

‘A Joycean Smutmonger’: Echoes of Joyce in Máirtín Ó Cadhain’s Rural Modernism

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Introduction

Any discussion of James Joyce’s legacy in relation to the Irish writers that followed him is doomed to a certain acceptance of the truism that *every* Irish writer of the twentieth century has in some sense written in the shadow of his influence. However, a different question may be posed: exactly which version of Joyce has been most influential on his successors? Is it the broadly naturalist Joyce of *Dubliners* and much of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*? Or is it the formally and stylistically experimental Joyce of most of *Ulysses* and the entirety of *Finnegans Wake*? In *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland* (2008), Joe Cleary argues that Irish literature post-Joyce — and most especially literature from rural Ireland — has been notable primarily for its tendency towards adopting the more naturalist aesthetic of early Joyce and rejecting the modernist experimentation of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*.¹ Cleary argues that this vogue for early Joycean naturalism — a term that Cleary acknowledges is not without complications in relation to Joyce — is borne out of a frustration with modernism’s seeming remoteness from ‘social engagement’.² By contrast, naturalism ‘remained admirably socially committed’, but, Cleary argues, ‘its aesthetic conservatism paradoxically replicated the dour conservatism of Irish society against which naturalism had set itself’.³ While Cleary’s criticism may appear harsh, there is a certain truth that, as admirably engaged as it is, rural naturalism’s determination to lay bare the malignancies at the heart of rural Ireland runs the risk of failing to imagine an alternative rural future. It may be tempting, then, to imagine that Joyce’s influence upon his first rural inheritors stopped at the early episodes of *Ulysses*, with rural Ireland failing to find use for his modernist experimentation.⁴ Such a view would align with that which sees rural life as caught in a stasis, incapable of making the leap into a truly modernist aesthetic. However, such a summary of rural Irish literature ignores the Irish-language writer Máirtín Ó Cadhain, whose works straddle socially engaged naturalism *and* a commitment to stylistic experimentation.⁵ Ó Cadhain’s frequent references to Joyce in his literary and critical writings call for a reappraisal of how the Dublin writer influenced Ó Cadhain’s developing aesthetic in the earlier part of his career. This essay will begin such an exploration by examining Ó Cadhain’s

¹ Joe Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2008), 97.

² Cleary, 98.

³ Cleary, 98.

⁴ It is worth noting at this point that rural Irish writers in the twenty-first century have arguably been keener to embrace Joycean stylistic experimentation than those of the twentieth century. One example is Eimear McBride’s *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* (2013), which has been noted for how it employs stream-of-consciousness to delve into the mind of a young girl coming of age in rural Ireland.

⁵ Indeed, Cleary acknowledges this tendency to overlook Ó Cadhain, describing him as ‘surely the most politically committed of the Irish modernist writers, but one whose work is regularly bypassed because he wrote in Irish’ (92).

naturalistic and early modernist phases through the lens of rural modernity and Ó Cadhain's adoption of a specifically rural modernist style. In doing so, it will seek to offer nascent definitions of what is meant by rural modernism within an Irish context.

Born in 1906 in An Cnocán Glas, part of the Irish-speaking area situated west of Galway city known as Cois Fharráige, Ó Cadhain is one of the most politically engaged writers that Ireland has ever produced. An active member of the IRA, Ó Cadhain was sentenced to prison for almost all of World War II as part of an effort by the Irish government to prevent Irish republicans from disrupting Ireland's carefully balanced neutrality. Regarding Ó Cadhain's republicanism, Eoghan Ó Tuairisc writes that it was 'of a positive kind, with two primary objects: to check the physical erosion of a people who by then were going by whole households to America; and to check the even more terrible erosion of a mind and a culture, one of the oldest in Europe, which he saw on the brink of extinction'.⁶ Ó Cadhain appears, for example, to have been wary of embracing violence for its own sake; in 1938, he opposed the IRA's bombing campaign in Britain and resigned from its Army Council in protest.⁷ Ó Cadhain was also a committed socialist throughout his life, as well as a steadfast supporter of Irish language rights. He wrote in a style of Irish characterised by the dialect of west Galway and possessed an extraordinary breadth of vocabulary, with his writing noted for its dense quality. Ó Cadhain was a polyglot of Joycean proportions and, in addition to his native Irish, understood — to varying degrees of fluency — English, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh, Breton, Russian, Spanish, German, French, and Italian.⁸ Until his death in 1970, Ó Cadhain was a prolific writer of journalism, short stories and novels, only one of which was published in his lifetime, the experimental work *Cré na Cille* (1949), literally translated as 'Churchyard Clay'.

Ó Cadhain's position as a writer from a periphery within western Europe, writing in one of its minor languages, contributed to his slow acceptance as a modernist writer. Indeed, questions of modernism/modernity have traditionally been discussed only in relation to urban contexts: Marshall Berman's famous declaration that 'the streets, our streets, are where modernism belongs' bespeaks such a blind spot,⁹ while Hugh Kenner is somewhat more blunt, writing that '[m]odernism is distinctly urban'.¹⁰ Berman famously describes being modern as being 'part of a universe in which, as Marx said, "all that is solid melts into air [...]".¹¹ Such formulations have since been adapted by critics such as Luke Gibbons to argue precisely for peripheral—and specifically colonised—areas such as Ireland as having 'experienced modernity before [their] time'.¹² Cleary highlights how in Ireland 'modernity meant dispossession, subordination and the loss of sovereignty, the collapse of its indigenous social order, the gradual disintegration of its Gaelic cultural system, and successive waves of

⁶ Eoghan Ó Tuairisc, 'Introduction', *The Road to Brightcity*, trans. Eoghan Ó Tuairisc (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1981), 8.

⁷ Cian Ó hÉigearthaigh, 'Máirtín Ó Cadhain: Politics and Literature', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 34.1 (2008): 29.

⁸ Liam Mac Con Iomaire, 'Introductory Note', *Graveyard Clay: Cré na Cille*, trans. Liam Mac Con Iomaire and Tim Robinson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), viii.

⁹ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 12.

¹⁰ Hugh Kenner, *The Mechanic Muse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 14.

¹¹ Berman, 15.

¹² Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press in Association with Field Day, 1996), 6.

politically or economically enforced emigration'.¹³ Each of these traits of modernity are heightened in the context of rural Ireland.

