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"But Where Can We Draw Water?": Ideology, Myth, and Legend in Twentieth-Century Irish Literature

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“BUT WHERE CAN WE DRAW WATER?”
IDEOLOGY, MYTH, AND LEGEND IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY IRISH LITERATURE

A Dissertation
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2015

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This analysis of Irish literature from the late nineteenth century through the early twenty-first century focuses, by employing Marxist theory, on the ideologies reflected in the adaptation of myth and legend. It traces the development of Irish society’s various adaptations as it moves from an English colony to an independent state. After my preface outlining the dissertation, there are two introductory chapters: Chapter 1 examines relevant Irish history and Chapter 2 advances Marxist and post-Marxist theory informing my critique of ideology.

Chapter 3 (Celtic Revival to the 1916 Easter Rising) examines the hegemonic shift away from the Protestant Ascendancy class, reproduced in the time period’s literature. Pádraic Pearse successfully merged the theme of blood sacrifice and martyrdom with the Irish legendary figure Cúchulainn, codifying a new mythology centered on the execution of the Easter Rising’s leaders. Pearse’s Cúchulainn replaced the more genteel reflection of Protestant ideology found in the writers of the Celtic Revival, coinciding with the shift in Irish society after the Rising.

Chapters 4 and 5 are both focused on how myth and legend were used after the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922. Taoiseach Éamon de Valera and his political party, Fianna Fáil, attempted to rid Ireland of outside influence by emphasizing a moralistic lifestyle, embodied in the Catholic Church and romanticized in the peasant farmer of the Irish-speaking Gaeltacht. Chapter 4 looks at how myth and legend were used by fabulist writers to satirize the nascent Irish government’s restrictive policies. Chapter 5 concentrates on how those writing in Irish depicted

the erosion of the Irish language and the lifestyle of the Gaeltacht. Chapter 6 analyzes the “Troubles” in Northern Ireland and the ideologies embedded in the texts of the time. The writers of the Troubles were forced to confront the sectarian violence occurring around them, and these experiences are reflected in their literary works. I also trace the lasting influence of the blood sacrifice of Pearse’s Cúchulainn. I conclude by arguing that Ireland is now headed into an era dominated by visual media that will hopefully move to a more pluralistic representation of Irishness.

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I am privileged to work with wonderful people at the County College of Morris. The support and encouragement of my colleagues in the English department have been constant sources of inspiration. The fact that I do not have the room here to thank each of them individually speaks to the quality of their character. I am especially grateful for the support of those who have been through the process already. I need to say a special thank you to Dr. Janet Eber, chairperson of the English and Philosophy Department, who made every effort to make accommodations to my schedule and commitments so that I could complete this dissertation. Her support and friendship—and the support and friendship of the entire department—illustrate why we are family, not just colleagues.

My eternal gratitude goes out to my family. To my sisters, Jordann, Delaney, Kelsey, and Brooke, thank you for always being there for me. To my father-in-law and mother-in-law, Jeff and Cindy, thank you for all your love, support, and encouragement. And to my parents, Patti and Toby, whose love and sacrifice have allowed me to grow into the man I am today, thank you for all that you have done for me. You have always encouraged and supported my lifelong desire to learn; I cannot imagine more loving and supportive parents than you. I love you with all that I am.

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PREFACE

In many ways, the genesis of this dissertation has been gestating for many years, beginning when I was a child attempting to understand my own cultural heritage. As with so many Americans whose ancestors have been in the United States for several generations, my background is varied. In my particular case, it is made up of a collection of mostly western European nations; however, the particular ones that always seemed to stand out were Irish and Italian, but especially my family's Irish heritage, since it could be found on both my mother's and father's sides. But I wondered to myself what made my Irish American heritage different from the backgrounds of my classmates. What does it mean to be Irish American? What ties bond a group of people together beyond familial ones? In other words, in this expansive web of cultural identity, why do we collectively determine that this particular set of attributes sets us apart from other groups?

I never felt like I found any great answers to these questions as a child. I knew about the hardships of my Irish ancestors as they left Counties Mayo and Roscommon and came to the United States, passing through Ellis Island and New York City, before settling in Newark, New Jersey, like so many before them. There was a palpable sense of community; many of my family members sought to foster those ties even further by joining fraternal organizations such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians or the Friendly Sons of Shillelagh. I learned about the Great Famine and St. Patrick, but I never felt any closer to understanding what it meant to be Irish. I certainly knew that it meant that I was not to identify with anything that was clearly English or Protestant in nature, but instead, to be Irish was to be exclusively Gaelic and Catholic. To be Irish, as Thomas N. Brown wrote in *Irish-American Nationalism*, was to buy into "the grandly

romantic conception of the Irish as Celts. The Irish Irish and the Irish of the diaspora were bound together by this racial tie.” If nothing else, that was certainly clear.

When I went to live in Ireland in 2002 to begin my graduate studies at the National University of Ireland, Galway, I began to recognize differences in how Irish identity was shaped and defined when compared to Irish-American identity. There was less outward jingoism and belligerent anti-English rhetoric. It had been several years since the signing of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement in Belfast between representatives of Catholic and Protestant parliamentary groups, which worked to create a greater shared governing process, to protect civil rights for all, and to end paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland. Any trip to Dublin and seeing the ubiquitous English hen and stag parties (bachelorette and bachelor parties, respectively) left to their own devices revealed that things had changed. This is not to say that there still was not animosity towards the English; instead, it was more a case of what Seamus Heaney suggests in his poem “Whatever You Say Say Nothing:” Heaney writes of “those sanctioned, old, elaborate retorts: / ‘Oh, it’s disgraceful, surely, I agree.’ / ‘Where’s it going to end?’ ‘It’s getting worse’” (*North* 52-53). However, the sectarian divide is still easily seen, even if “smoke- signals are loud mouthed compared with us” (52), because names give people away: “That Norman, Ken and Sidney signaled Prod, / And Seamus (call me Sean) was sure-fire Pape” (53). Outwardly when discussing the Troubles, it was appropriate to shake one’s head and agree that what was happening in the North was a shame; however, there was no way to ignore markers of identity that continued to separate Irish and English. Regardless, the country was still riding the economic high brought about by the Celtic Tiger, that heady economic boom of the 1990s, and the newfound clout that came with it on the European stage as a member of the European Union,

and it seemed that people had better things to worry about than those factors that divided them from their neighbors to the east.

I returned home to the United States with an M. A., feeling a bit closer to the answer yet still far from it. I did, however, recognize that I was part of a larger tradition that connects the United States and the Irish-American experience to Ireland across the Atlantic. There are major figures in politics and the arts whose background has reinforced the connection between both nations: people such as former Irish Taoiseach (prime minister) and president Éamon de Valera, whose mother was Irish but who was born in New York City, a fact that kept him alive in the wake of 1916's Easter Rising when fifteen of its Irish leaders were executed; thirty-fifth president of the United States, John F. Kennedy; poet John Montague, who grew up in New York City; and filmmaker John Sayles, whose Irish-American roots have allowed him to explore Ireland in his film *The Secret of Roan Inish*. The connection between Ireland and the United States has been significant since the mass exodus from the island in the wake of the Great Famine and the major Irish political movements and groups have sought support—both moral and financial—from Irish Americans. Going back to Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet, to the Fenians, Clan na Gael, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and Davitt, Parnell, and the Land League, money and political support went back to Ireland, as Thomas N. Brown traces in his book.

Again, I think that in many ways the beginnings of this study go all the way back to my childhood, and these questions have remained with me as I have sought to find a clearer understanding. I decided that I wanted to look at ideology as a factor shaping Irish identity. My main contention in this dissertation is that because of its inevitable connection to nationalism and politics, the use of myth and legend is reflective of the zeitgeist of each particular time period in

Ireland in the twentieth century, which also means that there needs to be a continual reevaluation of the uses of myth and legend throughout twentieth-century Irish literature.

What I have done throughout most of this dissertation is analyze the ideologies present in Irish literary works from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first. However, I have begun with two chapters that work to contextualize the literature historically and theoretically. It is nearly impossible to write effectively about Irish literature of the time periods that I cover here and not write about history as well. As a rule, I have followed Frederic Jameson's famous declaration to "always historicize" throughout this dissertation. By contextualizing these Irish texts within the historical time periods from which they come, one can analyze the ideological terrain on which struggle occurred and where failures arose. The use of myth and legend in modern Irish literature is most effective when it moves away from idealization and romanticization and instead attempts to deal with the real lives and struggles of the Irish and Northern Irish people. In spite of the fact that the connection to the Easter Rising has led to the perpetuation of myth and legend used in connection to blood sacrifice and violence in the name of a larger conflict, these tales have been reclaimed by many writers in response to this violence to highlight the problems of society. It is from these examples where shifts in hegemony can possibly lead to greater changes in society and a more pluralistic Ireland can emerge from the violent shadow of the past.

As I focus on history so extensively in Chapter 1, I must also acknowledge the historians whom I have cited in order to contextualize these literary texts historically, much as I recognize the most key literary critics later in this preface. Throughout this dissertation I have relied particularly upon R. F. Foster's *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* and Terence Brown's *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002*, both of which provide a necessary framework for an

analysis of the time periods that I examine. Foster, for better or worse, has dominated much of the critical attention paid to Irish historical texts in the last thirty years or so as the poster boy for revisionism in Irish historiography. Many, including Seamus Deane and Terry Eagleton, claim that his book is anti-Irish in nature and that it has minimized the actual exploitation and suffering of the Irish under British colonialism through its reductionist view that all tension and violence can be traced to back to sectarianism. Regardless of this opinion, when combined with additional accounts, I have found it to be quite useful. Malcolm Brown's book provides invaluable links between twentieth-century Irish history and its literature by focusing on cultural developments. Additionally, Thomas Bartlett's *Ireland: A History* proved invaluable in my chapter on Irish history, going beyond the more contemporary scope of Foster and certainly Brown. And Nicholas Canny's assessment of sixteenth and seventeenth-century relations between Ireland and English colonial forces offered an essential underpinning to my analysis, which also worked to contrast with some of Foster's claims in *Modern Ireland*.

In addition to the necessary historical contexts, I have also included a second introductory chapter, Chapter 2, that specifically presents the Marxist and Post-Marxist theoretical contexts in order to more clearly articulate my understanding of the key theoretical terms that I have used throughout this dissertation, particularly ideology and hegemony. I have relied upon the theories of Marx, Althusser, Gramsci, and Laclau and Mouffe to synthesize a definition of ideology that both takes into account and moves beyond the Marxist base-superstructure definition, which, while essential in many regards, cannot fully take into account the issues presented by transnational capitalism and the inability of various subgroups of the working classes to organize effectively under it. Taking a materialist approach that one may find in Marx and Althusser as my starting point, I then turn to Gramsci and his conception of hegemony and to how Laclau and

Mouffe illustrate how hegemony can be a terrain for struggle and moves beyond the base-superstructure determinist model that many turn to in conceiving ideology. This provides the theoretical framework upon which I will build in my analysis of a changing Ireland during the twentieth century. In this chapter, I also provide an Irish Marxist context, focusing on the work of James Connolly and Jim Larkin, specifically.

This dissertation as a whole is not meant to be a comprehensive analysis of the figures of Irish myth and legend in modern Irish literature. It seeks instead to analyze the ideologies that emerge from behind the adaptations of various Irish myths in what I feel is a representative number of texts from the Revival period through the formation of the Free State. What prompted me initially to conduct such an investigation was a passage in Terry Eagleton's *Ideology* that connects ideology to mythology: "Both myths and ideology are worlds of symbolic meaning with social functions and effects" (188). This idea becomes especially clear when we consider how myths and legends are used in the Revival period. From Standish O'Grady to Pádraic Pearse, the figure of Cúchulainn, in particular, is more than just a figure from a remote bardic tradition or past historical legacy. Different from Fionn mac Cumhaill,¹ who has remained a recurrent figure (in various guises) without interruption, Cúchulainn was revived and re-imagined at the end of the nineteenth century.

My choice to begin at the end of the nineteenth century with how the Celtic Revival used myth and legend was an easy one, as many of the time period's most significant writers—William Butler Yeats, John Millington Synge, Standish J. O'Grady, Lady Augusta Gregory, and George Russell—incorporated myth and legend in their work. The time period is also one of

¹ For an excellent analysis of the character of Fionn see James MacKillop's *Fionn mac Cumhaill: Celtic Myth in English Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1986).

great transition: Ireland was moving toward its independence and away from the hegemonic control of the Anglo-Irish who relied upon English policy to keep them in power.

This historical moment is also significant because it provides two influential—and, politically, very different—adaptations of myth that are both problematic in nature, but indicative of the hegemonic shift that takes place around the events of the Easter Rising in 1916. Standish O’Grady’s treatment of myth and legend is important, as it is the version that many others who could not read the Irish of the original medieval texts, including W. B. Yeats in his poems and plays, would use as the basis of their own readings of myth. This is particularly troublesome because O’Grady’s version of the Ulaid cycle in *The Coming of Cuculain* reshapes the legends by attempting to create a unified narrative of the disparate tales and by remaking Cúchulainn as an aristocratic hero one might find in a Defoe novel. His version also indicates a decidedly Anglocentric ideology that longs to keep things as they are with the Anglo-Irish maintaining their control over the island. On the other hand, the rhetoric that Pádraic Pearse uses in his speeches (especially his famous 1913 oration at the grave of O’Donovan Rossa), his essays (“The Murder Machine,” “How Does She Stand,” and “Three Lectures on Gaelic Topics”) and creative writing (his play *The Singer* and his poems “Mise Eire,” and “The Mother”) emphasizes the importance and necessity of blood sacrifice for a free and independent Ireland. This idea of the blood sacrifice, while not new or used only by Pearse, allows for a new myth to be codified around Pearse and the others who were executed for their participation in the Easter Rising. Despite the fact that O’Grady’s Anglo-Irish ideology is damaging in that it continues the cycle of exploitation and violence against the Catholic Irish, it is the ideology of Anglo-Irish hegemonic control in its twilight, raging against the closing of the day. Pearse’s use of blood sacrifice

would continue to influence succeeding generations, making it just as problematic as the ideology represented in O'Grady's work.

In addition to the texts by O'Grady and Pearse, in Chapter 3 I focus on the poetry and plays of Yeats, Lady Gregory's 1902 *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, and Synge's 1907 *The Playboy of the Western World* as three varied Anglo-Irish uses of myth and legend. It also analyzes Sean O'Casey's dramas as a response to Pearse's rhetoric and the failure of Connolly and Larkin's Marxist cause, especially in his play *The Plough and the Stars* (1926).

In Chapter 4, on the other hand, I move to the period after the formation of the Irish Free State in 1921. The fabulists of the first decades of Ireland's independence, the writers of the time who employed fantastic settings for their thinly-veiled versions of Ireland, used myth and legend to criticize the nascent government's conservative policies and strict moral rectitude. This chapter focuses specifically on the novels of Flann O'Brien (*At Swim-Two-Birds* [1939]), Eimar O'Duffy (*King Goshawk and the Birds* [1926] and *Asses in Clover* [1933]), and James Joyce (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* [1916], *Ulysses* [1922], and *Finnegans Wake* [1939]), as each takes the myths and legends that were held as sacred by the previous generation and uses them satirically to work around de Valera's censorship laws.

While Irish writers writing in English were using myth and legend to criticize de Valera and his political party, Fianna Fáil, those writing in Irish at the same time had different concerns. Industrialization changed the face of the Irish economy which was no longer driven by small-time agriculture. As such, those writing in Irish who called the Irish-speaking areas (or Gaeltachts) home found that the ways of life cherished for generations was dying, as was the language they wrote in. As Dublin ideologues went about romanticizing the west of Ireland and made those living there emblematic of Irish life in general, the financial infrastructure to help

those living there maintain a living wage was collapsing. In a way, the Gaelic Irish living outside of major cosmopolitan (and capitalist) centers made up an alien collective within their own country. Many younger people living in the *Gaeltachtaí* had neither the desire nor the fortitude to adopt the lives of the previous generations and turned to major cities and to England and America, where work was more plentiful and opportunities to escape could be found. Loss was everywhere—loss of culture, loss of language, and loss of identity. The two main writers looked at in Chapter 5 are the two dominant figures in Irish-language prose and poetry, respectively: Máirtín Ó Cadhain and Máirtín Ó Direáin. Each writer approaches the situation differently, but each illustrates how the Irish language can be a medium of significant art. For writers writing in Irish, the figures from myth and legend were seen as part of their culture, their language. They represented the continuation of the line of Irish *filí*, the poets of old. The fact that for these writers the Irish language and its tales represented one of the most sophisticated cultures of the medieval period, one now on the verge of collapse. There is almost an elegiac use of myth and legend, as though if the linguistic thread that links the old tales passed down orally before being transmitted to paper were to be severed, so would the country's true life line. Life in the west is not romanticized in Ó Cadhain and Ó Direáin; instead, it is mourned as if already dead. In fact, in Ó Cadhain's *Cré na Cille* (*The Dirty Dust*, 1949), the characters *are* already dead, as the story humorously depicts the afterlife in a small Connemara graveyard. Thus, as a result, there is a palpable sense of anger in their writings written in a dying language to a dying culture. Despite the fact the subject matter can be quite dire, there is still a good bit of humor to be found. Ó Cadhain's *Cré na Cille* and Myles na gCopaleen's *An Béal Bocht* (*The Poor Mouth*, 1941) are perfect illustrations of how humor can be used as a means to combat the failure of governmental policies in protecting the culture and language of the Gaeltachts.

Chapter 6 covers the period of the Troubles in Northern Ireland (1968-1998) and how writers respond to the violence that many bore witness to directly and how myth and legend is used/criticized. Not surprisingly, the main writer I examine here is Seamus Heaney, the Nobel Prize winning poet from County Derry, and how his poetry depicts and responds to the sectarian violence between Catholic (the Provisional IRA) and Protestant (Ulster Volunteer Force, among others) paramilitary groups, and the violence perpetrated against the citizenry by the Repressive State Apparatus of the Royal Irish Constabulary. The violence and the conflict between paramilitary groups has shaped much of the narrative about Ireland in the late-twentieth century, for better or worse. I have also included the work of Heaney's contemporary poets John Montague, Padraic Fiacc, Michael Hartnett, and Ciaran Carson, as means of comparison as I consider how each treats the Troubles differently. Inevitably, the tension present in the country itself is also voiced in the poetry of the time. Many of these writers longed to see the British occupation of Northern Ireland, and use of force that accompanied it, end. Along with the desire to see a united Ireland, there was also the desire to break from the perpetual cycle of violence.

Part of my analysis of ideology and hegemony is focused on groups of people whose voices are suppressed as a result of their concerns running contrary to dominant hegemonic forces. I am concerned with how working-class issues are covered by writers during the time periods represented here. In addition, a large focus is on the representation of women and how women's voices emerge in the latter half of the twentieth century to combat the stereotypical depictions of Ireland as a woman (such as Éire, Cathleen Ni Houlihan, and the Hag of Beare) and to reclaim powerful but frequently silenced and overlooked women from myth and legend, especially the character of Medb, Connacht's queen from the Irish epic *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. The two main women writers to whom I turn are Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Eavan Boland. What

emerges from looking at their work is how differently women handle myth and legend in the time of the Troubles from their male contemporaries. In addition, they also point to the oppression of women and the silencing and/or demonizing of them in the older texts, while at the same time highlighting the futility and pain caused by using myth and legend to justify sectarian-ethnic violence. In this section, I am particularly indebted to C. L. Innes's *Women and Nation in Irish Literature and Society 1880-1935*, her detailed and well-researched analysis of how problematic a gendered representation of the nation was during this time period and its lasting influence.

Finally, I turn my attention to film, since it replaces literature as the dominant cultural artifact during the last half of the twentieth century. I start at the end of Chapter 6 with an analysis of how Neil Jordan's 1992 film *The Crying Game* takes a different approach to myth and legend and to the Troubles. In my conclusion, the emphasis on film is even greater, with a look at how ideology is reflected in the use of myth and legend in Neil Jordan's *Ondine* (2009), John Sayles's *The Secret of Roan Inish* (1994), and Tomm Moore's *The Secret of Kells* (2009).

Overall, my dissertation breaks from other readings of Irish literature during the designated time periods with my analysis of the ideological ramifications of myth and legend as they are represented in the texts I have chosen to analyze. Certainly other scholars have analyzed the effects of history on Irish writers of the time periods included here; as I have mentioned earlier, it is nearly impossible to escape the shadow of history and the effects of colonialism and imperialism when writing about Ireland and Irish literature. There are also other writers who have used Marxist theory in their analysis of Irish literature as a cultural product. However, there are no lengthy and sustained studies of the ideologies reflected in the literature discussed in this dissertation, to the best of my knowledge.

Of course, this is not to say that there are not writers who have laid the groundwork for my own work. The leading Irish critic to whom I have most frequently turned during this study is Declan Kiberd, who takes Edward Said's postcolonial theories and successfully applies them to Ireland. His two seminal texts *Inventing Ireland* and *Irish Classics* are essential books for anyone looking to gain an understanding of Irish literature. Along with Kiberd, Seamus Deane's and David Lloyd's work on establishing Ireland's place in postcolonial theory, and especially Lloyd's Marxist readings included in his collection *Anomalous States*, have been invaluable during the research process. Philip O'Leary's extensive and meticulously researched studies of literature in the Irish language during 1881-1939 (*Gaelic Prose of the Gaelic Revival 1881-1921*, *Gaelic Prose and the Irish Free State 1922-1939*, and *Irish Interior: Keeping the Faith with the Past in Gaelic Prose*) provided me with a fantastically detailed overview of the literature I have analyzed here, as has James M. Cahalan's *The Irish Novel: A Critical History*. I also must acknowledge the work that José Laners has done in her *Unauthorized Versions: Irish Menippean Satire, 1919-1952*, because she deftly chooses lamentably neglected but important texts that emerge around the formation of the Free State, many of which are reflected in my own chapter on the fabulists.

I realize that my search to answer the question as to what makes one Irish is not an easy one to answer conclusively. The simplicity of the initial assessment that I received as a child still rings true for many. And there is certainly something meaningful in the antagonism between Irish and English, Catholic and Protestant that will continue for a long time. The complexity in the shifting depictions of Irishness found in writers such as Foster, Deane, Lloyd, and Conor Cruise O'Brien makes it clear that there is no easy and concise definition of what it means to be Irish. But we do find ourselves at a point in history where there has been some shift away from

the grand narrative of Irish history, where Ireland has stepped out from under the shadow of England and of the old history more comfortably than ever before since the beginning of English colonialism in 1169, in large part due to the economic changes at the end of the twentieth century. It is now confronted with literally a changing face, as people from all over the world are immigrating to Ireland's shores as opposed to the Irish leaving them as it was for so many years from the middle of the nineteenth century on. This inevitably must also affect and modify the definition of Irishness. The question of what it means to be Irish is an open one, and I certainly am curious as to where it will lead in the future.

CHAPTER 1

“ROMANTIC IRELAND’S DEAD AND GONE”: A BRIEF HISTORY OF IRELAND AS
LINKED TO IDEOLOGY, MYTH, AND LEGEND

"But where can we draw water,
Said Pearse to Connolly,
"When all the wells are parched away?
O plain as plain can be
There's nothing but our own red blood
Can make a right Rose Tree.'
—W. B. Yeats, "The Rose Tree"²

What does it mean to be “Irish”? At first glance, it seems a somewhat easy question to answer, that anyone who was born in or became a naturalized citizen of the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland can lay claim to being Irish. However, this would belie the more difficult aspect of identity that exists on a more symbolic level, as how one identifies oneself as a human being is not as easy as determining where one was born. Because of Ireland’s complex history, especially as it relates to its experiences as England’s first colony outside of their neighbors Scotland and Wales, makes attempting to sort out the question of “Irishness” even more difficult.

For me, one of the most significant aspects of Irish culture is the wide breadth of tales that make up its myth, legend, and folklore. For, as William Doty suggests in his influential *Mythography*, “Myths vary in *cultural viability* across the society’s history, so that one must always be alert to the process by which something develops mythic status (*mythicization*), or loses it in ‘merely’ secondary/tertiary influences, as in most contemporary literature or television” (18). With any analysis of this body of work, it is clear that there is no cohesive narrative. Instead, we get a loose collection of stories that vary widely across the dominant cycles of tales: mythological (tales about Lugh and the Tuatha Dé Danann and a series of

² Quoted from Yeats’s *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, Volume 1: The Poems* (183).

invasions), Ultonian (tales of Ulster with the focus on the Irish epic hero Cúchulainn, including the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*), Fenian (tales concerning Fionn mac Cumhaill and the Fianna), and the Cycle of Kings (some historical, most quasi-historical at best but featuring Labraid Loingsech, Brian Boru, and Suibhne, in particular). The Ultonian cycle provides the main focus for me, because it becomes the main focus for Irish writers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What becomes significant, to build on what Doty posits, is that “seldom does a single myth actualize the entire worldview, because that apparently requires a collection of many interlocked stories, a canon rather than one sample. In the process of transmission, constant change and adaptation to new or changed contexts takes place” (35), and there are multiple versions of these myths and legends worth studying through the process of adaptation through time, from the oral to the literary and then through the reinterpretation that comes later. In this case, it was near the end of the nineteenth century that there was a cultural movement that emphasized aspects of Irish culture that were not influenced by English occupation; the tales of ancient Ireland were a major component of this movement. These stories then become associated with the Easter Rising and the idea of blood sacrifice that accompanies it. Because of this usage, they have become politicized and used in the support of the struggle of particular groups in Ireland throughout the twentieth century against England, in both pre- and post-independent Ireland. As such, the shifting usage of myth and legend reflects larger shifts in society.

This study is meant to be an analysis of significant works of Irish literature—written in both English and Irish—from the latter part of the nineteenth century through the twentieth century; however, it is not only a study of Irish literary art. Instead, I want to focus on how Irish literature reflects the larger issues found in the society that produces it, thereby making my case that an ideological reading of these texts should be essential when considering them in the larger

framework of art's connection to culture and society. In order to successfully do so, I find it necessary to first provide an overview of the historical contexts of Ireland as an English colony, followed in my next chapter by a brief consideration of the development of "ideology" as a Marxist/post-Marxist term and how that connects to the Irish contexts and writers that provide my focus in the body of this dissertation. So as to more completely establish *why* there was so much animosity between the Irish and the English before Irish independence and then between the Catholics and Protestants after the formation of the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland (1922), I need to go back to the first English invasion in 1169. This background is necessary because it becomes part of Irish and Anglo-Irish identity over the centuries, as reflected in the literary texts themselves.

It is easy to be lulled into the convenient narrative of more than 800 years of English occupation and oppression—or as Frank McCourt sardonically put it at the beginning of *Angela's Ashes*, "the English and all the terrible things they did to us for 800 long years" (11). As Seamus Deane suggests, such a narrative produces "readings of the past that are as monolithic in nature as that which they are trying to supplant" (*Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* 8). It is this "monolithic" narrative that informs so many of the literary texts—and the ideologies connected to them—covered in this dissertation. Without it, there is no need to recreate Cúchulainn in the image of the Protestant Ascendancy, or to turn him into a freedom fighter willing to die for Ireland. This narrative, however, belies other issues in Ireland's complicated history. It was not as if, when the Normans landed in Wexford in 1169, they stepped on shore and said, "Right, boys, things are going to change; from now on, we are in charge," and that was that, and from that point on all one needs to do is swap dominant weapons in the oppressive police state, starting with pikes and swords and moving to high-capacity assault weapons. This

would disregard actual history. There was a lack of unity amongst the Irish themselves, starting in the early Celtic period, which became ever more devastating from the Tudor period onward, especially in reaction to the revolts of 1641-42 and Cromwell's response. As in Chinua Achebe's representation of the Igbo in Nigeria, one cannot depict indigenous Irish people as completely overwhelmed and defeated by the colonizing forces. It is in this more than 800-year struggle where I think the shifting ideologies and hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces—ideas that I will address and define later in this two-part introduction—can be analyzed successfully. What becomes clear is that oral and written verse and prose helped to shape the dominant impressions that many critics have when considering the complex relations between Ireland and John Bull's island to the east.

I. 400 BCE-1500 CE: Invasions and Repulsions

For many Irish writers—and Irish people in general, for that matter—there has been an inevitable and inescapable focus on history. I say inevitable because of the impact colonialism and imperialism has had on Ireland and the Irish consciousness and the necessity to turn to history to make sense of the loss of culture and identity. The desire to return to a pre-invasion Ireland was especially central in the work of the Revival period, as writers such as William Butler Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory, and John Millington Synge all would turn to examples from Celtic myth and legend as a means to reconnect with a past that had no connection to the English and their culture. As will be my focus in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, despite the seeming irony in the fact that many of the key writers of this time period were Anglo-Irish, their work captured a sentiment to return to a time before the English invasion in 1169, to a time when Ireland was Gaelic and free.

The story of the Irish as a Gaelic people *does* begin with an invasion: the Celtic invasion sometime between the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. About the Celtic invaders, Dáithí Ó hÓgáin suggests that “in Ireland, the ancient population stock seems not to have been greatly changed by immigrants” (104). The Iverni Celts who settled in Ireland, “hungry for new land and perhaps regarding their migration as a sacred act,” frequently married the indigenous women, and “their offspring with native Irish women would have been in an even more dominant position socially, perpetuating the Celtic language as the symbol of success and prestige, and so Ireland would have gradually but inevitably become Celticised” (104).

The Celts brought their language, culture, myths, and religion to the island, all of which would be idealized and romanticized during the Revival period around the turn of the twentieth century. It would be this culture that would give O’Grady, Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Pearse the myths and legends of Cúchulainn and Fionn. It was not only the future Éire that the Celts would inhabit, but they would also invade would become Great Britain. Linguistically, we typically talk about how the Celtic languages develop over the centuries across the British Isles in two main categories: Q-Celtic languages and P-Celtic languages. The Goidelic languages of Irish and Scots Gaelic are two examples of Q-Celtic, while the Brythonic Cymry of Wales is a P-Celtic language: “The basic distinction lies in the replacement of the apparently earlier *q*-sounds of the Q-Celtic by a *p*-sound (for example, the Old Irish word for ‘son’ is *mac*, but in Old Welsh it is *map*) (James 11). These languages are important, for, while there have been significant changes from the language(s) the Celts brought to the islands to now, these languages remain vital means with which to combat the imperialism of the Anglo-Saxon descendants and the Germanic language they brought, which would become the basis for today’s English. The Celtic languages make up an entire different branch of the Indo-European linguistic tree and are

structured differently than English, which again is comes from the Proto-Germanic branch. Where English is a SVO (subject-verb-object) language, Irish and other Celtic languages are VSO languages. Because Irish and Cymry—and to a lesser extent Scots Gaelic—are intricately tied to national and cultural identity, they remain as markers to differentiate the Celtic from the Anglo elements of society on both islands.

The Celts were unable to hold onto the island of modern-day Great Britain; despite the fact that the first-century Roman invasion did not change much for the Celts there, the fifth-century invasion by the Germanic groups, the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, did. The Celts were pushed to the far reaches of the island, with the largest groups forced to the southwest corner in what is present-day Wales and the north to the Highlands of Scotland. In Ireland, however, Celtic civilization grew and prospered throughout the early medieval period, especially after the wide-spread conversion to Christianity beginning in the fifth century as a result of St. Patrick's missionary work: "It is curious to consider that Ireland, the last Celtic country which Christianity reached, was converted not through the power of Rome, but as an indirect result of a predatory campaign carried out by one of the last great Iron Age warriors" (Ó hÓgáin 212); here Ó hÓgáin is referring to the capture of Patrick (Patricus) from Britain by Niall, the Irish high king who would found the dominant Irish family the Uí Néills (212). The development of Christianity on the island in the fifth century "gave rise to a great commitment to learning and asceticism" (213). This would lead to the formation of influential monastic centers like Clonmacnoise in County Roscommon and led to Ireland being called the "island of saints and scholars."

However, it would also be during the early medieval period that Ireland would be forced to endure invasions from the Viking hordes, which began at the end of the eighth century in 795 and continuing through the tenth century. It is from the Vikings that Dublin got its name: The

Vikings called the city Blackpool, which in Irish Gaelic is Dubh Linn; for the Vikings, Dublin was a significant port. There are some writers—Seamus Heaney comes to mind, in “Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces” in 1975’s *North* and James Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*—who will refer to the Vikings and their influence on Ireland. However, when most people refer to *the* invasion in Ireland, they are referring to the English invasion that occurred beginning in May 1169. It is this invasion that will come to dominate Irish consciousness and therefore Irish writers, as they attempt to write in response to the empire and heal the scars resulting from occupation. Nearly every writer covered in this dissertation will in some way refer to this invasion and the consequences of it. Ireland at the time was divided into five kingdoms or provinces³ dominated by dynastic families who controlled smaller kingdoms (*túatha*), especially the Uí Néills (anglicized as O’Neill) from Ulster (Northern Uí Néills) and Meath (Southern Uí Néills).

Whereas other high medieval kingdoms were organized under one high king, in Ireland the Irish high king (*ard rí*) did not have quite the same power and influence. After the death of Munster’s Brian Boru in 1014—an historical figure who managed to wrest the dominant rule from the Uí Néills in 1002 to become high king, and also became mythologized in his own way—there was no high king who was able to hold consistent sway over the various *túatha*.

Infighting and political maneuverings for the throne created tenuous alliances, which would directly lead to the invasion in 1169. The king of Leinster at the time, Diarmait Mac Murchada, had seen his power in the region eroded by political tensions made worse by the death of his ally the high king Muirchertach Ua Lochlainn, after which Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair claimed the position of *ard rí* and stripped his rival Mac Murchada of his kingship in 1166. In response,

³ Today the island of Ireland, which contains both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (UK), has four provinces: Ulster in the northeast, much of which is Northern Ireland; Leinster to the southeast in which Dublin can be found; Munster to the southwest; and Connacht, the westernmost province. The Irish Gaelic word for these ancient kingdoms is *cúlge*, which means fifth: the fifth kingdom was Meath in central Ireland. Meath eventually was folded into Leinster.

Mac Murchada turned to the Anglo-Norman king, Henry II, for aid, and while Henry could not aid Mac Murchada directly, he did allow for others in the kingdom to do so. Mac Murchada offered riches and land to any English noble willing to aid in reclaiming Leinster's throne. Richard (Fitz Gilbert) le Clare, Second Earle of Pembroke, also known as Strongbow, took him up on his offer and agreed to lead a force into Ireland and aid Mac Murchada under the condition that along with the promised land and riches, he would also be able to marry Mac Murchada's daughter, Aoife, and succeed Mac Murchada as King of Leinster upon his death (Bartlett 35-36).

Diarmait Mac Murchada appears in several Irish literary texts for his role in bringing the English to Ireland. In the Nestor episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Mr. Deasy remarks that a "faithless wife first brought strangers to our shore here, MacMurrough's wife and her leman, O'Rourke, prince of Breffni" (290). The faithless wife is Mac Murchada's wife, Derbforgaill, who was at one time married to king of Breifne, Tigernán Mór Ua Ruairc. Ua Ruairc was closely allied with Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, who stripped Mac Murchada of his kingship, which then led him to seek aid from Henry II (Bartlett 35). In Yeats's play *The Dreaming of the Bones*, the Young Man questions the Young Girl about a pair of ghosts and "the memory of a crime"; the ghosts are revealed to be "Diarmuid and Dervorgilla / Who brought the Norman in" (*Plays* 282). Diarmuid is Diarmait Mac Murchada, while Dervorgilla is Derbforgaill. For their part in the events that led to the invasion in 1169, Yeats suggests that "O never, never / Shall Diarmuid and Dervorgilla be forgiven" (*Plays* 283).

The first English forces landed in 1169 under Raymond FitzGerald and le Clare and his retinue followed in 1170. Wexford, Waterford, and Dublin fell in quick succession to le Clare, FitzGerald, and Mac Murchada's armies in 1170, and when Diarmait Mac Murchada died in May of 1171, le Clare became King of Leinster. As le Clare and other Englishmen became

politically powerful in Ireland, Henry II feared that they would become too powerful, and initiated his own invasion of Ireland beginning in 1171, when he landed just outside of Wexford “accompanied by 500 knights, 4,000 foot-soldiers, including a large body of archers” (Bartlett 37). The trained archers gave the English forces a distinct advantage, although the Gaelic Irish forces could count the difficult terrain as their own advantage. What really doomed the Gaelic Irish forces was the infighting amongst the *túatha* that led to the introduction of English aid in the first place. As Henry marched through Ireland in 1171 and 1172, he was able to gain pledges of loyalty from many Irish kings. As a result, as Thomas Bartlett suggests, “First what happened was an invasion, followed by a conquest of a large part of the island” (34).

Not all of Ireland fell to the English at the end of the twelfth century. Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair signed the Treaty of Windsor in 1175, granting Henry control of Leinster and agreeing to profess loyalty and offer fealty. However, Henry agreed to let the Irish kings continue to own and control their lands, so as a result it was not a complete conquest of the island. This incomplete conquest would create difficulties for the English in Ireland until large-scale attempts to completely conquer the remaining remnants of Gaelic Ireland occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially in attempting to pacify the powerful Uí Néill clan in Ulster (Bartlett 37-38). Even though the Gaelic Irish and the English shared Catholicism as a common faith, the English saw themselves, their culture, language, and even their Catholicism⁴ as distinctly superior to those of their Irish counterparts. The fear for many English and Welsh settlers who came to Ireland in the intervening years was that they would degenerate into “mere Irish” as a result of coming into too close contact with the Gaelic Irish. Despite Nicholas Canny’s accurate analysis that “the extent to which English habits had been abandoned by the

⁴ The way the Irish church developed in the medieval period was different than it did throughout most of Europe; the Irish monasticism that controlled the church in Ireland was not the same as the dominant ecclesiastical organization in Rome.

Anglicized population in favour of Gaelic ones was greatly exaggerated by contemporaries” (106), this fear-mongering about degeneracy was, on the whole, successful. English writers of the time depicted Ireland as “a pagan land, a barbaric island, even a deranged state of mind, that was the antithesis of Englishness and invasion, conquest and colonisation of this formerly Christian country, now agreed by all to have decayed into barbarism, were therefore imperative in order to impose change” (Bartlett 41). Disregarding the fact that there was some intermarrying between the Old English⁵ and the Gaelic Irish, the English, on the whole, sought to maintain their cultural differences and to distance themselves from the Irish and their customs.

II. Life Under the Tudors: The Irish Fight against Consolidation and the Plantation Movement

The psychic wound of the invasion of 1169 would dominate cultural memory, but it is really the events beginning during this time period that would mark the legacy of English colonialism in Ireland. Religion, which was not a central issue with the relations between the Old English colonizers and the Gaelic Irish, would become a focal point with the changes in the state religion in England under the Tudors. Joyce represents the connection between Henry II (whom Pope Adrian IV—the only English pope—encouraged to invade Ireland) and Henry VIII in the “Oxen of the Sun” episode. The episode takes place in a maternity ward and chronicles the development of the English language, beginning with a pastiche of the alliteration of Old English poetry: “Before born bade bliss had. Within womb won he worship” (*Ulysses* 315). Joyce connects the two Henrys through his play with the word bull, which has several allusive strains here, namely Adrian’s papal bull *Laudabiliter* and the animal, symbolic for its connection

⁵My usage of Old English here refers to the Anglo-Norman settlers and their descendants, not the language developed from the Anglo-Saxon dialects, spoken in England from the fifth through the twelfth centuries. It is a term adopted by many scholars of medieval Irish history; for the sources that I have included here, both Bartlett and Canny use the term.

to the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. He describes Henry VIII's ascension to the position of the King of Ireland in 1541 as "he and the bull of Ireland were soon as fast friends as an arse and a shirt" (*Ulysses* 328). He also depicts Henry's break from the Pope Clement VII and the Catholic Church: "the lord Harry called farmer Nicholas all the old Nicks in the world and an old whoremaster"; Joyce has Henry call the pope the devil and a whoremaster. It is this moment in history, however, that will be indicative of the changes that occurred in Ireland under Henry and Elizabeth. And it is the legacy of these religious changes that will be central to the ideological tension found in the texts covered in my chapter here on the time period leading up to the Easter Rising in 1916. It is also from these changes that religion will be a marker of identity, whose effects are especially felt in the period of the Troubles discussed in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

The cultural differences between the English and the Gaelic Irish were emphasized even more during the sixteenth century as a result of the significant changes in English society beginning with Henry VIII's reign. Because of Henry's split with the Catholic Church and founding of the Anglican Church in 1536—which led to his excommunication by Pope Paul III—he attacked the Pope by sacking Irish churches and monasteries, beginning a period throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when valuable church land in Ireland was confiscated. This worked to serve dual purposes: (1) It was an attempt to limit the church's power in Ireland, and (2) it provided additional tillable land for England and its settlers (Bartlett 82-83).

These land confiscations went beyond the church, however, and were central to a more concerted effort to finish the conquest that began in the twelfth century. General unrest combined with Elizabeth's excommunication by Pius V in 1570—prompted in some degree to Elizabeth's response to the first Desmond Rebellion—provided the necessary motivation for a

military response by some of the powerful Old Irish families to test England and its “heretic” queen’s reign in Ireland. The Desmond Rebellions in Munster were the first major revolts under Elizabeth in Ireland. The rebellions began in large part as reactions to the queen’s response to the struggle for control in Munster between the Old Irish FitzGerald dynasty and the Old English Butlers, which led to the pardoning of Elizabeth’s cousin Thomas Butler, Third Duke of Ormonde, and the arrest of two prominent FitzGeralds—Gerald and John of Desmond. It was after the first rebellion when Pius excommunicated Elizabeth. As a result, James Fitzmaurice FitzGerald saw it as his duty as a Counter-Reformation soldier to end Elizabeth’s reign in Ireland (Bartlett 92-93). The Desmonds were able to make significant gains in Munster and had help in Leinster from local agitation and Italian and Spanish papal forces, as the rebellion made strides throughout the southern part of the island. This progress, however, was essentially destroyed when the combined Irish and papal forces were routed by Lord Grey de Wilton and an army of 4,000 at the Siege of Smerick in November 1581; Grey’s particularly brutal actions,⁶ ordering the massacre of the surrendered rebel forces at Dún an Óir after he promised the safety of their lives and scorching the earth—and the latter would lead to a wide-spread famine in Munster—would force Elizabeth to dismiss his services (R. Foster 33-34). The skirmishes continued until the death of Gerald FitzGerald, Earl of Desmond, at the hands of Elizabeth’s forces in 1583, which ended the Desmond rebellion for good and led to the confiscation of land and the establishment of the Munster plantation (94).

This failure, however, was only the first significant one and would not be the most devastating for the old Gaelic Irish dynasties. That distinction belonged to the Tyrone’s

⁶ Sir Walter Raleigh was one of Grey’s officers at Smerick; he received a plot of 40,000 acres in Munster after the rebellion was quashed. However, his participation in the massacre was not forgotten and murder was one of the charges brought against him in 1603. One of his neighbors in Munster was the English poet Edmund Spenser, whose Kilcolman Castle was burned by compatriots of the Desmonds in 1598.

Rebellion (or Nine Years' War). As the Gaelic Irish began to regain control over the lands lost during Strongbow's and Henry II's conquest of Ireland in the twelfth century, they attempted to push back against the English in Ireland. Led by Aodh Mór Ó Néill (Hugh O'Neill) of the Uí Néills of Ulster and Aodh Rua Ó Dónaill (Red Hugh O'Donnell), the Gaelic Irish dynasties sought to repel the growing attempts by the Tudors—both through a manipulation of hereditary titles and through military expansion in the form of forts and garrisons throughout the countryside—to control Ireland (Beckett 22-23).

The initial tide of war went the way of Ó Néill's forces, especially at Yellow Ford (1598). Deep in Ó Néill's territory in Tyrone, the fort was in a precarious position. On top of that, the English army was organized and trained to be effective on the open battlefield, but the Irish forces used essentially guerilla tactics and the difficult terrain to their advantage, forcing the English to deal with small bands of troops in forests and bogs, which eliminated any advantage the English army had. Ó Néill's army sacked the fort, killing or dispersing the 4,000 English troops garrisoned there, including the commanding officer, Henry Bagenal, who was shot and killed relatively early in the skirmish (Bartlett 96-97).

On top of the defeat at Yellow Fort, the English would enter into a series of disastrous decisions under Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex, who was made military commander in Ireland in 1599, but proved incapable of effectively dealing with Ó Néill, regardless of his promise to do so. In fact, despite having an amassed army of 16,000 troops, as a result of his bungling in Ireland—he failed to make any headway in his campaigns in Munster, Leinster, or Ulster, and risked losing the entirety of the island, including the area of the Pale around Dublin—he signed a cessation of conflict with Ó Néill in September 1599. It appeared through the first few years of the conflict that the Irish were winning back what they had lost.

Unfortunately for the Gaelic Irish, this did not last. In 1600 Elizabeth replaced Essex as Lord Deputy in Ireland with Charles Blount, Eighth Baron Mountjoy. Mountjoy was far more effective and brutal than Essex, and the war came to a head at Kinsale in October 1601 until January 1602. Spanish troops under Don Juan del Águila aiding the Ulster coalition landed in Kinsale on 2 October 1601. Kinsale is, however, quite far from Ulster where Ó Néill and Ó Dónnaill controlled much of the territory and the pace of the war. Mountjoy, sensing an opportunity, led a siege against the Spanish forces garrisoned in Kinsale; in response, Ó Néill was forced to lead an army of more than 6,000 strong to aid Águila and the Spanish, fearing that any significant loss of Spanish troops would mean an end to Spanish aid in the future, and he understood that there would need to be an influx of trained soldiers to keep any perceived gains moving further in the conflict (R. Foster 37-39).

The move to Kinsale proved to be a crushing defeat for the Irish forces. There was an inability to successfully coordinate an attack against the 12,000 English troops. The initial attacks at the beginning of 1602 were met with stiff resistance and the Irish troops were ill-equipped to fight the English army at its own game, and any attempt to draw them into the boggy marshlands surrounding Kinsale failed; Ó Néill was forced to retreat back to Ulster. The Spanish would eventually surrender Kinsale, and Águila's forces left Ireland. The struggle continued sporadically through 1603, but the tide had turned at Kinsale. Kinsale would linger in Irish literature: Máirtín Ó Direáin describes it as "Kinsale of the sorrow" in "How We Wasted the Candle" (99). Ó Dónnaill left for Spain in 1603; Ó Néill and Tyrconnell compatriot Rory Ó Donnell left the island on 14 September 1607. Deemed "the Flight of the Earls," this effectively ended the old Gaelic Irish order and lifestyle. Many Irish writers, as will be the focus in Chapter 5 of this dissertation, were unable to come to terms with the loss of the Old Gaelic order even

into the twentieth century. Losing the land to the English was painful, but it was losing the language and culture of the past that would be most damaging. Writers such as James Joyce and Seamus Heaney would spend much of their careers trying to exorcise the “skeleton / in the tongue’s / old dungeons” (Heaney, *North* 19), finding it impossible to render identity whole through an alien tongue.

III. 1603-1685: Cromwellian Massacre and Plantations

Losing their land to the English colonists would continue to haunt the Irish for more than three hundred years after the Munster and Ulster plantations. It would become a main focus of the literature as well. This is especially true for the writers covered in Chapter 5 of this dissertation, as those living in Irish-speaking Gaeltachts became so attached to the land and the customs that lived on through its cultivation. Moving beyond the Gaeltachts, Patrick Kavanagh’s famous poem *The Great Hunger*, also discussed in Chapter 5, illustrates the significance of the land restored to its Irish custodians after Ireland’s independence.

The losses at Smerick and Kinsale and the Flight of the Earls drastically changed the power dynamic in Ireland and transformed the literal landscape as well.⁷ As Nicholas Canny explains, “Officials in Ireland needed no more than this nod of royal approval before they set about the work of introducing plantations to six of the nine counties⁸ in the province of Ulster, to Counties Wexford, Leitrim, and Longford, and to particular baronies in the King’s and Queen’s counties and in County Tipperary” (132). Now under James I, the English court sought to eliminate any potential lingering threat by confiscating the lands of the Ó Néills and any others

⁷ In order to effectively use the land for the plantations they needed to clear bogs and forests and establish hedge rows and fences to mark pasturage fields.

⁸ Those six counties were Armagh, Coleraine, Fermanagh, Tyrone, Cavan, and Donegal (R. Foster 60; my note).

who supported the aborted uprising; the lands in Ulster and Munster were especially attractive because of the more open pasturage. Confiscated land was then offered to English and Scottish settlers. R. F. Foster writes:

The tenure offered would be the simple and desirable arrangement of common socage. The areas were to be carefully demarcated in proportions of 1,000-, 1,500-, and 2,000-acre lots. Chief undertakers would be allowed 3,000-acre lots, on condition that they were resident, settled English, or Scottish families, and undertook to bear arms and to build defences. Deserving natives would be carefully treated, and the colonized lands were to provide laboratory conditions for the chemistry of the civilizing process. (61)

Unlike in Munster, where the English planters were allowed to hire Irish tenant farmers, the Ulster planters needed to hire their labor force from England or Scotland to help to eliminate causes of further dissent and rebellion. This law, however, met with significant problems and many landowners ended up hiring Irish in Ulster anyway.

Despite these changes, life remained relatively similar from that of previous generations in terms of customs. The English were not particularly successful in getting the Irish to adopt their language or religion. Protestant clergy inherited the churches and land once belonging to the Catholic Church, but had issues communicating to the people, as most knew little to no Irish Gaelic. The English themselves tended to cluster around towns, not longing to branch too far into the countryside.

After James I's death in 1625, the British were more focused on problems at home under Charles I, which would eventually come to a head during the multiple Civil Wars from 1642-51, leading to the momentary end of the monarchy with the execution of Charles I on 30 January 30

1649, and the exile of Charles II in 1651. With the establishment of the Commonwealth in 1649, Oliver Cromwell, who would later be named as the Lord Protectorate in 1653, went to Ireland to end the amassing of arms by Royalist sympathizers there and to end the dissent between Irish Catholics (comprised of Gaelic and Old English settlers) and English and Scottish planters, who battled among each other since the beginning of the Irish Rebellion in 1641. As Foster notes, “For those who led the revolt on 22-3 October 1641 were not the dispossessed natives, driven beyond endurance; nor were they fanatically Catholic revanchists. They were Ulster gentry, of Irish origin, but still possessing land: the ‘deserving Irish’ whose interests had survived the plantation” (86). The rebellion of 1641 initially meant to spare the lives of civilians, but part of the rebellion involved the massacring of “Ulster settlers by their native neighbors, especially directed at those outside the walled towns. Lecky’s hesitant estimate of 4,000 casualties is too high; a figure of 2,000 may be nearer” (85). The rebellion was in direct response to the plantations in Ulster: “The stored-up bitterness that derived from the systematic loss of property and status spilled over in an onslaught against the persons and belongings of the foreign Protestants who had settled in Ireland during the preceding decades” (Canny 144). With many Ulster settlers fearing for their lives, the Parliamentary-controlled government in London, having dealt with the issues at home and in Scotland, turned its eyes to its neighbor to the west. It was the alliance between the Royalists and Irish Catholics under Owen Roe O’Neill that led the government to act with military force.

Cromwell, who many Irish people would say has the most hated name in all of Irish history, was particularly brutal in his treatment of Irish rebels. As I will establish in Chapter 3, for many of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy—especially Standish James O’Grady—Cromwell was seen as a hero, but for the majority of Irish Catholics he was as far from a hero as one could get:

the Irish even use Cromwell's name as a curse (in Irish, *mallacht Chromail ort*, or the curse of Cromwell on you). James Joyce alludes to him multiple times in *Finnegans Wake*, and one time he mentions "the curses of cromcruwell" (22), which, according to Adeline Glasheen, combines the curse of Cromwell with Crom Cruach (56); Crom Cruach, the legendary Irish monster, is discussed in my conclusion, as it appears in the film *The Secret of Kells* (2009). When he landed in Ireland at Ringsend, just outside Dublin, on 15 August 1649, he began his nine-month campaign in Ireland, which was marked by two violent massacres within the first three months: one at Drogheda in September and the other at Wexford a month later. Foster suggests about Drogheda that "[l]ike the later horror at Wexford, it is one of the few massacres in Irish history fully attested to on both sides" (102). What is a surprise in both cases is not the number of soldiers killed by Cromwell's forces—3,500 in Drogheda, more than 2,000 in Wexford, by Cromwell's account—but the number of clergy and lay people. For Cromwell, the violence was justified and retaliatory in response to the massacres in Ulster in the early-1640s: "I am persuaded . . . that this is a righteous judgment upon these barbarous wretches, who have imbrued their hands in innocent blood" (qtd. in Collins 101). Cromwell, a devout Protestant, saw the conflict in religious terms as well; he was doing a service to the Commonwealth and to God. It was from the sixteenth century onward that this conflict became seriously rooted in religious differences, which would later define the internecine conflict in Northern Ireland. As Nicholas Canny suggests, "It is clear, therefore, that two separate societies were developing in Ireland and that it was religious rather than cultural factors that now distinguished them" (143). It was Cromwell's religious zeal and his military might that defined his actions in Ireland.

Cromwell was in Ireland for only nine months, but he left behind a legacy that impacted significant numbers of Irish Catholics and Dissenters: "When Cromwell left Ireland in May

1650 he left behind a devastated country in which famine and disease, including bubonic plague, were rife” (Bartlett 127). The British forces had taken to using scorched-earth tactics in Ireland; it is believed that these tactics were first suggested in the dialogue *A View of the Present State of Ireland* attributed to Edmund Spenser, though published anonymously and posthumously. In the dialogue between Euduxos and Irenius, Irenius suggests various ways to get any rebellious Irish to submit. He suggests that those who are not killed by the soldiers would inevitably die of famine or starvation, pointing to the Desmond uprisings as an example: “The proof whereof I saw sufficiently ensampled in those late wars in Munster, for notwithstanding that the same was a most rich and plentiful county, full of corn and cattle, that you would have thought they would have been able to stand long, yet ere one year and a half they were brought to such wretchedness” (qtd. in Spenser 10-11). He goes on to describe the emaciated, skeletal Irish as broken by the might of English forces:

Out of every corner of the woods and glens they came creeping forth upon their hands, for their legs could not bear them. They looked anatomies of death, the spake like ghosts crying out of their graves . . . yet not able to continue therewithal, that in a short space there were none almost left and a most populous and plentiful county suddenly left void of man or beast. Yet sure in all that war there perished not many by the sword, but all by the extremity of famine, which they themselves had wrought. (qtd. in Spenser 11)

Unfortunately for the Irish rebels, history reflected Spenser’s suggestions about the best way to eliminate the opposition in Ireland. Most Irish people would not fall to the sword or gun; instead, there were massive deaths due to war-related famine and disease: “Modern historians . . .

have estimated that between 20 and 40 per cent of the population perished between the years 1641 to 1651” (Bartlett 127).

Those who did not die often found themselves dispossessed, and those who were able to gain some land back from Cromwell’s Commonwealth were sent to Connacht, and this legacy is seen in the writers discussed in Chapter 5 here. Irish Catholic landowners were reduced dramatically; in Wexford alone, “77 per cent of Catholics (by 1641 figures) disappeared as landowners; the remainder got lands in Connacht, on average less than half of their original holdings in acres, and stony Connacht acres at that” (R. Foster 111). This statistic would become reflected throughout Ireland; by the time the Restoration occurred in 1660 “Catholics, who in 1640 owned 59 per cent of Irish land, now owned only 22 per cent, though they still made up about 66 per cent of the population” (Collins 116). This percentage would continue to drop: “By 1703 . . . the Catholic share of Irish land ownership had fallen to 14 per cent; a half-century more would reduce it to 5 per cent” (R. Foster 155).

