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New Hibernia Review, Volume 17, Number 4, Winter/Geimhreadh 2013,
pp. 17-47 (Article)

Published by Center for Irish Studies at the University of St. Thomas

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/nhr.2013.0055>



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Temporality and Irish Revivalism: Past, Present, and Becoming

In the late Seamus Heaney's *Human Chain* (2010), his elegy for Colin Middleton "Loughanure" becomes a Proustian exercise in remembrance as well as an examination of individual legacy prompting him to return to his time at the Irish College (Coláiste Bhríde) in Rannafast in 1953. In the final two parts of the poem, the young Heaney's inadequacy in Irish dovetails the limitations of remembrance as the elder poet tries "to remember the Greek word signifying / A world restored completely: that would include / Hannah Mhór's turkey-chortle of Irish."¹ The Irish College rite of passage is apt for many reasons. Heaney's elegy for Middleton centers on his painting of Loughanure, near Rannafast, which is part of the landscape the poet had recently traveled by ambulance having suffered a stroke—circumstances that clearly add urgency to remembrance. But equally, the Irish College experience was, and still is, about trying to reconnect with the lost legacy of previous generations, a return to the source of language and identity in the Gaeltacht.

In this context, the phrase "Hannah Mhór's turkey-chortle of Irish" carries an intriguing ambivalence that reflects the inherent contradictions of revivalism. On the one hand, there is an overwhelming immediacy in Heaney's sound picture but, at the same time, an immutable distance commensurate with irretrievable loss. The "turkey-chortle of Irish" is unmistakably described, yet entirely incomprehensible and unattainable. Therein is the paradox of the revival: its attempt not just to restore a world completely, as a frozen image, but also to bring that world to life in the present. In the case of the young Heaney it did not quite work. Yet, though he did not go on to become a fully engaged Irish speaker, the literature of the Irish language had been a constant source

1. Seamus Heaney, *Human Chain* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), pp. 64–65. See also Heaney's prose poem "Stations of the West" in *Stations* (Belfast: Ulsterman Publications, 1975), p. 22. It seems most likely that the Greek word in question was *apocatastasis*, meaning "complete restoration, restitution, re-establishment." Henry Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1883), p. 183.

of productivity—as witnessed in his numerous translations from the Irish and other critical engagements.²

As my use of the term itself implies, my intention here is to consider revivalism to be a discrete discourse and in so doing, to resist the tendency toward *histoire événementielle*, according to which revivals are seen primarily as events. As such, significance has been ascribed to the Irish Revival of the 1880s to the 1920s mostly as a catalyst for bringing about the event of political independence in 1921. What follows here is predicated on the understanding that revivalism is a recurrent socio-cultural force, centered around religion and art, which is both international and transhistorical. The proliferation of revivals throughout history points to a recurring force rather than a discrete event: the Renaissance, the Gothic Revival, the Greek Revival, Islamic Revival, evangelical revivals and so on. The common feature of all of these revivals is the basic desire to renegotiate the present by means of a radical synthesis with the past. Yet, the notion of revival is implicitly contradictory, in that the literal sense of revive (from late-Latin *reviver* “to live again”) appears to make no sense except to the imagination. Revival is a way proposed originally by religion and art to overcome the limits of nature, and of mortality in particular. In rejecting the finality of death, in whichever sphere it pertains, revival replaces this finality with a radically different temporal scheme, one that allows for traffic or even synthesis between past and present, living and dead. In other words, revival replaces the “natural” boundaries of time with an open-ended and negotiable temporality.

Gothic literature typically places characters out of sync with time and induces historical time to lie heavily on the present, stifling progress and forcing an anomalous, unnatural set of circumstances that must be confronted.³ It is no surprise that the temporal idiosyncrasies of the Gothic are often referenced to those of

2. These include Heaney’s *Sweeney Astray: A Version from the Irish* (Derry: Field Day, 1983) and *The Midnight Verdict* (Oldcastle: Gallery, 2000), versions of the medieval tale “Buile Shuibhne” and of Brian Merriman’s “Cúirt an Mheanoíche” respectively, as well as his translations and versions of poems attributed to Colm Cille included in *Human Chain* (2010).

3. For a discussion of temporality in gothic literature see Jarlath Killeen, *Gothic Literature 1825–1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), particularly Chapter 1, “The Ghosts of Time.” For critical discussions of gothic literature in the Irish context, see: W. J. McCormack, “Irish Gothic and After: 1820–1945,” *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, volume 2, ed. Seamus Deane et al. (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), pp. 831–949; Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (London: Verso, 1995); Roy Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Penguin, 1995), especially Chapter 11, “Protestant Magic”; Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000), Chapter 22, “Undead in the Nineties: Bram Stoker and Dracula”; Luke Gibbons, *Gaelic Gothic: Race, Colonization and Irish Culture* (Galway: Arlen House, 2004); and Jarlath Killeen, *Gothic Ireland: Horror and the Irish Anglican Imagination in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005).

colonialism, which creates its own temporality in which the colonized is perceived to be out of step with “public time.” This sense of alienation from the present was summarized by the nineteenth-century Belfast revivalist, Robert Shipboy MacAdam, in his remark that “the lineal descendants of the former lords of the soil and their retainers vegetate, as it were, in ignorance of the wondrous changes going on in the world around them.”⁴ In due course, when colonized peoples have attempted to retrieve their position and place in time, these efforts have often been dismissed as an attempt to fake or invent tradition. Inevitably, this has frequently led to a polarized view of revivalism as an exclusively progressive or regressive force.

Evidently, the progress of the Irish language revival has been infused with considerations of temporality, as manifested particularly in literature and in the discourse surrounding native tradition. Indeed, much has already been written about the temporalities of the colonial condition in regard to Ireland.⁵ The reference to “becoming” in the title of this essay reflects a desire to challenge the narrow, historicist view of revivalism as a misguided or contrived attempt to alter the natural course of history. A countervailing view of time and history is available to us in the work of the post-structuralist philosopher, Gilles Deleuze. Besides reinterpreting the work of Henri Bergson on time and memory, Deleuze took up the Nietzschean notion of the “eternal return,” whereby repetition and endless recurrence are the rule. Although some have chosen to see these conditions as a great burden, for Deleuze the repetition is—ironically—a guarantee of opportunity and of difference, wherein the only hope for mankind is a revolutionary becoming; he writes, “Becoming isn’t part of history; history amounts only to the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to ‘become,’ that is, to create something new.”⁶

4. Robert MacAdam, “The Archaeology of Ulster,” *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, First Series, vol. 1 (1853), 2.

5. This formed part of the context for an earlier article by the present author. See Fionntán de Brún, “Expressing the Nineteenth Century in Irish: The Poetry of Aodh Mac Domhnaill (1802–1867),” *New Hibernia Review*, 15, 1 (Spring, 2011), 81–106. Regarding temporality and the colonial condition in Ireland, see, for example: David Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008); Kevin Whelan, “Between Filiation and Affiliation: The Politics of Postcolonial Memory,” in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*, ed. Clare Carroll and Patricia King (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003), pp. 92–108; Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 1996). For literature in Irish and postcolonialism, see: Máirín Nic Eoin, *Trén bhFearann Breac: an Dlíáithriú Cultúir agus Nualitriocht na Gaeilge* (Dublin: Cois Life, 2005); Gearóid Denvir, “Decolonizing the Mind: Language and Literature in Ireland,” *New Hibernia Review* 1, 1 (Spring, 1997), 44–68.

6. Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 171. A discussion of Nietzsche’s proposition of the eternal return is the starting point for Milan Kundera’s novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984).

The concept of a radically different temporal scheme, one that allows for traffic or even synthesis between past and present, living and dead, is a very old one in Irish literature, predating the modern revivalist period by well over one thousand years. Joseph Nagy's study, *Conversing with Angels and Ancients* (1997), examines the dialogue between the living and dead (or the supernaturally old), which forms the basis of a body of literature stretching from the seventh century to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries:

From the realms of hagiography and vernacular literature predicated on hagiographic themes, talk with angels and ancients has provided the texts' legitimating core. Patrick, in the world of his lives and the world he inhabits in vernacular or metasaga, is sought out by an angel who speaks with him, and as a result of this conversion/conversation, Patrick returns to his 'past', Ireland, and revives that past in order to speak with its representatives, convince them and reform them in a Christian image.⁷

Nagy gives particular prominence to *Acallam na Senórach* (Colloquy of the Ancients) a late twelfth-century text in which Caoilte and Oisín relate the deeds of Finn mac Cumhaill and his Fianna to St. Patrick. Part of the function of this text is to provide a bridge between past and present and to give legitimacy to the conservation and use of knowledge originating in pre-Christian Ireland:

Recovering the past, according to this variation on the theme of reviving the dead, is a way of revitalizing the present, or removing the cap that marks off the past and making the past productively open-ended, a source of paradigm and inspiration for the future.⁸

A key feature of the texts studied by Nagy is that the "old news" is never conveyed or captured in its totality. There is always the tantalizing prospect of a return visit, a resumption of the dialogue.

Further intriguing evidence of the Celtic penchant for dialogue between living and dead is attributed to the second-century-BC Greek poet, Nicander of Colophon:

And it is often alleged because of nightmare dreams that the dead truly appear, for the Nasamones receive special oracles by staying at the tombs of their parents. . . . The Celts also for the same reason spend the night near the tombs of their famous men, as Nicander affirms.⁹

7. Joseph Nagy, *Conversing with Angels and Ancients: Literary Myths of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1997) p. 325.

8. Nagy, p. 323.

9. From Tertullian, "On the Soul," quoted by Philip Freeman, *War, Women and Druids: Eyewitness Reports and Early Accounts of the Ancient Celts* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 35.

This convention is immediately reminiscent of one of the most famous Irish poems of the eighteenth century, “Úrchill an Chreagáin,” [The Graveyard of Creggan] by the Armagh poet Art Mac Cumhaigh, where the poet spends the night at the tomb of the Ó Néill in Creggan graveyard where he is visited by a dream-maiden.¹⁰ An impassioned discussion of past and present ensues, the poet lamenting the loss of the Gaelic leaders who would have given him protection and sustenance in the past, the dream-maiden urging him to leave this land and follow her west to a land of honey. While the motif of sleeping by the tombs of the dead as prelude to supernatural encounter may be merely coincidental in this instance, the desire to initiate an exchange between living and dead is not. The *aísling* poetry that flourished in the eighteenth century was all about mediation between past and present, the dream maiden explaining the decline of fortunes in the present and the promise of future deliverance by recourse to the prophecies of dead saints.¹¹

All of these examples of dialogue between living and dead or supernatural, between past and present, give us an important context in which to assess the inclination in the modern Irish revivalist period (various phases from the late eighteenth century onward, and most significantly in the forty years after 1880) to create a synthesis of past and present or, in Douglas Hyde’s famous phrase, “to render the present a rational continuation of the past.”¹² Indeed, the desire to enter into direct dialogue with the dead is witnessed in the necromancy and various spiritualist proclivities of Yeats and other figures associated with the Celtic Twilight. What seems most obvious here is the common recurrence of a desire to renegotiate or reform the present through active engagement with the past, particularly the heroic or spiritually rich past. Just as Mac Cumhaigh was motivated by a lack of heroic leadership in the eighteenth century, Yeats was moved by disenchantment with spiritual impoverishment in the nineteenth century.