Recent critical explorations of rural modernity/modernism fall in line with broader trends coming under the banner of 'alternative modernities'. This is exemplified by Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz' influential article, 'The New Modernist Studies' (2008), where the authors emphasise scholarly works that seek to 'globalize modernism both by identifying new local strains in parts of the world not always associated with modernist production and by situating well-known modernist artifacts in a broader transnational past'.¹⁴ Such work not only helps to recover modernisms in parts of the world far from Europe and North America but can also help to identify variant modernisms within these countries as well, something that Susan Stanford Friedman notes in *Planetary Modernisms* (2015) when she writes that '[t]he association of modernism and modernity with Europe and the United States in the humanities not only excludes non-Western locations but also contains peripheries within "the West"'.¹⁵ Mao and Walkowitz' article helped to challenge the rural/urban divide found within critical studies of modernity and modernism up to that point, something that subsequent critics have since further explored. In 2013's *Regional Modernisms*, Neal Alexander and James Moran argue against the notion that modernist writers were removed from regional or provincial concerns.¹⁶ Indeed, Alexander and Moran point out that 'regional affiliations are apparent in the work of many high modernists but are perhaps particularly pronounced in that of "late" modernists writing during and after the 1930s'.¹⁷ While 'regional' is a relatively broad category that can include urban peripheries, in *Rural Modernity, Everyday Life and Visual Culture* (2015), Rosemary Shirley sets out to specifically 'reactivat[e] the rural as a site of modernity'.¹⁸ Shirley identifies 'four persistent narratives' promulgated about rural life, which she lists as insularity, artifice, stability and order, and which, she argues, 'contribute to the idea that the countryside, or its place in the national imaginary stands in opposition to some of the major characteristics associated with modernity'.¹⁹ Similarly, the essays in Kirstin Bluemel and Michael McCluskey's *Rural Modernity in Britain: A Critical Intervention* (2018) set out to show how 'rural regions, communities, classes and figures can originate and sustain histories of and criticism on modernity and the modern'.²⁰ Bluemel and McCluskey affirm that rural areas 'cannot be viewed only as retreats from modernity' but instead 'must also be seen as modern spaces inviting us to consider the diverse effects of new ways of moving, communicating, producing and perceiving'.²¹ While such works have helped to recover a sense of rural modernity, the aesthetic category of modernism remains stubbornly associated with the urban. Most recently, Andrew Frayn has offered a preliminary definition of 'rural

¹³ Cleary, 78.

¹⁴ Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'The New Modernist Studies', *PMLA* 123.3 (2008): 739.

¹⁵ Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 352n27.

¹⁶ Neal Alexander and James Moran, 'Introduction: Regional Modernisms', *Regional Modernisms*, eds. Neal Alexander and James Moran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 1.

¹⁷ Alexander and Moran, 3.

¹⁸ Rosemary Shirley, *Rural Modernity, Everyday Life and Visual Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 3.

¹⁹ Shirley, 7.

²⁰ Kirstin Bluemel and Michael McCluskey, 'Introduction: Rural Modernity in Britain', *Rural Modernity in Britain: A Critical Intervention*, eds. Kirstin Bluemel and Michael McCluskey (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 2.

²¹ Bluemel and McCluskey, 14–15.

modernism’ in a study of the poetry of Norman Nicholson. Frayn’s definition sees rural modernism as ‘the linguistic and metaphorical representation of industrial modernity as inherent in the rural, the juxtaposition of rural beauty and rural industry: a conscious act of looking at that which is more frequently placed outside the frame’.²² This critical framework offers a new paradigm in which to reconsider Ó Cadhain’s literary importance in modernist studies.

If Ó Cadhain’s position as a writer from rural Ireland, writing in Irish, made his acceptance into the pantheon of European modernists unlikely, this was only exacerbated by his writing’s notorious difficulty. As Ó Cadhain admitted late in life, ‘Ní ghéillim orlach do mo léitheoirí ach tá lucht léite agam’ (‘I don’t yield an inch to my readers but I have readers’).²³ Ó Cadhain had for a time worked as a lexicographer. Louis de Paor notes that he collected more than 860,000 words of material in the Galway dialect between 1937 and 1946.²⁴ Reading Ó Cadhain in the original is at times reminiscent of the lexicographical work, as though the writer were determined to include every word from his local dialect before it vanished from the earth. Indeed, de Paor writes that ‘the need to preserve words and idioms that would otherwise be lost must be factored in to any assessment of this aspect of his style’.²⁵ This compulsion to document his local area recalls the Joycean idea that Dublin could be rebuilt from the pages of *Ulysses*—in the same way, the Cois Fharraige dialect has been frozen forever within Ó Cadhain’s writing. Perhaps because of such notoriety surrounding its linguistic extremes, *Cré na Cille* went untranslated into English until 2015—*The New Yorker* somewhat dramatically dubbed it ‘The Irish Novel That’s So Good People Were Scared to Translate It’.²⁶ In 2015, Alan Titley translated *Cré na Cille* under the title *The Dirty Dust*, while the following year saw the publication of *Graveyard Clay*, translated by Liam Mac Con Iomaire and Tim Robinson.²⁷

The appearance of these translations saw Joyce namechecked in many reviews—indeed, it has become something of a mainstay within literary criticism to refer to *Cré na Cille* as the ‘*Ulysses* of the Irish language’. David Greene, in 1972, wrote that ‘Ó Cadhain’s *Cois Fharraige* takes its place with Joyce’s *Dublin*, and *Cré na Cille* is the only book by an Irishman which is worthy of comparison with *Ulysses*’, while Seán Ó Tuama in 1976 reflected that ‘Ó Cadhain wrote the most consciously-patterned and richest-textured prose that any Irishman

²² Andrew Frayn, ‘Rural Modernity, Rural Modernism and Deindustrialisation in Norman Nicholson’s Poetry’, *English Studies* 104.3 (2023): 484.

²³ Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar Tta, 1969), 38. Where published translations of Ó Cadhain’s work are available, I have quoted solely from these throughout this article. However, where no such translations exist, I have offered my own in brackets.

²⁴ Louis de Paor, ‘Introduction: Introducing Máirtín Ó Cadhain’, *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 34.1 (2008): 16.

²⁵ De Paor, 16.

²⁶ William Brennan, ‘The Irish Novel That’s So Good People Were Scared to Translate It’, *The New Yorker*, 17 March 2016. <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-irish-novel-thats-so-good-people-were-scared-to-translate-it>. Accessed 19 January 2022.

²⁷ As indicated by the title, Titley’s is a much looser translation of the original, placing more emphasis on Ó Cadhain’s scabrous humour. By contrast, *Graveyard Clay* is more loyal to the original and overall gives a better sense of the tone of Ó Cadhain’s novel. For this reason, I have chosen to quote from *Graveyard Clay* throughout, except when drawing attention to particular elements of the language in the original.

has written in this century, except Beckett and Joyce'.²⁸ The critical reflex towards Joyce in fact had negative consequences for Ó Cadhain originally, as the manuscript of *Cré na Cille* was rejected by the editors at the publication house An Gúm because, according to Ó Cadhain, it was too long and too 'Joycean'.²⁹ Ó Cadhain evidently deemed this a peculiar reason to turn down a novel, writing in a 1949 letter to his friend Tomás Bairéad: 'Ní thuigeann sé, is cosúil, gurb í an moladh is mó a d'fhéadfaí a thabhairt ar leabhar í a bheith Joycean! Faraoin nach fíor é! ('He doesn't understand, it seems, that the highest praise one can give a book is to call it Joycean! Alas, it isn't true!').³⁰ Nevertheless, Ó Cadhain appeared to quietly enjoy cultivating such comparisons, even if he felt them misplaced.³¹ This self-mythicisation continued right up until the end of his life, as can be seen in a lecture given by Ó Cadhain in 1969, the year before he died, where he expounded upon his literary career and opinions.³² Over the course of the lecture Ó Cadhain mentions Joyce more than any other writer not writing in Irish — in fact, only the Irish language writer Séamus Ó Grianna features more often — and doubles down on the comparisons between his writing and Joyce's. In one anecdote, he recalls being on a bus one day while *Cré na Cille* was being serialised in the *Irish Press* and overhearing a conversation between a man and a young woman. 'What do you think of this story serialised in the *Irish Press*?' asks the woman. 'This O Cadhain [*sic*] fellow', responds the man. 'A right galoot if ever there was one. A Joycean smutmonger'.³³ This clearly amused and satisfied Ó Cadhain, with the anecdote influencing a passage from *Cré na Cille* where one character who claims to be a writer is labelled a blasphemer by the others, refused admission to their literary 'Rotary', and compared to Joyce: 'You won't be admitted. Your work is Joycean [...]. You have a low-down mind to have written a thing like that [...]. A right Joycean galoot'.³⁴ Even if Ó Cadhain was suspicious of such comparisons with Joyce, he seemed happy enough to quote and re-quote them. As Cathal Ó Háinle writes: 'sílim go bhféadfaí a áitiú freisin gur theastaigh ón gCadhain a thabhairt le fios leis an tagairt do Joyce in *Cré na Cille* go raibh a shaothar féin i ndáiríre inchomórtais le saothar Joyce ar shlí éigin' ('I think it could also be argued that Ó Cadhain wanted to make it known by this reference to Joyce in *Cré na Cille* that his work really was comparable to Joyce's in some way').³⁵