IV. 1688-1700: The Restoration, James’s Failure at the Boyne, and the Penal Laws and Catholic Response

The period between James II’s abdication and the reign of William and Mary at the end of the seventeenth century represented a watershed period for the Irish, as it represent the last legitimate hope at having a Catholic on the English throne who might reverse the course of the events of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Nicholas Canny suggests, “of the survivors of the old order, it was the previously privileged groups such as priests and poets who had lost status; and it is significant that it was these who fostered the myth of a lost golden age which might again be recovered” (160). James’s defeat in Ireland was so devastating that poets writing in Irish developed an entire genre of poetry around it: the *aisling*, or vision poem: Irish poets

“*aislingí* or vision poems predicting the return of the gallant Stuart heroes and anticipating the downfall of the Hanoverian Georges continued to be written, and sung; but such sentiments were more rooted in sentimentality rather than reality” (Bartlett 169). The most famous examples of the *aislingí* are Aogán Ó Rathaille’s from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Depicting Ireland allegorically as a woman seeking a lover who could liberate her and restore her to her youth, this particular kind of poem would resonate for centuries, with poets even in the twentieth century, such as Ciaran Carson and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, would respond to the *aisling* tradition, as analyzed in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

However, with the Restoration the Irish did have some hope. Even though Charles II flirted with Catholicism⁹ and was more lenient to the Catholics in England and Ireland, it was when his brother, the future James II, actually converted to Catholicism in 1669 and ascended to the throne upon Charles’s death in 1685 that it appeared the Irish had a sympathetic ruler who would help restore Irish Catholics to their previous prominence and lands. He began to populate his court and armed forces with Catholics and lessened previously existing laws aimed at Catholics and Dissenters, which led to increasing pressure from Protestants in England. The Irish saw James working to reverse much of what had occurred in Ireland since Henry VIII’s split from Rome in 1533.

However, this enthusiasm was met with a crushing blow when William of Orange, husband of James’s daughter Anne, took the throne in 1688 when James fled to Catholic France, which Protestant England saw as his abdication. James saw his opportunity in Ireland where he was still recognized as the rightful king by the Irish Parliament. Ireland would then become the stage for the control over England between Jacobite and Williamite forces, the winner then

⁹ Charles II had planned to convert and aid the French against the Dutch in 1670, and he actually did convert upon his deathbed.

having direct control over the religious identity of three kingdoms. If James won, he would have to overturn the Bill of Rights passed in 1688, which in part barred Catholics from the throne, but would offer Catholics in Ireland their first truly sympathetic monarch since Mary I; if William won, it essentially ended any chance the Irish had to fend off English control of the island and its parliament.

The outcome was hotly contested during the early part of the conflict beginning in 1689. Landing in Kinsale with his retinue and a group of French forces on 12 March 1689, James promptly marched on and took the garrisoned Derry in April. He convened Parliament in May of that year and passed a series of bills that overturned any penal laws against Catholics and sought to confiscate the lands of supporters of William. If successful, the lands lost during the previous period of confiscation and plantation under Cromwell would have been restored to Irish Catholics (Bartlett 135). The hopefulness of James's victory was not to last long, however. William landed at Carrickfergus in Ulster on 14 June 1690 with a substantial army comprised of 36,000 men, a mixed army of English, Irish, Dutch, German, and Danish troops all fighting under William's banner. When the Jacobite and Williamite armies met at the Boyne on 1 July 1690, it would be the first important strike for William and his forces. Perhaps its true significance is overstated in retrospect, because James fled back to France after the battle—and earned himself the nickname “*Seamus a Chaca* (James the Shit)” (Bartlett 136)—but on the whole it was not a decisive or overwhelming victory outside of that fact. The truly devastating defeat would come at Aughrim on 12 July 1691 (R. Foster 148). The Jacobite forces numbered nearly 20,000 despite the fiasco of the Boyne, but by the end of the battle for Aughrim it would be nearly halved, and after retreating to Limerick, offered a willingness to sign a peace treaty.

The end of the conflict between the Jacobite and Williamite armies effectively ended Ireland's hope for a restoration of life before Cromwellian plantations. The terms of the Treaty of Limerick, signed on 3 October 1691, were not as backbreaking as they could have been; it was not, however, ratified by the Irish Parliament, which was made up entirely of Protestants. Instead of reverting to a relatively lax policy on Catholicism, much as it was under Charles II, Parliament initiated a new and much harsher series of penal laws (Beckett 152).

Parliament was able to do so because—in addition to the confiscation of land under Elizabeth, James I, Oliver Cromwell, and 1690s Protestant parliamentarians—social freedoms were severely curtailed. In 1607 England barred Irish Catholics from serving in public office, which swung the balance of power in the House of Lords and Commons in Ireland from Catholic to Protestant, and in 1652 Catholics were barred from serving in Irish Parliament at all thanks to the Act of Settlement. As a result, decisions that would have met with great resistance from that large percentage of the population were swept through without great disapproval on the floor. Eventually, especially after the Cromwellian administration's changes and the failure of James II, a series of penal laws were put into place, limiting the rights of those refusing to conform to the Test Act and convert to the Anglican faith. These penal laws were made even more stringent after the end of the war between James and William. Initial legislation passed in 1695 was aimed at disarming Catholics and from keeping them from going to Catholic educational institutions outside of the country, especially in France and Belgium. As mentioned earlier, Catholics could not hold public office or enter into the legal profession. One law frequently mentioned to illustrate the oppressive nature of the legislation stipulated that Catholics could not own a horse worth more than £5 and that horses could be seized for little return.

As the eighteenth century progressed, additional legislation was passed to limit the power of the Catholic Church. Bishops were banned and priests had to register with the government. The Popery Act of 1793 worked to restrict large Catholic landowning by subdividing land among the landowner's sons at the time of his death, unless the eldest son was willing to convert: "A Roman Catholic landlord might not bequeath his land by will: on his death it was to descend by gavelkind, that is by equal subdivision among all his sons" (Beckett 158). Catholics lost the right to vote in 1728 and additional lands belonging to Catholic churches and laity were seized.

As both R. F. Foster (205-11) and Thomas Bartlett (163-72) suggest, it is difficult to measure the actual impact these penal laws had on Catholic citizenry, since the laws themselves were often not upheld in any substantial way. Catholics still found ways to practice their faith, and some even still managed to cast a ballot. The true measureable effect came in the limiting of land ownership. The fact that Catholics still owned nearly ninety percent of the land at the turn of the seventeenth century, but only five percent one hundred and fifty years later, is staggering. These laws, especially those regarding the inheritance of land, "almost completed the destruction of the Roman Catholic gentry" (Beckett 158).

The other great change came in the form of a hegemonic shift. The disenfranchisement of Irish Catholics combined with the confiscation of land from Gaelic Irish and Old English in Ireland gave rise to the Protestant Ascendancy. R. F. Foster defines the Ascendancy in terms of Anglicanism:

Membership of the Ascendancy in eighteenth-century Ireland was not, as one might assume, restricted to descendants of families who acquired a noble patina through settlement of estates or military service; nor did the term comprehend the entire 25 per cent of the population who were Protestant. The definition revolves

around *Anglicanism* . . . They comprised an elite who monopolized law, politics, and ‘society,’ and whose aspirations were focused on the Irish House of Commons. (170)

The New English settlers in Ireland sought to remake Ireland in their image through Parliamentary action. The penal laws were part of this effort. Even though there was not the great conversion to Protestantism that English and Irish Protestants hoped for—ironically the reverse occurred, as the number of Catholics on the island actually increased in the eighteenth century—the Protestant Ascendancy did control the dominant economic forces in Ireland. This was especially true for agriculture and trade. They were able to develop “more like a class consciousness, in the sense that this can form among upper caste even in pre-capitalist society” (R. Foster 170). The Ascendancy occupied somewhat of a liminal space; they were certainly not Irish in any of the previous incarnations of the term, but they were not English, either, and their control of Ireland relied on England to maintain and protect that control. In part of Chapter 3, I will look at the end of the Ascendancy’s economic control leading up to the Easter Rising and how the writers of that class attempted to reinscribe the dominant hegemony in their literary works.

V. 1700-1803: Growth of the Ascendancy, and Tone and Emmet and Armed Irish Rebellion

The Ascendancy’s consolidation of power in the eighteenth century would create the class of Anglo-Irish writer that would come to dominate the Celtic Revival period. It would also set up the divide between the Gaelic-Irish writers and the Anglo-Irish writers as will be covered throughout this dissertation but especially in Chapter 3. Additionally, writers would turn to the revolutionary activities of Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet as emblematic of Ireland’s romantic

failures. Tone and Emmet were heroes for both Anglo-Irish and Gaelic-Irish writers. They appear in the works of Pearse, Joyce, Heaney, and others. Pearse used Tone and Emmet throughout his political work in particular. In a speech he gave in June 1913, he said that Tone's "soul was a burning flame, a flame so ardent, so generous, so pure, that to come into communion with it is to come unto a new baptism, unto a new regeneration and cleansing" (qtd. in Dudley-Edwards 174). Joyce, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, used the rumors surrounding Emmet's death in *Ulysses*. Heaney's poem "Wolfe Tone" describes him dressed in French military regalia, "I affected epaulettes and a cockade," and alludes to his suicide, as he "played the ancient Roman with a razor" after "the big fleet split and Ireland dwindled / as we ran from the gale under the bare poles" (*Opened* 294). In spite of the fact that both Tone and Emmet were from the Ascendancy, they sought to undermine English control of the country and were thus celebrated long after their deaths, by both Anglo Irish and Gaelic Irish.

With the dramatic changes to Irish society in the seventeenth century, it is no surprise that the eighteenth century saw multiple attempts to undermine the Ascendancy's power in Ireland, since the Irish Catholics had no means of Parliamentary reform. One of the largest issues faced by many Catholics who were not able to purchase their own land was that they were forced to work on small plots on the many plantations found throughout, especially in Munster and Ulster. As a result, there were agrarian revolts led by groups such as the Houghers in Connacht in 1711-12, who killed cattle and sheep; the Oakboys in the north; and the more famous Whiteboys in the middle of the century, who had a larger reach than many of these other groups but focused primarily on the south of Ireland in Tipperary and Waterford. The Whiteboys were focused on unfair rent practices by plantation owners that oppressed tenant farmers, and "the movement was economic rather than political or sectarian" (R. Foster 223). Early on the Whiteboys focused on

tactics similar to those of the Houghers—killing and maiming animals and knocking fences over, as fenced-in land was used for cattle grazing and not tillage—but their organization did become larger and more sophisticated. In spite of this fact, as Thomas Bartlett notes, “[w]hile undoubtedly serious, the Whiteboy movement was never formidable” (200).

More celebrated than any of the agrarian groups were the United Irishmen, led by Theobald Wolfe Tone. Though a Protestant by birth who studied at Trinity College, Tone was committed to seeing changes in Irish society with the aim of unifying the Ascendancy with Catholics and Dissenters (mostly Presbyterians of Scottish origins in Ulster). Initially the United Irishmen were pledged to universal suffrage, thereby reinstating the Irish Catholic vote, which would then lead to more sweeping parliamentary changes through a combined effort among Catholics, Protestants, and Dissenters. Failing at this, the group became determined to see changes occur through armed rebellion. They made their first attempt in December 1796 with the enlisted aid of over 14,000 French troops. This plot was thwarted by nature and not the British, however, as a storm kept the French from landing at Bantry Bay (Bartlett 216).

After spending a few years in Philadelphia, Tone returned to Ireland and again attempted to enlist the French, who were still at war with the English, to aid in an uprising. Seventeen ninety-eight was a year that would live on in Irish cultural memory as a touchstone of Irish courage and doomed failure. Unfortunately for Tone and the United Irishman, who had gained a considerable following, Napoleon and the French did not send military support as they had under General Hoche in 1796, and the rebellion crumbled due to the lack of support and an unorganized and poorly trained militia, despite the promising beginnings of the rebellion. A small group of French ships (carrying 1,100 troops) landed in Killala, County Mayo in August under General Jean Humbert, but after initial gains were soundly defeated, and by the middle of

October the uprising was over (Beckett 265-66). Tone himself was captured in October during the last battle at Tory Island and was sentenced to hang, but slit his own throat before that could occur and died on 8 November 1798. In reaction against these rebellions, 1801 the Act of Union was passed making Ireland part of the United Kingdom, joining England, Scotland, and Wales.

The legacy of 1798 was to have a lasting influence, as Tone, despite his Protestant roots, would be considered a martyred hero by Catholic Ireland. His name, along with Robert Emmet's, would long be mentioned among those willing to die for Ireland. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, Pádraic Pearse, one of the principal leaders of the Easter Rising of 1916, saw in Tone a kindred spirit who understood the necessity of blood sacrifice. Despite Tone's desire to mend the growing rift, the United Irishmen Rebellion of 1798 also highlighted the sectarian tension that would define many of the problems in Ireland for the two hundred years. It was, as R. F. Foster suggests, "probably the most concentrated episode of violence in Irish history" (280). Both Catholics and Protestants would retain different visions of the rebellion, however. For Catholics, the promise and loss of the Wexford Rebellion (May through June 1798) would linger in Irish consciousness long after the last volley was fired, mainly for the atrocities committed by both sides. Initially, it represented the most successful part of the campaign for the United Irishmen, especially with victories at Oulart Hill, under Catholic priest Father John Murphy, and at Enniscorthy. Rebel leaders even set up a Wexford Republic after seizing Wexford town.

However, it was not to last, as English forces under General Gerard Lake crushed the remaining rebel forces at Vinegar Hill on 21 June 1798. Beyond the importance of the battle itself, the atrocities committed would stay with both sides. First, it was Catholics, who piked seventy Protestants on the bridge in Wexford to go along with numerous others who were pitch-

capped, which occurred when a cone filled with boiling tar was placed on a person's head. The English forces repaid the violence and then some. The rebel leaders were hanged and their heads placed on pikes outside of Wexford's courthouse. Father John Murphy was flogged before he was hanged; his decapitated head was spiked on a wall looking at a Catholic church in Wexford, and his body was placed in a barrel and burned (Bartlett 224).

The events at Antrim and Down in 1798 would also have lasting effects. The United Irishmen in Ulster faced violence not only from English authorities, but also from the Orange Order, which was organized in 1795, and the Protestant Peep O'Day Boys (R. Foster 272). Both sectarian groups desired to stop the United Irishmen and Catholic insurrectionists, especially the Defenders. The conflict between Catholics and Protestants still continues in Ulster and is the main focus of Chapter 6 in this dissertation about the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland. It was the Protestant industrial bourgeoisie of Ulster who gave the United Irishmen their key leaders in that province; however, ironically enough, it is the same social caste, who, in contemporary times, sees the leaders of 1798 as a scourge. When the Orange Order protests and attempts to impede the Henry Joy McCracken parade that commemorates his death on 31 August, they are really protesting one of their own. This is the kind of Irish identity politics that this dissertation will focus on as represented in works of literature and film.

Only five years after the failed United Irishmen uprising, another Protestant—Robert Emmet, whose brother Thomas was one of the tactical leaders of the United Irishmen—desired to complete what Tone and the United Irishmen had started and led another attempt at overthrowing the British in Ireland in 1803, but met with similar results as Tone and his rebels. While more coordinated than the United Irishmen rebellion, like it Emmet's was doomed by bad luck and a general inability to coordinate an effective and sustained attack. Emmet, only twenty-

five years old at the time of the uprisings beginning in May 1803, had secretly stashed large caches of weapons in several locations in Dublin; unfortunately for him, on 16 July 1803 his depot on Patrick Street in Dublin exploded and the Dublin officials were alerted. This caused Emmet to move forward with the rebellion before he was really ready. Hastily organized, the rebellion was doomed from the start.

Like Tone, Emmet would become one of a long list of “martyrs” who died for Ireland and become mythologized, and his would be a name recited as an Irish patriot, even through relatively contemporary times. Bobby Sands was compared to Emmet when he succumbed to his hunger strike in prison in 1981, protesting British change of policy to not hold IRA members as prisoners of war in Northern Ireland. Emmet is particularly romanticized, in large part because of the way he was captured and his famous “Speech from the Dock” that he gave before he was hanged on 20 September 1803. Arranging to meet his beloved, Sarah Curren, at Harold’s Cross on 25 August, he was betrayed and, instead of meeting Sarah, he met Dublin chief of police Henry Charles Surr. Upon being convicted of high treason, Emmet gave a speech that would influence countless other Irish people to fight and die for Irish independence. In closing he said,

Let no man write my epitaph; for as no man who knows my motives dare now vindicate them, let not prejudice or ignorance disperse them. Let them rest in obscurity and peace, my memory left in oblivion, and my tomb remain un-inscribed until other men can do justice to my character. When my country takes her place among the nations of the world, then, and only then, let my epitaph be written. (qtd. in Llywelyn 43)

The last sentence in particular has been repeated by Irish men and women seeking Ireland's independence, this is especially true for Pearse and the leaders of the 1916 rebellion who would use Emmet's words here as propaganda for their own cause. Even after the twenty-six counties got their independence in 1922, these words would continue to be used in mourning the absence of Northern Ireland's counties in an independent Ireland.

VI. 1803-1900: Parliamentary Reform and *An Gorta Mór*

As most of this dissertation will focus on Irish writing in the twentieth century, I cannot emphasize enough the influence that the events of the nineteenth century had on the writers covered here. Daniel O'Connell and Charles Stewart Parnell were heroes to Joyce and Yeats alike. James Joyce wrote his first known poem about Parnell, entitled "Et tu, Healy" (referring to Parnell's leading supporter Timothy Healy, who turned against him). Parnell is a central figure in Joyce's work, as will be discussed in Chapter 3. Yeats's poem "To a Shade" is about Parnell and the failure of the emerging Irish middle class to recognize what he had set out to do for them; they were the "pack" his "enemy" had set on him. He tells Parnell's ghost, the "unquiet wanderer" to "gather the Glasnevin coverlet / about your head till the dust stops your ear" and that he "had enough of sorrow before death" and is "safer in the tomb" (*Poems* 110). After the failed armed rebellions of Tone and Emmet, it was the Parliamentary work of O'Connell and Parnell that represented the great hope of the Irish during the nineteenth century, and the writers of the time period were equally swayed by these two great Irish Parliamentarians.

Even though there were still the threats of violent insurrection, especially by the Young Irelanders in 1848 and the Fenian Brotherhood a decade later, the major hopes for significant change came in the form of parliamentary reforms. Led by County Clare barrister Daniel O'Connell, the Irish were re-enfranchised in 1829 with the passage of the Emancipation Act,

largely because another Irish uprising was feared by Prime Minister Robert Peel and his Parliament. O'Connell, a Catholic known as the Liberator, became the foremost statesman for Irish Catholics after Irish Catholics and Dissenters were allowed to sit in Parliament. Later in the century, Ireland would move toward independence with the development of the Irish Parliamentary Party led by charismatic Meath Parliamentarian Charles Stewart Parnell, celebrated as “the uncrowned king of Ireland” even though he was an Ascendancy Protestant, who proposed Home Rule. Home Rule would have granted Ireland quasi-independence similar to the dominion status of Canada or New Zealand. First proposed by Parnell in 1886 as the Government of Ireland Bill and proposed again in 1893, the bill failed to be passed in Parliament, despite Prime Minister William Gladstone's support. The bill lost a good deal of public backing after Parnell found himself embroiled in a public divorce proceedings, which would inevitably cause a huge backlash from the Catholic majority. The Irish Parliamentary Party became less and less relevant after the trial and Parnell's death in 1891. Though he did not meet his end like Tone or Emmet, Parnell was seen as a hero to many, who saw his Home Rule bills as being the best chance for independence.

Even though there was a great focus on the dominant nineteenth-century Irish Parliamentarian voices, the singular event that would capture not only the Irish writer's but also the general Irish consciousness is the Great Famine (*An Gorta Mór*, the Great Hunger). For the purpose of this dissertation, the clearest examples of the devastation can be seen in the writers of the Gaeltachts covered in Chapter 5.

Throughout the nineteenth century Ireland continued to make political gains in Parliament, but the most defining aspect of Irish life in the nineteenth century was the Great Famine, which began in 1845. Potatoes were the staple diet—“60 per cent of the national food

supply” (Donnelly 171)—for most poor Irish people, who lived as subsistent tenant farmers for largely Protestant or Scotch Presbyterian—and often absentee—landlords. Due to Corn Laws and other legislature that dictated Irish trade statutes, potatoes were often the only foodstuffs available to many, with beef, pork, and grains such as wheat and barley largely earmarked for trade or beyond the meagre budget of most families. When the potato blight, a fungus-like microorganism that destroys potato and tomato crops, arrived in Ireland in the early-1840s, it caused widespread devastation. This differed in scope and devastation from more localized famines and blights that had occurred throughout the previous century-and-a-half. Along with the starvation that affected wide swaths of the population, disease, especially dysentery, would cause additional death and hardship. Many of those who did survive found it necessary to emigrate to survive. As a result of the famine and subsequent period of extensive emigration, the population of the island decreased tremendously:

Only six of the thirty-two counties lost less than 15 per cent of their population between 1841 and 1851. In another six counties the population in 1851 was from 15 to 20 per cent lower than it had been a decade earlier. Of the remaining twenty counties, nine lost from 20 to 25 per cent of their population, while eleven lost over 25 per cent between 1841 and 1851. (Donnelly 169)

In total, “[m]ass death and mass emigration during the famine reduced the total population of Ireland from almost 8.2 million in 1841 to fewer than 6.2 million in 1851” (Donnelly 170). This statistical loss was especially devastating in the western province of Connacht, which would lead to a general estimation of the end of a way of life, romanticized and mythologized in Irish consciousness in memoriam, a loss that contemporary poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, whose own work is looked at in relation to the Troubles in Chapter 6, sees “as the most lasting scar caused

by the Great Famine” (“A Ghostly Alhambra” 68). The legacy of the Famine will be analyzed in Chapter 5 in my discussion of the writers of the Gaeltacht.

What happens over time is that these events—including the Siege of Kinsale and the “Flight of the Earls”; the Munster, Ulster and subsequent plantations; the Rebellion of 1641 and the “Wild Geese”; James, William, and the battle of the Boyne; the Penal Codes; Tone and Emmet; the Great Famine, and more—all coalesce into a narrative that romanticizes the Gaelic past, creates martyrs of the failures under colonial rule, and demonizes the English imperial presence. It is certainly impossible to ignore the developments throughout Irish history; and, as a narrative from the perspective of certain Irish factions, this is all neat and tidy, and it is a story that is easy to get behind in many ways. However, it fails to reflect the myriad other issues that plagued the island in the more than 800 years since Strongbow and the Normans invaded Ireland, mostly dealing with the inability for the Irish to ever be completely united or sufficiently organized to compete against English/British forces.

By no means do I suggest that the atrocities and acts of genocide committed by the English and Protestant-backed Anglo-Irish Ascendancy are any less abhorrent. The death and displacement of the Irish people—as a result of war, famine, and a collapse of the traditional economic system, which led to millions of Irish to emigrate—cannot be understated. These atrocities are indicative of the destructive powers of colonial occupation. However, I merely wish to highlight that the narrative of 800 years of occupation and oppression is a convenient, but misguided one, and one that has helped to perpetuate actual violence in all four provinces, especially Ulster. It is impossible not to look at Irish literature and see this narrative reflected in the texts. It is here where the threads of history, ideology, and literature come together that I want to situate my argument. As the texts will be from the late-nineteenth and twentieth

centuries, I want to focus directly on the period that led to the formation of the Republic of Ireland and, as a result, Northern Ireland. To look at how these texts work with or against the dominant and shifting controlling ideologies will hopefully illustrate the complex relationship between art and history and the necessity of reading historically.

But art can be a terrain on which one can analyze ideology as it reflects particular interests in society. In this case, I have limited the study to particular Irish literary texts that are reflective of the struggle that Ireland went through beginning with the period directly before the Easter Rising in 1916, the seminal moment that would lead to the formation of an independent Ireland, and in happens in the decades after that.

CHAPTER 2

“A MORE PERSONAL UNION”: A MARXIST AND POSTMARXIST CRITIQUE OF
 IDEOLOGY AND HEGEMONY IN AN IRISH CONTEXT

“Experience must show later whether a more personal union can continue to subsist between the two countries [England and Ireland]. I half think it can if it takes place in time.

What the Irish need is:

(1) Self-government and independence from England.”

—Karl Marx¹⁰

When Marx wrote this to Frederick Engels on November 30, 1867, he was specifically addressing what needed to occur in order for the *English* working class to successfully mount a revolt. He suggested that the Irish must first get their independence and that only then would the English working class be able to unite with the Irish working class and not see the Irish as beneath them. Nationalism—in this case present in the idea that being English made people better than their Irish counterparts—along with the constant availability of cheap Irish labor, made it difficult for many of the English working classes to accept the Irish as partners against the larger forces of exploitation in England. Therefore, in Marx’s analysis, the Union first had to be dissolved, Ireland then gain its independence, and the English working class get over its own prejudices. These events needed to occur before the English proletariat could ever hope to overthrow the landed gentry, because, as Marx so rightly illustrated, “the overthrow of the English landed oligarchy . . . remains impossible because its position here cannot be stormed so long as it maintains its strongly entrenched outposts in Ireland” (*Selected Writings* 639).

Marx touches upon truly significant points in the two brief letters about English revolution through Irish independence that he sent Engels in 1867. England was different from most European monarchies of the time and did not face the same threat of upheaval in 1848 that

¹⁰ Quotation from Marx’s *Selected Writings* (638).

many European nations had. Due mainly to the attempts to limit the powers of the crown by the Cromwellian Commonwealth in the 1640s, and again forty years later in the aftermath of James II's abdication and defeat, England was not in the same position as France at the end of the eighteenth century or Germany in 1848. While labor and civil unrest was seemingly always present in England in the nineteenth century, the two Reform Bills—especially the second bill passed in 1867—helped to shift some of the power from the landed gentry to the industrial bourgeoisie. This, in turn, led to a shift in parliamentary power from the House of Lords to the House of Commons; it took a revolution in France to accomplish a similar shift in power. Martial law and suppression of proletariat organizations and writings helped to solidify industrial capital's power in cities, which became more and more industrialized with little in the way of worker's rights even through the first half of the eighteenth century. The presence of unskilled labor—especially unskilled Irish labor—in both England and colonial Ireland—presented an obstruction to labor reform, which Marx had seen firsthand while living in England after the failed German uprisings in 1848. Due to England's imperialist venture in Ireland, he realized that Ireland presented a particularly difficult situation not only for the Irish themselves, but also for the working classes in England.

It is somewhat ironic, considering Marx's comments, that in 1913 James Connolly looked to English trade unions to strike in solidarity with the Irish Transport and General Worker's (ITGWU) lockout and strike. More than 20,000 workers were locked out of their jobs for refusing to sign a contract that would have prevented them from joining the ITGWU. Connolly was a proponent of syndicalism, under whose banner the workers of the world could unite in solidarity. He saw, especially in the strikes in Liverpool in 1911 that united all transport workers behind the initial seamen's strike, the effectiveness of unifying "amalgamate kindred Unions"

(*Selected Political Writings* 314) in solidarity for quick, sporadic strikes. These sporadic strikes, which Connolly believed to be “the greatest weapon against capital” (315), were not met with solidarity in England. Marx was correct in his assumption that many of those involved with the English labor movement would not see their Irish working-class compatriots as equals; nationalism and prejudice would triumph over solidarity.

Connolly and James Larkin are the two names most associated with the Irish labor movement in the early twentieth century. Larkin may have provided the image and spoken voice of Irish labor, but it was Connolly who articulated the theoretical basis of a burgeoning Irish socialist movement. Jim Larkin, who organized the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union after the National Union of Dock Labourers’ (NUDL) strike in Belfast in 1907, was from Liverpool and was involved in union activities with the NUDL there before moving to Ireland to help unskilled workers unionize. Before their involvement “Irish trade groups were generally rather inactive offshoots of British organizations” (R. Foster 436), whereas Larkin and Connolly realized the significance of establishing united Irish unions to deal with the specificity of Irish working-class issues, which were not identical to English working-class issues.

Connolly, even today, holds up as by far the most significant theorist of Irish labor and socialism. His influence can be seen on writers such as Sean O’Casey and Eimar O’Duffy, whose works are covered later in this dissertation. Connolly, too, was born to Irish parents in the United Kingdom, having been born and raised in Edinburgh, and was influenced by his surroundings much as Larkin was. Connolly’s parents lived in the slums of Cowgate with fellow Irish immigrant industrial workers. Seeing his fellow Irish living in squalor, struggle, and alienation would lead him to get involved in the Scottish socialist movement before moving to

Ireland. Once there, Connolly saw Ireland's independence going hand in hand with the Irish working class's overthrow of the bourgeoisie:

The Irish Working Class which has borne the brunt of every political struggle, and gained by none, and which is today the only class in all Ireland which has no interest to serve in perpetuating either the political or social forms of oppression—the British Connection or capitalist system. The Irish Working Class must emancipate itself, and in emancipating itself it must, perforce, free its country. The act of social emancipation requires the conversion of land and instruments of production from private property into the public or common property of the entire nation. (*Selected Political Writings* 189)

Initially he believed that small labor victories stemming from sporadic strikes would help to shift political power, but eventually Connolly would come to the conviction that for this emancipation to take place it would have to be outside of the political arena, because “political action was impossible for republicans” (169). Even though many Irish were thrilled with the prospects of Home Rule developed under Gladstone and Parnell, Connolly saw it as merely transferring an inherently oppressive capitalist system from the English to the Irish bourgeoisie who, he felt, “set the seal of their approval upon a system founded upon the robbery of their countrymen” (177). In his estimation, Home Rule was “a mockery of Irish national aspirations” (178) that “would not, in any sense be a step towards independence, but would more likely create effectual barriers in the way of its realization” (168). In “Erin's Hope” (1909), he would go on to establish that the ancient Irish way of life was a kind of proto-socialism based around “clan or common ownership” (174); it was the English system that established private property in Ireland

and thus the exploitation of labor and “the agricultural depressions, poorhouses, and other such glorious institutions in Church and State” (175) that necessarily goes with it.

Connolly suggested that since Home Rule would only be a lateral move, passing the system already in place from the English to the Irish bourgeoisie, those in support of it were misguided in their assertions that “Home Rule would mean the immediate establishment of manufacture and the opening of mines, etc., in every part of Ireland” (178). The further failure of capitalism in Ireland was guaranteed due to the inability of Irish bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie to fully understand the necessary infrastructure to compete with England in international markets, because, in his frank estimation, Ireland would be unable to effectively do so:

To establish industry successfully today in any country requires two things, neither of which Ireland possesses, and one of which she can never possess. The first is the possession and wherewithal to purchase machinery and raw material for the equipment of her factories, and the second is customers to purchase the goods when they are manufactured. (178)

He posits that Ireland was not equipped to compete, having neither the established industrial capital nor the agricultural technology to compete on free markets. And even if by some miracle they were able “to cover the green fields of Erin with huge, ugly factories,” the inevitable results would be disastrous failure:

. . . [E]ven then we would quickly find that under the conditions born of the capitalistic system our one hope of keeping our feet as a manufacturing nation, would depend upon our ability to work longer and harder for a lower wage than the other nations of Europe in order that our middle class may have the

opportunity of selling their goods at a lower price than their competitors. This is equivalent to saying that our chance of making Ireland a manufacturing country depends on us becoming the lowest blacklegs in Europe. (180)

Connolly is correct in his understanding of Irish economic forces here. Imperial capitalism developed unevenly in Ireland; in a predominantly rural society, industrial capital did not develop as it did in England, and there was not the infrastructure in place to handle a dramatic move to manufacturing as the main economic force that developed more slowly in England. Combined with Ireland's colonial status, the economic conditions would come to affect the literary production of the Irish Literary Revival leading up to the Easter Rising, which would set bourgeois cultural nationalism, led in large part by Ascendancy writers, in competition with Catholic political nationalism, as to be covered in Chapter 3. Connolly found fault in both as neither addressed the issues central to the exploitation of the Irish working class.

Connolly did not lay the entire blame of Ireland's failures on the English (or their Irish bourgeois capitalist counterparts), but instead saw how problematic the influence of the Irish nationalists and especially the Catholic Church in Ireland could be on the Irish proletariat.

And history proves that in almost every case in which the political or social aspirations of the laity come into opposition to the will of the clergy the laity represented the best interests of the Church as a whole and of Mankind in general. Whenever the clergy succeeded in conquering political power in any country the result has been disastrous to the interests of religion and inimical to the progress of humanity. (63)

Connolly goes on to enumerate instance after instance of the Church's opposition to any attempt made by Irish men and women to secure their freedom from England, starting with Adrian IV

and the papal bull that granted Ireland to England in 1155 through the Home Rule scandals. He does this to point to the fact that the Church's condemnation of Irish attempts at freedom in the past were always wrong, and thus the claims made by Father Kane in 1910 to discredit socialism in Ireland would also be proven wrong in the future. Time after time, in Connolly's estimation, the Church was focused solely on securing its own prosperity:

That political activity in the past, like the clerical opposition to Socialism at present, was and is an attempt to serve God and Mammon—an attempt to combine service of Him who in His humbleness rode upon an ass, with the service of those who rode rough-shod over the hearts and souls and hopes of suffering humanity. (71)

Connolly continually attempted to advance the idea that socialism's aims were not that different from what the Church's should be: "The Socialist doctrine teaches that all men are brothers, that the same red blood of a common humanity flows in the veins of all races, creeds, colours, nations, that the interests of Labour are everywhere, and that wars are an abomination" (112). He then questions how a "doctrine which is high and holy in theory on the lips of a Catholic become a hissing and a blasphemy when practised by the Socialist?" (113).

Connolly illustrates the effects of ideology through his analysis of the Catholic Church's and Home Rule's influence on Irish citizens at the turn of the twentieth century. In Ireland in the period before the Easter Rising, there was a confluence of ideologies—religious, imperial, and especially national. It is nationalism that would become the single most important terrain on which the struggle for hegemonic control takes place.

Since it is such an essential focus of this dissertation as a whole, I want to first clarify ideology as it is used in a Marxist and post-Marxist praxis and to establish my own definition, as

this concept will be essential to my readings. Through this definition, I can establish a clearer sense of meaning when using key Marxist terminology. The problem that so many definitions of ideology cause is that they are often essentialized as merely part of the base-superstructure model determined by the economic system in place during a given period. Anyone seeking a singular definition of ideology would be stymied, because ideology has so many definitions, and many of them are contradictorily at odds with one another.

Ironically, it is difficult to find a clear definition of ideology even within Karl Marx's writing. In fact, "Marx has spawned such a range of metaphors for thinking about ideology that we each have to pick our own way through the bewildering range of images and models that have been generated" (Barrett, *Politics of Truth* 16). However, if one needed a general definition of ideology according to early Marx and Engels, the clearest one come from *The German Ideology*: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production" (64; emphasis in original). To clarify further, ideology is connected to the dominant economic class who controls the means of production and it then also controls the intellectual production as well. Marx goes on to develop this idea in connection to the base-superstructure model of society the preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*:

In the social production of their life, men into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure

and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.

(Selected Writings 425)

Again, here Marx illustrates the fact that ideology emerges out of the ruling economic class: in the case of industrial capitalism, if the bourgeoisie controls the means and mode of production, then they also control the ideology.

In the United States, for example, the ideology of the dominant classes puts a particular emphasis on individualism and the idea of social mobility and the “American Dream,” that anyone, with hard work and determination, can raise him/herself out of poverty into success and riches. This is also then connected to a desire to perpetuate Smith’s “invisible hand” that suggests the markets will control and stabilize themselves and that there is no need for governmental regulations. The working-class individual who lacks the significant resources (such as education, connections, and amassed capital) sees his or her opportunity in hard work as a means to success and not the social determinants that will keep that person always wanting. However, he or she will vigorously defend the capitalist system that provides such promise, despite the fact that this same system relies on the exploitation of the same working class to which he or she belongs. It is this material determinism that creates the ideological terrain upon which a person defines oneself. This idea also articulates what Terry Eagleton writes about ideology in his introduction to *Literary Theory*, that ideology involves “the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in” (13).

Issues do arise when looking at Marx's definition of ideology, however. One large stumbling block is in the obscurity of his "camera obscura" metaphor, also used in *The German Ideology*:

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. . . . Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. In in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.

(*German Ideology* 47)

This passage, which is one of the most frequently cited to illustrate the illusionary aspect of ideology, is problematic, because it leads to the idea that ideology is "pure illusion," which, in turn, leads to the coinage of the term "false consciousness" in connection with ideology, a term Marx himself never used (Barrett 5). The earlier definition I have provided from *The German Ideology* will be closer to the one I will use throughout this dissertation as opposed to the *camera obscura* one.

It is because of the various contradictory elements within Marx's own philosophy, and the additional theoretical distinctions that thinkers such as Lukács, Althusser, Marcuse, Adorno, and others have made about "ideology" and its place within Marxist thought, that we may end more confused than when we began. For this reason I will supplement the idea of ideology with hegemony. Hegemony will help to explain aspects of control that are not directly dictated by

economics. It will be a term that I will come back to in my discussion of Irish society and the shifts that accompany the transition to an independent Irish state.

It is perhaps because of the difficulties in defining ideology that the idea of hegemony has received more attention in the last fifty years, as theorists have sought to explain aspects of society and culture that do not conveniently fit into the base-superstructure definition of ideology as it relates to dominant economic forces. Hegemony, a term frequently associated with Antonio Gramsci, gets its most thoughtful treatment in his *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci was imprisoned under Mussolini's Partito Nazionale Fascista from 1929 until 1936, during which he wrote in thirty-three *quaderni* (notebooks) on various subjects concerning economics and culture. Much of the notebooks deal with Italy's particular situation as Gramsci saw it in the end of the nineteenth and certainly in the early twentieth century, especially the economic and political relationship between Northern and Southern Italy. From these notebooks we get some significant ideas that have garnered a good deal of attention from other Marxist theorists who seek a clearer understanding of why a wide spread socialist revolution has not taken place and how capitalism has been so successful in maintaining its control on world-wide markets. If material determinism establishes the ideology of a particular bloc, then when the economy collapses leaving the working class without work and destitute—as it has multiple times during the twentieth century throughout the world—then why is there not a universal proletariat revolution? For Gramsci, it is because of hegemony.

However, before moving on to a definition of hegemony, I think that it is important to understand how Gramsci defines ideology and how it relates to hegemony as he conceives it. Barrett postulates that Gramsci “formulates a way of looking at ideology that suffers from neither the problems attendant of seeing ideology as illusion nor those that follow from the

‘historicism’ of seeing ideology as part of a mechanically related historical social totality” (*Politics of Truth* 27). If one rigidly adheres to the base-superstructure model of ideology, it is easy to conceptualize it as a purely negative notion, that it is determined by the economic base. Gramsci writes, “One must therefore distinguish between historically organic ideologies, those, that is, which are necessary for a given structure and ideologies that are arbitrary, rationalistic, or ‘willed’” (376-77). He clarifies his last point in what is the most significant aspect of his theorizing about ideology: “To the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is ‘psychological’; they ‘organize’ human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.” (377). He develops his idea of the historical bloc, connecting material forces to ideology: the “material forces are the content and ideologies the form, though this distinction between form and content has purely didactic value, since the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces” (377). Ideology can be positive for the exploited classes, as it can be used as the terrain on which the working class might mobilize and effect change. Often we see that ideology is used only in the negative sense, that it is the controlling force used by the State for the purpose of, in Althusser’s words, the reproduction of the conditions of production. It is determined from this economic model that the any member of the proletariat has this “consciousness” thrust upon him/her at birth. From this model, of course, there is little room for effective struggle or movement. How can the proletariat organize if those who constitute it are merely pawns within the complex web that is culture? And how does this explain other issues like racism within the working class itself?

Here is where Gramsci develops the idea of hegemony. Hegemony is tied closely to, but is not entirely explained by, ideology. Hegemony is the “‘spontaneous’ consent given by the

great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige . . . which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production” (12). The central idea here is “spontaneous” consent. This works on an ideological terrain and does not occur through the use of force. This concept is made more explicit when considering the difference between Althusser’s RSAs and ISAs. He illustrates that “what distinguishes the ISAs from the (Repressive) State Apparatus is the following basic difference: the Repressive State Apparatus functions ‘by violence,’ whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses function ‘by ideology’” (97; emphasis in original). In an Irish context, England used its armed forces to crush the Irish and used additional tactics, such as Lord Grey de Wilton’s scorched earth policy in Munster, in order to punish the native Irish into assimilation. This then led to the ISAs and an emphasis on English educational policies and a shift towards English cultural and linguistic dominance. One functions by force and violence, the other by ideology.

Again, this is where Gramsci’s ideas are not tied only to the negative ideological functions assumed in the economic base-superstructure metaphor. Along with the idea of hegemony for Gramsci is his concept of the intellectual. Connolly also touches upon the need for an intellectual element in any successful movement that has a firm understanding of socialist literature as a corpus and the particular history and situation of their own nation: “each country requires also a local or native literature and spoken propaganda translating and explaining its past history and present political developments in the light of knowledge gained from a study of Socialist classics” (*Selected Political Writings* 152). Socialism, in Connolly’s mind, needs to be brought to the people in a way that allows them to see how it can be beneficial to their actual lived experiences:

It is only when Socialism is brought down from the clouds and is shown to have direct bearing upon the political life of each country as a reflex of the economic history of that country, and to have a message bearing upon the political problems of the day, it is only then that Socialism has an opportunity of developing from being a cult of the few to become the faith of many. (152)

Here, in 1913—that same year of the Dublin lockout so crucial in the history of the Irish labor movement—Connolly articulates a similar idea as Gramsci’s concept of the organic intellectual. Gramsci differentiates between “traditional” intellectuals, who, regardless of their occupation, are still under the hegemonic control of the dominant class. “Organic” intellectuals, on the other hand, develop within individual groups; they are “the thinking and organising element of a particular fundamental social class” (3). He goes on to suggest that the “working class, like the bourgeoisie before it, is capable of developing from within its ranks its own organic intellectuals” (Gramsci 4). In this way, one is able to break from the traditional idea of ideology as a totalizing effect, and it is from this break that classes may begin to organize to work against those that control the means of production.

It is here where we must turn to Gramsci’s terms “war of position” and “war of manoeuvre”—both terms that will be essential in my discussion in Chapter 3—because it is through these “movements” that classes can create change. “War of position” is “the battle for winning political hegemony, the securing of consent, the struggle for the ‘hearts and minds’ of the people and not merely their transitory obedience or electoral support.” War of manoeuvre, on the other hand, “comes at a later stage: it is the seizing of state power, but (in direct opposition to the Leninist tradition of political thought) cannot take place except in a position where hegemony has already been secured” (*Politics of Truth* 55). Thus, it is on the terrain of the war of position

that the organic intellectuals must work in order to sway hegemony. It is from this terrain that a “passive” revolution can take place.

How does Gramsci’s idea of hegemony play out when moved from the theoretical to a more “real world” scenario? Stuart Hall focuses on a real-world scenario from England in the 1980s, specifically. For Hall, hegemony is an especially useful idea when combined with Foucaultian idea of the dispersal of power: “Hegemony points to a way of conceptualizing the emergence of Thatcherism in terms of the struggle to gain ascendancy over a whole social formation, to achieve positions of leadership in a number of different sites in social life at once, to achieve the commanding position on the broad strategic front.” He sees that Thatcher’s Conservative Party as “a leading bloc, which is capable not only of organizing its own base through the construction of alliances between different sectors and social forces, but which has as a central feature of that process the construction and winning of popular consent to that authority among the key sectors of the dominated classes themselves” (53). This is exactly what Gramsci means by hegemony. The dominated classes easily accepted what Thatcher and her party represented (especially with the idea of a return to “traditional” English values) despite the fact that economically they were being exploited even more than before, and the separation between the working classes and the wealthy grew.

We can easily apply this to an appropriate Irish context as well. Home Rule is central to any discussion of Irish political history. Connolly’s depiction of Home Rule as an impediment to true Irish and working-class freedoms was one shared by a relatively small minority in Ireland. But why was this true? Why was it that the working classes throughout Ireland could not see Home Rule as a negative force in their own lives? Why did it have such vocal support from the majority in Ireland at the time? That is not to say that there were not those who disagreed with

the piece of legislature, and a careful study of the various responses to Home Rule reveals how various ideologies and the consent of the people can come together through hegemony.

In large part the working classes were willing to support the Ascendancy Protestant Parnell because he was able hitch his growing political name to that of the working-class Catholic Michael Davitt and the Land League and use the positive press to start the Irish Parliamentary Party and push for Home Rule. In the Land League's ability to help the poor tenant farmers and to provide a voice and organization for them, it generated energy from some of the progressive circles to back Parnell in what he sought to do in Parliament. What is often lost in any discussion of this time period—with the lion's share of discussion centered on Home Rule and its failure—is that the Land League was primarily a progressive bourgeois institution. The more radical claims of nationalizing the land were met with derision, and Parnell, as a member of the Ascendancy class and a landlord himself, benefitted from the modifications to the law as it changed how and how much rent landlords were able to charge and presented the opportunity for the tenant farmers to sell their land. While he may have played the role of the champion of the people—and Ireland's "uncrowned king"—Parnell was not as selfless as he was portrayed. He was, however, a brilliant parliamentarian and was able to use the massive support he had in Ireland to influence Gladstone's Parliament and set the stage for Home Rule.

Because of his dealings with the Land League and the push for Home Rule, Parnell made enemies of two dominant forces in Ireland: the landed oligarchy, made up of plantation owners and Ascendancy families, and the Catholic Church. Both had tremendous power in the country, and both were deeply affected by the effects of the Land War and the threat of a semi-independent Ireland. When the facts of the divorce trial between Captain John O'Shea and his wife Katherine came to light, implicating Parnell as Katherine's lover, the Catholic Church and

Protestant landed oligarchy worked to effectively ended Parnell's career and the first Home Rule bill.

Nationalists, unionists, and the Catholic Church all had ideological positions reflected in Home Rule and the responses to it, with hegemonic control at stake. For the most ardent supporters of Home Rule, who were mostly progressive bourgeoisie, this was an opportunity to wrest control away from London and solidify their own control of Ireland with the hopes of furthering development of the manufacturing and industrial sector and further establish their control of the land. In Parnell they had a charismatic and effective politician who could use Parliament to their advantage. It was similar to the bourgeoisie in France who needed to eliminate the *ancien regime* to control the means of production. In this case, the bourgeois and petite bourgeois hoped that an armed revolution would not be necessary. Although the working classes' position would not change dramatically, the Irish Parliamentary Party relied that the mere hope of a modicum of independence from England would be enough to win and control the support of the majority of the working poor and middle classes. In many ways, it was—until the news of the scandal in 1889-1890.

The Irish Parliamentary Party and its supporters' position illustrates how hegemony can be a terrain of the war for position; however, their desire to engage in a war of manœuvre was blocked as a result of Parnell's scandal. Here, the dramatic split that occurred between Parnellites and anti-Parnellites is a clear indication of the control the Church had on the country. "The Church was always suspicious of Home Rule's Protestant origins" (R. Foster 418). The Catholic Church appealed to the parishioners to forsake Parnell and Home Rule on moral grounds; they felt that by involving himself in an adulterous relationship with Katharine O'Shea,

he proved to be no longer fit to represent Ireland and its people. Through the Church's ideological control of its followers, they were able to advance their own agenda.

Davitt, who ironically was blamed in part for Parnell's disassociation from the party and the failure of the first Home Rule bill, was actually the most radical of those involved with the Land League and felt that the end result of the land agitation should be the nationalization of the land. Again, in the public perception of events, Davitt was demonized for the failure of Parnell's more moderate position, a position that was far more attractive to the bourgeoisie, as it represented their interests.

Part of what makes Gramsci's theory so attractive is that it gives voice to issues from groups within the working class that are often marginalized and subsumed into the overwhelming focus of class itself. For example, the issues of race, gender, and sexual equality are often seen as secondary to class issues, which ignore the particular exploitation of each marginalized group, much of which cannot be satisfactorily explained or understood merely through class relations.

This is where Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* comes into play. Laclau and Mouffe build on Gramsci's theories in the context of a neo-liberal, transnational capitalism. They are not sold on the idea of ideology as we have it from Althusser and other Marxists, as they feel as a concept, it is too reductionist and revisionist: "the State was an instrument of class domination, and Social Democracy could only participate in its institutions with the purpose of spreading its own ideology, and defending and organizing the working class" (35). Their issue here is that this is far too convenient way to enact social change, as if all one had to do was wait for economic conditions to get bad enough and then instantaneously all workers would unite under the common banner of poor working conditions

and pay, a fact that one can easily see playing out in Ireland throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Unfortunately, as we have seen, this is not how things work. There are far too many diverse groups within the working class, with too many diverse needs, for there to be a unified edifying aspect of this model of ideology.

This is not to say that every conceptualization of ideology fails; in fact, ideology is “the precise terrain” on which groups can come together, but this is different from the base-superstructure model, and here Gramsci’s idea of “organic ideology” becomes important: “Ideology is not identified with a ‘system of ideas’ or with ‘false consciousness’ of social agents; it is instead an organic and relational whole, embodied in institutions and apparatuses which welds together a historical bloc around a number of basic articulatory principles” (Laclau and Mouffe 67). It is through ideology that “the hegemonic link is no longer concealed, but on the contrary becomes entirely visible and theorized” (67). When might this occur? When the historical bloc is successfully formed: “Intellectual and moral leadership constitutes . . . a higher synthesis, a ‘collective will’, which, through ideology, becomes the organic cement unifying a ‘historical bloc’” (67).

And here is where hegemony enters the picture, because, according to Gramsci, “the proletariat can become the leading and dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of alliances which allows it to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State” (qtd. in Laclau and Mouffe 66). Laclau and Mouffe amend Gramsci’s ideas through the inclusion of theories from Derrida and Lacan. Since history and individual subjects are not unified “wholes,” we cannot discuss them as such, and if society itself cannot be seen in terms of a single, unified object, then we cannot approach it from a single perspective: “Renunciation of the category of the subject as a unitary, transparent and sutured

entity opens the way to the recognition of the specificity of the antagonisms constituted on the basis of different subject positions, and, hence the possibility of the deepening of a pluralists and democratic conception” (Laclau and Mouffe 166). It is through this line of thought that they come up with the idea of a “*radical and plural democracy*” (167). It is finally in their thesis that they articulate how this may occur: “Our thesis is that it is only from the moment when the democratic discourse becomes available to articulate the different forms of resistance to subordination that the conditions will exist to make possible the struggle against different types of inequality” (154).

The reason why there has not been a working-class revolution is that there has not been a way to bring the various proletarian sub-groups together merely on the economic level. The experience and subordination of women is different from African Americans, which is different still from LGBTQ workers. For the Irish, Catholics and Protestants, Anglo-Irish and Gaelic-Irish, city and country, etc., they are all exploited differently under colonial occupation, and it was easy to play these conflicting interests against one another, as will be discussed in Chapter 6. What Laclau and Mouffe are suggesting is that these groups can come together through a hegemonic moment if, instead of trying to unify them as one, we see the plurality and quality of each. In this way various groups come together not under one unified flag (such as that of the proletariat), but under the “logic of equivalence”: “The equivalential articulation between anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-capitalism, for example, requires a hegemonic construction which, in certain circumstances, may be the condition for the consolidation of each one of these struggles” (182). The socialist dimension would be only a part of the movement; it would constitute the economic change. Social change, on the other hand, would have to take into account the diversity of subjects and the necessity for an equal and, as Laclau and Mouffe have said, a

radical and plural democracy. This social change would occur, in their estimation, through hegemony.

Both Gramsci and Laclau and Mouffe see hegemony as a positive, dynamic way through which change can occur and the proletariat can overthrow capitalism and control the means of production. Their conception of hegemony includes an understanding of an “organic” ideology, one that understands the economic element of ideology, but divorces it from the base-superstructure metaphor that limits the working class, to effectively find the terrain on which to organize. The fact that so many theorists who have used ideology as a means to explain the cultural and social element of capitalist success, but have reduced the working class into one homogeneous group, struggling for the same cause, fails to take into consideration the varied lived experiences of people. That is why thinkers such as Michèle Barrett¹¹ and Cornell West¹² have such a hard time accepting Althusser’s definition. Despite the fact that there may be issues that arise in Laclau and Mouffe’s argument, one cannot help but at least see a way that change perhaps can come about, and this is in large part due to Gramsci’s conception of hegemony.

In an Irish context, ideology and hegemony must inevitably return to English occupation and the development of the infrastructure and Irish trade under the English, thus leading to the formation of what one might consider a modern industrial state. This shift in production from subsistence agriculture to large-scale factory production is marked by the rapid growth of cities, especially Belfast, in the nineteenth century, just as it did as most nations that went through the growing pains of industrialization during this time period.

¹¹ Barrett’s analysis of ideology and gender in *Women’s Oppression Today* is particularly strong. She also critiques the theories of Laclau and Mouffe in her chapter “Ideology, Politics, Hegemony: From Gramsci to Laclau and Mouffe” in *The Politics of Truth*.

¹² See West’s essay “Marxist Theory and the Specificity of Afro-American Oppression” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*.

With the foundations of ideology and hegemony set, I needed a more comprehensive way to interpret literary texts through a Marxist lens. What emerges from using the interpretive method set out by Fredric Jameson in his *Political Unconscious* is a varied and often contradictory set of ideologies that point to a country seeking to define itself simultaneously by and against the difficulties of its own history. Jameson suggests that there are three “horizons” through which one can interpret a text. The first is to consider the individual text as a “symbolic act” (76), and to tease out the contradictions present in this singular, political utterance. At this point one moves to the second horizon, which Jameson points to a text as an “*ideologeme*” that reflects a contradictory dialogue of social discourse. The final horizon, the historical, is where there text is “restructured as a field of force in which the dynamic sign systems of several distinct modes of production can be registered and apprehended” (98).

These complexities also indicate the difficulties in finding an easy resolution for “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland, which will be analyzed in Chapter 6; even if Northern Ireland were no longer be part of the United Kingdom and became instead part of the Republic of Ireland, these issues would not go away, and the ethno-religious conflicts would not be resolved neatly. This conflict illustrates the thorny nature of ideology and hegemony. For example, a fact frequently overlooked is that a pro-union Protestant group in Ulster had armed and organized itself as a militia (before Dublin and the Volunteers had) in response to the threat of the establishment of Home Rule.

