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THE NORTHERN REVIVAL
&
THE ULSTER LITERARY THEATRE

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*The Northern Revival
&
The Ulster Literary Theatre*



Mark Phelan Doctoral Thesis
Trinity College, Dublin, 2007



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The Northern Revival
&
The Ulster Literary Theatre

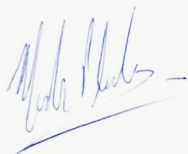
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Summary

My research was largely conducted using the archives of the Linen Hall Library, the Central Library Belfast; and, to a lesser extent, the National Library in Dublin.

As regards the research methods used in my research, this mainly involved detailed and extensive analysis of primary and secondary sources, including unpublished manuscripts and materials. The Linen Hall Library provided me with extensive access to their Rutherford Mayne Collection as well as myriad other theatrical and political collections. The Central Library granted me access to their enormous FJ Bigger Collection and to their extensive clippings collections and related theatre ephemera, as well as providing me kind permission to reproduce many images and photographs which feature in this thesis

I also consulted local amateur and professional theatre companies throughout Belfast; the BBC; the Ulster Museum; the Lyric Theatre and the general public through a number of appeals for information published in the local press. I also interviewed some surviving relations of Cathal O'Byrne as well as Paddy Scott (now deceased); a Belfast journalist who knew several of those involved in the Ulster Literary Theatre.

As regards the major findings of this thesis: I have located many unpublished playscripts of the Ulster Literary Theatre; located the original programme of their first production; and discovered the real identities of several pseudonymous contributors to the journal *Ulaid*.

Acknowledgements

There are many individuals I need to thank. Dr Eamonn Phoenix planted, many years ago, those first seeds of interest in the Ulster Literary Theatre that germinated in my M.Phil. thesis and which hopefully flower more fully here. His eclectic, encyclopaedic knowledge of Northern culture and politics has provided me with constant information and inspiration!

I also must thank my supervisor, Professor Brian Singleton, for his patience and encouragement, especially as I suspect he, like me, must have feared at times that I would never finish! For his steadfast support over the years, I owe him my heartfelt thanks. The redoubtable curators of the Linen Hall's Theatre and Performing Arts Archive, Ophelia Byrne and Hugh Odling-Smee, have both, over the years, provided me with invaluable assistance and support. Their extraordinary dedication and labour made the Linen Hall a wonderful place to work; I feel sorry for those future students and scholars whose research experience will be impoverished by Hugh and Ophelia's absence as both have moved on to other jobs. I owe them an enormous debt of thanks and wish them well in their new careers.

Finally, I owe more than I can ever repay to my own family for their unwavering and unconditional support over the years. My father, Liam, made extraordinary editorial efforts to refine and revise my propensity for florid speechifying – though I can feel his keen editorial eye(!) looking upon this sentence with disapproval! His proof-reading helped clarify and condense my expression and has immeasurably improved this study. It is perhaps fitting, given the ULT's rejection of literary tropes, that this Irish father-son relationship is a happy and loving one; even though, during some heated discussions over editorial alterations, I sometimes felt tempted to 'riz a loy'!

It is to my long suffering wife Rhian (and now our children, Nia-Laoise and Sé) that I owe the most thanks. Too many family holidays and evenings were postponed or spent apart because of this dissertation. Too many late nights and too much stress has affected my behaviour as a husband and father. Now that this monkey-millstone-albatross is removed, will I hopefully be able to repay them for their love and understanding.... I can think of no more important acknowledgement to make.

Abstract

This thesis examines the history, aesthetics and politics of the Ulster Literary Theatre (ULT) in the context of the Northern Revival. It argues that the Irish Revival was inherently partitionist as it excluded/ignored the North of Ireland from its geographical imaginary of the nation. This erasure has been invidiously endorsed in Irish theatre historiography which has equally occluded the work of the Northern Revival and the ULT: a neglect this thesis seeks to reverse and redress.

The Irish Revival has been axiomatically acclaimed as a successful politico-cultural project of decolonisation. Consequently, the conceptual and methodological frame of scholarship in this field is frequently calibrated according to binary co-ordinates: Ireland vs England; nationalism vs imperialism; colonialism vs decolonisation; Irish-Ireland vs Anglo-Irish nationalism. This dissertation argues that there are equally important axes to grind, (North vs South), given that these Manichean frameworks obscure the important political complexities and cultural hybridities of the North of Ireland. These were neither recognised (nor represented) by the various movements comprising the Irish Revival, as was especially the case with the national theatre movement: a failure that forced the ULT to develop its own decentred, regionalist aesthetics and ideology which were remarkable for their reliance on inclusive, civic, and secular values in their (re)fashioning of Irish nationalism.

This thesis examines the ULT's role within (and relation to) the Revival, explores how it evolved (1904-1912) from being a corollary of the Irish Literary Theatre to delivering a critique of its Southern counterpart, and, finally, its construction of a prescient, pluralist narrative of nationalism that contested many central precepts and practices of the Irish Revival well before they were critiqued by later generations of artists and intellectuals in the post-1922 Counter-Revival.

In doing so, this thesis challenges the central grand-narrative of Irish theatre historiography which emphasises the wholly successful role the national theatre played in Ireland's struggle for independence by arguing that this account conflates nation with state, ignores the political fact of Partition and, therefore, obscures what could arguably be regarded as the fundamental failure of the Irish Revival. Moreover, if the grand narrative of Irish theatre history/historiography in the twentieth century has been

thematically dominated by the question of a 'national' theatre it has also been *methodologically* dominated by a temporal/historical epistemology at the expense of any examination of space and geography. Through my analysis of the role socio-geographic forces played in shaping 'cultural Northernness'; the imaginative geography of the Revival; the ULT's spatialized cultural politics; specific ULT and Abbey productions in Belfast and Dublin; and the impact of audience agency and local geographies on live theatrical performance, this thesis seeks to highlight how a geographical hermeneutic can help complement more traditional historicist methods of examining Irish theatre history.

The 'Northern Revival' & the Ulster Literary Theatre

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Introduction

*'What should most concern all Ulstermen and all Irishmen is the future of Belfast - for with it is inextricably bound up, for good or for evil, the whole future of the Irish nation.'*¹

(Stephen Gwynn)

*'There are not two Irelands and two kinds of Irishman: there are four millions of Irish, men and women, and children, each of them varying from all the others, but all of them closely akin in their needs, and there is only one of Ireland, whole and indivisible, a nation knit as all nations are, out of the incalculable dissimilarities and resemblances of its people into an imperishable unity.'*² (St. John Ervine)

The Northern Revival and the Ulster Literary Theatre

From the late-nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, the Irish Revival casts a long shadow over the politics, culture, literature, and life of modern Ireland. Although, it was part of the history of European Romanticism, its flowering on the western fringes of the continent cross-pollinated Irish culture and politics with vivid and violent consequences, nurturing the seeds of nationalism which later laid the foundations of an independent state.

Over the decades, a prodigious amount of scholarship has been published on the Revival, which generally is acclaimed as an extraordinarily effective politico-cultural project of decolonisation.³ As a consequence of this, the conceptual and methodological

¹ Stephen Gwynn, *The Famous Cities of Ireland*, Dublin: Maunsell & Co., Ltd, 1915), p. 341.

² St John Ervine, *Sir Edward Carson and the Ulster Movement*, cited in Benedict Kiely, *Counties of Contention: A Study of the Origins and Implications of Partition* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1945), p. 141.

³ Ernest Boyd, *Ireland's Literary Renaissance*, (Dublin: Maunsell, 1916); Malcolm Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature from Thomas Davis to W.B. Yeats*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972); David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980* (London: Faber & Faber, 1987); Deane, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Edward Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: London: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Christopher Fitz-Simon, *The Irish Theatre* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983); Adrian Frasier, *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman and the Struggle for the Abbey Theatre* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1990); Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1981); Grene, Nicholas, *The Politics of Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Hugh Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1979* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: the Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Akken and Unwin, 1987); Hugh Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1979* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1979); Norman Jeffarres, *Anglo-Irish Literature* (London, 1982); Declan Kiberd, *Synge and The Irish Language* (London: Macmillan, 1979); Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995); Joseph Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848-1918* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1979); Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996); Ben Levitas, *The Theatre of Nation: Irish Drama and Cultural Nationalism, 1890-1916* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993); Andrew Malone, *The Irish Drama* (London: Constable, 1929); P.J. Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, The Gaelic League and the Co-Operative Movement* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003); D.E.S. Maxwell, *A Critical History of Modern Irish Drama, 1891-1980*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Christopher Murray, *Twentieth Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Robert O'Driscoll, *Theatre and*

frame of many of these studies are calibrated according to the binary co-ordinates of Ireland Vs England; nationalism Vs imperialism; colonialism Vs decolonisation.⁴ Other studies take a different approach and instead interrogate the stresses and divisions *within* Irish nationalism, but these are framed in terms of a polarised struggle between the Irish-Ireland and Anglo-Irish wings of the Revival.⁵ Both approaches occlude the political complexities and cultural hybridities of the North of Ireland in spite of its importance to the 'future of the nation' alluded to by Gwynn. In this thesis I will interrogate and articulate the North's cultural complexities by examining its role within, and relation to, the Revival. I would argue that this study serves to undermine the hegemony of aforementioned historiographical meta-narratives of the Revival period and could potentially overhaul our critical understanding of this vital period in Irish history.

Revising 'Revising the Revival'

The crucial period between the disillusionment of Charles Stewart Parnell's⁶ death (1891) and the detonation of the Easter Rising (1916) - a period memorably likened by Conor Cruise O'Brien not so much to a lull between storms but to the interval between a verdict and a sentence⁷ - is perhaps the most exhaustively studied

Nationalism in Twentieth Century Ireland (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971); Shaun Richards, *Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Drama*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Anthony Roche, *Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1994); R. Schleifer, (ed.) *Genres of the Irish Literary Revival* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1980); Gerry Smyth, *Decolonisation and Criticism: The Construction of Irish Literature* (London: Pluto Press, 1998); Mary Trotter, *Ireland's National Theatres: Political Performances and the Origins of the Irish Dramatic Movement* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001); Robert Welch, *The Abbey Theatre, 1899-1999: Form and Pressure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); George Watson, *Irish Identity and the Irish Literary Revival: Synge, Yeats, Joyce, and O'Casey* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994); Stephen Watt, Eileen Morgan, and Shakir Mustafa, (eds.) *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

⁴ For example, Cairns and Richards, *Writing Ireland*; Deane, *Celtic Revivals*; Deane, Eagleton, Jameson, Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*; Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*; Smyth, *Decolonisation and Criticism*.

⁵ For example: Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, The Gaelic League and the Co-Operative Movement*; Garvin, *Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*; Trotter, *Ireland's National Theatres*.

⁶ Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891) Irish nationalist leader: born Wicklow into a wealthy landowning Protestant family: educ. Magdalene College, Cambridge; 1873-80 Home Rule MP for Meath; 1880-91 Home Rule MP Cork city, developed with J.G. Biggar an obstructionist policy in Parliament, where his filibustering engendered the Irish party with more influence than their small size would otherwise have warranted and the success of this policy in turn won support from the militant Fenian movement with whom he united in their resistance to Irish land laws; later turned his attention to Home Rule, 1885 election returned 86 nationalist MPs which assisted him to convert Gladstone to the Home Rule cause and thereby forging an alliance between his own party and Gladstone's Liberal party. However, a combination of ill health, a disastrous affair with Mrs O Shea, which led him to being named as co-respondent in her divorce petition in 1889, sundered his party and shattered his influence.

⁷ Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Shaping of Modern Ireland* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 1. See also Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and State in Twentieth Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 1-2.

epoch of modern Irish history. The 'classic Revival narrative'⁸ as Richard Kirkland calls it, takes place between these two totemic dates and maintains that during this period, nationalist energies were displaced from the political sphere and directed into the cultural sphere. However, this narrative stems more from Yeats' self-fashioning of history to secure his position as a central figure in what was *the* most crucial period in modern Irish history, and has recently been rejected by historians and critics.⁹ Conjoined to this classic, historiographical meta-narrative is the fact that this fecund period of cultural activity was followed by a 'Counter-Revival' after 1922 - the '*annus mirabilis* of the modern movement'¹⁰ - after which a succession of intellectuals and artists critically dismantled the romantic myths which both propped up, and were purveyed by, this earlier period of Revival.¹¹ This latter meta-narrative, however, has not been questioned by historians and it is my contention that the project of post-Revival critique was already well under way in the work and writings of the Ulster Literary Theatre: a regional movement which critiqued the political philosophy and cultural praxis of the dominant Revivalist organisations and institutions, such as the Abbey Theatre and the Gaelic League, on a contemporaneous level when these movements were in the actual process of establishing their hegemonic position in Irish society.

Traditionally, the Revival has been (reductively) regarded as a decolonising period in which the emerging cultural formation of nationalist Ireland was constructed out of an almost atavistic opposition to modernity and materialism, and a concomitant celebration of - to re-mint Deane's coinage - the Celtic-myst(ification) of identity.¹² This Celtic

⁸ Richard Kirkland, 'Dialogues of Despair: Nationalist Cultural Discourse and the Revival in the North of Ireland, 1900-20', *Irish University Review* 33:1 (March 2003) http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286_4157267_ITM access date: 1.5.04.

⁹ 'The modern literature of Ireland, and indeed all that stir of thought which prepared for the Anglo-Irish war, began when Parnell fell from power in 1891. A disillusioned and embittered Ireland turned from parliamentary politics, an event was conceived, and the race began, as I think, to be troubled by that event's long gestation.' W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955) 554. Historians Roy Foster and Alvin Jackson dismiss Yeats' description of a transference of energies from parliamentary politics to cultural revivalism, and state that his period was characterised by greater continuities than Yeats allowed for. See Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1988) 431-3; Alvin Jackson, *Ireland, 1798-1998* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p.169-70.

¹⁰ Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980* (London: Faber & Faber, 1987), p. 36.

¹¹ See p. 220; also Terence Brown, 'The Counter Revival: Provincialism and Censorship 1930-65' in *Field Day Anthology Volume III* (Derry: Field Day Publications), pp. 89-95.

¹² In his Field Day pamphlet, 'Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea' Deane claims that '[a] literature predicated on an abstract idea of essence - Irishness or Ulsterness - will inevitably degenerate into whimsy and provincialism', and moreover, given the backdrop of sectarian conflict in the North, any such meta-narrative of origin and essence is inherently dangerous. Accordingly, Deane advocates the deconstruction of tradition and argues that it is imperative for the Irish to reject their 'readiness to accept the mystique of Irishness as an inalienable feature of [their] writing and, indeed, of much else in [their] culture.' Deane's

mythology celebrated a remote, rural, romantic Celtic spirituality, nostalgically cherished an idealised Gaelic past and fetishized the native peasantry as a repository of national identity. Thus, the Revival has been characterised as being opposed to modernity and progress, and many scholars have simply unpacked this thesis through a limited reference to poetry, prose, and drama produced in a pre-Raphaelite vein of the Revival. However, in recent years, a plethora of publications have questioned these conventional critical and historical analyses of the Revival and there have been three significant shifts in terms of how the Revival has been reappraised.

Some critics and historians have condemned conventional readings of the Revival for its reductive reliance on a 'false dichotomy between culture and politics.'¹³ This argument, exemplified by P.J. Mathews' work, reads against the grain of the Revival narrative and suggests that the 'self-help' mentality of different politico-cultural movements like the Gaelic League and the Co-operative Society, with their practical conflation of art and politics, aesthetics and economics, constitutes a more modern message than has generally been acknowledged.¹⁴ Another major analytical shift is embodied by John Hutchinson's argument that much of the impetus for the Revival was generated by the thwarted ambitions of the Catholic lower-middle class, whose aspirations of class mobility were blocked by Protestants (and Englishmen) who occupied superior social strata.¹⁵ Finally, another revisionist re-reading asserts that the Revival was more of a Southern *unionist* than a *nationalist* cultural project: a duplicitous Ascendancy project designed to protect and maintain their hegemonic social position in the new political state that was ineluctably emerging. As Vivian Mercier quipped, 'the true purpose of the Irish Literary Revival was to provide alternative employment for the sons of clergymen after disestablishment had reduced the number of livings provided by the Church of Ireland.'¹⁶ In support of this thesis, scholars have drawn attention to the

statement that, 'the dissolution of that mystique is an urgent necessity if any lasting solution to the North is to be found' was a key cultural and political concern of Field Day Theatre Company and is reminiscent of the rhetoric of their dramatic predecessors in the ULT. (Seamus Deane, 'Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea', in *Ireland's Field Day* (London: Hutchinson, 1985), p. 57.

¹³ P.J. Mathews, 'The Irish Revival: A Re-Appraisal', in *New Voices in Irish Criticism* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 13-20.

¹⁴ See P.J. Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, The Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003).

¹⁵ John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: the Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Akken and Unwin, 1987). A similar approach is adopted by Tom Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland 1858-1928* (Oxford, 1987). However, both Garvin and Hutchinson's arguments have been contested on the grounds that they are not based on any empirical research into the class composition of Gaelic League membership, amongst other things. See Timothy G. McMahon, "'All Creeds And All Classes'? Just Who Made Up the Gaelic League?", *Eire-Ireland Journal of Irish Studies* 37:3-4 (2002): 118-168.

¹⁶ Cited in Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 423.

growing democratization of Irish administrative and political structures,¹⁷ the disproportionate involvement of senior figures from the landlord class of Southern Irish society, and the concomitant feudal vision underpinning much of the Revival's poetry, drama, and politics which belies a profound anxiety about the emerging Catholic *bourgeoisie*. Lionel Pilkington argues that the national theatre movement which emerged during the Revival was primarily 'concerned with preserving – by means of ideological renovation – the continuity of Ireland's leadership minority.'¹⁸ All of these revisionist readings are illuminating and serve to revise and recast our understanding of the Revival. However, as their central social focus, they examine the urban Catholic middle classes and Southern Protestants from a middle-class or aristocratic pedigree. On a theoretical level, both of these social categories are redundant in the North in light of its different religious, demographic and class configuration. Moreover, none of these approaches directly engages with the historical context or cultural output of the Northern Revival, and its complex, contrapuntal contribution to the cultural politics of the period.

In this thesis, I will examine the various organisations, activities and energies that commingled in the vertiginous, heterogeneous movement of the 'Northern Revival'. In particular, I will focus on the emergence of the Ulster Literary Theatre (1904-1911), the much-overshadowed Belfast corollary of Yeats' Dublin-based Irish Literary Theatre (ILT)¹⁹ and I will investigate how this new 'artistic and liberalising movement'²⁰ functioned at first as a mere corollary of the ILT before subsequently evolving a critique of its Southern counterpart and developing a prescient, pluralist narrative of Northern identity that anticipated many of the regionalist and post-national discourses that were to emerge over the course of the century.

The ULT and the Northern Revival operated in a completely different, (if overlapping) cultural context and political climate from that experienced by the intellectuals, artists and activists of the Irish Literary Renaissance which was centred in the capital and, accordingly, they developed different aesthetic, ideological and cultural practices. After all, the socio-political complexity of Ulster, given its larger Protestant

¹⁷ The Local Government Act (1898) and later legislation empowered locally elected country councillors to be responsible for local administration. Other important legislation such as the Land Acts of 1903 and 1909 further undermined the position of the landowning classes and facilitated the later work of the Congested District Board, which by 1923, had transformed land politics in the country by redistributing over two million acres.

¹⁸ Lionel Pilkington, 'Theatre History and the Beginnings of the Irish National Theatre Project', in *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*, ed. Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Crysfort Press, 2000), p. 30.

¹⁹ The Irish Literary Theatre (1899-1902), later known as the Irish National Dramatic Society (1902-4), the Irish National Theatre Society (1904-6) and the National Theatre Society Limited (1906-).

²⁰ Arthur Griffith, 'All Ireland', *The United Irishman*, 31 December 1904.

population following the seventeenth century Plantation, its extensive industrialisation and evangelisation over the nineteenth century and its strong socio-economic, diasporic, proxemic and political links to Britain, effectively precluded the ULT from any wholesale accommodation within the same aesthetic-ideological paradigm of cultural nationalism promulgated by the largely Dublin-based Irish Revival. This disjuncture created a cultural crisis in terms of 'national' identity for Northern nationalists; but this crisis was obviated by the ULT's adoption of a regionalist agenda and their recognition of the realities of Ulster's local political landscape, which they embraced from the outset, declaring in their 1904 manifesto that, 'our art of drama will be different from that other art of drama that speaks from the stage of the Irish National Theatre in Dublin.'²¹ This seismic shift in emphasis, however, was not secessionist in nature and was qualified with the demurral: 'we shall have our own way [...] and still be in Ireland.'²²

Thus, the ULT adopted a radical, regional approach to their work in order to address the specific social, political and cultural difficulties of their Northern *mise en scène*. In the course of this, they gradually distanced themselves from Yeats' Dublin-based national theatre and Revivalist representations of an idealised peasantry, a mythical past, and essentialized identity. After an early period in which it unsuccessfully aped Yeats' Celticist peasant drama, the ULT moved on to stage and engage urgent socio-economic and political issues affecting Belfast and Ulster such as the municipal jobbery of Belfast city council, the prescriptive precepts of Irish nationalism and Ulster unionism, the agricultural co-operative movement, sectarianism, land politics and peasant philistinism, (as well as developing a rich vein of kitchen comedy). In the course of this, the ULT critiqued and reconstructed some of the more exclusivist and essentialist principles of (Southern) nationalism and embraced a hybridised, regional ideal of 'Northern identity' that simultaneously countered the colonial stereotype of the 'Stage Irishman' and the idealised 'pleasant peasant' subjects of the 'national' stage in Dublin. Moreover, this achievement was all the more radical as the Irishmen portrayed on the ULT's stage were drawn from 'alien', Protestant, 'planter' stock, at a time when nationalist definitions of identity increasingly emphasised the 'native' Gaelic, rural, and Catholic qualities of Irishness.

In later chapters, I will outline a brief history of the ULT and investigate the specific dramaturgy developed in their work in terms of its pioneering use of realism, as well as satire, farce, burlesque and proto-Pirandellian meta-theatricality to deconstruct the

²¹ *Ulaid* 1:1 (November, 1904), p. 2.

²² *Ulaid* 1:2 (February, 1905), p. 2.

'Abbey Play'. The virtual absence of any sustained critical consideration of the ULT's work seems remarkable,²³ given the contemporary context of revisionist criticism and new directions in Irish theatre historiography, all of which have helped interrogate identity politics and Irish theatre in radical new ways. None of these new approaches, however, have challenged the dominant narrative of Irish theatre historiography, namely, that an effective critique of the Revival's aesthetics and ideology only emerged when they became painfully chauvinistic and constrictive in the post-Partition, Counter-Revival period, an argument that overlooks the contribution of the ULT to *contemporaneous* debate.

Although most historians entirely ignore the Northern Revival, there are a few accounts which describe its politics and personnel in peripheral terms, as 'the northern margin of the Celtic Twilight'.²⁴ I would argue, however, that the significance of their work should be central, not marginal, to our understanding of the mechanics and dynamics of the Irish Revival. A reconsideration of the work of the Northern Revival and the ULT not only helps us to recover some of the extraordinary heterogeneity of cultural narratives, aesthetic forms and political discourses circulating in this period, but also serves as a cautionary tale by revealing the fluidity of political positions and hybridised identities which existed before this flux became fixed into Manichaean coordinates of nationalist identitarian discourse in the post-Partition period.

David Lloyd has claimed that Ireland's (post)colonial status is contested, for it is an 'anomalous' exemplar of colonialism.²⁵ Ireland's experience of cultural concussion, incurred through the violence of the imperial encounter, is as problematic as it is paradigmatic. However, the anomalies, contradictions and paradoxes which make Ireland an 'anomalous exemplar' of colonialism are nowhere more evident than when one examines Ulster in relation to the rest of Ireland (and Britain). However, in spite of the extraordinary proliferation of studies of nationalism, imperialism, decolonisation and post-colonialism in Ireland in the Revival period, ranging across disparate disciplines, (history, political science, literary studies, cultural theory, theatre studies), little or no reference is made to the *cultural* history of Ulster and its relationship to the rest of Ireland. This is especially ironic given the hegemonic position of postcolonial theory as the dominant conceptual and methodological approach to Irish criticism and the

²³ The only detailed accounts of the Ulster Literary Theatre are in the form of unpublished doctoral and masters' dissertations.

²⁴ John Hewitt, 'Forward', in Cathal O'Byrne, *As I Roved Out* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1982), p. i.

²⁵ David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1993), p. 7.

propensity of postcolonial discourse to emphasize the 'hybrid' nature of colonial cultures.²⁶ Nevertheless, in contrast to the plethora of publications examining theatre in the South of Ireland,²⁷ there is no single recent work that undertakes a similar examination of theatre in the North,²⁸ as scholarly attention is almost exclusively concentrated on the post-1969 period of 'Troubles' drama.²⁹

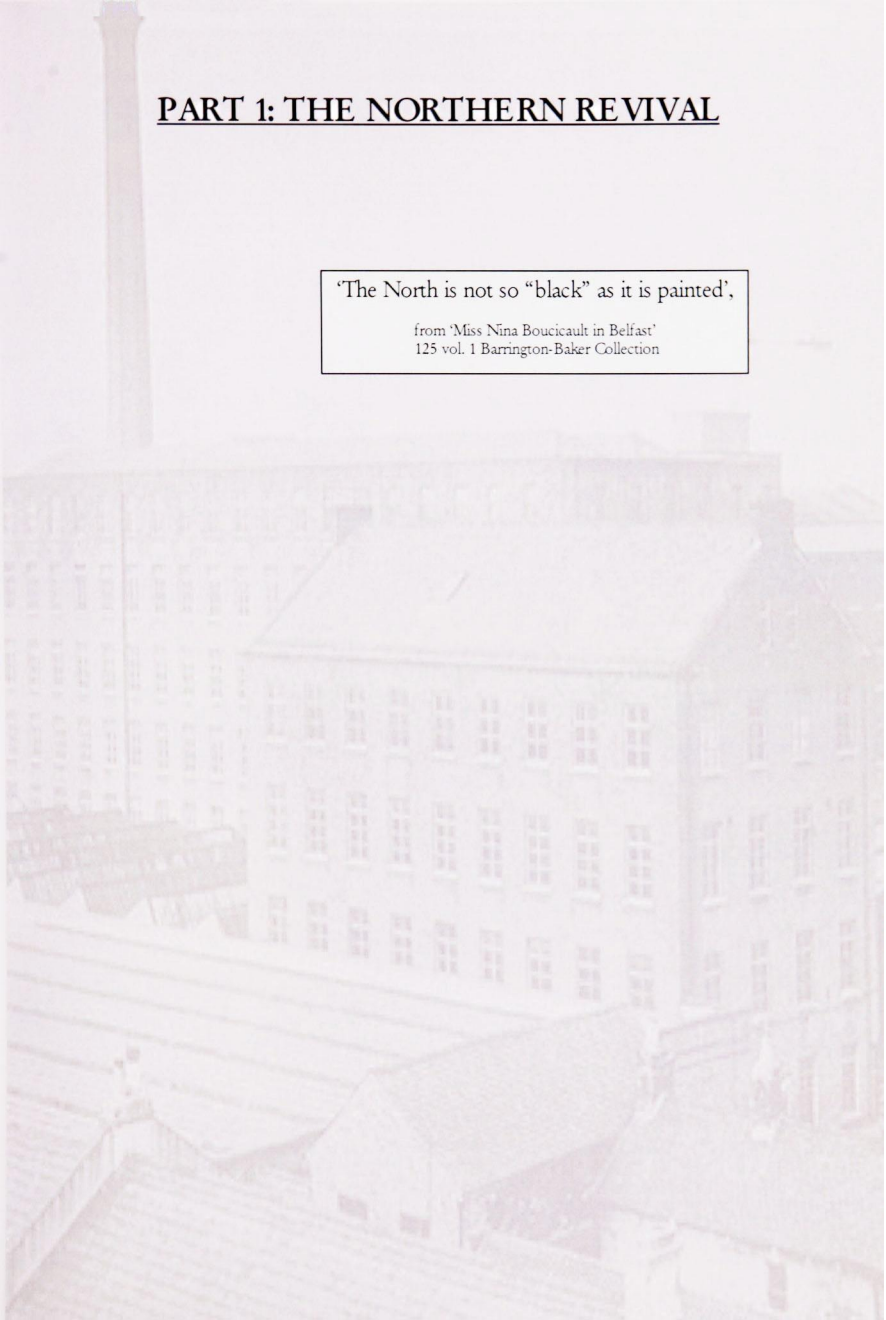
²⁶ David Lloyd, 'Regarding Ireland in a Post-Colonial Frame', *Cultural Studies* 15:1 (2001): 12.

²⁷ Ernest Blythe, *The Abbey Theatre* (Dublin: National Theatre Society, 1963[?]); Dawson Byrne, *The Story Of Ireland's National Theatre: The Abbey Theatre, Dublin* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1929); Brenna Katz Clarke and Harold Ferrar, *The Dublin Drama League, 1918-1941* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979); Gerard Fay, *The Abbey Theatre, Cradle Of Genius* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1958); William J. Feeney, *Drama in Hardwicke Street: A History of the Irish Theatre Company* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984); Christopher Fitzsimon, *The Abbey Theatre: Ireland's National Theatre: The First 100 Years* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003); James W. Flannery, W.B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre: the Early Abbey Theatre in Theory and Practice (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Adrian Frazier, *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman and the Struggle for the Abbey Theatre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Hans von Göler, *Streets Apart from Abbey Street: The Search For An Alternative National Theatre In Ireland Since 1980* (Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2000); Hugh Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre 1904-1979* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1979); Peter Kavanagh, *The Story of the Abbey Theatre* (New York: Devon-Adair, 1950); Dan H. Laurence and Nicholas Grene (eds.), *Shaw, Lady Gregory and the Abbey* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1993); D.E.S. Maxwell, *A Critical History of Irish Drama 1891-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); E.H. Mikhail (ed.), *The Abbey Theatre: Interviews and Recollections* (London: Macmillan, 1988); Christopher Murray, *Twentieth Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Sean McCann (ed.), *The Story of the Abbey Theatre* (London: New English Library, 1967); Micheál Ó hAodha, *The Abbey: Then and Now* (Dublin: Abbey Theatre, 1969) and *Pictures at the Abbey: the Collection of the Irish National Theatre* (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1983 and *Theatre in Ireland* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974); Robert O'Driscoll (ed.), *Theatre and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Ireland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971); Michael J. O'Neill, *The Abbey at the Queen's: the interregnum years, 1951-1966* (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1999); Lennox Robinson, *Ireland's Abbey Theatre: A History 1899-1951* (London, 1951); Anthony Roche, *Contemporary Irish Drama: from Beckett to McGuinness* (Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1994); Alan Simpson, *Beckett and Behan and a Theatre in Dublin* (London, Routledge & Paul, 1962); Caroline Swift, *Stage by Stage* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1985); Mary Trotter, *Ireland's National Theatres: Political Performance and the Origins of the Irish Dramatic Movement* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001); Stephen Watt, *Joyce, O'Casey, and the Irish Popular Theatre* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991); Robert Welch, *The Abbey Theatre, 1899-1999: Form and Pressure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁸ Tom Maguire's monograph *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland: Through and Beyond the Troubles* is due to be published by University of Exeter Press in 2006, although as it eponymously indicates, his study concentrates on theatre in the post-'69 period, see below.

²⁹ For example: Tom Maguire, see above footnote; Stuart Marlow, 'The Northern Irish Troubles: A Problem of Representation', in *The State of Play: Irish Theatre in the Nineties*, ed. Eberhard Bort (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1996), pp. 146-166; Ronan McDonald, 'Between Hope and History: The Drama of the Troubles', in *Druids, Dudes and Beauty Queens: The Changing Face of Irish Theatre* ed. Dermot Bolger (Dublin: New Island, 2001), pp. 231-249; Murray, *Twentieth Century Irish Drama*, pp. 187-222; Roche, *Contemporary Irish Drama*, pp. 216-278. There are four notable works that examine theatre in the North of Ireland. Two of these, Sam Hanna Bell's sweeping survey, *The Theatre in Ulster: A Survey of the Dramatic Movement in Ulster from 1902 until the Present Day*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972) and Hagal Mengel's more focused study *Sam Thompson and Modern Drama in Ulster* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1986), have been out of print for a considerable period of time and are somewhat dated. Ophelia Byrne's *The Stage in Ulster from the Eighteenth Century* (Belfast: Linen Hall Library, 1997) provides a brief, but important overview of Northern theatre over three centuries and Roy Connolly's *The Evolution Of The Lync Players Theatre, Belfast: Fighting The W'anes* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000) concentrates specifically on the Lync theatre. Lionel Pilkington's already seminal *Theatre and State in Twentieth Century Ireland* is crucial not only for being the first scholarly study of Irish Theatre to differentiate between state and nation (hitherto coterminous in Irish Theatre Studies) but for offering the first serious, sustained scholarly engagement with theatre in the North of the Ireland, and not only in the post-'69 period. Other texts which offer useful information on Ulster theatre, but are perhaps less formally academic in their approach are Mary O'Malley's account of the Lync Theatre she helped found, *Never Shake Hands With The Devil* (Dublin: Elio publications, 1990); her son Conor O'Malley's account of the same theatre, *A Poet's Theatre* (Dublin: Elio

In my examination of the Northern Revival and the ULT, I hope to provide a contrapuntal reading of this period by exploring the ULT's regionalist aesthetics and politics which were commensurate with *local* realities, and yet securely immured within the *national* sphere of Irish politics and culture. Cultural production, representation and dissemination are material political forces and the Irish national theatre which emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century was imbricated in the political formation of the Irish state(s). However, although Irish theatre has always been hailed for its role in staging the nation, and its contribution to Irish independence, this view fundamentally elides the fact that Ireland was Partitioned in 1922. In this thesis I argue that the failure of the Irish national theatre in Dublin to recognise or represent the complexities of the North, or to try and reconcile its differences in these formative years of the Irish Revival (1891-1916) betrays its imaginative complicity in, and ideological acceptance of, the political Partition of Ireland. Furthermore, the ULT's regional philosophy and cultural practice, and their ambivalent relation to the ideological forces and dramaturgical forms of their Southern nationalist counterparts, in turn enabled the movement to pioneer a complex, secular, and civic concept of Irishness that preceded by many years the later revisionist pluralism attempted by artists, intellectuals and politicians in the Counter-Revival period and beyond.



PART 1: THE NORTHERN REVIVAL

'The North is not so "black" as it is painted',

from 'Miss Nina Boucicault in Belfast'
125 vol. 1 Barrington-Baker Collection

Chapter 1: Conditions & Contexts

Cathedrals of steel rise above you – strange shapes, the more terrible and intriguing because you only half understand their function. Aloft at dizzying heights crawl the craftsmen priests who serve before the altar of industry.¹

Willie Yeats brought a trainload of fairies to Belfast. Wide of hat and loose of tie, he arrived in Great Victoria Street and, resisting the call of the lake isle of Innisfree (otherwise known as Rat Island), remained just long enough to give us industrial dwarfs and gnomes of the wee black North a hint of things that did be happening beyond the end of our horse-tram lines, our black regiments of factory chimneys, our smug wee red brick villas in the red-brick suburbs.²

It is a little difficult for the stranger to understand us. One man told his friends when he left Belfast that it was a place where they opened a meeting with a doxology and closed it with a free fight.³

¹ Denis O'D. Hanna, *The Face of Ulster* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1952), p. 44

² Dennis Ireland, 'The Night Willie Yeats brought the Fairies to Belfast', in *From the Jungle of Belfast: Footnotes to History 1904-1972*. (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1973), p. 17.

³ *The Magpie*, 17 June 1899.

Background image: As Titanic looms in the background, Belfast dockers leave the shipyard after the day's work.

Introduction: Redressing the North's Role in the Revival

*'Let Dublin go churning out its literature and its stout; here on the mud-banks of the Lagan we were praising God with a thunder of riveting.'*¹

In his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* Shaun Richards observes that the development of Irish theatre history is 'haunted' by 'the idea of nation'; and that Irish theatre is 'marked by the "national" appellation and all its implications.'² Lionel Pilkington has further pointed out that Irish theatre history and criticism have remained largely unaffected by the methodological and ideological shifts which 'revisionism' – 'an intellectual movement that defines itself as an objective critique of the orthodoxies of pietistic nationalism'³ – has brought about in Irish historiography. As Pilkington points out, no 'parallel movement may be detected in relation to Irish theatre'⁴ scholarship which traditionally focuses on the national(ist) narrative of the Abbey. A number of recent studies have helped redress this. Cheryl Herr and Stephen Watt have examined Irish melodrama and popular theatre in the late Victorian-early twentieth century period; Mary Trotter's *Ireland's National Theatres* also explores the heterogeneity of popular and political theatrical practice in the period in which the Abbey Theatre emerged; Pilkington's own work, *Theatre and State in Twentieth Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* makes the crucial distinction between the traditionally conflated concepts of 'nation' and 'state' in its rigorous examination of twentieth century Irish theatre; and Christopher Morash's landmark study, *A History of Irish Theatre 1601-2000*, detonates the myth that modern Irish drama begins with the founding of the Abbey theatre by extending the diachronic and synchronic axes of conventional Irish theatre history in his superb reconstruction of three centuries of a vibrant theatre-going tradition. Similarly, work by Christopher Wheatley, Alan Fletcher and Helen Burke make vital contributions to the field, establishing the existence of older indigenous theatrical traditions that have been ignored by conventional scholarship.⁵

¹ Denis Ireland, *From the Jungle of Belfast*, p. 29.

² Shaun Richards, *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 1.

³ Pilkington, 'Theatre History and the Beginnings of the Irish National Theatre Project', in *Theatre Staff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre* ed. Eamonn Jordan, (Dublin: Caysfort Press, 2000), p. 27.

⁴ Pilkington, 'Theatre History', p. 27.

⁵ Christopher J. Wheatley, *Beneath Lerne's Banners: Irish Protestant Drama of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999); Alan J. Fletcher, *Drama, Performance And Polity In Pre-Cromwellian Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000); Helen Burke, *Riotous Performances: The Struggle For Hegemony In The Irish Theatre, 1712-1784* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

However, in spite of the current vitality and vigour in Irish theatre history, there is still little critical appreciation of theatre in the North of Ireland, especially in its pre-1969 formation. In particular, there has been no recognition of the important role that Ulster, and in particular Belfast, played in the Irish cultural and dramatic Revival (1880s-1920s), specifically in relation to the work of the Ulster Literary Theatre.⁶ Traditionally, Ulster's involvement in the Revival has been (dis)regarded merely as a series of minor satellite activities located in 'the northern margin of the Celtic Twilight': a movement much more brilliantly constellated around the capital. However, closer examination reveals not only the large number of Northerners who played a critical role in Revival in Dublin,⁸ but a diverse, dynamic plethora of activities and organisations based in Belfast which constitute a distinct formation within the Revival that deserves more detailed attention.⁹ However, even the most recent revisionist publication, *The Irish Revival Reappraised* reifies the 'classical revival narrative' by describing this dynamic period as an era wherein myriad cultural, political and economic movements converged, although it reductively collapses the Revival's heterogeneity to a combination of Douglas Hyde's Gaelic League; the Co-operative movement of Plunkett and A.E.; the Anglo-Irish literary Revival of Yeats, Gregory and Synge; the Irish-Ireland movement of D.P. Moran; and the political movements of Arthur Griffith's Sinn Féin, thus occluding both the suffragette and socialist movements of the period, as well as the strain of physical-force

⁶ In relation to the ULT, Ernest Boyd is perhaps the only historian to credit the Ulster Literary Theatre with having played a significant part in the Irish Renaissance, (*The Contemporary Drama of Ireland* pp. 170-92). The ULT does come under the critical purview of Ben Levitas' superb *Theatre and Nation*, however, the broad remit of his study necessarily restricts the detail and depth of his appraisal. As regards the Revival in the North, Catherine Morris, Richard Kirkland, and Robbie Meredith have all recently redressed this historical neglect: see Morris, 'In the Enemy's Camp: Alice Milligan and *Fin-de-Siècle* Belfast', *Cities of Belfast*, (eds.) Nicholas Allen and Aaron Kelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), pp.62-71; Richard Kirkland, 'Dialogues of Despair: Nationalist Cultural Discourse and the Revival in the North of Ireland, 1900-20', *Irish University Review* 33:1 (March 2003), see http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-4157267_11M and "'The *Shanachie* of Belfast and its Red-Brick Gaeltacht": Cathal O'Byrne', *Bullán: An Irish Studies Journal* 4:2 (Winter 1999/Spring 2000): 67-82; Robbie Meredith, 'The *Shan Van Vocht*: Notes from the North', in *Critical Ireland: New Essays in Literature and Culture*, eds., A. Kelly and A.A. Gills (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 173-80. My M. Phil. thesis also examines this hitherto unexplored area, *The Rise and Fall of the Ulster Literary Theatre*, (unpublished M.Phil Thesis, TCD, 1998).

⁷ John Hewitt, 'Forward', in Cathal O'Byrne, *As I Roved Out* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1982), p. 1.

⁸ A.E. (George Russell), F.J. Biggar, George A. Birmingham, Ernest Blythe, Shan F. Bullock, John Campbell, Joseph Campbell, Ethna Carberry, Roger Casement, Erskine Childers, Tom Clarke, Seamus Connolly, James Cousins, James Humbert Craig, Lynn C. Doyle, Charles Gavin Duffy, John Eglinton, St John Ervine, Samuel Ferguson, James W. Good, W.R. Gordon, Carl Hardebeck, Hamilton Harry, Cahir Healey, Paul Henry, Nesta Higinson, Bulmer Hobson, Herbert Hughes, Mary Hutton, Charles Johnston, Charles Lamb, John Lavery, Sir Shane Leslie, Sean Lester, Robert Lynd, Patrick McCartan, Dinny McCullough, Eoin MacNeill, Rutherford Mayne, Alice Milligan, Seaton Milligan, John Mitchel, Fred Morrow, Harry Morrow, Jack Morrow, Norman Morrow, Albert Morrow, Edwin Morrow, William Orpen, Cathal O'Byrne, Eoin O'Duffy, Colm Ó Lochlainn, Cahal O'Shannon, Herbert Moore Pim, Seumas O'Sullivan, David Parkhill, Margaret Pender, Maire Quinn, W.B. Reynolds, George Roberts, George Sigerson, Francis Sheehy Skeffington, Seamus Stoupe, Rose Young, Helen Waddell, Florence Mary Wilson.

⁹ Many of these organisations and activities are examined later in this chapter.

republicanism promulgated by the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) which culminated in the Easter Rebellion of 1916.¹⁰ Little wonder then that this study also fails to identify or engage with the Northern dimension to the Revival,¹¹ although, in mitigation, this elision of Ulster is symptomatic of a much larger neglect of the socio-geographical realities of the North and its involvement in the Irish Revival and the national theatre.¹² This scholarly failure to recognise the socio-geographical realities of the North in relation to Irish theatre's 'national' appellation is an extension of the Revival's failure to recognise the regional realities of Ulster and its inability/unwillingness to accommodate the North within its theatrical imaginary of the nation.

In stark contrast to contemporary critics' failure to identify the North's role in the Revival is the modest commendation made many years earlier by ULT playwright and novelist Lynn Doyle:¹³

we have taken no contemptible part in the Irish Literary Revival of recent years. Some of the sweetest singers among our latter-day poets are Ulster born and bred: and the accomplishment alone would justify us in claiming our share of the restoration of Irish drama.¹⁴

Indeed, a more enthusiastic (and somewhat exaggerated) endorsement of the North's contribution is recorded in an anonymous article written for *The Times* in 1922, the first year of the 'Counter-Revival', declaring: 'had it not been for Northern pioneers of the revival it would have never taken place.'¹⁵ Doyle's less grandiose observations on the North's role in the Revival, however, are tempered by his qualification that the particular Northern formation of the Revival was significantly different for:

the Gaelic Revival has not touched us. At least one section of us. That section will have no truck with Maev and Grania, Cuchullain and Conchubar, the Fianna and the Children of Lir. It looks upon these fabled beings as having their origins not in Ireland [...] and is inclined

¹⁰ Betsey Taylor Fitzsimon and James H. Murphy (eds), *The Irish Revival Reappraised* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), p. 13.

¹¹ Whilst the collection does feature two short essays on the poet Joseph Campbell and essayist Robert Lynd, (who were both involved in the ULT and the Revival), as well as a highly derivative essay on the ULT's published organ *Ulaid*, none of these are constellated in their proper critical and cultural context as part of a more diffuse, but discrete Northern Revival.

¹² Lionel Pilkington's excellent *Theatre and State in Twentieth Century Ireland* has recently helped redress this imbalance.

¹³ Leslie Alexander Montgomery, pseud. Lynn C. Doyle (1873-1961): poet, novelist, and playwright, publications include: *An Ulster Childhood* (Dublin: Maunsel & Roberts, 1921) and *Ballygullion* (Dublin: Maunsel 1908).

¹⁴ Lynn Doyle, *An Ulster Childhood*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁵ 'A Correspondent', 'Ulster's Share in the Revival', *The Times*, 5 December 1922.

to suspect them of a past not wholly untainted by the heresy of Home Rule [...] They are too airy and unsubstantial for our Northern imagination.¹⁶

Doyle's observations, however, have not been followed up in any significant or sustained way by historians or critics, perhaps in part due to the fact that, until recently, the regional sphere has always been subordinate to the national as 'the nation acts as a context within which the region can be intelligibly understood.'¹⁷ This paradigmatic relegation of the regional in relation to the national is axiomatic, based on the assumption that the provincial is regressive, whereas the national is progressive, a premise contested in later chapters. It is imperative that this territorial teleology is reversed, and indeed this has recently taken place in postcolonial histories and geographies which have revoked the privileging of metropolitan centres over colonial peripheries by decentering Europe through writing its history 'from and for the margins.'¹⁸ The same approach can be productively applied internally to an examination of the geographies of nationalist discourse in the colonial context by examining its formation 'from and for' its own margins, such as the North of Ireland: a region which was imaginatively occluded from the nationalist mapping of the nation during the Revival; an elision that soon followed (and facilitated) the empirical exclusion of the North through the political reality of Partition.

Given the significance of this connection between the congruence of the imaginative-empirical cartography of southern Revivalist nationalism and British imperialism/Ulster Unionism, which resulted in the formation of two states within one nation, it seems extraordinary that the cultural co-ordinates which have fix(at)ed Irish theatre studies for so long are between Dublin and the West. For example, Ulf Dantanus frames his study of Brian Friel by pronouncing that the greatest schism in Irish drama is the axis opened by playwrights Synge and O'Casey, i.e. the metropolitan pale of the capital and the marginal province of Connaught. Such a statement is a significant geographical distortion, not to mention historical elision, of the empirical fact of Ireland's partition into two states and is all the more extraordinary given Irish theatre's internationally celebrated role in 'nation-building'. I would argue that there are altogether more important axes to grind in terms of the relationship between North and South rather than East and West. After all, Partition constitutes an altogether more significant

¹⁶ Lynn Doyle, *Ulster Childhood*, pp. 19-20

¹⁷ Alon Confino, 'On Localness and Nationhood' *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 23:2 (2001): 9.

¹⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 16.

schism, with profound implications for Irish theatre: not only in terms of the material processes of theatrical production (which take place in two different administrative, infrastructural, and economic settings), but for the tectonic impact Partition had in shifting the political and cultural contexts shaping the 'horizons of expectations' of theatre audiences, North and South.

This schism is also of profound importance to the concept of nation and the paradigm of national identity that has been consistently privileged as *the* structuring principle of Irish theatre scholarship throughout the last century. After all Irish theatre's role as an agent of cultural nationalism and an apparatus of political decolonisation has been the subject of voluminous scholarship extolling its unqualified success in nation building. Such analyses, however, conflate nation with state, thus further eliding the political fact of Partition and thereby the partial failure of the Revival project.

Therefore, it is imperative that the cultural formation of Northern nationalism is considered and critiqued in relation to its role within, and resistance to, the Irish Revival. Any examination-cum-explanation of the slippery contours of 'cultural Northernness'¹⁹ in this period, and the contemporary complexity of its legacy may today help us to fundamentally reappraise the Revival, Irish theatre historiography and the (post)colonial geographies of Irish cultural politics.

¹⁹ Richard Kirkland, 'Northern Revivals: Cultural Nationalism and Political Identity in Ulster 1900-1920', Keynote lecture at "'Its Own Way of Things': The Ulster Literary Theatre & Its Legacy Centenary Symposium', Queen's University Belfast, 22 October 2004.

Chapter 1: Conditions & Contexts

Belfast: from 'Athens of the North' to 'Linenopolis'

*'A strange, tough, hybrid town, with a forest of factory chimneys on both banks of the Lagan; a town which, paradoxically enough, regularly reared (and then promptly expelled) a host of writers, artists, and unpractical "dreamers" of all kinds.'*²⁰ (Denis Ireland)

The closing decade of the nineteenth century was an extraordinarily dramatic period during which a plenitude of political and cultural movements collided in the spectacular context of rampant economic growth, rapid social change and the constant crepuscular spectre of another Home Rule crisis. Painter Paul Henry's²¹ evocative accounts of life in Belfast in this dynamic period remind us that the competing, conflicting discourses of the time were more myriad and multicoloured than the polarised primary colours of mere Orange and Green politics, as a veritable 'Babel of voices [...] prevailed at that time in Belfast.'²² Scientific, religious, economic and political ideas circulated and clashed with the politics of scientific materialism and evangelical religion colliding as ferociously as 'the Montagues and the Capulets of inflammable Linenopolis.'²³ An extraordinary efflorescence of historical, political, scientific, artistic, cultural organisations added to the ferment and 'into this seething turmoil of controversy I [Henry] was born.'²⁴

My concern here is to investigate this complex, critical period in order to explore

²⁰ Denis Ireland, *From The Irish Shore: Notes on my Life and Times* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1936), cited in *Northern Windows: An Anthology of Ulster Autobiography*, ed., Frank Ormsby (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1987), p. 57.

²¹ Paul Henry (1877-1958): born Belfast, educ. at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution, where he met Robert Lynd, apprentice designer with the Broadway Damask Company in Belfast before entering the Belfast School of Art; studied at the Académie Julien in Paris and in Whistler's studio; 1901 moved to London where he shared rooms with Robert Lynd until 1912 and where he was also friendly with ULT members Rutherford Mayne and the Morrow brothers; left London for the Aran Islands having been inspired by reading Synge; hose work influenced him enormously; used an excerpt from *Riders to the Sea* to accompany his painting 'The Watcher' which was exhibited with the Belfast Art Society in 1911, and as Edward Hickey records, before he had ever even visited the West, [Paul Henry, *Further Reminiscences* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1973), p.11]; after holidaying in Aran Islands he decided to stay where he remained for several years; also attracted to the Glens of Antrim in reaction to the puritanical and joyless brick of Belfast; contributed illustrations to magazines such as: *The Graphic*; *The Lady* and *Black and White*; began to use oils for his West of Ireland pictures, those for which he is best known; 1920 moved to Dublin, elected to the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1929; founder member of the Dublin Painters; designed posters for the Irish Tourist Board and the London, Midland & Scottish Railway; 1951 published his biography, *An Irish Portrait*, exhibited in London, Paris, Belfast, Brussels, Boston, New York, and Toronto; from 1920 onwards, he had red/green colour blindness, and lost his sight in 1945; died in Enniskerry, County Wicklow.

²² Paul Henry, *Further Reminiscences* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press & Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 1978) p. 27.

²³ W. J. Lawrence, *Barry Sullivan: A Biographical Sketch* (London: W. & G. Baird, 1893), p. 65.

²⁴ Paul Henry, *Further Reminiscences*, p. 27.

the immediate context out of which the Ulster Literary Theatre emerged and evolved. I will examine this period in three chapters. In this first chapter, I will examine the urban, economic and industrial development of Belfast which transformed this 'classical little Georgian town'²⁵ into the home of the 'economic man of Victorian textbooks.'²⁶ I will also explore how this transition, aided by the integration of trade and technology, imbricated the city within the cultural discourse of British Empire and interpellated its inhabitants as colonial subjects like nowhere else in Ireland. This chapter will also examine the concomitant evangelisation of the North in the same period, and the growth of a puritanical anti-theatrical prejudice with which the ULT would later have to contend. The second chapter, 'The North's Awake' will investigate the myriad cultural activities and nationalist political movements which comprise the Northern Revival and how it was influenced by both *national* political issues, such as the Boer War and the 1798 centenary, and *local* opposition against the *bourgeois* mercantilism and unionism of Belfast. The final section of this chapter breaks new ground in its exploration of the politics of sexuality and nationality as it examines the suppressed, secretive sexuality of key figures of the Revival such as Roger Casement, F.J. Bigger, Cathal O'Byrne, John McBurney, Forrest Reid, and others, all of whom were homosexual. In doing so, this chapter opens up an intriguing interstitial history; a margin within the margin, which deserves to be explored in much greater detail.

As the rest of my thesis will specifically examine the Ulster Literary Theatre, I believe it is both apposite and necessary to provide an overview of how the 'theatrical formation' of Belfast evolved in this specific colonial context. Consequently, the third chapter will briefly examine the theatrical scene of the late 1890s-early 1900s, and then explore how the various cultural movements of the Northern Revival affected and inflected popular and political theatrical practice. This chapter then traces the genealogical emergence of a nationalist theatre through a unique study of 'Irish Nights' in Belfast: occasions featuring the performances of popular, political melodramas which elicited a ritualised, riotous response of para-theatrical activity from Belfast's working class audiences.

²⁵ Denis Ireland, 'The Faeries came to Belfast', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 27 December 1952.

²⁶ J.W. Good, *Ulster and Ireland* (Dublin: Maunsell & Co., 1919), p. 256.

Belfast: Industrialisation & Empire

*'a maritime city...the chief manufacturing and commercial city of Ireland [...] a modern city, and its history is simply one of industrial progress [...] the Commercial Metropolis Of Ireland.'*²⁷ (Belfast directory, 1905)

ANDREW'S: You've got your Home Rule Bill launched anyway.

O'LOUGHLIN: Not mine Thomas. Ireland's. Ours.

ANDREW'S: Oh not me. Besides she's only launched. I doubt you'll find that she'll make it into active service... It's her cargo I'm thinking of. The powers of taxation invested in this putative Dublin parliament, for instance. You know as well as I do what's implied.

O'LOUGHLIN: Irish taxes for Irish services.

ANDREW'S: Dublin taxes on Northern industry to prop up its own peasant economy.

O'LOUGHLIN: (exaggerating accent) Ah, Thomas, sure you're terrible suspicious of poor peasants.

ANDREW'S: We're simply rationalists up in the North, doctor. We look at Belfast today, a city close to half a million souls employed in manufacturing industries that can compete with any in the world. Yet what was it before the Act of Union made us part and parcel of Britain? A scruffy, provincial village.²⁸ (Stewart Parker)

Belfast underwent vast changes in the 19th century as the rapid development of its manufacturing industries, its factories, foundries, mills and massive shipyards, linen and tobacco industries attracted an immense influx of agricultural workers, particularly after the famine of 1845-9, when starving peasants fled the blighted countryside for the city. Belfast was the fastest growing city in the British Isles from 1841-1901 and its population outstripped Dublin's, a radical demographic change confirmed in the 1891 census which established Belfast as the largest city in Ireland, its population having increased from 20,000 in 1801 to 350,000 by 1901. The growth of Belfast can be traced to the development of the cotton industry in 1780, before steam power facilitated the growth of cotton mills that, in turn, led to the later mechanisation of linen manufacture. These industries reached a prosperous peak during the 1860s cotton famine that followed the American Civil War and their decline soon after that was superseded by the advent of heavy industries: shipbuilding and engineering which precipitated a period of massive growth in rural migration and urban expansion as Ulster's lack of local coal and steel resources were more than compensated for by its indigenous technological

²⁷ A local directory, 1905, cited in Conrad Gill, *The Rise of the Linen Industry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), p. 46.

²⁸ Stewart Parker, *Isleburg*, in *Titanic* ed., John Wilson Foster (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 344-5.

expertise.

Dublin remained the administrative and commercial centre of Ireland, but Belfast was the industrial centre with a smaller middle class and a significantly larger working class than the capital. It was, therefore, a city unique in the island: heavily industrialised, predominantly Protestant, prosperous and proud of its world famous shipyards and linen industry. This distinctive character led many to regard the city as 'a non-Irish aberration,'²⁹ the bastardized 'offspring of industrial England.'³⁰ Certainly, in terms of trade and technology, Belfast was more integrated with Scotland and northern England than with any of its urban counterparts in the South, as Marianne Elliott's magisterial survey records, 'Belfast, in its size, economic activities and social problems, had more in common with Glasgow or Liverpool, than with any town elsewhere in Ireland.'³¹ Massive financial investment by British magnates and entrepreneurs further welded trade and political connections to Britain and the Empire and helped to develop both pride in their place in the Empire, 'the enviable rank she is hastening to attain among the commercial *entrepôts* of the British Empire'³² and contempt for the mainly agricultural economy of Southern Ireland.

Belfast's booming industry and exports created a commercial class and the *embourgeoisement* of this mercantile *élite* concomitantly transformed their previously passive acceptance of the Union to one of ardent support as 'Protestant political religious and economic interests became indissolubly associated with the Union.'³³ The 1801 Act of Union was seen as protecting the privileged position of Protestants in Ireland and, unsurprisingly, Northern industrialists and magnates were amongst the most active opponents of Home Rule.³⁴ However, unlike many of their Protestant employees and their grassroots support, they regarded Home Rule as a threat to their economic hegemony rather than their religion, but as Home Rule was indicted as 'Rome Rule' from pulpits across the province they camouflaged their real agenda in party colours. Indeed, a great deal of scholarship has examined how the Home Rule crises and

²⁹ Jonathan Bardon, *The History of Ulster*, p. 403.

³⁰ A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Ulster Crisis: Resistance to Home Rule 1912-1914* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1967), p. 45.

³¹ Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster* (London: Penguin Press, 2000), p. 321.

³² *The Belfast Newsletter*, 18 July 1849, cited in Bardon, p. 306.

³³ David Harkness, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century: Divided Island* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 2.

³⁴ In 1893, during the second Home Rule crisis, a delegation comprising the Belfast Chamber of Commerce and Belfast Harbour Commissioners led by Edward Harland MP and his partner Wilhelm Wolfe, MP, (founders and owners of the world's largest shipbuilding firm, Harland and Wolff Ltd.), met with Gladstone at 10 Downing Street to protest that the repealing the union would bring economic ruin to Ulster. Later generations of industrialists and businessmen also provided leadership for Unionist opposition to Home Rule, even Lord William Pirrie, initially a convert to Home Rule, later recanted and became a committed advocate for continued union with Britain.

'Protestantism, profits, empire and war'³⁵ in this period of industrial expansion and imperial economy affiliated Ulster unionism with a new sense of 'Britishness'. As J.W. Good³⁶ laconically observed, since North-East industrialists had imported their raw materials (flax and iron) and exported their final products (ships and linen) they had consequently come to regard themselves as *in* Ireland rather than *of* it.³⁷

Conversely, these same forces concentrated Catholic Northerners' oppositional sense of 'Irishness'³⁸ as this disillusioned, disaffected community increasingly gravitated towards a de-colonising nationalism that was romantic, anti-materialistic, anti-modern and thus opposed to the dominant commercial values and colonial culture of Belfast. In this way, the 'battle of two civilisations'³⁹ to use the famous phrase coined by D.P. Moran, was all the more clamorous in Ulster where it was configured differently, interpellated within a racialized discourse that dialectically defined native, Catholic Irish against Anglo-Scotch Protestant settlers. Ulster, frequently condemned for its parochialism, had enthusiastically immersed itself in at least one wider European debate: the belief in 'national essences'; in innate, inherited qualities of race. These racialized discourses were zealously appropriated and articulated to legitimise the causes of both Protestant 'planters' and 'native' Catholic Irish. Essentialist and exclusivist taxonomies of ethnicity thrived in this tribal atmosphere. Nationalists labelled Protestant planters as alien, dour, and different, and conversely, unionists believed that the native Irish were feckless, superstitious, and lazy. Indeed, the tenacity of these sectarian stereotypes led Belfast novelist James Douglas to coin a new name for his hometown: 'Bigotsborough'.⁴⁰

The more frequently used derogatory term for Belfast, however, was

³⁵ Richard English, *Ernie O'Malley: IRA Intellectual*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 106. See also, L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 1994).

³⁶ James Winder Good (1877-1930): educ. Royal Academical Institution and Queen's College, Belfast; reporter on the *Northern Whig*; later moved to Dublin where he became leader-writer for the *Freeman's Journal*; assistant editor of the *Irish Statesman*, and later joined the staff of the *Irish Independent*; also correspondent for English and American newspapers and highly regarded in the field of journalism.

³⁷ Cited Denis Ireland, 'Books and Writers In North-East Ulster', in *The Bell* 4:5 (August 1942): 319.

³⁸ See Liam Kennedy and Phillip Ollerensaw, *An Economic History of Ulster, 1820-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, c1985), Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); M.E. Daly, *Industrial Development and Irish National Identity* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992).

³⁹ D.P. Moran, *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland* (Dublin: 1905), chapter 6. Moran maintained that Ireland was locked in a battle between two conflicting, incompatible visions of how Ireland was to be constituted politically and culturally. The historian, F.S.L. Lyons later formalized this conflict as one between advocates of 'Irish Ireland versus Anglo-Irish Ireland' (See 'Irish Ireland versus Anglo-Irish Ireland', in F.S.L. Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 57-83.) However, in Belfast and Ulster, an altogether different clash was taking place between two political formations that were much more violently incompatible: Ulster unionism and Irish nationalism, whose irreducible, irreconcilable precepts ensured an altogether more shattering 'clash of civilisations' than the conflict delineated by Moran and Lyons.

⁴⁰ James Douglas, *The Unpardonable Sin* (Grant Richards: 1907).

'Linenopolis', for obvious reasons as linen and textile industries employed 30,000 citizens, (23,000 of whom were women), often in horrific conditions against which James Connolly later campaigned, excoriating the stifling, 'suffocating atmosphere' in which thousands of 'poor slaves' toiled.⁴¹ Shipbuilding was the second largest employer of labour in the North and on average throughout the 1890s Harland & Wolff produced 100,000 tons a year and by 1900, employed 9,000 workers.⁴² Although already the largest shipyard in the world, it added a further 390,000 square feet between 1907-12! Gallahers tobacco firm employed 3000, the engineering giants of Mackies, Sirrocco Works, Musgraves were household names, whilst Belfast distilleries and foundries produced over 60% percent of Ireland's whiskey exports and was the island's largest gun manufacturer.⁴³ This was a dynamic period of economic growth and the burgeoning reputation of Belfast's industries for pioneering new inventions and innovations led to the prophet of the Victorian gospel of 'Self-help', Samuel Smiles, hailing the city as a model of good practice.⁴⁴

Edward Harland's⁴⁵ brilliant designs for twin-screw ships led not only to the launch of *Trentonic* and the *Majestic* in 1889, but to a decade of global domination during which Belfast produced the largest and fastest ships the world had ever seen.⁴⁶ Belfast's

⁴¹ James Connolly, *The Re-Conquest of Ireland* (Dublin: Maunsell 1917), p. 230.

⁴² By 1912 it had 12,000 workers and during the two World Wars this figure peaked between 25,000 - 30,000 workers.

⁴³ Jonathan Bardon, *An Illustrated History* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1995), p. 133.

⁴⁴ Samuel Smiles (1812-1904) Founder of the self-help movement and author of *Self-Help* (1859), a popular handbook promulgating the moral value of the (Protestant) work ethic. The same 'gospel' of self-help privileged experience/praxis over the abstractions of philosophy/book-learning, which perhaps explains his high praise for Harland and Wolff and Belfast, one of 'the most prosperous and entertaining towns in the British Islands,' cited in Foster, *Recoveries*, 62. Edward Harland also contributed a chapter to Smiles' *Men of Invention and Industry* (1897). Foster describes how the North was far advanced in industry, science and field work, however, his argument relies on the reductive notion that the rest of Ireland and the Revival movement as a whole were characterized by anti-modern backwardness. Foster admits, but overlooks, (perhaps strategically so, given his efforts to emphasise the differences between North and South in line with his unionist beliefs), the fact that Smiles would also have extolled the work of many nationalist societies active in the Irish Revival, such as the Gaelic League, the G.A.A. and the Co-operative movement as prime examples of his 'self-help' creed being used in the cause of a national ideal. For an account of 'self-help revivalists' active in the Irish Revival see, P.J. Mathews, 'The Irish Revival: A Re-Appraisal', in *New Voices in Irish Criticism* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 13-20. For a more specific analysis of the A.E.'s co-operative movement as an exemplar of Smiles's 'self-help': see Leeann Lane, 'Its in the Cottages and the Farmers Cottages that the Nation is Born': A.E.'s *Irish Homestead* and the Cultural Revival', *Irish University Review: A Journal of Irish Studies* 22: 3 (2003): 165-181.

⁴⁵ Edward Harland (1831-1895) born in Scarborough, Yorkshire was educated there, and was apprenticed to the firm of Robert Stephenson & Co., Newcastle-upon-Tyne. He became a draughtsman in Glasgow, and in 1853 he was appointed manager of a shipyard on the Tyne. In 1854 he came to Belfast as manager of a Belfast shipyard. He and his associates bought the business in 1859 and developed it so that it became one of the most important shipyards in the world. In 1862 G. W. Wolff became his business partner. From 1875 to 1886 he was Chairman of Belfast Harbour Commission. A baronetcy was conferred upon him and he served as Mayor of Belfast. In 1887 he was High Sheriff of County Down, and from 1889 to 1895 he was member of parliament for the North Belfast constituency.

⁴⁶ *Trentonic's* maiden voyage broke all records for an Atlantic passage, crossing in just 6 days, 17 hours and

manufacturing prowess and proficiency, in an age underpinned by the *telos* of technological accomplishments and scientific progress, made it a symbolic city of the modern period, as inventions such as the internal combustion engines, pneumatic tyres, (invented by an Ulsterman), kinetoscopes, celluloid film, radio, box cameras, automobiles, aircraft and ocean liners, transformed the modern world.⁴⁷ In this 'machine age', scientific qualities of size, speed, power, and efficiency were transmuted into cultural values becoming 'cultural imperatives and not just technical ambitions.'⁴⁸ In Belfast, such cultural imperatives - inimical to Revivalist nationalism - merged with the mythology of the Protestant work ethic and were crucial to the formation of unionist identitarian paradigms in this period: of the pragmatic, industrious rational 'Ulsterman,' as opposed to the Celticised 'Irishman' with an emphasis on the profound differences between Belfast and Dublin (see Chapter 5).

Belfast's scientific culture, however, has been traditionally ignored or elided in Irish historiography which tends to treat science as a British or Anglo-Irish activity 'and not, since it took its rise in colonial days, sufficiently Irish to promote the nation's exceptionality or non-Britishness.'⁴⁹ Consequently, science, rationalism and empiricism were indelibly branded as 'unIrish'. This helps explain why Belfast and the North are excluded from examinations of the Irish Revival as the scientific, industrial and technological development of Belfast placed it 'beyond the pale' of the nationalist ideology of the Irish Revival and played a crucial role in shaping cultural and political identity in the North.

John Wilson Foster's scintillating cultural history of Irish science has done much to redress the neglect of science in Irish historiography and his work brilliantly examines the ideological forces underpinning Belfast's scientific culture and their circulation within

25 minutes. The 23,000 ton *Cymric*, launched in 1897 was the largest cargo ship in the world and two years later the *Oceanic II* was launched: 686 feet long, weighing 17,274 tons, with 28,000 horsepower twin screw engines and able to travel at 21 knots, it was the largest and most elegant ship ever constructed by the yard. When this engineering feat was eclipsed by a new generation of leviathan liners, the *Lusitania* and *Mauretania*, built for Cunard, their great rivals White Star Line again commissioned Harland and Wolff to build bigger, and in 1911 the *Olympic* was launched. At 45,000 tons with 46,000 horsepower, she displaced not only a huge wave across Belfast harbour, but with it, all of her competition. That is, until the launch of her sister ship, *Titanic*, a few months later and which was 1000 tons heavier, but attracted less headlines, until her fateful sinking on her maiden voyage.

⁴⁷ See John Wilson Foster's superb accounts of how the 'Mechanical Age' which changed utterly the modern world culminated in the manufacture of the *Titanic*, the sinking of which signalled the opening of the twentieth century as surely as the collapse of the twin towers closed it. See chapters 1 & 6 in *The Age of Titanic: Cross-Currents in Anglo-American Culture* (Dublin: Merlin publishing, 2002), especially pp. 1-38; 166-207. Also see Foster's brilliant recuperation of the badly neglected field of the cultural history of science in Ireland, (two thirds of which necessarily focuses on Belfast), in *Recoveries: Neglected Episodes in Irish Cultural History 1860-1912* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2002), especially pp. 49-138.

⁴⁸ Foster, *Recoveries*, p. 67.

⁴⁹ Foster, *Recoveries*, p. 9.

the wider continental cross-currents of Anglo-European thought.⁵⁰ He connects its industrial 'aesthetics' with one avant-garde strain of modernism: the Futurism propounded by Marinetti and its celebration of speed, technicism, and the 'reign of the machine'⁵¹ as the touchstones of the modern age. This new scientific-industrial culture was increasingly regarded as an innate part of Protestantism, as demonstrated by the asymmetrical industrialisation of Ireland, with Protestant north-east Ulster rapidly developing whilst the Catholic South remained a predominantly agricultural economy.⁵² Unionist politicians seized upon this argument of uneven development to declare that 'Protestantism [...] is the only key to the riddle why Belfast advances while Galway recedes,'⁵³ though nationalists countered, 'If Belfast linen had been put under the same penalties as Galway wool, we should have had no populous thriving Belfast to praise today.'⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the sectarian rationale that deficiencies of race and religion rather than a deficit of raw materials were responsible for the under-development of the South of Ireland were widely held in Ulster:

[the] widespread belief that Irish poverty and turbulence originate in the baleful influences of creed and race is very generally held as an unquestionable truth in north-east Ulster where I lived.⁵⁵

To Northern unionists, 'poverty' and 'turbulence' were intrinsically associated with the rest of the Ireland, their causal origins rooted in Romanism and rebellion. The most recent manifestation of this invidious nexus could be found in their 'Revival' movement, which was now insidiously spreading North to threaten their position.⁵⁶ As James Good laconically noted, 'the Ulsterman is firmly convinced that to have woven better linen and built better bigger liners is a proof not merely of his economic superiority but of the

⁵⁰ For a more personal industrial and scientific history and heritage see John Dowling, 'In Defence of Belfast' *The Bell* 4.5 (August 1942): 329-331.

⁵¹ See Foster, *Age of Titanic*, pp. 26; 30-1; 35; 167; 169.

⁵² Hugh Shearman in his history of Ulster explicitly connects the North's scientific and industrial prowess with its 'Puritanism': a quality which 'has produced from among the people of Belfast, some of the world's best engineers, some of the world's most competent administrators, generals, lawyers and men of learning.' Hugh Shearman, *Ulster* (London: Hale, 1949), pp. 162-3.

⁵³ Good, *Ulster and Ireland*, p. 277.

⁵⁴ Robert Lynd, 'Galway of the Races', *Essays on Life and Literature* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1951), p. 11.

⁵⁵ Cited in J. Loughlin, *Gladstone: Home Rule and the Ulster Question 1882-93* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, c.1986), p. 147.