There is, of course, a danger here that 'Joycean' comes to stand as nothing more than a synonym for 'difficult' or 'vulgar'. Irish-language critics have, however, for a number of years sought to delve deeper into this comparison. Radvan Markus' recent publication, *Carnabhal na Marbh* (2023), draws attention to Ó Cadhain's and Joyce's shared vogue for indulging in the carnivalesque and their works' rootedness in a broader Rabelaisian tradition in European

²⁸ Quoted in Eoin Byrne, "'Éistear le mo ghlór!": Máirtín Ó Cadhain's *Cré na Cille* and Postcolonial Modernisms', *Irish Studies Review* 26.3 (2018): 336.

²⁹ Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *As an nGéibheann: Litreacha chuig Tomás Bairéad* (Dublin: Sáirséal agus Dill, 1973), 160.

³⁰ Ó Cadhain, *As an nGéibheann*, 160.

³¹ Even before readers began drawing comparisons with Joyce, Ó Cadhain evidently felt some affinity with the Dublin writer. For example, Cian Ó hÉigeartaigh notes that while a member of the IRA's Army Council just before World War II, Ó Cadhain's contributions to the Council meetings were 'recorded under the *nom-de-guerre* "Joyce"', 29.

³² This talk was later published in book form under the title *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar Tta, 1969).

³³ Ó Cadhain, *Páipéir Bhána*, 12–13.

³⁴ Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *Graveyard Clay: Cré na Cille*, trans. Liam Mac Con Iomaire and Tim Robinson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 204.

³⁵ Cathal Ó Háinle, 'Ó Cadhain, an Rí Séamas II, Joyce agus Molly Bloom', *Saothar Mháirtín Uí Chadhain*, ed. Máire Ní Annracháin, *Léachtaí Cholm Cille* 37 (2007): 11.

writing.³⁶ Markus remarks how comparisons with Joyce have also been used deliberately to elevate Ó Cadhain's standing as a modernist writer.³⁷ Within Irish-language criticism there has been a tendency to separate Ó Cadhain's writings into periods, with the earlier period — which features Ó Cadhain's most sustained focus on rural life — associated with naturalism, and the later period — where urban settings predominate — linked with modernist experimentation. Máirín Nic Eoin argues that such strict cut-and-dry periodisation within the criticism accords with the belief 'gur feiniméan cathrach iltíreach is ea an litríocht nua-aoiseach agus, le go mbeadh sí nua-aoiseach, go gcaithfeadh nualitríocht na Gaeilge cúl a thabhairt le cultúr an bhéaloidis, na tuaithe, an iarthair, an comhthéacs cultúrtha agus tíreolaíoch is mó ar samhlaíodh an Ghaeilge agus litríocht na Gaeilge leis ag tús thréimhse na hathbheochana' ('that modernist literature is a cosmopolitan, urban phenomenon and, in order to be modernist, modern literature in Irish had to turn its back on folkloric culture, the rural, the west, the main cultural and geographical context that Irish and Irish-language literature conceived of itself at the beginning of the Revival period').³⁸ However, such a view appears fundamentally at odds with those expressed by Ó Cadhain himself. Mícheál Briody has drawn attention to notes that Ó Cadhain prepared for a radio debate with Brian Ó Nualláin (aliases Flann O'Brien and Myles na gCopaleen) in which Ó Cadhain argued against the motion 'gur i gcathracha amháin is féidir litríocht a chumadh' ('that it is in cities alone that literature can be created').³⁹ Ó Cadhain does appear to believe, however — in what is in fact quite a Joycean view — that living in a city can help a rural writer to better understand their place of origin: 'Tiocfaidh fear na tuaithe go dtí an chathair agus breathnóidh sé ar ais go léirmheasach agus go scoite ar an tuaithe, nó gabhfaidh Éireannach go Sasana agus déanfaidh sé an rud céanna' ('The rural man will come to the city and look back critically and detachedly on the country, just as an Irishman will go to England and do the same thing').⁴⁰

I wish to add to the body of criticism comparing Ó Cadhain and Joyce by arguing that Ó Cadhain's vision of rural Ireland is marked by many of the same concerns regarding modernity that Joyce gives expression to in his work, while also outlining the stylistic influence that Joyce's most experimental writings have on Ó Cadhain's modernism. Some of Ó Cadhain's later writings have frequently been spoken of in reference to Joyce, particularly the short story 'A Simple Lesson' from *An tSraith ar Lár* (1967), and the difficult-to-classify *Barbed Wire* (unpublished until 2002), which both feature a very Joycean flair for multilingual wordplay. However, this essay focuses instead on two earlier, rural-centred examples from Ó Cadhain's writing, one broadly naturalist and the other experimental, showing the early influence that Joyce had on Ó Cadhain. The first section will compare Ó Cadhain's short story 'An Bhliain 1912' ('The Year 1912') with Joyce's 'Eveline' from *Dubliners*, while the second will focus on Joycean echoes in Ó Cadhain's masterpiece *Cré na Cille* and explore how this may help us to formulate a definition of Ó Cadhain's rural modernism.

³⁶ Radvan Markus, *Carnabhal na Marbh: 'Cré na Cille' agus Litríocht an Domhain* (Indreabhán: Leabhar Breac, 2023): 151–160.

³⁷ Markus, 150.

³⁸ Máirín Nic Eoin, 'Athnuachan agus Athghabháil Shaothar Liteartha Uí Chadhain', *Studia Hibernica* 45.45 (2019): 71.

³⁹ Briody, Mícheál. "'Gur i gcathracha amháin is féidir litríocht a chumadh": Máirtín Ó Cadhain idir Tuath agus Cathair', *Ar an Imeall i Lár an Domhain: Ag Trasnú Tairseacha Staire, Teanga, Litríochta agus Cultúir*, eds. Radvan Markus, Máirín Nic Eoin, Deirdre Nic Mhathúna, Éadaoin Ní Mhuircheartaigh, Brian Ó Conchubhair, and Pádraig Ó Liatháin (Indreabhán: Leabhar Breac, 2021), 255.

⁴⁰ Cited in Briody, 255–56.

Exile, Escape, Emigrate

While *Cré na Cille* is noted for its experimentations in form and language, Ó Cadhain's short stories, particularly his earliest stories, are marked by a dedication to social realism. Ó Cadhain credited his discovery of a short story by Maxim Gorky — which he claimed to have originally read in a French translation — as providing inspiration for the style of writing he would pursue, one which was suitable to the people and place he had come from:

Gheit mé suas den leaba a raibh mé sínte uirthi dhá léamh. Níor léigh mé a leithéid roimhe sin. Tuige nár inis duine ar bith dhom go raibh scéalta mar seo ann? 'Bheinnse i n-ann é sin a scríobh', arsa mise liom féin. 'Sin obair a níos mo mhuintir-sa ach gur malairt ainmneachaí atá orthu'.