One of the most influential analyses of the modern Irish revivalist movement, John Hutchinson’s *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism; The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (1987) takes the view of revivalism as a recurrent “movement of moral regeneration,” rather than a regressive, atavistic phenomenon: “For the revivalist, the past is to be used not in order to return to some antique order but rather to re-establish the nation at a new and

10. *An Duanaire: Poems of the Dispossessed 1600–1900*, ed. Seán Ó Tuama and Thomas Kinsella (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1994), pp. 176–81.

11. See Breandán Ó Buachalla, *Aísling Ghéar: na Stíobhartaigh agus an tAos Léinn 1603–1788* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1996), p. 545.

12. Douglas Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland from Earliest Times to the Present Day* (New York: Charles Scribner’s and Sons, 1901), p. vii.

higher level of development.”¹³ Many would disagree with this view of the Irish Revival of the 1880s–1920s as being a movement of moral regeneration. It has become commonplace to speak of a Counter-Revival, in the period following the establishment of the Free State in 1921, whose most persuasive exponent was undoubtedly Sean O’Faolain. O’Faolain’s critique of the Revival often rounded on the attempted synthesis of past and present which, he claimed, had created a faked tradition: “We used the Gaelic past as an excitement to inspire us; we never examined it; we are not able, when we do examine it, to see what it has to offer us in our, present state.”¹⁴ Setting himself and Frank O’Connor at odds with their former teacher Daniel Corkery, O’Faolain remarks, “To us, Ireland is beginning, where to Corkery it is continuing.”¹⁵

Yet the alternative view—that revivalism is a universal, recurring sociocultural force—was expressed succinctly by Michael Tierney in a discussion of O’Faolain’s *King of the Beggars*:

It would be a great pity if any large number of Mr. Ó Faoláin’s Irish readers should be led, by a natural irritation with some of the crude and hasty methods now in vogue for reviving the Gaelic language, into concluding as he has done that there is no way out except the choice he presents between a ‘fake’ and the entire rejection of their own history. Democracy is no substitute for culture, and much of what is most precious and of highest quality in past civilisations was in fact the result of their enthusiastic devotion to, and attempt to recover, literary, linguistic, and artistic traditions that were not always genuinely ancestral to them. After all a surprising amount of what adds most to the savour of life even at present has come to us from the obsession of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the languages and cultures of Greece and Rome. How much poorer would be European literature and art if all the consequences of the Renaissance were suddenly to disappear?

Yet the Renaissance was far more a ‘fake’ even in Italy, which could lay some claim to continuity with Rome, than the Gaelic revival is in the original home of

13. John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), p. 198; p. 10.

14. Sean O’Faolain in Michael Tierney, D. A. Binchy, Gerard Murphy, John Ryan, and Sean O’Faolain, “Politics and Culture: Daniel O’Connell and the Gaelic Past,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 27, 107 (September, 1938), 380.

15. Philip O’Leary, *Gaelic Prose in the Irish Free State 1922–1939* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), p. 441. In the mid-1960s, this same frustration was memorably expressed by Gus Martin: “Is our past so unique that we must always be gazing backwards lovingly at it? Of course every country has its historical novelists—a small proportion! But in general they leave the past to the historians and the archaeologists. But we look over the heads of the present, wade through the welter of life to revive the ghosts of the past.” Augustine Martin, “Inherited Dissent the Dilemma of the Irish Writer,” *Studies*, 54, 213 (Spring, 1965), 16.

Gaelic culture, whose political destiny even in our own time has been changed by the half-recovered memory of its ancient ‘otherness.’¹⁶

We might summarize these opposing views as being first, a view of the past as closed off from the present, in which history and time are linear, additive, and organic in nature; and second, as a view of the past and present as actively integrated, in such a way that history and time can be circular, overlapping, and synthetic. A common critique of nationalist movements and modern nations is that they rely on “invented traditions,” which are of very recent provenance and often of spurious origin as opposed to other “natural,” organic “continuities.”¹⁷ But, colonialism effects its own unnatural temporality, where the colonized is, in Albert Memmi’s phrase, removed from history “dropping him off by the side of the road—outside of our time.”¹⁸ In the Irish context this phenomenon could be dated at various points but it was arguably in the nineteenth century that it would realize itself most starkly, as summarized by John Mitchel: “the ‘nineteenth century’ would not know itself, could not express itself in Irish.”¹⁹ In other words, the Gaelic language and culture of Ireland were out of step with “public time.”

“Public time” is understood here to be the sense that people have of belonging to a specific period of time. Jerome Buckley’s classic study, *The Triumph of Time: A Study of the Victorian Concepts of Time, History, Progress, and Decadence* (1967) places this new awareness of time in the Victorian nineteenth century where the “notion of public time, or history, as the medium of organic growth and fundamental change, rather than simply additive succession, was essentially new.”²⁰ Similarly, Benedict Anderson makes an important distinction between the modern awareness of time and the medieval, although there is little doubt that he underestimates the medieval when claiming that there were no “radical separations between past and present.”²¹ In the eighteenth century the novel

16. Michael Tierney, et al., “Politics and Culture,” 368. A professor of Greek at UCD, Tierney was a well-known Catholic intellectual who had been a Fine Gael TD before going on to become a member and vice-chairman of Seanad Éireann 1938–44 and finally, president of UCD from 1947 to 1964.

17. See *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 14.

18. Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, transl. Howard Greenfield (1957; London: Earthscan, 2003), p. 156.

19. John Mitchel, “The Famine Year,” in *Jail Journal* (1868; London: Sphere Books, 1983), p. 415. See also de Brún, 81.

20. Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *The Triumph of Time: A Study of the Victorian Concepts of Time, History, Progress, and Decadence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 5.

21. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 23. This characterization of the medieval view of time is clearly exaggerated. See: Richard H. Godden, “The Medieval Sense of History” in *Misconceptions About the Middle Ages*, Stephen J. Harris and Bryon L. Grigsby (London:

and the newspaper became indicative of this heightened awareness of time, but neither of these forms were produced by Gaelic Ireland until the late nineteenth-century revival.²²

In other words, the awareness of public time is essentially a by-product of modernity or perhaps, more specifically, of the Industrial Revolution since the establishment of standardized Greenwich Mean Time in the mid-nineteenth century came about through the development of railways.²³ The profound impact of industrialization heightened the Victorians' sense of living in a distinct era, one characterized by relentless progress and indeed, by a cult of progress. Under the influence of Darwin, time came to be equated with ideas of progress and decline. In these circumstances, the sense of peripheral languages and cultures being left behind, in a way that reflected natural selection, gained currency.²⁴ This was also the era of the Positivist view of history proposed by Auguste Comte as comprising three stages of development leading to the final stage where science and rational thought would dominate.

The Victorian cult of progress and imperial expansion is often associated with Lord Macaulay and Francis Bacon, whose ideas were reinforced in the national school curriculum according to Séamus Ó Grianna (1889–1969), the writer from Rannafast in the Donegal Gaeltacht.²⁵ Ó Grianna remarks of his education, at the end of the nineteenth century, that he “would have been led to believe that the wisdom of classical philosophers was worth nothing compared with the wisdom of Bacon and Macaulay.”²⁶ The Victorians' sense of belonging to an age of unprecedented material, scientific, and imperial progress is almost axiomatic—as is its corollary, the age of decadence and spiritual decline, ex-

Routledge, 2008), p. 204; Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, transl. Arthur Goldhammer (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1981).

22. This is certainly not to say that Irish-speaking Ireland did not interact with these forms, particularly the newspaper, in spite of Joep Leerssen's suggestion that Gaelic Ireland had no public sphere. Joep Leerssen, *Hidden Ireland, Public Sphere* (Galway: Arlen House, 2002), p. 36. For a discussion of this issue and a pertinent critique of Leerssen's view, see Lesa Ní Mhughailé, “Bilingualism, Print Culture in Irish and the Public Sphere, 1700–1830,” in *Irish and English: Essays on the Irish Linguistic Cultural Frontier, 1600–1900*, ed. James Kelly and Ciarán Mac Murchaidh (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012), pp. 218–42.

23. In Ireland, Dublin Mean Time replaced Local Mean Time in 1880 before GMT was eventually adopted in 1916. See F. W. Dyson “Standard Time in Ireland,” *The Observatory*, 39 (1916) 467–68.

24. For a detailed study of the influence of Darwinism and related currents of thought on the Irish language Revival at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, see Brian Ó Conchubhair, *Fin de siècle na Gaeilge: Darwin, an Athbheochan agus Smaointeoireacht na hEorpa* (Indreabhán: An Clóchomhar, 2009).

25. This is, of course, the same Rannafast where Seamus Heaney came to study Irish as a youth.

26. “Bheadh sé creidte agam nárbh fhiú dadaidh an eagnaíocht a bhí ag fealsaimh an tseansail le taobh na heagnaíochta a bhí ag Bacon agus ag Macaulay.” Séamus Ó Grianna, *Saoghal Corrach* (Dublin: An Press Náisiúnta, 1945), p. 18.

pressed by Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, William Morris, and others. Whatever one's position on "the condition of England," however, the view prevailed that a country like Ireland, peripheral and predominantly rural, was out of sync with public time and that a language such as the Irish language was bound to be similarly out of step and destined to extinction.²⁷

There is much evidence of an anachronistic self-image in Gaelic Ireland itself from the seventeenth century through to the nineteenth. The messianic tradition in Irish poetry, which constantly reiterated the desire for deliverance from the present by the Stuart Pretender, Bonaparte and so on, provides a case in point. This suggests a certain temporal disjunction in the consciousness of Gaelic poets and their audiences, one that is also witnessed in the letters and field name books of the nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey where there are numerous instances of what MacAdam calls "the former lords of the soil and their retainers" hanging on to their medieval lineage in spite of the poverty of their circumstances, almost as ghosts. In the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the same sense of fall is evident in the burlesque versions of heroic literature from the Ulster and Finn Cycle or such songs as "An Chrúbach" where the mythical cow is a hapless and bony ghost.²⁸

Ghosts are, of course, most readily associated with the gothic, that branch of literature where liminality prevails and where the past cannot be relinquished but rather, lingers and erupts in the present. W. J. McCormack's seminal essay on gothic literature in Ireland explains its appeal as resulting from the fact that past and present were not separate in Ireland, and remarks that "In the Gothic novel wrongful disinheritance is an explicit formula."²⁹ Something quite akin to wrongful disinheritance, the memory of dispossession, prevailed among the Irish-speaking population in the nineteenth century and before.