But art can be a terrain on which one can analyze ideology as it reflects particular interests in society. In this case, I have limited the study to particular Irish literary texts that are reflective of the struggle in Ireland beginning with the period directly before the Easter Rising in 1916, the seminal moment that would lead to the formation of an independent Ireland, discussed

in Chapter 3. One of the most significant aspects of the Rising is the fact that there are antagonistic ideologies present, which must inevitably be reflected in the literature of the time period. History, Stephen Dedalus's "nightmare from which I am trying to awake" (*Ulysses* 28), and its Irish implications are the focus of much literature in the early twentieth century, and it falls on the generations that follow to respond directly to this time period. Gregory Dobbins suggests through Terry Eagleton's analysis of nationalism and ideology that

nationalism is not so much one ideology that competes for hegemony alongside other ideologies, but rather is itself an ideological terrain. Nationalism enacts an ideological horizon with specific discursive limits, between which various articulations of nationalist positions present themselves in a competitive manner in order to become dominant. ("Whenever Green Is Red" 525)

One of the major issues here whenever nationalism is discussed in relation to Ireland under British rule is that before the formation of the Free State and finally the Republic, there was not an Ireland in the way we typically conceive of the nation-state in modern terms. This is an idea that Jonathan Githens-Mazer develops in his *Myths and Memories of the Easter Rising*. He borrows the term *ethnie* to describe the collective identity that became such a central focal point during this period. An *ethnie*, according to Anthony D. Smith, is "a named human population with shared ancestry, myths, histories and culture, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity" (qtd. in Githens-Mazer 7). In this case, the people living in an Ireland still controlled by English colonial forces and government at the end of the nineteenth century found a shared, collective identity that went back to a history and culture before the English invaded. Using the term *ethnie* to capture this collective identity is a more fitting description of what occurred in Ireland before the formation of the Free State. It is around

this sense of nationalism that so many disparate elements were able to find some common ground in Ireland around the turn of the twentieth century: “Nationalism is a word that has been used in all sorts of sloppy and undifferentiated ways, but it still serves quite adequately to identify the mobilizing force that coalesced into resistance against an alien and occupying empire” (Said 74). To develop this idea even further, Anthony D. Smith suggests that

notions of autonomy and authenticity and symbols of self-reliance and of natural community (for example, re-enactments of resistance events, or symbols of landscapes or historical monuments or of local products, crafts or sports) exemplify the fusion of cognitive and expressive aspects and the links with wider sentiments and aspirations. The feeling for authenticity to be found among the exponents of the Gaelic Revival in late-nineteenth century Ireland, with its stress on native sports, nature, local crafts and ancient pagan heroes, illustrates the diffusion of the new language and symbolism of Irish nationalism. (Smith 73)

As it is Irish nationalism, however, that emerges as a result of the Easter Rising and the War for Independence, my analysis in Chapters 4 and 5 must focus on the shift to an independent Free State (1922-37) and the issues inherent in the formation of a new republic. Connolly did not survive to see the Free State established, as he was executed for his role in the Easter Rising on 12 May 1916. He would not have liked what developed, as what ended up occurring reflected his great fear of Home Rule: the end of British rule was replaced by Irish bourgeois control. The hegemonic shift, while significant in terms of nationalist identity, was not met with economic change. From Éamon de Valera’s Constitution in 1937 and his economic and educational policies with Fianna Fáil, through the Troubles in Northern Ireland and the economic boon of the

Celtic Tiger in the 1990s, it is in this context that the rest of my argument must be framed, as it is here that Ireland has sought and will seek to define itself, in the past, currently, and in the future.

CHAPTER 3

“A TERRIBLE BEAUTY IS BORN”:

THE LITERATURE OF THE REVIVAL PERIOD THROUGH THE WAR FOR
INDEPENDENCE

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century saw a significant focus on ancient myths and legends by Irish writers, centered on the Anglo-Irish literary elite in Dublin. As explored by writers such as Standish James O’Grady, William Butler Yeats, George Russell (“Æ”), Lady Augusta Gregory, and John Millington Synge, the larger-than-life figures of the ancient tales—especially Cúchulainn from the Ulster Cycle—provided these writers with the material they hoped would inspire their fellow Dubliners and all Irish men and women to a more ardent appreciation of their culture that they felt had been lost to the cosmopolitanism of end-of-the-century Dublin. Along with the growth of cultural nationalism came a renewed and more focused political unrest, which would eventually become armed through the founding of paramilitary organizations¹³ such as the Irish Volunteers (and the more clandestine Irish Republican Brotherhood, which would become the IRA) and the Irish Citizen Army. As these groups became more radical, so did the use of myth and legend. As a result of the Easter Rising and subsequent executions, a new myth and legend became codified around Patrick Pearse’s use of Cúchulainn as a figure of blood sacrifice, grounding Irish martyrology with the ancient Irish literature and Catholic iconography. Christ and Cúchulainn become united with Wolf Tone, Robert Emmet, and most importantly the 1916 rebels led by Pearse. It is this version of Cúchulainn that would have lasting effects on Irish society.

¹³ Ireland often had clandestine groups who sought Ireland’s independence through armed rebellion; earlier groups include the United Irishmen (1798), Young Irelanders (1848), Fenians (mid-nineteenth century), etc.

As the world moved toward the *fin de siècle*, there was a great anticipation and anxiety as the twentieth century approached. Ireland was no different. What was different, perhaps, from other European countries wondering what the end of the century would bring was the fact that Ireland was still an English colony. Things were changing, however, and major changes were still on the horizon. The Irish had made major Parliamentary gains under Parnell's leadership and the introduction of a series of Home Rule Bills, which would effectively give Ireland control over itself. The economics were changing, too. There was a growth in the Irish Catholic middle class as the economy continued to move somewhat toward cities as major industrial and economic centers and moderately away from the agrarian sector that had driven Irish economics for centuries. As with so many of England's colonies, there was a developed bourgeoisie that made up the colonial authority in Ireland, comprised in part of Anglo-Irish men and women who represented the hegemonic order of the imperial power in Dublin.

Accompanying these economic changes were cultural ones. Two major cultural movements spurred a focus toward all things "Irish": the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), founded in 1884, and the Gaelic League (1893). In the middle of the nineteenth century there were several significant Irish cultural organizations founded in America—most notably the Fenian Brotherhood (later Clan na Gael) and the Ancient Order of Hibernians. However, in Ireland it was not until the end of the nineteenth century when these organizations gained more notoriety. The GAA emphasized the cultural importance of playing traditional Irish sports such as Gaelic football, camogie, and most notably, hurling, a sport depicted often in the old Irish legends and connected to the Irish epic hero Cúchulainn.¹⁴ The Gaelic League, on the other hand, dedicated its efforts to the promotion and development of the Irish language, long

¹⁴ In a notable scene in "Cúchulainn's Boyhood Deeds" in *The Táin*, he takes on 150 boys in a game of hurling and is seen consistently with his hurling stick and ball (Kinsella 77-79).

moribund because of devastating English colonial efforts. The English could not get the indigenous Irish to give up Catholicism, but they were able to get them, to a considerable extent, to stop speaking their own language.

Another major cultural movement was the Celtic Revival. In this movement there was a greater emphasis on the myths, legends, and folklore of the ancient Celts. This movement was at great odds with much of the literature of England and Continental Europe during that time period. Regardless, there was not a single, unified usage of myth and legend by those writers often associated with the Celtic Twilight or Irish Literary Revival in the period before the Easter Rising. The fact that many in the Irish Literary Revival turned to the past for inspiration is not debatable; however, there were disparate uses of these stories varying according to the ideologies present behind them, and it is through an analysis of these ideologies where one might find both a reflection of the hegemonic order and also the terrain on which counterhegemonic maneuver may take place leading up to the Easter Rising. One of the major points of contention was how the upper-class, Protestant, Anglo-Irish Ascendancy writers presented these stories, centered on the plays presented at the Abbey Theatre by William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), Lady Augusta Gregory (1852-1932), and John Synge (1871-1909)—and all three were influenced by Standish James O’Grady (1869-1928)—versus those who followed Pearse in the Gaelic League as it became more politicized and moved away from Douglas Hyde (also Anglo-Irish) and his view of the League as a cultural institution, not a political one.¹⁵

There is some need to emphasize the fact that many of those involved in the various political and cultural nationalist movements before the turn of the century were Anglo-Irish by birth. It is also worth noting that many of these same people saw themselves as entirely Irish and

¹⁵ Yet even Hyde became President of Ireland—not the head of state (which would be the Taoiseach), but in a more ceremonial role that was the political incarnation of Irish culture.

did not consider themselves English at all. However, for many Irish people, those belonging to the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy could never be considered truly Irish. They would in many ways always be outsiders, reminders of a traumatic period in Irish history: “‘the Irish nation is *de facto* a Catholic nation’ and the Protestant Ascendancy, no matter how much they learnt, spoke and wrote Irish, or repudiated the ethos of their class and caste, would be considered fundamentally un-Irish” (R. Foster 454). This brings up the problem of identity and how one defines oneself. It goes beyond the personal identification, however. Cultural and religious identities were, and continue to be, essential elements of Irish life. James M. Cahalan suggests that religion was—and is—“a convenient label used to isolate the opposed groups in Irish society, marking differences that were social and economic rather than simply religious” (*Great Hatred* 26). This became especially clear as the country navigated the first two decades of the twentieth century. In fact, as Ireland moved closer to the Easter Rising, the already high anti-British sentiment throughout the country increased.

The problematic aspect of identity in Ireland is one of the most significant issues during this time period. Ireland itself was undergoing tremendous changes. The literature of this period is often the focus of those thinking of the Easter Rising, in no small part due to the cultural nationalism associated with the Abbey Theatre and the fact that many of the fifteen executed for their roles in the Rising were poets themselves. How could this not be the case when the two documents most emblematic of this time—the proclamation read by Pearse outside of the GPO on Easter Monday morning and Yeats’s “Easter, 1916”—came out of this literary milieu? What this revisionism often does not take into account is the fact that there was an economic shift in the country from the end of the eighteenth through the first couple decades of the twentieth centuries that had a tremendous influence on the country, reflected in the shifting ideology. The

Catholic Irish middle class was becoming more important, economically overtaking the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. This then led to a greater hegemonic shift, although this shift was not as dramatic as Jim Larkin, James Connolly, Sean O’Casey, and others involved in the Irish labor movement would have hoped.

Early on in the twentieth century, it certainly looked as if those who supported the Irish labour movement would get their wish, as there seemed to be a greater chance of class warfare than armed rebellion: “[F]or a considerable time it appeared that the critical confrontation would take place not between British government and Irish nationalists, but between Irish capital and Irish labour” (R. Foster 443). Despite the fact that early on most of Dublin’s citizenry never even considered that Ireland could beat England in an actual armed conflict, with the promise of the proposed Home Rule many Irish sought to ignore the economic crisis that left “at least 16,000 families living below the poverty line” (437). Labor issues were often seen as secondary to many who supported Irish nationalism: “Catholic nationalism, in the form of bishops as well as politicians, was firmly dedicated against committing any future Home Rule state to burdens of social expenditure” (438). Ireland, and Dublin specifically, moved into the second decade of the twentieth century, as parliamentary policy failed to bring independence and Ulster and Dublin established new militias, further shifted the focus away from labor issues, despite widespread poverty in the capital, “especially on the north side of the Liffey” (436) .

The Irish Parliamentary Party had dominated Irish politics since Charles Stewart Parnell and the first Home Rule Bill of 1886. Despite the fact that the party was able to weather several scandals—most notably Parnell’s personal and political ones, it could not maintain its popularity after his death. The party splintered into two main factions—one led by John Redmond, who continued to champion Parnell’s policies, and another, larger faction that remained with John

Dillon. On top of this, the seemingly endlessly delayed passing of the Home Rule Bill took away some of their political luster. Add to that R. F. Foster's suggestion that the party "became increasingly 'imperial,'" it is somewhat surprising that they still managed to control most of the political machinery in the country: "But the formidable machinery remained, and the hegemony over electoral organization outside north-east Ulster and parts of Dublin" (434). However, this was short-lived, as they could not maintain their control after the First World War and the Easter Rising. They could not remain relevant when faced with the changes that took place in the hearts and minds of the Irish themselves. The Sinn Féin ("we ourselves") movement,¹⁶ led by Arthur Griffith, became more prominent in Irish politics after many of those who were executed after the Rising were tied to that party. Despite the fact the Irish Parliamentary Party weathered Parnell's scandals, it could not overcome their lasting effects and a sense of frustration from both Unionists and Nationalists. The general failure of the Irish Parliamentary Party further illustrates the hegemonic shift in Irish politics away from attempts to change Ireland through parliamentary reform led by the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy to open rebellion.

The Anglo-Irish, despite their desire to be identified as Irish, were instead seen as English. Pearse, whose vehement hatred of the English was perhaps in part to distance himself from his own English ancestry, and Griffith used the lingering anti-Anglo sentiments to drum up an army made up of volunteers in Dublin. These anti-British sentiments found not only political vexation against English presence in Ireland and control over Irish parliamentary affairs, but also did so through responses to Anglo-Irish writers.

In addition, many of the Anglo-Irish writers failed to accurately calculate the influence that the Catholic Church had on its parishioners—a Catholic church that was later written into

¹⁶ George Bernard Shaw liked to suggest that Sinn Féin was "Irish for 'John Bull'" (qtd. in Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World* 211).

the 1937 as a virtual state religion. Instead, symptomatic of the ideological issues that I wish to focus on in this chapter, the Anglo-Irish revival overestimated the influence that the culture of the Ancient Celts would have on the vast majority of the Irish people and underestimated the hegemonic control of the Church. Even if their versions of myth and legend did not reveal a desire to maintain the status quo, it is difficult to see the majority of Irish Catholics living in Dublin being moved to enact social change merely by reading ancient tales and lore of a distant society.

At times, Ascendancy writers such as Yeats and George Russell (*Æ*) were able to align their concerns with the concerns of the proletariat; however, those moments tended to be brief. To be fair, Yeats and others were certainly angered by the treatment of Jim Larkin's Irish Transport and General Workers' Union who went on strike in August 1913. Ireland sufficiently lagged behind England in terms of organized labor unions. As R. F. Foster suggests, a large part of the problem came from "the non-industrial base" which led to "the precarious and extremely impoverished conditions of its proletariat by the late nineteenth century" (436). The fact that so many workers were not unionized affected the general working and living conditions of the working classes. With the help of labor leaders—especially Connolly and Larkin—unskilled, casual workers who had previously been non-unionized sought leverage against the bourgeoisie and went on strike. However, the Dublin Employers' Federation did not want to meet the demands of Larkin and the union: they sought an eight-hour workday, unemployment provisions, and a pension, basic employment practices already enjoyed by many other European and American workers. Yeats's frustration with the Irish bourgeoisie is clearly seen in his poem "September 1913," where he famously declared that "Romantic Ireland is dead and gone, / It's with O'Leary in the grave" (*Collected Poems* 7-8), after chastising William Martin Murphy and

other nascent Catholic leaders of the Dublin Employers' Federation who locked out their union leaders in 1913:

What need you, being come to sense,
 But fumble in a greasy till
 And add the halfpence to the pence
 And prayer to shivering prayer, until
 You have dried the marrow from the bone
 For men were born to pray and save (1-6)

“September 1913” and other works—especially those of George Russell—are examples of the Irish Literary Revival sympathetically championing workers' rights, yet there was a general failure of the Anglo-Irish elite to truly understand the real lives of the working classes. This failure, certainly, was not the only factor that led to a change in how Irish myth and legend were used. As England prepared to enter into what many thought would be a short conflict, a Home Rule bill finally passed through parliament in September of 1914—though its actual enactment was tabled until after the war—with some suggesting that it to be a way to appease the Irish and keep them willing to provide additional troops.

Home Rule was not a universally Irish-supported measure, unsurprisingly. Many of the loudest voices came from Ulster, the province that contained the highest concentration of loyalist Protestants; in response to the earlier introduction of the bill, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) was formed in November 1912, creating a paramilitary group that promised to fight any attempt to enforce a measure that separated Ulster from the United Kingdom. The fact that this “short conflict” turned into World War I further aggravated many in Ireland. John Redmond, head of the Parnellite Irish Parliamentary Party, was among the many hoping for a short conflict, as he

promised the support of the National Volunteers, a group founded in response to the Ulster group (UVF), to Prime Minister H. H. Asquith. As the war continued to drag on and Irish soldiers continued to be conscripted in support of the English war efforts, many began to tire of waiting. The Irish National Volunteers split, with the more radical elements gaining in strength and numbers. As this radical element began to exert a greater influence on Irish proceedings, so did Patrick Pearse.

Pearse (1879-1916), a schoolteacher by trade, became more and more involved with those who sought direct rebellion against England and who felt that Home Rule did not go far enough: Pearse “realized that Home Rule, if it even came, could not change the character of the country: he could envision no place for himself in a Home Rule parliament. So he came to dream of a revolution, in which he would walk gaily to his death” (Edwards 177). After the split from Redmond’s Volunteers, Pearse became head of the military organization of the new group, despite the fact that he had no formal military background. He was instrumental in organizing the Easter Rising and for getting the support of James Connolly and the Irish Citizen Army (ICA). On the whole the Irish Volunteers and the ICA were two distinct groups and, although their concerns overlapped at points, the initial lack of concern over changing the capitalist economic structure that relied on the exploitation of the working classes was a major stumbling block in terms of getting the two groups together. The Marxist and Labour groups’ “opposition was founded on the belief that the motivation behind the Volunteers was unsympathetic to the class struggle—the Labour movement had no interest in any change in Irish society which did not involve a shift in the balance of power from capitalist to worker” (Edwards 207). In fact, early in the labor movement Larkin and Connolly felt that the working class’s “best interests were served not so much by a campaign against England as by a determined effort to assert itself

in the face of the economic ruling class at home” (Cahalan, *Great Hatred* 40). However, as time went on, Connolly’s stance changed and he instead felt that it was only by overthrowing British imperialism that the Irish working classes could be liberated, and he therefore felt there was a pressing need for an armed rebellion against England. It was Pearse who was able to convince Connolly that their ultimate goals were the same; each believed that it was only through a physical show of force that change could occur. It was then Connolly who was able to bring the ICA and the main organizing and radicalized branch of the Irish Volunteers, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), together. This was crucial for Pearse’s plans on Easter Monday, 1916.

Along with Pearse’s strategic and organizational talents, he provided much of the significant propaganda and rhetoric of the IRB: “The ideology of 1916 is inescapably connected with Pearse” (R. Foster 477). Central was his belief in blood sacrifice; it was his way of fostering the continual legacy of the martyrs of the past that already existed in Ireland going back to Hugh Ó Néill and continuing through Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet and adding his own name to this list, cementing his own immortality in his eyes. He focused on a series of figures and motifs that idealized and sanctified blood-letting for a chance for renewal, from Cúchulainn to Christ to Wolfe Tone to himself: “Pearse the poet owed more to the Romantics than to Christianity, in whose institutional theology he had little interest. His mystical religion centered on Christ—the crucified Christ—as his mystical political stance centered on his own blood” (Edwards 201).

Pearse was aware that the Rising would fail—so, too, by the time of the Rising, were some of the other leaders, including Connolly to a large extent—but this played right into Pearse’s willingness to give his life for Ireland. “His messianic and sacrificial notion that the ‘Irish’ cause was somehow congruent with Christ’s sacrifice appealed to MacDonaugh and

Plunkett as well: the idea of a revolution in consciousness brought about by a symbolic and willed loss of life” (R. Foster 477). After Roger Casement was arrested attempting to bring smuggled arms from Germany into Ireland for an armed rebellion, Eoin MacNeill withdrew his support and instructed other members of the Irish Volunteers that there would be no uprising. When Pearse awoke on Monday, 24 April 1916, he knew that the Rising had little chance of success. What remains interesting in the events surrounding the Easter Rising was that it had very little support from the general populace, who were shocked by the death, destruction, and general interference of day-to-day life, and from those who feared repercussions from the English and the withdrawal of the proposed Home Rule. It was only *after* the executions of fifteen prominent leaders of the Rising—including Pearse—that the people began to resent the actions taken by the English in Ireland and actually supported the Rising. As George Bernard Shaw suggested, “[i]t is absolutely impossible to slaughter a man in this position without making him a martyr and a hero, even though the day before the rising he may have been only a minor poet. The shot Irishmen will now take their places beside Emmet and the Manchester Martyrs in Ireland” (qtd. in Thompson 103-04). Pearse, like many of the others who lost their lives as a result of the Rising, became a martyr, just as Shaw suggested he would. His writings were seen as prophetic, and the Christ-like Cúchulainn would become a symbol of the Rising itself.

Pearse capitalized on the growing Irish nationalism that grew in tandem with and helped to foster the cultural movement. As a result of Pearse’s literary and political works and his participation in the Easter Rising, a new myth was codified around him as, in the words of Charles Townshend, “ideal types replaced reality; symbols took on real power” (qtd. in R. Foster, *Modern Ireland* 487). He had entered into the line of succession that he put in place leading up to the Rising: he himself was now one of the martyrs in a long line of blood sacrifices,

real and imaginary, from Cúchulainn to Christ to his own favorite hero, Tone. “Pearse’s poems and addresses, carefully marketed to secure maximum effect, became a sacred book. On every level, martyrolatry had taken over” (487). But it is his version of Cúchulainn that was at the center of Irish politics and national identity in the time surrounding the Easter Rising in 1916.

The history here is crucial in understanding how Irish myth and legend developed and the significance they played in the shifting ideologies that coincided with the massive political changes in Ireland in the twentieth century. Cúchulainn became particularly important. There is no unified Irish identity or Irish nationalism present in the myths and legends of the Ulster cycle; in fact, the stories of myth and legend reflect the general disunity of the Celts in Ireland. However, in the wake of the executions after the Easter Rising, Pearse’s version of Cúchulainn would become a symbol of Irish rebellion against British oppression, offering an example to modern Ireland to fight against the empire, even if that meant offering oneself in a blood sacrifice to do so.

After the Irish Civil War, which began in 1922 following the Anglo-Irish Treaty signed by Irish representatives Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith with Prime Minister Lloyd George, writers turned their attention to the problems at home, causing yet another change in how Irish heroes were depicted. What becomes apparent in any analysis of the figure of Cúchulainn is the lack of a consistent ideological usage. However, what is relatively consistent, despite the major difference in how he is depicted, is the fact that the changes in usage reflect the larger shift in ideology; as the paradigm shifts, so do the traits of Cúchulainn that are particularly emphasized. It is in the events of the Rising—and the blood sacrifice imagery favored by Pearse—that cemented the version of Cúchulainn that emerged from this time period and against which every subsequent generation would have to contend.

It is necessary to turn from history to literature in order to document the changes in Cúchulainn's emphasized traits, because it is through the representation of Cúchulainn that one can see three varied—and discordant—ideologies present in three dominant literary examples: Standish James O'Grady, William Butler Yeats, and Patrick Pearse. O'Grady's version is the earliest and has a dramatic influence on Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory, and others in the Irish Literary Revival. It is fraught with significant issues, however, when one examines the ideology that emerges from a closer inspection of what O'Grady does with the old legends. In Yeats's depiction, it becomes obvious that he moves away from O'Grady's concerns and instead the legends are a vehicle for Yeats's own struggles with himself and his country and indicate his inability to overcome his background as he sought to connect with the Irish people at large. Pearse, like Yeats, uses Cúchulainn to forward his own objectives, but he also has the significance of the historical moment which propels his version onward. Pearse and Cúchulainn are both emblematic of the Easter Rising. In his execution, which he actively embraced, he fulfilled the prophecy he set in his writings. He joined his heroes Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet and all of those from the past who were willing to shed their blood for a renewed Ireland. This legacy of failure moved the Irish people after his execution and became an essential part of how people thought of the events of 1916, thus mirroring the shift in how the Irish thought of themselves, but it also had a real, lasting, and negative influence on how the past would be used to perpetuate violence. But Pearse's version is not the dominant version of Cúchulainn found during the Irish Literary Revival; it became dominant only in the wake of the Rising. The distinction for the most influential author on the Revival's writers belongs to Standish James O'Grady.

Standish O'Grady's influence on the Revival's use of Cúchulainn is immeasurable. Because of this fact, the changes that he makes to the mythic hero and the Ulster Cycle are that much more significant when looking at the ideological uses of the figure. In the preface to O'Grady's *The Coming of Cuculain*, George Russell (Æ) wrote, "no man in Ireland intervened in the affairs of his country with a superior nobility of aim. He was the last champion of the Irish aristocracy and still more the voice of conscience for them, and he spoke to them of their duty to the nation as one might imagine a fearless prophet speaking to a council of degenerate princes" (vi). William Butler Yeats praised him as having "had made the old Irish heroes, Finn, and Oisín, and Cuchulain, alive again, taking them, for I think he knew no Irish, from the dry pages of O'Curry and his school, and condensing and arranging, as he thought Homer would have arranged and condensed" (*Autobiography* 148). He repeats a similar sentiment in his "Introduction to *Fighting the Waves*:" "It is that famous man Cuchulain . . ." In the eighties of the last century Standish O'Grady, his mind full of Homer, retold the story of Cuchulain that he might bring back a heroic ideal. His work, which founded modern Irish literature, was hasty and ill-constructed, his style marred by imitation of Carlyle" (*Selected Criticism* 208). Although he criticizes O'Grady's stylistic flaws, he makes the point of calling him the founder of modern Irish literature, which, ironically, Yeats, not O'Grady became. Notice also the repetition of comparing O'Grady's mission to that of Homer,¹⁷ which reflects the Irish desire for their own epic to cement the importance of their culture. This desire for a national epic goes back to the initial texts of the legends as they are transposed by scribes. Looking at the most complete version of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* from the *Book of Leinster*, there seems to be a desire to mimic Virgil's *Aeneid* by placing a greater emphasis on the deeds of Cúchulainn, in turn making him an

¹⁷ Pearse also compares the old Irish myths to Homer in his lecture "Some Aspects of Irish Literature" (1898), which I will touch upon later.

epic hero in the vein of Aeneas. However, it would not be Homer or Virgil on whom O'Grady would model his adaptations of the Red Branch Cycle; instead he would opt for a more modern, English arrangement.

This is an important point moving forward; in Irish the tales of Cúchulainn are a loose, often contradictory collection, especially as we move away from Ulster, whereas O'Grady attempts to make a more cohesive narrative in English modeled after English narrative traditions (especially Walter Scott's historical novels);¹⁸ in fact, one can see elements of what James M. Cahalan suggests about Scott in O'Grady's work, as both sought "to develop a historical realism out of conventions of romance" (*Great Hatred* 14). O'Grady attempts to mediate between the ancient world of the Celts and the modern world and to force the former to conform to the latter in regards to the ways in which stories are told. O'Grady could not refer to the original Irish texts because he did not know the language. What happens as a result of his inability to read or understand Irish is that we get an adaptation of a translation, which makes O'Grady's text twice-removed from the original.

I do not make this statement necessarily to critique O'Grady's inability to read Irish or to question his fidelity to the Irish sources. I agree with Linda Hutcheon's assessment that adaptations are worthy of study regardless of their accuracy to the original source material. In studying various adaptations of Irish myth, we can analyze each as "a product (as extensive, particular transcoding) and as a process (as creative reinterpretation and palimpsestic intertextuality)" (Hutcheon 22). She likens the adaptation process to that of a jazz musician's variation on a song: "Like jazz variations, adaptations point to the individual creative decisions and actions" (86). Instead of looking at a one-to-one correspondence between original sources

¹⁸ "O'Grady's prefaces to his works reveal that his point of view on history was closer to Walter Scott's than was that of any other Irish historical novelist" (Cahalan 92).

and a singular “correct” adaptation, she illustrates that adaptations can be seen as “(re-) interpretations and (re-) creations” (172). As such, studying each adaptation for choices made in what is emphasized and what is left out as a way to analyze ideology is my main point of contention.

Returning to O’Grady and the choices that he makes as an adaptor of Irish myth and legend, it must be noted that he is certainly not the only writer who has adapted a text from an unfamiliar language; however, there are issues that need to be analyzed when it comes to *how* O’Grady uses the legends. O’Grady’s elevated diction illustrates the fact that, as John Wilson Foster notes, that “the old stories should not merely be translated, but reshaped according to modern fictional criteria and expectations” (23). In “reshaping” these myths and legends, O’Grady makes significant choices that indicate a decidedly aristocratic, Anglo-Irish ideology. Perhaps looking at O’Grady’s version of Cúchulainn as adaptation is more appropriate. As such, it becomes clear that the choices he makes in the adaptation process reveal his ideological concerns. As Cahalan notes, to “recreate the knightly tradition of Cúchulainn was exactly the aim of O’Grady’s literary and historical work” (*Great Hatred* 92),¹⁹ and in this aim was a desire to reinforce Anglo-Irish economic and political superiority.

By emphasizing an aristocratic background of his hero, O’Grady develops a not so subtle design for the Anglo-Irish to lead the nation. This focus becomes a questionable issue for many involved in the cultural nationalist movement: A coterie of elites, more often than not Anglo-Irish, deemed it appropriate to change the mindset of the middle and working class by focusing on a pre-invasion Irish culture. By leading the larger segments of Irish society to a fuller understanding of Irish culture, the cultural nationalists hoped to inspire the general populace and

¹⁹ For a greater understanding of O’Grady’s place in Anglo-Irish literature, Cahalan’s chapter “The Shift from Romance to Realism: Standish O’Grady and William Buckley” in *Great Hatred, Little Room* is invaluable.

lead to a bloodless revolution behind a united Irish identity. O'Grady himself was designated as a Fenian Unionist by Lady Gregory; this paradoxical label captures his ideology perfectly, and illustrates the problems with such an ideology when placed in a historical and political context. The first literary critic who attempted an overview of this period, Ernest Boyd, likewise entitled his chapter on O'Grady in *Appreciations and Depreciations* "A Fenian Unionist," and he meant it as a compliment. Boyd championed O'Grady as being able to do what no "present-day critics of West Britonism" could do: define the "essential grievance of Irish Ireland whose intolerance is the despair of our peacemakers" (14). He went on to say that O'Grady had "not failed to leave his imprint on the best in contemporary Irish literature and politics" (22). But this brings up several significant issues that are revealed through the uses of Cúchulainn: Neither the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy nor the Catholic-Irish could effectively get over the great divide between them, a divide that grew out of historical situations. O'Grady himself did not have great faith in the common Irish person. He even remarked that writers should "leave the heroic cycle alone, and not bring them down to the crowd" (qtd. in Kiberd, *Irish Classics* 402). While there were Catholic Irish such as Joyce who despised the rabble²⁰ (made evident in the famous scene in *Portrait* where Stephen refuses to sign McCann's²¹ petition), the fact remains that an ideological gulf existed between the Anglo-Irish writers who dominated the Revival and the rest of Irish society. In fact, Declan Kiberd points to O'Grady's use of Cúchulainn and other figures as being

²⁰ Joyce's hatred for the rabble and crowd-mentality can be seen throughout his work, starting with his first publication a pamphlet entitled *The Day of the Rabblement* (1901). He frequently will use the metaphor of a fox or a stag hunt with the rabble cast as the blood-thirsty hounds and his victim of choice (Parnell, Christ, himself) cast as the fox/stag. He took the idea from a quote used in the papers at the time to describe an issue with Parnell that Yeats picked up on (itself a misinterpretation of Goethe): "The Irish seem to me like a pack of hounds, always dragging down some noble stag" (*Autobiography* 211).

²¹McCann was based on Joyce's friend Francis Sheehy-Skeffington; he was arrested and shot for being a rebel during the 1916 Easter Rising, despite the fact that he was a pacifist who had attempted to stop looting and theft during the Rising.

“on closer inspection . . . disguised versions of the British imperial present” (403). Again, this goes in line with the idea of the Fenian Unionist: one who believed in the inherent problems of the Irish being subjugated under the crown, but who sought not independence, but a greater sense of equality. He was “no Catholic nationalist” (Cahalan, *Great Hatred* 90).

This becomes even clearer when looking at O’Grady’s version of Irish history *The Story of Ireland*, published the same year as his *Coming of Cuculain* (1894), in which he has two chapters on Oliver Cromwell. There is no figure more despised in Irish history than Oliver Cromwell, in part due to his legacy left in folklore. The siege of Drogheda by English forces, Cromwell’s decisive and bloody beginning to his campaign in Ireland in September 1649, left nearly everyone within the city’s walls dead, including tales of atrocities committed by Cromwell and his men. There was certainly a massacre in Drogheda after the surrender of the army comprised of Irish Catholic Confederates and Royalists, though the exact figures and measures used is difficult to know precisely. These atrocities have lived on in folklore, where Cromwell is seen as a “folk villain” (25) and “the devil” (24). Cahalan illustrates several pointed examples in folklore where “Cromwell always loses and O’Connell always wins” (25); one such example has Cromwell killing himself, while another has him dying in Ireland where the land itself refuses to accept his corpse: “Cromwell’s corpse was rejected by the Irish soil and the coffin found back above ground each morning” (25). This is a clear indication of the ways in which one can find “the power of wishful thinking in Irish folklore” (25), which certainly extend to the Irish Literary Revival as well.

With the Irish folk memory and its view of Cromwell in mind, perhaps nothing could be so offensive to anyone who actually supported the Irish in their bid for independence than what O’Grady writes about Cromwell. There are two chapters focused primarily on Cromwell and his

initiatives in Ireland: “Cromwell in Ireland” and “The Storming of Drogheda.” In the former, Cromwell is described as “one of the ablest men that ever lived, a most sagacious ruler, and a most valiant soldier” (*Story of Ireland* 123) and as a “great Englishman, who, as it were, stamped his image, certainly in a very remarkable manner, upon this country” (124). Although there is a good deal written and said about Cromwell and his campaign in Ireland, much of it does not have the same tone and tenor of O’Grady’s praise. Even stranger, O’Grady begins his chapter on Cromwell and Drogheda with a long description of Cromwell’s physical appearance, leading to a discussion of two engravings of Cromwell in the National Gallery one of which has Cromwell with “an insane face,” the other, “too feminine and refined” (125), and a painting that shows him as “a very morose person suggesting not at all the bold, frank, and intellectual physiognomy that was Cromwell’s” (125). O’Grady then tries to rectify apparent deficiencies in Cromwell’s character; he seems particularly offended by the depiction of Cromwell as “inarticulate” (126; 130-31). This hero-worship of Cromwell could never come from one who fervently sought Ireland’s independence and a regime change.

It is not surprising, then, that O’Grady would look to English literature to reform and restructure Irish legend. In the mid-nineteenth century, Eugene O’Curry worked to translate ancient texts from Irish into English; however, his work was disrupted by the British government for fear of the works inciting national sentiment and revolt. O’Curry was chosen as a translator because of his understanding of the language and history of Ireland; O’Grady cannot boast to have the same knowledge, so he uses O’Curry’s translations to reshape Irish legend into a decidedly English product. O’Grady wanted Cúchulainn to be an example to modern Ireland: “In the pages of O’Grady, Cuchulain was reborn in the shape which he was to dominate the Irish revival: chevalier, visionary, solitary, valiant, patriot” (J. Foster 33). However, by ignoring the

truly Irish linguistic and cultural elements, he reinscribes the dominant Anglo-Irish ideology; he was “an advocate for aristocracy” (34). As Foster adds, “O’Grady could not or would not take the last obvious step toward a republican belief in Ireland’s separation from Great Britain, but preferred to contemplate by some species of daydream the inchoate, never fulfilled unity of a purely legendary Heroic Ireland” (34). In this way he can claim the desire for Irish independence, but keep the status quo intact.

Even though Lady Augusta Gregory knew Irish and undertook the translations of the *Táin* herself, there are issues that arise as a result of the choices made while translating or adapting that yield similar results to O’Grady’s. Her version, too, Anglicizes the legend, despite her use of her Hiberno-English “Kiltartan” dialect. Despite the fact that she is certainly sympathetic to the Irish cause, she feels the need to act as moral guardian to anyone reading her translations: She “removed many of the grotesque or supernatural interventions by which Cuchulain received assistance from the otherworldly *sidhe*” (Kiberd, *Irish Classics* 406-07). Lady Gregory’s desire to soften some of the more violent and sexual aspects illustrate the dominant ideology that would be so prevalent in Éamon de Valera’s Free State; As John Wilson Foster emphasizes, “Equally distasteful to Lady Gregory were overt sexual references. In this matter, as in the matter of the macabre and grotesque, her Victorian upper-class and Irish nationalist prejudices conspired to suppress an archaic feature of Irish literature that surfaced, against all attempts to censor it, in James Joyce” (28).

O’Grady’s and Lady Gregory’s versions of Cúchulainn are extremely important, as they were the major influences on Yeats as he developed his own version of Cúchulainn. This is especially true in the plays that he wrote for the Abbey Theatre. Yeats praised both O’Grady and Gregory for their work on Cúchulainn, famously suggesting in the preface to *Cuchulain of*

Muirthemne that her book was “perhaps the best book that has ever come out of Ireland” (qtd. in Gregory, *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* 11). It is her “fine understanding of English” that separates her from previous translators. By praising her for her understanding of English, Yeats implicitly and ironically suggests that a writer such as O’Curry, whose first language was Irish, was ill-suited to translate the text. By looking at a passage from Yeats quoted earlier in this chapter where he praises O’Grady and calls O’Curry’s texts “dry” (*Autobiography* 148), we can see the praise comes to one who can reshape the disparate ancient Irish texts into a traditional nineteenth-century English narrative form. However, as John Wilson Foster writes, in “colonizing and exploiting Gaelic literature the littérateurs imposed an urban discourse upon a rural (in the case of folklore), a modern upon an ancient (in the case of bardic literature), an English upon an Irish (in the case of both)” (30).²² This becomes for me the main point of contention. While most uses of Irish myth and legend were pursued with a desire to change Ireland’s political situation, the ideology behind these texts reveals a decidedly more complicated element that points to maintaining a stratified society, with the Anglo-Irish keeping political and economic power.

One of the most significant examples to illustrate the ideologically significant changes made by the writers during this period is one of the earliest tales in Cúchulainn’s saga, included in “Cúchulainn’s Boyhood Deeds.” This scene depicts a raging Cúchulainn about to destroy everyone at Emain Macha, the capital of the Ulaidh (the modern province of Ulster). Cúchulainn’s *ríastrad*, or Warp-Spasm, is similar to a berserker rage; once Cúchulainn enters it, nearly every person or monster he encounters will be dead:

²² To be fair, a similar accusation could be made about the Catholic Irish literati lampooned in Myles na gCopaleen’s *An Béal Bocht* [*The Poor Mouth*] (1941), which will be discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

The Warp-Spasm overtook him: it seemed each hair was hammered into his head, so sharply they shot upright. You would swear a fire-spark tipped each hair. He squeezed one eye narrower than the eye of a needle; he opened the other wider than the mouth of a goblet. He bared his jaws to the ear; he peeled back his lips to the eye-teeth till his gullet showed. The hero-halo rose up from the crown of his head. (Kinsella, *Táin* 77)²³

The only way Conchobor, king of Ulster, can think to break the hold of Cúchulainn's *ríastrad* is to show "naked women to him" (92). At his suggestion, "the women of Emain went forth, with Mugain the wife of Conchobor at their head and they stripped their breasts to him" (92). In Thomas Kinsella's translation, not much is made of the women's nudity, other than that it leads the boy to hide "his countenance" (92); all that is mentioned is the previously quoted passage. In O'Grady there is a much greater emphasis on this scene:

Then the women of the Ultonians did a great and memorable deed, and such as was not known to have been done at any time in Erin. They bade all the men retire into the dun after they had lowered the bridge; and when that was done three tens of them, such as were the most illustrious in tank and famous for accomplishments, and they all in the prime of their youth and beauty, and clad only in the pure raiment of their womanhood, came forth out of the quarters of the women, and in that order, in spite of shame they went to meet him in lowly wise, with exposed bosom and hands crossed their breasts. (*Coming of Cuculain* 92)

Clearly this adds a great deal to the original text, projecting Victorian prudery onto a pre-Judeo-Christian society and tradition. The issue again, as will be the case with violence as well, was

²³ An even more developed description of Cúchulainn's warp-spasm can be found in the chapter of the *Táin* that Kinsella calls "The Sickie Chariot" (150-53).

that these writers sought to tone down the legends for the sake of controlling their audience's reactions. However, as can be seen with Synge and his mention of the women in their shifts in *A Playboy of the Western World*, the prudery seen in O'Grady is not necessarily far from the general public's own prudery, indicating the hegemonic control of the Catholic Church and the lingering effects of Victorianism (disguised under a cleansing for the sake of "Irishness"). The underlying problem with O'Grady's choice is that he believes he can be the arbiter of good taste.

There was the belief for many Irish nationalists that "there is no evil in Ireland except that which is introduced by the British or the Americans" (Thompson 73), and that in "the Irish Catholic aesthetic of the time, to be conscious of evil was to be morbid, neurotic, and evil oneself. There was simply no other way of coming to terms with the Vision of Evil except through dismissal and repression" (72). Both Yeats and Synge would face a backlash for their plays: Yeats for *The Countess Cathleen* (in the Abbey's performance of the play in 1911) and Synge for 1907's *Playboy of the Western World*. Those in attendance at *The Countess Cathleen* took issue with the fact that the protagonist sells her soul to save her starving tenants (only to be saved in the end); this was an issue because no self-respecting Catholic could support any fraternizing with the devil, regardless of how altruistic one's motives were. James Joyce uses this riot in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as a means to further distinguish Stephen Dedalus's disdain for and separation from the Irish rabble around him, who claim, "No Irish woman ever did it!" (226).

Synge, on the other hand, in a great moment of irony, was attacked for his portrayal of the Irish peasantry near the end of *Playboy* when he has Christy Mahon say, "It's Pegeen I'm seeking only, and what'd I care if you brought me a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself maybe, from this place to the Eastern World" (531-33). The problem with what

Christy says here was the mention of seeing women in their “shifts,” or undergarments (“slips” in America). This is ironic because this is an allusion to a story of Cúchulainn’s boyhood quoted earlier. Here, Synge drastically tones down the original source material, but the overriding sentiment from the audience was that it was an inappropriate depiction of Irish femininity. Ironically, Synge’s play would be dismissed as evil and anti-Irish, despite all of its actual Irishness. Synge sought to modify the original as he has his Cúchulainn, Christy Mahon, affected by the thought of the local peasant women in their undergarments: “the latter-day disciples of Cuchulain could not tolerate the vision of a peasant boy, whose fury was soothed (if only in imagination) by females standing in shifts” (Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language* 119). Lady Gregory’s translation actually maintains a relatively accurate depiction (“They consulted together, and it is what they agreed, to send out three fifties of the women of Emain red-naked to meet him” [364]); however, Synge realized he could not mention the peasantry standing naked in front of this “murderer.” As William Irwin Thompson suggests,

The particular row over Synge’s play, however, is a crucial indication of the development of Irish nationalism in 1907. The sanctified parochialism had been present in the literary movement since the Young Ireland days, but the parochialism of the literary movement of the ‘nineties was not so fervent and hysterical: probably because the hysteria was saved for the Parnell controversy. The riots over *Playboy* introduce a note of desperation and intensity; the complex issues of the literary movement are being simplified into the slogans needed for action in the political movement. (73)

A further irony about the use of the word “shift” comes from the fact that Douglas Hyde²⁴ uses it in his *Love Songs of Connaught* (1893)—a text considered sacrosanct by the same Irish social conservatives who instigated the *Playboy* riots. Synge said that shift was “an everyday word in the West of Ireland, which could not be taken offence at there, and might be used differently by people in Dublin. It was used without any objection in Douglas Hyde’s *Songs of Connaught*, in the Irish, but what could be published in Irish perhaps could not be published in English” (qtd. in Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language* 138). Not only was *Playboy* seen as immoral, but it came from an Anglo-Irishman. Even Pearse was initially critical of the play for these reasons: “The Anglo-Irish dramatic movement has now been in existence for ten years. Its net result has been the spoiling of a noble poet in Mr. Yeats, and the generation of a sort of Evil Spirit in the shape of Mr. J. M. Synge. ‘By their fruits ye shall know them’” (qtd. in Thompson 71).

As time went on, the voices of the nationalists who disapproved of the Anglo-Irish influence became louder and louder. This corresponded with the growth of the more radical elements, some of which grew out of the cultural nationalist movement itself; these same radical elements had become more politicized and began to move further away from culture as a means to social change. It also became increasingly clear why: The Unionist ideology espoused by Anglo-Irish people such as Standish O’Grady went against the changing tides. In many ways these concerns are best exemplified in O’Grady. These ideological concerns present in O’Grady’s work are even more problematic, because they influenced the rest of the Revival and its writers. For example, turning to three examples of another Cúchulainn story “Aided Óenfir Aífe”—the story of Condlae’s murder at the hands of his father, Cúchulainn—one can consider

²⁴ While both Hyde and Synge were Anglo-Irishmen who learned Irish as a part of their divinity degrees at Trinity College, Hyde never suffered the backlash and mistrust to which many of his Anglo-Irish contemporaries were subjected.

the adaptations created by Yeats and Lady Gregory. Often translated as “The Death of Aífe’s Only Son,” Lady Gregory’s renames it “The Only Son of Aoife” (in *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*) and Yeats, *On Baile’s Strand* (his celebrated 1904 play). Each of these versions retells essentially the same story; however, the handling of certain details reveals a great deal about individual ideologies and concerns. Two versions (Thomas Kinsella’s and Jeffrey Gantz’s) detail the violent end of the boy from a spear thrown by Cúchulainn: “He sent it speeding over the water at him and brought his bowels down around his feet” (Kinsella, *Táin* 44); “He cast it at the boy through the water, and the boy’s innards fell at his feet” (Gantz 151). Lady Gregory’s version is “But Cuchulain threw his spear, the Gae Bulg, at him with all his might, and it struck the lad in the side and went into his body, so that he fell to the ground” (239). Gantz also adds Cúchulainn’s claim that he would have a “mist of blood upon my skin the gore from the body of Condlae” (151). The original reads “Dé fola form chnis crú cuirp Conlai” (*Aided Óenfir Aífe*), which is fairly close to Gantz’s translation. The gore and violence of this is decidedly absent from Lady Gregory’s version; she does not include the conversation that Cúchulainn has with Emer in her text where he says that he will kill the boy. Much as with O’Grady, the moral choices she makes robs the text of significant elements, recasting the pre-Christian, pagan ways of Celtic Ireland in more puritanical Victorian terms.

Yeats provides a different take on the story in *On Baile’s Strand*. In typical Yeatsian fashion, the emphasis is on the poetics of the play and the individual mind represented by Cúchulainn. Instead of having Cúchulainn aware of the fact that he is going out to kill his son, Yeats has the hero come to this knowledge only as the boy dies, wishing that he had a son like him before the fight begins. He makes the ironic claim earlier in the play that “If I had fought my father, he’d have killed me / As certainly as if I had a son / And fought with him, I should be

deadly to him” (*Collected Plays* 177). This allows Yeats the dramatic opportunity, at the end of the play, for Cúchulainn to understand what he had done.

The more significant change in the play is the decision to have Cúchulainn wrestle with the oath he has to make to the high king, Conchobor, who seeks to bind Cúchulainn to it: “This king / would have me take an oath to do his will, / And having listened to his tune from morning, / I will no more of it” (149). In this way, as Barton Friedman suggests, he becomes a figure like Blake’s Orc, the fiery spirit of revolution, to Conchubur’s Los (27), a figure who holds slave-like to tyrannical reason and forces others to do the same. The spirit of revolution must fight against Los, just as Cuchulain²⁵ rebels against the king: “You shall not stir, High King: I’ll hold you there” (*Collected Plays* 177), as he goes to fight against his young son. At the end of the play, he fights the sea, wracked by guilt, longing to kill the king with every strike of every wave: “He sees King Conchubar’s crown on every one of them” (181). This goes directly against the tale in the original as Cúchulainn says he will kill the boy “for the sake of the Ulaid” (Gantz 151). Yeats is more concerned with a rebellious figure who cannot abide by the chains of oppression.

Yeats adds elements of himself to his version of Cúchulainn, casting him as a middle-aged poet-figure, just as Yeats was at the time. In reality, Yeats exists somewhere between O’Grady and Pearse (who represents the other end of the spectrum from O’Grady) in terms of his ideological uses of Cúchulainn. It is impossible to ignore Yeats’s opinion of the emergent Irish middle class (the previously quoted “September 1913” is a clear indication). Inspired by John O’Leary to use Irish myth and legend in his writings in the 1880s, he saw the opportunity to do with it much what Shelley did with the story of Prometheus:

²⁵ I have maintained Yeats’s spelling of the Hound of Ulster here to differentiate him from general representations in myth and legend.

Might I not . . . create some new *Prometheus Unbound*; Patrick or Comumbkil, Oisín or Fion, in Prometheus' stead; and, instead of Caucasus, Cro-Patric or Ben Bulben? Have not all the races had their first unity from a mythology of rock and hill? We had in Ireland imaginative stories, which uneducated classes knew and even sang, and might we not make those stories current among the uneducated classes, rediscovering for the work's sake what I have called "the applied arts of literature," . . . and at last, it might be, so deepen the political passion of the nation that all, artist and poet, craftsman and day-labourer would accept a common design? (*Autobiography* 131)

Despite the fact that the use of myth and legend in his poems from *The Trembling of the Veil* was done to inspire those Irish masses "for unity," it is hard to ignore the connotation of this quotation. It is for him and those also associated with the Celtic Revival to lead the people of Ireland to a more artistically crafted version of the stories of myth and legend, and through these stories the people will unite for political change. This, of course, is both naïve and classist; the naïveté of this assessment would become clear even to Yeats, as he became more and more disillusioned with the Abbey Theatre and the cultural nationalists goals.

Always the literary chameleon, Yeats is interesting, however, in that he manages to go along with the hegemonic shift seen during the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One of Yeats's most enduring traits is his ability to never be too heavily influenced by one single style or philosophy, which allows him to shift easily between different styles and philosophies. In this way he can be like both O'Grady and Pearse—but more sophisticated than both, as he was a far superior writer than either. As time goes by, he sees Cúchulainn as a sacrificial, Christ-like figure as Pearse does; in his final play, *The Death of Cuchulain* (1939),

Yeats suggests that Cúchulainn was with Pearse and Connolly in the Post Office at the end of the play: “What stood in the Post Office / With Pearse and Connolly?” (*Collected Plays* 446). He also uses the theme of blood-sacrifice in “The Rose Tree”: In a poeticized dialogue between Pearse and Connolly, he has his Pearsean-figure state that “There’s nothing but our own red blood / Can make a right Rose Tree” (*Collected Works, Vol. 1: The Poems* 17-18). This sentiment is shared throughout his 1921 collection of poems *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, most notably in “Easter, 1916,” which immortalizes the leaders of the Rising; “Sixteen Dead Men”; and the already mentioned poem “The Rose Tree.” However, despite the changes in Yeats’s general outlook, it is difficult to ignore the fact that he often shared O’Grady’s aristocratic desire to avoid bringing myths and legends down to level of the masses—an extraordinarily ironic fact when one considers that it is from the masses that these stories are derived—which illustrates the classist attitude of many of the writers of this Revival.

His opinions and concern for the working classes developed through the years leading up to the Rising, but Pearse cannot be said to have fully understood the working classes either. “Communism repelled him; Socialism he distrusted,” Ruth Dudley Edwards declared (181). Nevertheless, it was Pearse’s vision, emblematic of the ideology of the 1916 Rising itself, that would become the one more central to the shifting ideological depiction of the hero. In it he looked to the figure of Cúchulainn as an example of the blood sacrifice necessary for independence: “pictured by him (Pearsé) as a slim, beautiful boy dying happily for Ireland” (R. Foster 459). Pearse has no problem reconciling the pre-Christian with the Christian, Cúchulainn with Christ,

. . . for Pearse, Christ and Cuchulain were not opposed. If it is hard to see Cuchulain riding in his chariot with the severed heads of his enemies about him,

as a Christ-like figure, we must look again, for Pearse most certainly did. He read the Ulster Cycle as an allegory, as an image of the story of Calvary. Emain Macha was a kingdom afflicted with a primal sin that was redeemed by the blood-sacrifice of Cuchulain. (Thompson 121)

This is not to suggest that Pearse was the only writer or leader who used the image of blood sacrifice in his rhetoric. In fact, Yeats uses the theme frequently in his early writings, most famously in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. In Ruth Dudley Edwards's estimation, Pearse's "rhetoric of blood was in keeping with much of contemporary political writing, in republican and socialist papers, whose tone had to compete with the growing hysteria of British army recruitment propaganda in the face of the German threat" (179). However, it is a central theme in his work, and is granted perhaps a more significant status due to its prescient nature. Inspired by Wolfe Tone and the 1798 uprising and the "nationalist legend" that saw the likes of Tone, Robert Emmet, O'Donovan Rossa, and others "as heroes in a single, ongoing morality play" (Cahalan, *Great Hatred* 30), Pearse continues this theme of blood-sacrifice throughout nearly all of his fictional works.

The most striking example can be found in his play *The Singer*: "Before Pearse fired a single shot, he rehearsed insurrection by writing a play about it" (Thompson 118). It is the story of a prodigal child, MacDara, the titular singer, who returns to his home in the west of Ireland on the cusp of battle. "MacDara's return to his people, like Christ's return to Jerusalem, is joyous and everywhere is met by crowds. Yet the singer knows he goes to his death" (Thompson 119). The play is rife with the themes that run throughout Pearse's work. For example, there is the long-suffering mother, who is significantly named Maire (Mary in the Irish language): "You poor women suffer so much pain, so much sorrow, and yet you do not die until long after your

strong, young sons and lovers have died” (Pearse, *Poems, Plays, Short Stories* 39). Central to Pearse’s writing and his life as a schoolteacher, the relationship between teacher and pupil is also highlighted in the play. And most significantly, Pearse focuses on the messianic identification of the protagonist and the necessity for a blood-sacrifice to save Ireland. It gets its blood-sacrifice when MacDara goes out to fight the Gall: “One man can free a people as one Man redeemed the world. I will take no pike, I will go into battle with bare hands. I will stand up before the Gall as Christ hung naked before men on the tree!” (43). MacDara is one of several key figures in Pearse’s writing who offer themselves up as a sacrifice for Mother Ireland: “Pearse’s aesthetic frequently celebrated the beauty of boys dying bravely in their prime, rather than growing into the compromises of adulthood” (R. Foster 477).

Inevitably, Pearse’s literary work reflects his political aims and his desire for an independent Ireland. Whereas most know Pearse for his role in and subsequent execution from his involvement in the Easter Rising of 1916, he was, first and foremost, an educator. Pearse, as the headmaster of St. Edna’s in Rathfarnham,²⁶ was consciously focused on education, both in his literary and political writings. His essay “The Murder Machine” outlines his views on education. In it he suggests that the English “have planned and established an educational system which more wickedly does violence to the elementary human rights of Irish children than would an edict for the general castration of Irish males. The system has aimed at the substitution of men and woman of mere things” (*Collected Works* 7).

He continues by suggesting that the colonial educational system set up by the English in Ireland was “a kind of servitude” (9) and that the worst part was that they were able to get the Irish themselves to support such a system: “To invent such a system of teaching and to persuade

²⁶ Pearse opened his school where Robert Emmet would frequently meet with his beloved Sarah Curran; the Hermitage was not far from her house.

us that it is an educational system, an Irish education system to be defended by Irishmen against attack is the most wonderful thing the English have accomplished in Ireland and the most wicked” (16). Pearse astutely recognizes the importance of hegemony and of the educational system as an Ideological State Apparatus, as Louis Althusser would suggest sixty years later. What Pearse worked for was the establishment of a school system that would teach “religion, patriotism, literature, art and sciences” (14). He would model his school on the old Irish educational system, “both pagan and Christian”: “There has never been any human institution more adequate to its purpose than that which, in pagan times, produced Cuculainn and the Boy-Corps of Eamhain Macha and, in Christian times, produced Edna and the companions of his solitude in Aran” (*Collected Works* 25). Here he states clearly the importance and connection of religion and patriotism. In fact, Pearse defines patriotism in “How Does She Stand?” in religious and sacrificial terms:

For patriotism is at once a faith and a service And our patriotism measure, not by the formula in which we declare it, but by the service which we render. We owe to our country all fealty and she asks always for our service; and there are times when she asks of us not ordinary but some supreme service. There are in every generation those who shrink from the ultimate sacrifice, but there are in every generation those who make it with joy and laughter, and these are the salt of the generations, the heroes who stand midway between God and men. (65-66)

It is here, in his definition of patriotism, where he links the sacrifices of Christ and Cúchulainn, his characters, and inevitably, himself. As Philip O’Leary suggests, “this reference to the Christ child brings us to Pearse’s most daring, indeed to some a blasphemous, identification, that of Cú Chulainn with Christ and ultimately of himself with both” (*Gaelic*

Prose of the Gaelic Revival 261). Pearse is willing to conflate his love of country and his religious beliefs and to see that service to both would inevitably demand the ultimate sacrifice: “A love and a service so excessive as to annihilate all thought of self, a recognition that one must give all, must be willing always to make the ultimate sacrifice this is the inspiration alike of the story of Cuculainn and of the story of Columcille, the inspiration that made one a hero and the other a saint” (*Collected Works* 25). It is impossible not to read his literary works through this, and to see all of it as a prophecy of his own blood-sacrifice. One has to be willing to sacrifice everything for Ireland, “a sacrifice Christ-like in its perfection” (69). This sacrifice and bloodshed would return Ireland to the people, and thus be positive: “but bloodshed is a cleansing and a sanctifying thing, and the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood. There are many things more horrible than bloodshed; and slavery is one of them” (99).