⁵⁶ This fear of being undermined or usurped, was lodged deep within the Northern Protestant psyche, and (re)enforced its garrison mentality. The 1801 Act of Union, introduced as a direct result of the 1798 Rebellion, was designed to assuage these fears, but even this alliance with Britain failed to allay the demographic demons that haunted them with the possibility of another 'Catholic' uprising.

soundness of his politics and the truth of his religion'.⁵⁷ Consider the following account's conflation of race, religion, progress and prosperity:

The success of Belfast is not due to the salubrity of the climate, to the richness of the soil, or to its natural position, certainly not to the small stream that forms its harbour. There are many towns more advantageously situated in Ireland. The increasing prosperity is the well-merited reward for the work of her sons, her condition is widely different from that of the other great towns of Ireland, because her inhabitants differ in race from theirs.⁵⁸

Although sectarian explanations of this uneven development along the lines of 'flax and Fenianism don't mix' can, of course, be dismissed, a more sophisticated examination of the relationship between religion, labour and capitalism is illuminating. Max Weber's seminal theory about the Protestant work ethic and capitalism, which maintains that belief in salvation collaborates with the interpellation, disciplining and rewarding of subjects constituted by specific forms of labour, can be productively applied to an examination of Belfast. Similarly, cultural critic Rey Chow's groundbreaking study *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* also offers further insights into the development of identity in the North, as Chow extends Weber's arguments in relation to ethnicity and the emergence of the 'protestant ethic'. Both theorists contend that:

Capitalism, in brief, has succeeded Protestantism in granting psychological sanction for hard work. Worldly success within capitalism stands de facto as the secular equivalent of a demonstrated conferral of grace and the assurance of religious salvation.⁵⁹

This matrix of relationships generated by the scientific, capitalist and colonial culture of Belfast was instrumental in interpellating Belfast's citizen-subjects and in shaping the nationalist politics. However, all three of these mutually constitutive fields are not always examined in historical studies of Belfast in this period. For example, while Foster's work is invaluable in terms of dismantling the historical myth of Ireland's cultural anti-modernity in the late nineteenth century, he fundamentally fails to relate how this

⁵⁷ James Winder Good, *Ulster and Ireland* (Dublin: Maunsel & Co., 1919), p. 275.

⁵⁸ John Harrison, *The Scot in Ireland* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1888), p. 112.

⁵⁹ Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 44. Chow's argument echoes Good's description of Belfast, 'there is probably no city of the same size... which retains so much of the spirit of the early Industrial Revolution, with its childlike faith in the gospel of salvation by machinery and its glorification of the man of business as the real saviour of society', *Ulster and Ireland*, p. 256.

scientific, technological and industrial modernity was inextricably connected within the colonial philosophy and praxis of British imperialism.

Yet, as historian Alvin Jackson records, 'East Ulster was one of the main props of the "engineering imperialism" which underpinned the infrastructure of the Empire'⁶⁰ and Belfast's extraordinary productivity, heavy industries and new technologies were of invaluable importance: McAdam brothers built the steam pumps which irrigated the Nile and Combe Barbour made quadruple-expansion engines for Indian cotton mills whilst Coates' hydro-electric turbines; Rowan's piston rings; Mackies' textile machinery; Sircocco's fans and ventilation systems; William Gregg, Sons and Phenix's spades, shovels and nails; and Joseph Braddell & Sons' 'Ulster Bulldog' revolvers, were exported throughout the Empire to support numerous industrial, agricultural, administrative and military projects. Belfast's mechanical and manufacturing industries far outstripped local demand and local expansion was thus closely connected to global markets of the British Empire. Commodities such as linen, tobacco, chemicals, whiskey, flour, glass and aerated waters flowed out of Belfast to be distributed throughout the colonies; an economic interconnection increasingly hardwired into a sense of British imperial identity. In her description of Belfast in 1911, Sybil Gribbon cites a flippant, but fascinating extract from Cantrell & Cochrane's company papers of how their particular commodity was consumed right throughout the Empire:

The popping of Cantrell and Cochrane's corks is heard in the bungalows of the British cantonment in the great dependency in the Far East, and its sparkle is familiar to the Vice-Regal entourage up in the hot season refuge of the Anglo-Indians at Simla. Dons and *seignorinas* quaff this liquid boon in the tropical climes of South America; the West Indies welcome it as a treasure; Afric's 'sunny fountains' are out-rivalled in their very habitat by its gleam; the Antipodes have taken this gift of Mother Empire with gratitude.⁶¹

It is an evocative passage revealing the intricate imbrication of culture, consumption and colonialism within the imperial process. This 'sparkling' carbonated commodity a potent colonial signifier: 'pure' water is aerated; ideologically saturated and overflows into economic, imperial, cultural and geographical fields of signification. Belfast, the protective, motherly metropole refreshes her parched colonist offspring in the far-flung tropics of the world. This merchandising literature not only maps the colonial geography

⁶⁰ Alvin Jackson, 'Ireland, the Union, and the Empire 1800-1960', in *Ireland and the Empire*, ed. Kevin Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 135.

⁶¹ Sybil Gribbon, 'An Irish City: Belfast 1911', in Harkness and O'Dowd, *The Town In Ireland*, p. 208.

and imperial economy of Empire, but radiates a profound sense of colonial pride in the exchange. Perhaps there is something that is also reassuringly familiar, that the comforting sounds of C&C corks reverberate in regions round the world that are similarly encircled by hostile natives; all the more so in 1911, as Home Rule rose for the third and final time to threaten 'Mother Empire'.

Belfast, thus, was an industrial, imperial city. Although never on the same scale as London or Glasgow in terms of its spatial or symbolic significance, it was equally 'imbricated with the culture of empire' whereby imperial identity 'was lived at the local level.'⁶² This was evident in the city's consumption of metropolitan merchandise, not only in any of Belfast's six branches of the British chain Home and Colonial stores, but in its cultural consumption of touring productions of English melodrama, music-hall, variety shows and opera produced on its stages and concert halls, and in its participation in the stage-managed performances of Belfast's industrial supremacy/imperial identity.⁶³ The culture of empire was also lived on a daily level though the highly codified, spatialised cultural politics of the city, not only in terms of the imperial nomenclature christening its street names,⁶⁴ but in the colonial grammar of Belfast's grandiose

⁶² These quotations are taken from Catherine Hall's superb *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 12. In this illuminating study Hall examines how the relationship between metropolitan centre and the colonial periphery is one in which gender, sexuality, national identity etc. are mutual constitutive discourses which she explores through a brilliant examination of the bi-directional transactions between men and women in Jamaica and Birmingham, against the broader context of colonial practices that inform and infect these exchanges. Her analysis of how imperial identity is lived on a local level in Birmingham is something which could also be applied to Belfast. Although neither city signified on the same scale as London or Glasgow, both were very much inscribed within the material practice of Empire.

⁶³ Whilst space precludes a more detailed examination, this statement refers to the enormous civic ceremonies periodically held to celebrate the launch of Harland & Wolff's largest ships. For example, the launch on 14 January 1899 of *Oceanic II*, was a massive stage managed event that helped 'perform' Belfast's civic pride and industrial prowess before the world's press and the local population. A special stand was constructed to accommodate an elite audience of 5,000 spectators on Queen's Island, special trains were laid on to transport spectators from all over Ireland and the remarkable step was taken of painting the ship's enormous hull white so that photographers could record this historical moment. As many as 150,000 attended the occasion and although numbers were swelled by overseas visitors from America, Europe, and from all over Ireland, this was an audience almost half the city's overall population! Other launches, such as that of the *Olympic* in October 20, 1910 were equally massive civic occasions, and this one was attended by the Irish Viceroy who travelled up from Dublin for the event along with other noble personages. Denis Ireland recalls the formality of these occasions, recording how his father would take these days off and 'appeared at launches in the same uniform that served for funerals—that is, in frockcoat and top hat.' Dennis Ireland, *From the Jungle of Belfast: Footnotes to History 1904-1972* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1973), p. 28. See Mark Phelan, '(Re)Mapping Nineteenth Century Irish Theatre: Historiography, Geography, Modernity', in *The Performing Society*, eds. Tracy C. Davis and Peter Holland (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) forthcoming.

⁶⁴ Hundreds of Belfast's streets are named after cities, regions, and rulers of the British Empire. In addition to a plethora of streets christened after the Royal Family and the British Monarchy (Great Victoria Street, Little Victoria Street, Albert Bridge, Albertbridge Road, Queen's Street, King's Street, Royal Avenue, Jubilee Parade, etc.), there are dozens more which map some of the furthest reaches of the Empire in the nineteenth century: Palestine, Canada, Cairo, Vancouver, Jerusalem, Dehli, Damascus, Bombay, India, Jamaica, Adelaide, Sydney, Sebastopol, Melbourne, Tasmania, etc. This colonial cartography was mapped



Grand Opera House Belfast c. 1898

ULSTER LITERARY THEATRE

THE MIST THAT DOES BE ON THE BOG

A Fog in One Act, by GERALD MacNAMARA.

Charles St. John	Mr. DOUG CANNON	Cissy Dodd (Sister to Mrs. Magill)	Miss SEVEEN CANNER
Fred Magill	Mr. G. A. CHARTERS	Michael Quinn	Mr. J. H. HARDING
Gladys Magill (his Wife)	Miss MARY CROTHERS	Hedger Quinn (his Wife)	Miss MARGARET O'GORMAN

The Action is Laid in Michael Quinn's Cottage, in the West of Ireland.

THE DRONE

A Comedy in Three Acts, by RUTHERFORD MAYNE.

John Murray (a Farmer)	Mr. G. A. CHARTERS	Donal MacKenzie (a Scotch Engineer)	Mr. ROBERT HENRY
Daniel Murray (his Brother)	Mr. ARTHUR MALCOLM	Sam Brown (a Servant Man)	Mr. J. H. HARDING
Mary Murray (his Daughter)	Miss SEVEEN CANNER	Alick McCready	Mr. DOSS CANNER
Andrew McMin (a Neighbouring Farmer)	Mr. JOHN FIELD	Kate (a Servant)	Miss MARY CROTHERS
Sarah McMin (his Sister)	Miss MARGARET O'GORMAN		

SCENE—John Murray's Kitchen in the County of Down.

A Few Hours Elope between Acts II and III. A Few Weeks Elope between Acts III and IV. Time—Present Day.

Business Manager
Stage Manager
Producer
Advance Representative

For the
ULSTER LITERARY THEATRE

J. F. MAGEE
J. F. CAMPBELL
D. PARKHILL
FRED MORROW

ULT Programme for Grand Opera House Performance

architecture. Nowhere was this more visible than the arabesque architectural codes and décor of the Opera House (see Plate 1) designed by Frank Matcham and built in 1895 at the height of Belfast's ascendancy. A veritable cathedral of orientalism, the opulence of its 'Moorish pilasterings'⁶⁵ reflected the 'Otherness' of far-flung exotic lands, and reassuringly reified its audiences/citizens' belief in the civilization of the metropolitan centre. The self-conscious marbled grandeur of the City Hall, with its Baroque dome, four towers, and Italian marble was another striking physical monument to Belfast's imperial prosperity and a source of civic and cultural pride.⁶⁶ Nationalists, (and more puritan Protestants), excoriated the excessive expense and over-elaborate design of the building.⁶⁷ The Scottish Providential Institution, constructed in 1902, immediately adjacent to the City Hall, prominently features a number of friezes that commemorate the city's sources of wealth - shipbuilding, textiles and ropeworks - and celebrates their imperial achievement.⁶⁸ Such spatial and architectural encoding of urban forms is typical of imperial and colonial cities, and the fact that Belfast was built on reclaimed mud from the Lough further reinforced this imperial narrative. As Belfast poet, Robert Johnston observes:

The moment of Belfast's ascendancy was entirely an act of will: the very ground on which the shipyard stands is man-made. Like the city as a whole, the industry was created by human hands, and provides the richest metaphor of the founders' idea of the world and of themselves.⁶⁹

This popular perception of Belfast's history combined with pride that it was forged out of adversity, built from muddy banks of the Lagan, became inextricably connected with its unionist identity. This settler narrative of nation can be mapped onto Homi Bhabha's

onto the local geography in order to celebrate and consolidate the city's connections to Britain. However, its self-consciousness bespeaks not only a sense of pride in the Empire, but perhaps a profound sense of anxiety and insecurity.

⁶⁵ Michael Farrell, 'Drama in Ulster Now', *The Bell* 2:4 (July 1941): 84.

⁶⁶ Completed in 1906, however, the foundation stone was laid in 1898.

⁶⁷ Jonathon Bardon records how the construction of the City Hall cost double the original estimate: £360,000 with its foundation stone alone costing £500! This prompted an inspector from the special enquiry launched by the Local Government Board at Dublin Castle to investigate the case to quip that the foundation stone, 'is a precious stone I suppose?', cited in Bardon, *Illustrated History* p. 170.

⁶⁸ The present day space of the city centre is all the more semiotically charged with numerous monuments erected on the grounds of the City Hall, such as the cenotaph commemorating Ulster's war dead and unionism's 'blood sacrifice', whilst memorials to Sir Edward Harland and the Titanic's victims architecturally signify the demise of heavy industries and the concomitant collapse of the city's industrial confidence.

⁶⁹ Robert Johnston, cited in Tom Paulin, 'The Vernacular City', in Nicholas Allen & Aaron Kelly (eds.) *The Cities of Belfast* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), pp. 237-8.

observations of how colonial space is fundamentally, 'the *terra incognita* or the *terra nulla*, the empty and wasted land whose history has to be begun [...] whose future progress must be secured in modernity'⁷⁰ as is dramatically manifested a century earlier in the unionist *Newsletter's* delight in Belfast's *ahistoricity*, and its celebration of the city as a *tabula rasa* that has since been inscribed with the colonial narrative of modernity:

Belfast is one of those cities happy in the possession of "no history", and they whose business it is to hand down to posterity a record of its municipal life and progress will have little to do but to write of a continuous, an *uninterrupted*, and a triumphal march of industrial prosperity.⁷¹

Thus history only commences with the arrival of British imperialism and the advent of industrialisation: a colonial fiction whereby Protestant covenanters, like so many Crusoes, built civilisation in Belfast and 'began' its history with their intervention in an otherwise 'barren' land. This narrative is consistently repeated in contemporaneous newspapers, journals and histories of the 1890s and, indeed, is a common narratological strategy in imperial fiction, travel literature and historiography⁷²; one which continued following Ireland's partition in 1922. Indeed, in a series of lectures entitled 'Ulster since 1800,' the renowned economic and social historian, E.R.R. Green, opined, 'Belfast, like Robinson Crusoe, did not really belong to the island at all instead of being the sole Irish industrial city, it was, in reality, an outpost of industrial Britain.'⁷³ Again, the import is clear, that Crusoe's colonizing mission has 'civilised' Ulster and annexed its territory from the rest of Ireland. Indeed, geography is inextricably intertwined with the history of imperialism, as pointed out by Edward Said, who maintains that the main battle in imperialism is always over land, 'who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back.'⁷⁴ This was self-evidently the case in Ireland where the struggle over land consistently constituted the greatest political grievance and cultural battlefield throughout the centuries. However, my concern here is

⁷⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, 'Race, Time and the Revision of Modernity,' in Bart Moore-Gilbert, Gareth Stanton & Willy Maley, eds., *Postcolonial Criticism* (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 177-8.

⁷¹ *The Belfast Newsletter*, 19 October 1898. Suitably, the occasion of this editorial eulogy was the Vice-Regal visit to Belfast for the ceremonial laying of the foundation stone of the City Hall: a building that apparently promises to be 'in every way worthy of the commercial distinction of the Northern metropolis,' *The Belfast Newsletter*, 19 October 1898.

⁷² See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), pp. 1-225; Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 1979); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁷³ 'Belfast does not Belong to Ireland', *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 21 October 1954.

⁷⁴ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. xiii.

with the political topography of Ulster where unionism's colonial narrative of building Belfast is contested by nationalist narratives whereby industrialization represents a 'violation' of Ireland,⁷⁵ and Belfast is a 'deliberately designed [...] node of Anglicization,'⁷⁶ a beach-head for the colonization of Ulster, the most Gaelic of provinces.

For some Northern nationalists influenced by the often primitivist precepts and practices of the Irish-Ireland Revival movement, the industrial reality and brash modernity of their capital city were anathema; inimical to their aesthetic sensibilities and ideological imperatives. Consequently, their literary output is notable for its neglect of Belfast, or when it does feature, it is treated either with contempt for its commercialism or nostalgically for its nationalist past. Surrounded by the modernist materiality of this 'city of mathematicians, engineers and inventors,'⁷⁷ subalterned by the politico-cultural hegemony of its massive unionist majority, these nationalists sought refuge in this mythologized past and its provision of a different narrative; a history already 'begun': the 'golden age' of Belfast's late-eighteenth century enlightenment and the ancient age of an intact Gaelic culture and community - a history that refuted the imperial historical narrative of an, 'uninterrupted, and a triumphal march of industrial prosperity.'⁷⁸

However, the dominant strain of Northern nationalism, as represented by the Ulster Literary Theatre, rejected this primitivist Revivalism for a more practical regionalism. As well as (re)constructing an oppositional nationalist narrative on historical or temporal terms, they also sought to create a spatial politics; a geographical paradigm of regional identity that could map onto the local contours of the North's divided political landscape. In the following chapters, I will examine the emergence of this new regionalist, cultural movement and the way in which it re-negotiated the political geography of the North by challenging the cartography of Irish nationalism and the coordinates of Ulster unionism.

⁷⁵ A number of literary critics have identified in the novels of Northern Catholic writers, such as Michael McLaverty, the motif of 'the blighted land', of an Irish landscape violated by an experience of industrialisation that serves as metaphor for colonialism. See Edna Longley, *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland*, (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1994), p. 90.

⁷⁶ Aodán MacPóilín, 'The Irish Language in Belfast until 1900,' in Allen and Kelly, eds., *Belfast*, pp. 127-151.

⁷⁷ Tom Paulin, 'The Vernacular City', in Allen and Kelly, *Belfast*, p. 238.

⁷⁸ *The Belfast Newsletter*, 19 October 1898.

Capital of Culture?: Puritanism, Philistinism & 'the ungodly theatricals'.⁷⁹

*'Nowhere else is the commercial element so all powerful, so supreme, as in the commercial capital of Ireland [...] Collectively, the Belfast Man has absolutely no artistic tastes.'*⁸⁰

The exponential growth of Belfast's manufacturing industries and population was conversely mirrored by the attenuation of the city's cultural and literary audience: 'With increased growth and the introduction of large manufactories (*sic*) there is no doubt that Belfast has fallen behind in culture and art.'⁸¹ This trend was either praised or pilloried depending on the political persuasion of the observer: a polarized perspective that endures today. For instance, unionist historian Jonathan Bardon celebrates the explosive growth of Belfast's industries, whereas the liberal Protestant poet, Robert Greacan, despairs over its concomitant cultural implosion. Bardon lauds the massive growth of the city, Greacan laments the 'lost 800,000, unmindful of its traditions, somewhat inarticulate,' and unable to furnish a 'large cultural audience for the serious writer.'⁸²

These modern-day perspectives had nineteenth-century precedents: H.O. Lanyon, President of the Belfast Chamber of Commerce, proudly declared exports of linen in 1894 'measured about 156,000,000 yards, which would make a girdle for the equator three yards wide.'⁸³ However, the metaphorical implications of such a statistic, of Belfast encompassing the world as a sophisticated, modern metropolis were scorned by the nationalist paper, *Northern Patriot*.⁸⁴ It lambasted Belfast for its parochialism, lampooning it as 'Linenopolis' - a soulless city stifled by its own shroud of linen, and preoccupied with profit:

We have been too busily engaged in providing for the material needs of life, or in securing physical comfort, or in amassing riches, to attend much to the requirements of the mind.⁸⁵

Many different reasons were forwarded in an effort to explain Belfast's artistic aridity. Adherents of the nascent, anti-materialist nationalism of the 1890s, surveying the

⁷⁹ 'Dr. Cooke lashing with virgolic tongue ... "the ungodly and unholy sins of theatricals"', Richard Hayward, *In Praise of Ulster* (Belfast: William Mullan & Son, 1943), p. 31.

⁸⁰ *Nomads' Weekly*, 10 May 1902: 220.

⁸¹ F. J. Bigger, 'Art and Culture in Old Belfast', *Ulster* 1:1 (1904): 12.

⁸² Robert Greacan, 'Trends in Irish Poetry', *Irish Bookman* 1:7, (February 1947): 73.

⁸³ *Belfast Directory* (1896) cited in Kennedy and Ollerensaw, *An Economic History*.

⁸⁴ The *Northern Patriot* was a nationalist newspaper edited by Alice Milligan and Ethna Carberry (Anna Johnston), who were later ousted on account of their uncompromisingly nationalist editorials. Undaunted, both women went on to found *The Shan Van Vocht*.

⁸⁵ *Northern Patriot*, 1: 16 (March 1887): 58.

century from the dusk of the *fin de siècle* twilight, were in no doubt as to the principal cause, indicting 'the sordid growth of city life'.⁸⁶ However, Belfast's industrial expansion could not be held solely accountable for the North's dearth of literary activity. For instance, the recollections of Belfast citizen, Hugh MacCartan, suggest that the city provided a setting that might have inspired, rather than inhibited creative responses:

Belfast greeted us, with a harsh crescendo of noise to which a hundred discords contributed - the jolting of carts and vans on the paving stones, the loading and unloading of merchandise at the docks, the siren calls of departing steamers, the clatter of horse-drawn trams, and above all, the interminable rat-tat-tat of countless riveters on the skeleton ships down the Lough [...] a long line of steamers moored to the docks, small boats chugging across the river, stacks of coals and timber on the Southern quays, huge cranes rising and falling with eerie precision, a forest of chimneys soaring into the sky [...] a succession of steel gantries enclosing vessels in various stages of construction.⁸⁷

All this activity, with its myriad sights and sounds and frenetic energy played out under the steel sentinels of the shipyards, seems to provide a rich source of material for a writer. Unfortunately, the opposite was true; a failure deplored by Belfastman Seamus Connolly in *Ulaid*:

what [...] has been the attitude of Ulster towards Irish literature? And that great city, which boasts of its power and pride, its wealth and intelligence, its monster factories and shipyards, its teeming number of citizens- what has it done to foster native literature? Alas, it ignored it entirely...a narrow and barren creed which would exclude all native beauty in art and literature because it is native; a little cell built around all sides, with a loophole towards London and wherein the mind starved for want of native provender, or grew sickly with imported rubbish.⁸⁸

The industrial nature of Belfast was an imaginative resource for precious few novelists,⁸⁹ only one artist of note,⁹⁰ and the subject/setting for local poetry and drama only at a

⁸⁶ (F.J. Bigger, 'An Ulster Village Library' *Ulaid* 1:2 (1905): 28.

⁸⁷ Hugh MacCartan, 'Belfast: Some Backward Glances', *The Capuchin Annual* (1943): 173.

⁸⁸ 'Connla', 'Literature and Politics', *Ulaid* 1:1 (1904): 17-18.

⁸⁹ In fact, I am aware of only one novel of note, written by a local author which takes the industrial nature of Belfast as its subject and setting, Shan F. Bullock's *Thomas Andrews: Shipbuilder* (1912): a biographical novel based on the eponymous inventor and designer of the *Titanic*.

⁹⁰ William Conor, (1881-1968): born Belfast, son of a sheet metal worker; educ. Cliftonpark Central National School and the Government School of Design, Belfast; after an apprenticeship as a poster designer at a printer's, he was able to fund himself for further study in Dublin and Paris; 1914 first exhibition which was held in his native city; during WW1 officially commissioned to record soldiers and munition workers, a role he reprised during WW2, 1947 elected to the Royal Hibernian Academy; 1952 Order of the British Empire; member of the National Society of Painters and Sculptors, London, and of

(much) later stage.⁹¹ In 'The Vernacular City,' the poet and critic Tom Paulin opines that Belfast needed a Walt Whitman figure to celebrate the city's industrial heritage and the creative intelligence of its engineers and inventors,⁹² whilst literary critic Foster wonders what a modern writer like Joyce might have done for the city had he turned his hand to the lively Linenopolis instead of the listlessness of turn-of-the-century Dublin.⁹³ Ulster, and Belfast in particular, were regularly, and rightly, excoriated as, 'a philistine area, materialist and parochial in its values, content to leave art to less realistic neighbours further south'⁹⁴; a reputation, partly due to the pervasive strain of puritanism that ran through the province,⁹⁵ which valued work and disdained pleasure (discussed below). In his survey of the arts in Ulster in the nineteenth century, the poet and patron of Ulster regionalism, John Hewitt, describes how a flourishing rhyming weaver poetic tradition and a prolific publishing industry in the North rapidly collapsed as:

The rising class of industrialists and large merchants with no rich cultural tradition of their own - they did not rise out of the ranks of the weavers - obsessed with the values of material success, saw no profit in the reading or making of so unmarketable a ware as poetry. Indeed, all art seemed a luxury they could not afford...⁹⁶

Commercial and scientific materialism had an adverse effect on literature.⁹⁷ However, Belfast's rapid industrialisation and urbanisation and the emergence of the new *bourgeois* class who regarded literature as 'unmarketable' and unprofitable were not the only explanations for the cultural atrophy of the former 'Athens of the North.' The particular

the Royal Ulster Academy of Arts; 1957 President RUAA; 1957 awarded honorary Master of Arts degree from Queen's University; exhibited in London, Paris and New York, working in a style based on French Impressionism, his works were nevertheless hailed as quintessential expressions of the life and environs of his native city: 'I suppose to some Belfast is ugly and sordid. I never found it so. I never run short of subjects with which to illustrate its industry and the beauty it has for me.' Cited in Judith C. Wilson, *Conor 1861-1968* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1981).

⁹¹ Richard Rowley's (1877-1947) acclaimed 'city poems': *The City Refuge, City Songs and Others*, and *Workers* were not published until 1917, 1918 and 1923 respectively, whilst his good friend, Thomas Carnduff's (1889-1956) collections of poems, *Songs from the Shipyards and Other Poems* (Belfast: E.H. Thornton) and *Songs of an out of Work* (Belfast: The Quota Press), were only published in 1924 and 1932, and his plays, *Workers* and *Machinery* produced in 1932 and 1933. The shipyards and factories of the city later became a rich resource for a whole array of Northern writers: Louis MacNeice, John Hewitt, Michael McLaverty, Sam Hanna Bell, Sam Thompson, Ciaran Carson, Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, Tom Paulin, and Glen Patterson amongst others.

⁹² Paulin, 'Vernacular City', in Allen and Kelly, *Belfast*, p. 238.

⁹³ Foster, *The Age of Titanic*, p. 167.

⁹⁴ N. Saunders and A.A. Kelly, *Joseph Campbell: Poet and nationalist 1879-1944* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1988), p. 27.

⁹⁵ See Hugh Shearman, *Ulster* (London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1949), pp. 158-163.

⁹⁶ John Hewitt, 'The Arts: Literature, Drama, Music', in *Ulster Since 1800: A Social Survey*, eds., T.W. Moody and J.C. Beckett (Belfast: BBC, 1957), pp. 208-9.

⁹⁷ See Edna Longley, *The Living Stream*, p. 87.

strain of puritanism prevalent in Ulster with its implacable opposition to literature and art, perhaps more than any other factor, was responsible for this cultural condition, though this fascinating dynamic of the North's cultural history has still not been researched in any sustained, serious way in spite of its pervasive influence. Indeed, in his book *Belfast*, W.A. Maguire sardonically comments that the only members of the Belfast public safe from the sectarian zealotry of the city's fathers were the inmates of the lunatic asylum at Purdysburn! He explains that the reason for this was that the asylum superintendent obdurately refused admission to chaplains and clerics, as enthused preachers might 'generate a wild and dangerous fanaticism among the lunatics.'⁹⁸ Though the Purdysburn may have been protected from this clerical contagion, it was to have a devastating effect on popular culture in Belfast in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Easter Mondays and Auld Lammas fairs:

John Grey has written how over the course of the 19th century industrialism, Victorianism and evangelism combined to combat what they deemed to be immoral or unproductive distractions to citizens' propriety and progress.⁹⁹ In the 1870s, the 'Plutonian Shore'¹⁰⁰ of the pleasure grounds at Queen's Island, with its menagerie, conservatory and gardens were closed down, appositely appropriated to accommodate Belfast's expanding shipyards. Popular amusements for the city's population were not only reduced by rampant industrial development, but also by concerted religious and moral campaigning. Belfast's proliferation of public houses – one public house/off-license for every 328 residents – became a 'target for temperance soldiers',¹⁰¹ likewise, the vital, vibrant excesses of public holidays, such as Easter Monday and the Auld Lammas Fair, became targets for evangelical attack.¹⁰² Both festival days were centred around Cave Hill and Smithfield market respectively and celebrated with carnivalesque excess by 'Men full of whiskey, maidens full of fun.'¹⁰³ Crowds also flocked to Queen's

⁹⁸ M. Finneane, *Insanity and the Insane in Post-Famine Ireland*, cited in W.A. Maguire, *Belfast* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1993), pp. 51–2.

⁹⁹ John Grey, 'Popular Entertainment', in *Belfast: The Making of the City 1800–1914*, ed. J.C. Beckett (Belfast: Appletree, 1983), pp. 99–116.

¹⁰⁰ *Northern Whig*, 6 December, 1875.

¹⁰¹ Sybil Gribbon, *Edwardian Belfast: A Social Profile* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1982), p. 26.

¹⁰² For an account of the old Lammas Fair couched in the 'scutching vernacular' of Ulster-Scots speech see the extraordinary poem of rhyming weaver Robert Huddleston, 'The Lammas Fair' in *A Collection of Poems and Songs on Rural Subjects* (Belfast: Printed by J. Smyth, 1844). For an account of Easter Monday's festivities, see F.J. Bigger, 'The Cave Hill and its Story: Sports on Easter Monday', in *In Remembrance*, ed., J.S. Crone (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1927), pp. 141–145.

¹⁰³ Anonymous, 'The Northern Athens: a Satirical Poem' (1826), cited Patricia Craig, *The Belfast Anthology*

Island on these festivals, when it was still open, to see, 'gymnastic feats, negro minstrels, displays of swordsmanship and performing dogs' amongst other attractions.¹⁰⁴ The entertainment was just as eclectic, if less respectable, elsewhere in the city, as is vividly described in the memoirs of Belfastman Samuel Elliott, with Punch and Judy shows, rhymers, and mummers performing on Cave Hill's slopes, 'peep and wild beast shows' playing in town and cock-fighting and gambling 'carried on to a great extent,' whilst the penny-singing saloons were packed 'with the roughest and lowest class of the "gods."¹⁰⁵ Other accounts describe how, tents and improvised stages for dancing 'reels, jigs and hornpipes' sprung up on Cave Hill, where *potin* drinkers, gipsies, fire-eaters, jugglers, thimble riggers and puppeteers entertained all, until performers collapsed from 'excessive consumption of illicit spirits.'¹⁰⁶ Other gastronomic attractions were available to young lovers, who could enjoy more than the food of love in Belfast and 'retire to an eating house [...] a bowl of broth, a penny bap and a pig's foot each.'¹⁰⁷ Both festival days gave free licence to excessive drinking and intermingling of otherwise stringently segregated communities, as thousands flocked to the city from the country and the ghettos emptied, so that 'with folly and riot the day was wasted. And scarcely an anniversary passed without loss of life.'¹⁰⁸ The sense of release, vitality and abandon is captured in the anonymous author of 'The Northern Athens: a Satirical Poem':

In Easter Times, and all the town let loose, ...
 All round the classic City, glad souls rush,
 To clasp the hem of harmony; intent,
 To flee dull toil: from Falls to Friar's Bush,
 From Shankill to the Shore, all air is rent,
 Glad hearts surrender'd to their joys' full gush -
 Full many a naggin quaff'd, and the last groat spent,
 In making a holiday so gay as theirs,
 All heedless of their sins as of their prayers.¹⁰⁹

Belfast: Blackstaff, 1999).

¹⁰⁴ Eileen Black, *The People's Park: The Queen's Island, Belfast 1849-1879* (Belfast: Linen Hall Library, 1988), p. 40.

¹⁰⁵ S. M. Elliott, *The World as I Found It: or, What I have done, seen, heard, read, thought, and endured: From the Mental Diary of a Weaver, A Soldier, A Sailor, a Police Officer, Clerk and a Traveller* (Belfast: Printed by William Brown, 1887), pp. 21-2.

¹⁰⁶ F.J. Bigger, 'The Cave Hill and its Story', in *Remembrance*, p. 143.

¹⁰⁷ Elliott, *The World as I Found It*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁸ Anonymous, *The Annals of Christ Church* (1844), cited in Grey, p. 100.

¹⁰⁹ 'The Northern Athens: a Satirical Poem' cited in Craig, *Belfast: An Anthology*.

Such ungodly excess as intimated in the last line, was assiduously attacked by the Tee Total Society and other religious and evangelical groups, who annually marched on Cave Hill until its Bacchanalian carry-on was respectfully replaced with 'eloquent speeches in praise of sobriety and total abstinence.'¹¹⁰

Thus emerged Belfast of the (in)famous Ulster Sunday; where the Sabbath was sacrosanct and inviolable. Journalist James Good records how one letter 'appeared in the Belfast papers tracing all the crimes of Prussianism to the fact that "Germany kept no Sabbath day."¹¹¹ The unremitting bleakness of Sabbath observance in Belfast as imposed and enforced by the municipal authorities was a source of nationalist resentment and for the anti-establishment satire of *Nomads' Weekly*¹¹² which strenuously opposed the reintroduction of 'the bygone fashion of Sunday funerals' protesting, 'Our Sabbath is already deadly dull and surely depressing enough [...] but with horses and mourners parading the streets it will be unbearable.'¹¹³ It is unsurprising then, that in a city where the Sabbath breaker was blasted as being 'one degree lower than a theatrogoer,'¹¹⁴ that a moral campaign was launched to seek the closure of all Temples of Thespis in the city formerly christened the 'Athens of the North' (ironically, an appellation given in the prologue of a speech celebrating the opening of the Arthur Street Theatre in 1784).¹¹⁵ Enter from the wings the tragic figure of soldier John Cordery, who went to the theatre where he got drunk, returned to barracks and murdered his sergeant. As he stood on the scaffold, before being publicly executed, he repented the day that he had ever darkened the door of a theatre: a confession seized on by the clergy in their campaign to close the city's theatres; happily, they survived, though tragically, John Cordery did not.

¹¹⁰ *The Northern Whig*, cited in Grey, p. 100. For an account of how these activities such as the those of the mummers and Rhymers were gradually eroded through a sustained evangelical campaign, see George Benn, *A History of the Town of Belfast, from 1799 til 1810* (Belfast: Marcus Ward, 1880).

¹¹¹ Good, *Ulster and Ireland*, p. 7.

¹¹² *The Magpie (A Journal of Humour and Satire)* is a wonderful example of a brilliant age in Irish journalism, although the witty acuity it brought to bear on local and national politics under the iconoclastic editorship of Alfred S. Moore has received little attention from historians and critics. Whilst supportive of the monarchy, unionism, and empire, the excessive and hubristic jingoism of many of Moore's articles and editorials is often ironic. Politically, the paper was consistent and balanced in its scathing satirical attacks on all political parties, reserving particular vitriol for religious fundamentalism and the corruption and incompetence of the municipal authorities: 'I do not intend *The Magpie* to become a Municipal Pillory, but when the daily papers withhold information, for obvious reasons – party or printing-contract reasons, to be candid – it would ill become our principles to be silent' (25 March 1899). Moore was a devotee of the local theatre and a considerable portion of the paper was dedicated to reviews of local performances, articles on actors, managers and playwrights as well as longer articles lamenting the lack of locally produced theatre; increasing audience indifference and the programming priorities of theatre managers.

¹¹³ *Nomads' Weekly*, 4 August 1900.

¹¹⁴ Henry Cooke, cited in Good, *Ulster and Ireland*, p. 128.

¹¹⁵ See F.J. Bigger, 'Art and Culture in Old Belfast' *Ulaid* 1:1(1904): 11.

In these conditions, any aspiring artistic movement such as the ULT had to endure not only the apathy and indifference encountered by their Southern counterparts, but was confronted by actual Calvinistic *hostility*.¹¹⁶ For instance, an entry in the *Parliament Gazetteer* recorded that Theatre was neglected, 'greatly to the credit of the metropolis of the north'.¹¹⁷ Belfast historian, David Kennedy, notes that, 'In post-Plantation Ulster, Presbyterians did not hold with the theatre', citing an occasion when Dublin's old Smock Alley Theatre collapsed during a performance of Shadwell's *Libertine*, after which 'divine' interference it was stated that, 'The candles burnt blue and went out; that two or three times a dancer extraordinary whom nobody knew was seen; that he had a cloven foot'.¹¹⁸ Ulster playwright, St John Ervine quipped that, 'Religious people, after the Greeks, have never greatly liked the theatre',¹¹⁹ and Hugh MacCartan recalls how the formidable Protestant preacher Henry Cooke inveighed against the 'sins of theatricals' deploying, 'Scripture, satire, wit, denunciation, invective, appeal combining in such an onslaught as must have brought terror even to the spirit of poor old Thespis, for all his years in Arcady or Hades'.¹²⁰ The theatre was frequently denounced as ungodly by 'many of those whose piety is more Calvinistic than Christian'¹²¹ and Belfast had many citizens who 'would as soon visit the infernal regions'¹²² as visit the theatre. As the clergyman novelist George Birmingham recalled:

¹¹⁶ I have come across an enormous amount of correspondence in Belfast local papers throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century exonerating the 'godlessness' of theatre. There is also an enormous body of religious pamphlets, lectures and sermons which denounce the sinfulness of theatre, one of the most vitriolic of which is written by an anonymous preacher and published as *The Lectures and Conversations Expressive of Character and Sentiment* (Belfast: William Ferguson, 1837). The first chapter is entitled 'THE THEATRE'; otherwise known as "the Devil's Chapel", or "The School and Nursery of lewd licentiousness and Hell"', (iv) which gives some sense of the diatribe that is to follow.

¹¹⁷ Cited in Maguire, *Belfast*, p. 56.

¹¹⁸ David Kennedy, 'Drama in Ulster', *The Arts in Ulster: A Symposium*, ed., Sam Hanna Bell (London: George G. Harrap, 1951), p. 51.

¹¹⁹ St John Ervine, *The Theatre in my Time* (London: Rich Gowan Ltd., 1933), p. 17.

¹²⁰ Hugh A. MacCartan, *The Glamour Of Belfast* (Belfast: Talbot Press, 1921), p. 112. For a more entertaining theological tirade against theatricals, see Anonymous, *The Lectures and Conversations, Expressive of Character and Sentiment* (Belfast: William Ferguson, 1837) which takes as a central moral question, 'Let us enquire have theatrical entertainments a greater tendency to promote virtue or vice, religion or profaneness?': to which the author invariably decides that the temple of Thespis is a 'school of vice [...] profanity, irreligion and wantonness' (16-17). Such punitarian fulminations against the theatre were not uncommon in the 19th century, but were particularly virulent in Belfast and produced a voluminous body of public correspondence in the local press, debating the 'morality' of theatre. The editor of *Nomads' Weekly* even created a mock 'letters to the editor' column in which one fictitious correspondent demands to know, 'how much money [do] you save by publishing correspondence about theatre-going, thus obtaining matter to fill a large part of your paper at a cost of nothing'. ('Correspondence All Gone Wrong,' *Nomads' Weekly* 25 May 1901.

¹²¹ David Kennedy, 'Ulster Theatre' *Irish Bookman*, (April-May, 1947), p. 35.

¹²² Harry Furniss, cited in John Grey, 'Culture and Arts in the North of Ireland since 1891', in *A Century of Northern Life*, ed. Eamon Phoenix (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1995), p. 165.

The theatre in Belfast was frowned on when I was a boy, and to see a play there was regarded as a sin. My father was liberal-minded beyond most of his fellow clergy and he never objected to my going to the theatre, though he asked me to do so as unostentatiously as possible, lest I should create a scandal.¹²³

The Ulsterman's 'anti-theatre complex'¹²⁴ was further compounded by class and notions of 'Respectability,' where with one eye cocked at the pulpit and the other at his social peers, the good citizen of Linenopolis shuffled uncomfortably outside the doors of the theatre:

not out of any real objection to the institution, but in fear of what their neighbours might say if they were to enter. It is certainly cowardly, but so strong has the prejudice against play-going amidst us.¹²⁵

A colonial complication of this 'complex' is identified by Ulster novelist, Forest Reid, who spoke of the 'respectable' citizen's 'not very intelligible [...] hankering after things English,'¹²⁶ a tendency elaborated on in the *Northern Patriot*:

The reputable Christian in Linenopolis will sometimes deem it advisable to wait until he goes to London before he patronises a place of the kind [...] and when the good man returns he can speak with a kind of deprecating air of our theatres as being dangerous for the young and of uncertain moral teaching.¹²⁷

This anti-theatrical prejudice remained equally virulent in the twentieth century and vestigially continues to affect, or afflict, the local theatrical scene. Defending Belfast's reputation against criticisms of the city's 'non-literary tastes'¹²⁸ and its outright hostility to theatre, James Logan readily admits and excuses this reaction by suggesting that it is not an altogether negative quality:

There is undoubtedly, rightly or wrongly, prejudice against the theatre, partly due to tradition, rigid upbringing and the lack of good plays, and considering everything, this attitude is not to be wondered at, for many plays are neither elevating nor educative. But the theatre, like many

¹²³ George A. Birmingham, *Pleasant Places* (London: William Heineman, 1934), p. 12.

¹²⁴ David Kennedy, 'Ulster Theatre', *Irish Bookman* (April/May 1947), p. 35.

¹²⁵ *Northern Patriot*, 1:16, (March 1897): 59.

¹²⁶ Forrest Reid, *Apostate* (London: Faber and Faber, 1924), p. 44.

¹²⁷ *Northern Patriot*, 16 March 1897.

¹²⁸ James Logan, *Ulster in the X-Rays: A Short Review of the Real Ulster, its People, Pursuits, Principles, Poetry, Dialect and Humour* (London: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1923), p. 48.

other institutions in the world, is not wholly bad, and while theatre-trotting is a poor recreation, there are at least a few plays which everyone should see, and Shakspeare [sic] ranks next to Scripture itself as the finest literature the world has ever known.¹²⁹

That such a profoundly anti-theatrical view should be expressed in a chapter celebrating the cultural environment and output of Belfast in a book that eulogises Ulster, is rich comment indeed.

Although 'industrial philistinism in their nonconformist zeal put the stage out of bounds for all decent respectable folk',¹³⁰ a thriving theatrical scene of vaudeville, variety and music hall flourished as burlesques, peep shows, melodrama, magic lantern shows, dioramas, jugglers, ventriloquists, acrobats, musical acts, soubrettes, serio-comic dancers, sword-swallowers, comedy conjurers, circus performers, vocalist comedians, contortionists, facial artistes, 'acrobatic grotesques', 'musical tramps', 'musical knife grinders', 'clever acrobatic trick cyclists', 'amusing modellers in coloured clays', hypnotists 'dealing with hypnotism versus electricity, mesmerism versus chloroform',¹³¹ survived in Belfast's numerous music halls and penny-singing saloons which were frequented by the city's expanding working class population.

Ironically, although theatres were closed on Sundays, Belfast's Sabbath day did offer some extraordinary (extra-)theatrical entertainment as punters flocked to the 'prostitution of religion at the Custom House steps':¹³² laconically described as 'the only "live" shows that Calvinistic Belfast provided'.¹³³ On the Steps, firebrand preachers and demagogues fulminated before thousands with 'homilies' that were volatile mixtures of salvation and sectarianism.¹³⁴ Some of the most famous *dramatis personae* were brimstone boys like Reverends 'Roaring' Hugh Hanna¹³⁵ and Thomas Drew, lay preacher-politicians like Arthur Trew and Thomas Sloan¹³⁶ who spoke for the Belfast Protestant

¹²⁹ Logan, *Ulster in the X-Rays*, p. 49.

¹³⁰ John Hewitt, 'The Arts: Literature, Drama, Music', in *Ulster Since 1800*, p. 211.

¹³¹ *Nomads' Weekly*, 11 August 1900.

¹³² *Nomads' Weekly*, 30 August 1902.

¹³³ Joseph Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 54.

¹³⁴ *Northern Whig* reports that the Custom House's geographical location also contributed to the conflict which regularly erupted there: 'around the Custom House there are many devious streets from which the mob can make damaging sorties and by which they can effect safe escapes. Around the Custom House too they have, in the street pavements, unlimited material of war.' 'The Custom House Steps', *The Magpie*, 3 June, 1899.

¹³⁵ Hugh Hanna (1824-1892): one of long line of Pentecostal preachers who were fundamentalist precursors of Ian Paisley's contemporary conflation of politics and religion. Indeed, Paisley pays homage to Hanna in the forward of David G. Browne's hagiography, *Hugh Hanna: Protestant Champion and Warrior Against Romanism and Republicanism* (Belfast: Puntan Printing Co., 1972).

¹³⁶ Thomas Henry Sloan (1870-1941): Born in Belfast and worked in Harland & Wolff. Was a prominent member of the Orange Order until he was expelled for criticising the leader of the Ulster Unionists,

Association¹³⁷ and spewed 'insensate hate,'¹³⁸ regularly incited rioting and unrest in a city that was regularly engulfed by civil unrest and prolonged disturbances. Indeed, Belfast was the most violent corner of Ireland throughout the century, with intense rioting breaking out in 1832, 1833, 1841, 1857, 1864 and 1886. In fact, the death toll of the 1886 riots exceeded the death toll of nationalist insurrections in 1803, 1848 and 1867 put together!¹³⁹

The notorious harshness and hostility of Belfast to arts and culture was excoriated by the Professor of Metaphysics and Ethics at Magee College and law-court Judge Shaw who railed at 'Gog and Magog, the two monsters of Belfast idolatry, namely Wealth and Respectability.'¹⁴⁰ In such a setting, it was not surprising that Ulster exported her artists and writers to the more conducive literary climates of Dublin and London. However, there were indications that things were slowly changing, as a tide of literary and political activity began to seep into the cultural life of the North. A new sense of confidence began to evolve, as a number of remarkable Ulster men and women were determined that the North should once again assert that it had a vital role to play in the renewal of Irish patriotic thought.

Colonel Edward Saunderson. He founded the Independent Orange Order in 1902 and became M.P. for South Belfast from 1902-1910.

¹³⁷ Founded by Arthur Trew and TH Sloan. An ultra-militant loyalist organisation with a predominantly working class membership and which was virulently anti-Catholic. Sloan used it as the support base from which to build the Independent Orange Order.

¹³⁸ Maguire, *Belfast*, p. 52

¹³⁹ For a history of the sectarian noting that racked Belfast throughout the nineteenth century and continued well into the next, see Andrew Boyd, *Holy War in Belfast* (Tralee: Anvil Books, 1969).

¹⁴⁰ Judge Shaw, 'Reflections of an Old Student', lecture at Queen's College Literary and Scientific Society, December 1902, cited in *Nomads' Weekly*, 20 December 1902.

Constitution of the Dungannon Club.

Chapter 2: 'The North's Awake'

'Mrs McCracken pulled out from a bundle of junk a battered old blackthorn shillelagh and gave it to me. When I demurred she said ominously, 'You may want it before you get home.' A disreputable old beggar was singing in a quavering voice 'The Shan Van Vocht. 'I bought a copy from him and caught a few words of his song. 'And Lord Edward will be there and our pikes in good repair'. As I felt the knobby head of my shillelagh in my hand, the words of the song[...] seemed all part of my newly acquired budding Nationalism. To bell with England!"¹

The Building up of Ireland

(a) Intellectually—By educating the people by means of Schools, Classes, Lectures, Publications, etc. The establishment of Libraries and every means calculated to educate the country.

(b) Materially—By the fostering of existing and the starting of new industries, by the exclusive use of Irish manufactures and produce, and by nationalised transit services, etc.

(c) Physically—By the popularisation of physical culture and training, by the spread of our national games, and by the training of the lads of the country.

II. The Regaining of the Political Independence of Ireland—

By a passive resistance to the government of this country by any other than the people of Ireland.

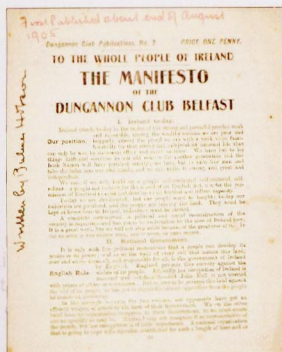
By the formation and support of the whole people.

By a passive resistance to the working of the

the attendance of the interests of the Parliament of the



with men of any class or creed who are working for the welfare of the country, as we believe that the interests of Ireland are above the interests of any creed, or class or party.



¹ Paul Henry, *Further Reminiscences* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press & Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 1978), p. 60.

Backgrounds: Constitution of the Dungannon club

Left: Manifesto of Dungannon Club, signed by its founder Bulmer Hobson

Right: Alice Milligan

Printed on Paper of Irish Manufacture.

Cultural and Political Revival & the 1898 Centenary

*'Belfast no doubt thinks the North Down election or the Revd. McQuinzy drivelbag's last Orange barangue of far greater interest and importance than the breaking up of Empires or the repartition of continents. Belfast is really I think a very stupid ill-bred town and although I have not (fortunately) been in it for several years until this visit I hope it may be fourteen years before I come to it again.'*¹ (Roger Casement)

*'Strange portents were abroad in the city of shipyards, factories, foundries and stubborn negation. A wind of idealism was blowing over the arid wastes of political controversy.'*²
(Hugh MacCartan)

For *fin de siècle* Northern nationalists, industrialisation, Puritanism and materialism had stifled the once vibrant cultural life of the North, creating a modern day version of the 'Curse of Macha', which in ancient legend had left the men of Ulster in an enchanted sleep, akin to the state of paralysis from which they now sought to awake their compatriots. However, mainstream nationalism and militant republicanism were in a moribund condition in late nineteenth century Belfast: the former depleted by the death of Parnell and deeply divided, the latter, in the form of the IRB degenerated into little more than a drinking club.

Parnell's Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) had been the most efficient, disciplined, and formidable nationalist movement in the history of Irish politics, as under its aegis Parnell united sundry strands of Irish nationalism into a coherent campaign to agitate for Home Rule. After the defeat of the 1886 Home Rule Bill, his sheer force of personality had managed to hold the movement together, but at the height of his popularity, he became embroiled in a controversial divorce case which led him into direct conflict with the all-powerful hierarchy of the Catholic Church - a confrontation not even Parnell could survive. His great national party split in two over the issue of whether or not their disgraced leader should resign, Parnell was forcibly deposed and died soon after in 1891. The speed and scale of his tragic fall injected even greater virulence into the faction-fighting which followed his death as his party acrimoniously disintegrated; disillusioning and dispersing nationalist energies in the process. However, as noted earlier in this chapter, there was a greater continuity in political activity throughout Ireland than Yeats would have us believe, and indeed, in Ulster, a revitalised sense of provincial self-confidence was growing, underpinned by the conviction that in times of need, the North should give the

¹ Roger Casement writing to his cousin, Gertrude Bannister, in 1898 cited in Dudgeon, p. 174-5.

² Hugh A. MacCartan, 'Belfast: Some Backward Glances', *Capuchin Annual*, (May, 1943), p. 176.

lead to the rest of the country. Stephen Gwynn,³ secretary of the Irish Literary Society in London, described this determination in *Ulaid*:

Northerns [*sic*] in all countries count it natural that the North should lead; and far back in Ireland's history we find the North leading...we know Cuchulain for a man from the North. Pass into ascertained history, to the days after Patrick, and we find sovereignty resting with the Northern Hy-Niall, till Brian wrenched it from them.⁴

The centrifugal force of the 'Ulster Revival' in its early years was a young Protestant woman, Alice Milligan⁵ (see Plate 2) whose extraordinary life and work have only recently received the critical attention it deserves as Catherine Morris has helped recuperate this marginalized figure from the footnotes of Irish history.⁶ Following the example of the Presbyterian radicals of 1798, her Methodist background provided no impediment to her

³ Stephen Lucius Gwynn (1864-1950): born in Dublin, but spent his formative years in County Donegal; educ. in Dublin and Oxford, teacher, then journalist and author; 1906 to 1918 Nationalist member of parliament for Galway and later a member of the Irish Convention; 1899 published *Highways and Byways in Donegal and Antrim*, and collected poems published 1923; published numerous novels and collections of short stories including: *The Old Knowledge*; *John Macswell's Marriage*; *The Glade in the Forest*; and *Robert Emmet*, 1926 published his autobiography, *Experiences of a Literary Man* and biographies of Henry Grattan, Dean Swift, Oliver Goldsmith, served in WWI and subsequently awarded membership of the Legion of Honour for service in France; honorary doctorate conferred upon him by the National University of Ireland.

⁴ Stephen Gwynn, 'The Northern Gael' *Ulaid*, 1:2 (1905): 9.

⁵ 1866-1953 [pseud. 'Iris Olkym' in *Northern Patriot*]; Born into a Methodist family in Omagh, Co. Tyrone; and second child of nine surviving children, to the Irish antiquarian Seaton F[orrest] Milligan (1836-1916); ed. Methodist College, Belfast, Magee College, Derry, and King's Coll., London; introduced to Irish through great uncle Armour Alcorn, who spoke to farm labourers in Irish; went to Dublin to learn Irish; taught at women's college in Derry, moved to Belfast; contrib. *Síon Fáin*, *United Irishman* (from 1893), and *United Ireland*; collaborated with her father on *Glimpses of Erin* (1890); met Michael Davitt, 7 May 1891, issued a novel, *A Royal Democrat* (1892); contrib. verse to *Belfast Naturalists' Field Club Report and Proceedings* (1894); published a life of Theobald Wolfe Tone (1898); *Beltsaine* (Feb. 1900); *Ulaid* (Feb. 1905); with Ethna Carbery founded and edited the *Northern Patriot*, organ of Henry Joy McCracken Literary Society in October 1895, contributing non-sectarian and nationalist feature articles; later removed by the board; with Ethna Carbery founded and edited *The Shan Van Vocht*, (Jan 1896-April 1899), enlisting James Connolly among the contributors and ceasing publication when William Rooney and Arthur Griffith founded the *United Irishman*; gave some hundreds of lectures on Irish history throughout the country for Gaelic League and was the leading architect of cultural revival in Ulster; contributed to *United Irishman* and other journals; involved in production of possibly first Irish-language play in Letterkenny, 1898, acting a part herself; President of Belfast branch of Irish Women's Association; vice-president of Henry Joy McCracken Literary Society; admired by Bulmer Hobson and Roger Casement, George ("E") Russell, and J. F. Bigger; she brought W. B. Yeats up Cave Hill, published serially in *United Irishman*, 1909, and dismissed in Lady Gregory's diary as 'a tawdry little piece'; contrib. poetry and prose to *Ulaid* (1905); issued *Hero Lays* (1908); collaborated with her brother on *Sons of the Sea Kings* (1914), based on the Scandinavian saga *Burnt Njal*; witnessed applause of crowds outside Pentonville when Casement was hanged; forced with her brother William to leave Ireland under 24-hour threat of execution by loyalists, 1920; founding member of Ulster Anti-Partition Council; elected to Irish Academy of Letters; honorary degree of NUI, presented by Eamon de Valera, 1941; passed her final years disillusioned, isolated and lonely at home in Omagh.

⁶ Catherine Morris is currently completing a book on Milligan, *The Northern Patriot: Alice Milligan and the Irish Cultural Revival*; a much needed update to Sheila Turner Johnston's *Alice: A Life of Alice Milligan* (Omagh: Colourpoint Press, 1994). See also Catherine Morris, 'In the Enemy's Camp: Alice Milligan and Fin-de-Siècle Belfast', *Cities of Belfast*, eds. Nicholas Allen and Aaron Kelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), pp. 62-71; 'Becoming Irish? Alice Milligan and the Revival', *Irish University Review*, 31:1 (2003): 79-98.



Plate 2: *Alice Milligan*

republican ideals and she was a fierce opponent of the sectarianism that characterised both the populist politics of Devlin's nationalist party and its affiliations with the Ancient Order of Hibernians and unionism's courting of the Orange Order. She was an indefatigable nationalist who founded the Irish Women's Association (1894), the Henry Joy McCracken Literary Society (1895), and the Irish Women's Centenary Union (1897). She taught, acted, and published prolifically: her plays, poems, pamphlets, articles, reviews, ballads, manifestos, appearing in nearly all the leading papers and journals of the day, and she gave hundreds of lectures throughout Ireland. She also wrote a number of patriotic plays,⁷ the first of which was published in the *Shan Van Vocht* in 1898 to commemorate the centenary of the 1798 Rising.⁸ She also pioneered a particularly effective form of political *tableau vivant*, which were staged throughout the country in big houses and parish halls before audiences of aristocrats and artisans alike (see chapter 3). Morris refers to Milligan's promotion of a regionalist agenda,⁹ (indeed, she wrote a radical nationalist column, 'raising the Northern voice in the Irish cause'¹⁰ for *The Weekly Independent*, entitled 'Notes from the North' that provided a hyperborean perspective on Ulster heritage and history), which emanated from 'the enemy's camp' (i.e. the Protestant North). Morris also maintains that Milligan sought to integrate her regional initiatives within the broader Revivalist narratives of the rest of Ireland, Britain and America. In many ways, this geographic-political imperative informing her role and work within the Revival is very much a precursor of the cultural practice of the ULT and their journal *Ulaid*.

As an ardent nationalist and suffragette, Milligan was the North's counterpart of Maud Gonne, not so much for her iconic beauty as for the galvanic power and ubiquitous presence in all fields of nationalist activity. With Ethna Carberry, (her fellow-Protestant, Anna Johnston¹¹), she edited the *Northern Patriot*, and their first editorial declared: 'the North will be put in touch with the other provinces, and a bond of love and union will cement all in pushing forward the good old cause that has braved unceasing persecution for seven centuries.'¹² However, their radical editorship was short-lived and led to the sacking of both women, who defiantly went on to found a new

⁷ *The Green Upon the Cape* (1898); *Oisín and Patraic* (1899); *Oisín in Tir-Nan-Oig* (1900); *The Last Feast of the Fianna* (1900); *The Harp that Once* (1901); *The Deliverance of Red Hugh* (1901); *The Daughter of Donagh: A Cromwellian Drama in Four Acts* (1902).

⁸ *The Green Upon the Cape* in *The Shan Van Vocht*, 4 April 1898.

⁹ Morris, 'In the Enemy's Camp', *Cities of Belfast*, p. 67.

¹⁰ Sheila Johnston, *Alice*, p. 80.

¹¹ Anna Johnston (1886-1911): daughter of the redoubtable Fenian Robert Johnston, married to Donegal novelist Seamus MacManus.

¹² *The Northern Patriot* 15 October 1895

publication, the *Shan Van Vocht*, as a harbinger of new nationalism. The paper radiated the redoubtable energy of both women and, in its three year life-span, attracted work from every major public figure, politician and poet of the day. Milligan's biographer, Sheila Johnston notes, '[i]n the pages of the *Shan Van Vocht* can be heard the first faint breaths of the infant Sinn Féin movement',¹³ and the poet, and husband of Carberry, Seamus McManus accurately (if patronisingly), observes that:

[T]hese two girls, with their wonderful little magazine, patriotic, poetic, fiery, stimulating, who revived Ireland's spirit when it seemed dead, and turned the tide of Ireland's fortune [...] With this revival of Ireland's poetry and Ireland's patriotism came the beginning of the Great Revival.¹⁴

The *Shan Van Vocht* breathed new life into the asphyxiated voice of Northern nationalism that had been stifled by the nineteenth century's industrialisation, urbanisation and evangelism and its consolidation of unionist hegemony. It was a milestone in political propaganda, and one of the first literary outlets for the young James Connolly, amongst others. Even prominent Southern activists such as Maud Gonne saluted the North's efforts to 'lead the way':

[W]e were full of almost envious admiration of some numbers of the *Shan Van Vocht*, the daring little paper Anna and Alice were editing! [...] I thought Dublin would have to look to its laurels if it were not to be outdone in literary journalism by Belfast.¹⁵

The paper cultivated political opinion, creating a market for an effective propagandist broad-sheet that was to later benefit its successor, Griffith's *The United Irishman*.¹⁶ Like so many other political papers, organisations and societies, *The United Irishman* grew out of the Revival that the *Shan Van Vocht* was instrumental in creating. For three years, Milligan and Carberry sought to mobilise nationalist opinion and to reverse the deleterious impact a century of political union had wrought on the republican ideal, especially in industrialised Ulster. Their stand was hailed as a heroic defence of a modern-day 'Gap of the North' by McManus:

¹³ Sheila Johnston, *Alice*, p. 90.

¹⁴ Seamus McManus, ed., *The Four Winds of Eirinn* (Dublin: M.H. Gill & Son, 1918), p. 150.

¹⁵ Maud Gonne, *A Servant of the Queen: Reminiscences* (London: Gollancz, 1974), p. 176.

¹⁶ Griffith's paper was first published in 1899, capitalizing on the marker created by *The Shan Van Vocht*. It had a wider circulation and greater support, a fact duly recognised by Milligan and she folded the paper with the final issue on 6 March 1899.

When the nation's hopes seemed shattered – and all patriotic work for Ireland was completely arrested – that these two young gallant girls stepped into the breach and founded their wonderful little magazine [...] Today, it is only the few remember that it was these two girls [...] who revived Ireland's spirit when it seemed dead and turned the tide of Ireland's fortune [...] With this revival of Ireland's poetry and Ireland's patriotism came the beginning of the Great Revival.¹⁷

Indeed, it is an intriguing historical irony that contemporary scholars read the term 'the *Shan Van Vocht*', (the poor old woman), as a nationalist literary-political trope and regard its significance – and signification – as relating to the social subordination and sexual sublimation of 'woman'.¹⁸ However, the denial of agency axiomatically associated with this particular 'masculinist' nationalist construct is inimical to the empowering role this eponymous publication had in facilitating Milligan and Carbery to assume an active role in the public sphere of Revival, where they promoted their nationalist and suffragette beliefs unhindered. It is also significant that although their suffragette convictions were secondary to their nationalist politics, the former fundamentally shaped the non-sectarian, egalitarian and secular nature of their nationalism. Through their journal, they sought to engage more women in politics and many *Shan Van Vocht* editorials appeal for solidarity in the face of bitter political division, calling for the 'women of Ireland' to come forth so that political unity could be facilitated.

The influence of the paper on numerous Ulstermen and women and also on a national scale is nowhere more evident than in the early political career of Bulmer Hobson,¹⁹ the co-founder of the Ulster Literary Theatre (see *Plate 3*). He attributed his

¹⁷ Seamus McManus, 'A Memoir for Ethna Carbery', only published in 1918 edition of the Seamus McManus (ed.) *The Four Winds of Erin* (Dublin: M.H. Gill & Son, 1918), pp. 149–50.

¹⁸ See Shaun Richards and David Cairns, "'Tropes and Traps': Aspects of 'Woman' and Nationality in Twentieth Century Irish Drama", in *Gender and Irish Writing*, eds. Toni O' Brien Johnson and David Cairns (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1991) p. 128–137.

¹⁹ Bulmer Hobson (1883–1969): Educated at *Friends* Quaker school Lisburn; joined Gaelic League 1901; Secretary of the first Antrim County Board of the GAA, 1901 – founded the Protestant National Society and Na Fianna Éireann, 1902 secretary of the *Coside Ceannair* (District Council) of the Gaelic League in Belfast and joined IRB (sworn in by Dinny McCullough), and co-founded the Irish Literary Theatre Society Belfast, later known as the Ulster Literary Theatre from 1904; founded Dungannon Clubs 1905; founder and editor of *The Republic*, 1906; Vice-President Sinn Féin 1907; introduced Sinn Féin to America, strengthened Clan na Gael-IRB alliance and expanded the Fianna, 1909; left Sinn Féin, 1911; edited *Irish Freedom*, 1912; secretary Irish Volunteers, 1913; swore Patrick Pearse into the IRB; organiser of Howth gun-running, 1914; later fell out of favour with republican colleagues after his acceptance of Redmond into the Volunteers and his opposition to the 1916 Rising (he favoured a strategic guerrilla campaign in opposition to symbolic, sacrificial symbolism promulgated by Pearse). Resigned from *Irish Freedom* and Supreme Council of IRB and became a civil servant in Free State government. It is extraordinary that apart from his own memoirs, there is still no single critical study of this massively important figure in the cultural and revolutionary movements that dominated Irish political life in the 1890–1916 period. See also León O Broin, *Protestant Nationalists in Revolutionary Ireland: The Stopford Collection* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan,

nationalist conversion to coming across a copy of the *Shan Van Vocht*²⁰ as a boy at Friends College, Lisburn, a Quaker-run school. A precocious political ideologue, he soon subscribed to the journal at the age of twelve, an action that 'marked me as an eccentric',²¹ and five years later he founded the Ulster Debating Society for Protestant boys in 1900, before establishing the Protestant National Society²² with the aim of converting 'young Ulster Protestants and to recruit them into the national movement',²³ an enterprise which led him on to co-found the Ulster Literary Theatre in 1904; the same year that he joined the IRB. Described as 'curiously Napoleonic in appearance',²⁴ his physiognomy was perfectly appropriate given his dynamic and ubiquitous involvement in all forms of cultural and political nationalism. He was active in the Gaelic League,²⁵ founding the *Tir-na-n-Og* branch in Belfast, and the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA),²⁶ working as secretary to the Antrim Board before leaving to found Belfast's first hurling association. In terms of more explicitly political activities, he founded the *Na Fianna Éireann* in 1902 (see appendix), was involved in *Cumann na nGaedheal*, and in 1904 joined the revamped Irish Republican Brotherhood²⁷ as well as co-founding the ULT. He also founded the Dungannon Club in 1905, and the separatist *Republic* newspaper a year later, before being elected Vice-President of Sinn Féin (1907) and appointed to the Supreme Council of the IRB in which capacity he swore in a promising new member: Patrick Pearse.

The *Shan Van Vocht* also helped co-ordinate the proliferation of cultural and political activities in this period. It provided a centralising source of news on Gaelic League and GAA activities, as well as information on various lecturers, *feisanna*, field-trips, commemorations, political meetings and protests, particularly during periods of intense activity, such as during the 1798 centenary and the Boer War (discussed later). The new

1985), pp. 34-36.

²⁰ Hobson also had another connection with Milligan as she and Hobson's mother were joint secretaries of the Irishwomen's Association.

²¹ Bulmer Hobson, *Ireland: Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Tralee: Anvil Books, 1968), p. 2.

²² He founded this with William McDonald, however, it is often referred to mistakenly as the Belfast Protestant Association (F.X. Martin refers to it as the BPA, whilst David Kennedy refers to it as the Protestant National Association, 'Ulster Unionism and the New Nationalism', in *The Making of 1916*, ed., K. Nowlan (Dublin: Stationary Office, 1969), p. 74), even Hobson himself gets the name wrong in a letter to Margaret McHenry, *The Ulster Theatre in Ireland*, p. 82.

²³ Hobson, *Ireland: Yesterday and Tomorrow*, p. 3.

²⁴ Robert Lynd, 'Hibernia Rediviva', *Irish and English: Portraits and Impressions* (London: Francis Griffiths, 1907), p. 120.

²⁵ Founded by Douglas Hyde, Fr. Eugene McEldowney and Eoin McNeill in 1893 to preserve and promote the Irish Language.

²⁶ The GAA was founded in 1884 by Dublin-based teacher Michael Cusack at Hayes Hotel in Thurles. It sought to promote native Irish sports of hurling, Gaelic football, and handball in an effort to combat the Anglicization of Irish sporting culture by the invidious 'foreign' sports of soccer, rugby and cricket.

²⁷ Irish Republican Brotherhood, a radical, separatist secret society in the tradition of physical force republicanism.



Plate 3: *Bulmer Hobson*

organised bodies of the G.A.A and Gaelic League also helped provide a federal network that allowed nodes of nationalist activity to develop throughout the province and profoundly changed its socio-political cartography. Senator Joseph Connolly hailed the growth of 'a new consciousness of what it meant to be Irish',²⁸ and attributed this to the activities and influence of the GAA. In fact, the political geography of the territorial structuring of the GAA, whereby it used the parish as the fundamental unit of the overall organisation, proved tremendously important as it successfully sublimated localism into nationalism. The GAA transformed the geography of nationalism, turning territorial units of individual counties into local and then larger units of patriotic feeling and national solidarity. Teams formed around local parishes were re-constituted as larger county formations that formed the building blocks of a larger national architecture, supported by solid, nationalist ideological foundations.²⁹

Although the GAA is traditionally viewed as having a greater impact in rural areas, its effect on the urban lives of Catholic communities in Belfast was remarkable. It radically transformed the bleakness of Belfast's Sabbath with games played on Sunday, after Mass. Indeed, given the puritanical control and convention exerted over the Lord's Day by the Protestant-dominated municipal council, the emergence of GAA sports during the Revival was uniquely important in Belfast where Sunday games were not only an enactment of cultural identity, but a *performance of power* that resisted the authorities' attempts to control and regulate nationalist socio-political behaviour in line with unionist orthodoxy.

Alongside the GAA was the work of the Gaelic League, whose activities have long been examined as a mainstay of the Revival movement. What is fascinating, however, about the history of Irish language in Ulster is that it was *already* being taught and promoted by many Protestant figures well before the foundation of the Gaelic League.³⁰ Many of its key advocates were women drawn from the North's big houses, such as Róisín Ní Ógáin, (Rose Young)³¹ Margaret Dobbs³² and Ada McNeill,³³ whose namesake, and

²⁸ Joseph Connolly, *The Memoirs of Senator Joseph Connolly (1885-1961): A Founder of Modern Ireland* (J.A. McGaughan ed., (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996), p. 38.

²⁹ For an analysis of the importance of the parish system to the organisational and ideological structure of the GAA see Paul Healy's *Gaelic Games and the Gaelic Athletic Association* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1998).

³⁰ For an excellent short history of Irish language in Ulster, see Padraig Ó Snodaigh, *Hidden Ulster* (Cork: Clódhanna Teoranta, 1977). For more local history of Irish language in Belfast, until the last century, see Aodán Mac Poilín, 'The Irish Language in Belfast until 1900' in the *Cities of Belfast*, in Allen and Kelly, pp. 41-61.

³¹ The daughter of Major Chichester Young. The Young family resided at Galgorm Castle, Ballymena, and were good friends of the Casements. Rose was an ardent nationalist and close friend of Roger.

³² Margaret Dobbs (1871-1962): secretary of the 1904 Feis, a position she maintained for fifty years. Published a book of plays, *Memento*, containing, *Lady Cantire's Courtship*, *The Way to Advertise*, *Cormac's Adventure*. Its dedication reads as follows, 'I dedicate these plays to the members past and present of *Caiside Deise na nGleann*. The first is a memento of Cushendall Dramatic Club in later times. I trust that the people

fellow Antrim native, Eoin MacNeill³⁴ (see Plate 4) actually co-founded the Gaelic League much later in 1893!³⁵ In Belfast, Irish classes were already running on a weekly basis under the non-sectarian auspices of the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club (BNFC).³⁶ This rather eclectic organisation, carried out excursions and attended lectures on various cultural, archaeological, botanical and historical subjects for the intellectual improvement of its largely (upper) middle class membership,³⁷ perhaps explaining why the BNFC 'appealed to the Protestant community'.³⁸ As part of its extraordinary range of activities, the Field Club ran 'Celtic' language classes that were so well attended that they decided to re-organise under the umbrella of the Gaelic League. The inaugural meeting of the first branch of the Belfast Gaelic League took place on the 19 August 1895 when it formally absorbed the BNFC class.

The connection with the BNFC was highly valued by the new organisation as it was vitally important in maintaining the non-sectarian momentum developed by its precursor organisation. Classes took place in the Belfast Art Society's rooms in 49 Queen Street which 'had become the centre for classes and meetings'³⁹ and regular *Gaeltacht* visits were undertaken to the Glens of Antrim as well as Draperstown and Omeath. Blaney records that its membership was 120 strong and that support was secular; transcending

of the Glens may find some interest in these memories of past activities.' (Reported in *The Irish News*, 21 January 1893).

³³ Ada was the scion of another Ascendancy family: the McNeills of Cushendun and as the owner of the family estate she regularly hosted and supported nationalist activities in spite of her family's strongly unionist affiliations (her cousin was a Unionist MP). She remained a close friend of Roger Casement right up until his death and was unrequitedly in love with him.

³⁴ Eoin Mac Neill (1867-1945): born in Glenarm, County Antrim, educ. St Malachy's College, Belfast, and the Royal University of Ireland; worked as a civil servant and in 1893 was a founder member of the Gaelic League, editing its publication, the *Gaelic Journal*; from 1908 to 1945 he was Professor of Early Irish History at University College, Dublin; commander of the Irish Volunteers, which he had helped to organise, and on Easter Sunday 1916 he countermanded orders for the Easter Rising because he felt that there could be no success; imprisoned and released in 1917; elected member of parliament for the National University of Ireland 1918; from 1922 to 1925 Minister for Education; served on the 1925 Boundary Commission, from which he resigned, just as its report was about to be published; retired thereafter from active politics. In 1927 he was appointed Chairman of the Irish Manuscripts Commission; published *Phases of Irish History*; *Celtic Ireland*; *St Patrick and Early Irish Laws and Institutions*.

³⁵ By 1908, however, the League had over 600 branches throughout Ireland with the Belfast region one of the most active areas.