There are many other ways besides this in which gothic literature and its peculiar temporality reflects and overlaps the situation of the Irish language and its literature in the nineteenth century through to the twentieth. There is the representation of the Gaelic Irish in the nineteenth-century Irish gothic novel "where Gaelic Ireland is set . . . in an anachronistic time-warp," as Joep Leerssen

27. An egregious example of this view was given in Robert Knox's *The Races of Man* (1850) where he remarks that the Irish were doomed to go "the way of the dark races of the world." See Ó Conchubhair, pp. 76–77. See also L. Perry Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997); Michael de Nie, *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798–1882* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

28. See Fionntán de Brún, "'Society in Ulster Seems Breaking Up': An Tionsclú, an Imirce agus Pobal na Gaeilge sa Naóú hAois Déag," *Éigse Loch Lao 1* (Belfast: University of Ulster), pp. 145–46.

29. McCormack, p. 834.

puts it in his discussion of Lady Morgan and Charles Maturin.³⁰ This is a tendency, which carries through into the revivalist period where Yeats, Gregory, and Synge valorize not only the spatially peripheral—wandering fiddlers and poets, fishermen, island communities, and so on—but ascribe a temporal detachment to these favored types. In Synge's *The Aran Islands* we are told that

Few of the people, however, are sufficiently used to modern time to understand in more than a vague way the convention of the hours, and when I tell them what o'clock it is by my watch they are not satisfied, and ask how long is left them before the twilight.³¹

There is a suggestion that Synge's observation might be his own primitivist projection, a naïveté ready to be exploited by his subject, when one old man asks Synge to send him a clock so that "they wouldn't forget me."³² Leerssen summarizes the tendency to deny contemporaneity or coevalness to peripheral cultures, drawing from the anthropologist Johannes Fabian: "What Fabian calls 'the denial of coevalness' in attitudes towards distant peripheries can bespeak either a sense of 'advanced' metropolitan superiority, or else a primitivistic nostalgia for the more 'organic' and 'natural' past."³³

We find a good example of prelapsarian nostalgia for the preindustrial world in the work of a contemporary of Yeats and Synge, Herbert Moore Pim (1883–1950). Pim was the author of some gothic novels, as well as a series of sketches, *Unknown Immortals in the Northern City of Success* (1917), where he describes a fish-seller in Belfast:

There is a doubt about his origin, and there is a greater doubt about his destiny. No one ever saw the fish-man begin his day of song, because his day never ends. He carries curious treasures, and he is full of wisdom. His garments cling about him, and his eyes are guarded from the light.

No man can tell his age, and he is without kith and kin in the world.

Far from being "without kith and kin in the world," it is most likely that this man was one of the "Fadgies" from Omeath, an Irish speaker from a very old and tightly knit community that settled in the Smithfield area of Belfast during the nineteenth century.³⁴ In Pim's whimsical portrait, the Fishman has more in com-

30. Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 1996), p. 51.

31. J. M. Synge, *Four Plays and The Aran Islands* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 179.

32. Synge, p. 180.

33. Joep Leerssen, "Celticism," in *Celticism—Studia Imagologica: Amsterdam Studies on Cultural Identity*, ed. Terence Brown (Rodopi: Amsterdam, 1996), p. 8.

34. Writing of the Omeath Gaeltacht in the same era, Fr. Lorcán Ó Muirí [Ua Muireadhaigh] wrote, "There was scarcely one of the old people in Omeath a decade ago who could not trace their descent

mon with the undead, such as John Melmoth of Charles Maturin's classic gothic novel *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) who is "independent of time and place."³⁵

The idea that the Irish language and its speakers were like the undead of gothic novels is also expressed from within the language revivalist movement. The native Irish speaker and revivalist Philip Barron of Waterford strikes a gothic note in the first number of his magazine *Ancient Ireland* (1835), where he announces his mission to revive the literature and study of Irish language from where it "lay buried."³⁶ Similarly, James Clarence Mangan's poem "The Irish Language" predicts that the language shall win "proud release from the tomb thou art sepulchred in."³⁷ One of the most common conventions in the gothic novel is the "found document," often a will, diary or fragment; as such, gothic novels frequently include "meditations on textual accuracy and transmission as central problems of historical retrieval."³⁸ This is precisely where the energies and focus of literary endeavors in Irish rested in the nineteenth century, rather than in creating a new body of prose. The Cork scribe Mícheál Óg Ó Longáin describes his scribal vocation as being "for the sake of the Irish language and in order to help release it from the pernicious, amnesiac darkness in which she has been for so long."³⁹

Besides the common ground with gothic literature, the values of Irish revivalism in the nineteenth century were clearly consonant with those of the Gothic

back to the seventeenth century. I have tested several of these genealogical trees by means of the census returns of 1666 and 1766, and rarely have I found any error." Lorcan Ua Muireadhaigh, *Amhráin Shéamais Mhic Chuarta* (Dundalk: William Tempest, 1925) pp. 13–14.

35. Charles Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820; London: Penguin, 2006), p. 50.

36. Philip Barron, *Ancient Ireland: A Weekly Magazine* (1835), 1, 1, 16.

37. *Collected Works of James Clarence Mangan*, vol. 4, ed. Jacques Chuto et al. (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2002), pp. 88–90. Mangan's poem is based on an original Irish poem published as "Dán Mholadh na Gaoidheilghe" by John O'Daly in his *Reliques of Irish Jacobite Poetry* (Dublin: Samuel J. Machen, 1844), pp. 1–3. The lines quoted above do not appear in O'Daly's version and as such "either O'Daly found a more complete text, with which he provided Mangan, or the poet played his own variations on the theme." Chuto, p. 279.

38. Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 111.

39. My translation. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the original Irish in this article are by the present author. ". . . air mhaithe leis an nGaoidheilg agus d'fhonn coghnámh fuasgalta do thabhairt uirthi ón ndorchadas ndearmadach ndanardha ionna bhfuil le cian d'áimsir." Meidhbhín Ni Úrdail, *The Scribe in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Motivations and Milieu* (Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 2000), p. 98. It is worth noting that in the Southern gothic novels of William Faulkner a similar sense of unresolved history sustains frequent meditations on time and leads ultimately to the dissolution of past and present, as Faulkner himself remarked: "Time is a fluid condition which has no existence except in the momentary avatars of individual people. There is no such thing as *was*—only *is*." Hugh Holman, "The Unity of Faulkner's *Light in August*," *PMLA*, 73, 1 (March, 1958), 165.

Revival in architecture, a connection that was to become critical later on in the case of Pearse. Thus, in his account of the Irish College he had built in County Waterford in the early 1830s, Philip Barron remarked that “the ancient Gothic order has been adopted.”⁴⁰ It is significant that Barron gives details of the Gothic credentials of his Irish College, as the principles espoused by the Gothic Revival in architecture were a rejection of the industrial, utilitarian, secularized nineteenth century and a return to the institutions and values of medieval society, which, in the words of one of the Gothic Revival’s chief exponents, A.W. N. Pugin, carried “the indelible stamp of faith, love and devotion.”⁴¹ The Gothic Revival and the cultural and social critique it entailed were very much the inheritance Pearse received from his father, James Pearse, an English ecclesiastical sculptor who became the “pioneer of modern Gothic Art as applied to Church work, in this country” (according to his obituary in the *Irish Independent*).⁴² A recurring theme in Pearse’s essays is his championing of medieval values over modern, as in education. However, the crucial question of whether revivalism aims simply to restore the past or to engage with the past to achieve a higher synthesis in the present was to arise in Pearse’s essays and encourage him to reject the Gothic Revival as simply a nostalgic fad: “Irish literature, if it [is] to live and grow, must get into contact on the one hand with its own past and on the other hand with the mind of contemporary Europe. This is the twentieth century; and no literature can take root in the twentieth century which is not of the twentieth century. We want no Gothic Revival.”⁴³

The question one must ask is, Could and can such a synthesis of past and present be achieved? As one writer put it in 1904 in the *Leader*, “Perhaps the greatest of all difficulties which underlie the whole of what is known as the Irish Revival is the length of time we are obliged to go back before we arrive at any mode of life that may with truth be termed distinctively Irish.”⁴⁴ This becomes a much more complex question when we consider that many parts of Ireland were still overwhelmingly Irish-speaking, and many more still in some intermediate stage of language shift. Seosamh Mac Grianna of Rannafast remarked in the 1920s of native Irish speakers who were fifty years older than him that their knowl-

40. Barron, p. 3. This should not be confused with Ollscoil na Mumhan, one of a number of Irish-language colleges for teachers of Irish founded between 1904 and 1906.

41. Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City* (London: Phoenix, 2004), p. 107.

42. Fionntán de Brún, “‘We Want no Gothic Revival’: Pádraig Mac Piarais, an Gotachas agus an Athbheochan” in *Féilscribhinn do Chathal Ó Háinle*, ed. Eoin Mac Cárthaigh and Jürgen Uhlisch (Indreabhán: Cló Iar-Chonnacht, 2012), p. 72.