(I jumped up from the bed on which I was sat reading it. I had never read anything like it before. Why had nobody told me that there were stories like this? 'I would be able to write that', I said to myself. 'That's the work my people do, only that the names are different'.)⁴¹

Ó Cadhain's trajectory as a writer of short stories follows an interesting path: while the first collections are dominated by harsh rural life in west Galway — and particularly the psychological experiences of the women living in it — his later stories explore urban life and the alienated existences of the men who work in its offices. Despite the cosmopolitanism of Ó Cadhain's literary eureka moment — reading Russian literature in French — it seems likely that inspiration also came from closer to home, from the stories of *Dubliners*. The short story 'An Bhliain 1912', from his second collection *An Braon Broghach (The Dirty Drop [1948])*, appears to be in conscious dialogue with Joyce's 'Eveline'. Both stories concern young women about to leave Ireland, driven by economic and familial forces to find a better life elsewhere. In Joyce's 'Eveline', the eponymous character is a nineteen-year-old woman who lives with her violent, most likely alcoholic, father to whom she hands over the majority of her wages every week. Eveline's mother is dead, as is her brother Ernest, and she therefore has 'nobody to protect her'.⁴² Into this scene of seemingly relentless misery comes Frank, a sailor who is 'kind, manly, open-hearted' and gives Eveline a means of escape by offering to take her back with him to Buenos Ayres.⁴³ Eveline initially accepts his offer and gets as far as the North Wall before finally caving in and refusing to follow Frank onto the boat, wracked by the guilt of leaving her family and the fear of what this new life with Frank would bring: 'All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her'.⁴⁴ As the story ends, we are left with an image of a hollowed-out Eveline, staring at Frank 'like a helpless animal' while '[h]er eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition'.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, in Ó Cadhain's 'An Bhliain 1912', a young woman called Máirín, also nineteen, prepares to emigrate to America. We follow her and her mother's thoughts throughout the story, as Máirín enjoys one last night of entertainment among neighbours before finally sharing an awkward goodbye with her mother and leaving for the boat with her

⁴¹ Ó Cadhain, *Páipéir Bhána*, 26.

⁴² James Joyce, 'Eveline', *Dubliners*. Ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), 26.

⁴³ Joyce, 'Eveline', 27.

⁴⁴ Joyce, 'Eveline', 28.

⁴⁵ Joyce, 'Eveline', 29.

young friends. While both 'Eveline' and 'An Bhliain 1912' are thematically similar, there are important distinctions to be drawn between them. Where Eveline is attracted to the idea of going to Buenos Ayres to live a life of freedom away from her oppressive father and with a man who promises excitement and adventure, Máirín is leaving rural Galway for the much more prosaic reason of finding employment. In Joyce's story, emigration—or exile—from Ireland is a choice that the protagonist may or may not take, and arguably a test of Eveline's independence of character; in Ó Cadhain's story, emigration is simply the inevitable fate of the younger generation growing up in rural Ireland. Eveline, by contrast, already has a job in Dublin, in 'the Stores'.⁴⁶ Leaving Ireland for her is a question of spiritual and personal 'escape', something that would 'save her' from her miserable existence with her father and give her 'life', 'love', and 'happiness'.⁴⁷ She can debate the merits of staying versus going, whereas for Máirín there is little in reality to debate. Ultimately, Eveline cannot go through with leaving, concluding that '[i]t was impossible',⁴⁸ but at the end of 'An Bhliain 1912' there is no such doubt: Máirín will leave, just as dozens of her friends and family too will leave in the years to follow. There is no dramatic tension over Máirín's choice as there is over Eveline's because there is no choice to make. However, perhaps the biggest difference between the two stories is that Ó Cadhain does not foreground the voice of Máirín in 'An Bhliain 1912', but rather places us primarily in the thoughts of her mother, watching her eldest child preparing to leave, likely forever. In this story, Ó Cadhain gives voice to the kind of character who is missing and who, when she does speak, is incomprehensible in Joyce's story: Eveline's mother. Her dying mother's final words — 'Derevaun Seraun' — have been endlessly debated by Joyceans, but what seems most likely is that they are a corrupted form of Irish.⁴⁹ Barry McCrea argues that 'the point of the phrase is its lack of meaning', as the words 'are a fragment of a lost language and lost world, unmotivated signs that cannot signify in the world they find themselves in'.⁵⁰ The strong sense that these words have their origin in the Irish language suggests that Eveline's mother came from an Irish-speaking background in the west of Ireland. In 'An Bhliain 1912' we get access to the lucid thoughts of such a woman, as her daughter leaves home.⁵¹

Filtered primarily through the thoughts of her mother, Máirín's emigration is expressed in funereal terms. In doing so, Ó Cadhain is deliberately referencing the tradition of the 'American Wake', whereby people emigrating to America would be given a 'wake' before they left—and while very much still alive—as it was accepted that most of the people present would most likely never see the emigrating person again. In Ó Cadhain's story, the 'trunk' which holds Máirín's belongings and which she is taking with her to America becomes a symbol of her coffin. This symbolism is hardly subtle, as the narrator reflects that

⁴⁶ Joyce, 'Eveline', 26.

⁴⁷ Joyce, 'Eveline', 28.

⁴⁸ Joyce, 'Eveline', 29.

⁴⁹ Jeri Johnson lists a number of the interpretations of this phrase in her notes to *Dubliners*, ranging from 'death is very near' to 'Worms are the only end' (213). The wide range of interpretations proffered is proof enough of the phrase's intrinsic meaninglessness.

⁵⁰ Barry McCrea, *Languages of the Night: Minor Languages and the Literary Imagination in Twentieth-Century Ireland and Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 21.

⁵¹ Another potential link between the two stories lies in Eveline's first name: the Irish name Eibhlín, usually anglicised as 'Eileen' in accordance with its pronunciation in Munster Irish, is in fact pronounced as 'Eveline' in Connacht Irish. This may be another indication that Eveline's mother came from an Irish-speaking area in the west. I would like to express my gratitude to the peer reviewer of this article for suggesting this.

It took the mother a moment to remember where it was she had seen the exact, pale yellow shade of its timber: on the face of a corpse after a long wake in sultry weather. And her revulsion at the thought of looking into it was the same feeling that had often made her avert her eyes from a corpse in its coffin.⁵²

In addition to the trunk, Máirín's new 'American coat' is explicitly linked by her mother with a death shroud: 'That American coat might as well be a shroud'.⁵³ Her mother sees emigration as 'an injustice on a par with the sacking of temples and the scorching of land', which stands in contrast to the attitude of Máirín and the other young people.⁵⁴ Though Máirín is emotional at leaving, ultimately she and her friends all know that this is their only hope of achieving a life of some comfort:

The young women were all excited about America. Excited about the life they'd all share soon in South Boston. It was their lot in life. The American trunk was their guardian angel, the emigrant ship their guiding star, the broad Atlantic their Red Sea.⁵⁵

Máirín's mother and the older generations are all too aware of this: 'God help the rest of us who have to stay at home', says one neighbour.⁵⁶ Critics such as Marjorie Howes have pointed out how the scale of emigration from rural Ireland meant that villages along the west coast 'did not coincide with the local territories they occupied' as they often felt more closely connected to cities in America, where their sons and daughters were living and sending letters from, than the towns and cities in Ireland.⁵⁷ Such attitudes are made explicitly clear in 'An Bhliain 1912' as the reader is given a brief glimpse into Máirín's own thoughts:

Máirín had never been farther than the Bright City before.⁵⁸ But tales of America were mother's milk to her. South Boston, Norwood, Butte Montana, Minnesota, or California, those names meant more to her than Dublin, Belfast, Wexford, or even places that were only a few miles out beyond the Bright City, in Achréidh. Her life and thoughts had been moulded by the glamour of America, by its riches and pastimes, by the gnawing longing to get there ...⁵⁹

America is a permanent feature of rural consciousness, the inevitable destination for all those who—luckily or unluckily— have no reason to stay. But emigrating offers more than just a life of riches and glamour: for Eveline, exile to Buenos Ayres would provide her with the opportunity to marry the sailor she has fallen in love with, while America will allow Máirín the chance to marry a young local man, Pádraigín Pháidín, who Máirín's mother realises will follow her and marry her there.⁶⁰

⁵² Máirtín Ó Cadhain, 'The Year 1912', trans. Katherine Duffy, *The Quick and the Dead: Selected Stories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 41.