³⁶ Under control of P.J. O'Shea who started them in 1892. The Belfast Naturalists' Field Club has received little focused study but constituted a fascinating connection between cultural activities North and South. W.B. Yeats was invited by the Club to give a lecture to members, which he duly delivered on 'Irish Faery Lore' on 21 November 1893, as reported in the *Irish News* and *Belfast Morning News*, 22 November, 1893.

³⁷ See Sybil Gribbon, *Edwardian Belfast: A Social Profile* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1982), p. 16. F.J. Bigger's edited accounts of the BNFC's myriad activities gives insight into the extraordinary diversity of their interests, see *Belfast Naturalists' Field Club Report and Proceedings*.

³⁸ Dudgeon, *The Black Diaries*, p.167.

³⁹ Roger Blaney, 'The Irish Language in Ulster from the 1890s to the Present Day', in *A Century of Northern Life: The Irish News and One Hundred Years of Ulster History 1890s-1990s*, ed. Eamon Phoenix (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1995), p. 174. For a brief first-hand account of the inaugural meeting see 'Benmore', 'Founding the Glen Feis', *The Glensman: A Monthly Magazine of Agricultural, Domestic, Rural and General Interest* 1:9 (June, 1932): 30.

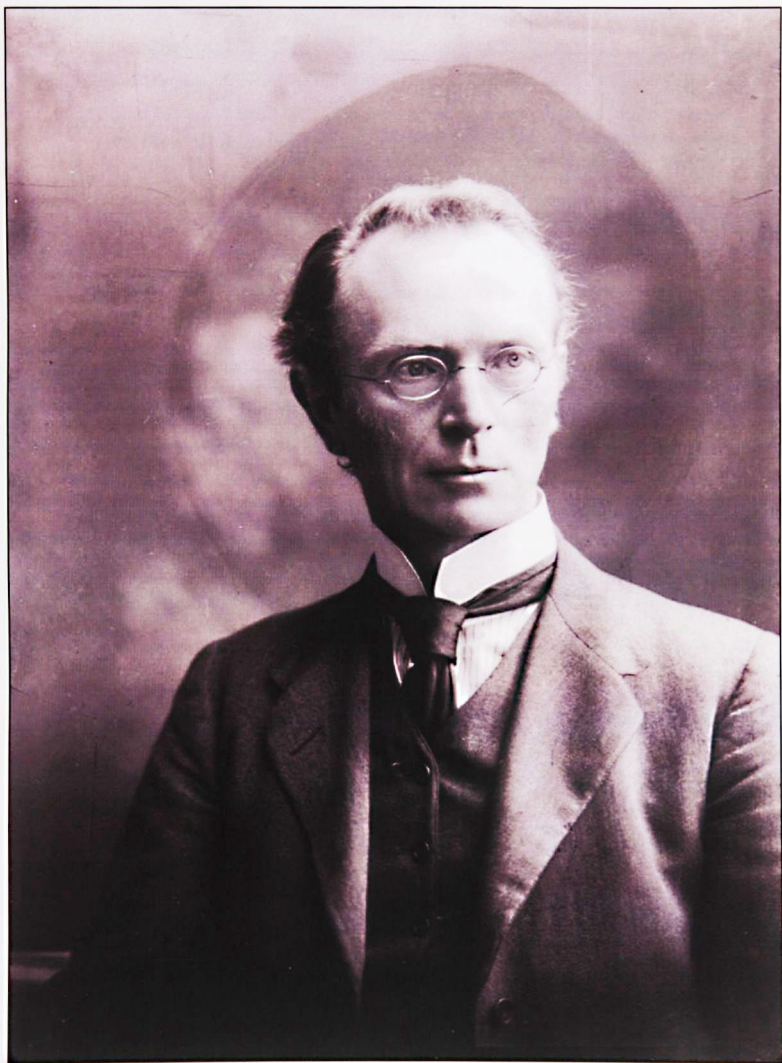


Plate 4: *Eoin MacNeill*

class and religious lines. Many of its leading figures were Protestants, including its President, Vice-President⁴⁰ and patron.⁴¹ Although many Protestant members like Robert Lynd,⁴² Ernest Blythe,⁴³ Alice Milligan, Francis Joseph Bigger⁴⁴ (FJB), Róisín Ní Ógáin,

⁴⁰ Dr. St Clair Boyd was elected president, PT McGinley elected Vice-President

⁴¹ Canon John Baptist Crozier, later Archbishop of Armagh. Timothy McMahon, in his meticulously researched analysis of the social and geographical composition of the Gaelic League membership throughout Ireland records that other prominent Protestant clergymen involved in a senior level with the Belfast Gaelic League included the Anglican bishop of Down, Connor, and Dromore, Dr. Thomas Welland, the moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly, the Rev. George Buck. See Timothy G. McMahon, "'All Creeds And All Classes?'" Just Who Made Up the Gaelic League?, *Eire-Ireland: Journal of Irish Studies* (Fall-Winter, 2002): 118-168.

⁴² Robert Lynd (1879-1949), Protestant republican, Gaelic League activist, journalist, literary reviewer, essayist, theatre critic, and editor. Born in Belfast and son of a Presbyterian moderator, became one of the most distinguished journalists and essayists of his age. Educated Royal Belfast Academical Institution and Queen's College, Belfast, where he studied classics; and graduated on the same day as Paul Henry, he worked for the *Northern Whig*, before leaving Belfast in 1901 to work for the *Manchester Daily Dispatch*. Later moved to London where he shared a studio with the artist Paul Henry and later became assistant literary editor of the *Daily News* in 1908. Contributor to *Ulaid*, *The Republic*, *Sinn Féin*, *The Peasant*, *Nation*, *New Statesman*, *John O'London's Weekly*, *Inis Fáil* (monthly journal of the Gaelic League in London 1904-10) and its successor *An t-Eireannach* (1910-13). Helped form the Dungannon Clubs with Bulmer Hobson and co-founded the London Dungannon Club no. 4 Branch. He was a prominent committee member of Sinn Féin's Central Branch and one of its London leaders, as well as a lifelong member of the Gaelic League, meeting his wife, Sylvia Dryhurst at a local meeting in London. (Both raised their children as fluent Irish speakers in the city); 1912-1947 literary editor, regular contributor to the *Nation*; 1913-1945 wrote a weekly essay for *New Statesman* under pseudonym 'Y.Y.', wrote for the Sinn Féin movement under the name of Riobard O'Flóinn; authored nearly forty books in all, of which the books / pamphlets dealing exclusively with Ireland are: *The Orangemen and the Nation* (1907), *The Ethics of Sinn Féin* (1907/8), *Irish and English: Portraits and Impressions* (1907), *Home Life in Ireland* (1909), *Rambles in Ireland* (1912), *Ireland a Nation* (1919). He remained proud of his Ulster identity and Belfast pedigree and inspired the Robert Lynd Summer School, which sadly lasted only a few short years. He is yet another fascinating figure of the Northern Revival who has remained largely forgotten and of whom there is no modern biography or critical study. See Sean McMahon 'Introduction' to *Robert Lynd: Galaxy of the Races, Selected Essays* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1990), pp. 1-44.

⁴³ Ernest Blythe (1889-1975): Born in Lisburn and became a prominent activist in linguistic and political circles; was a member of the IRB and later became a cabinet minister in the Free State government and manager of the Abbey Theatre where he vociferously pursued a policy of promoting Irish language productions. He remained dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Irish language throughout his life, as is fittingly remembered by the Irish language theatre company, *Taibhears na Gaillimhe* he helped Michael MacLiammóir and Hilton Edwards found.

⁴⁴ Francis Joseph Bigger, (1863-1926): lawyer, historian, antiquarian. His uncle was Joseph Gillis Bigger, a key ally of Parnell and architect of the obstructionist policy and his grandfather was an Irish Volunteer and fought in the 1798 Rising. Born Belfast, seventh son of a seventh son of Church of Ireland woollen family from Biggerstown, near Mallusk, Co. Antrim; educated at Royal Academical Institution (which his grandfather helped found), then studied at Queen's College and later in Dublin. He built up over the years an unrivalled collection of Irish books and manuscripts which now form one of the most valuable collections in the Central Library Belfast. Studied law in Dublin; later MA, QUB; solicitor, 1888; Freemason; supporter of Irish language revival and attended P.J. O'Shea's Irish classes; member of Coisde Gnotha [Executive Council] of Gaelic League; served as President of Belfast Naturalists' Field Club; ed. *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 1894-1914; numerous pamphlets and journal contributions, some 387 articles listed in Hayes's *Sources for the History of Irish Civilisation*; his house Ardagh was a meeting-place for Northern nationalists (demolished in 1986); restored public houses under Trust agreement; paid for Gaelic Feis at Cushendall, erected granite slab over grave of St Patrick at Downpatrick Cathedral; he restored castles (such as Jordan's Castle, Ardglass, purchased in 1911, see appendix), churches, crosses and monuments at his own expense; established with others the Ulster Public House Reform Association, with a model premises near Mallusk; removed the bones of Henry Joy McCracken to his home, and later re-interred them in the McCracken family plot near Carlisle Circus; wrote *William Orr* (1906) for Maunsell, issued antiquarian writings on *Irish Penal Crosses* 1713-1781 (1909), *Cranfield Church* (1911), *The Magees* (1916), calendar of family papers; also studies of Amyas Griffiths, Surveyor Gen. of Belfast, 1780-1785 as

Margaret Dobbs, and Ada McNeill, were passionate nationalists, Pádraig Ó Snodaigh records that many Protestant members were equally prominent Unionists and Orangemen: Lindsay Crawford (founder of the Independent Orange Order), and the Reverend Dr. Kane, (Grand Master of the Belfast Orange Order), both supported the Gaelic League from its foundation⁴⁵ and, indeed, one of the first Northern branches of the Gaelic League was situated on the Shankill! The fact that their President Dr. St. Clair Boyd was an Anglican unionist was considered to be invaluable by grassroots members as he was able to reassure Protestants that they could join the new organization without fear⁴⁶ and, in addition, his high social standing helped establish the respectability of the League in the city's cultural and civic life.⁴⁷

In spite of its cross-community membership, Blaney records how the League was unafraid to engage in politics, publicly denouncing a magistrate for sentencing Patrick Connors to a week in prison for giving evidence in Irish. Their defence of the Irish language and denunciation of the state's suppression also echo in the article written by Roger Casement for *Ulaid* which similarly protested the authorities' prosecution of a Donegal farmer for displaying a sign on his cart in Irish. Interestingly, the single, significant issue to divide members was whether Ulster Irish should be adopted by all classes or would such a regional approach be too provincial instead of national:⁴⁸ a debate that was to later dominate discussion in *Ulaid* with relation to dramatic representation. Apart from this small *contretemps*, the League set an harmonious example of how Northerners with different political and religious beliefs could collaborate with the aim of furthering national culture. Indeed, at a major public meeting of the League in December 1904, (where one of the key speakers was Patrick Pearse), the chairman of proceedings, Cardinal Logue, advocated Irish as a strategy to reconcile the sundered identities of the island, arguing that it 'afforded a common platform to Catholic and Protestant, Gael and

The Belfast Miscellany (1916) and Alexander Mitchell [q.d.], issued *Aeneas O'Hanahan* [q.d.], a novel, and *Four Shots from Dawn* (1919), 'fireside stories, humorous and pathetic'; also *Mrs. Siddons and the Stage of Belfast* (1925) and *Crossing the Bar* (1926), being an account of beliefs about death and the afterlife with legends and incidents, mostly Irish; published notes on the Franciscan Friary in Ballycastle as well as the churches of St. Tassach or Raholp and St. Nicholas of Artole in Downpatrick (1917); his library of 3,000 volumes presented to Belfast Central Library by his brother, Lt. Col. F. C. Bigger in 1927 to form the Bigger Collection of the Irish Library. He is the dedicatee of Cathal O'Byrne's *As I Roved Out* and George A. Birmingham's *The Northern Iron* (1907).

⁴⁵ Pádraig Ó Snodaigh, *Hidden Ulster* (Cork: Clódhanna Teoranta, 1977), p. 28.

⁴⁶ Edmond Morrissey to Eoin MacNeill, 20 Nov. 1895 (NLI MS 10,901, MacNeill Papers, Belfast File), cited in Timothy G. McMahon, "'All Creeds and All Classes'"

⁴⁷ This was evident from McMahon's social breakdown of the Belfast membership which had a higher proportion of medical doctors in its ranks than any other geographical region.

⁴⁸ Munster Irish was widely taught under the aegis both of the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club Irish branch and the Gaelic League and eventually provoked a movement which agitated for the rights of Ulster Irish, which was attacked by some critics for its 'provincialism'.

Sean-Ghall, and *Nua-Ghall*, north and south.⁴⁹

However, the reality was that whilst Irish was spoken in a number of Northern Protestant localities, 'Ulster Protestant opinion on the Gaelic League was clearly divided'.⁵⁰ In County Down, Orangemen intimidated local League meetings, surrounding venues, beating drums, yelling blasphemies and shooting off revolvers.⁵¹ The League was also attacked by more mainstream unionism, notably the *Belfast Newsletter* which regularly condemned its objectives as political and seditious rather than philological and cultural. In 1899, the newly elected unionist Lord Mayor of Belfast, Otto Jaffé, although Jewish himself, even refused to chair a meeting of the Gaelic League in spite of strong public petitions of support from establishment figures including the chair and former Chair of Modern History at Oxford, Professors Powel and Froude.⁵²

The Lord Mayor's rejection and the *Newsletter's* vitriolic attacks provoked impassioned debate and lively correspondence in the local press. *Nomads' Weekly*, which regularly satirised some of the more pre-Raphaelite proclivities of the League, entered into the fray, publishing letters from Professor Powell and Dr. St Clair Boyd defending the League, which the *Newsletter* had refused to publish.⁵³ It was perhaps inevitable that the League's promulgation of Irish language, legend, sport and music in the cultural sphere would also promote nationalist ideals in the political sphere, and that this would be invariably interpreted as a threat by unionists in spite of the generous, democratic demographic of its executive membership.⁵⁴ Whilst many Protestants who were politically unionist in their beliefs, were happy to accept aspects of Irish culture or adopt Irish identities, (such as William Conor who Gaelicized his name to William Connor, and for a short period Liam Ó Concohair⁵⁵), as Forrest Reid observes, an incorrigible 'distrust of things Irish'⁵⁶ endured in Belfast. As all 'things Irish' were promoted by the Gaelic League it was perceived as being inherently untrustworthy:

⁴⁹ 'The National Language Meeting at St Mary's Hall', *The Irish News*, 16 December 1904.

⁵⁰ Sean Mac Reamoinn, 'Our Final Sign' (Coleraine: University of Ulster CCLIB Pamphlet, 1996), p. 9.

⁵¹ As reported in the Gaelic League weekly newspaper, *An Claidheamh Solais*, cited in McMahon, "'All Creeds and All Classes'"?

⁵² Cited in Blaney, p. 176.

⁵³ *Northern Whig*, 6 May 1900.

⁵⁴ Many Gaelic League activists protested that this was not the case, including the Belfast-born Protestant clergyman and novelist, George Birmingham (1865-1950, pseud. of Rev. James Owen Hannay) who published *Is the Gaelic League Political?* (1906) in support of the League and its revivalist policy.

⁵⁵ This name change took place in a period in which Conor made several spiritual pilgrimages to the Western seaboard and the same islands that his Belfast compatriot Paul Henry had visited. A fascinating comparison can be made between both Belfast painters, however, as Conor, unlike Henry, rejected this pastoral, primitivist school of painting that celebrated the bucolic beauty of the 'wild West' and returned to the industrial setting of Belfast which provided him with the urban inspiration and subjects that informed the rest of his career.

⁵⁶ Forrest Reid, *Apostate* (London: Faber and Faber, 1924), p. 44.

The League was never quite considered 'respectable' - that awful Belfast word - by the Planters. To be a Gaelic Leaguer was to be a suspect always. The League may shout at its loudest and longest that it was non-political and non-sectarian. The slogan did not impress Belfast. With the league's membership 99% Catholic what could you expect? "Scratch a Gaelic Leaguer and you'll find a Fenian was the formula."⁵⁷

However, there is a danger that the complexity and hybridity of Irish cultural and political activity can be collapsed and simplified into such sectarian terms, as depicted in O'Byrne's criticisms above. There was a remarkable blurring in this period of what Edward Said describes as the *filiative* and *affiliative* bonds of political, religious cultural and national identities.⁵⁸ Nowhere was this more evident than in the extraordinary acceptance of, and involvement in, the *Féis Ceoil* by pro-unionist Protestants and the support offered by civic authorities to the promotion and protection of Irish musical culture.⁵⁹ I am aware of no study that has yet examined this area of intercultural exchange in spite of the fact that this historical micro-narrative confounds the easy compartmentalisation of Irish cultural and political history in this period.⁶⁰

The first *Féis Ceoil* was held in the capital in 1897 and the second *Féis* was planned for Belfast the following year; the same year as major centenary celebrations of the United Irishmen's 1798 Rising - a movement founded in the city - were being planned. 1898, then, is a seismic year in which the shifting plates of Irish cultural politics in Belfast collided, throwing up new formations that fundamentally changed the political landscape. The self-aggrandising memoirs of Sir James Henderson, *A Record Year in my Existence as Lord Mayor of Belfast 1898: Written and Compiled for his Daughter and Sons by their Affectionate Father*⁶¹ portentously records every detail of his year in office (1898-9) and provides

⁵⁷ Cathal O'Byrne, *As I Roved Out*, p. 175.

⁵⁸ Edward Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 20. Said refers to *filiative* bonds as those linkages that are assumed to be natural and which produce cohesion, stability, authority: an order that arranges and inscribes *affiliative* relations, those configured in terms of race, gender, class, sexuality, etc.

⁵⁹ The *Féis* movement also played its part within the Irish Revival. However, like many of the other cultural movements comprising the Revival, it also had its internal factions and the movement's decision to host music festivals with the aim of developing 'Irish National Music' was a far from harmonious enterprise. Some factions wanted music composed to an exclusively nationalistic score, whilst others argued musical activity in general should be encouraged. See Harry White, *The Keeper's Recital: Music and the Literary Revival* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998), p. 112.

⁶⁰ White's otherwise excellent analysis of music in the Irish Revival does not engage with its difference in the North. Indeed, his neglect of the North is reflected in the fact that he makes no mention of Belfast composer Herbert Hughes or Belfast-based composer Carl Hardebeck, in spite of both men's prolific output and prolonged activity in the Northern Revival.

⁶¹ James Henderson, *A Record Year in my Existence as Lord Mayor of Belfast 1898: Written and Compiled for his Daughter and Sons by their Affectionate Father* (Belfast: Newsletter, 1989).

valuable source material for exploring the tensions, stresses, convergences and contradictions of the time, whereby Henderson vigorously promotes Irish cultural nationalism but vehemently condemns its political manifestation.

Henderson had succeeded his friend, William Pirrie, as Mayor and boasted impeccable unionist credentials: he was a stout Presbyterian, successful businessman and the proprietor of *The Belfast Newsletter* to boot. Yet, as President of the *Feis Ceoil* Association he also helped organise its second national festival in Belfast's Linen Hall,⁶² formally opening the occasion in May 1898 before a reception of over 850 guests, (including representatives of Gaelic Revival movements in Scotland and Wales) and featuring performances of Irish music and singing, Gaelic conversation and recitations. Explaining his support for the movement Henderson states, (in third person), that it is:

a great source of pleasure [...] to show any little attention in their power to those connected with that musical association which had for its object and aim the cultivation of the old tune that they had heard so much of in days gone by [...] In his opinion those who were pushing forward that movement [...] were deserving of the very highest praise and encouragement from every patriotic Irishman and Irishwoman.⁶³

It would appear then, that this unionist mayor was singing from the same Revivalist hymn sheet as the Gaelic League. Indeed, the above cultural credo was perfectly in tune with the League's philosophy which was also committed to the recuperation and cultivation of Irish music. Indeed, the *Feis Ceoil* week finished in the Exhibition Hall under the auspices of the Gaelic League with a series of *tableaux vivants*, the first of which presented the legend of the Red Branch knights and Cuchulain's defence of Ulster against the depredations of Queen Maeve and which 'were loudly applauded'.⁶⁴ However, the Gaelic League was an organisation wholly reprehensible to Henderson, his newspaper regularly indicting its activities as backward, seditious and contemptible. Henderson's anomalous, contradictory position was caused by his complete decoupling of the *Feis*' cultural politics, whereby he endorsed the cultural and effaced the political narratives underpinning the *Feis* movement. This was perhaps assisted by the significant Protestant demographic of the Belfast *Feis*, as it was largely attended by refined rather

⁶² The Linen Hall was home to the municipal authorities until the present-day City Hall was constructed on its site in 1906.

⁶³ James Henderson, *A Record Year*, pp. 177-8.

⁶⁴ 'The Gaelic League Festival', *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 8 May 1898.

than radical audiences, (Henderson's list of the most prominent performers/guests attending is conspicuous for the absence of key nationalists such as F.J. Bigger and Bulmer Hobson, and for his omission of Milligan who was involved in staging *tableaux vivants* over the *Feis* week), and the fact that the festival was so symbolically contained and spatially constrained within the centre of unionist municipal power. This was also facilitated by the fact that the *Feis* created a place outside of cultural nationalist cartography, providing a physical and psychical space beyond the binary terrain of native and colonial traditions.

White maintains that the *Feis* helped transcend the exclusivist key of cultural nationalism, by blending 'ethnic repertory and the European aesthetic'.⁶⁵ Certainly, this is evident in the concert programme that closed the Belfast *Feis* in 1897 which opened with the winner of the best 'new Irish composition' category: the German composer Dr Koeller's delectable 'Tis night in Ireland'. This was followed by a programme of music that included Handel's 'Waft Her Angels' and was more international than indigenous in composition.⁶⁶ The '98 *Feis* was committed to launching more competitions that would concentrate on the performances of unpublished Irish airs, using extraordinarily incongruous arrangements of instruments such as bassoon, euphonium, cornet, French horn and trombone. Little wonder then that *The Magpie* lampooned the *Feis*, calling it the 'itinerant German Philharmonic Society':⁶⁷ a disparaging reference to the 'foreignising influence'⁶⁸ of Dr Koeller in organising *Feis* activities and for winning its composition competition.⁶⁹ The hybridity of this cultural concoction and its incompatibility with unionist and nationalist narratives of identity reveal how the *Feis* created an 'in-between' space, an interstitial site of 'overlap and displacement of the domains of difference'.⁷⁰ The positive possibility of the *Feis* opening up a new public performative space beyond the singularities of unionism and nationalism where hybridised and heterogeneous identities could be expressed and embraced was recognised by many activists.⁷¹ However,

⁶⁵ White, *The Keeper's Recital*, p. 113. White's discussion of the way in which the *Feis* created a space beyond 'the constraints of cultural nationalism' have informed my argument here, see pp. 112-3.

⁶⁶ Organ solo: Toccata (Hess); soprano solo, 'I will extol thee' (Costa); violin solo: 'Concerto No. 9' (DeBenot); 'La Folia' (Carelli-Leonard); 'Waft her, Angels', (Handel); 'Nocturne in A for Piano', (Field), 'O God' (Mendelssohn).

⁶⁷ 'The "Feis Ceil" Fraud', *The Magpie*, 26 May 1900.

⁶⁸ 'The "Feis Ceil"', *The Magpie*, 17 June, 1899.

⁶⁹ This may have also been a dig at the London-born, blind, Belfast-based, self-professed 'Professor of Music, Carl Hardebeck who was also active in the *Feis Ceil* movement collecting and composing 'authentic' Irish music, as his father was also German, albeit a naturalized British subject. Indeed, there is an extraordinary minor history of German musicologists who became involved in Irish traditional music in this period, just as there were also many German philologists interested in the study of Irish language.

⁷⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 1-2.

⁷¹ Carl Hardebeck, for instance, maintained that if the Gaelic League had taken up music earlier, 'the

the opportunities offered by the *Feis* swiftly evaporated as nationalist celebrations of the 1798 centenary and unionist counter-demonstrations reinforced the sectarian, socio-spatial geography of Belfast and serious rioting again erupted in the traditional 'seismic zones'⁷² of the city.

1798 centenary⁷³

*I cannot pretend to have any clear picture in mind of what happened during the next few days after the centenary demonstration of 1898. At no small risk to myself I had bought a favour which I pinned on my lapel: it bore the words, "Who Fears to Speak of Ninety Eight." This token of partisanship was worn only by the members of the demonstration [...] I was in several scuffles, surrounded by rough men and women [...] every man and woman's hand was against the police. I tired of this Hogarthian scene. After a while I turned into a somewhat quieter street and found my way home reflectively. I had been saddened by the savagery and violence and incoherence of the scenes I had witnessed. We were supposed to be celebrating something that happened a hundred years ago. One hundred years, I reflected, is a long time, and I began to wonder again what this strange thing called "nationality" really meant to me.'*⁷⁴

(Paul Henry)

If many Protestant unionists were divided in their cultural engagement with the *Feis Ceoil* and ambivalent about aspects of the Gaelic League, they demonstrated much clearer political reactions towards nationalist 1798 centenary celebrations. Henderson was unqualified in his condemnation of the 'rabble' that celebrated the centenary of 1798 on New Year's Eve and mocked their efforts as 'a miserable fiasco'.⁷⁵ Once in office, he recommended that the city's magistrates re-route the 'rebel procession'⁷⁶ commemorating the Rising and condemned all such commemorations as 'meaningless displays.'⁷⁷ Henderson's hostility to such open celebrations of a political insurrection – though they had been organized by many of his co-religionists – was shared by many unionists. One incandescent correspondent to his paper, the *Newsletter* declared:

I cannot sufficiently condemn the organisers and promoters of this

language movement would have succeeded better.' Gregory Allen, 'The Blind Bard of Belfast: Carl Hardebeck (1869-1945) *History Ireland*, 6:3 (Autumn 1998): 42

⁷² This term, describing the territorial, tribal fault-lines of sectarian conflict in Belfast's warring ghettos was first used by Frankfort Moore, cited in A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster 1609-1969* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1977), pp. 143-5.

⁷³ For an account of the impact and activities of the '98 centenary in the North, see Peter Collins, *Who Fears to Speak of '98?* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Society, 2004), pp. 31-52; T. O'Keefe, '1898 Efforts to Celebrate the United Irishmen: the '98 Centennial' *Eire-Ireland* 33:2 (1992): 67-91; Senia Paseta '1798 in 1898: The Politics of Commemoration, *Irish Review* 22 (1998): 46-53. For an excellent concise analysis see Selina Guinness, 'The Year of the Undead: 1898', *New Voices in Irish Criticism* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 21-9.

⁷⁴ Paul Henry, *Further Reminiscences* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1973), p. 61.

⁷⁵ James Henderson, *A Record Year*, p. 54.

⁷⁶ James Henderson, *A Record Year*, p. 231.

⁷⁷ James Henderson, *A Record Year*, p. 235.

rebel procession, a procession meant to be provocative, formed to commemorate the sordid incidents of one cruel and cowardly rebellion, with the avowed object of bringing about another.⁷⁸

However, for nationalists, the centenary of the 1798 Rebellion provided the ideal opportunity for them to demonstrate their anti-colonial resistance to Britain; an opportunity that was all the more important following the outpouring of loyalist support for Queen Victoria during her Diamond Jubilee celebrations the previous year. The Queen's visit had provided Irish unionists with a pretext for patriotic displays of loyalty: Union Jacks and bunting bedecked shop windows and lampposts, whilst local councils in the North tripped over themselves to deliver hubristic addresses proclaiming their unstinting loyalty. *The Magpie's* St Patrick's Day editorial satirised this patriotic fervour a full month before the visit, mocking Belfast city council's decision to present Her Majesty with an address, in spite of her absence:

Such a graceful and kindly act on the part of the Bumbles of the Lisburn Road cannot fail to touch the heart of our august sovereign. It will be the climax, the coping stone to the long list of honours which Her Majesty has received from her devoted subjects. See Venice and die, indeed. Receive an address from the Guardians and wish you were dead.⁷⁹

The occasion of Royal visits in 1897 and 1900 provided an opportunity for nationalists to stage counter-demonstrations of their political allegiance and, between these two dates, the 1898 centenary represented an even bigger opportunity for demonstrations of nationalist solidarity and strength. However, instead of presenting a united front, the centenary preparations precipitated a power struggle within nationalism as pro- and anti-Parnellite factions ventilated their divisions, whilst advocates of parliamentary and physical force nationalism competed for ideological hegemony. Alice Milligan established a National Commemoration Committee to co-ordinate centenary celebrations and took on a pivotal role as organising secretary for activities in Ulster where there were no less

⁷⁸ Letter to the editor, *Belfast Newsletter* cited in, James Henderson, *A Record Year*, p. 230.

⁷⁹ *The Magpie*, 17 March 1900. During the week of the Jubilee visit, one perceptive theatre critic of *The Magpie* posed the question, 'Why was the name of the play at the Theatre Royal changed from *The Rebel's Wife* to *The Patriot's Wife*?' He goes on to note that the previous week, 'it was being played in England under the first title,' before sagaciously suggesting, 'Is it that the rebel in England is a patriot in Ireland?' *The Magpie*, 24 March 1900.

than fifty-three '98 clubs, nineteen based in Belfast.⁸⁰ Originally, these Clubs were an IRB/Fenian initiative but constitutional nationalists, weakened by Parnell's death in 1891 and failure of the second Home Rule Bill in 1893, sought to take control of the movement for fear of losing further support to revolutionary nationalism. The in-fighting which ensued was particularly fractious in Ulster, and incessant internal disputes and bitter factionalism characterised Northern preparations for the centenary, in spite of the *Shan Van Vocht's* repeated appeals for unity. The exasperation of its editors (as well as their suffragette proclivities), are clearly evident in their calls for nationalist solidarity and their specific appeal for the 'women of Ireland' to come to the fore. Indeed, Milligan founded the Irish Women's Centenary Union, so that, 'the better half (numerically speaking, of course I mean) of the population'⁸¹ could be involved in political activity and perhaps exercise a unifying influence. In Belfast, constitutional nationalism under the belligerent control of 'Wee' Joe Devlin,⁸² wrested control of the Belfast '98 Clubs and appointed Devlin as President of the Belfast and Ulster United Centenary Association, an ironic title as his accession prompted a walkout by Milligan and others who (correctly) adduced his involvement as political opportunism rather than a patriotic commitment to the ideals and objectives of the United Irishmen.

However, in spite of internal in-fighting, numerous events were staged over the course of the year and 'the air was vibrant with talk of the great names of that epoch.'⁸³ Commemorative parades were held in late May/early June, with further celebrations in August and September as scores of marches were held throughout the North, one of which was graced by Maud Gonne, who was scripted to appear on a white charger. St Patrick's Day celebrations were larger than usual, torch-lit processions were held on New Year's Eve and a commemorative group climbed to McArt's Fort on Cave Hill, scene of Wolfe Tone *et al's* pledge to break the link with England. For obvious reasons,⁸⁴ there were only few physical monuments erected in the North compared to the South, with the

⁸⁰ Peter Collins, *Who Feared to Speak of '98?* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Society, 2004), p. 31.

⁸¹ *Shan Van Vocht*, September 1897, cited in Margaret Ward, *In Their Own Voice: Women and Irish Nationalism* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1995), p. 9.

⁸² Joseph Devlin (1871-1934): born Belfast, journalist and secretary of the United Irish League 1902, Irish Parliamentary Party MP for North Kilkenny 1902-6, revived and was President of the Ancient Order of Hibernians 1905-34, MP for West Belfast 1906-18. Member of the Irish Volunteers 1913, M.P. for Falls (beating Sinn Féin's Eamon de Valera) 1918, MP for West Belfast in the new Northern Irish Parliament 1922, M.P. Fermanagh and Tyrone at Westminster 1929-34.

⁸³ Joseph Campbell, cited in Saunders and Kelly, *Joseph Campbell*, p. 16.

⁸⁴ Monuments to various republican figures were vandalised or destroyed. For example, a commemorative stone erected to the memory of Betsey Gray, (one of the heroic figures of '98 lore: a Presbyterian rebel murdered along with her brother and her lover as they fled the scene of battle at Ballynahinch), was destroyed by Orangemen, leading to local riots. See Peter Collins, *Who Feared to Speak of '98?* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Society, 2004), p. 43.

result that nationalist energies were instead invested in banners and flags, similar to those of the Orange Order, which were made by the same firm: Bridgetts of Belfast.⁸⁵ The *Shan Van Vocht* and the nationalist press published ballads, poems, advertised field trips to battle sites and excursions to the graveyards of the martyred dead, whilst an enormous *Féis*, featuring thousands of participants was also staged over the course of the year.⁸⁶ Pictures of '98's heroes Henry Joy McCracken, Jemmy Hope, Samuel Neilson, William Orr, Samuel Neilson bedecked streetlamps and gable walls, whilst bunting, banners, arches and flags festooned 'every street and entry in the Falls.'⁸⁷ All this the *Shan Van Vocht* hailed as evidence that 'the National Spirit is not dead in Ulster,'⁸⁸ though a more dispassionate analysis cannot ignore the fact that much of this was confined to Catholic areas of the city. This reflects the increasing conflation of Catholicism and nationalism and maps onto the sectarian geography of this segregated city, but it also reflects the success which unionist authorities had in controlling and containing centenary celebrations and demonstrations of nationalist politics. When nationalist organisers sought to move beyond the Catholic ghettos of west Belfast, planning the route of their largest parade on June 6 to meet in Cromac Square and from there to march through the city centre to the west of the city, the municipal authorities stepped in, re-routed the parade and drafted in 300 additional police to monitor the 15,000 strong nationalist crowd.⁸⁹ This enormous demonstration of Irish nationalist strength inevitably prompted a violent unionist backlash and uproar which resulted from the June parade led to weeks of serious rioting in which there were hundreds of civilian and police casualties.

Thus, 1898 was a crucial year. Its mobilisation and activation of nationalist communities marked a high point in an increasingly spectacular form of mass politics, following the 'demo' politics of the anti-Jubilee protests in 1897 and anti-Boer War protests of 1900, and which ultimately led to a radicalisation of Irish politics through the

⁸⁵ Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 31.

⁸⁶ Again, the memoirs of young Protestant painter, Paul Henry, throw an interesting light on these events as he admits to being wholly ignorant as to the reasons for these commemorative celebrations; his ignorance owing to an admixture of education which studiously 'ignored the fact that we were Irish and not English' and the fact that he was 'immured [...] in my own ivory tower of art that in 1898 I did not know what constituted the difference between nationalist and Unionist'. Henry records that, 'People were coming from all over Ireland to take part, and a certain Maud Gonne, whom I had never heard of, was to lead the procession on a white horse.' Paul Henry, *Further Reminiscences*, 1973, cited Craig, *Belfast*, p. 302.

⁸⁷ Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 28.

⁸⁸ *Shan Van Vocht*, 6 June 1898. Although the ULT was 'formally inaugurated in 1904' David Kennedy argues that 'the moment of its conception might be placed in 1898, in that moment when the men of the North remembered an earlier 1898.' *Enter Robbie John*, written and compiled by David Kennedy to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the ULT. BBC Northern Ireland, 25 November 1954, transcript in possession of author, p. 2. Hereafter referred to as *Enter Robbie John*.

⁸⁹ *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 4 June 1898.

rejuvenation of the IRB, and later, Sinn Féin.⁹⁰ Throughout the 1890s, Belfast's Catholic community had been growing in confidence as was publicly demonstrated by the increase in nationalist political parades which culminated in 1898.⁹¹ Over the next decade, demonstrations and parades were organised under the ideological auspices of the Gaelic League, the Irish National Foresters, the United Irish League and most significantly the Ancient Order of Hibernians. The Catholic Church's removal of its ban on membership of the AOH in 1904 massively increased the public profile and membership of this hitherto secret society and under the control of Joe Devlin, its National President, it became the hegemonic nationalist faction in the North. Devlin systematically purged the Order of its republican members, absorbed the organisation into the political body of the Irish Parliamentary Party and re-aligned it with the Catholic Church in the process, swelling its membership from 10,000 in 1905 to 60,000 in 1909.⁹² With over 300 divisions throughout the Province, it became the strongest of all the nationalist factions and its campaigning for the constitutional issue of Home Rule circumscribed the growth of Sinn Féin in the city.⁹³ Devlin's political chicanery, ruthless careerism and ideological opportunism ensured his unrivalled hegemonic position and provides a perfect case study proof of Tom Garvin's thesis that ambitious lower-middle class Catholics used the Gaelic Revival for social mobility and to satiate their hunger for power so that when independence was achieved, they would inherit the position as the nation's new bourgeois governing elite. The difference of course, is that the dominance of this Northern elite was confined to local, ghettoised fiefdoms, politically subordinate to the inbuilt hegemony of the unionist state.⁹⁴

Devlin's successful takeover of both the centenary movement and the AOH, not only helped secure his dominant position within Northern nationalism, but it shifted secular cultural nationalism onto more aggressive sectarian, Catholic terms. This shift, was later decried by Connolly as a fundamental 'blunder' as it alienated Protestant support for republican ideals and helped aggravate sectarian tensions.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ See Roy Foster, *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it up in Ireland* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 221.

⁹¹ See Neil Jarman and Dominic Bryan, *From Riots to Rights: Nationalist Parades in the North of Ireland* (Coleraine: Centre for the Study of Conflict), pp. 23-25. See <http://www.ubt.ac.uk/csc/reports/riotstorights.pdf>

⁹² Jarman and Bryan, *From Riots to Rights*, p. 22.

⁹³ In the famous landslide elections of 1918 which saw Sinn Féin swept to power, its President, Eamon De Valera, was annihilated when he stood for election in the West Belfast constituency by Joe Devlin who won with a massive majority. It was a dramatic demonstration of the rupture between regional and national politics.

⁹⁴ Tom Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland, 1858-1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁹⁵ Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 35-6.

The Revival of Republicanism⁹⁶

*'By the year 1900, the republicans of Ulster were a small and negligible force [...] but at this time, there was a new stirring [...] and it centred around two people, Dennis McCullough and Bulmer Hobson.'*⁹⁷ (F.X. Martin)

*'It was the age of colour patriotism and green flaggery [...] mainly concerned with the visible demonstration of their faith and loyalty in the same way as the Orange lodges [...] I formed the notion [...] that bands and banners and perfervid oratory were among the greatest obstacles to intelligent political thought.'*⁹⁸ (Joseph Connolly)

One of the ironies of the North's occlusion from histories of the Revival is that Belfast revolutionaries were largely responsible for the revolutionary period that changed utterly life on the island for the next century. Geoffrey Dudgeon alludes specifically to the period 1911–16 as:

[T]he five years that dynamised and remoulded the life on the island of Ireland for almost a century, changes for which[...] Belfast revolutionaries were in many ways the most responsible.⁹⁹

Historian F.X. Martin also attributes the political revival of republicanism in the North to two revolutionary figures: Bulmer Hobson¹⁰⁰ and Dennis McCullough¹⁰¹ (see Plate 5). Like Dudgeon, he highlights the paradox that although no actual fighting took place in the North in 1916, the Rising could not have taken place had it not been for Ulstermen. Unionist mobilisation and arming of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) to resist Home

⁹⁶ For an account of republican activities in the North in this period, see Austen Morgan, *Labour and Partition: The Belfast Working Class 1905–23* (London: Pluto Press, 1991), pp. 198–212; Francis Xavier Martin, 'McCullough, Hobson, and Republican Ulster,' in *Leaders and Men of the Easter Rising*, ed. F.X. Martin (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1985), pp. 95–108.

⁹⁷ F.X. Martin, 'McCullough, Hobson, and Republican Ulster,' p. 96.

⁹⁸ Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 36.

⁹⁹ Dudgeon, *The Black Diaries*, p. 163.

¹⁰⁰ Bulmer Hobson's parents were not representative of the majority of Northern Protestants. His father was a keen advocate of Home Rule and his mother was extensively involved in grassroots nationalist and suffragette activities, organizing the Irishwomen's Association (along with Alice Milligan) which met in the Hobson home for regular readings.

¹⁰¹ Denis McCullough (1883–1968): born in Belfast, joined IRB, 1901, member of the Supreme Council, 1906; imprisoned August–November, 1915; President of the Supreme Council, 1916. He was also active in the Gaelic League and the Dungannon Clubs and elected into the Executive of the Irish Volunteers in 1913, and introduced the movement to Belfast. He supported the Easter Rising but was not informed of its details and was given the ludicrous orders of marching his one hundred and thirty-two Volunteers to Tyrone to rendezvous with Patrick McCartan's cohort, before marching to join Liam Mellows' Volunteers in Connaught. Unsurprisingly, these orders were not followed and he returned with his men to Belfast. After the Rising he became an established member of the Free State's new political class and married the eminent Fenian Dr. James Ryan's sister, whilst his own sisters married prominent Free State military and political figures Seán T. O'Kelly and Richard Mulcahy, and he sat as a *Cumann na nGaedheal* T.D. from 1924–1927.

'there was a new stirring in the IRB and it centred around two people in Belfast, Dennis McCullough and Bulmer Hobson'²



Dinny McCullough



Bulmer Hobson

Plate 5

² F.X. Martin, *Leaders and Men of the Easter Rising*, p. 96.

Rule ironically inspired nationalist Ireland to do the same, leading to the formation - largely due to Hobson's efforts - of the Irish Volunteers (1913) under the command of Ulsterman Eoin MacNeill¹⁰² a movement that 'made 1916 possible.'¹⁰³ Furthermore, a triumvirate of Ulstermen: Bulmer Hobson, Roger Casement and Eoin MacNeill, subsequently organised the Howth gun-running in 1914 which armed and equipped the Irish Volunteers, whilst Tyroneman Joe McGarrity, was one of the three-man executive of *Clan na Gael* that helped supply the weaponry which was subsequently used in the Easter Rising.

Moreover, it is also significant that many of these Northerners who helped prepare the ground for the 1916 Rising opposed the mystical as opposed to military manner in which it was conducted.¹⁰⁴ In *Defensive Warfare: A Handbook for Irish Nationalists*, Hobson argued armed insurrection should only be attempted if victory was possible; that it was wrong to be attempted in any other circumstance: 'We must estimate our resources and those of our opponents and only venture into conflict where the chances of war are in our favour. *We must not fight to make a display of heroism, but fight to win.*'¹⁰⁵ This pragmatic philosophy - a precursor to the more hard-headed guerrilla tactics successfully adopted by Michael Collins in the War of Independence - flies entirely in the face of Patrick Pearse's spiritual rather than strategic notions of physical force violence. Pearse's vision of nationalist uprising was theatrical, not tactical; infused with a Catholic sensibility of blood sacrifice. Hobson gave the notion of armed revolt in the futile form of pseudo-religious, public spectacle short shrift and believed that success could only come through a strategic, low-intensity, guerrilla policy of hit-and-run. 'We were aiming at making the British government in Ireland impossible, and developing a guerrilla business. That

¹⁰² The Volunteers were set up following a call to arms article written by MacNeill entitled 'The North Began' on 1 November 1913 in *An Claidheamh Solais*. This prompted Hobson to get the editor of the paper to ask Mac Neill was he ready to 'discuss the implications' of his article' (F.X. Martin, 'McCullough, Hobson, and Republican Ulster', p. 102.) Mac Neill agreed and the Volunteers were established three weeks later in 1913. Hobson, took the further crucial step of swearing in Pearse to the IRB shortly after this. The Volunteers were largely used as a Trojan Horse by the IRB, unbeknownst to MacNeill.

¹⁰³ F.X. Martin, 'McCullough, Hobson, and Republican Ulster,' p. 95. Martin also flags up the fact that James Connolly's parents were both from Monaghan and that he always 'looked upon himself as an 'Ulsterman' (96).

¹⁰⁴ Eoin MacNeill in consultation with Hobson, issued countermanding orders on the day of the Rising whilst the latter and McCullough were both 'kept in the dark' by Pearse (whom Hobson had sworn into the IRB) for fear that both men would 'put a spanner in the business' -- little wonder then than Pearse's junta within the IRB placed Hobson under house arrest immediately before its outbreak, see Hobson, in *Irish Literary Portraits*: W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, George Moore, George Bernard Shaw, Oliver St John Gogarty, F.R. Higgins, AE (London: BBC, 1972), p. 207.

¹⁰⁵ Bulmer Hobson, *Defensive Warfare: A Handbook for Irish Nationalists* (Belfast, no publication details, 1909), my italics. See also: <http://www.fourthwrite.ie/issue2alt8.html>

wasn't dramatic enough for Pearse or Connolly, who wanted to make a splash.¹⁰⁶ McCullough, although more willing to support a full-scale military campaign against British forces, shared Hobson's rather than Pearse's philosophy of physical force republicanism: 'Pearse was a dedicated man – I wasn't a dedicated man. I didn't want to die, to tell you the God's truth, unless I had to.'¹⁰⁷

Both Hobson's and McCullough's influence and impact on nationalist politics extended well beyond provincial boundaries. The former, a Co. Down Quaker, was a key figure in the Northern Revival described by Dublin Castle as 'the most dangerous man in Ireland,'¹⁰⁸ a justifiable charge given his extensive involvement in nationalist activity. Dennis McCullough, hailed *a lá* Hobson as 'one of the most dangerous suspects in Ireland'¹⁰⁹ came from a prominent republican family. Inducted into the IRB and sworn into his Fenian father's circle in 1901, he was horrified at the great gap between the gallous rhetoric and the inactive reality of this 'secret society'. He immediately set about rejuvenating what was a moribund organization that had degenerated into a drinking club in Donnelly's pub on the Falls Road into a dynamic and disciplined organisation and, in the process, politically parricided his father by expelling him along with his elderly, inactive cronies, 'I cleared out most of the old men (including my father) most of whom I considered no further use to us.'¹¹⁰

Morgan records that by 1901, the police 'guestimated' that there were 400 IRB members in eleven circles within the city¹¹¹ and McCullough, working with fellow ideologues Hobson and Sean MacDermott (see *Plate 6*)¹¹² demonstrated 'a certain puritanism'¹¹³ in the selections of new recruits, only accepting those who were tee-total and committed. His successful revamping of the organisation attracted attention in

¹⁰⁶ *Irish Literary Portraits*, p. 207.

¹⁰⁷ *Irish Literary Portraits*, p. 208.

¹⁰⁸ This description of Hobson was given by Major Ivor Price, a British officer in charge of the political police in Dublin Castle and appointed to investigate the causes of the 1916 Rising.

¹⁰⁹ Morgan, *Labour and Partition*, p. 201-2.

¹¹⁰ McCullough Statement, 14 October 1957, *McCullough MSS*, UCDA P120/29(1).

¹¹¹ Morgan, *Labour and Partition*, p. 199.

¹¹² Sean MacDermott (1884-1916): born in Leitrim; emigrated to Glasgow aged sixteen before returning to Belfast in 1902 where he worked as a barman and a later as a conductor on the trams. He joined the Gaelic League where he met Hobson and McCullough and became both a fluent Irish speaker and a republican activist. He also was a member of the A.O.H. before being sworn into the IRB by McCullough in 1906, after which he became a key figure in the rejuvenation of the organisation. He was also the co-founder and manager of *Irish Freedom*, and active in Sinn Féin, especially in Belfast. He was also elected to the Provisional Committee of the Irish Volunteers, co-opted onto the Supreme Council of the IRB, a signatory of the 1916 Proclamation, and a combatant in the Easter Rising for which he was executed in 1916.

¹¹³ Bulmer Hobson, *Ireland: Yesterday and Tomorrow*, p. 35. F.X. Martin cites how they required all extant members 'to be sober, disciplined and active, or get out', in 'McCullough, Hobson, and Republican Ulster', p. 96.



Plate 6 : *Sean McDermott*

Dublin, where the IRB leadership soon co-opted him as one of eleven members of its Supreme Council in 1906, before designating him as the representative for Ulster in 1909. Hobson (1911) and MacDermott (1912) later joined him on the council along with the recently released dynamiter, Tom Clarke (1909), under whom they formed a caucus of young Ulster radicals who chafed under the conservatism of the movement's elderly Dublin leadership. Consequently, they later ousted this leadership and appointed McCullough as the new President of the IRB in 1915 so that Northerners now were almost in complete control of the IRB.¹¹⁴

The IRB was closely affiliated with the various cultural and political movements discussed earlier, such as the Gaelic League and the GAA. Hobson, McCullough and MacDermott were members of both, and regarded them as a rich resource for new recruits. Indeed, as veteran Fenian, Dr. Ryan candidly recounts in his memoirs, the IRB actively cultivated its close links with the GAA, 'we all kept closely in touch with it, partly - let me admit - with the object of securing recruits for the physical force movement.'¹¹⁵ Membership of the political and cultural nationalist movements of the IRB, GAA, and Gaelic League were further cross-fertilised by the founding of the Dungannon Clubs (see Plate 7) by Hobson and McCullough in Belfast in 1905. Inspired by the example of the non-sectarian Irish Volunteers, it took its name from the latter's Dungannon Convention in 1782, when the Volunteers proclaimed English interference in Irish affairs would no longer be tolerated. The Dungannon Clubs soon spread rapidly throughout the North and established branches in the South as well as in Scotland and England.¹¹⁶ The Belfast branch, however, remained its central hub, and consisted of approximately fifty 'young men at a white heat of enthusiasm.'¹¹⁷ It was a vociferously separatist organisation and

¹¹⁴ This was all the more the case given the command and control structure of the organization as the IRB's Supreme Council did not meet frequently, and when not in session, the President, Secretary and Treasurer, (McCullough, McDermott, Clark) were permitted to act as an Executive Committee.

¹¹⁵ Dr. Mark Ryan, *Fenian Memories* (Dublin: M.H. Gill & Son, 1945), p. 169. Indeed, key IRB personnel were present at the inaugural meeting of the GAA. For more detail on the relationship between the two organisations, see W.F. Mandle, *The Gaelic Athletic Association and Irish Nationalist Politics, 1884-1924* (London: Croom Helm, 1987).

¹¹⁶ P.S. O'Hegarty founded a branch in London; IRB man Dan Branniff founded another in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne and Dr Patrick McCartan founded a branch in Dublin amongst his fellow medical students. Sean McDermott was later appointed by Hobson to become the full time organiser of the Dungannon Clubs, a role he successfully fulfilled as many new branches were founded, albeit only in Ulster. Dr. Patrick McCartan (1878-1966): a native of Carrickmore, Co. Tyrone, was another extremely active member of the Dungannon Clubs. He was originally introduced to the republican movement by fellow Tyrone man McGarrity, after joining *Clan na Gael* in Philadelphia, 1905. He founded a Dungannon Club in his native Carrickmore and became a leading figure in Irish republicanism in later years as editor of *Irish Freedom* before enjoying a long political career: MP for King's County, 1918; TD 1919-23, representative of Sinn Féin in USA, 1918-21; senator, 1948-51.

¹¹⁷ Hobson, *Yesterday*, p. 8. Hobson's account of the number of activists involved in the Belfast branch vary. At first he records that there were approximately thirty to forty members (8), but later states that

sought to bring about the decolonization of Ireland by intellectual, material and physical means, albeit by passive resistance (see appendix).¹¹⁸ It argued for a policy of political abstention from Westminster and waged a successful anti-recruitment campaign against the British Army, printing large postcards, (many of which were illustrated by John Campbell, George Morrow and Jack Morrow, see appendix), as well as leaflets that were successfully distributed all over the country. In 1906, Hobson also founded and edited *The Republic*,¹¹⁹ a weekly paper espousing the Dungannon Club's separatist message. Its opening editorial declaims:

The ineffective and outward political movements, Unionist and Nationalist, must be superseded and silenced and in their place a national movement, virile and militant, that recognises no creed save that of Irishman, and no party save that of the nation, must be established.¹²⁰

Contributors to this radical new paper included ULT members James W. Good, P.S. O' Hegarty and Robert Lynd. The latter two were based in London and later organized a production of the ULT's *The Enthusiast* to be staged under its auspices. This new republican movement and its political journal harkened back to their United Irishmen forebears and sought to unite the sundered Protestant and Catholic communities of the North in the name of a common ideal. In Hobson's words, 'Denis McCullough and I decided to start a new organisation which would have a better chance than the National Council'¹²¹ *to make progress in the peculiar and difficult condition in Ulster*.¹²² Hobson was critical

there were fifty members, both men and boys (21).

¹¹⁸ The manifesto for the Dungannon Clubs outlines this specific taxonomy of strategies, by encouraging educational, economic initiatives, as well as the 'popularization of physical culture[...] by the spread of our national games.' *Constitution of the Dungannon Club*, 3: 1(c).

¹¹⁹ *An Phoblacht* (the republic), the paper affiliated to the contemporary republican movement of Sinn Féin and the IRA, deliberately draws its name from Hobson's original newspaper. The first edition of this paper was produced on 13 December 1904 after £60 had been secured by Hobson, although the paper perpetually remained in financial crises and its contributors and editor were never paid. Hobson travelled to America to secure funding for the paper, during which time Good took over the editor's position. Financial assistance from Roger Casement and donations from the Dungannon Clubs only postponed the inevitable as financial pressures forced a merger with *The Peasant* in 1907 after only six months of publication.

¹²⁰ *The Republic* 13 December 1906.

¹²¹ The National Council was founded by Arthur Griffith in 1900 for the purposes of opposing any loyal addresses being made on the occasion of a royal visit. Hobson rejected its Dublinocentric concentration and complete lack of branches throughout the rest of the country as well as its resistance to the more republican stance of *Cumann na nGaedheal* which was dominated by the IRB.

¹²² Hobson, *Ireland: Yesterday and Tomorrow*, p. 21. (my italics) For Hobson's account of the Dungannon Clubs, see pp. 19-30.

Constitution of the Dungannon Club

First Published about end of August
1905

Dungannon Club Publications, No. 2.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

TO THE WHOLE PEOPLE OF IRELAND

THE MANIFESTO

OF THE

DUNGANNON CLUB BELFAST

I. Ireland to-day.

Ireland stands to-day in the midst of the strong and powerful peoples weak and miserable, among the wealthy nations we are poor and beggarly, among the proud we cry with a weak voice faint-heartedly for that strong and independent national life that can only be won by strenuous effort and great sacrifice. We have but to let things drift, and continue in our old courses for another generation and the Irish Nation will have perished utterly; we have but to turn like men and take the helm into our own hands, and we can make it strong, and great and independent.

We can, if we will, build up a people self-contained, self-centered, self-reliant—a people not looking for the repeal of an English Act, nor for the permission of England to exist and develop to its highest and fullest capacity.

To-day we are uneducated, but our people must be taught: to-day our industries are paralysed, and the people are leaving the land. They must be kept at home here in Ireland, industries must be started.

A complete commercial—a political and social reconstruction of the country is requisite—and has got to be undertaken by the men of Ireland now. It is a great work, but we will not step aside because of the greatness of it. IT CAN BE DONE IF THE PEOPLE WILL, AND IT MUST, OR THEY PERISH.

II. National Government.

It is only with free political institutions that a people can develop its genius or its power; and so at the back of every evil that infests this land, over and above them all, and responsible for all, is the government of Ireland by England. England governs this country against the wishes of its people. Ethically her occupation of Ireland is immoral and indefensible—but John Bull is not worried with points of ethics or conscience. But so long as he governs this land against the will of its people, he has got to expect the utmost opposition from the people he insists on governing.

In the struggle between the two nations, our opponents have got an efficient weapon of attack in the form of their Government. We on the other hand have no organisation to oppose to their Government, so we must create one as speedily as may be. England may not recognise it as representative of the people, but her recognition is of little importance. A national organisation that is going to cope with injustice established for such a length of time and so

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of Arthur Griffith¹²³ and other nationalist figures based in the South who 'had little understanding of the difficulties that confronted us at public meetings, where the majority of our audiences were nearly always hostile.'¹²⁴ Unlike Countess Markievicz, whose pleas for cultural activities were met by Belfast millgirls who 'happily pelt[ed] her with snowballs', Griffith had little experience of the obloquy and antipathy endured by Northern nationalists. If he had, he might have understood the need for local initiatives like the Dungannon Clubs. Hobson's recognition of the 'peculiar and difficult condition in Ulster' and realisation that a different political vision was needed to tackle this reality, was later shared by the ULT, which Hobson had co-founded a year earlier. Indeed, there was a considerable overlap between both organisations with many of the principal writers of the *Republic* also prominent members of the ULT's *dramatis personae*: James W. Good, Robert Lynd, P.S. O' Hegarty and of course, Hobson himself. However, the Dungannon Clubs later merged with Cumann na nGaedheal (1907), and the National Council (1908) to form Sinn Féin, and in roughly the same period, the *Republic* merged with W.P. Ryan's *Irish Peasant* (1907), with Hobson as assistant editor, a job that required him to move to Dublin. Over the next few years, Hobson was largely based in the capital where he worked as a journalist and a full-time republican activist, founding and editing *Irish Freedom* (1912-14) and serving as Chairman of the Dublin Centres Board and as Leinster Representative on the IRB's Supreme Council.¹²⁵ Ironically, this physical dislocation politically distorted the *realpolitik* of Hobson's hyperborean Protestant republicanism, as he began to advocate increasingly simplistic and unrealistic nationalistic objectives. Morgan criticises Hobson's editorial management of *Irish Freedom* arguing that it demonstrated a 'grave misunderstanding of Ulster opposition to Home Rule,'¹²⁶ with numerous columnists welcoming the mobilisation and militarization of Ulster unionists due to their own atavistic, anti-British sentiments and their short-sighted belief that this would force nationalist Ireland to do the same. Such a fundamental misreading of the political situation indicates that Hobson, based in Dublin, lost sight of the 'particular and difficult condition in Ulster' that he had been so cognisant of earlier in his political

¹²³ Arthur Griffith (1871-1922): journalist, politician, and leading figure in the Gaelic Revival, 1893 co-founder of Celtic Literary Society, leading member of the Gaelic League and IRB, 1905 co-founder of Sinn Féin, member of Irish Volunteers and involved in Howth gun-running, editor of various radical nationalist newspapers and journals including: *United Irishman* and *Sinn Féin*; Vice-President Sinn Féin; 1918 elected MP, 1919 Acting President Dáil, member of Collins' negotiating team after Anglo-Irish War, 1922 elected President of Dáil and died the same year.

¹²⁴ Bulmer Hobson, *Ireland: Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Tralee: Anvil Books Ltd., 1968), pp. 23-4.

¹²⁵ See Hobson, *Yesterday*, p. 36.

¹²⁶ Morgan, *Labour and Partition*, p. 202. Morgan states that there were two essential problems with Irish republicanism in this period, the fact that it was 'inimical to industrialization' and 'unrealistic about the protestants of Ulster' (198).

career.¹²⁷ For the ULT, the movement he co-founded, this provincial condition remained of central importance to their regionalist politics and prevented their movement from being ideologically acculturated, in the same manner as Hobson within the dominant discourse of Southern nationalism.

The Boer War

A further political stimulus to the Ulster Revival and Irish nationalism in general, was the outbreak of the Boer War (1899-1902): a conflict that proved crucial to the ideological formation of anti-imperial opinion in Ireland.¹²⁸ Ironically, instead of stifling dissent against the Empire abroad, this conflict actually stimulated discontent domestically, as the Boer War furnished the burgeoning Irish nationalist movement with a contemporary parallel of their own struggle, in much the same way that American and French revolutions had inspired the United Irishmen a century earlier.

Nationalists identified with the Boers, regarding them as another small nation resisting the colonial domination of the British Empire, and this international conflict added a contemporary resonance to their own commemoration of the 1798 United Irishmen. Furthermore, the success of the Boers' armed resistance in the (ironically named) Orange Free State and the Transvaal, exposed the inadequacies of passive, parliamentary nationalism in Ireland. Roy Foster records how the war boosted membership of the Gaelic League (107 branches in 1899, nearly 400 by 1902).¹²⁹ However, the Boer War also proved to be devastatingly divisive in the long run as it galvanised nationalists and unionists into diametrically opposed camps.¹³⁰ Consider Sean O'Casey's depiction of this division in Dublin:

Every man, woman and child fought battles hour by hour, either for the

¹²⁷ Indeed, this ideological slippage in Hobson's politics, given his physical and philosophical dislocation from Belfast can be mapped against his minimal involvement in the ULT after 1905. In his autobiography he briefly mentions that he moved on from the ULT to other activities, like founding the Dungannon Clubs, stating 'In the North, now that the ULT was firmly established, I turned to the work of organising Ulster for the new policy...' (*Yesterday and Tomorrow*, p. 21). However, the ULT was far from 'firmly established' in the first year of its existence. This statement reflects both Hobson's confidence in the commitment and abilities of other men like David Parkhill to steer the movement through its early years, and perhaps his decision to re-direct his efforts away from drama, (he wrote only one play for the ULT), so that his quixotic and unpredictable energies could be invested in other political activities.

¹²⁸ See also Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 433; P.J. Mathews, 'The Boer War, The Irish Literary Theatre and the Emergence of a New Separatism', in *Irish University Review* (Special Issue: New Perspectives on the Irish Literary Revival, ed. Margaret Kelleher) 33:1, (Spring/Summer 2003): 99-116; Donal McCracken, *The Irish Pro-Boers* (Johannesburg: Perskor, 1989).

¹²⁹ Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 456.

¹³⁰ Nationalist councils in the South of Ireland passed resolutions in favour of the Boers; the reverse happened in unionist councils in Ulster.

British or the Boers. Transvaal flags were in everyone's house, in everyone's window or in everyone's hand. At times spontaneous processions formed in the streets, marched through the city booing every redcoat that passed, and often coming into collision with the irritated police. All fancy-goods shops and newsagents were filled with Boer symbols; streams of ribbons flashing the colours of England's enemies flowed through every street and sparkled in every second window [...] a story went everywhere that De Wet was really Parnell come to life again, and up in arms against the English.¹³¹

In the North, the same divisions were all the more partisan and the polarising symbolism of the conflict was particularly compelling in Belfast where nationalist efforts to emulate the United Irishmen meant that they regarded the Boers' struggle as analogous to the American and French Revolutions that so inspired their forefathers. Indeed, Catholic gangs in the city operated under new monikers of Boer generals, bonfires were lit in Catholic areas to celebrate Boer victories and ballads and broad-sheets celebrating the efforts of John McBride's Irish Brigade, fighting alongside the Boers were widely disseminated and 'symbolised the sympathy with the Boers and the antagonism to empire that was universally felt by nationalist Ireland.'¹³² Nationalist celebrations of Boer victories caused consternation amongst the unionist population, confirmed their suspicions of the incorrigibly seditious temperament of the Catholic population and reinforced the fears of how 'popery' would threaten their future should Home Rule ever be introduced. Unionists, who for so long felt comforted by their belief that the British Empire's military machine would forever guarantee their security and quell rebel unrest, were unnerved by the shocking vulnerability of the British Army in the Boer conflict, causing widespread alarm about their own security, which no doubt steeled their later determination to arm themselves to defend the Union as part of Carson's Army. However, when Pretoria fell to British troops in June 1900, Protestant shipyard workers 'downed tools to parade through Belfast singing patriotic songs.'¹³³

The sectarian bodies of the Orange Order and the AOH also allied themselves to British and Boer sides, further polarising local politics by copper-fastening unionist opposition to Home Rule which was generally regarded as a disingenuous deceit, designed to separatist specifications, whilst strengthening the republican convictions that violent uprising was the only viable means of attaining their goals.

¹³¹ Sean O'Casey, *Autobiographies, Vol. 2: Pictures in the Hallway* (London: Pan Books, 1971), p. 198.

¹³² Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 38.

¹³³ Barden, *Belfast: An Illustrated History*, p. 159.

Reviving the Arts: Poetry, Music, Art & Drama

*'In these latter days of Renaissance and revival...the ULT a coterie of poets, players, dreamers and idealists has risen among us, like a phoenix out of the dead ashes. We have societies, literary political scientific, without number – all doing their share of work in the moral and mental regeneration of the people.'*¹³⁴ (Joseph Campbell)

*'so it was in Belfast in those golden days. Every week one heard the name of a new poet, a new playwright, a new painter, a new storyteller.'*¹³⁵ (Hugh MacCartan)

Complementing and commingling with the activities of the BNFC, Gaelic League, GAA, '98 Clubs, the *Féis Ceoil*, the Dungannon Clubs, AOH and the IRB was an even more diffuse, heteroglossic explosion of literary activity and cultural production that shaped the Northern Revival. Between 1891-1904, an eclectic efflorescence of artistic and literary activities occurred which were both independent of, and inspired by, the aforementioned movements. This vibrant cultural scene receives short shrift in official histories of the period: Fitzpatrick, Foster, Harkness, Jackson, Lee, Laffan, Fitzpatrick ignore it entirely,¹³⁶ Elliott and Hepburn mention it briefly,¹³⁷ and the eminent Ulster historian, Jonathan Bardon, makes but fleeting reference in his otherwise meticulously detailed histories of Belfast which prioritise industrial, economic, imperial and party political narratives.¹³⁸ Similarly, Sybil Gribbon's brief study of Edwardian Belfast focuses on the economic, industrial, religious and political character of the city, and says little about cultural and artistic activities beyond a faint reference to its 'folk culture' of music hall songs, hymns and Irish airs that comprise the 'faded repertoire of [...] Italian organ grinders'.¹³⁹ Her evocative description is inaccurate, however, as a great deal of artistic activity and energy was evident, although it was not always played out in the public sphere. The Linen Hall Library, for example, moved to its new premises in 1896 and hosted a diverse cultural programme of lectures, exhibitions, readings, meetings and festivals over the following decade even attracting censure from the City Council for a particularly seditious speech, sedately titled, 'The Holy Hills of Ireland' delivered by

¹³⁴ Joseph Campbell, 'Art in Belfast', *The Nationist*, 2 November 1905.

¹³⁵ Hugh MacCartan, 'Belfast: Some backward Glances', *Capuchin*, p. 177.

¹³⁶ David Fitzpatrick, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century: Divided Island* (Basingstoke, Macmillan Press, 1993); Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland: Alvin Jackson, Ireland, 1798-1998* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) and *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (London: Phoenix, 2003); Michael Laffan, *The Partition of Ireland, 1911-1925* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press, 1983); Joseph Lee, *The Modernization of Irish Society 1848-1918* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1973).

¹³⁷ Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster*, p. 368; A.C. Hepburn, *A Past Apart: Studies in the History of Catholic Belfast* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1996), p. 12.

¹³⁸ Jonathan Bardon, *An Illustrated History: A History of Ulster* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1992).

¹³⁹ Sybil Gribbon, *Edwardian Belfast: A Social Profile* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1982), p. 26.

Francis Joseph Bigger. Bigger was also patron of the College of Irish, founded in 1905, which provided another cultural centre of gravity in addition to *Ardriagh*, the home of the 'Don Quixote of the North'¹⁴⁰ located on the northern outskirts of the city (see later).

There were remarkable artistic developments in this period, in poetry, painting, music and drama. In 1896 a small literary coterie calling themselves the Kirtkat Club, including amongst its members James Cousins¹⁴¹ and Mary Hutton¹⁴² began work on her translation of *The Tain* in 1898, with illustrations by John Campbell, who also designed the cover of *The Lane of the Thrushes* (1905) containing the poetry of Cathal O'Byrne and Cahir Healey. His brother Joseph,¹⁴³ described by Ezra Pound as 'the dark man from the

¹⁴⁰ This phrase is used by Roger Dixon, curator at the Ulster Museum, in an unpublished lecture on Bigger entitled 'Francis Joseph Bigger: Belfast's Cultural Don Quixote,' which he has delivered in various venues throughout the North, most recently at the Linen Hall Library, 8 November 2006.

¹⁴¹ James Cousins, (1873-1956) 1873-1956 born in Belfast of a Methodist family; office boy, clerk, and secretary to the Lord Mayor, Sir Daniel Dixon; moved to Dublin in the late 1890s, and encouraged George Roberts to do likewise as representative of a Belfast firm; became theosophist, vegetarian, and playwright; met Fay brothers, 1901; acted in Irish National Theatre Society. His plays for the society include *The Sleep of the King* (1902); *The Racing Lug* (1902); *The Sword of Dermot* (1903); Yeats censured his later play *Sold* as ill-written ('too much Cousins'); taught at Harcourt Street School from 1905; married Margaret Cousins; founding editor of *Irish Citizen* (1912), handing over to Francis Sheehy-Skeffington on his departure for Liverpool, 1913, and India, 1915; took name of Jayaram on conversion to Hinduism; journalist, poet, playwright and manager for Irish Literature Theatre. Poetry: *Ben Madighan and Other Poems* (Belfast: Marcus Ward [1894]); *The Legend of the Blemished King* (Dublin: Doyle 1897); *The Voice of One* (London: T. Fisher Unwin 1900); *The Quest* (Dublin: Maunsel 1906); *The Awakening and other Sonnets* (Dublin: Maunsel [1907]); *The Bell-Branch* (Dublin: Maunsel 1908), 47pp.; *Etain the Beloved and Other Poems* (Dublin: Maunsel 1912); *Straight and Crooked* (London: Grant Richards 1915); *The Garland of Life* (Madras, Ganesh 1917); *Moulted Feathers* (Madras: Ganesh 1919); *Sea-change* (Madras: Ganesh 1920); *Forest Meditations and Other Poems* (Asia (Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House 1925); *Above the Rainbow and Other Poems* (Dublin: Maunsel 1926); *The Girdle* (Madras Puck/Ganesh 1929); *The Wandering Harp, Selected Poems* (NY, Roerich Museum Press 1932); *A Bardic Pilgrimage, Second Selection of the Poetry of James H. Cousins* (NY: Roerich Museum Press 1934); *The Oracle and Other Poems* (Madras: Ganesh 1938); *Reflections Before Sunset* (Adyar, Madras: Kalakshetra 1946). *Drama: The King's Wife* (Madras: Ganesh 1919); *The Sword of Dermot* (Madras: Shama's Publishing House 1927); *The Hound of Uladh, Two Plays in Verse* (Adyar, Madras: Kalakshetra 1942); *The Racing Lug*, printed in *United Irishman* (5 July 1902), reproduced in Hogan and Kilroy, eds., *Lost Plays of the Irish Literary Renaissance* (Proscenium 1970); *The Sleep of the King, one act poetic drama*, and *The Sword of Dermot*.

¹⁴² Mary Hutton (1862-1953): [Margaret (Mary), var. Mary Anne, née Drummond]; born in Manchester, attended University College, London and studied Celtic literature, member of Belfast Gaelic League Executive; lectured at Ard-Scoil Uladh, Belfast, later appointed to QUB Senate; converted to Catholicism, 1902; met Patrick Pearse and conducted friendly correspondence and he stayed with her on his visits to Belfast; supported St. Enda's; issued *The Tain* (1907), a verse-translation, commenced in c.1897, which became a great success at St. Enda's, where she made the first of many visits in April 1909; appointed Margaret Stokes memorial Lecturer, 1909; moved to Dublin on death of her husband in 1912.