43. P. H. Pearse, “About Literature,” *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 26 May 1906, 6–7.

44. Quoted by Tom Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland 1858–1928* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), p. 117.

edge of Irish surpassed his (Mac Grianna's) to the same degree that Mac Grianna's surpassed the Irish of Revivalists, such as Pearse.⁴⁵ Evidently, alongside the conventional boundaries of past and present are those represented on the spatio-temporal plane of east-west, Gaeltacht-Galltacht. Seán Ó Ríordáin's call to "return again" to the Ireland of the sixteenth century by simply going west to the Kerry Gaeltacht in the early 1960s, where an ideal past existed in the present, typifies this dichotomy.⁴⁶ Heaney's sojourn in the Donegal Gaeltacht as a school boy in 1953 was part of the same well-established, westward return.⁴⁷

Considered against the ambivalent temporality of the gothic nineteenth century, and the even greater temporal ambivalence of the twentieth century where Irish Revivalism becomes a major cultural force, the notion of history as linear additive succession, or as clearly demarcated stages as expressed by positivism and historicism, becomes decidedly unconvincing. Nevertheless, the notion that history is driven by an inevitable linear progress has had and still enjoys great influence. The historian Tom Garvin exemplifies this attitude in his 1987 study, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland 1858–1928*, where he writes that

the nationalist's hatred of the recent past debarred him from taking up a Burkean incremental conservatism which treasured past ways while accepting gradual innovation. The separatist was, commonly, a restorationist of an extinct past rather than a preserver of continuity with the recent, genuine past.⁴⁸

The phrase that jars here is "the recent, genuine past": is only the recent past genuine? Or do revivalists espouse a false past? Rather than the past and present being parceled into discrete stages or phases, the evidence of revivalism suggests that we consider a Bergsonian understanding of time where the past and present coexist, as formulated by Gilles Deleuze: "Not only does the past coexist with the present that has been, but . . . it is the whole, integral past; it is *all* our past, which coexists with each present. The famous metaphor of the cone represents this

45. "Iolann Fionn" [Seosamh Mac Grianna], *Filí Gan Iomrá in Athchló Uladh*, ed. Gearóid Mac Giolla Domhnaigh and Gearóid Stockman (Muineachán: Comhaltas Uladh, 1991), p. 137. This was originally published as a booklet in 1926.

46. Seán Ó Ríordáin, "Fill Arís," *Brosna* (Dublin: Sáirséal agus Dill, 1964), p. 41. An English version of this poem titled "Return Again" is included in the forthcoming volume edited by Frank Sewell, *Seán Ó Ríordáin, Selected Poems / Rogha Danta*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, in association with Clo Iar-Chonnacht, 2014), pp. 162–63.

47. For a discussion of this motif in the contemporary poetry of Cathal Ó Searcaigh see Pádraig de Paor, *Na Buachaillí Dána: Cathal Ó Searcaigh, Gabriel Rosenstock agus Ról Comhaimseartha an Fhile sa Ghaeilge* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 2005), pp. 100–01.

48. Garvin, p. 109. See also Timothy J. McMahon, *Grand Opportunity: The Gaelic Revival and Irish Society, 1893–1910* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), where the author contends that Garvin's thesis was overly dependent on a consideration of the separatist's mentality to the neglect of the broader revivalist motivations of the Gaelic League.

complete state of coexistence.”⁴⁹ For Bergson the “pure present” is “the invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future.”⁵⁰ Duration, in Bergson’s view, is a dynamic process of pure mobility characterized by continuity of progress and heterogeneity.

A related feature of Deleuze’s adaptation of Bergson’s theory of time is his interpretation of the Nietzschean “eternal return,” which he sees as an opportunity and a guarantee of difference rather than repetition: “Destiny in the eternal return is also the “welcoming” of chance.”⁵¹ Drawing also on Heraclitus as a philosopher of flux, Deleuze affirms the importance of “becoming” rather than being.⁵² Interestingly, Heaney’s reflection on his time in the Gaeltacht centers on the notion of return. He has come to the Gaeltacht as a schoolboy as part of a spiritual return *ad fontes*. Indeed, his journey there is marked by a “flit of the foreknown” and a sense of reincarnation.⁵³ His return to this scene in *Human Chain* leads him to ponder on “a world restored,” which, similarly to Deleuze, he refers to elsewhere as “the world of the second chance.”⁵⁴ Admittedly, these are abstract reflections on time and duration; yet they provide a theoretical or imaginative frame of reference for the concrete actuality of revivalism—for example, how in a city such as Belfast the Irish language has been in a continual state of revival from at least the end of the eighteenth century.⁵⁵ At the very least, these interpretations of temporality allow for a broader understanding of revivalism, one that goes beyond an over-simplification that presents it as an atavistic reflex, or a mere contrivance that ignores the true or natural process of history.

49. Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, transl. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1988), p. 59. Explaining the schema of the cone Bergson says, “If I represent by a cone SAB the totality of the recollections accumulated in my memory, the base AB, situated in the past, remains motionless, while the summit S, which indicates at all times my present, moves forward unceasingly, and unceasingly also touches the moving plane P of my actual representation of the universe. At S the image of the body is concentrated; and, since it belongs to the plane P, this image does but receive and restore actions emanating from all the images of which the plane is composed.” Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, transl. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 152.

50. Bergson, p. 150.

51. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London: Athlone Press, 1983) p. 28.

52. Deleuze, p. 24.

53. “Wraiths,” in Seamus Heaney, *Human Chain*, p. 67. The sense of the Gaeltacht college being a spiritual rite of passage is most explicit in “Stations of the West,” mentioned in footnote 1.

54. Dennis O’Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 351.

55. The Belfast Harpers’ Convention of 1792 sought to “to revive and perpetuate the ancient music and poetry of Ireland” and the first Irish “magazine,” *Bolg an tSolair*, was printed in Belfast in 1795 as part of a revivalist initiative. *Belfast and the Irish Language*, ed. Fionntán de Brún (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), p. 8.

The Irish-language writer whose work, more than any other writer, is engaged implicitly with Bergson's conception of time and with such related concepts as Nietzsche's "eternal return" is Máirtín Ó Cadhain (1906–1970). As Declan Kiberd notes in his penetrating essay on Ó Cadhain's novel *Cré na Cille* [Graveyard Clay] (1949), the border between living and dead had been all but erased by such modernists as Ó Cadhain and Beckett.⁵⁶ In *Cré na Cille*, the time is "de shíor" (eternal) and the finality of death is dispensed with as the characters, all deceased, engage in an endless cycle of gossip and bickering. As Kiberd remarks, "there is a circular structure to both *Cré na Cille* and Beckett's trilogy. The characters cannot step out of time, but they are also incapable of growth. There can be no beginning, middle or end in the ensuing narration, only the perpetual repetition of the same range of sentences, petering out into a dot-dot-dot."⁵⁷ Death is an anticlimax in *Cré na Cille*, for, as the character Muraed Phroinsiais explains, people simply continue the same life as they had in the "ould country," except that they cannot leave the grave nor hear the living. Yet far from leading to an eschewal of the faith or even a questioning of Christian eschatology, the characters continue to value the trappings of Christian burial (respectable plots and crosses, crucifixes, and shrouds), albeit on a strictly material rather than spiritual basis, as a reflection of social prestige.⁵⁸ Similarly, there is no decline in the traditional belief in the prophecies of native saints, which had for so long bolstered messianic hopes and on which the dialogue between living and supernatural was predicated in *aisling* poetry.⁵⁹

The peculiar temporal scheme of *Cré na Cille* might be reasonably traced to many of Ó Cadhain's preoccupations and experiences, not least his concern that he was writing in a language that might die before him.⁶⁰ His internment along with hundreds of other republicans in the Curragh prison camp during the years of World War II seems to have been part of his fascination with Dostoyevsky's *The House of the Dead* (1860), the fictionalized account of the Russian author's incarceration in a Siberian prison camp. Describing this period of his life to his brother, Dostoyevsky wrote, "I consider those four years as a time during which I was buried alive and shut up in a coffin."⁶¹ Just as the dead of *Cré na Cille* con-

56. Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000), p. 574.

57. Kiberd, p. 580.

58. The opening line is a pertinent example of this. Caitríona Pháidín wonders if she has been buried in the "pound place" according to wishes expressed before her death, or in the cheaper "fifteen shilling" area of the graveyard. This point is discussed in Gearóid Denvir, *An Cadhan Aonair: Saothar Liteartha Mháirtín Uí Chadhain* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1987), pp. 41–43.

59. Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *Cré na Cille* (Dublin: Sáirséal agus Dill, 1949), pp. 214–16.

60. Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1969), p. 40.

61. "Translator's Introduction" in Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The House of the Dead* (1862; London: Penguin, 2003), p. 7.

tinue to live in a limited sense, Ó Cadhain spoke of his imprisonment in terms that suggest a period of spatio-temporal exile. In one account he refers to his temporary release as a return to Ireland, rather like Muraed Phroinsiaís's reference to the land of the living as the "ould country."⁶² The sense of prison being a house of the dead may well be universal, but in Ó Cadhain's case and in the case of other republicans in newly independent Ireland there was a strong feeling that the spatio-temporal exile of incarceration was part of a wider injustice which involved a disruption and betrayal of the nationalist teleology, that is, the rightful chronology of national liberation. Interestingly, Ó Cadhain refers to the entire project of national liberation as "an aisling," the vision articulated by the leaders of the 1916 Rising and betrayed by the successive governments of the new independent state.⁶³

In many ways, some of the gothic motifs witnessed in representations of Gaelic Ireland after political conquest and cultural subjugation in the seventeenth century, such as "wrongful disinheritance," liminality, and temporal alienation, become the province of anti-Treaty republicans in the twentieth century. This is expressed most vividly in Seosamh Mac Grianna's final, unfinished novel *Dá mBíodh Ruball ar an Éan* (1940) [*If the Bird had a Tail*] in which "wrongful disinheritance" is registered literally and figuratively at the novel's core. *Dá mBíodh Ruball ar an Éan* centers on the fate of a tortured artist, Cathal Mac Eachmharcaigh, who is essentially a prisoner in the house from which he has been wrongfully disinherited by his older step-brother, a corrupt politician who is leader of the "Laochra na Saoirse" [Heroes of Freedom] party. A large part of Mac Eachmharcaigh's torment is the result of his vain attempt to keep the higher ideals of art separate from the worldly machinations of politics and propaganda. This struggle is doomed to failure, as the house in which the artist lives and works is dominated by the dark forces presided over by his half-brother: the artist's gradual decline is inevitable. What we learn of this struggle is revealed to us by a journalist, Mánas Mac Giolla Bhríde, who discovers Mac Eachmarcaigh's diary after the latter's death (the classic gothic "found document"). Mac Giolla Bhríde becomes not only "heir" to the artist's vexation but also experiences a sense of physical possession as the diary

62. "Faoi dhó a tháinig mé amach go hÉirinn nó gur saoradh faoi dheire thiar mé beagnach cheithre bliana go leith in a dhiaidh sin." [Twice I came out to Ireland until I was eventually freed almost four and a half years after that]. 'Máirtín Ó Cadhain Papers', Trinity College Dublin, M/2/31, p. 7. See also Claire Wills, *That Neutral Island: A Cultural History of Ireland During the Second World War* (London: Faber, 2007), pp. 333–43.

