged a meeting between the UULA and Carson, who then gave an incendiary speech at the Orange field inciting his followers to expel Sinn Féin supporters and trade unionists. The UULA, a body Carson had created, and which Bates controlled, then carried out the expulsions.

Between Carson’s speech and the re-opening of the shipyards, the IRA assassination of Colonel G. F. Smyth in Cork on 17 July provided the excuse for loyalist “action”. After Smyth’s funeral on 21 July, the first morning of full production after Carson’s speech, a crowd of between “two and five thousand” loyalists assembled at Workman and Clark’s to protest against the “peaceful penetration” of Sinn Féin (Patterson 1980, 115). Loyalist workers then attended similar meetings at dinner time, when “the sudden ebullition of active hostilities against the Sinn Fein workers in the shipyards” erupted like “a spark in a powder magazine”, after one worker allegedly shouted out “Up the rebels!” (*BN*, 22 July 1920). A white terror swarmed through the two yards engulfing Catholics and Protestant trade unionists, some swimming for their lives under a hail of rivets. This ignited a series of expulsions affecting up to 10,000, including hundreds of Protestant trade unionists as the terror rippled from the shipyards, reverberating through Belfast’s foundries and factories.

The UULA organised the expulsions: they were not spontaneous. Internal disciplinary charges levelled against executive member, Nicholas Gordon, demonstrate that the UULA organised the meeting that sparked the dinner time expulsions. Gordon stood accused of failing “to have a meeting at the Queen’s Island when called upon” on the day of the pogrom. Furthermore, he did not condemn a comment that “the days of the Orange flag and the big drum were over” and allegedly called James Connolly and John Crumlin, the two main UULA members behind the expulsions, “the catspaw of the Official Unionist Party”⁴⁷. William Grant told a subsequent UULA meeting in Portadown that the expulsions “were bound to occur” when “they had to take the law into their own hands”. Fellow leading UULA member, John Holness, claimed that “before Christmas” Sinn Feiners in the shipyards “were boasting that it

⁴⁶ UULA, 1-3 July 1920, PRONI, D1327/11/4/1; *BN*, 12 July 1920.

⁴⁷ UULA, 15 December 1920, PRONI, D1327/11/4/1.

was the Protestants who would go now”, before fantastically claiming that loyalists “could see the pistols sticking out of their hip pockets, and they said they were going to change the tune of the Protestant workers on the island” (*BN*, 23 August 1920).

After the initial frenzy, the UULA then organised protests in City Hall against a motion by two BLP councillors to have the workers reinstated⁴⁸. Indeed, the corporation’s Unionist chairman refused the councillors’ subsequent request to have the meeting postponed, thereby facilitating widespread intimidation, with loyalist shipyard workers packing City Hall, carrying revolvers, throwing projectiles, and threatening to kill non-Unionist councillors (*BN*, 2 August 1920; *Irish News*, 2 August 1920). Dawson Bates effectively controlled the UULA, while J.M. Andrew’s acted as chairman. In short, the Unionist leadership left their fingerprints all over the pogrom. Bates wrote to Carson on 4 August, thrilled by the “great exodus of Sinn Feiners”. He had “never seen the temper of the men so strong in regard to their determination not to work along with Sinn Feiners any longer”. Tellingly, Bates added that “the movement [...] entirely lacks anything of an excited character and [...] is entirely different to the old spasmodic outbreaks, which used to take place now about the Twelfth”. This represented an organised assault that purported to “exercise every possible self-restrain[t] and to prevent hooliganism breaking out among their ranks”⁴⁹. On 7 August, Wilfred Spender addressed the UULA about the re-organisation of the UVF⁵⁰. As the *Westminster Gazette* reported: “It is common knowledge in Belfast, and frequently admitted by individual Unionists, that plans were matured at least two months ago to drive all Home Rule workmen in the shipyards out of their employment” (24 July 1920). To present the Ulster Unionist leadership as the fortuitous beneficiaries of spontaneous loyalist agency distorts the available evidence and points to an abject failure of deductive reasoning.

Neither does Bates’ rationale for the violence stand up to scrutiny. Loyalist claims that ex-servicemen suffered unemployment because republicans had peacefully penetrated the industrial centres to steal their jobs ignored Sinn Féin’s weak support amongst Belfast nationalists and the enormous growth in war-time employment – it is very difficult to steal a job that didn’t previously exist⁵¹. Indeed, Belfast’s Catholic community was also “four times as likely to enlist as Catholics from other parts of Ulster” and proportionately contributed as many recruits as the city’s Protestants (Mercer 2003, 30). In 1919, loyalists formed the UESA, “all loyal Ulster men and 95% are Orangemen”⁵², in opposition to the Comrades of the Great War Association as the latter accepted Catholic members. In short, like a great deal of the radical Right, Unionist paranoid rhetoric and conspiracy theories had a very tenuous relationship with the truth.

Arguably, the specific targeting of socialists or rotten Protestants constituted a more significant stimulus for the expulsions than fantastical fears about an invasion of rural Catholics. The UULA campaign insured that the “entire cadre of working-class leaders” suffered with their Catholic comrades. One prominent trade unionist recounted how “every man who took a part in the Trade Union movement [...] had been absolutely driven from the [...] island” (Morgan 1991, 270). The UULA then directed vigilance committees in workplaces, which began in the two shipyards on 28-29 July – that many of the excluded Catholics and trade unionists had recently served King and Country apparently counted for nothing. Furthermore, Harland and Wolff recognised the vigilance committee in the unsuccessful negotiations with the Carpenters’ Union to reinstate

⁴⁸ UULA, 29 July 1920, PRONI, D1327/11/4/1.

⁴⁹ Bates to Carson, 4 August 1920, PRONI, D1507/A/36/4.

⁵⁰ UULA, 11 August 1920, PRONI, D1327/11/4/1.

⁵¹ Joe Devlin secured 72.3% of the vote in Belfast Falls against Éamon de Valera’s 27.7% (*BN*, 30 December 1918).

⁵² UESA to Carson, 24 November 1919, PRONI, D1507/A/31/45-6.

expelled workers (Bell 2016, 88). With this exception, British trade unions singularly failed to challenge the expulsions, thereby facilitating loyalist control without severing ties to craft unions (O'Connor 1988, 178). The cause of labour had ridden the wave of First World War production, which temporarily swelled in the early peacetime market, before crashing into overproduction by the autumn of 1920. By December 1920, a quarter of Irish workers were idle (O'Connor 2011, 119). To all intents and purposes the UULA had achieved a principal aim outlined the previous summer: the depoliticization and effective neutering of the trade union movement.

The two leaders of Ulster Unionism then publicly backed the pogrom. On 14 October, James Craig's wife recorded in her diary how he "unfurls a big Union Jack for them and makes a splendid speech [...] that he approves of their action in not allowing the disloyal element in their midst"⁵³. Carson subsequently told parliament that "I am prouder of my friends in the shipyards than of any other friends I have in the whole world"⁵⁴. Yet, with Bates operating as political fixer, there is *prima facie* evidence that both leaders anticipated the expulsions, as well as the reorganisation of the UVF, with both pushing for a Special Constabulary in government.

5. From Ulster Volunteer Force to Ulster Special Constabulary

The British government then recruited the pogromists *en masse* into the new Ulster Special Constabulary (USC). The Specials undoubtedly acted as a further economic incentive for loyalty during the post-war depression. Indeed, James Craig coached a UULA delegation before meeting Bonar Law to petition for their creation in the pogrom's aftermath⁵⁵. The Specials also represented the effective state-sanction of the UVF. Fred Crawford recorded in his diary that he had been active "since March [1920], when Sir Edward Carson asked us to mobilise them again"⁵⁶. Carson counselled secrecy, however, so as not to disturb the progress of the GOIA⁵⁷. By 25 June 1920, the UUC appointed Wilfred Spender as UVF organiser across Ulster. Hamar Greenwood, who succeeded Macpherson as Chief Secretary in April 1920, privately sanctioned this initiative, but added that "it would be politically unwise to announce this publicly" (Buckland 1973, 446). In September 1920, the Tyrone UVF leadership, including Ricardo, issued a secret memo admitting that the Specials would only include Protestants⁵⁸.

The Unionist leaders' appeals for British assistance operated against a deeply ingrained and condescending suspicion, not only of the rebels, but also of lower-class Protestants. Bew, Gibbon, Patterson taking a lead from Althusser, condemn James Connolly's "pre-Marxist notion of ideology" (1979, 9) and his classical socialist analysis of the internal forces at work within the Orange monolith. Rather, they argue that leadership ideology was "not primarily Orange at all", but rather "democratic," "pro-imperialist" and "secular" (8). Below this, however, the leadership struggled to control a "populist strain within Protestant ideology" (9). Such analysis wilfully ignores the evidence and constructs "counter-factual fictions" (Thompson 1978, 108). Leadership rhetoric and agency not only chimed with popular Orangeism, but Carson and Craig, through Bates, manipulated popular extremism to institute a white terror. Post-war

⁵³ Typescript from Diary of Lady Craigavon, 14 October 1920, PRONI, D1415/B/39.

⁵⁴ 25 October 1920, *Hansard, HC*, vol. 133, c 1493.

⁵⁵ UULA, 4-7 September 1920, PRONI, D1327/11/4/1.

⁵⁶ 27 September 1920, PRONI, D640/11/1.

⁵⁷ Montgomery to unidentified correspondent, April 1920, PRONI, D627/439/15.

⁵⁸ Ricardo, Stevenson and McClintock, "Highly confidential" memoranda, September 1920, PRONI, D1678/6/1.

Unionism constituted one element in an international counter-revolution, which included the allied invasions of Russia and subsequent civil war, radical right-wing paramilitaries across central and Eastern Europe, and the rise of Italian fascism.

The Unionist leadership merely echoed their own anti-democratic anxiety for British consumption, with the imperial government self-interestedly swallowing it whole. On 23 July 1920, a “convinced” James Craig told the British cabinet the USC would prevent “mob law” and “prevent the Protestants from running amok”. In fact, Craig’s UUC had sparked this violence through the UULA. General Tudor warned that the Specials’ creation “would show that the Government did differentiate between rebels and loyalists”. Lloyd George, however, did not think “of such differentiation, but of releasing troops and police”⁵⁹ (Cabinet Conclusions, 23 July 1920). Locked in a struggle to subvert the creation of a democratic Irish Republic, the imperial state employed Ulster loyalism as a colonial bulwark – a role Orangeism had filled since the 1790s.

In May 1922, while referring to escalating violence in Belfast, Churchill disingenuously told cabinet that “Whether it was a case of six of one and half a dozen of the other he did not know. He would be sorry to try and arrive at any other ratio”. Nevertheless, the British stationed nineteen battalions, forty-eight thousand Specials and “orders had been given to accede to Sir James Craig’s request for arms and munitions to equip these”. Churchill warned that, “at any moment, patience may be ruptured, and we shall find ourselves in an atmosphere where people see red”⁶⁰ (British Cabinet Conclusions, 30 May 1922). Apparently, if loyalists weren’t armed to the teeth; they might become violent – so the British government created and funded the USC. Yet, partition and Northern Ireland’s illiberal exceptionalism within the British polity pointed towards wider imperial objectives. Partition had nothing to do with dual rights to self-determination for separate Irish and British nations. In March 1920, Bonar Law ridiculed “loose talk” about granting self-determination to Ireland, characterising the position as “living in the world with his eyes shut”. Law further lamented the “childish mistake” of ignoring Ireland’s centrality “to national security”. In short, self-determination for imperial possessions had “never been adopted by any nation in the history of the world except after defeat and under compulsion”⁶¹. Even after the signing of the Treaty, Churchill speculated on the contingency plans if “Republican forces” triumphed in the south, which envisaged Northern Ireland’s use as a base for reconquest⁶² (Cabinet Conclusions, 15 April 1922). Similarly, James Craig viewed the six-county area as “an impregnable, Pale”, while other leading Unionists visualised its use as “a bridge head for the re-conquest of Ireland”, if southerners declared a Republic⁶³.

By the May 1921 elections, the loyalist stranglehold on working-class politics and indeed Belfast itself appeared complete. When three labour candidates booked the Ulster Hall, loyalists seized the building and telegraphed Craig: “Mass meeting of loyal shipyard workers who have captured Ulster Hall from the Bolsheviks Baird, Midgley and Hanna request that you address them for a few minutes tonight”. Craig replied that “I am with them in spirit. Know they will do their part. I will do mine. Well done big and wee yards” (*Northern Whig*, 18 May 1921). Likewise, the prominent socialist and labour candidate, James Baird, told those assembled to hear the election returns that “many seeking to vote were brutally assaulted” amidst the “worst

⁵⁹ TNA, CAB/24/109.

⁶⁰ NAL, CAB/23/30; a battalion contained between five hundred and one thousand soldiers.

⁶¹ 30 March 1920 *Hansard*, HC, vol. 127, c 1125-1126.

⁶² TNA, CAB/23/30.

⁶³ For Craig’s statement see O’Leary 2019, 340; Montgomery to Stronge, 6 April 1920, PRONI, D627/435/21; Montgomery to Leo Maxse, 7 May 1920, PRONI, D627/435/75.

intimidation” during a contest “marked by wholesale impersonation” (Farrell 1982, 37). Loyalist direct action had crushed a growing labour constituency, a campaign orchestrated by the UUC, which the British state sanctioned through the USC. This all operated within the remit of wider imperial interests. As Lord Birkenhead remarked in July 1921, the government was “quite ready to be liberal to Ireland now that he and his friends had secured the safety of Orange Ulster”⁶⁴.

The argument here is not that Unionism lacked popular support. Rather, the evidence challenges the widespread assumption that Ulster Protestants constituted a homogenous group; a proposition typically deployed to legitimize partition. The local election results in January and June 1920 indicated a secure majority against partition and for independence across Ulster’s nine counties. In the urban elections, nationalists captured Derry corporation, but anti-partitionists (including labour) also secured unexpected victories in Lurgan, Dungannon, Carrickfergus, Larne, Limavady, Cookstown and Lisburn. In fact, anti-partitionist parties won over 54% of seats across the nine counties and over 41% within the proposed six counties, with a majority in Fermanagh and Tyrone and nearly half in County Armagh. Indeed, anti-partitionists won control of twenty-four of seventy-five local bodies in the six counties. A homogenous Unionist Ulster was a fiction⁶⁵. Moreover, the general strike of January 1919 and municipal election results a year later pointed to the consolidation of an independent, anti-partitionist labour constituency in Belfast itself. In response, the Unionist elite employed mass reactionary violence to create the material conditions for a fabricated polity, Northern Ireland, which lacked any genuine democratic legitimacy, outside rhetorical flourishes about self-determination designed to excuse imperial *force majeure*.

On the last day of May 1922, Lloyd George claimed that Mussolini’s *Fascisti* served as an “exact analogy” for the Specials that the initial attack and brunt of subsequent violence involved the “murder of member of the [Catholic] minority”, while Britain had armed 48,000 Protestants. In June 1922, the civil servant, Stephen Tallents, arrived in Ulster to enquire into outrages against northern nationalists. Ricardo told Tallents that the full-time A Specials “contained a large leaven of a bad type”, had serious problems with “drink and consequent indiscipline” and represented a “distinctly partisan force”. The part-time B Specials were “drawn from the Protestant section of the population and mainly from the more extreme side”. Ricardo then stated that the “N. Govt. is a very strict party machine which is influenced at the present time entirely by Belfast views of extreme type”, concluding that “the twenty-six counties [govt.] are not the only one that would benefit by a return to the Union and to impartial [...] Imperial Govt.”⁶⁶. Despite his contemptible opinion of Bates, Tallents whitewashed the Unionist regime. Nevertheless, his sympathetic report confirmed the stranglehold that paranoid right-wing conspiracies held over the Unionist psyche. “The social cleavage between the Protestants and Catholics in Belfast is almost absolute, greater [...] than the division between Pole and Jew in Warsaw [...] the Protestant community of the North feel that it is an outpost of civilisation set precariously on the frontiers of Bolshevism”⁶⁷.

The British government would fully resource the USC for two years to the tune of over £6 million, a period of little or no violence in the north (Farrell 1982, 79). Ricardo hinted that the Specials partially solved the problem of chronic unemployment: “every man in N.I. who has lost his job or who is at a loose end has endeavoured to get into the A’s and in many cases has succeeded”. He also reported to Tallents that “today the feeling against the Specials [...] is more bitter than against the Black & Tans – with this great difference – on the removal of the Black

⁶⁴ O’Connor to Dillon, 29 July 1921, Trinity College Dublin, MS 6744/848.

⁶⁵ For statistics, see O’Leary 2017, 822.

⁶⁶ Report by Gen. Ricardo to Stephen Tallents, June 1922, TNA, CO 906/27.

⁶⁷ Tallents to Smith, 15 July 1922, TNA, CO 906/30.

& Tans one side of the contending parties was removed". In Ulster, the USC had established "a group of personal blood feuds which will last for generations to come"⁶⁸.

6. Conclusions

Patterson has argued in relation to Belfast "[t]hat the local bourgeoisie were happy to see trade unions weakened and the left attacked is quite probable, but this had occurred because of developments over which they had little or no influence" (1980, 142). In fact, the Belfast bourgeoisie through the UUC played the decisive role in clamping down on the emergent socialist movement. In a similar vein Patterson argues that "Orangeism [...] could develop into a militant populism which expressed class conflict in terms of upper class 'betrayal' of the Protestant cause and develop links with sections of the labour movement" (144). Therefore, "[b]y concentrating solely on the integrating functions" of Orangeism, Connollyite socialism "produced an inadequate analysis" and "underestimated its resilience as a social force" (*ibidem*). Likewise, the republican socialist tendency "to treat Protestant working class Unionism in the Connollyite fashion as bigotry" dominated the thinking of twentieth-century Marxists "from whom a serious analysis would be most expected" (149). The heavily caricatured "manipulated dupes" thesis, in Patterson's widely accepted view, "proved incapable of even beginning an analysis of that class's political and ideological history" (150).

In effect, Patterson argues that "Orangeism *did* function both as an integrative mechanism and as a source of conflict" (147). The fundamental question here is: where did the weight of emphasis lie? While no serious observer disputes the presence of a reactionary Orange ideology within sections of the Protestant working class, the account outlined above contests long-prevalent assumptions about the immutability of sectarian antagonism in Ulster. For a brief period, a significant minority of working-class Protestants embraced a principled anti-sectarian egalitarianism. Orange ideology did not operate on some intangible level of the superstructure; it required material sustenance and depended on determined agency. Its triumph relied on loyalist shock troops in the first instance and its consolidation operated against the foundation of a discriminatory statelet, whose birth pangs reverberated to the beat of Lambeg drums.

An analysis of the politics propounded by UULA representatives in Belfast points to a fusion of inherent concepts of Protestant supremacy linked to the colonial past fused with a wider derived imperial, racist discourse. Similarly, the notion that the Unionist leadership espoused a liberal, democratic and secular ideology bears little or no relation to reality. The very same week he parleyed with Belfast's pogromists, Carson praised the exploits of General Dyer at Amritsar⁶⁹. The liberalism of British imperialists essentially excluded what George Orwell described as "unpeople", or those "unfit to enter history" (Orwell in Chomsky 2012). Well into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for many among the metropolitan elite, Irish Catholics ranked with other subject nations – those sullen peoples, half-devil, half-child. Such people could not enjoy liberty, as they occupied a profane space. The most challenging aspect of lower-class Protestant involvement in trade unionism revolved around working-class Orangemen's willingness to open the sacred space of freedom to their Catholic neighbours (Lorsurdo 2011, 309-10). The Unionist leadership employed a supremacist ideology and promoted reactionary violence to breach this gap, in the process riveting extreme loyalism into the very structures of the Orange state.

⁶⁸ Report by Gen. Ricardo to Stephen Tallents, June 1922, TNA, CO 906/27.

⁶⁹ *Hansard*, HC 8 July 1920, vol. 131, c1712.

A supremacist dimension formed part of the internal logic of loyalism and, rather than restraining this tendency from running amok, the structures of the Unionist bloc encouraged conceptions of Protestant superiority and Catholic inferiority, thereby justifying violence. Indeed, separate republican and Free State intelligence reports in 1924 claimed that elements of the USC had formed branches of the Ku Klux Klan. In April 1924, the IRA reported that “The KKK has been formed about three months ago in Belfast under the title of the ‘Gay Crusaders’. Members consist of Specials officers and recently the ordinary rank and file have been admitted”⁷⁰. On 4 January 1923, the *Belfast Newsletter* carried an article on the Klan and Italian Fascism, which asserted that while “undemocratic” at root, it would “be absurd to underestimate the significance of such movements or to ignore what is noble in their intentions. Their strength springs from the genuine desire [...] to make life sweeter and more wholesome” (*BN*, 4 January 1923). Fortunately, here, government rested “on the will of the people, rather than on the symbolism of White Hood or Black Shirt” (*ibidem*). In 1934, Craig himself boasted that members of the “Orange Order, the Black Brotherhood or the B Specials could substitute as Fascists” (Loughlin 1995, 544). Recent analysis has argued that the Unionist government operated “a moral economy of loyalty”, wherein Catholics and trade unionists became “liable to political discrimination, while those loyal were to be rewarded through patronage” (Loughlin 2017, 1). Certainly, Craig himself claimed the Stormont government’s main function was “to distribute the bones” (Probert 1978, 57). A far more straightforward approach would be to locate the Orange state within the aspirations of the contemporaneous British radical right.

The payoff for preferential treatment in employment, whether a position in the A’s, a job in a foundry, factory or local government was that working-class Protestantism was “stripped of” its “progressive elements” (Bew, Gibbon, Patterson 1978, 16). Yet, the Unionist establishment and bourgeoisie constituted the net beneficiaries of the Orange economic order. Belfast went from being the most militant centre of trade union activity in Ireland in 1919 to the quietest, failing to engage in the British engineering lockout of 1922 and abstaining from any industrial action in 1923 when, after the end of its civil war, southern Ireland witnessed an explosion of popular militancy. The Labour Ministry report (1923) noted that (in Belfast) “no material stoppage occurred in the shipbuilding and engineering industries or in the transport trades. The linen trade generally was also free from serious trade dispute” (O’Connor 1988, 101). Arguably, the UULA served a similar function to other corporatist groupings on the radical Right, which gave some expression to working-class politics, but within the carefully demarcated confines of cross-class solidarity based on ethnic or national distinction, a position that typically reinforced or improved the relative position of capital over labour. The UULA Westminster MPs always voted against organised labour and sided with the National Democratic Party, former Labour MPs who supported Lloyd George’s coalition. McGuffin himself publicly admitted, “If they (UULA) had not been much in the limelight of oratory they had been diligent in their support of the Government” (*Belfast Telegraph*, 28 April 1919). These social imperialists all became members of the British Empire Union, another grouping that shared an affinity with emergent fascist ideology in Europe (Linehan 2001, 44).

Certainly, the evidence suggests that the Unionist elite deliberately manipulated a form of reactionary Orange populism, akin to contemporary authoritarian and fascist trends in post-war Europe and Britain, to subvert far more progressive, and developing, currents amongst working-class Protestants, which employed the liberal aspects of Orange ideology in a universalist

⁷⁰ Free State intelligence division, 1924, Irish Military Archives, MS 334; Adjutant 4th ND IRA to GHQ, April 1924, University College Dublin Archives, P69/35/115.

fashion to include non-Protestants. Indeed, this Faustian bargain formed the very basis of the new Orange State, but *cui bono?*

The argument most closely associated with Patterson and Bew, that lower-class extremists somehow held the liberal Unionist elite to ransom, does not hold water. With the centenary of Northern Ireland now past, a challenge to the historiographical consensus on state formation and the nature of Ulster Unionism appears overdue. The dominant discourse relies heavily on a raft of “Establishment Marxism” which employed “left-wing terminology to produce an apologia for contemporary conservative practice” (Coughlan 1994, 301). Bew, Gibbon, Patterson conveniently argued that national independence and unification “have no relevance to the future of Ireland” (in Coughlan 1994, 303). As Coughlan rightly noted: “This of course is no novel thesis. It is the view of unionists, of the Orange Order, of transnational capital and of Her Majesty’s Government [...] The originality of the authors and of their several imitators is that no one previously had the thought of presenting it as Marxism” (*ibidem*). Northern Ireland emerged from a deeply reactionary, sectarian counter-revolution, enshrined in the very essence of the polity, which sowed the dragon’s teeth of future conflict. In this venture, the Unionist leadership received the unconditional support of an imperial state that applied the principle of self-determination against the vanquished, while its own dominions swelled – an empire built and maintained on concepts of race.

Since the early nineteenth century, English cartoonists have depicted Conservative prime ministers from Peel through Salisbury to Ted Heath as Sisyphus, condemned to roll the rock of Ireland to the mountain’s summit, only for it to slip their grasp and face the same laborious task in perpetuity⁷¹. The Corinthian king’s punishment reflected his crimes of duplicity and arrogance. Arguably, any solution to Britain’s interminable Irish Question might begin with an acknowledgement of the thoroughly illiberal, undemocratic and supremacist historical underpinnings of the partition settlement imposed on the island by the imperial state in 1921.

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⁷¹ Salisbury in 1886 by John Tenniel and Heath in 1971 by Cummings.

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“800 Years We Have Been Down”*: Rebel Songs and the Retrospective Reach of the Irish Republican Narrative

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Abstract:

From the glamorous, cross-dressing “Rebel, Rebel” of David Bowie, to the righteous Trenchtown “Soul Rebel” of Bob Marley and The Wailers, both varied and various musical articulations of cultural and socio-political rebellion have long enjoyed a ubiquitous presence across multiple soundscapes. As a musicological delineator in Ireland, however, ‘rebel’ conveys a specifically political dynamic due to its consistent deployment as an all-encompassing descriptor for songs detailing events and personalities from the Irish national struggle. This paper sets out to examine the specific musical delineator of “rebel song” from both musicological and politico-ideological perspectives with a view to interrogating its appropriateness as a universal descriptor for such output and will further demonstrate how to the present day, the genre represents yet another contested ideological space within the politico-historical narrative of traditionalist Irish Republicanism.

Keywords: Historical Appropriation, Irish Republicanism, Rebel Songs, Republican Ballads

1. Introduction

Commentary on the song tradition of the Irish national struggle is notable for its diverse range of attendant terminologies, with descriptive prefixes such as “political”, “revolutionary”, “patriotic”, “violent”, “Republican”, “resistance”, “seditious”, “subversive”, “protest”, “Fenian”, and “Nationalist”, among others, all deployed interchangeably across multiple discourses. Despite such nomenclatural fluidity, however, one delineator displays a particular consistency above all others: that of “rebel song” (McCann 1985; Rollins 2018; Millar 2020a). While it

* Quotation taken from the ballad “Irish Ways and Irish Laws” (1981).

is unclear when the term first gained consistent usage in Ireland, it was sufficiently embedded in popular political consciousness by the early twentieth century to have been deployed by James Connolly in his 1903 ballad composition entitled simply, “A Rebel Song” (Millar 2020a, 52) and was also engaged by his fellow 1916 martyr Patrick Pearse in the title of his political songster, *Songs of the Irish Rebels* (1910). An indication of the term’s contemporary ubiquity can be gleaned from an examination of two recent monographs on the subject. Millar (2020a) deploys the descriptive prefix “rebel” a total of 307 out of 421 times in referring to both individual song texts and in wider commentary on the genre itself, as does Rollins (2018) in 204 out of 282 instances. Similarly, it was the predominant classification marker of McCann (1985), who utilised the term in 212 out of 287 references in her ground-breaking doctoral thesis on political song in Belfast¹. Indeed, as works that engage extensively with composers, performers and audience members, the consistent deployment of “rebel song” across such a notably diverse spectrum of analytical contexts is indicative of how deeply embedded the descriptor has become within the rebel music community itself, rather than simply reflecting a prescriptive classification approach taken by the individual authors.

2. “Rebel” and “Rebel Song” as Contested Ideological Markers

Despite such widespread agency as a musical delineator, the wider politico-historical deployment of “rebel” is notable for both its thematic opacity and subjectivity, often resulting in considerable difficulties in defining the attendant musical genre. Such elasticity of classification parameters is greatly accentuated by the binary, often highly contentious, narratives of rebel songs, which continue to provoke disputation up to the present (Pratt 2017). Vallyly notes how rebel songs are “by definition, ‘partial’”, further remarking that “[t]hose who empathise will warm to the themes like meeting old friends; those who disagree with the concepts expressed will bite back their distaste” (2017, 886). Similarly, while Zimmerman cites their “romantic appeal” (1967a, 205), he equally acknowledges how the narratives of rebel songs routinely project “intolerance, chauvinism, self-delusion and partisan misrepresentation of facts” (1967b, 88). Perhaps the most famous vocalisation of the term was ironically not from a noted performer of rebel songs but instead emanated from one of the genre’s most strident critics. Due to U2 lead singer Bono’s oft-repeated caveat before performing “Sunday, Bloody Sunday” that “[t]his song is not a rebel song” (*Under a Blood Red Sky*, 1983) the descriptor (as opposed to the actual song tradition that he was explicitly disassociating from) gained an international articulation otherwise unlikely via the contemporary ballad tradition. While the disclaimer primarily reflected U2’s anxieties at being branded “fellow travellers” of the IRA, particularly in the US (Lynskey 2010, 473), it also essentially sought to delineate what the song *was not*, as opposed to what it thematically *was*, or perhaps in this instance, what it was thought to be in danger of becoming. The band’s virulent opposition to the IRA’s armed struggle was well known, yet the fact that a song referencing the killing of fourteen unarmed civil rights demonstrators by British soldiers was, in their view, in danger of appropriation by supporters of violent Republicanism and thus reconstituted as a rebel song, clearly shows the subjectivity of the content matter and, by extension, the wider genre itself.

¹ Other descriptors utilised by the authors are McCann (1985): “political” [24], “resistance” [19], “Republican” [9], “protest” [8], “patriotic” [6], “Nationalist” [4], “rebellion” [4], “revolutionary” [1], Rollins (2018): “Republican” [62], “Republican rebel” [11], “political” [5], Millar (2020a): “Republican” [84], “revolutionary” [15], “political” [6], “Fenian” [3], “resistance” [3], “protest” [1], “seditious” [1], “subversive” [1]. Author citations of terminologies as quoted from other sources have been excluded from the above comparisons.

Such nomenclatural unease is not solely experienced within musical spheres and can be similarly observed throughout wider politico-historical discourse in Ireland, where the term under consideration can accommodate a multiplicity of diverse interpretations. The unresolved national question (and thus the contested ownership of the attendant historical narrative) has often resulted in several interconnected ideological descriptors such as “Republican”, “Nationalist”, “Fenian”, (or in the modern era, “Provo”, “Stickie”, “Dissident”², etc.) having similarly ambiguous political connotations, often deployed interchangeably as either complimentary or pejorative markers. In the case of the latter, such usage can often be embraced and inverted as terms of empowerment as expedient (Sanders 2011, 282). While “Fenian”, for example, will generally denote the nineteenth-century Republican movement of the same name (along with the significant canon of attendant ballads from the period), it is also regularly deployed by the extremes of northern Loyalism to the present as a derogatory reference to what are deemed non-compliant Nationalists, a convention that deliberately divests the term of any vestiges of nostalgic heroism³.