One of Pearse’s favorite quotations comes from Cúchulainn in the *Táin*: “I care not though I were to live but one day and one night, if only my fame and my deeds live after me” (*Collected Works* 38);²⁷ he not only includes this line in “The Murder Machine,” but went so far to also paint it onto the wall of St. Edna’s. In many ways, however, he is also writing his own epitaph. Pearse always had an eye on fame; if he could not get it in this life, perhaps he could get it in death. For he realized that his death was a necessary and foregone conclusion; “Christ without the cross is not Christ, and Pearse knew that the rebel-martyr without death was no hero at all” (Thompson 122). He becomes one of “our Fenian dead” (Pearse, *Collected Works: Political Writings and Speeches* 137). In this way, Pearse mythologizes his own death. As he said, “Life springs from death; and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations” (136).

²⁷ Kinsella translates this as, “If I achieve fame, I am content, though I had only one day on earth” (85).

Thus, throughout Pearse's literary works one sees recurring characters and themes: the master and mother, and most importantly, the one willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good and for the freedom from slavery. All of this is present in his political writings as well. Here, much as in O'Grady's and Yeats's work, there is an idealized Cúchulainn, an idealized depiction of the west of Ireland and its peasantry, which will actually replace Cúchulainn as Ireland's great myth in the generation after the Rising. But as O'Grady, Gregory, Synge, Yeats and Æ all idealize the west, so too does Pearse: For the Gaeltacht in Pearse's work is "a Gaeltacht almost entirely the product of his own imagination" (O'Leary, *Gaelic Prose of the Gaelic Revival* 262-63). As a result, "despite his love for the Connemara peasantry in Dublin he retained the world-view of his class" (Edwards 170).

Pearse joins a long list of artists, politicians and propagandists who sought to unite the failures of the past with the changing future. All of the historical losses and failures mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation coalesce in this narrative. Failure created martyrs and the Irish were adept at created hagiography for all its loyal dead. Although one can find O'Grady guilty of worshipping and idealizing Cromwell, Pearse is equally guilty of his own hero-worship (especially of Tone and Emmet). In his "Three Lectures on Gaelic Topics," he introduces his version of hero worship by tying it to the figures of Irish myth and legend:

And what is true of hero-worship in general is true, in an especial manner, of the hero-worship of the Gael.... Fearghus, Conchubhar, Cúchulainn, Fionn, Oisín, Oscar—these were more to the Gael than mere names of great champions and warriors of a former time: they represented to him men who had gone before, who had fought the good fight, who had passed from earth to the mystic Tír na n-Og,

who had become gods,—but whose spirits, heroic and immortal, still lived after them.

He then continues to link the past to the present through literature, music, and language:

And though well-nigh two thousand years have rolled away since those mighty heroes trod this land of ours, yet is their spirit not dead: it lives on in our poetry, in our music, in our language, and, above all, in the vague longings which we feel for a something, we know not what, our irresistible, overmastering conviction that we, as a nation, are made for higher things. . . . And men *can* be brought to realize this by the propagation of a literature like that of the Gael,—a literature to which nature-love and hero-love shall form the key-words, a literature which shall glorify all that is worthy of glory,—beauty, strength, manhood, intellect, and religion. (“Three Lectures on Gaelic Topics” 228; 229-30)

Pearse’s Cúchulainn is an idealized example of masculinity against the backdrop of an Ireland that is again described in feminine and maternal terms. She is both lover and protector: “we had first to learn to know Ireland, to read the lineaments of her face, to understand the accents of her voice; to repossess ourselves, disinherited as we were, of her spirit and mind, re-enter into our mystical birthright” (92-93). As C. L. Innes writes, “Pearse’s vision sets up a clear division between an active male warrior Cuchulain who fights for his country and dies for it, a Christlike redeemer and Messiah which is also by traditional iconography male, and the passive female figure of Mother Ireland who waits to be redeemed, or perhaps inspires, and then accepts the sacrifice of her sons” (60). According to Pearse’s philosophy, a young man must die to save Mother Ireland, who is closer to the stereotype of the old, dutiful woman (the Shan Van Vocht,

Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the Hag of Beare) than the vibrant maiden of the aislings.²⁸ The sacrifice and blood-letting would lead to a rebirth, a dreadful martyrdom that would trump history. In Pearse's famous poem "The Mother," the voice of the poet is like that of the Shan Van Vocht (an tSeanbhean Bhocht), who bore "Cuchulainn the valiant" and who weeps in shame over her "children that sold their own mother" (Pearse, *Poems, Plays, Short Stories* 323). Pearse's Shan Van Vocht is a representation of what Eagleton suggests as a way to fetishize the desire for national unity through "sexist stereotypes about 'Mother Ireland', to whom these heroes are eternally wedded, and whom they will fertilize with their life-giving blood" (*Ideology* 189-90).

This singular vision of blood sacrifice does not take into consideration contradictory elements found in the tales of Cúchulainn from the legends and sagas of the past, especially the fact that Cúchulainn does not fight for a united Ireland; in fact, he can barely fight for a united Ulster. But for Pearse, that is not necessarily an issue worth considering. Instead, the focus on blood sacrifice helps to foster Pearse's inherent desire for martyrdom, writing his own myth through characters from Ireland's past. It also illustrates "a cyclical, homogenizing reading of history, in which there is an heroic continuity of anti-imperialist struggle and in which almost all of the ills of Ireland can be laid at Britain's door" (189).

Pearse himself becomes both part of this history and an emblem of the struggle for Ireland's independence. When he is executed in the wake of the Easter Rising, he fulfills the promise he makes throughout his works. What's more, as the tide of public opinion turns in response to the court martialing and rushed executions, Pearse, of whom the general public never thought much, became a national hero. As the dominant themes of self-sacrifice become part of the new Ireland, it would become part of the national consciousness moving forward. His image in profile would later be found on a ten-shilling piece; on the back, the statue of Cúchulainn that

²⁸ Pearse found the aisling a "dead convention...most wearisome" ("Some Aspects of Irish Literature" 151).

stands in the General Post Office. Pearse and Cúchulainn are intricately tied to the discourse surrounding Irish martyrdom. As a result, because of the events of the Easter Rising, a new mythology is codified around Pearse's version of Irish myth and legend, and although he is not the first to use such imagery, the facts of the rebellion and its aftermath shrouds the reality in myth. This newly codified mythology centered on blood sacrifice becomes particularly problematic, as it is one of the images recycled after the formation of a separate country of Northern Ireland comprised of six Ulster counties from the other twenty-six counties of the Republic of Ireland.

In the cases of both O'Grady and Pearse, it is imperative to analyze the ideological implications of the uses of Irish legend. It is even more significant in many ways to see what is left out, then what remains. Regardless of whether the texts can be seen as hegemonic or counter-hegemonic, there is a distortion of the original to suit a larger aim, conscious or unconscious as it may have been. There is no doubt that Pearse and O'Grady used Cúchulainn differently; for the former, he became the symbol of blood sacrifice; for the latter, he was reshaped as aristocratic and tempered. For both, he is representative of an idealized Irishman, removed from the actualities of early twentieth-century Irish life.

The problem with all of these versions of Irish myth and legend is that they were supposed to empower the Irish, but none of them deal with the realities facing working-class masses in Ireland that these writers wanted to inspire. In fact, it is the Irish masses that need to be led to the Promised Land by a coterie of those who truly understand that they could artfully recreate the stories of the past and inspire those in the present to join together. These versions do not seek to illustrate life as it really is, but cast it in a country far removed from the current issues with which most Irish had to deal. These were the dreams of an Anglo-Irish aristocracy and a

desired martyrdom for a schoolteacher. However, the “myths of Irish nationalism, however retrograde and objectionable, are not pure illusions: they encapsulate, in however reductive, hyperbolic a form, some substantial historical facts” (Eagleton, *Ideology* 190). And, as Edward Said posits, Pearse’s emphasis on the purely Gaelic facets of the movement were a necessary first step towards independence:

Whether in its general statements, such as the Indian constitution, or Pan-Arabism and Pan-Africanism, or in its particularist forms such as Pearse’s Gaelic or Senghor’s *négritude*, the nationalism that formed the initial basis of the second moment stood revealed both as insufficient and yet as an absolutely crucial first step. Out of this paradox comes the idea of liberation, a strong new postnationalist theme that is already implicit in the works of Connolly, Garvey, Martí, Mariategi, and Du Bois, for instance, but sometimes requiring the propulsive infusion of theory and sometimes armed, insurrectionary militancy to bring it forward, clearly, and unmistakably. (76)

These ontological facts are often obscured by the ideological concerns of the Revival period.

All of these writers were influential during the time period leading up to and following the Easter Rising, but each had his or her detractors. Even Pearse, who became the martyr figure he always wanted to be, was lampooned in Séan O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars*; the play captures a fact that is often forgotten in the narrative shift that occurs after the Rising, which is that Pearse and the other participants did not have the support of the majority of the citizens in Dublin, working class or otherwise. It was only after the arrests and executions of the significant leaders of the Rising when attitudes towards the Rising and its principle players changed. O’Casey was an important aid to Jim Larkin and James Connolly in the Irish Citizen Army

(ICA); however, he bitterly broke from Irish insurrectionary activities due to what he deemed as incompetence on the part of Pearse and others. He came to literary prominence with his plays at the Abbey Theatre, especially *Juno and the Paycock*. O'Casey came from a working-class Dublin family of thirteen. A committed socialist in his youth, he found many like-minded individuals in the Irish Transport and General Workers Union, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), and the ICA. He was influenced tremendously by Connolly, whose tireless work with the issues facing the proletariat in Ireland and around the world provided the ideological guidance to the ICA. The ICA was founded to help protect Irish Transport and General Workers Union members who went on strike in 1913 and in the subsequent riots. It continued as an armed militia, acting along with the Irish Volunteers as a response to the Ulster's citizen militia organized in the face of Home Rule. O'Casey struggled to see how Pearse's program and the involvement of the Irish Volunteers could help with what the ICA sought, which was a socialist state. O'Casey left the ICA after the group continued to become associated more and more with the Volunteers and became more and more committed to the idea of an armed revolt against Great Britain.

The *Plough and the Stars* took its name from the image on the ICA's flag: "The plough represents the turning over of the soil of capitalist society by the class struggle, the patient work of planting the seeds of the future, but also the imperious need to harvest their fruits when they are ripe. As for the stars, they stand for the beauty and the loftiness of the goals and ideals of the workers' movement" ("Sean O'Casey and the 1916 Easter Rising"). The play's timeframe is split between Dublin in November 1915 before the Rising and Dublin in 1916 during Easter Week while the Rising was happening. O'Casey depicts a group of characters who share a tenement, an environment that O'Casey knew intimately. He never liked Pearse in real life, and

one can sense the glee with which he uses Pearse's words in the second act. Pearse himself is never named and only physically depicted as a "*silhouetted . . . figure of a tall man*" (O'Casey 162; emphasis in original); when snippets of his speeches are captured they are credited to "*The Voice of the Man*." As only a disembodied voice, Pearse becomes like the Pied Piper's song, ephemeral, fleeting, but ultimately destructive to those who listen too long or too hard. The quotations used are those in which Pearse emphasizes blood sacrifice as a necessity for a free Ireland; not only is bloodshed necessary, but it should be welcomed by those willing to give their lives for their country: "There are many things more horrible than bloodshed, and slavery is one of them" (162); "Such august homage was never offered to God as this: the homage of millions of lives given gladly for love of country. And we must be ready to pour out the same red wine in the same glorious sacrifice, for without shedding blood there is no redemption" (164). Of course, these words taken from "The Coming Revolution" and "Peace and the Gael" respectively do not mark Pearse's most famous and most quoted oration; that belongs to the speech Pearse gave at O'Donovan Rossa's graveside in 1913, admonishing the "the fools" who "have left us our Fenian dead," which is the speech that O'Casey uses at end of the second act.

Characters like Jack Clitheroe and Fluther Good are swept up in the fervor stirred by the war rhetoric used in the time before the armed rebellion, leading them to say that "Ireland is greater than a mother" and "Ireland is greater than a wife" (O'Casey 178). But many of the characters—especially the Covey, who calls Pearse's orations "a lot of blasted nonsense, comrade" (174)—are not impressed. "O'Casey's compassion is not for the soldiers who go out to fight for an illusion, but for the civilians who suffer because of these dreams of transcendental glory" (Thompson 223). In fact, many of those who are not taken by the dream of Kathleen Ni Houlihan and Irish nationalism are often *actual* wives and mothers, left for the idealized

mother/wife-figure of Éire; they are too busy worrying about the states of families and households, not the dreams of a future independent Irish state. When Nora says, “there’s no woman gives a son or a husband to be killed—if they say it, they’re lyin’, lyin’, against God, Nature, an’ against themselves!” (O’Casey 184), she speaks for many women who had to bury their husbands and sons, “butchered as a sacrifice to th’ dead!” (184). Nora is a “real woman, and not a mythic one, she wants her man alive, not bleeding into a dirt made sacred because of its nationality. Unfortunately, Nora, the real woman, does not confront the mythic Cathleen to fight for Life” (Thompson 210). For O’Casey, so much of the tragedy in his plays comes from the fact that his female characters are often raised above the irony that one finds throughout his work and honestly praised for their “enduring, suffering humanity” (223).

O’Casey frequently depicts working-class characters and issues, which would typically lead to a sympathetic Marxist reading; however, there are some issues created by O’Casey’s own desire to avoid any totalizing identifications. This is due in large part to what he deemed as the failure of Irish socialism under Connolly after Jim Larkin left for the United States, which led to the ICA joining with the Irish Volunteers. As Declan Kiberd writes, “in *The Plough and the Stars*, O’Casey uses socialism to denounce nationalism, and then finds socialism inadequate anyway” (*Inventing Ireland* 235). The Covey is the mouthpiece of a socialist’s—and a young O’Casey’s²⁹—criticism of Pearse’s brand of Irish nationalism, but when Fluther calls him “a word-weavin’ little ignorant yahoo of a red flag Socialist” (144), he’s not far off. The Covey parrots socialist rhetoric: “There’s only one war worth havin’: th’ war for th’ economic emancipation of th’ proletariat” (170); and “There’s only freedom for th’ workin’ man: conthrol

²⁹ When the Covey says, “Because it’s a Labour flag, an’ was never meant for politics. . . . What does th’ design of th’ field plough, bearin’ on it th’ stars of th’ heavenly plough, mean, if it’s not Communism? It’s a flag that should only be used when we’re buildin’ the barricades for a Workers’ Republic!” it is essentially the same as O’Casey’s criticism of Connolly when he joined the ICA with the Volunteers.

o' th' means o' production, rates of exchange, an' the means of disthribution" (165). However, that is really all he does, talk; at no point is he or his talk taken seriously. Thus, in this play neither those who fight nor those who try to rationalize reasons for not fighting are heroic. O'Casey could have been "touted as a plebian genius" (233) and his version of the Stage Irishman, a stereotyped portrayal of the Irish people marked by an idiosyncratic brogue and popularized by Dublin-born playwright Dion Boucicault (1820-1890), could have been politically subversive to both English racism and the Irish bourgeoisie but, as Kiberd so aptly notes, there was a "failure to carry through the implications of his more promising analysis" (234).

There is something to be said about the brilliance of the second act in *The Plough and the Stars*. William Irwin Thompson suggests that O'Casey's irony in the second act

works by suggestive juxtapositions, and the manner in which these juxtapositions are placed in a context of comedy darkens the comedy in an almost expressionistic manner. The caricatured faces of the traditional stage-Irishman become grotesque in the act's total configuration of meaning. The slapstick, burly, blustering, stage-Irishmen undergo sea-change in the depths of our thoughts; their smiles become leers, and their seemingly innocuous patter becomes threatening. (217)

Had he been able to maintain this ironic stance throughout, it would have been much more subversive; the mimicry would have becoming meaningful politically. In highlighting how Jack and Fluther are so easily enraptured by the bourgeois romantic rhetoric of nationalism from Pearse, the fact that so many young men and women were willing to believe in the national myths and blood sacrifice used in Pearse's rhetoric shows how easy it was for the working

classes to lose sight of the importance of the class struggle against the imperial government in Ireland.

Kiberd critiques O'Casey's use of a "Synge-song" (232) accent, but one could see elements of Homi Bhabha's concept of "mimicry" in O'Casey's use of his version of the Stage Irishman. For Bhabha, mimicry "is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject that is the same, but not quite*. Which is to say that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (86). O'Casey's Hiberno-English is rife with examples that could easily be mistaken for what has been deemed "Stage Irish." It is different from the Hiberno-English of Synge or Lady Gregory, who themselves had to deal with criticism for their own kind of Stage Irish, marked also by their being Anglo-Irish; it is not "the clipped, cutting edge of inner-city Dublinesque eloquence, which always contains an implied rebuke to the poverty which has given rise to it" (Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 232). It is instead even more artificial than Synge's, much closer even to that of the ubiquitous Stage Irishman who could be found as the marked Other onstage in English theatres throughout the nineteenth century. O'Casey's characters sound more like Myles na Coppaleen in Dion Bouicicault's *The Colleen Bawn*. It is for this reason, the pervasiveness of the stereotype, that O'Casey could have used mimicry for political ends, exposing the emptiness of such conventions. Unfortunately for O'Casey, the fact that he ends up satirizing the colonized as much as the colonizer ends up undercutting almost the entirety of the effectiveness of his satire. It is not merely the economic conditions that keep these characters mired in poverty; there are not many who can rise above the limited scope of their own intelligence. O'Casey sufficiently illustrates the powerlessness of the proletariat, but often fails to raise their suffering above melodrama and sentimentality. On the whole, the

characters in the play are broken people and are not far removed from James Joyce's characters in *Dubliners*.

But O'Casey's is just one of the dissenting voices, seeking a counter-hegemonic terrain on which to mount a struggle that moved beyond the barriers of racial identity toward class unity. Overall, however, these voices are often drowned out by the wave of history. Pearse's role in the uprising helped to sway the tide and move Ireland toward an independent state. As a result of this period leading to an armed struggle that itself would lead to independence, it is necessary to view these texts within their historical context and to see them as reflecting a shifting dynamic in Ireland at the time.

Also to be considered are the legacies of these texts and their influences after their publication. In some regards, Pearse's idealized use of Cúchulainn may have been far more damaging in the long run than O'Grady's was. Pearse's Cúchulainn, in many ways, became *the* Cúchulainn after the events of the Rising—a Cúchulainn who represented the glory of an Ireland before the Normans and Strongbow invaded and the Papal Bull granted Ireland to England in the twelfth century, and one who was willing to sacrifice himself for the good of the Gaels around him. It is this version that inspired the statue to commemorate 1916 that still stands where Pearse and his comrades once did in the foyer of the General Post Office. And it was his Cúchulainn that would be used by the Provisional Irish Republican Army in the late-twentieth-century Troubles in Northern Ireland as a symbol unceasing dedication to restoring the six counties to those in the republic to the south. Though used far less than the Provisional IRA, Cúchulainn would also be used by the IRA's opposition, the Orange Order and the Ulster Volunteers. The legacy of this version of Cúchulainn is decidedly bloody.

CHAPTER 4

“AN EMBODIMENT OF OLD IRELAND”:

SATIRE AND THE FABULISTS IN THE TIME OF DE VALERA

In comparison to the writers of the period leading up to the Easter Rising, the writers in the generation that followed directly after the Rising had other issues with which they needed to contend. Many of these issues arose as a result of the Free State Ireland that emerged after the Irish Civil War of 1922-23. Far from the radical, socialist state for which Connolly and others had hoped and died, the Ireland that developed out of the civil war was conservative under the stewardship of Éamon de Valera, the only rebel commandant to survive the Easter Rising due in large part to his American citizenship through his matrilineal line. Writers such as Flann O’Brien (Brian Ó Nualláin), Eimar O’Duffy, and James Joyce focused their ire on the nascent government, as it failed in the eyes of many to become a nation that was worth the bloodshed and destruction. Nationalism, so central to the 1916 rebellion through its own invented Ireland, was poisoned by the War for Independence and the civil war that followed.

Nationalism is deeply connected to the development of the nineteenth-century nation-state, but as Ernest Gellner points out, “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist” (qtd. in Anderson 6; emphasis in original). For Ireland, this became even more significant because there was an attempt to create a past unified state that had never been in actuality; the rhetoric one finds in Ireland through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reveals an idealized, romanticized Irish past that never existed. It is in this idealized past that the writers of the Revival period drew their pictures of the country. And it was this same idealized past used by those tasked with formation of the nation itself after the formation of the Free State in 1922. Modern Ireland was invented through

this process of nationalism. Because of its colonial status during the nineteenth century, it was a bit late to the nationalism that swept through Europe.

Ireland lacked a cohesive national identity because colonial rule and most especially the Great Famine of the 1840s severed it from a continuous past. The problem with this process, as is evident with the emphasis on the past by those who led the Easter Rising, was that it inevitably emphasized and replicated an imaginary Irish identity that fit the needs of their nationalistic desires:

The immediate past had to be negotiated, either by being ignored or by assigning the Ireland that had disappeared then to the ancient Ireland of legend. The rupture between the traditional and the modern culture could then neither be dramatized as the characteristic national experience, with neither loss of the old nor entry into the new complete. The transitional condition was understood to be one of incoherence, caught between two languages, Irish and English, two land systems, also Irish and English, two civilizations, one vivacious and wild, the other organized and dull. (Deane 51)

With the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, the country needed to forge an identity of its own, not an easy task when considering Deane's description of the country's transition into national selfhood as one of "incoherence." Modern nation-states, from the nineteenth century on, frequently define themselves against one another; this is especially true in a colonial context. For example, as will be further detailed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, Ireland would define itself through the small farmer in the west of the island versus the cosmopolitanism of England. In this way, Ireland had to inevitably define itself against England. No longer fully England's colony, the country's first order of business after the end of the civil

war was to redefine the country in its own terms. What that meant was to emphasize a particular way of life: austere, morally upright, religiously devoted, and desiring nothing more than a small house and a family.

The dominant ideology in the country was therefore in favour of achieving and maintaining as much self-sufficient Irish independence as possible. The prevailing republican creed, which was propounded in school-rooms, in newspapers, on political platforms, assumed that the ancient Gaelic Irish nation had finally thrown off the thrall of foreign subjugation and that her true destiny lay in cultivating her national distinctiveness as assiduously as possible. (T. Brown 134)

Consistent throughout this period was the tension found in a nation that was becoming more and more modernized while still attempting to pretend that the traditional ways of life were a viable means of existence. Despite the fact that “Dublin in the 1930s was a city still dominated by a rural ethos” (Kiberd, *Irish Classics* 513), industrial capitalism under England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries made the traditional way of life—working on small, family-operated farms—essentially obsolete. Despite this fact, or perhaps because of it, small, rural agrarian life became the romanticized symbol of Ireland, replacing the myths and legends of the Revival period. Where there was once Cúchulainn and the Shan Van Vocht, there was now the small thatched cottage and the resilient Irish farmer—speaking Irish and maintaining the traditions of the past—who became the more realistic link to an uninterrupted “Irish” existence.

However, the actual realities of Irish economic life of the time were more complicated. One of the largest issues Free State Ireland had to face was the make-up of the economy. In the 1920s only 13% of the Irish workforce was involved in industrial labor (T. Brown 93). The

problem in Ireland was that it was not entirely suited for industrial capitalism, especially as the true industrial center, Belfast, was removed from Free State Ireland, instead remaining in the United Kingdom, and “without an adequate industrial base (and this had been lost thanks to partition) further industrialization could not proceed rapidly enough to absorb those disemployed by farm mechanization,” (Greaves 37), which were some of the fears Connolly had in “Erin’s Hope” in 1909. However, none of these economic issues changed the romanticization of the small subsistence farmer. In fact, the leader who became the leading and longest-lasting head of the twentieth-century Irish state, Éamon de Valera, hoped for a return to a more traditional way of life stripped of an emphasis on material comforts and consumption:

The Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home of the people who value material wealth only as a basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit; a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdom of serene old age. (qtd. in T. Brown 134)

Here was where the desire to return to a traditional way of life made even less sense and was as romantic as the version presented during the Revival period. Desiring a romanticized past naively assumes an understanding of the economics of the modern world. Even as de Valera was praising the small farmer (and gladly capitalizing upon their votes for Fianna Fáil victory in the Dáil), many were struggling to eke out a living in the years between the World Wars. This situation is similar to what small Japanese farmers had to endure as Japan transitioned out of the shogunate period in 1868: “The Japanese peasantry was freed from subjection to the feudal *han-*

system and henceforth exploited directly by the state and commercial-agriculture landowners” (Anderson 95). Even with the end of the plantation system under the English, led in large part by Scotch Presbyterians, “the increasingly modernized countryside” reduced “the number of farm labourers through redundancy” (T. Brown 80). Regardless of the real issues facing the actual Irish agricultural class, de Valera preferred the romanticized vision of “life on the Irish small farm” which would make up “an Ireland of frugal God-fearing folk” (T. Brown 133). This economic hardship was compounded by de Valera’s own bungling economic policy. His overwhelming desire for self-sufficiency led him to raise tariffs and to refuse to pay “certain annuities due to Britain under the terms of agreements entered into by the previous administration.” The withheld annuities led to England raising its tariffs, which in turn hurt the Irish agricultural and industrial sectors; the two countries then were in “a state of economic warfare” (T. Brown 131). Ireland now had home rule within the United Kingdom, but economically it was still inextricably tied to England.

By blaming all of Ireland’s ills on England’s materialism and its emphasis on modernity, he failed to see the issues inherent in a capitalism that would still make life as a small farmer—especially in the West of Ireland—particularly difficult. Declan Kiberd suggests that because the economic system in place did not change, or did not have the necessary infrastructure to change, there was not much difference between Ireland under Irish or English control: “Ownership of the state, and not its very nature, seemed in retrospect to have been the primary point of contention between the Irish and English” (*Irish Classics* 501). As a result, ironically, even with Ireland moving towards its own nation status it was, as Seamus Deane suggests, “a derivative of its British counterpart . . . it is, *mutatis mutandis*, a copy of that by which it felt itself to be oppressed” (*Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* 7-8). Although Connolly felt that any Irish

independent state would by necessity become socialist—and despite Pearse’s own radicalization—the fact that it did not only highlights the fact that O’Casey fears became reality for the Irish in the Free State, both under W. T. Cosgrave and Cumann na nGaedheal, and de Valera and Fianna Fáil.

Although Ireland had difficulties finding its economic identity during the first half of the twentieth century, the period was rich with a variety of Irish writers, all of whom had to reckon with the massive shadow cast by James Joyce, the singular writer who dominated modern fiction in Europe and America. Many writers struggled with, to refer to Harold Bloom’s famous coinage, the anxiety of influence and sought to carve their own path away from Joyce’s monolithic shadow. Samuel Beckett, for instance, stripped his language of any unnecessary words and wrote in French because he liked the sparseness of the language. Realizing that there was no point in trying to out-Joyce Joyce, he went in the opposite direction. Flann O’Brien, who has become one of the most celebrated Irish writers of this time period, has become the best example of a group of writers that James M. Cahalan has so aptly called “fabulists.” Irish writing moved away from the dominant thematic and stylistic elements of the Revival period and instead focused on realistic (represented by the poetry of Patrick Kavanagh) or satiric writing. In Cahalan’s estimation when comparing the fabulists to those writing naturalistic or realistic fiction, “while the realist novels attack those features of Irish society by exposing them, the fabulist novels travel to freer, more remote realms, distant in time or space, which often suspiciously resemble modern Ireland” (*Irish Novel* 220). This last point is important. Writers such as O’Brien, Eimar O’Duffy, James Stephens, Mervyn Wall, and Austin Clarke used settings that ostensibly—whether set in the distant past or in the future (or outer space in the case of

O'Duffy's *The Spacious Adventures of the Man in the Street*)—represented a thinly disguised contemporary Ireland.

For many, this became the only way to escape some of the more stringent censorship supported by de Valera and influenced by the Catholic Church that artists were forced to endure as Ireland became even more parochial and isolated, as it sought to define itself against Europe and, more specifically, the United Kingdom: “The rhetoric by which the majority of people were swayed was that of Ireland’s priests and politicians, who believed that by purging Ireland of all ‘indecencies’ and foreign influence, they could shape it into a spiritual model for the world” (Carlson 8). The Censorship of Publications Act (1929) was passed after the establishment of the Free State in order to control what could or could not be represented in print, banning any publication deemed indecent or obscene; indecent here is defined “as including suggestive of, or inclining to sexual immorality or unnatural vice or likely in any similar way to corrupt or deprave” (qtd. in Carlson 4). This was entirely reflective of de Valera’s conservative policies, which were directly influenced by the Catholic Church and a moral system that was very much out of touch with the modern world.

The Revival period’s obsession with Irish cultural elements also become fodder for the writers of the time period, for the cultural nationalists’ focus on a romanticized past had no relevance to Ireland’s current situation. Learning the Irish language, playing Gaelic football or camogie, or reading the ancient myths and legends for inspiration could not and would not change the real lives led by men and women. For writers to turn to myth and legend as a means to inspire the people to revolt had no chance of success. Of those writers and their usage of myth during the Revival period, Synge was perhaps the most successful in remaining faithful to the older texts, both literally and in spirit and because, in Kiberd’s words about *Deirdre of the*

Sorrows, “(t)he play...enacts Synge’s protest against those who recruit a past for the war against the future, rather than using it in that extirpation of the present which alone makes the future possible” (*Inventing Ireland* 303).

In comparison to the uses of myth and legend before most of Ireland’s home rule beginning in 1923, the uses after it moved closer to Synge’s treatment as Kiberd analyzes it than Yeats’s or Pearse’s. Writers such as Flann O’Brien and Eimar O’Duffy were able to use Irish myth and legend to articulate their political and artistic aims. Flann O’Brien employs several figures from Ireland’s literary past: Mad Sweeney, the Pooka, the Fairy, and Finn MacCool. He uses these characters as he weaves several texts and storylines together in *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939). Through the development of these narratives and the presentation of numerous genres, he is able to illustrate that each genre “has its own equally valid or invalid convention, its own formula. Each formula in turn is illustrated and then parodied” (Mercier 40).

In terms of the parody of the mythic genre, in O’Brien’s first novel, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, Finn becomes a storyteller within one strain of the narrative, relaying the story of Sweeney. Finn here is, on the whole, stripped of his heroic characteristics, except for his massive size; he is a storyteller whose audience does not want to listen to the tales of old. From this depiction, we can only come to the same conclusion as James MacKillop, who suggests that “the mythic Finn behind the ancient narratives is too distant to serve as a basis for determining a twentieth-century Irish identity” (142). This became a running theme for the treatment of heroic figures of myth and legend in many of the texts from this time period. As a result, “Finn MacCool, an embodiment of old Ireland, lives and dies simultaneously” (143). But Finn is just one of many stock characters that O’Brien takes from various genres who, in the literary version of

Schrödinger's cat,³⁰ simultaneously live and die, and through this feat he is able to critique modern literature on the whole:

Characters should be interchangeable as between one book and another. The entire corpus of existing literature should be regarded as a limbo from which discerning authors could draw their characters as required, creating only when they failed to find a suitable existing puppet. The modern novel should largely be a work of reference. Most authors spend their time saying what has been said before—usually said much better. (O'Brien, *The Complete Novels* 21)

The characters of myth and legend have an awkward place here; their time has passed, their glorious battles have long been over, and as a result, they could only feel out of place in modern society.

But it is more than just that their time that has passed: “Throughout *At Swim-Two-Birds* one has the sense of a post-heroic society: a people who had once asserted revolution or death now has to cope with the death of the revolution” (Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 514). This time period is a period of transition, and even though for so long many had clung to the myths of the past as a means to assert a truly Irish identity, after the Civil War and the establishment of the Free State much of this needed to be reexamined. What results is a hearkening to a non-existent past from Éamon de Valera's government.

As great writers can, O'Brien used the inherent tension between the heroism of the legends and the decidedly unheroic present for his own hilarious purposes. In *At Swim-Two-Birds* O'Brien manages to unite characters from disparate genres such as myth and legend,

³⁰ In 1935, Erwin Schrodinger famously developed a thought experiment to challenge Heisenberg's Uncertainty principle, central to quantum physics, by creating a hypothetical situation: place a cat in a box with a small vile of poison, a hammer, a small amount of radioactive material and a Geiger counter, then seal the box. If any of the radioactive material decays, the hammer smashes the vile, releasing the poison. At this moment, until the box is opened and one can confirm one way or the other, the cat is simultaneously alive and dead.

folklore, American westerns, proletariat balladeers, all in a wonderfully strange postmodern amalgamation. The novel seems to be both in line and at odds with the mundane existence O'Brien knew in his day to day life as a civil servant. It is ironic that both O'Brien and Eimar O'Duffy worked for the Irish government, as each spends a good deal of his literary life writing against the same government; perhaps they were the most qualified, seeing as each saw the results of Irish bureaucracy firsthand: "Much of the book [*At Swim-Two-Birds*] mocks the obsession with pensionable jobs and with the examination system that alone led to such plum appointments" (Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 517).

The novel's central protagonist is a university student who appears to his uncle to be a lazy, good-for-nothing layabout. Contained within are several subnarratives concerning the narrator's invented tale of an author (Trellis) and his characters. The characters are created through a process that Trellis calls "aestho-autogamy" (O'Brien, *Collected* 37). The characters, all of whom seem to come from any number of disparate genres, eventually plot to kill their creator (Trellis), who spends an abnormally extensive time sleeping. While he sleeps, his characters such as Finn, the Pooka, Jem Casey, Sweeney, the Good Fairy, and Orlick Trellis—after Trellis rapes one of his own characters—run amuck and seek to try their author for a series of crimes in a novel penned by Orlick. The series of novels-within-the-novel ends once the narrator passes his exams, leaving Trellis and his fate without resolution.

In one hilarious scene near the end of the novel, the characters from all of their disparate genres play a low-stakes poker game, despite the Pooka's protestations that he does not "hold with gambling . . . for money" (137). Sweeny agrees to play through a parody of the Middle-Irish: "They have passed below me in their course, the stags across Ben Boirche, their antlers tear the sky, I will take a hand" (137). The characters question how the Good Fairy, who is

invisible, will be able to play and—more importantly—be able to pay should any debts be accrued: “How are you going to take the cards if you have no hands and where do you keep your money if you have no pocket” (138).³¹ When the Good Fairy is able to persuade all involved that it has money and thus beginning the game, the Pooka tells the story of “Dermot and Granya . . . one of the old Irish sagas” (138). In the end the Good Fairy loses, which creates a problem as the Fairy has no money, with the explanation given that it always wins at cards (141). The Pooka agrees to cover the Fairy’s debts if the Fairy relinquishes any positive influence over Trellis’s child, Orlick, allowing the Pooka to encourage him to be evil.

This section is a perfect example of what O’Brien does throughout *At Swim-Two-Birds*: blending various genres and various subplots that are at points ribald and hilarious. The fact that in this section of the novel all the characters have descended upon a hotel, awaiting the birth of Orlick, allows O’Brien the opportunity to bring the various genres together. Though it may not seem as if a Middle-Irish poem about a cursed king, American Western dime store fiction, bad proletariat poetry, and a smooth-talking “devil or pooka” (104) would work together, O’Brien is able to make it work and to satirize the lot of them while he is at it.

Eimar O’Duffy also focused much of his literary talent on satire. Even before the significant changes made during de Valera’s presidency, he rightly anticipated the more conservative direction the country would take. His Cuanduine trilogy lambasts Irish society through a characteristic Irish vehicle: satire. Satire, as Vivian Mercier’s classic book *The Irish Comic Tradition* suggests, has been an essential element of Irish writing since its inception: “Satire develops out of injurious spells as the druidic wizard evolves into a poet or bard” (3). Mercier goes on to further this analysis:

³¹ The Good Fairy admits to not having pockets early (103; 115).

Satire, unlike wit or humour, is an official function of the trained poet, though one which he soon begins to exercise for his own power and prestige rather than for those of his patrons or his tribe. There is evidence in the sagas of its having been used as a weapon of war to hamper the enemy's strength by its magical operation; however, the earliest examples which survive suggest that satire was in fact chiefly used to punish niggardly patrons and other enemies of the individual poets. (7)

One can find an example of this particular brand of satire in a story from the Mythological Cycle in "Cairbre mac Edaine's Satire upon Bres mac Eledain":

One day the poet Cairbre arrived at Bres's fort expecting the hospitality that poets were accustomed to receiving from their patrons. Instead he was shown into a narrow, mean, dark little house without a bed or a stick of furniture and no fire in the hearth. He was given three small dry cakes on a little plate and that was all. Cairbre was furious at Bres for this insulting treatment and the next morning as he crossed the enclosure on his way out of Tara, he composed a satirical poem against the king. This was the first satire ever made in Ireland, and through it the poet cursed Bres. (M. Heaney 9)

Here satire is used a punishment of the host, Bres, who was king of the Tuatha Dé Danann. He is an example of a bad king, eventually replaced by Lugh, Cúchulainn's father and a solar deity.

For literature to be a terrain for ideological struggle, there needs to be a method, a means of attack and for the Irish that comes in the biting form of satire, imbued with magic. The fact that the English language's most famous example of satire—Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*—was written by an Anglo-Irishman should come as no surprise really. It becomes a vehicle for the

Irish writers to write about the issues they found plaguing their society but to write about them subtly and with a good deal of subterfuge. The act of writing satirically—both before and after the formation of the Free State—is itself a political act; as a result, it can be connected to Homi Bhabha’s idea of “mimicry,” as discussed in relation to Sean O’Casey in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. In satire being “*almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha 86), it can mimic and mock. Satire also allowed writers during this time to successfully write about the issues they saw in their own society without less fear of censorship. Here, “*almost the same, but not quite*” worked to protect them.

O’Duffy’s satire is also aimed at a “bad king” of sorts: capitalism and the dominant ideology that accompanies it, represented through King Goshawk. The plot of the trilogy, while not the most complex, focuses on a near-future world (O’Duffy published the novels between 1926 and 1933, setting them in the 1950s) controlled by capitalists who had become kings due to their control over particular markets. “O’Duffy envisages a continuous growth of monopoly capitalism from the 1920’s onwards which has made it possible for Goshawk the Wheat King to buy up all the wild birds in the world and cage them to satisfy a whim of his Queen” (Mercier 205). The high king of the capitalists is King Goshawk, the wheat king, who proceeds to capture all the songbirds and flowers in the world for his own personal collection. The Philosopher attempts to rally the people of Ireland to respond, and he is met with an egg thrown at him. He then travels to heavens to find one who will aid him in his quest. After speaking to Socrates, who cannot help him, he is directed to seek the hero Cuchulain.

Where O’Duffy’s satire is particularly successful is in his juxtaposition of elements of the heroic literature of the past with the clearly unheroic present, much as one sees in O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds*. O’Duffy alludes to myth and legend right from the beginning of the novel; it

opens with a scene called “The pillow-chat of Goshawk and Guzzelinda,” which is an allusion to the opening of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (The Cattle-raid of Cooley) as Medb and Ailill argue over who is richer and has more possessions; they find that the only thing that separates them is that Ailill has come into possession of a large bull that used to belong to Medb but who refused to be owned by a woman, which then leads Medb to try to get her own giant bull. The kings and queens of the past have been replaced by millionaire industrialists. Their exploitation is hyperbolic here, as Goshawk feels he has the right to claim all the songbirds as his own, and only the Philosopher feels the need to protest. Humor and biting social critique come together as Cuchulain comes back from Tir na nOg to help the Philosopher in his quest to free the birds from Goshawk’s captivity.

The use of Cúchulainn in *King Goshawk and the Birds* runs contrary to the uses of this leading figure in Old Irish saga in the examples in my previous chapter focused on the Revival period. Instead of setting Cúchulainn’s tales in the past to inspire the present, O’Duffy places his Cuchulain³² in the present to illustrate the shortcomings of society, while maintaining significant elements of his character. He is violent, impulsive, and confused by the sexual mores and prohibitions of the times. When the Philosopher first meets Cuchulain in Tir na nOg, he is described as he is in the sagas: “Three colours were in his hair: brown at the skin, blood-red in the middle, golden at the ends. Snow white was his skin; as seven jewels was the brightness of his kingly eyes. Seven fingers had he on each hand; seven toes on each foot” (O’Duffy 35). O’Duffy goes on to describe him in the arms of a naked Fand, despite the fact that “Manannan Mac Lir shook his cloak of forgetfulness” (36) between them, referring to the ancient Irish tale of “The Only Jealousy of Emer” included in the *Book of the Dun Cow*. He runs into trouble when he feels “an urge of the flesh” (74) and tries to woo the local Dublin women. O’Duffy captures

³² In referring to O’Duffy’s use of Cúchulainn I will use his spelling (Cuchulain).

the poetic—but decidedly non-Petrarchan—elements that we find in Cúchulainn’s language in the sagas: “My desire is for two snowy mountains, rose-crowned, that are fenced about with thorns and barriers of ice,” a point he develops more explicitly when pressed: “It is your fair bosom that is the fruit of my desiring, and your red lips ripe for kissing, and your warm white body pressed to mine in the clasp of love” (O’Duffy 77). Not only does this offend the woman herself but it also enrages the Censor Morum: “You must be one of those foreigners if you think we would so outrage the modesty of our Womanhood by questioning them on such a subject” (78). He then threatens to take Cuchulain to “the Lothario Asylum” (79). By not eliminating these elements of Cúchulainn’s character, O’Duffy remains closer to the more explicit spirit of the original texts and critiques Irish society at the same time. “Cuchulain’s shock and dismay at the degeneration of modern Irish civilization provide much for comic satire as well as bitter condemnation of modern values” (Quintelli-Neary 118). It also indicates his misplacement in such a society; here, the woman is not able to understand the euphemistic quality of Cuchulain’s language as Emer had in “Cúchulainn’s Courtship of Emer,”³³ so even communication has devolved. The ways of love and war in the modern world differ dramatically from what the legendary Cúchulainn was used to.

Cuchulain falls in love and decides to leave the world, despite the Philosopher’s plea that he deals with Goshawk and frees the birds. He is willing to leave his son to finish the quest; the son takes the name Cuandúine, the Hound of the People, much like his father’s Cúchulainn, the Hound of Cullen. Just as his father was after returning from Tír na nOg, Cuandúine is shocked by the poverty and general failure and ills of human society. The break between what Cuandúine

³³ Cúchulainn in seeing Emer’s breasts says, “I see a sweet country . . . I could rest my weapon there,” to which Emer responds three times that “No man will travel this country” until certain feats are completed.

feels is right and just and the realities of the world are the central focus of the trilogy and the satire is most successful when it illustrates the issues of life under capitalism.

In her analysis of his work, José Laners focuses on how O’Duffy “satirizes the evils of capitalism and materialism” (56). O’Duffy’s critique runs beyond capitalism as an economic system that relies upon the exploitation of workers, and moves to what Louis Althusser calls Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). For Althusser, these ISAs are necessary as they help to, in Marxist terms, “reproduce the conditions of production” (Althusser 85), which in turn must secure the “reproduction of labour power” (87). The link here, of course, that goes beyond merely providing a wage is “a reproduction of its submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class ‘in words’” (89). In other words, there needs to be some aspects of society that need to work to reproduce the dominant ideology, which keeps workers buying into a system in which they are exploited. Althusser clarifies that these ISAs work in tandem with what he has called Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) used by the State to maintain control through the use of force (police, courts, prison, the armed forces all are considered RSAs). ISAs, on the other hand, must function more insidiously, through ideology, which in turn leads to the perpetuation of hegemonic control for the ruling class(es): “All ideological State apparatuses . . . contribute to the same result: the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation” (Althusser 104). Althusser determines the various institutions that function as ISAs; religious, educational, family, legal, political, trade union, communications, and cultural (96) are all examples of ISAs.

In O'Duffy's Cuanduine trilogy, nearly all of these ISAs are addressed specifically. Of particular importance are politics, communication, religion, family, and schools, almost all of which work to the same end, a point Althusser makes when he suggest that "the unity that constitutes this plurality of ISAs as a body is not immediately visible" (97). Each seems to be an individual institution, but they all function collectively to reproduce the dominant ideology. O'Duffy establishes this reality throughout his trilogy. It is clear that each ISA works well collectively in Irish society. For example, de Valera and his government emphasized the family as the integral element in Irish society in his 1937 constitution: "The State recognizes the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law" ("Current Constitution"). Following this central tenet, the patriarchal Catholic Church and government worked collectively to establish and emphasize the importance of the nuclear family; the constitution goes on to assert women's domestic role, insisting that their place was in the home. By limiting working-class families to one income, it enabled the cycle of poverty which would continue for most of the twentieth century. Politics, religion, education, and the family unit in Ireland all worked together to replicate the dominant ideology.

For example, in the third novel in O'Duffy's trilogy, *Asses in Clover*, he satirizes what would become a central vision of de Valera's conception of Ireland after the establishment of the Free State: the small homeowner happy with the simple things in life. When Cuanduine encounters Mac ui Rudai he relates his tale of woe to him; his four brothers are wildly successful in their various pursuits whereas he strives only for "a wee housemen and my bean a' tighé" (*Asses in Clover* 43):

A cottage on a hill...and a garden round it, and a couple of fields. A wide hearth to the cottage, with red curtains to the windows, and the lamplight shining through them to welcome me home at the close of day. A good wife on the other side of the fire, and the children playing around the floor. Work for my two hands, and enough for bite and sup and a bit over. That was the whole of my desire. (*Asses in Clover* 42)

Even though most would agree with Cuanduine and consider this to be a “modest desire indeed” (42), Mr. Robinson, an economist, suggests that “we can’t get everything we want in this world. This isn’t a Utopia, you know” (42). Ironically, Mac ui Rudai gets a significant amount of money for inventing “a bomb filled with gas that drove people mad,” and he is changed by the fortune he makes as a result: “his appetites had grown with his income, and he no longer desired the little houseen and the bean a’tighe that were once the goal of his ambition” (128). This reinforces one of the most central aspects of capitalism: one always wants to consume more; it is a siren’s song.

The constant need for the latest and greatest is an essential to capitalism; without it the gears grind to a halt. It is the fetishistic property of commodities according to Marx, which in part creates value:

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing. . . There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of

commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. (*Selected Writings* 473-74)

Mac ui Rudai's original desires were modest: a simple house and a wife to come home to after a hard day's work. However, as his influx of capital grows, so does his desire for more. It is blamed in part on the movies: "It is to be feared that the pictures were partly responsible for his downfall; for, having seen several hundred filmstars in their cami-knickers, he could not help feeling that it would be more enjoyable to possess a girl so prettily to himself than to tie himself to a bean a'tighe who—now he came to think of it—would be wearing good stout bloomers" (*Asses in Clover* 129). He is able to marry a "modern girl," Kathrynne, but their marriage ends only a few years later, and not because of the death of their child, but because "his masculine insensibility and self-sufficiency, his callous indifference to her need for the joy and laughter that are a woman's birthright, irritated, exasperated, almost maddened her" (132), and so she eventually leaves him when he tells her he has "gone bust" (134). Both were disillusioned by popular depictions of love—he by the belief that because he was rich he was entitled to a beautiful woman on his arm, she by being "in love with love rather than the man" (130).

But this belief by Mac ui Rudai is reflected only in the dominant ideology of the time. The media and politics work to replicate the controlling hegemony. O'Duffy is clear that politics are a sham. The two-party political system merely fulfills the wants of those who control the means of production; as such, he makes it clear that there is no significant difference between political parties. O'Duffy names his parties the Yallogreen Party and the Greenyallo party and the two candidates running as O'Codd and Coddoo; he continues the parallelism in their campaign

slogans (*King Goshawk* 14). José Laners suggests that “the Treaty Debate of 1921-1922 in the Dáil is satirized in *King Goshawk and the Birds* by means of simple inversion” (54). Here, O’Duffy mentions “the great civil war that had been waged between them over the question of rejoining the British Empire, from which the Irish people had seceded years earlier” (15). What O’Duffy is satirizing here is an inversion (as Laners so rightly deems it) of the debates of the passage of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921-22. These debates over the Anglo-Irish Treaty raged so intently in the Dáil Éireann over what the Free State leaders Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins had agreed to with the British Prime Minister Lloyd George. What de Valera and those who opposed the treaty insisted was that it failed to truly establish an independent Ireland because it included an oath that Ireland would be loyal to the crown, making it more of a commonwealth than an independent state. De Valera resigned as president after the Treaty narrowly passed the Dáil and the country found itself in civil war. All the talk surrounding the treaty ratification led to the deaths of thousands of Irish people, but this time it was not at the hands of the English but those of Irish brothers and neighbors.

Politics, as it often is depicted in satire, is merely folly. Not too dissimilar from O’Casey, O’Duffy became disillusioned with the revolutionary movement from his time in the Easter Rising under Pearse (fictionalized in his *Wasted Island*), and “he withdrew from the Nationalist movement after the Rising and fell back upon his already deeply ingrained socialist principles” (Hogan 18). As he maintained a socialist position, he could not see anything but the failure of the Irish government to significantly change from what the English had previously had in place. “The action of the government made the deeds of Nero, Queen Elizabeth, and Oliver Cromwell look mild and benignant in comparison” (*King Goshawk* 149).

Nationalism is also a focus when looking at O'Duffy's analysis of politics here, most specifically the Free State's attempt to define itself against England. O'Duffy's unnamed narrator goes into the differences between England and Ireland when discussing Cuanduine's trip to England: "Now, as every Irishman knows, the people of England are in every way inferior to the people of Ireland, being materialists, whereas we are idealists" (*King Goshawk* 220). This plays on much of the rhetoric of the time leading up to de Valera, rhetoric that he himself would use frequently. In a greater barb aimed at the Irish, O'Duffy continues, "By this timidity and love of compromise the English are deprived of that ennobling inspiration which we draw from our martyrs, and they lose also what we have aptly named the suffrage of the dead. The reincarnation of thousands of deceased patriots to outvote the living would be impossible in an English election" (221). Irish people's habit of turning the dead into martyrs and allowing these dead to control public opinion is the target of O'Duffy's satire here. All one has to do is think of Pearse's oration at the grave of O'Donovan Rossa to see exactly what O'Duffy is satirizing.

Later in *King Goshawk and the Birds* there is a celebration for the "Shaw Centenary" attended by "no less than five millionaires, with a choice collection of politicians, soldiers, archbishops of all denominations, vivisectionists and other scientists, a couple of leading sportsman of the day, and a sprinkling of fashionable novelists" (249). Shaw was a well-known socialist, but here he is depicted as a champion of capitalism, inspiring the captains of industry with lines paraphrased in *Goshawk* such as "the first duty of every citizen is to make money" (250). Just like every other quotation and paraphrase from Shaw used in this Centenary celebration, it is taken totally out of context to be used as the speaker sees fit, to illustrate the complete opposite of the purpose that Shaw intended. The previous quotation comes from *Major Barbara*, where Shaw actually writes, "The first duty of every citizen is to insist on having

money on reasonable terms; and this demand is not complied with by giving four men three shillings each for ten or twelve hours' drudgery and one man a thousand pounds for nothing."

This section ends, "And the evil to be attacked is not sin, suffering, greed, priestcraft, kingcraft, demagoguery, monopoly, ignorance, drink, war, pestilence, nor any other of the scapegoats which reformers sacrifice, but simply poverty." Here Shaw condemns the system that allows for such inequity, with poverty as the great evil, poverty created by such a system of inequity. This sentiment is completely contrary to what these demagogues are preaching at the Centenary, where they suggest that "Shaw was above else a patriot" (*King Goshawk* 252). Politics, religion, and education all come together behind economics.

In connection with politicians failing to make any changes to the economic system, O'Duffy continually points to the media's failure to represent reality objectively. The unnamed narrator goes so far as to suggest that the writers of the chronicles of myth and legend are more trustworthy in their descriptions than journalists: "For myself, I think the chroniclers are more trustworthy, as they are certainly the more entertaining; for, if they lie, they lie for the fun of it,³⁴ whereas the journalists lie for pay, or through sheer inability to observe or report" (*King Goshawk* 59). This sentence brings something else to mind: many of the previous literary generation saw more truth in the tales of Ireland's past than they did in the events of their time period, a point that O'Duffy would elucidate in *King Goshawk and the Birds* in highlighting the differences between his Cuchulain and the modern world. In many ways, for all of their fictional absurdity and playfulness, the writers of the generation between the World Wars were more effective in dealing with the realities of their time than the previous generation had been.

³⁴ I cannot help but think that O'Duffy may have had the added warning by one of the scribes who recorded the *Táin* in the *Book of Leinster*: "But I who have written this story, or rather this fable, give no credence to the various incidents related in it. For some things in it are the deceptions of demons, other poetic figments; some are probable, others improbable; while still others are intended for the delectation of foolish men" (O'Rahilly 272).

What is more, in *King Goshawk and the Birds* all of the newspapers in England are owned by only two men (Lord Mammoth and Lord Cumbersome), two men who were able to buy out everyone else but each other. “Being unable to buy each other up, they hated each other with a noble intensity, and directed their newspapers to take opposite standpoints on all topics” (202). The consolidation of ownership here leads not to competition in the accuracy of the reporting; instead, the only differences in how stories and incidents are reported come in the form of petty personal hatred. Like Joyce in the Aeolus chapter in *Ulysses*, O’Duffy parodies newspaper writing, in this case about Cuandaine’s coming to England. In these parodies the reader can see how the newspapers turn against Cuandaine, just as they had against the Philosopher early in the book, once he seeks to free the songbirds from captivity. Ironically, one suggests that “Mr. Quandine’s latest effusion can only be described as a violent attack upon the rights of property and the freedom of the individual. . . . This anarchical proposal means the complete disorganization of our whole social and economic system” (*King Goshawk* 264-65). By suggesting that the whole social and economic system will collapse if the birds are freed is of course hyperbolic; it does, however, illustrate the power of ideological and hegemonic control. In order for the ruling ideology to remain such, the press is used to strike fear into the electorate, who then turn against Cuandaine. Here the dominant ideology is able to reproduce itself effectively. One must also not forget that de Valera himself owned one of the Ireland’s most influential papers, *The Irish Press*.

In *King Goshawk* Cuchulain is brought back to earth to fight against the “wickedness and folly of man” (37) and return the songbirds to everyone after they were bought by King Goshawk. Cuchulain chastises the Irish when he comes to earth by saying, “O pitiful brain of man . . . What fears, what habits, what ordinances, what prohibitions have stamped you slave”

(45). As Marguerite Quintelli-Neary suggests, “advancing materialism represents modern man’s greatest derivation from traditional values, although his thirst for ownership spawns even greater evils” (118). Humans have become slaves to their desires for material goods and allowed for moral and sexual prohibitions to dictate their actions. Ideology is behind both, and it is this ideology that is so thoroughly lambasted in *King Goshawk*.