¹⁴³ Joseph Campbell, (1879-1944, pseud. Seosamh Mac Cathmhaoil); son of William Henry Campbell, a Catholic nationalist building-contractor, his mother being interested in things Gaelic. Collaborated with Herbert Hughes on *Songs of Uladh* (1904), written to old airs arranged by Herbert Hughes, supplying words for "My Lagan Love" among others; briefly resided in Dublin, 1905; moved to London, 1906; worked as English teacher for London County Council Schools, and served as secretary to Irish Literary Society, London, assisted Eleanor Hull on Irish Text Society; met Nancy Maude, dg. of Col. Aubrey Maude of the Cameronian Highlanders, at poetry reading, and married her in 1910, against objections of her family; returned to Dublin, 1911; wrote *Judgement* (Abbey, April 1912) and *The Turn Out*, an unperformed play of 1798, acted as publicist and recruiter for the Irish Volunteers, engaged in rescue-work during 1916 Rising, chairman of Wicklow County Council, 1920-1921, interned for eighteen months as a Republican, 1922-23; translated Patrick Pearse's poems in Irish for *Collected Works*, sep. from Maude in 1924; left Ireland, disillusioned, and settled in New York, 1925-1939; founded School of Irish Studies in New York 1925,

north,¹⁴⁴ was also establishing his position in the forefront of young poets: his *Garden of the Bees* published in 1905, (dedicated to Bigger whose garden it was named after), and *Rushlight* (1906) collections led to claims that he was now, 'contesting Colum's claim to be the most racial of our singers'.¹⁴⁵ Campbell, however, was but one of a burgeoning school of local poets including, Moira O'Neill,¹⁴⁶ Samuel K. Cowan,¹⁴⁷ Louis McQuilland, John Justice Prender, Mary Hutton, Herbert Moore Pim.¹⁴⁸ Before leaving for Dublin and then India, Belfast poet James Cousins published *Ben Madighan and Other Poems*, and his play, *The Racing Lug* became the first co-production of the ULT. Collectively this school of poets caused Stephen Gwynn to comment that they illustrated the truth that Belfast is not all of one orange colour.¹⁴⁹ In the field of music, Joseph and John Campbell wrote an opera, *Eoghan and Una*, a 'mixumgatherum'¹⁵⁰ of folk tradition and operatic form, described by Stephen Gwynn as 'the oddest jumble of Gaelic adaptation

also founded Irish Foundation, 1931; re-established and edited *The Irish Review*, 1934; lectured at Fordham University New York 1927-38; returned to Ireland in 1939. Published works, Poetry: *The Garden of the Bees* (Belfast: W. Erskine Mayne; Dublin: Gill 1905); [Seosamh Mac Cathmhaoil] *The Rush-Light* (Dublin: Maunsell & Co. 1906); *The Man-Child* [Dublin: Loch Press 1907]; *The Gilly of Christ* (Dublin: Maunsell & Co. 1907); and *The Mounting Singer* (Dublin: Maunsell 1909). *Mearing Stones, Notes from My Note-book on Tramp in Donegal* (Dublin: Maunsell & Co. 1911); *Irishry* (Dublin & London: Maunsell & Co. 1913); *Earth of Cualann* (Dublin: Maunsell 1917); *Orange Terror*, by 'Uitach' [rep. from *Capuchin Annual*] (Dublin 1943); Austin Clarke ed. and intro., *The Poems of Joseph Campbell* (Dublin: Allen Figgis 1963). Plays: *The Little Courberd of Slainge*, (1904); *Judgement: A Play in Two Acts* (1912); *The Turn Out* (1912).

¹⁴⁴ Patricia Hutchins, *Ezra Paund's Kensington, An Exploration 1885-1913* (London: Faber, 1963), p. 128.

¹⁴⁵ MacCartan, 'Belfast: Some Backward Glances', p. 177.

¹⁴⁶ Moira O'Neill (1864-1955): real name: Nesta Higginson. Pastoral poet from a landed Protestant family. Born in Cushendun, Co. Antrim; married Walter Clermont Skrine, and later Robert Keane; lived for some years in Canada, then in Rockport, Co., Antrim, and after on farm-estates in Kildare and Wexford, latterly reclusively except for close family contacts; five children; poetry published extensively in *Blackwood's Magazine*, both poetry and reviews; collections include *An Easter Vacation* (London: Lawrence & Bullen 1893); *The Elf-Errent* (London: Lawrence & Bullen); *Songs of the Glens of Antrim* (London: W. Blackwood & Sons 1900); *More Songs of the Glens of Antrim* (London: W. Blackwood & Sons 1921); *From Two Point of View* (London: W. Blackwood & Sons 1924); *Collected Poems of Moira O'Neill* (London: William Blackwood & Sons 1933); composed words for tunes collected by Honoria Galway. Her daughter was the novelist Molly Keane.

¹⁴⁷ Samuel K. Cowan (1850-1918); born Lisburn, Co. Antrim; contributed to *Lyra Hibernica Sacra*; living at Glanganha, Bangor, Co. Down; contrib. *Kottabor*, incl. in J. M. Lowery, *Book of Jonists*; author of Christmas card verse, occasionally set to music by Sir Arthur Sullivan; *Poems* (London 1873); *The Murmur of Shells* (Belfast 1879); *A Broken Silence and Some Stray Songs* (1883); *Play*, a picture book, verses of SKC (London 1884); *Laurel Leaves* (Belfast 1885); *Femima Jenkins and Other Jingles* (1892); *Roses and Rue* (Newry 1894); *Victoria the Good* (Newry 1897); and *From Ulster's Hills* (1913); militia major; included in *Sung by Six*, *Collected Poems of Six Poets* (Belfast 1896).

¹⁴⁸ Hubert Moore Pim (1883) politician and author; like Bulmer Hobson, born into Quaker family and educated at Friends Lisburn and later studied in France; abandoned unionist roots and became a political and religious convert, becoming a member of AOH and Redmond's United Irish League; 1913 joined Irish Volunteers wrote prolifically: newspaper articles, poems and novels including *Unknown Immortals*, *Songs from an Ulster Valley*, *The Pessimist*, converted to Catholicism circa 1914 and subsequently wrote regularly for *Irish Monthly* (a Jesuit publication); helped publish *The Irishman*, the *Irish Volunteer*, and *Nationality*, however, he later became disenchanted with separatist politics during the Anglo-Irish War, recanted his politics and reverted back to unionism, publishing *Unconquerable Ulster* before later flirting with Italian fascism.

¹⁴⁹ Stephen Gwynn, *Irish Literature and Drama in the English Language* (London: Nelson, 1936) 206.

¹⁵⁰ See Saunders and Kelly, p. 20.

and archaic English.¹⁵¹ Although this opus was never produced, greater musical success was enjoyed by Cathal O'Byrne (see appendix), along with Richard Rowley, Pádraig Gregory, John Stevenson¹⁵² and Florence Wilson¹⁵³ who wrote ballads and lyrics 'shaped in the national mould.'¹⁵⁴ Composers Herbert Hughes,¹⁵⁵ Hamilton Harty¹⁵⁶ and Carl Hardebeck¹⁵⁷ arranged folk melodies into a form of musical nationalism attuned to a broader European Romantic tradition,¹⁵⁸ and Harty composed music for poems written by a whole range of poets, including Alice Milligan, Joseph Campbell, Patrick Colum, W.B. Yeats, P.W. Joyce, Cathal O'Byrne, Cahir Healy¹⁵⁹ and also set eleven poems by Moira O' Neill to music. Hughes and Campbell's *Songs of Uladh*, a 'remarkable first

¹⁵¹ Stephen Gwynn, *Experiences of a Literary Man*, p. 118.

¹⁵² No dates. Member of publishers McCaw, Stevenson & Orr, Belfast; pseudonymously author of *Pat McCarty, Farmer of Antrim: His Rhymes with a Setting* (1903); reproduced from *The Pen*, also *A Boy in the Country* (1912).

¹⁵³ Florence Wilson (1870-1946): born Lisburn, Co. Antrim; married a solicitor in Bangor, residing at Groomsport thereafter. Contributed to *T.P.'s Weekly*, *Irish Homestead*, *Northern Whig*, *Ulster Guardian*, *Northern Whig*, and other papers; associate of Alice Milligan and Alice Stopford Green; author of the famous 1798 ballad, 'The Man from God Knows Where' (1918) based on Thomas Russell, included in her collection *The Coming of the Earls* (1918) which ran into several editions and was extremely popular in America.

¹⁵⁴ MacCartan, 'Belfast: Some Backward Glances,' p. 177.

¹⁵⁵ Herbert Hughes (1882-1937): Belfast-born composer and music critic; son of a local flour manufacturer. He studied music at Royal College of Music in London and later became music critic of the *Daily Telegraph* where he worked until 1932. Heavily involved in the Northern Revival on the musical front; helped found the Irish Folksong Society and co-edited all its publications as well as producing collections of his own compositions and arrangements of traditional folksongs, such as *Irish Country Songs* (1909) and *Historical Songs and Ballads of Ireland* (1922). He often travelled on musical field trips with F.J. Bigger and others, most notably on a journey to Donegal with Joseph Campbell and Bigger which resulted in the publication *Songs of Uladh* (1904). He composed and arranged many pieces for ULT productions and nationalist ceremonies, often in association with his brother Freddie who was a well-known folk singer. However, in spite of his output, neither he, nor Carl Hardebeck, feature in the most comprehensive study published to date examining music in relation to the Irish Revival: Harry White, *The Keeper's Recital: Music and Cultural History in Ireland 1770-1970* (Cork: Cork UP, 1998), see especially, 'Music and the Literary Revival', pp. 94-124.

¹⁵⁶ Sir (Herbert) Hamilton Harty (1879-1941): conductor, composer and accompanist, born Hillsborough, Co. Down; best known for the unmistakably Irish sound of many of his compositions, and a respected and admired conductor, considered at one time to be the premiere accompanist in London.

¹⁵⁷ Carl Hardebeck (1869-1945): born of a German father and a Welsh mother and came to live in Ireland in 1893; organist and teacher in Belfast and won several composition prizes at the Dublin Feis Ceoil. Experience of conflict in Belfast, World War I, and the Irish Civil War contributed to making him an ardent Irish nationalist: 'I believe in God, Beethoven and Patrick Pearse'. In 1922 appointed first professor of Irish music at University College Cork, but returned to Belfast in the following year. He lived in Dublin from 1932 arranging Irish traditional music for various instrumental and choral forces (many for educational purposes) for An Gúm, the government publisher of the Republic of Ireland.

¹⁵⁸ See Raymond Warren, 'Orchestral Music' in David Greer, (ed.) *Hamilton Harty: His Life and Music* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1978), pp. 89-115.

¹⁵⁹ Cahir Healy (1877-1970): Donegal-born journalist, poet, *litterateur* and political activist. He was a regular contributor to *The Shan Van Vocht* and Arthur Griffith's *The United Irishman*. He spent much of his youth actively engaged in various cultural activities of the North's revival; frequented Bigger's home; founded the first Gaelic League branch in his hometown of Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh in 1902; was Chair of the county board of the GAA; secretary of Sinn Féin in North Fermanagh and friendly with key personnel of the IRB. However, he later abandoned these interests to work as an insurance agent in Enniskillen, where he remained until his retirement in 1937.

book',¹⁶⁰ was published in 1904, thanks to the largesse of Bigger and married traditional Irish airs by the former to the latter's lyrics, including the well known air 'My Lagan Love'. The annual *Feis Ceoil* further stimulated interest in Irish musical traditions and practices, as evidenced by Malachy McFall's upsurge in business producing knee harps for beginners. Suitably, this musical revival crescendoed to a climax with the 1903 Belfast Harp Festival in 1903, which had sonorous significance as it recalled Edward Bunting and Belfast's *halyon* days as Athens of the North.

In artistic terms, younger artists such as the Morrow brothers, Paul Henry, William Con(n)or, Frank McKelvey, Seamus Stoupe, James Humbert Craig,¹⁶¹ John Campbell, Charles Lamb¹⁶² were producing a body of work strongly influenced by local folk designs and national Celtic traditions which dramatically affected Irish painting during the Revival (see appendix).¹⁶³ The Ulster Arts Club (UAC) was also founded in 1902,¹⁶⁴ a few weeks after the first co-production of the ULT,¹⁶⁵ with which it shared many members. According to its historian, Patrick Shea, the UAC was a direct 'product of the Irish Literary Renaissance'¹⁶⁶ and, although it had no political or explicitly national(ist) commitment in its constitution which simply declared its intention to 'promote the social intercourse of art workers in Belfast,' the UAC was greatly interested in 'Irishness.' Shea solicitously fine tunes this statement by stressing it meant 'Irishness rather than nationalism,'¹⁶⁷ for both terms were not synonymous to its mixed membership. This non-partisan and secular strategy/identity was fiercely protected by the UAC, as illustrated by the rejection of an application for membership by a local clergyman in 1911. In the politically tense period during the recrudescence of the third Home Rule Bill, the application was refused on the grounds that 'the admission of a

¹⁶⁰ Seamus O'Sullivan, 'Joseph Campbell,' in *The Rose & Bottle & Other Essays* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1946), p. 104.

¹⁶¹ Like Lamb, this Belfast painter went west for inspiration and became predominantly known as a landscape painter. After making frequent tours of the western seaboard, he later took up residence in Cushendun, in the glens of Antrim where the landscape provided him a lifetime's inspiration.

¹⁶² Lamb was heavily influenced by Paul Henry's style and subject, making the west of Ireland his home-ground, in contradistinction to William Connor who preferred to focus on the industrial and urban setting of Belfast.

¹⁶³ Literally dozens of the above figures became leading members of the ULT, as actors, playwrights, stage hands, scene painters, box office staff, administrative staff, reviewers, promoters, and publicists and of course, audiences.

¹⁶⁴ It was originally founded as the Ulidian Artists' Club on 2nd December 1902, but changed its name one month later, in January 1903 to The Ulster Arts Club.

¹⁶⁵ This production of James Cousin's *The Racing Lug* and Yeats' *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, was a co-production with the ULT, see next chapter.

¹⁶⁶ Patrick Shea, *A History of the Ulster Arts Club* (1971, no publication details), p. 6.

¹⁶⁷ Shea, *Ulster Arts Club*, p. 5.

Clerical element in the Club might be productive to dissension.¹⁶⁸

However, as an umbrella organisation, many of its members numbered among the ranks of those most active personnel of the Northern Revival. Harry Morrow, a leading figure of the ULT, was the founder of the UAC and served as its first Vice-President, and later as President (1910-11). Indeed, all of the Morrow Brothers contributed to both the ULT and the UAC: Albert Morrow was elected as one of the first honorary members in 1903, six other Morrow brothers (Albert, George, Harry, Norman, John and Edwin) contributed to the Arts Club's inaugural exhibition in November 1903, and Albert Morrow's poster sketches were the subject of an exhibition later in 1908. W.R. Gordon, who was also President of the UAC (1914-15), acted in numerous ULT productions, whilst Pádraig Gregory, Cathal O'Byrne, John McBurney and J. Shannon Millen were also active members of both the UAC and ULT, as was the ubiquitous F.J. Bigger, Honorary Solicitor of the former and patron/sponsor of the latter. Indeed, Bigger was arguably the most important individual underpinning the Northern Revival and was largely responsible for co-ordinating the single largest cultural manifestation of the Northern Revival: the *Feis* of the Glens in 1904, another critical year in the formation of the North's cultural and political landscape.

The Feis of the Nine Glens

Held on June 30th June, this *Feis* was the largest ever of its kind to be held in Ireland, with over 700 entries and 4,000 people in attendance¹⁶⁹ and this extraordinary cultural event involved a variety of performances, dramatic, sporting, oral, cultural, ethnic and industrial, under the eclectic auspices of the Ulster Literary Theatre, the Gaelic League and the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society. F.J. Bigger was Chairman of an organising committee that included his friends Roger Casement, Alice Milligan and Ada McNeill. He also designed the costumes of the pipers¹⁷⁰ (see appendix) and the green linen banner and jerseys for the local hurling team, who paraded in their new regalia as part of the opening ceremony. John Campbell illustrated the *Feis* programme and Horace Plunkett officially opened the festival and presented many of the prizes, which included awards for the best Lord's prayer written in Gaelic (Mary Hutton), the best spinner of lint, the best baker of soda bread and the best-dressed boy and girl in Irish materials

¹⁶⁸ Arts Club minutes, cited Patrick Shea, *Ulster Arts Club*, p. 12.

¹⁶⁹ For a brief, first-hand account of the personnel and preparations that led to the founding of the first *Feis* of the Glens, see 'Benmore' (John Clarke) 'Founding the Glen Feis', *The Glensman: A Monthly Magazine of Agricultural, Domestic, Rural and General Interest* 1.9, (June, 1932): 28-32.

¹⁷⁰ See photograph in 'Founding the Glen Feis', *The Glensman* 1.9, (June, 1932): 31.

from the Glens.

The range of names of those who attended the *Feis* and received awards testifies to the generous democratic demographic of the festival: Monsignor O'Lavery and Lord McNaghten both received awards, whilst Sir Daniel Dickson, a linen potentate and a 'rough hard Orangeman'¹⁷¹ attended along with the fiery Reverend 'Roaring' Kane, a formidable anti-Home Rule Grandmaster of the Belfast Orange Lodge, (where he signed the minutes in Irish), who declared himself a Protestant and unionist, but proud to remember he was still an 'O'Cahan'. Also in attendance were composer Herbert Hughes, poet Padraic Colum, Douglas Hyde, harpist Owen Lloyd, John Clarke, Major Berry, Sir Hugh Smiley, Lord Cushendall (Ronald McNeill), Barbara McDonnell, Evelyn Gleeson and Helen Laird. Bigger had also invited Stephen Gwynn, whom he had met in Donegal the previous year on a field trip with Herbert Hughes and Joseph Campbell. Gwynn was particularly affected by the presence of two Glensmen, Eoin MacNeill and Roger Casement: one Catholic, the other Protestant, both of whom were later sentenced to death for involvement in the 1916 Rising. Gwynn's account of the first *Feis* of the Glens notes the significance of the *Feis* taking place in Antrim, 'the most Protestant of all Ulster counties', and hails the event as a remarkable example of the political potential of the Gaelic League.¹⁷²

In addition to the traditional, cultural performances of Gaelic games, dancing, music, singing, recitation and Gaelic conversation, there were competitions for 'babies, breadmaking, sewing, horsehoes, *sugan* harness, storytelling [...] liltng, essay writing [...] wrestling, leaping'.¹⁷³ The *Feis* also featured an 'Industrial Exhibition' and events focusing on arts, crafts, local history and heritage. Crafts associated with local cottage industries, (spinning, weaving, etc) and older agricultural methods were displayed and exhibitions of other rural skills and traditions from boat-building to basket making, toy models to boot making were also demonstrated. A short play, *The Fate of Shaun O'Neill* by 'Benmore'¹⁷⁴ was performed to 'considerable commendation',¹⁷⁵ according to its author. The evening before the opening of the *Feis*, a masque written by Margaret Dobbs of the *Feis* Committee was performed, as was her hitherto undocumented play, *The Lady of Cantire*.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Gwynn, *Experiences*, p. 258.

¹⁷² Gwynn, *Experiences*, p. 258.

¹⁷³ Joseph Campbell, 'Northern Autobiography', *Journal of Irish Literature* 8.3 (September 1979): 87.

¹⁷⁴ Pseudoname for John Clarke

¹⁷⁵ 'Benmore', 'Founding the Glen Feis', *The Glensman: A Monthly Magazine of Agricultural, Domestic, Rural and General Interest* 1.9, (June, 1932), p. 32.

¹⁷⁶ A rare programme for this production is contained within the Rutherford Mayne Archive at the Linen Hall Library, Belfast, which describes the piece as a 'historical play' and a production of the 'Belfast

which was given an open-air performance and 'drew big audiences.'¹⁷⁷ Set 'in those uneventful days when O'Neils, O'Donnells, and McDonnells forgetful of the menace of English advance, wrangled between themselves for the supremacy of Ulster', its political import could not have been lost on local audiences; some of whom, as was reported in *The Irish News*, travelled long distances from Lurgan and Newcastle to the Glens where they stayed overnight, 'for the express purpose of seeing the plays.'¹⁷⁸ Enthusiastic audiences called its author to the stage after each performance, where she paid 'high tribute' to Fred Morrow of the ULT, 'who had done great work under circumstances of considerable difficulty.'¹⁷⁹ A bizarrely incongruous performance – an 'exotic incident' – which also played out alongside these other performances, occurred when a band of African natives who had travelled over from Glasgow, 'in straw petticoats and beads, started to give a performance on the strand [...] and] drank paraffin oil, set it afire in their mouths, beat tomtoms and danced.'¹⁸⁰ The hilarious heterogeneity of these 'authentic' cultural performances and the celebration of these indigenous traditions was perhaps the object of Joyce's scorn in his portrayal of the 'Citizen' in *Ulysses* as a revivalist, Irish Irelander who promulgates the use of everything 'Irish' from Gaelic language to 'our flax and damask from the looms of Antrim.'¹⁸¹

The *Feis* was crucially important because it functioned as a highly self-conscious performance of cultural authenticity and local self-sufficiency as advocated in the self-help creed of the co-operative and cultural nationalist movements of the Revival. Furthermore, the geographical location of the *Feis*, deep in the picturesque, Gaelic speaking Glens of Antrim, resonated with particular significance for the Northern Revival. The Glens signified a space and place that remained culturally connected to a preserved Gaelic past, where native traditions survived and thrived and had not been supplanted as had happened in the surrounding region of Antrim and Ulster. Moreover, its geography mapped the mythic contours of Irish legend: the Children of Lir languished as swans on the sea of Moyle which washes the shores of the glens; Deirdre and the Sons of Uishneach landed in the glens following their exile in Scotland, Finn MacCool hunted

Literary Theatre', though its personnel were largely all ULT members.

¹⁷⁷ 'Feis of the Glens: Picturesque Cushendall', *Northern Whig*, 28 June 1966.

¹⁷⁸ *Irish News*, 19 August 1905.

¹⁷⁹ *Northern Whig*, 28 June 1966.

¹⁸⁰ Joseph Campbell, 'Northern Autobiography', *Journal of Irish Literature* 8.3 (September 1979), p. 87.

¹⁸¹ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin, 1986) 268

<http://www.doc.ic.ac.uk/~rac101/concord/texts/ulysses/ulysses12.html> accessed 7.9.2005, cited Kirkland.

in its forests and Oisín's resting place lies in Glennaan.¹⁸² The Glens were mapped as a symbolic site of survival and cultural continuity, much in the same way that Connemara and the Aran islands became ideologically interpellated in the discourse of Southern nationalism.¹⁸³ Indeed, the contours of this political cartography are clearly mapped in Moria O' Neill's *Songs of the Glens of Antrim*, published in 1900. A key text framing this location as a repository of native culture, its poems rhapsodise about a romantic race of fishermen and farmers who inhabit the glens. The remoteness and isolation of the area meant that it had effectively been cut off from the rest of the province so that older ways of life were preserved. However, the same isolation also (ironically) aligned the region with the eastern seaboard of the Scottish coast, whose mountains and islands are always within view and which were arguably more familiar than many of their compatriots. As Joseph Campbell records:

Orkney and Hebridean blood runs in their veins, the common patronymics being MacDonnell, MacAllister, MacKitterick, MacCloskey, MacCusker, MacGavoch, MacStravick, MacNeill, and in the extreme North - the Route - MacQuillan.¹⁸⁴

The significance of the Glens and its symbolic similarity to the West of Ireland is also reflected in its importance to Ulster painters and Irish speakers. Artists, such as James Craig, relocated both their homes and studios to the regions, whilst *Gaeltacht* excursions regularly visited the Glens and nearby Rathlin Island: two of the most active Irish language areas in the North.¹⁸⁵

This apparently nostalgic, nationalist and anti-modern aspect of the *Feis* of the Glens was tempered by the progressive work of the co-operative movement and the cross-community range of those who attended. However, these occasions contributed to a sense of national pride, self-sufficiency and cultural alterity to the dominant unionist

¹⁸² Oisín's resting place here is referenced in John Hewitt's poem 'Ossian's grave': 'Legend has it, Ossian lies / beneath this landmark on the hill, / asleep till Fionn and Oscar rise / to summon his old bardic skill / in hosting their last enterprise.'

¹⁸³ This same tendency is evident in the dramatic *mise en scène*, as James Cousin's *The Racing Lug*, a precursor to Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, is set in the equally picturesque and peripheral coast of Carrickfergus off the Antrim coast as indeed, most of the work produced by the ULT was set in County Down as opposed to the wild west of Ireland so popular setting of the early Abbey. Robbie Meredith also notes how Alice Milligan, writing in *The Shan Van Vocht* relocated the geographical location of 'authentic Ireland' to Donegal: 'the land of the Northern Gael'. Robbie Meredith, 'The Shan Van Vocht: Notes from the North', in *Critical Ireland*, p. 178.

¹⁸⁴ Joseph Campbell, 'Northern Autobiography', p. 86.

¹⁸⁵ The Glens of Antrim were to fascinate future generations of Ulster poets, most notably, John Hewitt who described the area as his 'Chosen Ground'. Hewitt's poem 'Fame' also refers to the period of cultural revival inaugurated by the 1904 *Feis*.

ethos. In smaller *Feis* held elsewhere throughout the North, particularly in strongly Catholic areas, the contribution of constructive unionist projects like Plunkett's co-operative movement and the support of local Protestant communities were less prominent. In these cases, a stronger nationalist narrative underwrote the performance of identity and authenticity. Robert Lynd's account of a *Feis* in Toome, for instance, describes an altogether less complex and hybrid occasion; more a celebration of prelapsarian culture existing 'before civilisation had made men barbarous', an event Lynd likens to a 'Hellenic festival'. This romantic description is redolent with the idea of a classical culture being reborn,¹⁸⁶ and lends itself more to the anti-colonial nationalist ideology of the burgeoning republican movement. It also supports Hutchinson's suggestion that cultural nationalism in this period was rapidly transformed into the instrument of a separatist revolutionary movement.¹⁸⁷

Francis Joseph Bigger & *Ardrigh*

'It has fallen to me, brought up in the country of the northern leaders of the insurrection of '98, related to several of them, familiar with their homes and haunts, acquainted with the scenes of their deaths, a frequent visitor to their graves, their people and my people have known and connected with each other [...] it has fallen to me, after the lapse of a century, to be a chronicler of their lives and actions.'
(F.J. Bigger)¹⁸⁸

Underpinning the Ulster Revival was the fascinating figure of Francis Joseph Bigger, a well-off solicitor, philanthropist, antiquarian, nationalist and freemason, who resided at *Ardrigh* on Belfast's Antrim Road (see Plate 8)¹⁸⁹ It is extraordinary and altogether symptomatic of the secondary importance allocated to the Northern Revival, that this fascinating figure - the focal point for nearly every form of linguistic, cultural and political nationalist activity throughout Belfast and the North for decades - still has not been the subject of a single biography or critical history¹⁹⁰ and yet:

¹⁸⁶ Robert Lynd, 'Hibernia Rediviva', *Irish and English: Portraits and Impressions* (London: Francis Griffiths, 1907), p. 94.

¹⁸⁷ John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: the Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: 1987), pp. 188; 307.

¹⁸⁸ F.J. Bigger, *Remember Orr*, United Irish Commemoration Society, originally printed 1906. (Facsimile Reprint, in Lanch Hall, 1998), p. 6.

¹⁸⁹ The Antrim Road was home to many active nationalist figures: Fenian Robert Johnston and antiquarian Seaton Milligan (fathers of Anna and Alice respectively); the poet Margaret Pender and Bulmer Hobson. The Waddell family also settled there following their return from Tokyo in 1900, and lived in Glandore Gardens, before moving to Cedar Avenue, both off the Antrim Road.

¹⁹⁰ His close friend Dr John Crone did produce a short book featuring a selection of Bigger's writing which included an extended, highly personal preface eulogizing Bigger and giving a broad biographical overview of his life and work *In Remembrance* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1927). However, this is written more in the

[T]o an earlier generation, he was something of a living legend - known throughout Ulster and indeed the whole of Ireland for his infectious enthusiasm for Irish history and antiquity, and his great contribution to the preservation and recording of our castles, crosses, folklore and traditions.¹⁹¹

Hailed as the 'father of twentieth century republicanism',¹⁹² Bigger was a patron and sponsor of all forms of nationalist activity: 'A prop of institutions, traditions, ceremonies; [...] A diviner of thoughts, a patron and friend of boys: an urge of native effort'.¹⁹³ With the same indefatigable energy as Alice Milligan, he gave lectures, lantern-slide presentations, and talks all over Ireland at the request of various *feisanna*, clubs and societies.¹⁹⁴ Francis McPeake, scion of Belfast's most famous musical dynasty of traditional Irish musicians, recalls that Bigger's home held lantern slides of the O'Neills and the O'Donnells 'because ordinary people didn't know anything about it' and that Bigger and Casement travelled throughout the North to 'tell the people that they were Irish in the North'.¹⁹⁵ He served as the Honorary Secretary of the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club for a decade, later served as its Chairman (1900-1903) and, as the leading antiquarian in Ulster, was elected a member of the Royal Society of Antiquaries in 1888 and a Fellow in 1896. He was also a member of the Royal Irish Academy, a Governor of Inst.¹⁹⁶ and a prolific contributor to numerous journals. His largesse supported dozens of Irish sporting, political and cultural organisations and publications, as well as the

manner of personal homage than a critical history.

¹⁹¹ Eamon Phoenix, 'Francis Joseph Bigger of Ardagh - Historian and Philanthropist' *Ulster Tatler*, 1987, no number, p. 40. (pp. 40-42)

¹⁹² Dudgeon, *Roger Casement: Black Diaries*, p. 180.

¹⁹³ Joseph Campbell, cited in Saunders and Kelly, *Joseph Campbell*, p. 16. This reference is kinked slightly in EIRDATA's bibliographical entry for Bigger, which states that he was a 'great lover of little boys' http://www.pgml-eirdata.org/html/pgml_datasets/authors/b/Bigger,FJ/life.htm. Given the Bigger's hidden homosexuality, this is a loaded reference by also referring to how in contemporary accounts he was a close associate of Roger Casement. For Bigger's influence, see T.J. Campbell, *Fifty Years of Ulster 1890-1940* (Belfast: Irish News, 1941), p. 28.

¹⁹⁴ 'An Irish Chieftain of Today', 'Mr Bigger is not a mere dreamer, He *does* things. He is a busy lawyer and a practical man of affairs. From ten in the morning till four in the afternoon he is found in his office every working day [...] Outside his office work, however, he finds time to rush off in his motor to Dublin or Sligo, to Donegal or Derry to deliver a lecture, to Armagh or Tyrone to establish a Piper's band, to Cushendall to superintend the annual celebration of a Cairn erected over the grave of Sean an Diomais. Or again, he is off to Cranfield near Randalstown, where lately he revived the Stations and the Processions at the Holy Well, or to Lough Neagh's banks to help the fishermen in the struggle for their rights, or to Rathlin islands to provide a motor boat for the islanders [...] Everywhere and always the enthusiastic apostle of Ireland's saints, customs and traditions, of her language, music and pastimes, and the earnest and successful promoter of our industries, he is comparable to St Patrick himself in the ubiquity of his journeyings', cited in J.S. Crone (ed.), *In Remembrance* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1927), pp. xxvii-xxviii.

¹⁹⁵ Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, M3 12: McPeake Transcripts, pp. 114-5.

¹⁹⁶ The Royal Belfast Academical Institution (Inst) school for boys was founded and formally opened at 1:00pm on the 1st February 1814 by William Drennan: the founder of the United Irishmen.

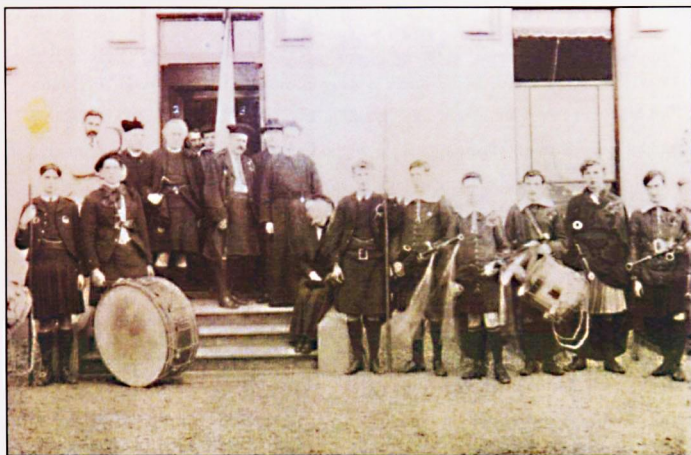


Plate 8a: *'A perfect bachelor's home.'* Rare photograph of Bigger's home, *Ard-righ* on the Antrim Road. Bigger pictured in the kilt on the doorstep.



Plate 8b : *Francis Joseph Bigger*

restoration of various archaeological sites: crosses, churches, monuments and castles, such as Jordan's Castle in Ardglass, which he rechristened 'Castle Sean'. As one of a number of Norman castles protecting the County Down coast and closely associated with Shane O'Neill, it was set to be demolished after being sold under the Land Purchase Act, until Bigger stepped in and bought it. He gradually restored the building by furnishing it from his own collections of antiquities and 'authentic' native furniture, and adorning its walls with pictures of Ulster chieftains, transforming it into the convivial setting for his famous evenings of entertainment, featuring performances of Irish music and dancing before numerous literary and cultural figures (see appendix). It was also a venue for Irish language schools and, *in situ*, Bigger dressed as a Celtic chieftain, whilst others were costumed as bards and pipers (see Plate 9). Philanthropically, he was also extremely active: he paid for a ferry for Rathlin Islanders, was active in temperance campaigns¹⁹⁷ and his home was a source of alms and food for the poor. Also in an effort to highlight the baleful housing conditions of the urban and rural poor, he had plans drawn up for labourers' cottages to be built in a more aesthetic style, arguing that this could be done with better materials and for less money than those provided by government. A row of cottages was subsequently built outside Belfast in Carnmoney with Bigger's money and christened 'the Sally Gardens' by their patron.

His home, *Ardriagh* (see Plate 8a), served as the fulcrum of the Northern movement and is variously described as the 'powerhouse of inspiration and knowledge',¹⁹⁸ 'the northern focal point',¹⁹⁹ 'the most cultured home in Ireland'²⁰⁰ and was a vitally 'important cultural centre for the Nationalists in Belfast'.²⁰¹ The gardens and grounds of *Ardriagh* lying between 'Cavehill and the sea, a mile or two north of Belfast, with a wide and lovely view over the Lough and away to the dales of Galloway,' in the words of its owner,²⁰² were not only aesthetically pleasing, but appositely symbolic in their location, for rising majestically above the Antrim Road was the promontory of Cave Hill, where Wolfe Tone had addressed his followers and which now cast a centennial shadow over

¹⁹⁷ He was Director of the Ulster Reformed Public House Association and helped numerous public houses convert into 'refreshment houses.'

¹⁹⁸ MacCartan, 'Belfast: Some Backward Glances,' p. 178.

¹⁹⁹ Jonathan Bardon, *The History of Ulster*, p. 420.

²⁰⁰ As described by Shane Leslie in the opening dedication to Bigger in his book, *The Irish Tangle for English Readers* (London: MacDonald & Co., 1946). In the rest of the dedication, Leslie describes Bigger as 'an Ulsterman devoted to all Ireland: a Presbyterian in theory and a Franciscan in practice: a lover of bees, flowers and relics: who gave counsel and courage to all Irishmen desirous to help a cause or a craft honourable to their country: who committed the high crosses of the North to the care of Orangemen: who, while he lived, gave Belfast the distinction of the most cultured home in Ireland'.

²⁰¹ F.X. Martin, 'McCullough, Hobson, and Republican Ulster', p. 98. He also had a home in Murlough Bay where similar congregations took place.

²⁰² F.J. Bigger, *The Birds of Ard-Ri* 1921 [no publication details], p. 3.

the place where men and women were again meeting in the same cause. *Ardriagh* provided a 'university'²⁰³ for nationalists of the city, its main chamber room lined from floor to ceiling with books which were 'at the disposal of his intimate friends.'²⁰⁴ It was also an unofficial museum, a 'veritable treasure house'²⁰⁵ in Countess Markievicz's words. One room, designated 'the '98 room' in honour of the United Irishmen, contained pikes, pictures, uniforms, miniatures and personal mementoes from its leaders, whilst the inner library contained the revered bones of Henry Joy McCracken, the martyred United Irishman, (until Bigger supervised their interment in Clifton Street Cemetery), and two massive cannons rescued from Dargan's Island guarded the front door to his home.²⁰⁶ Even the scenic location of *Ardriagh*, with its view across the Lough and its beautiful gardens provided inspiration to its visitors.²⁰⁷

There are numerous accounts of evenings at *Ardriagh*,²⁰⁸ where amidst the skirling of pipes, fiddlers, and dancing, leading cultural and literary figures met and mingled. Martin describes how, 'Thirty or forty of Bigger's friends used to gather regularly in the house for an informal meal and a *ceiliadh*'²⁰⁹ and Bigger often brought blind *uilleann* piper John O'Reilly from Galway to Belfast to play on these evenings.²¹⁰ In his memoirs, Desmond Fitzgerald records that Bigger's home provided political refuge from Belfast's 'unadulterated unionism'²¹¹ and O'Byrne describes a scene where beneath the windswept darkness of Cavehill, 'inside, in the great library, the lights were lighted [...] and heaped up turf fires glowed on hearths at either end of the long room,' and evocatively recounts how candle-light was the only illumination allowed in the library bedecked with crimson linen, and how the floor's rug carpets were pulled back to reveal oaken boards on which *ceilidhes* took place. On one particular occasion, O'Byrne recalls the harpists and pipers playing before their guest of honour, Roger Casement, who lay on 'a heaped-up pile of cushions [...] happy to be back in Ireland [...] and] at *Ardriagh* [...] with its prince of hosts

²⁰³ See Flann Campbell, *The Dissenting Voice: Protestant Democracy from Plantation to Partition* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1991), p. 374 [-5].

²⁰⁴ F.X. Martin, 'McCullough, Hobson, and Republican Ulster', p. 99.

²⁰⁵ Countess Markievicz, 'The History of the Hearts of Steel', *Gaelic American* 4 May 1910.

²⁰⁶ Cathal O'Byrne recalls sitting astride the cannons with others when listening to Bigger inform them about old Belfast, *As I Roved Out*, p. 287.

²⁰⁷ Joseph Campbell's collection of poem *In the Garden of Bees* was named after Bigger's gardens.

²⁰⁸ For example: Joseph Connolly, *Memoirs*, pp. 76-7; Hugh MacCartan, 'Some Backward Glances'; Cathal O'Byrne, 'Roger Casement's Ceilidhe', *Capuchin Annual*, (1946): 312 and *As I Roved Out*, pp. 170-1; F. X. Martin, 'McCullough, Hobson, and Republican Ulster', p. 99; Shane Leslie, *The Film of Memory*, pp. 384-5; Patrick Scott, 'Ardriagh: A House Imbued with 'the Gaelic Spirit'', *The Irish Times*, 8 April 1986; Desmond Fitzgerald, *Demond's Rising: Memoirs 1913 to Easter 1916* (Dublin: Liberties Press, 2006), p. 44.

²⁰⁹ F.X. Martin, 'McCullough, Hobson, and Republican Ulster', p. 99.

²¹⁰ Scott, 'Ardriagh: A House Imbued with 'the Gaelic Spirit'', *The Irish Times*, 8 April 1986.

²¹¹ Fitzgerald, *Demond's Rising*, p. 44.



Plate 9: *Harpist in Celtic Costume*

and his warm friend Frank Bigger.²¹² Another *Ardrigh* visitor records:

To walk into that house was a thrilling experience, you were almost certain to meet an established or rising celebrity [...] Rev. Mr Hannay [...] known to fame as George A. Birmingham...Shane Leslie mediating on his projected novel [...] Joseph Campbell browsing [...] Alice Milligan in the throes of a new historical pageant.

And, 'Even if you didn't, there was a vast army of books in the library, the relics of McCracken, Orr and Jemmy Hope in the little museum; and if you strolled out into the garden, you could feast your eyes on the *parterres* of flowers.'²¹³

The list of luminaries from political, literary, cultural and revolutionary fields who visited Bigger's home is extraordinary, as 'People distinguished for their service to Ireland in various ways'²¹⁴ mingled with one another at the many debates, lectures, meetings and musical evenings hosted at *Ardrigh*. Amongst their number were: Lord Ashbourne (William Gibson), George A. Birmingham (Canon Hannay),²¹⁵ Ernest Blythe, William Bulfinn, John Campbell, Joseph Campbell, Ethna Carberry, Erskine Childers, Patraic Colum,²¹⁶ Desmond Fitzgerald,²¹⁷ James Good, W.R. Gordon,²¹⁸ Alice Stopford Green,

²¹² Cathal O' Byrne, 'Roger Casement's Ceilidhe', *Capuchin Annual*, (1946) 312. O'Byrne recounts how they sang Barbara Allen and Casement's favourite song, 'The Castle of Dromore' on this particular evening, which Casement later recalled in the last letter he wrote from prison before his execution.

²¹³ MacCartan, 'Belfast: Some Backward Glances,' p. 177.

²¹⁴ Cathal O'Byrne, *As I Roved Out*, p. 171.

²¹⁵ James Owen Hannay [pseudo. George A. Birmingham] (1855-1950): born Belfast, educ. Haileybury and Trinity College, Dublin; 1892-1913 rector of Delgany, Westport, County Mayo; 1892 a member of the General Synod of the Church of Ireland. He published prolifically. Works include: *Spanish Gold*; *The Seething Pot*; *The Bad Times*; *A Padre in France*; *A Wayfarer in Hungary*; biographies of Isaiah and Jeremiah; 1934 published his autobiography *Pleasant Places*; his play, *General John Regan* upset local community of Westport, especially when they discovered the identity of the pseudonym under which he wrote; subsequently left to serve as chaplain to the British Embassy in Budapest, then in France as army chaplain during the WWI; 1924 clergyman in Somerset and later in London.

²¹⁶ Padraic Colum, (1881-1971): poet, playwright and leading member of the Revival, one of the earliest dramatists of the Abbey Theatre, promoted by Yeats and AE until he fell out with the former, also produced several works on Irish folklore and a biography of Arthur Griffiths, and a member of the Irish Academy of Letters.

²¹⁷ Desmond Fitzgerald (1888-1947): Irish revolutionary, poet, and *Cumann na nGaedh* politician; born London; 1911 married Mabel McConville, a Protestant Irish nationalist and lived in France until 1913 before moving to County Kerry; involved with the Imagist group of poets; 1914 joined the Irish Volunteers and organised a Volunteers group in County Kerry; 1915 imprisoned for making a political speech; later expelled from Kerry and moved to County Wicklow, combatant in 1916 Rising and later imprisoned, 1918 released after being elected as a Sinn Féin MP; 1919 appointed Director of Publicity for Dail Éireann at its first assembly; editor of the *Irish Bulletin*; 1921 arrested but later released following the Anglo-Irish Treaty which he supported, appointed first Minister for External Affairs of the new independent Irish Free State; government representative at the League of Nations and at Imperial Conferences; 1927-32 Minister for Defence; 1938 appointed to Seanad Éireann where he remained until

Arthur Griffith, Stephen Gwynn, Carl Hardebeck, Cahir Healy, Paul Henry, Professor Robert Henry,²¹⁹ Herbert Hughes, Bulmer Hobson, Douglas Hyde, Robert Johnson, Sir Shane Leslie,²²⁰ Sean Lester,²²¹ Robert Lynd,²²² Dennis McCullough, Eoin MacNeill, Rutherford Mayne, Kuno Meyer, Alice Milligan, several of the Morrow brothers, Colm Ó Lochlainn,²²³ Cathal O'Byrne, John O'Reilly,²²⁴ David Parkhill, Margaret Pender,²²⁵

retirement from politics in 1943; one of his sons Garret FitzGerald, served as Taoiseach on two occasions in the 1980s.

²¹⁸ A 'painter, a leader in the amateur dramatic movement and a master of Inst., also a notable singer of Irish songs', Patrick Shea, *A History of the Ulster Arts Club*, (1971, no publications details), p. 3. He also acted in numerous ULT productions and was the first Honorary Secretary of the Ulster Arts Club before later becoming its President.

²¹⁹ Robert Mitchel Henry (1873-1950); born in Belfast, educ. Royal University, Dublin, and London University; Professor of Latin at Queen's University Belfast for thirty years and persuaded Queen's to teach Irish, 1938 Pro-Vice-Chancellor; 1939 appointed Professor of Humanities at St Andrews University; member of the Royal Irish Academy, 1920 appointed President of the Classical Association of Ireland, among his publications are *The Evolution of Sinn Féin* and editions of Livy, Cicero, Virgil and a study of the Roman epic.

²²⁰ Shane Leslie (1885-1971); born into a wealthy Protestant Ascendancy family; cousin of Winston Churchill, educ. Cambridge where he flamboyantly converted to Catholicism – a conversion accompanied by his political proselytisation and he became an exponent of Irish nationalism; later disinherited for his anti-unionist writings; published prolifically as a poet, novelist, travel writer, editor, biographer, and historian, producing over seventy works; editor of *The Dublin Review* but forced to resign over the sexually explicit content of his autobiographical novel *The Cantab* which was attacked by the Catholic hierarchy. 1910 and 1911 elections stood as a Nationalist candidate in Derry and participated in many of the myriad cultural nationalist organisations and activities in Belfast and Ulster, often attired, like Cathal O'Byrne, in his characteristic saffron Irish kilt; he was also, possibly, homosexual. IRA leader Patrick McCartan threatened him with 'exposure' in a letter he sent to Bulmer Hobson in which he recommended the IRA threaten all Irishmen who may possibly confirm Casement's homosexuality.

²²¹ Sean Lester (188-1959) Belfast Protestant, journalist, Irish nationalist and diplomat; born in Carnickfergus, County Antrim, the son of a butcher into strong unionist family; educated at Methodist College, Belfast, joined Gaelic League and became a nationalist convert; sworn into IRB by Ernest Blythe who also advised him to follow a career in journalism; worked on the staff of the *North Down Herald* and later the *Freeman's Journal* and moved to Dublin, joined the Volunteers and sided with MacNeill rather than Redmond when they later split, editor of *Irish Freedom*; 1922 joined the new Department of External Affairs of the Irish Free State; 1929 Irish representative at Geneva; later appointed to the High Commission for the League of Nations where he protested vehemently against the Nazi persecution of the Jews; 1940 League's Acting Secretary-General; 1947 retired to Galway; presented Woodrow Wilson Award and honorary doctorates from the National University of Ireland and Trinity College, Dublin.

²²² Robert Wilson Lynd (1879-1949): Protestant republican, essayist, journalist; born in Belfast, educ. Royal Belfast Academical Institution and Queen's College, Belfast, where he studied classics, trained with the Belfast daily, the *Northern Whig*; member of the Dungannon Clubs and Gaelic League; taught Irish classes in London; 1901 went to Manchester then London to work as a freelance journalist; shared a studio with the artist Paul Henry; joined *Daily News* (subsequently called *News Chronicle*); 1912-1947 literary editor; regular contributor to the *Nation*; 1913-1945 wrote a weekly essay for *New Statesman* under pseudonym 'Y.Y.', wrote for the Sinn Féin movement under the name of Riobard O'Floinn; published prolifically including an edited collection of some of the works of James Connolly; among some of the more than thirty books he published *Home Life in Ireland*; *Ireland a Nation*; *The Art of Letters* and *Doctor Johnson and Company*. He died in Hampstead.

²²³ Colm Ó Lochlainn (1892-1972): typographer, printer, book-binder and bibliophile; editor of *Irish Street Ballads*; proprietor of The Three Candles Press; co-edited *The Life of Hugh Roe O'Donnell, Prince of Tyrconnell* (*Beatha Aodh Rua O'Domhnaill*).

²²⁴ The blind uilleann piper who was brought by Bigger from his home in Galway to Ardtrigh, where he taught Francy 'Da' MacPeake, the head of Belfast's most famous musical family.

²²⁵ Margaret Pender O'Doherty (1865-?): born in County Antrim, educ. locally and in Belfast; poetry and short stories published in newspapers; she wrote several historical novels, including *The Green Cockade: A Tale of Ulster in '98*; *The Last of the Irish Chiefs*; *The Outlaw and Spearman of the North*.

Hubert Moore Pim, W.B. Reynolds, and the singularly melancholic figure of Roger Casement, suffering from recurring malaria, contracted during his humanitarian work in the Congo. Little wonder then, that his home was often under surveillance by informers and police spies as this remarkable constellation of individuals remained in orbit around *Ardriagh*.

However, Bigger was not merely involved in cultural and antiquarian activities, and, tellingly, he called these gatherings his “firelight” (as opposed to his “twilight”) school.²²⁶ Dudgeon records how an informer’s report to the Dublin Metropolitan Police connected Bigger’s cultural work with revolutionary activity, and that he was responsible for the printing and publishing of anti-recruitment literature, (probably on behalf of the Dungannon Clubs), later ‘issued to the Gaelic Clubs at ½d per copy.’²²⁷ Although historian Jonathan Bardon dismisses Bigger and his friends, ‘as ‘utterly unrepresentative of the mass of Ulster Protestants who were repelled by these new interpretations of cultural identity,’²²⁸ this large coterie of Protestant nationalists harkened back to the 1790s, the ‘Golden Age’ of Northern pre-eminence in the political and cultural life of Ireland. They espoused a secular, civic and ecumenical form of nationalism and may be regarded as the inheritors of a radical Protestant tradition reaching right back to the United Irishmen. Significantly, Joseph Campbell records that the first time Belfast was hailed as the ‘Northern Athens’ was in 1793 at the opening of the new Theatre Royal in Arthur Street, Belfast:

The synonym formed part of the prologue spoken, according to the old custom, before the rise of the curtain, ‘Yes and old Time shall yet, with glad surprise \ View in Belfast, a second Athens rise.’²²⁹

Theatre had embodied the enlightened spirit of this heroic age, but now the Belfast stage was merely the commercial venue for second-hand, English productions imported from Britain. However, the groundswell of cultural activity of the Northern Revival, combined with the political resurgence of nationalist societies, ensured that both cultural and political forces of the Revival converged in the formation of the Ulster Literary Theatre which sought to promote a radical new formation of politics that might again help ‘a second Athens rise.’

²²⁶ Cited Campbell, *The Dissenting Voice*, p. 375.

²²⁷ Dudgeon, p. 173.

²²⁸ Bardon, *Ulster*, p. 422.

²²⁹ Joseph Campbell, ‘Art in Belfast’, *The Nationist*, 2 November 1905.

'The Queer North': National & Sexual Politics

'Homosexuality provides a history remarkably illuminating for the issues of marginality and power upon which contemporary debates, cultural, psychological and literary have been converging.' (Jonathan Dollimore)²³⁰

'In connection with those Gaelic pioneer days, we recall with not a little pride, that we were the first persons with the temerity to walk through the streets of Belfast wearing an Irish kilt.'
(Cathal O'Byrne)²³¹

Adrian Frazier's seminal essay 'Queering the Irish Renaissance' observes that the late Victorian period has been rejuvenated by the research of queer studies scholars.²³² Frazier's own essay partially succeeds in doing the same for the Revival period in Ireland, limited as it is to a study of the masculinities of George Moore, Edward Martyn and Yeats.²³³ As I have argued earlier, an engagement with the cultural dynamics and mechanics of the Northern Revival can help to revise our understanding of the Irish Renaissance. Indeed, there is another fascinating narrative within this micro-history of the Northern Revival which I would like to explore; one that has, until now, dared not speak its name. This is the complex, suppressed and secretive story of the gay sexuality of many prominent Northern political and literary activists and the network of relations between Roger Casement, F.J. Bigger, Cathal O'Byrne, John McBurney, Forrest Reid, Shane Leslie, the 'Neophyte' boy scout troop and others.

Many of these figures came from strongly unionist, Protestant backgrounds and there is a sense that, for some of them, political dissidence mapped onto their sexual 'deviance'. The fact that these individuals were intimately interconnected through their work in the Northern Revival raises the question to what extent, 'is sexual desire a figuration for politics, or politics a displacement of sexual desire?'²³⁴ Certainly, there is evidence of both in the political and personal narratives of two quixotic figures in particular, Francis Joseph Bigger and Roger Casement (*see Plate 10*).²³⁵

²³⁰ Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 32.

²³¹ Cathal O'Byrne, 'Memories Theatrical', *Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 21 October 1944.

²³² Queer Studies emerged as a discrete theoretical discourse in the early 1990s out of lesbian/gay studies and its precursor feminist studies and theory, and it interrogates the politics and performance of identity and in particular the construction and representation of homosexuality.

²³³ Adrian Frazier, 'Queering the Irish Renaissance: The Masculinities of Moore, Martyn and Yeats', in *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*, eds., Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valulis, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), pp. 8-38.

²³⁴ Frazier, 'Queering the Irish Renaissance', p. 10.

²³⁵ Different authors on different occasions have described both Bigger and Casement as an 'Irish Don



Plate 10: Roger Casement, from FJ Bigger's papers

Roger Casement

Casement was belatedly converted to the cause of Irish nationalism around the turn of the century and became actively involved from 1904-6 in Irish affairs after being radicalized by his humanitarian work in the Congo.²³⁶ His consular work in Brazil later kept him largely out of Ireland between 1906-12 - although during this period he maintained an active correspondence with Bulmer Hobson and Alice Stopford Green whilst funding myriad nationalist organizations and activities²³⁷ - and was followed by another intensive surge of activity from 1912-16.

The subject of Casement's sexuality has long been a sensitive and fraught issue²³⁸ and the authenticity of his notorious 'Black Diaries' has been the subject of heated debate by historians and political figures for decades. It was only relatively recently (1992) that this matter was finally settled when forensic tests, sponsored by both British and Irish governments, scientifically proved their authenticity. The diaries first emerged as Casement awaited trial for treason and was facing the death penalty following his ignominious capture in Kerry whilst smuggling weapons from Germany for use in the 1916 Rising. In spite of the strength of British public feeling against the 'criminals' responsible for the Rising who had 'treacherously' sought help from the same German enemy their armies were fighting in the trenches of Europe, Casement posed a particularly difficult problem for the British authorities given the residual humanitarian halo attached to his name, following his distinguished service for the British Foreign Service and his exposure of the horrors of slavery in the Congo and Brazil (for which he was knighted). He could not simply be hanged as an ordinary criminal. Thus, the government resorted to a smear campaign to discredit Casement by exposing his 'deviant' sexuality and, by extension, his

Quixote' figure: see novelist Shane Leslie who describes Casement as 'an Irish Quixote' (*Long Shadows*, London: John Murray, 1966, p. 187). Roger Dixon, curator at the Ulster Museum, has given a number of local talks in Belfast entitled 'F.J. Bigger: the Irish Don Quixote'.

²³⁶ Casement's conversion was in part effected by historian Alice Stopford Green whom he met 'through the Africa movement germinated by her friend Mark Kingsley'. Green was the widow of an English historian and daughter of a Protestant arch deacon from Meath and became a fiercely partisan historian herself. Her *The Making of Ireland and its Undoing* (1908) and *Irish Nationality* (1911) later profoundly affected Casement's politics, see Jeffrey Dudgeon, *Roger Casement The Black Diaries: with a Study of his Background, Sexuality, and Irish Political Life* (Belfast: Belfast Press, 2002) p. 167.

²³⁷ Nearly all accounts of Casement record his generous largesse in funding and supporting financially struggling projects: 'he literally gave everything away he had to help the national movement. He raised money to defend prisoners, to feed school-children in the Gaeltacht, to finance Gaelic colleges and to keep our small and insolvent newspapers in existence.' Hobson, *Yesterday and Tomorrow*, p. 80.

²³⁸ For a concise overview of some of the controversies, see Lucy McDiarmid's 'The Posthumous Life of Roger Casement' in *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*, eds, Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gulanella Valiulis, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), pp. 127-58. See also: H. Montgomery Hyde, *Roger Casement* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964); Brian Inglis, *Roger Casement* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1973); B.L. Reid, *The Lives of Roger Casement* (London: Yale University Press, 1976).

corrupt character and politics. It did this by distributing copies of his captured diaries, which recorded in salacious detail his promiscuous homosexual activity, amongst influential figures within British society who may otherwise have lobbied for clemency for him. Casement's friends and supporters were horrified, vociferously disputing the veracity of the diaries and damning them as crude forgeries designed to blacken his good name, just as another perfidious British government had attempted to do to Parnell a generation earlier. The 'Black Diaries,' as they came to be known, explicitly detailed all of Casement's homosexual liaisons, from the size of partners' penises to the amount he paid some of them, and were regarded as a disgusting audit of indecency and proof of his 'perversion',²³⁹ which enabled the British to incriminate and execute their author.

Following his execution and the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922, the debate over the authenticity of these diaries resurfaced on many occasions, but with a different resonance. As Walshe remarks, 'the tenuous nature of national identity necessitated a denial of difference, with its incipient threat of dissidence,'²⁴⁰ and in the fragile new political state, homosexuality and the homoerotic remained subalterned identities and discourses. Nationalist politicians and historians periodically repeated their denials of Casement's 'perversion'²⁴¹ as they felt any recognition by the state of his sexuality would threaten the legitimacy of its patriarchal, heterosexual hegemony. Indeed, it was not only the State that felt threatened by the resurrection of this dead martyr's sexuality, but senior Northern republicans who had been comrades (and confidants) of Casement, such as IRA veteran Patrick McCartan. Dudgeon records how McCartan threatened F.J. Bigger's nephew, TCD Professor John Bigger in 1937 and warned him against giving any personal testimony that could confirm the validity of Casement's homosexuality. John Bigger had earlier confirmed to other parties that his uncle, Francis Joseph Bigger had shown him Casement's diaries and private papers and that they knew beyond doubt that 'Casement was a homo.'²⁴² This explosive revelation was considered by McCartan to be a serious threat and, from America, he wrote to fellow Northerner Bulmer Hobson of the need to silence Bigger: 'I hope to get Sean Russell [the IRA Chief of Staff] or some of the boys to give Bigger some "friendly advice."²⁴³ The 'boys' obviously made contact: Bigger maintained a strict silence on the matter for the rest of his life.

²³⁹ René MacColl, *Roger Casement* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1956).

²⁴⁰ Walshe, 'Introduction', *ibid.*, 6.

²⁴¹ The most significant text of this period was W.J. Maloney's (now discredited) *Forged Casement Diaries* (1936).

²⁴² Letter from Frances Hackett to W.J. Maloney, cited in Dudgeon, p. 552.

²⁴³ Cited in Dudgeon, p. 552.

However, times have changed enormously since the 1930s and the taboo of Casement's homosexuality, like that of Oscar Wilde's, has largely evaporated and his reputation restored; a transition facilitated by the massive transformation of Irish culture, society and politics into a more modern, progressive and pluralist state. In fact, gay authors, like Colm Tóibín, have argued that Casement's homosexuality helped make him a great humanitarian:

He loved the people of the Congo and the Amazon Indians [...] he wanted to fondle them and make love with them in a way which would give him pleasure. Since he was gay, he did it with blokes. One presumes that some of them took pleasure in it too - maybe even some of the ones he paid. On the other hand, having it off with a large, bearded man from Northern Ireland might not have been to everyone's taste.²⁴⁴

Tóibín's humane recasting of Casement's sexuality is an example of a more compassionate revisionism that has affected historiographical, queer and post-colonial studies outside Ireland. Frequently, homosexuality has been viewed as a sexual mnemonic for colonialism: of European men taking sexual advantage of subalterned natives.²⁴⁵ However, Robert Aldrich's magisterial survey recently challenges such paradigmatic assertions of the complicity between colonialism and homosexual activity by extending this field to consider how many homosexual writers and politicians also provided a humanitarian critique of colonialism.²⁴⁶ With regards to new scholarship on Casement, the most brilliant and meticulous reappraisal is the work of Belfast-based gay rights activist Jeffrey Dudgeon, whose work has thrown interesting new light on Casement's sexuality, including the existence of a boyfriend in Belfast, Joseph Miller Gordon,²⁴⁷ but it is his relationship with Bigger which is the most intriguing.

As discussed earlier, Bigger's 'perfect bachelor's home'²⁴⁸ was a meeting point for many young men in Belfast, all of whom were politically active, energetic and disenchanted with the Unionist environment of their native city. Typically, these

²⁴⁴ Colm Tóibín *The Irish Times* [Weekend], 2 March 2002.

²⁴⁵ See Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990) which examines how different colonies of the British Empire provided sites of homosexual licence.

²⁴⁶ Aldrich lists Alexander von Humbolt, Andre Gidé, Herman Melville, Charles Warren Stoddard, Edward Carpenter, E.M. Forster, Louis Couperus, Claude Farrère, Marshal Lyautey, Alain Daniélou, François Augiéras, Jean Genet as well as Roger Casement as homosexual figures who critiqued various colonial practices and institutions. Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 367-396.

²⁴⁷ See Jeffrey Dudgeon, *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries: with a Study of His Background, Sexuality, and Irish Political Life* (Belfast: Belfast Press, 2002).

²⁴⁸ Connolly, *Memoirs*, p.76.

gatherings at Ardrigh gathered a broad range of young men from both communities and different classes and (with few women present) in a strongly homosocial environment. As Joseph Campbell records: 'Bigger loved youth, and once a week round the hearth of his library at 'Ardrigh' collected his "young bloods", as he called them,' where they would read patriotic and political material, including 'racy extracts' from his monograph on the United Irishmen, before being entertained to supper and retiring 'upstairs, and until 11 o'clock sit spellbound under his infectious leadership.'²⁴⁹ The sense of transgression on religious, political and class (and for some, sexual) grounds helped cross-fertilise cultural interests and political beliefs and thus help confront and contest the dominant order of Belfast's Victorian and unionist character.

Whilst Bigger was described as a patron and sponsor of all and lover of 'young boys', a term that has been used with loaded connotations,²⁵⁰ the subject of his sexuality has been more often than not surrounded by silence or innuendo. Austen Morgan's claim that Bigger 'may have been a homosexual'²⁵¹ is the most outright comment, in contrast to other coy evasions of the matter,²⁵² despite the copious circumstantial evidence that seems to confirm his homosexual orientation.

From an early age, Bigger was a sickly child and became deeply attached to his mother who doted on her favourite son. When his other siblings left home, Bigger lived on with his mother in Belfast until her death and his 'ardent devotion to his Mother and her memory'²⁵³ was manifest on a daily basis as her place at Ardrigh's dinner table was set and reserved for her long after she passed away. It seems that the only person to have received the same 'ardent affection' of Bigger over the course of his life was his close friend Roger Casement, who frequently resided for long periods at Ardrigh, (as did Cathal O' Byrne who was 'constantly at [...] Bigger's' according to Casement's cousin, Gertrude Bannister).²⁵⁴ Indeed, the closeness of both men's relationship is illustrated by the fact that Casement, who had no permanent home, stored most of his belongings with Bigger, including some of his most sensitive personal papers, including explicit personal diaries and correspondence. After Casement's arrest, Bigger reputedly opened the trunk

²⁴⁹ Joseph Campbell, 'Northern Autobiography', *Journal of Irish Literature* 8.3 (September 1979): 94.

²⁵⁰ The EIRDATA bibliographical entry concludes with this phrase, and loads its importance by subsequently referring to his friendship with Casement. http://www.pgil-eirdata.org/html/pgil_datasets/authors/b/Bigger.FJ/life.htm

²⁵¹ Austen Morgan, *Labour and Partition: The Belfast Working Class 1905-23* (London: Pluto Press, 1991) 199.

²⁵² The Insh website, 'Gay Community News', whose playful mock motto is 'a queer nation once again', explicitly refers to Bigger as 'a gay solicitor' in a review of Dudgeon's book on Casement's diaries. http://www.gcn.ie/newgcn/st_full_story.asp?id=128&i=b, accessed 10. 10. 2004.

²⁵³ Crone, *In Remembrance*.

²⁵⁴ Cited in René MacColl, *Roger Casement* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1956), p. 213.

containing all these papers and was so horrified by the details of Casement's homosexual relationships contained within them, that he burnt its contents.²⁵⁵ Whilst MacColl and others state that this destruction was motivated by Bigger's 'revulsion,' it is also highly likely that Bigger needed to protect his own reputation as he had been closely linked with Casement and was the subject of much salacious speculation in Belfast already. Intriguingly, after his own death in 1926, Bigger's 'faithful housekeeper'²⁵⁶ Bridgit Matthews, on his instructions, burnt many of her master's papers just as he had done with Casement's. Undoubtedly, many of these papers were political in nature and related to secret and subversive IRB / IRA activity, but the lack of personal documents that were preserved and donated in the massive archive deposited in Belfast's Central Library suggests that many of these papers must also have been personal in nature. Historian Alice Stopford Green wrote to Bridgit with the admonitory advice that, 'Perhaps it is well to say nothing as to some things that were collected for fear of raising gossip in Belfast. There is much you should keep carefully in your remembrance where it should be safe'.²⁵⁷ Indeed, Bridgit remained silent about her master for the rest of her life and refused interviews with historians and journalists over the years.²⁵⁸

Whilst there is no clear, certifiable evidence of homosexual liaisons between Bigger and Casement, or any other men or boys, there is a great deal of circumstantial evidence which suggest the nature of his sexual orientation, not least of which was the contemporaneous circulation of rumours about his sexual proclivities in secret police reports. These rumours originated no doubt, out of the bachelor's extremely active involvement in youth activities, as a letter by Casement's biographer W.J. Maloney attests:

[Bigger] was interested in the boy scout movement about thirty years ago when I occasionally went to Belfast and never had any interest in what he was doing. Yet that did not spare my shocked ears from hearing that the Greeks had a name for Francis Joseph Bigger's habits and that he needed none to show him how to scout for boys.²⁵⁹

Whilst Maloney goes on to protest, 'In this rumour he was I am sure misrepresented' there

²⁵⁵ See René MacColl, *Roger Casement*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1956), p. 224 and Brian Inglis, *Roger Casement: The Biography of a Patriot who Lived for England and Died for Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1993), p. 439.

²⁵⁶ Hugh A. MacCartan, 'Belfast: Some Backward Glances,' *Capuchin Annual*, (May, 1943), p. 177.

²⁵⁷ Dudgeon, p. 196.

²⁵⁸ I am indebted to the historian Eamonn Phoenix for this information. He tried, unsuccessfully to interview Bigger's housekeeper on a number of occasions to ascertain what papers were burnt and why. Her silence, he suggests, was part of a pact agreed with her master.

²⁵⁹ Maloney, cited in Dudgeon, p. 553.

are a number of photographs I have discovered in the extensive archive of his papers at Central Library in Belfast that appear to be explicit evidence of homoerotic, same-sex desire (see appendix). Many of the photographs feature different, handsome young boys, often attired in heraldic dress and posing before ancient ruins. Other images include young boys dressed as maidens (see *Plate 11*) and pictures of a young proto-boy scout movement called the Neophytes,²⁶⁰ (which Bigger founded in 1900 at St Peter's Church on the Antrim Road), feature various young semi-naked men exercising outside their tents on a camping expedition. All these images emphasise the physical condition (and beauty) of the young men, whilst these photographs of boys dressed in doublets and hose reveal a strong gaze of desire for their young male subjects. Given the illegality of homosexual activity and the devastating repercussions should one be 'outed' *a la* Wilde and Casement, it is wholly unsurprising that homosexual relations were rarely in the public view. Aldrich recounts how this culture of secrecy meant that 'traces of inclinations appear in more subtle ways', listing works dedicated to companions, use of language, suggestive allusions, (particularly to figures of Antiquity), photography and painting emphasising the 'physical beauty of male models'.²⁶¹ Certainly, all these traces can be detected in the work of various nationalists who may have been gay. They are certainly evident in Bigger's photographs, perhaps also in both Shane Leslie's and O'Byrne's dedications to Bigger,²⁶² and possibly in some poems written between Casement and Cathal O'Byrne.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Different from the Na Fianna Éireann – the Irish Boy Scouts founded by Hobson in 1902 in Belfast. The musician and member of the ULT Herbert Hughes, was Honorary Secretary of the Neophytes and as Dudgeon suggestively records, had once said of Standish O' Grady, 'I loved him with all the fervour of adolescence', cited in Dudgeon, p. 184.

²⁶¹ Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 404.

²⁶² O'Byrne dedicates *As I Roved Out* (1946) 'To the memory of his life-long friend Francis Joseph Bigger of Ardagh, Historian, Archaeologist and Antiquarian, whose erudition, generously shared made the writing of it seem possible'.

²⁶³ Cathal O'Byrne was an extraordinarily colourful and camp nationalist figure in Belfast, noted for his delicate temperament and dandified dress. What Kiberd calls the 'cult of the kilt' (Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, London: Vintage, 1996, 524) was evident in its full sartorial splendour in Belfast in this period, and O'Byrne along with Joseph Campbell, Shane Leslie and F. J. Bigger frequently dressed in them. This extremely self-conscious performance of 'ethnic' cultural identity was described by O'Byrne many years later:

In connection with those Gaelic pioneer days, we recall with not a little pride, that we were the first persons with the temerity to walk through the streets of Belfast wearing an Irish kilt. This we also did in London, where for four successive years, during the week of the 'Aonach', we gave Irish Folk Song recitals to the delight of the London Gaels and their thousands of friends. How well we remember the secret glee we felt, knowing that every time we walked out through London's crowded thoroughfares in our saffron kilt we were breaking the English law, for the old proscription against an Irishman appearing in public [...] is in force to this day. ('Memories Theatrical', *Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 21 October 1944).

However, the tangible sense of transgression and cultural otherness radiating from this account is not



Plate 11: *Male Neophyte Dressed as a Celtic Maiden*

Awaiting execution in Pentonville prison, Casement was prohibited from holding any letters, yet his cousin Gertrude Bannister recalls that an illicit letter had been smuggled in from O'Byrne which Casement held onto until the end. Also amongst the last possessions Casement held onto in his cell before his execution, was a copy of the bisexual poet Rupert Brooke's *1914 and Other Poems*,²⁶⁴ on the front of which had been transcribed O'Byrne's poem to Casement, 'O Friend of my Heart', which some have suggested can be read as a mildly homoerotic declaration of his love for Casement.²⁶⁵ After his execution, this book and its inscription were left to O'Byrne.²⁶⁶ Certainly, as Kirkland notes, rumours circulating about the nature of their relationship were perhaps responsible for O'Byrne's decision to leave for America. O'Byrne (see appendix) cut an extraordinarily dashing, if dandified figure; his waxed moustache and saffron kilt suited the highly camp, self-conscious nature of his deportment and behaviour. Some controversy certainly surrounded this suspiciously effeminate nationalist bachelor who converted to Catholicism, but there seems little doubt that he was gay and, like another repressed homosexual figure, Forrest

simply one of sartorial subversion, of nationalist resistance to 'English law', but of a violation of gender-specific codes of dress. Both in this account and in Bigger's photographs of cross-dressed young boys there is a clear sense of a doubly transgressive performance of ethnic and sexual identity.

²⁶⁴ There is a fascinating parallel between Brooke and Casement: both became celebrities in their lifetime and feted in high society and were extraordinarily striking figures, Brooke for his beauty, Casement for his presence and noble stature (he was over six feet in height). Furthermore, Casement's anti-colonial convictions and political martyrdom, and Brooke's romantic, patriotic war poetry and untimely death transmogrified both men into nationalist icons in Ireland and Britain. Concomitantly, their gay sexuality was suppressed and occluded over the years. (Brooke's private letters articulating his same-sex desire for numerous male acquaintances were officially kept out of print by his executors until 1998). To add further poignancy to this parallel, given the similarity of both figures and the final circumstances I have described of Casement's fate, Roger was executed on the 3rd August 1916 whilst Rupert, who died the previous year was born on the 3rd August 1887. I have not been able to ascertain if Brooke and Casement had ever actually met one another, or if the English poet reciprocated Casement's respect, but this would certainly prove to be an interesting area for further research.

²⁶⁵ 'O, friend of my heart:

Like the swish of the wind in the rustling grass,
 like the rhythm of a star,
 Like a singing stream to a thirsty soul in a
 desert place lonely and far,
 Like a deep throated music of thrushes in the
 windless quiet of days
 Is the breath of your praise.

O Friend of my heart!

'Tis a debt I pay in this telling for hours of
 delight,
 To lay my wreath of bays at your feet I
 would gladly climb afar to your height,
 I would walk the flints with terrible joy, if
 at the journey's end,
 I would greet you, O friend!"

From Cathal O'Byrne and Cahir Healy, *The Lane of the Thrushes: Some Ulster Love Songs* (Dublin: Sealy, Bryers & Walker, 1905), p. 7.

²⁶⁶ See Cathal O'Byrne, 'Roger Casement's Ceilidhe', *Capuchin Annual*, 1946-7, 314.

Reid, remained celibate throughout his life.²⁶⁷

Critics of this line of argument may object to the suggestive nature of such connections and its reliance on innuendo and circumstantial evidence. However, homosexuality did not, or could not, proclaim itself openly. Nationalist activity was already subversive in the unionist North, but homosexual acts were illegal and the scandal and punishment recently meted out to Oscar Wilde would very much have served as a warning about the dangers of indiscretion or of being 'outed'. Perhaps a measure of Belfast's puritan abhorrence of homosexuality is reflected in the publicity surrounding the Theatre Royal's 1901 production of *Lady Windermere's Fan* whereby Wilde's name was removed from advertisements and playbills. These dangers were doubly brought home by the persecution and execution of Roger Casement. Furthermore, evidence and records of homosexuality have often been censored or destroyed. Consequently, it may be impossible to *empirically* prove the homosexuality of Bigger, O'Byrne and others, but as Éibhear Walshe maintains in his introduction to *Sex, Nation, and Dissent In Irish Writing*, the first lesbian/gay work in Irish Studies, it is imperative for scholars to move beyond the 'essentialist notion that sexuality is *only* expressed through sexual acts' (my italics).²⁶⁸ Playing with Oscar Wilde's quip that it is always Judas who writes the biography, Walshe indicts Irish biographers for lacking Judas' frankness, and suggests that their positivist treatment of their subjects' lives conveniently excuses them from addressing the difficult issue of their gay sexuality:

Actual proof of same-sex acts seems to be required before a biographer will allow for a lesbian or gay sensibility. A plea of physical and emotional innocence, unnecessary if the writer were dealing with a heterosexual subject, is heard again and again in these otherwise perceptive and scholarly biographies.²⁶⁹

Biographers may tend to lack the Judas touch, but most historians have also been evasive about the issue. As mentioned earlier, the historian Jonathon Bardon dismisses Bigger *et al.* as 'utterly unrepresentative of the mass of Ulster Protestants who were repelled by these new interpretations of cultural identity.'²⁷⁰ That Bigger *et al.* do not fit within the dominant paradigm of Protestant identity or represent the unionist politics of the majority of their

²⁶⁷ On O'Byrne's sexuality see Dudgeon 584-90. For Reid, see Colin Cruise, 'Error and Eros: The Fiction of Forrest Reid as a Defence of his Homosexuality', in Éibhear Walshe (ed.) *Sex, Nation, and Dissent in Irish Writing* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), pp. 60-87.