“Rebel” – and as will be observed, the attendant song tradition – similarly transmits an almost identical dichotomy. While for some, the trope has unquestionably noble attributes, reflecting what Quinn has termed “the concept of an Irish ‘hero’, extolled with superlatives like *bravest, fearless and dauntless*” (2020, 153), for others, the putative rebel is a manifestly nefarious persona of seditious intent who – similar to “Fenian” – continues to be associated with political subversion, particularly in the north of Ireland. The latter worldview was famously articulated by demagogic Unionist politician and Free Presbyterian preacher Ian Paisley in the aftermath of the Battle of The Bogside and the establishment of Free Derry in August 1969. Following the decision of British Home Secretary James Callaghan to visit Bogside residents and confer with Nationalist leaders, Paisley publicly lambasted Callaghan as “the ally of the Bogside rebels [and] a man who is prepared to give a charter of revolution and violence and a blank cheque to those who are out to destroy this province”⁴. Yet despite such invective deployment, leading Free Derry activist Eamon McCann displayed no discernible unease with the same term when describing how “for the most part we played rebel songs” (1974, 54) during his contribution to Radio Free Derry, a pirate station established in The Bogside during the insurrection. Thus, if one protagonist in a binary conflict can disparage his opposite number as a rebel, while the recipient of the barb is more than content to simultaneously self-reference as such, it is perhaps unsurprising that the attendant musical genre should resist convenient classification. Such musical dichotomy was noted by Millar in newspaper coverage of intercommunal rioting in Belfast’s Divis Street in 1964 following a contentious display of the Irish flag (2020a, 92-93), disturbances for which Paisley himself played a central role in fomenting. Where the Unionist *Belfast Telegraph* (30 October 1964) reported how the Nationalist crowd maintained their spirits via the communal singing of “rebel songs”, the Nationalist *Irish News* (1 October 1964)

² Supporters and/or members of the Provisional IRA, the Official IRA, and a collective pejorative for anti-Good Friday Agreement Republicans, respectively.

³ Such disparaging usage was famously inverted by then Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams while addressing an internment commemoration march in Belfast in 1995, where he stated: “Fellow Fenian bastards, you’re all very, very welcome here to our city centre, and outside our City Hall”. Adams’ opening remarks were largely overlooked due to his speech also containing his infamous “They haven’t gone away, you know” aside in relation to the IRA (*An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 17 August 1995). See also title of PhD thesis by 1981 hunger striker Laurence McKeown: *Unrepentant Fenian Bastards: The Social Construction of an Irish Republican Prisoner Community* (1998).

⁴ Paisley’s comments of 28 August 1969 can be viewed in the film “No Go: The Free Derry Story” (2006).

wrote of the “patriot songs” that were heard from the same crowd throughout the week’s events (1964). A comparable Unionist worldview was articulated by Foster in his review of Zimmerman (1967a), in which he juxtaposed “Catholic Nationalist songs of rebellion” against “Protestant Loyalist songs of affirmation” (Foster 1970, 210), thus adding the vexed question of religious affiliation to musical representations of the putative rebel.

Similar subjective interpretations have also periodically manifested themselves within musicological discourse. While he does not use the term “rebel” extensively in *Songs of Irish Rebellion*, Zimmerman nonetheless felt compelled to qualify its occasional appearance following a complaint by prolific Republican songwriter and 1916 veteran, Brian O’Higgins, in which the latter pointedly remarked that “patriotism [...] should not be confounded with rebellion” (1967b, 86)⁵. While Zimmerman did concede that certain aspects of rebellion elicited “a bad connotation for many people” (87), he rebuffed O’Higgins’ criticism by stating that within the specific context of Ireland, such ballads were not exclusively focussed on the national struggle, but also narrated opposition to injustice in much wider parameters. Indeed, his contention that for Irish people “[t]he word ‘rebellion’ might have no derogatory sense, quite the contrary, so long as it designated the struggle against *what they considered* to be injustice” (*ibidem*; author’s emphasis), provides something of an unintended insight, perhaps, into both the contemporaneity and subjectivity involved in attempting to specifically delineate a rebel song.

Yet as noted, “rebel” had been utilised previously without any apparent difficulty by both Pearse (1910) and Connolly (1903) in their respective compositions. O’Higgins’ discomfort with the term would therefore appear to emanate from the hagiographical elevation of the 1916 martyrs in the immediate aftermath of their executions, a trope particularly evident during the state-sponsored 50th-anniversary celebrations of the Rising that had immediately preceded his exchange with Zimmerman. The subtle nuance attendant to such historical repositioning was to form the central narrative of Mick Hanly’s “The Terrorist or The Dreamer?”, a ballad that examines some of the ideological complications associated with the transitional dynamic from temporal “rebel” to eternal “patriot”. Written at the height of the modern Troubles, it juxtaposes contemporary condemnation of an anonymous Provisional IRA car bomber with the simultaneous lauding of a young, unnamed participant in the Easter Rising, stating of the latter that “[t]hey said he was a rebel then – but he’s a hero now”, further referencing the 1966 celebrations as a time when “[w]e didn’t call them ‘rebels’ then, we used ‘patriot’ instead”. In the context of such retrospective historical realignment, the narrative rhetorically questions as to who should now be considered as “[t]he terrorist or the dreamer, the savage or the brave?”, remarking acridly that “it depends whose vote you’re trying to catch, whose face you’re trying to save”, an unusually sharp commentary on the often expedient and cynical appropriation of historical figures from Ireland’s struggle for independence⁶.

⁵ Descriptive prefixes deployed by Zimmerman (1967a) include: “political” [36], “rebel” [16], “patriotic” [10], “nationalist” [5], “seditious” [2], “violent” [2], “inflammatory” [1], “national” [1], “revolutionary” [1]. Author citations of terminologies as quoted from other sources have been excluded.

⁶ Despite having never been recorded by Hanly himself and not appearing in any Republican songbooks to date, the song gained a certain notoriety when banners with a selection of the lyrics appeared alongside giant portraits of Bobby Sands and William Wallace at a UEFA Champions League game between Glasgow Celtic and AC Milan on 26 November 2013. Celtic was fined £42,000 for the “illicit banner” display by their fans (*Belfast Telegraph*, 13 December 2013). The song has been recorded by several performers, most notably by former H-Block prisoner and Blanketman, Brendan McFarlane.

Despite Zimmermann’s defence of the term, “rebel” unquestionably poses certain fundamental difficulties, particularly for those of a more puritanical Republican⁷ hue, given that “rebellion” may imply the usurpation of an established, legitimate political order, a worldview that Republicans would unambiguously refute as a description of British jurisdiction in Ireland. This is not to suggest, of course, that “rebel” is never used within popular Republican discourse, where terms such as “1916 rebels”, “Wexford Rebellion”, etc., are regularly encountered. Indeed, 1916 leader Constance Markievicz famously self-referenced as such during the Dáil Treaty debates of 1921, proclaiming that “while Ireland is not free, I remain a rebel, unconverted and unconvertible [...] I am pledged as a rebel, an unconvertible rebel, because I am pledged to the one thing – a free and independent Ireland” (McAuliffe 2018, 162), as did her fellow Anti-Treatyite, Mary MacSwiney who vowed to “be their first rebel under their so-called Free State” (*ibidem*). It should be noted, however, that such usage is more often than not expedient and imbued with a certain nostalgic affection, with those in question remaining first and foremost “Republicans” in pursuit of “The Republic”, an oft-times quasi-spiritual political terminus to which “rebel” does not accord sufficient ideological gravitas (Doyle 2008, 131; Ferriter 2019, 62).

Further politico-musicological sensitivity to the term was revealed in a 1981 interview of renowned Conamara *sean-nós* singer Seosamh Ó hÉanaigh, conducted by traditional musician and academic Mick Moloney:

(Moloney): “In the context of the last five years or so, [North American] people of Irish extraction in particular, are expecting all people who are involved in traditional music and song to sing ‘rebel songs’, and to sing songs in particular that are very anti-English. How do you deal with that?”

(Ó hÉanaigh): “A couple of times someone asked me, ‘Why do you never sing a ‘rebel song?’”, and I said: ‘To my mind, we never had many rebels; we had patriots. A rebel is someone who stands out against a government elected by his own people. I have ‘patriotic songs’ ”. (Mac Con Iomaire 2007, 362)

Blankenhorn similarly notes Ó hÉanaigh’s reluctance to perform works of an overtly militant hue during this period:

In later life, Joe [Seosamh] would give a nuanced reply to people who asked him to sing ‘rebel songs’, referring to himself as a ‘patriot’ rather than a ‘rebel’. While his performance of songs like Skibbereen, John Mitchel, and The Glen of Aherlow left no doubt how he felt about the unjust treatment of Irish people at the hands of imperial authorities, his awareness of the ongoing Troubles made him reluctant to throw petrol on fires that were burning hot enough already, and he purposely avoided singing the rabble-rousers that many – particularly in America – requested. (2021, 9)

It should be noted that Ó hÉanaigh’s comments reflect the somewhat predictable difficulties encountered by an Irish singer performing to an Irish-American audience during the 1970s, rather than being an explicit assertion of doctrinaire Republican principles on his part. Navigating audience expectations of an incendiary ballad from “back home” would appear

⁷ Even in the current era of relative peace in Ireland, the term “Republican” remains a deeply divisive and contentious political descriptor. Due to the armed thematic common to each of the songs under review, the term is used exclusively within the current research as a necessarily broad reference to those who support and/or engage in armed struggle towards the ending of British jurisdiction in Ireland. For a wider discussion on the varying definitions and interpretations of Irish Republicanism, see McGarry (2003), Jones (2005), Honohan (2008).

to have been the primary motivation for such sentiment, and in doing so, seeking to avoid being unfairly pigeon-holed as an overtly Republican singer, a common anxiety of many Irish traditional musicians from the late 1960s onwards (Ferriter 2012, 270).

That the deployment of such a highly subjective marker as a musicological prefix should result in a multiplicity of fluid analytical metrics is perhaps unsurprising, with what both musically and historically constitutes a rebel song being largely impossible to delineate as a consequence (Millar 2020a, 5). Such obstacles to concise song classification have long preoccupied scholars and are not unique to the genre under consideration (Atkinson 2013, 123-124). Regarding rebel songs, however, the difficulty is not exclusively musicological but is also of specifically ideological concern, a difficulty continually reinforced by the cyclical metamorphosis of Irish Republicans from armed to constitutional methods. Indeed, given the consequential contestation surrounding Republican legitimacy, political song in Ireland is notably resistant to such efforts (Wallis, Wilson 2001, 117). The analytical difficulties provoked by such ideological disputation were highlighted as far back as 1969 by Wilgus who noted how in Ireland, “the distinction between ‘folk’ and ‘national’ song is difficult to apply” due to the unavoidable fact that “the protest has been more on national than on class or even political grounds, and because the struggle not only lasted so long but in essence is continuing” (1969, 566), an astute and prescient observation to make in September 1969 at the outset of the Northern conflagration.

3. *Republicans, Renegades and Rogues: The Difficulties in Defining Rebel Song*

When attempts at musicological classification of rebel songs are made, the results are necessarily vague and open-ended. Rollins has highlighted such inherent difficulties within her own research by conceding that the analytical parameters used were “not intended as classifications with finite perimeters”, as “[m]any rebel songs [...] can fit comfortably into two or more categories” (2018, 122), further acknowledging the porosity of the genre by conceding that several rebel songs fall into an analytical “grey area” (136). From her fieldwork with contemporary musicians, she delineates three distinct subcategories of popularly performed rebel songs, namely those “of the folk genre; rebel songs that could also be classified as historical songs [...]; and ‘modern’ rebel songs”, restricting the latter to output from the post-1968 period (135)⁸. Millar notes similarly broad interpretations by musicians, thus pointing not alone to the inherent flexibility of the genre boundaries themselves, but also to the issues of performers’ individual tastes and audience expectations which must also be duly considered (2020b, 12). He further highlights the subjectivity of such works by conceding that while some can be “identified by their subject matter”, others can “*become* rebel songs because of how they are used and understood, or how their lyrics or meaning are manipulated” (*ibidem*; author’s emphasis). McCann identifies a comparable internal classification structure within the putative audience, claiming that “[t]hese songs are categorised as ‘rebel songs’ *by those for whom they have social meaning*” (1985, 83; author’s emphasis).

While the output of the rebel song tradition is predominated with events and personalities from the Irish national struggle, scholarly interpretations vary considerably as to both their

⁸ In addition to such musicological heterogeneity, the absence of any definitive demarcation lines for rebel songs can often result in individual works having the ability to ideologically span markedly diverse viewpoints on the Irish national question. For a discussion on the simultaneous appropriation of the nineteenth-century ballad “A Nation Once Again” by both supporters of physical-force republicanism and constitutional nationalist politicians south of the border in the 1970s, see Parfitt (2019, 406; 411).

musical and historical remit. The underlying anti-colonial thematic has been articulated with varying degrees of intensity, from the hyperbole of Galvin who describes how such works reflect “the unimaginable and unending brutalities of reprisals inflicted on the Irish [i]n almost every generation from 1169 to 1923, their lot [being] murder, torture, eviction, starvation, forced labour or exile” (1955, 9), to Morgenstern’s observation that rebel songs narrate “the struggle for Irish independence from the *longue durée* of British colonial rule” (2021, 352, n.1), to the considerably less incendiary tone struck by Millar who posits the tradition as one “that largely stems from, and focuses on, the island’s awkward and complicated relationship with its largest neighbour, Great Britain” (2020a, 11). Similarly, while Zimmerman acknowledges a passive dynamic within the tradition, describing rebel songs as “ballads that helped the Irish to voice their opposition to British rule” (1967b, 86), Morgenstern notes their violent undercurrent as works with the capability of “actively encouraging young men to partake in a ‘glorious’ fight for freedom” (2021, 352-353, n. 1), as does Quinn who contends that “Irish ‘rebel songs’ express tropes and motifs like the ‘cult of death’, the search for liberty, the understanding that Ireland’s destiny is unfinished, and the realisation that the ‘call’ to participate may arise at any time” (2020, 169). While the trope of anti-colonial resistance casts a necessarily wide analytical net, more recent scholarship has sought to present the rebel genre as one specifically dominated by physical-force Irish Republicanism, a political philosophy that first emerged in the late eighteenth century (Smith 1995, 6; English 2006, 95-96). McCann is quite specific in this regard, stating that “rebel songs were those of the Republican song tradition” (1985, 199), while Millar revisits the significance of audience and performance space by noting how such works are not simply *about* Republicans, but rather are “those [songs] written and performed *by* Irish Republicans” (2020b, 130; author’s emphasis). Rollins houses rebel songs firmly within the wider Republican spectrum by specifically delineating such output as “republican songs” (2018, 14-15) composed of “music and lyrics [that] illustrate republican narratives and promote the ideologies of republicanism” (11), further noting how “[t]he majority of rebel songs relate to the Republican struggle” (122).

Despite the noted predominance of Republican content, however, the specific delineator of “Republican” is seldom used as a descriptive prefix, with Millar noting how “rebel” remains very much the accepted term of reference among Irish republicans themselves (2020b, 130). However, the arbitrary use of what can often prove to be a markedly non-political marker to describe what is a manifestly political (read Republican) genre, runs the significant risk of facilitating an unavoidably depoliticised thematic within the song canon. For while “Republican” – and to a lesser degree “Fenian” and “Nationalist” – all clearly convey an anti-colonial dynamic (albeit unarmed in the case of the latter), only the former presents a clear trajectory towards a definitive, long-term political dispensation, an attribute largely absent in the term under consideration. Therefore, by not specifying the context of the post-revolutionary scenario (and thus focussing explicitly on the revolutionary moment itself), “rebel” effectively denies the song canon the notably more solid political agency attendant to markers such as “Republican”, and others. Indeed, “rebel” only essentially delineates what a particular song is ideologically *opposed to*, rather than giving any semblance of the new political reality that its narrative seeks to advocate. The wider deployment of “rebel” can create yet further ambiguity in that it can also denote anti-establishment activity in general, as opposed to the more definitive historical parameters of the Irish struggle. Zimmerman has noted this interpretive diversity, claiming that many rebel songs are simply “songs of spontaneous protest or complaint by those who had no clear political consciousness” (1967a, 12) and therefore exude no discernible anti-colonial thematic as a consequence, further distinguishing such non-political output from the “[s]treet ballads more closely connected with the national movement” (*ibidem*).

While the expedient musical cohabitation of the non-political rebel and the avowedly political Republican under the single classification marker of “rebel song” is doubtlessly convenient, it frequently abbreviates a multiplicity of characters, events and worldviews, many of whom are both socially and ideologically antagonistic and, in the case of Republicanism, are often explicitly repugnant. Both Millar (2020a, 25-34; 48) and Zimmerman (1967a, 44-45) have identified several nineteenth-century rebel songsters containing texts that cross the blurred line between pro-Catholicism and anti-Protestantism, thus exuding a sectarianism at which Republicans would – in theory, at least – ideologically balk. While such works may well be “rebel songs” in the very broad sense of being anti-established order, they are a far cry from even the loosest articulation of egalitarian Republican worldview. Zimmerman further highlights the incongruity of the overtly Catholic Nationalism of Daniel O’Connell appearing in numerous song collections “side-by-side” (1967a, 46) with the physical-force Republicanism of the United Irishmen, a musical collocation which would, no doubt, have caused considerable anxieties for the former due to his preferred political tactic of remaining “law abiding [and] loyal to the Queen” (*ibidem*). It may be safely assumed, of course, that Republicans would have felt similarly ill at ease in O’Connell’s company, yet such is the unlikely ideological cohabitations often accommodated by the mercurial parameters of rebel song. Interestingly, Zimmermann proceeded to do likewise in his own collection, a *faux pas* for which he was excoriated by Ó Lochlainn who described “The Glorious Repeal Meeting at Tara Hill” (Zimmermann 1967a, 81) as a “truly toady production showing how un-Irish O’Connell had become” (Ó Lochlainn 1967, 334). Citing such obsequious lyrics as “God bless our Queen, long may she reign / What foe will dare offend her?” (*ibidem*) and “Three cheers were given for the Queen” (*ibidem*) – hardly the incendiary rhetoric of heady revolution – Ó Lochlainn remarked how “[i]t was well that nine-tenths of [O’Connell’s] audience were Irish speakers knowing no English, or these sentiments would have been decidedly unpopular” (1967, 334)⁹.

As well as Quinn’s observation that the putative musical rebel can be readily conflated with the mythological trope of the pre-Christian Irish hero, she further expands the genre parameters by noting the regularity with which “*fighting* [is] used as a synonym for *rebel*” (2020, 153) in popular discourse, a worldview that pushes the canon further into non-political territory. Zimmerman refers to one such “fighting rebel” in his discussion of “The Pursuit of Farmer Michael Hayes” (1967a, 258), a ballad that demonstrates how a “hateful character could become a gallant hero in the eyes of the oppressed peasants” (*ibidem*). Hayes was a much-despised bailiff for a Tipperary landlord and had expelled upwards of one thousand local tenants from their homes during his career, a fate he too was ironically to suffer in his final years¹⁰. Following his own eviction in 1862, he proceeded to shoot his former employer dead in a local hotel, before spending the remaining years of his life on the run from authorities in Ireland – or at leisure having ultimately escaped to America, should the song narrative be believed. Thus, despite his previous activities for which he gained considerable local opprobrium, the killing of an unpopular landlord would appear to have been sufficient grounds to warrant Hayes’ immortalisation in song and his subsequent elevation into a heroic local rebel, albeit not one motivated by particularly altruistic or political intentions¹¹.

⁹ Both the political and cultural divisiveness of O’Connell are also evident throughout wider folkloric narrative where he is alternatively celebrated as a messianic saviour of the Irish nation or roundly condemned as a treacherous collaborator with British interests in Ireland. For further discussion, see Ó hÓgáin (1983).

¹⁰ *The Nation*, 9 August 1862. Quoted in Zimmermann (1967a, 258).

¹¹ Zimmerman notes how “The Pursuit of Farmer Michael Hayes” was an expedient lyrical appropriation of the broadside ballad, “The General Fox Chase”, a text assumed to be an allegorical account of the pursuit of Republican

A comparable “fighting rebel” from several centuries previous – and one of equally non-political persuasion – was Count Redmond O’Hanlon, a similarly dubious character whose narrative largely mirrors that of Hayes, save for the former’s lineage as a member of the Gaelic aristocracy. In the aftermath of the Cromwellian confiscations, the O’Hanlon family had been dispossessed of their historical lands near Tandragee, Co. Armagh. Following a brief spell in the service of the French Army, Redmond returned to Ireland in 1671, whereupon without property or title, retreated to the hills surrounding his old South Armagh-North Louth bailiwick as an outlaw. Throughout much of the 1670s, he led a marauding campaign of attacks and raids on local landholders, as well as operating a primitive form of protection racket against English and Scottish planters in the locality, activities that only ended with his assassination in 1681 (Casey 1975, 11; Manganiello 2004, 397). O’Hanlon’s extra-legal exploits would in time be the subject of numerous rebel songs, the best known of which came from the pen of renowned Dublin songwriter P.J. McCall¹². The narrative of Redmond O’Hanlon presents an unlikely depiction of romantic stand-and-deliver highway robbery from a putative “man of the people” who “won’t let the rich Saxons alone” (McCall 1899, 24), and although couched in notably mild language throughout, the ballad speaks freely of O’Hanlon’s use of brute violence and preparedness to kill if necessary: “ ‘Take your own choice to be lodging / Right over, or under the ground!’ ”; “Mind, if the heart is dark in your body / ‘Tis Redmond will let in the light!” (*ibidem*)¹³. Yet the markedly non-political thematic was seemingly no obstacle to the ballad’s inclusion in several political songsters (Faolain 1983, 158; O’Hanlon 1930, 29; and others), an inconsistency that is particularly notable in the instance of *Ballads from the Jails and Streets of Ireland* (Shannon 1966), where it is casually housed alongside several explicitly Republican narratives, such as “Cathal Brugha”, “Seán Sabhat”, “James Connolly”, “Seán McDermott” and “Brave Tom Williams”, among others. O’Hanlon’s appearance among such hagiographic texts is ideologically inconsistent, and the apparent ease with which his criminal violence – similar to Hayes’ nefarious career as a landlord’s bailiff – could be so easily dissembled and elided in popular ballad, again points to the porosity of the “rebel” construct and the innate ability of the wider song genre to accommodate such markedly non-political players.

4. *Telescoping the Past: The Inconsistent Historical Timelines of Rebel Song*

Yet regardless of the blurred musical demarcations between political and non-political “rebels”, the one lacuna that effectively prohibits a coherent definition of rebel song is the absence of any universally agreed analytical timeframe. While, as noted, several scholars emphasise the predominance of Republican narratives – thus dating the tradition’s genesis to the late eighteenth century (McCann 1985, 206; Quinn 2020, 169; Morgenstern 2021, 352)¹⁴ – others deliberately

fugitives, for which a singer was once reputedly arrested for performing in Dublin’s George’s Street (1967a, 258). While the song’s origins may well have been in the realm of political rebellion, its manifestation in the form of Hayes was very far removed from such consideration.

¹² As well as composing such muscular Republican output as “Kelly, the Boy from Killane” and “Boolvogue” from the 1798 period, McCall also gained a considerable reputation as a collector and preserver of traditional song in the Carlow and Wexford areas during the late-nineteenth century.

¹³ Armagh folksinger Tommy Makem also penned a work of the same name, with particular emphasis on the trope of “the gallant rapparee” who – unsurprisingly – only ever robbed the rich. In a footnote to his ballad, he describes O’Hanlon as “[a] seventeenth-century Irish Robin Hood who had been forced from his lands, and who always invited his victims to ‘Come out and be robbed by the handsomest man in Ireland’ ” (Makem 1988, 28).

¹⁴ Zimmerman posits a slightly earlier date by including works from the volunteer period of the 1780s (1967a, 36-37).

sidestep this putative date by commencing their analysis in historical periods considerably before the emergence of Republicanism, and often before any discernible national consciousness was in evidence. Valley (2017, 886) traces the roots of modern rebel songs to the Irish language *aisling* poetry of the seventeenth century, a form of radical political expression that went into terminal decline alongside the suppression of the language and the wider Gaelic order, while Faolain positions the tradition's origins over a century earlier, claiming that “[t]he rebel song emerged first in Tudor Ireland in the form of the *ros g catha*, ‘bardic haranguing’, on the eve of battle” (1983, 4)¹⁵.

The Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169, an event that marked the genesis of British jurisdiction in Ireland, remains to this day a major psychological touchstone for Irish Republicanism and consequently, for its attendant song tradition¹⁶. Yet even this seminal date does not meet with any broad consensus as an analytical parameter. Galvin begins his examination of the canon with an account of Brian Boru’s reputed address to his forces before the Battle of Clontarf in 1014 (1955, 10). Not content with either Norman or Viking invasions as historical markers, some scholars retreat wholesale into mythological prehistory. Faolain insists on solidifying the “rich, evocative tapestry of Irish songs of resistance” (1983, 3) into an unbroken politico-musical narrative that reaches far beyond even the putative “Year Zero” of 1169, by welding this period seamlessly onto the previous “fifteen centuries of Gaelic tradition” (*ibidem*), thus creating a wholly improbable timeframe of some two and a half millennia. He further expands the parameters by insisting that

[e]ven today, it is not unusual for the rebel songwriter to invoke the ghosts of the legendary Gaelic world of a millennium and more ago. To attempt comprehension of the rebel tradition is to begin in prehistory and follow the march of the Gael from the time Cú Chulainn’s successors met St. Patrick and listen as the classic formalised poetry of the Druid evolved into the exuberant, defiant verse of the street balladeer. (xii)

Such telescoping of the rebel musical tradition should not be entirely unexpected, given the tendency of Republicans to similarly posit their own political narrative as an unbroken 800-year continuum, a timeframe that retreats considerably beyond the emergence of Republicanism in the late-eighteenth century (Hepworth 2021, 1). Irish Republicans have rarely, if ever, been content to commence either their political or cultural narratives at this point and to the present, regularly appropriate previous historical periods so as to deliberately “Republicanise” their own prehistory (Smith 1995, 6)¹⁷. The contemporary centrality of such historical repositioning by physical-force Republicans can be gleaned from the opening sections of the IRA’s training manual which states that

¹⁵ Faolain further emphasises the ancient poetic roots of what he terms “rebel balladry”, by describing the modern song genre as a “process evolving from a Celtic culture that has always accorded an honoured place to the poet, the bard and the storyteller” (1983, 4). Similarly, Quinn reaches considerably beyond the Tudor conquest to the “bardic tradition of old when the inclination was to ‘laud the deeds of outlaws and rebels’ (Cooper 2009, 35)” (Quinn 2020, 152).

¹⁶ Millar has highlighted how “[the] Anglo-Norman invasion and centuries of resistance to foreign rule produced a raft of material that could meaningfully be described as rebel songs” (2020a, 47).

¹⁷ In more recent times, Republicans have been accused of attempting to historically appropriate the northern civil rights movement of the late 1960s, following the publication of an article by leading Sinn Féin strategist Declan Kearney (2018). Kearney’s opinion piece sought to credit Sinn Féin and IRA members with playing a central role in the movement’s formation in 1968, a view condemned by leading civil rights activists Bernadette Devlin and Eamon McCann as “the delusional silliness of individual ramblings” and an instance of Sinn Féin “attempting to colonise history”, respectively (“The View”, BBC NI, Broadcast 8 February 2018).

[f]or the past 800 years, the British ruling class have attempted to smash down the resistance of the Irish people. Campaign after campaign, decade after decade, century after century, armies of resistance have fought [...] to cast off the chains of foreign occupation. [...] Today, the Irish Republican Army carries on that self-same war which was fought by all previous generations of Irish people”. (Qtd. in O’Brien 1995, 350)¹⁸

While the apparent seamlessness with which Republicans can historically abbreviate eight centuries has been questioned by some commentators (Patterson 1997, 12; English 2006, 37), Morgenstern has noted how the rich cultural propaganda value of such historical retreat was deduced very early on by Irish revolutionary leaders Theobald Wolfe Tone and Thomas Davis – both themselves noted songwriters – and that by deliberately linking the Republican present to the distant Gaelic past, traditional Irish music and song have displayed a “remarkable power to underscore the strive towards Irish autonomy from centuries of British colonial rule” (Morgenstern 2021, 347-348). Millar has referred to such musical convention as “collapsing the past and the present so as to force audiences to experience Ireland’s invasion synchronically” (2020a, 143), citing the example of “The H-Block Song”, with its choral invocation of contemporary Republican resistance to the labelling of Ireland’s struggle as “800 years of crime” (*ibidem*)¹⁹.

But it is not simply the narrative invocation of linear (if extremely broad) historical timelines as ideological signposts to the present that is evident throughout Irish rebel songs. Numerous high-profile works expediently lurch between events several centuries apart, with scant regard for any semblance of coherent chronology. Such deliberate historical truncation is particularly evident in “For What Died the Sons of Róisín?”, a text written by renowned Dublin ballad singer Luke Kelly. In Verse 2, Kelly invokes the Viking era as his chosen historical commencement, asking: “For what flowed Ireland’s blood in rivers / That began when Brian [Boru] chased the Dane[?]” (*Songs of Resistance 1968-2001* 2001, 113), before catapulting the narrative forward some 900 years in the following line with the assertion that such sacrifice “did not cease, nor has not ceased / With the brave sons of [19]16” (*ibidem*). In Verse 3, historical chronology is effectively abandoned when the narrative retreats over 200 years to the martyrdom of Theobald Wolfe Tone in 1798, then forwards momentarily to that of Robert Emmet in 1803, before accelerating beyond even the previously cited marker of 1916 to ask of the contemporary struggle: “To whom do we owe our allegiance today? / For what suffer our patriots today?” (*ibidem*). “Irish Ways and Irish Laws”²⁰ supersedes even Kelly’s questionable timeline by opening with an idyllic description of a pre-invasion Gaelic utopia of peaceful coexistence – itself a highly dubious historical trope – with “villages of Irish blood waking to the morning”, in an era before “the Vikings came around, / [t]urned us up and turned us down” (Moore 2000, 66). The song was first recorded in 1981 by Moving Hearts, a folk-rock ensemble fronted by renowned folksinger Christy Moore. Moving Hearts were a highly politicised and overtly Republican outfit and coupled with Moore’s high-profile involvement with the H-Block campaign at the

¹⁸ Lest such worldview be considered an exclusively Republican phenomenon, it is worth noting Noam Chomsky’s review of a recent monograph on the subject of decolonisation in which he refers to Ireland’s “800 year history of harsh and often murderous foreign domination” by Britain (McVeigh, Rolston 2021).

¹⁹ The ideological cohesion provided by such approach has been similarly highlighted by Pratt, who cites 1981 hunger striker Bobby Sands’ composition “Back Home in Derry” as having the ability to bridge “the temporal distance” (2017, 106) between the protesting prisoners in Long Kesh in the late 1970s and the revolutionaries of 1803. Such retrospective ideological positioning was also manifest in much of Sands’ writings where past Republican martyrs were consistently referenced, particularly in the latter entries of his hunger strike diary (Sands 1982).

²⁰ “Irish Ways and Irish Laws” was written by songwriter John Gibbs (Moore 2000, 66).

time, brought a notably sharper edge to contemporary rebel song during the turbulent period of the 1980 and 1981 hunger strikes (McLaughlin, McLoone 2012, 74-76). Yet despite the left-leaning, politically progressive worldview of much of their output, they too were equally content to perform a work that manages to successfully telescope almost a millennium of anti-colonial struggle into the space of just two verses, where the lyric accelerates from “800 years we have been down”, to the early 1980s when “[t]oday the struggle carries on” (66), all the while presenting the Irish people as a unified and unimpaired collective of centuries-old continuous resistance:

Cromwell and his soldiers came,
 Started centuries of shame,
 But they could not make us turn,
 We are a river flowing,
 We are a river flowing. (*Ibidem*)

5. 800 Years of Republican Resistance?