⁵³ Ó Cadhain, 'The Year 1912', 43.

⁵⁴ Ó Cadhain, 'The Year 1912', 41.

⁵⁵ Ó Cadhain, 'The Year 1912', 46.

⁵⁶ Ó Cadhain, 'The Year 1912', 46.

⁵⁷ Marjorie Howes, "'Goodbye Ireland I'm going to Gort": Geography, Scale, and Narrating the Nation', *Semicolonial Joyce*, eds. Marjorie Howes and Derek Attridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 65.

⁵⁸ 'Bright City' is a literal translation of Ó Cadhain's 'An Ghealchathair', an urban area which approximates as Galway city. It is a recurring presence in several of Ó Cadhain's stories, including in *Cré na Cille*.

⁵⁹ Ó Cadhain, 'The Year 1912', 48.

⁶⁰ Ó Cadhain, 'The Year 1912', 49.

Eveline's recently deceased mother exists in Joyce's story primarily as a victim of her husband's violence and whose fate Eveline appears determined not to emulate. By contrast, the mother of 'An Bhliain 1912' is a strong-willed if frustrated character, far from the 'poor old woman' synonymous with rural Ireland.⁶¹ In fact, she is still relatively young and is pregnant with another child who she supposes will see Máirín before she does as she realises that most likely Máirín will not be the last of her children to leave: 'The mother knew now that this was just the first of her brood to spread her wings and leave for the land of summer, a wild goose gone, never again to return to her home'.⁶² Her sorrow is expressed at times in bitter, almost hateful, frustration: 'Her own flesh and blood were the worst enemy she could have'.⁶³ Her relative proximity in age to her eldest daughter does not, however, mean that they belong to the same generation, as Ó Cadhain gives the reader a number of conspicuous suggestions regarding the mother's distance from her daughter's generation. For one, she appears more comfortable in an oral culture than a written one, as the thought of writing letters fills her with frustration:

She knew that from now until she died she would never again have the chance to say what was on her mind without having someone else write it down for her, in a language whose patterns and substance were as strange to her as the speech of a ghost from the fairy hill. A letter was a withered straw when compared to the warm rush of words exchanged by mouth and the joy of eye contact. The mind's impulses and the tides of the heart would be dammed up by the dry act of writing.⁶⁴

This woman, who has been brought up in a culture founded on the oral transmission of supernatural tales, realises how ill-prepared she is for maintaining a relationship with her children over scraps of paper, prepared by someone else. Language once written down, regardless which one it is, becomes alienating and static in comparison to the 'warm rush of words exchanged by mouth'. Her tendency towards superstition is again referred to when she realises that she has forgotten to place some 'hen-dirt' among her daughter's clothes for good luck.⁶⁵ However, she does not dare to re-open the trunk as she cannot 'bear her daughter to make fun of her [...] accusing her of silly superstition'.⁶⁶ Such episodes show that there is a clear divide opening up between mother and daughter, between those destined to stay and those destined to leave, as Máirín seeks to clear her mind of older, Gaelic customs in preparation for her life in America. Above all else, this provides us with a window into a society navigating its way between the forces of tradition and modernity. Indeed, Susan Stanford Friedman argues that 'the struggle between modernizing and traditionalizing forces within a given society' is a 'defining characteristic of modernity'.⁶⁷ The experience of rural modernity is here defined by this sense of uncertainty around how best to survive into the

⁶¹ The 'poor old woman', or *seanbhean bhocht* (also 'Shan Van Vocht'), is a staple of Irish literature, particularly Revivalist literature. This old, downtrodden figure normally represents Gaelic Ireland and functions to encourage the heroes of the story to fight on her (i.e. Ireland's) behalf. This figure is featured in W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory's play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), while the milkwoman who appears at the beginning of *Ulysses* is a parodic play on this vogue.

⁶² Ó Cadhain, 'The Year 1912', 54.

⁶³ Ó Cadhain, 'The Year 1912', 47.

⁶⁴ Ó Cadhain, 'The Year 1912', 42.

⁶⁵ Ó Cadhain, 'The Year 1912', 45.

⁶⁶ Ó Cadhain, 'The Year 1912', 45.

⁶⁷ Stanford Friedman, 157.

future—through the purchase of a new coat for America, or the placement of hen-dirt inside one of its pockets.

Ultimately, both ‘Eveline’ and ‘An Bhliain 1912’ are stories of emigration that deal with those who stay behind. In ‘Eveline’, it is the main character’s reluctance to embrace an uncertain future beyond Ireland that is her undoing, while in ‘An Bhliain 1912’ we view matters from the perspective of the mother destined to see her children leave one after the other. In each story, the broadly naturalist style employed by both authors serves to foreground the fact of emigration as an intrinsic facet of modernity in peripheral societies. ‘Eveline’ was the second short story that Joyce wrote for publication in *The Irish Homestead* and arguably still contained a greater fidelity to the naturalist style demanded of such a publication by the time of its inclusion in *Dubliners*. Nic Eoin notes that during the period leading up to the publication of *An Braon Broghach*, Ó Cadhain had been greatly influenced by classic, realist short stories.⁶⁸ In this sense, Ó Cadhain’s commitment to social realism in these rural short stories calls to mind Tyrus Miller’s description of ‘late modernism’, which he contrasts with ‘high modernism’ in its greater sense of earnestness and engagement with political and historical context, leading to the relative abandonment of ‘the modernist gold standard: form as the universal currency in which aesthetic value could be measured and circulated’.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, differences remain in each story’s treatment of emigration as a symptom of modernity: while in Joyce, emigration is lamentable because it is necessary to leave in order for the individual to live freely, away from the oppression of home, for Ó Cadhain it symbolises the economic failure of the Irish state to provide a future for its own people. If anger is the overriding emotion in Ó Cadhain’s tale, a sense of despondency dominates in Joyce’s. The reader might conceivably both will Eveline to board the ship and in ‘An Bhliain 1912’ hope that Máirín will rethink her decision to emigrate. In the end, we know, as Eveline does, that both are ‘impossible’.