Religious affiliation, “which served as the basis of very old, very stable imagined communities” (Anderson 169), is central to Irish identity. For Ireland, religious affiliation is particularly important because Catholicism is one of the major identity markers that separate the Irish from the English and colonial settlers in Ireland. But as one can see in O’Duffy, the Church is intricately linked to the state under de Valera, a fact that de Valera himself encouraged considering his emphasis on the church’s special position in the state in his 1937 constitution. Because de Valera went out of his way to further emphasize Ireland as a Gael-Catholic-centric nation in order to respond to the years of occupation, he alienated Anglo-Irish citizens. This alienation would create additional problems in Northern Ireland in the years following the establishment of the Free State.

Through his inversions, O’Duffy makes the Church in the novels focused on the complete opposite of what one would expect. Business and religion go hand in hand—literally—in O’Duffy’s world: “The main door was of gold and ivory. On either side of this stood colossal figures representing Christ and a stockbroker clasping hands above the lintel, symbolic of the great truth that business and religion go hand in hand” (*Asses in Clover* 7). Inside the church one finds that “it is possible to serve both God and Mammon” (8). This church preaches the importance of birth control, which in the novel *St. Progressa* calls “the cleverest and most beautiful of human inventions” (153). Saint Progressa is one of the main icons of the church,

along with St. Sisyphus and St. Procrustes. The statue of St. Progressa represents her “with a scientific chaplet about her brow, and a baby beneath her feet, swaddling the orb of the world with a contraceptive appliance. Before this ikon women and girls of every degree used to pray regularly for sex knowledge and sterility” (*Asses in Clover* 11). The main thrust of the hymn to her can be summed up in the lines “Thanks to thee we can rut like the rabbits / And still remain sterile as stone” (12). Later in the novel Cuandine enters into a conversation about sexual intercourse and reproduction with Saint Maceratus, Bricriu of the Bitter Tongue, and Saint Progressa. In a great moment of irony, Saint Progressa becomes the voice of reason in the discussion:

Just try for a moment to look at this question from the *woman’s point of view*, forgetting your antiquated masculine prejudices, which are the product of male selfishness and sensuality fostered by the superstitious sentimentality of so-called religion. Forget about your brutal desire to have plenty of cannon-fodder for future wars, and your materialistic anxiety to have large numbers of underpaid robots engaged in industry. (154)

This builds on an earlier section of the novel that inverts traditional gender roles, the same roles that de Valera would codify in his constitution. Here, “people can’t afford children nowadays unless they’ve *both* got jobs” (33). O’Duffy’s inversion can clearly be seen when Cuandine meets an out-of-work husband and a working wife:

Mostly it was the men that talked, for the goodman’s wife, besides being of a taciturn disposition, was tired by her heard day’s work, and preferred to smoke her pipe in silence; only interrupting occasionally to correct some male misconception of business or politics, which she did with the greatest gentleness

and tolerance you could imagine. This, however, was not very often, for their chatter was mainly about shopping, and making ends meet, and cookery and sewing, and love; these being the subjects of greatest interest to their host, who was a thoroughly domesticated fellow, as a working woman's husband ought to be. (*Asses in Clover* 35)

The wife takes on characteristics typically associated with men of her society. O'Duffy undermines traditional gender depictions, although it seems his real target here is how working and being exploited under capitalism have an influence on a person more so than it is a sweeping critique of gender roles. It does work hand in hand, however, with much of what O'Duffy does throughout his trilogy—and what much great satire does—to make the mundane, taken-for-granted, everyday aspects of life seem odd to illustrate their incongruence with how things should be. As a result, he gets to play the role of Bricriu to all the fake Cúchulainns out there.

Much of what O'Duffy focuses on in his Cuandaine trilogy is the narrow, limiting focus of common morality during this time period. As José Laners notes, “During the 1920s a series of laws were adopted in Ireland to protect moral values, the overly puritanical interpretation of which is satirized at length in *King Goshawk*” (57). As much as O'Duffy satirizes politicians, the Church and the press, a good deal of vitriol is saved for the masses controlled by these outside forces. Like Joyce, O'Duffy depicts the people as a rabble, blinded by their own fear and hunger for violence, which is reflective of how Althusser's RSA can become internalized in the masses and that violence acts to support the ideological and hegemonic control. A clear example of this is when the Philosopher suggests that the people of Ireland respond to the theft of the song birds through their votes. He is met with violence instead of cheers:

Here the Philosopher's speech was cut short by an egg . . . Next minute he was plucked from Gratton's pedestal and fell among a roaring, raging mob , who began beating him and kicking him and tearing him and trampling him, and even fighting with one another in their efforts to get a blow at him. Some spat in his face; others threw dirt at him; one died of rage because he could not reach him. Nor were the women backward in the fray. Some stabbed him with hatpins; others clawed his face; more who could not get near him, went into paroxysms of fury, foaming at the mouth and yelling "Kill him! Tear his eyes out!" and similar objurgations. Several fainted with fury; others in their transports went black in the face, and with hideous grimaces and frantic bodily contortions flung themselves on the ground, kicking up their legs and screeching like demoniacs.

(King Goshawk 20-21)

When a man rescues the Philosopher from the river he was thrown into after this beating, the rescuer is "prosecuted under the Blasphemy and Indecency laws and the Treason-felony laws for the utterance of a blasphemous, indecent, treasonable, and felonious statement, to wit: 'Politics in this country are a damned cod'; and being duly convicted was sentenced to penal servitude for life" (21). Karl Marx suggests that people will cling to a system of inequity because they believe it will, at the very least, protect them: "Security is the highest social concept of civil society, the concept of the police. The whole of society is merely there to guarantee to each of its members the preservation of his person, rights, and property. . . The concept of security does not allow civil society to raise itself above its egoism" (*Selected Writings* 61). The fact that the people themselves, who are exploited, violently turn on one who is attempting to

point to an element of inequity in the system that exploits them is exactly what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe suggest through the term *new antagonisms*:

But this intervention by the state at even broader levels of social reproduction has been accompanied by a growing bureaucratization of its practices which has come to constitute, along with commodification, one of the fundamental sources of inequalities and conflicts. In all the domains in which the state has intervened, a politicization of social relations is at the base of numerous new antagonisms.

(162)

To take this idea further, capitalism encourages conflict through disparate social groups throughout society. For example, to look at Ireland's history, one can point to the Troubles in Northern Ireland. If Catholics and Protestants in Belfast are concerned with hating one another and laying their problems at one another's feet, no one is focused on what commonalities are there, namely their exploitation at the hands of the British capitalism.

Not surprisingly, for the characters who populate his Dublin, socialism is seen as the enemy throughout O'Duffy's first and third novels in the trilogy,³⁵ as it was throughout most of the twentieth century, with the Cold War as the obvious example. The dominant media outlets in the novels consistently point to the threat of socialism. In fact, when Cuandine arrives in England, he is described (by both newspapers) as a "Bolshevik" (*King Goshawk* 201) for his attempts to rally the Irish behind his plan to free the birds.

Since Cuandine is able to free the birds, the ISAs that work to keep capitalism's control are forced to modify their viewpoints to reflect the change, while simultaneously maintaining the

³⁵ The second novel, *The Spacious Adventures of the Man in the Street*, focuses on what happens to Aloysius O'Kennedy when his body is commandeered by the Philosopher to house Cuchulain's spirit at the beginning of *King Goshawk and the Birds*. He is sent to Rathé, an alien planet but an anagram of "Earth," where the Rathéans can have as many sexual partners as they want but there is a social taboo placed on food and eating. They are monophagists and can only eat one thing their entire lives.

key position that class inequality is necessary for society. For example, politicians suggest that the release of some of the birds was the plan all along, “that a moderate release of the birds had always been an essential feature of their programmes.” The Pope declared “the monopoly of all singing birds by one individual a grave abuse, nevertheless human inequalities were decreed by divine law,” and that although Goshawk had “abused his power . . . *millionaires are a necessity. Without them we would have no employment.*” Finally, the press, despite criticizing Goshawk, felt it necessary to add that “we disapprove of any action which would prevent the legitimate accumulation of birds in the future” (*Asses in Clover* 229-31; emphasis in original). The Socialist press looked at the situation from a different perspective:

The Socialist press, on the other hand, showed marked disapprobation of Cuanduine’s action. To restore birds to alleged freedom under national capitalist governments was, they said, merely to bolster up the existing state of things. Birds were confirmed individualists, and sang for their own enjoyment. They should therefore be kept under the control of an international bureau, and trained to sing for the enjoyment of the proletariat. (*Asses in Clover* 231)

What O’Duffy writes here is essentially the view of many socialists when it comes to real economics (not birds). It is, in fact, what happens to Ireland after its declaration of independence; by not adopting a socialist economic structure as James Connolly had proposed, it merely bolstered the existing state of things in terms of economics. But this should come as no surprise, because the problem, according to Lanter, is that “Capitalism . . . is dogma, rigorous and monolithic in nature” (89). The birds, like humans under capitalism, are not willing to be freed. When Cuanduine goes to Castle Goshawk to free the birds “and with a stroke of the Cruaidin Cailidcheann he ripped open the great aviary, and said to the birds: ‘Now, my beauties,

you are free, and my task in the world is done” (*Asses in Clover* 270). As he does he sings them to go “Away! Away!” and “On the winds of the world / In freedom ride” (270). It is through their freedom, Cuandaine hopes that they will “Awake ye now / In the hearts of men” (270); unfortunately for Cuandaine, “the birds, however, were so much accustomed to captivity that they would not stir, and pecked him viciously when he tried to shoo them forth” (*Asses in Clover* 271). In his quest to free them he is met with violence, much like the Philosopher earlier in the novel.

Despite all that Cuandaine does, he is not ultimately successful in his quest. As a result, after seeing most of his endeavors end in failure, he tells his wife, “I perceive very clearly that this is no world for you and me. Let us leave it” (*Asses in Clover* 297). With that he disappears from the text, leaving the narrator without any knowledge as to where he goes: “What became of the hero thereafter can never be told, for he was never seen again by mortal eye. Whether he found rest in Tir na nOg, or fresh fields for noble deeds in some corporeal world lit by some better sun, or whether he still rides through space in search of his heart’s desire, nobody knows” (*Asses in Clover* 297).

It is ironic that through his three Cuandaine novels O’Duffy’s characters are not successful in enacting any social change. In fact, as Lanter rightfully posits about O’Duffy’s texts, “social critics are either denounced, ignored or willfully misinterpreted, but they do not change the world” (66). The failure of Cuandaine’s freeing of the birds at the end of *Asses in Clover* is indicative of the hold ideology has on people and how this control is necessary in a system based on exploitation. One might assume all one needs to do is call attention to the fact that another is being exploited to cause that person to “wake up” to his or her actual circumstances and call for a change, but the birds themselves here are a perfect metaphor for the power of hegemonic control:

They do not want to be free and attack their liberator instead. This is directly what Gramsci suggests through his definition of hegemony as “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (12). Or, to use Žižek’s translation of a line from Marx’s *Capital*, “they do not know it, but they’re doing it” (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 28; emphasis in original).³⁶ Despite the fact that O’Duffy’s proposal for an upheaval of capitalism with his “social credit” is unrealistic, he certainly does understand how influential ISAs can be, long before Althusser coined the term.

While more ink has been spilt over James Joyce than any other writer writing in English not named Shakespeare, he is not often considered in the same company as O’Brien or O’Duffy. O’Brien had to wrestle with the figure of Joyce, and O’Duffy was not nearly of the same class of writer. Unlike O’Duffy or O’Brien, Joyce was not a civil servant and did not live in the British Isles after leaving Ireland in his early twenties. Despite this fact, Joyce, while living on the continent for nearly his entire adult life, was always focused on Ireland, most specifically Dublin. Joyce was highly critical of the backwards-looking Revivalists. He includes the figure of the Shan Van Vocht in the various symbols that make up the dominant motif of the Irish woman with her “batlike soul waking to the consciousness of itself in darkness and secrecy and loneliness and, through the eyes and voice and gesture of a woman without guile, calling the stranger to her bed” (*Portrait* 183). This is Stephen’s thought as he recalls the story that Davin had just told, a tale Joyce modified from Synge’s story of the unfaithful wife (*Collected Works II: Prose* 71-72) that clearly also alludes to the theme that one can find in the *aisling* and the woman who calls for a lover (*Spéirbhean*) to rescue her. Joyce depicts her here with breasts

³⁶ Here Žižek provides the original: “*Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es*” (qtd. in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* 28; emphasis in original).

bared to the nationalist Davin, inviting him in without a husband home. Davin, of course, does not oblige her. Joyce, as he is wont to do, contrasts the story in the next paragraph with a woman selling flowers, whose “young blue eyes seemed to him at that instant images of guilelessness; and he halted till the image had vanished and he saw only her ragged dress and damp coarse hair and hoydenish face” (183).

Joyce returns to the Shan Van Vocht at the beginning of *Ulysses* in the figure of the old milk woman:

He watched her pour into the measure and thence into the jug rich white milk, not hers. Old shrunken paps . . . Old and secret she had entered from a morning world, maybe a messenger. She praised the goodness of the milk, pouring it out. Crouching by a patient cow at daybreak in the lush field, a witch on her toadstool, her wrinkled fingers quick at the squirting dugs. They lowed about her whom they knew, dewsilky cattle. Silk of the kine and poor old woman, names given her in old times. A wandering crone, lowly form of an immortal serving her conqueror and her gay betrayer, their common cuckquean, a messenger from the secret morning. To serve or to upbraid, whether he could not tell: but scorned to beg her favor. (12)

Here Joyce explicitly connects the milk woman with the Shan Van Vocht by calling her the poor old woman. He also highlights a trope he frequently returns to when he calls her silk of the kine (from the Irish *a shíoda na mbó*): Joyce consistently ties Irish womanhood to fecundity and the cow (a symbol Joyce uses from the very first page of *Portrait* and its moocow), which also has resonance with the *Táin* and its giant brown and white cows. Ireland is the “old sow that eats her farrow” (*Portrait* 203). He depicts the Shan Van Vocht as promiscuous, willingly taking the

English and Roman lovers to her bed, serving both. Even when she returns as one of the phantasmagoric figures in the Circe episode, Gummy Granny, she talks about the “strangers in my house”: “OLD GUMMY GRANNY: (*rocking to and fro*) Ireland’s sweetheart, the king of Spain’s daughter alanna. Strangers in my house, bad manners to them! (*she keens with banshee woe*) Ochone! Ochone! Silk of the kine! (*she wails*) You met with poor old Ireland and how does she stand?” (*Ulysses* 486). Again, this undermines the form of the aisling and the romanticized version of Éire/Ireland as a gendered land longing to be freed from her captors.

This is Joyce at his most political when it comes to his usage of myth and legend. The focus on Ireland as gendered female is problematic at best. It is a woman who needs help from a man to be free—a damsel disguised as crone in distress—who is then possessed by another when she is freed; this position was first assigned to the Stuart heirs after the failures of James II in Ireland and then to those willing to die for the cause. Ideologically, while entrancing to those such as Emmet, Tone, and Pearse, it continues to emphasize the subservient role often given to women in Ireland, one that can also be supported by in the Catholic Church’s perception of women: “Those who are most victimized by ideology are often its truest believers. . . . Joyce saw it reflected by the tendency of women to support the Catholic Church, though a woman could see it in the devotion of men to warfare. For Joyce, opposition to the Church was on the side of support for the liberation of women” (Brivic 48). A perfect example of this ideological control is Dante Riordan in *Portrait*, who vehemently defends the church during the dramatic Christmas dinner argument over Parnell, his involvement with Kitty O’Shea and the resulting disgrace and death that followed. The fervent Mariolatry in Ireland is representative of how this ideology replicates itself. Mary is seen as totally devoted to her faith and her family, meek and subservient, the picture of serene grace: these are the traits Irish women are encouraged to

emulate. She is not Countess Markievicz, her sister Eva Gore-Booth, or Maud Gonne, all women who outspokenly called for Irish independence, with the first being involved in the Rising itself. The continual focus on the church's absolute authority—here, even in matters of politics—takes precedence. In Dante's opinion, the church had every right to preach against Parnell from the pulpit: "They were always right! God and morality and religion first . . . God and religion before everything!" (*Portrait* 39). For Dante, she continues to blindly support an institution that works to keep women in proscribed roles. She sees Parnell, a man whose political ambitions could have worked to establish a free and sovereign Irish State, only in terms that the Church establishes: "A traitor to his country! . . . A traitor, an adulterer! The priests were right to abandon him. The priests were always the true friends of Ireland" (*Portrait* 38).

The problem with this view of women is that it perpetuates the dominant patriarchal system that exploits women, particularly working-class women. The larger ramification of this dominant ideology is easily seen in life under de Valera. A particular focus of his 1937 constitution, influenced by the archbishop of Dublin John Charles McQuaid, was the role of women in the nation, central to the family (see Article 41, "The Family" ["Current Constitution"]). It continues to define the importance of women in the home: "In particular, the State recognizes that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved" and by that importance it attempts to limit any outside employment for women: "The State shall, therefore, endeavor to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labor to the neglect of their duties in the home" ("Current Constitution"). Just as de Valera's parochialism was established through his model of an independent Ireland, it was even clearer when it came to how he viewed women: as exclusively wives and mothers. He idealized them as housewives, and there is a great emphasis

on women in the domestic sphere and attempt to limit outside employment for women. The fact that divorce was prohibited (“The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the Family is founded, and to protect it against attack” [“Current Constitution”]) and contraception banned—both as per Catholic dogma—codified this role even further. The wording of today’s constitution remains exactly the same (although there is now a provision for the dissolution of marriage that was not included in de Valera’s).

For a writer who obsessed over language, it should come as no surprise that Joyce is at his most political when undermining the power structure inherent in language itself. Perhaps rumor and personal failure have a much greater significance when read in an Irish context. In “Racial Discourse and Irish History,” Luke Gibbon suggests that Joyce’s use of language is “akin to the language of rumor, as analysed by Gayatri Spivak, that is to say a form of spoken utterance that carries back into the innermost effects of spacing and rupturing” (496). For Spivak, “the power of rumor in a subaltern context” is derived “from its participation in the structure of illegitimate writing rather than the authoritative writing of the law” (293). Stephen’s “illegitimate writing” antagonizes the Arnoldian view of Shakespeare. Frederic Jameson believes that as a result of British imperialism, Ireland is condemned to “an older rhetorical past and to the survivals of oratory (the absence of action), and which freezes Dublin into an underdeveloped village in which *gossip* and *rumors* still reign supreme” (“Modernism and Nationality” 63). Looking at the references in the novel to Emmet and Parnell, rumors abound. With Emmet most of the rumors concern his burial, whereas the rumors about Parnell are even more suggestive, pointing to the idea that he may have faked his death. These rumors have political significance as they show rebellion against the British presence in Ireland.

Since rumor becomes a part of how the Irish constitute history, Stephen's reading of Shakespeare's life through rumor and gossip becomes more politicized. In fact, David Lloyd posits that "the nationalism of a colonized people requires that its history be seen as a series of unnatural ruptures and discontinuities imposed by an alien power while its reconstruction must necessarily pass by way of deliberate artifice" (89).

Obviously the text in which Joyce comes back to myth and legend most frequently is in *Finnegans Wake*, published in 1939, the same year as *At Swim-Two-Birds*. Both texts include Fionn as a character. But as James MacKillop suggests, "Fionn mac Cumhaill is one of the thousand faces in the monomyth" (180), useful for Joyce as he shifts the shapes of the family in his dreamscape, but Fionn is not privileged over the many other characters alluded to in the text. In fact,

Consequently many critics of the novel have assumed there must be an Irish popular tradition that Fionn mac Cumhaill, a sleeping warrior, lies buried beneath Dublin, stretching from the Head of Howth to Phoenix Park. If we accept this it would seem that Joyce was inviting us to think the sleeping Fionn was a counterpart to the sleeping Tim Finnegan and the 628 pages of the text of the *Wake* is his dream....But a close reading of the text will not support that thesis. (MacKillop 172-73)

What readers often assume is that Fionn must have a privileged place in the text, but he plays a much more significant role in *At Swim-Two-Birds* than he does in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.

What remains consistent in these examples of myth and legend is how O'Brien, O'Duffy, and Joyce all illustrate the tendency of the Celtic Revival to romanticize the past as a way to glorify the present. However, as they highlight, the idealized past is not accurate to the past or to

the present. In fact, ideologically, the focus on the romanticized past in the period leading up to the foundation of the Free State does not effectively deal with the issues of exploitation of women and the working classes. The past and its dead heroes masked the larger social issues for the sake of nationalism. For these writers, the reality was that English control was replaced by a backward-looking and increasingly conservative Irish government. The change in government did not drastically affect the working conditions and economics of the state. Even though Ireland was free of England, it was not free of the economic policies that relied upon exploitation and de Valera's emphasis on austerity and the championing of the Irish peasant did little to change or alleviate their circumstances. This is especially true for those living in Ireland's *Gaeltachtaí*.

CHAPTER 5

“AND FOUGHT WITH THE INVULNERABLE TIDE”:

Ó CADHAIN, Ó DIREÁIN, NA GCOPALEEN, AND THE GAELTACHT WRITE BACK

“I do not think these country imaginations have changed much for centuries, for they are still busy with those two themes of the ancient Irish poets, the sternness of battle and the sadness and parting of death”—W. B. Yeats³⁷

While Irish myth and legend flourished during the Irish Literary Movement centered in Dublin, the language that first gave us these myths and legends was struggling. Despite the fervency that accompanied the various nationalistic movements at the turn of the twentieth century, which caused many—such as Patrick Pearse and John M. Synge—to want to improve their Irish, the fact was that those who spoke it fluently grew fewer and fewer through the first half of the twentieth century. England’s policy that banned the language, until 1871, was one of the most effective elements of their colonial occupation, and if one were to add the number of people who either died in the mid-nineteenth-century Great Famine³⁸ or emigrated, the number of those who spoke Irish diminished even further. Even with the emphasis of Irish language education and acquisition under Fianna Fáil “the number of native speakers in the designated Gaeltacht areas halved between 1922 and 1939” (R. Foster 546).

For those writing in Irish in the first half of the twentieth century, their struggle was different from those writing in English. Theirs was not the romanticized version of the West; it was the actual one. There were not any “noble peasants,” just those looking to get by. They were not like Yeats, Pearse, and Synge—who tried to inspire Dublin’s citizenry to connect with their culture through the revival of old myth and legends and the past—but instead they clung to

³⁷ Quoted from Yeats’s “The Galway Plains” in *Selected Criticism* (128).

³⁸ Many Irish people preferred to call the “Great Famine” *An Gorta Mór* (The Great Hunger), since a famine is when there is not enough food of any kind, whereas during 1845-51, the potato was the only crop that was destroyed by a devastating fungus; other crops (such as rye and barley) that could have fed starving people were exported steadily out of the country. Peasants had access only to potatoes, their sole staple crop, and they had no money with which to buy anything else.

and protected the language and the oral tradition through which Gaelic culture (including legends and myth) was preserved. In the works of writers such as Máirtín Ó Cadhain, Máirtín Ó Direáin, and Myles na gCopaleen (Flann O'Brien), one can find the traces of a fierce sense of pride in the language and a great concern for its demise. In Ó Cadhain's and na gCopaleen's fiction and Ó Direáin's poetry, there is a fierce longing to maintain the traditions of the past while at the same time mourning what has been lost. There is also a great satirizing of those who idealized and romanticized their moribund culture, visiting and reveling in the "quaintness" of the Gaeltacht only to return to the more economically-developed Dublin later.

This is not to say that all writers of this and the preceding time period romanticized the west. In fact, the most famous poem by Ireland's most celebrated poet of the generation after Yeats was Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger* (1941). In it, he describes life in Ireland as the final act of a tragedy: "We will wait and watch the tragedy to the last curtain / Till the last soul passively like a bag of wet clay / Rolls down the side of a hill" (70). The poem itself is a narrative about the life of Patrick Maguire, a middle-aged, lonely, small-time farmer living in County Monaghan, but it is a poem's themes could easily reflect the decline of the Gaeltacht as a whole as well. Maguire begins to question "if his mother was right / When she praised the man who made a field his bride" (71). With "No hope. No lust" (91), the poem is like a Gaeltacht version of Eliot's *The Waste Land* but whose horrors are more real than Eliot's. The land and the characters suffer a barrenness and hopelessness:

And the wet grass could never cool the fire
 That radiated from her unwanted womb
 In that country, in that metaphysical land,
 Where the flesh was a thought more spiritual than music,

Among the stars—out of reach of the peasant’s hand. (79)

That hopelessness extends to any sense of future promise, for “There is no tomorrow; / No future but only the time stretched for mowing of the hay / Or putting an axle in the turf-barrow” (77), and even if one were seek an escape, Kavanagh suggests that there is “No escape, no escape” (88). Even death cannot offer true escape from the field or solace from the loneliness of solitude: “Patrick Maguire, the old peasant, can neither be damned nor glorified; / The graveyard in which he will lie will be just a deep-drilled potato field” (91). In the end, Kavanagh critiques those who idealize without understanding the realities of the situation for so many of those people in the west of Ireland. He points to the green fields and the lives of the peasants who live in them, because “*There* is the source from which all cultures rise, / And all religions, / *There* is the pool in which the poet dips,” and without the peasant “base civilization must die” (88). He ends the poem with a warning that “Silence, silence. The story is done” (91), signifying not only the end of Patrick Maguire’s tale but also the tale of the Gaeltacht itself.

Kavanagh does deviate from the standard depiction of the Gaeltacht during the period of the Free State, however. As Ireland sought its own identity during the early years of independence in the Free State (1922-37), it inevitably turned to what many considered to be a crucial link to the past, stretching beyond the years of British occupation: the west of Ireland, specifically the Gaeltachtaí—the Irish-speaking areas, especially Connacht in the West, and which also included areas of Ulster to the North and Munster to the South—and the peasants that inhabited these areas. The peasant farmers, who lives changed relatively little over centuries, represented the continual, pure “Irishness”: “Conservative ideology and the social fabric were bound up with one another, both expressive of the atavistic and widespread conviction that the essential Irish reality was the uniquely desirable, unchanging life of the small farm and country

two in the Irish-speaking west” (T. Brown 171). To many Irish people, the west was a bastion of Irish identity and culture; the peasants were the collective guards. There the Irish language was still the primary language for many; there the stories of folklore were passed from one generation to the next. For much of the country it was difficult to disentangle what was inherently Irish about their identity from what was influenced by the Anglicization of the island, including the stories of myth and legend that dominated the Celtic Revival.

In fact, it is the myth of the west of Ireland that takes the place of ancient Irish myth and legend in the national consciousness post-independence. It is ironic that the figures of myth and legend, such as Cúchulainn and Deirdre, were not seen as representative of Ireland once it got its independence, in large part because they were shaped predominantly by Anglo-Irish writers and aristocratic ideologies during the Celtic Revival. Instead, the people turned to the land and to those who represented that unbroken link to the past.

This is not entirely surprising when considering the fact that Ireland’s economy was still driven in large part by agriculture, as its infrastructure was not developed enough to handle heavy industrialization at the time of its independence in 1922: “In 1926, as the census recorded, 61 percent of the population lived outside of towns or villages. In 1926 53 percent of the state’s recorded gainfully employed population were engaged in one or another in agriculture” (T. Brown 9). The period directly after the founding of the Free State through the 1950s was one of economic and social isolationism in Ireland. By turning inward, the Irish-Gaelic-speaking peasant farmer became a national symbol. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, Éamon de Valera’s Fianna Fáil focused on maintaining both the traditional way of life that the peasants represented and the Irish language that many still spoke: “The Irish language, religion, and aspects of rural life that could be identified as embodying Gaelic tradition served as the

essentialist symbolic forms, giving significance to the life of the state and its citizens” (169). Since the Free State excluded the six counties of Northern Ireland that contained the most consolidated Protestant political power, the emphasis of what it meant to be Irish became even more intensely focused on those Gaelic and Catholic elements, which explains the desire to include the Catholic Church and the Irish language as part of the government’s plans early on. De Valera and Fianna Fáil held the “conviction that the life of an Irish small farm represented a purity and decency of life that could set Ireland apart from the more commercial societies that surrounded her” (138).

Several significant problems became apparent over the first thirty years of Ireland’s independence, however. One was that the economy could not sustain itself as comprised under the initial Fianna Fáil government. De Valera’s emphasis on small-town rural was not sufficient or practical in the long run. In addition to general infrastructure issues concerning the composition of Irish economy, the government’s desire to see the rural, Irish-speaking areas reinvigorated with new life once the Free State’s school curriculum and its emphasis on the Irish language really took hold, never materialized. In fact, it was just the opposite. Emigration to growing Irish towns outside of the Gaeltacht, America, Scotland, Australia, and major British cities became a viable option for many, and the life of the small farmer in the west became difficult and untenable for even more.

Many of the complications of small rural farming date back to before the Famine. As tenant farmers during the Plantation period fathers were often forced to subdivide their already small landholdings with their sons. The Famine changed the situation dramatically, as statistics show a decline of fifty percent in small-farm tenure (R. Foster 334-35). After the Famine, the shift to livestock farming would also continue. Also, as a result of the Famine, many of the

farmers who managed to survive attempted to hold onto their land as long as possible without passing it down, thus delaying marriage and family life in a dedicated effort to work the farm. As a result of a series of important legislative acts starting with the Land Acts of 1870 and 1881, both of which help to control rent prices, and especially the Purchase of Land Act of 1885, which helped to provide an opportunity for small farmers to buy their land outright, farmers gained significant control over their land for the first time since before the Plantation period began in the sixteenth century. Instead of reverting to the subdivision of the land, as it may have been before the Famine, the farm would usually be passed down to one child—usually the eldest male—but not after a lengthy waiting period. The father would frequently hold onto control of the land even well into his sixties and seventies; the inheriting child might be forty or fifty by the time he gained the farm himself.

This delay in inheriting the farm led to delayed marriage as well. The censuses from this time period reveal the advanced age to which many waited until marrying: “in 1929, the Irish age of marriage was the highest in the world—34.9 for men, 29.1 for women—while one-quarter of the female population were unmarried by their forty-fifth birthday” (R. Foster 539). Nearly eighty percent of males remained unmarried at age 30; 62 percent at 35; 50 percent at forty and a remarkable 26 percent at 65 (T. Brown 9-10).

Because of the Famine, farmers were forced to change how they ran their farms. However, the most drastic change to Irish society as a result of the Famine came in the way of the population itself. More than one million people died as a result of *An Gorta Mór*, and this statistic is exacerbated by the fact that by “1870 at least 3,000,000” emigrated (R. Foster 345). The number of people who left Ireland continued to grow through the first half of the twentieth century and by the 1920s “43 percent of Irish men and women were living abroad” (T. Brown

10). Due to primogeniture and a delayed marriage rate, many Irish people were forced to emigrate. Emigration, while widespread throughout the island “at a net rate of 6 per 1,000 for the period 1926-46” (T. Brown 140), affected the west at a higher rate. However, this rate was affected by crop yields in Connacht in particular, as subsistence farmers in the west often lived below poverty level, and the lack of funds made emigrating difficult. Unless one could get a job as a teacher or clergymen, emigration often offered the most promising situation for children of small farmers in the west. Emigration also provided an escape from the stilted and conservative life of the west, regardless of any idealization from Dublin and its environs:

Since the 1940s larger numbers of people (particularly young women) than in earlier decades left rural and small-town Ireland because they believed a more attractive life awaited elsewhere. The lure of the urban world, glimpsed in film and magazine, made emigration less awesome, gave a sense of possibility to what in the past would have been experienced only as the workings of an implacable fate.

(T. Brown 174)

Even as the rest of the country romanticized the peasant farmer of the west, the actual lives of the farmers were not as stagnant as perhaps assumed.

There was only so long that Ireland could remain isolated from the rest of the world. Ireland’s isolation was boosted by its neutrality during the two World Wars; however, many left Ireland to seek employment in England and returned with experiences of the modern world they longed to see brought to their homeland. The developments in mass communication, travel, and media also led many to seek their fortunes elsewhere. This is especially true with the advent and proliferation of film that depicted modern lifestyles with the lure of riches promised by capitalism. Working indoor plumbing was still unheard of in many households, so seeing an

indoor toilet and bathtub in the movies inspired many Irish men and women to leave their farm homes, where there appeared little chance of advancement.

Large-scale emigration during and after the Famine had devastating results on the Irish language. The Irish language was in serious trouble even before the failures of the Free State's program:

Even in those districts designated *fíor-Gaeltacht* areas by the Gaeltacht Commission, where 80 percent and over of the population claimed knowledge of Irish, in the period between 1911-26 showed a decrease from 149,677 claiming knowledge to 130,074—an actual loss of 19,603 or 13.1 percent. What is even more striking is that in those areas the Gaeltacht Commission designated *breac-Gaeltacht*, partly Irish-speaking (i.e., with 25-79 percent of the population claiming knowledge of the language of Irish), the period 1911-26 saw a reduction of 47,094 persons claiming knowledge of the language, a loss of 28.7 percent.
(T. Brown 50-51)

One of the major problems in Gaeltacht areas after the Famine (besides death and emigration) was the fact that “Irish parents were bringing up their children through the sole medium of English” (51). All of this seemed to suggest an end to the Irish language early in the twentieth century, as only “17.6 per cent of the population” (R. Foster 518) could speak Irish at all by the founding of the Free State.

As a result, and seeing the language as an essential element of Irish identity, *Fianna Fáil* began a program to reorder school curricula to include a greater focus on the Irish language. In their estimation, most classes should be taught in Irish: “all singing in the National schools should be in Irish, that instruction in history and geography, which was taught from the third

standard onward, should be through Irish, and that one hour a day should be spent in direct language acquisition” (T. Brown 41). These changes in the curriculum also meant that classes in art and science were disposed of in favor of a greater emphasis on the language.

Despite the fact that the Free State government sought to make the Irish language a central tenet of their administration, the actual results could not reverse the decline. Part of the problem with Fianna Fáil’s attempts to integrate the Irish language as a central focus of education and curriculum was that “[s]ince independence the Irish educational system had changed but little if one excepts the major effort to gaelicize schools in hopes of linguistic revival. The general profile of the educational system bequeathed by the departing colonial power remained, even as late as the early-1960s, essentially unchanged” (T. Brown 236). By not having a larger, clearer social program in place, or reshaping the educational process beyond forcing language acquisition onto the students, the experiment was doomed to fail. People did not take to the language; nor did they move to Irish-speaking Gaeltachts. As a result of the failure of schools to reinvigorate a stagnant language revival and the large-scale emigration of those living in the fíor-Gaeltacht areas, the language and the traditional ways of life that supported it were declining with a rapidity that the government could not combat. Because of this pedagogical failure, they gave up trying; by the 1960s Ireland reevaluated their educational policies, saw the failures of the past, and made significant changes that brought the country more in line with what was occurring in schools in the United States and United Kingdom.

The nascent government’s educational policy failures aside, some of the greatest writers in Irish were writing during this period, in a time where they could anticipate the language’s and Gaeltacht traditions’ seemingly-imminent end by looking at life—and the attendant changes—around them. The first grouping of modern texts written in Irish that would come to have a

tremendous influence on Irish writing in general—especially after translation into English—were the Blasket autobiographies: Tomás Ó Criomhthain’s 1929 *An tOileánach* (*The Islandman*), Peig Sayers’s *Peig* (1936), and Muiris Ó Súilleabháin’s *Fiche Bliain ag Fás* (*Twenty Years A-Growing*) in 1933. The Blaskets, formerly Ireland’s most westerly inhabited islands, just off the Dingle peninsula in County Kerry, became a symbol of the traditional ways of life, unimpeded by English occupation, much like the more-celebrated Aran Islands. Just as the Aran Islands provided a particular focus of the period of the Celtic Revival—due in large part to Synge’s plays and prose—the Blaskets become emblematic of the Free State period. These autobiographies captured the particular idiomatic aspects of the Irish spoken on the Blaskets and the lives lived, with all the joys and difficulties, unadorned with some of the prose with more writerly flourishes one could find coming out of Dublin. The islands became even more emblematic when in 1953 they were deemed unsafe and their inhabitants headed for the mainland.

Tomás Ó Criomhthain’s *The Islandman*, for example, is filled with tales of his life on the Great Blasket, often in hunt of rabbits, seals, lobsters, and mackerel. He tells tales of the life of the island, both his familial life and the life and customs of the islanders collectively. Ó Criomhthain (1856-1937) himself explains his desire to write his autobiography: “I have written minutely of much that we did, for it was my wish that somewhere there should be a memorial of it all, and I have done my best to set down the character of the people about me so that some record of us might live after us, for the like of us will never be again” (244).

Most of the tale concerns life on the Blaskets, but there are times where the islanders venture to the mainland, where Ó Criomhthain frequently will make a distinction between how

the islanders and their counterparts on the mainland act.³⁹ One of the most humorous scenes, ironically, is where Ó Criomhthain recounts going to a wake for one of his departed relations on the mainland in Dunquin, which is actually quite close to the Great Blasket, close enough that the island is visible from the town. He is initially taken aback by the presence of a barrel of porter at the wake, but is told that “it’s been coming into fashion for quite some time now” (209). When offered the glass of the porter, he is faced with a conundrum: “It isn’t that I like to break a custom—I’ve never done it—but I didn’t care for the drink that was going round, for I’ve hardly so much as tasted it ever” (210); he is saved by “the man of the house,” who recognizes that he is more accustomed to whiskey. Although this may not seem like much, it does highlight the ritualistic aspects of the both the wake itself and life in the west of Ireland. The wake, often seen as a solemn affair, is more akin to a party in many regards in Ireland; loved ones eat, drink, and talk about the deceased loved one who just so happens to be lying in the room while the celebration is going on.

An aspect that Ó Criomhthain focuses on here and that can also be found in other texts about the islands on the western coast of Ireland is the insular nature of the communities there. While there is the sense that the Gaeltacht villages as a whole feel that way about themselves compared with the rest of Ireland, the islanders seem to feel it to an even greater extent. In the previously-quoted section in Ó Criomhthain’s *The Islandman*, he feels distinctly out of place even in Dunquin despite its general proximity to the Blaskets. Although not written in Irish,

³⁹ In the 1990’s television program *Father Ted*, starring Dermot Morgan and Ardal O’Hanlon, there is a wonderful send-up of the differences between island living and the mainland in an episode appropriately titled “The Mainland.” In it the three priests and their housekeeper, who live on a sparsely populated island, visit the mainland for two main purposes: to buy Father Jack a new pair of glasses and to collect £200 Father Ted wins in a bet. Once they get there, however, hijinks ensue: Ted (Morgan) and Dougal (O’Hanlon) visit the caves but get lost when they run away from *One Foot in the Grave*’s Richard Wilson who does not take kindly to Ted’s repeating his catchphrase “I don’t believe it”; simultaneously, one of the priests (Father Jack) and the housekeeper (Mrs. Doyle) end up in jail and Ted has to spend his winnings to get them out, proclaiming at the end of episode to never return to the mainland, unless it is necessary, which, he dejectedly suggests, it always is.

Peadar O'Donnell's (1893-1986) work also depicts islanders' reticence about outside influence. One of James Connolly's disciples and one Ireland's most radical socialist writers from the Civil War-period—in which he fought —through the 1970s, O'Donnell frequently sets his work in the Rosses, a semi-Irish-speaking area of Donegal. 1927's *Islanders* is set on the fictional Inniscara Island just off the coast of Donegal. O'Donnell's unflinching portrait of the islanders and the meagerness of their existence work to rectify a sometimes clunky plot and awkward underdeveloped love triangle. The novel focuses primarily on the Doogan family and the relationship between the widowed Mary and her children, especially her eldest, Charlie. They are entirely reliant upon what the land and—even more—the sea provides. If Charlie is unable to catch mackerel, salmon, or herring most especially, the family is left more often than not with a scant meal of potatoes, about which Charlie exclaims, “People can't live for ever on praties” (16), a claim that could be made for all of poverty-stricken Ireland at the time. Later in the novel, the villagers reject Donal Dubh's claim that the island is “a hard place to rear childer, an' it's a hard, unfortunate place to be reared in” (75), but it is a hard claim to refute when confronted with the realities presented in the novel.

Inevitably, much as one finds in Máirtín Ó Cadhain's stories, there is a necessity to leave the homeland in search of a better life and financial means to support the family. Mary Doogan mourns the coming day when her children leave her and the island: “It's away to the Lagan with the childer to earn a few shillin's, then away to Scotland, an' it ends up with America. This is the first scatterin' of my childer: God knows if I'll ever have ye all gathered under me wing again. God alone knows!” (39). Charlie, fearing the financial ruin of his family, continually repeats his desire to go away to Scotland to earn a more consistent wage, but two of the girls, Sally and Nellie, leave first. They go to Lagan, County Armagh, to work as domestic servants.

However, Nellie dies in Lagan as a result of “neglected appendicitis” (50). As in Ó Criomhthain’s autobiography, there is a description of the wake rituals on the island after her death. The Doogan family is forced to sell their cow to raise the funds to bring Nellie’s body back to the island to be buried next to her father. The whole island is involved in the process, even before the body is returned from the mainland: “At midnight they said the fifteen decades, just the same as if it was an ordinary wake, and many young folks sat up with the Doogans until morning, but there were no games played, like is when an old person is dead. In the morning a string of boats took the islanders out to meet the corpse” (49). Before that, as some of the villagers prep the Doogan’s house for the impending wake, they question “whether candles should be lighted, since the corpse wasn’t in the house” (48). Like Ó Criomhthain, O’Donnell emphasizes the significance of ritual and community when it comes to burying the dead.

Despite the hardship that accompanies island living, there is a pride that these characters feel for their way of life and for the community. There is a necessity for exchange between the mainland—the central town of Dungloe, especially—but there is a weariness when dealing with those who come from the mainland. There is an “island code” (37) that was in effect for any outsider who attempted to court one of the island women, one that required the mainlander to accede to an island for a young woman’s affection: “He must go off, or the favoured one must drive him off” (37). For Charlie, there seems to be an inevitability that he will end up with Susan Manus, despite his attraction to the mainland local doctor’s sister, Ruth Wilson. Ruth “long wished to live in the Rosses and to know its people. It was a desire born of the Abbey Theatre, and fostered by short trips to Kerry and Connemara” (66). Regardless of Susan Manus’s father’s suggestion that Ruth was perfect for island life, believing that they would “educate ye up to the life fine” (73), Charlie knows that their relationship can never survive: “It

would be madness for me to ask her come here on the island . . . greater madness to let her” (116). Even though it is hard for many of the characters to see leaving the island and its insular community, financial circumstances make it difficult to continue the traditional way of life, a fact not often dealt with in romanticized versions of the Gaeltacht. When Mary Doogan, who dies before the end of the novel, suggests that “Our day will soon be over” (87), one has to wonder—like Kavanagh’s suggestion that “The story is done” (91)—if that same comment can be made about life in the Gaeltacht in general based on the lack of viable economic opportunities present.

Works such as Tomás Ó Criomhthain’s *The Islandman* and Peadar O’Donnell’s *Islanders* deserve recognition for their ability to accurately depict life in the islands specifically and the Gaeltacht in general. They are able to strip the romanticization from both the setting and the characters they might otherwise have in other texts written by Irish writers writing in English from the comforts of the Pale. However, this does not mean that they have the same artistic importance of other writers writing in Irish during the time period. The two Máirtíns—Ó Cadhain (1905-70) and Ó Direáin (1910-88)—remain two of the most significant writers of the Irish language to this day. Along with Seán Ó Ríordáin and Máire Mhac an tSaoi, they really ushered in a use of Irish in a modern context. Influenced by the work of James Joyce and other modernists, they moved beyond traditional ways of writing to incorporate more experimental elements.

In Ó Direáin’s homage to Ó Cadhain (“The Tree that Fell”), he calls Ó Cadhain “fallen tradition’s sacred tree” and “king of the word” (117). Hailing from Cois Ferraige, in County Galway’s Gaeltacht, Ó Cadhain was devoted to the Irish language and the Irish cause, even spending several years in jail as a result of his involvement in the I. R. A. He is most known for his seminal 1949 novel *Cré na Cille* (*The Dirty Dust*), which works on the premise that the

intimate relationships and petty jealousies last beyond life and continue on after death. As one of the graveyard's more esteemed inhabitants, the Master (Máistir Mór), suggests, the dead "are always talking about the small stupid insignificant stuff here" (*Dirty Dust* 14).

The recently-departed Caitriona Paudeen's (Caitriona Pháidín's) hatred for her sister Nell (Neil), still alive in the "ould country" (*Dirty Dust* 6), is the dominant thread that connects the various parts of the novel, woven through the cacophony of the other disembodied voices of the dead. Caitriona's hatred for her sister became the driving force in her life after Nell married Jack the Lad, the same man Caitriona had her sights on while seeking a husband. It continued throughout her life, and the competition even carried over to the comparative successes of their children and grandchildren. Its final focus was on who would be the beneficiary of their other sister Baba's will, which was not resolved before Caitriona herself died. Death has not quenched Caitriona's hatred, as she continues to rail against Nell in the grave; she curses her every chance she gets, from the moment she realizes that Nell buried her in the Fifteen Shilling section of the graveyard and not the Pound plot for which she longed and was not given her cross of Connemara marble,⁴⁰ to the point when she finds out that Nell came into a huge sum of money. A steady stream of obscenities flies from Caitriona's mouth whenever Nell's name is mentioned.

None of the characters in Ó Cadhain's novel are idealized. This is especially true for Caitriona: She is manipulative and conniving, with one of the foulest mouths in all of literature.⁴¹ In fact, when it appears that she is nice to the other corpses around her, it becomes clear that her

⁴⁰ The novel ends with Caitriona realizing that she—nor any future corpse in the graveyard—will have a cross made of Connemara marble.

⁴¹ In his translation, Alan Titley uses a wide array of English language curse words to convey the sharp qualities of the curses in Ó Cadhain's Irish. For example, in the second sentence of the book Caitriona says, "D'imigh an diabhal orthu dá mba in Áit an Leathghine" (They can go to hell if I am stuck in the Half Guinea place, *Cré na Cille* 1). Titley instead turns that into, "Fuck them anyway if they plonked me in the Ten Shilling plot" (*Dirty Dust* 3). Or where Ó Cadhain uses words like "raicleach" (vixen or obstreperous woman, *Cré na Cille* 3) to describe Nell or the Master's former wife, Titley goes with "cunt" (*Dirty Dust* 5). In both cases, the former would read rather tame by today's standards, but in Irish it carries a weight similar to that of the latter.

niceties are only part of a ruse that she promptly drops after she is finished attempting to glean some knowledge of her sister and their family from those who die after she does. She is only truly nice to Jack the Lad; however, when Jack dies and is buried in the Pound Plot, he wishes only for her to leave him alone.

Ó Cadhain's Irish is vibrant, full of idiomatic brilliance without any of the quaint romanticized aspects one might find in other Irish language texts of the time, and is so complex that it took sixty-six years for an English translation to appear, in March 2015, by Alan Titley.⁴² Because these characters are dead, they often repeat their conversations as if stuck in a loop. Kitty constantly moans about the pound she never got back when she loaned it to Caitriona so that she could buy a round table. Two men bicker over the outcome of the 1941 All-Ireland football match, while another two go on about "The War of the Two Foreigners" (*Dirty Dust* 27, 48, 97, 130, 145, 170, etc.). The most consistent use of repetition comes from Caitriona's exclamation that she is "going to burst," which ends nearly every section in the novel. This is not to suggest that this repetition stops them from talking. In fact, with nothing else to do, all they do is talk. Their conversations are not changed through the experience of dying. They are not granted some sense of enlightenment, leading to a deeper understanding of life. Instead, they just as frequently rely on trite, hackneyed phrases in death as they did in life.

Just as Ó Cadhain depicts the minutiae of everyday life (and death!) in *Cré na Cille*, they are also present in his short fiction. His focus was primarily on the *Gaeltachtaí* of the West of Ireland, and how life was changing there at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the

⁴² Some of the best examples of Ó Cadhain's talents come in the Trumpet of the Graveyard (Stoc na Cille) sections, which often open the ten interludes; these are all filled with beautifully poetic prose, both in the original Irish and in translation: "Ach cheana is abairt bhearnaithe na crainn dhídhuilleacha ar mhaoileann an chnoic. Is lánstad dorcha í an ail lar bhruach rite na mara. Ansiúd ag bun na spéire tá an litir leathchumtha ag críochnú ina práib dhúigh" (*Cré na Cille* 192); "But the sap is sagging in the trees. The aureate voice of the thrush is coppering. The rose is slouching. The dark rust which ruins, ravages, and runkles is corroding the cavalier's blade" (*Dirty Dust* 140).

twentieth centuries. He “was intent on demythologizing the Gaeltacht, saving it from the ideologues he saw attempting to turn it into a folk museum complete with quaint, costumed, and Irish speaking natives, isolated from the rest of modern Ireland and the world” (O’Leary, *Irish Interior* 433). At the same time, he was “determined to preserve the peculiar insights from medieval and even pre-Christian times which had survived in the folk memory” (Ó Tuairisc 8). One finds elements of the oral tradition alive in Ó Cadhain’s fiction, but in a very modern, vibrant way. Ó Cadhain’s fiction exists in the space between the past and the present, turning a keen eye on the importance of the Gaeltacht and the Irish language in a modern Ireland. In doing so, he sought to rescue the Gaeltacht from those who sought to preserve it only as a quaint relic of the past.

Ó Cadhain’s story “The Withering Branch” focuses on the transition from youth to maturity. At the beginning, the unnamed narrator works up the courage to ask the haughty Nora Mhór to dance when he is just an adolescent—“on the brink of manhood” (Ó Cadhain 15)—and she is a captivating force, a trend-setting tornado of a woman. She is not pleased by this upstart whisking her onto the dance floor: “A flinty glint came in her eye and even more of a flush into her features, to put one in mind of Maeve’s face on the Plain of Muirtheimhne seeing the Connachtmen suffer a wholesale slaughter come of her own implacable whim” (16). Although he knows that what he has done has bordered on “tabú” (14),⁴³ he revels in his victory, even going as far to ask to see her home. She declines: “The cheek of you. A little grabber of a boy” (19).

⁴³ I would assume that Ó Tuairisc decided to keep the connotations of the Irish word *tabú* in his translation, as it has specific resonance going back to the ancient Celts and the idea of the *geis*, a powerful and specific prohibition for an individual; for example, one of Cúchulainn’s *geis* was to not eat dog meat (his totem animal), which he does in order to avoid breaking another of his *geis*, to always accept food offered to him by three old hags. By eating the dog meat, he breaks his *geis* and this inevitably leads to his death: “On their way south they came upon three wrinkled hags, blind in their left eyes, bending over a fire . . . he saw that the animal was a hound. He made to pass them, for he knew that they were not there for any good and moreover there was a *geis* on him forbidding him to eat the meat of a hound since it was his namesake” (M. Heaney 147-48).

Through his stories Ó Cadhain typically weaves several allusive strands that coalesce in a cohesive image by the end. The first, in this case, is his description of Nora as the Mona Lisa: “Her face, I thought, wasn’t precisely beautiful. . . . As if the painter of the Mona Lisa, not softening his first red layer of colour, had left the face unfinished” (16). The second, and most significant in this context, is to describe her like the women of myth and legend: “She might have been Fionnuala McDonald come back again, the Black Princess, Emer, Maeve, or even Redmane of Macha. She would have queened it in Cruachain once or Emhain Macha” (17).

He then takes these images of Nora Mhór at her proudest and haughtiest and returns to them after fifteen years have passed. The narrator, who has been away for some time, describes himself as “Oisín returned from the Land of Youth to find not the Fianna but a strange and alien people” (20), and even he does not even recognize Nora Mhór. She has lost the aura she once had; she is “no Maeve no Macha come again. That divine impertinence was gone forever from her eyes” (22), and out of all the people at the party only he sees her as she was, “as a conquering queen” (23). They dance again, though in different circumstances. Ó Cadhain returns to the Mona Lisa allusion: “More chaste, more chastened, now more like the face of the real Mona Lisa, as the agonies of a wounded pride had shaped it” (23). The narrator leaves the party to catch up with Nora Mhór and finally see her home.

This story is a rumination on how time changes (and does not change) us, and uses the figures of Irish myth and legend to do so. Nora Mhór is the link between the narrator’s youth and maturity: “A slice of my life went with Nora. She left me in a critical state of mind, wavering between youth and age” (24).

There is a decidedly different use of myth and legend here than in the work of the Revivalists. Whereas those in Dublin fought over the representation of a woman selling her soul

to save Ireland (Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* [1899]), or the hint of a woman in her undergarments (Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* [1907]), here the allusions surrounding Nora Mhór illustrate the harsh realities of life in the West. In her youth she has all of the power and beauty of the legendary female figures, but time is not kind to those who stay in the Gaeltacht, especially when beauty's crown withers. Her situation also highlights one of the difficulties for many women in the west of Ireland who do not marry early or emigrate.

Máire Mac an tSaoi's (1922-) poem "Warning" covers similar territory to Ó Cadhain's story of Nora Mhór, although her poem focuses on a self-involved man from the perspective of a local woman, reversing the sexes of Ó Cadhain's "The Withering Branch." The speaker chastises the unnamed young man, warning him that his "Comely head lifted on shapely shoulder" (77) will not always be so comely, that "The glow that lights your face" will change over time and that "the night comes on apace, boy" (77). Her warning is more pointed as she alludes to his precarious place in the family as the second son: "Watch yourself, be wary, for you're the second son, / And one day you'll come home again and they'll not / let you in" (79). It is in the final stanza that she anticipates a precipitate fall for this young man, just like the one Nora Mhór experienced. As she suggests, the girls with whom he dances now, needing only a "wink" (79) will not be so quick to dance with him, "And some there will pity you, but few, boy, and / not I!" (79).

For characters like Nora Mhór and the unnamed second son in "Warning," the vibrancy of youth is often crushed by the lack of opportunities. This lack of opportunities often led many to leave the Gaeltacht through emigration, especially to America. Ó Cadhain's "The Year 1912" uses a technique similar to the one he used in "The Withering Branch" of repeating several allusive images throughout the course of the story to connect to his larger theme, which in this

case is emigration to America. There is the constant threat of emigration from the young people in Ó Cadhain's stories. Here, the images all illustrate a sense of loss. Ó Cadhain opens the story with a trunk "perched up on the ledge of the kitchen dresser, adored like an idol" (25). The trunk is the image that signals Mairin's leaving; for her mother this trunk makes Mairin's emigration real. It is "a ghost from the Otherworld come to snatch away the first conception of her womb and the spring of her daily life" (25). This is the first mention of the motif of the faery world and the changeling, and America is the West, both literally and figuratively, the "Fairy Palace" (33). In Mairin's place already is a changeling: "Her body was cold too, cold and insubstantial as a changeling from the Liss" (38).

With this journey there is the repetition of images of death and the grave, illustrating the loss of the youth's vibrancy in Connemara. "That American coat, the graveclothes—how to tell one from the other? The 'God speed her' that would be said from now on had for its undermeaning 'God have mercy on her soul'" (28). The carriage that carries the trunk to Bright City (Galway) is described as "giving a corpse 'the quick trot to the graveyard'" (37). Mairin becomes another "wildgoose that would never again come back to its native ledge" (39). It is the same sense of loss that Mary Doogan feels in O'Donnell's *The Islanders* when her children go to Lagan, or threaten to go to Scotland or America. Both mothers' fear barely holds back a sense of resignation that the children will leave, that it is inevitable. When the children do leave, the traditional way of life moves that much closer to its end.