While the above works deploy significantly abbreviated timelines *within* the confines of individual narratives, some commentators insist on the collation of entire suites of texts from across a comparably truncated timeframe in order to deliberately project a concomitant politico-musical symbiosis. The chronological compilation of such works seeks to contrive a complementary soundscape to mirror what Shanahan has dubbed “the standard Republican narrative” (2009, 12) of 800 years of resistance, a pseudo-historical approach that has been questioned by Zimmerman (1967b, 88), among others. Such porosity of historical timeline is evident in the introduction to *Songs of Resistance 1968-2001*, a Republican songbook whose preamble states that while “[m]ost of the songs in this collection belong to the period since 1968 [...] songs of national resistance from previous times are also included”, all of which collectively narrate “the indomitable and unconquerable spirit of resistance to foreign rule and injustice which has sustained the Irish people for centuries” (2001, vi), thus impairing its own stated terms of reference in its very introduction²¹. Galvin (1955) and Faolain (1983) are considerably more direct in their respective analytical approaches and are unapologetic in their construction of an 800-year politico-musical timeline for rebel song. The latter notes how “[e]ight hundred years of Anglo-Hibernian history” (1983, 3) have been catalogued by “those inspired poets who have given us the lyric [...] of Irish resistance since 1169” (ix), while reminding us that it is “this emotional tie to the Irish past that is the basis of rebel song” (*ibidem*). Galvin is more explicit still, stating bluntly that “[t]he history of Ireland is largely that of some 800 years of resistance to invasion, annexation, absorption, settlement, enclosure, oppression and exploitation by England” (1955, 2) and that consequently, “Ireland’s songs sound a continual note of resistance on many levels” (*ibidem*). Vallely strikes a more moderate tone in his rationale, but the sentiment essentially remains the same: “When one considers the history of resistance to British domination of Ireland over some 830 years, it would be surprising if a large number of songs did not reflect this” (1999, 365). Other researchers are more circumspect, with Moylan

²¹ *Songs of Resistance 1968-2001* was published by Provisional Sinn Féin twice in 1975 and again in 1982. The fourth edition was issued in 2001 by Republican Sinn Féin, an organisation that split from the mainstream Republican Movement in 1986.

in particular keen to reject the 800-year thesis in his anthology of rebel songs, condemning such contention as “a facile construction” representative of largely outdated cultural conventions that were specifically “the fashion among nineteenth century anthropologists” (2016, x). Such misgivings are infrequent, however, and the propensity to reach back over eight centuries – both musically and politically – retains considerable ideological currency to the present, particularly among more doctrinaire adherents of traditional Republican orthodoxy.

But while the attendant historical galvanisation facilitated by both the longevity and diversity of the rebel song tradition is clearly useful to more doctrinaire Republicans in promoting the narrative of a centuries’ long continuum of unbroken resistance, it does nonetheless place them in an additional ideological predicament to that emanating from the previously highlighted subjectivity of “rebel” as a putative genre descriptor. By retrospectively inserting themselves both historically and musically into a timeframe that preceded their own existence by some 600 years, Republicans must equally embrace a notably opaque trope of “rebellion” that let alone can often display no discernible thematic of national separatism, but as noted, can also be markedly non-political in trajectory. Thus, in the specific case of rebel songs, the Republican convention of appropriating an 800-year struggle in its entirety frequently necessitates a certain amount of musical (if not, in fact, ideological) cognitive dissonance.

A notable work that engages in such retrospective repositioning is “Follow Me Up To Carlow”, a rebel song of considerable ubiquity throughout Republican songbooks, recordings and academic commentary (*The Soldiers’ Songbook* n.d., 6; Galvin 1955, 90; *Songs from the Barricades* 1974, 9; Faolain 1983, 80; McCann 1985, 493; *Songs of Resistance 1968-2001* 2001, 25; Millar 2020a, 100, and others). Written in 1899, the ballad is another McCall composition and one that narrates a military victory by Wicklow chieftain Fiach McHugh O’Byrne over British forces at the Battle of Glenmalure in 1580. Despite relating events some 200 years before any nascent Republican trajectory, the song was pointedly grafted onto contemporary world-view by Christy Moore, one of its more noted performers, when he claimed that the narrative “contain[ed] an atmosphere and a mood which survives in the subconscious memory of many Irish people”, further describing O’Byrne’s English protagonists as those who “came from over the sea and took the land, raped and pillaged and murdered” (2000, 127)²². While “Follow Me Up To Carlow” clearly conveys a thematic of rebellion, it is something of stretch to consider it a text of national separatist hue, given that McHugh O’Byrne was a leader well-practiced in ingratiating himself with crown authorities when it advanced his own political ends (Morgan 1993, 185). Indeed, he was not unique in this regard, and Shanahan notes the regularity and relative ease with which “Irish chieftains gladly align[ed] themselves with the invaders when it suited their purpose” (2009, 70)²³. It could perhaps be suggested, therefore, that similar to Redmond O’Hanlon and Farmer Michael Hayes, if McHugh O’Byrne ever really was a “rebel with a cause”, it was very much largely his own. Thus, the ubiquitous classification of “Follow Me Up To Carlow” as a rebel song would appear to be solely on the rather tenuous basis that McHugh O’Byrne militarily engaged British forces, with his political side-dealings with same casually omitted. Such deliberate obfuscation greatly facilitates the retrospective attribution of modern Republican credentials to a specifically non-Republican historical event, a trope also evident in “Redmond O’Hanlon”. In the opening verse, McCall simultaneously decriminalises

²² Moore recorded “Follow Me Up To Carlow” in 1973 while a member of the folk group Planxty.

²³ Casey notes how the family of the aforementioned Redmond O’Hanlon similarly engaged in such duplicity when “[i]n 1595, Oghie O’Hanlon opposed Hugh O’Neill against [Queen] Elizabeth and, for his support, received from the Crown a grant of seven townlands, embracing *clan* lands in Orior” (1975, 11), a political strategy that does not appear to have stood the family in particularly good stead with the British in the long run.

and politicises the banditry of O’Hanlon by claiming that “a native” will be let pass unmolested, “a Scotchman [...] will pay him a guinea a year” – both highly unlikely outcomes – yet by demanding “your life or your gold” of the English, “[b]y stages Count Redmond O’Hanlon / Gets back what they plundered of old” (1899, 24).

But while such expedient embracing of the distant Gaelic past can often successfully galvanise contemporary and past struggles, it can also lay some unexpected ideological tripwires for the Republican constituency to navigate. It has been noted previously how such casual abbreviation of history has regularly admitted some questionable, non-political narratives into the wider rebel song tradition. Yet several Republican songwriters have accentuated this ideological irregularity by deliberately fusing the contemporary (political) Republican martyr with the (pointedly non-political) rebel of several centuries past *within* individual song texts. One such work is “Fergal Óg O’Hanlon”, a narrative that relates a posthumous apparition by the eponymous IRA volunteer at Clones, Co. Monaghan²⁴. In his brief interaction with the anonymous narrator – who appears suitably unperturbed to be conversing with a Republican revenant – O’Hanlon refers to his death alongside his fellow IRA martyr Seán South, and how they both now reside in the ethereal realm of the Republican otherworld. While vivid articulations of an eternal warriors’ paradise into which contemporary Republican martyrs are duly welcomed by previous generations of heroes are a standard trope of the genre (Ó Cadhla, 2017a), the celestial cast who await the two IRA volunteers in this instance is somewhat less orthodox:

At Brookborough, we fought and died.
 Seán South and I fell side by side,
 And now we’ve joined with joy and pride
 The hosts of Count O’Hanlon.
 (*The Easter Lily: Songs and Recitations of Ireland*, vol. III, 1964, 23)

The appearance of career criminal Redmond O’Hanlon and his fellow-travellers in such an avowedly Republican martyr-ballad makes for an interesting conflation. While both O’Hanlons may well fit under a (very) loose definition of “rebel”, the suggestion that Fergal O’Hanlon would contentedly reside in Republican Valhalla with his outlaw namesake (or that the latter would ever reach such a lofty plain) is ideologically inconsistent, to say the very least, and further demonstrates how such casual relocation of a contemporary Republican hero within a multifarious 800-year narrative is a decidedly risky literary convention and one that creates something of an ideological high-wire act for Republicans. Thus, due to the blunt insertion of a medieval extortionist into a modern narrative of an idealistic boy-martyr, the composer, in attempting to “Republicanise” the “rebel” past, unintentionally criminalises the Republican present, an irony of some note given the intense prison struggles for political status engaged in by Republicans throughout the twentieth century²⁵.

It is this same dogmatic essentialism, for which physical-force Irish Republicanism is so widely noted, that further complicates the ubiquitous deployment of “rebel” as a universal musical marker. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, what Spencer has termed “the myth of self-sacrifice and the glorification of loss” (2015, 20) assumed totemic importance

²⁴ Volunteers Fergal O’Hanlon and Seán South were killed during an IRA attack on an RUC station in Brookborough, Co. Fermanagh on New Year’s Eve, 1956.

²⁵ The trope of revenance forms the central narrative of yet another Redmond O’Hanlon text, “The Ballad of Douglas Bridge”, in which an anonymous member of his troop appears posthumously outside of Strabane, Co. Tyrone (Colum 1922, 50). Both the thematic and structural similarities with “Fergal Óg O’Hanlon” are particularly obvious.

within Republican ideology, creating a quasi-theological adherence to the tenets of martyrdom that pertains to the present (Smith 1995, 13; Shanahan 2009, 40; Beiner 2014, 199). This philosophical shift was similarly reflected in the attendant song tradition whereby the “idealistic rebel” (Zimmerman 1967a, 66) of old was in turn elevated into what McCann famously styled the Republican “hero-martyr” (1985, 204). With the increasingly hagiographic extolment of Republican sacrifice within the physical-force tradition, it was clearly no longer sufficient for artistic articulations of the putative rebel to solely project generic thematics of heroism and bravery. Instead, such output was now obliged to accommodate heavily essentialised representations of glorious martyrdom and altruistic self-sacrifice, an ideological repositioning that created some significant literary challenges for composers of Republican song to navigate (Ó Cadhla 2017b, 276). Little wonder, therefore, at the previously highlighted rejection by O’Higgins of even the mildest conflation of patriotism with rebellion within the song tradition.

Yet O’Higgins’ dogmatism is neither exceptional, nor particularly unreasonable, should even the most cursory comparison be drawn between the diverse suite of rebel songs under consideration and those of an explicitly Republican hue. Indeed, that the largely expedient musical collocation of such iconic Republican martyrs as hunger striker Terence MacSwiney or executed IRA teenager Kevin Barry, alongside the cynical opportunism of Farmer Michael Hayes, the territorial self-interest of Fiach McHugh O’Byrne, the banditry of Redmond O’Hanlon, or the uber-Catholic Nationalism of Daniel O’Connell, should provoke sharp contention from many quarters is perhaps unsurprising. Yet by simple virtue of the largely undefinable and hazy parameters of rebel song, such generic classification is the unavoidable (and often unpalatable) reality for Republicans. Therefore, the above collective of malcontents – all “rebels” of varying persuasion – may quite legitimately be accommodated alongside the putative Republican hero-martyr (musically, at least, if not ideologically), despite being widely at odds with traditional Republican dogma.

Regardless of such ideological anxieties, however, where the delineator of “rebel” does manifestly succeed is in its comprehensive galvanisation of the genre in parallel with “the standard Republican narrative” (Shanahan 2009, 12) of eight centuries of unbroken resistance, stretching from the armed separatism of the modern era to the earliest Gaelic insurrections. Such consolidation successfully creates a singular robustness for the song tradition that less commonly deployed terminologies such as “patriotic”, “resistance”, “political”, “Nationalist”, “revolutionary”, “Fenian” and perhaps most crucially, “Republican”, all singularly fail to achieve. As demonstrated, however, this cohesion is often achieved at a certain ideological cost, with the casual musical absorption of some highly questionable *dramatis personae* unintentionally puncturing the 800-year trope of Republican continuity in the process. Thus, if Republicans insist on both musically and politically appropriating their prehistory in its entirety, they must do so at considerable risk of ideological cross-contamination.

Yet as noted by Millar (2020b, 130), “rebel” remains the most consistently utilised musical term of reference among the contemporary Republican constituency, despite the numerous inconsistencies highlighted in the current research. Indeed, it is somewhat ironic that the descriptor of “rebel” facilitates the preferred Republican politico-ideological timeline in a way that “Republican”, as a putative musical delineator, simply cannot. Furthermore, the popular acceptance by Republicans of the ideologically hazy “rebel” also represents a unique form of *pax musica* within the minutely contested arena of intra-Republican legitimacy, a circumstance largely impossible to arrive at due to the ideological wrangling that continues to be associated with the wider politico-historical deployment of “Republican”. What is perhaps more ironic still, is that while physical-force Irish Republicanism remains to the present a rigidly dogmatic

ideology, its adherents very much *require* a term as suitably vague and subjective as “rebel” should they wish to simultaneously project the essentialist narrative of 800-years of unbroken resistance – six centuries of which, it must be remembered, Republicans did not actually inhabit – within a parallel musical continuum. Indeed, given the hagiographic elevation of martyrs within the wider ideological framework of Republicanism, it can surely be posited that Republicans are more readily engaged with *who* is commemorated within their song tradition, much less *what* their song genre stands to be classified as or named. While the current research has highlighted the propensity of Republicans to variously utilise rebel songs as ideological conduits to retrospectively “Republicanise” past events, such philosophical fluidity can also facilitate a diametrically opposite dynamic, that is, to “deRepublicanise” an individual, event, organisation, or even an entire period of history. Since the early twentieth century, such contestation has regularly manifested itself in public, often bitter, disputations over the legitimate “ownership” of individual works within the wider rebel song tradition and are a consequence of the ubiquitous fissures and ideological ruptures within physical-force Irish Republicanism, a theme that will be returned to in a further paper on the inherent classification difficulties associated with political song in Ireland.

6. *Concluding Remarks*

This paper has noted the multiplicity of descriptive terminologies for musical output attendant to the Irish national struggle, with the delineator of “rebel song” displaying a popularity not evidenced with any other comparable term. While some occasional unease at the descriptor’s potential to unintentionally conflate patriotism with sedition has been noted, “rebel song” continues to retain a notably solid agency among performers, songwriters and audiences, as well as throughout academic commentary. Despite such ubiquity, however, the current research has also highlighted the marked absence of any agreed definition as to what constitutes an Irish rebel song, a lacuna that has often encouraged a necessarily broad categorisation approach. Thus, agreement as to what musicological – and crucially, as a genre of political song, ideological – parameters are appropriate to deploy in any analysis is largely impossible to establish. Such opacity is greatly accentuated by the specific political context of Ireland, in which the term “rebel” is, itself, a highly subjective construct, both inside and outside of musicological discourse. While thematically underpinned by an evident anti-colonial trajectory, it has been demonstrated how the ideological vagueness of “rebel” has often unintentionally allowed for a diversity of non-political *dramatis personae* to be accommodated within what is ostensibly a political song canon. While such individuals may well be collectivised as “rebels” in the loosest possible articulation, their motivations are singularly at odds with the altruism of the Republican martyrs often incongruously housed alongside them in songbooks and on popular recordings.

Along with such thematic opacity, the lack of an agreed analytical timeframe for rebel songs also casts an unavoidably wide classification net that further inhibits coherent definition of the genre. It has been noted how some commentators commence their analysis in the late eighteenth century, coinciding with the first appearance of Republicanism on the Irish political landscape, others with the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169, while some insist on retreating into the hazy realms of mythological prehistory for their putative starting date. It has been argued that such flexibility of timeline – and consequently, narrative content – is not without design, and reflects the concomitant ideological tendency of Irish Republicans to variously locate themselves retrospectively within an 800-year continuum of anti-colonial struggle, thus reaching considerably beyond their actual 200-year existence. While the established vagueness of “rebel”

greatly facilitates such expedient historical blurring, it has also been demonstrated how such convention is undertaken at the considerable risk of ideological cross-contamination. Several works examined have demonstrated how the casual historical abbreviation evident throughout the rebel song canon can prove highly problematic within the refined philosophical parameters of traditionalist Irish Republicanism, an ideology from which the rebel genre draws the majority of its content. Thus, the all-embracing nature of the song canon represents something of an ideological Catch-22 for Republicans. By appropriating a putative 800-year timeline of anti-colonial resistance in its entirety, Republicans must musically associate themselves with elements often explicitly repugnant to their own core tenets; yet to refute the broad parameters of rebel song also necessitates Republicans eschewing the opportunity to retrospectively insert themselves within an 800-year musicological soundscape that dovetails seamlessly with their own preferred (and largely self-referenced) historical narrative. It has been argued, therefore, that traditionalist Republicans very much *require* a term as ideologically open-ended as “rebel song” should they wish to engage in such historical reconfiguration, a convention that is, ironically, not possible with the more specific political signifier of “Republican”.

Thus, despite the absence of any agreed definition, the failure to establish a coherent analytical timeframe, its noted subjectivity, its attendant politico-historical (and consequential musicological) vagueness, and the convoluted ideological gymnastics of orthodox Republicans, it is clear that the musical descriptor of “rebel song” is very much embedded as a classification marker within the popular Irish soundscape and looks set to remain so for as long as the genre itself continues to exist. Finally, it has been argued that the historical selectiveness that permits the “Republicanising” of past events can also facilitate a reciprocal “deRepublicanising” of history, whereby yesterday’s “patriots” can expediently become today’s “irregulars” or “dissidents”. Such ideological metamorphosis is greatly accentuated by what McGlinchey has termed the “unfinished business” (2019) of the Irish national struggle and, coupled with the cyclical transition of Republicans from physical force to constitutional approaches, represents a further arena of contestation within Irish Republicanism often manifested in public disputations surrounding the “ownership” of specific works from within the wider canon of rebel song.

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Voices



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Meeting through/in Languages Q&A with Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin about *The Mother House*

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Abstract:

The interview was conducted on the occasion of Conci Mazzullo's translation of Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's poetry collection *The Mother House* (The Gallery Press, 2019), which is published in this issue of *Studi irlandesi*. The conversation was inspired by cultural and linguistic complicity, and it touches on Ní Chuilleanáin's interest in courageous nuns in convents, personal experiences tied to great losses, and significant events in Irish History.

Keywords: Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Interview, Languages, *The Mother House*

This interview developed in different moments, starting in September 2021 while I was in Tavernelle, near Perugia, for the Festival "Riflessi DiVersi"¹, invited by Eiléan, to read some of my translations from *The Mother House*², which has won "The Irish Times Poetry Now Award", 2020.

In that occasion I started asking questions about the poems I had just translated enquiring about its sources of inspiration and Eiléan and I finally ended up recalling and commenting on deeply interesting cultural and historical issues and on her personal experiences.

¹ "Riflessi Diversi – I poeti irlandesi ci raccontano - 2021", is an event, organized every year by Fernando Trilli in Magione and in Perugia at the University for Foreigners, where Irish and Italian poets and translators read their works.

² Ní Chuilleanáin (2019b), The excerpts from the poems included in *The Mother House* and in Ní Chuilleanáin's other collections appear by kind permission of the author and The Gallery Press (<www.gallerypress.com>).

*CM: I'd like to start with a very interesting lecture you delivered as poet-critic at Queen's University, Belfast on the 28th March 2019, which was published in *Instead of a Shrine*³. In this essay you referred to the poetry of 17th century England and analysed poems connected with death ceremonies. Why did you make the parallelism between poetry and ritual so relevant?*

ENC: Because after my husband MacDara's⁴ death some people quoted the poem by Henry King⁵ and I was very struck by this in their letters of sympathy. I have always been interested in external rituals.

CM: The same happened to Joyce who was fascinated by the Catholic church rituals and, when in Rome, he would go to the Vatican or other churches to see the priests' performances as if he were audience in a theatre.

ENC: Also for my research on the History of Reformation, people would attack priests making a cross at Baptism, some would protest, while others would look for a clergyman who did that. But rituals are social phenomena as well. For example, in Italy, when crossing a door, if you have to cross a threshold you would say: 'Permesso', not in Ireland. The nuns in my school would take a shortcut to go through the chapel, but would always genuflect in front of the altar. They used to wear very long skirts which came down to the ground, but they would tuck them up while teaching, while working, showing their grey petticoats. While instead when they went to pray, or had to meet the bishop in the parlour, they would, very unobtrusively, let them down.

CM: Did they do this to be more proper?

ENC: They were proper all the time, that was appropriate for work. Yet rituals are not only connected with religion, Universities have their rituals, states have their own. Ritual is a way of qualifying space.

*CM: I read an interesting review of *The Brazen Serpent*⁶, where the interviewer Lucy McDiarmid, pointed out that women had managed to create alternative rituals coming from women's folk tradition. She says that 'mysteriously resonant women appear as sacramental as their gestures' Where does your female sensitivity insert in this consonance between poetry and feminine rituals?*

ENC: I think McDiarmid referred to fairies. I suppose women had their own typical rituals.

*CM: Your essay about Pearse Hutchinson⁷ is vibrant, lively and touching. I found it particularly revealing when you referred to him as somebody who would not totally master several languages. He was so curious to capture the different nuances of meaning turning his initial non awareness into a challenge to discover new cultural realities, I felt that both of us have pursued the same route while talking to each other not sharing a mother tongue, in Italian or English. This perception would have always got to extremes when the two of us analysed stylistic or linguistic choices and discussed about translating your poems and pinning down the most suitable right terms. When I decided to translate the complete text of *The Mother House* and got a copy, I immediately felt connected with it when I*

³ Ní Chuilleanáin (2019d).

⁴ MacDara Woods (1942-2018), was an Irish poet, one of the most prominent of his generation, cofounder of the literary magazine *Cyphers*, and a member of Aosdana, the Irish Arts Council's affiliation recognising outstanding contribution to the arts in Ireland. He is the author of 20 collections of poetry. With his wife Eiléan he lived part of the year in Umbria.

⁵ King (1919 [1912]).

⁶ McDiarmid (1996). Ní Chuilleanáin (2019c)

⁷ Ní Chuilleanáin (2019e, 1-20).

saw the photo of the sculpture on the front cover, I recognized the papier maché “Giotto’s Circle” by the sculptor Janet Mullarney⁸ whose work we admired at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin.

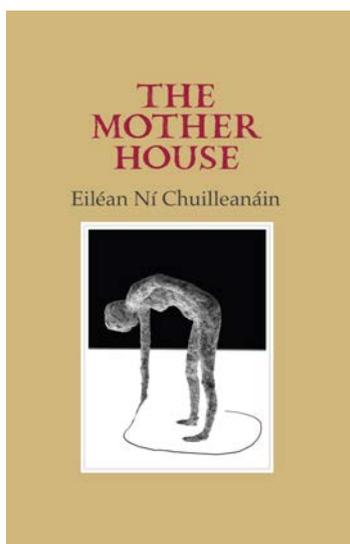


Figure 1 – Cover of *The Mother House* (2019), with Janet Mullarney’s “Giotto’s Circle”
Reproduced by kind permission of The Gallery Press, <www.gallerypress.com>

CM: Why did you choose this image to illustrate the Irish edition of The Mother House?

ENC: Janet’s sculpture ... I liked the image of a woman focused on her activity. She doesn’t ask to be looked at.

CM: She defies what is considered the feminine canon that for centuries had women as object for portraits and nudes. Why are you so fascinated by religious women in convents?

ENC: Because I had three aunts who were nuns, and once I eavesdropped on them telling in French about their experience during the Second World War in Scotland, France and Belgium when they worked to support people in distress or wounded. Two aunts worked in hospitals; it was their normal work. And I saw in them strong, powerful women willing to cooperate.

CM: You once told me about your impressions when you first went to Naples with your family and you were a child. What did you feel then?

ENC: In 1955 when we first went to Naples I was impressed by naked children, destroyed houses and by grandiose churches still standing because I was used to Irish churches built before 1800, which were destroyed and abandoned. Because of Penal Laws⁹ Catholic people couldn’t

⁸ Janet Mullarney (1952-2020), sculptor. She studied in Florence and was known for “incorporating an extensive range of materials including bronze, wood, plaster, foam, cloth, glass and wax, her dynamic sculptural works reference religious iconography, art history and human relationships” <<https://imma.ie/collection/alpha-and-omega/>> (05/2022).

⁹ The Irish Confederate Wars resulted in much destruction of church property. Irish Catholics were severely persecuted under Oliver Cromwell. The introduction of the Penal Laws (17th and 18th century) forbade the practice of Roman Catholicism, (xvii-xviii century), and as a result priests and bishops had to hide or escape.

meet to pray or go to Mass; everything had to be done in hidden places in the mountains – the so called “Mass rocks” were used as altars – or in private houses.

CM: In fact, in your poems “An Imperfect Enclosure for Nano Nagle¹⁰ (1718-1784)” and “A Map of Convents” you are telling about Nano Nagle building up a convent in Cork. Why did you send me to take pictures of Nano Nagle’s convent? Why did you put “An Imperfect Enclosure” just at the beginning of the collection of poems?

ENC: This was the collection where I thought I would finally have my say about convents so I put this poem first.

CM: In the same poem you hint at what Protestants could think about her what do you think, do you agree with it? What menace could women gathering to pray pose? “The house she built first, giving /on the street – could she close up /doors and windows on that side? It would be noticed as a convent”.

ENC: Nano Nagle’s convent seems to me a turning point in the history of Ireland and of Cork city. And I am fascinated by the seedy parts of the city after growing up in the College. The threat was because the nuns had been educated in France, Catholic education being forbidden in Ireland.



Figure 2 – Photo taken in the cemetery of the Convent of Nano Nagle in Cork. Photo by Conci Mazzullo

¹⁰ Nano Nagle (1718-1784) devoted her life to the poor people and uneducated children of Cork. She founded seven schools and an almshouse for poor women and the Order of the Presentation Sisters. She was a very courageous woman, and did all this under the Penal Laws, when opening a Catholic School could lead her to three months imprisonment.

CM: *In The Mother House there is a lot of sorrow mixed with daily realities connected with your personal experience as for example in “Hofstetter’s Serenade”¹¹ and “The Morandi Bridge”¹², how can you blend daily life, serene images and language with really desperate moments of your life?*

ENC: But I don’t think the images in “The Morandi Bridge” or “The Unreconcile” are serene at all.

CM: *As I have previously said in Studi irlandesi A Journal of Irish Studies 2020¹³, the first poem is related to your sister’s death and to the legacy of the thread of ‘pure sound’ music she left you, while the second poem refers to your husband’s loss. What did you feel and think when you heard that the Morandi Bridge had collapsed?*

ENC: I felt that I wanted to tell MacDara about this awful news without realizing he had died three months before.

CM: *In the poem you are reminiscing “you and I drove along slowly [...] behind a small Fiat, packed and weighed down /with people, cake and flowers for a mother-in-law / that made a Sunday lunch” and you added something related to geology, what did you hope?*

ENC: As I said in the poem I hoped that “the stone of the world / could carry language”.

CM: *Is “Allow Plenty of Time”, related to Macdara’s illness?*

ENC: Yes, while he was in hospital I would dash from class to him. After he died, I felt all my energy drained, I kept saying to myself why I was so anxious about trifling things?

CM: *I gave my interpretation about it. By doing so you wouldn’t think of your great sorrow and loss while you were experiencing it. After forty-eight years together it was a self-help way of behaving to try to fill the void, so as not to think of the abysmal loss.*

What about the poem “The Unreconcile”? As we were commenting on the lexical choice of “goccia” in my translation of the final stanza, you pointed out that it was connected with “Andromaca’s tears, the little river she invented” and the painful “men and women [who are] crying in underground hospital car parks [while] no river and no rain can wash any of this away”.

Why did you choose “The Unreconcile” among those I had to read in Perugia? Is there any connection with your hospital life during Macdara’s final moments?

ENC: Yes, there is, but there’s also reference to my sister’s illness, “A woman in London queuing in Outpatients [...]” is her.

CM: *You once said to me that you don’t feel like writing on pandemics, that you can’t write poems on demand after something dreadful happened. How did you go through the period of the pandemics?*

¹¹ See <<https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/bsfm-sijis/article/view/11771>> (05/2022).

¹² The Morandi Bridge in Genoa, officially Polcevera Viaduct, a concrete bridge built between 1963 and 1967, along the A10 motorway, was called Morandi Bridge after Roberto Morandi its designer. It collapsed during a rainstorm in August 2018: 43 people died and 600 were left homeless. The new bridge was designed by the internationally renowned architect Renzo Piano and was inaugurated in June 2019.

¹³ See Mazzullo 2020, 309-311.

ENC: My son Niall went shopping for me and brought me food and necessary stuff for living and every Wednesday he would come to eat a pizza with me and keep me company. And I reread the *Comedy*.

CM: Why did you choose to approach Dante again? Was it dictated by academic engagements or intimate necessity?

ENC: As you know Dante is my favourite poet. Academic engagements have kept me close to Dante because of teaching the literature of the English Renaissance, but with poetry it is always the feeling that leads me to the allusion.

CM: You probably don't remember but my graduate student recorded you reading your poems inspired by the Comedy on Dantedi at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, in Dublin, 25 March 2021. My students at university were fascinated by the souls trying to get on the boat, and by the whirlwind and the airs of Love in Paolo and Francesca solemnly remembered in the poem "For James Connolly". Why did you choose those Dante references connected with water and air for your lines?

ENC: The answer to both of those questions is almost the same. I cannot hope to reproduce the effect of Dante's Italian, but he is a poet of such astonishing imagery that the images are held in my mind somewhere very close to the surface. So when I reach for a way to express something that has not quite found a shape it is often something from Dante that comes to mind. A motive in relation to the Connolly poem is also that Connolly spoke Italian, he learned it in America so as to be able to reach the Italian workers in New Jersey when working as a Union organizer. Dante is like Atlas holding up the sky, a sky so populated with complex mechanisms of meaning, like constellations.

CM: I've always known that Dante deeply touched you. Who are the other poets inspiring you?

ENC: Kavafis and Yeats from whom I learnt a lot about rhythm and language. The real inspiration comes from the poets I read when I was young: Charles Baudelaire, Elizabeth Bishop, Donne, Spenser, Milton, Sidney, Eibhlín Dhubh Ní Chonaill.

CM: I'm sure that all the cofounders of Cyphers, Pearse Hutchinson, MacDara Woods, Leland Bardwell were your travel companions throughout your poetic career, What did each of them leave you to make yours?

ENC: I lived so long in the company of my fellow editors that I think I must have absorbed everything I was capable of. I am not conscious of a legacy of poetry but can hear their voices when I try to judge a poem.

CM: I share your feeling and I am pretty sure that they read and criticised your poems. Were there other critics who you liked commenting on your lines?

ENC: Seamus Heaney who once said "There is something second sighted, as it were, about Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's work, by which I don't mean that she has any prophetic afflatus, more that her poems see things anew, in a rinsed and dreamstruck light. They are at once as plain as an anecdote told on the doorstep and as haunting as a soothsayer's greetings"¹⁴.

¹⁴ See the Gallery Press website page on Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's collection *The Girl Who Married the Reindeer* (2001) <<https://gallerypress.com/product/the-girl-who-married-the-reindeer-eilean-ni-chuilleanain/>> (05/2022).

CM: Which of your poems did Seamus Heaney like best?

ENC: Well, there is an interesting experience we shared. He chose two poems of mine for an anthology published by Poetry Ireland in 1999. We were also invited to a poetry reading and I wasn't particularly happy about "The Horses of Meaning"¹⁵, but he liked it and said not to change anything.

CM: Where does your idea of being a poet come from?

ENC: Because I wanted to experience rivalry with my mother who was a writer of prose and earned a living out of it. I wanted to try something more difficult which did not guarantee money. In a certain way I disappointed both my parents who expected me to become a novelist. But it was probably because of my mother who tuned my ears to poetry as she often read poems to us children.

CM: In *The Mother House* there is a poem which really struck me deeply "A Room Full of Seicento Frames". How come you came up with this graphic image of empty frames?

ENC: I saw an interesting exhibition on the 1st April, Fool's Day 2015 in London at the National Gallery called *Frames in Focus: Sansovino Frames* showing 30 early baroque frames of the Florentine architect and sculptor Sansovino. I was so fascinated by the hallmark of the Sansovino's curling scroll motif, his branches of grapes and cherubs or full rams' heads and bare breasted woman that I gave life to them in this poem.