Rural Modernism Among the Dead and the Dust

While stories such as ‘An Bhliain 1912’ work along the more naturalistic lines of *Dubliners*, this is not to say that there were no indications at this stage of Ó Cadhain’s propensity for linguistic play and experimentation. For example, Ó Cadhain at times harks back to older Gaelic literary traditions in stringing along protracted alliterative phrases. Examples of this from ‘An Bhliain 1912’ include: ‘doimhneacht, draíocht agus diamhaireacht duibheagáin dhochuimsithe’ and ‘ba chlaochlú gan chóiríocht gan chróchar, gan chás gan chaoineadh é’.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Ó Cadhain’s rural stories remain rooted in social realism, making it all the more remarkable that *Cré na Cille*’s dramatic break with conventional narrative form came only one year following the publication of *An Braon Broghach*.

⁶⁸ Nic Eoin, 88.

⁶⁹ Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 31.

⁷⁰ Máirtín Ó Cadhain, ‘An Bhliain 1912’, *Rogha Scéalta* (Indreabhán: Cló Iar-Chonnacht, 2014), 68, 70. Evidently it is nigh-on impossible to replicate both meaning and effect in translation. Katherine Duffy opts for a general—and necessarily reduced—sense of the overall meaning, rendering them as ‘the secret of vast, mysterious depths’ and ‘it would be a passing without proper rites and ritual’ (41, 43). Translated literally, they read as ‘depth, magic and boundless darkness of the abyss’ and ‘it would be a transformation without the proper equipment, without bier, without concern, without keening’.

Cré na Cille takes place underground, among the clay and the corpses, as instead of finding peace in death, the deceased continue their raucous bickering into the afterlife. The ‘main character’ is Cairtriona Pháidín who spews out a never-ending invective towards her still-living sister Nell, though over the course of the work dozens of characters enter the fray, as each fresh corpse brings news from aboveground. The novel is composed solely of the characters’ voices coming and going, each voice indicated by a dash with the only clues as to who is speaking provided by repeated phrases or particular personal hang-ups. There is no neat plot to speak of, as the stream of new gossip provides little sense of an overall narrative arc or conclusion. While Ó Cadhain’s phenomenally broad range of vocabulary and linguistic playfulness have rightly been identified as hallmarks of *Cré na Cille*’s style, the narratological approach within the novel has also added to the work’s perceived difficulty. With voices weaving in and out of the novel, it has been suggested by Declan Kiberd that the work mimics the form of a radio play in its foregrounding of the characters’ voices over that of a narrator.⁷¹ Brian Ó Broin poses the question of where we might place the ‘narrator’ of *Cré na Cille*, if such a figure can even be said to exist for the work. Ó Broin concludes that ‘if *Cré na Cille* has any overarching narrator, that narrator is heterodiegetic—he is absent from his own narrative’.⁷²

Such thorny questions surrounding the position of the narrator are of course familiar to any reader of Joyce, particularly in relation to the later episodes of *Ulysses* and the majority of *Finnegans Wake*, where it becomes difficult to situate exactly where the narrator stands in relation to the narrative itself, and whether they can be considered above proceedings, within them, or to be missing altogether. While reviewers of *Cré na Cille* were quick to namecheck Joyce and *Ulysses* in particular, they were generally slow to elaborate on the comparison. Perhaps *Cré na Cille*’s most Ulyssean feature is Ó Cadhain’s tendency to employ what Joyce referred to as the technique of ‘gigantism’ for comic effect, which manifests itself primarily through the use of absurdly long lists in the ‘Cyclops’ episode of *Ulysses*.⁷³ Markus identifies this similarity between the two authors in his recent study and highlights one particular example during an argument between two corpses split down civil-war lines, one defending Éamon de Valera while the other defends Arthur Griffith.⁷⁴ They do so by invoking historical Irish figures, beginning in the world of politics and Irish republicanism, and soon descending into the realm of ancient history, religion, and mythology, eventually ending up with Gael Glas, supposed creator of the Irish language.⁷⁵ What each of the figures mentioned has in common is that every one of them was dead by the time de Valera and Griffith had split over the issue of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1922. The passage recalls the long list of Irish heroes in ‘Cyclops’, many of whom are either fantastical or not Irish.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta Books, 2000), 574.

⁷² Brian Ó Broin, ‘Máirtín Ó Cadhain’s *Cré na Cille*: A Narratological Approach’, *Irish University Review* 36.2 (2006): 292.

⁷³ Joyce lists ‘Gigantism’ as the technique for ‘Cyclops’ in the Gilbert Schema, which can be found in Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’: A Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1930), 41.

⁷⁴ Markus, 158.

⁷⁵ James MacKillop, ‘Goídel Glas’, *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), *Oxford Reference*, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198609674.001.0001/acref-9780198609674-e-2632>. Accessed 19 January 2022.

⁷⁶ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage, 1986), 12.176–199. References to *Ulysses* follow the convention of episode number followed by line numbers.

While *Cré na Cille* has frequently been compared to *Ulysses*, Joyce's other great experimental work, *Finnegans Wake*, is only brought into discussion in Ó Cadhain studies when speaking of the wordplay contained in the short story 'A Simple Lesson' and passages from *Barbed Wire*.⁷⁷ However, the Wakean influence can also be detected as early as *Cré na Cille*, particularly in relation to the work's form. Firstly, both works attempt to convey a state beyond that of daytime life—the world of nightly dreams and the world of the dead. Just as Joyce felt this world 'cannot be rendered sensible by the use of wideawake language, cutanddry grammar and goahead plot', Ó Cadhain similarly felt a need to create a form that would convey the darkness of death.⁷⁸ By removing any narratorial aid, Ó Cadhain plunges his readers into such a state of darkness, blindfolding them and forcing them to rely on their ability to distinguish the voices that infiltrate the abyss. *Finnegans Wake* nominally takes place over one night but manages to encompass the entire history of the world, while Ó Cadhain makes clear the scale of his temporal setting at the beginning of the work: 'Time: Eternity'.⁷⁹ As well as such metaphysical issues, *Cré na Cille* also shares the *Wake*'s linguistic playfulness, though evidently to a lesser degree. Part of *Cré na Cille*'s difficulty for most readers of the original lies in Ó Cadhain's use of extremely dialectal Irish and his propensity for carving out neologisms, particularly for invectives, some of which border on Wakean levels of inventiveness. What is certainly clear is that Ó Cadhain had read at least some of the *Wake*, as it is mentioned on several occasions during his 1969 lecture. One particular mention is worth highlighting:

Maidir le *retoric Finnegan's Wake* [sic] ní mór é a léamh go grinn agus é a sheadú le brí ar bith a bhaint as. [...] Measaim go bhféadfainn saothar mar *Finnegan's Wake* [sic] a scríobh. Bhainfeadh sé an-fhada de dhuine cupla leathanach féin a chur i dtoll a chéile. Is cumadóireacht é ach ní shílím go bhféadaí scríbhneoireacht a thabhairt air, ach sa méid gur leis an ngnáthaibítir a chuirtear ar fáil é.

(As for the rhetoric of *Finnegans Wake*, it is necessary to read it carefully and to linger over it in order to get any meaning out of it. [...] I believe I could write a work like *Finnegans Wake*. It would take a person a very long time to put a couple of pages together. It is composition but I don't think you could call it writing, except insofar as it is provided with the standard alphabet.)⁸⁰

Once again, Ó Cadhain is slow to heap too much praise on Joyce or to mark out *Finnegans Wake* as the way forward for experimental literature; and yet, that almost throwaway comment — 'I believe I could write a work like *Finnegans Wake*' — is revealing. Ó Cadhain was evidently attracted by the polyglossial universe created by Joyce in the *Wake*. Within the graves of *Cré na Cille*, Ó Cadhain dropped in one non-Irish-speaking character, the fallen French fighter pilot, allowing him to embrace some quasi-Wakean linguistic play. We learn early on that this individual was a fighter pilot who crashed into the harbour and was buried

⁷⁷ Ian Ó Caoimh situates these works in the context of Futurism and draws comparisons between Ó Cadhain's later works' use of multilingual wordplay and *Finnegans Wake*. See Ian Ó Caoimh, 'Saoradh na bhfocal: Máirtín Ó Cadhain agus an Todhcháiochas', *Litríocht na Gaeilge ar Fud an Domhain II: Critic, Cultúr agus Comhthéacs Comhaimseartha*, eds. Riona Nic Congáil, Máirín Nic Eoin, Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail, Pádraig Ó Liatháin and Regina Uí Chollatáin (Dublin: Comhar, 2015), 101–24.