While "The Year 1912" deals with the emigration to America that wins over so many young people's hearts in Ó Cadhain's stories, like a faery leading a child to the Otherworld, his story "The Gnarled and Stony Clods of Townland's Tip" illustrates the most striking similarity between Ó Cadhain and Ó Direáin: the loss of traditional values leaves many with the sense of

living in a foreign land. However, this was a reality of the times. The countryside, romanticized for remaining unchanged in its traditions, was in the process of being changed dramatically. Some, such as Ó Cadhain's character Old Peaits, became even more entrenched in the old ways as a result, stubbornly refusing to accept any change at all. In many ways, it is because Old Peaits is connected to that long line of storytellers who pass along old folktales and legends through the oral tradition:

The old tales and legends were still remembered by *seanachais* (storytellers) in parts of the west, a repository of ballad, song, and historical legend had been handed down, the people still observed ancient pre-Christian shibboleths and fairy-thorns, holy wells, the rites of the agricultural year, the calendar customs, magic cures, pishogues (or superstitions), and the lore of the countryside.

(T. Brown 75)

Old Peaits, who was once known as “Peaits the Songs, Peaits the Stories, Peaits the Folklore” (80), retreats to his “strip of red bog” (79); he has “seen the farmers on the Plain below him giving away their Irish for a cackle of broken English” (79). He no longer tells the tales of the past, no longer recites the poems like eighteenth and nineteenth century blind poet Raftery (Antoine Ó Raifteirí); he is closed off, the present has “fossilized the story in his heart, locked the song under his tooth” due to “the unbearable burden of having to spend what was left of his days among a generation of people who were alien to him and his traditional style” (80). Ó Cadhain does not romanticize Peaits. He is a grumpy, boorish man who sets out to satirize the town after winning the Oireachtas for being “the most exact in song and story, the wittiest in ditty, the most authoritative in lore, in all four corners of Ireland” (79-80).⁴⁴ Satire, of course, was the weapon of the *filí* (poets), who would curse anyone who was inhospitable or stingy

⁴⁴ This description is reminiscent of the Gaeligores descending on Corkadoragha in *An Béal Bocht*.

(Mercier 112).⁴⁵ But here, after Peaits satirizes the town, and “everybody’s ears were red” because of it, he drops dead. It is a petty, poor satire. “And since old Peaits’ cabin fell some years back there is no house now on the gnarled and stony clods of townland’s tip” (84). Nature and the land reclaims what had been lost to humanity, similar to Wordsworth’s “The Ruined Cottage,” but lacking any romanticization of the beauty and power of nature or its restorative effects.

Here the land itself, the former site of Peaits’s cabin, becomes symbolic of the shift in traditional values and country life to the city or America and an embrace of modernity. This is a dominant theme in Ó Direáin’s poetry as well. But in Ó Cadhain’s story one gets the sense that there has been a failure on the part of traditionalists and revivalists in some way, as we are left with the image of “the gnarled and stony clods,” which is not a particularly positive one, as if nature has reclaimed what was rightfully hers in the first place. Ó Direáin, on the other hand, takes solace in such lonely, desolate places. For example, when he describes the ruin in “The Church of the Four Beautiful Ones,” there is a sense of mystery and of a secret that the church will not reveal: “And you will not betray their secret, / You crumbling ruin” (43). As Frank Sewell suggests, “Ó Direáin takes . . . his ‘salving delight’ in holy places associated with asceticism and scholasticism which, having fallen into neglect, are unsullied by mass contemporary use” (116).

He consistently resists the modernization of Ireland and capitalist enterprises that drives it, and yet does not feel quite secure in his homeland on Inis Mór, the largest of the Aran Islands off the coast of Galway: “Ó Direáin’s vision of mid-twentieth century Ireland could be summed up in two words: destruction and desecration” (Sewell 134). In “To Ireland in the Coming

⁴⁵ Mercier has a brilliant chapter on the various kinds of satire (*aéir*) in Early Irish literature. See *The Irish Comic Tradition*, 105-27.

Times”—in which he lifts unchanged the title of Yeats’s poem in which he dedicated himself to a romanticized Ireland—he chastises the country, calling Kathleen Ni Houlihan a “whore” who has betrayed Pearse’s vision: “And if you’re looked on as a whore again / Play the famous whore in earnest / And sell his glory and satiate / Each lout who sidles up to solicit, / Betray his ideal as well and lead / A new mate and his wealth to bed” (Ó Direáin 97). But at the same time he chastises himself for being a cog in the machine: “I despise each paper scrap, / The wage and recompense I get / For petty meaningless labour” (Ó Direáin 57). There is a consistent tension between the heroic ideals of the past and the disillusioned present that has failed so miserably and given so much away. This is why he puts so much emphasis on the ruins, the stones, the clay and trees; they resist the encroachment of modernity and the desecration of the traditional that accompanies it. Sewell suggests that what “Ó Direáin sought was preservation of the self’s autonomy, symbolized by his defiant image of upright or ‘standing tree / crann seasta’” (105).

In two of Ó Direáin’s homages—to Synge and to Ó Cadhain—he connects both writers to the past. In Synge’s case, he focuses on two of his most famous plays, *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. He suggests that Synge’s characters came to him during his stay in the Aran Islands learning Irish. But as he praises him for his characters that “leaped like heroes from the pages,” he simultaneously mourns the fact that “the ways of my people decay. / The sea no longer serves as a wall. / But till Coill Chuain comes to Inis Meáin / The words you gathered then / Will live on in an alien tongue” (105). Ó Direáin chafes at the fact that the oral tradition that gave Synge these characters and the idiom of his stage work cannot sustain itself and instead live on in English. In “The Tree that Fell” he depicts Ó Cadhain’s death as significant beyond just one man dying: “But it was not you who fell: / Murchu’s banner fell once more, / We suffered defeat at another Kinsale, / Another Aughrim and

Scarifhollis” (119). Ó Direáin sees Ó Cadhain’s death in terms of Ireland’s worst historical defeats, and I am sure in his mind it was. Ó Cadhain was arguably Ireland’s most vocal and talented writer in Irish, and a man who strove for further recognition and protection for the language from the nascent government. Both of these homages are similar in one respect: They mourn the loss of the past and tradition and fear the future, seeing it as further desecration of the values and traditions he loves in “the bleak ancestral land of my people” (39).

Both Ó Cadhain and Ó Direáin live within the Irish language, and find solace and freedom in it, but for different reasons. For Ó Direáin “poetry was necessary for him not just because contact with Irish meant contact with his past, with his centre (as he saw it) of origin, but because the language continued to be an essential part of his identity, his medium for interpreting the world and life itself” (Sewell 141). Whereas he saw his own generation as a “wretched era” (qtd. in Sewell 141.), he found solace in the language but feared what was to come. There was a sense of freedom in writing in Irish for Ó Cadhain: “He had the advantage . . . of being free of all the worries as to whether what he wrote was sufficiently Irish or not: and he was free also of the editorial pressures from London or New York publishers. . . . He was at liberty to express rather than exploit his material” (Kiberd, *Irish Classics* 588). Ó Cadhain perhaps is not as fearful of what seemed like the impending death of the Irish language; in fact, if we believe that *Cré na Cille* is “a metaphor for the state of the Irish language,” then perhaps Declan Kiberd is right in his suggestion that it is “a sly innuendo to the effect that the argument was no longer about how to save the language as about who owned the embarrassingly vociferous corpse” (*Irish Classics* 589).

And this, I think, is where Ó Cadhain and Ó Direáin differ. There is a hopeless desperation in Ó Direáin, in contrast to a resolute obstinacy in Ó Cadhain—a sense that the best

one can do is fight when one can, let go of the rest, and accept that life is a certain way and one can do little to change it. In addition, those in the Gaeltacht must represent themselves and their culture in their own language to highlight the differences between the reality of their lives and the romanticized versions depicted in the Revivalists' works. In Ó Direáin's view of Ireland in "How We Wasted the Candle" comes close to his pessimistic view of his country and modernity in general: "Once we thought the day would be ours⁴⁶ / The victory gained, the old joy returning, / And we burned the candle prodigally / . . . / But as the candle has wasted till now / Let the last inch waste in time to come" (99). This resignation is quite different than Brid's in "The Road to Brightcity" as she makes her way to Galway in the early morning hours: "Brid looked back along the road. Back along those nine crooked miles with which she struggled. She realised she must do them again, again, and again. . . . She was ready to take up her share of the burden of life" (Ó Cadhain 78).⁴⁷

Despite the fact that many of Ó Cadhain's short stories and Ó Direáin's poetry analyzed here would not be considered particularly humorous, it would be inaccurate to suggest that all writings in Irish during this time period depict a dire, hopeless situation, as they do not. Satire and humor have been essential elements of Irish literature going back to the Celts and the oral tradition, and they continue to be. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Ó Cadhain's most famous novel, *Cré na Cille* (1949), is a series of discourses and disputations among buried corpses, and even though they are dead, they are still talking underground. They continue much as they were while alive, with the same petty squabbles and jealousies they had in life. The novel refuses to

⁴⁶ This has a resonance in the famous saying *tiocfaidh ár lá* (our day will come).

⁴⁷ Although Ó Cadhain's "Going On" is a very bleak story. In it, a family deals with the crushing weight of poverty on a failing farm. At the end of the story, the husband and father hangs himself from the barn rafters. It is his six-year-old-son who sees his hanging body first and points it out to his mother as they are driving the cow to the field. She realizes what has occurred, but "In a little while she tapped the cow again—it was easier to go on" (*The Road to Brightcity* 111).

romanticize the people of the Connemara Gaeltacht. Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* was covered in my previous chapter; however, Flann O'Brien (1911-66) was just one of several pseudonyms used by Brian Ó Nualláin (or Brian O'Nolan in his day-to-day life in his civil service job). For a quarter century he wrote a riotous bilingual column ("Cruiskeen Lawn") in *The Irish Times* under the name Myles na gCopaleen, the name under which he published his 1941 novella *An Béal Bocht* (*The Poor Mouth*). Myles na gCopaleen means "Myles of the Little Horses" and was a character in a nineteenth-century Dion Boucicault melodrama, *The Colleen Bawn* (1860), one of many examples of the stage Irishman found especially during the nineteenth century.⁴⁸ *An Béal Bocht* is narrated by Bonaparte O'Coonassa and details life in the Gaeltacht, in the invented Corca Dorcha (Corkadoragha). The narrative presents life's difficulties more humorously than in Ó Cadhain's short stories, but it is no less horrifying when one considers the underlying connections to reality in the satire. It takes the form of one of the Blasket autobiographies; Bonaparte frequently parrots the famous line from *An t-Oileánach*: "because our types will never be there again" (O'Brien 414)—"mar nach mbeidh ár samplaí arís ann" (na gCopaleen 9).⁴⁹ As James M. Cahalan suggests, it's not only the people who will never be there again: "Ambrose the Pig's likes will not be there again, nor will the likes of the fireplace's bad smell be there, *etcetera ad nauseum*" (*Irish Novel* 243). Although it might be tempting to read *An Béal Bocht* as mocking the Ó Criomhthainn and the Blasket autobiographies, that interpretation would miss the larger critique in the parody:

⁴⁸ In his chapter on *An Béal Bocht* in *Inventing Ireland*, Declan Kiberd focuses on how by taking the name Myles na gCopaleen, O'Brien/Ó Nualláin uses this pseudonym as a send-up of the stage Irishman.

⁴⁹ In Ó Criomhthainn the text reads: "mar ná beidh ár leithéidí arís ann" ("because our likes will not be there again") (qtd. in O'Brien, *Collected Novels* 493); in Flower's translation of *The Islandman* the line is translated as "for the like of us will never be again" (O'Crohan 244).

What Myles na gCopaleen was satirizing therefore was not the original Irish versions of island literature. Rather it was their translation and the cultural and social assumptions that underlay the complacent regard in which such works were held by people who had neither a developed knowledge of the Irish language itself nor an understanding of the actualities of the Gaelic past they so sedulously venerated. (T. Brown 181)

For na gCopaleen's main targets are really those who represent the west of Ireland without letting it speak for itself, specifically the English and the Revivalists in Dublin, those who have relegated the West to poverty and a remote, idealized past. As Philip O'Leary points out, "Myles's scorn was not directed at Gaeltacht people" but instead "aimed at those 'die-hard' movement fanatics who saw a need to perpetuate that moribund lifestyle and culture—for others, of course—in order to preserve some punitive ineffable native essence that could symbolically enrich their own comfortable lives in Anglophone Ireland" (*Irish Interior* 462).

This group of revivalists who are routinely lambasted in *An Béal Bocht* is called the *Gaeilgeorí* (Gaeligores)—non-native, inferior Irish speakers, often from Dublin, who descended upon the *Gaeltachtaí* with their puritanical view of Gaelic culture:

Oftentimes now there were gentlemen to be seen about the roads, some young and others aged, addressing the poor Gaels in awkward unintelligible Gaelic and delaying them on their way to the field. The gentlemen had fluent English from birth but they never practised this noble tongue in the presence of the Gaels lest, it seemed, the Gaels might pick up an odd word of it as a protection against the difficulties of life. This is how the group, called the Gaeligores nowadays, came to Corkadoragha for the first time. They rambled about the countryside with little

black notebooks for a long time before the people noticed that they were not *peelers* but gentle-folk endeavoring to learn the Gaelic of our ancestors and ancients. Before long the place was dotted with them. (O’Brien 435-36; emphasis in original)⁵⁰

Na gCopaleen makes the distinction that they are not peelers—a term used to denote British police officers—but instead they are “gentlefolk” from Dublin. They come to Corkadoragha to connect with a remote—and highly idealized—past. One can easily see the real-life counterparts in the revivalists that sought to go to the Aran or Blasket Islands, to Dingle or Donegal, to learn Irish in a land that time and the English forgot.

In one of the most humorous scenes in *An Béal Bocht*, one of the Gaeligores (a folklorist whom na gCopaleen ironically calls a *seanchaí*) comes to Corkadoragha to record Irish speakers reciting folklore using a gramophone, but “Since folks thought it was unlucky, the gentleman had a difficult task collecting folklore tales from them” (O’Brien 431).⁵¹ He is forced “to collect the folklore of our ancients and our ancestors . . . under the cover of darkness” (432).⁵² One night, as he plies a group with alcohol hoping to record some of the stories they know, a stranger enters the barn who, as the Dubliner believes, begins to drunkenly speak Irish: “It appeared that the gentleman thought the Gaelic extremely difficult . . . he understood that good Gaelic is difficult

⁵⁰ The original Irish-Gaelic text of this passage reads, “Bhí daoine uaisle le feiceáil anois go minic ar na bóithre, cuid acu óg is cuid acu aosta, ag cur Gaeilge ciotáí dothuigthe ar na Gaeil bhochta agus ag cur moille orthu agus iad ag dul faoin ngort. Bhí an Béarla gallda go líofa ó dhúchas ag na daoine uaisle ach ní chleachtaídís an teanga uasal sin I láthair nan Gael, ar eagla, dar loim, go bpiocfadh na Gaeil corrhfocal di suas mar dhíon ar dheacrachtaí an tsaoil. Sin mar tháinig an dream sin, dá ngairmtear “na Gaeilgorí” anois, go Corca Dhorcha den chéad uair. Bhíodar ag fánaíocht ar fud na dúiche le “neoit boc” bheaga dhubha go cionn I bhfad sular bhraith na daoine nach pílears a bhí iontu ach daoine uaisle ag iarraidh Gaeilge ár sean agus ár sinsear a fhoghlaim uainn. Le gach bliain a chuaigh thart d’éirigh an mhuintir seo níos líonmháire. Níorbh fhada go raibh an tír breac leo” (na gCopaleen 40-41).

⁵¹ “De bhrí gur cheap na daoine go raibh mírath ag baint leis an ngléas, bhí obair achrannach ag duine uasal an seanchas béaloidis a chruinniú uathu” (na gCopaleen 35).

⁵² “Níor thug sé iarracht ar bhéaloideas ár sean agus ár sinsear ó na daoine...” (na gCopaleen 35).

but that the best Gaelic of all is well-nigh unintelligible” (432-33).⁵³ He is praised for this recording; he is even awarded an academic degree in Berlin for what they claimed was Irish that was “so good, so poetic and so obscure” and that “there was no fear for Gaelic while the like was audible in Ireland” (433).⁵⁴ It turns out to be the O’Coonassas’ lost pig on the recording.

In another scene the Gaeligores have a *feis* (cultural festival) in Corkadoragha. After they collectively take Gaelic “honorary titles” (438),⁵⁵ several amongst them are chosen to serve as a high council for the affair. The President (“The Eager Cat”) delivers a speech in which, as Cahalan suggests, “nearly every other word is ‘Gaelic’” (*Irish Novel* 244): “May I state that I am a Gael. I’m Gaelic from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet—Gaelic front and back, above and below. Likewise, you are all truly Gaelic. We are all Gaelic Gaels of Gaelic lineage” (O’Brien 440).⁵⁶ Inevitably, nearly everyone in the town dies throughout the festival’s proceedings, especially due to the non-stop dancing: “During the course of the feis many died whose likes will not be here again and, had the feis continued a week longer, no one would be alive now in Corkadoragha in all truth” (444).⁵⁷ However,

just beneath the hilarity lies Myles’s trenchant concern that for some interested in Irish language was not valued as a medium of ordinary communication for real

⁵³ “Cheap an duine uasal go raibh róheacracht sa Ghaeilge sin....Thuig sé go mbíonn an dea-Ghaeilge deacair agus an Ghaeilge is fear beagnach dothuigthe” (na gCopaleen 36).

⁵⁴ “Dúirt na saoithe úd nár chualadar riamh aon phíosa Gaeilge a bhí chomh fóna fileata do eolasi agus bhíodar cinnte nár bhaol don Ghaeilge an fhad a bhí a leithéid le clos i gcríocha Fáil” (na gCopaleen 37).

⁵⁵ My personal favorites are “The Bout of Dancing” (“An Bata Damhsa”), “Popeye the Sailor” (“Popshúil Mairnéalach), and “The Dative Case” (“An Caoileach Corcra”).

⁵⁶ “Ní miste dom a rá gur Gael mise. Táim Gaelach ó mo bhaithis go bonn mo chois—Gaelach thoir, thiar, thuas agus thíos. Tá sibhse go léir fíor-Ghaelach mar an gcéanna. Gaeil Ghaelacha de shliocht Ghaelach is ea an t-iomlán againn” (na gCopaleen 47).

⁵⁷ “Le linn na féile, cailleadh a lán daoine ‘ná beidh a leithéidí arís ann,’ agus dá leanfaí den fheis go cionn seachtaine eile is fíor nach mbeadh aoinne anois beo i gCorca Dhorcha” (na gCopaleen 52).

people but as an esoteric survival from the past, a symbol of cultural ethos no longer relevant to the society supposedly committed to its revival, and, perhaps worse, a source of academic status and/or financial gain. (O’Leary, *Irish Interior* 462)

Herein lies one of the most significant critiques in na gCopaleen’s work: the economic disparity between those well-off people who visit the Gaeltacht to get in touch with their roots, and the poor peasants who actually live there. Inevitably, being “truly” Irish means that one must live in abject poverty: “It has always been said that accuracy of Gaelic (as well as holiness of spirit) grew in proportion to the lack of worldly goods and since we had the choicest poverty and calamity, we did not understand why the scholars were interested in any half-awkward, perverse Gaelic which was audible in other parts” (O’Brien 436).⁵⁸ Sitric O’Sanassa, who “possessed the very best poverty, hunger, and distress” is praised by the “gentlemen from Dublin . . . for his Gaelic poverty and stated they never saw anyone who appeared so truly Gaelic” (O’Brien 463).⁵⁹ Sitric himself becomes reified and for the Gaeligores he is an essential part of the romanticized landscape, and as such he must conform to their romanticized view of the peasant. Because of this, “One of the gentlemen broke a little bottle of water which Sitric had, because, said he, it spoiled the effect” (O’Brien, *Collected Novels* 463).⁶⁰ Sitric’s poverty is what makes him an object of idealization for these Gaeligores, but, ironically, the money the

⁵⁸ “Bhí sé ráite riamh go mbínn cruinneas Gaeilge (maraon le naofacht anama) ag daoine de réir mar bhíd gan aon mhaoin shaolta agus ó tharla scoth an bhochtanaís agus na hanacra againne, níor thuigeamar cad chuige go raibh na scoláirí ag tabhairt aired ar aon cham-Gaeilge bhreac-chiotach a bhí le clois i gcríchaibh eile” (na gCopaleen 41).

⁵⁹ “Bhí scoth an bhochtanaís, an ocráis agus na hanacra aige freisin. . . . Daoine uaisle a tháinig i mótaras as Baile Átha Cliath ag breathnú na mbochtán, mholadar go hard é as ucht a bhochtanaís Ghaelaigh agus dúradar nach bhfacadar riamh aoinne a bhí chomh boacht ná chomh fíor-Ghaelach” (na gCopaleen 77).

⁶⁰ “Buidéal beag uisce a bhí ag ó Sánasa uair, bhris duine de na daoine uaisle é de bhrí gur ‘*spile sé an effect*’” (na gCopaleen 77; emphasis in original).

Gaeligores bring to Corkadoragha helps to end the poverty of the village, thus making them less “Gaelic.”⁶¹ To be truly Gaelic is to be poor and to suffer.

This poverty—and the accompanying suffering—in large part defines “the Gael.” In fact, at one point the main character actually asks if “the Gaels are people?” To which, his grandfather replies, “They’ve that reputation anyway, little noble, said he, but no confirmation of it has ever been received. We’re not horses nor hens; seals nor ghosts; and, in spite of all that, it’s unbelievable that we’re humans” (O’Brien 472).⁶² Throughout the novella there is very little that separates humans from animals: they live together, sleep in the same buildings, and are dependent upon one another. However, what is more significant is the fact that more than once, the pigs are mistaken for Gaels. One was the previously mentioned scene where the Gaeligore records the pig speaking “Irish”; the other is when an English inspector comes to see how many children in the house can speak English. The family concocts a plan to dress up some of the pigs as children, since the government will “pay the likes of us two pounds a skull for every child of ours that speaks English instead of this thieving Gaelic” (O’Brien 427).⁶³ The inspector was an old, sickly man who “cared not a whit for the Gaels . . . and never had any desire to go into the cabins where they lived” (428).⁶⁴ He is disgusted by the overwhelming smell coming from the family’s cottage filled with animals. His poor eyesight also allows them to get away with their

⁶¹ “And that for this reason, our Gaelic has declined” (O’Brien, *Collected Novels* 436): “Agus ar an ábhar sin go bhfuil meat hag teach ar ár nGaeilge” (na gCopaleen 42).

⁶² “An bhfuilir cinnte,” arsa mise, gur daoine Gaeil?”

“Tá an t-ainm sin amuigh orthu, a uaislín,” ar seisean, “ach ní fritheadh deimhniú riamh air. Ní capaill ná cearca sinn, ní róna ná taibhsí, agus ar a shon sin is inchreidte gur daoine sinn; ach níl sa mhéid sin ach tuairim” (na gCopaleen 90).

⁶³ “Táther ag brath ar dháphunt sa bhliain a dhíol lenár leithéidíne i leith gach cloigeann clainne again a labhraíonn an Sacs-Bhéarla de ghnáth in ionad na Gaeilge bradaí seo” (na gCopaleen 28).

⁶⁴ “Ní raibh aon mheas ar Ghaelaibh aige . . . agus ní raibh fonn air riamh dul isteach sna botháin a raibh cónaí orthu iontu” (na gCopaleen 30).

ruse. He is contented to hear Bonaparte say his name is “Jams O’Donnell,” the name that all Irishmen are given once they attend English school (O’Brien 425).

On one level there is undeniably great deal of humor here, as na gCopaleen absurdly inflates the idea that the Gaels are closer to animals in the eyes of both the English and the Gaeligores; however, there is the larger issue that the reification of human beings leads to a social and economic product that is easily exploited for varying purposes by the English and Anglophone Irish. O’Leary posits that

Myles’s characters are not people; they are Gaels. Accordingly, they do what Gaels do—or rather are expected to do—which is suffer in abject and malodorous poverty in remote, dreary and sodden places, all to assuage the guilt of their more comfortable countrymen by preserving a linguistic and (debased) cultural legacy that the ancestors of those countrymen were for quite logical reasons eager to renounce. (*Irish Interior* 460)

Again, those in the Gaeltacht have been reified in the Marxist conception of the term. They are no longer people, but Gaels, a stand-in for the past, “folk-park interpreters in their own homes, their beliefs, customs, and behaviour scripted for them by those who saw their value as primarily symbolic and inspirational” (462). When considering that those writing in Anglophone Ireland often idealized and romanticized the Gaeltacht in large part for its connection to the past, can it be a surprise that both Ó Cadhain and na gCopaleen depict those living in Irish-speaking areas as dead (or living dead), stuck in the endless routines scripted for them by others: “if the movement insisted that the Gaeltacht was to be seen as a linguistic, social, and cultural morgue, he⁶⁵ would, like Ó Cadhain, fill his book with corpses” (459). It is no coincidence that like na gCopaleen, Ó Cadhain “could not resist a little malice of his own directed at the folklore establishment. We

⁶⁵ “He” is Myles na gCopaleen / Brian Ó Nualláin.

learn that the downed airman who is learning Irish in the graveyard can now fulfill what Ó Cadhain saw as the dream of every necrophilic folklore collector by following his informants into the afterlife” (O’Leary, *Irish Interior* 421).

Here, O’Leary refers to the unnamed French pilot shot down over the Gaeltacht in County Galway, who, although he speaks his native language through much of *Cré na Cille*, is able to learn Irish. In fact, at one point it is remarked that he is “a real Irishman . . . He’s already writing a thesis on the dental consonants of the Half Guinea’s dialect” (*Dirty Dust* 197). However, in an uproariously funny bit of satire, the others in the graveyard judge the Irish he has learned from the dead as not meeting the criteria to be qualified for such a thesis: “The Institute has delivered the judgment that he has learned too much Irish of a kind which has not been dead long enough according to the appropriate approved schedule, and there is a suspicion that some of it is ‘Revival Irish,’ they are of the opinion that he must needs unlearn every single syllable of it before he shall be qualified to pursue that study” (197). Much like na gCopaleen’s Gaeligores who satire the Revival period’s obsession with the Irish folklore that emerges from the oral tradition, “Frenchie . . . wants to collect every piss and piddle of folklore that he can, and save it so that every new generation of Gaelic corpses will know in what kind of republic former generations of Gaelic corpses lived” (197). He even believes that “it would be easy to make a Folklore Museum of the Cemetery, and that there’d be no problem getting a grant” (197). Ó Cadhain suggests that the impulse that drives na gCopaleen’s Gaeligores continues on even to the grave.

In one of the most telling scenes in *An Béal Bocht*, O’Coonassa actually comes into some money through a thoroughly folk-epic journey in the mountains in search of the lost treasure of

Maeldoon O'Poenassa, reminiscent of some of the ancient hero tales.⁶⁶ After successfully recovering O'Poenassa's gold from the summit of the Hunger-stack, he attempts to enter into "modern" society by heading to "Galway or Caherciveen or some other place such as these" (O'Brien 483)⁶⁷ to purchase a pair of boots. He hides his modern footwear from the others in Corkadoragha on his return.⁶⁸ He is later arrested and tried for the murder of a man Galway and the theft of his gold, and because he purchases the boots with the gold he got from the mountaintop, he is a logical suspect in the eyes of the law. Here, na gCopaleen brings the dominant themes of exploitation by the English and the Anglophone Irish together in the end, and O'Coonassa can only fail when attempting to break his proscribed role of the poor peasant in the living museum of the Gaeltacht, and as a result, he must be punished. He is arrested and tried without fully understanding what is occurring to him. Because he lacks a sufficient understanding of English—and is addressed only in English—he is unaware of what is happening: "I have a faint memory of being in a noble palace; being a while with a great crowd of peelers who spoke to me and to one another in English; being yet another while in prison. I never understood a single item of all that happened around me nor one word of the conversation nor my interrogation" (O'Brien 487).⁶⁹ He is sentenced to 29 years in jail for a crime he did not commit. The Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) here are quite clear: the police and courts working in unison to maintain the dominant hegemonic state. This theme runs throughout the

⁶⁶ As the note at the end of *An Béal Bocht* suggests, na gCopaleen took the name Maeldoon from the Old Irish tale *Immram Maíle Dúin* (*The Voyage of Maeldoon*) (495).

⁶⁷ "Gaillimh nó Cathair Saidhbhín, nó áit éigineile mar sin" (na gCopaleen 106).

⁶⁸ This leads to a very funny moment. As most were not used to what a footprint would look like, the others in Corkadoragha assume that Bonaparte's footprints are actually those of the mythical Sea-cat, a drawing of which can be found on page 455 and looks remarkably like the map of Ireland on its side!

⁶⁹ "Tá lagchuidhne agam a bheith istigh i bpálás uasal, seal in éineacht le slua mór pílears a bhí ag caint liomsa agus le chéile i mBéarla, seal I gcarcair. Níor thuigeas faic dá raibh ar sful mórthimpeall orm, ná briathar den chaint agus den cheistiúchán a cuireadh orm" (na gCopaleen 111).

satire: One must fall in line, have minor financial gains through exploitation (capitalizing off the Gaeligores' feis, speaking English in front of the census taker, etc.), but be sure to maintain a general lifestyle that can only be described as backwards. By attempting to break through to modern society and its desire for material possessions and comforts, O'Coonassa has disrupted his place as an object of study and exploitation.

Instead of using Irish myth, legend, and folklore to glorify a romanticized, fictitious Irish past, or subtly criticizing the restrictive nature of the Free State government under de Valera, those writing in Irish were more focused on the vitality of their own fading culture, real and unadorned, unconcerned with the morality of the bourgeoisie a few hundred miles away in Dublin. In fact, the greatest uses of myth and legend in the works of those writing in Irish during the mid-twentieth century tend to fall into two categories: those highlighting the destruction of Gaelic culture under imperialism and modernity, and those critiquing people who sought to plunder the Gaeltacht for its culture and language. For Ó Cadhain, Ó Direáin, and Ó Nualláin (na gCopaleen), the target of their critiques was not only the English and the imperial practices that led to the widespread destruction of the indigenous culture, language and economic structure, but also the Revivalists who wanted to preserve the Gaeltacht as a living museum, unconcerned with the suffering of the people actually living there. For a writer such as Ó Cadhain—beneath his scathing critique of anyone who wished to view the Gaeltacht as merely a depository of the past, existing only to be exploited by those in the Anglophone areas of Ireland—the vitality of the Gaeltacht is tied to the past, but is very much a living, breathing, real culture. Although each writer longs to preserve the traditions of the past and to capture the oral traditions so central to the Irish language, each one sees the future differently.

Irish never became the language that Pearse wanted it to be, or the language Fianna Fáil attempted to revive through its education policies; it never overthrew English, and more than likely never will. Even Pearse understood to a certain extent that he “could not graft a dying language to an English culture” (Edwards 203). As many postcolonial situations have proven, indigenous populations may remove the imperial presence from power, but the cultural institutions left are much more difficult to extricate one from. However, the Irish Gaelic tradition has produced and continues to produce writers who carry the torch from these three writers. Their legacy continues within the communities they feared would not outlast their lives. However, these writers do not have the same economic concerns; nor is there the great fear that Irish will die out entirely and thus their focus on myth and legend will be different.

What emerges from the time period between the 1919-20 Irish War for Independence and the middle of the twentieth century (covered here between this and the previous chapter) is a shifting society attempting to define itself. What also emerge are significant differences between those living in and around the Pale and those living the Gaeltacht. As those in Dublin were fighting a restrictive and conservative face of the government that solidified under de Valera, those in the Gaeltacht were fighting for their livelihood. As a result the ideological concerns for those writing in Irish and in English were different. Regardless, satire regains an important place in Irish literature during this time period, more so for those Irish writers writing in English as was indicated in the previous chapter, but *An Béal Bocht* and *Cré na Cille* were impressively satirical in Irish as well. What should not come as a surprise is that the ideologies espoused in the satires written in English and Irish differ so wildly. One was writing against the conservative shift in hegemony in Dublin, whereas the other was pointing to the hypocrisies of those in Dublin who looked to the west as a museum to enhance their own middle-class lives.

CHAPTER 6

“WE HUG OUR LITTLE DESTINIES AGAIN”:

MYTH AND IDEOLOGY IN THE LITERATURE OF THE TROUBLES

This chapter will cover a time period largely dominated by the Troubles in Northern Ireland, primarily from 1969 through the end of the twentieth century after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. I can only hope to briefly analyze the complexities of the historical and political situation in Northern Ireland; the main focus of this chapter will be on how Irish writers and the film *The Crying Game* respond to the sectarian violence and human rights issues in Northern Ireland. The chapter will concentrate a good deal on the poetry of the period, especially Seamus Heaney's, Eavan Boland's, and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's, as each poet wrestles differently with the legacy of sectarian violence.

On July 12, 1690, Protestant William of Orange's army defeated its Catholic Jacobite counterpart at the Boyne, a decisive battle that effectively ended James's campaign to reclaim the throne for the Stuart dynasty. It also effectively ended the hopes of a Catholic monarchy in England, what many in Ireland considered a necessary first step in the repeal the Cromwellian settlements of 1652 and 1662. The Boyne was an historic failure and it would lead to the strengthening of the Penal Codes in Ireland, further disenfranchising the Irish Catholics, and completing England's hold on the country that would last for another 230 contentious years.

On July 12, 1969, riots broke out in Belfast and Derry during the annual Orange Order parade celebrating the victory at the Boyne.⁷⁰ A month later full-scale riots erupted throughout

⁷⁰ This was not the first time this occurred: “In 1935, for instance, a procession of Orangemen were harassed and attacked by Catholics and became the starting point of extremely serious riots in Belfast. Their seriousness can be judged by the fact that troops had to be sent in to quell the disorders and, even more, that eleven people were killed” (Manhattan 98).

Northern Ireland, especially in Belfast and Derry. The riots reached a fever pitch on August 12 and 13, 1969, in the Bogside area of Derry: “The Apprentice Boys of Derry hold their annual celebration of the relief of (Protestant) Derry from the forces of (Catholic) James II every 12 August. In 1969 the city was very tense when the Government refused to call off the march. The inevitable riot ensued and the bitter feud between residents and police broke out once again” (Arthur 110). And thus began the contemporary Troubles in the North.

One problem when looking at myth and legend as it is used in Northern Ireland during the period of The Troubles is that both sides use it as propaganda to support what Benedict Anderson would suggest as imagined communities. Cúchulainn can be found in both pro-loyalist/unionist Protestant and pro-nationalist/republican Catholic murals—some found on the ironically named Peace Walls—in Belfast. In the Shankill section of Belfast, a predominantly loyalist section of the city, a mural of Cúchulainn stands with a sword raised, under the Northern Irish flag with the Red Hand of Ulster. A scroll unfurls on the right hand side of the mural with the words “Here We Stand, Here We Remain,” which tries to connect Cúchulainn as an Ulsterman to the current residents as “indigenous Ulster people,” standing against “those who have caused harm to our past and tried to castrate our culture, our identity and our place on this island” (“Mythology Figure of Cuchulainn, Shankill Rd Murals, West Belfast”).



Fig. 1. Mythology Figure of Cuchulainn, Shankill Rd Mural, West Belfast

In the Ballymurphy section of the city, the image of a dying Cúchulainn taken from Oliver Sheppard's statue that stands in the front of the General Post Office in Dublin is surrounded by smaller portraits of IRA members who had died or been killed in the early 1970s. At the bottom of the mural is the word Irish Gaelic word "Saoirse"—freedom (Leach).

It is clear that the use of Cúchulainn in the iconography of Northern Ireland during the times of The Troubles is complex. Both sides see the Hound of Ulster as being emblematic of their vision of Northern Ireland. He is representative of the credos of both the I. R. A. and U. V. F. The problem with this is that it perpetuates the violence done by both paramilitary groups in the name of religion and country—more imagined communities. It also illustrates the problematic use of the myth and legend in the iconography and literary works surrounding the

period of the Easter Rising of 1916. This is the legacy of those such as Pearse who saw Cúchulainn as a representative of the necessity of blood sacrifice for the good of Mother Ireland.



Fig. 2. Cúchulainn Freedom Mural, Lenadoon Avenue, BallyMurphy

The fact that both loyalists and republicans continue to look to the past to define the present should not be a surprise to anyone remotely familiar with Irish history and its relationship to England and the United Kingdom. What needs greater focus when analyzing the period of the Troubles is how easy it is to distort history for the sake of a political narrative that requires the belief that violence is a necessary means to an end. This distortion is fundamental to both sides. The loyalists attempt to connect their contemporary political situation in Northern Ireland to ancient Ulster as a distinct provincial unit still at war with their ancient neighbors to the south. The republicans, on the other hand, present a narrative that links Celtic ancestors to a land and soil that was stolen from them by their neighbors to the east. This invasion disrupted

the essential connection to their land, to their language, and to their people. Both, however, miscast ahistorical inaccuracies as truth worth killing and dying for.

Not surprisingly, the burgeoning group of Irish poets emerging after the 1960s—many of whom were from the North—responded to The Troubles in their poetry. Some of Ireland’s most famous contemporary poets such as Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon, and Eavan Boland had to wrestle with the violence happening around them. Each chose to write their poetry as English, the problematic linguistic terrain in the context of a much divided area and generation. I feel it also necessary to see how a writer writing in Irish such as Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, who, although not from Northern Ireland, deals with similar issues, to see where she overlaps and diverges in her concerns from those writing in English during a similar time period.

Seamus Heaney (d. 2013) was born in County Derry in 1939, seventeen years after the formation of the Free State and two years after the passage of the 1937 Constitution under Éamon de Valera. Heaney had a distinct understanding of the importance of place, both in his life and in his poetry. In his essay “The Sense of Place” he points to the significance of the land and meaningful locations of the island to the Irish, going back to the ancient Celts and *dinnseanchas*, the “poems and tales which relate the original meanings of place names and constitute a form of mythological etymology” (*Preoccupations* 131). The essay goes on to focus on how “different senses of Ireland, of Northern Ireland . . . have affected poets” (131). There is perhaps no contemporary Irish poet quite so influenced by a sense of place than Heaney. As he suggests about a poet in general, “One half of one’s sensibility is in a cast of mind that comes from belonging to a place, an ancestry, a history, a culture, whatever one wants to call it” (34). Growing up in the dominantly-Catholic Derry during the period of history that saw the lengthening of distance between the loyalists and republicans, he personally witnessed the

growing dissatisfaction in the North. The time of his childhood saw the passing of the Republic of Ireland Act of 1948, which, as the name suggests, established the country as a republic and one year later the passage of the Ireland Act of 1949, which acknowledged the republic but also established that the counties in Northern Ireland could join the counties to the south only with a vote of ratification by the majority of the citizens in Northern Ireland and its parliament. The Republic of Ireland was free of English entanglement, but for those like Heaney's family in the North, the Troubles were just beginning.

Heaney's understanding of place went beyond just the names of places and the political and ideological weight of what one calls home.

These voices pull in two directions, back through the political and cultural traumas of Ireland, and out towards the urgencies and experiences of a world beyond it . . . I have maintained a notion of myself as Irish in a province that insists that it is British. Lately I realized that these complex pieties and dilemmas were implicit in the very terrain where I was born. (35)

Like many Irish people, Heaney saw the importance of the land itself. He goes beneath, as he suggests in his signature poem, in his first collection of poems, "Digging." The poem connects the generations through the land and the act of digging. The majority of the poem is focused on how his father and grandfather could work the ground. However, for the speaker, digging through the ground "for the good turf" was to be done with a pen, as he had "no spade to follow men like them" (*Death of a Naturalist* 4); instead, he will be follow his predecessors by using his pen like a spade and "dig with it." It is impossible not to see the beginnings of themes that Heaney would pursue throughout his career: the symbol of the land (especially the bog), the connections of countless generations, the loss of the way of life from the previous generations,

the violence that would besiege his nation, and the role of the poet to capture all of it. For many Irish artists—and postcolonial artists in general—there arises the need to emphasize the possession (and dispossession) of the land and the necessity to see the land as representative of a continuity from the past through to the present. The land itself is imbued with a particular power to store the memory and lifeblood of the indigenous population. This conception, as it is used in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is that it perpetuates the myth of nationalism⁷¹ as inventing the nation and tying it to particular land with a particular language, culture and people, and idealizing each (land, culture, language, people) in turn. Despite the fact that this idealization can be inspiring to a colonized people, in the case of Ireland, it can also lead to the justification of violence as it has in Northern Ireland. David Lloyd posits that Heaney's attempts to connect the poet through a long historical continuity of place, culture and language result in an idealized representation, similar to the idealization one can find in the works of the cultural nationalism before the Easter Rising:

Place, identity and language mesh in Heaney, as in the tradition of cultural nationalism, since language is seen primarily as naming, and because naming preforms a cultural reterritorialization by replacing the contingent continuities of an historical community with an ideal register of continuity in which the name (of place or of object) operates symbolically as the commonplace communicating between actual and ideal continua. (*Anomalous States* 24)

This idealized continuum is the same one found from the seventeenth century on in Ireland, as the imagined creation of a nation before the Norman-Saxon invasion is set up against the colonial state as a means to inspire revolution. It is the same conception of Ireland found in

⁷¹ Here, I am using the idea of nationalism as Benedict Anderson develops it throughout his *Invented Communities*, and as is discussed earlier in my Chapter 1. It is fair to refer back to Jonathan Githens-Mazer's term *ethnie* as I noted in Chapter 1 when referring to Ireland before the formation of the Republic.

Robert Emmet, in Wolfe Tone, in Patrick Pearse and in many others who sought to use it to forward their own aims.

It is essential to trace how Heaney develops this metaphor of continuity through the land, as he would become particularly invested in the metaphor the bog provided him, a connection he would emphasize in the name of his farm, Mossbawn, “the planter’s house on the bog” (*Preoccupations* 35).⁷² Heaney sought a metaphor for his poetry that would make “it possible to encompass the perspectives of a humane reason and the religious intensity of the violence its deplorable authenticity and complexity” (*Preoccupations* 56-57). He found in Peter Glob’s *The Bog People* an appropriate metaphor for the violence he saw in modern times: the bog, marshy wetlands intricately tied to Irish everyday life, providing peat used for fuel. For Heaney, the bog could capture and symbolize something essential about the modern violence in the North that masqueraded as truth but in reality emanated “from the bankrupt psychology and mythologies implicit in the terms Irish Catholic and Ulster Protestant” (57). The bog’s ability to keep and preserve what is thrown into it was essential for Heaney. From Glob, who determined that the bodies preserved in the bogs were often sacrificial victims, he saw the bog as representative of a collective unconscious that stores the violent drives lurking deep within. Heaney’s analysis of the political situation in Northern Ireland and the terrorists’ attachment to land as history as part of a long history:

To some extent this enmity can be viewed as a struggle between the cults and devotees of a god and a goddess. There is an indigenous territorial numen, a tutelary of the whole island, call her Mother Ireland, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, the poor old woman, the Shan Van Vocht; and her sovereignty has been temporarily

⁷² He also refers to Mossbawn in his poem “Balderg.” In it he calls Mossbawn a “bogland name” (*North* 5). It also illustrates his desire to include the word *bawn* in his translation of *Beowulf*, allowing for a subtle critique of England’s colonial practices in its earliest epic.

usurped or infringed by a new male cult whose founding fathers were Cromwell, William of Orange and Edward Carson, and whose godhead is incarnate rex or caesar resident in a palace in London. What we have is the tail-end of a struggle in a province between a territorial piety and imperial power. (*Preoccupations* 57)

Heaney made the connection between those recovered bodies tossed into the bog, such as the Tollund Man, and the sacrificial victims of the ritualized violence in Ireland throughout the centuries. Heaney writes that the bog bodies “were ritual sacrifices to the Mother Goddess, the goddess of the ground who needed new bridegrooms each winter to bed with her in her sacred place, the bog” (57); in Heaney’s estimation, the motivations of people who were willing to sacrifice another for the Mother Goddess were not dissimilar from the motivations of those devotees of Mother Ireland. “Taken in relation to the tradition of Irish political martyrdom for the cause whose icon is Kathleen Ni Houlihan, this is more than a barbarous rite: it is an archetypal pattern” (57). This idea of that the violence of ancient pre-Judeo-Christian European groups and the violence of twentieth-century sectarian violence in Northern Ireland are both connected through this archetypal pattern is key to Heaney’s poetry—especially in his 1975 collection *North*—as he saw his poetry as “an attempt to rhyme the contemporary with the archaic” (Heaney, “Art of Poetry”). Heaney’s goal, according to Declan Kiberd, was to “translate the violence of the past into the culture of the future” (*Inventing Ireland* 591).

The bog and the land were the central images to many of the poems from *North*. He consistently reiterates the connection between the violence of the past, violence that many in modern times would consider inhumane, and the violence that was prevalent throughout Belfast and Northern Ireland starting in 1969. In “Kinship” he writes of the bog as containing “cooped secrets / of process and ritual” (*North* 33). It is the “Insatiable bride” (34) and “Our mother

ground . . . sour with the blood / of her faithful” and that within her one can “Read the inhumed faces / of casualty and victim” (*North* 38). He addresses Tacitus, the great historian of the Roman Empire, to

report us fairly,
 how we slaughter
 for the common good
 and shave the heads
 of the notorious,
 how the goddess swallows
 our love and terror. (*North* 38-9)

From this final section of the poem, one can see the symbolic connection between the Germanic groups Tacitus would have written about in *Germania* and the sectarian groups that perpetuated the violence in Northern Ireland.

Heaney’s first attempt at uniting the bog and the sacrificial victim comes in “The Tollund Man,” from 1972’s *Wintering Out*. Heaney suggests that the poem

is a prayer that the bodies of people killed in various actions and atrocities in modern Ireland, in the teens and twenties of the century as well as in the more recent past, a prayer that something would come of them, some kind of new peace or resolution. In the understanding of his Iron Age contemporaries, the sacrificed body of Tollund Man germinated into spring, so the poem wants a similar flowering to come from the violence in the present. Of course it recognizes that this probably will not happen, but the middle section of the poem is still a prayer that it should. (“Art of Poetry”)

Heaney hopes that peace will flower from the sacrificed bodies of the conflict in the North, something he acknowledges “probably won’t happen” (“Art of Poetry”). Yet at the same time, he builds on the iconography of the martyred corpse—like Pearse’s Fenian dead—from which there can be a flowering in the future . . . with the provision that there be some sort of unity moving forward. He says the poem is “a prayer,” but a prayer for whom specifically? The bog poems seem to never address the actual lives and the actual violence and the actual deaths that occur in Northern Ireland, but instead add them to those collectively lost to the archetypal violence.

Though he had focused on the bog (“Bogland”) and bog-preserved bodies (“The Tollund Man”)⁷³ in earlier collections, at the heart of *North* is the series of “bog poems” inspired by the photographs of the bodies pulled from the bogs captured by Glob: “Bog Queen,” “The Grauballe Man,” “Punishment,” and “Strange Fruit.” All of these poems focus on the “Murdered, forgotten, nameless” (*North* 32) bodies pulled from bogs far from Ireland, “each hooded victim / slashed and dumped” (29), but each works to develop the metaphor of the bog as a repository of the past and the archetype of the ritualistic violence that could be found in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland throughout the twentieth century. However, as Declan Kiberd suggests, “The bog-myth has the effect of distancing contemporary violence” (*Inventing Ireland* 594). In his desire to connect the violence in Northern Ireland to violence throughout history the effect is that the bog poems often shift the focus from the atrocities of the paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland to the violence perpetrated against the bodies thrown into the bogs.

Of the bog poems from *North*, the poem most explicitly tied to Ireland has to be “Punishment.” In it, Heaney focuses on the body called “Windeby I,” as he describes the ritual

⁷³ “The Tollund Man” is Heaney’s first attempt at uniting his metaphor of the bog with one of the bodies discussed in Glob’s *The Bog People*. In it he connects the ancient sacrifice with the violence found closer to home: “Out there in Jutland / In the old man-killing parishes / I will feel lost, / Unhappy and at home” (*Open Ground* 63).

execution of a young woman,⁷⁴ drowned in the bog after being tied to “the weighing stone” (*North* 30). He calls her “my poor scapegoat” and suggests that he would have “cast the stones of silence” (31) had he been present at her execution. He confesses this because he has “stood dumb / when your betraying sisters, / cauled in tar, / wept by the railings” (31). Here, Heaney ties the punishment doled out to this “Little adulteress” (30) to the punishment given to women who consorted with British soldiers and constabulary: “It’s a poem about standing by as the IRA tar and feather these young women in Ulster” (“Art of Poetry”). Heaney goes on in the interview to talk about the genesis of “Punishment”:

But it's also about standing by as the British torture people in barracks and interrogation centers in Belfast. About standing between those two forms of affront. So there's that element of self-accusation, which makes the poem personal in a fairly acute way. Its concerns are immediate and contemporary, but for some reason I couldn't bring army barracks or police barracks or Bogside street life into the language and topography of the poem. I found it more convincing to write about the bodies in the bog and the vision of Iron Age punishment. Pressure seemed to drain away from the writing if I shifted my focus from those images.

Heaney acknowledges “the element of self-accusation,” which is one of the strongest features of the poem, and one that does approach the issue of guilt that many who witnessed the violence during the Troubles must have felt, of somehow being implicitly guilty through their inability to do anything to stop it. Declan Kiberd points to the fact that “Heaney uses the word ‘connive’ with the phrase ‘civilized outrage’ to indicate his sense that there are no easy solutions to the

⁷⁴ It is ironic that DNA evidence suggests that Windeby I was actually an extremely malnourished young man, but this fact does not diminish the power of Heaney’s analogy here.

poetic, as well as the political, problems posed” (*Inventing Ireland* 594). This is apt for much of Heaney’s work in *North* that focuses on the Troubles. However, there is something to be said for the fact that in moving away from the images of actual violence in Derry and Belfast, images that may not be immediately clear to readers, he unintentionally obfuscates what actually happened to those tortured by both the Provisional IRA and the constabulary and armed forces present in Belfast. In the quoted passage above, Heaney admits that he found it easier to write about the distant past than to address the atrocities of the present directly. As a result, his tacit silence in regard to this violence *is* exactly what emerges from the poem.

In many ways, however, my critique here and other criticism of Heaney for not being more direct, more involved, and more explicit are unfair. He is a victim of his own fame and the weight of being the most significant Irish poet who lived during the Troubles. Heaney could not please everyone. It was as if others sought Heaney to speak for all Irish men and women, in both Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, just because of who he was and where he came from. It is unfair to assume that his experiences as a child in Castledawson and Bellaghy and his early adulthood in Belfast granted him the ability to translate the violence and the experiences of the many directly affected by that violence to the rest of the world; he won the Nobel Prize for literature, not peace. Many attempting a Marxist reading of Heaney’s poetry, such as Seamus Deane, David Lloyd and Joe Cleary, largely criticize Heaney’s inability to escape from bourgeois ideology. For example, Cleary calls Heaney the “most middle brow” of any of the Irishmen who won the Nobel Prize and that he is “the most stylistically conventional, the least formally innovative, the least at odds with the dominant political or intellectual values of the moment” (103).

Calling Heaney the “most middle brow” of the Irish Nobel Laureates—who included also W. B. Yeats (1923), George Bernard Shaw (1925), and Samuel Beckett (1969)—largely ignores the historical context of each winner. Shaw, Yeats, and Beckett wrote during the height of modernism, when literature was considered “highbrow,” and to be fair, the failure of Irish writers who write in a modernist vein after the 1950s is the focus of that part of Cleary’s chapter “Capital and Culture in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Changing Configurations,” from which I have quoted his views on Heaney. The assertion that Heaney is the least formally inventive of the three is debatable—I would suggest that title go to Shaw—and even if one were to agree with that claim, it should not be seen as a deficit in his abilities; Yeats and Beckett each absolutely changed his particular medium through their stylistic innovations. Nearly every recent winner of the Nobel Prize after Heaney would also fall victim to Cleary’s criticism of being less innovative. Outside of Shaw’s socialism, neither Yeats nor Beckett was particularly concerned with the representation of the working classes. And Yeats swings so far right that he flirts with fascism. I do not mean to suggest that one cannot criticize the more problematic issues in Heaney’s work, just that some of these criticisms themselves seem to be a reaction in part to Heaney’s success with multiple audiences and what literary works one considers to be more aesthetically important. Can one claim that Heaney is essentially perpetuating the dominant hegemony of his society? How does he represent the realities of the Troubles in Northern Ireland as they affect the lives of its citizens and the citizens of the Republic of Ireland? These, of course, are loaded questions that can be answered differently depending on perspective. Inevitably, however, it is necessary to place Heaney within the larger context of this historical time period and the responses to it found in Irish art, especially its literature. Only then can one effectively parse the ideologies present.

Although critics such as Joe Cleary have suggested that he idealizes and aestheticizes violence, thus perpetuating the myth of sacrificial violence, does he do so more than other Derry and Belfast writers of his day and age? Or is this critique levied upon Heaney because he was popular to a larger mass audience? For David Lloyd, Heaney's bourgeois ideology and nationalist sympathies are some of the most troubling aspects of Heaney's work:

The writer, like the analogous figure of the martyr, attains "saturation" with meaning, and hence representativeness, for nationalism by partaking of that which he represents, the spirit of the nation. Both represent the ideal resolution of the problem faced by the ideologists of the bourgeois nation state which comes into existence by depositing "arbitrary" power: how, that is, "to reconcile individual liberty with association." (15)

In Lloyd's analysis, Heaney focuses on the poet as seer who works to connect the present situation to the past, illustrating a clear continuity, but in reality ignores the real lived historical experiences of either. Heaney fails in the eyes of Lloyd or Cleary in his inability to focus on the lives of real people and the continued exploitation and manipulation of the working classes through the perpetual myth of national identity, received primarily through a shared language and place: "The combined effect of political thinking on each side of the border has been to perpetuate not only nationalist ideologies, but their attraction along sectarian and, effectively, racial grounds" (Lloyd 19). Just as Pearse essentially ignored the larger issues of class presented by Connolly in his own romanticized vision of the ideology of 1916, the emphasis on sectarian and religious issues relegates the issues of the working classes on both sides of the political spectrum as secondary ones at best.

But is this entirely true? If one focuses solely on the bog poems, then, yes, as Lloyd posits, there are significant problems present; however, it would be difficult to accept that Heaney does not critique the means of exploitation in Northern Ireland, namely the police and military forces used on regular citizens in response to Provisional IRA violence, but what about the other poems in *North*? One may want Heaney to go beyond his claim that “whatever you say, you say nothing” (*North* 54), but this was the experience of many who lived in Belfast at the time. There are complexities to the historical situation that move far beyond the IRA Provos and UVF Loyalists. It is an easy narrative to get swept into, and that easy narrative of the Irish versus the English is one that Lloyd, Deane, Cleary, and many others seek to avoid. Heaney does address the actual lives of many in “Whatever You Say Say Nothing.” He begins the poem by thinking about “an encounter / With an English journalist in search of ‘views /on the Irish thing’” (52), criticizing terminology used by the media to cover the conflict before moving to “sanctioned, old, elaborate retorts” told “[e]xpertly civil-tongued with civil neighbors” (52). They dance around the subject with benign phrases such as “Oh, it’s disgraceful, surely I, agree. / Where’s it going to end?” which merely seek to avoid the unpleasantness of the violence that surrounds them. Of course, “Religion’s never mentioned here” (54). However, he criticizes the fact that beneath these niceties lie the deep-seated distrust within the community; here, names give one’s allegiance away:

That Norman, Ken and Sidney signalled Prod,
 And Seamus (call me Sean) was sure-fire Pape.
 Oh, land of password, handgrip, wink and nod,
 Of open minds as open as a trap. (55)

The violence is so commonplace that “Men die at hand” (53) and the explosions of bombs made of gelignite (explosive jelly) is as common a sound as a Celtic football supporter after a win saying “The Pope of Rome / ‘s a happy man this night” (53).⁷⁵ This poem effectively illustrates the influence that the conflict has on the day-to-day lives of those living through it. Here and elsewhere, despite Heaney’s nationalist sympathies, he goes out of his way to suggest that neither side is right.