CM: By the way in this poem you also focus on the missing scene from the frames: "The scenes were all missing, though the guarded ovals [that] / bleed and reek.." were depicted when painters were advised "o observe executions, to capture / the reality, to get it right". Where did you get this cruel, realistic images of artists having to assist to these execrable performances?

ENC: While I was doing my research on Counter-Reform I came across a very interesting book written by Gabriele Paleotti *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images, 1582* and he suggested that artists should observe executions and also frequent slaughterhouses.

CM: Have you got plans for this year?

ENC: I want to celebrate Leland Bardwell's¹⁶ centenary, the 100th anniversary of her birth, and write the introduction to the edition of her *Collected Poems*.

CM: In *The Mother House* there is a vibrant powerful poem called "Raging Foam for Leland Bardwell (feb.1922-June 2016)", dedicated to her reckless brilliant adventurous life as a poet and mother. Why did you refer to the sea, which has always been your leitmotif in other poems as in "Seaweed", to celebrate her? The second stanza strikes as affectionate and revealing when you say: "The foam breaks and withdraws. /It's a scatter of moments remembered, /my life, her life; and I

¹⁵ In *The Girl Who Married the Reindeer*, (2019a).

¹⁶ Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and Brian Leyden on Leland Bardwell, in *Books for Breakfast 47: Leland Bardwell at 100* <https://www.buzzsprout.com/1162427/10513176?fbclid=IwAR14HoCHU_fYeYauelpcQ1rEzLOQuXS7Y-Hllu5_LJGKUbnV0ipZj4Q8w6nQ> (05/2022).

gather them all up, /old scenes that are broken rumours /thrown high by the waves' or in 'and looking down now in the profound/bay of memory, trying to guess how deep, / I see her [...] to read in a clear /Ladylike voice, the night Patrick Kavanagh died [...]'.

ENC: The sea... when I started seriously writing poetry I was in love with a marine biologist and he was in love with the sea. It has left its mark.

CM: Thanks, lovely talking to you!

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Writings



Seven Poems

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“A profession”

I’m not gay but I know about suppression
I’m not black but I know about oppression
I’m not bipolar but I know about depression
I’m not poor but I know about recession
I’m not homeless but I know about repossession
I’m not addicted but I know about obsession
I’m not a slave but I know about possession
I’m not religious but I know about confession
I’m not mute but I’m a man and I had to learn about expression

“Hook line and sinker”

Beware the guru....

Who controls your thoughts and actions...
Who claims to have all the answers.

Whether he shouts it from the rooftops...
Or whispers in your ear.

For he is just a charlatan...
Who uses others words.

Preys on you when you’re vulnerable...
And closes down your life.

Be careful who you meet...
When you’re at your lowest points.

Be careful who you let in...
When left open to deceit.

For life’s lessons can be expensive...
And leave you incomplete.

Beware of the guru...
 For he sells hope and brings only pain

“A Hand To Hold”

To hold a hand in yours
 To have yours held
 When in love
 When in loss
 When strangled in grief
 Or lost without relief

When walking down summer's streets
 Or buried beneath winter's sheets

A hand to let you know they care
 To just let you know they are there
 A hand to miss
 A hand to kiss
 A helping hand; A healing hand
 And when you're at the end of your wits
 All you need is a hand that fits

“Breathe Again”

Filling in the time
 Now is the winter of our discontent
 Will we be able to pay the rent....
 Feed the kids.....
 Keep the car....
 Have a job....
 Breathe again Will we be able to
 Go to a football match
 A gig
 See Messi score
 Or god forbid Bono sing on Grafton st.
 Walk the fields at electric picnic
 With friends....
 With friends who no longer walk those fields
 Walk through Dublin city Centre...
 to Hodges Figgis to look at books
 Across the road to Tower Records
 And back to The Record Spot
 Cause you prefer to help out the small guy

Chai latte and a muffin at Accents's
 Or the large chain at the bottom of Georges St
 Because you know ..chai latte and a muffin
 Will you walk hand in hand
 With the one you love
 Through Dublin
 Through London
 Through Bristol
 Through Nottingham
 Through.....wherever you've been
 And might ever be
 Will you ever take these things for granted
again
 Now is the winter of our discontent
 Will we be able to pay the rent...
 Feed the kids...
 Keep the car...
 Have a job...
 Breathe again

“Under The Clock at Clearys”

Waiting for the date that never arrives....
 You stand with others spaced two metres apart..
 Back before two metres was a necessity.

You arrive early
 Fifteen minutes early
 The minutes tick by....

Girls don't arrive before the time...
 They don't like standing alone in a city centre...
 It gives the wrong impression.

The fifteen minutes are up ...and still no sign.
 You check your watch...
 these are the days before mobile phones
 And long before watches become fashionable again.

The other dates have come and gone...
and still you stand.

Maybe the bus is late,
 maybe something happened at home,
 maybe there was an accident,

maybe she's in hospital,
 maybe she's dead.
 Cause why else would she stand you up.

The days of no phones to text, to call.

And you stand under Clearys Clock
 And you make your way home ...alone

Next time....
 I'll stand under Easons Clock

“Every Lidl Helps”

Oh what's become of the middle aisle at Lidl..
 Where are the trumpets?
 The mini violins?
 The oil change filter for the 1964 Chevrolet....
 that Steve McQueen drove in the film The Getaway?
 Where are the things you never knew you needed
 The motors for speedboats?
 The cross country winter skis?
 The self assembly Norwegian three piece suite
 Oh what's become of the middle aisle at Lidl..
 A place that a lonely soul could visit when there was nothing else to do.
 To frequent
 And lament
 On a bicycle
 Made for Two
 Oh what's become of the middle aisle at Lidl
 I don't want power tools
 For DIY fools
 Or slide rules
 For educate together schools.
 Fluorescent exercise gear to be seen
 For the glamorous sexy Eastern European
 Oh what's become of the middle aisle at Lidl
 Oh to come across that pin stripe one piece suit
 Nowadays I just come home with fruit

“Understanding *Ulysses*”

Four Poems

Dave Lordan
traduzioni di Rubina Valli

Convergence Centre Genoa. Friday 21 July 2001
i.m Carlo Giuliani, murdered by paramilitary police.

A hundred yards behind us
 the Mediterranean heaves its waste
 against a limestone barricade.
 Condoms, nappies, bottle tops,
 all that unnecessary detritus
 rising to mock our gas stung eyes
 like the unlearned lessons of past mistakes.
 Rumours sicken our panic,
 spreading through the camp
 as fast as microbes
 through the lungs of sleeping babies.
 "Three are dead- one a child".
 "There's police in the ambulances".
 "If you're hurt, don't go to hospital- you'll be arrested".
 "They'll gas us while we sleep".
 "The camp security are FBI".
 Tonight no-one will leave this camp
 of thirty thousand unarmed rebels
 for hostel or hotel room,
 for fear of rampaging Carabinieri.
 We are surrounded.

Every fifteen minutes
 a helicopter circles the camp
 thirty metres overhead
 and stops dead.
 Out of spite they deafen us,
 blind us with a power lamp
 to keep us awake, on edge.
 To film us all and file us.
 Anger whips across us like a desert wind.
 En masse we raise two fingers,
 bare our teeth and scream obscenities,
 wish we were the Vietcong.

Dizzy with the sudden loss of innocence
 A few are like drunken actors
 directed by a lunatic.
 They tumble round on set,
 make up their lines,
 mumble the first words
 that come into they're heads
 till they're out of their minds.

A Cailin cries for her anarchist brother-

Centro di convergenza Genova. Venerdì 21 luglio 2001
In memoria di Carlo Giuliani, assassinato dalle forze dell'ordine

Cento metri indietro
Il Mediterraneo getta i suoi rifiuti
Contro una barricata di cemento
Condom, pannolini, tappi di bottiglia
Taniche di benzina e Tampax
Montano a schernire i nostri occhi pizzicati dal gas
Come lezioni non apprese dal passato.
Le voci nauseano il nostro panico,
dilagano per il campo
veloci come batteri
nei polmoni di neonati addormentati.
“Tre morti – uno è un bambino”
“Ci sono poliziotti sulle ambulanze”
“Se sei ferito non andare in ospedale – ti arrestano”
“Ci gaseranno nel sonno”
“Gli agenti di sicurezza sono spie”
Stanotte nessuno lascerà questo campo
Di trentamila ribelli senza nome
Niente ostelli o stanze d'hotel
Per paura dei carabinieri furenti
Siamo circondati.

Ogni quarto d'ora
Un elicottero ruota attorno al campo
A trenta metri
E si blocca.
Per disprezzo ci assordano,
Ci accecano con torce da campeggio
Per tenerci svegli, al limite.
Per filmarci e schedarci tutti.
La rabbia ci frusta come un vento del deserto.
In massa alziamo due dita,
scopriamo i denti e urliamo oscenità,
magari fossimo Vietcong.

Storditi da un'improvvisa perdita d'innocenza
Alcuni sono come attori ubriachi
Diretti da un pazzo.
Rotolano qua e là sul palco
Inventano le battute
Borbottano le prime parole
Che gli saltano in mente
Fino a perdere la testa.

Una tipa piange per il fratello

missing in action.
We comfort her, try to construct
a normal Friday night scene.
Someone cracks open a bottle of wine,
passes round a stack of paper cups
his mother gave him.
Another offers round the last of his cigarettes.
But there's no hope of small talk
when the dancing fires
reflected in our eyes are burning buildings.
I take a drink, and then another.
It tastes good, works like medicine.

The oldest have the blankets
and are already sleeping.
We huddle together
and make the best of our
Mattress of cold concrete
our makeshift cover
of jackets and Bandana's.
Spray spits in off the sea,
and sends shivers up my spine.
My bladder aches with cold.
I know I'll get no sleep tonight.
You take off your glasses
and tell me to mind them.
My heart wraps itself in this warning
and I am moved to tears by the pathos
of broken glasses.
Whatever happens tonight,
batons or bullets, tear gas or tanks,
I will mind your glasses.

I lie back and stare straight up
into the bottomless night.
I think about how Love
is what makes Death so awful
and Death is what makes
Love so urgent and so painful.
The black sky is a poisoned sea
where nothing lives,
The stars are burning islands
decorated with skulls.

Disperso in azione.
La confortiamo, cerchiamo di costruire
La scena di un weekend normale.
Qualcuno spacca una bottiglia di vino da bere
Fa girare una pila di bicchieri di carta
Che gli ha dato sua madre.
Qualcun altro offre la sua ultima sigaretta.
Nessuna speranza di chiacchierare
Quando i fuochi che ci danzano negli occhi bruciano edifici.
Prendo un sorso, e poi un altro.
È buono, come una medicina.

I vecchi hanno le coperte
E dormono già.
Noi ci stringiamo
E facciamo quel che si può
Col nostro materasso di cemento freddo
Le nostre coperte improvvisate
Di giacconi e bandane.
Tremo. Sono esausto.
La vescica mi fa male dal freddo.
So che non dormirò stanotte.
Ti levi gli occhiali
E mi dici di starci attento.
Il mio cuore si aggrappa a questo compito
E sono commosso fino alle lacrime dal pathos
Degli occhiali rotti.
Comunque vada stanotte
Manganelli o proiettili,
starò attento agli occhiali.

Mi sdraio e guardo su
Dritto nella notte senza fondo.
Penso a come l'Amore
È ciò che rende la Morte così orribile
E la Morte è ciò che rende
L'Amore così urgente e doloroso.
Il cielo nero è un mare di veleno
Dove non vive nulla.
Le stelle sono isole di fuoco
Decorate di teschi.

“Victory Parade”

A birthday brunch in the city,
among early-middle-aged old friends.

A bowl-shaped scented
candle passed across the table
as a gift.

A bomb inside the
candle. A cannibal
inside the bomb.
The cannibal eating
what’s been cooked by the bomb.

A gradual in-drift of
mustard gas.

The cannibal blinded and choking on gas.

Several tanks and armoured pick-
up trucks rolling out of the gas
cloud

followed by soldiers in masks.

The soldiers find a village
shadowed by a pinewood
church. Inside it the
elders and infants and
some with-child are
hiding.

The soldiers dousing with diesel
and then flamethrowing the church.

Nothing and no-one
surviving except for
one enormous bell
superstition has caused to never be rung.

Concealed in the bell hollow:
the healing holy mummy of a crocodile.

Jerome in the desert embracing the crocodile.

The soldiers shrink,

“Parata della vittoria”

Un brunch di compleanno in città,
tra vecchi amici di mezza età.

Una candela a forma di ciotola viene passata per
La tavolata come un dono.

Nella candela c'è una bomba. Nella bomba
C'è un cannibale.
Il cannibale mangia
Ciò che la bomba ha cotto.

Si va alzando del gas tossico.

Il cannibale è accecato e soffocato dal gas.

Tanti carri armati e pick-up corazzati
Emergono dalla nube di gas

Seguiti da soldati con la maschera.

I soldati trovano un villaggio adombrato
Da una chiesa in legno di pino. All'interno si nascondono
Gli anziani e i bambini e le donne incinte.

I soldati gettano diesel
e poi fiamme sulla chiesa.

Niente e nessuno sopravvive a parte una
Enorme campana
Che per scaramanzia non è mai stata suonata.

Nascosto nella cavità della campana:
la santa salvifica mummia di un cocodrillo.

Fra' Girolamo nel deserto abbraccia il cocodrillo.

I soldati Rimpiccioliscono a un esercito di formiche
Che marcia nelle tasche di un generale (Napoleonico) a cavallo.
Rapido, il generale:

1: sfodera un telescopio
2: sonda l'orizzonte e il cielo
3: spia un ordine tatuato su un satellite
Per innalzare la bandiera nazionale sulla campana.

becoming columns of ants marching into the
pockets
of a (Napoleonic) general on horseback.

Rapidly, the general:

1: unsheathing a telescope
2: surveying horizon and sky
3: spying an order tattooed on a
satellite to raise up the national
flag on the bell.

A scorched hermit
leaping out of a bush to disagree on the
flag.

In the midst of a screaming
dispute both commander and
hermit
being stampeded
to mud
by legions of
cavalry
flooding in through the west
and the east and the north and the
south.

And now it is snowing the pinnacle, snowing
the black nuclear snow that smears away almost
everything

except

the singing teeth of the bomb,

the victory howls of the cavalrymen.

“Found Poem”

Heh! You found me.
That’s great.

You found me.
But I can’t tell where
we are. Can you?
A bookshop?

Un eremita ustionato salta fuori da un cespuglio
In disaccordo sulla bandiera.

Nel mezzo di una disputa accesa
Sia il comandante che l'eremita
Sono schiacciati in poltiglia da legioni di cavalleria
Che arrivano a frotte da ovest e est
E sud e nord.

E ora nevicata il pinnacolo,
La nera neve nucleare
Che imbratta quasi tutto

Eccetto

I denti della bomba che canta

gli ululati vittoriosi della cavalleria!

“Poesia trovata”

Haha! Mi hai trovato.
Che bello.

Ma non posso dirti dove sono.
Vero?
Una libreria?

If so, please steal me.

I have so often been stolen
but I have never been caught.

But maybe you've already stolen me.
Maybe you've already taken me home.

Maybe you are lying down on your bed now
Holding me open above you and gazing,

Peeling my layers away,
Drinking my nakedness in.

I've never been anything but naked
And I'll let anyone gaze
As long as they please.

Why not take a step beyond staring?
Why not step through the page and come in?

There are as many ways to enter me
As there are to enter a wood.

As many ways to take shelter.
As many ways of getting lost.

You can die inside me
If you want. I'll preserve you for another time.

Many are buried here
Who did not want to die.

Stick around long enough
And you will start to help
Me unbury them.

One by one, you will hear them sing
As if they were never wronged.

For I am making an enormous
Flock of them-

A flock of songs.
Songs of strength and redemption

Se è così, per favore rubami.

Mi hanno spesso rubato
Ma non mi hanno mai catturato.

Magari mi hai già rubato.
Magari mi hai già portato a casa.

Magari adesso sei steso sul tuo letto
Mi tieni aperto e guardi,

sfogliando via i miei strati,
bevendoti la mia nudità.

Non sono mai stata altro che nuda
E lascerò chiunque guardare
Finché lo desidererà.

Perché non spingersi oltre il guardare?

Perché non fare un passo nella pagina ed entrare?

Ci sono tanti modi per entrare dentro di me
Quanti per entrare in una foresta.

Altrettanti modi per trovare rifugio.
Altrettanti modi per perdersi.

Puoi morire dentro di me
Se vuoi.
Ti preserverò per un'altra volta.

Molti che non volevano morire
Sono sepolti qui.

Trattieniti abbastanza a lungo
E insieme inizieremo
a riesumarli

Uno per uno, li sentirai cantare
Come se non avessero mai subito un torto.
Perché ne sto radunando
Un enorme stormo.
Un enorme stormo di morti e dispersi.

Uno stormo di canti e inni e incantesimi
Per sostenere il mondo

For bearing the world
And repairing it: that is my work.

Enough! To tell you the truth I'm getting
a little tired of being found.

Being found seems so dull and so permanent.
Museums and catacombs are full of the found.

I long to be in motion, going nowhere.
I long to be lost in myself again.

Inside me, there's everything.
So, come on in. Or let me go. I'm rearing.

I guess I'm less like a wood
and more like the wind

and no-one has ever found the wind.

“Tita”

You just tut-tut agreeably and smirk
with eyebrows raised while being informed
over the phone by a concerned local citizen
that your grandfather,
whose teeth are longer
than the second Balkan War
and who never let the national tongue
disturb his local palate
was squinted on Aiello's
tranquilised main drag
pedaling his rusty two-wheeler up
the middle of the wrong side of the road

at the sky blackening zenith
of that tourist dousing barrage
of sleet and pea-sized hail
when the radio was hissing
with complaint from
sun and sea-bound drivers
who could not spy
through rain-swept glass
what was throttling down
the avenues towards them

E ripararlo: questo è il mio lavoro.

Basta! A dir la verità
Mi sto un pochino stancando di essere trovata.

Farsi trovare sembra così banale e così definitivo.
I musei e le catacombe sono pieni di trovati.

Io bramo il movimento, l'andare ovunque.

Bramo di perdermi di nuovo in me stessa.
Dentro di me, c'è tutto.

Allora, su, entra.
O lasciami andare.
Io indietreggio.

Mi sa che più che a un bosco assomiglio al vento
E nessuno ha mai trovato il vento.

“Tita”

Fai tz-tz con finto assenso
E ghigni
Con le sopracciglia alzate
Mentre vieni informata
Al telefono
Da un preoccupato cittadino locale
Che tuo nonno,
i cui denti sono più lunghi
della Seconda Guerra Balcanica
e che mai lasciò la lingua nazionale
disturbare il suo palato locale
è stato visto sulla pacificata
via principale di Aiello
pedalare la sua bici arrugginita
nel mezzo del lato sbagliato
della carreggiata

mentre il cielo si va oscurando allo zenit
e la muraglia di turisti si inzuppa
di nevischio e grandine grossa come piselli
quando la radio sibilava
coi reclami degli automobilisti
diretti verso il mare e il sole
che non potevano ben leggere

You said your neighbour said your Grandad
was brandishing a folded up umbrella
like a pike

that he held his ancient smited peasant face upraised
to heaven's thundering height

and he was returning a bloody armada of curses
to that bastard god
who had inflicted
on him this life.

attraverso il vetro battuto dalla pioggia
cosa macinava verso di loro sulla strada
a tutta velocità

tu dicesti che il vicino disse
che il nonno brandiva un ombrello chiuso
come una lancia

che alzava il volto antico e dissacrato
alle altezze tonanti dei cieli

e restituiva una maledetta armata di bestemmie

al dio
che gli ha inflitto
questa vita.



“A Blackbird at Polanesi”

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One beautiful evening, at the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a friend brought us to see the little village of Polanesi high above the Ligurian coast. To get there we would normally have taken the Via Aurelia, but we couldn't get to it because the traffic was completely blocked. Later, having reached our destination by a different route, we could look down on the Aurelia where the traffic was bumper-to-bumper. There had been a major accident and the entire road was blocked. From our perch on the hillside, on the way up to Polanesi, it looked like a war had broken out and these were the refugees.

Not long afterwards we were standing in a tranquil *piazza* in front of a little church and the silence was so intense that we could hear every note of a blackbird's song. On the wall of the church was a plaque dedicated to 'The Fallen of The Russian Campaign' and it wasn't hard to make the connection between the visible signs of distress on the Aurelia, people whose lives had been turned upside down by an accident, and the Russian invasion[,] the result of another iteration of fascism, but not very different in essence to that which led the young men of Polanesi to die on the Russian Steppe. Not coincidentally the Via Aurelia was built to allow the rapid deployment of Roman legions to the northern territories of the empire.

From this came the poem “A Blackbird at Polanesi”, which I wrote simultaneously in English and Italian.

Incidentally, the hamlet of Polanesi is a neighbour of the town of Recco which, between the months of November 1943 and June 1944, because of a strategically important railway bridge that still runs through the town, was so badly bombed by the allies that over 90% of the medieval town was razed to the ground. They missed the bridge. Since I wrote the poem, Mariupol has suffered the same fate, but without the partial exculpation that the bombing of Recco was necessary to stop the supply of Nazi troops at the Gustav Line.

"A Blackbird at Polanesi"

and in the evening at Polanesi
high above the traffic
massed bumper to bumper
on the old Via Aurelia
which goes all the way
back in time to Rome

a lonesome blackbird sings
his melancholy lovesong
to the olive trees
the little church
the stone commemorating
the dead of the Russian Campaign
and the heedless silver sea

but we listen on the car radio
to news of the siege in Kyiv
a million refugees on the road
and try to imagine the roar
of artillery fire
in what was once a home
thinking fascism makes
a new face in every generation

"Un merlo a Polanesi"

E la sera a Polanesi
in alto lassù il traffico
ammassato paraurti contro paraurti
sull'antica Via Aurelia
che va fino in fondo
indietro nel tempo a Roma

canta un merlo solitario
il suo malinconico canto d'amore
agli ulivi e la chiesetta
la lapide che ricorda
i morti della campagna di Russia
e il distratto mare d'argento

ma ascoltiamo alla radio
le notizie sull'assedio di Kiev
un milione di profughi per strada
e proviamo a immaginare il ruggito
del fuoco dell'artiglieria
in quella che una volta era un casa
pensando che il fascismo fa
una faccia nuova a ogni generazione

Twenty-six Poems from
The Mother House

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin
translated into Italian by Conci Mazzullo



A Note on the Texts

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¹ <www.gallerypress.com> (05/2022).

² <<https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/bsfm-sijis/article/view/11771/11410>> (05/2022).

“An Imperfect Enclosure”
for Nano Nagle (1718-1784)

She was out in all weathers.
 She was tired, someone gave her
 a chair in a shop. Rested
 and then away, in the street, on the move.

The house she built first, giving
 on the street —could she close up
 doors and windows on that side?
It would be noticed as a convent.

She asked to be buried in
 the common cemetery.
 They broke through the wall
 of the nuns’ graveyard

and slipped her coffin inside.
 But she would not stay,
 so they built her a stone tomb
 nearer to Cove Lane

and opened a latch at one end
 so hands could touch the coffin.

“A Journey”

I went driving through the countries
 where I could read the names,
 the posters outside cinemas,
 the leaflets in the churches;

the scripts began to slow me down
 after the mountain border climb
 and beyond the roadblock I could see
 only the shapes: the shed end

and the parked van, and the slow-
 motion shadow of somebody
 at the edge of the road. I looked
 again at the deep wound in my arm;

it was all cleaned and covered up,
 so as not to frighten the children.

“Una clausura imperfetta”
per Nano Nagle (1718-1784)

Lei era fuori con ogni tempo.
 Lei era stanca, le diedero
 una sedia in un negozio. Riposò
 e poi via, in strada di nuovo.

La casa che costruì per prima, dava
 sulla strada —poteva chiudere
 porte e finestre da quella parte?
Sarebbe stato notato come un convento.

Chiese di essere sepolta nel
 cimitero comune.
 Fecero un varco nel muro
 del cimitero delle suore

e vi fecero scivolare la sua bara.
 Ma non ci sarebbe rimasta,
 così le costruirono una tomba in pietra
 più vicina al vicolo Cove

e aprirono un passaggio con un chiavistello
 così le mani potevano toccare la bara.

“Viaggio”

Sono partita guidando attraverso paesi
 dove potevo leggere nomi,
 poster fuori dai cinema,
 volantini nelle chiese;

le scritte iniziarono a farmi rallentare
 dopo la salita al confine della montagna
 e oltre il blocco stradale riuscii a vedere
 solo ombre: il tetto del casotto

e il camion parcheggiato, e l'ombra
 di qualcuno, lenta, in movimento
 al limite della strada. Guardai
 ancora la mia profonda ferita al braccio;

era tutta pulita e bendata,
 per non spaventare i bambini.

“The Unreconcile”

The numbers work their tricks, dividing and stacking
 in columns
 that shake when a draught from an open diary or
 an old account-book slips its blade in between:
ninety-sixty-seven, seventy, seventy-one, seventy-eight,

eighty-three, eighty-four, eighty-nine, two-thousand-and-nine.
 A boy fretting on the bus to school is one.
 A girl on the train from Fishguard to Oxford is one.
 A woman in London queuing in Outpatients is still one.

Exile-sex-death: just as Charles Baudelaire saw the swan
 on the building site in Paris, grey webbed feet on the dry
 stones, his open beak, stretched neck, in the pose Ovid
 explains is peculiar to human beings, and he thought

about Andromache’s tears, the little river she invented,
 about the consumptive African woman tramping the foggy street,
 he thought of slender orphans withering like flowers,
 of the defeated, of the stranded sailors, and so on —

nothing can shift the weight, the hundred stones in the
 school yard
 are founded on deeper buried stones, a hundred
 men and women are crying in underground hospital
 car parks —
 no river and no rain can wash any of this away.

“Love”

The view from the train is better than dream.
 A man is gazing down his lines of beetroot,
 alone tractor waits at the level crossing,
 one light glowing although it’s not quite dark.
 A doll has fallen into the gloom of the gloom of the hedge,
 her frilly skirt still white. Walls come closer,
 lights on Clara station cast their orange trawl.
 Beyond its margin the engines
 vibrate in the car park, harmonizing the hum of love.

A newspaper spread on a dashboard
 catches the last light from an office window;
 a parent’s overcoated shape is reading,
 waiting for the noisy gang that clings
 by the doors with their luggage while
 the wheels are slowing and finally slide and stand.

“L'inconciliabile”

I numeri fanno il loro gioco, dividendosi e accatastandosi
in colonne

che si scuotono quando una bozza da un diario aperto
o un vecchio libro contabile vi scivola la sua lama:

mille-novecento-sessanta-sette, settanta-uno, settanta-otto,

ottanta-tre, ottanta-quattro, ottanta-nove, duemila-nove.

Un ragazzo che si agita sull'autobus verso scuola è uno.

Una ragazza sul treno da Fishguard a Oxford è uno.

Una donna a Londra in fila nell'ambulatorio è ancora uno.

Esilio-sesso-morte: proprio come Charles Baudelaire vide il cigno
nel cantiere a Parigi, grigie zampe palmate sull'arida
pietra, becc'aperto, collo stirato, nella posa che Ovidio
spiega è tipica degli esseri umani, e pensò alle

lacrime di Andromaca, un fumiciattolo che lei inventò,
alla consunta donna africana che calcava le strade nella nebbia,
pensò a sottili orfani che si consumavano come fiori,
agli sconfitti, ai marinai sbandati e così via —

niente può alleviare il peso, le centinaia di pietre nel cortile della scuola
sono basate su più profonde pietre seppellite, un centinaio
di uomini e donne piangono in sotterranei
parcheggi d'ospedale
nessun fiume, né pioggia può lavarne via neppure una goccia.

“Amore”

La vista dal treno è meglio di un sogno.

Un uomo sta scrutando i suoi filari di barbabetole,

un trattore solitario attende al passaggio a livello,

una luce riluce sebbene non sia abbastanza scuro.

Una bambola è caduta nell'oscura siepe,

ancora bianca la sua gonna civettuola. I muri si avvicinano,

alla stazione Clara, luci proiettano il loro strascico arancio.

Oltre il margine vibrano

i motori nel parcheggio, in armonia col brusio d'amore.

Un giornale spiegato sul cruscotto

coglie l'ultima luce dalla finestra di un ufficio;

la forma di un genitore infagottato sta leggendo

in attesa del rumoroso gruppo che si stringe

davanti le porte con le valigie mentre

le ruote rallentano e infine scivolano e si fermano.

“Kilmainham”

Tell me he said how you managed to break out of my jail
so that I can build a better one that will not fail.

So I explained about the whistle and the gin,
the special shoes and so forth, and I threw in

the ropes made out of blankets, the false handcuffs, the vitriol,
the cunning tailored loose-cut trousers, the tobacco-pipe,
and all

to distract him from the innocent who passed down the
high wall
at my side, who is wandering the world now
transparent as the ocean, direct as the shallow flow
of tides over stones, will he make it home, or must he fall?

“On the Move”

Arthur Maximilian Woods, August 2015

The path turns right, and turns again where the sheep
spotted a sweeter tuft of grass —
it halts by bridges, under trees, it keeps going —
Arthur is ready to follow, he stands
barefoot on the cool grass. Go on, Arthur,
follow the path, walk on the grass not the gravel, until
when you look back the house has disappeared.

The window seems quite plain while he is out of view
and when he surfaces again our sight
fills up like a full glass. It's the trick of a road
emptying itself, a stage where someone's
hidden by flat forest scenery, and when the cue arrives
he passes along remote and small
until turning to meet us again, making for home —

loaded, we'll see, when he empties his pockets,
with mountains, friends, pine cones, clouds and such stuff.

“Kilmainham”

Dimmi, disse, come sei riuscito a scappare dalla mia prigione
così da costruirne una migliore, impossibile da violare

Così gli spiegai del fischio e del gin
delle scarpe speciali e così via, e ci misi dentro

le corde speciali fatte con le coperte, le false manette, il vetriolo,
i furbi pantaloni larghi, il tabacco da pipa
e tutto

per distrarlo dall'innocente che passava sotto
l'alto muro
di fianco, che sta vagando per il mondo ora
trasparente come l'oceano, diretto come il basso flusso
di maree su pietre, arriverà a casa o cadrà?

“In movimento”

Arthur Maximilian Woods, agosto 2015

Il sentiero gira a destra, e gira ancora dove le pecore
hanno scovato un ciuffo d'erba più dolce —
si ferma accanto i ponti, sotto gli alberi, e continua —
Arthur è pronto a seguire, sta
a piedi nudi sull'erba fresca. Vai Arthur,
segui il sentiero, cammina sull'erba non sulla ghiaia, sino
a quando voltandoti indietro la casa sparisce.

La finestra sembra abbastanza semplice quando non si vede
e quando lui riaffiora di nuovo alla nostra vista
si riempie come un bicchiere. È lo scherzo della strada
che si svuota, un palco dove qualcuno è
nascosto nel basso scenario della foresta, e quando arriva la battuta
procede lontano e piccolo
sinché si gira per rincontrarci, dirigendosi verso casa —

carico, lo vediamo, quando svuota le sue tasche,
di monti, amici, pigne, nuvole e roba simile.

“Resemblances”

My mother nodding down at me from her portrait
in the hall never looked so still in her lifetime,
only when she sat for Edward McGuire
who loaded her with a black coat from Kinsale.
She does look like herself though,
as Adam looked like God
but also looked like Eve.
Do I look like her? I am older now
than her age when she died.