63. In a talk given to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Rising, also titled "An Aisling," Ó Cadhain asks what has happened to this "vision," claiming that if they could return to the present the leaders of the Rising would see an Ireland that was more like England than it was in their own time. Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *An Aisling* (Dublin: Coiste Cuimhneacháin Náisiúnta, 1966), p. 23.

takes over his mind and body: “the torment and heat of the author was in my blood.”⁶⁴

In mood and tone as well as in narrative structure, *Dá mBíodh Ruball ar an Éan* is remarkably close to film noir. Just as film noir owes much of its origins to the gothic novel—the term itself is based on the French *roman noir* or “gothic novel”—Mac Grianna’s novel is in many ways a modern rendering of the earlier gothic form, particularly where aspects of temporality, and more specifically chronology, are concerned.⁶⁵ The seemingly inevitable chronology of national deliverance is disrupted on various levels in *Dá mBíodh Ruball ar an Éan*. Faced with the odious reality of Ireland under independence, the artist Mac Eachmharaigh renounces his former service to the nationalist project and becomes instead a martyr for the cause of art: Prometheus bound, as Máнас Mac Giolla Bhríde has it.⁶⁶ In this manner, Mac Eachmharaigh begins to produce works of a purgatorial nature which the narrator describes as “cubist-classical,” radically modernist but drawing on classical tradition, and which carry such ironic titles as “In the name of God and of the dead generations,” from the opening line of the 1916 Proclamation.⁶⁷ These paintings represent the temporal purgatory of the nationalist vision—free from foreign rule, yet as far as ever from ultimate salvation. The significance of Mac Eachmharaigh’s “cubist-classical” style is to break entirely with the present’s corrupt version of national independence and to keep faith retrospectively with a purer ideal in the way that anti-Treaty republicans sought to adhere to the vision of 1916.⁶⁸

There are indeed strong indications from the outset in *Dá mBíodh Ruball ar an Éan* that the progress of the national liberation narrative is belied by an alternative narrative of a distinctly gothic bent. The narrator and journalist, Máнас Mac Giolla Bhríde, alludes to this on the first page where he speaks of

64. “Bhí mé i mo oidhre ar an bhuaireamh a fuair sé” [I was heir to the vexation he endured]. “Bhí sí in m’intinn agus crá agus teas an údair in mo chuid fola” [It was in my mind and the torment and heat of the author in my blood]. Seosamh Mac Grianna, *Dá mBíodh Ruball ar an Éan* (Dublin: an Gúm, 1992), p. 5; p. 55.

65. The first three of five characteristics of film noir cited by Christine Gledhill are “1) the investigative structure of the narrative; 2) plot devices such as voice-over or flashback, or frequently both; 3) proliferation of points of view.” Christine Gledhill, “Klute 1: a Contemporary *Film Noir* and Feminist Criticism,” in *Women in Film Noir*, ed. Ann E. Kaplan (London: British Film Institute, 1978), p. 14.

66. Seosamh Mac Grianna, *Dá mBíodh Ruball ar an Éan* (Dublin: An Gúm, 1992), p. 29.

67. “In Ainm Dé agus Shlóite na Marbh,” *Dá mBíodh Ruball ar an Éan*, p. 25.

68. More generally, Seamus Deane has remarked of the portrayal of the artist since the death of Parnell that “modern Irish writing has been fond of providing us with the image of the hero as artist surrounded by the philistine or clerically-dominated mob.” Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature, 1880–1980* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 31.

having a secret mien which prevented him from ever succeeding in life.⁶⁹ Here Mac Grianna borrows from a line written by one of his own ancestors, Aodh Ó Domhnaill, an oral poet of pre-famine Ireland, “If it were not for the fate under which I was born that prevented me from ever succeeding in life.”⁷⁰ The sense that a malign fate will ensure that the end will not be reached is obvious to the reader on arriving at the point where the novel tails off and is followed by a now-famous postscript where the author tells us that “the well has run dry” and he will write no more.⁷¹

A further reflection in *Dá mBíodh Ruball ar an Éan* of the abrogated chronology of national liberation is revealed through the novel’s investigative structure. The structure, too, is reminiscent of film noir, where the full circumstances of a crime or injustice are revealed through flashback and reverse chronology. In film noir, this investigation frequently involves a “wrong man” character whose hitherto benign progress in life has been disrupted inexplicably at an as-yet-unknown juncture. This is precisely the approach followed in *Dá mBíodh Ruball ar an Éan* where both Cathal Mac Eachmharcaigh and the narrator and investigator, Máнас Mac Giolla Bhríde, are preoccupied with retracing the chronology of events in the hope that the critical point at which betrayal took place can be revealed.

The injury of wrongful disinheritance and spatio-temporal exile, although certainly fictive in Cathal Mac Eachmharcaigh’s case, clearly mirrors the author’s own experience of imprisonment in the Curragh as an anti-Treaty republican between 1922–23), and of his profound disenchantment with the Ireland of the Free State until his famous 1935 postscript to *Dá mBíodh Ruball ar an Éan*, which marked the abrupt end of his literary career and the onset of severely debilitating mental illness. Although both Mac Grianna and Ó Cadhain present their fictional and literal incarcerations as part of the struggle between progressive art and repressive state authority; Ó Cadhain adds to his identification with Dostoyevsky’s imprisonment by the tsarist regime by comparing his interrogation by state authorities in Dublin with that described by Arthur Koestler in *Dark-*

69. “Ba í an mhéin rúin sin a thug orm gan teacht in éifeacht riamh” [It was that secret mien/mind which prevented me from ever succeeding in life]. *Dá mBíodh Ruball ar an Éan*, p. 3.

70. “murab é gur rugadh faoin chinniúint mé nárbh fhéidir mo thabhairt in éifeacht.” *Filí gan Iomrá*, p. 139. Aodh Ó Donaill should not be confused with Aodh Mac Domhnaill (1802–67) of County Meath.

71. “Thráigh an tobar sa tsamhradh, 1935. Ní scríobhfaidh mé níos mó. Rinne mé mo dhícheall agus is cuma liom” [The well dried in the summer of 1935. I will write no more. I did my best and I don’t care.] *Dá mBíodh Ruball ar an Éan*, p. 89. This comes after several clues that the novel, like national liberation, will not achieve its full course but will instead be put into abeyance, one instance being Máнас’s assertion that when this book is complete the first period of his life will come to a close. *Dá mBíodh Ruball ar an Éan*, p. 5.

ness at Noon.⁷² One should, of course, resist any reified notion of imprisonment as an exclusively abstract, metaphysical condition. Both of Ó Cadhain's parents died during his incarceration. On the occasion of his mother's death, which occurred six weeks after his initial imprisonment, he was allowed "to come out to Ireland" to attend her funeral. When his father died a couple of years later, however, permission to attend the funeral was denied.⁷³ Ó Cadhain also gives a strong indication that the circumstances of his arrest and imprisonment either led to or contributed to his mother's death, writing "Chuala sí gur tugadh droch-íde sa mbeairic dom agus fuair sí bás tobann" [she heard that I was given a bad beating in the barracks and she died suddenly].⁷⁴ The personal cost of spatio-temporal exile could hardly be clearer here. But it is also part of the wider experience, evinced by some anti-Treaty republicans in the 1920s and anti-Dáil Éireann republicans from the 1930s onward, of being removed from the entire project of national liberation and cultural revival while others directed its realization in a way that was inimical to its original aims. Disinheritance, incarceration, and its implicit spatio-temporal exile became the metaphorical, as well as the often literal, condition of those who opposed the abrogation of the original "vision" of national liberation.

The proposition that the just course of the nationalist teleology had been abrogated or arrested by those who had betrayed the original vision is one that underlay Máirtín Ó Cadhain's lifelong public engagement on such issues as education, the preservation of national heritage and tradition (particularly folklore), economic and social policy and, of course, the Irish language and the Gaeltacht. At the heart of this engagement was the question discussed at the beginning of this article: How and if one can revive a language or any significant element of national culture in those places where it has died out. This question is of central importance to Ó Cadhain's controversial 1950 talk on folklore to Cumann na Scríbhneoirí [the writers' society]. Although its many ad hominem interjections and general condemnatory intensity were characteristic of Ó Cadhain's polemic style, the author's recent imprisonment by the state authorities is likely to have fueled his coruscating critique of the state's intervention in the preservation of national culture. The charge of betrayal underscores the entire case. Nevertheless, Ó Cadhain's criticism of the state-funded Folklore Commission is also founded on a deeply considered examination of the broader question of revival and temporality.

Essential to Ó Cadhain's argument was the notion that death was every-

72. Máirtín Ó Cadhain Papers, Trinity College Dublin, M/2/31, p. 3.

73. The other occasion where Ó Cadhain was temporarily released from prison was when he was taken to hospital for an x-ray. Máirtín Ó Cadhain Papers, Trinity College Dublin, M/2/31, pp. 7–8.

74. Máirtín Ó Cadhain Papers, Trinity College Dublin, M/2/31, p. 8.

where synonymous with the study of Irish and folklore; he asserted that the collected forces of academia and state-sponsored heritage preservation amounted to a small triangle in Dublin city center, which one might call “Príomh-Chill Éireann: an Chré Mharbh” [the Chief Cemetery of Ireland: the Dead Clay].⁷⁵ Folklore was simply a study of the dead, and the Gaeltacht—the contemporary communities for whom Irish and its traditions were living and immediate—had been reduced to a mere branch of folklore.⁷⁶ If this image suggests the situation realized in *Cré na Cille* of a community buried and yet living, so also do the frequent references to *cré* (particularly the opposition of “dead clay” and “living clay”) evoke the sense in *Cré na Cille* of clay as a synecdoche for the mysteries of time, creation, and transformation.⁷⁷ In the novel this occurs chiefly through the naming of each of its ten interludes after a different organic process by which the initial “*cré dhubh*” [black clay] becomes eventually “*cré gheal*” [bright or white clay]. It is also a recurring trope in the magnificent, declamatory monologues of “*Stoc na Cille*” [Trumpet of the Graveyard], the oldest voice in the graveyard and the only one to express a deeper awareness of eternity:

Here in the grave the spool is forever spinning; turning the brightness dark, making the beautiful ugly, and imbricating the alluring golden ringlets of hair with a shading of scum, a wisp of mildew, a hint of rot, a sliver of slime, and a grey haunting of mizzle. The vespertine veil of indifference and forgetfulness is being woven from the golden filaments of the setting sun, from the silver web of moonlight, from the resplendent cloak of fame, and from the departing wafture of fugacious remembrance. For this weaver’s material is none other than the malleable and kneadful clay.⁷⁸

For Ó Cadhain, folklore was “permanent” and what appeared to be dying was simply being transformed into something new. It was not a question, therefore, of rescuing the body, but rather, the spirit that lay deep below. The error was in

75. *Ó Cadhain i bhFeasta*, ed. Seán Ó Laighin (Dublin: Clódhanna Teoranta, 1990), pp. 151, 155.

