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Introduction

In his collection of essays, *The Irish Story*, Roy Foster observes: 'If the Irish are to remember or commemorate anything, it is worth recalling the great upward curve of Irish cultural achievement from about 1890 to 1914, and the fact that this went with an opening out of attitudes, a modernization of nationalism, an exploration of cultural diversity, a questioning of too-readily-received forms of authority in public and indeed private life. That was the period when, in a sense, modern Irish history was "made"'.¹ Literature of the Revival period may not appear, on first sight, to be in much need of 'recalling', with courses on the Irish Literary Revival or Irish Cultural Renaissance now firmly established on university syllabi internationally, carrying with them what is usually a predictable list of issues, texts, and authors. This popularity in turn has served to consolidate what Richard Kirkland, in his contribution to this volume, terms the 'classic Revival narrative' which 'cites as a beginning the fall of Parnell in 1890 and a subsequent disenchantment with hegemonic political activity' and 'finally peters out around 1922 with the end of the Anglo-Irish war and the bitterly satirical portraits of Revival figures found in Joyce's *Ulysses* of that year'.

Within the past five years or so, an emerging generation of cultural critics has turned again to the Revival period, prompted, as many of these essays testify, by two groundbreaking publications: the 1995 publication of Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland* and the 1997 publication of volume I of Roy Foster's *W.B. Yeats: A Life (1865-1914)*. Taking up, and often reshaping, the opportunities presented by those two works, these younger scholars write from explicitly comparative and interdisciplinary perspectives; as a result, the cast of Revival authors, genres, texts, and subjects is richly and provocatively expanded. And, as contributor Clare Hutton has noted, some of the most basic issues concerning the Irish Literary Revival – when did it begin, how should it be described, for whom did it matter – re-emerge as open, and not easily answerable questions.

The aim of this issue of the *Irish University Review* is thus to feature this new scholarship and to make available its new perspectives. Many of the essays recover what Eve Patten, author of the first essay, has described as the disguised seams of influence and inheritance within the history of the Revival. Patten's own essay re-examines nineteenth-century Ireland's extensive commitment to theoretical and applied

science, itself a distinctive 'renaissance' which, as she illustrates, was purposefully sidestepped by Yeats and also the subject of a calculated exclusion by many of the architects of the Irish Cultural Revival. In turn, Selina Guinness, in her essay on evangelicalism, dissent, and theosophy, performs a valuable repatriation of the esoteric aspects of the Revival; through a detailed study of conversions to the first Dublin Lodge of the Theosophical Society, she refutes earlier views of occultism as an escape from, rather than an engagement with, current politics and Irish history. Eamonn Hughes's essay calls for a wider attention to autobiography as a Revival genre: such writing is too often read, he argues, as a version of the national narrative, thus ignoring what James Stephens has termed 'the fact of me-ness'. And as Hughes identifies, a deep paradox has come to characterize constructions of the Revival whereby identity is perceived as a keynote of writing but at the expense of the personal self.

The essays by Brian Ó Conchubhair, Richard Kirkland, and Catherine Morris turn to other, neglected movements: most notably, the Gaelic revival and the Northern cultural revival. Ó Conchubhair examines the debate concerning the use of the Gaelic and Roman fonts for printing, which developed most notably in the pages of *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* in 1883. He shows how this debate set the agenda for the language revival movement, with a diversity and complexity of viewpoint that fails to be recognized by other Revival scholars; he also reveals the existence of a generation of critics, previously ignored, who preceded the better-known Pearse, Pádraic Ó Conaire, and Peadar Ó Laoghaire, and whose work provides a key influence on Douglas Hyde's famous call for 'De-Anglicization' in November 1892. Richard Kirkland's essay, mentioned above, looks at the uncertain place occupied by the Northern Revival in twentieth-century Irish literary history; in addition, he shows how the reconstitution of this movement – 'fragile in its existence and uncertain in its aims' – is far from straightforward and traces its lingering aspirations in subsequent Northern Irish culture from the work of Cathal O'Byrne to Ciaran Carson. While Kirkland underlines the Northern Revival's significance as a competition for hegemony within Catholic Ulster, Catherine Morris focuses on the contribution of one neglected and marginalized individual, Alice Milligan. Born into a Northern Methodist family, and later a committed nationalist, Milligan was in her own lifetime a strong critic of what she termed 'the so-called Irish Literary Revival'; as Morris shows, from both Milligan's life and writings may be traced the relationship of Protestants to the intensified debates on becoming Irish in the Revival period.