I head upstairs and see myself,
and see my room, the books
on their shelves, all the wrong way round
rearranged in the bevelled glass of my aunt's
complicated sideboard which sits
across the landing from the study door.
Like everything that I deal with now the room
has a double, a frill of light surrounding it.

When I kill the landing light
the books are still present for a moment
in the glow from the laptop screen facing the shelves,
their new regime still briefly stamped
in the memory of mercury and glass.

“Somiglianze”

Mia madre mi fa cenno con la testa dal suo ritratto
all'ingresso, mai, mi è sembrata così immobile in vita sua,
solo quando posò per Edward McGuire
che la caricò con un mantello nero di Kinsale.
Lei assomiglia a se stessa, però,
come Adamo assomigliava a Dio
ma anche a Eva.
Le assomiglio? Sono più vecchia ora
di lei quando morì.

Mi avvio al piano di sopra e mi vedo,
e vedo la mia stanza, i libri
nei loro scaffali, tutti al contrario,
riposizionati nel vetro smussato della complicata
credenza di mia zia, che sta
di fronte sul pianerottolo
della porta dello studio.
Come ogni cosa di cui mi occupo ora la stanza
ha un suo doppio, un fremito di luce la circonda.

Quando uccido la luce del pianerottolo
i libri sono ancora presenti per un attimo
nel bagliore dello schermo del portatile di fronte gli scaffali,
il loro nuovo stato ancora brevemente fissato
nella memoria del mercurio e del vetro.

“The Blind”

1

One broken slat pulled from the blind
shows only a slice: the marbled clouds,
a world of bright sky stretching.

But she can't look out. The news,
a thread that crawls and winds, drags her
into the dark well

that widens, then pulls tighter
what is down there is heavy
and it is true. It pulls on her skin.

All of her is in here,
it is all in the rule, every stitch that
she is wearing, every minute

in the table of the day, each
close-packed piece of type
that printed her instructions.

2

After all, she looks out, a slight turn
and her cheek is against the blind, she sees
the boats are coming home, their path

curved and yielding to the current;
they scatter and cluster again, to follow
into the small harbour, one by one;

when the last one has passed under the tower
the light of evening is offered —
like a bowl that is offered, held in both hands,
the milk-white light fills
the whole wide empty bay.

“La serranda”

1

Una stecca rotta della serranda
mostra solo uno scorcio: nuvole di marmo,
un mondo di cielo luminoso si allunga.

Ma lei non può guardare fuori. Le notizie,
un filo che striscia tortuoso, la trascina
nel pozzo scuro

che si allarga, poi si restringe con forza:
ciò che sta sotto è pesante
e vero. Tira sulla sua pelle.

È là tutto di lei,
è tutto nella regola, ogni punto che
indossa, ogni minuto

nell'orario giornaliero, ogni
pezzo impacchettato di carattere
stampato nelle istruzioni.

2

Dopo tutto, guarda fuori, un breve scarto
e la sua guancia, è appoggiata alla serranda, lei vede
le barche che stanno rientrando, il loro percorso

curvo che si lascia andare alla corrente;
si sparpagliano e raggruppano ancora, per procedere
nel porticciolo, una ad una;

quando l'ultima scorre sotto la torre
la luce della sera si offre —
come ciotola si offre, tenuta con due mani,
la luce bianco-latte riempie
l'intera baia vuota.

“Allow Plenty of Time”

Can I pause, will there be time to pause
 along the way, how long will it last,
 that spell when I can't move and can't turn a page,

before facing the road? The Russians in *War and Peace*
 before the failed abduction, the smokers
 outside the slow café, watching

a slow goods train stretching itself out —
 they all do it naturally and don't need
 a tap on the glass or a church bell

to make them shiver and then
 slowly begin again.

“A Map of Convents”

For Margaret MacCurtain

Cove Lane

*... and I took in children by degrees, not to make any noise
 about it in the beginning. In about nine months I had about
 two hundred children.*

— Nano Nagle

Here is the map, with the underground streams,
 the vessels that shrug at their tether, the walled islands,
 and the fine gardens. There was another map,
 of a different place, in her head; she told nobody.

Nothing gave her away, not her clothes,
 or the clothes of her company, secular and plain,
 or the cabin in the southwest corner
 where now the playing-field is hard ground.

It was poor like the shacks and cellars
 piled together in the laneways
 that sloped up from the South Channel.
 The map of the city never showed
 those children swiftly assembling
 into a parliament of girls and boys.

“Concedimi più tempo”

Posso fermarmi, avrò tempo per fermarmi
per strada, quanto durerà,
quell’incantesimo quando non riesco a muovermi
a voltare pagina,

prima di affrontare la strada? I russi in *Guerra e pace*
prima del fallito rapimento, i fumatori
fuori il lento caffè a guardare

un lento treno merci che si allunga —
lo fanno con naturalezza a loro non serve
un tocco sul vetro o la campana di una chiesa

per farli rabbrivire e poi
lentamente ricominciare.

“Una mappa di conventi”

Per Margaret MacCurtain

Cove Lane

*...e presi I bambini un po' per volta, per non fare sapere
di loro all'inizio. In circa nove mesi avevo circa duecento bambini.*
— Nano Nagle

Ecco la mappa con i ruscelli sotterranei,
le imbarcazioni si scrollavano legate alle cime, le isole murate,
e i bei giardini. C’era un’altra mappa,
di un posto diverso, nella sua testa; non lo disse a nessuno.

Niente la tradiva, neppure i vestiti,
o gli abiti della congregazione, semplici e laici,
o il piccolo edificio all’angolo a sud-ovest
dove ora il campo da gioco è terreno compatto.

Era povero come le baracche e le cantine
accatastate nei vicoli
che risalivano dal canale a sud.
La mappa della città non ha mai mostrato
quei bimbi che velocemente si riunivano
nel parlamento delle ragazze e dei ragazzi.

Work

Try it again, says the voice. After that
a tinkling, the last piano lesson
joins up with the mutter of Latin,
the scholarship class getting a final trot
through the metrics of Horace's *Odes* —
and soon it will be all stillness indoors.

Now silence is waiting, a music from under the floor
too deep to be heard, a procession pacing
with tall faded banners that sway and swallow
the laneways' clatter and the brewery smell.
It flows like a tide, it encloses our evening.
It's as if we grew gills like fish to breathe it in deeply.

Chapel, 2014

When the rubble is piled in the chancel,
when the eye goes astray
in confusion and the light
entering by the usual window
pauses, at a loss, failing,
missing the usual gleam,
even their shadow scatters
here where they were gathered
in their full bodily presence,

but this is a house of levels
in a city of ridged hills —
the brothers asleep in the crypt
going on two centuries now,
the parlour down at street level
where the girls came for their lesson
still furnished. Empty upstairs the rooms
of those who were absent with permission,
where they studied, where they wept.

Lavoro

Riprova ancora, dice la voce. Dopo questo
 un tintinnio, l'ultima lezione di piano
 si unisce al mormorio del latino,
 la classe degli esaminandi, al trotto finale
 attraverso la metrica delle *Odi* di Orazio —
 e subito l'immobilità dominerà la casa.

Ora si attende il silenzio, una musica sotterranea
 troppo profonda da sentire, una processione in cammino
 con alti stendardi scoloriti che ondeggiavano e ingoiano
 il clamore dei vicoli e l'odore della birreria.
 Fluisce come marea, conclude la serata.
 Ed è come se avessimo branchie come pesci per respirare nel profondo.

Cappella, 2014

Quando i detriti sono accumulati nel presbiterio,
 quando l'occhio è sviato
 tra la confusione e la luce
 che entra dalla solita finestra
 si ferma, sperduto, non riuscendo,
 perdendo il solito guizzo,
 persino la loro ombra si disperde
 qui dove esse erano raccolte
 nella loro pienezza corporea,

ma questa è una casa a più livelli
 in una città con colline e crinali —
 i fratelli dormono nella cripta
 da secoli ormai,
 il parlatorio al livello della strada
 dove le ragazze venivano a lezione
 ancora ammobiliato. Vuote le stanze di sopra
 di quelle che erano assenti giustificate,
 dove studiavano, dove piangevano.

“A Roomful of Seicento Frames”

When the invaders rifled the convents
 they brought these trophies away
 and the curious may visit them, here
 in the New Wing. Not only St Catherine
 in crimson and pale blue, St. Peter Martyr,
 his head cloven, St Agatha,
 St. Margaret with her dragon, but then,
 at the side, in the little room,
 there is just a scant collection
 of empty frames, polished, ornate -
 the visitors glance in at them
 and pass along, puzzled by the display,
 these flourished shapes enclosing
 only the wall hanging, dark damask.

I might move on to the long gallery
 where the domestic scenery
 displays itself at its best,
 blond headed families grouped and mingling,
 some out of doors, their tall trees shading them,
 dandling their tailored sleeves —

but I stay on for now, alone
 with the frames, their gilded spirals
 half shaped like the ring made
 by fingers and thumbs of both hands,
 their dark-stained quotes, twisted,
 curved like the martyr's ribs; like ivy
 they shine, they clasp, but it's emptiness
 embraced. The scenes (imagine
 a triumph with captives, or a judgement
 with pillars and guards all ready) —
 the scenes are all missing, though the guarded ovals
 bleed and reek, the sliced poplar
 shifts like a hand mirror offering
 a better view of what stank worse
 than even the painters could tolerate
 in the days when the authorities
 advised them to be at their windows
 to observe execution, to capture
 the reality, to get it right.

“Una stanza piena di cornici del seicento”

Quando gli invasori svaligiarono i conventi
 portarono via questi trofei
 e i curiosi potrebbero visitarli, qui
 nell’Ala Nuova. Non solo S. Caterina
 in porpora e celeste, S. Pietro martire,
 con la testa spezzata, S. Agata,
 S. Caterina col dragone, ma poi,
 di fianco, nella stanzetta,
 c’è una scarna raccolta
 di cornici vuote, lucide, decorate —
 i visitatori vi lanciano un’occhiata
 e proseguono, disorientati da tale esposizione,
 queste forme fiorite che racchiudono
 solo lo scuro damasco appeso alla parete.

Potrei procedere verso la lunga galleria
 dove lo scenario domestico
 si mostra al suo meglio,
 famiglie dai capelli biondi si raggruppano e mescolano,
 alcune all’aperto, i loro alti alberi fanno ombra
 dondolando le loro maniche su misura—

ma rimango qui per ora, sola con le cornici, le loro spirali dorate
 formate a metà come un anello fatto
 da dita e pollici di tutte due le mani,
 i loro titoli con macchie scure, deformati,
 curvati come le costole di un martire; come l’edera
 brillano, si avvinghiano, ma è il vuoto che
 abbracciano. Le scene (immagina un trionfo di prigionieri, o un giudizio
 alla colonna e le guardie pronte) —
 mancano tutte le scene, sebbene gli ovali protetti
 sanguinino e puzzino, il pioppo reciso
 si sposta come uno specchietto offrendo
 una vista migliore di ciò che puzzava di più
 che persino i pittori potessero tollerare
 in quei giorni quando le autorità
 li avvertivano di affacciarsi alla finestra
 per osservare le esecuzioni, per catturare
 il vero, per farlo bene.

“The Small Museum”

Enormous in the low crypt
 (and even taller winged attendants
 are offstage pressing to get inside)
 the alien vested saints have
 waited to manifest, they pounce
 and lift up the despicable body,
 they place it at the centre, the point
 where order meets disaster.

We need to be here, our signatures
 (which not many will read) must populate
 the lower margin, while
 on an upper floor of the universe
 the man, gigantic and bare, embraces light,
 seeks brighter light, ignores the mob
 as if he had met us in his own house,
 naked at dawn, and we shrink seeing him
 since the rising sun and shadows make him
 tall as the judge on the day of anger.

“Sister Marina”

‘Was there no drama in their lives?’
 Once, it was almost Passiontide
 and in Lent of course no letters arrived —
 people knew better than to write.
 So, when a letter landed postmarked Lancaster
 for Sister Marina, Reverend Mother
 opened and read it and went to find her
 just leaving an empty classroom. She closed the door
 and handed over the letter. Reverend Mother
 was by two years the younger;
 now for the first time in her life she saw
 a face dragged backwards, dragged down, and how
 pain and fear come first, and only about
 two seconds later the beginning of thought
 weighing down on the heart. She saw the brother’s wife,
 the brother grim-faced as ever, the sick child
 as they printed on the other woman’s mind,
 as plainly as if a light had flickered
 and lit them up in a screened picture.
 Nothing that happened after so clearly displayed
 how the body is all summed up in a face,
 in a flaw - how knowledge travels all the way
 down through a body and burns into the floor.
 That was drama, she thinks, and hopes for no more.

“Il piccolo museo”

Enormi nella cripta bassa
 (e persino i più alti assistenti alati
 sono fuori scena spingendo per entrare)
 i santi con paramenti alieni, hanno
 atteso per manifestarsi, sobbalzano
 e sollevano lo spregevole corpo,
 lo pongono al centro, nel punto
 in cui l'ordine incontra il disastro.

E' necessario essere qui, le nostre firme
 (che non molti leggeranno) devono popolare
 il margine inferiore, dove
 su un piano superiore dell'universo
 l'uomo, gigante nudo, abbraccia la luce,
 cerca la luce più brillante, ignora la folla
 come se ci avesse incontrato a casa sua,
 nudo all'alba, e noi ci ritraiamo vedendolo
 dal momento che il sole nascente e le ombre lo mostrano
 alto come il giudice nel giorno della rabbia.

“Suor Marina”

‘Non c'era dramma nelle loro vite?’
 Una volta, era quasi periodo della Passione
 e nella quaresima naturalmente non arrivavano lettere —
 le persone sapevano che era meglio non scrivere.
 Così, quando arrivò una lettera postata in Lancaster
 per Suor Marina, la Reverenda Madre
 la aprì, la lesse e andò a trovarla
 appena lasciata una classe vuota. Chiuse la porta
 e le porse la lettera. La Reverenda Madre
 era due anni più giovane;
 ora per la prima volta in vita sua vide
 un viso teso, stanco e quanta
 pena e paura inizialmente la afferrarono, e solo
 circa dopo due secondi l'inizio di un pensiero
 che pesava sul suo il cuore. Vide la moglie
 e il viso cupo del fratello
 come sempre, il bimbo malato
 che si fissavano nella mente dell'altra donna,
 così semplicemente come se la luce tremolante
 li avesse illuminati su uno schermo.
 Niente che successe dopo mostrò così chiaramente come il corpo
 è tutto sintetizzato in un volto,
 in una tempesta — come la conoscenza viaggia attraverso
 un corpo e brucia sul pavimento.
 Quello è un vero dramma, pensa, e spera mai più.

“To the Mother House”

1

The tender heaved on its way across,
the liner floated grand in the harbour, and the girls
afraid of looking back picked out a porthole
and stared and waited for this parting to be over.

There was a war coming, there was work. The young ones
would never see a soldier, only smile
at meagre faces in the alpine sanatorium.
They nursed the miners hammered in the pit,
learning their obstinate love, meeting the mistress
who came after a death with a cushion
to go in the coffin, embroidered with *Bébé*.
The older nun lived through Belsen, sent there
after hiding a crashed airman in the laundry.

2

Sister Clara, Sister Antony, meeting a niece
in the quiet convent garden in Desvres,
are overheard reminiscing, always in French,
about the first convent on the hill of Cork
and its precious holdings, The Penal Chalice,
the letters from an Italian priest (it's hoped
soon to be beatified), the foundress's diaries,

and all that was sent from the mother house: wine and brandy,
lace, the little medals blessed and certified
in Rome, in the Holy Year. A relic of the True Cross
in its gold box, a fine linen all embroidered
in Portugal by a novice. Marble for the shrine.

The marble is there still, under the altar.
The mule-driver's curses, the rattling ass and the cart
leave no sign on the stone; it sucks in meaning.

Marble is perfect, how it shows the bones
inside the skin, the folds in the light shroud,
and the trailing strands of hair.

“Alla casa madre”

1

Il battello si sollevava con fatica durante la traversata,
il transatlantico fluttuava imponente nel porto, e le ragazze
spaventate di voltarsi indietro scelsero un oblò
e fissarono lo sguardo attendendo la fine del distacco.

Una guerra era in vista, c'era lavoro da fare. Le giovani
non avrebbero mai visto un soldato, solo sorriso
a visi consunti in un sanatorio alpino.

Curavano i minatori feriti nel pozzo,
imparando a conoscere il loro amore ostinato, incontrando
l'amante che veniva dopo la morte con un cuscino
per la bara, ricamato con *Bébé*.
La suora più anziana passò attraverso Belsen, mandata lì
dopo aver nascosto nella lavanderia un aviatore schiantato al suolo.

2

Suor Clara, Suor Antonia, che incontrano una nipote
nel giardino tranquillo del convento a Desvres,
stanno ricordando, sentite di sfuggita, sempre in francese
il loro primo convento sulle colline di Cork
e i suoi preziosi averi, il Calice Penale,
le lettere di un prete italiano (si spera da
beatificare subito), i diari della fondatrice,

e tutto ciò che fu spedito dalla casa madre: vino e brandy,
pizzo, e medagliette benedette e certificati
a Roma nell'Anno Santo. Una reliquia della Vera Croce
nella sua cassetta d'oro, una delicata alba ricamata
in Portogallo da una novizia, marmo per il tabernacolo.

Il marmo è ancora lì, sotto l'altare.
Le maledizioni del mulattiere, il rantolante asino e il carretto
non lasciano segno sulla pietra; toglie il significato.

Il marmo è perfetto per mostrare le ossa
nella pelle, le pieghe nel leggero sudario,
e le trascinati ciocche di capelli.

“Work”

The oldest of all the sisters has to string
 little pink beads on the edges of *Agnus Deis*.
 She has a basket of the silk badges
 and she gets through the heap while she thinks
 about prayers and her life. But can she be sure?
 What did the sister say only just now,

I hadn't felt that way since...1946...
 and wasn't it later than that, the move
 to this house from the old convent?
 If she wasn't so stiff she would walk herself,
 leaning on her stick up as far as the graveyard,
 and check the dates on all of the early crosses.

“The Faces”

1. Woman in a Traffic Jam

I still see the woman, a drowned
 face rising up out of a wave,
 time combing back strands of her hair.

I see her now just as clearly
 as when we travelled beside her;
 the man was raging at the wheel

as in forty minutes we moved
 and passed again in jammed traffic;
 she had her knitting out, her face

never altered. A mile ahead
 some disaster made a headline;
 sometimes we inched forward, sometimes

they slid ahead by a few yards.
 It was like history, held there
 in view of another lifetime:

we climbed the cogged wheel of our age,
 our century, side by slow side.

“Lavoro”

La più anziana delle suore ha da infilare
piccole perline rosa ai lati dell'*Agnus Dei*.
Ha un cestino di coccarde di seta
e arriva alla fine del mucchio mentre pensa
alle preghiere e alla sua vita. Ma può essere sicura?
Cosa ha appena detto la suora?

Non mi sono sentita così dal...1946...
e non fu dopo, allora, il trasferimento
in questa casa dal vecchio convento?
Se non fosse così irrigidita ci andrebbe lei stessa,
a piedi, appoggiata al bastone su sino al cimitero,
a controllare le date su tutte le vecchie croci?

“Facce”

1. Donna in un ingorgo

Vedo ancora la donna, un viso
affogato che esce fuori dall'onda,
il tempo pettina all'indietro ciocche dei suoi capelli.

La vedo ora proprio chiaramente
come quando viaggiavamo accanto a lei;
l'uomo al volante si infuriava

e come in quaranta minuti ci siamo mossi
e fermati di nuovo nell'ingorgo;
con fuori il suo lavoro a maglia, il suo volto

mai mutato. Dopo un miglio
il disastro divenne titolo di prima pagina;
a volte ci faceva camminare centimetro per centimetro, a volte

scivolavano avanti di qualche metro.
Era come nella storia, trattenuti lì
in vista di un'altra vita:

ci arrampicavamo su per la ruota dentata della nostra età
il nostro secolo, fianco a fianco lentamente.

2. *The Cobbler of Spilimbergo*

So through a thickened lens of time
I see clear over centuries
Domenico the cobbler,
his face a metaphor, like her

actual face, held still. He owned
these three books: *The Decameron*,
Orlando Furioso and

a vernacular *Testament*,
and when the inquisitors came
and confiscated all of them

he swore *I'll never read again*.
I see his eyes they are searching
for words vanished, the wave of time

sweeping over him with headlines
he cannot read, gripped in traffic,
his fate redacted, his eyes blank.

“The Bookshelves”

These are our cliffs, where we hang, grope and slide.
Why should there be a path upwards among such casual
stacks? Somebody shelved them size by size
but still they signal throbbing on shadow types.
Their lightning blazes like a faraway headlight
bound firmly elsewhere. Most times
it's the finger tucked in the big dictionary that leads
onward (as if under submerged voussoirs, along
damp paving to the ancient reservoir) to tell us
that the jumping flashes on the rockface were the codes
for a name that we could never have otherwise known.

2. *Il ciabattino di Spilimbergo*

Così attraverso una spessa lente del tempo
vedo chiaro oltre i secoli
Domenico, il ciabattino,
il suo viso una metafora, come la sua

vera faccia, tenuta ferma. Possedeva
questi tre libri: *Il Decameron*,
L'Orlando furioso e

un *Testamento* in vernacolo,
e quando gli inquisitori vennero
e li confiscarono tutti

giurò *non leggerò più*.
Vedo i suoi occhi cercare
parole svanite, l'onda del tempo

lo travolge con titoli che
non riesce a leggere, stretto nel traffico
il suo fato redatto, lo sguardo vuoto.

“Gli scaffali di libri”

Queste sono le nostre rupi, su cui ci appendiamo, andiamo a tentoni e scivoliamo.
Perché dovrebbe esserci un sentiero che va su tra quelle casuali
pile? Qualcuno li ha posti in scaffali per grandezza
ma ancora mandano segnali palpitando su caratteri scuri.
Il loro illuminarsi si accende come un faro in lontananza
ben fermo da un'altra parte. Il più delle volte
è il dito ficcato nel grande dizionario che porta
avanti (come sotto concetti sommersi, lungo
umida pavimentazione verso un'antica cisterna) per dirci
che gli intermittenti flash sulla parete rocciosa erano codici
di un nome che non avremmo, altrimenti, mai saputo.

“Monsters”

Now that there's nothing I don't understand,
 why do they come to me with their informations?
 They come in my dreams with their highlighting pens,
 they tell me the roman numerals
 on the shelf-end panels in the cathedral library
 have all been regilded, someone has worked
 with agate and crows' feathers to raise
 gold flourishes and leaf script capitals. Show us,
 they ask, the book that opens like a curtain;
 and I tell them about the day I met
 Ovid in the street, and he passed me
 without a greeting.

He had just thought
 of the words that made the shrouds and tackling
 swell with small buds, then looping stems,
 then five-pointed leaves of ivy
 catching, clutching the oars.

When I read it again myself I can see the oarsmen
 frozen at their work, the sleepy drunk youngster
 they were planning to sell, who wept
 when tied his hands, all of a sudden in charge,
 his forehead ornate with grapes —
 he is balanced on delicate sandals,
 watching how they change, their spines
 curve, they dance in the waves, each man
 a monster to his neighbour.

“The Capture”

1

First, I need help to make the frame, with wings
 and a nose and a tail fin,
 room for those thick-furred beasts
 if they scramble up or settle out of the air,
 and a crack to harbour seeds for a trail of leaves,

so when I leap away the horizon swings
 in the far distance, the hills
 are floating like smoke, the fields
 and the valley exposed, then diving, the plane
 flashing, and in every hollow under the leaves

a life huddles listening for a note that stings
 music into life, a song that jumps, that grieves.

“Mostri”

Ora che non c'è niente che non capisco,
 perché vengono da me con le loro informazioni?
 Vengono in sogno con i loro evidenziatori,
 mi raccontano che i numeri romani
 su pannelli alla fine dello scaffale nella biblioteca della cattedrale
 sono stati riindorati, qualcuno ha lavorato
 con agata e penne di corvo per sollevare
 il florilegio e i capilettera con foglia d'oro. Mostraci,
 chiedono, il libro che si apre come una tenda;
 e dico loro del giorno in cui ho incontrato
 Ovidio per strada che mi oltrepassò
 senza un saluto.

Aveva proprio pensato
 alle parole che fecero gonfiare le cime e le sartie
 con piccoli boccioli, steli cadenti
 poi foglie di edera a cinque punte
 che ghermivano e avvolgevano i remi.

Quando lo rileggo io stessa, vedo i rematori
 bloccati al lavoro, il giovane assonnato, ubriaco, che
 stavano programmando di vendere, che pianse
 quando gli legarono le mani, improvvisamente carichi,
 la fronte adorna di grappoli —
 lui è bilanciato su sandali delicati,
 osservando come cambiano i loro dorsi
 curvi, danzando nelle onde, ognuno
 un mostro per il suo vicino.

“La cattura “

1

Primo, ho bisogno di aiuto per incominciare, con ali
 e un naso e una coda-piuma, spazio per quelle bestie con pelo spesso
 se balzano su o si stabiliscono fuori dell'aria,
 e una fessura per accogliere semi per una scia di foglie,

così quando salto via l'orizzonte oscilla
 in lontananza, le colline
 stanno fluttuando come fumo, i campi
 e la valle esposti, poi si tuffano, l'aereo che
 lampeggia, e in ogni cavità sotto le foglie

una vita si raccoglie ascoltando una nota che spinge
 la musica nella vita, una canzone che risuona, che soffre.

2

Except that I am not the earth but a late map of this earth,
 its edges tackling me down, don't expect me
 to race again. The yearly bands of children
 at school under the hedges are memorizing
 their alphabets and fluxions and the distances
 grow longer with every name called on the roll.

I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink
 as there's no room left in the passages of my brain
 for every conversation between the slug and the leaf,

yet if I follow the slow air where it spreads tracking
 the labouring boats across the oceans,
 where it knocks at every door and pushes inside,
 where it winds along roads in France beside
 the daughters leaving home to serve strangers,
 the sons in foreign fields, the one holding
 King Louis' hand on the scaffold as he prays,
 the earth recedes.

Can they all be crammed and keyed, 'the Irish race
 through history', which terms do we lack, to hold
 that frame together, and how can we see anything
 without the frame?

If I am a screen flickering
 between the four hand painted provinces
 and the bricks and timber,
 this roof that shelters me,

I should find the bits of the frame,
 I should walk around them to see if
 they could be matched awry, to a different plan,
 then try if can persuade them
 to limp back over the hedges, and
 if then I'll feel the weight of the beasts
 as they settle again along the mismatched wings.

2

Tranne che io non sia la terra ma una vecchia mappa di questa terra,
 i cui i bordi mi fissano con le puntine, non aspettatevi
 che gareggi ancora. Le bande annuali di bambini
 a scuola sotto i cespugli stanno memorizzando
 i loro alfabeti e flussi temporali e le distanze
 si allungano con ogni nome chiamato all'appello.

Io potrei eclissarmi e avvolgermi in una nuvola in un battito di ciglia.
 perché non c'è più spazio nei passaggi del mio cervello
 per ogni conversazione tra la chiocciola e la foglia,

tuttavia se seguo l'aria lenta dove si diffonde rintracciando
 le barche indaffarate attraverso gli oceani,
 dove bussa ad ogni porta e spinge dentro,
 dove si dipana lungo strade in Francia oltre
 le figlie che lasciano casa per servire stranieri,
 figli in campi stranieri, uno che tiene
 la mano di Re Luigi sul patibolo mentre prega,
 la terra arretra.

Possono essere tutti ammassati e codificati, 'la razza irlandese
 attraverso la storia', quali termini ci mancano,
 per tenere insieme quella cornice,
 e come possiamo vedere qualcosa
 senza cornice?

Se io sono schermo lampeggiante
 tra le quattro province dipinte a mano,
 e i mattoni e il legno,
 questo tetto che mi da rifugio,

dovrei trovare pezzi della cornice,
 dovrei camminare lì intorno per vedere se
 possono essere male assortiti, con un piano diverso,
 poi tentare se posso persuaderli
 a saltare indietro oltre i bordi e
 se poi sentirò il peso delle bestie
 quando si preparano ancora con le ali scompagnate.

“Space”

She has looked for a space, empty so she can grow,
and three dimensions seemed enough. The room
contains her, the white ceramic tiles visible
beyond the archway where the low door thrown open
swings: all is void, and the packed stuff
menacing, her for months in toppling stacks
is cleared and abandoned

—just

then without warning
down on the river
the ship that lay moored
for three whole days, its
temporary lights,
empty decks shining,
begins its journey
again, silently,
stiffly almost, down
to where the river
spreads wide and smooth
open to the tides
and slips off —smaller —
out on the channel.

“Spazio”

Ha cercato uno spazio, vuoto così potrà crescere,
e tre dimensioni sono sembrate abbastanza. La stanza
la contiene, le bianche mattonelle di ceramica visibili
oltre l'arco dove la porta bassa aperta
oscilla: tutto è vuoto, e la roba impacchettata
che la minaccia da mesi in rotolanti mucchi
è tolta e abbandonata

—proprio

allora senza preavviso
giù per il fiume
la nave attraccata
da tre interi giorni,
le sue luci temporanee,
i luminosi ponti deserti,
inizia il suo viaggio,
di nuovo, in silenzio,
con fermezza, quasi, giù
sin dove il fiume si dispiega
ampio e liscio
apre le maree
e scivola via – più piccolo –
fuori nel canale.

“Vista”

Ora che il traffico si ferma, *ora*,
 aiutami ad arrampicarmi sul tavolo,
 poi una gamba su verso il davanzale,
 e poi la girerò, il ginocchio destro
 freddo contro i tubi di rame
 per guardare la vista. Se qualcuno guarda
 può vedere lo strappo nella mia calza,
 ma il vedere —

proprio dentro la stanza
 attraverso l’alcova dove il ritratto
 soleva stare. Così tanto tempo,
 e quando il vento smette di soffiare
 la tenda di traverso riesco a vedere
 la forma del muro. È una linea di polvere
 contro il pallido verde-blu.

Almeno questo è vero: il ritratto è sparito.
 Era una donna, gli occhi
 che chiaramente riflettevano un’immagine rimpicciolita
 San Sebastiano preso,
 legato, un martire. Una volta, occupava
 l’intero muro, l’alto spazio
 dietro l’altare —

ora
 quando guardo nei suoi occhi, lo vedo,
 il pilastro rovinato, le pietre antiche,
 il suo elegante corpo torto,
 i suoi occhi impazienti lo fanno restringere
 come la linea di polvere
 mi chiama per vederla, ora, sull’ombroso
 muro pallido verde-blu.

“The Raging Foam”
For Leland Bardwell (February 1922-June 2016)

1

Everything is late after an awful spring,
 the morning sun, floating among clouds
 when it ought to be shining between those two tall trees,
 the fresh blue flower that should be here
 to catch the light, making the minute real,
 not open yet: they miss their yearly meeting.
 I hear the news of her death and I wonder,
 the seat behind her house that was a suntrap,
 right by the sea, the waves
 splashing and foaming on the rocks below,
 is the sun late there, is there only shade?

2

The foam breaks and withdraws.
 It's a scatter of moments remembered,
 my life, her life; and I gather them all up,
 old scenes that are broken rumours
 thrown high by the waves
 (the horses swimming to the pier,
 the baby in her cradle tossed
 into the waiting currach). A segment
 I recognize, the foam
soapy water under a boat's side;

and looking down now in the profound
 bay of memory, trying to guess how deep,
 I see her in a ladylike tweed coat placing
 black spectacles to read in a clear
 ladylike voice, the night Patrick Kavanagh died:
*Walk on serenely, do not mind
 That Promised Land you thought to find...*

“Schiuma scatenata”

Per Leland Bardwell (February 1922-June 2016)

1

Ogni cosa è in ritardo dopo un'orrenda primavera,
 il sole del mattino, flutuante tra le nuvole
 quando dovrebbe splendere tra quei due alti alberi,
 il fresco fiore blu che dovrebbe essere qui
 per catturare la luce, rendendo il bocciolo, non
 ancora aperto, vero: gli manca l'incontro di ogni anno.
 Sento la notizia della sua morte e mi chiedo,
 il sedile dietro la sua casa era una trappola per il sole
 proprio vicino al mare, le onde
 si abbattevano schiumanti sulle rocce, sotto,
 il sole è in ritardo lì? C'è soltanto ombra?