76. Ó Laighin, p. 139.

77. The full English definition of *cré* is “clay; earth, dust.” Niall Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Bearla* (Dublin: an Gúm, 1977), p. 312. The text of Ó Cadhain’s lecture on folklore, “Béaloideas,” is divided under three main headings ‘An Chré’ [the clay], ‘An Chré Mharbh’ [the dead clay] and ‘An Chré Bheo’ [Living clay]. The text is also replete with references to clay and earth qualified by various adjectives. An important example of this is where Ó Cadhain speaks of the provenance of various cultural achievements as having risen from “an chré the” [the hot clay], “an chré uaibhreach” [the proud clay] and, referring to the Celtic Twilight’s “Kiltartanese” and “living speech,” “as an gcré chéasta . . . an chré dhiamhair arb aisti a thig sa deireadh gach feart urlabhra maraon le gach fás” [from the tortured clay . . . the mysterious clay from which comes eventually every miracle of speech as well as all growth]. Ó Laighin, p. 157.

78. I am grateful to Alan Titley for permission to quote this extract from his translation of *Cré na Cille*, which is to be published by Cló Iar-Chonnacht.

trying to give life to something when what was required was a “re-cultivating of the soul.”⁷⁹

The contradistinction in *Cré na Cille* between the grandiosely transcendental soliloquies of “Stoc na Cille” and the relentlessly material preoccupations of the other dead voices are indicative of both Ó Cadhain’s materialist view of culture and society and his distrust of the romantic mysticizing of peasant society.⁸⁰ The most enduring target of Ó Cadhain’s public engagement was the hypocrisy of the Irish state in having elevated Gaeltacht culture to a spiritual ideal, while overseeing the material neglect of its people—particularly evident in chronic emigration.⁸¹ Although Ó Cadhain was unapologetically socialist and republican, he was also a committed Catholic.⁸² He was of, and firmly on the side of, the tillers of soil, but also clearly open to the mysteries of the soil. It is perhaps this Catholic conviction that allowed Ó Cadhain to renounce the Celtic mysticism typified by Matthew Arnold and the Celtic Twilight, and yet still speak not only of “re-cultivating the soul” but also of that “particular little island of spirituality in the human mind that is the Gael.”⁸³ Where the discourse of romanticism and cultural nationalism led to an obfuscation of material realities, Ó Cadhain was quick to oppose this. This did not, however, mean that he could not consider cultural revival to have a spiritual dimension or even function. Indeed, in the script of one his last talks, titled “An Dá Leitríocht” [the two literatures], he described the business of contemporary Irish-language literature as being “a work of bestowal, a spiritual act in a very particular way.”⁸⁴

The combination in Ó Cadhain’s approach to cultural revival of both material and spiritual sensibilities is suggestive of what Anthony D. Smith termed “the crisis of dual legitimation” in nationalist discourse, a “legitimation in terms of received religion and tradition versus legitimation by appeal to reason and

79. Ó Laighin, pp. 135, 132.

80. See, for example, his review of Patrick Kavanagh’s *Tarry Flynn* (1948), which he praises for its authentic insider’s portrayal of rural life, which he contrasts with the “beautiful life” described by newspaper columnists who had never spent a week working on a farm. Máirtín Ó Cadhain, “Tarry Flynn” *Comhar*, 8, 3 (March, 1949), p. 28.

81. Speaking of Ó Cadhain’s championing of the Gaeltacht, Alan Titley writes that “It is almost, but not entirely, true to say that whatever he [Ó Cadhain] did in the public arena he did for the people of the Gaeltacht.” Alan Titley, *Nailing Theses* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 2011), p. 293.

82. At the beginning of a talk given to the Irish Soviet Friendship Society in 1962, Ó Cadhain declared, “I am not now nor never was in the Communist Party. I am a Christian, a Catholic.” Máirtín Ó Cadhain Papers, Trinity College Dublin, M/2/29, p. 1.

83. “. . . an t-oileáinín spioradálta ar leith san aigne dhaonna arb é an Gael é.” Ó Laighin, p. 132.

84. “Is obair thíolaicthe í, beart spriodáilte ar bhealach an-áirid.” Máirtín Ó Cadhain Papers, Trinity College Dublin, M/2/47, p. 45.

observation.”⁸⁵ Of course, to admit of a spiritual dimension is to be open to a concept of time as subordinate to deity or at least to some unknown entity. Yet, one of the most consistent features of Ó Cadhain’s writing on culture, and most particularly on approaches to cultural revival or preservation, is his belief in a material synthesis that was both a necessary and natural path toward continuity. Just as the eternal time of *Cré na Cille* is punctuated by the organic process of synthesis undergone by the graveyard clay, so too is the narrative of national liberation in Ó Cadhain’s view dependent on a synthesis of history and folk tradition.⁸⁶

In proposing the importance of synthesis to the well-being of national culture Ó Cadhain drew particularly on T.S. Eliot’s understanding of the nature of both community and tradition. In his landmark essay *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* [White Papers and Written Papers] (1969), published the year before his death, his description of his native Gaeltacht community as a “local organic community” is based particularly on his reading of Eliot, whom he also considered to be the most perceptive writer on literary tradition of his times.⁸⁷ The emphasis on synthesis and renewal expressed in *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* reiterates the main premise of Ó Cadhain’s 1950 essay on folklore. In the 1969 essay, he draws particular attention to some of the conclusions reached by Eliot in his essay titled “What Is a Classic?” (1944), especially with regard to temporality: “If we cease to believe in the future the past would cease fully to be *our* past: it would become the past of a dead civilization.”⁸⁸ The error of the government-sponsored Folklore Commission was, in Ó Cadhain’s view, symptomatic of the state’s betrayal of the original vision of national liberation. That is to say, it failed to effect a synthesis of past and present or to make, in Hyde’s words, “the present a rational continuation of the past.” Ó Cadhain quotes Eliot’s warning against “a new kind of provincialism” by which he meant “a provincialism, not of space, but of time; one for which history is merely the chronicle of human devices which have served their turn and been scrapped,

85. Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991), p.96. See also John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), p. 207.

86. “Dúinne is rud comhiomlán doroinnte an stair agus an ‘folk tradition’. Is é a síntéis ár ndóchas as Náisiún Gael.” [For us history and folk tradition are an aggregate and indivisible thing. Their synthesis is the basis of our hope in the Nation of the Gael]. Ó Laighin, p. 142.

87. Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1969), pp. 9, 14. See also: Alan Titley, *An tÚrscéal Gaeilge* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1993), pp. 232–33; Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh, *Ag Samhlú Troda* (Dublin: Coiscéim, 2002), pp. 6–7, 11, for a discussion of both the origin of the term “local organic community” and Ó Cadhain’s reference to its development after Eliot by English writers such as Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart.

88. Ó Laighin p. 142; T.S. Eliot, *What Is a Classic?* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945), p. 25.

one for which the world is the property solely of the living, a property in which the dead hold no shares.”⁸⁹

Although clearly deeply aware of the theoretical issues implicit in cultural revival, Ó Cadhain was by no means silent on the practical achievement of this synthesis of past and present. While acknowledging the importance of fidelity to historical precedent, he also recognized the practical value of “false traditions” and cites the example of Iolo Morgannwg (1747–1826) in Wales, whose influence was in evidence in the modern Eisteddfod.⁹⁰ As Michael Briody has shown, Ó Cadhain’s attack on the Folklore Commission was grounded in many practical and strategic considerations. Notable among these was the almost two-fold increase of government funding awarded to the Folklore Commission, at a time (1949–50) when it was being proposed that the funding of Irish-language literary magazines should be decreased, and also his desire to rebuff such public intellectuals as Arland Ussher and Sean O’Faolain as well as Séamus Ó Duilearga (director of the Folklore Commission)—all of whom were seemingly dismissive of contemporary literature in Irish while enthusiastic about the value of folklore.⁹¹ Indeed, it seems at times that Ó Cadhain could be too practical: in *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca*, he encouraged an abandonment of poetry for prose in Irish on the grounds that writing was integral to the revival of Irish and prose was the very cement and concrete of life.⁹²

An interesting view of how the state could accomplish a practically grounded, revivalist synthesis was offered Ó Cadhain in 1962 when he was part of an Irish group that visited the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic.⁹³ His chief interest, according to Ó Cadhain’s account of the visit, was to “try and find out something

89. Ó Laighin p. 146; Eliot, p. 30. Ó Cadhain did not include the second part of this quotation, perhaps because his intention was to emphasize the importance of believing in the future while being aware of the past.

90. “Ní shéanaim ach oiread gur leas, uaireanta, iad ‘traidisiúin’ bhréige fearacht an rud a thionscail Iolo Morgannwg agus ar léir a shliocht in Eisteddfod na Breataine Bige fós.” Ó Laighin p. 146. For a detailed discussion of the influence of such competitions as the “Oireachtas” in the development of the oral tradition in twentieth-century Ireland, see Éadaoin Ní Mhuircheartaigh, “Drámaíocht ó Dhúchas? Stáitsiú na nEalaíon Béal san Fhichiú hAois.” PhD diss., NUI Galway, 2012.

91. Mícheál Briody, “‘Is Fearr an tAighneas ná an tUaigneas’: Máirtín Ó Cadhain agus Bailiú an Bhéaloidis,” in *Bliainiris 9* (Ráth Chairn: Carbad, 2009), pp. 22–24. See also Ríonach Uí Ógáin, “Máirtín Ó Cadhain agus Saol an Bhéaloidis” in *Saothar Mháirtín Uí Chadhain—Léachtaí Cholm Cille 37*, ed. Máire Uí Annracháin (Maigh Nuad: An Sagart, 2007), pp. 131–56.

92. *Páipéir Bhána agus Páipéir Bhreaca*, p. 37.