²⁶⁸ Éibhear Walshe, 'Introduction', in *Sex, Nation, and Dissent in Irish Writing*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), p. 7.

²⁶⁹ Éibhear Walshe, 'Introduction', p. 7.

²⁷⁰ Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, Press, 1992), p. 422.

co-religionists is indisputable. However, Bardon ignores the fact that their regionalist nationalist politics were *equally unrepresentative* of Southern nationalism. Moreover, the sexual identities of many of their number were also unrepresentative of the masculinist ideology of both unionism and nationalism.

The Revival was a counter-cultural project that sought to create a nationalist 'autonomous self-image in opposition to the colonial culture.'²⁷¹ As always, the formation of identity requires the 'negation of other possible forms of existing,'²⁷² and consequently, the politics of gender and sexuality are ineluctably encoded within the ideology of nationalism. As the editors of *Nationalisms and Sexualities* observe:

As *man* and *woman* define themselves reciprocally, so national identity is determined not on the basis of its own intrinsic properties but as a function of what it (presumably) is not [...] Nations are forever haunted by their various definitional others.²⁷³

This is especially true in post-colonial nations where the imperial power represents itself as strong, masculine, and protective, and its colonised 'other' as feminine, weak and passive. Thus, the colonial relationship is invariably gendered²⁷⁴ and anti-colonial nationalism inverts and reverses this gendered representation with a hypermasculine (and somewhat homophobic) ideology that is especially strong within the militant republican tradition, *pace* McCartan's threat to Bigger. In this context, homosexuality and its connotations of effeminacy is seen as vitiating nationalist identity and is regarded as a threat that must be suppressed and silenced. Nationalism always aims at:

the integration of a highly differentiated population into a modern nation state, a project which has always sought to transcend antagonisms, contradictions and social differences for the sake of a unified conception of political subjectivity.²⁷⁵

Post-1922, this concept of a unified political subjectivity is transformed from a counter-hegemonic concept within an oppositional nationalism into a hegemonic concept within the new nation state, and as Walshe notes the 'primacy of a particular form of masculinist

²⁷¹ Eibhear Walshe, 'Introduction', *Sex, Nation, and Dissent in Irish Writing* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), p. 2.

²⁷² David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993), p. 4.

²⁷³ Andre Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Summer and Patricia Yaeger, 'Introduction', *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (London: 1992), p. 5.

²⁷⁴ See Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984).

²⁷⁵ Lloyd, *Anomalous States*, p. 5.

nationalism' that subsequently predominated in Irish literature, culture and politics 'led, inevitably, to the suppression of a number of counter-discourses (i.e. feminism, radical socialism, lesbianism, the homoerotic).'²⁷⁶

The gay identity of Casement, Bigger, O'Byrne and others challenges the masculinist discourse of Irish nationalism (and Ulster unionism), and blurs the binary identity politics that have for so long fossilised Irish politics and criticism, particularly in the North. Whilst the revisionist revolution of Irish history has helped fragment grand historiographical narratives and release subterranean or suppressed micro-histories, it has often been traduced by opponents as a partisan, anti-nationalist, crypto-unionist political project. However, revisionism cuts both ways, and here helps to contest the dominant unionist historiographical narratives of Belfast and Ulster. A Benjaminian brushing against the grain of Belfast's history reveals the abjected histories and silenced voices of those subalterned on the basis of their sexuality and politics with the advent of the Northern unionist state after Partition.

Accordingly, there is an ethical as well as an empirical value to revisionist history. As David Lloyd states, to engage in an 'archaeology of Irish culture'²⁷⁷ and to understand the hegemonic role of 'culture in the formation of citizen-subjects', we need to, 'recover subterranean or marginalized practices which have been understood variously as aberrant, marginal, pre-modern and residual, or incoherent.'²⁷⁸ This recovery of both the marginalised history of the Northern Revival and the micro-history within it, of a clandestine, subterranean subculture of a gay-nationalist network is part of this process. It is important that these marginal elements, these minority discourses, are recuperated and reintegrated to help us interrogate the historio-political process of identity formation that expunged them as 'unrepresentative'. The recovery of these cultural practices and political identities help reveal the hybridity of colonial culture and a more diverse field of historical possibilities which helps shifts the terms of debate away from the moribund 'narrow ground' determinist nature of Northern identity politics that has for so long limited political and cultural debate.

Thus, the sexuality and subjectivity of this network of activists within the Northern Revival kinks all *straightforward* revivalist and regionalist narratives. It represents an intriguing, interstitial history; a margin within the margin, of individuals, identities and activities that have long been beyond the purview of both unionist and nationalist

²⁷⁶ Eibhear Walshe, 'Introduction', *Sex, Nation, and Dissent in Irish Writing*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), p. 3.

²⁷⁷ David Lloyd, *Anomalous States*, p. 6.

²⁷⁸ David Lloyd, *Anomalous States*, p. 7.

histories, and thus, offer a fascinating insight into this Revival period from a different perspective.

Commercial and Colonial Theatre

As so often, *Nomads' Weekly* accurately, if acidly, describes the theatrical scene in this period:

We may say roughly of the theatrical provender to which we are treated in Belfast that, as to three fourths of it, it consists of rubbishy pieces played by rubbishy companies, and that, of the remaining fourth, one third of it consists of fine pieces by rubbishy companies, one third of rubbishy pieces by fine companies, and the remaining third of fine pieces by fine companies. There is one qualification of this division, and it is that many pieces are fine within themselves, are brought so often that they have become a weariness of the flesh.¹

Similarly, the *Northern Patriot* lamented that lack of 'serious' drama and of any local dramatic activity, as apart from brief runs of the Shakespearean Company, the Carla Rosa Company, and Comptons Old English plays, 'absurdity and folly and vulgarity jostle each other on and off the boards of our theatres in endless rotation.'² *Nomads' Weekly* regularly bemoaned the 'parlous condition'³ of theatre-going in Belfast, sarcastically citing William Archer's ('one of England's leading dramatic critics') prediction that, 'The Twentieth Century is going to be a great dramatic century' and stating, 'One wonders, can Mr Archer have expressed this opinion after a glance at the prospective bookings of the Belfast theatres.'⁴ Playwright St John Ervine recalls how the only theatre he experienced in this period were biannual productions of pantomimes at Easter and Christmas and the odd touring production which, 'still lived in the provinces, although it had ceased to live in the West End of London.'⁵ Ervine also observed that the posters and playbills, such as those produced by Albert Morrow, were 'generally more enthralling than the play'⁶ and represented the only local input into the theatrical scene. The stifling provincialism of the touring theatrical circuit and the *bourgeois* nature of local audiences is also encapsulated in Ervine's recollection that both he and his mother, 'had a passion [...] for plays in whose title the word *London* occurred.'⁷

Nomads' Weekly blamed the decline of theatre going in Belfast, on poor

¹ *Northern Whig*, 14 April 1900.

² *Northern Patriot*, 16 March 1897.

³ *Nomads' Weekly*, 30 March 1901.

⁴ *Nomads' Weekly*, 18 May 1901.

⁵ St John Ervine, *The Theatre in My Time*, p. 49.

⁶ St John Ervine, *The Theatre in My Time*, p. 13.

⁷ St John Ervine, *The Theatre in My Time*, p. 15.

management, an indifferent public and the 'race of canting psalm-smiters'⁸ whose puritanical attacks on theatregoing, discussed earlier, had such a deleterious effect on local audiences. This contemporaneous view has been reinforced by all subsequent commentaries written on theatre in Ulster, of which Frankfort Moore's is perhaps the most elegant in its description:

the tidal wave of prejudice against theatre-going in the town during the gloomy mid-Victorian era threatened to become a veritable deluge, weeping every scrap of unsel and every glint of spangle into the limbo of the lost.⁹

In the face of these harsh conditions, Belfast's struggling theatres developed elaborate marketing strategies in their attempts to cajole the citizens of Linenopolis through their doors. The Alhambra and the Theatre Royal reduced their ticket prices in 1901, the latter by one-half with 'the extra privilege of being allowed to smoke in the auditorium,'¹⁰ in spite of the fact that the theatre had burnt down less than twenty years earlier. One touring company, no doubt aware of Belfast's notorious reputation, trumped local theatres' incentives by going one step further, 'presenting patrons with bottles of cider!'¹¹ For the city's working class population the theatre was one of very few outlets of entertainment cheaply available to them and the bleakness of the city's entertainment scene is recalled by Protestant shipwright and playwright, Thomas Carnduff:

Life for young working class people in 1900 was somewhat empty of entertainment. There were no cinemas, few organised playing fields and, with the exception of religious societies, no attempts to induce the youth of the city into healthy and useful citizens.¹²

The outbreak of the Boer War, however, provided a boon to Belfast's theatres as its stages hosted a series of patriotic melodramas which toured cities throughout Britain before arriving in Ireland. Indeed, the way in which British and imperial values were transmitted through the cultural practices of popular theatre and early cinema constitutes an enormous area that, as yet, has not been researched by historians or critics in relation

⁸ *Nomads' Weekly*, 20 April 1901.

⁹ Frankfort F. Moore, "'Murdering" Cleopatra and Wrecking her Barge. The Stage in Belfast: Denunciatory Days and Now', *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 June 1934.

¹⁰ *Nomads' Weekly*, 18 May 1901.

¹¹ *Nomads' Weekly*, 18 May 1901.

¹² Thomas Carnduff, *Thomas Carnduff: Life & Writings*, ed. John Grey (Belfast: Lagan Press, 1994), p.69.

to Ireland,¹³ although some inroads have recently been made in terms of how this was conducted through sporting activities.¹⁴ Joseph Connolly's memoirs again give a sense of the extent to which commercial theatres and cultural production were influenced by this imperialistic atmosphere:

As I remember it, the Boer War saw the peak point of vulgar expression of the arrogant spirit of British imperialism. Jingoism it came to be called and we in Ireland got our full share of it. Our theatre, our music-halls [...] were soaked in the propaganda that proclaimed the glory of *Britannia* and contempt for the lesser breeds.¹⁵

Such patriotic melodramatic fare was characteristically and caustically mocked by *Nomads' Weekly*, (in spite of its editor's support for the war), with one exasperated reviewer protesting, 'I have a partiality for the burlesque, but when it comes to a serious pathetic repetition of the heroism of Irish soldiers in the Boer War, recited in the classic costume of a Roman problem methinks there is a limit to foolery.'¹⁶ Whitford Kane, an actor from Larne, at that time eking out a living in London, performed in one such propagandist play, *True to the Queen*, in which he repeatedly saluted the Union Jack dressed as a British soldier.¹⁷ Given the fact that he was later to become a prominent figure in the Ulster Literary Theatre his blushes were spared as this particular production failed to arrive in Belfast! However, many such Boer War melodramas like *Briton or Boer?* - a 'sensational military sketch' - played in Belfast after touring England. As Connolly recounts:

[O]ur theatres and music halls at that time were all visited, week by week, by London companies and British touring entertainers, and these merely repeated the performance that had won applause in Leeds, Sheffield, Edinburgh and elsewhere in Britain, our Irish audiences got the same medicine. There was a revulsion of feeling against all this [...] its vulgar

¹³ There has been a proliferation of studies in relation to British theatre, notably Peter Bailey, ed., *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986); Jacky Bratton, ed., *Music Hall: Performance and Style* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986); Dagmar Kift, *The Victorian Music Hall: Culture, Class and Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Michael Kilgarriff, *Beauty and Banjos: Peculiar Lives and Strange Times of Music Hall and Variety Artists* (London: Oberon Books, 1998). The only publication in the Irish field is Eugene Watters and Matthew Murtagh's *Infinite Variety: Dan Lowrey's Music Hall, 1879-97* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), although this particular publication is written more as homage than history.

¹⁴ Alan Bairner, 'Ireland, Sport and Empire', in *An Irish Empire?: Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire*, ed., Keith Jeffery (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 64.

¹⁵ Connolly, *Memoirs*, 38.

¹⁶ *Nomads' Weekly*, 11 August 1900.

¹⁷ See Jack Loudan, 'Whitford Kane' *Irish News*, 12 February 1959.

stupidity and boastfulness aroused the antipathy of anyone with any vestige of national feeling.¹⁸

The jingoistic excesses of this imperial fare incensed local nationalists and inspired patriotic demonstrations of support from unionist audiences. At the same time, there was a growing realisation that any nationalist response to this staging of imperial propaganda was essentially an *empty-handed* one, as the Northern Revival, which had made great progress with its sophisticated network of clubs, societies, organisations and activities, had been exposed during the Boer War for their conspicuous failure to capitalise on the propagandist potential of the stage. Perhaps watching in the stalls were David Parkhill and Bulmer Hobson, who later founded the ULT in 1904 'to be used as an instrument of nationalistic propaganda.'¹⁹ However, its emergence was not an overnight appearance but part of a slow, incremental evolution of what Raymond Williams defines as an 'emergent' culture: one that was 'substantially alternative or oppositional to'²⁰ the cultural hegemony of Belfast's commercial and colonial theatrical scene.

An Emergent Irish Theatre

In 1902, few people were aware of the germination of a literary revival. In December 1902 Belfast people were probably wondering what the new City Hall would look like and reading the lively correspondence in the local press about a plan to put the tramway horses out to grass and to substitute electric motive power. Henry Irving and Ellen Terry had just presented "The Merchant of Venice" in the Grand Opera House and the Belfast Newsletter was commenting sadly on the Belfast public's poor support for serious theatre. But the Theatre Royal in Arthur Square was packing in the audiences with a play called "The Secrets of the Harem". When produced in London, it drew a protest from the Turkish Ambassador!²¹ (Patrick Shea)

In 1902 the *Secrets of the Harem* were divulged on the Belfast stage during which a dashing English officer defended the virtues of a Christian maiden by swathing her in the Union Jack and challenging the native heathens to desecrate it. However, in the same year as this orientalist imperial propaganda played to packed houses in the city, *Nomads' Weekly* reported that its editor Alf Moore and novelist Robert Cromie had collaborated in

¹⁸ Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 39.

¹⁹ Bulmer Hobson, *Yesterday and Tomorrow*, p. 23.

²⁰ Raymond Williams, *Marcism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 123. For a discussion of Williams' definitions of 'emergent' and 'residual' cultures, see pp.121-7.

²¹ Patrick Shea, *A History of the Ulster Arts Club*, (1971, no publication details), p. 6-7. This performance took place in the same month as the ULT's collaboration with the ILT.

dramatising a short story and, inspired by the success of this, Cromic was now working on a one act play, 'founded on some of the incidents of the successful Irish romance, *Kitty's Victoria Cross*'. This prompted one enthused critic to declare: 'The production of two plays by local authors looks as if Belfast is determined to have a little National Dramatic Movement of its own.'²²

That such a small gesture could be hailed as even a 'little' National Dramatic movement reflects the frustration of Belfast playgoers and their longing for locally produced work. The *ennui* of Belfast's intelligentsia and the frustration of its theatre *aficionados* are further evident in a letter signed 'enthusiastic playgoer' published in the same paper in October, appealing for some form of playgoer's club or theatre movement to be established.²³ This lack of any locally produced drama and vitiated theatrical scene contrasted unfavourably with the vigour of the nationalist wave engulfing other aspects of cultural and intellectual life and, as this tide belatedly caught up with the theatre on the shores of a new century, the appeals of the 'enthusiastic playgoer' were at last answered for the following month, the Ulster Literary Theatre staged its first co-production with the Irish Literary Theatre and performed *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and *The Racing Lug*.

Even before the advent of the ULT, there is evidence of an emerging body of new nationalist drama. An editorial of the *Northern Patriot* in June 1896 proclaimed that it had received a 'well written' nationalist drama and appealed for amateur dramatic movements to get in contact with the author to produce it. (I could find, however, no evidence to suggest this happened). In 1898, Alice Milligan was involved in production of *The Passing of Conall*, possibly the 'first modern production in the Irish language'²⁴ to be staged in the North and which was performed in Letterkenny. Then in 1899, her friend and fellow editor, Ethna Carberry, collaborated with a different group to produce another Irish language production, *Padraig ag an Teambhair* (St. Patrick at Torah), which played to some acclaim in St. Colum's Hall in Derry in April. The following year, P. T. McGinley's play, *Eilís agus an Bhean Deirce* (*Alice and the Beggar Woman*) was staged in Belfast in November 1900. Also in this period the Belfast School of Art Sketching Club, which traditionally produced conventional productions of popular and classical plays, began to experiment with writing and performing their own material. *Nomads' Weekly* reports that

²² *Nomads' Weekly*, 2 August 1902.

²³ *Nomads' Weekly*, 4 October 1902.

²⁴ Robert Hogan and James Kilroy, *The Irish Literary Theatre 1899-1901* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1975) p.

52. *The Passing of Conall* (anon.) was published in *The Freeman's Journal*, 21 November 1898.

one of its members, James Woods, (later a prominent member of the ULT), wrote a new play for the Club to perform, entitled *In the Dark of the Dawn*. Set in a public house and dealing with a moment from Wolfe Tone's life, it was acclaimed by its reviewer as, 'undoubtedly a promising essay in the art of a playwright'.²⁵ It was this amateur enthusiasm for writing and performing 'folk plays' that former School of Art Sketching Club member and ULT stalwart Gerald MacNamara satirises in *The Mist That Does be on the Bog*.²⁶

Perhaps the most important figure in this nascent nationalist theatre scene was Alice Milligan, who was extremely active as a playwright, actress, and choreographer. Milligan wrote a number of patriotic plays, including: *The Harp that Once* (1901); *The Deliverance of Red Hugh* (1901); *The Daughter of Donagh: A Cromwellian Drama in Four Acts* (1903); *Cu Chulainn*; and *Diarmaid agus Gráinne*. Her less well-known play, *The Green Upon the Cape*, comically dramatised a clandestine meeting in a tavern outside Paris between Wolfe Tone and another United Irishman, and was published in the *Shan Van Vocht* in 1898.²⁸ Written to commemorate the 1798 centenary, it was another gesture towards developing a theatrical strand of Revivalist activity. However, although Milligan produced a significant body of published drama, it was her work in developing a non-literary form of physical, imagistic theatre - *tableaux vivants* - that made the most important contribution.

Produced throughout the country Milligan's *tableaux vivants* had a profound effect on audiences, both North and South, and they represent a vital, if critically neglected, dramaturgical contribution to the Irish Revival given the way in which they reflect and refract the cultural nationalism of the period. Yeats was extremely taken with the stylised, imagistic, and immobile form of acting pioneered in these productions and they undoubtedly influenced the development of his own aesthetic ideas on acting, scenography, and performance.²⁹ Maud Gonne also travelled to Belfast where she was impressed by performances of Milligan's *tableaux*, so much so that she afterwards sought the assistance of her Ulster counterpart for *Inghinidhe na hÉireann* (Daughters of Erin)

²⁵ *Nomads' Weekly*, 12 April 1902.

²⁶ In MacNamara's play, a small troupe of bourgeois Belfast protestants involved in the 'folk movement' travel to the west of Ireland to research and rehearse their own play, *What's all the Strababout?* See chapter 6.

²⁷ See my article, "'Beyond the Pale": Neglected Northern Irish Women Playwrights, Alice Milligan, Helen Waddell, Patricia O'Connor' in Melissa Sihra, ed. *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp 109-114.

²⁸ *Shan Van Vocht*, 4 April 1898.

²⁹ See Norman Jeffares, W. B. Yeats, *A New Biography* (London: Hutchinson 1988), p. 118. See also P.J. Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, The Gaelic League Movement and the Co-Operative Movement* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003), p. 76-7.

theatre company to stage similar work in Dublin. Maire Quinn wrote to Milligan in 1900 on behalf of *Inghinidhe* and Gonne:

Dear Miss Milligan, Miss Gonne has asked me to write to you with reference to the Gaelic *Tableaux*, which we are so anxious to have in Dublin. We were so pleased to hear [...] that you were interested in this project and had so kindly promised to give us the benefit of your experience and assistance in carrying them out.³⁰

With Milligan's assistance, *Inghinidhe* soon developed a nationalist mixumgatherum theatrical programme, comprising performances of Irish music, dancing, singing, and recitations, with a series of *tableaux vivants* as the evening's political and performative centrepiece.

Milligan not only choreographed and 'wrote' these *tableaux* but often acted in them and, performed in what was perhaps the 'first modern production in the Irish language' in 1898. The same year, the *Feis Ceoil*, another crucially important movement of the Revival, was held in Belfast and featured a week-long festival of Irish music which concluded in the Exhibition Hall under the auspices of the Gaelic League, for whom Milligan choreographed her first series of *tableaux vivants*. These dramatised, 'scenes from the story of Cuchulain and the Flight of Diarmuid and Grainne',³¹ and 'were loudly applauded'.³² To ensure that the political import of these imagistic performances was not lost, they were accompanied by a lecture which located the triptych of *tableaux* within the larger political narrative of nationalist Revival.³³ Milligan wrote of her desire for these Gaelic *tableaux* to 'increase public interest in the National Literary Theatre'³⁴ and they certainly seemed to have the desired effect as in the following year, she was invited to Dublin to present plays and *tableaux* at Gaelic League meetings. Spurred on by the success of the ILT, she wrote *The Last Feast of the Fianna* (1899) for the company who performed it in February 1900: a production singled out by some scholars as being especially important as it 'marks the first attempt to take Irish legend as the subject of

³⁰ Cited in Hogan and Kilroy, *The Irish Literary Theatre*, p. 85-6.

³¹ Alice Milligan, letter to *The Daily Express*, 21 January 1899, cited in Hogan and Kilroy, *The Irish Literary Theatre*, p. 54.

³² 'The Gaelic League Festival', *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 8 May 1898.

³³ In many ways, this particular theatrical event constitutes the founding moment of Gaelic drama. See P. Ó Siadhail, *Istair Dhrámaíocht na Gaeilge 1900-1970* (Conamara: Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 1993), p. 20.

³⁴ Cited Hogan and Kilroy, *Irish Literary Theatre*, p. 54.

national drama.³⁵ The performative efficacy of this particular theatrical form is evident from contemporaneous reviews, one critic from the *Daily Express* opining:

If the aim of the Irish Literary Theatre is to create a national drama it is obvious that the development of Miss Milligan's method is the proper road to reach ultimate success.³⁶

The simplicity of the *tableau* form, however, belies the complexity of its reception and its influence – dramaturgically and politically – on the later evolution of Irish drama. Its simplicity also reflects the limited resources at Milligan's disposal and the sophistication of her political thinking as her constant travelling and lecturing at various political gatherings throughout Ireland brought home to her the need for a pragmatic, propagandist form for promulgating the message of national Revival. *Tableaux* provided a portable, flexible, fluid form which was technically simple, short, adaptable, and easy to rehearse. Their minimalism made them mobile and they could be staged in non-theatrical venues like drawing rooms and church halls as well as more conventional performance spaces. Often mounted behind gauze screens, their Celtic costumes, mythical subject matter, and atmospheric music created an arresting visual and aesthetic effect and their performances provided a creative platform for League meetings or political debate. These *tableaux* largely drew *dramatis personae* from Irish legends, Cuchulain, Queen Maeve, Oisín, Finn, but also featured more political and religious figures, like St Patrick, St. Brigid, and the Shan Van Vocht.

Contemporaneous reviews reveal that these *tableaux* made a remarkable impression on audiences as Irish mythology and nationalist ideology were conflated in a visually compelling manner. Although simple in form, the embodied politics of these performances manifested a sophisticated kind of corporeal dramaturgy as the convoluted narratives of ancient myths were broken down into simple, imagistic snapshots. For example, scenes of violent combat were visually staged with actors 'standing still as statues in strained and difficult attitudes',³⁷ whereas other *tableaux* featured voiceovers delivered outside the *tableau* by an actor narrating the events depicted within. Milligan became increasingly skilful at manipulating this mode of performance, and the innovation of this imagistic theatre generated considerable interest with reviews

³⁵ P.J. Mathews, *Revival*, p. 76.

³⁶ Cited in Christopher Fitzsimon, *The Irish Theatre* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1983), p. 137.

³⁷ 'The Gaelic League Festival', *The Irish News*, 8 May 1898.

consistently remarking on its vivid, visual appeal, and its efficacy in engaging audiences.

The romantic imagistic appeal of this theatrical form was not only successful with 'sophisticated' audiences, but with working class folk who frequented playhouses and music halls rather than the hired halls and private residences where much of the Revival's more rarefied early drama was performed. Such audiences were familiar with *tableaux* through their experience of melodrama; a pictorial, spectacular form wherein individual scenes often concluded with set *tableaux*. Thus, Milligan's modernist aesthetic, (in contradistinction to Yeats' dramaturgy), was dependent on, rather than distanced by, a plebeian theatrical tradition. Her nationalistic *tableaux* converged with the visual culture of the popular stage whilst connecting with the high politics of the Revival, so that her political message was framed within the 'horizon of expectations' of popular audiences accustomed to the spectacular 'moving picture' world of melodrama. The efficacy of this aesthetic form is particularly evident when one considers that many *tableaux* featured symbolic, personified images of Ireland in the forms of Dark Rosaleen and the Poor Old Woman. Consequently, her plays partially paved the way, dramaturgically, visually and politically, for the most famous stage entrance in modern Irish theatre history: Maud Gonne's onstage embodiment of Cathleen ni Houlihan in Yeats' 1902 play.

In this brief survey can be seen the contours of an emerging nationalist programme that certainly had progressed a great deal from the visual, if vacuous nationalism of Dr. Corry's National Diorama, first produced in Belfast in 1864. As one of the most successful dioramas ever produced in Ireland, (it subsequently successfully toured England, America and Australia), it comprised fifty views of Ireland painted on large canvas screens, 20' x 12' in size, illuminated by lanterns and accompanied by romantic Irish melodies.³⁸ It proved tremendously popular in its hometown of Belfast, where Barney Maglone³⁹ hailed its arrival thus: 'we have in Belfast now, that sprig of the dhrama, that high flying people call diorama.'⁴⁰ Its simplistic, sentimental signification of Irish identity was shorn of party politics, although the same cannot be said for another genre of Irish political melodrama, which was particularly popular and provocative in the North.

In Belfast, performances of these popular, political melodramas were known as

³⁸ See John Grey, 'Popular Entertainment', in *Belfast: The Making of a City*, p. 105.

³⁹ Robert Arthur Wilson (1820-1875): born in Donegal, later became the most famous journalist on the staff of the *Morning News*, in Belfast and was better known by his penname 'Barney Maglone'.

⁴⁰ Cited in Grey, 'Popular Entertainment', p. 105.

'Irish Nights' and they produced a ritualised, riotous response of para-theatrical activity from their audiences. 'Irish Nights' appealed to, and were attended by, working class audiences from both sides of the sectarian divide. They attended the playhouse equipped with instruments, flags, oranges, and rivets from the shipyards, whilst many had also sinned (and sung) themselves on the 'liquid fire and distilled damnation'⁴¹ condemned by Reverend O'Hanlon for being so freely available at the theatre in his *Walks Among the Poor in Belfast*. These plays were enormously popular throughout the North, not just on the professional stage, but on an amateur and community level. As one critic wearily conceded:

As for amateur representations of *Arrah-na-Pogue* and *The Shaughbraun* and other Irish dramas – well, I confess in Belfast within the last half score years one and another society have produced them as often as I have fingers and toes.⁴²

Another critic, remarking of the popularity of these Irish dramas at the Theatre Royal claims in mock-brogue that, 'These dramas constichoot the foinest Iorish stage licheratoor we hev' got at the prisint moment.'⁴³ This particular phenomenon is deserving of much further comment and I shall concentrate on this in the following section.

'Irish Nights' In Belfast

JESSIE: *Johnny Patterson the Irish Singing Clown, met his death last week in the circus ring in a most untimely accident. He was a devout patriot of his native Ireland, who nevertheless had come to believe that the one hope for that troubled isle lay in a commingling of the Orange and Green, an accommodation between the Nationalist and Unionist factions [...] To this end he wrote a song, 'Do Your Best For One Another' which he performed...holding in one hand a flag showing the harp and in his other, one showing the crown [...]*

BOUCICAULT: *'Permit me to speculate – abuse hurled from both sides, faction fights ensuing Patterson set upon by both camps simultaneously.*

JESSIE: *It just says there was a riot, he was trying to save the circus equipment and was struck on the head with an iron bar.*⁴⁴
(*Heavenly Bodies*, Stewart Parker)

⁴¹ Reverend O'Hanlon, *Walks Among the Poor in Belfast* (Wakefield: S.R. Publishers, 1971), p. 9.

⁴² *Nomads' Weekly*, 5 April 1905.

⁴³ *Nomads' Weekly*, 11 March 1899.

⁴⁴ Stewart Parker, *Heavenly Bodies*, in *Plays*: 2 (London: Methuen, 2000), p. 88.

"But they wouldn't clod rivets at the stage would they?" [...] "You never know what a man will do with drink and religion in him."⁴⁵ (*St John Ervine*)

Melodrama has been a much maligned genre in theatre history. However, its perjorative associations have been based on prejudiced assumptions: that its aesthetics of excess - extravagant emotion, sensationalism, simplicity, and its popularity amongst predominantly working-class audiences - meant that it was suitable for simpletons. What Walter Benjamin excoriated as the 'ancient lament that the masses seek distraction whereas art demands concentration from the spectator'⁴⁶ fuelled bourgeois disdain for this popular form, and the derision of the *Theatrical Inquisitor's* dismissal of melodrama as 'appeal[ing] to those who wish to be amused without the slightest exertion on their part, or any exercise whatever of their intellectual powers'⁴⁷ remained the dominant critical response throughout the Victorian period. This derogatory attitude continued into the twentieth century and characterised the reactions of the founding figures of the Irish National Theatre. Frank Fay, co-founder of the National Dramatic Society in Dublin, denounced both the aesthetics of the Queen's Theatre: home to 'the shoddiest kind of melodrama'; and the intelligence of its audiences: '[they] wouldn't, at present, understand anything else.'⁴⁸ His contempt was shared by Yeats, Lady Gregory,⁴⁹ and successive generations of Irish practitioners and historians, as epitomized in Hugh Hunt's history of the Abbey Theatre in which he records that the plays and playwrights of this Victorian period are 'best forgotten.'⁵⁰ However, a revival of revisionist interest in Irish melodrama in recent years has re-examined this theatrical form and emphasised its radical rather than reactionary nature. By investigating the structural relations between Irish political melodrama's aesthetic form and ideological function, the specific historical and socio-

⁴⁵ Ervine, *The Theatre in my Time*, p. 14-15.

⁴⁶ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, trans. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 232.

⁴⁷ *The Theatrical Inquisitor*, cited in R. Leach, *Victorian Melodrama* (London: Harrap, 1978), p. 15.

⁴⁸ Frank Fay, cited in Hogan and Kilroy, *Laying the Foundations 1902-4* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1976), p. 31. For another excoriating account of the audiences of melodrama, see 'Irish Drama at the Theatre Royal', in *Towards a National Theatre: The Dramatic Criticism of Frank J. Fay*, ed., Robert Hogan (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1970), pp. 20-1.

⁴⁹ Stephen Watt contends that the famous declaration of the founding manifesto of the nascent Irish National Theatre: 'We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment as it has been represented...' was written to redress melodrama's *misrepresentation* of Ireland and her people. Stephen Watt, 'Late Nineteenth-Century Irish Theatre: Before the Abbey - and Beyond', in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth Century Irish Drama*, ed., Shaun Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 29-30.

⁵⁰ Hugh Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1979* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1979), p. 5. Hunt was also a Director of Plays at the Abbey Theatre.

political conditions of its production and reception and its cultural legacy in contributing to the development of modern Irish drama, the works of Stephen Watt, Cheryl Herr and Mary Trotter⁵¹ have collectively reconstituted this marginalised theatrical tradition to reposition it as a vital precursory body of nationalist drama which actually anticipated the more esteemed work of the Abbey Theatre, and was arguably more effective in politically galvanising its audiences. Their scholarship has discredited the derogatory assumptions that canonically occluded melodrama from Irish theatre history, and reinforces British historian Douglas Reid's assertion that, 'a close study of reactions to melodrama and the assumptions which have been made about it does lead to a view of the complexity rather than the simplicity of this popular culture.'⁵² I intend to examine this complexity in the context of the unique phenomenon of 'Irish Nights' in Belfast: occasions featuring performances of well-known Irish political melodramas, which prompted ritualised, riotous responses from the city's working-class audiences.⁵³

Popular entertainment for Belfast's new urban population was much the same as in other industrial cities in mainland Britain and, as in Dublin and Cork, its theatres were dominated by English touring companies, although local audiences were distinguished by a certain toughness which caused performers to remark that, 'if you could survive Belfast and Glasgow, you could survive anywhere.'⁵⁴ For instance, in a Belfast playhouse in 1819, a stone, rather than a thunderbolt, hurled from a local divinity in the gods, seriously injured an actress and in the Grand Opera House the 'fourth wall' literally had to be materialised in the form of a giant net - installed to catch 'Belfast confetti' (steel rivets

⁵¹ Stephen Watt, *Joyce, O'Casey, and the Irish Popular Theatre* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991) and 'Late Nineteenth-Century Irish Theatre: Before the Abbey - and Beyond', in Shaun Richards (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth Century Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 18-32; Cheryl Herr, *For the Land They Loved: Irish Political Melodrama, 1890-1925* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991); Mary Trotter, *Ireland's National Theatres: Political Performance and the Origins of the Irish Dramatic Movement* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001), pp. 35-72. Furthermore, recent productions in both the Peacock and Abbey Theatres, including Ken Bourke's self-consciously farcical historical melodrama, *The Hunt for Red Willie* (2000), Stewart Parker's *Heavenly Bodies* (2004) dealing with the life of Dion Boucault, whose plays *The Colleen Bawn* and a spectacular revival of *The Shaughraun*, (produced by John McColgan of *Riverdance* fame) were produced in 1998 and 2004 respectively - the latter reprised due to popular demand - also testify to the resurgent interest in this particular theatrical form by Irish practitioners and audiences.

⁵² D.A. Reid, 'Popular Theatre in Victorian Birmingham', in *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama*, eds. D. Bradby, L. James, B. Sharratt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 82.

⁵³ 'Irish Nights' is an appellation I use throughout to describe these particular theatrical events and is borrowed from the colloquial, contemporaneous term used by Belfastmen Hugh MacCartan and St John Ervine to describe these particular dramatic occasions.

⁵⁴ Cited in John Grey, 'Culture and Arts in the North of Ireland Since 1891', in *A Century of Northern Life*, ed. Eamon Phoenix (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1995), p. 165.

from the shipyards) and (empty) porter bottles hurled from the gallery.⁵⁵ Belfastman Samuel Elliott recalls this rough and rowdy atmosphere, fondly reminiscing:

It was quite a common thing to throw an unfortunate offender or unpopular personage from the gallery to the pit and there kick and buffet him 'til almost dead, nothing apparently but the dread of the law causing them to desist [...] seats were torn up and thrown about through the house and on to the stage causing the speedy exit of the actor.⁵⁶

The worst incident in a Belfast theatre that I have come across, took place in 1906,

⁵⁵ There is a long running tradition of theatrical disturbances in Belfast playhouses stemming from political conflict. The oldest examples I have come across are alluded to in the letters of Margaret McTier, (sister of William Drennan, the founder of the United Irishmen). She wrote to her esteemed brother about her experience at the theatre on February 27th 1793: 'I sat in the box with three officers, at the opening of our elegant new theatre on Monday, who appeared as if they had been sent to Coventry. "God Save the King" was the first tune. The officers clapped, all the house did the same, but the gallery and a few voices in the pit, for the second music called "Ca Ira." This was silenced, but they contented themselves with obtaining and clapping the "Volunteers March", and this much feared first night was finally got over.' In *As I Roved Out*, Cathal O'Byrne, explains that 'Ca Ira' was one of the earliest revolutionary songs of the French Revolution which so inspired the radical Presbyterians of Belfast (p. 375.) In another letter, McTier, also speculates that continuing controversy will ensure that, 'Our playhouse [...] be shut up, as last night two officers jumped over the box while "God save the King" was playing and horsewhipped a captain of a ship sitting in the pit with his hat off [...]. The man proved to be a most loyal subject, a stranger her, not perhaps blessed with a quick ear', a defect corrected in Belfast with a thick one. Nevertheless, the theatre remained opened and the melodrama continued: 'There was a great riot in the playhouse on Friday about "God Save the King", and the military prevailed'. (Margaret McTier, *Drennan Letters: William, his Brother-in-Law and Sister, Samuel and Martha McTier*, ed. D.A. Chart (Belfast: Majesty's Stationary Office, 1931), 138; 299; 341). Disturbances also took place outside of the theatre as well: one fascinating example is the controversy surrounding the redoubtable actor Barry Sullivan's visit to Belfast in 1883. One of the most successful and pre-eminent performers of his era Sullivan was especially popular in Belfast where he was 'the God of the Ulsterman's idolatry'. He also became an impassioned and active nationalist, using his enormous popularity as an extra-theatrical stage to voice his political opinions. However, upon arriving in Belfast in 1883, where the city's nationalists had organised to meet him for a triumphant torch-lit procession through the city (as he had been greeted elsewhere in Ireland), the city's authorities stepped in and banned the proceedings, 'fearing a revival of the old feuds between the Montagues and the Capulets of inflammable Linenopolis', W. J. Lawrence, *Barry Sullivan: A Biographical Sketch* (London: W. & G. Baird, 1893), 49; 65. There is a long history of protests, demonstrations and disturbances in 19th century playhouses in Ireland and substantial evidence to suggest that they were activities tolerated by civic authorities and availed of by local audiences on a regular basis. This is an area covered superbly in Morash's *A History of the Irish Theatre 1601-2000* which draws attention to theatre's 'legal status [...] as a place of public protest' (p.102) and refers to an 18th century pamphleteer's declaration that: 'The Theatre has ever been the very Place where the People have distinguished their Patriot Spirit; and when their Remonstrances have been [...] obstructed by the Powers that be [...] they have made Use of, to shew their Sense of whatever Gnevance or Oppression they have labelled under' (cited Morash, pp. 66-7). This role was actually enshrined in law as evidenced by the legal defence presented on behalf of body of Orangemen who noted in Dublin's Theatre Royal in 1822, hurling wood and oranges at Viceroy Wellesley to demonstrate their displeasure at his administration's movement towards agreeing to introduce Catholic Emancipation. Their lawyers based their defence on, "the theory that a disturbance at the theatre was not a breach of the peace" (Mary D. Condon, *The Dublin Riots of 1822*, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Southern California, 1930, p. 85): a legal argument which confirms the unique socio-political position of theatre and suggests that there was an extraordinary level of tolerance for such practices in an otherwise strict Victorian age. See also Mark Phelan, '(Re)mapping Irish Drama in the Nineteenth Century: Geography, Historiography and Modernity' in *The Performing Society*, eds. Tracy C. Davis and Peter Holland (London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2007).

⁵⁶ Elliott, *The World As I Found It*, p. 23.

provoked by the seemingly innocuous act of 'a cowboy hypnotist,' whose provocative performance led to the fire proof screen being speedily lowered to facilitate the escape of the fleeing cowboy, who left behind a scene worthy of any Wild West saloon brawl as:

[T]he crowd smashed the musicians' instruments, demolished the decorations and electrical fittings [...] the cinematograph apparatus was broken up and chairs flung into the stalls [...] The scene was one of wild disorder and the row only quelled when 50 police were marched in.⁵⁷

However, though such violent *fracas* frequently occurred in theatres throughout the British Isles, the unique in-house ructions associated with Irish Nights can be distinguished from other theatre disturbances as they were precipitated by performances of Irish political/historical melodramas on the public stage. This particular sub-genre of Irish political melodrama became increasingly popular in this period due to the resurgence of nationalist feeling, the commercial potential of which was identified and exploited by playwrights Hubert O'Grady, Dion Boucicault, John Baldwin Buckstone, and J.W. Whitbread.⁵⁸ Their work was produced extensively throughout Ireland, in both urban and rural areas, but 'Irish Nights' were unique to Belfast given that the city was a crucible of inter-communal conflict throughout various Home Rule crises.

On 'Irish Nights' audiences attended the theatre equipped with flags, instruments, oranges and other paraphernalia. Little wonder that one playgoer referred to them as 'melodramas within melodramas'⁵⁹ and they can indeed be seen as plays within plays, with multiple roles being performed both on and off-stage by Catholic and Protestant audiences. One of the best accounts of an Irish Night is related in the Ulster actor, Whitford Kane's memoirs, as he recalls a performance in Boucicault's *The Shaughraun*,

The play was generally turned into a battle between the religious factions. Naturally, it was a nervous play for the actors [...] especially the priest and young Fenian hero [...] they often looked with anxious eyes at the gallery knowing that the climax at the end of the first act would cause a hullabaloo. This occurred when the young Irish rebel was in hiding. The gallery patrons would point out to the English captain where he was

⁵⁷ *The Irish News*, 1 April 1906.

⁵⁸ Whitbread's melodramas were usually staged as part of an Irish season at his Queen's Theatre, however, he also sold the performing rights to small 'fit-up' theatre companies which then toured the town and countryside throughout Ireland. See W.G. Fay and Catherine Carswell, *The Days of the Abbey Theatre* (London: Rich & Cowan Ltd., 1935), p. 39.

⁵⁹ MacCartan, 'Some Backward Glances', p. 175.

concealed for they believed this was their duty as true British subjects, and when the priest refused to disclose it, they hurled rivets and bottles at the actor. Luckily this scene happened just before the intermission and the asbestos curtain served as a timely shield for the players [...] and the gallery policeman would conveniently turn his back and see nothing if an odd rivet should find its way there. Cracking the skull of a fellow citizen during a performance of *The Shaughbraun* was hardly a misdemeanour.⁶⁰

This colourful account reveals the sense of ritualised theatre both on and off- stage and the strategic, sectarian segregation of the audience with the added symbolism of the asbestos curtain, which in protecting the stage, reflected the poisoned fabric of Belfast society before it.

The popularity of Irish history and politics with these dramatists perhaps stemmed from the fact that it provided them with ideal melodramatic material.⁶¹ Battlefields and the backdrop of the 'Wild West' of Ireland provided sensational settings,⁶² informers and traitors facilitated plots riddled with villainous double crosses, deceptions and dastardly asides, and the Irish pantheon of patriots provided familiar cast lists of *dramatis personae* who needed no introduction, whilst the revolutionary rhetoric of the eponymous heroes of *Wolfe Tone*, *Robert Emmet*, *Sarsfield*, *Lord Edward*, *Father Murphy* lent itself to the rarefied speech of melodrama.⁶³ Interestingly, this recourse to history for both subject and setting displayed by Irish melodramatists was in marked contrast to the scene in England, as noted by Bram Stoker - the Irish author and manager of the century's most successful actor, Henry Irving. Stoker reasoned that the rarity of successful historical plays in England was best explained by his compatriot playwright, Dion

⁶⁰ Kane, *Are We All Met?*, p. 46-7.

⁶¹ Not only did the events and figures of Irish history provide playwrights with raw material, but it could also be argued that the narrative strategies and style of Irish historiography reproduced the dramaturgical form of melodrama, given its reliance upon stock characters, stereotypes, sensationalism, and a Manichean struggle of virtue and vice in the form of nationalism and unionisms. Historian Oliver McDonagh has examined the way in which Irish historiography, especially in the 19th century, became increasingly affected and inflected by nationalist and unionist ideology; so that historians from both sides developed diametrically opposed interpretations of the same historical events, whilst Cheryl Herr examines the inherent theatricality of much Irish historiography, in terms of the dramatic motifs, strategies, and structures they often deploy. A similar connection is made by Roy Foster, who maintains - via Hayden White and others - that history, like all literary forms, is framed and formulated by narratives of one kind or another. (Oliver McDonagh, *States of Mind: Two Centuries of Anglo-Irish Conflict, 1780-1980* (London: Pimlico, 1992), pp. 1-2, 4-7; Cheryl Herr, *For The Land they Loved*, p. 19-21, 47-8; Roy F. Foster, *The Irish Story: Teeling Tales and Making it Up in Ireland* (London: Allen Lane, 2001), p. xi.

⁶² See Michael R. Booth, 'Irish Landscape in the Victorian Theatre', *Place, Personality and the Irish Writer*, Andrew Carpenter, ed. (Gerrard's Cross: Colin Smythe, 1977), pp. 159-172.

⁶³ Peter Brooks has pointed out how political and revolutionary rhetoric is inherently melodramatic not only in terms of its stylistic penchant for fiery excess and flamboyant extravagance, but in its deeper rhetorical and ideological structure given that it is usually couched in conflict with another system of beliefs or ideological orthodoxy, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

Boucicault, who declared in, 'a beautiful Irish brogue which was part natural, part cultivated' that, 'The rayson why historical plays so seldom succeed is because a normal audience doesn't go to the thaytre with its politics in its breeches pockets.'⁶⁴ Stoker was obviously ignorant as to how his client and friend's plays were received by the 'abnormal' audiences of Belfast, whose pockets positively bulged with politics and projectiles of various kinds!

In contradistinction to Dublin, where the nationalist heroes of Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmet *et al.*, arrived on stage to deafening cheers of 'patriotic sentiment' and villains, (informers, soldiers and police) were catcalled and 'hissed', these roles and receptions were reversed to riotous effect in Belfast. The former 'Athens of the North' had little of the capital's relative political homogeneity and this demographic difference undermined the dramaturgical dialectic of these political melodramas by disrupting the hero-villain hierarchy that lay at the heart of the play. For example, when the Kennedy Miller Company toured from Dublin to Belfast to stage *Lord Edward*, loyalists and nationalists lauded their own representatives and lambasted those of their 'Other' simultaneously. One audience member describes these different reactions to the hero Lord Edward Fitzgerald, and the villain Magan:

the Shankill hurled oranges at Tyrone Power, (who played Lord Edward) and the Falls shared its hatred of Frank Breen's informer by fierce hisses and catcalls [...] Now and then a scuffle would break out at the points of junction between the two.⁶⁵

Lord Edward (see Plate 12) dealt with the life of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, a nationalist hero of the 1798 rebellion. However, it attracted audiences equally from the Catholic Falls and the Protestant Shankill, who were seated to the left and right respectively. Both camps attended with instruments, flags, oranges and, more ominously, rivets 'purloined' from the shipyards - a setting deemed unsuitable for the young dramatist, St John Ervine by his aunt who refused to take her curious nephew to an Irish Night for:

she was fearful there may be a row in the gallery between the Papist and the Orange corner boys who congregated there [...] to make a

⁶⁴ Cited in Bram Stoker, *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving*, vol. 1 (London: William Heinemann, 1906), p. 138

⁶⁵ MacCartan, 'Backward Glances', p. 175

THEATRE ROYAL,

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THIS EVENING —

The New Romantic Irish Drama, in Five Acts, depicting the
Vivid Scenes, Episodes, and Vicissitudes in the Life of

LORD EDWARD; or, '98

(Founded on the Revelations in W. J. FITZPATRICK'S Work,
"Secret Service under Pitt.")

By J. W. WHITEREAD, Author of "The Irishman," &c., &c.

Lord Edward Fitzgerald (One of the noblest
figures of Irish History) ..

Mr. H. Somersfield Arnold

Major Sirr (The Foe of Dublin) ..

Mr. Edward Shelton

Major Swan (Assistant Town Major) ..

Mr. T. W. Dunscombe

Captain Ryan ..

Mr. James Duffy

Francis Higgins (an Attorney-at-law, nick-
named the "Shamado") ..

Mr. Frank Breen

Francis Magan (a Barrister-at-Law — an
Informer) ..

Mr. Dane Clark

Neilson (a Faithful Adherent of Lord Edward's) ..

Mr. Chas. P. Cooke

Tony (a Negro — Servant to Lord Edward) ..

Mr. Fred Newland

Thady McGrath (a Boy of the right sort —
true to the core) ..

Mr. James O'Brien

Mr. James Moore (Merchant, 119, Thomas Street) ..

Mr. G. Dunn

Mr. Murphy (Feather Merchant, 151, Thomas St.) ..

Mr. A. Richardson

Palmer } (Clerks in Moore's { ..

Mr. C. Warren

Gallagher } employ) } ..

Mr. A. O'Neil

McCabe ..

Mr. W. J. Byrne

Napper Tandy (a General in the Irish Army of
Rebellion) ..

Mr. B. Payne

demonstration of their religious beliefs.⁶⁶

Again, the drama of these occasions was well underway before the curtain had even been raised, with cries of, 'Up the Celts' and 'Go on the Blues', and as the first bars of 'The Wearing of the Green' opened the play, the collected Catholic choirs of the Falls and the Markets roared along. In response, a similarly enthused Shankill choral replied with a loyalist broadside of the 'The Protestant Boys', and when Lord Edward entered centre-stage to reveal his plans to free Ireland from English tyranny, St. Peter's Brass Band, from the heart of Falls, subsequently 'marched round the boards playing "The Boys of Wexford"'⁶⁷ in carnivalesque support of their patriot hero's revolutionary talk. This nationalist performance provoked the Protestant gallery who ended up 'staging a melodrama of their own'.⁶⁸ a synchronous, symbolic and ritualised interaction between text, performance, actors and audience(s) that was an anticipated and integral part of the theatrical event. This unique and rather intimidating atmosphere prompted one audience member to wonder what the company made of their rowdy reception:

What the Kennedy Miller company - straight from the applause of the Old Queen's theatre in Dublin - thought of their noisy prelude, I could only guess; probably they were prepared for it, possibly they enjoyed it.⁶⁹

Such tumultuous conditions and tendentious positions radically affected the reception of the play by both 'interpretative communities'. The extraordinary atmosphere of the occasions conditioned the theatrical experience in a way that coerced individuals within each group to accept the fixed interpretation of their own community and to reject those of the Other, regardless of director's, author's or actors' attempts to influence their reading of the text/performance. Each side supported separate characters who represented their own communities' political beliefs; they cheered at different occasions, chanted different slogans, sang different songs in an environment more akin to a football match. Moreover, the physical segregation of this polarised and highly partisan audience had a profound effect on how each interpreted the historical events being staged before them as this separation of each side not only minimised the points of contact and conflict

⁶⁶ Ervine, *The Theatre in My Time*, p. 14.

⁶⁷ MacCartan, 'Backward Glances', p. 175.

⁶⁸ MacCartan, 'Backward Glances', p. 175.

⁶⁹ MacCartan, 'Backward Glances', p. 175.

between each community, but exercised a deeper structural effect in regulating and reinforcing each faction's reading of the performance text and their understanding of its wider significance in the political stage outside the theatre building.

MacCartan records that both communities developed diametrically opposed 'readings' of *Lord Edward* so that each left the theatre 'satisfied'; albeit for entirely different reasons. Loyalists felt reassured by the rebellion's defeat, the dispatch of its leaders, and the restoration of the ruling order: a victory, which in the contemporaneous context of the Home Rule crises, helped placate a community threatened by the growth of the Catholic population and its increasing confidence in challenging Protestant supremacy.⁷⁰ For nationalist audiences, however, Fitzgerald's heroic spirit transcended the bitter reality of the rebellion's military defeat. His noble sacrifice had long been sanctified by nationalist mythology which had fetishized failure as an act of ideological alchemy that transposed material failure into moral victory and a valiant history of 'glorious defeats'. Fitzgerald's dying declaration, 'I have devoted myself wholly to her emancipation, sacrificed wife, children, fortune even life itself in her cause,'⁷¹ and noble expiration *en tableau* in the arms of his family, had a tremendous emotional resonance given the surge of renascent nationalism in Belfast, particularly in the run up to the centenary celebrations of the 1798 Rebellion which the play had been written to commemorate.

Although Cheryl Herr characterises the nationalist melodramas that played at Queen's Theatre Dublin as 'consensus dramas',⁷² when they toured to Belfast they were transformed into an altogether different theatrical event and became more conflictual than consensual. *Lord Edward* both valorized nationalist resistance to British rule and, simultaneously, validated loyalist faith in the unionist status quo by confirming their historical superiority and present day dominance. In a very dramatic way, the reception of these plays in Belfast differed enormously from what happened in Dublin, as both nationalists and unionists 'hijacked' these performances to reify their conflicting political ideologies.

Another unique and important aspect of these theatrical events is the fact that, in spite of the voluminous scholarship examining the economic, demographic and socio-political development of Belfast and the forces underpinning the process of polarisation

⁷⁰ See A.C. Hepburn, *A Past Apart: Studies in the History of Catholic Belfast, 1850-1950* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1996); Marianne Elliot, *The Catholics of Ulster* (London: Penguin, 2000).

⁷¹ *Lord Edward*, in *For the Land they Loved*, p. 168.

⁷² Herr, *For the Land they Loved*, p. 5.

that resulted in the sectarian geography and ideology of the city, theatre has been completely neglected in all historical, anthropological, cultural, sociological and political research. This is in spite of the fact that theatre remained virtually the singular, secular meeting place in the whole of Belfast! Catholics and Protestants, separated residentially, religiously, socially and spatially, attended the theatre together in droves and mixed freely together, with the notable exception of Irish Nights, when audiences self-consciously replicated the religious and political segregation extant outside the theatre within it.

In this way Marvin Carlson's contention that, '[t]he social occasion in which theatre is embedded obviously conditions in a major way both the experience and its interpretation'⁷³ is dramatically evident in Belfast's 'Irish Nights', given the extreme sectarian, sociological conditions of their production and reception. On one level, the separation of audiences into Catholic and Protestant sections contributed to the overall entertainment of the occasion. There is a palpable sense of *collective* enjoyment of the whole spectacle, particularly in the audiences' shared anticipation, along with that of the hapless actors, of the fateful lines that prompted the fusillade of missiles.

However, in spite of the perfervid political atmosphere of these occasions, I have been unable to find any records of serious disturbance outside theatres in Belfast on Irish Nights, suggesting that these in-house ructions were an accepted part of the theatrical experience. Indeed, the fact that the audience corralled themselves in different areas, and brought 'ammunition' with them, suggests a local familiarity with and anticipation of, the likelihood of offstage dramatics. Such a supposition is supported by Whitford Kane's acknowledgement that Irish political melodramas were 'always a draw in Belfast, not so much for its dramatic value, but as the audience knew it would get a chance to participate in the performance.'⁷⁴

Such accounts reveal the theoretical and historical limitations of scholarship which considers theatrical performance as something created and presented in front of a passive audience.⁷⁵ Irish Nights testify to theorist Tony Bennett's view that:

All texts [...] may be 'productively activated' during what is traditionally and inadequately thought of as the process of their consumption and

⁷³ Marvin Carlson, 'Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performance', in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past*, eds., Tom Postlewait and Bruce McConachie (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1991), p. 85.

⁷⁴ Kane, *Are We all Met?*, p. 46.

⁷⁵ Marvin Carlson criticises this misdirected application in his article, 'Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performances', in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past*, pp. 82-98.

reception.⁷⁶

Certainly, this was the case with performances of political melodrama in Belfast before audiences that were malevolently partisan rather than meekly passive. Whilst Bennett was writing of the role and agency of a literary readership, his theoretical paradigm of 'reading formations' may be appositely applied to the performative context of audience participation, as shown, somewhat comically, by the performance of yet another Boucicault play, *Arrah-na-Pogue*, which was 'productively de-activated' by a Belfast audience! As shipyard worker, poet, dramatist and staunch Orangeman, Thomas Carnduff recalls:

We weren't so sweet on this type of dramatic art and generally collected a party of enthusiasts to patronise the performance, not so much to welcome the artists, rather to bring the play to an early conclusion [...] we filled our pockets with suitable missiles, such as bolts, rivets, half bricks and such things [...] we allowed the play to proceed until one of the actors burst forth into song. He managed to get through two lines of 'The Wearing of the Green.'⁷⁷

It was an intervention that resulted in the forcible expulsion of Carnduff and comrades by his fellow theatre-goers. This vivid, violent interaction between audience and performance, and the *intra-action* among other audience members powerfully demonstrates the political agency of spectators who participated fully in the spectacle before them rather than being pacified by it.

In relation to this issue of audience agency I intend to consider two extraordinary melodramas popularly staged in *rural* areas throughout Ulster, and which are not examined by Watt, Herr or Trotter: *The Siege of Londonderry*, by John Mitchelburne and *The Battle of Aughrim*, by Robert Ashton. In spite of their phenomenal popularity, especially in Ulster,⁷⁸ neither of these plays or playwrights has been examined in any detail; a neglect

⁷⁶ Tony Bennett, 'Text, Readers, Reading Formations', *Literature and History*, no. 9 (1983) p. 214.

⁷⁷ John Grey ed., *Thomas Carnduff: Life & Writings* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 1994), p. 125. Boucicault's political sympathies would not have been well known to Belfast's politicised audiences. It was widely reported at the time that his play *The Shaughraun* had played to Fenian prisoners in English prisons, and that Boucicault had publicly called for the Fenians to be released, writing an open letter to Prime Minister Disraeli to this effect. Boucicault had also earlier angered the political establishment, including the Queen herself, for his publication of the nationalist song, 'The Wearing of the Green' in his play *Arrah-na-Pogue*. It was precisely the fear of this sort of reaction which had led the Lord Chamberlain's office in Britain to prohibit performances of numerous plays which addressed the political situation in Ireland.

⁷⁸ Adams records that there were numerous editions of both plays: Mitchelburne's *Ireland Preserv'd: or the Siege of Londonderry* was originally published in 1705 with subsequent editions issued in Belfast in 1744, 1750

narcotically noted by historian G.C. Duggan, 'The poppy of oblivion appears to have fallen on them.'⁷⁹ As may be surmised from the titles, both plays deal with the momentous seventeenth century battles that marked the defeat of Catholic armies by Williamite forces⁸⁰ and the fact that history is re-enacted centre-stage in both makes their historiographical banishment to the wings of Irish theatre history all the more ironic.

The author William Carleton recorded that both plays further fomented sectarian strife in rural Ulster, albeit it, in a radical new form as, 'political rancour became dramatic.'⁸¹ He described that both plays 'were acted in barns and waste houses night after night and were attended by multitudes, both Catholic and Protestant.'⁸² Both texts were widely taught in hedge schools, learned off by heart, and regularly recited and performed throughout the North. *The Battle of Aughrim*, in particular, was popular with the Orange Order, who enacted it in order to 'show the whole world how the field of Aughrim was so gloriously won'⁸³ although the extent to which their world extended beyond their Catholic neighbours is doubtful.⁸⁴ Attracted to the play's strongly pro-Williamite sentiments, the author being 'a great enemy of Popery and wooden shoes',⁸⁵ they originally performed their play within their own community and these productions are very much performative precursors to the pageants and parades that are so much part of present-day Orange culture.

However, unlike performances of the modern day mock battle of Scarva, members of the Catholic community also took part in early productions of *The Battle of Aughrim*. What is altogether more surprising is that local Catholics actually approached the

and 1759, in Newry 1774 and Strabane 1787, as well as many more 'probably... now lost', and Belfast editions of *The Battle of Aughrim* in 1767 and 1800, a Newry edition in 1781 and a Strabane edition in 1785, and "because of the nature of the play and the consequent heavy wear and tear there were almost certainly many local editions", *Printed Word and the Common Man*, p.70.

⁷⁹ G.C. Duggan, *The Stage Irishman* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1937), p.31. Christopher Morash also recently referred to them in his *History of Irish Theatre 1601-2000* and I am also grateful to Deana Rankin for referring me to Niall Ó Ciosáin's essay on Aston's play in *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland, 1750-1850*, (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 100-118.

⁸⁰ Both texts are invaluable in contributing to our understanding of how these seismic political events percolated down through society and were processed in the popular culture of the era.

⁸¹ William Carleton, *The Autobiography of William Carleton* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), p. 34. Carleton also expanded this account in the little known comic piece, 'The Battle of Aughrim' which is described as being an extract from an unpublished novel *Anna Coigrave* and which appears in *Humours of Irish Life*, ed., C.L. Graves (Belfast: Gresham Publishing Company Ltd, 1913), pp. 131-38.

⁸² Carleton, *Autobiography*, p.34.

⁸³ Carleton, *The Humours of Irish Life*, p. 132.

⁸⁴ Elsewhere in this article, Carleton caustically refers to how the world does not extend beyond the parish, 'on the chairs [...] being the seats of honour, were placed the Protestant portion of the audience, because they were the most wealthy and consequently the most respectable, at least in the eyes of the world – by which we mean parish.' *Humours*, p. 136.

⁸⁵ William M. Thackeray, *The Irish Sketch Book and Critical Reviews* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1985), p. 184.

Orange Order and requested to 'be allowed the favour of representing the Catholic warriors of the disastrous field'.⁸⁶ This casting of the *dramatis personae* of the Jacobite and Williamite forces along traditional tribal lines inevitably resulted in a sanguinary sectarian showdown between erstwhile neighbours, roared on by their kith and kin in the audience, so that:

[W]hen they came to the conflict with which the play is made to close, [the Battle of Aughrim], armed as they were with real swords, political and religious resentment could not be restrained and they would have hacked each other's souls out had not the audience interfered and prevented them. As it was, some of them were severely, if not dangerously wounded.⁸⁷

A more literal manifestation of Conor Cruise O'Brien's maxim that Irishness is the condition of being involved in the Irish situation and usually of being mauled by it⁸⁸ would be difficult to find as this remarkable account describes how traditional theatrical conventions of illusion and reality, past and present, audience and actors, collapse in the heat of 'acting out' *The Battle of Aughrim*, when ancestral animosities overwhelm the actors. It seems that the Catholic actors, bitterly resentful of the hegemonic historical and socio-political scripts imposed on them by the dramatic text and the subordinate roles it prescribed for them, were determined to resist by reversing their historical defeat and wreaking revenge on their contemporary enemy in the live, performative *present*: 'Well they bate us at Aughrim' said the Catholics, 'but [...] we'll turn the tables and lick them now', a performative reversal that dovetailed with the millenarian politics of the Ribbonmen and other nationalist secret societies. Conversely, Protestant actors fought to defend the integrity of the script and the wider socio-political structure it shored up, which had secured their superiority ever since the historic battle they were now re-enacting: "'We licked them before" said the Orangemen, "an' by japers, we'll lick them again."⁸⁹

Carleton's description of a divided community ritually re-enacting its past to reinforce it on one side and rewrite it on the other, is remarkable. In this instance, Ashton's popular melodrama fulfils Roland Barthes' stricture that art 'must intervene in

⁸⁶ Carleton, *Humours*, p. 132.

⁸⁷ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 36.

⁸⁸ Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Irishness', *Writers and Politics* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), p. 13.

⁸⁹ William Carleton, *Humours*, p. 136.

history,' and that 'theatre must participate in history by revealing its moment.'⁹⁰ This is vividly achieved in the above performance which 'reveals' history through (re)enacting it in the present, instigating a spatial and temporal collapse that blasts these events out of the 'the continuum of history.' Hence history is dramatically 'revealed' to be 'the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous empty time, but time filled by *the presence of the non*','⁹¹ as this *presence* is one which is embodied by the actors and activated by the political agency of audiences who were all too conscious of how 'history' and its representation and performance, are inextricably linked with the reality of the present.

In *Performing History* Freddie Rokem notes, 'As we know, it is usually the victors, not the victims, who write history. The issue here is to what extent this is true of those who "perform" it on the stage as well.'⁹² These forgotten performances of *The Battle of Anghrim* present a remarkable case study for Rokem's question, as they are extraordinary examples of the victors' (written) history being contested (in performance) by those who had been written out of that history. As such, these unique performance events, with their overlapping relationships between audiences and actors are theatrical palimpsests, mapping multiple contradictory narratives. They cannot be dismissed as simplistic melodramatic texts, or as comic, chaotic theatrical events, but should be recognized as complex, multi-layered performances of power and resistance.⁹³ In these performances, both communities ritually (re)enact the past in a simultaneous effort to resist and reify the socio-political hegemony of the present, in much the same way as the rowdy, para-theatrical 'performances' of identity were enacted by their urban counterparts in Belfast's playhouses.

These previously unresearched areas of popular theatre and culture in both urban and rural settings provide a fascinating field for further research by applying Rokem's theories of 'performing history' and actors operating as 'hyper-historian', or from a more sociological/anthropological perspective on the performance of political or ethnic identities. They provide equally attractive possibilities to historicist reconstructions of the material conditions and cultural contexts of these performances and to literary scholars examining the thematic motifs and dramaturgical forms in the context of Irish theatre's supposed fixation with history plays. As a number of critics, playwrights and historians

⁹⁰ Roland Barthes, 'The Brechtian Revolution', in *Critical Essays: Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 38.

⁹¹ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, p. 252-3 (my italics).

⁹² Freddie Rokem, *Performing History* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), p. 8.

⁹³ Rokem, *Performing History*, p. 8.

have observed that history is often recorded and remembered with a degree of narrativization that is inherently theatrical,⁹⁴ these plays provide ideal material to discursively engage with these critical ideas and contexts. Perhaps the most useful approach is one which investigates the geography of performance evident in these particular theatrical events. After all, 'Irish Nights' in Belfast and their riotous rural counterparts in the folk melodramas of Ashton and Mitchelburne were unique to the North and were not experienced anywhere else.

As yet, I have only been able to discover three first-hand accounts of live performances in rural areas of these melodramas, one by Thackeray⁹⁵ and two by William Carleton,⁹⁶ but these are all accounts of *The Battle of Aughrim*, although Carleton notes that 'the *Siege of Londonderry* had been also acted, but I never saw it.'⁹⁷ Nevertheless, a comparison between both men's accounts of different performances of *The Battle of Aughrim* makes fascinating reading as the production witnessed by Thackeray took place peaceably in Galway, whereas one performance witnessed by Carleton, in Augher, Tyrone, literally 'brought the house down' as the roof of the overcrowded barn collapsed and a riot ensued amongst actors and audiences! The reason for these widely divergent audience reactions rests in the fact that Galway, like most of the south of Ireland, had only a vestigial strain of sectarianism which remained virulent in Ulster after the vicious, internecine bloodletting of the 1798 Rebellion. After 1798, the North, unlike the largely subdued western seaboard, remained rife with secret, sectarian societies that flourished in rural areas and inflamed inter-communal conflict between Catholics and Protestants

It is crucial, therefore, that an examination of the performance of Irish political melodrama in the North of Ireland focuses on the *geographical* as well as the historical context of their production and reception. However, the entire grand narrative of Irish theatre history has *thematically* been dominated by the question of a 'national' theatre and *methodologically* dominated by a temporal/historical epistemology that has been at the

⁹⁴ See Cheryl Herr, *For the Land they Loved*, pp. 19-21, 47-8; Kevin Barry, *Crane Bag* 7: 2 (1983): 119; Roy Foster, *The Irish Story*, pp. 1-22. Belfast playwright Stewart Parker's stunning *Northern Star* explicitly makes this connection, as its playful meta-theatrical style continually draws attention to the play's dramaturgical structure, a mnemonic relationship in which the performance of history also draws attention to the narratological strategies and structures of historiography.

⁹⁵ Thackeray, *Irish Sketch Book*, pp. 184-90.

⁹⁶ Carleton, *Autobiography*, pp. 33-6.

⁹⁷ Carleton, *Autobiography*, pp. 34-5. Duggan also cites that the play was also performed (*Stage Irishman*, p. 85) as does Adams, (*Uncommon Bookman*, p. 70).

expense of any examination of space and geography.⁹⁸ The dynamics of audience agency and the local geographies that invariably condition live theatrical performance and its local reception illustrate the pressing need to develop a geographical as well as an historical materialism in order to transform our understanding of Irish theatre history.

In the course of researching these political melodramas and investigating the theatrical means of their production and the historical and cultural context of their reception on 'Irish Nights', the impossibility of recreating their live atmosphere or retrieving the para-theatrical performances of these occasion is an implacable fact that becomes all the more frustrating. Nevertheless, it is imperative that we look beyond the surface simplicity of these melodramatic texts and treat them as historical, histological slides that reveal much about the underlying post-colonial, socio-cultural, political, and psychological striations of Belfast society at the turn of the century.

Finally, I would like to relate this concept of the geography of performance to another aspect of the theatrical event, namely the role and agency of the audience. George Moore, author and playwright of the Irish Literary Theatre, declared in the foreword to *The Bending of the Bough* that, '[t]he same audience goes everywhere, and the same fare is consequently served everywhere at the same prices.'⁹⁹ But this is patently not true, particularly with regards to the different reception of Irish political melodrama in Dublin and Belfast. Describing the disparity between these two cities, the Ulster novelist George Birmingham wearily averred, 'they are very little more than a hundred miles apart, yet I suppose that Manchester and Bombay are not more separated in spirit.'¹⁰⁰ Audiences are never homogeneous, though they are often assumed to be, or are ignored entirely in Irish theatre historiography as, beyond the *Playboy* and *Plough* controversies, there has been little sustained examination of the vital issue of audience reception. In this, Irish theatre historians have furthered Yeats *et al.*'s modernist mission in removing the political agency of audiences. The *embourgeoisement* of theatre audiences and theatrical modernism in the twentieth century sought to silence audiences in darkened auditoria, to separate them from onstage action and leave them staring at the light. By pacifying and positioning spectators in this way, they turned audience into spectators, invidiously eroding their

⁹⁸ Gerry Smyth's *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination* (London: Palgrave, 2001) marks a notable departure from this. Inspired by the 'spatial turn' in postmodernist scholarship, it represents the first systematic attempt to analyse the complex spatial practices and motifs that permeate Irish culture and identity in their ideological affiliations. See Chapter 5.

⁹⁹ George Moore, cited Stephen Watt, *Popular Theatre*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ George Birmingham, *An Irishman Looks at his World* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919), p. 264.

agency by predisposing them to read the spectacle before them in certain ways, whilst simultaneously restricting their modes of response. As most Irish historians and critics have concentrated on twentieth century Irish drama, it is perhaps unsurprising that the role and agency of audience, so prominent in the 19th century playhouse, have been relegated and received little scholarly attention.¹⁰¹ Indeed, the success of modernism in removing the rowdy, participative element of the nineteenth century theatre and controlling and containing audience agency within the new contract of modernist/realist theatrical practice may be measured by their continuing 'silence' in Irish Theatre Studies.

Given the different contexts and constituencies of political theatre, it is unsurprising that audience reactions should be so different, but this has important implications for the ILT's aesthetic/ideological agenda of developing a sense of 'theatrical nationhood'.¹⁰² This brief chapter intimates the future difficulties that lay ahead for the 'national' theatre movement and its ambition to forge a nation out of an audience, as my study of 'Irish Nights' in Ulster reveals the impossibility of converting spectators into citizens, (or at least, one class of citizens). Though such a project and process was (arguably) proven to be possible in Dublin, it made little progress in Belfast. Both the popular 'emancipatory nationalism'¹⁰³ of Irish political melodrama and the more elite nationalist drama of the ILT and Abbey Theatre were equally ineffective with Belfast audiences, as I will later examine in relation to different reactions in Dublin and Belfast to performances of Yeats' *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (see Chapter 5).

Empirically and imaginatively reconstituting the responses of audience in this regard is important, as ULT (and ILT) productions in Belfast were partly read in terms already established by the theatregoing community who attended Irish Nights. This is particularly evident in relation to performances of Gerald MacNamara's historical extravaganzas, *Susanne and the Sovereigns* (1907) and *Thompson in Tir-na-nOg* (1912), when the 'gods' were packed with punters 'lined up with rivets and bolts in their pockets'.¹⁰⁴ Accordingly, the particular theatrical formation of Belfast audiences was important in influencing the work of the ULT and instrumental in the development of their own

¹⁰¹ This also reflects the fact that studies of Irish theatre have, until recently, been mainly written by scholars from English or History departments, who have consequently focused on the dramatic text rather than the theatrical event.