2

La schiuma si rompe e si ritira.
 È un frantumarsi di momenti, ricordi,
 la mia vita, la sua vita; e li raccolgo,
 vecchie scene che sono spezzate dicerie
 lanciate in alto dalle onde
 (i cavalli che nuotavano al molo,
 la bimba nella culla lanciata
 nel currach in attesa). Un segmento
 lo riconosco, la schiuma
acqua saponosa sotto il lato della barca;

e guardando giù ora nella profonda
 baia della memoria, cercando di capire, quanto profonda,
 la vedo nel suo cappotto di tweed da signora
 mettersi gli occhiali per leggere con una voce chiara
 da signora, la notte che Patrick Kavanagh morì:
*Cammina serenamente, non far caso
 alla Terra Promessa che credevi di trovare...*

3

I know the date Kavanagh died, I know the date
 In two-thousand-and-thirteen we lost her
 on the train to Cork and found her again on the station
 walking on serenely accompanied
 by the remote jingling of the keys
 of all her houses, the voices of all the strays
 remembering the floors they slept on,
 the unhooking in the small hours.

4

And even in the late nights
 when the house was full already,
 they dragged it out, the *Raging Foam*
 for the last of the latchicoes with no home to go to.

5

The wild girl in Leixlip, the mother in London,
 her children dancing half-naked in summer
 on Karl Marx's grave, the woman I rode out with
 in the Phoenix Park on the little polo ponies,
 which was later than some palaces and before so many
 others —
 I remember, or she told me, or someone had the story,
 but as the sea rises up to flood the pools between rocks
 making one shining surface of rising water
 where all the reflected lights floating shine together,
 they carry the glint of all the colours,
 the headstalls of horses, the written pages and her face:
 they are there with scraps and overnight guests and
 children
 claiming, allowing no precedence, only the black cat
 crouches on its dry shelf of time, the last of a dynasty
 of kittens.

3

Conosco la data in cui Kavanagh morì, conosco la data
 nel duemila e tredici quando l'abbiamo persa
 sul treno per Cork e la ritrovammo alla stazione
che camminava serenamente accompagnata
 dal tintinnio delle chiavi
 di tutte le sue case, le voci di tutti i vagabondi
 che ricordano i pavimenti dove hanno dormito,
 lo sbottonarsi nelle ore piccole.

4

E persino nelle tarde notti
 quando la casa era già piena,
 la trascinarono fuori, la *Schiuma Scatenata*
 per l'ultimo dei violenti vagabondi senza casa dove andare.

5

La ragazza selvaggia a Leixlip, la madre a Londra,
 i suoi figli che ballavano mezzi nudi in estate
 sulla tomba di Karl Marx, la donna con cui sono andata a cavallo
 a Phoenix Park sui piccoli pony da polo,
 che fu dopo alcuni luoghi e prima di così tanti
 altri —
 Ricordo, o lei mi disse, o qualcuno conosceva la storia,
 ma mentre il mare cresce per allagare le pozze tra le rocce
 facendo una lucida superficie di acqua montante
 dove tutte le luci riflesse fluttuanti risplendono,
 portano il luccichio di tutti i colori,
 le testiere dei cavalli, le pagine scritte e il suo viso:
 sono lì con frammenti, ospiti notturni
 e bambini
 che né pretendevano, né davano precedenza, solo il gatto nero
 si accuccia sul suo scaffale del tempo, l'ultimo di una dinastia
 di gattini.

“Fastnet”

The winds go past, and the waves,
 they forget where they were aiming
 like a mind whose door is blown open
 by another life imagined,
If only, forgetting the present:
Oh, any time, not now, anywhere
but not here, and the storm
 sticks to us, a tall shadow marching
 beside us, big as a darkening cloud —

no way of slowing down,
 another life compelling,
 and the wind is a Gothic parade
 with faces like Castlereagh
 seven bloodhounds beside him
 panting for wider carnage,
 faces that zoom and then pull back
 and each of the serial lives is
 plunged and then dragged to the surface.

Only the man that minds the light,
 watching the great revolving spokes
 hitting the piled castles of spray,
 can say, trapped, not able to save,
This is life, I am living it now,
here, and the rock answers him back
 as they wait for the storm to change its key,
It is yours, yours alone, you are living it here.

“Fastnet”

I venti vanno oltre e le onde,
 dimenticano dove si stavano dirigendo
 come una mente la cui porta è spalancata
 da un'altra vita immaginata,
Se solo, dimenticando il presente:
Oh, in qualsiasi momento, non ora, ovunque
ma non qui, e la tempesta
 ci si incolla addosso, un'alta ombra che ci
 marcia accanto, grande come una nuvola che si oscura —

nessun modo per rallentare,
 un'altra vita irresistibile,
 e il vento è una parata gotica
 con volti come i sette segugi di Castlereagh
 accanto a lui, ansanti per un grande massacro,
 volti che si avvicinano e poi si ritraggono
 e ognuno di loro vive, è
 sommerso e poi trascinato in superficie.

Solo l'uomo che si occupa della luce,
 osservando i grandi raggi rotanti
 che colpiscono i mucchi di castelli di spruzzi,
 può dire, intrappolato, incapace di salvare,
Questa è vita, la sto vivendo ora,
qui, e la roccia gli risponde
 mentre aspettano che la bufera cambi il suo tono,
È tua, solo tua, tu la stai vivendo qui.

“An Informant”

When I asked her about the fate of the mission ship
sent away so many years ago
(and we knew then they'd be lucky to make land)
I could see she knew. She couldn't stop talking,
but her words sounded foreign.
I heard her sigh at last, taking off her gloves,
then silently picking up one of the lamps,
and she moved to the front door.
It was stiff, it hadn't been opened
since the last visit of the Vicar Forane,
but we found the key and pulled it wide.
She laid the lamp down in the doorway
and looked along the broad walk, to the gate
that is a roofed arch, with an alcove
intended for laying down a coffin,
so the bearers could take a rest. Sighing,
lifting the lamp, she carried it down there,
and I understood the words she used,
and what she wanted, for the action
to be complete. That we would leave it
there in the archway until the oil was spent
and the lamp died of its own accord.

The flame that had flickered pale in the daylight
shone steadily in the deep shade of the arch.
This is the short from, she said, we must
do this at least. This much we owe their names.

“L' informatore”

Quando le chiesi del fato della nave in missione
Spedita via così tanti anni fa
(sapevamo allora che saremmo stati fortunati a toccare terra)
mi accorgevo che sapeva. Non riusciva a smettere di parlare,
ma le sue parole suonavano estranee.
La sentii sospirare alla fine, togliendosi i guanti,
poi in silenzio, raccogliendo una delle lampade
lei si mosse verso la porta di casa.
Era rigida, non era stata aperta
dall'ultima visita del Vicario di Forane,
ma trovammo la chiave e l'aprimmo.
Lei posò la lampada sulla soglia spalancata
e guardammo lungo l'ampia via, verso il cancello
che è un arco con tetto, con un'alcova
intesa per deporvi una bara,
cosicché i portatori potessero riposarsi. Sospirando,
sollevando la lampada, la portò laggiù
e capì le parole che usava,
e ciò che voleva, perché l'azione
fosse completa, l'avremmo lasciata lì
nell'arco sinché l'olio fosse consumato
e la lampada morisse spontaneamente.

La fiamma tremolante che ha pallida luce
brillò costantemente nella profonda ombra dell'arco.
Questa è una forma breve, lei disse, noi dobbiamo
fare almeno questo. Tutto questo dobbiamo ai loro nomi.

“The Morandi Bridge”

Let me lean my cheek against this limestone pillar —
I want to press until I feel the buzzing,
the sound the world makes when it isn't going
anywhere, a purr of grey transparent wings

hovering in one place. A humming to itself
because it needs to lie still, stay quiet and
recover, and who will bring help?

The noise
when the bridge fell down in Genova —the road

you and I drove along slowly, heading east
behind a small Fiat, packed and weighed down
with people, cake and flowers for a mother-in-law
that made a Sunday lunch; they were taking their time —

it was lunchtime again each year when we reached the bridge,
and the families were always on the move,
so we'd drive along slowly, those fifteen minutes
high up over the factories and streets —

I would tell you this news if the stones of the world
could carry language, but after eight months, the shock
and the noise inside them still, they cannot move
or even allow a message to pass through.

April 2019

“Il ponte Morandi”

Fammi appoggiare la guancia contro il pilastro di calcare —
la voglio pressare finché sento il ronzio,
il suono che fa il mondo quando non sta andando
da nessuna parte, un ronzio di grigie ali

che si librano in un posto. Un mormorio per se stesso
perché serve per stare tranquillo,
stare in silenzio e guarire, e chi porterà aiuto?

Il rumore
quando il ponte cadde a Genova —la strada

tu ed io guidavamo lentamente, verso est
dietro una piccola Fiat, impacchettata e appesantita
con persone, torta e fiori per la suocera
che faceva il pranzo della domenica,
stavano andando lentamente prendendo il loro tempo —

era sempre ora di pranzo quando
raggiungevamo il ponte,
e le famiglie erano in movimento,
così noi guidavamo lentamente, quei quindici minuti
sopra le fabbriche e le strade —

gli volevo raccontare questa notizia
se le pietre del mondo potessero veicolare il linguaggio,
ma dopo otto mesi lo shock
e il rumore lì dentro ancora, non possono muoversi
o persino permettere che un messaggio arrivi.

aprile 2019

CODA

“Ag Stánadh Amach”

Agus í ag stánadh amach, ina seasamh san áit sin, ag stánadh ag féachaint amach trí fhuinneog ard thuas staighre. An staighre ard deas caol, agus cairpéad uaithne air. Agus cad a chonaic sí ach slua mór daoine, ach nárbh fhéidir léi iad a fheiscint go cruinn soiléir mar gheall ar an sneachta a bhí ag titim le fada.

Cén fáth gur tháinig na focail sin ar ais chuici, focail na mná feasa?

Fear agus ualach mór á iompar aige go tuathalach, bean á leanúint, páiste ar a droim agus páiste eile ina lámh aici, cailín óg ag rith lena cois. Seandaoine ag luí siar fágtha ar deireadh. Agus an sneachta ag titim anuas gan stad, ag súrac gach imire óna mbalcaisí, iad ag cosaint a gceann is a n-aghaidh ar an ngaoth chomh maith agus ab fhéidir leo, ionas nach n-aithneofaí iad.

Aon bhábóg amháin ina lámh ag cailín beag, gúna bán uirthi agus ribín dearg. Cén fáth gur thugadar ribín dearg di, an tuar fola é sin?

Na daoine ag triall thart gan cabhair a fháil ó éinne, agus an oíche ag luathú. Iad beagnach dofheicthe ach bhí a fhios aici go rabhadar ann fós agus slua eile á leanúint. D’fhan sí ag an bhfuinneog go dtí gur éirigh an ghealach agus chonaic sí an taobh tíre: folamh, bán, sleamhain snasta. Bhí an ghaoth ina tost agus mar sin chuala sí na saighdiúirí i bhfad sar a tháingadar i láthair. Fuaim na leoraithe i bhfad, ag brostú ar an áit, ag brostú i dtreo di.

Ach níor leagadar lámh uirthi, bhí sí socair sábháilte thuas staighre. Fiú níor tharraing sí an cuirtín, níor mhúch an solas. D’fhan sí ann agus a gúna corcra agus an cairpéad uaithne ag lonrú amach. Nuair a d’imigh siad d’fhágadar a rian ar an sneachta, agus ansan do thosnaigh an sneachta arís agus chlédaigh an lorg.

Cén fáth gur tháinig focail na mná sin ar ais chuici? *At chiu forderg, at chiu rúad.* Nuair a tháinig Fedelm chun eolas a thabhairt don bhanríon faoi na rudaí a bhí le teacht, labhair sí as a carbad, is d’éist an bhanríon ina carbad féin. Ar an leibhéal céanna. Iad gléasta mar an gcéanna, éadaí ildathacha orthu araon. Ach mise, dúirt sí ina haighe féin, anseo mar atáim, socair sábháilte thuas staighre, ní fheicim ach an méid atá os mo chomhair, san aimsir láithreach. Nach leor san d’aon duine amháin?

Loinnir frithchaite ón sneachta á soilsiú.

“Gazing out”

As she gazed out, standing upright in that place, gazing looking out of a high upstairs window. Fine high narrow stairs, a green carpet. Then what did she see only a great host of people, only that she could not see them clearly because of the snow that had been falling for ages.

Why did the words come back to her, the words of the wise woman?

A man awkwardly carrying a big bundle, a woman following him, a child on her back and another held by the hand, a young girl running at her side. Old people at the back, left behind. The snow ceaselessly falling, leaching every tinge from their old clothes, they shielded their heads and their faces as well as they could against the wind, in the hope of not being recognized.

A little girl holding a single doll, a white dress on her, a red ribbon.

Why did they give her a red ribbon, does that stand for blood?

The people passing along without help from anyone, night coming on. Almost invisible but she knew they were still there and another host following them. She stayed at the window until the moon rose and she

saw the countryside empty, white, smooth, clean. The wind had fallen silent and so she heard the soldiers long before they came. Noise of lorries far away, hurrying to the place, hurrying towards her.

But they did not lay a hand on her, she was safe and sound upstairs. She did not draw the curtain or put on the light. She stayed there, her purple dress and the green carpet shining out. When they were gone they left their track on the snow, and then it started to snow again and covered the traces.

Why did that woman's words come back to her? *I see them crimson, I see them red.* When Fedelm came to tell the queen what she foresaw, she spoke from her chariot, and the queen listened from over her chariot. On the same level. They were dressed similarly. Both dressed in many colors. But, said she to herself in her own mind, from this place I'm in, safe and sound, I can only see what is in front of me, in the present. Is that not enough for a single person?

The reflected light from the snow shining on her.

“Guardando fuori”

Mentre guardava fuori, in piedi in quel posto, guardando fuori da una finestra sulle scale lassù. Belle alte strette scale, un tappeto verde. Poi cosa vide solo una grande schiera di persone, solo che non riusciva a vederle bene per la neve che era caduta a lungo.

Perché quelle parole riecheggiarono per lei, le parole di una profetessa?

Un uomo che stava faticosamente portando un grosso involto, una donna che lo stava seguendo, un bimbo sulle spalle e un altro tenuto per mano, una ragazzina che le correva a fianco. Persone anziane sul retro, lasciate indietro. La neve che cadeva incessantemente, imbiancando ogni sfumatura dei loro vecchi abiti, proteggevano le loro teste e visi meglio che potevano contro il vento, nella speranza di non essere riconosciuti.

Una ragazzina teneva una sola bambola, con un vestito bianco, un fiocco rosso.

Perché le diedero un fiocco rosso era per significare il sangue?

Le persone passavano senza che nessuno le aiutasse, la notte incombente. Quasi invisibili, ma lei sapeva che erano lì e un'altra schiera dopo di loro. Stette alla finestra finché non sorse la luna e vide la campagna vuota, bianca e liscia, pulita. Il vento era diventato silente e così sentì i soldati molto prima che arrivassero. Rumore di camion in lontananza, che si affrettavano verso quel luogo, si affrettavano verso di lei.

Ma non posero una mano su di lei, era salva e sicura su per le scale. Non tirò le tende né spense la luce. Stette lì, col suo vestito porpora e il tappeto verde brillante. Quando andarono via lasciarono una traccia sulla neve, e poi ricominciò a nevicare e coprì le tracce.

Perché le parole di quella donna riecheggiarono per lei? *Io li vedo vermigli, li vedo rossi.* Quando Fedelm venne a dire alla regina quello che prevedeva, parlò dal suo carro, e la regina la ascoltò dal suo carro. Allo stesso livello. Erano vestite in modo simile. Ambedue vestite con molti colori. Ma, disse a se stessa nella sua mente, da questo posto in cui sono, sana e salva su per le scale, posso solo vedere ciò che mi sta di fronte, ora. Non è abbastanza per una sola persona?

La luce riflessa dalla neve brillava su di lei.

“An Crann”

An teach a d'fhágamar i naoi déag dathad is a naoi —
 —Agus gan fhios ag éinne fós cé mhéad páiste
 Atá tar éis fás suas ins an áit chéanna ó shin —
 —Maireann an crann a chuir m'athair ann,
 Ach cad a tharla don gcasán suiminte a leag seisean,
 Rud a theaspáin dom conas a thriomaíonn an tsoimint féin ngaoth?
 Is ann a d'fhoghlamas conas mar a bhíonn an saol
 Idir mhnáibh is fearaibh, mo mháthair sa bhaile linne,
 M'athair ag teacht abhaile, ise ag fiafraí as Gaeilge,
 ‘Bhfuil aon scéal agat?’
 An cailín aimsire sa chistin, sneachta i mí na Nollag,

Go dtí go bhfuairéas amach nach raibh an méid sin
 Ceart in aon chor. Chuamar go léir ar aghaidh
 Ar bhealach éigin eile, á leanúint
 Mar a fhásann an crann, gach géag ag nochtadh a léarscáil féin,
 Go dtí an lá go dtáinig an áit ar ais chugam
 Agus d'fhanas go dtiocfadh na focail, thosnaíos á dtóraíocht
 Ar leibheéal níos doimhe fós, díreach mar a chuardaíonn an phréamh
 A bealach fé thalamh, ag lorg cothaithe is buntobair.

“The tree”

The house we left in 1949—
 and who knows now how many children
 have grown up in that same place since then—
 the tree is alive that my father planted there.
 But what happened to the cement path he laid,
 that showed me how cement dries under the wind?
 That's where I learned how the world is
 between men and women, my mother with us at home,
 my father coming home, her asking him in Irish
 ‘Have you any news?’
 the maid in the kitchen, snow in December,

until I found out that all that information
 wasn't true at all. We moved on
 along a different road, that we followed
 as the tree grows, every branch displaying a map of its own,
 until the day the place came back to me
 and I waited for the words to come, I began searching
 in a still deeper seam, just as the root explores
 its road underground, looking for sustenance and a source.

“L'albero”

La casa che lasciammo nel 1949—
e chi sa ora quanti bambini
sono cresciuti in quello stesso posto da allora—
l'albero che mio padre piantò lì è vivo.
Ma cosa è accaduto al sentiero di cemento che pose,
che mi mostrò come il cemento si asciugasse col vento?
È qui che ho imparato come il mondo sia
tra uomini e donne, mia madre con noi a casa,
mio padre che veniva a casa, lei che gli chiedeva in irlandese
'Hai qualche notizia?'
La domestica in cucina, neve a dicembre,

sinchè non scoprii che quelle informazioni
non erano vere, per niente. Ci spostammo
lungo vie differenti, che seguimmo
quando l'albero crebbe, ogni ramo che mostrava una sua mappa,
sino al giorno che quel posto tornò a me
e io attesi che le parole arrivassero, iniziai a cercare
in una vena ancora più profonda, proprio come la radice esplora
la sua strada sotterranea, cercando sostentamento e una fonte.



Recensioni / Reviews

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Renée Fox, Mike Cronin, Brian Ó Conchubhair (eds), *Routledge International Handbook of Irish Studies*, Abingdon, Oxon, New York, Routledge, 2021, pp. xvi+502. GBP 190. ISBN: 978-0-367-25913-6.

The cover of this impressive handbook from Routledge sports a very telling image: over the grim stone walls of a bleak Galway towercastle is blazoned the photographic image of two women quietly embracing. They are private (though their portraits reach to nearly the full height of the walls), profoundly intimate and confidently subversive. The intimation is that women have taken possession of a traditional male bastion: where the castle is a material image of a masculine preserve, cold and commanding, while the feminine is represented by a tactile physicality, in which emotional nuances and subtleties of meaning are at play. The handbook is a first-rate anthology of essays celebrating (while critiquing) the myriad political, social and cultural changes brought about in Ireland by the collapse of the Celtic Tiger and the subsequent processes of recovery, despite the demands of negotiating the pandemic after 2020. In effect, this is a study of the transformations Ireland has undergone since 2008 and how they have changed perception, theorising, understanding, interpretation and awareness. It was a time when Ireland steadily found its secure place within the EU and opened its borders to immigrants in ways that have challenged all previous conceptions of what constitutes both “Irishness” and personal identity, and how they traditionally were represented. It is fitting that women dominate that cover, drawing one’s eye away from the seemingly focal placing of the castle: already before 2008 feminism was re-writing and redesigning women’s place in the community, but gained new strength in the aftermath of that significant date. (It is appropriate that Anne Enright is the most discussed of contemporary writers in the volume.) Quickly LGBTQ+, Disability and deaf studies have found secure representation and placement, as diversity became a central and centralising concern; and did so in social as well as artistic terms. There has been a wide-ranging opening up to the ethical necessity of change, where change was welcomed by moneyed institutions and governments as readily as by intellectual circles focusing more directly on moral, social and ecological criteria. This provides the background and context for the *Handbook* within which individual essays find their place.

Thirty-nine authors contribute some thirty-seven essays, which have been organised into seven sections: Overview, Historicizing Ireland, Global Ireland, Identities, Culture, Theorizing and Legacy. The aim, beautifully realised, is not to pursue *conflict* with more traditionally dominant critical approaches (such as postcolonialism or Catholic paternalism), but rather a *conversation* between old and new lines of enquiry. Diversity by its very nature encourages multiplicity, difference and a view of the culture, which it promotes as malleable, shifting. The aim here is not to be divisive or exclusive, but open to potential. To that “conversational” end, many of the essays are of shared authorship, deliberately linking different disciplines to find new shared directions even while acknowledging areas of separateness. It is stimulating to find essays linking lesbian politics, anti-racism and sports within Irish communities and on a national level, or exploring a balance between the value of the huge Irish diaspora and that of the new patterns of immigration and their impact not only on fiscal issues (the diaspora is shown to have been a major tool in the post-2008 recovery) but on fiction, drama and performance art. The very collection of essays shows the ubiquitous presence of diversity as a shaping force in Irish life and culture.

A personal cavil: the one area that (disappointingly for this reviewer) seems to have eluded examination is the field of dance and movement, which is surprising when one considers how the Dublin Dance Festival pre-Covid regularly demonstrated the wealth of performers and choreographers currently at work throughout Ireland, fearlessly interrogating many of the social and theoretical fields that these essays investigate and doing so prior to 2008. Essays on the subject of music show how that discipline has steadily broadened to reach beyond folk manifestations of the genre, and one could argue the same for dance. The value of the multiplicity of folk traditions is not denied but seen as one of many possible forms of musical expression. Dance similarly honours its rich heritage of forms and traditions (national and local), while offering other choices of style and purpose. It is the freedom to choose that is important within a gamut of possibilities that spans from folk to ballet, from musicals to physical theatre.

The trio of general editors are to be congratulated on assembling a first-rate anthology that, unlike many collections of its kind, holds together as if genuinely pursuing a commonly shared sense of purpose; and the result is inspiring and exhilarating. So uniformly of a high standard are the essays overall and critically so inter-dependent, that it would seem invidious to select any one or two for closer study, since it is the context and the all-embracing vision that are the *Handbook's* strengths. There is throughout an engaging sense of the joy of sharing together the challenge of facing what is a new world of cultural potential, which owes little or nothing to a defeated, isolationist Britain. Here is a united critical front, but no universalising impulse. No scholar in any of the disciplines that come under the mantle of Irish Studies can afford to ignore this development.

Richard Allen Cave

Sally Rooney, *Normal People*, London, Faber&Faber, 2018, pp. 266. GBP 8.99. ISBN: 978-0571-33464-3.

Normal People, a BBC Three series based on the novel by Sally Rooney, produced by BBC Three, Hulu and Screen Ireland, 2020.

At first, it is difficult to make out what is going on, both in the book and the TV version. Mundane, pleasant conversation runs through the text, never in inverted commas. In the BBC TV series the sexual scenes dominate the narrative much more than in the book. Seductive though they are, they tend to get in the way of understanding the deeper social analysis in the novel. It all gradually falls into place.

Normal People by Sally Rooney is about the relationship between two students from their high school years to the end of their university education. Marianne and Connell belong to two very different families both living in the little Irish town of Carricklea, Sligo. They go to the same local state school which educates children largely from a working-class background; the very same background to which Connell belongs. He lives in a small, terraced house with Lorraine, his single mother. A different set-up from Marianne's, who lives with her solicitor mother and her older brother in a large, comfortable, elegant house cleaned by Lorraine twice a week. Connell often picks up his mother by car. Marianne seeks his company. Both bright and academically successful, they talk about school and books. Connell – unlike Marianne – is socially successful and well-integrated into the school environment. They start a sexual relationship and agree to keep it secret from fellow students for fear of being teased.

In their final year, they apply to go to university. Marianne has no hesitation in going for the best, Trinity College Dublin, to study International Relations and Politics. Connell is unsure. He thinks of Law at Galway University. Marianne persuades him that English Literature is his subject, and Trinity the place he should aim for. He applies. They are both accepted. They split up before the end of the school year and after that their emotionally intense relationship continues in an on-off pattern.

In Dublin, Marianne blooms and is widely admired for her looks, her conversation, her brains. She becomes a great social success girl. She lives in her grandmother's pied-a-terre in Merrion Square, the most sought-after address in Dublin. Her friends are all upper-class people. Connell shares a room with Niall, a new friend, and works in a garage at weekends. He feels alienated and out of place in Dublin. When Marianne had suggested Trinity his initial instinct was that:

If he went to college in Galway he could stay with the same social group, really, and live the life he has always planned on, getting a good degree, having a nice girlfriend. People would say he had done well for himself. (Rooney 2018, 26)

Academically he is confident and soon everyone recognizes in him an original and well-schooled mind; new friends call him "genius". When he intervenes in discussions, it is from a position of great knowledge. Fellow students engage in "heated debates about books they had not read" (68), but not Connell. He takes his academic work seriously and reads all the relevant texts.

Connell and Marianne restart their emotional and sexual relationship. He is inevitably drawn to her set of friends among whom he feels out of place:

[...] being Marianne's best friend and suspected sexual partner has elevated Connell to the status of rich-adjacent: someone for whom surprise birthday parties are thrown and cushy jobs are procured out of nowhere. (99)

Both win scholarships. For Connell it is a matter of financial survival; for Marianne it means the satisfaction of being recognized. The scholarship allows Connell to travel through Europe with Niall and the latter's girlfriend in the summer of 2013. They end up in Italy and visit Marianne in her family villa near Trieste where she holidays with Peggy – a friend from Dublin – and Jamie, her latest boyfriend.

The choice of location for the family villa is an interesting historical detail on the part of Rooney. Most writings about Italy locate the villas of foreign owners in Tuscany, the Rome area, the Neapolitan coast, or Sicily. Rooney's choice winks at Joyce who lived and worked in Trieste for several years.

In the villa, the situation around the triangle Connell, Marianne and Jamie becomes extremely tense, verging on violent. After travelling through scorching heat and uncomfortable trains, Connell is conscious of his poor, dirty clothing. “Jamie gives him a mocking smile and says: You’re looking rough, mate.” (162-163). Connell’s inner thoughts and feelings are violent. On the same page we read:

Jamie is somehow both boring and hostile at the same time, always yawning and rolling his eyes when other people are speaking. And yet he is the most effortlessly confident person Connell has ever met. (*ibidem*)

Class is at the basis of the evening’s explosion over dinner or rather the subtle ties of belonging to old-money families versus being a “new rich” or a “truly working-class chap on his first trip abroad”. Marianne goes out of her way to minimize tensions and to make everybody feel comfortable. In Connell’s unspoken words: “Marianne is very smooth and sociable on these occasions, like a diplomat’s wife” (171). She is also very generous and offers plenty of wine and finally champagne for which she lays out glasses that are: “[...] broad and shallow like saucers. Jamie turns his empty one upside down and says: Do we not have proper champagne glasses?” (*ibidem*). There is a tit-for-tat exchange with Peggy about what proper champagne glasses are. Jamie is accused of being a philistine as well as a racist:

I’m a philistine? he says. We’re drinking champagne out of gravy boats. [...] It’s an old style of champagne glass, says Marianne. They belonged to my dad. (*ibidem*)

We come near the end of their studies, and they are together again. Connell’s first story is published under a pseudonym; he is too shy to pen it under his real name. He receives an offer for a plum job in New York and wants Marianne to go with him as a condition for accepting the job. She persuades him that it would be better if he went on his own:

You should go, she says. I’ll always be here. You know that. (266)

Thus ends the novel and I suppose that to New York he goes. Will they get together again? Will their troubled romance continue? The beauty of an open-ended novel is that we, the readers, can fill in the missing parts to suit our character. Other questions spring to mind. Will Connell’s work meet up the high expectations of early efforts? Is New York a better place for creative work than Dublin or Sligo?

In suggesting that Connell leaves Ireland, Rooney has him follow the trajectory of many Irish authors of the past; Wilde and Shaw found success in London. Joyce rejected both Dublin and London in favour of Europe as the congenial environment to realize his talent. In spite of their rejection of Dublin as home to a writer – fictional in the case of Rooney – both Joyce and the author of *Normal People* write with great feelings and lyricism about Dublin. In “Two Gallants” Joyce chooses a serene summer evening:

The grey warm evening of August had descended upon the city and a mild warm air, a memory of summer, circulated in the streets. The streets, shuttered for the repose of Sunday, swarmed with a gaily coloured crowd. Like illumined pearls the lamps shone from the summits of their tall poles upon the living texture below which, changing shape and hue unceasingly, sent up into the warm grey evening air an unchanging, unceasing murmur. (Joyce 1994 [1914], 52)

Rooney focuses on the colours and sounds of rain:

Dublin is extraordinarily beautiful to her [Marianne] in wet weather, the way grey stone darkens to black, and rain moves over the grass and whispers on slick roof tiles. Raincoats glistening in the undersea colour of street lamps. Rain silver as loose change in the glare of traffic. (Rooney 2018, 254)

Joyce's Irish society was very different from that experienced by Connell and Marianne. It is clear why Joyce had to leave the stifling religious and sectarian environment of his Ireland. In Rooney's novel, the two Irish millennials behave no differently from other young contemporaries in other countries, including plenty of texting and emails. There is no hint of the historical struggle for Irish independence. Nationalism and sectarianism hardly appear in the novel; neither does religion. We see two funeral church functions and they are described just as social gatherings with no mention of their possible religious significance. There is, however, an allusion to the Magdalene Laundry report of abuses within the Catholic Church (167).

Connell also finds Dublin society stifling and suffocating. What bothers him is not the religion or the sectarianism but the class element within the young people he mixes with. He is fine when in his working-class milieu in Sligo, but lost when circumstances and his love for Marianne force him to mix with middle- and upper-class people. He feels out of place, a misfit. In the end, Marianne understands this and encourages him to accept the opportunity to move away. She declines to follow him to New York and lets him go free from the class baggage she represents.

But why New York? Why not London or a European town? To understand this, we must have a little excursion into recent and older Irish history. The story in the novel takes place between January 2011 and February 2015. These years are marred by the austerity that followed the financial crash of 2007-2008. Many young people, often the best-qualified ones, were forced to leave Ireland – or indeed Greece and Italy – in search of jobs and opportunities, a particularly cruel fate after the preceding decades of Irish prosperity and growth.