Among the most significant new critics of the Revival are those who seek to restore its materialist dimensions, exploring how modern Irish

history was indeed 'made'. The essays by P.J. Mathews, Clare Hutton, and Ben Levitas exemplify these trends, bringing also a significant repositioning of the relations of politics and culture in this period. Mathew's essay analyses the Boer War and the Irish Literary Theatre, and their comparative geneses; in particular, he brings to light the newly forming energies of radical separatism during these years and the significant intervention made therein by George Moore's play *The Bending of the Bough*. In his conclusion, Mathews persuasively calls for a shift in emphasis away from the biographical studies which have dominated recent scholarship, and away from 'the individual self-fashioning of the leading revival figures'. Clare Hutton's essay realizes this very change through her study of the institutions, as well as individual agents, which promoted Irish cultural revivalism, in comparison with the textual representations of the Revival and their 'historically skewed view'. Thus Hutton valuably counterpoints a careful historicist analysis of Southwark Irish Literary Club and of publishing institutions, with the Library scene in Joyce's *Ulysses*, as 'carefully historicized fiction'. Ben Levitas's essay, 'Plumbing the Depths', brings Irish theatre history beyond its 'elite tables' through a study of the distinct drama of Ireland's urban working class and of urban realism. Many neglected plays and playwrights (Frederick Ryan, Terence MacSwiney, Andrew P. Wilson, and Oliver St. John Gogarty) are restored to lively attention, and Levitas decisively shows how the 'plumb-line of urban realism' came to Sean O'Casey 'well-worn by previous use'.

Nicholas Allen's essay on 'science, culture and the Irish intellectual revival' follows on from Patten's essay to examine science's role in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Far from being marginal to the revival, science, Allen proves, was central to the Revival period as a discipline and discourse whose terms informed the logic of cultural debate. This is evidenced in the newspapers and journals of these years such as the *Leader*, *Sinn Féin*, *Studies*, and *Irish Review*, where evolution, for example, was an especially 'enabling discourse of the Irish Revival' since, as Allen notes, 'a transformation over time that could apply to nations as to species'. Yet, as Leeann Lane shows in her reading of the pages of AE's *Irish Homestead*, progress was also tempered by nostalgia; thus Irish agricultural co-operation, while forward-looking economically, also contained for AE a strong nostalgia for 'an idealized hierarchical past'. Lane traces the sources of this ambivalence in AE's theosophical beliefs, and its effects in the eventual elevation of moral regeneration over economic renewal.

The final two essays in this issue look ahead from the Revival to our own times, and scrutinize the effects of current critical constructions. Moynagh Sullivan's essay stages an important retrieval of the writings

of poet Blanaid Salkeld who, as she illustrates, is situated uncomfortably, for critics, between revivalism and modernism and whose work continues to be affected by the respective gendering of these movements. In a crucial step for current canon-making, Sullivan questions the value of retrieval work wherein a writer is restored only 'as an antecedent according to the values already established in a self-promoting tradition' and underlines the new critical awareness needed to recognize the rich experimentalism of Salkeld's work. In his essay, Shaun Richards moves through the often contentious debates concerning the drama of Martin McDonagh and advances the case for McDonagh's work as a valuable contemporary engagement with the world staged by Synge. More unsettlingly, Richards's essay moves itself to question the possibility of the plays' disassociation from that particular influence, arguing that the function of McDonagh's texts critically depends on their audience's ability to identify the Syngean originals.

Viewed as a whole, this collection provides a new type of literary history of the Revival, with provocative implications. Through various methodologies, contributors reject a traditionally author-centred criticism that continues to be obsessed with the canon and which has lingered in the context of Revival writing long after its dismissal elsewhere. The materialist and historicist approaches employed here recover the history of ideas and beliefs, institutions and movements, periodicals and publishers, while also restoring long-neglected individuals – from John Eglinton to Blanaid Salkeld, Tomás Ó Flannaoile (Thomas Flannery) to Alice Milligan – to attention. Alternative histories of the Revival, involving class, gender, region, and language, thus emerge, and often in contentious relationship with one another, tensions and alternative possibilities which have been firmly edited out of the standard simplified 'Revival history'. As a consequence, these essays confirm that the retrieval of other histories and traditions – working-class drama, the Northern Revival, the language revival movement, women's literary production, to name just some examples – is far from straightforward and cannot simply involve the addition of 'missing pieces' to an existing narrative. This special issue points the way forward differently: to a rethinking of the timelines of Irish literary history and the development of new models of intertextuality and influence, towards a fuller history of the Revival, its complex origins, and continuing effects.

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NOTES

1. Roy Foster, *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland* (London: Allen Lane, the Penguin Press), p.35.