¹⁰² Loren Kruger, *The National Stage: Theatre and Cultural Legitimation in England, France, and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 6.

¹⁰³ Watt, *Popular Theatre*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁴ Rutherford Mayne, cited Sam Hanna Bell, *Theatre in Ulster*, p. 44.

dramaturgical forms and regionalist cultural politics.

Conclusion

The extraordinary efflorescence of literary, cultural and political activities in the North of Ireland in the early 1900s from which the ULT emerged should not be examined in isolation, but as a diffuse, disparate collective that can be regarded as a 'Northern Revival', as distinct from the Irish Revival. The intrinsic difficulty, however, in assessing the impact, influence and legacy of the Northern Revival stems from the shattering experience of Partition which smashed the *telos* of the movement, dispersing its cultural energies as Northern nationalists were left isolated and disillusioned in a new and hostile state (discussed later).

However, contemporaneous accounts describe how the 1798 commemorations, the anti-Boer protests, and the activities of the B.N.F.C., *Féile Ceoil*, G.A.A., Gaelic League, U.A.C., Dungannon Clubs and the I.R.B. helped to cultivate an oppositional cultural-political identity to resist the ideological hegemony of British imperialism-Ulster unionism. Joseph Connolly describes these myriad movements as contributing 'to a new nationalist awakening among the Catholics of Belfast',¹⁰⁵ but his reference to religion, signifies the limited impact of these activities amongst the Protestants of Belfast. Having said that, the most active and prominent adherents and activists were Protestants: Alice Milligan, Ethna Carberry, Bulmer Hobson, David Parkhill, F.J. Bigger, Roger Casement etc. Historian Kevin Nowlan suggests that, 'these movements were breaking down barriers between Catholic and Protestant, between Unionist and Nationalist. But their appeal was limited to an elite and their action was slow.'¹⁰⁶ However, as I have mentioned, the efficacy of the Northern Revival and the extent of its influence, are difficult to ascertain given its ultimate failure with the formation of the Northern Irish state as Partition sundered the island of Ireland and dealt a shattering blow to Northern nationalism. What can be evaluated, however, is the return and recirculation of many of the critical narratives, contradictions and dynamics of the Northern Revival in later

¹⁰⁵ Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 13.

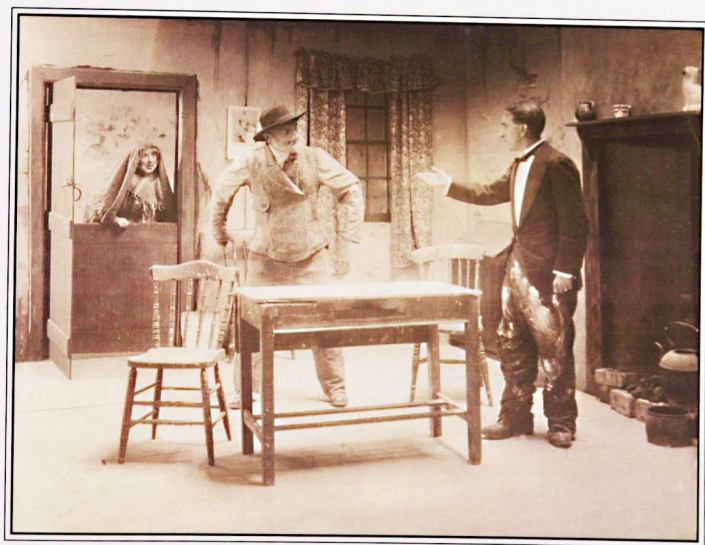
¹⁰⁶ Kevin Nowlan ed., *The Making of 1916: Studies in the History of the Rising* (Dublin: Stationary Office, 1969), p. 75.

cultural movements which emerged in Ulster post-Partition; whether in the form of the poetic regionalism of John Hewitt, the periodical regionalism of successive Northern journals (*Rann*, *Lagan*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Threshold*), the 'poetic Renaissance' of the late '60s, or the putative progressive 'post-nationalism' of Field Day Theatre Company. Unlike all of these movements which have received considerable scholarly attention, the Northern Revival remains marginalized within contemporary scholarship in spite of the fact that this extraordinary network of dynamic political movements and artistic societies significantly impacted upon the cultural life of the North and represents a vital chapter in Ulster's political and cultural history.

In the second half of my thesis I shall explore how the ULT emerged out of this Northern Revival and was initially in orbit of the Irish Literary Theatre and the wider Irish Revival, before gradually easing away from the capital's cultural gravity to develop 'its own way of things'. I shall also consider how Ulster was ineluctably 'Other' to much of the aesthetics and politics of the Revival, and investigate how the ULT's (perforce) regionalist politics and cultural practice critiqued their counterparts in the National theatre.

Part 2:

The Ulster Literary Theatre



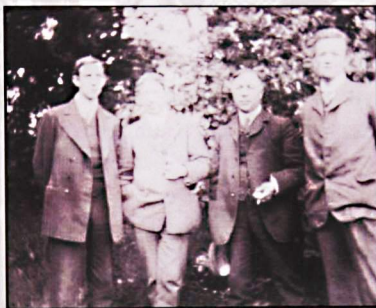
Above: *The Mist that Does be on the Bog*

Chapter 4: History: 1904-16

Feil Brighde Number.

February, 1905.

Their object of forming the society was simply to get upon the local stage a drama which should not know the Stage Irishman, the type of Irishman which romps through the plays of Gerald Griffin, Dion Boucicault, and such works of purely farcical and melodramatic type as "Lord Edward" or "98", and so forth.¹



¹ 'Belfast Irish Literary Theatre Society', *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 October 1903.

From left: David Parkhill (Lewis Purcell), Fred Morrow, Harry Morrow (Gerald MacNamara), Sam Waddell (Rutherford Mayne)

Background: Cover of *Ulad*

The Irish Literary Theatre Society Belfast

*'In those days, Belfast [...] had little appetite for plays of ideas or drama that dealt with 'subjects.' I think the preference was for the matinee idol and musical comedy.'*¹
(Joseph Connolly)

*'Glorious, pious and immortal memory. The lodge of Diamond in Armagh the splendid behung with corpses of papishes. Hoarse, masked and armed, the planters' covenant. The black north and true blue bible. Croppies lie down [...] Stephen seated himself noiselessly before the princely presence. Framed around the walls images of vanished horses stood in homage, their meek heads poised in air: Lord Hastings' Repulse, the duke of Westminster's Shotover, the duke of Beaufort's Ceylon, prix de Paris, 1866. Elfín riders sat them, watchful of a sign. He saw their speeds, backing King's colours, and shouted with the shouts of vanished crowds.'*²
(James Joyce)

1904 is a year made immemorial by James Joyce's *Ulysses* as its hero Leopold Bloom navigates his Homeric journey across Dublin. Joyce's capital is a centre of paralysis: a condition with which their nationalist compatriots of 'Delfas'³ would have identified. On the theatrical scene, 1904 began with the illustrious launch of the newly refurbished Theatre Royal, but its sensational production of the salacious bodice ripper *How Girls are Brought to Ruin* which opened the season was not the most auspicious augury and gave no indication that by the end of the year, a new 'artistic and liberalising movement',⁴ in the words of the *United Irishman* would be operational in Linenopolis.

Many commentators⁵ have described the ULT as a mere corollary of the Southern

¹ Joseph Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 59.

² James Joyce, *Ulysses*, www.doc.ic.ac.uk/~rac101/concord/texts/ulysses/ulysses2.html, accessed 14.5.04.

³ James Joyce, *Finnegan's Wake* <http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/j/joyce/james/j8f/complete.html> accessed 17.3.03.

⁴ Arthur Griffith, 'All Ireland', *The United Irishman*, 31 December 1904.

⁵ The ULT was a 'slavish clone', Edna Longley, *The Living Stream* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1994), p. 104; 'founded in 1903 in emulation of the achievement of the Irish Literary Theatre', Robert Welch, *The Abbey Theatre, 1899-1999: Form and Pressure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 44; 'The Ulster Literary Theatre was an off-shoot of the Irish literary movement', David Kennedy, 'Ulster Unionism and the New Nationalism', in *The Making of 1916*, ed., Kevin Kowlan, (Dublin: Stationary Office, 1969), p. 75; 'The immediate impulse came from the founding of the Irish Literary Theatre in Dublin', David Kennedy, 'The Drama in Ulster', *The Arts in Ulster*, p. 52; 'The earlier stages of the Ulster Literary Theatre were merely a repetition of what has already been recorded of the movement in Dublin', Earnest Boyd, *Ireland's Literary Renaissance* (New York: J.J. Little & Ives Co., 1916), p. 363; 'the stimulus to it came from Dublin', Michael Farrell, 'Our Only Regional Drama', *The Bell* 2:5 (1941): 81; 'the Irish Literary Theatre and its offshoot, the Ulster Literary Theatre', David Kennedy, 'The Theatre in Ulster: 1944-1953' *Rann* 20 (June 1953): 41; 'the Ulster Literary Theatre, a group which had been formed in 1902 by Bulmer Hobson and others in imitation of the Irish Literary Theatre in Dublin', Frank Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical, 1923-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.161; 'The company, amateur to the end, survived into the 1930s and developed in kitchen

movement of the Irish Literary Theatre.⁶ However, as I have outlined in earlier chapters, its origins lie in the rich efflorescence of cultural and political activities of the Northern Revival. In fact, it was directly from one of the more obscure groups of the Revival's dense network of societies and organization that the ULT emerged: the little-known Protestant Nationalist Society.⁷ Founded by Bulmer Hobson and William McDonald, the aim of this body was to 'try and convert young Ulster Protestants and to recruit them into a national movement'.⁸ Although this organisation had in Hobson's view 'a brief and unimportant life', it was crucial in 'bringing together a group which subsequently formed the Ulster Literary Theatre'.⁹

Of course, the ILT *was* influential and all accounts of the theatre agree that it was Yeats' *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, in particular, that encouraged Hobson and his friend David Parkhill to travel South in autumn 1902 to enlist support for their plans to establish a 'Belfast Branch' of the Irish Literary Theatre. However, the actual original stimulus for both men had been ILT productions of Alice Milligan's *The Last Feast of the Fianna* and James Cousin's *The Racin' Lugg* in 1902: plays by Ulster authors which must have alerted both men to the possibilities of establishing a Northern dramatic movement. They stayed with Maire Quinn, 'a true daughter of Ulster',¹⁰ who took them to meet the INTS the following day and who warmly welcomed their visitors and immediately offered their assistance: 'Dudley Digges and Maire Quinn promised to come and act in our first production'.¹¹ However, their support was staunchly by Yeats' hostility¹² as he refused them permission to perform his play to launch the new theatre, an edict blithely over-ruled by the star of the show, Maud Gonne: 'Don't mind

comedy and tragedy a regional variant of the Abbey's style, of which it was not invariably respectful', D.E.S. Maxwell, 'Irish Drama 1899-1929: The Abbey Theatre,' vol. 2, *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* ed. Seamus Deane (Derry: Field Day, 1991), p. 564; 'a form of imitation and a gesture of independence', Christopher Murray, *Twentieth Century Irish Drama: A Mirror up to Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 188; 'Originally, it was the intention of a few amateur enthusiasts to found a branch of the Irish Literary Theatre in Belfast. Somewhat coldly received by the parent body, they formed their own organization', F.S.L. Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland 1890-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1979), p. 132.

⁶ At this time the Irish Literary Theatre was operating under the name of the Irish National Dramatic Company or the Irish National Dramatic Society, and in itself was largely reconstructed under this new name by a number of prominent Ulstermen: James Cousins, George Roberts, and A.E., who along with the Fays became the 'first organic unit of the new movement', James Cousins, cited in Robert Hogan and James Kilroy, *Laying the Foundations, 1902-4* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1976), p. 30.

⁷ In a letter to Margaret McHenry, Hobson refers to this organization as the Protestant National Association, (McHenry, *The Ulster Theatre in Ireland*, p. 82.)

⁸ Hobson, *Ireland: Yesterday and Tomorrow*, p. 3.

⁹ Hobson, *Ireland: Yesterday and Tomorrow*, p. 4.

¹⁰ Joseph Holloway, *Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer*, Robert Hogan and Michael O' Neill eds., (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 6.

¹¹ Bulmer Hobson, letter to Sam Hanna Bell, cited, Bell, *The Theatre in Ulster*, p. 2.

¹² The reasons for this are later examined in greater detail, see pp. 213 and 247.

Willie. He wrote that play for me and gave it to me. It is mine and you can put it on whenever you want to.’¹³ Whatever the legalities of her argument, both men were bolstered by her support and bridled at Yeats’ coldness: Hobson famously exploding ‘Damn Yeats, we’ll write our own plays!’¹⁴ on the train *en route* home to Belfast.¹⁵

However, with the extensive assistance of the Dublin players and spurred by simmering resentment of Yeats’ indifference, James Cousins’ *The Racin’ Lug* and Yeats’ *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* were performed in Belfast in St Mary’s Minor Hall in November 1902.¹⁶ Gerald MacNamara recalled that ‘small and all as this hall was it was much too large for the audience who patronised them on those two occasions’¹⁷ as the prevailing conditions of indifference and hostility described in the previous chapter were manifest in poor attendances, ‘not more than fifty,’¹⁸ and the cameo entrance earlier in the day of a puritanical caretaker who refused permission for the players to bring in their scenery: ‘This hall is used for Sunday school and we’ll have none of your damn scenery here.’¹⁹ This was the first of many different obstructions subsequently encountered by the players and precipitated an innovation which became the hall-mark of the movement: when the curtain was raised, it revealed a stage cloaked in drapes; a modernist setting so strikingly unfamiliar that it prompted a spontaneous round of applause.

The inaugural programme of this new dramatic movement reflected its initial

¹³ Bulmer Hobson, letter to Sam Hanna Bell, cited in Bell, *The Theatre in Ulster*, p. 2. A different, version of events is obliquely recalled in one of Maud Gonne’s letters to Yeats, written in 1903. The letter was written soon after her acrimonious split from the INTS following its performance of Synge’s *The Shadow of the Glen* and its refusal to produce Colum’s *The Saxon Shilleen*. She regarded this as a betrayal of the Society’s political aims and excoriated Yeats for forgetting the INTS’s nationalist origins and his earlier encouragement of various National Societies to perform *Cathleen ni Houlihan* in the name of the ‘National ideal’: ‘You remember you quite agreed with me formerly that a play like “Kathleen” which would do national good should be allowed to be acted by all societies who wished to act it and that it would be selfish to confine it to one society. If I remember right you said this when some cooperative Society in the North proposing acting it & as it was not a National Society I asked you what I should do about this matter.’ Maud Gonne, *Always Your Friend: The Gonne-Yeats Letters 1893–1938*, eds., Anna MacBride White and A. Norman Jeffares (London: Pimlico, 1992), p. 177. Significantly, Dudley Digges and Maire Quinn, both of whom provided essential assistance to the Belfast players, also objected to the INTS production of Synge’s play and walked out of the company to found the Cumann na nGaedhael Theatre Company along with Gonne. Little wonder then that all three openly supported the early ULT and were so favourably disposed to the nationalist objectives of their Northern counterparts.

¹⁴ Bell, *The Theatre in Ulster*, p. 1.

¹⁵ Although this outburst is always attributed to Hobson, Rutherford Mayne recalls that the sentiment was actually Parkhill’s, ‘I recollect that Parkhill’s reaction to this was that we write our own plays. He asked me to write a play and he said that he would write one himself.’ *Enter Robbie John*, written and compiled by historian David Kennedy to commemorate 50th anniversary of the ULT, BBC Radio Northern Ireland, 25 November 1954, (transcript of programme in possession of the author), subsequently referred to as *Enter Robbie John*, p. 6.

¹⁶ St Mary’s Hall was a location frequently used for nationalist political meetings, particularly during the Home Rule period.

¹⁷ Gerald MacNamara, *Enter Robbie John*, p. 4.

¹⁸ Joseph Campbell, ‘Northern Autobiography’, p. 84.

¹⁹ *Enter Robbie John*, p. 6.

geographical and dramatic equilibrium, with a play by Belfastman James Cousins counterbalanced by that of a Dubliner, W.B. Yeats.²⁰ The programme of this inaugural production (*See Plate 13*) contains invaluable information on the Northern movement at this crucial formative period, not least the fact that the name of this nascent theatrical body was neither the 'Ulster Literary Theatre,' nor 'The Ulster Branch of the Irish Literary Theatre', (as has been reported in *every* single written account of the theatre), but 'The Irish Literary Theatre Society Belfast.'²¹ Furthermore, the programme contains the cast list of those involved in the performance, whereas later ULT programmes were notable for the fact that actors' real names were never published in programme cast lists (see later). Moreover, a short declamatory mission statement contained in the programme is particularly significant when compared with the rather different manifesto later espoused in *Ulad*. As a result, it deserves to be quoted in full:

The Irish Literary Theatre Society Belfast has been founded to produce good literary plays, both in Irish and English, of a genuinely Irish character. The stage in Ireland has been flooded with imported vulgarity – its whole tendency is anti-national, and the few 'Irish' plays there are caricatures of the Irish people. The result is, that the stage, which ought to be a great educational force in the country, is demoralising and denationalising.

All plays produced by The Irish Literary Theatre Society Belfast will be in sympathy with the Gaelic Revival; there will be no caricaturing of the Irish people, and no imported vulgarity. The plays will be literary and national. The Irish Literary Theatre Society Belfast hopes to be able to present plays regularly, and if they are supported, people will be able to compete with the West-Brish theatres, and their imported British plays.²²

This ambitious declaration resonates with the rhetoric of Douglas Hyde and his seminal lecture on the 'The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland' (1892), in excoriating the invidious influence of British culture and theatre which has deracinated - 'demoralised' and 'denationalised' - the Irish people. It also adopts the Gaelic League position of promoting Irish culture, language and literature as part of the anti-colonial nationalist struggle against

²⁰ Joseph Campbell, who attended the opening night of this co-production after seeing an advertisement in town, records that there were 'no more than fifty' present in the audience.

²¹ I discovered this programme in the archives of the Central Library Belfast in an uncatalogued collection of theatre memorabilia called the Barrington-Baker scrapbooks. The discovery of this document is significant for all sorts of reasons, especially as it has previously been assumed that all such programmes had disappeared from the historical record, as there was only a limited print-run and small attendances.

²² Programme Note, *Barrington-Baker Scrapbooks*, Central Library, Belfast.

THE RACING LUG.

By SEUMAS O'CUISIN.



PLACE—Kitchen of Cottage in a North of Ireland Fishing Village.

TIME—March 188—; Night.



Characters:

Johnny - - - P. O'RYAN
(An old Fisherman)
Nancy - - - MAIRE T. QUINN
(His wife)
Bell - - - MISS COOPER
(Their daughter)
Rob - - - W. J. GREEN
(A young fisherman)
Rev. Mr. McMeekin - J. DUDLEY DIGGES
(A young Presbyterian minister)



Selection "Erin's Wreath." —

airgead éiríannac 7
saothar éiríannac.



Tailors Co-Partnership,

— Ltd. —

5 BRIDGE ST., BELFAST.



CLERGYMEN, Gaelic Leaguers, and all those who desire to give Irishmen Employment at Home should patronise the above Establishment, where they will not only get

Genuine Irish Material,

but will have it made on the Premises by Irish Workmen who are paid Trades Union rate of Wages, and not made by Jewish Outworkers or Sweated Female Labour—the method usually adopted by those who so largely advertise Irish Manufacture.



IRISH TWEED SUITS from 50/-
IRISH OVERCOATS " 40/-
IRISH TROUSERS " 18/6

Cathleen Ni Hoolihan.

By W. B. YEATS.



SCENE: Interior of a Cottage close to Killala in 1798.



Characters:

Peter Gillane - - W. J. GREEN.
Michael Gillane - J. DUDLEY DIGGES.
(His son, going to be married.)
Patrick Gillane - W. MacDONNELL.
(Michael's brother.)
Bridget Gillane - MISS O'FARRELL.
(Peter's Wife.)
Della Cahel - MISS O'BOYLE.
(Engaged to Michael.)
The Poor Old Woman, MAIRE T. QUINN.
(Cathleen Ni Hoolihan.)

Neighbours



Selection, "Éire 50 Dúlé," —

Plate 13: 1902 Programme of First Co-Production with the Irish Literary Theatre

Britain's cultural dominance and its use of theatre as an educational apparatus rather than an outlet for 'vulgar' entertainment. Its clear distinction between 'good literary plays' and the 'imported vulgarity' of touring English theatre and indigenous 'Irish' drama that 'caricatures' the Irish people, also displays the same division between high art and popular culture that characterised the founding principles of the ILT as expressed its manifesto:

We propose to have performed [...] certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature [...] We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and easy sentiment, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us.²³

The Belfast branch, however, was more hesitant in its manifesto; its qualified statement with regards to attracting audiences: 'The Irish Literary Theatre Society Belfast *hopes* to be able to present plays regularly, and *if they are supported*' (my italics) contrasts with the *über*-confidence of the ILT, 'We are confident of the support of all Irish people,' and displays a practical approach that was later to become the hallmark of the ULT's artistic policy and practice. This programme's declaration: 'All plays produced by The Irish Literary Theatre Society Belfast will be in sympathy with the Gaelic Revival' and its close replication of the aims and ideals of the ILT, the Gaelic League and Hyde, provides a fascinating point of comparison with the later manifesto of the movement in 1904 as, in the intervening period, the Company slipped its moorings to Revivalist ideology and developed its own regionalist aesthetics and politics.

There are other interesting details to this programme, such as an advert for a tailors firm in Bridge Street, Belfast which peddles its wares with the patriotic appeal:

Clergymen, Gaelic Leaguers and all those who desire to give Irishmen Employment at Home should patronise the above establishment, where they will not only get *Genuine Irish Material* [printed in an ornate Celtic font] but will have it made on the Premises by Irish Workmen who are paid Trades Union rate of wages, and not made by Jewish Outworkers or Sweated Female Labour – the method usually adopted by those who largely advertise Irish manufacture.²⁴

²³ Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), pp. 8-9.

²⁴ Programme Note, Barrington-Baker Scrapbooks, Central Library, Belfast

The advertising language cleverly appeals to three consumer constituencies contained within the Revival movement: Gaelic Leaguers, trade unionists, and suffragettes, blending them all in its branding of Irish clothing to maximise its market appeal. Indeed, it was not uncommon for retailers to strategically advertise their wares in certain political or cultural publications, as ULT member James Good recalls an entrepreneurial shoemaker advertising his wares 'in one glorious sentence' in an Orange sheet: "'Wear Kelly's boots to trample the Papists.'" ²⁵

The programme also gives details of the musical performances which helped orchestrate the whole evening and reveals how musicians Herbert Hughes and W.B. Reynolds were involved from the very beginning. Ironically, a musical performance of 'Erin's Wreath' took place during the interval between both plays and appears poignantly apposite in retrospect, given the subsequent unravelling of this North-South *rapprochement*. Indeed, an early intimation of the collapse of this North-South collaboration was evident in the different reactions of audiences to both plays: a warmer response elicited by the familiar accents of Cousins' characters, as opposed to the alienating effect of Yeats' elaborate dialogue. ²⁶

Based on a tragedy that befell his mother's family, ²⁷ Cousins' *The Racin' Lug* is set in Carrickfergus on the Antrim coast, and portrays the grief of a family of fishermen following a tragic drowning. In many ways *The Racin' Lug* is a Presbyterian prototype of Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, ²⁸ given its thematic concerns and dramaturgical simplicity as the family fatalistically cope with tragic loss with the same stoic strength as Synge's Aran Islanders. However, the impact of the production on Belfast audiences stemmed not only from its emotional charge, but the familiarity of its *mise en scène*, setting, accents, and characters. It evidently struck a chord with local audiences. One critic noted, 'Mr Cousins' play was a good choice to start with' and commented, 'it was presented seriously and impressively, in spite of certain shortcomings.' More significantly, he credits Cousins with bringing 'Ulster Presbyterianism on the Irish stage for the first time (I imagine) apart from caricature,' ²⁹ and in this respect, the play was perfectly in tune with the programme's declaration that 'there will be no caricaturing of the Irish people', in this case, specifically refusing to caricature the Ulster Protestant community of Ireland.

²⁵ Good, *Ulster and Ireland* p. 93.

²⁶ See Chapter 5.

²⁷ Cited by Hogan, *Laying the Foundations*, p. 29.

²⁸ It also is a precursor of Belfastman Joe Tomelty's *All Soul's Night* (1948).

²⁹ Belfast Irish Literary Society: Two Plays in St Mary's Hall', *The Belfast Telegraph*, 21 October 1903.

It was perhaps because of this realistic and dignified portrayal of a grieving Protestant family that the critic of the *Belfast Telegraph*, a solidly unionist publication with little sympathy for the Gaelic Revival that the theatre claimed to be part of, responded so positively to the play:

It may be thought strange to be recommending these [shows] in our columns; but the matter is a non-political one, one in which young Irishman of every creed and political colour may join. In it we may drop our distrust for each other and join together hand-in-hand on the creation of a truly characteristic and local (national, if you like) art and literature. We have joined together in music, in industrial development and other estimable activities; why not in literature and the drama?³⁰

Cousins' play also had an equally important impact on audiences in Dublin. In fact, a decade later, his *The Racin' Lug* and *The Sleep of the King* were staged in Dublin as part of a special evening's tribute to their author, who was soon to leave for India. After the performances, poet Patraic Colum paid tribute to Cousins' drama, singling out the *The Racin' Lug* as:

one of the plays dealing with the north of Ireland, of which they had too few, as compared with those dealing with other parts of Ireland. It was one of Mr Cousins's distinctions that he had introduced to them in the south the humanity of the north; and on the other hand, to the north he had introduced Ireland's 'inextinguishable dream.'³¹

The success of *The Racin' Lug* in comparison with *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* was instrumental in shaping the aesthetic development of the ULT. They recognised the need not only to provide some form of self-representation for local audiences, but to challenge Southern ignorance of what they regarded as 'the black North.' The reception of *The Racin' Lug* was a defining moment for the Ulster company and the players evidently recognised this. Belfast poet, Joseph Campbell, remembers this first night and acknowledged that Cousins' play gave 'me my first insight into what could be done, with simple speech'³² (although, he did not apply this insight into the value of 'simple speech' in the ludicrously florid dialogue of *The Little Cowherd of*

³⁰ Belfast Irish Literary Society: Two Plays in St Mary's Hall', *The Belfast Telegraph*, 21 October 1903.

³¹ 'The Cousins' Presentation', *Irish Citizen*, 7 June 1913, cited in Robert Hogan. *The Abbey Theatre: The Rise of the Realists 1910-1915* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979), p. 307.

³² Joseph Campbell, 'Northern Autobiography', p. 85.

Slainge, his first play for the ULT!) *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, on the other hand, seems to have baffled Belfast audiences and Campbell records that the play which detonated in the public consciousness in Dublin, was a bit of a damp squib in his native city, 'On the whole the mood was a static one.'³³ The poor acting of the Belfast players was perhaps partly to blame, one critic noting:

Belfast, which has shown Dublin how to make music on previous occasions, must it seems to me, learn of Dublin how to act Literary drama. On Saturday, we had two of the Dublin Literary people with us. With all their good intentions, our own actors seemed scarcely to know even the most elementary part of their business, and saw Mr Dudley J. Digges gradually impart ideas and methods to them.³⁴

As a means of explaining the apparent discrepancy between the acting abilities of the players the critic goes on to suggest that, 'the Ulster temperament does not so readily lend itself to the arduous of the stage as that of the more fiery Southron' but that in spite of this, the local actors, 'have nothing to be ashamed of [...] They acquitted themselves with credit and gave great promise for the future.'³⁵

However, bad acting alone cannot be blamed for the failure of Yeats' play in the city, for it was staged on two further occasions in 1903 and 1904 and yet still continued to misfire and mystify audiences. Of the 1904 production, ULT playwright Rutherford Mayne candidly admitted, 'I'm afraid I didn't quite catch what Yeats was at,'³⁶ a reaction seemingly shared by the Belfast public. The reasons for the different responses of Northern audiences to Yeats' nationalist play in comparison with Dublin's audiences and the significance of this discrepancy in relation to the later development of the ULT along with its more discursive implications for Irish theatre historiography will be examined in Chapter 5.

The evident indifference of Northerners to the Southern pitch of 'Cathleen's call' provided a pragmatic and political justification for the more personal motivations of Hobson and others - given their *chagrin* at Yeats' antipathy to 'all things Ulster'³⁷ - to found a separate theatre movement in Ulster. The rapid deterioration in the relationship between Northern

³³ Joseph Campbell, 'Northern Autobiography', p. 85.

³⁴ Belfast Irish Literary Society: Two Plays in St Mary's Hall', *The Belfast Telegraph*, 21 October 1903.

³⁵ Belfast Irish Literary Society: Two Plays in St Mary's Hall', *The Belfast Telegraph*, 21 October 1903.

³⁶ Mayne, *Enter Robbie John*, p. 6.

³⁷ Bell, *Theatre in Ulster*, p. 2.

and Southern dramatic movements that caused the ULT to evolve from playing as a corollary of the INTS to presenting a *critique* of the same movement was precipitated by Yeats' fury at their second, unlicensed performance of *Cathleen* in 1903 along with AE's *Deirdre*.³⁸ This production took place without the assistance of the Dublin players and prompted a curt letter from Belfastman George Roberts,³⁹ the secretary of the INTS, denouncing their (ab)use of the title, 'The Northern Branch of the Irish National Literary Theatre' and demanding royalties from the struggling company as, yet again, what Cousins decried as the notorious 'tendency to fission',⁴⁰ entered centre stage in the Irish theatrical scene. AE sympathised with his fellow Ulstermen, writing to Lady Gregory to complain about the treatment of 'some nice boys who wanted to constitute themselves the Belfast branch of the society and who never realised the lofty skyreaching dignity of the Theatre Society until they got an indignant letter [...] putting them in their "proper place."⁴¹ However, the INTS' attempt to assert their authoritative control of the 'nation' had the opposite effect as the Northern movement dropped its derivative name, rechristened itself the Ulster Literary Theatre, and developed over the years a regional theatrical aesthetic portraying 'stage Ulstermen' which undermined the INTS'⁴² authority to represent the nation and challenged the very concept of a unitary, homogenous national identity.

The 7th of December 1904, marks the definitive birthday of the ULT, as plays written by their founders (Hobson's *Brian of Banba*, and Purcell's (David Parkhill) *The Reformers*, (Plate 14), were produced and performed independently by the company in the Ulster Minor Hall, in accordance with their aim, 'to produce literary and artistic plays and to encourage in Ulster a school of writers and actors of such plays.'⁴³ *Brian of Banba* was a 'vivid glance of Ireland before the English invasion',⁴⁴ and *The Reformers*, a satire on municipal jobbery. The columns of *Nomad's Weekly* promoted the event in advance stating:

³⁸ Although coldly received by their dramatic colleagues in the South, these performances were critically commended, *The United Irishman* declaring they contained, 'the proper ratio between political preaching and dramatic rendering' (24 October 1903).

³⁹ George Roberts (1873–1953): co-founder of the INTS, secretary of the ILT, co-founder of Maunsell & Co. publishers an actor of some note For a description of him see, Seumas O Sullivan, 'The Irish National Theatre' in *The Rose and Bottle & Other Essays* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1946), pp. 28–33.

⁴⁰ James Cousins, 'Irish National Theatre Society', *The Daily Express*, 9 October 1903.

⁴¹ Quoted in Roy F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life: The Apprentice Mage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 320.

⁴² Later the National Theatre Society.

⁴³ Programme notes, Rutherford Mayne Archive Linen Hall Library, Belfast.

⁴⁴ *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 23 December, 1904.

To have a play written on local topics by a local writer and interpreted by local actors – scenery, too, by local artists – is an event too unique to miss. Hat in hand, *Nomad's Weekly* wishes the Ulster Literary Theatre all success- and an overflow audience.⁴⁵

These first performances greatly benefited from the closure of the School of Art Sketching Club in 1904,⁴⁶ whose members joined *en masse*, bringing with them a considerable degree of experience and expertise. As one critic of *Nomad's Weekly* had fulsomely effused over an earlier SASC production: 'Amateurs! There were times so good that one forgot that those who strutted their little hour behind the electric footlights were amateurs at all.'⁴⁷ One of these new recruits Harry Morrow⁴⁸ – 'the School of Art thespians [...] tower of strength'⁴⁹ – recalls how they brought badly-needed practical expertise, 'painting scenery, making props, drawing posters, designing costumes,'⁵⁰ as well as some seasoned actors into the movement. Reviewers accordingly observed that although flaws in the plays were 'chiefly the faults of a beginner'⁵¹ the acting and staging proved, 'a most agreeable surprise.'⁵² The *Northern Star* also praised the 'courage' of the group and urged that 'the warmest support' be given it.⁵³ Maurice Joy, writing in the *Northern Whig*, celebrated the fact that the company were, 'drawn from every class and creed' and confidently declared, 'it will epitomise the youth culture of the city.'⁵⁴ The reaction of the staunchly unionist *Newsletter*, however, was qualified, admonishing against the 'introduction of objectionable and narrow features.' This warning against the inveigling threat

⁴⁵ *Nomads' Weekly*, 31 December 1904.

⁴⁶ The School of Art Sketching Club had been active for a number of years in the Belfast arts scene and had produced a number of plays with considerable proficiency: 'There is little to fear of amateur acting becoming a dead letter in Belfast, when we have a flourishing organization like the School of Art Sketching Club in our midst.' *Nomads' Weekly* 5 April 1902. Bell lists among their previous theatrical offerings Scribe's *The Ladies' Battle*, H.T. Craven's *Meg's Diversion*, and the 'famous comedies', *The Benicia Boy* and *Home* and infers from this that they had expressed no interest in producing Irish plays (Bell, 15-16). However, *Nomads' Weekly* reports that one of their members had written a play about Wolfe Tone entitled *In the Dark of the Dawn*. 12 April 1902, see previous Chapter.

⁴⁷ *Nomads' Weekly*, 12 April 1902.

⁴⁸ Harry Morrow [pseudo. Gerald MacNamara] (1865-1938): playwright, actor, painter; one of many talented Morrow and leading playwright of the ULT who remained active in the Ulster theatre scene many years after the ULT has ceased to exist.

⁴⁹ *Nomads' Weekly* 12 April 1902, 173.

⁵⁰ Enter Robbie John

⁵¹ *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 9 December 1904.

⁵² *Northern Star*, 10 December 1904.

⁵³ *Northern Star*, 10 December 1904.

⁵⁴ *Northern Whig*, 24 December 1904.

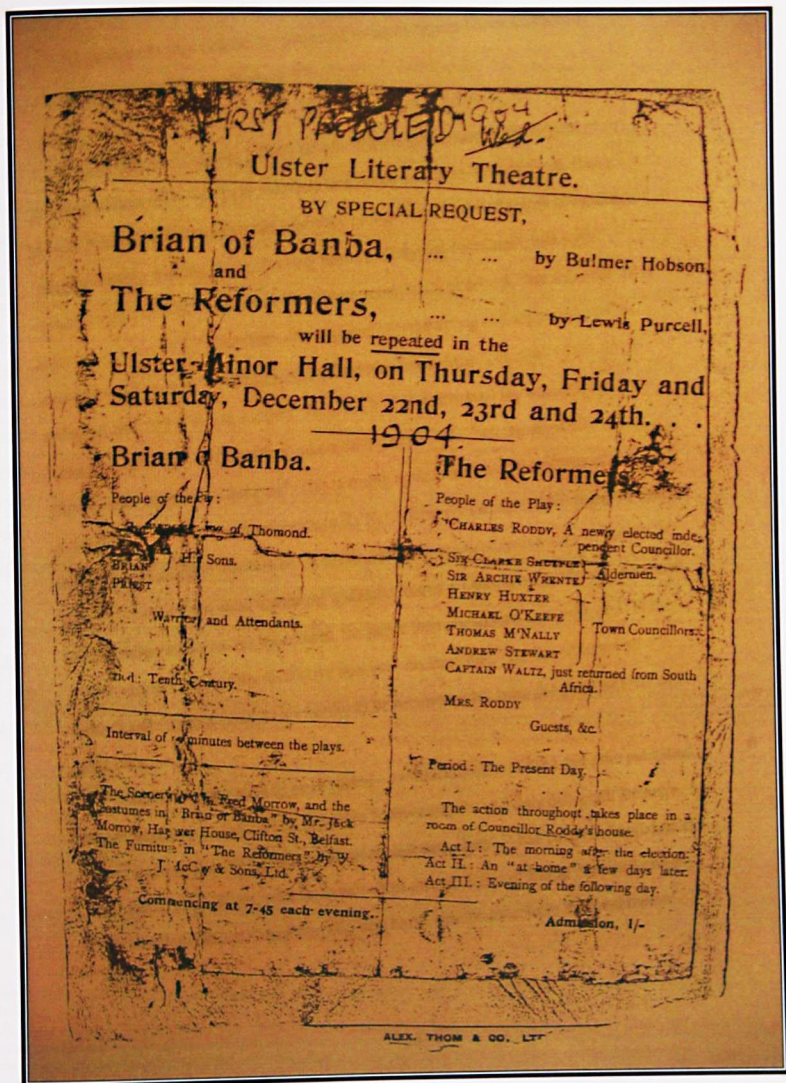


Plate 14: Programme of First productions of the ULT, 1904.

of 'stifling' political dogma was a veiled reference to its nationalist character and the paper's claim that it 'would alienate' viewers of a 'wider and more comprehensive view of human affairs',⁵⁵ referred not to an apolitical audience but to a unionist one. Having expressed political misgivings over the movement, the paper then questioned the 'politeness' of the project and in a delightfully dismissive *bon mot* declared, 'the introduction of political and religious subjects are hardly to be recommended from the point of view of good taste.'⁵⁶

Such reactions were to be expected: the first editorial of the *Ulster Literary Theatre*, the published literary organ of the theatre, had promised 'provocation' and duly delivered. Belfast's famed determination to 'guard ourselves against new ideas'⁵⁷ had been challenged on the most public of platforms with these two short pieces: *Brian of Banba* 'touched one as with a new revelation'⁵⁸ and Parkhill's play attacked local political figures and the corruption of civic authorities. Parkhill's play in many ways emulated Frederick Ryan's satire on municipal corruption *The Laying of the Foundations* (1902), but had less of the latter's Ibsenite emphasis and was more Molièresque in its comedic construction of political figures.⁵⁹ Given the acute political sensitivity of Belfast's audiences (described earlier) any attack on local political figures could have had similar riotous repercussions to those of Irish Night extravaganzas, and the ULT were perhaps understandably anxious about the reactions of audiences, prompting the editor of *Ulster*, W. B. Reynolds, to make the following assuasive statement before the play was produced:

We merely wish it known that the play [*The Reformers*] neither condemns nor approves of any specific party or clique in Belfast, or any other municipality, and refers to no religious sect. The writer of the play observed a certain 'dramatic' situation, and set a few imaginary characters therein, the result being a little drama. We cannot let out our work for the purposes of anyone, politician or sectary [...] We have no ambition to become political or municipal pamphleteers or lampooners.⁶⁰

The somewhat disingenuous disavowal of the movement's overt political commitments is

⁵⁵ *Newsletter*, 9 December 1904.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ J.W. (James Good), 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *Ulster* 1:2 (1905), p. 4.

⁵⁸ *Enter Robbie John*.

⁵⁹ No copy of Parkhill's script exists and my comments are very much informed by contemporaneous reviews, a range of which are collated in Hogan and Kilroy's *Laying the Foundations*, pp. 122-5.

⁶⁰ Reynolds, 'Editorial' *Ulster* 1:2 (1905): 3.

correctly dismissed by Hagal Mengel as a smoke screen.⁶¹ However, Reynolds need not have worried as the play's sharp satire, witty dialogue and comic construction won over audiences and broke new boundaries in the local theatre scene:

Ten years ago, it is odds that the mimic riot in the last act of the *Reformers* would have followed a very real riot amongst the spectators; five years ago, a manager would have not been surprised to find a body of policemen in duty in the hall to keep the peace; but now the spectacle is cheered by men who, although they still label themselves with the odd party designations, have begun to realise that they are Irish in something more than in name.⁶²

As indicated in the above quotation, their work was more 'revelationary' than revolutionary. Indeed, this was generally true for a great deal of the ULT's work as they promulgated a new form of cultural nationalism based on a localised representation of Ulster life that extolled pride in its Irish character and challenged sectarian moulds of political and cultural identity. In doing so, they won many converts, of whom a good example was the novelist Forrest Reid.⁶³

Well-heeled, urbane, Protestant and quite pro-British, Reid remained somewhat of an outsider within the ULT. He candidly admitted his apolitical nature and confessed to being somewhat bewildered by his contemporaries' ideological motives and cultural inclinations:

I had never been interested in politics [...] had never distinguished in my mind north from south. I didn't know what Ulad meant; I didn't know why Joseph Campbell should call himself Seosamh Mac Cathmhaóil. It seemed to me to be a most difficult name to pronounce and since Reynolds got over it by pronouncing it Joe, the difficulty still remains.⁶⁴

Reid remained immune to Reynold's attempts to convert him to this nationalist revival: 'I listened to Reynolds without conviction.'⁶⁵ Such detachment makes his wry observations invaluable in measuring the efficacy of a movement that won him over in spite of himself:

[Reynolds] took me on this damp dark night of January or February 1905

⁶¹ Hagal Mengel, *Sam Thompson and the Modern Drama in Ulster*, p. 33.

⁶² James Good, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *Ulad* 1.2 (1905): pp. 4–5.

⁶³ Forrest Reid (1876–1947): Born Belfast; educ. locally and at Cambridge; wrote novels and some critical studies, including one on Yeats (1915) and two volumes of autobiography *Apostate* (1926) and *Private Road* (1940). Reid was also homosexual, a good friend of E.M. Forster, and a life-long celibate.

⁶⁴ Forrest Reid, *Private Road* (London: Faber & Faber, 1941), pp. 35–6.

⁶⁵ Forrest Reid, *Private Road*, p. 35.

[...] to a house in May Street, and there in a brightly-lit backroom upstairs, I watched a rehearsal of *The Enthusiast* [...] I remember Padraic Colum chanting in my ear Yeats' new poem 'The Happy Townland' and a parody of another Yeats poem 'I heard the bad old men say.' Fred Morrow was stage-managing, W.R. Gordon was there, and Bulmer Hobson and John Campbell, the black-and-white artist who played the part of Sam McKinstrey [...] Rutherford Mayne who had the part of Rab [...] the whole thing was a revelation to me, it was so fresh, natural and new, and I felt that Reynolds, after all, had perhaps not exaggerated its importance.⁶⁶

The thrilled sense of creative vitality in this account is all the more striking given the lofty ambivalence that normally typifies Reid's prose. The discovery, amongst the black, damp streets of Linenopolis of this 'brightly-lit' room filled with actors, poets and writers clandestinely *rehearsing* their art, was revelatory for Reid. The title of the play was appropriate and Reid soon counted himself amongst the cast of 'Enthusiasts' comprising the Ulster Literary Theatre.

The Enthusiast(s)

The eponymous idealism of Parkhill's 1905 play appositely describes the cast of enthusiasts that formed the Ulster Literary Theatre. Parkhill had co-founded the ULT with the quixotic, Quaker republican Bulmer Hobson, to provide a 'commentary on the political and social conditions of the North of Ireland,'⁶⁷ but it was Parkhill's drama which was more successful in achieving the objectives of the movement. His first play *The Reformers*, a 'smart, spicy, comedy *exposé*'⁶⁸ of municipal jobbery which launched the ULT was very successful, but it was his second play, *The Enthusiast*, produced one year later in May 1905, that made a name for the tyro-playwright and marked a new direction in the development of his theatre company (Plate 15).

The play deals with the efforts of Jamie Mc Kinstrey, an idealistic farmer's son who returns home from his studies in Belfast to unite local Catholic and Protestant farmers under the ideological auspices of the co-operative agricultural movement. McKinstrey's attempt to proselytise Ultonian farmers to his utopian vision of agricultural co-operation is crushed, as the local community meeting called to discuss the project disintegrates in internecine sectarian

⁶⁶ Forest Reid, '18 Years Work', *The Times, Irish Supplement*, 5 December 1922.

⁶⁷ Hobson, *Ireland: Yesterday and Tomorrow*, p. 4.

⁶⁸ *Nomads' Weekly and Belfast Critic*, 24 December 1904.

conflict. The play concludes with the disillusioned hero, 'sitting dejectedly alone, the last remnant of spirit crushed out of him by the sound of drums in the distant night.'⁶⁹

Parkhill's play shows how even the conciliatory philosophy of the co-operative movement, which proved so successful in the South, could make little progress in Ulster, where rural communities were as politically polarized by sectarian politics as their urban counterparts in Belfast. In *The Enthusiast*, the co-operative ideal of small farmers combining with neighbours into large collectives so that, 'with organized labour [they] could be made to pay with one-half of the sum of work that is expended on the separate dozen farms,'⁷⁰ disintegrates as the divided rural community of south Antrim cannot even agree on a location for the first meeting:

- JAMES: I intend to call a meeting of the country side and lay the scheme before them.
 FATHER: A meetin'?
 SAM: In the Orange hall?
 JAMES: No, no. It can't be in the Orange hall.
 FATHER: But there's no other hall hereabouts.
 JAMES: You see, it wouldn't do to have it there. We want *everybody* into this. Neither Home Rulers nor Catholics would come to it. I'll hold it in the big meadow.
 SAM: Home Rulers in it?
 AUNT: (*Throwing down 'Christian Herald'*) An' Catholics? Lord's a mercy!
 JAMES: Oh, how long is this damnable division to last? [...]
 RAB: It's dam' good this week. The's three murders in it [...]
 JAMES: But I will carry it through, I will bring all creeds and classes together on a common platform [...] (*He stops, seeing that no-one is listening*)⁷¹

The little scene echoes in St. John Ervine's later play *Mixed Marriage* (1911), in which striking Belfast workers try to organise a cross-community meeting so that their solidarity is not undermined by sectarian suspicions. However, even this simple logistical task is complicated by the difficulty in settling on a neutral venue:

- RAINY: Where is this meeting' to take place.
 MICHAEL: Well, we wur thinkin' o' St Mary's Hall.

⁶⁹ Joseph Power, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *Ulster* 1:4 (Sept. 1905): 6.

⁷⁰ *The Enthusiast*, p. 31.

⁷¹ Lewis Purcell (David Parkhill), *The Enthusiast*, *Ulster* 1:3, (May 1905): 32-3.

ULSTER LITERARY THEATRE.

The aim is to give help to the producer literary and artistic talent, and to encourage the artist to think of literature and drama as a whole. These aims are intended to be accomplished by a series of four sketches and one comedy in the programme of the season.

The sketches:
 (1) *The Enthusiast*, by Norman Morris.
 (2) *The Enthusiast*, by Norman Morris.
 (3) *The Enthusiast*, by Norman Morris.
 (4) *The Enthusiast*, by Norman Morris.

THE ENTHUSIAST. A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS, BY NORMAN MORRIS.

People of the Play:
 NORMAN MORRIS: The man who has written the play.
 WILLIAM MCKINSTREY: The man who has written the play.
 ALAN MCKINSTREY: The man who has written the play.
 ALAN MCKINSTREY: The man who has written the play.
 ALAN MCKINSTREY: The man who has written the play.

THE ENTHUSIAST. A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS, BY NORMAN MORRIS.

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 ALAN MCKINSTREY: The man who has written the play.
 ALAN MCKINSTREY: The man who has written the play.
 ALAN MCKINSTREY: The man who has written the play.



SAM MCKINSTREY.
 "I would sign the pledge for no woman."

Programme of first performance of The Enthusiast.

Sketches of *The Enthusiast* characters by Norman Morris (reproduced courtesy of Mrs Brigit Ferguson).



Plate 15: Norman Morrow's sketches of characters *The Enthusiast* which appeared in the last issue of *Ulad*. William John McKinstrey (above) is easily recognizable as WR Gordon who played the role.

- RAINEY: What!
- HUGH: Sure, what does it matter where it takes place?
- RAINY: A Cathlik hall like that where Home Rulers always go?
- HUGH: It's the only hall we can git. Sure, we'd take the Ulster on'y they wudden let us have it [...]
- RAINY: A wudden go near St Mary's Hall.⁷²

Even when a neutral location is agreed in Parkhill's *The Enthusiast*, underlying suspicion and sectarianism inexorably (re)surface, bringing proceedings to an abrupt end:

- AUNT: Is the meetin' ower already?
- RAB: Aye.
- AUNT: An' what way did it go?
- RAB: Oh, it wuz a gran' meetin'. I nivir seen a better fight.
- AUNT: Glory be! A fight?
- RAB: Aye, better nor any twelfth [...]
- AUNT: An' what started it?
- RAB: Och nothin'! It jist started itself, like any other fight, afore anybody knowed.
- AUNT: (*Philosophically*) An' when ye think o' it, whut else cud ye expect but a fight, bringin' Home Rulers an' Catholics as' Dippers, an' tramps, an' a' the riff-raff o' the country into the same field. It's flyin' in the face o' Providence!⁷³

Whilst *The Reformers* had generally been acclaimed as 'an Ibsenic comedy without any of the great dramatist's dolefulness',⁷⁴ some reviewers singled out this quality in *The Enthusiast* for criticism. The Ibsenite pessimism of its *dénouement*, whereby the 'enthusiast' is rejected as the 'enemy of the people' and fatalistically acquiesces in the defeat of his 'superior' idealism by sectarian atavism was condemned by poet Padraic Colum as 'immoral'. Colum's criticism fanned considerable debate, with one columnist on the *Nationist* retorting, 'Why should we shrink from the contemplation of a point or aspect of Irish life that is not ideal?'⁷⁵ Local critics, however, were more fulsome in their praise and Forrest Reid, who had witnessed earlier rehearsals of the play, felt compelled to write an open letter to the *Northern Whig*

⁷² St John Irvine, *Mixed Marriage*, in *Selected Plays of St John Irvine* (London: Colin Smythe, 1988), p.27.

Significantly, St Mary's Hall where 'Home Rulers always go' was the venue for the first performances of the ULT, although they astutely sought to move to the Ulster Minor Hall soon after, not just for commercial reasons of box office, but to appeal to a broader Belfast audience.

⁷³ *The Enthusiast*, pp. 32-3.

⁷⁴ *Nomads' Weekly and Belfast Critic*, 17 December 1904.

⁷⁵ *The Nationist*, 4 January 1906.

extolling *The Enthusiast* as, 'infinitely superior to any modern play [...] seen in Belfast.' Hailing the play as 'a little work of art worth a hundred of the productions of Pineros and Jones we are so frequently asked to applaud today',⁷⁶ he exhorted the local audience of Lineopolis to lend their support to the ULT. Other critics commended Parkhill's efforts to tackle an urgent political issue and praised his:

selection of a theme, and without affectation or pretence at preaching he manages in the space of two short scenes, to restate with boldness and originality, the central problem which Ireland has to solve in the near future if she is to preserve her national identity and attain to that high destiny which her sons, whatever views they may hold, unite in believing the future holds in store.⁷⁷

The *Newsletter*, as noted with the *The Reformers*, was preternaturally sensitive to any political infiltration of art and protested against the political distortion of dramatic arts that were 'cribbed, cabined and confined to voice forth any particular propaganda.' Yet, it was 'pleased to note that a distinct advance had been made in reference to these matters. "The Reformers" may have alienated the sympathies of many, but "The Enthusiast" [...] is greatly superior in many ways.'⁷⁸ However, Parkhill's play *was* political, though its advocacy of co-operative politics obviously made it 'artistically acceptable' to this unionist paper. Other critics in the nationalist press correctly adduced that the co-operative politics of the play were subsumed within the movement's explicitly nationalist nature and acclaimed the Theatre for 'preaching [...] the principles of broad nationalism [...] and] deserve the warmest support of every Irishman who wishes to see an elevated, prosperous and free Ireland.'⁷⁹

The play explicitly advocates the progressive politics 'sweeping the country' of Sir Horace Plunkett's Irish Agricultural Organisation Society⁸⁰ (IAOS), which sought to steer a third way between the Scylla and Charybdis of nationalist and unionist politics. Indeed, the *Northern Whig* suggested, 'Sir Horace Plunkett might do worse than subsidise the Literary

⁷⁶ *The Northern Whig*, 5 May 1905.

⁷⁷ *Northern Whig*, 5 May 1905.

⁷⁸ 'The Ulster Literary Theatre: Dramatic Performances in the Clarence Hall', *Newsletter*, 6 May 1905.

⁷⁹ *Northern Star*, 24 December 1904.

⁸⁰ Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, founded in 1894, sought to promote ideas of co-operative organization among Irish farmers and to co-ordinate existing co-operative societies. It also attempted to bring about the modernization of Irish agriculture through the improvement of farming techniques, and the introduction of new technologies. It sought to improve the lot of farmers and conditions on the land and made representations to government on their behalf. Sir Horace Plunkett was the first President of this organization and oversaw its growth where, by 1903, the organization had 800 branches and 80,000 members.

Theatre to produce it in districts which up to the present have remained deaf to his gospel.⁸¹ Historian Roy Foster describes the IAOS as a 'conciliationist'⁸² movement and this is certainly reflected in the heterogeneous composition of its central committee, convened by Plunkett and comprising Liberal and Tory Peers, Parnellite factions, prominent Orangemen, a Jesuit educationist, northern industrialists and even the nationalist and unionist mayors of Belfast and Dublin! This miraculous collective Plunkett modestly called a 'strange council', but one which might 'fairly claim to be representative in every material respect.'⁸³ In spite of bitter political differences, the IAOS managed to secure a new Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland in 1899, (in effect, creating a *de facto* home rule for Irish agriculture)⁸⁴ and it sought to modernize Irish agriculture by improving farming techniques, introducing new technologies and forming co-operative organisations of small farmers. Plunkett records his efforts to transform Irish agriculture into an efficient and technically proficient enterprise in his visionary treatise, *Ireland in the New Century* (1904): a work redolent of McKinstry's rhetoric:

We are on the eve of the creation of a peasant proprietary, involving the rehabilitation of rural life, and one essential condition of the successful inauguration of the new agrarian order is the elimination of anything, approaching to sectarian bitterness in communities...⁸⁵

However, McKinstry's fickle idealism is as much the object of Parkhill's satire as the sectarianism of the local community, for his commitment to the co-operative cause compares unfavourably with Plunkett's as another co-operative 'Enthusiast' and Ulsterman, George Russell (AE) records: 'He [Plunkett] had fifty unsuccessful meetings before he could get the first farmer's creamery started.' Plunkett demonstrated little of McKinstry's naivety and tackled sectarianism head-on, even appealing to it to secure cross-community agreement!

⁸¹ *Northern Whig*, 20 May 1909.

⁸² Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 434.

⁸³ Horace Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century* (London: John Murray, 1904), p. 218.

⁸⁴ P.J. Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, The Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003), p. 9. This process was also assisted by new legislation and administrative reforms: The Congested Districts Board (1890), Local Government Act (1898) Wyndham's Land Act (1903), all helped pave the way for the 'relatively smooth transition from British rule to the political independence of the Irish Free State.' Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and State in Twentieth Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 3.

⁸⁵ Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century*, p. 100.

He said a few weeks ago in Belfast at a public meeting where he tried to melt the obdurate sectarianism with a little humour. "We all know that those who differ from us on matters of religion will be adequately punished in the hereafter. So why harbour bad feeling now?"⁸⁶

As the earliest surviving play of the ULT, (it was published in *Ulaid*), *The Enthusiast* provides an interesting dramatic counterpoint to Yeats' *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, where the idealistic son of a peasant family rejects the bourgeois materialism of marriage desired by his parents in order to follow the French at Killala and 'drive the strangers out'⁸⁷ of Cathleen's fourth green field. This dramaturgical narrative is inverted in *The Enthusiast* as Jamesy's co-operative ideals are crushed and he succumbs to Minnie's 'love-business talk' whilst the fourth green field offstage resounds to the percussive drumming of drunken Orangemen. Perhaps, this anti-revivalist narrative was the real reason for Colum's dislike of *The Enthusiast*, but certainly the play conspicuously fails to follow the same (Southern) narratological structure of renewal which appears ubiquitously in the literature and drama of the Irish Revival. There is no transformation, no rejuvenation, no turning Cathleen Ni Houlihan from an old hag into a beautiful queen. In fact, Parkhill's play manifests a profound *anti-revival* narrative: there is no escape from history, no bright new dawn for the Enthusiast, but a dark night of drums, drunkenness, and the death of his ideals. Given that the meta-narrative of Irish cultural nationalism in this period emphasised revival, renewal, rejuvenation, Parkhill's play - and indeed much of the later work of the ULT - goes against this grain, and offers no 'glorious phoenix-like rebirths that the audience were used to.'⁸⁸ This is how Leerson describes Synge's *Playboy* and *Shadow of the Glen* and, if nothing else, the ULT shares Synge's deflationary dramaturgy in this respect.

The Enthusiast resembles the realistic portraits of rural life in Ulster drawn by William Carleton, Lynn Doyle and others. As 'the historian of the Irish peasantry of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,'⁸⁹ Carleton's writings reflect the sectarian tensions of the region, as recorded in his description of the riotous peasant performances of *The Siege of Londonderry* and *The Battle of Anghrim* referred to in the previous chapter. In fact, the description by

⁸⁶ *Letters from AE*, ed. Alan Denson, (London: Abelard-Scuman, 1961), p. 37.

⁸⁷ William Butler Yeats, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, in *Modern Irish Drama*, ed., John P. Harrington (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 9.

⁸⁸ Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 222.

⁸⁹ Rev. J.E. Mc Kenna, *Parochial Records, Diocese of Clogher* (Enniskillen: Fermanagh Herald Office, 1920), p. 200.

McKinstry's farmhand Rab, of the disastrous community meeting called by Jamie resembles Carleton's stories of Party conflicts:⁹⁰

AUNT: Was there much speechifyin'?

RAB: Aye, a good dale o't – as far as I mind. Jamie started the whole show o' coorse. He blethered away in that high-falutin' style o' his (*striking a heroic pose*) for near han' an hour. To tell ye the truth, I'm no' sure yet whut it wuz all about, for I wuz crackin' th' whole time to a wheen o' girls [...] as I say, I wuzn't botherin' my heed much [...] but as far as I mind, about half a dozen got up in turns an' said it may be a good thing an' it might be not [...] Then Andy Moore got up [...] an' said they were goin' till upset the Crown and Constitution. An' at the wind up he axed Jamie if he cud gie scripture for it, an' Jamie as much as said he cudn't. Then somebody shouted "Socialisms," and Ned Graham – he wuz drunk- he shouted it wuz a Fenian thing, an' he kep' shoutin' that the whole time. An' sez I to myself, this is goin' to be the warm meetin'.⁹¹

This Carletonesque vignette of peasant society is especially interesting when read against the typology of the Revival's representations of rural life. The cultural tropes of the 'pleasant peasant' and the picturesque Irish countryside as an Arcadian, prelapsarian space were fundamental to Revivalist (re)presentations of Irishness, and a rationale for national self-determination. Its representations of the west of Ireland, in particular, were influenced by the aesthetics of late nineteenth century Romanticism and the ideology of cultural nationalism, and as a primarily urban, metropolitan movement, the Revival's constructions of 'Irishness' were projected onto a pastoral, western, rural space, 'from the city's pavements grey on which the poet articulated their common need for a return to some peaceful natural place of origin.'⁹² In contrast, there is nothing peaceful about Parkhill's portrayal of rural society, which is altogether anti-romantic. In fact, his dramatisation of a divided community is an anti-pastoral portrayal of rural peasantry and goes completely against the grain of the Irish Revival in its depiction of their philistinism, sectarianism and materialism.

⁹⁰ See 'The Battle of the Factions', 'The Party Fight and Funeral' in *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, Vol.1 (London: Barnes & Noble, 1991)

⁹¹ *The Enthusiast*, p. 33.

⁹² Nicholas Grene, 'Black Pastoral: 1990s Images Of Ireland' *Litteraria Pragensia: Studies in Literature and Culture* 10:20 (2000) <http://komparatistika.ff.cuni.cz/litteraria/no20-10/grene.htm> accessed: 12:01.03

As such, the play can perhaps be regarded as a precursor of the literature of the post-1922 Counter-Revival and to Patrick Kavanagh and John B. Keane's later demolitions of the mythical rural idyll. *The Enthusiast*, and later plays by Rutherford Mayne, are dramaturgical *imprimaturs* of the 'black pastorals' Nicholas Grene classifies as constituting the most recent sub-genre of contemporary Irish theatre,⁹³ and can be linked to the work of Keane, Tom Murphy and Martin McDonagh or, more specifically within a Northern anti-romantic tradition, to George Shiels and Eugene McCabe.⁹⁴

However, it is the aesthetics rather than the politics of *The Enthusiast* that are especially important, not only in terms of its rejection of the pleasant peasant trope, but in its development of a distinctive Northern dramaturgy. Produced in 1905 along with Joseph Campbell's play, *The Little Cowherd of Slainge*,⁹⁵ Parkhill's play represented a milestone in the artistic development of the ULT.⁹⁶ Its naturalistic speech marked the theatre's rejection of the pseudo-Syngé-song grandiloquence favoured by their Southern counterparts in favour of what Tom Paulin evocatively calls the 'scutching vernacular'⁹⁷ of Ulster speech. This contrast is starkly evident in the May 1905 ULT productions: *The Enthusiast*'s naturalistic dialogue is dramatically different from the florid speechifying of Campbell's play which 'never fully cleared the lesser faery world of malign leprechaun and changeling'.⁹⁸ Written in a derivative style of Celticist drama,⁹⁹ compare the *Cowherd*'s stilted diction:

I would speak with thee, woman. How is thy care? Ah woman, I like not thy looks. Thou turnest the white of thine eye to me. Thou art wan as a

⁹³ Nicholas Grene, 'Black Pastoral', accessed: 12.01.03

⁹⁴ See: John B. Keane, *The Field* (1965), *Many Young Men on Twenty* (1961), *Sive* (1985), *Sharon's Grave* (1960), *Year of the Hiker* (1963); Tom Murphy, *Conversations on a Homecoming* (1985); Martin McDonagh, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996), *The Skull in Connemara* (1997), *The Lonesome West* (1997), *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1996); George Shiels, *The Rugged Path* (1940), *The Summit* (1941); Eugene McCabe, *King of the Castle* (1964).

⁹⁵ Campbell's play in his own words was a 'foolish' first attempt at poetic drama. It was based on a legend of the Mourne Mountains about a magical cowherd who lures a local chieftain's daughter to her death. The play was published in the first issue of *Ulaid*, 1:1 (November) 1904, pp. 24-32.

⁹⁶ These productions took place on the 4th May 1905, in the Clarence Place Hall, May Street, Belfast. Reviews record that music by Bach and Purcell (not Parkhill!), songs by Cathal O'Byrne, Frederick Hughes, and R.M. Patterson, and arrangements by William Dunn and Carl Hardebeck were performed during the interval.

⁹⁷ Tom Paulin, 'The Vernacular City', *The Guardian*, 23 February 2002.

⁹⁸ Bell, *Theatre in Ulster*, p. 19.

⁹⁹ The *Northern Whig* criticised its twilight obscurity, of 'figures that move through it so majestically are swayed by sorrows too obscure and shadowy to touch us home.' 'Ulster Literary Theatre: Performance in the Clarence Hall', *Northern Whig*, 5 May 1905, whilst an article in the ULT's own journal *Ulaid* was even more blunt: 'About "The Little Cowherd of Slainge" [...] there is not much to be said. That Seosamh MacCathmhaoil can produce good work is indisputable, that he has not done so in this little picture of ancient Ireland is equally so.' Joseph Power, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *Ulaid* 1:4 (September 1905): 10.

witch-wife- strange thing in this tanning sun and whole-some southerly
air,¹⁰⁰

with the clattery speech of *The Enthusiast*:

I knowed fine there wuz somethin' up wi' him. Naebody iver heered the
likes o' the talk he wuz goin' on wi' afore you came in. Jamie McKinstry,
ye shud be weel ashamed o' yourself.¹⁰¹

Indeed, one Southern critic singled out this aspect of Parkhill's play, praising its 'marvellous fidelity' to the 'speech of Co. Antrim folk [...] indeed it would scarcely be too much to say that he has caught their idioms more cleverly than any previous writer.'¹⁰² In attempting to authentically reproduce the rhythms of Ulster vernacular the ULT started to develop its own regionalist aesthetic and moved away from the stylized speech and mythological settings characterizing the poetic drama of the ILT. The second production of *The Enthusiast* which took place at the Gaelic League *feis* in the Temple of Liberty¹⁰³ at Toome, Co. Antrim in 1905, along with *Brian of Bamba*, reinforced this process as Joseph Campbell records that it was 'sad to study [the] reaction' of the farmers and pollan-fishers of the audience who were 'bored' by Brian:¹⁰⁴ their incomprehension of Hobson's inflated language mirrored that felt by William John McKinstry for his enthusiast son's educated talk: 'Why did ye no' tell it to me in plain language? How wuz I to make sense o' your high-falutin' talk?'¹⁰⁵

These lines struck a chord with the ULT who recognized that their audience's disinterest in *Brian* was only matched by their delight in the 'homely touches of type, local idiom and situation' of *The Enthusiast*.¹⁰⁶ The play's 'Chaucer-cum-Burns' composite speech of English, Irish, and Ulster-Scots had a remarkable effect on local audiences whose 'lavish greeting for the drama'¹⁰⁷ stemmed from their delight in hearing the earthy idiom and

¹⁰⁰ Joseph Campbell, *The Little Cowherd of Slainge, Ulad 1:1* (Nov. 1904), p. 24.

¹⁰¹ David Parkhill, *The Enthusiast, Ulad 1:3* (May 1905), p. 30.

¹⁰² Power, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', p. 8.

¹⁰³ The full title was The Temple of Liberty, Learning, and Select Amusement, see Robert Lynd, 'Hibernia Rediviva', *Irish and English: Portraits and Impressions* (London: Francis Griffiths, 1907), p. 96.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Campbell, 'Northern Autobiography', p. 93.

¹⁰⁵ *The Enthusiast*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Campbell, 'Northern Autobiography', p. 93.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Lynd, *Robert Lynd: Galway of the Races, Selected Essays*, ed. Sean McMahon (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1990), p. 57.

cadences of their own speech. After all, this was the first time that Ulster peasantry had ever been represented onstage, as Cathal O' Shannon¹⁰⁸ records:

Now the only plays that I had ever seen at that age [...] were local amateurs. They generally played Boucicault-plays like the *Shraughraun* [...] but when I saw this performance in Toombridge even though I was only a youngster of 13 years of age I was very much impressed. I was interested enough in *Brian of Banba* [...] But what really did impress me was not that but *The Enthusiast*, because for the first time I saw the kind of people that I knew and lived among and sprung from in Co. Antrim and Co. Derry were there alive and talking as they talked at home.¹⁰⁹

The success of *The Enthusiast* encouraged the ULT to aesthetically develop the regionalist ideology articulated in its literary journal *Ulad* and, subsequently, the vast majority of their plays features an Ulster *mise en scène*, whilst their 'manipulation of a singularly barbarous dialect'¹¹⁰ as one English critic inveighed, became a key dramaturgical feature of their work. Between 1904-16, they produced twenty-five new plays, many of them remarkably successful in recording the rhythms, vocabularies and cadences of Ulster vernacular. Their work, in this regard, resonates with the rhyming poetry of the nineteenth century weaver poets and their fascination with the North's terse, abrasive, pithy, dissonant speech; and which is evocatively described by Ulster poet W.R. Rogers:

I am Ulster, my people an abrupt people
Who like the spiky consonants in speech
and think the soft ones cissy; who dig
the *k* and *t* in orchestra, detect sin
in sinfonia, get a kick out of
Tin cans, fricatives, fornication, staccato talk,
Anything that gives or takes attack.¹¹¹

This is a crucially important element of their work to consider when assessing the political efficacy of their work. After all, theatre is as much an auditory medium as it is visual, and, for

¹⁰⁸ Cathal O' Shannon: born in Derry and worked in Belfast as a shipping clerk, before later taking up a career as a journalist. An ardent republican and socialist he was a prominent member of the IRB and James Connolly's ITGWU. As an active socialist republican he founded Betsey Gray branch of the Fianna which met in former British army huts on the Falls Road!

¹⁰⁹ Cathal O'Shannon, *Enter Rabbie John*, p. 14.

¹¹⁰ Cited in Bell, p. 38.

¹¹¹ W.R. Rogers, 'Epilogue to "The Character of Ireland"', *Collected Poems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 101.

audiences wholly unaccustomed to seeing and hearing themselves onstage, *The Enthusiast* was nothing short of a revelation: 'fresh and vivid and of the earth' as one critic exclaimed and, 'in startling contrast to those chopped and mangled sentences that often pass current as stage English.'¹¹² Another critic hailed Parkhill's 'marvellous fidelity' to the speech patterns of Co. Antrim peasants, capturing it 'more cleverly than any previous writer' and comparing it, (unfavourably), with the peasant speech recorded by 'Dublin playwrights' who are:

seemingly possessed of a desire to emulate the simplicity of Maeterlinck's marionettes, have evolved a kind of classical *patois* for their Irish characters. But, however suitable it may be for the shadowy people of the Belgian dramatist's imagining, creatures of no country living in an unnamed land of ancient castles and wild forests, girdled by an ever moaning sea, it does not do for the presentation of flesh and blood actualities whom we know and meet everyday in life.¹¹³

The ULT's self-conscious fashioning of speech facilitated their artistic objectives of articulating an Ulster identity. Consequently, their work must be constellated within the wider context of Ulster's literature and cultural history. Poet and critic, Tom Paulin, has long been fascinated by the linguistic and cultural history of Ulster speech, which he views as a vital architectonic force that has shaped Northern cultural consciousness and identity.¹¹⁴ He relates this cultural vernacular to the North's poetic tradition and connects two of the most celebrated Northern poets, John Hewitt and Seamus Heaney, directly through their use of 'local speech' which is used 'to define a distinctive Ulster identity.'¹¹⁵ The ULT were doing this from the first performance of *The Enthusiast*. The efficacy of Parkhill's play is clear from the remarkable effect it had on his colleague and collaborator, Joseph Campbell. Embarrassed by the poetic purpled prose of *The Little Cowherd*, he thereafter abandoned this *faux* Celtic mistiness in favour of dialogue flavoured by the local cadences, rhythms, speech patterns, and vocabulary of Ulster vernacular, which came to characterize his later dialect poems and plays. The influence of the *Enthusiast* is evident in Campbell's introduction to one of his later collections of poetry:

¹¹² *Northern Whig*, 5 May 1905.

¹¹³ Joseph Power, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *Ulster* 1:4 (September 1905), pp. 8–9.

¹¹⁴ Tom Paulin, 'Foreword', John Hewitt ed., *Rhyming Weavers and Other Poets of Antrim and Down* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2004), p. vii.

¹¹⁵ Tom Paulin, 'Foreword', *Rhyming Weavers*, p. vii.

Being a Belfastman, hearing the half-Scots, half-Irish speech of my neighbours about me daily I could not escape so lusty an environment, Indeed, if truth be told, I grew up with three languages: a legacy from my father's side of the family where the memory of Border Gaelic, the Chaucer-cum-Burns of Co. Down, the classic English of my schoolbooks and the literature I read - not with any system, but discursively. This, perhaps, explains the use of strange idioms and odd words, a polyphonic, polymorphic jargon, which dogs my style even yet and puzzles and irritates my readers.¹¹⁶

However, so successful was Parkhill in developing his aural aesthetic that the political polemic of his play was obscured, overwhelmed by the public's spontaneous delight in witnessing their countrymen on stage. This shortcoming was identified in one of *Ulad's* editorials:

the effect on the audience was curiously instructive. It was of a mixed kind. They entered into the fun and the homely touches of type, local idiom and situation generally with the greatest enthusiasm. But it is very doubtful if the tragedy, the point of the play, reached more than a very small number of those present.¹¹⁷

In spite of this, his play still had an important political effect on audiences who were 'converted' courtesy of its idiom, rather than its ideology, as was the case with Cathal O' Shannon.¹¹⁸ It was not just the naturalistic dialogue of the play that marked a departure for the movement, but the stage realism employed by the players. In part, this was achieved by the unmannered and naturalistic acting¹¹⁹ of the maturing company, and by the innovation of dispensing with stage footlights, so that 'one got the proper shades and shadows.' For this technical advance, 'as in other instances, the influence of the Ulster Literary Theatre may have a far reaching and wholly beneficial effect' recorded one critic, before making a loaded reference to the presence of the 'Belfast Footlights Amateur Dramatic Company' who were in

¹¹⁶ Joseph Campbell, *The Garden of the Bees*, see Saunders and Kelly, *Joseph Campbell*, p. 18.