⁷⁸ James Joyce, *Letters of James Joyce*, volume III, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 146.

⁷⁹ Ó Cadhain, *Graveyard Clay*, 1.

⁸⁰ Ó Cadhain, *Páipéir Bhána*, 33–34.

in the local graveyard. At one point the other corpses wonder why he continually mentions prostitutes when Hitler's name comes up, when, in fact, as Mac Con Iomaire and Robinson point out, they are presumably confusing the French *merde* ('shit') for the Irish *meirdreach* ('prostitute').⁸¹ Over the course of the novel he attempts to learn some Irish in order to communicate with the other corpses, and at one point lectures the others on the similarities between Irish and Breton. This passage features layered punning by Ó Cadhain in Irish, French and Breton, as confusion reigns between the Irish word *gaiste*, meaning a 'snare', and the Breton word *gast*, meaning a 'whore'. Mac Con Iomaire and Robinson note that the seemingly nonsensical outburst '[a] ghaist na ngast i ngast ag gast atáim' might be interpreted as 'in the snare of a whore I am'.⁸² Such passages show that Ó Cadhain's Wakean impulse for multilingual word play was already evident well before the more overt examples found later on in 'A Simple Lesson' and *Barbed Wire*.

One of the most commented-upon features of the narrative form of *Cré na Cille* is the recurring 'Stoc na Cille', literally the trumpet of the graveyard.⁸³ The 'Stoc' appears for the first time at the beginning of the third interlude, and it introduces each of the following interludes up until Interlude Eight, after which it disappears with as little explanation as it arrived. The 'Stoc' begins and ends each of its appearances with the following invocation: 'I am the Trump of the Graveyard! Let my voice be heard! It must be heard...'⁸⁴ Each appearance lasts little more than a page in length but encompasses some of the book's densest prose. The 'Stoc' may remind readers of Joyce's 'thunderwords' in the *Wake*, both blasting through their respective narratives at regular intervals, though it clearly serves a different purpose. Many critics have speculated as to its meaning, but what appears certain is that none of the corpses within the graves can hear it; neither does the 'Stoc' appear to follow the conversations of the corpses. This has led critics such as Joan Trodden Keefe to argue that the 'Stoc' is Ó Cadhain's way of satirising the 'Bugle' or 'Loudspeaker' announcements from his time in prison, ignored by the internees.⁸⁵ Trodden Keefe also deems the Irish spoken by the 'Stoc' to be artificial, but such a view overlooks the complexity of some of the passages. Ailbhe Ó Corráin, by contrast, writes that the 'Stoc' 'introduces the central themes of regeneration and decay and gives the work much of its suggestive power'.⁸⁶ Such themes will of course be familiar to readers of the *Wake*, through ALP's riverine journey out to sea and up into the clouds, only to fall and begin again: 'End here. Us then. Finn, again!'⁸⁷

One of the most striking 'Stoc' passages comes in Interlude Seven, as Ó Cadhain portrays the Irish landscape in terms of ancient Irish writing and calligraphy:

⁸¹ Ó Cadhain, *Graveyard Clay*, 36n26.

⁸² Ó Cadhain, *Graveyard Clay*, 227n13. For the original passage, see Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *Cré na Cille* (Indreabhán: Cló Iar-Chonnacht, 2021), 285, while for a more detailed discussion of this, see Mattieu Boyd, 'Gast! A Breton moment in *Cré na Cille*, and why it matters', *Irish Studies Review* 25.4 (2017): 444–453.

⁸³ For an extensive discussion and overview of critical commentary on the role of the Stoc, see Róisín Ní Ghairbhí, 'I dTosach Do Bhí an Briathar: "Deacracht" *Cré Na Cille*', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 34.1 (2008): 47–52. See also Joan Trodden Keefe, 'The Graves of Connemara: Ireland's Máirtín Ó Cadhain', *World Literature Today* 59.3 (1985): 363–373.

⁸⁴ Ó Cadhain, *Graveyard Clay*, 65.

⁸⁵ Trodden Keefe, 371.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Mac Con Iomaire, 'Introductory Note', xxvii.

⁸⁷ James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 628.13–14. References to *Finnegans Wake* follow the convention of page number and line number.

Above ground, land, sea and sky are a fresh, ornate manuscript. Every hedge is a majestic curve. Every boreen is a streamline of colour.⁸⁸ Every field of corn is a golden letter. Every sunlit hilltop and winding land-locked bay with its white sails is a compound sentence of beauty. Each cloud is a glorious dot of lenition on the purple capital letters of peak-tops. The rainbow is an apostrophe between the wonderful hemisphere of the earth. For this scribe's task is to publish the gospel of beauty on the parchment of land, sea and sky...⁸⁹

In this passage, the 'Stoc' describes the landscape in terms that recall Irish monastic manuscripts, with their curves, bright colours, and ornate script, exemplified by *The Book of Kells*. As has been well documented, *The Book of Kells* is one of the most important intertexts for the *Wake*, with several passages from Joyce's work describing pages from the manuscript.⁹⁰ The most extended examples occur in chapter I.5 of the *Wake*, with several famous pages from *The Book of Kells* described here, most particularly the 'Tunc' page, which Joyce refers to directly: 'the tenebrous Tunc page of the Book of Kells'.⁹¹ In Ó Cadhain's passage, the artwork of such manuscripts mimics the rural landscape—its hedges, country roads, fields, hills and bays—suggesting an intrinsic link between language and land, just as Joyce also intimates in the *Wake* through references to 'landuage' and 'landeguage'.⁹² Worth noting, however, is that the writing which Ó Cadhain describes is clearly in the Gaelic script, as he refers to a cloud appearing like a 'dot of lenition' — this is a reference to the *ponc séimhithe* of traditional Gaelic script, a dot placed above a consonant whose sound is altered through lenition; it is now signified by the letter 'h' in modern Irish spelling. It is tempting to conclude, initially at least, that this passage is an elaborate love letter from Ó Cadhain to the Irish landscape and its literary script.

However, this is merely the 'Stoc' in its living guise, and by the next paragraph we are reminded that death and decay must follow life: 'But already the deciduous trees on the mountain summit are a gapped sentence. The cliff on the steep seashore is a dark full stop. Out there on the horizon the half-formed letter ends in a blot of ink...'⁹³ The scribe which had produced such ornate, godly beauty now experiences the more mundane and human issue of 'writer's cramp'.⁹⁴ Each 'Stoc' passage follows a similar trajectory: the vitality of life balanced with the inevitability of decay. Nic Eoin argues that this theme of regeneration is 'ceangailte ar bhealach an-domhain le polaitíocht agus le cúinsí pearsanta Uí Chadhain: a imní faoi thodhchaí na teanga, faoi sheachadadh an chultúir, agus faoi inbhuanaitheacht an phobail, imní a bhfuil gaol aige le ceist na hoidhreachta pearsanta' ('linked very deeply with Ó Cadhain's politics and personal circumstance: his concern about the future of the language, cultural transmission and the sustainability of the community, a concern linked to the

⁸⁸ *Bóithrín* in Irish, meaning a small country road.