The choice of New York indicates a wink, on the part of Rooney, at earlier Irish history. Following the great famine of 1846-1847, many Irish people were forced to emigrate for survival. Ireland lost almost half of its population between 1841 and 1911 (Hobsbawm 1987, 41). America became a welcome destination and its economic growth gave the Irish great opportunities. Together with other early European immigrants – British, German, Scandinavian – they rose to the top of society. After the 1880s, new waves of immigrants reached the USA: Italian, Slavs, Poles, Russians. These, on the whole, had to content themselves with lower positions in the class pecking order.

Connell, like many recent immigrants from Ireland, is likely to be seen very favourably in New York society; his Irish origin and accent would be assets rather than problems. Whether the change of air and country will help or hinder the quality of his literary output remains an open question.

As for the "normal" in the title of the book, it might, at first, seem strange. On second thought, the two young people may be the *new normality* of the digital age. They are both psychologically disturbed and this is no wonder as they both come from what, a few decades ago, might have been seen as dysfunctional families and are gradually becoming statistically normal. They both suffer the effects of mixing classes in the context of declining social mobility. The contemporary young people's culture tells them that changing sexual partner is just the thing. It is cool. However, their feelings towards each other tell them differently.

The subtlety of surface triviality combined with deep social analysis draws the mind towards Jane Austen to which Rooney takes us deliberately when Connell reads *Emma* in the library.

The society Marianne and Connell are part of, and suffer from, is, however, very different from the one experienced by Austen's characters. In the British novelist's fiction, we get the feeling of a stable society with the underlying expectation that such stability will continue indefinitely. Rooney gives us the image of a twenty-first century society in which young people – “normal people” from both the upper and lower social classes – are troubled, insecure and unhappy. In spite of all that texting, when it comes to communicating emotions, the digital generation fares no better than Jane Austen's characters.

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Antonio Bibbò, *Irish Literature in Italy in the Era of the World Wars*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, pp. xv+304. € 103.99 (hardback). ISBN: 978-3-030-83585-9.

Questa opera di Antonio Bibbò, frutto di una ricerca vastissima ma certosina, sarà d'ora in poi probabilmente considerata una pietra miliare nel campo degli studi irlandesi in Italia. L'autore ha ricostruito un quadro completo della traduzione, trasmissione, diffusione e ricezione delle opere di autori irlandesi in Italia tra gli albori del Ventesimo secolo e il 1945. Come scrive, “my case study can shed light both on the history of Italian and Irish literatures, their relationships, and the way they refract each other within the Italian literary system” (2-3). E si è però trovato a dover affrontare l'argomento non solo da un punto di vista letterario, ma necessariamente culturale, storico e politico: “This constant entanglement of culture, literature, and politics is one of the main features of the reception of ideas of Ireland in Italy at the start of the twentieth century. It is therefore worth exploring the ways in which Irish politics and culture at large were perceived within certain Italian circles; in fact, even when the interest was eminently literary, Irish politics occupied a key role in the accounts of Italian mediators, and political accounts of Irish history were rarely devoid of comments on the island's cultural identity. As mentioned in the introduction, when a peripheral literature shares its main language with a central literary system, which is more established and widely recognized, politics is one of the main distinguishing elements through which the former carves out its own separate identity” (27-28).

La sua scrupolosa attenzione si è estesa, oltre l'ambito dei traduttori e degli editori di scritti irlandesi, ai mediatori culturali in senso lato, quali compagnie e interpreti teatrali e redattori e intellettuali “scout” delle case editrici, ma anche, superando l'ambito puramente letterario, ai giornalisti, ai militanti politici e ai saggisti che in quei decenni si erano occupati dell'isola verde dal punto di vista storico, politico e culturale, data la peculiarità della letteratura anglo-irlandese, scritta in una lingua che la accomuna all'Inghilterra e al mondo anglosassone e che in Italia ne rendeva (e forse ancora ne rende) difficile l'individuazione nazionale. Mediatori culturali per i quali Bibbò ha qui coniato il felicissimo neologismo “Irlandesisti”. La stessa attribuzione di un

autore all'Irlanda, o definizione in Italia (e non solo) della "Irlandesità" di un autore, dipendeva, con oscillazioni e variazioni, dalla sua collocazione politica e culturale riguardo alla questione nazionale irlandese, o al suo trattare temi specificamente irlandesi.

Come nota Bibbò proprio all'inizio del volume, "When I started my investigation into the perception and reception of Irish literature in Italy, I thought I would be spending a lot more time with James Joyce than with any of his fellow Irish writers" (1). Una impostazione iniziale da letterato puro, scontratasi con la constatazione che nel caso di Joyce, e non solo, la sua "presence on the Italian literary scene was also often associated with a virtual erasure of his Irish roots. The author of *Ulysses* was most often regarded within an European, rather than an Irish, frame of reference [...]. The presence of Joyce in this book is thus more in the guise of a cumbersome *absence*" (2). James Joyce e non solo, visto che anche Oscar Wilde e George Bernard Shaw venivano quasi sempre considerati in Italia inglesi, a dispetto dell'anagrafe, e, come Bibbò nota a più riprese, la sola opera teatrale di Shaw che avesse a che fare con l'Irlanda, *John Bull's Other Island* del 1904¹, non venne né tradotta né rappresentata in quei decenni nel nostro Paese.

La ricerca di Bibbò riguardo ai "mediatori culturali" di cui sopra è stata accuratissima e ricchissima, riuscendo a trovare e ad esaminare con acribia archivi poco noti, polverosi schedari dei teatri, corrispondenze private e documentazione interna delle case editrici, locandine e annunci, il paratesto delle pubblicazioni, quotidiani, periodici letterari e non, riviste teatrali e studi biografici semiclandestini. Il quadro che ne è emerso riguardo alla trasmissione di testi irlandesi in Italia nel periodo considerato e allo stesso interesse italiano per l'isola verde è di una impresa non collettiva o di tendenza, ma di solito frammentaria e frammentata: "I have focused on identifying networks of shared interests connecting the Italian mediators involved in Irish affairs, but a rather fraught picture has emerged. Most intellectuals connected with Ireland and committed to disseminating Irish literature were engaged in solitary endeavors and only rarely came into contact with one another, with collaborations being even less common. Even the frequency of mediators quoting one another or relying on the work of their predecessors is relatively low. Nonetheless, while these literati did not see themselves as part of an integrated group or movement, certain shared ideas of Ireland still made their way into the Italian cultural and political scene" (8-9).

Queste diffuse o condivise idee dell'Irlanda che continuano a ricorrere in Italia portano il nostro autore alla storia delle immagini o "imagologia", settore o nuova disciplina di cui è uno dei fondatori e massimi esponenti l'olandese Joep Leerssen, che proprio alla formazione delle immagini dell'Irlanda e al loro contributo alla identità o coscienza di sé irlandese ha dedicato due opere cruciali². Dice a proposito Bibbò: "Thus, my main concern is not with the mere recording of all translations of Irish writing in Italy [...] but with the way notions of Ireland influenced the reception and circulation of Irish literature. In order to do so, I have investigated the nature and dissemination of what imagologists (or image studies scholars) call *images* of Ireland in Italy" (9). Quanto alla costruzione di una identità nazionale in Irlanda con la formazione di immagini, prosegue l'autore, "The new literature of the nation had to get rid of old and colonial ideas of Ireland in order to establish the country as autonomous and independent. The process of image-building was instrumental to the development of a new Irish identity

¹ Sola se si eccettua il successivo atto unico comico antimilitarista *O'Flaherty V.C., A Recruiting Pamphlet* del 1915, ovviamente rappresentato in Inghilterra solo nel 1920.

² Vedi Leerssen (1996a), dedicato alle immagini dell'Irlanda fino al Diciottesimo secolo, su fonti sia in Gaelico sia in Inglese; e Leerssen (1996b), che prosegue lo studio per il secolo successivo. Vedi anche una sorta di manuale di imagologia che delinea la nuova disciplina, a cura dello stesso Leerssen e di Beller (2007).

as a counterpoint to the colonial version that had been assigned to the country over centuries of British rule. Irish studies have always dealt with various and often contrasting versions of Ireland: Catholic, Protestant, pagan, rebellious, and Celtic Ireland, as well as the politically ingenious mix of all these aspects presented by the movement for the Celtic Revival, with the diverse images of a still politically unresolved Ireland being one of the main issues faced by the country at the turn of the century” (9).

E questo non lineare processo di formazioni di immagini di una nazione in quella stessa nazione, immagini che ne vengono a creare l'identità percepita, naturalmente interagisce in modo non necessariamente biunivoco sulla formazione di immagini riguardo alla stessa nazione in un'altra, e su tale processo influisce anche la formazione di immagini di sé nella seconda nazione. Nel caso di Irlanda e Italia nella prima metà del Novecento, nota Bibbò: “Images of national literatures influence translation processes and are simultaneously influenced by them: the variability of images related to a specific literary tradition is often linked with the variability of that tradition's repertoire in a foreign country. In the case study at hand, this is further complicated by the fact that, in the decades here investigated, Ireland was undergoing profound changes as it transitioned from being part of the Empire to an almost independent country, with Italy likewise rapidly shifting from a liberal country to a dictatorship. An effect of this can be seen, for instance, in Ireland being compared more often to regions of Italy in the years before its independence and to the entire Bel paese in the years following the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921” (11).

Fino alla Prima guerra mondiale in Italia i “mediatori” della cultura irlandese tendevano a mostrare una serie limitata e alquanto monotona di immagini: “A relatively narrow and monolithic notion of Irishness in the 1910s was characterized by an image that primarily focused on a depiction of the Irish as melancholy and contemplative Celts, but was also ingrained in the traditional idea of Ireland as a fellow Catholic country [...] it emphasized some commonplace ideas about the Irish, including their religious allegiance, which resulted, as we will see, in a virtual erasure of the Protestant element and a tacit agreement that Irish writers were, in one way or another, Catholic” (12). Ma la Grande guerra, in Irlanda accompagnata dalla Rivolta di Pasqua del 1916 e seguita dalla Guerra d'Indipendenza del 1919-1921, dalla Partizione e dalla Guerra civile del 1922-1923, e in Italia seguita dagli otto anni di sommovimenti sociali e di disordini armati che nel 1926 videro il pieno affermarsi della dittatura fascista, segnò da noi una specie di cesura nella trasmissione culturale di immagini relative all'isola smeraldina: “It is only around the 1920s that different images of Ireland and Irish literature began making inroads in Italy, first in the political discourse, influenced by the turmoil of the early 1920s, then in literary criticism”, nota Bibbò (12).

Da allora, e fino al 1945, anche la caratterizzazione della identità irlandese si precisò come contrapposizione all'Altro (in questo caso l'Inghilterra): “In those same years, this also brought about a decisive shift from the notion of Irishness as non-Englishness to a more bellicose anti-Englishness. While present from the beginning of the century, the latter notion was especially foregrounded by fascist propagandists focusing on denouncing English colonial atrocities and using Ireland as a pawn in their cultural diplomacy war, especially after the Ethiopian crisis of 1935” (12). Le immagini dell'Irlanda precedenti, osserva Bibbò, “tend to maintain their original function but are in most cases also redeployed within Italian political and cultural discourses imbued with new meanings. To give but one example, the notion of virile and fighting Gaels became more frequent in fascist discourses that framed Ireland as a thorn in Britain's side and a possible fascist ally. This, in turn, brought about the rediscovery of Irish literature during the Second World War, and especially its politicization. By the time the war was being fought, the commonplace image of Ireland had decidedly shifted to anti-England, to the point that even

writers, who until that moment had been perceived as uninterested in politics, such as James Joyce, were deemed anti-English” (12-13)³.

L'autore ravvisa giustamente “the variability and hybridization of national images, as they interact with each other and are continuously altered by their context of reception” (13), e le adduce, quasi scusandosi, quale motivo per avere esteso il campo della sua ricerca al di là della critica letteraria e dello studio letterario della trasmissione dei testi, fino alla dimensione più propriamente politica e storica: “It is for this reason, in particular, that this book devotes significant attention to the dissemination of journalistic, political, and diplomatic discourses about Ireland. It is outside of the purview of this work to discuss the story of Irish politics in Italy, or to provide a full survey of the intense debates on Irish politics that interested Italian-based mediators at various stages during the early decades of the century and that provided a reflection on the political turmoil in Ireland. Instead, the book will focus on some outstanding contributions and analyze them from the point of view of the stereotypes of Ireland that they conveyed. The principle of selection is that the texts analyzed here – that are not immediately concerned with literary matters – should address cultural issues and attempt to affect a wider debate on Irishness beyond the political commentary” (*ibidem*). E ancora, approfondendo le giustificazioni per la sua trascinazione dal puro Parnaso letterario, Bibbò scrive: “The sections that are more concerned with political writings and issues, then, display a focus on intellectuals who also often disseminated information on Irish culture and whose views directly or indirectly influenced the status of Irish literature in Italy. These mediators are well represented by the rectors of the Irish College Michael O’Riordan and John Hagan, the historian Ernesto Buonaiuti, and the philosopher Mario Manlio Rossi, as well as by most of the fascist authors of propaganda texts (e.g. Nicola Pascazio, Luigi Villari, Pier Fausto Palumbo)” (13). E l'autore ribadisce e approfondisce quanto già fatto intravedere dall’inizio: “As alluded to earlier, politics and literature were tightly bound together in Italian accounts of Irish affairs, to the point that a strong affiliation with Ireland and its politics was often a necessary element for a writer to be considered Irish. The main source of confusion was, to be sure, the language. Due to this confusion, Italian literati had two main ways of figuring out whether a writer was Irish or not: their biographical circumstances or their interest in, and work on, things Irish” (13). E ancora: “While the primary focus of the book is on the dissemination of literature, the analysis of other discourses was thus necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of the notions of Irishness in Italy” (14).

L'autore riassume così il suo lavoro: “In the reconstruction of motivations and aims of mediators, minor or otherwise, I attempt to ascertain the trajectories of certain ideas of Ireland and how they were intertwined with the reception of Irish literature. This book therefore comprises a survey of images of Irishness in Italy and a history of the reception and dissemination of Irish literature in the country” (15).

Con una osservazione che a posteriori può sembrare banale, ma che è indubbiamente astuta, perché spesso la realtà che illumina è trascurata nella coscienza comune degli studiosi di qualunque scienza umana, Bibbò nota che “Images are important not just because they influence the responses of the public, but because they influence the choices of mediators themselves” (15).

Irish Literature in Italy in the Era of the World Wars si snoda in cinque capitoli di interessante e piacevole lettura (piacevole, intendo, anche per chi sia digiuno dei temi e delle sottigliezze della critica letteraria e della letteratura come disciplina).

³ Sull’aspetto più decisamente e strettamente politico, e culturale in senso lato, del rapporto tra Italia e Irlanda in questo stesso periodo vedi Chini (2016), citato anche in modo ricorrente da Bibbò.

Il primo, o Introduzione, “Imagining Ireland in Italy”, da cui ho tratto molte delle precedenti citazioni, descrive e anticipa il contenuto dell’opera, e discute ampiamente la metodologia e l’epistemologia adottate.

Il secondo, “Early Irlandesisti”, esamina alcuni riflessi in Italia della controversia sullo *Home Rule* o autogoverno irlandese degli anni Dieci, tra cui in particolare gli influenti scritti di argomento irlandese di Ernesto Buonaiuti, il capofila del Modernismo (religioso) italiano, e del suo amico Nicola Turchi, pubblicati tra il 1911 e il 1914, e il primo riferimento alla cosiddetta Rinascita celtica fatto già nel 1905 da Giacomo Boni nella *Nuova Antologia*, la rivista “latitudinaria” del liberalismo italiano, in quegli anni molto diffusa, notando che gli scritti di Buonaiuti registrarono il flusso inverso della trasmissione culturale, venendo in parte pubblicati in inglese in Irlanda (come poi accadde al resoconto di viaggio del filosofo Mario Manlio Rossi). Giustamente minore o minima attenzione è prestata da Bibbò ad altre opere coeve di argomento politico irlandese, come quelle di Gino Borgatta, di Luigi Einaudi e di altri autori della *Nuova Antologia*, perché, tutte ristrette nelle considerazioni economiche o circoscritte alla analisi interna della struttura istituzionale britannica nel contesto della battaglia sull’*Home Rule*, non veicolavano alcuna immagine particolare dell’Irlanda. I due autori modernisti Buonaiuti e Turchi, sostenitori dell’autogoverno irlandese, presentavano una visione apertamente di parte a favore dell’Irlanda, di cui davano una immagine di Paese caratterizzato dall’essere insieme celtico e cattolico, e dalla opposizione agli invasori inglesi. Ripercorrendo la storia dell’isola e citando gli scrittori anglo-irlandesi dei due secoli precedenti i due glissavano sull’appartenenza religiosa e politica di essi, con il sotterfugio di attribuire a essi una “anima celtica” (a sua volta ripiena di molte virtù, e modellata sugli assai noti saggi del 1854 di Ernest Renan e del 1867 di Matthew Arnold, con una “razza irlandese mite e pura, ardente e sognatrice” [41], perennemente giovane). Appiattimento delle complessità della storia irlandese comune da allora, come nota Bibbò (ma, in effetti, comune anche a vari precedenti “mediatori” italiani dell’Ottocento): “The convenient erasure of religious differences, all the more unexpected in the writings of a theologian, would become a common feature of the works of other mediators” (37). Il nostro autore nota e documenta anche gli effetti del rimbalzo incrociato della trasmissione culturale: nella traduzione inglese (del 1913) dei due articoli di Buonaiuti, pubblicata in forma di volume dall’editore dublinese nazionalista M.H. Gill, agli Orangisti dell’Ulster veniva affibbiato l’aggettivo “*ravid*”, che nell’articolo originario di Buonaiuti non compariva per nulla; mentre ne *L’Isola di smeraldo* (la pubblicazione aggiornata del 1914, con aggiunti i contributi di N. Turchi) compaiono, con nuovo aggettivo che pare traduzione di quello aggiunto nella traduzione inglese, “i feroci orangisti dell’Ulster”. Con chiarezza Bibbò nota che “The ideal of a primitive Church like Ireland’s, so prominent in *L’isola di smeraldo*, could thus be perceived as a not-too-subtle means of criticizing the Roman Curia” (39), e che l’immagine buonaiutiana del 1911 dell’Irlanda quale “unica vera nazione cattolica del mondo” (39) rappresentava un attacco obliquo alla Chiesa di Roma, “some more or less direct attacks on the Roman Curia, particularly concerning their timid support for the Irish cause in the past” (40); e infatti nel 1914 Buonaiuti scriveva: “La chiesa cattolica da parte sua potrebbe più amorosamente considerare i servigi inestimabili resi alla sua santa causa dalla tenace fedeltà irlandese, dall’inesauribile zelo di proselitismo dei figli morali di san Patrizio. Potrebbe più adeguatamente apprezzare l’eroica storia di questo popolo che da otto secoli, si può dire, lotta per la sua fede, indissolubilmente intrecciata alla sua coscienza nazionale” (39-40). E le allusioni dei due modernisti prefiguravano, aggiungo io (ma anche Bibbò ne sembra consapevole), l’invenzione, propagata negli ultimi decenni, di una “Cristianità celtica” dell’Alto Medioevo, tra IV e XI secolo dopo Cristo, che sarebbe stata incompatibile con la Chiesa di Roma.

Il capitolo poi presenta due dei mediatori ecclesiastici e politici più rilevanti, i due successivi rettori del Collegio Irlandese di Roma, Michael O’Riordan e il suo allora vice John Hagan, il quale già nel 1913 pubblicò a Roma in italiano, in sostegno del nazionalismo irlandese nella lotta per l’autogoverno, il libro *Home rule: l’autonomia irlandese*. A differenza della visione “femminea” dell’Irlanda trasmessa da Buonaiuti e Turchi e condivisa poi da altri Irlandesisti, di un carattere nazionale primitivo e malinconico trascinato dagli impulsi emotivi, immagine comunque virata al positivo in contrapposizione agli inglesi, il prelado irlandese Hagan, nota Bibbò, “sought not only to win over the opinion of the public at whom the pamphlet was targeted, consisting primarily of Roman ecclesiastics, but also made quite a resolute attempt to subvert established stereotypes of Ireland and England, with a view to acquiring more political support for his country among Vatican circles” (44) e mentre definiva gli inglesi “degenerati” la sua immagine del popolo irlandese era decisamente mascolina e non femminile: “whereas Buonaiuti and Turchi largely accepted established images of Ireland and the Irish but sought to change their significance and turn them into positive images, Hagan seemed interested in waging a different battle, involving turning preconceptions on their head and proposing a relatively unheard of (in Italy) image of Ireland as civil, cultivated, and virile” (47). Il nostro autore passa poi alla svolta rappresentata dalla Rivolta di Pasqua, dalla lotta costituzionale per l’autogoverno alla guerra per l’indipendenza nazionale, e ai suoi riflessi sulla diffusione delle immagini dell’Irlanda in Italia, a partire dall’opuscolo di O’Riordan del 1916 che confutava la versione inglese (ripresa naturalmente dalla stampa dell’Italia in guerra) e condannava la repressione inglese. Compaiono in questo mutato quadro, oltre agli opuscoli dei due prelati irlandesi a Roma, nuovi autori che introducono nuove immagini: tra questi il socialista napoletano Dino Fienga, nel 1916 e di nuovo nel 1920, che rimette in primo piano oppressione coloniale, sfruttamento imperialista e senso di inferiorità dei colonizzati come cardini della questione irlandese; il socialista populista milanese Paolo Valera, dalla prosa iperbolica, nel 1921 concentrato sulla denuncia dei crimini inglesi contro l’Irlanda; e nel 1920 Benito Mussolini e la scrittrice Annie Vivanti. Le immagini che essi trasmettono sono di un popolo martire ma eroico, virile e combattente, oppresso da un nemico vile e cinico: ogni attenzione alle appartenenze religiose irlandesi viene abbandonata (la stampa cattolica però continuava a mettere in risalto l’Irlanda come nazione in primo luogo cattolica, e perseguitata in quanto tale). “The number of contributions that appeared during the Anglo-Irish war” – scrive Bibbò – “thus confirmed a common trait of Italy’s relationship with Ireland: interest in Irish affairs arose particularly when political circumstances were favourable, and was never separated from the dynamics of Italy’s relationship with England. Nevertheless, Ireland certainly benefited from that in terms of propaganda in Italy” (59-60).

L’ultima parte di questo secondo capitolo è dedicato al “mistero” di James Joyce che, esule volontario a Trieste, cercò per almeno sette anni, fino alla Guerra mondiale, di inserirsi nella scena culturale italiana, pubblicando anche su giornali triestini diversi articoli in italiano sulla politica irlandese. Che fosse per la posizione periferica della Trieste austroungarica rispetto alla penisola, o per la sua goffaggine nei contatti editoriali, o perché nei suoi articoli politici non veicolava immagini sufficientemente manichee dell’Irlanda, il suo tentativo fallì. Prese il suo posto di grande scrittore internazionale (e non specificamente irlandese) nelle traduzioni e nell’immaginario italiani soprattutto dopo il 1945. Bibbò ricostruisce i suoi contatti con editori e intellettuali italiani, e illustra con competenza le possibili cause di questa risultante assenza.

Il terzo capitolo, che è in effetti il più lungo nell’opera, si intitola “False Start: Carlo Linati and the Irish” (83-177). Il letterato lombardo Carlo Linati operò quale traduttore e diffusore di autori irlandesi per quasi quaranta anni, anche se con diversa intensità nel corso del tempo, e apparirebbe quindi come il mediatore culturale per eccellenza tra i due Paesi. Bibbò lo

introduce così: “Irish drama was introduced to Italy by Carlo Linati, a respected figure at the start of the century and the first irlandesista who accompanied his interest in Irish literature with a consistent program of translations” (84). Ma l’interesse di Linati, mosso anche da una somiglianza che ravvisava tra una Lombardia rurale attaccata dalla modernità e la semplicità irlandese, era prevalentemente rivolto alle opere teatrali. Fu, certo, in Italia il primo traduttore di William Butler Yeats (nel 1914), di Lady Augusta Gregory (nel 1916) e di John Millington Synge (nel 1917), cui si aggiunsero nel 1920 James Joyce e nel 1936 Seán O’Casey, e contribuì a pubblicare anche traduzioni di prosa nelle riviste di cui era animatore, come *Il Convegno* di Milano. Bibbò prende spunto da una attenta analisi dell’opera di “mediatore” di Linati per indagare a fondo sui suoi contatti, sulle operazioni di diffusione culturale cui prese parte o che tentò, per approfondire il ruolo dei teatri italiani nella rappresentazione di opere irlandesi (come ad esempio quelle interpretate dall’attrice Emma Gramatica), e per individuare altri diffusori di testi irlandesi in Italia, come ad esempio l’amico di Linati, Enzo Ferrieri, direttore de *Il Convegno* e primo traduttore di James Stephens. Ma, nota Bibbò a proposito dell’interesse di Linati per Synge, che esso “lies in presenting a portrait of Ireland and its literature consistent with a specific stereotypical image of a people cut off from other civilized countries, with whom it shares little significant cultural elements” (132). Una Irlanda e i suoi scrittori quindi “melancholy, Celtic, and primitive” (133) secondo l’interpretazione del traduttore lombardo, e gli Irlandesi per giunta selvaggi, portati alla violenza e ammiratori di criminali, secondo la sua introduzione a *The Playboy of the Western World* di Synge. Il più lungo testo irlandese in prosa tradotto dallo scrittore comasco, a sostegno di tale visione “primitivista” dell’Irlanda, fu *The Aran Islands* di Synge, che pubblicò infine in volume nel 1944. Linati non aveva peraltro particolare comprensione della politica e della storia irlandesi, come dimostrano i suoi alquanto scialbi commenti alle opere teatrali di argomento più politico da lui stesso tradotte, e le scelte operate entro le stesse traduzioni. Anche Joyce (con cui Linati ebbe una corrispondenza per la traduzione della sua unica opera teatrale, *Exiles*) venne de-politicizzato e in qualche misura de-irlandesizzato dal traduttore comasco. Ma, “despite Linati’s timid and rather intermittent attempts, the depoliticization of Joyce in Italy did not promote a different take on Irish literature. Instead, it confirmed the Italian bias typical of early twentieth century, whereby practically the only way to distinguish between a generic Anglophone and an Irish writer was the latter’s inevitable involvement, in some way, with the nationalist movement or at least national themes” (151). L’iniziale scelta di Linati di tradurre le opere teatrali di Yeats, Gregory e Synge, le “Tre Corone” come vennero chiamate, unita al primo saggio sull’*Abbey Theatre* del giornalista Mario Borsa nel 1906, istituì in Italia un canone che per molti anni fece risultare quei tre autori unici esponenti del Rinascimento celtico irlandese, e sancì anche una visione limitata della letteratura irlandese in generale. Scrive Bibbò: “The stratifications of the Irish (literary) society were hardly taken into account, and a casual reader of Linati’s translations and articles would be excused for thinking that Yeats and Synge were Irish Catholics writing the story, and reinterpreting the myth, of their occupied country” (153). E, inoltre, “Narrating Ireland in Italy thus seemed to entail the production of a more or less homogeneous narrative. The non-British, or non-English, element, depending on the emphasis of the mediator, was a staple of literary discourses and would be perceived as a key characteristic of Irish literature for most of the time span under consideration, before giving way to a more explicitly belligerent anti-Englishness, an overt conflict rather than simple difference. The sheer existence of an Irish literature that was not tightly bound with national affairs or concerned with Irish themes, and somewhat opposed to English literature, was rarely considered by Italian mediators who were at pains to define such an elusive object” (157). Sempre le scelte di Linati fecero sì che fino agli anni Trenta in Italia

si ignorasse del tutto la poesia di Yeats, e non la si traducesse. La prima corposa traduzione di poesie di Yeats e di altri autori irlandesi (James Stephens e George Russell), opera di Francesco Gargaro nel 1935, venne pressoché ignorata. Anche folklore e mitologia irlandese vennero quasi del tutto ignorati in quell'epoca in Italia, con l'unica eccezione della traduzione di *The Crock of Gold* di James Stephens nel 1929, su impulso di Gian Dàuli. Anche le due opere folkloriche e mitologiche di W.B. Yeats, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* e *Celtic Twilight*, come già notava nel 2009 Fiorenzo Fantaccini, tradotte subito in altri paesi, da noi restarono fino agli anni Ottanta ignorate.

Il quarto capitolo, "Ireland in Fascist Italy", tocca più direttamente l'aspetto politico della trasmissione degli autori irlandesi in Italia, e introduce la figura di altri mediatori culturali oltre a quelli su cui si era già soffermato. L'immagine dell'Irlanda in Italia era decisamente cambiata dopo la Prima guerra mondiale: "Between the wars, there was a wider perception among Italian observers of the Irish Free State as a country in its own right, rather than merely as part of the British Empire. Thus, Ireland's partially achieved independence was reflected in the images of the country that circulated in Italy. Most intellectuals of that period tended to see Ireland as a cognate country and a potential Fascist ally, and quite significantly, it was no longer compared to Italian regions but rather to the whole of Italy" (179). E naturalmente, soprattutto dopo la Guerra d'Abissinia del 1935, l'Irlanda venne vista dal regime come "a potential ally of Fascist Italy" (179-180), il che produsse in Italia una nuova ondata di pubblicazioni di propaganda di regime che la riguardavano.

Ma i due più interessanti volume italiani sull'Irlanda degli anni Trenta avevano poco a che fare con la propaganda fascista: "Thus, the first publications of the decade that testify to a surge in interest in Irish politics – presenting ideas of Ireland worthy of discussion – are two books, both published in 1932, that did not issue from Fascist quarters: Mario Manlio Rossi's *Viaggio in Irlanda* and Mario Borsa's *La tragica impresa di sir Roger Casement* [...]. These very different texts contained two rather conflicting versions of Ireland that also departed significantly from the notion of a Catholic, proto-Fascist country that the regime sought to propagate. Rossi and Borsa each drew on a long-standing familiarity with both England and Ireland (dating back to the end of the previous century, in Borsa's case), based on direct access to primary sources, to provide a passionate and nuanced representation of the newly established state" (184).

Il filosofo e anglista emiliano Mario Manlio Rossi, non iscritto al partito fascista e quindi escluso allora dall'insegnamento universitario, era diventato amico di Yeats, Lady Gregory e altri esponenti del Rinascimento celtico. Questo suo volume ebbe l'onore di essere pubblicato l'anno dopo in traduzione inglese in Irlanda, seppure abbreviato rispetto all'originale italiano, col titolo *Pilgrimage in the West*, e Bibbò discute convincentemente sul perché alcune parti vennero omesse. Il libro fino ad anni recenti è stato l'unico, nella pubblicistica italiana dedicata all'Irlanda, che non contenesse inesattezze o veri e propri svarioni storici. *Viaggio in Irlanda* è ancora oggi il solo, tra le opere italiane sull'Irlanda pubblicate dopo la creazione dello Stato Libero nel 1921, ad avere dato voce alla visione, pur nazionalistica, dell'aristocrazia intellettuale anglo-irlandese protestante, e introducendo pertanto altre, non comuni, immagini dell'isola. Come nota Bibbò, "Rossi was one of the very few Italian observers, and certainly the most prominent, to adopt a pro-Anglo-Irish stance, emphasizing the role of the Ascendancy in the construction of a national sentiment. Issued by Doxa, a Protestant publishing house based in Milan, the book claimed that only the Anglo-Irish could have genuine national sentiment, as they had undergone the proper political evolution having experienced the Reformation" (185). E, sempre mettendo in luce le tesi di Rossi, Bibbò aggiunge: "The running theme is the construction of the Irish national sentiment. While Rossi maintains that Catholicism had a

nationalizing function in Ireland, he is also keen to foreground the guidance provided by the Protestant elites educated at Trinity College who created “il vero patriottismo irlandese moderno”, which went, according to him, unrecognized by the Home Rule movement” (*ibidem*). Lo storico italiano Cantimori recensì il libro di Rossi, ci informa Bibbò: “The novelty of Rossi’s approach to Irish affairs did not go unnoticed given that, in a perceptive review published in *Leonardo*, Delio Cantimori specifically highlighted that one of the key elements of the volume was its correction of the traditional framework of the political struggle in Ireland, moving it beyond the contrast between Catholics and Protestants and, in particular, foregrounding the participation of Anglo-Ireland in Irish national life” (187).