¹¹⁷ *Ulad* 1.4, (September 1905): 2.

¹¹⁸ Cathal O'Shannon attributes his political proselytisation to the Irish nationalist cause to performances by the ULT at the Temple of Liberty in Toome, after which he decided to join the Dungannon Clubs, see 'Jubilee of an Ulster Theatre', *Evening Press*, 3 December 1954.

¹¹⁹ 'The actors, one and all discarded the conventionalities and mannerisms of the 'legitimate' stage, and gave a freedom and individuality to the reading of their parts [...] The players seem to realise that there was no 'precedent', no established custom, and the result was that they rendered their roles naturally and easily.' The Ulster Literary Theatre: Dramatic Performances in the Clarence Hall' *Newsletter*, 6 May 1905.

the audience.¹²⁰ Rutherford Mayne, who acted the part of Rob, credited *The Enthusiast* as ‘the first realistic play of Irish rural life I’d ever seen,’ which opened ‘the road to success for the Ulster Theatre with the folk plays afterwards,’¹²¹ and it was also tremendously influential on Mayne’s development as the dramatist who pioneered stage realism in Ireland (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Thus, Parkhill’s play was of seminal importance in the development of the ULT’s regionalist realism and a dramaturgical tradition which pioneered a very different form of P.Q.: not the ‘Peasant Quality’ associated with the Abbey, but a Protestant Quality!¹²² Indeed, against an increasingly chauvinistic political background in which many nationalists emphasised the Gaelic, Catholic, and rural aspects of ‘Irishness’, the work of the ULT was all the more radical as their *dramatis personae* were predominantly Protestant Irishmen and women!

¹²⁰ *The Belfast Telegraph*, 6 May 1905. Just before these performances (26–29 April), the Belfast Footlights Amateur Dramatic Club had dazzled local audiences with a blinding rendition of *A Pair of Spectacles*.

¹²¹ Rutherford Mayne, ‘The Ulster Literary Theatre’, *The Dublin Magazine* 31:2 (April–June, 1955): 17.

¹²² Historian F.S.L. Lyons sardonically observes that the aesthetic of the early ‘Abbey play’ was evaluated by audiences on the basis of its ‘PQ – peasant quality’, F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (London: Fontana 1982), p. 235.

Taking *A Turn in the Road*

Following the failure of *Cathleen, Brian* and the *Cowherd* to galvanise Ulster audiences, the ULT only produced one more mythological play, Lewis Purcell's (David Parkhill) *The Pagan*, which proved his last contribution to the theatre. It was produced alongside Rutherford Mayne's debut play, *The Turn of the Road* in another double billing of ancient and contemporary Ulster in which the audiences resoundingly approved of the latter. Significantly, both plays were produced at the College Hall of Queen's College at the invitation of the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Hamilton,¹²³ an enormous step up for the young company who had previously performed in the nationalist parish hall of St. Mary's and were now presented with, 'a larger and perhaps a more critical audience than it has ever been faced with.'¹²⁴ The size and intelligence of the audience were not the only differences, as they now played to a solidly (upper) middle-class, unionist audience for the first time as 'it would never occur to a Unionist that anything in St. Mary's hall could be of any interest to him.'¹²⁵ *The Pagan*, was the only play of Parkhill to be published (1907), although Reid rather unfairly described it as 'quite disappointing to read.'¹²⁶ The play is a fascinating allegorical critique of contemporary Ulster, though this polemic is distanced by its setting in sixth century Belfast and its dramatisation of a 'struggle between Paganism and Christianity.'¹²⁷ In the play, a young chieftain's daughter Nuala, recently converted to the 'new' religion, is wooed by various Pagan and Christian suitors and selects one of the former, in the original 'mixed marriage'.¹²⁸ Conventionally, the play has been regarded as a rather lightweight piece, 'a curious [...] comedy',¹²⁹ and was well received with the resplendent Celtic costumes, designed by artist John Campbell and modelled by his brother (Plate 16) and sister, singled out for particular praise in creating 'a Yeats-like mystic antique

¹²³ Mayne attributes this coup to the influence of Robert Lynd's brother Laurence who was President of the university's Gaelic Society. 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *The Dublin Magazine* 31:2 (April-June 1955): 18. However, Bell records that the performances took place under the auspices of the Literary and Scientific Society (Bell, *Theatre in Ulster*, p. 26).

¹²⁴ *The Telegraph*, 5 December 1906.

¹²⁵ Cited in Michael Farrell, 'Our Only Regional Drama', *The Bell* (1941): 81. See footnote 70 above.

¹²⁶ Forrest Reid, 'Eighteen Years' Work: The Ulster Players', *The Times, Irish Supplement* 5 December 1922.

¹²⁷ Ernest Boyd, *Ireland's Literary Renaissance*, cited in Bell, p. 25.

¹²⁸ The euphemism usually to describe a Catholic/Protestant relationship, which gives the title to St. John Ervine's play *Mixed Marriage* (1911), traditionally regarded as the first dramaturgical prototype of what Christopher Murray later identifies as the 'Romeo and Juliet *types*' of Northern theatre. Christopher Murray, *Twentieth Century Irish Drama*, p. 192.

¹²⁹ Ernest Boyd, *The Contemporary Drama of Ireland*, p. 192.



Plate 16: *Joseph Campbell in Celtic Costume (The Pagan)*

production.¹³⁰ However, its ancient setting was not the familiar *mise en scène* of the Celtic Twilight:

In *The Pagan*, Mr Lewis Purcell has broken new ground, turning from the world of “The Reformers” and “The Enthusiast” to ancient Ireland. He sees it differently, however, from the majority. It is not in his eyes the decorative dream-world of Mr Yeats, where frail figures murmur beautiful words in a world of shadow, but a world of coherent ideas, bright, various, and many-coloured, where blood runs in men’s veins and on occasion ginger hot in the mouth. Greatly daring, he does not even exclude humour in his study of the conflict of ideals between Pagan and Christian Ireland, but is subtly and cleverly managed without clowning or offensiveness. He sees his subject, too, from the dramatic, and not the dogmatic, point of view, and this helps him to avoid arid discussions that lead nowhere [...] the dialogue is free from obtrusive archaisms and usually lucid and effective, but occasionally a note of the modern jars.¹³¹

Most reviews concentrate on the aesthetics of the play at the expense of its political import. Sam Hanna Bell, however, touches on the hidden polemical depths which are fully explored in Mengel’s perspicacious analysis to which I shall briefly allude. The native O’Neill tribe and their Scottish Cruithin¹³² rivals are competing Gaelic and Pictish clans symbolising present-day nationalist and unionist communities in the North, whilst Nuala, the idealized object of their struggle, represents the traditional sublimated female trope of nation, replete with references to the ‘fourth green field’. These straight-forward characterisations and polarized positions are complicated by the fact that the native O’Neills are Christians and the invading Picts are pagans: ‘a *double entendre* [that] may have been bewildering for outsiders, but to a knowledgeable Belfast audience it would have been a source of great satiric delight.’¹³³ Thus the struggle for Nuala between the two tribes is multilayered as, ‘[u]nder all the apparently simple and farcical game of intrigue there hides an elaborate and mischievous allegory of

¹³⁰ *The Freeman’s Journal*, cited in Mengel, p. 65. Yeats and Lady Gregory also highly praised the production values of the play when the ULT staged it at the Abbey in 1907.

¹³¹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 5 December 1906

¹³² The Cruithin tribe depicted in the play resemble the Scottish Picts and as such the enmity between the Gaels and Picts is used as an ancient corollary to the contemporary struggle between nationalist and unionists, Catholics and Protestants. Recently, the notion of the Cruithin as a tribe or people who allegedly occupied Ireland before their extirpation by invading waves of Gaelic tribes has been has become politically important to the nascent Ulster Scots movement, which has seized upon this theory as advanced in the (methodologically and ideologically suspect) work of Ian Adamson, the Ulster unionist, antiquarian and former Lord Mayor of Belfast: see Adamson, *Cruithin: The Ancient Kindred* (Newtownards: Nosmada Books, 1974); *The Ulster People: Ancient, Medieval and Modern* (Belfast: Pretani, 1991); *Dalriada: Kingdom of the Cruithin* (Belfast: Pretani Press, 1998).

¹³³ Mengel, *Thompson*, p. 145.

protestant colonialism in Ulster.¹³⁴ Whether or not this critique of colonialism was understood by the audiences at Queen's College is hard to ascertain, but the ULT were never invited back and *The Pagan* proved to be the last play written in the heroic or mythological mode.

As Mengel notes, Parkhill's *The Pagan* was, 'eclipsed by the success of its complement *The Turn of the Road*,'¹³⁵ the debut play of Rutherford Mayne, who had acted in *The Enthusiast* and now remodelled its dramaturgical form and theme for his own portrayal of an Ulster peasant homestead wherein an idealistic young man struggles against the strictures of his conservative family and community. The similarity between these plays was noted by at least one perceptive critic who remarked that its 'setting and the characters resembles somewhat Lewis Purcell's *The Enthusiast*.'¹³⁶ Indeed, Mayne himself modestly acknowledged, 'Whatever success was achieved by writing *The Turn of the Road* was due to Purcell's help and advice.'¹³⁷ Depicting the struggle of young Robbie John Granahan, a talented violinist, against the philistine values of his puritanical family who demand that he forsake his fiddle for the farm, *The Turn of the Road* was warmly received by audiences. As a study of an artist battling against a philistine community, it represented another step in the development of the theatre as an artistic rather than political movement and further developed the distinct dramaturgical form of the 'Ulster Play.' After playing at Queen's College *The Turn of the Road* and *The Enthusiast* moved to the Ulster Minor Hall and, in the following year, Parkhill travelled to Dublin where he booked the Abbey Theatre so that over the Easter period in 1907 both plays premièred before Yeats, Lady Gregory, Douglas Hyde, AE, Seamus O' Sullivan, the Fays, and most of the Abbey players, establishing a pattern that would be repeated in 1908 and 1909. Indeed, the company decided that the following year it would première its two new plays, *The Leaders of the People* and *The Drone* in Dublin.

The 1907 Abbey performances are significant for a number of reasons. First of all, they revealed the extraordinary advancements that had been made by a company that had been roundly slated for its poor first performances alongside two of their professional ILT colleagues in 1902 in Belfast. Now, in Dublin, they were feted before the largest audiences

¹³⁴ Mengel, *Thompson*, p. 67.

¹³⁵ Mengel, *Sam Thompson*, p. 65.

¹³⁶ *Belfast Telegraph*, 5 December 1906. The puritanical patriarch of Mayne's play is also named William John (Granahan as opposed to McKinstry) in another nod to the influence of Parkhill's play.

¹³⁷ Rutherford Mayne, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *The Dublin Magazine* 31.2 (April-June 1955): 18. The published version of the play is also dedicated to 'Lewis Purcell, in remembrance of his kindly aid and criticism.' (Rutherford Mayne, *The Drone and Other Plays* (Maunsel & Co., 1912), p. 71.

'seen at the Abbey since the *Playboy* row'¹³⁸ and hailed by the *Irish Times* as 'beyond question one of the most sterling productions of the Irish literary revival ever seen at the Abbey Theatre.'¹³⁹ Redoubtable theatregoer Joseph Holloway enthused, 'I have not enjoyed myself so much at the theatre for a very long time as at the Abbey tonight in witnessing the first performance in Dublin of the Ulster Literary Theatre.'¹⁴⁰ Even Yeats gave credit to the movement he had earlier tried to impede, commending their attention to the 'details of life' and claiming that the ULT was 'the only dramatic society, apart from our own, which is doing serious artistic work.'¹⁴¹

In a remarkably short period, the ULT not only improved their technical skills and production standards, but had developed their own realistic style of performance which contrasted with the more affected 'Abbey style'; a difference approved by Dublin's critics who praised the effective naturalism of the Northern players and their 'fidelity to reality.'¹⁴² This fidelity was unfavourably compared to the 'artificiality' of the Abbey players, whose 'decadent sophistries' were contrasted with 'Ulster sanity.'¹⁴³ And this was in spite of the fact that one of the ULT plays was set 1,500 years ago and was performed in elaborate Celtic costume.

It is also significant that the first two plays of the ULT to make it into print were those performed in Dublin, which highlights the strength of the centre-periphery relationship between the capital and the rest of Ireland and partially explains the Dublincentric emphasis of historical scholarship on the Revival.¹⁴⁴ As mentioned earlier, one of the most difficult aspects of researching the Northern Revival and the ULT in particular is the paucity of published plays, given the lack of printing and publishing companies in Belfast in contradistinction to the extraordinary output (and influence) of Maunsel & Co. in Dublin, a printing firm which played an enormously powerful, if critically neglected, role in shaping and

¹³⁸ Joseph Holloway's *Abbey Theatre: A Selection from his Unpublished Journal, Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer* ed., Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill (London: Feffer & Simons, Inc., 1967), p. 91.

¹³⁹ *Irish Times*, 7 April 1907.

¹⁴⁰ Joseph Holloway, *Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre: A Selection from his Unpublished Journal Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer*, eds. Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 90.

¹⁴¹ *Sambain*, November 1908, 5.

¹⁴² *Sinn Féin* 6 April 1907.

¹⁴³ D.E.S. Maxwell, *A Critical History of Modern Irish Drama, 1891–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 65.

¹⁴⁴ Rutherford Mayne recounts how George Roberts wanted to publish both plays following their successful productions in Belfast, but tellingly, 'thought it desirable that they should be presented to a Dublin audience in the first instance', 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *Dublin Magazine*, p. 20.

sustaining the Irish Revival.¹⁴⁵ Ironically, the publication of *The Pagan* and *The Turn of the Road* by Maunsel took place at the instigation of Belfastman George Roberts, its co-founder and the former secretary of INTS who had written to the ULT to protest their 'appropriation' of the name, 'The Northern Branch of the Irish National Literary Theatre'. Bulmer Hobson, who was well aware of this fraught history between Northern and Southern movements, subsequently hailed the significance of these productions in the last edition of *Republic*:

the gulf that has divided Ulster from the other provinces is due more to the lack of knowledge than to essential differences of outlook or temperament, and the theatre in striving to bridge that gulf is engaging in a work of vital importance to the Irish nation.¹⁴⁶

For Hobson, the ULT's work and its theatrical tours in particular were vital not only for the interpretation of Ulster life and identity, but for its assistance in integrating the 'Black North' with the rest of Ireland. Whilst Hobson had helped set up the ULT for a rather limited propagandist purpose, his experiences of living in Dublin after moving there in 1908 to edit the *Irish Peasant*,¹⁴⁷ and in particular whilst campaigning for *Sinn Féin* in the Leitrim North by-election the previous month, brought home to him the 'gulf' between North and South. The February election was significant in that it was triggered by the M.P. C.J. Dolan's defection from the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) to stand as a *Sinn Féin* candidate – a move which pushed the party into an electoral arena never envisaged by its founder.¹⁴⁸ Hobson, however, was enthusiastic about *Sinn Féin*'s challenge to the political hegemony of the older IPP and was extremely active in the electioneering, during which he was specially singled out as the target of a campaign which sought to smear his name. The fact that he was a 'Quaker from

¹⁴⁵ For an overview as to the sheer scale of Maunsel publishing see Clare Hutton, 'A Checklist of the Publications of Maunsel and Company, Irish Publishers, 1905–1925', *Publishing History* 51 (Spring 2002): 83–114. Hutton has done a great deal of research in this area, see 'Joyce and the Institutions of Revivalism', *Irish University Review* 33 (2003): 117–132 in which she suggests the need for a re-examination of the way in which scholars engage with the Irish Literary Revival, arguing that the actual literary texts themselves have (mis)shaped a historical view of the experience of Revivalism at first hand: an experience which can be better understood through a more holistic understanding of the relationships between institutions and individual agents (writers, readers, publishers etc). See also David Gardiner, 'The Other Irish Renaissance: The Maunsel Poets', *New Hibernia Review* 8.1 (Spring, 2004): 54–79.

¹⁴⁶ *Republic*, 28 March 1908, cited in Ben Levitas, *The Theatre of Nation: Irish Drama and Cultural Nationalism 1890–1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 139.

¹⁴⁷ Hobson later returned to Belfast briefly in 1909 as the paper fell into financial difficulty, before returning to Dublin again in 1911.

¹⁴⁸ Arthur Griffiths had never planned for *Sinn Féin* to become a political party that would compete in elections, but more of a grass-roots movement that would lobby others for political change.

the “black North” was exploited by IPP campaigners who played the sectarian/geographical card, describing him variously as an Orangeman, a member of the Salvation Army, a ‘lay preacher down from Belfast to proselytise the people of Leitrim’ and alleging that he was against Catholic education.¹⁴⁹ Because of these personal attacks, Hobson was no doubt made aware of the suspicions and stereotypes regarding the North, and must have recognised the role that the ULT could play in breaking down such divisions and suspicions through touring the South. Moreover, given the febrile atmosphere of the time, it appeared that this task could be best achieved in a cultural sphere which was less divisive than the fractious public sphere of party politics.

In addition to earning general critical acclaim, Mayne’s play was a considerable commercial success and this had important implications for an impoverished company desperate to follow up the success of *The Enthusiast*. Having incurred a hefty debt through payments for halls, scenery, advertisements and royalties and without a wealthy benefactor ‘to dower it’¹⁵⁰ like the Abbey’s Annie Horniman, the ULT continued to struggle financially. In fact, their penury prompted an innovative scheme to ‘float’ the theatre, as Gerald MacNamara recalled: ‘There was a deficit. It was willingly – in fact joyfully paid by the members. At this, the darkest hour, a brain wave settled on the President who proposed ‘that the theatre be “floated.”’ This consisted of sending out prospectuses inviting the public to send in subscriptions [...] for which they could gain admission to the performances.’¹⁵¹ However, the scheme ended farcically, as the company only received a single donation of five shillings.¹⁵² This failed approach illustrates another difference between Northern and Southern movements. Even before the Abbey had secured its wealthy English benefactor, the early ULT had strenuously opposed implementing a similar strategy of floating itself as a company. Frank Fay was particularly vociferous in his opposition, finding that the idea of floating the ‘national’ theatre:

makes [me] boil with rage. We don’t want any of the financial gang, who would run the Universe, Limited, if they could, in connection with the Irish National Theatre [...] these money-grubbers who are

¹⁴⁹ See Brian Feeney, *Sinn Féin: A Hundred Turbulent Years* (Dublin: O’Brien Press, 2002), p. 50. On this latter point, these proto-spin-doctors were correct as Hobson had written in favour of abolishing all ‘sectarian systems of education, Catholic or Protestant.’ Bulmer Hobson, ‘The New Ulster’, *Nationist*, 30 November 1905.

¹⁵⁰ Michael Farrell, ‘Our Only Regional Drama’, p. 85.

¹⁵¹ Rutherford Mayne, *Dublin Magazine*, p. 16.

¹⁵² Mayne also records that this donation was returned when the Theatre enjoyed a firmer financial footing.

making the earth hideous [...] Let us keep cursed commercialism at arm's length. It pollutes anything it touches.¹⁵³

The ULT had also excoriated 'cursed commercialism' in its own columns of *Ulad*, yet it consistently recognised the gap between reality and romance and the need to operate with astute pragmatism. This was also a measure of how the movement moved from its early ideological origins to radical nationalist politics and their Southern counterparts. The rather muted response to Parkhill's play as opposed to the success of Mayne's play eponymously indicated the inevitable changes in the Theatre's future artistic direction towards contemporary folk drama. Subsequently, by following the aesthetic aims of its members, rather than the political motives of its founders who planned to use theatre as 'a vehicle for propaganda,' the ULT moved further into the literary arena.

Mayne followed up *The Turn of the Road* with *The Drone* (1908, see Plate 17) which depicted the efforts of Dan Murray to avoid work whilst living off the labour of his gullible brother on the fictitious pretence that he is busy inventing a revolutionary new type of mechanical fan-bellows. Shorn of any overt political message, Mayne's comedy was a gentle critique of the Protestant work ethic and laid the foundations for the folk drama of St John Ervine, George Shiels, Lynn Doyle and others. *The Drone* became the single most successful play of the ULT and was performed by a plethora of theatre companies and amateur performers throughout Ireland. Playing almost annually in the ULT's repertoire for nearly thirty years, *The Drone*, encapsulates both the early promise and later failings of the theatre, as the originality of its realistic portrayal of Ulster peasants and its naturalistic dialogue were diminished through endless revivals. This illustrates the ULT's gravitation towards the commercial 'cornucopias of the Opera House,'¹⁵⁴ and the neglect of its early artistic ideals. Mayne's later plays, *The Turn of the Road* (1906), *The Drone* (1908), *The Truth* (1908), *The Captain of the Hosts* (1910), *Red Turf* (1911) provided the bulk of the ULT's early repertoire and income as, more than any other dramatist, Mayne facilitated the evolution of the Theatre from a political movement into an artistic one. In many ways, Mayne was also the original architect of the 'Ulster Play,' although in this respect, and for his contribution to the wider contribution to the development of Irish realism, he is yet to be given full credit.¹⁵⁵ A more detailed

¹⁵³ Frank Fay, *Towards a National Theatre*, p. 58.

¹⁵⁴ David Kennedy, 'The Ulster Theatre', *Irish Bookman* (April/May, 1947): 33.

¹⁵⁵ John Killen's edition of Mayne's plays (*Selected Plays of Rutherford Mayne* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1997)) was the first reprint of his work for many years. In his introduction Killen justifiably acclaims Mayne as, 'a very

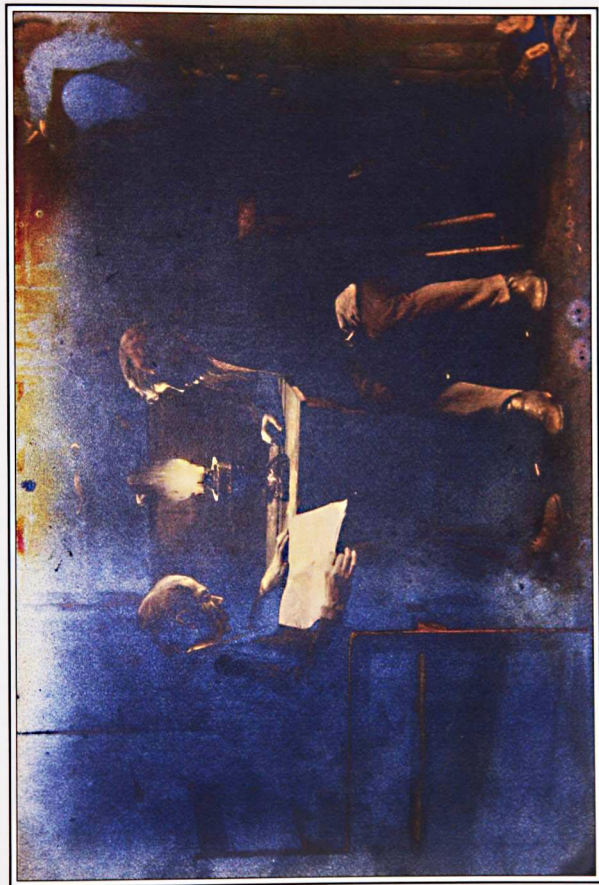


Plate 17: The Drone. *With kind permission of Central Library, Belfast*

investigation of these plays, the development of a distinct Northern dramaturgical form and the place of Mayne in the canon of Irish theatre will be offered in Chapter 5.

Bell, Boyd, Kennedy, Mengel, and Mayne all describe this transition into folk-drama and kitchen comedy and maintain that the company's original, idealistic political aspirations expired in the process. Their observations, whilst partially correct, are somewhat short-sighted for two reasons. First of all, they fail to see that this transposition - *at first* - did not compromise the nationalist ethos of the movement. Certainly, it meant that the didactic political agenda of Hobson and Parkhill to use 'theatre [...] as an instrument of nationalist propaganda, not of artistic refinement'¹⁵⁶ was discarded. However, this change in policy was a pragmatic move, not political apostasy, for it was fully supported by the more nationalistic members of the company, including Parkhill and Hobson, who recognised the need to adapt the philosophy and practice of the Theatre. In 1904, the liberal unionist Horace Plunkett had characterized the Revival as a form of 'the eternal question of the interdependence of the practical and the ideal in Ireland'¹⁵⁷ and, one year later, even the fire-brand revolutionary Bulmer Hobson was coming round to this opinion as he appealed in *The Nation*ist, 'there must be a blending of the ideal and the practical.'¹⁵⁸ This melding of the ideal and the practical through a process of negotiation and accommodation was epitomised by the early work of the ULT.

Secondly, it is a fallacy to separate aesthetics from politics as the ULT's development of a realist, (rather than a propagandist) drama was politically effective in performance. In portraying Ulstermen as they really spoke and acted, they attacked 'that caricature that is so complacently accepted as the real thing [...] today,'¹⁵⁹ and in the process converted many audience members who had previously affiliated themselves with a British, rather than an Irish, sense of identity. In fact the so-called 'apolitical' folk drama of Mayne, portraying humble rather than heroic Ulstermen, was altogether more efficacious in achieving the original proselytising aims of Hobson and Parkhill - and this is what I mean by stating the theatre was

important figure in the development of the theatrical tradition, not just in Ulster, but in Ireland,'(i) and draws attention to the fact that his work made a vital contribution to, 'an Ulster (as opposed to Yeats' Leinster) theatrical tradition,'(ii), as 'he wrote and acted in plays that put ordinary Ulster people in ordinary Ulster dress, speaking contemporary Ulster dialect, before theatre audiences throughout these islands for the first time [...] and opened the way for successive generations of Ulster writers' (xviii).

¹⁵⁶ Mengel, *Samy Thompson*, p. 14.

¹⁵⁷ Horace Plunkett *Ireland in the New Century* (London: John Murray, 1904), p. 160.

¹⁵⁸ Bulmer Hobson, 'The New Ulster', *Nation*ist, 30 November 1905.

¹⁵⁹ James Good, 'The Theatre and the People', *Ulster* 1:3 (May 1905): 14.

more 'revelationary' than revolutionary. One example of this is recounted by the actor Whitford Kane, a self-confessed 'Anglicized' actor from Larne, who grew up in an environment that 'looked to England for all things cultural'.¹⁶⁰ He declared, 'It is to my affiliation to the Ulster Literary Theatre [...] that I am indebted to finding myself,'¹⁶¹ an epiphany experienced after seeing a performance of *The Turn of the Road*:

This performance, must have struck some national chord in me for I went again the next night; and, after that, I was asked to join a gathering at the Arts Club. There I heard for the first time some of the beautiful folk songs and poems of my own country, and as I listened to them I realised how intensely Irish Ulster was, in spite of its many peculiar distinctions. It was on that night that I resolved I would try to become a good Irish actor, rather than a would-be English one.¹⁶²

As a young man, Kane had left Ireland for the 'lights of London' to become an actor where he played gentrified roles in plays such as, *True to the Queen*, *From Shop Girl to Duchess*, *Nell Gwynn*, *The Mystery of the Hanson Cab*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. Exiled from Ulster throughout the period of the Northern Revival, he was oblivious to the impact of cultural nationalism in his native province and the emergence of the Ulster and Abbey theatres, his experience instead confined 'to English playhouses'.¹⁶³ 'Mayne's world' then came as a complete shock to someone who confessed that he aspired, in both craft and character, to be an Englishman and it forced him to confront 'his national birthright'.¹⁶⁴

The Belfast playwright John Coulter¹⁶⁵ also attributes his cultural awakening to his Irishness and his political conversion to Home Rule to the work of the ULT, and said that his awareness of, and involvement in, the Irish Revival 'had been stirred by the ideals and the

¹⁶⁰ Kane, *Are we All Met?*, p. 109.

¹⁶¹ Kane, *Are we All Met?*, p. 110.

¹⁶² Kane, p. 110.

¹⁶³ Kane, p. 109.

¹⁶⁴ Kane, p. 110.

¹⁶⁵ John Coulter (1888-1980): born in Belfast, educated at Manchester University; taught textile design in Belfast, and art and English at Coleraine Academical Institute; moved to Dublin to be near the Abbey, taught at Wesley College; returned to Belfast to start theatre, 1919, but impeded by Troubles; moved to London; freelance for BBC; edited *Ulster Review* in 1924; contributed to *The New Adelphi*, 1927 met and married Clare Primrose, a Canadian author, and moved to Toronto. He wrote a number of Irish plays: *Conchobar* (1917); *The House in the Quiet Glen* (1937); *Family Portrait* (1937); *Holy Manhattan* (1941); *Turf Smoke* (1945); *The Drums are Out* (1948); *God's Ulsterman* and a number of plays with a Canadian setting/subject: *Riel* (1949); *The Crime of Louis Riel* (1967); *The Trial of Louis Riel* (Ottawa: Oberon 1968). He also founded the Canadian Arts Council and the Canadian Conference of Arts.

plays of the Ulster Literary Theatre – the Abbey Theatre of the North', who, 'kindled in my imagination an excited awareness of quite another Ireland than the Ireland I had known.'¹⁶⁶ A similar cultural 'epiphany' was experienced by the young Cathal O'Shannon,¹⁶⁷ who became a seminal figure in the republican movement (as well as a leading theatre critic), after seeing the ULT for the first time at the Toomebridge Feis: '[t]hat same day I came to two decisions [...] to settle in Belfast sometime and when I did to follow the fortunes of the ULT and to join the Dungannon Club.'¹⁶⁸ The immediacy of the play's impact on O'Shannon is remarkable and reveals the power of these 'harmless' plays in locating an audience in their own *mise en scène* and articulating an Ulster voice and identity for a people who had never before been represented in the public sphere. Indeed, the potential of these plays was recognised by the Dungannon Clubs – the separatist nationalist movement founded by Hobson which later developed into Sinn Féin – and they arranged for *The Enthusiast* to be staged in London in 1907.¹⁶⁹ So the dramaturgical aesthetic of these plays, with their realist representations of Ulster peasants, prejudices, and politics, and authentic reproduction of Ulster speech was inherently ideological in expressing Ulster's 'emotional and intellectual vitality,' and functioned as a popular, countercultural force against the dominant politico-cultural hegemony of unionism. Mayne's work in particular developed this aesthetic and articulated the Northern voice, without ever directly confronting the forces that had long enforced its silence. This challenge was taken up by the satirical pen of Gerald MacNamara (Harry Morrow), whose remarkable farces *Susanne and the Sovereigns* (1907) and *Thompson in Tir-na-nOg* (1912) appeared to fulfil *Ulaid's* prediction that 'our talent will be more satiric than poetic'¹⁷⁰ (see Plate 18).

¹⁶⁶ John Coulter, 'Introduction' *The Drums are Out* (Chicago: De Paul University, 1971), p. i.

¹⁶⁷ Cathal O'Shannon, (1889-1969): born in Randalstown, Co., Antrim; raised in Derry; educated at St. Columb's College; member of Gaelic League and IRB; founder member of the Irish Volunteers; organiser for ITGWU for James Connolly; sub-edited the separatist paper *Republic*; interned in 1916, though non-combatant, having mobilised 100 Volunteers who dispersed without orders; anti-conscription campaigner, 1918; unsuccessfully urged that Labour Party should contest election of December 1918; worked on early drafts of Democratic Programme of first Dail, Irish delegate to Socialist International Conference, Berne, presenting Irish case for self-determination; editor *The Voice of Labour*, 1918-19, and *The Watchword of Labour*, 1919-20; arrested March 1920; founder member of the Socialist Party of Ireland, and expelled with William O'Brien, TD Meath-Louth, June 1922; lost seat, 1923; edited *Voice of Labour* and *Watchword*, 1930-32; workers' representative at Labour Court from its establishment, 1946; edited *Fifty Years of Liberty Hall* (1969).

¹⁶⁸ Uncatalogued document, Rutherford Mayne Archive, Linen Hall Library, Belfast. See 'Jubilee of an Ulster Theatre', *Evening Press*, 3 December 1954.

¹⁶⁹ See *The Peasant*, 27 April 1907. Later in 1907 the Dungannon Clubs became amalgamated under new Sinn Féin organization.

¹⁷⁰ *Ulaid* 1.1 (1904): 1.

'The Happiest Period':¹⁷¹ *Susanne and the Sovereigns*

Susanne and the Sovereigns originated as an annual improvised party piece performed at the Morrow's painting and decorating business in 40 Clifton Street which was 'turned into a theatre at the Christmas holidays.'¹⁷² The firm was more or less adjacent to a large Orange hall, a still famous landmark in the city with its roof crowned by an enormous statue of King William of Orange mounted on a rearing charger overlooking the nationalist districts of north Belfast. The significance of this location, suggests Rutherford Mayne, was influential in the development of young playwright Harry Morrow, who spent most of his life 'under the shadow of the Orange Prince; and that punctually every twelfth of July, the thunder of thousands of drums resounded in his ears from morn to midnight',¹⁷³ and this is manifest in his burlesquing of Orange traditions in both *Susanne* and *Thompson*. McHenry, Hobson, and Mengel all record that this informal, irreverent *aperçu* was later developed up by Harry Morrow and David Parkhill in 1907 for a public performance under the aegis of the ULT which was duly given in at the Exhibition Hall¹⁷⁴ in December 1907.¹⁷⁵

Mayne described the play as the Theatre's 'most daring and audacious attempt in their history. To anyone who knows the city well, it might easily have had the same result as throwing a lit match into a barrel of gunpowder.'¹⁷⁶ The incandescent nature of the play was due to the fact that it satirized the revered status of 'no less a personage than King William the Third of, "glorious, pious and immortal memory,"'¹⁷⁷ and his Catholic counterpart, King James II: the respective champions of Ulster's nationalists and unionists. These *dramatis personae* were listed as follows:

WILLIAM THREE. A hero king. Brave and kind and good looking.

¹⁷¹ Forrest Reid, 'Eighteen Years' Work: The Ulster Players', *The Times, Irish Supplement* 5 December 1922.

¹⁷² Harry Morrow, cited in Hanna Bell, *Theatre in Ulster*, p. 29. Jack and Fred Morrow later opened a Dublin branch of the business on 15 D'Olier Street in 1905 which was wholly unsuccessful. Both became actively involved in the Theatre of Ireland company, especially Jack Morrow who remained in the capital for the rest of his life, whilst Fred returned to Belfast in 1906.

¹⁷³ Rutherford Mayne, 'Gerald MacNamara' *The Dublin Magazine* 13:2 (April-June, 1938), 13:2 55.

¹⁷⁴ The Exhibition Hall, unlike St Mary's Hall, was a neutral venue in that it was not a location for political meetings but a recreational venue, and formerly, an ice skating rink.

¹⁷⁵ McHenry, *Theatre in Ulster*, p. 18; Hobson, *Yesterday and Tomorrow*, p. 5; Mengel, p. 73.

¹⁷⁶ Mayne, *Dublin Magazine*, p. 18.

¹⁷⁷ Mayne, cited in Bell, p. 30.



An unknown ULT production featuring Harry Morrow (right seated)

Plate 18: Susanne and the Sovereigns

JAMES THE SECOND. For him see note above...¹⁷⁸

In a further act of irreverence, the programme sported an illustration of John Campbell's, depicting a comical King Billy, mounted on a rocking chair (see Plate 19). MacNamara ruthlessly lampooned Belfast's beatification of both figures by purporting 'to reveal the secret history of the war of 1690,'¹⁷⁹ mocking King Billy's arrival in Ireland as a mission to protect the Protestant virtue of an Orange Grandmaster's daughter from the amorous advances of King James. The broadsheet-programme for the first production explains in mock-heroic terms, the company's reasons for selecting this historical subject and setting, 'We took for our subject some of the stirring incidents in the struggle between William III, and James II, thus following the methods of Greek tragedians in choosing a story which is already familiar to all.' This conjoining of Greek tragedy and Irish comedy continues with the mock classical comparison between Derry and Troy, 'the popular belief [...] that the object of struggle between William and James was the possession of a crown' is incorrect and, ignoble! Derry was besieged for the same romantic reason that Troy was besieged: for the love of a beautiful maid.¹⁸⁰ The comic, carnivalesque treatment of loyalist mythology is established from the opening of the play as a deputation of Orangemen from the 'commercial capital of Ireland'¹⁸¹ arrive in Amsterdam to the accompaniment of Lambegs and Lillibulero to entreat 'loyal' William to accept the 'first offer of the throne of Ulster'¹⁸² in return for deposing King James. They receive the following response:

KING WILLIAM: Gentlemen, you do me a great honour, I am so overcome with emotion that words fail me to properly acknowledge the great compliment you pay me. *But* tell me, where is Ulster? (*All look at each other in surprise and disgust*).

SIR JOSEPH: Your Majesty, it is the most northern and most loyal portion of Ireland.

¹⁷⁸ Programme for *Susanne and the Sovereigns* (see appendix)

¹⁷⁹ Bulmer Hobson, 'Mr Bulmer Hobson's Account of the Origin of the Ulster Theatre', cited in McHenry, *The Ulster Theatre in Ireland*, p. 83.

¹⁸⁰ Programme for *Susanne and the Sovereigns*, Linen Hall Library, Theatre and Performing Arts Archive. (See appendix)

¹⁸¹ Gerald MacNamara, *Susanne and the Sovereigns*, in Kathleen Danaher Parks, *Gerald MacNamara: Ulster Playwright* unpublished PhD. Dissertation, University of Philadelphia, (1984), p. 53.

¹⁸² *Susanne and the Sovereigns*, p. 55.

KING WILLIAM: (*looking wearied*) Gentlemen, I'm afraid we cannot come to terms. You must clearly understand my position. I am Prince of ALL Orange – not a piece of Orange. Is it reasonable to expect that I should give this country up for the chance of a part of Ireland?¹⁸³

William's reluctance to become embroiled in Irish politics is reversed upon discovering one of the delegation's daughter is Susanne, 'my angel, my guiding star,' which prompts his immediate conversion to the Protestant cause: 'I go to Ireland at once. This Jacobite King must be banished from your shores. My Susanne must be freed from his obnoxious attentions [...] Henceforth I devote my life to the cause of Ireland.'¹⁸⁴ However, his commitment to the cause later falters following his defeat of King James:

KING WILLIAM: [...] let us sink all party difference, and be truly brothers.

KING JAMES: (*Taking William's hand*) Till death, brothers.

KING WILLIAM: And to prove my sincerity I am willing to forego part of the fruits of my victory. I will allow you to keep Ireland.

KING JAMES: (*anxiously*) But – but –

KING WILLIAM: Nay, do not thank me. You shall be King of Ireland while I am to reign in England.

KING JAMES: No, no, no. I will not hear of it. I could not think of depriving you of Ireland.

KING WILLIAM: Brother, I insist.

KING JAMES: I must refuse – really I – I don't want it...God knows I have enough trouble already...¹⁸⁵

William subsequently offers the position to his generals and then to the defeated Jacobite generals of James' army, all of whom refuse his offer so that he is forced to turn to Lundy:

KING WILLIAM: Lundy [...] you are condemned to be burned to the ground...I will give you one chance for your life. The condition is that you are to accept the throne of Ireland.

¹⁸³ *Susanne and the Sovereigns*, p. 55.

¹⁸⁴ *Susanne and the Sovereigns*, p. 57.

¹⁸⁵ *Susanne and the Sovereigns*, p. 83-4.

SUZANNE AND THE SOVEREIGNS:

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FRUIT ACT

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REVISED 4/07

These results are important in terms because they show that the two types of
data can be used to estimate the same parameters.

Notes:—The authors were interested to see if phy. med. benefited the students. Two members of the audience who had to be treated in hospital during their year and months as nursing or in terms of prolonged stay in hospital in regard to physical work, in addition to the work of physical medicine and therapy, said: "I am glad that I found, after being carefully studied and treated for rheumatoid arthritis."

* *Journal of the American Association of Teachers of Music*, 30:3 (1980), 333, note 10.¹² Koushki et al. (2006) found that the presence of English in the home of Turkish immigrants in Germany is positively related to the child's English proficiency.² *Global Impact of HIV Infection: A Review of Public Research, Institute of Medicine, 1993.*

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* *East Mountain, ca. 1900.*

McIntyre's *20th Century of the World of Science*.

© 2004 Blackwell Publishing Ltd, *Journal of Internal Medicine* 255: 105–112

* *Excerpted from the book "The Power of the Powerless" by Václav Havel.*

¹ *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 35, 10, 1207-1215, 1996.

Source: *Encyclopedia of Capitalism*.²

*"The American People's Choice"

[illegible]

Programme for
Susanne and the Sovereigns

LUNDY: Burn me!¹⁸⁶

Although it was initially feared that such irreverent treatment of this sensitive subject could ignite the notoriously volatile Belfast public and its violent gallery gods, the show passed off peacefully. Indeed, it proved so popular that the improvised stage had to be dismantled every night and set further back, 'until at the end of the week it was up against the far wall and the Hall was full of enthusiastic patrons.'¹⁸⁷

Susanne's failure to inflame Northern animosities can be perhaps explained by the extraordinary political circumstances at the time. In 1907, the redoubtable trade unionist Jim Larkin had arrived in Belfast and immediately set about organising Belfast's working classes to campaign for better conditions and new terms of employment. With a fiery oratory, not altogether unfamiliar to Belfast audiences, he mobilised workers in shipyards and factories (and, temporarily, the police), through various meetings, strikes and demonstrations organised by the burgeoning trade union movement. This current political context is satirically alluded to by King Billy's butler in the opening lines of *Susanne*, 'The Prince is expecting a deputation of Orangemen from Belfast today. I wonder what they want. I hope they don't want him to go to Belfast, for I hear it's an awful place. They are always having riots and strikes over there.'¹⁸⁸ Some of these strikes did erupt into violent demonstrations but what distinguished these particular disturbances from near perennial sectarian rioting in the city was the fact that:

for the first time [...] the contending parties were not orange and green, nor Catholic against Protestant, but the combined forces of Catholic and Protestant [...] united together as labour against the hard-boiled and unyielding Belfast employers.¹⁸⁹

In unprecedented scenes of fraternity, nationalist and unionist bands paraded in solidarity on the 12th of July, after which they attended a labour meeting where, instead of the traditional Orange address, they listened to combined appeals for unity from the head of the Orange Order and Joe Devlin, the first nationalist MP for West Belfast. Connolly recalls the era as 'an incredible position to witness in our city and some of us wondered what the outcome would

¹⁸⁶ *Susanne and the Sovereigns*, p. 84.

¹⁸⁷ Enter Robbie John

¹⁸⁸ *Susanne and the Sovereigns*, p. 52.

¹⁸⁹ Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 67.

be.¹⁹⁰ Larkin himself prematurely boasted that 'the old sectarian curse had been banished forever from Ulster'.¹⁹¹ The remarkable sight of erstwhile enemies marching together and sharing the same platform was perhaps the single most striking manifestation of a unique period in Belfast's history, as the political and religious stranglehold was briefly lifted, and an air of tolerance allowed to breathe. It is no small coincidence that Forrest Reid hails the 1907-8 season as 'the 'happiest period', citing how the Theatre 'emerged from obscurity [...] Actors and authors working in perfect harmony'.¹⁹²

Susanne's success must equally be placed in its theatrical as well as political context. In an earlier chapter, I examined the local tradition of Irish Nights in Belfast's theatrical scene and the rowdy responses of the partisan, politicised audiences who were an integral part of the city's theatrical formation. *Susanne* tapped into this popular tradition of 'Irish Nights' and, indeed, exploited it. This tradition meant that the audiences of *Susanne* (1907), and later of *Thompson* (1912), 'read' these productions in terms which had already been established by those who had attended Irish Nights. In writing the play, Reynolds, MacNamara and Parkhill were well aware of this tradition and made full use of it to broaden their appeal to a popular, working class audience.¹⁹³ For example, Reynolds' opening score, 'Overture 1690', was a musical pastiche of (in)famous party political tunes such as 'The Boyne Water' and 'The Boys of Wexford', which were performed by sectarian choirs of segregated audiences on Irish Nights described in the previous chapter. This musical accompaniment was an intertextual link that helped orchestrate the theatrical event as a whole \ in recalling the interactive ambience of Irish Nights. In doing so, it encouraged audience participation and engendered certain expectations which were subsequently confounded for political purposes as the play progressed. Again, this serves as an interesting counterpoint to the theatrical practice of the Abbey which sought to discipline audiences and remove rowdy elements by deploring audience interaction and raising ticket prices.

Susanne drew upon divisive events in the North's political history, namely the Siege of Derry and the Battle of the Boyne, both of which are commemorated and re-enacted annually

¹⁹⁰ Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 67.

¹⁹¹ Cited in Henry Patterson, *Class Conflict and Sectarianism: The Protestant Working Class and the Belfast Labour Movement, 1868-1920* (Belfast, 1980), p. 71.

¹⁹² Forrest Reid, *The Times*, 5 December 1922.

¹⁹³ Yeats, in contrast, was interested in attracting an elite rather than a popular audience, the limitations of which were laconically noted by Lady Gregory with regard to the Abbey's box office: 'Yeats tonight; that means empty seats', cited in Leon Ó Broin, *Protestant Nationalists in Revolutionary Ireland: The Stopford Collection* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1985), p. 32.

in Ulster¹⁹⁴ where they are the mythopoetic bedrock of Orange culture. Contemporaneous reviews and personal accounts of ULT members reveal initial anxieties that the play might be received in the same violent fashion as *Irish Nights*, given that the gods were packed with punters 'lined up with rivets and bolts in their pockets'.¹⁹⁵ One critic confessed that he expected the occasion to erupt in a riot similar to those experienced at the Abbey, 'It was not without an uneasy feel [*sic*] that I might at any moment find myself in the midst of an "Abbey" row that I sat out the performance'.¹⁹⁶ This fear was shared by the company members. Joseph Campbell in an unpublished letter admits, 'we were just a bit timid of the audience in presenting "Susanne and the Sovereigns,"'¹⁹⁷ Bulmer Hobson recalls, 'On the first night, when the curtain rose, it was touch and go for a few minutes as to whether we would have a riot started by indignant Orangemen'¹⁹⁸ and Rutherford Mayne records, 'what might have been the cause of first-class riots was turned by irresistible wit, and by humour into an uproarious success'.¹⁹⁹ Bell also records how a critic of a revived performance of the play in 1909 was still incredulous that 'the theatre was not besieged'.²⁰⁰ These responses and contemporary analyses all profess surprise that the production did not produce a riot, as Laura Lyons postulates, 'it is difficult to understand why disturbances did not break out.'²⁰¹ However, the reasonably quiescent response of Belfast's audiences can be explained when one compares the play to the performances of *Irish Nights* and examines how differences in form, characterization, and the (re)presentation of history created an entirely different dynamic in audience reception.

The genre conventions of melodrama and burlesque create different aesthetic contracts between audiences and spectacle. As a satirical extravaganza, *Susanne* was performed as a mock heroic comedy and had none of melodrama's Manichean extremity in its language, politics, characterisation, or action. The 'polarities of melodrama's moral world,'²⁰² which were re-cast in the colours of Orange and Green in nationalist melodrama, were wholly absent from

¹⁹⁴ The Orange Order ritually re-enacts the Battle of the Boyne at the sham battle of Scarva, whilst the Derry's Apprentice Boys re-enact the closing of Derry's gates and burn an effigy of the treacherous governor Lundy on the city's walls.

¹⁹⁵ Rutherford Mayne, *Enter Robbie John*.

¹⁹⁶ 'Susanne and the Sovereigns', *The Leader*, 11 January 1908.

¹⁹⁷ Letter to Barrington Baker, 4 January 1908. Theatre archive, Central Library Belfast.

¹⁹⁸ Hobson, *Ireland, Yesterday and Tomorrow*, p. 5.

¹⁹⁹ Mayne, *Enter Robbie John*.

²⁰⁰ *Ulster Guardian*, 26 November 1910, cited Bell, p. 30.

²⁰¹ Laura E. Lyons, 'Of Orangemen and Green Theatres: The Ulster Literary Theatre's Regional Nationalism', in *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage* eds., Stephen Watt, Eileen Morgan, Shakir Mustafa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 42.

²⁰² Bratton, J. 'The Contending Discourses of Melodrama', in *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, pp. 38–9.

MacNamara's play. Indeed, the original programme of *Susanne* laboriously emphasises its generic identity as an 'extravaganza', going into considerable detail to define and differentiate the genre from other forms of representation and stressing its playful, imaginative, comic nature.

The playscript of *Susanne* gives an imperfect sense of the play which appears extremely episodic, uneven, and superficial. However, the issue at stake is not so much the quality of the play in terms of its formal properties, as such a fixation with the 'ideology of the aesthetic'²⁰³ obscures the more important issue of the actual impact the play had on its audiences. Also, the gaps and discontinuities in the actual script were designed to allow for improvisation and embellishment in performance, as its co-author recalls that it 'always appeared in a different shape at every performance.'²⁰⁴ One reviewer singled out how Lundy 'habitually wears a sash, green on one side, Orange on the other, for emergencies';²⁰⁵ an amusing detail omitted from the stage directions and from all other reviews and is indicative of the missing performance text. In fact, *Susanne* must be evaluated in relation to its actual performance for it is an extraordinary dramaturgical pastiche of theatrical forms and performative modes, commingling music hall and Molière, commedia dell'arte, satire, parody, puns, mimicry, impersonation, and vaudevillian slapstick: 'Fellow citizens! I make no statement that I cannot stand over (*He slips, falls and is helped up*).'²⁰⁶ It also draws upon melodramatic conventions of improbable escapes, implausible disguises, double crosses, stock characters, stereotypes, and appeals to emotion. MacNamara, (who also played Lundy in the production), had been an art student in Paris in the 1890s where he had been influenced by the style and technique of the French actor Coquelin,²⁰⁷ which perhaps accounts for this comic concatenation.

²⁰³ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1990)

²⁰⁴ Mengel, p. 150.

²⁰⁵ 'Susanne and the Sovereigns', *The Leader*, 11 January 1908.

²⁰⁶ *Susanne and the Sovereigns*, 65.

²⁰⁷ Benoît Constant Coquelin, 1841-1909): French actor who made his debut at the Comédie Française in 1860 and achieved fame in classic comic roles, especially in the plays of Molière. He also travelled widely, touring Europe and America in 1886 and America, again, in 1900 with Sarah Bernhardt with whom he returned to perform in Paris. He also was significant for the way in which he critically and analytically interrogated his art, publishing a prolific number of works including: *L'Art et le comédien* (1880), *Molière et le misanthrope* (1881), essays on *Eugène Manuel* (1881) and *Sully-Prudhomme* (1882), *L'Arnolphe de Molière* (1882), *Les Comédiens* (1882), *L'Art de dire le monologue* (with his brother, 1884), *Tartuffe* (1884), and *L'Art du comédien* (1894). He also believe in simulated rather than 'real' emotion being demonstrated in performance, putting him in conflict with Sir Henry Irving's views on acting techniques.

This hilarious heterogeneity of performance styles and traditions was also seasoned with numerous satirical references as the play relentlessly lampoons local culture and politics in the North.²⁰⁸ The programme's mock heroic comparison of Derry and Troy was also matched by the play's carnivalesque conflation of high and low culture. For example, in the first scene of Act Two, set in the besieged city of Derry (see Plate 20), two loyal sentries patrol its iconic walls and pass the time by reciting dialogue from the opening scene of *Hamlet*. Both claim to be members of the fictitious Shankill Road Shakespearian Society and the Sandy Row Thespian Club, a satirical reference to the religious reticence of Protestants *vis-à-vis* theatre. Their comic exchanges prepare the way for the clandestine entrance of James, who enters like Hamlet's ghost before bribing the starving sentries with sandwiches to take him to Lundy's quarters. This meta-theatrical linkage of high Shakespearian tragedy and low satirical travesty is but one example of the play's dense network of intertextual references that audiences well-versed in local politics and popular theatre were able to appreciate. The sophistication of this theatrical event was as much a reason for its popular success with Belfast's audiences as were its high production standards, which meant that, 'Time and time again, during the playing of "Susanne", the stage effects were such as to compel the enthusiastic applause of the audience.'²⁰⁹

The heteroglossic complexity of this theatrical form – as opposed to melodrama's dialectic struggles – was one reason why Belfast's gallery gods did not riot during the performance. A second key factor was the nature of the characterisation. As with the *dramatis personae* of Ashton and Mitchelburne's plays, King James, King Billy and Lundy are neither heroic nor villainous, but vaudevillian comic caricatures. The treacherous character of Lundy²¹⁰ – the *bette noire* of loyalism – appears onstage not as a realistic historical figure but as an actual animated effigy: a combustible combination of straw and gunpowder, terrified by cigarettes and candles, who is eventually held captive by William to be used as a firework to 'celebrate our victory.'²¹¹

²⁰⁸ The ephemeral nature of satire and the topicality of the play's innuendo make all their targets hard to identify.

²⁰⁹ Susanne and the Sovereigns', *The Leader*, 11 January 1908.

²¹⁰ Robert Lundy was the Governor of Derry who is vilified in loyalist culture for advocating that Derry's Protestant citizens surrender to the Jacobite forces and for his treacherous dealings with the Jacobite forces. Consequently, his effigy is annually burnt on bonfires on the twelfth of July by Derry's Apprentice Boys and by the Orange Order, unless he is replaced by effigies of even more reviled figures of the pope and/or various nationalist leaders.

²¹¹ *Susanne and the Sovereigns*, p. 76.

- VAN TOOTIL:²¹² (*Takes out a cigarette and lights it*)[...] Sir I am proud to meet your acquaintance. (*He approaches with outstretched hands*).
- LUNDY: Thank you. But stand off! Stand off!
- VAN TOOTIL: (*surprised*) You are not afraid of me?
- LUNDY: No. I am afraid of that cigarette.
- VAN TOOTIL: Afraid of a woodbine?
- LUNDY: And so would you be if you were made like me.
- VAN TOOTIL: If it's a fair question – how *are* you made?
- LUNDY: I am full of gunpowder.
- VAN TOOTIL: Gunpowder! Great heaven, how did this happen to you?
- LUNDY: I am not quite clear about it myself. Some horrible mistake. It all happened since I became an effigy. But do not question me. It is a sore point.²¹³

A similar approach was taken to the empirical facts of history and Belfast audiences thoroughly enjoyed the absurd historical anomalies of Orangemen meeting King William of Orange before the former had been founded and the latter had been titled. Moreover, the programme for *Susanne* denies the validity and veracity of established narrativizations of these historical events, stating: 'the play is not founded upon any recognised history, because, from exclusive information at the disposal of the authors, there is grave reason to doubt that the history of the Three Kingdoms is, in many points, not to be replied upon.' In a further denial of possible positivist or political complaints about the accuracy of its version of historical events it states: 'NOTE: The authors have attempted to write a play, not a text-book for students';²¹⁴ a caveat prescient of the debate surrounding the historical 'authenticity' of Brian Friel's *Translations*, attacked by some historians and critics for distorting historical 'truth', but defended by the author's claims that his artistic mediation merely inflicted 'tiny bruises on history'.²¹⁵ Friel later wrote *Making History* to satirise this controversy and indeed, its playful mocking of empiricist-positivist approaches to history is also anticipated by the ULT's *Susanne*, in its critique of such limited, and limiting, attitudes to the past:

²¹² Van Tootil was the official banner painter to the court of King William.

²¹³ *Susanne and the Sovereigns*, p. 71-2.

²¹⁴ Programme for *Susanne and the Sovereigns*, (See appendix).

²¹⁵ Historians Sean Connolly and J.H. Andrews criticised Friel's depiction of the political intent behind, and processes of, the British Ordnance Survey, and these criticisms were taken up by unionist literary critics like Edna Longley and Bruce Kirkland as evidence of Friel's nationalist bias. However, Friel responded to these reductive criticisms with the wry response 'you don't go to *Macbeth* for history.' Cited Ondrej Pilný, 'Narrative And Communication: The Case Of Brian Friel and Field Day', *Litteraria Pragensia* 10-20 (2000) <http://komparatistika.ff.cuni.cz/litteraria/no20-10/pilny.htm> accessed 20:07:03.

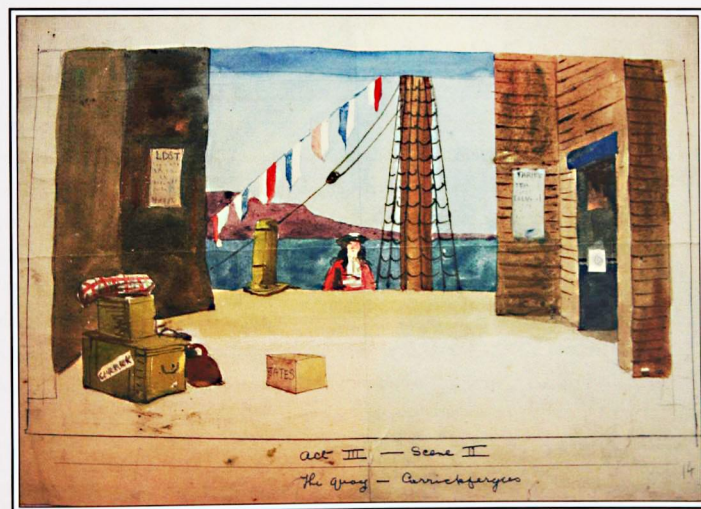
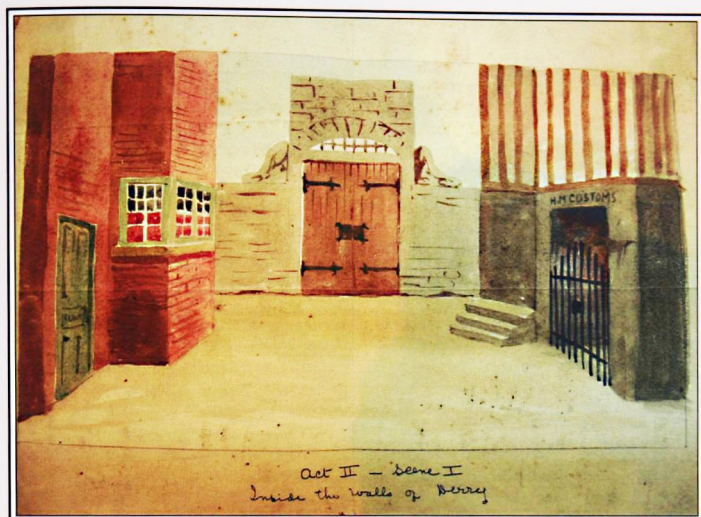


Plate 20: *Watercolour sketches for set for Susanne and the Sovereigns*

But members of the audience who may be inclined to dismiss certain scenes and incidents as resting on no basis of historical fact are requested to suspend judgment until. In addition to the works of historical authors like Macaulay, Lecky, Froude, and Leland, they have carefully studied and collated the undermentioned authorities:-

'Journals of the House of Commons of Ireland,' 1613-1800 (19 vols. folio).

'Journals of the House of Lords' (18 vols).

'Ninth report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records, Ireland' (Dublin, 1877).

'Cane's History of Williamite and Jacobite Wars in Ireland.'

'Collectanea de rebus Hibernicis.'

'Essai Historique sur l'Irlande.'

'Mackenzie's Narrative of the Siege of Derry.'

'Memoires de Madame de la Fayette.'

'Faithful History of the Northern Affairs of Ireland from King James' Accession to the Siege of Londonderry' (Dublin, 1690).

'Zeuss' Grammatica Celtica.'

'Ceachta beaga Gaedhilge.'

'Irish Auxiliary of the London Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews: Third Annual Report' (Dublin, 1821).²¹⁶

This motley list of sources in Latin, French, Irish, and English becomes increasingly absurd, but the hilarity of this bibliography belies the more serious satirical point of the authors' rejection of established historical narratives. These texts, and the established popular histories of Lecky *et al.*, have given the inchoate flux of the past a coherent and fixed form - a tribal narrative - and as many theorists of history have argued, this 'coherency' is similar to that found in stories and is equally fictitious.²¹⁷ As such, the play attempts to liberate its audience from what Hayden White evocatively calls the 'burden of history', as it moves away from a mimetic, or melodramatic (re)presentation of history, to provide a perspective that challenged, rather than contributed to, present-day problems.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Programme for *Susanne and the Sovereigns*, Linen Hall Library, Theatre and Performing Arts Archive

²¹⁷ See Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1987).

²¹⁸ Hayden White, 'The Burden of History', *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 27-50.

Connecting the playful form and polemical politics of *Susanne*, Mary Burgess repeats Mengel's assertion that MacNamara's work anticipates by many years Denis Johnston's *The Old Lady Says No* in its expressionist form.²¹⁹ It is also a dramaturgical precursor to Stewart Parker's work, particularly *Northern Star*, which similarly critiques fixed historical narratives and presents history instead as an open-ended, fluid process of transformation. Dramaturgically, both plays rely on metatheatrical pastiche rather than realism as this reveals the inherent fictionality and the limitations of realism as a form of theatrical or historiographical representation.

Performed during the Christmas season, *Susanne* was, to use Levitas' phrase, a pantomime horse with Trojan pedigree, 'smuggling into the view of its audience the absurdities of sectarianism.'²²⁰ The persiflage of the play thus camouflaged serious political points and the audience tolerated MacNamara's withering critiques of their prejudices because the fantastical world in which they were set afforded them the shelter of illusion, a quality that allowed them to enjoy their laughter in safety. Farce provided a medium in which their differences - so bitterly divisive outside in the street - could, within the theatre, briefly unite both communities through laughter. Whilst the theatre, 'rocked and roared',²²¹ something altogether more subtle was being articulated; what dramatist and novelist Lynn Doyle classified as:

[our] one great corrective of bitterness, that dry sense of humour that is so often fused with self-criticism. We are conscious of our bitterness, and see the ridiculous side of it now and then. In a strange way it is a bond of union between the two parties.²²²

Doyle's nuanced insight into Northern psychology illustrates the achievement of *Susanne*, (and *Thompson in Tir-na-n-Og*), as this 'strange bond' was realised through the audience's recognition of the 'ridiculous' extremes of their bitterness. Beneath the laughter though, lay a radical dynamic that, ironically, was recognised by an English critic of the London production of *Thompson*, 'This play is really propaganda in the form of serio-comedy. It is

²¹⁹ Mary Burgess, 'Belfast Carnavalesque: The Satires of Gerald MacNamara', in *Cities of Belfast*, ed. Nicholas Allen and Aaron Kelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), p. 77.

²²⁰ Ben Levitas, *Theatre of Nation*, p. 166.

²²¹ *Northern Whig*, 10 December 1912.

²²² Lynn Doyle, *An Ulster Childhood*, (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1985), p. 40.

directed, primarily against the false kind of Ulsteria born of fanatical ignorance.²²³ This ‘propaganda’ was an altogether more sophisticated form than that envisaged by the young ideologues Parkhill and Hobson when they founded the theatre for political and proselytising purposes a few years earlier, as MacNamara’s plays encouraged audiences to ‘consent to accept the license of humour [which] became an act of complicity in the relegation of their difference’²²⁴ and, as such, his burlesque comedies were extremely effective in promoting the Theatre’s cultural pluralism.²²⁵

Susanne played to packed houses in the former skating rink of the Exhibition Hall, although this is not the reason for historian David Kennedy’s critique that the ULT were wont to ‘skate over the thin ice of political and sectarian animosities.’²²⁶ Kennedy’s formalist evaluation is unduly severe as the ULT’s use of comedy was explicitly political and not to simply entertain. *Susanne*’s programme states, ‘Whilst disdaining any desire to be serious, we cannot overcome an ingrained tendency to instruct as well as amuse our audience. Let us amuse, or not, instruct we will.’²²⁷ Moreover, it needs to be recognised that this serio-comic approach was unavoidable. The ULT could not tackle the subject of the Williamite wars in the same way as Lady Gregory did in *The White Cockade* (1905) as melodramatic representations could not function as ‘consensus dramas’ in Belfast like they did in Dublin. The repercussions of any realistic representation of such contentious history, (and its concomitant political critique), can only be imagined when one considers the extraordinary extra-theatrical disturbances triggered by Synge and O’Casey’s plays in Dublin amongst audiences whose divisions were relatively minor compared with those of Belfast. The riots surrounding Abbey productions are distinctive for their ‘performativity’, in the sense that they were self-consciously ‘theatrical’ – the protests were planned, prepared, rehearsed, and performed alternative identities and ideologies to those enacted on the national stage. Riots in Belfast, whilst also being part of an ethnic ‘acting out’ of political identity, were altogether more serious in terms of their violent consequences and were often provoked by the most

²²³ *The Daily Standard*, cited Bell, *Theatre in Ulster*, p. 48.

²²⁴ Levitas, *Theatre of Nation*, p. 167.

²²⁵ In an unpublished letter to Barrington-Baker, Joseph Campbell states that the company were ‘satisfied that all who witnessed it grasped its meaning’ and records that only ‘3 or 4 [...] left the hall in different nights during the 1st act.’ Barrington Baker *Scrapbooks*, Central Library, Belfast.

²²⁶ David Kennedy, ‘Ulster Theatre’, *Irish Bookman* (April / May) 1947, p. 35.

²²⁷ Programme for *Susanne and the Sovereigns*, Linen Hall Library, Theatre and Performing Arts Archive.

innocuous provocations.²²⁸ This inherent volatility and the increasingly unstable political context of the ongoing Home Rule crisis, and the particular theatrical formation of Belfast's audiences who were conditioned to dialectically opposed readings of Irish drama, were powerful forces that could not be ignored or attacked outright by the Theatre. The ULT's aesthetics and politics are mutually constitutive in that these collective pressures compelled the company to develop distinct dramaturgical forms just as they developed their regionalist cultural politics. Their playful, pluralist theatre succeeded not only in challenging barriers between the divided communities of Bigotborough, but in bringing about better relations between North and South:

Does this playing of this piece by these young Ulstermen portend the dawning of the better day as regards the relations between North and South we occasionally hear about? Taking note of the fact that the play had a most successful run [...] one might easily be tempted to think that [it] does. I merely record the fear that, just as the pot boils but slowly downwards, the fine nationalism of the Ulster players will transmit itself but slowly down through the viscous layers of intellect that intervene between theirs and those of, say the men that run the "Newsletter" [...] And so [...] let me wish as a New Year wish, God speed in their blessed work in bridging the Boyne – with Ridicule.²²⁹

Little did this hopeful critic know that his New Year wish would appear to come true in 1908 when the border was bridged as the ULT travelled South to present its new plays on the national stage in Dublin, and the Abbey players ventured North for the first time to play a short season in Belfast.

The ULT in Dublin & the Abbey in Belfast:

In April 1908 the ULT returned to Dublin with two new plays, *The Leaders of the People* by Robert Harding (James Good) and Rutherford Mayne's *The Drone*. Described by Mayne as, 'a modern play dealing with the clash of party politics and political idealism',²³⁰ Good's play

²²⁸ There have been numerous account of how even the whistling of party tunes, flying of political flags, etc. precipitated serious violent disturbances. See Andrew Boyd, *Holy War in Belfast* (Belfast: Pretani Press, 1987); Catherine Hirst, *Religion, Politics and Violence in Nineteenth Century Belfast: The Pound and Sandy Row* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002).

²²⁹ 'Susanne and the Sovereigns', *The Leader*, 11 January 1908.

²³⁰ Rutherford Mayne, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *The Dublin Magazine* 31:2 (April–June, 1955): 20.

deals with an Ulster election and the fortunes of a new party of conciliation in the North. Loftus Rankin is its ambitious parliamentary candidate seeking the support of nationalist M.P. Timothy McGrath, and labour leader Ned Leslie, while claiming to have already secured the backing of Hugh Elewynn, 'the great Gaelic agitator'. His campaign nearly founders when Hugh subsequently turns up, and revokes his support, prompting Rankin's fiancée to come to his rescue. *Leaders'* 'revelation of the complex political forces what (*sic*) an election in an Ulster constituency brings into play'²³¹ explored the fraught interface between cultural Revival and party politics; and was praised by the *Peasant* for doing so.²³² Its urban setting, exposure of the electoral process and the political chicanery of party politics were well received in Dublin. *The Drone*, as mentioned earlier, was perhaps the most successful folk comedy written in the early decades of the twentieth century and was hailed in Dublin as, 'a masterpiece of comedy life and manners, the finest of its kind that has ever yet been put on any Irish stage by Irish players.'²³³ One incredulous Belfastman who sat in the stalls of the Abbey to review the performance felt transported, 'one got the impression [...] that we were spectators in an actual Co. Down home, and not watching a play at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.'²³⁴

Although both plays had only a short run at the Abbey (4–5 April), they made as significant an impression as their previous performances there, with audiences, actors and critics unanimous in their praise for the Theatre's 'simplicity' and 'truthfulness'. The ULT's technique of playing without footlights and fading the stage lights before the curtain closed were innovations which further enhanced their naturalistic presentation, and had a 'profound' effect on audiences. Indeed the *Irish Times* extolled the performances as the most significant to have been staged at the Abbey:

There was a time in the history of Irish culture, and it was a time not long gone by, when it was usual to ask the question – Can any good thing come out of Ulster? But as last night's performances showed, not only can good things come out of Ulster; but Dublin must look to its laurels; for in art, as in everything else, when Ulster makes up its mind to try, the rest of Ireland is hard put to it to beat it [...] Both the plays and the acting are so remarkable that we may say without exaggeration that no more significant production has been seen in Dublin in our day. We seem to be on the verge

²³¹ *Belfast Morning News*, 4 May 1909.

²³² *Peasant*, 2 May 1908.

²³³ *Sinn Féin*, 2 May 1908.

²³⁴ *Belfast Morning News*, 4 May 1908.

of a revolution in dramatic art, and remarkable enough, it has been left to Ulster to lead the way.²³⁵

It seemed that the Boyne was indeed being bridged and that the ULT was living up to the tradition outlined in *Ulad* that it was 'natural for the North to lead'.²³⁶ The only setback to the Dublin trip was that the 'Players were annoyed over the fact that their names were given in some of the Dublin papers' in spite of 'their desire to remain anonymous'.²³⁷ Back in Belfast, both plays had warm, if less effusive, reviews and smaller houses, possibly because the British Empire Shakespeare Society, (their motto: 'Using no other weapon but his name'), was playing *Merchant of Venice* in the Ulster Minor Hall.

Critics commended the fact that the politics and parties of Good's play were 'delineated so vaguely that they are quite interchangeable [...]. Tim McGrath is called in the bill a 'Nationalist' MP; he might equally, with one of two altered details, become an Orange M.P.²³⁸ and praised the performances for their high standards. *The Drone* which was later hailed as 'perhaps the finest Irish folk comedy ever written'²³⁹ and the '[t]he prototype of all kitchen comedies',²⁴⁰ was unanimously acclaimed by Belfast papers, the *Belfast Evening Telegraph* hailing Mayne for handling 'human nature with an almost lyrical rhythm and truth'.²⁴¹ The nationalist *Irish News* deplored the small audiences for both plays which were, 'hardly of the proportions naturally to be expected at performances given by this young Irish combination of Irish authors and players,' and referred to the 'importance of the fine work that is being done under difficult circumstances by the ULT'.²⁴² Perhaps unsurprisingly, the paper bestowed higher praise on Good's electioneering play, finding that, "'The Drone" follows a familiar furrow unlike the *Leaders of the People* which breaks new ground.'²⁴³ Rutherford Mayne later conceded that *Leaders*, 'though finely written [...] failed to achieve popular success'²⁴⁴ and indeed, the play was neither published nor revived by the company, although the *Irish News* effused that,

²³⁵ 'Two New Plays', *Irish Times*, 25 April 1908.

²³⁶ Stephen Gwynn, 'The Northern Gael', *Ulad* 1:2 (February 1905): 9.

²³⁷ *Peasant*, 2 May 1908.

²³⁸ 'Ulster Literary Theatre: Plays at Exhibition Hall', *Belfast Telegraph*, 4 November 1908.

²³⁹ Richard Hayward, *In Praise of Ulster*, p. 32.

²⁴⁰ David Kennedy, 'The Theatre in Ulster: 1944-1953' *Rann* 20 (June 1953): 41.

²⁴¹ 'Ulster Literary Theatre: Plays at Exhibition Hall', *Belfast Telegraph*, 4 November 1908.

²⁴² *Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 2 November 1908.

²⁴³ *Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 2 November 1908.

²⁴⁴ Rutherford Mayne, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *The Dublin Magazine* 31:2 (April-June, 1955): 20.