⁸⁹ Ó Cadhain, *Graveyard Clay*, 176.

⁹⁰ For a detailed examination of Joyce's use of *The Book of Kells* and its historical context, see Anne Marie D'Arcy, 'Columban Texts and Joyce's "Book of Kells" (FW 482.33): The Limits of a Palaeographer's View in *Finnegans Wake*', *James Joyce and the Arts*, eds. Emma-Louise Silva, Sam Slote, and Dirk Van Hulle (Leiden: Brill | Rodopi, 2020), 181–196.

⁹¹ Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 122.22–23.

⁹² Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 327.20, 478.9–10.

⁹³ Ó Cadhain, *Graveyard Clay*, 176.

⁹⁴ Ó Cadhain, *Graveyard Clay*, 176.

question of personal heritage’).⁹⁵ As such, we can see that Ó Cadhain’s embrace of an experimental modernist style, expressed in terms of a rural landscape, is never removed from the political and personal concerns that acted as impetus for the more naturalistic stories, such as ‘An Bhliain 1912’. To dismiss the stylistic experimentation of these passages as merely Ó Cadhain luxuriating in his mastery of the language is to miss a core philosophy driving *Cré na Cille*: all that is living will die; all that is dead will decay; all that decays will form new life. Such philosophical musings are inextricable from Ó Cadhain’s political concerns. From this we may venture a definition of Ó Cadhain’s rural modernism: linguistic and formal experimentation where the disorientating experience of rural modernity provides both the raw material in terms of imagery and becomes the object of the work’s social and political commentary.

Another point of comparison between the modernist styles of *Cré na Cille* and *Finnegans Wake* lies in their indebtedness to an oral tradition. One of the most proffered pieces of advice for the struggling reader of the *Wake* is that they should attempt reading the work aloud, at which point the meanings hidden among the layered puns will purportedly reveal themselves. The Irish-language author Breandán Ó hEithir noted in a lecture how he was driven to conduct a similar experiment with *Cré na Cille* after the novel had been criticised for not being loyal to the spoken Irish of the Cois Fharráige Gaeltacht. Ó hEithir states that such most likely politically-driven criticisms shocked him as he ‘had read the book aloud to old people at home [the Irish-speaking Aran Islands], some of whom could not read Irish themselves, and was much gratified by their reactions and by the way pet phrases and imprecations passed into speech’.⁹⁶ The work’s fidelity to the spoken word was once again proven when an adaptation of *Cré na Cille* was put on stage in 2005 in Galway. According to Louis de Paor, ‘a busload of older people from Connemara were brought to the preview and began speaking back to the characters, as though they were near neighbours they had not seen for a while’.⁹⁷

It is hardly an accident, however, that the greatest celebration of colloquial Irish on the written page should take place among the dead and the dust. Ó Cadhain, towards the end of his 1969 lecture, bemoaned the troublesome position that the writer of Irish found themselves in: ‘Is deacair do dhuine a dhícheall a dhéanamh i dteanga arb é a cosúlacht go mbeidh sí básaithe roimhe féin’ (‘It is difficult for a person to do their best in a language that looks likely to be dead before they are’).⁹⁸ The second last line of *Cré na Cille* appears as a lamentation for the future of Irish in a finally independent Ireland, as the eldest member of the graveyard is at last given permission to speak after having spent the novel requesting it in vain: ‘You have permission to speak now, but it seems you prefer to be deathly dumb’.⁹⁹ Like the elder corpse, the Irish language, despite nominally having state protection, appeared likely to Ó Cadhain to fall silent. ‘[D]eathly dumb’ is the translation given for ‘béal marbh’ in the original, which is literally a ‘dead mouth’, but it is also likely a play on the Irish expression

⁹⁵ Nic Eoin, 81.

⁹⁶ Breandán Ó hEithir, ‘Máirtín Ó Cadhain by Breandán Ó hEithir’, 13 May 2020, in *Davis Now Lectures*, RTÉ Radio One, radio clip, 25:59, <https://www.rte.ie/radio/radio1/clips/21768066/>. Accessed 19 October 2023.

⁹⁷ De Paor, 13.

⁹⁸ Ó Cadhain, *Páipéir Bhána*, 40.

⁹⁹ Ó Cadhain, *Graveyard Clay*, 315.

‘béal beo’, literally a ‘lively mouth’, but which in reality means ‘talkativeness’.¹⁰⁰ *Cré na Cille*’s talkativeness is a reaction against what its author saw as the future for the language it was written in: silence. Like Máirín’s mother in ‘An Bhliain 1912’, Ó Cadhain grew up in what was still a predominantly oral culture, an inheritance which he acknowledged, writing that ‘[a]n uirnis liteartha is fearr a fuair mé ó mo mhuintir an caint, caint thírúil, caint chréúil, caint chraicneach a thosaíos ag damhsa orm scaití, ag gol orm scaití, de mo bhuíochas’ (‘the best literary tool I received from my people was talk, homely talk, earthy talk, polished talk, which at times sets me dancing, at other times weeping, whether I like it or not’).¹⁰¹ Like that other great ‘talkative’ work of Irish literature, *Finnegans Wake*, Ó Cadhain’s *Cré na Cille* only reveals its true linguistic mastery when read aloud, existing as a unique argument for the vitality of the oral tradition from which it sprung, crafted in a style and form that is utterly modernist.

When the first edition of *Cré na Cille* was published in 1949, the biographical notes for Máirtín Ó Cadhain, when translated into English, went as follows:

A Galwayman who has seen the world. Spent a while as a teacher, a while as an organiser of language and of revolution, a while stacking turf in the Phoenix Park, and a while building houses. Five years in captivity in the Curragh.¹⁰²

The notes, ‘unmistakeably written by the author himself’ according to Mac Con Iomaire, give a terse insight into how Ó Cadhain conceived of himself as an author.¹⁰³ There is equal emphasis on the local (‘[a] Galwayman’) and the cosmopolitan (‘who has seen the world’), on the intellectual (‘teacher’, ‘language’, ‘revolution’) and the physical (‘stacking turf’, ‘building houses’). The years spent as a republican internee are stated almost in passing, but in one word—‘captivity’—Ó Cadhain lambasts the Irish Free State’s own brand of tyranny, all too familiar now. The line ‘an organiser of language and of revolution’ displays Ó Cadhain’s conception of himself as both an author and an agitator, for he is remembered among many in the Irish-speaking community as much for his relentless campaigning on their behalf as he is for his literary work. Ó Cadhain conducts a sometimes-savage satire of the place and people he grew up around, but above all else it is his steadfast commitment to that community that strikes the reader. For Ó Cadhain, revolution and language went hand-in-hand, and thanks to publications like *Cré na Cille*, he can also be described as an organiser of revolution in language. In this, more than anything else, does Ó Cadhain resemble Joyce.

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¹⁰⁰ Ó Cadhain, *Cré na Cille*, 389.

¹⁰¹ Ó Cadhain, *Páipéir Bhána*, 15.

¹⁰² Quoted in Mac Con Iomaire, xvii-xviii.

¹⁰³ Mac Con Iomaire, xvii.

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