What is more is that Heaney does specifically address real-life violence in *Field Work* (1979), despite that this collection is a self-conscious movement away from the socio-political issues of Northern Ireland, just as Heaney himself physically moved away from Belfast in 1972 and was in Dublin by the time *Field Work* was published. “The Strand at Lough Beg,” “A Postcard from North Antrim,” and “Casualty” all focus on individual lives cut short by the conflict.

The former was dedicated to his cousin Colum McCartney, who was killed randomly by sectarian violence; frequently innocent people died as a result of the conflict between the Provisional IRA and the UVF, leaving families to mourn and bury the dead. The story of how he died is unclear. Heaney knew that he was killed near the Fews in County Antrim. Heaney was a fan of the Middle Irish poem *Buile Shuibhne (The Madness of Sweeney)*,⁷⁶ so he cannot help but allude to the fact that the Fews was one of the areas where Sweeney spent his exile: “Where Sweeney fled before the bloodied heads, / Goat-beards and dogs’ eyes in a demon pack” (*Field Work* 9). He questions how his cousin’s death took place:

⁷⁵ Despite the fact that both teams play in Glasgow’s, the fans of Celtic (predominantly supported by Catholics) and the Rangers (Protestants) illustrate the depth of sectarian antagonism in Northern Ireland.

⁷⁶ The poem depicts a prince, Sweeney, who is angered by the proposed establishment of a Christian church on his lands. As a result, he ends up cursed by St. Ronan to be insane living in exile; he flies, bird-like, around the countryside. Heaney translated the poem as *Sweeney Astray* in 1983.

What blazed ahead of you? A faked road block?
 The red lamp swung, the sudden brakes and stalling
 Engine, voices, heads hooded and the cold-nosed gun?
 Or in your driving mirror, tailing headlights
 That pulled out suddenly and flagged you down
 Where you weren't known and far from what you knew. (9)

He then uses the natural elements to make a transition back to Lough Beg and hunters' guns being "fired behind the house" (9) and the lazy morning on the farm, tending to cattle. This natural scene and its depiction, something that would not be out of place in Heaney's first collection, *Death of a Naturalist*, is disrupted by the image of McCartney's body after he had been shot:

I turn because the sweeping of your feet
 Has stopped behind me, to find you on your knees
 With blood and roadside muck in your hair and eyes,
 Then kneel in front of you in brimming grass
 And gather up cold handfuls of the dew
 To wash you, cousin. I dab you with moss
 Fine as the drizzle out of a low cloud.
 I lift you under the arms and lay you flat.
 With rushes that shoot green again, I plait
 Green scapulars to wear on your shroud. (10)

Karl Miller, in an interview with Heaney, elucidates the connection between "The Strand at Lough Beg" and the Section VIII from Heaney's *Station Island* (1985), set at Lough Derg, a

pilgrimage site said to be where St. Patrick was shown the entrance to Purgatory. Throughout the poem, Heaney the pilgrim encounters the shades of the dead, and in Section VIII, one of the shades he talks to is his cousin, Colum McCartney, elegized in “The Strand at Lough Beg.” McCartney, “a bleeding, pale-faced boy, plastered in mud” (*Station Island* 82), chastises his cousin for not responding to his death appropriately. He says that Heaney was with other poets when he got the news of his death and that the other poets “showed more agitation at the news” (82). He criticizes the pilgrim for aestheticizing his death: “You saw that, and you wrote that—not the fact. / You confused evasion and artistic tact” (83). He blames “[t]he Protestant who shot me through the head,” but he also blames Heaney “for the way you whitewashed ugliness and drew / the lovely blinds of the *Purgatorio* / and saccharined my death with morning dew” (83).⁷⁷ In this section of the poem, Heaney addresses specifically the criticism that has been used against him frequently. He wrestles with the claim that he aestheticizes violence and does not confront it directly. In the interview with Miller, as he discusses Section VII where the shade of a shopkeeper friend of Heaney’s killed in the Troubles tells him about reaching out and squeezing his wife’s hand before heading out, only to be shot moments later (79). Heaney wonders aloud if “maybe what should be left is the blood on the road instead of the squeeze of the hand” (“All We Have to Go On”).

In “Postcard from North Antrim” he writes of Sean Armstrong, who was “the clown / Social worker of the town / Until your candid forehead stopped / A pointblank teatime bullet” (*Field Work* 11). And just as he does with the previous poem, he weaves the violence and randomness of their deaths with the memories of them that linger; in the case of Armstrong it is his rousing voice singing the rugby song “Oh, Sir Jasper (Don’t Touch Me!)” at the poet at a party he was hosting the night Heaney got together with his future wife, Maire (12). Louis

⁷⁷ In “The Strand at Lough Beg” Heaney’s epigram comes from the opening canto of Dante’s *Purgatorio*.

O'Neill is memorialized in "Casualty," although he is not named in the poem. O'Neill was killed in a bombing less than a week after Bloody Sunday in January 1972, where 26 people were shot dead during a Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association protest:

He was blown to bits
 Out drinking in a curfew
 Others obeyed, three nights
 After they shot dead
 The thirteen men in Derry.
 PARAS THIRTEEN, the walls said,
 BOGSIDE NIL. (14)

Here, the thirteen mentioned are those protestors killed; the PARAS are the British Parachute Regiment who killed them. Bogside is often depicted as the center of working-class Catholic families in Derry. The poem itself is focused on one of those working-class citizens who died; O'Neill was a small-time eel fisherman. The final stanza of the poem captures the funeral procession, describing "Those quiet walkers / And sideways talkers / Shoaling out of his lane" (15). In all three poems the focus of the poem is on actual—not mythologized—violence and its effects.

Again, I want to return to how other Irish and Northern Irish poets represent the Troubles at the same point in time that Heaney is writing, in order to address the concerns presented by Lloyd and Cleary in particular. There is no doubt that Heaney was influenced by his own position as a middle-class, Catholic citizen who was supportive of nationalist issues. But is his focus on a mythologized Ireland the same as it was for Pearse? Is his aestheticization of violence the same as that of a poet like Padraic Fiacc's, for example? Fiacc (b. 1924) may represent the

working classes and the violence during the Troubles more explicitly, but he certainly cannot write the way that Heaney could. Fiacca, who was born in Belfast but spent most of his formative years in New York City, often focuses on urban landscapes, putting his poetry at odds, both physically and stylistically, with Heaney's focus on lush natural settings. "Elegy for a 'Fenian Get'" is dedicated to a nine-year-old boy, Patrick Rooney, who died on 15 August 1969 after being shot by a member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary during gunplay with the Provisional IRA at Divis Flats in Belfast. Fiacca describes the boy's death: "the altar boy was shot dead / By some trigger-happy cowboy cop" (169). In "Credo Credo," he describes British soldiers:

Your soldiers who make for our holy
 Pictures, grinding the glass with your
 Rifle butts, Kicking and jumping on them
 With your hobnail boots, we
 Are a richer dark than the Military
 Machine could impose ever. (172)

In "The British Connection" he enumerates the various scrap metal and trash that could be used as weapons against the repressive forces of the police and the armed forces in Belfast:

And youths with real bows and arrows
 And coppers and marbles good as bullets
 And oldtime thrupenny bits and stones
 Screws, bolts, nuts (Belfast confetti)
 And kitchen knives, poker, Guinness tins
 And nail-bombs down by the Shore Road. (169)

There are qualities to Fiacc's work worth studying; for example, his unsettling focus on violence and working-class conditions forces the reader to confront them directly. I am not suggesting, however, that Fiacc and Heaney are of the same class of poets. My point in choosing Fiacc for a comparison is to highlight that although Fiacc is more concerned with working-class issues and depicts actual violence more realistically than Heaney does, it seems to me that Fiacc could be accused of perpetuating the ideology of sectarian violence more explicitly than Heaney does.

Looking at how other contemporaries of Heaney handle the Troubles yields additional evidence of the way that art deals with crisis and, in this case, responds to the typical narrative in the Irish/Northern Irish context. Many of these poets mourn the loss of traditions and the dead as Heaney does, and many of them share his nationalist sympathies. For many, Michael Hartnett's lines in "A Farewell to English"—a poem written to commemorate Hartnett's desire to write his future poetry in Irish—that "Poets with progress / make no peace or pact / the act of poetry / is a rebel act" (524) are fitting. But equally for many, Hartnett's "Haiku 86" from *Inchicore Haiku* also speaks to their reality: "All divided up / all taught to hate each other. / Are these my people?" (525).

It is hard not to hear sympathetic echoes of Heaney as one seeking to find the mythic in the everyday in John Montague (b. 1929), another poet who spent much of his childhood in New York, before returning to live with his aunts in Garvaghey, County Tyrone. Like Heaney, Montague was criticized because, as George Watson remarked, his "Catholic imagination . . . is too caught up in the nets of history and is addicted to the creation of racial myths and racial landscapes" (qtd. in Davis 258). Montague's poetry is full of imagery that laments the passing of language and traditions, not dissimilar to what one might find in the poetry of Máirtín Ó Direáin and the fiction of Máirtín Ó Cadhain; however, he wishes to demystify "the romantic myths of

the past. In setting out to reconcile local tradition with the international reach of modern poetry, Montague views Irish life through urban, secular, and cosmopolitan eyes” (Welch 371).

Montague’s poetry is also not dissimilar to Heaney’s in his ability to merge the personal and the national. In “A Grafted Tongue” Montague points to the English imperial school system’s ability to get the Gaelic Irish to forsake the Irish language for English: “To grow / a second tongue, as / harsh a humiliation / as twice to be born” (267). He mentions the “tally stick” (267), or *bata scoir*, a small bit of wood or turf on which a mark was made every time a child spoke Irish in the classroom, for which punishment was exacted at home. He effectively parallels those forced to learn English in the nineteenth century and the more contemporary Irish children attempting to learn Irish: “Decades later / that child’s grandchild’s / speech stumbles over lost / syllables of an old order” (276).

Montague also addresses how the loss of the Irish language is tied closely to the land itself in “A Lost Tradition,” which reads very much in the tradition of Ó Direáin: “The whole landscape a manuscript / We had lost the skill to read, / A part of our past disinherited” (266).

The final stanza reads:

Push southward to Kinsale!
Loudly the war-cry is swallowed
In swirls of black rain and fog
As Ulster’s pride, Elizabeth’s foeman
Founder in a Munster bog. (266)

He places the beginning of the end for the language at the Siege of Kinsale (at the end of 1601 through the beginning of 1602), which led to the Flight of the Earls, effectively ending the Old Irish order.

The old Irish way of life is the focus of Montague's "Like Dolmens round My Childhood"; he lists the names of older people who lived near Montague's aunts in County Tyrone, all of whom had died, taking their peculiarities with them:

Ancient Ireland, indeed! I was reared by her bedside,
 The rune and the chant, evil eye and averted head,
 Formorian fierceness of family and local feud.
 Gaunt figures of fear and friendliness,
 For years they trespassed on my dreams,
 Until once, in a standing circle of stones,
 I felt their shadow pass
 Into that dark permanence of ancient forms. (265)

But this poem lacks the elegiac tone one might expect from the passing of traditional way of life; in fact, they trespassed on his dreams, but in death they pass into "that dark permanence of ancient forms." Montague "sought, through local familial and national history, to rediscover [Tyrone] as a fertile rather than a narrow and barren ground" (Deane, *Short History* 238-39). There is something vibrant and living in the land.

It is this generation of poets, especially those familiar with both Irish and English, who depart from the pessimism of Ó Direáin. Even in death there is rebirth and renewal through memory, not blood sacrifice. Even though people and objects may die or disappear it does not mean that they are necessarily gone forever. Like Montague writing about the strange and curmudgeonly odd, old neighbors, Michael Hartnett (1941-99) covers similar terrain in "Death of an Irishwoman." He describes an "Ignorant" old woman who "thought the world was flat," leading a Spartan lifestyle of "monotonous food" in "a stone cold kitchen" (522). It is only after

her death that she becomes extraordinary in the speaker's mind: "I loved her from the day she died" (522). In death she becomes "a summer dance at the crossroads" or "a child's purse, full of useless things" (522). Death elevates her, and here Hartnett seems to have a bit of a laugh at the whole business of mourning the death of the traditional ways of life. This woman led that lifestyle because she chose to, and Hartnett was certainly not going to celebrate her as a romanticized, idealized peasant just because she had chosen to live her life as such.

A significant facet of so many of the poems I have included here from this time period involves memory and how the mind captures and crystallizes an experience. But I think the approach to memory is different than that of the Irish poets and writers of earlier eras, and this is one of the reasons why the use of myth and legend is different, as well. Thomas Kinsella (b. 1928), whose most famous contribution to Irish literature is his beautiful translation of the *Táin*, hints at this in his "Butcher's Dozen." The poem, which is focused on the events of Bloody Sunday in 1972, depicts Derry in a surreal, almost Dantean way, encountering the ghosts of the dead. In it, he addresses one of the most frequently mentioned critiques of Irish artists:

That sympathetic politicians
 Say our violent traditions,
 Backward looks and bitterness
 Keep us in dire distress.
 We must forget, and look ahead,
 Nurse the living, not the dead. (247)

However, I think that these poets at least attempted to address both the past and the present situations in their poetry, which is no small feat. When one compares the work of the poets writing about the Troubles with those who wrote during the Cultural Revival period leading up

to the Easter Rising in 1916, there is no doubt that the poets of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s have a more measured approach to the subjects of violence and national identity.

Perhaps the poet who deals most effectively with the violence of the Troubles is Belfast's Ciaran Carson (1948-),⁷⁸ especially in his *The Irish for No* (1987)⁷⁹ and *Belfast Confetti* (1990). Carson grew up speaking Irish and learned English in the streets of Belfast—a process he describes in his poem “Second Language” as “And I woke up, verbed and tensed with speaking English; I lisped / the words so knowingly” (57). His poetry, like many other dual-language poets, is influenced by his bilingualism. In poems such as “Belfast Confetti,” “Campaign,” and “Ambition,” Carson aesthetically and unflinchingly represents the Troubles. “Belfast confetti” was a term used by Fiacca in “The British Connection,” to indicate the scrap metal and bits and bobs that could be used in a homemade bomb. In Carson's poem of the same name, it is “raining exclamation marks, / Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys. A fount of broken type. And the explosion / Itself—an asterisk on the map” (25). He captures the unease and tension, the way life had become militarized by the threat of violence from both sides: “A Sarecen, Kremlin-2 mesh. Makrolon face shields. Walkie-talkies. What / is / My name? Where am I coming from? Where am I going? A fusillade of / question marks” (26). He uses this “broken type” of random, disconnected thoughts that mirror the suffocation of the city under siege. The detritus of punctuation marks (“exclamation marks,” “asterisk,” “hyphenated line,” “stops and colons,” “question marks”) highlight the fact that “Every move is punctuated” (26). The fear and tension makes it impossible to think, “to complete a sentence in

⁷⁸ Carson, too, has a brilliant translation of the *Táin*, published in 2007.

⁷⁹ *The Irish for No* is a title that anyone who knows Irish can enjoy with a chuckle, as the language lacks a word for “yes” and “no;” one responds in the affirmative or negative through the verb. For example, if someone were to ask another if he or she liked tea (“An maith leat tae?”), the response would either be “Is maith liom tae” or “Ní maith liom tae.” One cannot respond yes or no, but must instead say at the very least I like (Is maith) or I do not like (Ní maith).

[his] head,” to even remember his name. It is in these moments when fear and violence converge, and the effects go far beyond those actually involved in the sectarian violence to all the citizens who see the city change right in front of their eyes.

The opening stanza of Carson’s “Campaign” depicts a man tortured during the time of the Troubles:

They had questioned him for hours. Who exactly was he? And when
He told them, they questioned him again. When they accepted who he

Was, as

Someone not involved, they pulled out his fingernails. Then

They took him to a waste-ground somewhere near the Horseshoe Bend,

and told him

What he was. They shot him nine times. (27)

Carson goes into detail here, although as in Heaney’s “Casualty,” the reader never knows his name. Carson himself describes “Campaign” as

. . . a documentary of a kind, based on an actual incident. I don’t think I had any political axe to grind in poems like this: I thought of myself as a recorder, a camera, or a fly on the wall, registering what was going on around me. Some of the poems are done with a black Belfast humour that was very much in vogue then. In a war situation everything tends towards the surreal: horrifying, yes, but also blackly comic or absurd. I didn’t think of myself as not holding back.

(“Interview”)

His unflinching ability to be the “camera” or “fly on the wall” combined with the almost hallucinatory, unreal (or, as he says, “surreal”) quality that makes Carson’s work on the Troubles successful.

In “Ambition” he describes time as a road with checkpoints, the kinds of checkpoints one might expect to find in Belfast during the Troubles:

And if time is a road, then you’re checked again and again
 By a mobile checkpoint. One soldier holds a gun to your head.
 Another soldier
 Asks you questions, and another checks the information on the
 head computer.
 Your name. Your brothers’ names. Your father’s name. His
 occupation. As if
 The one they’re looking for is not you, but it might be you. Looks
 like you
 Or smells like you. (*Selected Poems* 41)

The metaphor of time as a road is often clichéd, but here it is given new life in the heightened tensions of the Troubles. The poem itself is actually about a son’s relationship with his father and their shared smoking habit, smoking “coffin nails” (40). Again, he weaves memories throughout the poem of the father and his experiences, including his time in prison for tampering “with / Her Majesty’s / Royal Mail—or was it His, then?” because “they’d always thought he was a Republican” (42). But even in a poem that has little to do with the actual Troubles, they linger unconsciously present.

In looking at these poets writing during the period of the Troubles, it appears clear that many of them share Heaney's penchant for idealizing the past and having nationalist sympathies. None of these poets are able to move away successfully from the totalizing effect that the sectarian violence had during this time period. Criticizing Heaney's bog poems for perpetuating a particular Irish aestheticization of violence fails in part to fully consider Heaney as a product of his society and civilization. Heaney's obfuscation may indicate a bourgeois desire to avoid confronting the violence directly, and his attempt to connect the violence of the Troubles with the violence throughout history may end up inadvertently mythologizing it in the process. However, what is eminently clear from the quotations provided over the previous paragraphs is that he is not alone. One may gain a better understanding of the particular historical time period and the people who lived it through an analysis of the writings of this time, regardless of the ideology espoused. What I find particularly important in regards to the use of myth and legend during this time period is that it moves away from Pearse's usage, despite the heightened political tensions and nationalist impulses of so many of these writers. The bloodied, martyred, Messianic Cúchulainn is not the focus. Instead, there is a more complex, more ruminative usage. Perhaps one can criticize Heaney—and critics certainly have—for a desire to distance himself from the conflict and to try to walk some middle ground; however, what emerges from a study of Heaney's poetry and so much of the poetry of this period is a complicated multivalence of responses.

There is a need in many ways to force the poetry from the time period of the Troubles to reflect the larger political narrative dominated by figures such as Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness, and the Reverend Ian Paisley. Adams and McGuinness, both former members of the Provisional IRA, were instrumental in Sinn Féin's rise in the 1970s and would become the

faces of the party in the 1980s, especially after the hunger strikes in 1981, led by MP Bobby Sands to change British policy and consider arrested IRA members as prisoners of war and afforded the rights of POWs under the terms of the Geneva Convention. Paisley, on the other hand, would found the Democratic Unionist Party in 1971 in opposition to Sinn Féin and the burgeoning civil rights movement of Northern Irish Catholics. Paisley also founded the Ulster Protestant Volunteers (UPV), a paramilitary group that along with the UVF would be responsible for numerous bombings throughout the late-1960s, 1970s and 80s. The fact that the main political figures of the Troubles all had a connection to the militant aspects of the political parties is significant. The political discord would help shape the narrative of the time period, dictated in large part as a response to the violence of paramilitary sectarian groups (Provisional Irish Republican Army and Ulster Volunteer Force) and the Royal Ulster Constabulary and British armed forces. But these men, who ironically ended up working together as the two most powerful government officials in the new Northern Irish government outlined in the St. Andrew's Agreement, in large part, established the political ideology to which the poetry must be analyzed in relation.

Gerry Adams, a charismatic leader from West Belfast who has long sought to distance himself from his IRA military past,⁸⁰ has sought to continue the legacy of James Connolly in establishing a socialist democratic union in Ireland, which would first entail a unification of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In his analysis of the political situation in Northern Ireland, Adams is partly correct when he suggests that “we have a system based on

⁸⁰ Adams was arrested numerous times throughout the 1970s for his various political agitations; however, more seriously, he was arrested in April 1974 for the 1972 IRA murder of Jean McConville, a mother of ten from Belfast, whose body was discovered buried on a beach in County Louth in 2003; she had been killed by a single gunshot wound to the head. Adams was implicated in the murder by several former (now dead) IRA members, Dolours Price and Brendan Hughes, in audio recordings that have become part of the Boston College archives. He has since been released. He continues to deny ever being part of the Provisional IRA.

coercion, violence, sectarianism and exploitation. By its very nature, British rule cannot be just or peaceful and, while this is so, revolutionary struggle will continue to strive to overthrow it in pursuit of true justice, peace and happiness” (49). However, Adams cannot see that violence begets more violence, not peace. Adams self-consciously echoes James Connolly’s stance; in his chapter entitled “Republicanism and Socialism,” Adams indicates that there cannot be a socialist Ireland without a united Ireland: “You cannot have socialism in a British colony such as exists in the Six Counties, or in a neo-colony, such as exists in the Twenty-Six counties,” and “there cannot be a credible movement for socialism in Ireland while the British connection divides workers in the Six Counties and while partition prevents a unity of working-class interests” (109).

The problem with Adams’s analysis is that he ties socialism here to republicanism, which does not address the ideological divide that has existed in the North since 1912 when Ulster organized a militia to fight off pending Home Rule. In his analysis of the Troubles, Roy Foster writes, “Though socialist republicans had been involved in the civil rights movement, they did not direct it” (*Modern Ireland* 589); as a result, the ideology of the republican movement supported by the paramilitary force of the IRA largely shaped the dialogue of the Troubles on one side. Even as some in the IRA attempted to “ease the movement out of the republican rut so congenial to the Provisionals into a posture fit for Marxist-Leninist party of the vanguard” (Bell 156), the dominant focus remained on religious and sectarian divides.

As I suggested in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, the focus on the mythological often moves away from providing any developed criticism of the class issues and instead allows the dominant hegemonic control of capitalist enterprises in exploitation in both Northern Ireland (as a part of the United Kingdom) and the Republic of Ireland. However, the issues here are more

complicated than in Pearse's overt propaganda, which does directly influence the ideals of the Provisional IRA. There is some need to contextualize Heaney's depiction of the violence of the Troubles and to analyze his poetry with a more focused understanding of the various narratives at play. For better or worse, how these writers use memory, both through the memory of individual poet and as collective cultural memory, results in a complex and ever-widening web of experiences that connect to the zeitgeist of "The Troubles" for Catholics in Northern Ireland. Many of Heaney's poems are most successful when they depict the small, personal moments made even smaller by the grandness of some of his themes. For example, he describes the paralyzing effect of all the deaths due to the Troubles in "Funeral Rites": "Now as news comes in / of each neighbourly murder / we pine for ceremony, / customary rhythms" (*North* 7).

There are definite concerns with some of Heaney's attempts at unifying ancient clan-based violence with modern paramilitary terrorism. However, many of the dubious elements one can find in poetry of Heaney and several of his contemporaries stem from the development of Ireland as a nation. David Lloyd is absolutely correct when he asserts that "[t]he anomalous character of recent Irish history derives from the fact that, unlike most Western European states, the moment of nationalist victory did not constitute a moment of apparent national unification, but rather institutionalized certain racial and sectarian divisions" (18). Many of the poets analyzed already in this chapter felt the desire to raise their art above politics, but there is no such thing as "art for art's sake," especially when confronted with the political and social realities present in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s through the beginning of the new millennium. As Lloyd adds, "The political function of aesthetics and culture is not only to suggest the possibility of transcending conflict, but to do so by excluding (or integrating) difference, whether historically produced or metaphysically conceived, insofar as it represents a

threat to an image of unity whose role is finally hegemonic” (*Anomalous States* 19). What Lloyd posits here about Heaney’s work is that it presents the same idea that Ireland is a defined nation, with a long, continuous line of history, culture, language, and religion that has been usurped by the English enemy and that the conflict in Northern Ireland could find resolution if only one were to consider the (imagined) unity of place and people. It is the same idea that can be found on bumper stickers today that have a map of Ireland with the equation $26+6=1$, as if the deep-seated issues in Northern Ireland can be solved as simply as adding the 26 counties in the Republic of Ireland to the six in Northern Ireland in order to make one unified nation. This eliminates the fundamental differences and actual historical circumstances, which are far more complex. Not only is this way of thinking extremely reductionist and a complete simplification of the issues that lead to conflict in the North, it conveniently forgets the fact that the Ulster Volunteers were formed in 1912 *before* their Irish contemporaries, just in case Home Rule passed, allowing them to fight to remain part of the United Kingdom. For the republicans who support the belief that just by making the counties in the North part of the republic, it would eliminate the sectarian violence is reductionist and continues the line of thinking that is founded on racial separation and superiority. This is the same rhetoric that continues to emphasize the divide between Catholics and Protestants, a rhetoric used by politicians and extremists alike to keep the focus on these imagined communities and the myths that sustain them.

However, to suggest that it would be easy to see the violence perpetrated by the Ulster constabulary and British armed forces as part of a repressive capitalist state and not as something directed against one’s ethnicity is easier said than done. What is worse is that the repressive nature of the police, military, and paramilitary—and the violent actions done to Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland by these factions—was condoned largely by the United Kingdom. This

certainly does not mitigate the bombings and executions perpetrated by the Provisional IRA, but for many of these poets who self-identified as Irish Catholics, the support for Irish nationalism *is* one of their traditions. Even though it would be pleasant to believe that class identity can take the place entirely of national identity disregards the overwhelming nature of identity politics in Northern Ireland.

As a result of the changes in Irish and Northern Irish societies, there needs to be a reevaluation of how writers used myth and legend in more contemporary times. This is not only because of the Troubles in Northern Ireland force a reconsideration of what it means to be “Irish,”⁸¹ and how the past should work to constitute that identity, but also because many felt that myths and legends helped to reinforce patriarchal concepts, especially concerning how women are portrayed. Originally, powerful goddess figures reflected the general power women had in Celtic society, as they were seen as equals to their male counterparts; in fact, Mary-Louise Sjoestedt suggests that “for production and destruction, in peace as in war, a double principle is in balance, the female governing the natural event, the male governing the social event” (33). The maternal goddesses such as Macha or Danu, or the triple war goddess the Morrígan illustrate the widespread power wielded by women. War is not the dominion of an angry male such as Ares in Greek mythology; instead, “the gods of slaughter have been personified as women in Irish mythology” (32). Often taking the form of a crow or raven (seen frequently as the goddesses Badb or the Morrígan), she oversees the battlefield from a distance; however, those who see her recognize and fear her power. She rests on Cúchulainn’s shoulder as he is dying, and so the raven is on the shoulder of Oliver Shephard’s statue in the foyer of the General Post Office in Dublin. In the Ulaid Cycle, one of the most powerful figures is Medb, queen of

⁸¹ Even Ian Paisley, who so determinedly disliked so much of what one might consider typical elements composing Irish identity (especially Roman Catholicism), defined himself as an Ulsterman and by extension an Irishman.

Connacht. She “represents in the euhemerized literary tradition the complete type of a deity who is at the same time a mother and a warrior” (Sjoestedt 37). However, as Irish society shifted away from the more balanced Celtic perspective of men and women to the patriarchal society supported by the Catholic Church and the imperial occupying English, these goddesses are erased or muted, transformed into virginal holy figures. If one were to consider the sexist tropes that had been cemented from the eighteenth century onward, it is apparent that women have been coopted as a romanticized personification of Ireland: woman as Ireland (Éire, Shan Van Vocht, and Kathleen Ni Houlihan), a passive, idealized figure of womanhood, seeking a man to possess her wholly in the aislings. This gendered trope does not die with Ó Rathaille in the eighteenth century; instead it flourished under cultural nationalism and continues to the present day. In fact, this gendered depiction of Ireland as a woman became so ingrained in the national consciousness that it was imprinted on Irish currency. Lady Hazel Lavery, an American married to artist Sir John Lavery, was painted as Cathleen Ni Houlihan in 1923 (Lavery 305); this portrait was then used on Irish bank notes beginning under the Free State government in 1928 and continuing through the 1970s. In the painting, Lavery is draped in a green tunic that matches the green land behind her perfectly, representing her—and, in turn, its—fecundity, while in her hands she holds the traditional symbol of the harp. Regardless of the fact that this stereotypical iconography is problematic in general, it becomes even more troubling when looking at the rape motif that can be found in the works of male poets.

The most obvious example of the rape motif can be found in Yeats’s “Leda and the Swan,” in which he depicts the mythological rape of Leda by Zeus while he inhabits a swan. The rape is also metaphoric, however, through its forcible violence, symbolic of the violence inflicted on the Irish by the English, and then the Irish against the Irish in the Civil War: The

violence of Zeus's raping of Leda only leads to more violence. It is through Leda that the mythological world gets Helen and the sacking of Troy, and Clytemnestra and the killing of Agamemnon. Clytemnestra is then killed by her son, Orestes, perpetuating the cycle of violence. The brutal moment of violence begetting more violence is depicted in the third stanza: "A shudder in the loins engenders there / The broken wall, the burning roof and tower / And Agamemnon dead" (*The Poems* 214). Yeats wonders if in the moment that Leda gleans some of Zeus's knowledge and power before the rape ends: "Did she put on his knowledge with his power / Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?" (*The Poems* 215). The obvious parallel here is to the raping of Ireland (Leda) by England (Zeus). Leda's children (the men and women of Ireland) will perpetuate that violence through the Civil War.

However, there are some more contemporary Irish poets—male and female—who complicate the image of Ireland as gendered female. In Ciaran Carson's 1998 collection *The Twelfth of Never*, he depicts Ireland as an "old colleen" ("The Rising of the Moon"), as the Dark Rosaleen ("Dark Rosaleen"), Hibernia ("The Display Case"), and an unnamed seductress in 1798. For Carson, Ireland as woman is not depicted positively, but neither is anything stereotypically "Irish" in Carson's collection. The fact that Carson uses titles from famous "rebel songs" and aiséings (for example, "The Rising of the Moon" and "Dark Rosaleen") undermines their troubling continual presence and power. Ireland as woman in these poems seems to suck the life out of those she encounters. In "The Rising of the Moon" he describes the "old colleen": "She stung me with the gaze of her nettle-green eyes. / She urged me to go out and revolutionize / Hibernia, and not fear the guillotine" (122); instead, after he "fell among the People of No Property," he is introduced to "fragrant weed," where "poppies, not potatoes, grew in contraband" (122). Opium (and perhaps the First Opium War) has sapped his resolve to fight

for her: “She said, *You might have loved me for eternity*. / I kissed her grass-green lips, and shook her bloodless hand” (122).

In “The Display Case,” Hibernia appears to a drunkard in “Creggan churchyard”; Creggan, in Armagh, is the burial place of the O’Neill clan and one of their poets, Art Mac Cumhaigh. Mac Cumhaigh, who lived from 1738-1773, wrote an *aisling* called “The Churchyard of Creagán” (“Úr-Chill an Chreagáin”). In it, the speaker sleeps in the churchyard “in sorrow” (as opposed to the drunkenness of Carson’s speaker) and the traditional maiden of the *aislings* (Ireland) asks the speaker to “come West, and travel the road with me / to that honey-sweet land still untouched by alien rule” (177), where he will eventually die for her; all he asks in return is to be buried “under this sod with “Creagán’s sweet Gaels” (181).

Carson’s Hibernia asks the drunkard to “[t]ake down these words . . . that all my know my / claim”; however, he fails her because he has “a problem with the language” (Carson 134). She then chastises him by saying, “Since you’ve abandoned [the Irish language] for lispings English / Scribbling poems in it exclusively, or so I’m told. / Turncoat interpreter, you wonder why I languish” (134). After his execution, his arm is “salvaged” as a “relic” by “some girl,” and “Her full speech is tattooed there for all time on my mummified arm” (134) that sits in the titular display case.

In Heaney’s “Ocean’s Love to Ireland,” Ireland is cast as a peasant girl, much as in Aogán Ó Rathaille’s *aislings*, especially “The Redeemer’s Son.” Heaney makes the rape explicit on two levels: “Speaking broad Devonshire, / Raleigh has backed the maid to a tree / As Ireland is backed to England” (*North* 40). The maid and Ireland are both raped by England’s forced presence in Ireland. Walter Raleigh was a member of the British forces who defeated “six hundred papists” (40) representing the Papal States (Spain and Italy) during the Siege of Smerick

(Ard na Caithe) in the fall of 1580. The battle was one of series of English attempts under the Tudors to quash the Gaelic-Norman earls and their uprisings during Desmond Rebellions in the late-sixteenth century; the earls (namely the Earl of Desmond in Munster and the Earl of Tyrone in Ulster) sought to overthrow a monarch whom they (and the Catholic Church) saw as heretical. In response, the English resolve to eliminate any divisive Irish sentiment grew more and more hard and bloodthirsty. The scorched-earth policy, recorded by Edmund Spenser in his book *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596), was utilized by Lord Grey (Spenser's employer) in response to the Desmond Rebellion and the plantation of Munster. One of those who received the largest land grants in the plantation was Raleigh.

Heaney's maneuvers throughout the last stanza shift away from Ó Rathaille's and other typical aislings. In "The Redeemer's Son" ("Mac an Cheannaí"), the "mild maid whose name was Éire" ("an ainnir shéimh darbh ainm Éire") (157) dies at the end of the poem after hearing that there will be no Jacobite "redeemer" to save her:

I told her, when I heard her tale,
 in a whisper, he was dead,
 that he had found death up in Spain,
 that no one heard her plaint.
 She heard my voice beside her;
 her body shook; she shrieked;
 her soul departed in a leap.
 Alas, the woman lifeless. (161)

Heaney, on the other hand, does not have his maiden die because of her experiences or the lack of foreign aid: "The ruined maid complains in Irish, / Ocean has scattered her dream of fleets /

The Spanish prince has spilled his gold / And failed her” (*North* 41). Instead, “She fades from their somnolent clasp / Into ringlet-breath and dew, / The ground possessed and repossessed” (41). She becomes one with the earth again, the earth that will be “repossessed” by the Irish eventually.

Heaney also uses the gendered motif of England (male) and Ireland (female) more playfully in “Act of Union,” where he describes the results of impregnating his wife, Maire: “I am imperially / Male, leaving you with the pain, / The rending process in the colony” (43). Her body is described as the land, an inversion of the typical *aisling* where the land is described as a woman’s body: “Your back is a firm line of eastern coast / And arms and legs are thrown / Beyond your gradual hills” (43). Their in utero son is depicted with his “parasitical / And ignorant little fists already / Beat at your borders and I know they’re cocked / At me across the water” (43). He continues the metaphor of a post-colonial Ireland through his wife’s body after giving birth: “No treaty / I foresee will salve completely your tracked / And stretchmarked body, the bog pain / That leaves you raw, like opened ground, again” (43-44). Heaney consistently plays with traditions, at times using them to his advantage and at times subverting them for his own gain.

It is difficult to fully appreciate Heaney’s influence on modern Irish poetry; he is, by and large, the “father-figure” for modern Irish poets, especially those with distinct ties to Northern Ireland. The “mother-figure” would have to be Eavan Boland, who stands as a celebrated influence for so many poets for her presentation of a woman’s voice in Irish poetry, so often overshadowed by male counterparts. Boland (b. 1945) was born in Dublin, but she spent much of her childhood in London, England, “the country I came to in nineteen-fifty-one: / barely-gelled, a freckled face six-year-old” (*New Collected Poems* 155). In describing her London

childhood in “An Irish Childhood in England: 1951,” she focuses on the theme of loss and an attempted restoration, a theme that is permeated throughout her poetry, and frankly, much of Irish literature: “in a strange city, in another country // waiting for the sleep that never did / restore me as I’d hoped to what I’d lost” (155). She ends the poem with a particularly effective image of

when all of England to an Irish child
 was nothing more than what you’d lost and how;
 was the teacher in the London convent who
 when I pronounced “I amn’t” in the classroom
 turned and said—“you’re not in Ireland now.” (*New Collected Poems* 156)

In this moment that highlights a profound sense of otherness, Boland’s use of *I amn’t* “generates the possibility of defining identity as subsisting inside this gap between positive and negative potentials, and is peculiarly apposite for an Irish person in exile from their own cultural reality—a reality itself defined by dislocation” (Clutterbuck 80).

This dislocation is not one merely of space, however. Language is one of the most significant themes in Boland’s poetry. In “Mother Tongue” she focuses on how the language issue in Ireland causes a fissure in identity and an attempt to reconnect it. Language cannot heal and unite, however.

Land. Ground. A line drawn in the rain
 and clay and the roots of the wild broom—
 behind it the makings of a city,
 beyond it rumours of a nation—
 by Dalkey and Kilternan and Balally

through two ways of saying their names. (*New Collected Poems* 256)

She describes being “born on this side of the Pale” and speaking “with the forked tongue of colony.” She goes on to imagine

my pure sound, my undivided speech

travelling to the edge of this silence.

As if to find me. And I listen: I hear

What I am safe from. What I have lost. (*New Collected Poems* 256-57)

Here, Boland, like Heaney, wrestles with two of the most significant themes in Irish literature: land and language. The loss of both becomes inextricably tied together over time. However, this loss is made even greater by the fact that women are so frequently silenced.

Boland consistently comes back to the idea that women, especially Irish women, are dislocated even further from identity through their silencing and erasure throughout history, for silencing and erasure are terms that seem to be interchangeable at times for women in Irish history. As Helen Kidd argues, “In the case of a move from a subaltern position to the status of a republic, within Ireland national identity still creates a subaltern grouping where women’s positions are everywhere constructed, but women are not heeded speaking” (36). In trying to identify some part of herself with the story of her nation’s struggle, Eavan Boland asks in her autobiography, *Object Lessons*, “What female figure was there to identify with? . . . The heroine was utterly passive. She was Ireland or Hibernia. She was stamped, as a rubbed-away mark, on silver or gold; a compromised regal figure on a throne” (66).

One of the most significant issues that arise with the repetition of images like Mother Ireland or Kathleen Ni Houlihan is that they become codified in ideology and women begin to internalize them. There is a need to break from these codified images by reevaluating them, by

breaking them down, and by stripping away the romanticized, idealized and dehumanized image of woman as Ireland. What emerges is the necessity to politicize what has been romanticized despite, in her words, that “permission for a suburban woman to write the Irish political poem was neither allowed nor foreseen” (*Object Lessons* 190). But this politicization is a necessary element in Boland’s poetry. In “Mother Ireland” she writes from the perspective of the feminized land that comes to consciousness: “At first / I was land.” As the land, “I did not see. / I was seen.” Those who see her, also name her. Once she learns her name through the “Seeds” and “Raindrops” that fall on her she is able to rise and “tell my story. / It was different / from the one told about me.” Those who named her also “misunderstood me.” They ask her to “*Come back to us*” but she asks them to “*Trust me*” (*Collected* 261-62). The story of Mother Ireland here is different and should be told from her perspective, not by the ones who sought to speak for her.

In one of her most acclaimed poems, “Mise Eire,” Boland turns to Pearse’s poem of the same name, writing that she “won’t go back to it— / my nation displaced / into dactyls” (*New Collected Poems* 128). This is not Pearse’s version; the poem is not told from the point of view of the shamed, lonely old woman, the Shan Van Vocht, who is shamed by her children’s inability to save her from her enemy’s harassments. Boland’s analysis of Francis Ledwidge’s “The Blackbirds” is apt of Pearse’s Hag of Beare: “What is more interesting is how, in his attempt to make the feminine stand for the national, he has simplified the woman in the poem almost out of existence. She is in no sense the poor old woman of the colloquial expression. There are no vulnerabilities here, no human complexities. She is a Poor Old Woman in capital letters. A mouthpiece. A sign” (*Object Lessons* 142-43). Pearse’s poem is, of course, one of those “songs / that bandage up the history / the words that make rhyme of the crime / where time is time past”

(128). She refuses this bandaging, instead letting the wound scar, but that scar “heals after a while” (129). She frequently writes about scarring and wounding, and it is often connected to language and identity, especially as it concerns women and their cultural-linguistic identification with a nation whose emblems are female but who expects her to be a passive receptor of masculine courage and activity: “There are gestures towards the possibility of women’s language, but the trope of scars and wounding remains indicative of the apparent impossibility of this” (Kidd 36). Boland herself would write about scarring in *Object Lessons*: “A nation. It is, in some ways, the most fragile and improbable of concepts. Yet the idea of an Ireland, resolved and healed of its wounds, is an irreducible presence in the Irish past and its literature” (128). In “Mise Eire,” she attempts to replace the position held by the long-suffering Kathleen Ni Houlihan, older than the Hag of Beare (“Sine mé ná an Chailleach Bhéarra”)⁸² with that of the lives of “real” women: a garrison prostitute and a woman onboard an emigrant ship.

However, elsewhere Clutterbuck sees some failure in Boland’s part to effectively “speak” for these women, in essence doing what she finds so problematic with the first “Mise Éire” and the nationalist representation of woman as Ireland. In attempting to tie the voice of Éire to the lives of real women, she has done something closer to what becomes suspect in Heaney’s writing: she inadvertently ignores the actual lives of women for a poeticized account of history that captures neither the actual lives of women or history. Instead, poetry remains.

But with a more comprehensive look, one will find that just as there are issues with the criticism of Heaney’s work, there are issues here with what Clutterbuck has suggested about Boland. So much of what she does in her twelve-poem sequence “Outside History” from the

⁸² “I am older than the Hag of Beare.” The Irish comes from Pearse’s version of “Mise Éire,” discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. The Hag of Beare is one of the gendered-female personifications of Ireland. While Cailleach means hag or old woman, it can be used in different contexts; both witch and nun can fit. It typically refers to an old, wise woman, with some connection to the divine.

collection of the same name (1990) is to do what Heaney does: weave the personal and specific with the larger themes of tradition, history, failure, pain, and joy. But in many ways she goes far beyond Heaney's ability to undermine the narrative tropes one finds in Irish writing that uses and incorporates elements of mythology. In the sequence Boland illustrates the problems with using mythology as if it is an actual part of history and the dangers of doing so in an Irish context; the conflation of myth and history in an Irish context is often used to justify violence.

In "The Achill Woman," the first poem of the "Outside History" cycle, she depicts a peasant woman who lives near a cottage Boland stayed in over a weekend while she was a student at Trinity in the 1960s. The woman who brings her water is not like the idealized peasant of literature; in fact, she is not represented accurately anywhere; she is one of those figures "outside history." And yet she is able to describe the famine in a way Boland had never experienced. Boland described meeting this woman in her autobiography: "She was the first person to talk to me about the famine. The first person, in fact, to speak to me with any force about the terrible parish of survival and death which the event had been in those regions. She kept repeating to me that they were great people, the people in the famine. *Great people*. I had never heard that before" (*Object Lessons* 124). Boland is presented with a version of the famine and its terrible influence on the people and the land in a way she had never before, and it did not come from an eminent historian or politician but from a woman who existed in the margins of history and politics. The irony in the poem, however, is that the speaker (Boland as a college student) is not aware of the irony between what the woman has just told her and the fact that Boland then retreats to the fire to read "the set text / of the Court poets of the Silver Age" (*New Collected* 176). Boland would describe these English "Court poets of the Silver Age" in her autobiography *Object Lessons* as "those sixteenth-century English songwriters, like Wyatt and

Raleigh, whose lines appear so elegant, so offhand yet whose poems smell of the gallows” (124). It was from these poems that she sought memorize “the cadences of power and despair” (125); she could not see the irony between the poems that represented the colonial presence that led to the death of those “great people.”

This poem is the depiction of a real woman who tells a real story of pain, death, and hardship. She is not the idealized peasant; she is a real woman. This example seems to undermine Clutterbuck’s critique of Boland’s “Mise Éire.” In the twelfth part of “Outside History,” Boland writes about how

I have chosen:
 out of myth into history I move to be part of that ordeal
 whose darkness is
 only now reaching me from those fields,
 those rivers, those roads clotted as
 firmaments with the dead.
 How slowly the die
 as we kneel beside them, whisper in their ear.
 And we’re too late. We are always too late. (*New Collected* 188)

This statement, of moving from myth into history seems to be the dominant focus of the poem cycle. This movement into history brings the pain of loss. However, it is a movement away from the delusion that comes with myth and a new terrain for a poet to critique the silencing of women through myth and, hopefully, limiting myth’s power.

In “Man and the Echo, when Yeats asks “Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?” he may be a bit self-indulgent, but the line illustrates how myth can lead one

astray. Consider Pearse's work and the Easter Rising: his works' rhetorical power led enough young men to their graves believing that they died for Éire. It became difficult for many to separate a belief in the myths from belief in real, lived experiences. Regardless of Clutterbuck's suggestion that Boland does not deal with the real lives of women in "Mise Éire," Boland certainly attacks the representation of women from an ideological standpoint. If ideology is, as Michèle Barrett suggests, "a generic term for the processes by which meaning is produced, challenged, reproduced, transformed" (*Women's Oppression* 97), then Boland certainly challenges ideology in Ireland.

In a similar vein from trying to disentangle history and myth, Boland works on conflating the distance between the past—and its myths and history—and the present, because "the past she seeks is recoverable only by its alignment with a correlative in the present" (Clutterbuck 81). In "The Making of an Irish Goddess," Eavan Boland describes myth as "the wound we leave / in the time we have" (*Collected* 179), and that in the story of Deirdre and the Sons of Usnach "(t)hree brothers die, their three saps / Spill until their split kith / Heals into an Irish myth" (52). In the poem "Naoise at Four," there are two Naoises, the one of legend and the speaker's four-year-old godson. By having two Naoises, she connects the past to the present, and she fears that "this sudden Irish fury / Will solve it to a folk memory" (52). In this way, she fears the consequences of the use of myth and legend.⁸³ Myth and legend, the stuff of early Irish poetry "depends on distance" (153); "This is the noise of myth. It makes / the same sound as shadow / . . . / Displaced facts. Tricks of light. Reflections. / Invention. Legend. Myth. What you will" (153).

⁸³ This is not to say that Boland does not make use of myth and legend herself. She wrote several poems that deal with the Children of Lir ("Dream of Lir's Son," "Malediction," and "Elegy for a Youth Changed Into a Swan,") and a poem focused on Étain's story, "The Winning of Étain"

The fact that myth, legend, and the poetry that comprises them rely on “tricks of light” and “distance” illustrates the fundamental problem that they are disconnected from reality. Because they are disconnected from reality, they ignore the ritualized violence and hatred that occur as a result. Other issues arise, however, and this goes beyond the terrorist activities that came out of the Troubles and goes to the representation of women in myth and legend. For many Irish women writers and poets it can be difficult to find a way to connect to Irish myth and legend because women are often depicted as being deceitful, merely sexual objects of the heroes, or powerful but marginalized. Many Irish women poets, such as Eavan Boland and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, take issue with the objectification and marginalization of women in the tales of myth and legend. So they need to change them. Alicia Ostricker writes, “old stories are changed, changed utterly, by female knowledge of female experience, so they can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy” (qtd. in Sewell, *Modern Irish Poetry* 171). Despite the fact that she is critical of the marginalization of women poets in the Irish tradition, she also feels that there is some benefit to writing from the margins: “Marginality within a tradition, however painful, confers certain advantages. It allows the writer clear eyes and a quick critical sense. Above all, the years of marginality suggest to such a writer—and I am speaking of myself now—the real potential of subversion” (*Object Lessons* 147). She sees the role of women in Irish society similar to Ralph Ellison’s depiction of African Americans in American society in the 1950s; the same metaphor of invisibility is appropriate for her.

One of the major ways in which both Boland and Ní Dhomhnaill change and destabilize myth and legend is by moving them into contemporary times, removing the totalizing aspect created by moving from history to myth. Boland comes back to Deirdre and the Sons of Usnach in “Story.” She compares herself to Deirdre: “And let the woman be slender. As I was at

twenty. / And red-haired. As I was until recently” (*New Collected* 236). As she leaves the story of “Two lovers in an Irish wood at dusk / ... hiding from an old and vengeful king” she moves towards “a table at which I am writing. I am writing / a woman out of legend. I am thinking how new it is—this story. How hard it will be to tell” (237). The story has been reclaimed by a woman in the present, to be told “new.” She continues a similar theme in “Time and Violence,” speaking through the various women in myth and legend: “*This is what language did to us. / Here is the wound, the silence, the wretchedness / of tides and hillsides of stars where / we languish in a grammar of sighs*” (238; emphasis in original). They desire to be taken out of myth where they cannot sweat and breed, stripped of all human qualities to conform to a masculine projection of idealized femininity. Instead, they ask to “*Write us out of the poem. Make us human / in cadences of change and mortal pain / and words we can grow old and die in*” (238; emphasis in original). By moving them from the world of myth and legend, a world removed from reality, these characters can find life—and death—on their terms.

The juxtaposition of the ancient and the modern strips the former of its distanced glory, a glory that was used so well in the rhetoric surrounding the Easter Rising as seen in the previous analysis of Pearse’s work in Chapter 1. What Maryna Romanets suggests about Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill is also applicable to Boland’s poetry:

there appears a pluridimensional, atemporal universe in which past and present, and future exist simultaneously. Her [Ní Dhomhnaill] deliberate confusion of different spatiotemporal laminations erodes the epic tradition and reduces ironically its fixed sacred values by fastening the shadows of the glorious past onto modern routine and, thus, removing them from a distanced horizon to a zone of maximal proximity and familiarity.

For example, Ní Dhomhnaill takes on both the Shan Van Vocht and Kathleen Ni Houlihan, reducing both to old bitter women. Similar to Máirtín Ó Cadhain's Nora Mhor in his story "The Withering Branch," Ní Dhomhnaill describes the Shan Van Vocht as once being beautiful and sought after, but is now reduced to "mumbling, babbling, murmuring / About that Long-Ago of a Year and a Day"⁸⁴ (*Pharaoh's Daughter* 129). Ciaran Carson goes on with his translation (that differs from considerably from the original Irish but still captures its essence):

And the ill-starred ones who came into the world
 When the noose got tighter on her neck
 Were doomed to be strung up
 And those first smitten by the light of day
 While she danced in the fire
 Were doomed to be burned-out, dazzled and frazzled
 With an all-consuming love for her
 So that it came to pass that they were mowed down
 In their hundreds, left and right, not with love
 But with a gnawing migraine-bright black lust
 And galloping consumption. (131)

Notice that this "all-consuming love" is not love, but a "migraine-bright black lust / And galloping consumption"⁸⁵ that dooms her followers. This contrasts dramatically with the version of the Shan Van Vocht found in Yeats and Lady Gregory, both of whom build on and expand on the romantic nationalism that leads men and women to give their lives to Ireland. The poem continues by calling her "cranky, cantankerous / And cancered, slobbering of this and that, /

⁸⁴ Translated by Ciaran Carson

⁸⁵ This line in the original reads: "ach an grá dubh is an manglam dicé a leanann é" (*Pharaoh's* 130).

straight- / Jacketed to her wheelchair, locked / Into self-pity, whingeing on and on” (*Pharaoh’s Daughter* 131). As the speaker cannot deal with any more of her whining or her romanticized reminiscences, the poem ends with a final plea to get her to stop talking: “Folly, I’m saying, gets worse with every generation: / Anything, every old cliché in the book, anything at all / To get this old bitch to shut the fuck up” (131). This is not the old woman who leads Michael Gillane to his death in 1798 in Yeats’s play; she is now “an old bitch.”

In Ní Dhomhnaill’s poem “Caitlín/Cathleen,” she becomes “Old Gummy Granny.” Paul Muldoon, who adds much of his own personality to his translation of the poem, describes her as another old woman who “never stops bending your ear / about the good old days of yore”:

You can’t take her out for a night on the town
 without her either showing you up or badly letting you down:
 Just because she made the twenties roar
 with her Black and Tam Bottom—O Terpsichore—
 and her hair in a permanent wave;
 just because she was a lily grave
 in nineteen sixteen . . . (*Astrakhan Cloak* 39)

Ní Dhomhnaill connects Kathleen Ni Houlihan here to the violence of 1916, the 1919-20 War for Independence—including the allusion to the Black and Tans—and the 1922-23 Civil War that was fought after the formation of the Free State in 1922 and a result of the treaty dispute. Here she is “a woman created to serve many causes” (Haberstroh 193), which of course is one of the problems with the figure in general. She has no true personality, as Declan Kiberd points out, “the Cathleen ní Houlihan of real flesh and blood must impersonate for her lovers the sorts of women they want her to be, and she must have her own desires unimplemented” (*Inventing*

Ireland 294). In Ní Dhomhnaill's hands, she is left with her dreams of being young and desired: "even if every slubberdegullion once had a dream-vision / in which she appeared as his own true lover, / those days are just as truly over" (*Astrakhan* 39). In both "The Shan Van Vocht" and "Cathleen," the typical image depicted in the *aislings* of the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries and truly emphasized during the period of cultural nationalism—that of Ireland as old-hag-turned-youthful-beauty—is completely undermined by placing her in a more contemporary setting where she is no longer relevant. She is instead a babbling, grumpy, senile old woman who refuses to shut up about a past that no one cares about.

Taking this idea of moving the figures of myth and legend into a more contemporary setting, in a series of poems Ní Dhomhnaill tackles the great Irish epic the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*.⁸⁶ In those poems she takes on the personae of the two dominant female characters in the poem, Medb and the Morrígan. This is significant as she seeks to restore the power the women once had in ancient Celtic society glossed over in an attempt to reinstall, through the figure of Cúchulainn, a sense of masculinity lost: "Cuchulain provided a symbol of masculinity for Celts, who had been written off as feminine by their masters" (Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 25; also, qtd. in Romanets). As Medb, she opens by saying (as translated by Michael Hartnett),

War I declare from now
 on all the man of Ireland
 on all the corner-boys
 lying curled in children's cradles
 their willies worthless

⁸⁶ For further discussion of Ní Dhomhnaill's work see Maryna Romanets's essay "Degenerating the Myth of Transhistorical Masculinity: Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's Cú Chulainn Cycle"; in Patricia Boyle Haberstroh's chapter on Ní Dhomhnaill in *Women Creating Women*; in Helen Kidd's "Cailleachs, Keens and Queens: Reconfiguring Gender and Nationality..."; and in Katarina Walter's "From Aisling to Chora: Female Allegories of the Nation in Contemporary Irish Women's Poetry."

wanting no woman
 all macho boasting
 last night they bedded a Grecian princess—
 a terrible war I will declare. (*Selected Poem* 111)

But as Frank Sewell suggests, Medb is “more defensive than aggressive;” she “wants to recover her *stolen* dignity, her *right* to equality, her freedom to be, and to be let be” (172; emphasis in original). Medb calls Cúchulainn a “Grave-haunter / who’d satisfy no woman” (*Selected Poems* 113). Cúchulainn is reduced to an impotent man-child: “Although Cú Chulainn of the Ulster Cycle has sex with an impressive number of women, the poet chooses to emphasize his impotence and to degrade him to the level of a contemporary condition, thus completely changing the conceptual register of the national epic and making the situation comically familiar” (Romanets). In this way she does not strip these women of their sexuality, she just shows that they are in control of them: Medb’s “womanness” overwhelms Cúchulainn, as she then goes on to chastise his

Fear, certainly of castration
 fear of false teeth in my cunt⁸⁷
 fear my jaws would grind you
 like oats in a mill
 me having a good comb to tease you
 you ball-less little bollocks. (*Selected Poems* 123)

By speaking through them, she reclaims them from their often silent place in myth and legend, and restores the power stripped from them through this silencing.