93. The visit appears to have been organized by the Irish Soviet Friendship Society. Ó Cadhain gave a lecture to this society, based on the experience of his visit, in November 1962 and mentions Mairéad Nic Maicín who was also part of the visiting group. According to the www.ainm.ie biographical entry for Maighréd Nic Mhaicín, she was a member of the council of the Irish Soviet Friendship Society. Nic Mhaicín’s husband, Patrick Breslin, appears to have been a victim of Stalinist repression and died in prison in Kazan in 1942. There is an account of Nic Mhaicín’s (known in English as Daisy

of the way the Soviets dealt with a minor culture.”⁹⁴ Ó Cadhain’s interest in the oral literature and extempore verse tradition of Kirghizia had been well established in his reading of the Chadwicks’ *The Growth of Literature* (1940) and of other scholars who had written about the Kirghizian tradition, most notably Vasily Radlov and George Thomson.⁹⁵ Explaining his debt to the Chadwicks, Ó Cadhain remarked:

The Chadwicks taught me all I knew about Kirghizia. In teaching me about Kirghizia, they gave me a deeper insight into myself, into the milieu in which I was born, into the culture—minor it may be—which I inherited. Here in a God forsaken corner in Ireland were the same riddle contests as in Kirghizia; the extemporising and compositions of verse for all occasions; the same sparkling speech which I may say *en passant* are not Synge’s playboyisms, the same heroic traditional tales which took hours and hours to recite and which were the comics as well as the detective novels of my youth. I do not exaggerate when I say that I had thousands of lines of formalised speech before I could talk English. This rich traditional life has been all but liquidated in our day.⁹⁶

The trip to the Kirghiz Republic immediately confirmed this perceived commonality between its rural culture and that of his native Cois Fharráige. Yet, while an old peasant woman’s lilting while milking a cow immediately reminded Ó Cadhain of his mother, the difference was that this old woman had been made a member of the Supreme Soviet.⁹⁷ Notwithstanding his disappointment at an apparent “Russianisation” in regard to language policy, a recurrent observation in Ó Cadhain’s talk on Kirghizia is how peasant culture had been brought into the modern technological age reasonably intact and treated with respect.⁹⁸ He was particularly enthusiastic about the evidence of modern infrastructure and reserved the highest praise for the “liquidation of mass and adult illiteracy.”⁹⁹ It appeared to Ó Cadhain that the Soviet Republic had achieved the successful transition from a predominately oral culture to a literate one, without appar-

McMackin) and Breslin’s life in 1930s Russia in Barry McLoughlin, *Left to the Wolves: Irish Victims of Stalinist Terror* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007), pp. 53–70.

94. Máirtín Ó Cadhain Papers, Trinity College Dublin, M/2/29, pp. 7–8.

95. H. Munro Chadwick and Nora K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940); George Thomson, *Marxism and Poetry* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1945); W. Radlov [V.V. Radlov], *Proben der Volksliteratur der Türkischen Stämme* (St Petersburg: no publisher, 1866).

96. Máirtín Ó Cadhain Papers, Trinity College Dublin, M/2/29, p. 7.

97. Máirtín Ó Cadhain Papers, Trinity College Dublin, M/2/29, p. 22.

98. “No one would be gladder to be proven wrong in the matter than myself. But from a number of impressions I came to the conclusion that there is definite Russianisation.” Máirtín Ó Cadhain Papers, Trinity College Dublin, M/2/29, p. 33.

99. Máirtín Ó Cadhain Papers, Trinity College Dublin, M/2/29, p. 34.

ently diminishing the active vigor of the oral tradition. A key indication of this was the inclusion of storytelling in the school program in both Russia and the Kirghiz Republic and the evidence of an active engagement with the native oral culture at the highest levels of officialdom:

When I mentioned *Manas* [Kirghizian epic poem] everyone began to recite it, even the Minister for Education. I'd like to listen to his opposite number here recite a long extract from 'the Midnight Court,' though there is documented evidence that our venerable Uachtarán learnt it by heart in the jails of long ago.¹⁰⁰

This last reference to Éamon de Valéra hints at the perceived betrayal of the original cultural aims of national liberation by the leaders of the independent state and places prison at the source of fidelity to the original vision. De Valéra had, of course, been taoiseach when Ó Cadhain was interned.

The notion that a successful cultural synthesis of tradition and modernity had been achieved in the Kirghiz Republic was eagerly proposed by George Thomson, the English Marxist and renowned classics and Irish scholar. In his *Marxism and Poetry* (1945), Thomson remarks that he had for many years worked unsuccessfully "to save the culture of the Irish-speaking peasantry," before realizing that "you cannot raise the cultural standards of a people without raising their economic standards."¹⁰¹ Thomson's belief in the dialectics of history and human development was given realization in the apparent synthesis of traditional culture and modernity in Central Asia, and in particular in the Kirghiz and Kazakh Republics. Through modernization and the eradication of illiteracy, Thomson claimed that the peoples of Central Asia

have ceased to be primitive. They have been industrialised. That is what happened to the English peasantry during the Industrial Revolution, and the result was that their culture was destroyed. That is what is happening to the Irish-speaking peasantry today, with the same result. What then is becoming of the culture of the Kazakhs and the Kirghiz and the other peoples of Soviet Asia? So far from being destroyed, it is bursting into new life, richer and more vigorous than ever before. The potentialities of this cultural renaissance are incalculable, and they will have repercussions all over the world.¹⁰²

At the core of revivalism lies an attempt to reconnect with the lost legacy of previous generations and to create an intergenerational synthesis or continuity where this has been disrupted. Yet, though spiritual and artistic beliefs can allow one to forego the naturally observed boundaries of time, and specifically the im-

100. Máirtín Ó Cadhain Papers, Trinity College Dublin, M/2/29, pp. 30–31.

101. Thomson, pp. 55–56.

102. Thomson, p. 56.

possibility of conversing with dead generations, the demands of reason and observation remain. In both Thomson's Central Asia and Pearse's West of Ireland, individuals were identified who embodied intergenerational continuity and who, in their extraordinary longevity, seemed almost to have defeated death—the ultimate desire of any revival. Thomson's example is the Kazakh “primitive poet” Jamboul, whom he considered, at ninety-nine years of age, to be “the oldest poet in the world.”¹⁰³ Born in 1846, Jamboul had been known in the nineteenth century as “the greatest bard of the Kazakhs” but much of what he had composed had since been lost. The reversal of this loss, according to Thomson, had been permitted by the Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent revival of oral literature: “here we have a primitive poet who had hardly lost his status under tribal society when he recovered it under socialism.”¹⁰⁴ A similarly totemic figure for Patrick Pearse is the Connemara folk poet Colm de Bhailís (1796–1906), whom he presented as being discovered by the Gaelic League's paper *An Claidheamh Soluis*:

The odd thing is that the poet's own personality has, to so large an extent dropped out of history. Less productive than Raftery, he has, here and there, reached a height which Raftery never reached; yet Raftery's figure stands out largely in the folk history of 19th-century Connacht, whilst, though Colum's name is still widely remembered, and some of his sayings repeated round firesides within miles of which he has never set foot, people seem to have forgotten that the old man was still alive. How lonely would have been his death, but for the accidents—were they accidents?—which led to his discovery by ‘An Claidheamh Soluis.’¹⁰⁵

Part of Pearse's great attraction to de Bhailís was his remarkable life span, spanning three centuries, which made him a living witness to generations of Irish historical experience. In the introduction to the first of his poems to appear in print, Pearse was eager to illustrate the exceptional life of the poet who had been an infant at the time of the 1798 Rebellion, a boy at the time of Robert Emmet's Rebellion, a middle-aged man during the Famine years, an old man during the Fenian Rising and had become a centenarian shortly after the founding of the Gaelic League in 1893. Indeed, de Bhailís resembles one of the supernaturally old

103. Thomson, p. 58.

104. Thomson, p. 58. In a recent study of Central Asian culture, the author points to claims that the secretaries appointed to transcribe the work of the native *akyns* (oral poets) “edited” their compositions in order to accentuate the Stalinist cult of personality. Razia Sultanova, *From Shamanism to Sufism: Women Islam and Culture in Central Asia* (I.B. Tauris: London, 2011), pp. 14–16. There is an unsubstantiated theory that Jamboul had actually died at the age of seventy and that the compositions attributed to him from the 1930s onward were originally Russian compositions. See <http://expat.nursat.kz/?3648>.

105. Colm de Bhailís, *Amhráin Chuilm de Bhailís* (Dublin: Connradh na Gaedhilge, 1904), xxi. See also Gearóid Denvir, “Decolonizing the Mind: Language and Literature in Ireland,” *New Hibernia Review*, 1, 1 (Spring, 1997), 57–59.

figures of medieval Irish literature who can explain their origins to the present generation.¹⁰⁶

Pearse's life and work is characterized by this quest for intergenerational continuity, be it literally and physically embodied as in the case of de Bhailís, or, as was more likely, aspired to through a feat of the imagination and the will. The invocation in the 1916 Proclamation of "the dead generations" is consistent with so much of what Pearse had written about and worked to bring about throughout his life.¹⁰⁷ The literal and imaginative influence of previous generations is attested to in his autobiographical fragment where he recounts the singular influence of his grandaunt, Margaret Brady, an Irish speaker who had inherited a tradition of insurgency going back to 1798, and whose songs foretelling Bonaparte's intervention in the fate of Ireland inspired Pearse to write his own verses on the same theme. Margaret Brady's songs were of course part of the *aísling* tradition, in which the promise of deliverance was reiterated by each generation with the messianic figure changing in each case to suit present circumstances.¹⁰⁸

106. One important example is Fintan Mac Bóchna, whose memory stretches back to the time of the Flood and is called upon by the men of Ireland to identify the original site of Tara. See Nagy, p. 5. A similar case to the venerable de Bhailís's was that of the County Waterford poet Roibard Bheldon (1838–1914) who, although considerably younger than de Bhailís, appeared to be a touchstone of intergenerational continuity. Bheldon was championed by the Gaelic League secretary, Pádraig Ó Dálaigh, around the same time as Pearse was promoting de Bhailís's work and legacy; see, *Roibárd Bheldon: File an Chomaraigh*, ed. Pádraig Ó Dálaigh (Dublin: Comhlucht Oideachais na hÉireann, 1903). Describing meeting Bheldon in 1905, Charlotte Milligan Fox wrote, "The bard was a tall, thin, refined man, with the airs and manners of an old aristocrat. His hands were long and finely shaped and he informed me that he claimed descent from the Princes of the Decies." "My mother," he added, "was a descendant of the old clan, Ó Faoláin, and from her I got my taste for poetry." See www.ainm.ie, biographical entry for Roibard Bheldon.