Il lodigiano Mario Borsa, attivo nel giornalismo italiano “importante” dagli anni Novanta dell’Ottocento, non fascista, si era occupato di Irlanda solo presentando l’*Abbey Theatre* e i suoi autori in un capitolo del suo libro del 1906 sul teatro inglese. Lascio al nostro autore Bibbò la descrizione delle circostanze in cui Borsa pubblicò nel 1932 il suo libro su Roger Casement, impiccato in Inghilterra per alto tradimento nel 1916, dopo la Rivolta di Pasqua: “Thus Mario Borsa presented a very well-informed and partisan portrait of Roger Casement, from his experiences in the Congo which inspired him to defend human rights, to his participation in the 1916 Easter Rising. Borsa’s book on Casement is particularly interesting, not only for its treatment of such a complex aspect of Irish history, but also because the book was part of the successful “Drammi e segreti della storia” series published by Mondadori, one of Italy’s prominent publishers at the time. The series targeted a wide readership who wished to acquaint themselves with historical events ‘that best present the eternal play of passions that nobly or basely inspire human actions’ by way of books based on historical research but written so as to have “the gift of bringing them to life through lively, vivid narration”, as the editorial advertisement put it. The book therefore enjoyed significant distribution, and while Borsa was no supporter of the regime, it is arguable that his unabashedly pro-Irish text could be marketed by Mondadori as consistent with the government’s anti-British slant” (191). Il volume, non privo di inesattezze, vede la storia dell’Irlanda come scontro continuo col colonialismo inglese e, scrive Bibbò, “he firmly maintains that a united Ireland is the only viable solution to the ‘antagonismo politico-religioso [...] tenuto vivo artificialmente dall’Inghilterra’ which was necessary to ‘dominare e tenere sottomessa l’Irlanda cattolica e nazionalista’” (193). Le immagini della nazione irlandese trasmesse da Borsa sono quindi quelle già affiorate nella pubblicistica italiana, come riconosce Bibbò: “In terms of images of Ireland disseminated by Borsa, his representation of the country and its people is based on two main elements, which at once confirm age-old stereotypes, but also, so to speak, confer more specific qualities upon them” (192); e sono da un lato gli irlandesi quali primitivi, campagnoli e portati ai voli di fantasia, dall’altro la ribellione a un dominio ingiusto, combattuto con eroismo. Conclude il nostro autore riguardo alle immagini e agli stereotipi che il libro di Borsa veicolava, con però l’aggiunta del Rinascimento celtico: “These elements clarify the interest of Borsa’s book, which is a great example of how passive reliance on age-old stereotypes, such as the differences in temperament between a supposedly solid Catholic and nationalist front and a Protestant occupier, could be exploited by an acute political commentator to redefine the Irish question and complicate it by focusing on historical elements such as British atrocities and Imperial realpolitik. In a similar vein, the ‘noble folly’ of Irish revolutionaries is explained by them all being children of the Celtic Revival. Once again, the nationalist front is presented as united, with no substantial differences being identified between the Catholic nationalist movement and the Anglo-Irish element” (193).

Bibbò presenta anche l'intellettuale e gerarca fascista Camillo Pellizzi⁴, fondatore a Londra dei Fasci italiani all'estero e poi presidente dell'Istituto nazionale di cultura fascista, più tardi sociologo, che nel 1923 aveva pubblicato tre articoli riguardo alla politica dell'Irlanda scossa dalla Guerra civile ne *Il Popolo d'Italia*, in cui prima esprimeva il sospetto che le forze anti-Trattato e De Valera fossero in realtà bolscevichi o al loro soldo, mentre poi, dopo la vittoria delle forze pro-Trattato, riconosceva che l'isola si era liberata dalla minaccia rossa. Nota Bibbò: "we can also confidently identify in Pellizzi's articles the progressive development of an interest in Irish affairs that would result in the scholar becoming one of the most acute observers of Irish theatre in the 1930s. Despite his belief in the inability of Ireland to govern itself, he was keen to emphasize the huge intellectual contribution made by the country to England" (182). Presentando poi Pellizzi come mediatore culturale per i suoi articoli sul teatro irlandese e poi per il capitolo dedicato ad esso in *Il teatro inglese* del 1934 (che venne anche pubblicato l'anno dopo a Londra in inglese), il nostro autore riscontra che l'impostazione della sua critica teatrale è che "theater is a way to gain an insight into the mind of a people and a privileged vantage point from which to discuss the political attitudes of a nation" (211). E osserva che, "Though a significant chapter is devoted to Irish theatre, Pellizzi's awareness of the complexities of Irish drama is perhaps even more evident from the other chapters of *Il teatro inglese*. As discussed earlier, Yeats is not included in the Irish section. Pellizzi often mentions Yeats's nationalist ideals, but places him among the 'Altri narratori e poeti [che] hanno tentato il teatro'" (212). Secondo Pellizzi, Yeats era poeta, non drammaturgo: "credeva nella poesia come si poteva credere nella poesia alla fine dell'Ottocento inglese: in una poesia [...] come una forza magica e taumaturgica", but struggling to find a way to bring poetry to the masses, he 'rivolse i suoi pensieri al teatro'" (*ibidem*). Bibbò dice anche de *Il teatro inglese* che, "In his account of Irish drama, Pellizzi showed profound expertise, discussing both the Abbey's early exponents (e.g. Lady Gregory and Synge) and its latest blooms, including the realist school, a rarity by Italian standards. He was not only conversant with the by-now traditional repertoire put together by Linati, but also familiar with lesser known dramatists" (213). E Bibbò nota come l'interpretazione del drammaturgo americano Eugene O'Neill e di Seán O'Casey da parte di Pellizzi abbia avuto "long-standing consequences" nei dieci anni successivi: O'Neill trasformato in irlandese per discendenza e per i suoi motivi veristici, e O'Casey ascritto agli autori realistici, ma purgato indebitamente del suo socialismo radicale, fatto così scomparire (214).

Bibbò si occupa anche del volume pubblicato nel 1934 dal militante fascista Nicola Pascazio, *La Rivoluzione d'Irlanda e l'Impero Britannico*. Esso scaturiva dal rapporto compilato da Pascazio e da un suo camerata, inviati in visita in Irlanda per conto dei CAUR (Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalità di Roma) onde vedere quali forze irlandesi potessero essere attratte dalla sirena mussoliniana, e viene presentato condivisibilmente così dal nostro ricercatore: "In this occasionally crude and superficial volume on recent Irish history, Pascazio often expresses the idea that Ireland could be drawn toward a Fascist dictatorship through O'Duffy and his Blueshirts. Although much less focused on the literary field, and rather more political in its

⁴Ebbene sì: Camillo Pellizzi era il fratello minore del nonno di questo recensore. Gerarca fascista atipico, in quanto estremamente anglofilo, lo zio Camillo riteneva che solo i popoli civili, quali gli inglesi, potessero governarsi da sé tramite istituzioni rappresentative, mentre i popoli semi-selvaggi, quali gli italiani, necessitavano della autorevole dittatura di un Cesare per potere raggiungere la civiltà. Quanto agli irlandesi, a dispetto della relativa moderazione dei suoi scritti, dovuta al suo ruolo politico e diplomatico (con tanto di visita ufficiale a De Valera capo del governo negli anni Trenta), li considerava degli assoluti selvaggi. A conferma del suo ostile giudizio ricordava anche come l'ambasciatore irlandese presso la Santa Sede finisse regolarmente ubriaco sotto il tavolo ai ricevimenti ufficiali.

analysis, the volume followed in the footsteps of Borsa in terms of both the simplification of the nationalist front and the expansion of the national literary canon, without displaying any of the literary and political acumen of the Milanese journalist [...] The primary point of interest in this propaganda piece, riddled with blunders (to note just one example, Pascazio falsely equates Fenians and Sinn Féiners) and confusing timelines, is the further establishment of key hetero-images of Ireland, further building upon notions already present in the works of Borsa and other early irlandesisti such as Hagan and Valera" (194). Bisogna però dire che, cosa che Bibbò non nota, Pascazio nel volume si mostrava alquanto oscillante riguardo a chi potesse essere il miglior fascista o alleato dell'Italia fascista in Irlanda, e lasciava aperta la possibilità che questi fosse indifferentemente Owen O'Duffy, il fascista dichiarato, o il suo avversario al governo, Éamon De Valera. La conclusione di Pascazio, scrive il nostro ricercatore, "is that the Italians should be made more acquainted with Ireland, with special emphasis placed on the common roots of Fascism and Catholicism" (195).

Il capitolo si occupa poi dei frutti ulteriori della propaganda fascista riguardo all'Irlanda, quali gli articoli ne *Il Corriere della Sera* del 1938 di Renato Simoni, il libro collettaneo *Irlanda* curato da Luigi Palumbo nel 1940, in cui tra gli autori compare la maggioranza dei "mediatori" di cui ci si è occupati (i cui contributi Bibbò analizza con cura, compreso quello di Serafino Riva, che nel 1937 aveva pubblicato un volumone su Synge), e *Irlanda e Roma* di Amy A. Bernardy, del 1942, illustrando di nuovo le immagini e gli stereotipi che veicolavano.

Bibbò registra, sempre con la medesima sottigliezza di analisi, nuove rappresentazioni e nuove traduzioni di opere teatrali irlandesi, e nuove traduzioni di autori irlandesi di prosa. Molte di queste traduzioni furono dovute all'opera di intermediazione editoriale e in minor misura teatrale di un altro mediatore culturale, l'editore veneto Gian Dàuli: "It was his innovative contention that the renaissance of Irish literature was primarily attributable to prose writing rather than poetry and drama" (223). Dàuli non si occupava solo di fare tradurre opere di autori irlandesi, ma anche americani, inglesi e di tutto il mondo anglosassone. Riuscì però a fare pubblicare, tra 1929 e 1930, ben dodici traduzioni di romanzi dell'irlandese d'America Brian Oswald Donn Byrne, il già citato libro di Stephens, e il primo libro di George Moore pubblicato nel nostro paese, in questo caso tradotto da Dàuli stesso. Attento al folklore celtico, la visione di Dàuli degli irlandesi ricalcava le immagini degli Gaeli immaginifici, mistici, istintivi, campagnoli, senza piedi per terra, che era già stata proposta da Renan e Arnold. E l'opera instancabile, seppur disordinata, di Dàuli ebbe un ruolo nell'espansione dei romanzi irlandesi pubblicati nel catalogo Mondadori. Bibbò descrive l'attività frenetica di Dàuli con uno scrupoloso uso delle fonti archivistiche.

Il quinto capitolo, "We Are All Irish in the Eyes of Mussolini: Irish Theater in the War Years", presenta il grande e influentissimo "uomo di teatro" Anton Giulio Bragaglia, direttore del Teatro delle Arti di Roma dal 1937, e Lucio Ridenti, direttore della rivista teatrale di Torino *Il Dramma*, che dal 1940 diedero nuovo slancio alla traduzione e rappresentazione di opere teatrali irlandesi, cosa dovuta anche al fatto che l'Italia fascista in guerra proibiva la rappresentazione di opere di autori di paesi nemici. Bibbò ripercorre queste produzioni sulla base di una attenta ricerca archivistica, e osserva come molti commediografi americani di origine irlandese (ma che nulla avevano a che fare con l'Irlanda) vennero disinvoltamente fatti passare per irlandesi. Come scrisse nel febbraio del 1942 lo stesso Bragaglia in una lettera a Ridenti scovata da Bibbò, "Io le recite le faccio come atto di guerra autorizzato dallo Stato Italiano che è in guerra con l'America" (272 n. 27; se a quel tempo fossero già esistite le emoticon, forse Bragaglia avrebbe fatto bene a chiudere la frase con una faccina sghignazzante). Compare poi il giovane attore, direttore di scena e critico teatrale Paolo Grassi, che dal 1943 diresse le edizioni della piccola

casa editrice milanese Rosa e Ballo. Tra i primi venti volumi della “Collezione Teatro” di Rosa e Ballo ben otto erano di autori irlandesi: Synge (l’intera opera drammatica in quattro volumi, più – al di fuori della collana – la traduzione completa di Linati di *The Aran Islands*), Yeats (due volumi), uno di O’Casey e uno di Joyce (*The Exiles*). Tranne che nel caso di due brevi drammi di Synge, tutte le altre traduzioni erano quelle di Carlo Linati. Come nota Bibbò, il programma di Grassi “to revive Italian theater does not involve a choice of writers unknown to the Italian public; rather it entails a rebranding of texts with which the public was already at least partly familiar” (276). E nota anche che Grassi non volle pubblicare altri drammaturghi irlandesi, pur già tradotti dalla rivista *Il Dramma*: “Even with Yeats’s plays, he favored those in which the political allegory was quite blatant, such as *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. He also privileged the expressionist tones of Synge and the bleak political realism of the socialist O’Casey. As it had been often the case, in the Italian reception of Irish literature, the mediator’s aim was less to explore new ground than to rebrand what was already part of the domestic repertoire” (277). L’autore nota anche come “This apparently safe choice of texts, however, was ingeniously reframed as subversive and anti-Fascist by Grassi” (277), facendo il divertente esempio della commedia di O’Casey del 1923, *The Shadow of a Gunman*, che tradotta da Linati nel 1936 era stata pubblicata ne *Il Convegno* senza che la censura del regime obbiettasse; ripubblicata da Rosa e Ballo nel settembre 1944, sempre senza che la censura della R.S.I. obbiettasse, dopo la Liberazione al volume venne aggiunta una fascetta: “I libri proibiti dai fascisti” (foto a 278).

Nel breve sesto capitolo, “Conclusion”, Bibbò riassume i contenuti e i risultati della sua ricerca: “It is a commonly held belief that Carlo Linati almost single-handedly paved the way for Irish literature in Italy at the start of the twentieth century. While his role as a mediator was certainly crucial, this book has argued that a much more complex network of irlandesisti was involved in importing Irish literature and culture into Italy, both laying the groundwork for, and complementing, Carlo Linati’s *scoperta*. Mediators such as Borsa, Buonaiuti, O’Riordan, Hagan, Joyce, Dàuli, Valera, Fienga, Pellizzi, Rossi, Pascazio, Bragaglia, and Ridenti belonged to very diverse milieus (Catholic modernism, journalism, politics, literature, theater) and had different statuses and often conflicting aims in mind, as well as different concepts of Ireland (Catholic, Gaelic, Anglo-Irish, colonial, socialist, proto-Fascist, and so forth), which they therefore depicted in various, often incompatible, ways. This book has investigated the discourses on Irishness in early twentieth-century Italy” (283). L’autore ribadisce come in Italia il legame, sempre dato per scontato in quei decenni, tra letteratura irlandese e nazionalismo del popolo dell’isola “meant that often Irish writers who were not ostensibly political or Catholic, or who did not at least dabble in national themes, were rarely perceived as Irish even when they managed to make it to the other side of the Alps. Unsurprisingly, the perception of the specificity of Irish literature gained momentum during those times that saw Italy either at war or simply at odds with England” (284).

Bibbò indica poi alcune prospettive di futura ricerca sui temi sviscerati dalla sua opera (che non credo comunque arricchirebbero o cambierebbero in modo rilevante i risultati della sua già magistrale ricerca), come ad esempio scoprire quante opere teatrali irlandesi siano state trasmesse dalla radio di Stato, l’EIAR, fino al 1945, e altri temi che riguardano però piuttosto il secondo dopoguerra, così come riguarda il dopoguerra il suo quesito finale: “Perhaps the most pressing question, however, is one that has accompanied me throughout my research. While exploring the dissemination of conflicting images of Irishness and realizing that such a wealth of scholarship, as well as popular literature, on Ireland was produced in Italy in the early twentieth century, I have been struck by the seemingly sharp contrast this presents with the general neglect for Ireland in the decades following the war. Why is the notion of Irish literature virtually set

aside in Italy in the postwar years, despite the continued study (and translations) of individual writers? Is it because of its complex and inconvenient links with the Fascist regime? Does it have to do with a wariness of nationalism that emerged in postwar Europe, together with the lack of interest in such questions demonstrated by New Criticism and structuralism?” (288).

Concludendo, ritengo che dal punto di vista storico e culturale la bella ricerca di Antonio Bibbò abbia rinvenuto e detto quasi tutto ciò che si potesse scoprire sulla ricezione della cultura irlandese e sulle immagini dell'Irlanda in Italia tra il 1900 e la fine della Seconda guerra mondiale.

Carlo Maria Pellizzi

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Riccardo Michelucci, *Guerra, Pace e Brexit. Il lungo viaggio dell'Irlanda*, Città di Castello, Casa editrice Odoja, 2022, pp. 287. € 20. ISBN: 978-88-6288-722-9.

Un ricchissimo frutto del lavoro pluridecennale, dagli accordi di pace di Belfast del 1998 fino a oggi, di Riccardo Michelucci, giornalista, fotografo documentarista e profondo conoscitore dell'Irlanda. Gli articoli e le interviste che l'autore aveva pubblicato su quotidiani e riviste o usato per trasmissioni radiofoniche, tutti comunque aggiornati e riscritti, corredati da nuove parti introduttive ed esplicative, ed abbondantemente illustrati dalle fotografie quasi sempre scattate dallo stesso Michelucci, compongono davvero “un mosaico ragionato di testimonianze, di piccole e grandi storie che raccontano il cuore di tenebra di una terra segnata dal dolore e dal sangue ma ancora ricca di ideali e di utopie possibili” (16).

Non si tratta, come in altri casi, di una raccolta degli scritti d'occasione prodotti nel corso di una carriera giornalistica, ma di un'opera compiuta, un percorso che illumina riguardo sia al conflitto anglo-irlandese e alla sua ultima fase (dal 1968-1969 agli accordi del 1998), sia al lungo e tormentato processo di pace, che avrà il suo reale coronamento, in un futuro forse prossimo, solo con la riunificazione dell'isola d'Irlanda. Spiegando il suo interesse, umano e professionale, per l'Irlanda, e “l'attrazione fatale” che essa ha esercitato su di lui, anche quando l'isola verde non era più sotto i riflettori dei mass media internazionali, Michelucci scrive: “Troppe erano le dinamiche ancora da approfondire e da comprendere, troppo paradigmatica e universale è l'esperienza della lotta di liberazione irlandese per non cercare di raccontarla a un pubblico italiano da sempre ingannato dalla falsa retorica della ‘guerra di religione’” (13-14).

Anche chi segua da più di cinquanta anni gli avvenimenti irlandesi ha molto da imparare dal libro di Michelucci, che approfondisce vicende che a un osservatore esterno risultavano solo fugaci episodi di cronaca nello stillicidio di un conflitto lungo e sanguinoso. A puro titolo

d'esempio (vi sono nel libro molti altri approfondimenti simili, e altrettanto utili), è magistrale come l'autore faccia luce sulle circostanze del massacro della Miami Showband, avvenuto il 31 luglio 1975, e su cosa rappresentasse nella cultura popolare irlandese del tempo quello stesso gruppo musicale, intervistando poi quello dei due sopravvissuti che più si è impegnato nella individuazione dei mandanti della strage, "esponenti dei servizi segreti britannici MI5 insieme alla squadra politica della polizia dell'Irlanda del Nord"; mentre cinque paramilitari lealisti, al contempo soldati di Sua Maestà nell'Ulster Defence Regiment, erano stati solo gli esecutori materiali del crimine, che comunque, per un accidente, non raggiunse l'obiettivo politico voluto (vedi 96-106, "Il giorno in cui la musica finì per sempre" e "L'ultimo testimone"). Godibilissimo, per fare un altro esempio, il ricordo della distruzione dell'imponente monumento all'ammiraglio Nelson sulla O'Connell Street di Dublino, avvenuto ad opera di un gruppo di repubblicani non affiliati ad una organizzazione nel marzo 1966, per celebrare simbolicamente il cinquantenario della Rivolta di Pasqua (vedi 196-204).

L'autore ritrae anche molti dei protagonisti di quegli anni, con interessanti resoconti a tutto tondo di quelli ormai scomparsi, e anche con vivide interviste a quelli ancora vivi. Tra questi ultimi c'è ovviamente chi aveva avuto un ruolo direttamente politico, quali ad esempio Bernadette Devlin, Eamonn McCann e altri attivisti della originaria campagna per i diritti civili, molti altri che furono soldati dell'I.R.A. (Esercito Repubblicano Irlandese) durante il conflitto – tanto quelli che hanno abbracciato l'attuale linea politica del Sinn Féin Provisional, come Séanna Walsh, quanto i dissidenti, come Brendan Hughes e Marian Price – e alcuni sacerdoti, come Raymond Murray e Denis Faul, impegnati nella denuncia degli abusi e delle atrocità del potere e al contempo nel tenere i contatti tra le parti contrapposte. Ma Michelucci dedica questo tipo di ritratti e di interviste anche ai letterati dell'Irlanda contemporanea, meno direttamente impegnati sul fronte politico, e il cui coinvolgimento politico spesso sfugge. Tra questi poeti e scrittori, come ad esempio Michael Longley, Michael Higgins (presidente della Repubblica irlandese dal 2011, oggi al suo secondo mandato) e il premio Nobel per la letteratura del 1995 Seamus Heaney (e si veda il capitolo "L'infinita letteratura dell'Irlanda divisa" riguardo agli autori contemporanei irlandesi di narrativa, 253-256).

Mentre Michelucci è apertamente schierato dalla parte dell'Irlanda, ravvisando con chiarezza il carattere coloniale del conflitto anglo-irlandese, "scontro tra indipendentisti e Stato britannico" ("La guerra a bassa intensità che è stata combattuta negli ultimi tre decenni del Novecento nelle sei contee del Nord Irlanda ancora appartenenti al Regno Unito ha rappresentato soltanto l'ultima fase dell'interminabile conflitto anglo-irlandese", prodotto da "[s]ecoli di oppressione coloniale")(14), egli è anche sorprendentemente obiettivo, e assolutamente esente da "servo encomio" verso chicchessia. Mi riferisco qui, ovviamente, alla corrente del repubblicanesimo irlandese attuale più politicamente influente, il Sinn Féin Provisional, oggi trionfante in entrambe le parti dell'Irlanda. Lo dimostra il fatto che l'autore non rifugge dall'affrontare argomenti assai scottanti, come ad esempio i resoconti riguardo alla nascita e allo sviluppo del processo di pace di Ed Moloney, e la ancora più scottante controversia riguardo allo sciopero della fame fino alla morte del 1981 – forse artatamente prolungato dall'esterno per motivi politici, a prezzo della vita degli ultimi sei caduti – suscitata dai due libri di Richard O'Rawe, prigioniero nel supercarcere di Long Kesh e incaricato dei comunicati dei prigionieri dello I.R.A. diretti all'esterno al tempo di quella estrema protesta (vedi su questa controversia "Ombre sull'IRA", 70-73).

Un libro, quello di Michelucci, pieno di sorprese, e che vale comunque la pena di leggere.

Carlo Maria Pellizzi

Bobby Sands, *Scritti dal carcere. Poesie e prose*, a cura di Riccardo Michelucci e Enrico Terrinoni, Vedano al Lambro, Paginauno, 2020, pp. 269. € 18. ISBN: 9788899699444.

La più estesa raccolta degli scritti dal carcere, poesie e brevi saggi e racconti, del martire repubblicano Bobby Sands, *Writings From the Prison*, era stata pubblicata in Irlanda nel 1998 (Sands 1998). Oggi grazie a Riccardo Michelucci ed Enrico Terrinoni, il pubblico italiano può finalmente disporre di una sua buona traduzione completa. Alcune traduzioni di altri testi di Sands pubblicati a parte in Irlanda e di alcuni contenuti nella raccolta ora magistralmente tradotta erano apparse decenni fa⁵; così come il resoconto autobiografico *One Day in My Life*, pubblicato in Irlanda già nel 1982 e non compreso in questa raccolta, era stato tradotto in Italia a cura di Silvia Calamati.

Ripetendo cose probabilmente già note a chi abbia un interesse verso la storia irlandese, Bobby Sands (Robert Gerard Sands, Belfast 9 marzo 1954 - Long Kesh 5 maggio 1981), primo figlio di una famiglia operaia cattolica, ma cresciuto in un quartiere a maggioranza protestante, subì insieme alla sua famiglia fin dalla più tenera età le azioni intimidatorie degli unionisti, mossi dall'odio confessionale suprematista. La goccia che fece traboccare il vaso e che lo convinse a diciassette anni a prendere parte alla lotta armata per la riunificazione e l'indipendenza dell'isola condotta dall'Esercito Repubblicano Irlandese, fu nel 1971 l'essere cacciato sotto minaccia di morte dal corso di avviamento professionale che stava seguendo ad opera di lealisti armati. Leader naturale, reclutò per la causa un gruppo di suoi amici d'infanzia, e nell'ottobre 1972 venne arrestato e condannato per la prima volta per possesso di armi, venendo rilasciato nell'aprile 1976. Tornato alla lotta, venne arrestato la seconda volta, sempre per possesso di armi, nell'ottobre dello stesso anno e condannato a 14 anni di prigione insieme a tre suoi compagni. Tra la liberazione e il secondo arresto era però cambiato tutto nelle condizioni di detenzione dei prigionieri politici nelle Sei Contee. Il ministro britannico per l'Irlanda del Nord, il laburista Roy Mason, aveva abolito lo status speciale dei prigionieri politici, che consentiva ad essi (tanto ai repubblicani quanto ai lealisti), a differenza dei detenuti comuni, di non indossare una divisa da detenuto, di non lavorare per il carcere, di associarsi per attività ricreative e culturali con altri prigionieri (ovvero di ricostituire in carcere i gruppi politici di appartenenza, con riconoscimento implicito da parte delle autorità della loro catena di comando), di ricevere una volta alla settimana pacchi, lettere e visite dall'esterno, e di avere forti sconti di pena. Bobby Sands subito dopo l'arresto rifiutò di indossare l'uniforme carceraria, venendo lasciato nudo e con solo una coperta addosso: fu così uno dei primi *blanketmen*, "uomini della coperta", come vennero chiamati tutti i prigionieri che non si sottomisero alle nuove disposizioni. Trasferito nei nuovi "blocchi H" del famigerato supercarcere di Long Kesh, Sands divenne uno dei leader della resistenza dei prigionieri grazie alla sua personalità carismatica e travolgente: "uno dei pochi che erano realmente in grado di motivare i compagni e tenere alto il loro morale. Il suo attivismo era incessante e la sua energia pareva inesauribile" (21). La "protesta della coperta" si trasformò nel marzo 1978 in *dirty protest* o "protesta sporca", perché i secondini sottoponevano a pestaggi i detenuti quando questi andavano a portare il bugliolo fuori dalla cella per svuotarlo e a fare la doccia. Sullo sfondo di questa lotta in condizioni estreme e disumane, Bobby Sands riuscì a scrivere e a far pervenire all'esterno i suoi scritti, con stratagemmi descritti da Michelucci nei particolari nella sua introduzione. Nell'ottobre 1980, sette prigionieri repubblicani iniziarono lo sciopero della fame per riavere lo status e i diritti di prigionieri politici, e Sands divenne il capo dei prigionieri dell'I.R.A. a Long Kesh. I britannici, contrariamente alle promesse con cui avevano fatto smettere lo sciopero della fame, non ripristinarono i diritti dei

⁵ Vedi ad esempio Sands (1981) e Sands (1997).

prigionieri, per cui il 1 marzo 1981 Bobby Sands iniziò un secondo sciopero della fame fino alla morte, secondo la tradizione repubblicana irlandese, che lo vide infine cadere il 5 maggio, dopo che, come candidato di protesta, era stato eletto al parlamento britannico in una elezione suppletiva. Sciopero che si concluse solo nell'ottobre successivo, dopo la morte di altri nove detenuti repubblicani. La morte di Sands e dei suoi nove compagni aveva dato una scossa all'intera Irlanda e aveva smosso l'opinione pubblica mondiale, per cui a quel punto lo status dei prigionieri politici nell'Irlanda del Nord venne ripristinato dal Governo britannico alla chetichella. I suoi scritti, il più delle volte firmati con lo pseudonimo "Marcella", ebbero dal 1977 una importanza decisiva nel fare conoscere all'esterno la lotta dei prigionieri, ed "ebbero un ruolo determinante nella campagna repubblicana che ruotò attorno al secondo sciopero della fame. Fuori dal carcere, il sostegno popolare nei confronti dei detenuti crebbe in modo esponenziale con il trascorrere delle settimane: ogni giorno migliaia di persone scendevano in piazza a manifestare, non solo a Belfast e nel resto del Nord Irlanda, ma in tutta l'isola" (20). Mentre sul breve periodo la morte di Sands e dei suoi compagni rafforzò la campagna militare dell'I.R.A. e dell'I.N.L.A. (Esercito di Liberazione Nazionale Irlandese, di cui facevano parte tre dei dieci caduti nello sciopero della fame) contro lo Stato britannico, l'elezione di Sands a Westminster e di altri tra gli scioperanti della fame al parlamento della Repubblica irlandese aprirono la via all'impegno elettorale del Sinn Féin, che lo portò ad essere determinante nel processo di pace che ha posto termine con gli accordi del 1998 a questa ultima, lunga fase del conflitto anglo-irlandese, e ad essere oggi il primo partito in entrambe le parti dell'Irlanda divisa.

"Bobby Sands possedeva un autentico talento da scrittore. L'originalità della sua voce appare dirompente come l'acqua di un fiume che ha sfondato gli argini", nota Michelucci. "La tensione costante tra l'imprigionamento del corpo e la libertà della mente e dello spirito [...] attraversa tutte le sue opere [...] e travalica i confini tradizionali della poesia, della prosa, del saggio politico, dell'autobiografia" (21). Poesie e prose davvero intense, intessute al tempo stesso di atroce realismo riguardo alla violenza dell'apparato repressivo, di coscienza politica in forma lirica (e spesso cadenzata sui tempi della ballata tradizionale irlandese), e di rimandi al mito e alla storia irlandesi. "Popolo d'Irlanda, pensate bene a questi versi / Non contengono scherzi o battute, o semplici rime / Se sapeste della tortura che conoscono i prigionieri / Irrompereste in queste segrete per abbattere quest'inferno" ("Un tributo ai secondini", 144).

Michelucci e Terrinoni hanno fatto un ottimo lavoro nella traduzione di questi testi non facili (non facili soprattutto, ovviamente, le poesie), e lo hanno accompagnato con un buon apparato di note che spiegano al lettore italiano le allusioni, le citazioni e i rimandi contenuti negli scritti di Sands. Note ottime ed esaurienti dal punto di vista storico; ma volendo trovare a tutti i costi il pelo nell'uovo, sembra che, a differenza degli irlandesi e degli abitanti della brumosa Val Padana e delle montagne che la circondano, i due curatori non abbiano molta familiarità con il "Piccolo popolo" delle fate e dei folletti; e il *claymore*, lungi dall'essere "Una sorta di spada scozzese simile al gladio" (254 n. 43), era il lungo spadone a due mani preferito per secoli dagli uomini dei clan delle Highlands.

Un'opera che mostra il grande spessore umano, poetico e letterario del martire irlandese oggi più noto nel mondo, che i due bravi curatori e traduttori hanno finalmente rivelato in pieno agli italiani con questa pubblicazione. Ma che il sacrificio di Bobby Sands e degli altri caduti per la causa dell'Irlanda non sia stato vano solo il futuro potrà rivelarlo.

Carlo Maria Pellizzi

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