⁸⁷ Michael Hartnett chooses the word “cunt” here, while in the Irish—which lacks a word with quite the same connotation—the word Ní Dhomhnaill uses is “phit” (*Selected Poems* 122), which means vulva (literally shell-less crab according to Niall Ó Dónaill’s Irish/English dictionary).

Ní Dhomhnaill consistently takes the stories told in myth, legend, and folklore and weaves them into her own poetry with a particular focus on women's voices, disrupting the seemingly unified perception of myth since the cultural nationalism of the turn of the twentieth century. Where there once were silence and subjugation, there are now speech and power. Her poetry is an act of reclamation. In response to the long-line of nationalist depictions of a feminized Ireland, she wrote "Masculus Giganticus Hibernicus." Here, she attacks the "symbol of hypermasculinity consistently promoted by militant nationalists" (Romenets). Ireland is a "female land" ("bhfeairann bainneann") and a "garden" ("gaidín") that will be turned "to a trampled mess" ("ina chosair easair") (*Selected Poems* 78-79), trampled by the giant men of the title. Notice, however, that these men are Irish, not English, hanging out "in pubs" ("i bpubanna"). They are "always after one thing, a young female body: "You'd live off the furze / or the heather that grows / on a young girl's sunny slopes" ("Tiocfá suas ar aiteann / nó ar an bhfraoch a fhásann / ar leirgí grianmhara mná óige") (78-79). Cast in the predatory terms of the pedophile, the imagery here loses the nationalist's idealized language and focuses instead on the genuinely problematic relationship between a femininely gendered land and a conquering masculine presence. The imagery of penetration and rape is presented without the idealized embellishment found in the poetry written by men.

Throughout all of these varied uses of myth and legend in modern Irish literature there is an aspect that remains consistent throughout: they can be molded and adapted to fit the individual artist's political and artistic aims. The malleability of myth is part of its lasting appeal, as if it is like Keats's Grecian urn to which we bring our problems and issues, and in which we seek answers. Declan Kiberd is certainly correct in his evaluation of the traditions of the past—of which myth and legend are certainly a part—when he suggests that the past "has in

effect lost its future, its power to challenge and disrupt; it exists only as a commodity to be admired, consumed, reducing its adherents to the position of tourists in their own land,” leaving those in Ireland “to recover the past as fetish rather than to live in the flow of actual history” (*Inventing Ireland* 294). But there is something more worth considering here about a reconsideration of the past as we have it here. This is particularly true in an Irish context where myth and legend are imbued with a sense of history, of tragedy, and of an undying desire for freedom at all costs. It is when probing deeper, that, as Eavan Boland suggests, one can remove the distance and the distorted romanticized view, and only then can one “set the truth to rights” (*Selected Poems* 153). However, in order to do so, myth and legend must be stripped of all its outer embellishments, for only then can we start to see the ideologies reflected in each.

In a way, stripping the outer embellishments of myth and legend has been a task of Irish filmmakers as well. It is an undeniable fact that in the last thirty years there has been a shifting landscape of art and literature, with the continual mixing of various media becoming the standard. No longer is capital-L Literature the dominant art form that it had been; instead, the emergence of visual media, particularly television and movies—not to mention the huge impact the Internet has had on culture—has surpassed the written word for entertainment and the transmission of knowledge. This does not mean that literature is not an important art form or that it is not worth studying, however, but just that there needs to be a widening net cast to see the trends and representations of class, conflict, and identity. As society moves away from the overwhelming dominance of written texts, it is just as important to trace how the themes of myth and legend find a home in contemporary times. To be sure, myth and legend does still appear, but in a different guise than in the past. Just as they were a century ago, Irish artists, writers, and

filmmakers are all aware of the weight of the past and its conflicts; however, now with the added weight of the Troubles there has been a reevaluation of that past out of necessity.

Thanks in part to the Irish Film Board, established in 1980, filmmakers have had an opportunity to stake their own claim of Hollywood and cinema across the world. They have also had the opportunity to reengage various tropes so consistently connected to Ireland, most especially the romanticization of the Irish people and countryside and the stereotypes frequently depicted in visual media concerning the country. Among the filmmakers, the greatest attention has been focused on Jim Sheridan (*My Left Foot* [1989], *The Field* [1990], and *In the Name of the Father* [1993]) and Neil Jordan (*The Crying Game* [1992], *Michael Collins* [1996], and *The Butcher Boy* [1997]). It is important to note that both Sheridan and Jordan began their careers as littérateurs, with Sheridan starting as a playwright and Jordan as a novelist, mirroring the cultural shift itself from written to visual forms.

Jordan's films are particularly apt when looking at the presentation and reconsideration of Irish myth and legend in a modern context during the time of the Troubles, especially what it means to be Irish and the violence used to forge that identity, which has really been the focus of this dissertation. The specter of history weighs heavily on films like *Danny Boy (Angel)*, *The Crying Game*, *Michael Collins* and *Ondine* (2009). The first two deal explicitly with the violence of the Troubles and life in Northern Ireland.

One can see 1992's *The Crying Game* as a radical rewriting of the *Táin*. Instead of focusing on the "tragic violence of the Cuchulainnesque Peter and the Maevis Jude" (Malcolm 5), Jody Malcolm posits that "By focusing on the Lyotardian 'little narratives that comprise the *Táin* rather than on the 'Grand Narrative' that has sustained Cuchulain's legacy, Jordan challenges us to renounce the violence of the past and go with Fergus into postmodern

possibilities” (Malcolm 5). Fergus, played by Stephen Rea, whose breakthrough had come on the stage in the original production of Friel’s *Translations* (1980), renounces the life of violence he led as a member of the IRA after befriending a British soldier, Jody (Forest Whitaker), whom he is to kill as a political maneuver for the IRA.⁸⁸ Fergus is decidedly not like Peter, who blindly adheres to the use of what he deems to be justified violence for the cause and dies as a result, or Jude, who uses her sexuality as a means to reinforce her power, or—as Dil says to her about her involvement in Jody’s death—“You used those tits and that ass to get him, didn’t you?” (Jordan, *Neil Jordan Reader* 265). Peter and Jude are the ones “who are never finished” (198), those Jody calls the “tough undeluded motherfuckers” (189), the scorpions in his tale of the frog and the scorpion, but Jody sees something else in Fergus instead, saying that kindness is his nature (197) and that he is “a good man” (201). Fergus is moved by his conversations with Jody and inspired by Jody’s love for Dil, he agrees to visit her and “Take her to the Metro for a margarita” (200) after Jody is run over by a truck running from Fergus.

When in England, Fergus calls himself Jimmy and has to deal with jingoistic hatred for the Irish: he is often called “Paddy” or “Pat”; there is some parallelism to the racial taunts that Jody must endure while stationed in Northern Ireland, “the only place in the world they call you nigger to your face” (Jordan, *Neil Jordan Reader* 191). In both cases, the use of racial slurs is meant to emphasize power (or lack thereof). It is while in England, seemingly away from the violence of the IRA, that he meets Dil, Jody’s love, and falls in love himself, but only after coming to terms with the fact that Dil is transgendered. It is his love for Dil and his sacrifice for

⁸⁸ This scene was influenced by Frank O’Connor’s “Guests of a Nation,” in which two English soldiers, Hawkins (‘Awwkins) and Belcher, are being held by members of the IRA during the War of Independence. They become friendly with each other over time, but the IRA members are forced to kill Hawkins and Belcher after “four of our lads went west” (“Guests of the Nation” 376), meaning the English had killed four Irish POWs. Bonaparte, the narrator, is completely changed by his experience shooting the men, similar to how Fergus feels after Jody’s death in *The Crying Game*.

her when he admits to and is imprisoned for Dil's shooting of a revenge-hungry Jude that finally frees him from the violence and offers him something new: "By bringing together two people who are separated by nationality, race, and sexuality, he provides a foundation for imagining other ways of being. Furthermore, once freed from the negative aspect of heritage, Fergus can assume the positive aspects of his nature, the part of his nature inherited from his mythic predecessor" (Malcolm 20).

The Crying Game confronts the recurring use of myth to support violence. This is part of Pearse's legacy; his Cúchulainn becomes in many ways *the* Cúchulainn, just as he stands in the GPO, sacrificing himself, tied to the post with the Morrígu on his shoulder. In Jordan's film, however, it cannot be the Hound of Ulster that wins the day. Much as he is depicted in *King Goshawk and the Birds*, his violence cannot positively exist in the contemporary world. Here, those who justify violence for their own political aims that blind them of their own humanity will die by it as well. It is only Fergus, whose nature is different, just as it is in the *Táin*, who wants no part of the conflict between his pupil Cúchulainn and his lover Medb, who must be the hero precisely because he is willing to write his own story. This is what Malcolm is referring to, I think, when referring to the "Lyotardian 'little narratives'" instead of the Grand Narrative that establishes Cúchulainn as an archetype of the many who follow who see themselves, their violence, and their deaths as part of this same narrative, and who use this narrative to justify their actions. The film undermines this Grand Narrative through its focus on and portrayal of Fergus; in the *Táin* Fergus is not the main character, although his wisdom makes one question whether he should be. In the film, he is moved by love, not violence, and that makes all the difference:

With Peter and Jude dead and presumably buried, Jordan effectively de-romanticizes the modern representations of the two most debilitating archetypes

of the myth of the recurring past, the myth that has impeded the Irish imagination's release into more open spaces of possibility and fulfillment. Fergus enters into these open spaces seeking an alternative to the violence of his former lifestyle and emerges from his journey as the true heir to the mythic Fergus, the new Fergus who can offer a vision of a better possible world to his people.

(Malcolm 17)

For Jody Malcolm this vision is “what could be if excessive sentimentality and fanaticism were abandoned” (22).

Jordan's film succeeds in its ability to bring the threads of ancient Irish legend, the poetry of Yeats, Frank O'Connor's short story “Guests of the Nation,” and the issues of the Troubles together in a deft critique of the dangers of history used as a tool to justify militaristic violence in Northern Ireland. It belongs in the discussion of the other texts covered in this chapter; each illustrates the complexity of the various ideologies competing for control in Northern Ireland, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic, violent and peaceful, with the line between each frequently blurred by issues of nationalism and identity. This period is similar to the period leading up to the Rising in 1916; each had artists attempting to wrestle with competing versions of Irishness through their art and actual violence that forced a reconsideration of those ideas. The writers who wrote about the Troubles had to confront history—real, imagined, revised, and manipulated—while witnessing violence done in the name of that history, firsthand. From these texts what emerges is a deeply distrustful, injured, hopeful strain—hopeful that the violence will come to an end, that traditions will be maintained, and that human lives will be cherished, regardless of creed or national identity.

CONCLUSION

“NOTHING BUT BEAUTY CAN REMAIN”: CHANGES IN IRISH IDEOLOGY IN THE NEW MILLENIUM

Even though sectarian violence does still occur in Northern Ireland from time to time, the Troubles have subsided by and large since the Good Friday Peace Agreement signed on April 10, 1998. The IRA bombing in Omagh killed 29 in August of that year, but large-scale bombings have been curbed since then; hardliners on both sides who refuse to accept the cease-fire continue to fight for their cause, but they do not have the support of large sections of the population. Because Catholics and Protestants now share power in the North, due in large part to the St. Andrew's Agreement in 2007 that brought long-time enemies Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party together, the institutional discrimination faced by Catholics in the workforce and housing sectors has been greatly reduced, leaving militaristic conflict largely in the hands of nationalist and unionist hardliners. The fact that there was an economic element here cannot be overlooked. As tourism dollars became more of a focused and necessary part of Northern Irish economy, taking the place of failing industries in the last two decades of the twentieth century, there needed to be assurances that Belfast and Northern Ireland *were* safe to visit.

Today's Ireland is not the same as the Ireland of the twentieth century—either the real or the romanticized version. The Celtic Tiger, the name given to the economic boom of the 1990s and the first few years of the twenty-first century, changed Ireland dramatically. The difficult periods of economic stagnation that marked much of the 1970s and 80s were made even more difficult by the events of the Troubles; however, political tensions began to ease as economic tensions did. The economic expansion made Ireland one of the most profitable European

countries in the period leading up to the recession that began in 2008. This fact highlights another significant shift in thinking. Ireland's relationship and history with the United Kingdom does not seem to have the same stranglehold that it had for centuries. In large part this is because of the shifting economic landscape. Ireland, even in its first decades of independence, was reliant upon English trade. With its emergence as a major player in the European Union there has been a movement away from looking at Dublin or London as the most significant seat of power; that distinction now belongs to Brussels, as both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland now report to, and depend on, the European Union.

I think this last point will have lasting and dramatic ramifications on Ireland and its people. Over time—and with the aid of the various peoples who emigrate to the island—the need to define Irishness purely in terms of markers of language, religion, and culture will, I hope, change and is already changing. The more identity moves from the Grand Narrative to the little narratives, the easier it becomes to see the problems with such an edifying version of history and identity supported by it.

Despite the fact that most of this dissertation has covered the rocky terrain of the uses of myth and legend for the purpose of pushing literary authors' particular ideologies, there is some hope for future uses of the stories of Ireland's past as a means to redefine Irishness away from the "tragic Irish" that seems to dominate this narrative thus far. This should not come as a tremendous surprise despite the fact that several significant figures and tropes have been trotted out time and again for the past hundred and twenty years or so. The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland are at a stage where they need an overhauled image as they seek a place in transnational capitalism's worldwide stage. Northern Ireland in particular can no longer have the IRA and UVF affect the construction of identity through conflict. It can no longer rely on

religious and sectarian violence to force the citizens of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to pick a side and to adhere to it completely, regardless of the fact that so many people abhor the violence that has accompanied life in Northern Ireland since 1968. Again, the aforementioned shift of power away from the traditional centers—Dublin and London—has helped with a refocusing of Irish identity in both the Republic and in Northern Ireland.

I have attempted to trace uses of myth and legend in Irish literature—and, in the case of *The Crying Game*, film—to find that each subsequent generation responds to the previous. The period leading up to the Easter Rising in 1916 saw two dominant strains: one, led by Ascendancy writers beginning with Standish James O’Grady and writers such as William Butler Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory, whom O’Grady influenced, and the other centered on the writings of Pádraic Pearse. Whereas the former dominates the period in terms of general literary usage of myth and legend, it is the events of the Easter Rising and Pearse’s own self-mythologizing that leads to a codification of a new myth that tied elements of ancient Irish legend (Cúchulainn in particular) with Irish martyrs (Emmet and Tone specifically), which—for better or worse—would be the myth that so many Irish writers would need to confront from 1916 on.

In combination with the uses of figures such as Cúchulainn, Deirdre, and Cathleen Ni Houlihan, it is not at all surprising considering the historical circumstances of colonization that Ireland relied upon various myths outside of the corpus of ancient texts as it sought to define itself. There are dominant examples that come from the old tales traced here, and they are frequently combined with the stories of martyrs (Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmet, Charles Stewart Parnell, etc.); however, others sought to mythologize particular elements in Irish society (Irish-speaking peasants from the west of the island) that also represented a particular Irishness not bastardized through imperialism. Regardless of the myth, through the various uses of myth and

legend covered in this dissertation what I found to be striking was that one can trace the development of Irish society as it emerges from restless colony to fledgling independent state to a firmer understanding of its place in Europe and the rest of the world. I am not sure how the lingering issues of violence, poverty, and human rights abuses in Northern Ireland will affect the continued use of myth and legend as it blends with history in both art and propaganda there.

One area that I feel will lend itself well to further study is how myth and legend is used in more popular media—film, television, and graphic novels. Ireland is still undergoing tremendous change as it enters into a new phase in its history, one filled with an influx of different populations. How it seeks to maintain the traditions of the past will inevitably find a home in popular media. The stories of the past have been replicated in every technological advent in the way we tell stories: What began as a series of tales in the oral tradition was shaped and reshaped by a literate ecclesiastical caste that transmitted the tales into writing for the first time. As a result, there is sort of an amorphous quality to the tales and a singular “true” version, a quest for which William Doty suggests “is often fruitless” (35). Every version is an adaptation and the choices of every adaptor reveal something about him/her and the society from which the adaptation arises. Because visual media has replaced the written word as the dominant way in which people are entertained and enlightened, it will be essential to see how the myths and legends are depicted as the *ethnie* moves beyond nationalism.

Already there have been several significant examples of popular media using myth and legend, which I think can be an avenue for future more in-depth study. For example, while his 1992 film *The Crying Game* was discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation, Neil Jordan’s much-lesser known 2009 film *Ondine* moves away from the violence of the North and instead focuses on issues of human trafficking and immigration, issues that Ireland has to deal

with as part of the European Union, a fact which continues the need to reevaluate what it means to be Irish today. Part of why the movie never garnered the same worldwide audience that *The Crying Game* did, I think, was because of its focus on particularly Irish issues that did not seem to translate well to a larger audience and that it lacked the promotional hook that the 1992 film had; there was no secret to lure audiences to see the movie. Jordan adapts the nineteenth-century fairy tale *Undine* and sets it in contemporary Ireland. The knight in the original is now Syracuse, played by Colin Farrell, a marginalized fisherman, and his water sprite turns out to be “a drug mule from Romania” (*Ondine*). Of course this story works well considering the trove of tales involving mermaids, merrows (*muirough*), roanes (*rón*) and selkies⁸⁹ one can find in Celtic folklore, such as “The Princess of Land-under-Waves,” “The Seal Woman,” “The Kerry Mermaid,” “The Shannon Mermaid,” and “The Secret of Ron Mor Kerry.” The latter three all concern a mermaid or seal woman who is captured by a man who marries or restrains her, keeping her from returning to the sea, often by hiding her cap or cloak, which allows her to travel survive under water. The movie builds on this theme. Ondine (Alicja Bachleda) is found in one of Syracuse’s nets while fishing, and they eventually into a relationship that is founded more upon legend than it is the truth.

The film illustrates the lure and influence of tales of myth and legend in everyday life. Often Syracuse will refer to a fairy tale existence. When he first brings Ondine back to his meager cottage after finding her in one of his nets, he tells her she can stay “Forever. Happily ever after. Once upon a time” (*Ondine*). Not surprisingly, he has a longing to believe in something magical: his fishing venture is largely a failure, his daughter Annie (Alisson Barry) suffers from kidney failure and he is called Circus the Clown by the West Cork town (and once

⁸⁹ Selkies are seal folk, living as seals but coming onto land from time to time, shedding their seal skins (often represented as a hooded cloak) and often appearing as beautiful, dark-haired women.

by his own daughter) for his alcoholic antics from his past. So the fairy tale functions as an escape from the everyday realities of his life. Ondine offers him something more, something better, just as the fairy tales promise. This fairy tale theme becomes symbolic to their relationship as a whole, but like all great magic realism forces the audience to question what story we're to believe and which one we'll ignore.

When Syracuse's boat is boarded by the fishing police, they are told that Syracuse caught the huge lot of salmon in his hull trawling. The police are understandably skeptical considering the impossibility of such an act and respond to the story by asking if "you want us to believe in fairy tales?" (*Ondine*). The fact that it is salmon has symbolic usage beyond the added layer of fantasy. The salmon has long held a key place in Irish legend: it is central to Fenian lore as the salmon of knowledge, Fintan. Fionn inadvertently receives all of the salmon's knowledge when he sucks his thumb after burning it on some fat from the fish, thus transmitting the knowledge originally meant for Fionn's master, Finn Eces. Ironically, instead of leading to Syracuse's understanding, the salmon leads to a greater questioning of reality. He cannot believe that Ondine's beautiful, haunting song in a language unknown to his ears could have been the cause of catching the load of salmon, but he cannot deny what he has seen with his own eyes. He does start to see her and her song as his good luck charm, however.

Syracuse's daughter, Annie, also helps to blur the lines between fantasy and reality when it comes to Ondine. She is the one who informs Syracuse about selkies, and who sees some truth in what Syracuse claims to be a tale about a mermaid he makes up for her at the beginning of the film: "You're such a shite storyteller, I knew it had to be true" (*Ondine*). While Syracuse relishes Ondine's company and sees her as his lucky charm, Annie harbors some hope that she really is a selkie. If she were, she could use her wish to make Annie better and do a better job

than the dialysis. At the heart of the film, in many ways, is Annie's understandable skepticism that only barely masks her desire for something good and positive to happen. She tells Syracuse that it is "hard to imagine a happy ending" (*Ondine*), yet clearly longs for one—both for her father and for herself. Her life with her mother, with whom she spends the most time, is not a great one. Both her mother (Dervla Kirwin) and her stepfather (a Scotsman who claims the Scots "invented selkies in the Old Hebrides") are alcoholics; they live in relative squalor and there always seems to be a threat of violence in the house. Annie despite all of the setbacks in her life clearly rises above her situation. Jordan illustrates various ways that the working class in Cork deal with the problems in their lives. Some turn to drink, others to their imaginations. Escape is the dominant motif here.

The film weaves in typical fairy tale tropes throughout. There is the wicked stepmother and stepfather and the shadowy villain, Ondine/Yoanna's "selkie husband," Vladic, whom Ondine describes as "a monster from a fairytale" (*Ondine*). All of these characters try to keep the main characters from any happily-ever-after for their own selfish motives. They also offer the very real threatening aspect one can find in magic realism, that which consistently seeks to undermine the fantasy. Each is thwarted, however; after a night at the pub where Maura drunkenly rides around in Annie's wheelchair, Andy is killed while driving home drunk with Maura (also drunk) and Annie. Andy's death does have a positive end: he is a match with Annie and his kidney helps to save her life. Vladic, the Romanian pește for whom Ondine is a drug mule, drowns trying to get her "seal coat" (the drugs she was carrying) that Annie hides in a lobster pot.

The lobster pots have symbolic resonance to another story concerning Irish merpeople, "The Soul Cages." In the story, which is set in Co. Clare, Jack Dogherty befriends a merrow,

Coomara, who had also been friends with his father and grandfather. They spend their time drinking in Coomara's house under the sea where Jack spies a set of lobster pots. Coomara informs him that the lobster pots are soul cages to house the souls of drowned sailors. By the end of the story, Jack is able to trick Coomara by getting him drunk on *poitín* and then returning to Coomara's house under the sea to free the souls. In the film, Vladic is unable to swim and becomes one of the drowned souls. Through his drowning the three main characters get their happily-ever-after.

Earlier in the film, real life threatens to intervene and Syracuse fears that things won't work out well, even though "that's not how fairy tales end. But this one does. This one does because it has to" (*Ondine*); however, things do work out ostensibly well in the end for the three, despite the obstacles along the way. *Ondine* is not a selkie; her haunting "selkie" song is an actual song by the Icelandic band Sigur Rós, "All Alright," which Annie correctly identifies when Syracuse sees the band playing it live on the television and says "it's real," to which Annie replies, "of course it is, it's Sigur Rós" (*Ondine*). She admits her real name is Yoanna and that she is a drug mule, for which she is arrested at the end of the film. But things work out, just as they would in a fairytale, for the three. Annie gets her new kidney and is allowed to live with Syracuse; *Ondine*/Yoanna is freed from her Romanian captor, Syracuse is given hope and freed from his depression, and all three get a new start with a family and a chance to escape the past. Even though the harsher elements of reality intervene and destroy the fantastic, the characters are given their chance at happiness.

This film uses magic realism as a way to question particular aspects of reality and to highlight what otherwise might be lost in humdrum, everyday life. Much as the stories "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" and "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World" by Gabriel

Garcia-Márquez use fairytale elements, Jordan's film takes the basic plot points and tropes from folk and fairytales to point to very real problems that people deal with on a day-to-day basis. However, just as in *The Crying Game*, *Ondine* illustrates the seductive nature that storytelling can have, obscuring the truth because the myth is more attractive. Annie and Syracuse and even Ondine/Yoanna want there to be some truth in the story of the selkie settling with a family on land; it is a tale that is easier to believe than the truth. One problem here, of course, is that because the tale obscures the truth, the line between truth and fiction becomes more difficult to apprehend with every passing day. Just as with the stories of Cúchulainn and the Shan Van Vocht, these tales can become part of a larger narrative that also obscures, hiding the realities like ideology can.

One area where the use of Irish myth and legend has particularly flourished is in books and films aimed at children and young adults, and this is an area that presents an abundance of under analyzed material. Just as one can look at the ramifications of ideology in adult literature, it becomes an equally important study to see how it is reproduced in children's media. What is emphasized is often ideologically essential to the dominant hegemony. So what emerges from a study of films such as John Sayles's⁹⁰ *The Secret of Roan Inish* (1994) and Tomm Moore's *The Secret of Kells* (2009) is an emphasis on the maintenance of the traditional ways of Irish life in the face of an imposing threat (modern urbanity eclipsing traditions in the former and the Viking invasion of the 8th century in the latter).

The central story of *The Secret of Roan Inish* is that Fiona returns to live with her grandparents after the death of her mother. She and her extended family had lived for generations on Roan Inish—Seal Island—only to leave after the tragic disappearance and

⁹⁰ Sayles is an Irish-American, but I think that over the years the interchange between filmmakers in Ireland and the diaspora has become significant, especially in the case of Jim Sheridan. Sheridan moved to the United States and has made it the setting of many of his recent films, most notably *In America* (2003).

assumed death of her infant brother, Jamie. As a result, similar to Peadar O'Donnell's *Islanders*, they all leave Roan Inish and the traditional life on the sea for the mainland and industrial jobs. Fiona, inspired by the greeting of an inquisitive seal and the nearness of Roan Inish, begins to question what happened to her brother; these questions are met with stories from family members and her own journey to the island. One important aspect of *The Secret of Roan Inish* is that it is a tale where the girl, Fiona (Jeni Courtney), gets to go on the adventure; she is not on the sidelines, as female characters so often are in these kinds of stories. The role of the skeptical but helpful sidekick here is played by Fiona's cousin, Eamon (Richard Sheridan), who loves the life of a fisherman in the west of Ireland and talks about returning to Roan Inish, but lacks the courage until Fiona forces his hand. The film is set in late-1940s Donegal, and the ravages of war and the hopes of a brighter tomorrow threaten dissolution of the traditional ways of life, which inundate the scenery: it is lush and green, with the power and beauty of the sea on full display. It relies heavily on traditional imagery often associated with Ireland (such as thatched-roof cottages, currachs, Aran-knit sweaters, tweed flat hats, smoking pipes, and piles of turf) and the tension between a modern and urban life versus the traditional life in the country is one of the central themes of the movie. As Fiona's grandmother suggests, "They say the east is our future; the west is our past" (Sayles). As much as the film seems to hold up traditional ways of life, there is a lingering sense of madness (as in Fiona's cousin Tadhg), or sickness ("the love of the sea is a sickness") that comes with staying and not moving on.

One of the best elements of the film is that John Sayles maintains the oral traditions of storytelling and the film itself mimics the kinds of qualities one might expect from that tradition: it is slow-moving, discursive and thoughtfully paced. Tales of the Conneely family on Roan Inish are told to Fiona by her grandfather Hugh (Mick Lally) and her cousins Eamon and Tadhg

(John Lynch) as she tries to make sense of the passing of her younger brother on the island and the family's connection to the selkies. As can be found in so much of Irish storytelling, elements of history—both familial and national—are mixed with legend, and it becomes difficult to know where the actual events end and the fictional ones begin. For example, when talking about the family's deep connection to Roan Inish—a connection lost due to “War, jobs across the sea” and the lure of an urbane lifestyle that so many felt in Ireland at this time—Hugh tells Fiona the tale of his great-grandfather Seán Michael. The flashback moves to a scene in one of the National schools in Donegal in the nineteenth century with an English teacher. As Hugh says, “The English were still a force in the country then. They had the schools. It was their language and their ways that you had to learn there—or else.” The schoolmaster (Michael MacCarthaigh) catches Seán Michael speaking Irish and punished him by making him wear a cingulum made of straw around his neck as a punishment. Most of the rest of the country had tally-sticks (*bata scóir*) that kept track of when a student spoke Irish instead of English, and those tallies were often met with corporal punishment at home. Seán Michael's wearing the cingulum is met with the derisive chant of “Idjit” from his classmates. English as a language was able to make such inroads in Ireland because of the social stigmas associated with it and the pressure to learn from parents and peers. This is a perfect example of how ideology replicates itself through force and shame. The English had willing participants among the Irish people when it came to the near demise of the language.

Seán Michael, however, is not able to accept the mocking gibes of his classmates or the language of the colonial occupiers and retaliates by physically beating the schoolmaster, telling him in Irish to “*sac suas i do thóin é*” (Stick it up your ass). He then leaves behind the mainland—and the English language—with his family, all of whom drown on the voyage during

a particularly vicious storm. He washes up on shore on Roan Inish and is nursed by to health by the local women, who tell him that he has come to the Island of the Dead, which he naively believes. He tells them that the last thing he remembers is being guided by a seal, which of course the audience will associate with the selkies, the seal people. This connection is made even clearer with the story of another relation, Liam, who marries a selkie, thus beginning the “dark” Conneely line: once in every generation a Conneely is born with dark hair and dark features, the links to the selkie line. The story is told by Tadhg, a relation who has a reputation amongst the community for being “daft.” It is a typical tale of the selkie wife: she comes ashore and has her seal-coat stolen from her, leaving her captive on land; she marries and has children but unhappily longs for the sea (“There was always a touch of sadness about Nuala”); and finally, by chance, she recovers her seal-coat and disappears forever into the sea. In this case, Liam and Nuala’s daughter asks her mother “why does father hide a leather coat in the roof?” which leads Nuala back to her seal form and away from Roan Inish forever.

Sayles’s film connects the stories of Seán Michael, Liam, Tadhg, and Jaime; they are the “dark ones” of the Conneely clan, the ones who have a connection to the traditions, the sea and the selkies. They each have qualities that cause them to be labeled “dreamers” at odds with the necessarily pragmatic society that has no time for dreamers, only life-sustaining labor. When discussing Tadhg, Hugh and Tess could have been speaking about any of the dark Conneelys: “He doesn’t know if he’s awake or dreaming.” Despite her “fair” qualities, Fiona too has a touch of a visionary; she has dream visions (*aisling*) of her younger brother, her dead mother, the selkies and their land-under-waves; some of the *aislings* she has while visiting the abandoned Roan Inish, which lead her to catch glimpses of a little naked dark-haired boy—her lost brother, Jaime—running to his bark, the well-loved family cradle he was lost to sea in.

The film focuses on liminal spaces. The grandmother describes Tadhg as being “caught between earth and water,” and one could describe the film in these terms as well: history and myth, modernity and tradition, past and present, earth and sea. It begs for a sense of balance. By not maintaining a connection with Roan Inish and the sea, all but giving it up for the mainland, the sea has taken its own measure by keeping Jaime. As the grandfather says, “the sea gives; the sea takes away.” Fiona and Eamon return to Roan Inish and refurbish the family’s cottage: they fix the thatch, repair and white-wall the outside, and sweep the cobwebs inside. They also cut turf with a traditional *slean*⁹¹ and fish using only a rope. In other words, they learn the traditions of the past. While they do so, nature and its guardians keep a watchful eye: as Fiona and Eamon go about their chores on the island, the camera consistently cuts to close-ups of the seals in the sea and the seagulls in the air watching them carefully. It is only when balance is restored and traditions maintained by Fiona and Eamon does the sea and the selkies return Jamie.

It is no coincidence that the two titles *The Secret of Roan Inish* and *The Secret of Kells* include the word “secret.” Each film pursues the idea that one who is connected to the traditions—but not dogmatically so—and to nature is shown its secrets. Both Fiona and Brendan have dream visions and can “see” into the heart of things, and it is because of the imaginations and perseverance of both children that nature lets them in. Tomm Moore’s *The Secret of Kells* is a stunningly beautiful animated film that is inspired by one of Ireland’s most-important cultural possessions, the ancient *Book of Kells*, which today is lodged and on display in Trinity College, Dublin. The film depicts historical Kells monastery under Abbott Cellach (voiced by Brendan Gleeson), who is obsessed with building a wall around the monastery to keep the Vikings out, as rumors of their destructive path through the countryside has reached the monks. He sees the wall

⁹¹ There has been an interesting confrontation of late between Irish traditional ways of life and life in the EU, as turf-cutting was banned in a small percentage of bogs (2% of harvesting bogs) in Ireland in order to preserve biodiversity there. Many Irish have protested this ban.

as serving another goal: a means to convert the local population once he saves them from the Vikings. Living with him and the other monks is his young nephew, Brendan. Unfortunately for all of the other monks and Brendan most of all, Cellach's focus on the wall is myopic; he hasn't the time for anything else, including the work in the scriptorium illuminating manuscripts. He feels the wall will "save civilization" and that anything within the walls of the sanctuary will be safe as well. He has focused on this so much that Brendan repeats that he "is not allowed outside the walls. It's too dangerous." But it is only when he leaves the walls of Kells that he really lives and is allowed to be a little boy: he roams the forest, climbs trees, runs and chases after Aisling (a faery girl he encounters), and goes adventuring. It is the forest that he will call home after Kells is inevitably sacked by the Vikings, and it is in the forest where he will complete Brother Aidan's vision for the Chi Rho page in what will become the Book of Kells.

The film uses striking visual imagery to connect with the past and with myth and legend. Though the film has an enormous and vibrant palette, dominant colors of black and white persist. Animal imagery also runs throughout: the black raven, which seems to follow the death and destruction waged by the marauding Vikings and which has obvious resonance with the Morríghna, is contrasted with the white dove and its corresponding allusions. Brother Aidan's cat who aids Brendan, Pangúr Ban, and Aisling (and the wolf into which she transforms) are also white. Pangúr Ban comes from an old Irish poem about a monk's cat and their respective trades: "Each of us pursues his trade, / I and Pangur my comrade, / His whole fancy on the hunt, / And mine for learning ardent" (O'Connor, *Kings, Lords* 14). As the act of illuminating a text has multiple symbolic resonances, and the final stanza reads:

Hé fesin as choimsid dáu;	Master of the death of mice,
in muid du-ngní cach óenláu;	He keeps in daily practice,
du thabairt doraid du glé	I too, making dark things clear,
for mu muid céin am messe.	Am of my trade a master. (O'Connor 15)

To quote the last two lines of Eavan Boland's translation, which links Pangúr's hunting with his master's, "I hunt each riddle / From dark to light" (*New Collected Poems* 54). The movie takes this further: no longer is this illuminating just a text, but the minds of those who view the book. At first, Brendan fears that he will be blinded just by looking at the text because he is a "sinner" (*The Secret of Kells*), but Brother Aidan informs him that he will be just fine. He is left awestruck at the beauty of the illuminations, which seem to dance on the page in front of him.

Brother Aidan enlists the boy's aid in collecting the berries necessary for the vibrant green pigment used in the book. While searching the forest he meets Aisling, one of the Tuatha Dé Danann, a very old forest fairy in this instance. She acts as the guardian of the forest, keeping its secrets from any prying eyes. She comes to like and trust Brendan, especially after he tells her that he is an orphan, a situation to which she can relate. In the forest, Brendan stumbles upon the lair of the sleeping Crom Cruach, a pre-Christian fertility god connected to human sacrifice in Co. Cavan. Even Aisling fears Crom Cruach and asks Brendan not to disturb its slumber, telling him that "this is a place of suffering"—to which Brendan replies, "That's all pagan nonsense. There's no such thing as Crom Cruach" (*The Secret of Kells*). He will find out later, however, that the Crom Cruach is very real: he bests the creature in its underwater lair in order to retrieve the second Eye of Crom Cruach, the first being taken by Columcille, which could be used a lens for Brother Aidan while working on the book.

Both *The Secret of Roan Inish* and *The Secret of Kells* reiterate central ideological tenets of twentieth-century independent Ireland: a return to ties to nature and simplicity and a fear of modernity and the outside influences that come with it, all of which are connected to a desire to return to traditional ways of life. Interestingly, especially when one considers life in Ireland for much of the last millennium, one element that may or may not be emphasized as much is religious faith. The main characters all have faith, faith that Jamie is not dead, that the Chi Rho page can be finished, and the *Book of Kells* be saved from the Viking hordes. But religious faith seems curiously underemphasized, especially in *The Secret of Kells*, which for all its focus on ecclesiastical monastic life seems to place greater—and certainly more positive—emphasis on the pre-Christian traditions found with Aisling and the woods, with its openness, its joy, and its lust for life. In *The Secret of Roan Inish* the grandmother, Tess, is the most outwardly religious, but Sayles juxtaposes the scene when Tess mutters to herself that Hugh is a “superstitious old man” while then going on to rake the coals of the fire place, making the sign of the cross above and below the wood and asking Mary, Brigid, and “the eight brightest angels” for protection, which seems to call into question the ritualistically superstitious elements of the Catholic Church in Ireland. Despite the fact that both films emphasize traditional aspects of society, it also seems as if there is an understanding that time marches forward and that the traditional ways of doing things are not for everyone, but that they must be for some or else they will be lost.

The dominance of visual media such as television and film is not limited to English-speaking Ireland, however. As the Irish language continues its revival, it seeks to expand into various other media besides the written text. Founded as Teilifís na Gaeilge in 1996, TG Ceathair (TG4) is Ireland’s Irish language television station. It broadcasts original and dubbed programming in Irish. One such example, despite its difficult nature, is a film version of Máirtín

Ó Cadhain's novel *Cré na Cille* was produced by ROSG and played on TG4 in December of 2007. Capitalizing on the explosion of graphic novels, Cló Mhaigh Eo has been publishing excellent graphic novels in Irish from myth and legend like *An Táin* and *Deirdre agus Mic Uisnigh* to a visually stunning version of na gCopaleen's *An Béal Bocht*. *The Táin* captures the spirit of the original. The tale seems tailor-made for a graphic format, with Cúchulainn as a precursor to today's superheroes. The battles rage, the blood splatters, and the heads are lopped off from page to page.

The final image is interesting, however: the large panel on the right half of the page depicts Cúchulainn's death and the image is clearly based off of Oliver Shepard's statue that stands in the foyer of the General Post Office in Dublin that commemorates the Easter Rising, celebrated at the end of Yeats's play *The Death of Cuchulain* (1939). On the bottom part of the left-hand side, a close-up on the eye of Badb of the Morrígna shifts to an image of her flying transposed over a blood-red moon before finally settling on his shoulder. The final text box reads: "Thug sé aghaidh ar fhir Éireann ansin. Is chuir sé a sciath is a chraoiseach lena ghualainn, is ghabh sé a chlaíomh nocht ina lámh, agus scaradh a anam lena chorp" (Ó Raghallaigh 40).⁹² The fact that the graphic novel depicts Cúchulainn's death goes beyond the scope of the original text. Cúchulainn's death is typically not included in the *Táin*,⁹³ which ends when the Donn bull kills Fionnbhennach and then its heart explodes, thus temporarily concluding the war between Connacht and Ulster (and the lovers' spat between Medb and Aíllil). The fact that the text refers to Cúchulainn's final act to turn his face to the men of Ireland builds on the

⁹² "And turning his gaze to the men of Ireland, and placing his shield on its side and his spear by his shoulder, and taking his bare sword in his hand, he gave up his spirit."

⁹³ To be fair, there is at least part of "Aided con Culainn" in *Book of Leinster*, which also contains the most complete version of the *Táin*, but it is incomplete.

typical motif of Cúchulainn as sacrificial figure and combined with the iconography connected to the Easter Rising, the Grand Narrative continues.

This is not meant to be a negative evaluation. Irish history cannot be amended to disregard the usage of Romanticized myth and legend during the Revival period leading up to the Easter Rising, and nor should it as long as it is contextualized. Its usage is important in the formation of an independent Irish nation; its connection to and usage in the perpetuation of violence is what complicates it. It certainly cannot be said that it was the romanticized view of Ireland and history that led people to join and support the paramilitary groups in the North, as to do so would be simplifying an extraordinarily complex web of identity and conflict. The economic and sectarian conditions had a far greater influence, although for the IRA the rhetoric was already in place to take advantage of. The larger question remains, however: where does Ireland go now? What aspects of myth and legend come to the fore? If ideology is reflected through literature and art, how does the use of myth and legend reflect the changes in ideology in Ireland? If violence is now no longer an acceptable reaction in Northern Ireland, how will this change how myth and legend is used going forward? Will the martyred dead finally stay dead? All this remains for future analysis, however.

The use of myth and legend in Irish culture is significant as one analyzes the ideological purposes of such usage. As the Ireland moved at the end of the nineteenth century to the end of over 700 years of British colonial occupation, there was a greater reliance upon the past, including the tales from myth, legend, and folklore to help establish an Irish identity not corrupted by colonial influence. As the cultural nationalist movement grew in significance, the figure of Cúchulainn from the Ulster cycle of Irish mythology, the hero of the great early and middle-Irish epic the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, came to symbolize Irish strength, fortitude and a

willingness to sacrifice one's life for the cause of Irish independence. This shift was accompanied by a politicization of the figure. Anglo-Irish writers such as Standish J. O'Grady and Lady Augusta Gregory attempted to mold the old tales into a more cohesive narrative, eliminating strange changes in character and some of the more bloody or sexual elements of the ancient texts. One of the largest issues is a lack of understanding of the language and the culture from which these texts emanated; although Lady Gregory did know Irish, she also felt that her society could do without unnecessary blood or sex. This decision, for better or worse, seems to follow in the English colonial tradition of desiring to be a caretaker to the less-civilized Irish. Regardless of the problematic ideology that emerges from the choices made by the likes of O'Grady and Lady Gregory, it was Pádraic Pearse who codified the figure's most significant usage in his rhetoric leading up to the Easter Rising, when he turned Cúchulainn into a patriot who was more than willing to die for his country. This is the version with which many will associate the epic hero, including many in Northern Ireland where he will be used as a symbol of blood sacrifice and ancient rights of land ownership.

After the formation of the Free State and de Valera's program to strip Ireland of any outside—particularly English—influence, many writers who felt at risk of being censored turned to the myth and legend to situate their texts outside of a contemporary time but still allow them to safely critique contemporary situations. These texts also called into question the development of Irish society after home rule came to the twenty-six-county Free State. For writers such as Flann O'Brien, James Joyce, and Eimar O'Duffy, a romanticized past was no foundation upon which to build a modern country, and each disparaged the parochialism of Ireland from the mid-1920s until the 1950s, when they were either dead or no longer productive and the country was beginning to move towards a more progressive view of itself and its policies. The fabulists'

Cúchulainn and Fionn are not the same ones of the Revival period. Both heroes find themselves in a very modern world that it is at odds with the worlds of myth and legend. In this way these writers were able to highlight the fact that modern Ireland was not and could not be a world of heroes and a romanticized Ireland of antiquity. To think so was to deny the real issues of the day: a sluggish economy that was made worse by de Valera's foreign policies; an increasingly conservative government and the limiting of civil rights; the continually growing divide between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland and the constant threat of sectarian violence.

Ironically, the parts of the country that were most romanticized at this time, the *Gaeltachtaí*, were suffering the most from an economy that had not modernized and could no longer compete with the more industrialized parts of the country. Small family-owned farms could not produce enough, nor was there sufficient infrastructure to get the goods from the farms to the major industrial centers. The Irish language, despite the preeminence given to it under de Valera's Fianna Fáil administration and his 1937 constitution, was dying. Because of the poor economic conditions, many young people had to leave for want of work. The traditions often died with those left behind. Writers of the Gaeltacht like Máirtín Ó Cadhain and Máirtín Ó Direáin used myth and legend to illustrate the dying traditions tied to land and language. Modernization, while seen as necessary and a positive change for most of the rest of the country, threatened to destroy the very lifeblood of the country that was so romanticized in Dublin.

Any discussion of the last fifty years of the twentieth century in Ireland has to at least mention the Troubles in Northern Ireland and the sectarian violence orchestrated by the IRA and UVF forces. For the writers of the North—regardless of whether they write in English, Irish or both—it was a difficult but necessary project to wrestle with tradition and history. Writers such as Seamus Heaney, Eavan Boland, and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill have called into question the very

traditions of the basis of the conflict and the use of stories from the past by both sides to justify the use of violence. If Cúchulainn was going to be a symbol for both the IRA (especially the martyr figure, valiantly tying himself to the post and dying for Ireland) and the UVF (as a symbol of an independent and feisty Ulster), then artists felt the need to find some way to undermine that imagery and symbolism, robbing it of its collective power. It also allowed Boland and Ní Dhomhnaill to question patriarchal culture and reclaim a woman's voice in myth and legend so often silenced or marginalized.

Because of its inevitable connection to nationalism and politics, the use of myth and legend is reflective of the zeitgeist of each particular time period in Ireland in the twentieth century, which also means that there has been a continual reevaluation of the uses of myth and legend throughout twentieth-century Irish art. Whereas early in the twentieth century the figures of myth and legend—particularly Cúchulainn and the Shan Van Vocht—were used to justify the violence necessary to birth an independent Irish nation free from the shackles of British oppression, as we move to the end of the century these same figures become demythologized. Writers and filmmakers sought to reclaim these figures, to strip them of the past political uses, undermining their usage to sanction the violence perpetuated by paramilitary sectarian groups. These symbolic figures have begun to be shaped differently. No longer can one look at Ireland-as-gendered-female. No longer can one view Cúchulainn as Ireland's martyred messianic figure. At least one cannot do this without sufficiently ignoring history and the real lived experiences of people.

And this is where Ireland sits now, needing in part to redefine itself in the modern age, a time when the quaintness of the romanticized view of Ireland in *The Quiet Man* has been replaced by the disquietude of the violence of the last century and the last forty years, especially

in films such as Jordan's *The Crying Game*, Jim Sheridan's *The Field* (1990) and *In the Name of the Father* (1993), and Ken Loach's *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006).⁹⁴ It is a time when the writers of the country have often been ahead of the lingering parochialism of a country still in the grips of Catholic ideology; for proof of this all one needs to do is look at the case of Savita Halappanavar and Ireland's abortion policy. A seventeen-weeks-pregnant Halappanavar, an Indian native working as a dentist in Ireland, exhibited signs of a miscarriage and sought an abortion at University Hospital in Galway on 21 October 2012. She was denied, however, as the Catholic Church's stance on abortion still controlled Irish legislature, and she died as a result of organ failure, resulting from septicemia a week later. Her mishandling and death have led to a reexamination by the legislature and the passage of The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013, which establishes the legality of abortion in certain proscribed situations. What remains is to see how art will respond to this tragedy and if it will be through Irish literary arts that this response comes.

However, despite the continuing issues with women's rights, especially reproductive rights, there appears to be a weakening in Catholic hegemony, as more and more young people in Ireland are turning away from the Church. According to Red C, an Irish marketing research company, less than half of the Irish citizens polled in 2012 considered themselves to be religious: Only 47 percent claimed to be religious ("Global Index of Religion and Atheism" 2). In fact, ten percent declared themselves to be a convinced atheist, which placed Ireland in the top ten percentages of declared atheists according to this poll, a significant distance from China at number one with 47 percent (10). In 2005 the percentage of people who were religious was 69 percent (5). With a 22 percent decline in those who declared themselves to be religious, it was

⁹⁴ Even though several of these films do not address the Troubles directly, the violence depicted, violence often associated with drastic change, is at odds with the comic fisticuffs one finds in *The Quiet Man*.

the second largest percentage drop across the 40 countries polled in both years (11). This may seem as a shocking shift in Irish society that has long considered itself Catholic in nature, but even in the “Survey of Religious Practice, Attitude, and Belief,” which was conducted in 1973–74, discovered that “although 90 percent of the Catholic population still attended mass at least once a week, 25 percent of single men and women in the 18–30 age-group had forsaken this religious obligation altogether, while 30 percent of those 21–25 had done so” (T. Brown 289). This trend has continued for forty years now, and it is reflected in the shifts in societal views on issues such as divorce, contraception, and LGBTQ rights. In fact, Ireland is the first country to pass a legislation legalizing same-sex marriage by a popular vote, an inconceivable fact considering that it was only in 1993 that “Fianna Fáil Minister for Justice was able to put a bill through the houses of the Oireachtas to decriminalize homosexual relations between consenting adults (the state in fact was required to do this on foot of the victory of David Norris⁹⁵ had won before the European Court of Human Rights)” (T. Brown 372). As Ireland becomes more and more secularized and moves away from the hegemonic control of the Catholic Church, Irishness will need even more defining. I think that Ireland will remain Catholic culturally, but the shift away from the Church’s control on political issues is significant, nonetheless.

As we approach the 100th anniversary of the Easter Rising, one has to wonder what aspects of the time period the country will celebrate. As Declan Kiberd suggested about the fiftieth anniversary, “Politicians and propagandists produced a sanitized, heroic image of Patrick Pearse, at least partly to downplay the socialism of Connolly, then attracting the allegiance of the liberal young” (*Irish Writer* 195). But Pearse’s image has suffered—both fairly and unfairly—

⁹⁵ David Norris, an Irish Senator and gay and human rights, won his trial against the state (Norris v. Ireland) in 1988 in the European Court of Human Rights, by claiming that the criminalization of homosexuality violated his rights to privacy.

since then. The problems in the North have certainly affected how we view Ireland in the twentieth century now.

As any post-colonial nation, Ireland must still assert itself in an attempt to find its place in the world, post-Celtic Tiger, post-9/11, but in large part it already has. It is no longer “the ‘beggar of Europe’, wedded to handouts as an alternative to generating wealth at home” (Bartlett 470). As a result, there has been and hopefully will continue to be a change in ideology, moving from one of separation and exclusion to one of acceptance and compromise. Similar to the Igbo aphorism frequently used by Chinua Achebe in his works “let the hawk perch, and let the eagle perch,” I think that Declan Kiberd’s summation to the Field Day pamphlets is significant: “they warned that one could not implement the dream of an absolute return to a mythic Gaelic past and that one should not submit to the shallow cosmopolitanism which sought to fill the ensuing vacuum. Instead, there should be a perpetual negotiation between both worlds” (*Irish Writer* 204).

Any desired return to a romanticized purely Gaelic past has not and cannot work. But neither should Ireland be so ready to throw off the past either. That, of course, would be a difficult feat anyway. And Ireland is already reconsidering its past, Kiberd adds:

94 per cent of the citizens of the Irish Republic voted in May 1998 to rescind a constitutional claim which they had been taught since childhood was a force of nature and a recognition that God had made our island a singular space destined for unification. For the sake of peace and good neighbourliness, they voted for a Belfast Agreement which included the contention that a county such as Antrim could be British or Irish or both. (*Irish Writer* 284)

It is intriguing to consider where Ireland will go in the next hundred years, because, as Kiberd continues, “It is in that same context that political nationalism seemed to accept its own demise in the Belfast Agreement, but only so that it could be reborn as cultural pluralism—a civic nationalism which would devise structures calibrated to the needs of all cultural traditions, unionist as well as nationalist, Protestant as well as Catholic” (286). This pluralism is important. This is what it means to be Irish today: it is a nation made up of disparate peoples, languages, and traditions. A pure society made up of only Catholic Gaels cannot and will not exist. It is a society that continues to grow and change and become more diverse as time goes on and more people immigrate from all over the EU. Embracing the changes and diversity opens up a new way to look at the country’s history and its cultural hybridity as David Lloyd writes of in “Adulteration and the Nation”: “Hybridization or adulteration resist identification both in the sense that they cannot be subordinated to a narrative of representation and in the sense that they play out in the unevenness of knowledge which, against assimilation, foregrounds the political and cultural positioning of the audience or reader” (114). It is through locating hybridization in texts that, as Lloyd suggests, we can move toward counterhegemonic terrain upon which contestation can be seen and analyzed.

With this in mind, perhaps the figure that should emerge from myth and legend as a more appropriate figure of modern Ireland is Fergus mac Róich,⁹⁶ for it is Fergus who seeks a more peaceful response when those around him clamor for war and bloodshed. Although Fergus certainly participates in battle and can be filled with rage at times,⁹⁷ it is Fergus who in both *The*

⁹⁶ Yeats frequently turned to Fergus in his early poetry and drama. He becomes one of many masks for Yeats; he sees Fergus as representative of a wandering poet/philosopher figure, much as Yeats fancied himself. A few good examples can be found in the poems “Who Goes with Fergus?” and “Fergus and the Druid,” and the play *Deirdre*.

⁹⁷ See the section in the *Táin* where he is prohibited from killing Conchobor and instead “turned aside and struck at the hills. With three strokes he levelled the three bald-topped hills of Meath” (248). Or his trickery and challenge to

Táin and “The Exile of the Sons of Uisneach” sees the stupidity of unnecessary conflict. It is, as Kiberd points out, Fergus who suggests that “history is still open” (*Irish Writer* 159).

I also think that part of the change in Ireland has come with a movement away from seeing the country as still a quasi-British colony (which has been central to nationalist and Marxist analysis since the separation of Northern Ireland) to Ireland seen as an independent state in a larger European context: “In numerous ways ‘Europe’s’ influence was profound: it was a case brought to the European court that led to the legalisation of homosexuality in the Republic; and in many other areas and at every level—work practices, family law, fishing quotas, interest rates and a single currency—European influence permeated into Irish society” (Bartlett 470). Much of this has to do with the rise of the Celtic Tiger, but it also illustrates the shift in thinking about national states and nationalism within the European Union. With the flexibility of moving from one nation to the next, it starts to erode the fixation on national purity and forces a broader thinking about the plurality of identity: there is not a single definition of what it means to be Irish; instead, the rise of immigration from eastern-Europe, Africa, and Asia has literally changed the face of Irish identity: “in the first decade of the third millennium the unthinkable happened as the Irish republic witnessed an unprecedented volume of immigration and struggled to meet the numerous challenges attendant on being for the first time a host country to a multi-ethnic flow” (Bartlett 469).

However, with the world-wide economic crises faced by capitalism in recent years, there should also be a reevaluation of how such a repository of myth and legend can aid artists in the future in terms of continuing to develop the terrain upon which they can combat dominant hegemony that allows exploitation to continue. For Irish artists, it is in these tales that a rich

Ailill Finn (Ailill the Fair Haired) in the *Táin Bó Flihais* in order to take Ailill’s wife, Flidhais, from him because she has fallen in love with Fergus.

tradition already exists, connecting past and present and a shared history that can be opened up for new generations, leading to a new definition of what it means to be Irish.

I can only hope that definition will still consider the traditions of the past but will not be controlled by it. Looking at the more recent uses of myth and legend in film, I see particular promise in Tomm Moore's use of it in his films *The Secret of Kells* and *The Song of the Sea*. In the films a child with determination and promise accepts the traditions of the past in order to aid the world in which they inhabit (the monastic art of the illuminated manuscript and the music of the selkie, respectively). Moore is able to weave the stories of myth and legend into his narratives, but they are freed of the weight of sectarian politics. I believe that myth and legend can still be used effectively as a tool for political change, but I hope that it will be used to help develop Ireland as a pluralistic and inclusive society that fights for the rights of silenced and marginalized voices. If this can occur, perhaps we have reached the age where Ireland awakes from the nightmare that is its history.

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