107. The Proclamation opens, "IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom." There are many examples one might cite here but Pearse's essay "Ghosts" is of particular relevance: "The ghosts of a nation sometimes ask very big things; and they must be appeased whatever the cost." P. H. Pearse, "Ghosts," in *The Collected Works of P.H. Pearse: Political Writings and Speeches* (Dublin, 1924), p. 221. It is very likely that Pearse himself was subject to this form of intergenerational appeal such as A.M. Sullivan's address to Pearse's own generation in the preface of his highly influential *The Story of Ireland* (1867): "When we who have preceded them shall have passed away forever, they will be the men on whom Ireland must depend. They will make her future. They will guide her destinies. They will guard her honour. They will defend her life. To the service of this 'Irish Nation' of the future I devote the following pages, confident my young friends will not fail to read aright the lesson taught by 'The Story of Ireland.'" A. M. Sullivan, *The Story of Ireland* (Dublin: A. M. Sullivan, 1867).

108. "Fragment of Autobiography by Patrick Pearse," unpublished typescript, Pearse Museum, Rathfarnham, Dublin) p. 26. See also Róisín Ní Ghairbhí, "A People That Did Not Exist? Reflections on Some Sources and Contexts for Patrick Pearse's Militant Nationalism," in *The Impact of the 1916 Rising: Among the Nations*, ed. Ruán O'Donnell (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2008), pp. 161–86.

The case of Pearse's Gaelic "nursemaid" is strikingly similar to others in the history of Irish revivalism, such as Thomas Crofton Croker, Lady Gregory, and Ernest Blythe, where the particular influence of a nursemaid or domestic servant had helped inspire a revivalist career.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, more generally, this phenomenon seems to have been part of the large-scale cultural transference or appropriation across class lines, typified by the work of the Grimm brothers as collectors of folk tales, which was essential to the development of cultural nationalism throughout Europe in the nineteenth century. This was certainly the experience of Pushkin, who learned the folklore of his country, including songs of former peasant rebellions, from his beloved serf nurse who appears as Filipevna, nurse to Tatiana, in his *Eugene Onegin* (1833).¹¹⁰

If this particular form of intergenerational continuity appears to be a natural occurrence, it is surely not accidental that in the late 1890s the Gaelic League advertised and implemented a scheme whereby urban Gaelic Leaguers could employ native Irish speakers from the Gaeltacht to act as nursemaids or domestic servants in their homes. With the same intentions, Pearse recruited a native Irish seanchaí from County Mayo, Mícheál Mac Ruaidhrí, as full-time gardener and teacher of horticulture to the boys of Sgoil Éanna, his bilingual school.¹¹¹ One might ask whether or not it made any difference if in one instance this intergenerational dynamic was accidental and the other manufactured. One is reminded here of Garvin's phrase "the genuine past" and the frequent tendency to view revivalist initiatives as inauthentic behavior to be treated with the same suspicion as "social engineering."

Again, conflicting notions of temporality complicate the issue. The linear deterministic model of progress encourages the view that the decline of specific languages and cultures is part of a natural order that cannot be reversed. This is not simply the view of history that prevailed in the age of Darwin and Comte; a similar historicism sustained the converse view of nationalist and cultural revivalists and continues to do so. A good example of this is the text of a Gaelic League pamphlet issued in 1966 as part of the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Rising, which includes the following statement: "We are certain that, because of the recurrent historical rhythm, the Irish people will inevitably and inexorably

109. On Croker, see Deirdre Nic Mhathúna, "A Journey from Manuscript to Print: The Transmission of an Elegy by Piaras Feiritéar" in *Irish and English: Essays on the Irish Linguistic Cultural Frontier, 1600–1900*, ed. James Kelly and Ciarán Mac Murchaidh (Dublin: Four Courts Press), pp. 252–53; for Gregory, see Colm Tóibín, *Lady Gregory's Toothbrush* (London: Picador, 2002), p. 42; for Blythe, see Earnán de Blaghd, *Trasna na Bóinne* (Dublin: Sáirséal agus Dill, 1957), pp. 16–17.

110. Alexander Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. xvi.

111. See: Ó Conchubhair, pp. 119, 290; Elaine Sisson, *Pearse's Patriots: St Enda's and the Cult of Boyhood* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2004), pp. 38, 205.

return to that which is culturally and idealistically their own.”¹¹² Yet, because the inevitability of such a course of events could not be evidenced from a rational, scientific viewpoint, the authors invoke a quasi-religious authority for their claim in the same way that the *aisling* poets had done up to the nineteenth century:

Unequivocally we state that we of Conradh na Gaeilge are dedicated to the restoration of the Irish language so that unborn generations shall one day rejoice in the full possession of our national heritage.

This is the national gospel proclaimed by Pearse. To this, we of Conradh na Gaeilge firmly adhere.¹¹³

It is perhaps no surprise that the authors refer to the vision of Pearse, rather than to the League’s first president, Douglas Hyde. After all, Hyde saw the League’s work as being “to render the present a *rational* continuation of the past” whereas Pearse’s “gospel” depended, to a significant degree, on a nonrational, imagined conception of the future. This is not to ignore the evidence of Pearse as a pragmatic and practical individual, nor to yield to the crude popular image of Pearse as poet dreamer. It is, rather, to acknowledge Pearse’s awareness of the very real and practical power of myth and utopian discourse. Writing his own piece on the anniversary of the Rising, Máirtín Ó Cadhain alludes to the nonrational, utopian foundations on which the vision of 1916 was created: “what could be more unreasonable than Easter Week? Were the race of the Gael not so unreasonable as they have always been, we would have long since disappeared from history.” Ó Cadhain declared that it is hope, rather than reason, that has been the “chain detonation” that runs through Irish history.¹¹⁴

Besides the rational motivation for revival such as the desire to improve upon the present and, in the case of colonized peoples, to reverse an injustice, it is clear that the aim of achieving a synthesis of past and present relies on a willingness to look beyond the boundaries of time observed in nature. Walter Benjamin’s phrase “a tiger’s leap into the past” from his “Theses on the Philosophy of History” encapsulates this confidence in our ability to actively engage with the past. In this famous essay, Benjamin re-imagines the boundaries of time and history and proposes a radical, revolutionary engagement with the past in which past and present become simultaneous. A key concept in Benjamin’s argument is his belief in what he calls “messianic time”:

112. Conradh na Gaeilge, *Where Stands Conradh na Gaeilge? Where Do You Stand?* (Dublin: Conradh na Gaeilge, 1966), p. 4. The copy consulted, in which the same phrase has been underlined, is contained in the Máirtín Ó Cadhain Papers, M/2/26.

113. *The Language and National Identity*, p. 1. The quasi-religious nature of the text is also evident in the format of questions and answers in the style of a school catechism.

114. Ó Cadhain, *An Aisling*, p. 1.

There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim.¹¹⁵

The same sense of messianic prophecy and of the supernatural bond between generations figures large in Irish history and in Pearse found perhaps its most successful advocate. The notion that there is “a secret agreement between past generations and the present one” has many implications, particularly where the responsibility of each generation toward a broad trans-historical aim is concerned. In the 1966 Gaelic League pamphlet the authors pose the question of whether or not Ireland had the will to endure as a nation and, in answering this, quote Eoin McKiernan, the founder of the Irish American Cultural Institute: “one generation more, and the world shall know whether Ireland had that will.”¹¹⁶

Almost fifty years later, as we approach the centenary of 1916, the discourse surrounding the Irish language is dominated by the same focus on generational responsibility. A government-commissioned comprehensive survey of language use in the Gaeltacht in 2007 concluded that, without decisive intervention, the strongest Gaeltacht areas would survive for at most fifteen to twenty years. This study was followed by a government-sponsored television campaign urging young people in the Gaeltacht not to be the last generation to use Irish.

It is hard to ignore predictions of terminal decline in Irish language usage when evidenced in rigorously conducted research as is the case with the 2007 survey. Nor is it easy to deny the grim implications this would have for the distinctive Gaeltacht communities to which generations of Irish people—including a young Seamus Heaney—looked to as a source of unbroken cultural continuity. Yet if, as Frederic Jameson has written, postmodernity is characterized by “the reduction to the present” and by the “end of temporality,” then what hold should the linear narratives of progress and decline exercise henceforth?¹¹⁷ With regard to another closely related condition of postmodernity—the triumph of *petites histoires* or micro-narratives over grand narratives—some recent writers have claimed that, under such circumstances, both Irish-language literature and folklore are ideally placed to flourish.¹¹⁸

115. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (Schocken Books: New York, 2007), pp. 263, 254.

116. *The Language and National Identity*, p. 5. McKiernan’s remarks are found in *The Will of a Nation: Ireland’s Crisis* (St. Paul: Patrick Butler Family Foundation, 1963).

117. Frederic Jameson, “The End of Temporality,” *Critical Inquiry*, 29, 4 (Summer, 2003), 709.

118. See *Twisted Truths: Stories from the Irish*, ed. Brian Ó Conchubhair (Indreabhán: Cló Iar-Chonnacht), p. 19; Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, *An Dúchas agus an Domhan* (Cork: Cork University Press), p. 136.

Again, the dichotomy of the material and spiritual appears in sharp relief. It may well be that the Irish language can survive among countless future generations as an artistic medium, even if its future as the medium of the material life of a community is not secure. It is perhaps for this reason that Máirtín Ó Cadhain regarded “art is long and time is fleeting” as among the greatest of all truths.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless when, toward the end of his life, Ó Cadhain examined the purpose of what he had set out to achieve as a writer he pointed to the material progress of the Revival. Writing in Irish, he remarked, was part of the action required to enable communities that had been broken down to be re-established. Revivalism, for Ó Cadhain, was not about an essentialist quest for authenticity, or a restoration of the past, but rather, about a radical renewal of the present. For this reason, it was clearly a matter of pride to him that the grandchildren of the non-Irish speaking W. B. Yeats were “native Irish speakers who had been raised in Dublin.”¹²⁰

In the same way, while discussing Irish revivalism in the twenty-first century, Seamus Heaney noted that for several generations it seemed there would always be a conflict between *pietas* and modernity. This, he felt, had now been replaced by composure and self-confidence and, as such, the Irish language seemed now to bespeak “parturition and the prospect of new life.”¹²¹ With all of this in mind, it seems certain that those who value the Irish language may, as ever, be required to look beyond the irreversible, linear plane of progress and decline and, after Deleuze, adopt a Bergsonian view of time where past and present are fully integrated and in which becoming, not being, is the thing.

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119. Máirtín Ó Cadhain Papers, M/2/47 p. 41. The same phrase is used to comic effect by the pretentious Nóra Sheáinín in *Cré na Cille*; see Kiberd, p. 589.

120. Máirtín Ó Cadhain Papers, M/2/47 p. 47.

121. O’Driscoll, pp. 315–16.