‘Robert Harding has produced one of the best in the Ulster Literary Theatre plays.’²⁴⁵ The unionist *Northern Whig*, (where Good worked as a sub-editor!) also revealed its party colours by lavishing praise on Mayne’s folk comedy *The Drone*, as did the unionist *Newsletter*.

The following week the papers had an opportunity to review another new ULT play, Mayne’s *The Troth* which had been performed in London by William Mollison’s theatre company to which Whitford Kane and Mayne were temporarily attached. Now back in Belfast for a brief tour that would take them to Dublin and Cork, they staged Mayne’s play before a ‘crowded house’ at the Theatre Royal. Dealing with agrarian distress, rack-renting and political assassination *The Troth* was completely different from Mayne’s previous work and the *Northern Whig* praised its ‘power, directness and refreshing realism,’ and its dramatic impact as a one-act curtain raiser.’ It also commended the author for not ‘concentrating on the crude sensation of the murder, but on the ‘conflict of human emotions.’²⁴⁶ Crucially, it ignored the most significant aspect of the play: its depiction of poor Presbyterian and Catholic tenant farmers, who are equally oppressed by their brutal landlord and forge an alliance – a ‘troth’ – to murder their oppressor. The *Whig* did take the opportunity to offer a more nuanced overview of the progress of the ULT, citing the founding ambitions of the theatre as outlined in *Ulad*, that its ‘art of drama will be different’ from that of the ILT and its ‘talent will be satiric rather than poetic’ and concluding:

It is four years ago this month since that opinion was expressed [...] The Ulster players [...] justify the prophecy of “Uladh” [*sic*] as anyone who will visit the Exhibition Hall in the present week will see. Certainly, the poetic drama has not been seen on the Northern stage since those early days when our players produced “Deirdre”, “Kathleen ni Houlihan” and “Brian of Banba”. It is a pity in a sense because the Ulstermen revealed a unique gift for dressing and staging poetic drama.²⁴⁷

This was an astute point, as the ULT had evolved their own regionalist aesthetic and left the ‘poetic drama’ to its Southern counterparts who arrived in Belfast at the end of the month.

²⁴⁵ *Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 2 November 1908.

²⁴⁶ *Northern Whig*, 12 November 1908.

²⁴⁷ *Northern Whig*, 3 November 1908.

The Abbey in Belfast

The Abbey came to Belfast in November 1908 to stage a selection of their repertoire at the Theatre Royal, including Yeats' *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and *The Hour Glass*; Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and *The Shadow of the Glen*; Gregory's *Spreading the News*, *Hyacinth Halvey*, *The Rising of the Moon*, *The Rogueries of Scapin* and W.F. Casey's *The Man Who Missed The Tide*. In the week preceding their arrival, a tremendous sense of expectation was evident in local papers, but the *Newsletter* records how 'glowing anticipation' gave way to 'disappointment' over its first production.²⁴⁸ This opinion was shared by other Belfast papers, with the unionist *Ulster Echo* particularly scathing in its criticism. It denounced Synge's *The Shadow of the Glen* as, 'a combination of burlesque and blasphemy tempered by vulgarity and (supposed) copious draughts of mountain dew,' and inveighed against Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon* as, 'an attempt to glorify sedition and ridicule the Royal Irish Constabulary' before sagely concluding:

To me the whole business of the Abbey Theatre is animated more by artifice than art, more intended to develop sympathy with sedition than with poetry or drama; promoted or at least utilised, more as a political than a literary propaganda [...] I am told that the company have some good plays in their repertoire, I hope I may be able to see them.²⁴⁹

The *Belfast Evening Telegraph's* lengthy review of the opening performance spends most of its allotted space outlining the fractious history of the Abbey, highlighting splits and controversies before pronouncing, 'Dublin has proven itself more intolerant than Belfast by far, and in the Ulster Literary Theatre is a force more vital, popular, and potent than the Dublin Theatre.'²⁵⁰ This sentiment was shared by other critics, even the redoubtable reviewer of the *Echo*, who says of the Abbey and Ulster theatres:

On their first visit to the North, it was hoped that further success would greet them, but it is with regret that we have to record an unfavourable impression. Speaking in a dramatic sense, we hold that the Ulster Literary Theatre has done far better work, both in regard to the plays themselves and the manner of their production. This may

²⁴⁸ 'The Theatre Royal: The Irish Players', *The Ulster Echo*, 1 December 1908.

²⁴⁹ *Ulster Echo*, 1 December 1908.

²⁵⁰ 'The Abbey Players' *The Belfast Telegraph*, 2 December 1908.

seem a bold statement but we venture to say that few of those present last night [...] would have grounds for controverting it.²⁵¹

The *Northern Whig* agreed with this negative assessment of the Abbey's poor performances in comparison to the ULT, criticising its removal from 'the realities of life' and proclaiming that:

The wavering nature of the support given to drama in this part of the world is the constant theme of those who love to convict their fellows of the unpardonable sin of Philistinism. Yet without straining facts it would not be difficult to make out on this point a good case for the despised Philistine.²⁵²

All of the papers blamed the Abbey's disappointing première on its selection of plays and its failure to use their best actors. Many complained of the incongruity of Lady Gregory's translation of Molière's comedy in a programme of Irish plays. A letter by 'A Supporter of Irish Drama' to *The Irish News* requested that the Abbey drop the play and replace it with Yeats' *Deirdre*. However, the run improved dramatically towards the middle of the week with performances of *The Man Who Missed the Tide* and *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*: an improvement attributed to the stage entrance of Sara Allgood in the latter and the fact that the former play featured a recognisably Ulster *mise en scène*. In spite of this, the theatre remained embarrassingly empty, the *Echo* reporting that only a half-a-dozen patrons occupied the dress circle,²⁵³ whilst 'The Playboy', complained in a letter to the *Northern Whig* that he felt like the King of Bulgaria watching the performances in 'solitary state' in the empty Theatre Royal, so that he was 'filled with shame to see almost empty a theatre which is often packed to the doors'.²⁵⁴ The despairing critic of *Nomad's Weekly* wearily opined:

last season the Ibsen week was a dire failure, and at present it looks as if the Irish players will return to the metropolis with one vivid impression – of the magnificent vista of woods (represented by the row and rows of empty seats) presented from the stage of the Theatre Royal.²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ 'The Theatre Royal: The Irish Players', *The Ulster Echo*, 1 December 1908.

²⁵² 'Visit of the Abbey Players' *Northern Whig*, 1 December 1908.

²⁵³ *Ulster Echo*, 3 December 1908.

²⁵⁴ *Northern Whig*, 4 December 1908.

²⁵⁵ *Nomad's Weekly*, 5 December 1908.

The *Ulster Echo* was less elegiac in its attitude towards the poor attendances at the Abbey performances, using the opportunity to rebuke the city's nationalist population:

where were the patriots of Belfast that they did not fill the theatre last night? [...] why were they not present in their thousands to pay tribute to their co-workers in the cause of Irish Nationality? Is it that they think that clubs are better for the purpose than plays; cattle-driving and boycotting better than poetry and the drama; lightning and moonlighting better than literature and lampooning?²⁵⁶

There was an element of truth in these rebarbative comments, given the disproportionate number of Northern radicals involved in rejuvenating revolutionary nationalism in Ulster, as examined in earlier chapters. Even Yeats' *Cathleen ni Houlihan* failed to attract a large nationalist audience. Moreover, it is quite extraordinary the extent to which Belfast's unionist press tolerated the nationalist politics of many of these plays. The *Ulster Echo*, which had been so hostile towards Lady Gregory's 'seditious' *Rising of the Moon*, warmly praised Yeats' *Cathleen ni Houlihan* regarding it as a harmless folk drama which was, 'sufficiently dreamy and poetic to capture those who prefer crying for the moon to working upon the land, and who prefer poetry and sentimentality to the practical side and affairs of life.'²⁵⁷ Perhaps this was another reason why *Cathleen ni Houlihan* failed to inspire Northern nationalists, (or to infuriate unionists), as both communities shared a predilection for pragmatic action rather than poetic abstraction.²⁵⁸ As James Good noted in *Ulster*, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre [...] is passionately interested, not in barren abstractions, but in men and women and the expression of vital emotions.'²⁵⁹

The experiences of the Abbey's inaugural tour to Belfast is interesting not merely for revealing differences between Belfast and Dublin, but for demonstrating how remarkable the work of the ULT had been in achieving such critical and commercial success in its home city, and in Dublin. By 1908, reviewers in both cities were hailing the ULT as the most advanced theatre company in Ireland. Moreover, the Abbey's tour to Belfast had the important, if

²⁵⁶ *Ulster Echo*, 3 December 1908.

²⁵⁷ *Ulster Echo*, 3 December 1908.

²⁵⁸ Some of these issues in terms of differences between North and South will be explained and examined in Chapter 5, where I will examine the differences in the reception of Yeats' *Cathleen ni Houlihan* in Belfast and Dublin.

²⁵⁹ James Good, 'The Theatre and the People', *Ulster* 1:3 (May 1905): 14.

unintended, effect of garnering critical support for the local company, a boost that was to benefit the ULT in its later work.

The ULT in England & America, 1906-1912

In addition to performances in Belfast, at various *feisanna* throughout Ulster, and in the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, the ULT also presented plays in Manchester, Liverpool, London, Baltimore, Washington and New York with varying degrees of success. Its first production outside Ireland was Parkhill's *The Enthusiast* which was performed under the political aegis of the London branch of the Dungannon Clubs, the separatist republican organisation founded by Bulmer Hobson, who had also co-founded the ULT along with the author of *The Enthusiast*.²⁶⁰ This production is significant for a number of reasons: first of all, the fact that this was the only play selected reveals how it articulated the radical politics of this revolutionary body; secondly, an examination of the membership of the ULT, the Arts Club, the IRB, and the Dungannon Clubs reveals the extraordinary concentration of Northern Protestant republicans who were involved in all four organizations.

The London Branch of the Dungannon Club was founded by Herbert Hughes after he had been converted to the cause by Hobson during a summer holiday in Belfast in 1906. The London branch had a large number of Ulster ex-pats in its membership, notably Eddie and Norman Morrow, Robert Lynd, George Gavan Duffy,²⁶¹ whilst P.S. O' Hegarty,²⁶² Sylvia

²⁶⁰ Performed 18th April 1907 in Bamsbury Hall, Islington, see *Peasant* 13 and 27 April 1907.

²⁶¹ George Gavan Duffy (1882-1951): born Cheshire, son of Charles Gavan Duffy by his third wife; educated in France and Stonyhurst; practiced law successfully as solicitor in London, 1907-1916; married Margaret Sullivan, 1907; volunteered to arrange defence of Roger Casement, called to Irish bar, 1917; took South County Dublin for Sinn Féin in 1918 Election; unofficial Irish delegate to Paris Peace Conference with Sean T. O'Kelly; expelled from France through English intervention; unofficial Irish envoy in Rome, 1920; read out the French translation of the "Declaration of Independence" (1916 Proclamation) in Dáil Éireann, 1921; participated in Irish delegation to Treaty negotiations in London, 1921, and reluctantly voted for acceptance of the terms in Dáil Éireann, 1922; served as Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1922; unsuccessfully proposed that Republican prisoners should be treated as prisoners of war, 27 Sept. 1922, and resigned ministry; resumed legal practice; attacked policy of reprisal execution, especially the shooting of Erskine Childers; appointed High Court Judge, 1929; shaped article on fundamental rights in Irish Constitution of 1936; made President of the High Court, 1946.

²⁶² Patrick Sarsfield O' Hegarty (1879-1955): born Carrignavar, Co. Cork. Educated North Monastery CBS; law clerk, 1895; postal service, Cork, 1897; served in London, 1902-1913; Cobh postmaster, 1913; Shrewsbury and Welshpool (Wales), 1914; resigned from PO over oath of allegiance, 1918; resigned from Sinn Féin with Hobson and others in disagreement with Griffith, 1910; edited Nationalist newspapers including *Irish Freedom* (1911-14); *An tEireannach* (1913), for Gaelic League; informed by MacDiarmada that the rebellion would take place in Sept. 1915; edited *The Irish World* (1918-19), and *The Separatist* (Feb.-Sept. 1922), with IRB support; accepted the Treaty

and Nora Dryhurst,²⁶³ Michael MacWhite,²⁶⁴ Freddie Colgey were other prominent members.²⁶⁵ Hughes later handed over control of the branch to Lynd, an Ulster essayist and author who had been based in London for a number of years, but had been inspired by a trip home to Belfast, where he encountered the earliest work of the ULT. Lynd describes his delight at discovering the, 'exciting beginnings of the literary movement associated with the Ulster Literary Theatre' and stimulated by the work of Parkhill, Mayne and Gerald MacNamara, he actively involved himself in this new movement that 'seemed to hold a promise of the appearance of an Ulster school of writing expressive of the spirit of the province.'²⁶⁶ Lynd contributed articles to *Ulster* and, more importantly, arranged for the ULT to stage their first performances in London. The significance of ULT performances under the aegis of the Dungannon Clubs has been ignored in all published accounts of the theatre,²⁶⁷ in spite of the fact that it sharply brings into focus their radical potential and corroborates Connolly's assertion that, 'all these efforts were, in the wider sense, serious plays and reflected the growing need for national cultural development.'²⁶⁸

The ULT also had its work staged on commercial as well as ideological grounds in England, thanks to the efforts of Whitford Kane, who, like all good converts, was evangelical in his enthusiasm for the new movement and was instrumental in organizing tours of London and Liverpool in 1910 and 1911. Kane also persuaded Mayne to join his company, the Kane and Mollison Company, on a tour of England as a professional actor in 1908, during which he wrote *The Truth*, which was also staged in London in October 1908, before its Irish première in Belfast in 1909.²⁶⁹ In 1910 he organised a special matinee of *The Truth* in

while on the Supreme Council of IRB; established 'Irish Bookshop,' Dawson St., Dublin; Secretary of Irish Dept. of Post and Telegraphs, 1922-45. Authored: *John Mitchell: An Appreciation* (1917); *The Indestructible Nation* (1918); *Sinn Féin: An Illumination* (1919); *Ulster: A Brief Statement of Fact* (1919); *A Short Memoir of Terence MacSwiney* (1922); with Bulmer Hobson, Eimar O'Duffy and Colm O'Lochlann, published seven-issue series of *Irish Review* (1922-1923); issued *The Victory of Sinn Féin: How it Was Won and How It Was Used* (1924); *A History of Ireland Under the Union 1801-1922* (1952).

²⁶³ Sylvia Lynd, (*nee* Dryhurst) (1888- 1952): poet, essayist, short story writer and novelist. Born in London, although parents were from Ireland; married Robert Lynd in 1909.

²⁶⁴ Michael MacWhite, (1883 - 1958): Irish diplomat.

²⁶⁵ For a detailed account of the formation of the London Dungannon Club, see P.S. O'Hegarty, 'Robert Lynd, 1879-1949', *Dublin Magazine*, 25:1 (January-March, 1950): 41-44, 42.

²⁶⁶ Robert Lynd, 'Introduction', *Northern Harvest: Anthology of Ulster Writing*, ed. Robert Greacan (Belfast: Derrick MacCord, 1944), p. ii.

²⁶⁷ My M.Phil thesis, 'The Rise and Fall of the Ulster Literary Theatre', Dublin: TCD, (1998) was the first study to draw attention to these important performances. More recently, Ben Levitas footnotes this production in *Theatre of Nation*, p. 109.

²⁶⁸ Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 60.

²⁶⁹ See Hanna Bell, *The Theatre in Ulster*, p. 34.

London which was attended by Harley Granville-Barker, Arthur Wing Pinero and John Galsworthy amongst others.²⁷⁰ At the time, Kane was actually performing in a play directed by Dion Boucicault Jnr. and his autobiography records the fascinating dilemma that, as an actor, Kane was caught between his personal cultural nationalism and his professional commercial employment. Having organised the ULT's visit to London, he set about harrying his fellow cast members to attend the Ulster players' production, which was conveniently taking place across the street in the Maiden Lane Theatre, (Kane even arranged for performances to be given at 5p.m. so that they would not have to miss their own rehearsals). However, whilst the rest of the company sallied forth to the Maiden Lane Theatre, Kane was held back by Boucicault who, dissatisfied with his performance, insisted that he play his part more in the mode of 'a comic-strip Irishman'²⁷¹ and demanded that he stay on late in rehearsals, which meant that the actor almost missed the five o'clock showing of *The Truth!* Kane angrily recalls this experience and states that Boucicault's direction:

irked me, for I was endeavouring to make the character a little real, knowing that my grandfathers, even in their worst Victorian days, had never resembled anything like stage-Irishmen.²⁷²

Dashing across to the Maiden Lane theatre Kane appeared oblivious to the irony of his situation that, having stayed late to perfect his 'stage Irish' character, he almost missed his compatriots' realist broadside against the very type of character he had been *rehearsing*. The fact that the engineer of this ironic situation was the scion of Dion Boucicault, the first playwright to set about rehabilitating the 'Stage Irishman' and whose son now seemed set on reversing such advances, further enriches the irony of this vignette!

The following year 1911, Kane again set about organising another ULT tour to England, and this time he was free from any conflicting commercial engagements. In his role as manager of the 'Ulster Players', he secured a short run at Kelly's Theatre in Liverpool and the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester. Although his memoirs record great frustration in guiding his 'flock across provincial England'²⁷³ he, undeterred, arranged another tour in February 1912 to the Royalty Theatre, London. In the audience for these performances was the colourful

²⁷⁰ Hanna Bell, *The Theatre in Ulster*, p. 38.

²⁷¹ Whitford Kane, *Are We All Met?*, p. 85.

²⁷² Whitford Kane, p. 85.

²⁷³ Cited Bell, *The Theatre in Ulster*, p. 40.

William A. Brady,²⁷⁴ an American fight promoter and theatre manager with a reputation for spotting talent. He bought the rights to *The Drone* and arranged for the players to travel, as the Abbey had before them, to America where they were to embark on a tour of the east coast. Under the inauspicious touring moniker, 'The Drone Company', the rebranded ULT set sail from London on board the *U.S. Cedric* on November 30th 1912, travelling first class and entertaining their fellow passengers with impromptu concerts and recitations. On board were John, Josephine, and Joseph Campbell, Whitford Kane, Stanley Gresley, Margaret O'Gorman (Bridie O'Farrell), Alec Thompson, Nellie Wheeler, Robert Forsyth and Margaret Moffat. However, soon after they had arrived in New York on December 8th the company foundered on the first of a series of unforeseen problems, as the theatre which had been hired could not open because it was not properly insured. This was an augury of much worse things to come, as the tour, which started with such high hopes, degenerated into farce and was ended prematurely after *The Drone* played to comatose audiences in Washington and Baltimore, before embarking on a disastrous 'run' in Daly's Theatre in New York, where it opened on December 30th and closed on New Year's Day!

The extent to which the festive season adversely impacted on audience numbers is hard to ascertain, but no mention of this is made in Kane's account of the tour, in which he blames Brady's 'Boucicaulting' of the play for its failure. Kane, who had already bridled under Boucicault Junior's bowdlerising influence during the previous tour, now blasted the saccharine Irish-American sentimentality which their new manager brought to the play, now 'thickly sugared with spurious sentiment' for 'everything had to be idealised to such an extent that it was absurd.'²⁷⁵ Brady's interference in the play no doubt contributed to its downfall, yet, research into his track record as a producer on New York's theatre scene reveals him to be one of the most successful theatre producers. Prior to *The Drone*, Brady had produced over eighty shows on Broadway, including comic operas such as *The Pirates of Penzance* and the

²⁷⁴ William Aloysius Brady (1863-1950): an American actor, manager, theatre owner, stage and motion-picture producer. He was also a manager and fight promoter for numerous world champion wrestlers and boxers. He gave the first career break to Humphrey Bogart, granting him a job as an office boy. He first started as a prizefight manager, before becoming a developer of Coney Island Amusement Park, which led him into the equally cut-throat business of Broadway theatre. He produced over 250 plays whilst simultaneously maintaining an interest in motion pictures. In 1914 he became a founder member of World Pictures (with their famous slogan, 'World Pictures - Brady Made') and served as President of the National Assembly of the Motion Picture Industry between 1915-1920, before being appointed chairman of a committee to organise the American film industry for the First World War in 1917. His daughter Alice Brady (1892-1939) was a well-known stage and film actress.

²⁷⁵ Kane, *Are We All Met?*, p. 137.

Mikado, as well as an eclectic mix of melodramas, farces, comedies, and high dramas such as: *The Fatted Calf*, *The Lights O' London*, *Little Women*, *The Rack*, *Bunt Pulls the Strings*, *Bought and Paid For*, the last two of which racked up more than eight hundred performances. Against this background, *The Drone's* disastrous run of only two nights was a box office disaster; one of the worst programming decisions made by Brady in an otherwise flawless career.

The reasons for the spectacular failure of *The Drone* are not at first apparent, particularly given the success of the play throughout Ireland and England, and the contemporaneous appetite for Irish drama in America. Perhaps one reason relates to the different horizon of expectations of Irish-American audiences. For example, Whitford Kane, who stayed on in America after the ULT's disastrous tour and established a lucrative theatre and film career, later wrote and acted in an extremely successful Irish play *Dark Rosaleen*²⁷⁶ (1919) which proved very popular, playing 85 nights more than *The Drone's* dismal run. Although Kane's play was never published, one may assume from its eponymous reference to Mother Ireland that the play purveyed dramatic tropes and themes with which American audiences were more familiar. Meanwhile, by 1919 back in Belfast, the remnants of the Ulster Literary Theatre, under the atrophied aegis of the Ulster Theatre, were performing light comedies by Charles K Ayre, Lynn Doyle, and George Morshiels in a country devastated by WWI and drifting inexorably into further conflict, as the bloodshed unleashed by the vicious Black and Tan War, the fratricidal tragedy of the Civil War and the later sectarian savagery of the Belfast pogroms irreparably damaged the social and civic fabric of Irish life, especially in Belfast. Though many historians and commentators have faulted the Ulster players for their reliance on comedy, it is a criticism which must be tempered with credit for the fact that the Company were able to stage anything at all in these bloody years of internecine conflict and civil unrest. Still, the lightweight fare of *The Lilac Ribbon*,²⁷⁷ *Felix, Reid and Bob*,²⁷⁸ and *The Lone Man*²⁷⁹ was a far cry from the early days of the ULT, from Hobson's desire to purvey nationalist propaganda, and from Parkhill's aspiration that it might promote unity not only between Protestants and Catholics of the benighted North, but also between Ulster and the rest of Ireland.

²⁷⁶ *Dark Rosaleen*, opened on the 22 April 1919, in the Belasco Theatre, New York.

²⁷⁷ Lynn Doyle's *The Lilac Ribbon* premiered on 5 June 1919 at the Grand Opera House, Belfast.

²⁷⁸ George Shiel's (pseud. George S. Morshiel) *Felix, Reid, and Bob* premiered 12 November, 1919 at the Grand Opera House, Belfast.

²⁷⁹ Charles K. Ayre's *The Lone Man* premiered on 14 November 1919 at the Grand Opera House, Belfast.

From *Thompson* to *The Turnout*, 1909–1912: The Beginning of the End

In 1909 the ULT revived its production of *Susanne* and returned to the packed Exhibition Hall, where it upstaged the world famous Ellen Terry who was playing in the Grand Opera House before ‘very poor houses.’ This prompted its manager, F.W. Warden, to poach the ULT for a week’s engagement at the Opera House, ‘an association that was to last thirty years.’²⁸⁰ The success of *Susanne* and its Opera House appearance encouraged MacNamara to pen another extravaganza and, when the Gaelic League commissioned him to write a play for propaganda purposes,²⁸¹ he presented them with *Thompson in Tir-na-nOg* – a brilliant, blistering critique of the exclusivist, essentialist pieties of nationalism and unionism, legitimately acclaimed by Forrest Reid as a ‘little masterpiece of its kind.’²⁸²

Thompson tells the story of redoubtable Orangeman Andy Thompson, who expires *en route* to the sham battle of Scarva and awakes in the mystical Celtic heaven of Irish myth, where he is hailed as a fellow fallen warrior. However, the ‘strange’ behaviour of their new comrade with his harsh sounding language and peculiar regalia, increasingly confounds the residents of this twilight world and their mutual incomprehension is depicted in a number of exchanges, where broad humour belies a number of salient observations:

GRANIA: Have you been in a real fight?

THOMPSON: O aye. I was in a scrap in Portadown last Sunday.

GRANIA: And whom were you fighting in Portadown?

THOMPSON: The Hibernians,

GRANIA: The Hibernians! But are not all people in Ireland Hibernians?

THOMPSON: Talk sense, woman dear.²⁸³

MacNamara not only satirizes the indigenous Orange and Green politics of the North, but the mythological settings and Synge-song dialogue of Revivalist literature and drama, as he

²⁸⁰ Enter Robbie John

²⁸¹ Cathal O’Shannon, who was an organising member of the Gaelic League, insists that it had not commissioned the play. He suggests instead that it was written for *Dail na nBan*: a ladies ancillary group of the Gaelic League involved in raising funds etc. for the main organisation.

²⁸² Forrest Reid, ‘Eighteen Years’ Work: The Ulster Players’, *The Times, Irish Supplement*, 5 December 1922.

²⁸³ Gerald MacNamara, *Thompson in Tir-na-nOg* in Kathleen Danaher Parks, *Gerald MacNamara: Ulster Playwright* unpublished PhD. Dissertation, University of Philadelphia, (1984), p. 129.

contrasts the Protestant practicality of Thompson's speech with the turgid dialogue of the Celtic characters:

GRANIA: He stood like a flame against the flameless sky and the whole sapphire of the heavens seemed to live in his fearless eyes.

THOMPSON: Well, well. Did ye know his face? [...]

GRANIA: O Andy, Andy, my heart's desire. Tell me dearest how you left Old Erinn. You said that you were killed in battle?

THOMPSON: I was blew up.²⁸⁴

MacNamara lampoons the flowery artifice of Synge and even the early plays of the ULT. His playful, prescient deconstruction of this dramaturgical form will be examined in Chapter 6 in relation to this play and *The Mist That Does be on the Bog*. The fantastical encounter between ancient and modern Ireland, between myth and modernity, enacted through the collision of Catholic and Protestant heroes, was masterfully handled by MacNamara. He recalled the ULT's original *dramatis personae* of 'dim giants from the Irish sagas, declaimed in blank verse to blanker halls,'²⁸⁵ lampooning, rather than lionising them, a treatment which ensured that they played to packed halls.

In its first editorial, *Ulad* had declared that the task ahead of the Ulster Literary Theatre was to furnish their future 'genius' with 'matter for his use, practising methods, perfecting technique and training actors.'²⁸⁶ In 1912, with their literary stature firmly established: 'we seem to be on the verge of a revolution in dramatic art, and remarkably enough, it has been left to Ulster to lead the way',²⁸⁷ their tide of popularity producing, 'no other effect than that of stimulation to do better,'²⁸⁸ and their most direct political satire *Thompson*, now centre-stage at the Grand Opera House, it seemed that the potential of the ULT were on the cusp of being fully realised. However, instead of capitalising on their commercial and popular success, they were to exploit it:

Those who have taken an interest and pride in the rise of the Ulster Literary Theatre would regret that the theatre should suffer the shortcomings of the Ulster Players' [...] commercialism and

²⁸⁴ *Thompson*, p. 128.

²⁸⁵ David Kennedy, 'Ulster Theatre', p. 33.

²⁸⁶ *Ulad* 1:1, (1904): 2.

²⁸⁷ *The Irish Times*, cited in Hanna Bell, *Theatre in Ulster*, p. 48.

²⁸⁸ Forrest Reid, *The Times, Irish Supplement*, 5 December 1922

materialism are written all over the players concern.²⁸⁹

In 1909, the ULT had produced *Susanne and the Sovereigns* in the Grand Opera House, a move that denoted the Theatre's passage from fringe to mainstream. However, this transition had a terminal effect on the Company for, as Connolly recalls, 'the association with Warden's Opera House was the beginning of the end for the Ulster Theatre as *originally conceived* and for many years conducted.'²⁹⁰ This was clearly indicated by the publication of the players' names in play programmes; a reversal of the Theatre's long-standing policy of anonymity. From the outset the ULT was known for its 'actors and playwrights' desire to remain anonymous.²⁹¹ Programmes had hitherto simply listed characters' names which were used by reviewers in their evaluations of individual performances. The sacrifice of the private ego of the actors for the greater good of the Theatre was the altruistic reason generally given for this policy.²⁹² This must be placed in the context of the personal backgrounds of the majority of those involved in the theatre, most of whom were Protestant and many were from staunchly unionist backgrounds and professions. The Theatre's involvement in the Irish Revival and its objectives in breaking down political and religious barriers in the North may have been idealistic, but they were pragmatic enough to conceal their involvement with the Theatre from those in their professional and personal circles who would have strongly disapproved of such activity. The varying degrees of precautions taken to protect their identity are reflected in James Good's literary output. As a staff member of the unionist *Northern Whig* paper, he used the initials of his Christian name in *Ulad*, wrote pseudonymously for the Ulster Literary Theatre,²⁹³ and anonymously for Hobson's separatist *Republic*. The publication of ULT members' names may have appeared innocuous but, in revealing the identity of its members, it placed their activities under the glare of the public spotlight, an exposure that further desiccated the radical nature of the movement.

²⁸⁹ *Sinn Féin*, 14 March 1914.

²⁹⁰ Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 61 (my italics).

²⁹¹ *The Peasant*, 2 May 1908.

²⁹² Whitford Kane notes that the company agreed from the outset, that everything should be subordinate to the Theatre and that none of their names should appear in the programme. Kane, *Are We All Met?*, p.107.

²⁹³ Pseudo. Robert Harding. To give a sense of how real this actual threat actually was, it is worthwhile recounting Bulmer Hobson's experiences of how his personal life and political activity balefully impacted upon his professional career: 'I was having considerable difficulty in making a living in Belfast. One firm dismissed me because I was a secretary to the Gaelic League, another because I was holding public meetings in support of the Sinn Féin movement [...] cited in O Broin, *Protestant Nationalists*, p. 36. Fellow Belfast Protestant radical Hubert Pimm, who worked in insurance, was also fired from his job on account of his nationalist activities, so little wonder then that the ULT players sought to retain their anonymity even when they played in Dublin.

Installed within the commercial heart of the city's theatre scene, many of the players began to enjoy the benefits of their new popularity. Flushed with success, and wary of courting controversy, especially in the rapidly deteriorating political climate of 1911-12 (see later), it was hardly surprising that the ULT anxiously emphasised the comic aspects of *Thompson* rather than the critique which underpinned it. This one-sided emphasis vitiated the play's polemical satire and consequently compromised its political efficacy in challenging its audience's 'Ulsteria.' The stress laid upon farcical and comical elements of their repertoire in this period is regarded by Kennedy as proof, at best, of the Theatre's 'immaturity' and, at worst, of its regression:

Extravaganzas [...] which skate over the thin ice of political and sectarian animosities [...] it is a discouraging symptom, a sign of lack of mental and spiritual growth, that such plays are the only approach our stage has made to these fundamental problems.²⁹⁴

Although there has indeed been a long tradition of comedy and farce being used by Northern playwrights to (ineffectively) critique sectarian politics and identity in Ulster,²⁹⁵ Kennedy's criticisms are somewhat simplistic. There was also considerable irony in the Theatre's gravitation towards commercial success, given the radically anti-materialist roots of its 'revolt against the tyranny of commercial materialism which weighed upon our native city.'²⁹⁶ Their popular success and secondment to the Opera House had a deeply insidious, debilitating effect on the Theatre's founding ideals, and historian F.X. Martin's pithy obituary sums up this process: 'an idealistic movement can sustain any blow except success.'²⁹⁷ However, the demise of the ULT's idealism cannot be blamed on Mammon alone, for from its earliest days, the Theatre had moved away from its radical roots in an effort to win public recognition.

Dr Pádraig Gregory, who was closely associated with the ULT from its earliest days, explained the decline of the theatre in somewhat different terms: 'I think there were certain elements got into the theatre - certain persons - and they got a taste for money and were not

²⁹⁴ Kennedy, 'Ulster Theatre', p. 35-6.

²⁹⁵ See Phelan, 'The Fantasy of Post-Nationalism in Northern Theatre: *Caught Red-Handed*' Transplanting the Planter', *Australasian Drama Studies* 43 (October 2003): 89-107. Even as far back as 1954, Mary O'Malley, the redoubtable founder of the Lyric Theatre, inveighed against the fact that the only dramaturgical strategy available to local authors who wanted to write political theatre was one 'made on the level of broad farce', 'Statement to PEN Delegates', cited in Mary O'Malley, *Never Shake Hands with the Devil* (Dublin: Elo Publications, 1990), p. 67.

²⁹⁶ Reid, *The Times, Irish Supplement* 5 December 1922.

²⁹⁷ F.X. Martin, 'Leaders and Men', p. 98.

content as we all were to save up our money with a view to acquiring our own theatre.²⁹⁸ The focus of his blame is upon the commercial 'infiltration' of the Theatre by outside elements, but he also alludes to other important factors crucial to its collapse. The ULT never managed to acquire 'its own theatre'²⁹⁹ and remained a 'homeless organisation',³⁰⁰ a situation that made it increasingly dependent upon its quasi-residential status at the Opera House,³⁰¹ a huge venue which obviously imposed severe limitations on their ability to experiment with new work. Gregory blames the influx of 'certain persons'³⁰² for the demise of the theatre and whilst this was undoubtedly a factor, one corroborated by Connolly,³⁰³ this was only made possible by the damaging exodus of key personnel. In the space of two years, David Parkhill, the movement's 'artistic conscience'³⁰⁴ emigrated to Australia; John Campbell, their '*fons et origo*',³⁰⁵ and Whitford Kane remained in America after their disastrous tour of 1912; Rutherford Mayne moved South in 1911 to work for the Land Commission; and was soon followed by Lynn Doyle. The loss many years earlier of their co-founder Bulmer Hobson had been surmounted by the Theatre, but it never recovered from the grievous loss of his fellow co-founder, Parkhill.³⁰⁶

David Parkhill had personified the early philosophy of the theatre as surely as his departure precipitated its eventual demise. He has remained a mysterious figure and very few biographical details can be found, save those scavenged from diffuse sources, almost all of which are anecdotal reminiscences of one sort or another. From what I have been able to ascertain, it was he who was *the* true moving force – rather than Hobson – behind the

²⁹⁸ Gregory, *Enter Robbie John*, p. 24.

²⁹⁹ Interestingly, Reid recounts in his autobiography *Private Road*, that W.B. Reynolds, the editor of *Ulster*, had from an early stage attempted to establish a building fund and had developed architectural plans for a theatre which he carried about in his pocket and would spread them out on the tables of public houses. (pp. 40-1).

³⁰⁰ Kane, *Are We All Met?*, p. 108.

³⁰¹ Although no written contract was ever signed with the Opera House, after their first performance in 1909, the company became a regular fixture there; an arrangement that did not come to an end until 1934.

³⁰² Gregory, *Enter Robbie John*, p. 41.

³⁰³ 'The popularity of the company attracted many whose sole interest was to be connected with it [...] various elements crept more and more into the scheme of things.' Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 61.

³⁰⁴ Reid, *The Times, Irish Supplement*, 5 December 1922.

³⁰⁵ 'Talk on the Ulster Literary Theatre', in *The Irish Book Lover*, vol. 11, 12 April 1911 (London: Salmond and Company), p. 165.

³⁰⁶ The ULT was never a professional theatre company with a dedicated staff or space but more of a loose collective of like-minded individuals. It had none of the (relative) stability, security and support which Annie Horniman and Lady Gregory provided the Abbey. It was mainly middle-class in its membership and absolutely dependent upon the drive and dynamism of individuals to keep things going. There were no minutes for meetings, nor were any records kept or preserved and there was never any real managerial or hierarchical structure to decision making or programming.

establishment of the Theatre. He was co-editor of *Ulaid*;³⁰⁷ the individual who introduced Mayne and Gregory to the Theatre;³⁰⁸ the delegate who travelled to Dublin to arrange the ULT's first performances in 1907; the playwright who most consistently pursued a radical political agenda in his work, and perhaps the real source of its famous founding statement, 'Damn Yeats we'll write our own plays.'³⁰⁹ His departure for Australia,³¹⁰ or the South Sea islands,³¹¹ appears to have been on health grounds. Joseph Connolly's recently published memoirs have shed new light on Parkhill's contribution, revealing how he feared the company might collapse upon his departure for Australia. At an early stage it seems that Parkhill foresaw the future direction of the Theatre and admonished Connolly to try and preserve its original political impetus:

the departure of Davey Parkhill/Lewis Purcell, for Australia for health reasons was a serious loss to the theatre, not alone for what he contributed by his plays and his flair for production, but even more for the basic ideas that guided his work in the theatre. I remember that shortly before he left for Australia we met and had a meal together, he told me that he feared for the future of the theatre and urged me to work closely with two or three others that he named to keep the original plans for the development of theatre in the foreground. The theatre, he emphasised, was not to be a mere group of actors, but a school for playwriting and production which was to concern itself in creating a real Ulster school in the Irish theatre movement.³¹²

As it turned out, Parkhill's fears were well founded and Connolly was powerless to intervene. As the personnel changed, and profit rather than politics informed the Company's agenda, the ULT's commercial gravitation towards the gilded 'cornucopias of the Opera House'³¹³ was

³⁰⁷ A role that he has not been credited with in any accounts of the theatre, as James Good, Joseph Campbell, W.B. Reynolds, Rutherford Mayne and even James Cousins have all been erroneously identified as editor(s) of the short-lived journal.

³⁰⁸ Padraig Gregory served his apprenticeship in the same architect's office as Parkhill who 'collared' his colleague 'into the movement by way in making me a ticket collector.' Mayne was induced by the irrepressible Parkhill to 'buy two tickets to go see his society' which was performing AE's *Deirdre* and Yeats' *Cathleen ni Houlihan* in 1903, *Enter Robbie John*, p. 5.

³⁰⁹ Rutherford Mayne recalls that the sentiment was actually Parkhill's: 'I recollect that Parkhill's reaction to this was that we write our own plays.' *Enter Robbie John*, p. 6.

³¹⁰ George Morrow, cited in Mengel, p. 70; Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 61.

³¹¹ According to Forrest Read, *Eighteen Years' Work: The Ulster Players*, *The Times, Irish Supplement* 5 December 1922.

³¹² Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 61.

³¹³ See David Kennedy, 'Ulster Theatre', *The Irish Bookman*, April/May 1947, p.33

inexorable and, with Parkhill gone, it 'was a fairly rapid disintegration'.³¹⁴ After 1907, there is no mention of Parkhill³¹⁵ but it is significant that Reid, Mayne, and Connolly all acknowledge the role he played in the Theatre, the latter hailing him as the source 'from whom it all sprang'.³¹⁶ Reid also suggests that Parkhill could have held the Theatre together during the acrimonious splits precipitated by the events of 1916.

The departure of the Theatre's central figures, the dereliction of its nationalist focus, and its defection from theatrical fringe to mainstream, all help to account for the waning of the Theatre's ideals, but do not explain the alacrity of this collapse. Only when the prevailing political climate is taken into account in terms of the unfolding 'state of chassis' surrounding the third Home Rule crisis and the rapid political destabilization of the North, are underlying causes for the sudden collapse of the Ulster Literary Theatre apparent.

In 1910, a general election left the governing Liberal party, led by Gladstone, dependent on the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) to form a new administration and their support was secured with the promise that Gladstone would implement Home Rule. These dramatic political developments precipitated the 'Ulster Crisis' which over the next two years left the North, and indeed Ireland, on the brink of bloody civil war. The North had already experienced two previous Home Rule crises in 1886 and 1893, both of which provoked 'frenzied parliamentary and propagandist campaigns'³¹⁷ and the paramilitary mobilisation of Orange Order. These massive mobilisations of unionism under the aegis of the Anti-Home Rule Movement and with the assistance of the Tory party, were ultimately successful and, following the House of Lords' defeat of the second bill, Gladstone's divided Liberal party was smashed in the 1895 election and a decade of Tory rule ushered in. With their conservative allies in power for the foreseeable future, militant unionism subsided and the febrile political atmosphere abated. Even the return of Gladstone in 1906 failed to ignite the same level of strife as the Liberal party, only recently restored from the ravages of the last bill, had no intention of reviving the issue that so nearly destroyed them. However, the hung parliament of 1910 shattered this delicate balance and in 1912, the third Home Rule Bill passed through the Commons. Although the House of Lords again rejected the bill, their veto, under the 1911

³¹⁴ Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 60.

³¹⁵ Although I recently discovered that he sent a script back to his colleagues in 1930 which was produced the following year, called *Cobblers Go Halves*.

³¹⁶ Forrest Reid, 'Eighteen Years' Work: The Ulster Players', *The Times, Irish Supplement* 5 December 1922.

³¹⁷ David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands: 1912-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 12.

Parliament Act passed specifically for this purpose, was only temporary and Home Rule was set to become law in 1914.

The temporary deferral of what was essentially a constitutional *fait-accompli*, fomented a revolutionary atmosphere in Ulster. The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) was founded on the premise that 'Ulster will fight and Ulster will be Right' and over half a million Northern unionists signed 'Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant' in 1912, committing themselves to use 'all means which may be found necessary' to defeat Home Rule, even if this meant armed resistance against the laws and forces of the British government. The 1912 Covenant crystallizes the reasons for unionist antipathy to Home Rule, regarding it as, 'disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster as well as the whole of Ireland, subversive of our civil and religious freedom, destructive of our citizenship and perilous to the unity of the Empire.'³¹⁸

The mass mobilisation of unionism and the militarism of the UVF ironically inspired the foundation of the nationalist Irish Volunteers, who were conversely committed to securing the implementation of Home Rule. Both revolutionary organisations comprised thousands of men who were well-drilled and, after illegal gun-running operations in Larne and Dublin, well armed. Moreover, the success of both organisations was dependent on the 'subordination of individual choice to communal solidarity':³¹⁹ a dynamic that had devastating consequences for the ULT and the Northern Revival as a whole. The radicalization of Northern society is also reflected in the fact that membership of the Belfast Orange Order expanded rapidly in this period, from 8,834 in 1908 to 18,800 in 1913³²⁰ (as also did the nationalist ranks of the Ancient Order of Hibernians). Alvin Jackson notes the irony that even Sir Edward Carson who, 'had raised loyalist militancy with a view to strengthening his advocacy, had by early 1914 himself become 'the servant of the militants.'³²¹

With the government increasingly powerless to intervene between these powerful paramilitary armies dedicated to different objectives and with sectarian tensions at fever pitch, Ireland seemed set to descend into bloody civil war. Carson and Redmond's political brinkmanship and the mass militarization of nationalists and unionists created an extraordinary pressure-cooker environment, especially in Ulster. This pervasive, oppressive

³¹⁸ Cited in Patrick Buckland, ed., *Irish Unionism, 1885-1923: A Documentary History* (Belfast: H.M.S.O., 1973), p. 224.

³¹⁹ David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands: 1912-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. vii.

³²⁰ See J. R. Archer, 'The Unionist Tradition in Ireland,' *Eire-Ireland* 15:2 (Summer 1980), p. 57.

³²¹ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland, 1798-1998* (Oxford, 1999), p. 155, 50.

atmosphere is superbly recorded in Frankfort Moore's novel *The Ulsterman*:

There is only one topic in loyal Ulster today; it is in the air: we breathe it. We can no more refrain from discussing Home Rule than people who are living on the side of an active volcano can refrain from making an occasional remark upon the rumblings underfoot or the sulphurous fumes overhead. When we were shut up in Ladysmith with the Ulsterman who held the prestige of England in the hollow of his hand, some good people thought the time an opportune one for starting a society for the study of philosophy. At the first meeting a shell threw about a ton of earth over the philosopher, and the meeting dissolved before the first resolution was out. It was decided, after that, that it would be advisable to postpone the discussion of the systems of Descartes and Kant until the Boers had exhausted their bombs. What do people aboard a sinking ship talk about? [...] They don't as a rule bother themselves about the pictures at the Royal Academy, or the laboured jocularities of Bernard Shaw.³²²

This fictional account of the rapid deterioration of the Northern situation, its increasing political volatility and its vitiating repercussions of this culture of crisis on the artistic environment of Belfast resonates with ULT member Joseph Connolly's personal reminiscences of this particular period:

From about 1911 and 1912 and with the development of the Carsonite volunteer movement, the 'atmosphere' of Belfast perceptibly changed [...] there was a sense of tension and a more careful and discreet attention to the expression of views and opinions.³²³

The journalist, and ULT member, James Winder Good also describes the dangerous atmosphere engendered by the mobilisation and militarization of Ulster society, whereby Carson's appearance at political demonstrations was customarily greeted with celebratory salvoes of gunshot. This lawless, martial atmosphere in the city was not confined to political meetings, but very much part and parcel of the Belfast's wider *mise en scène*:

It became the fashion for half Belfast to go about its business and its pleasure with a revolver in its hip pocket, life was more exciting than it is in Albania or in a mining town as shown in cinema films of the wild and woolly West. I have seen a drunken Volunteer reeling home on a Saturday

³²² F. Frankfort Moore, *The Ulsterman: A Story of To-Day* (London: Hutchinson 1914), p. 121-2.

³²³ Connolly, *Memoirs*, p. 80.

night blaze furiously at a street lamp; and at hotly contested football matches a goal would be greeted by a salvo of revolver shots from the spectators which would send mud and gravel spurting up almost under the feet of the players.³²⁴

In such a volatile and violent atmosphere, politically provocative theatre was virtually impossible. Moreover, with the ULT now safely harboured in the commercial port of the Opera House and staffed with many new members who knew little, and cared less, about the Theatre's political ideals and origins, it was not surprising that they decided to 'skate over' provocative topics, or that a 'certain timidity, a reluctance to try experiments' crept into the company.³²⁵

This 'timidity' is graphically illustrated by the theatre's failure to produce what was arguably one of the finest plays written in these years, Joseph Campbell's *The Turnout*. A short piece, Campbell's play is distinguished by the savagery with which it depicts a conflict often idealised in Irish theatre and history: the 1798 Rebellion. Portraying the tragic involvement of the Presbyterian Maxwell family in '98, *The Turnout* reveals how the egalitarian ideals of the United Irishmen were drowned in internecine bloodshed. The Maxwells are already bitterly divided when the play opens, the daughter Ruth condemning the 'treachery' of her father and brother for fighting against the Crown, whilst her mother defends their decision with a violent absolutism, 'Moderation's a poor thing [...] you won't beat England with the whites of eggs.'³²⁶ The rancorous slanging between the mother's republicanism and the daughter's anti-Catholicism dramatises both the internal conflict between secular and sectarian strands of Ulster Protestantism, and the wider external conflict between unionism and nationalism in the contemporaneous political context. The violent discourse of both termagants is then sharply contrasted with the etiolated exhaustion of their menfolk upon their return from the battlefield, broken in body and spirit, 'I'll say no more to you woman, for I'm tired and broken.'³²⁷ As the tide of battle outside turns in favour of the Crown and Yeomanry ransack the countryside for fleeing rebels and fire rebel homesteads, their recriminations gradually subside as their fate becomes inexorable.

Both poetic and brutal, *The Turnout* is a remarkable play as, sustained by Campbell's

³²⁴ Good, *Ulster and Ireland*, p. 268.

³²⁵ Read, *The Times, Irish Supplement* 5 December 1922.

³²⁶ Joseph Campbell, *The Turnout*, in *The Irish Review*, (August) 1912, p. 331.

³²⁷ Campbell, *The Turnout*, p. 334.

masterful control of tension, its powerful narrative drives the play to its savage conclusion. Moreover, it is an unflinching portrayal of political and religious divisions that punctures the romance of 'glorious '98' with the reality of sectarian bloodshed. At one point, a gored Yeoman, bleeding heavily, enters the homestead, his blood-spattered arrival anticipating the later stage entrance of O' Casey's dying soldier in *The Plough and the Stars* as another brutal supernumerary reminder of the gap between gallous stories and dirty deeds. The absolutist language of the play, its unflinching depiction of violence and divisions of an Ulster Protestant household combine to present an effective anti-romantic representation of the 1798 Rebellion and provide a potent commentary on the current condition of Ulster (and Ireland). *The Turnout's* exemplary combination of aesthetics and politics fulfilled both the political and literary aspirations of the ULT. Although written the same year as MacNamara's extravaganza, it is symptomatic of the changed priorities of the Theatre that while *Thompson* gloried in the gilded splendour of the Opera House, *The Turnout* was quietly published in a magazine, but never produced.³²⁸

Many years earlier at Ardriagh, the haunted, melancholic figure of Roger Casement, still suffering from the after-effects of malaria contracted in the Congo, exclaimed before the budding members of the ULT, 'Ye are all broken reeds.' Campbell later confessed to have been haunted by this phrase, finding it 'cryptic in the light of after events',³²⁹ and it reverberates in the final, despairing words of the father in *The Turnout*. With the rebellion crushed, his family riven, and Yeomen torching their home, he cries out 'A broken reed David, a broken reed.'³³⁰ In these closing lines of a forgotten play, we may find a poignant epitaph for the loss of the spirit of Ardriagh and the ideals that founded the Ulster Literary theatre.

Postscript on ULT: 1916

Bulmer Hobson, the co-founder of the ULT, reminisces that the company 'kept quite clear of the political feuds of Belfast, its satires on all sides had good humour and wit and drew good houses.'³³¹ However, all was not what it seemed as the following - and hitherto

³²⁸ Joseph Campbell, *The Turnout*, in *The Irish Review*, (August) 1912, p. 317-335.

³²⁹ Joseph Campbell, 'Northern Autobiography', p. 94.

³³⁰ Joseph Campbell, *The Turnout*, p. 335.

³³¹ Margaret McHenry, *The Ulster Theatre in Ireland*, p. 83.

ignored - excerpt from Forrest Reid's account of the Theatre suggests that the reality was much more fraught:

in 1916 that split in the group which seems to be inevitable in the growth of all such enterprises occurred, and several of the leading actors, among them, it is to be regretted, Mr James Hodgen, resigned. Yet even before this, one had an uneasy feeling that things were not quite as they had been.³³²

Reid's gnomic reference to underlying tensions and differences evidently related to political and religious divisions, given his citing of 1916 as the year in which these internal tensions came to the fore. His cryptic, elliptical allusions to inherent strains within the movement are not mentioned in any accounts of the Theatre. They are absent from Bell and Mengel's surveys and even Kennedy's commemorative broadcast on the ULT was evasive on the issue, with only a passing reference to 'the hardening of political feeling'³³³ before proceeding to reminisce with surviving members of the ULT.

It is, however, indisputable that 1916, a year of symmetrical 'blood sacrifices' for diametrical opposed causes, represents an epochal date in Ulster and Irish history. Historian David Fitzpatrick incisively outlines the similarity of these 'blood sacrifices' and how they became interpolated within the mythopoeic narratives of nationalism and unionism:

The emotive power of both episodes lay in their affirmation of personal courage untainted by pursuit of self-interest – the essential rhetoric of liberation. The victims acquired the sanctity of martyrs, whose willing sacrifice instilled a stronger faith in to the living [...] By venerating the dead of 1916, the survivors joined them as part of history's procession.³³⁴

In 1916, Belfast's enormous industrial and manufacturing power was fully deployed behind the British war effort and political divisions between pro- and anti-Home rulers were temporarily suspended until the bloody events of 1916 sundered sympathies once more. The events and effects of the Easter Rising need no further exposition here, save to mention that the historiographical narrative of the Rising usually concentrates on its transformation of Sinn Féin's fortunes and the concomitant collapse of the IPP as republicanism supplanted

³³² Forrest Reid, 'Eighteen Years' Work: The Ulster Players', *The Times, Irish Supplement* 5 December 1922.

³³³ Kennedy, *Enter Robbie John*, p. 40.

³³⁴ David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands: 1912-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 61-2.

constitutionalism in the post-1916 period. However, 1916 was equally significant in terms of another political transformation, this time in relation to Ulster's politics, although this fact is often overlooked or fleetingly footnoted. In the North, the majority of families, especially in Belfast, had members fighting in the Great War (indeed, one of the last scraps of information on the mysterious disappearance of David Parkhill states that he had enlisted and was driving an ambulance in France). Pearse's 'heroic sacrifice' was regarded by Ulster unionists as heinous treachery, an act of terrorist insurgency that conclusively proved the ineluctably irredentist and unregenerate nature of Irish nationalism. This feeling was intensified when, ten weeks after the Rising, the slaughter at the Somme gave shape to a loyalist blood sacrifice that would politically pledge the red hand of Ulster to the British state.

One small indication of how the Easter Rising changed utterly the political situation in Ulster can be explored in relation to St John Ervine, the Ulster Protestant playwright who was, at that time, director of the Abbey Theatre. Ervine had been a Fabian nationalist Home Ruler, but had later become increasingly unionist in his views. Although he was the *bête noire* of the Irish-Ireland movement, he was culturally broadminded enough to call himself Irish. Ervine was appalled by the Easter Rising and scathing about the insurgents including numerous Abbey actors and playwrights,³³⁵ being especially vehement in his contempt for that 'damned dago'³³⁶ deValera, which helped to precipitate a mutiny in the Abbey company and ultimately forced Ervine to resign. Soon after, he enlisted in the British army and fought in Flanders, where he lost a leg. The 1916 Rising and the Great War transformed Ervine from a fairly liberal unionist into a fanatical loyalist, who excoriated the 'Eirean darkness' of the Free State and expired on his deathbed with an 'almost pathological hatred of the rest of Ireland.'³³⁷ His conversion is particularly relevant in the context of evaluating the work of the ULT in the North.

1916 then is the year that bookends 1898 and, like 1898, was a year of tectonic significance for the North's future political landscape. As the protracted executions of the 1916 signatories and indiscriminate internment turned the tide of opinion in the capital, building a tidal surge of support for Sinn Féin, the groundswell of popular opinion failed to

³³⁵ Indeed Hugh Hunt records that 'Ervine regretted that 'Helga', the British gunboat which shelled the insurgents into submission, did not blow the Abbey to pieces, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre 1904-1979*, p. 111.

³³⁶ Cited in Christopher Fitzsimon, *The Abbey Theatre, Ireland's National Theatre: The First 100 Years* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), p. 43.

³³⁷ John Boyd, 'St John Ervine, a Biographical Note', *Threshold*, 25 (Summer 1974): 112.

reach Northern shores, even amongst the nationalist community. This was clearly demonstrated in the pivotal 1918 election- the most important in modern Irish history - which swept Sinn Féin to power and paved the way for the War of Independence, its fratricidal fallout and the Partition of Ireland. In Belfast, Sinn Féin's candidate for West Belfast (the only constituency in the city able to return a nationalist candidate), was Eamonn deValera no less. He was humiliatedly crushed by the election of Joe Devlin, of the constitutional Irish party, who won with a massive majority. The 1918 electoral map is one of the most striking manifestations of how 1916 transformed the political landscape of Ireland, and this anomaly of political geography again reflects, in the words of the co-founder of Sinn Féin and the ULT, 'the peculiar and difficult condition in Ulster.'³³⁸

The events of 1916 in the capital and the continent had a deleterious effect on the Northern Revival and destroyed what Alvin Jackson evocatively terms the 'politics of consent':³³⁹ a form of politics only recently resuscitated in the form of the Good Friday Agreement. It was this consensual, inclusive language that the ULT had sought to develop in order to bridge divisions within Ulster and between North and South.

In an interview, many years later, when questioned on the 'confused history' of the ULT, Rutherford Mayne was remarkably candid in his response:

[D]on't forget that even to the end – ten or twelve years ago – we were always under a bit of a cloud [...] After all, when you've a flaming nationalist like Bulmer Hobson or Joe Campbell, or Francis Joseph Biggar [*sic*] as a member of your society, it takes lot of explaining away. There wasn't much of Caesar's wife about us – even at the start. And that suspicion – although it wasn't always apparent – meant a good deal more than most of us cared to admit. But the suspicion was there – all the time.³⁴⁰

Thus, *The Enthusiast* not only embodied the early political philosophy and cultural practice of the ULT, but provides a poignant epitaph for the demise of the theatre, as the 'miserable suspicion' indicted by *The Enthusiast* appears to have invidiously infected the ULT itself, and to have persisted to the present day.

³³⁸ Bulmer Hobson, *Ireland: Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Tralee: Anvil Books Ltd., 1968), p. 21.

³³⁹ Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History 1800-2000* (London: Phoenix, 2003), p. 202.

³⁴⁰ 'The Bellman' (pseud. Larry Morrow), 'Meet Rutherford Mayne', *The Bell* 4.4 (1942): 246.

Chapter 5: Geography & Regionalism

'we must strive to cultivate everything that is most racial, most smacking of the soil, most Gaelic, most Irish, because, in spite of the little admixture of Saxon blood in the North east corner, this island is and will ever remain Celtic at the core.'

Douglas Hyde, 'The Necessity of De-Anglicizing Ireland' 25 November 1892.

'The humour would be broader, the consciousness of the make-believe finer, and the self-analysis more biting and evident, and it is here that Rutherford Mayne scores as a dramatist of the first order. He gives the touch of canniness and seriousness to situations almost farcical which at once creates an atmosphere and gives you Ulster as apart from any other part of Ireland.'

Frances, 'Five O Clock Tea Talk', *T.P.'s Weekly*, 16 February 1912, cited in Robert Hogan. *The Abbey Theatre: The Rise of the Realists 1910-1915* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979), p. 227.

The Southman is often a charming companion for holiday making or mountaineering, but the Northman excels in a day's work and as a builder of bridges¹

James Logan, *Ulster in the X-Ray: A Short Review of the Real Ulster, its People, Pursuits, Principles, Poetry, Dialect and Humour* (London: Arthur H. Stockwell, c1923), p. 41.

(Re-)Mapping Irish Theatre Criticism

*'Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of the colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss of the locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must hereafter be searched for and somehow restored. Because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, the land is recoverable at first only through the imagination.'*¹ (Edward Said)

*'National identities are co-ordinated, often largely defined, by 'legends and landscapes'; by stories of golden ages enduring traditions, heroic deeds, and dramatic destinies located in ancient or promised home-lands with hallowed sites and scenery [...] Landscapes, whether focusing on single monuments or framing stretches of scenery, provide visible shape; they picture the nation.'*² (Stephen Daniels)

The work of postcolonial scholar Edward Said consistently emphasises the 'primacy of the geographical element'³ in the colonial encounter and his work investigates both its insidious presence in imperial literature and its explicit influence in the ideology of anti-colonial movements which sacralise the imperative of territorial reclamation. Significantly, in spite of the recent recourse to postcolonial theory evident in Irish Studies over the past decade or more - and the central significance of place, space, and displacement in Ireland's colonial experience - the dominant methodology of Irish criticism has ironically been a temporal one though one could argue that a spatial, geographical hermeneutic is equally important, not to mention apposite. However, in spite of Said's seminal influence in shaping Irish criticism and the symbolic centrality and space in Irish culture and politics, the application of a geographical, as opposed to historicist, materialism has only recently been attempted by a number of Irish scholars.

One concussive cultural consequence of colonialism is the way in which geography and landscape operate as imaginative and ideological sites of conflict between imperial powers and decolonising nationalist movements. As Scott Brewster has noted, territorialising tropes are 'deployed both in colonialist discourse and in cultural and political nationalism: these competing projects of mapping could take the shape of the Ordnance Survey or the idealisation of the West in the Revival.'⁴ They were equally important to the civic, secular nationalism pioneered by the Ulster Literary Theatre in its

¹ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 271.

² Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 5. For a more specific examination of how this applied in relation to Ireland, see C. Nash, 'Embodying the Nation: The West of Ireland Landscape and National Identity' in M. Cronin and B. O'Connor, eds., *Tourism and Analysis* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993).

³ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 271.

⁴ Scott Brewster, *Ireland in Proximity: History, Gender, Space*, p. 125.

exploration and articulation of an Ulster identity that was separatist not secessionist in nature. This is an important distinction, especially in view of the way that the imaginative *topos* of Irish literature and landscape has been distorted by the geo-political facts of Partition, so that regionalism is later construed as a declaration of autonomy, (if not of unionism). However, the ULT's regionalism was irreducibly nationalist in nature. Its articulation of Ulster vernacular, its local settings; both urban or rural and the spatialized cultural politics first developed in *Ulaid* and successfully transposed into theatrical practice (in its representation of lived experience in Ulster) are all fundamentally connected to the ULT's complex engagement with place and space. If the ULT's pluralist portrayal of different, dissonant but coexisting communities instead of a specious notion of political, racial, or religious homogeneity (and conformity) is to be fully appreciated, then the importance of space and place must be examined in detail.

Geographer Brian Graham argues that, 'the relationships between the island's geography and culture are fundamental to understanding the confusions and contestations of identity that fracture its peoples', and moreover that these relationships, 'are equally critical to the formulation of any structures that might lead to an eventual resolution of the conflict.'⁵ The past four decades of political conflict euphemistically dubbed the 'Troubles' with its killing fields along the border and in urban centres of Belfast and Derry where terraced streets are segregated into sectarian territories separated by 'peacewalls', have reopened older fault lines of Ireland's history. Yet, it is the 'spatial turn' affecting postmodern studies rather than the territorial nature of the Troubles, that has had the most important impact in shifting the landscape of Irish Studies where 'issues of history have traditionally taken precedence over issues of geography.'⁶ Recently, a number of publications have begun to redefine the field: *Ireland in Proximity: History, Gender, Space* eponymously indicates the inclusion of this new theoretical paradigm, whilst Jim McLoughlin's ground-breaking *Re-Imagining the Nation-State: The Contested Terrains of Nation-Building* (2001), applies a geographical, as well as historical, methodology in its examination of Irish nationalism. McLoughlin convincingly argues the need for a place-centred approach to the study of nationalism; one that recognizes the role geography plays in the formation of nation states. Similarly, *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination*, the most recent publication by Gerry Smyth, one of Ireland's

⁵ Brian Graham, 'Ireland and Irishness: Place, Culture and Identity', in, *In Search Of Ireland: A Cultural Geography* ed. Brian Graham, (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 2.

⁶ Liam Harte, *The Irish Times* [Weekend], 3 November 2001.

most prominent post-colonial theorists and critics,⁷ reconstitutes space as a conceptual term within contemporary cultural, literary, and historical studies in Ireland, reflecting not only the new emphasis on 'spatiality' in cultural theory and social sciences, but relating it to the shifting terrain of Irish Studies.

Smyth and McLoughlin have pioneered this fieldwork, but there has been no effort by theatre scholars to apply a similar spatial hermeneutic as a theoretical-methodological framework for their own examination of Irish theatre.⁸ There is a triple irony in this. First of all, as theatre theorist, Una Chaudhuri, argues the essential element in all theatrical representation is space and her work investigates the complex, contradictory interplay between place, space, and representations of place 'that the theatrical apparatus makes possible',⁹ (indeed, her study forms part of a larger methodological debate within Theatre and Performance Studies in terms of examining the geography, as opposed to the history, of theatre).¹⁰ Secondly, the politics of space, place and landscape pervade Irish criticism as territorial tropes and spatial metaphors, but in spite of being regularly deployed in literary and dramatic criticism, they remain routinely decoupled from their conceptual, theoretical and disciplinary moorings in the cultural and political geography. Thirdly, in spite of this pervasiveness of spatial and geographical metaphors, the politics and representation of place and space of the North - where borders, boundaries and territories are most bitterly contested - have usually been examined with regard to the post-1969 period and in relation to Partition,¹¹ but not in the crucial period between 1890-1922 and the emerging contours of the cartography of political and cultural nationalism of the Irish Revival.

In this chapter, I will examine the geographical imaginary of the ULT and the regionalist politics they developed and defined: a position that was neither parochial nor provincial, but informed by a profound understanding of the North's culture and society and by their realization that there could be no wholesale identification with, or

⁷ Gerry Smyth, *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination* (London: Palgrave, 2001).

⁸ Perhaps the single exception to this is Michael McKinnie's examination of a site-specific performance of *Convictions*, 'The State of this Place: *Convictions*, the Courthouse, and the Geography of Performance in Belfast', *Modern Drama* 46:4 (Winter 2003): 580-597.

⁹ Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. xi.

¹⁰ See also: Michal Kobtarka, 'Inbetweenness: Spatial Folds in Theatre Historiography', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 5:2 (1991): 85-100; Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); *Modern Drama* 46:4 (2003) Special Issue on Space and the Geographies of the Theatre.

¹¹ Clare O' Halloran, *Partition and the Limits of Irish Nationalism: An Ideology Under Stress* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1987); Joe Cleary, *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel and Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15-50; 97-141.

interpellation within, the meta-narrative of nationalist ideology promulgated and performed on the 'national' stage in Dublin. The ULT's work consistently critiqued essentialized and essentializing discourses of nationalist ideology which excluded the North from its imaginative mapping of 'Irishness'. Moreover, I would argue that the continuing neglect of this issue in historiographical scholarship of Ireland's national theatre and the cultural nationalism of the Revival is deeply problematic, given the patent failure of *both* to be 'inclusive of all the inhabitants of the territory which is claimed as congruent with its cultural aspiration'.¹² Most studies of the Revival's political nationalism and cultural practice deconstruct a series of binary oppositions sustaining it, configured in terms of the capital/Connaught, urban/rural, Gaelic/English, but offer no examination of the North-South relations/representations. Even one of the most recent 'revisionist' texts examining Irish theatre in the Revival period reinforces this narrative:

Even in the nationalist movement, the Irish people were divided along many political and cultural lines: Catholic Irish versus Anglo-Irish; urban versus rural folk; Irish speakers versus English speakers; those who sought a purely Irish nationalism versus those who sought a cosmopolitan Ireland with close ties to Europe. Issues of class and gender further complicated the nationalist picture.¹³

It is extraordinary that a study eponymously emphasising itself as a fresh *re*-examination of 'national theatres' ignores North/South division: a cleavage which led to the ultimate sundering of Ireland, and unleashed divisions far deeper than those caused by class, gender, language; whether one lived in Rathmines or Roscommon, Dalkey or Drumcondra. As mentioned earlier, there are more important axes to grind in terms of the relationship between North and South as opposed to East and West. After all, the spatial symbolic binary signified by the watery border of the Shannon pales (with all that term connotes) in comparison with the difference demarcated by the drumlins of Ulster. Nevertheless, scholarly attention has been fixated on the way the West was idealised and has never focused on why the North was ignored.

In this chapter I will examine relations between North and South and explore how Ulster was ineluctably 'Other' to much of the political rhetoric, cultural politics and dramatic representation of Revivalist nationalism and drama in this period. I will then

¹² Graham, 'Ireland and Irishness', *Search of Ireland*, p. 2.

¹³ Mary Trotter, *Ireland's National Theatres: Political Performance and the Origins of the Irish Dramatic Movement* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001), p. 4.

consider the ULT's efforts to write the North back into 'the imaginative record of the nation',¹⁴ concentrating on the work of Rutherford Mayne and the regionalist politics espoused in the ULT's literary organ, *Ulad*. Before this, I would like to illuminate these discursive issues through a discrete analysis of the production and reception of Yeats' seminal play, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* in Belfast and Dublin. By exploring the national and local geographies of performance of what has long been regarded as *the* founding play of modern Irish drama, I hope to highlight the inherent difficulties of any theatre movement aspiring to be truly 'national': an issue confronted by the ULT who redressed this problem with their own regionalist vision.

Local and National Geographies of Performance: *Cathleen ni Houlihan* in her Fourth Green Field

*'I can't imagine the Dublin Irish Literary Theatre appealing so intimately to an audience as their brothers here in Belfast manage to appeal to us. And the explanation is not far to seek. [...] I should fancy that in these revival movements, literary and other, you must be local before you can hope to be national.'*¹⁵ (The Leader, 1907)

*'Be National. Put yourself in the way of that great wave that is certainly breaking across the country. If we are not with it, we will be of no account [...] We have achieved the nation and the Nation is about to become self conscious.'*¹⁶ (Padraic Colum)

*'Local experience mediates national identity.'*¹⁷ (Anthony Cohen)

Theatre history is suffused by an immanent sense of loss, ghosted by the spectral presence of past performances as the *liveness* of theatre can never be recuperated or represented, but remains ineluctably absent and ineffable, beyond the positivist purview of its written wor(l)d. Nevertheless, for theatre historians, reviews and criticism are never merely material ephemera that recall the lost evanescence of live performance, but vital artefacts that assist their imperfect efforts to empirically and imaginatively reconstruct the theatrical past.

My research on the ULT is largely dependent on such traces of the theatrical event, especially as many of their plays were never published. Indeed, fifty years ago, a historian

¹⁴ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), p. 194.

¹⁵ 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *The Leader*, 30 November 1907 (my italics).

¹⁶ Letter from Padraic Colum to Fay, following the Theatre of Ireland's split from the Abbey, imploring him to seek some sort of *rapprochement*, cited in Robert Hogan, Richard Burnham, and Daniel P. Potect, *The Abbey Theatre: The Years of Synge, 1905-1909* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1978), p. 186.

¹⁷ Anthony P. Cohen, *Belonging: Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Cultures* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 1982), p. 13.

researching the same subject, reflected that all that remained of some plays was 'a fugitive line in the memory of the players'.¹⁸ Often, reviews are the only historical residue that remains of their work and these provide tantalising textual traces of plots, performances, scenography, action and responses to plays that would otherwise have disappeared completely. Of course, while theatre scholars, in particular, must always be wary of wholly positivist approaches to the theatrical past,¹⁹ reviews remind us of another crucial fact: that performances and their reception are always *local* phenomena, and so can partially help us map the local contours of the 'human geographies' that affect and inflect the production and reception of theatre.

Reviews appearing in the Belfast press and the ULT's journal *Ulad* in the early 1900s reflect these local human geographies but, more importantly, reveal a rupture between the local and national sphere that is elided in Irish theatre historiography. In Belfast, canonical productions of the nascent Irish 'national' theatre, such as *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, played before unreceptive, deeply ambivalent audiences, dramatising the disparity between its 'imagined community' and that of Dublin. This disjuncture is significant because it challenges the dominant theories and methodologies traditionally used by theatre scholars in their examinations of the hegemonic political formation of the Irish national theatre. Frequently such analyses focus on *national* theatre as an institution, as opposed its *live* performances and the *local* conditions that determine the reception of its work, particularly outside the capital.²⁰ Although the co-founder of the Irish national theatre, W.B. Yeats professed that 'All art is national,'²¹ it nevertheless remains true that theatrical performance is always local for it is dependent on the temporal and spatial contingencies of live performance. Like Yeats, many theatre scholars have preferred to ignore this vital epistemological feature of theatre in favour of drama.

Local reviews of performances by the national theatre in Belfast remind us of this paradox and reveal the limitations of applying Benedict Anderson's seminal theory of 'imagined communities' to analyses of nationalism and national theatres. Anderson's

¹⁸ David Kennedy, *Enter Robbie John*, p. 38.

¹⁹ See Tracy C. Davis, 'Questions for a Feminist Methodology in Theatre History', *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, eds., Thomas Postlewait & Bruce A. McConnachie, (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1989), pp.59-81; 'Towards a Postpositivist Theatre History,' *Theatre Journal*, 37(December 1985): 465-86.

²⁰ This is at belatedly being redressed by the work of the Irish Theatrical Diaspora: a research network dedicated to examining the production and reception of Irish Theatre on tour, which it has explored in relation to Ireland, England and America in three conferences since 2004.

²¹ W.B. Yeats, *Uncollected Prose*, Vol. 2, eds., John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson (London: MacMillan, 1975), p. 141.

theories, like those of Eric Hobsbawm,²² investigate nationalism on a macro level as a global, historical phenomenon, a process and product of modernity wherein the local sphere is subsumed by the grand narrative of the nation. But this theoretical privileging of 'big nation' nationalism ignores the impact and influence of the local sphere in shaping or mediating ideas of nationhood and nationness.²³ Furthermore, given that nationalism is a fissile political ideology, especially in countries like Ireland where localism has an extraordinarily powerful and pervasive influence on the socio-geographic formulation of identities, it is all the more important that the role of the local, and its relationship to the national, be considered.

Accordingly, I wish to examine nationalism and national theatre on a micro level in relation to the North of Ireland and will parallel the political ideology of nationalism with the dramatic praxis of the Irish national theatre movement to show how the local and the national are not commensurate, or even complementary spheres. I will also argue the importance for scholarly analyses of theatre's role in the larger cultural processes of nation/state formation to recognise that the philosophy and praxis of the Irish 'national' theatre were often undermined by its local reception in regions resistant to its centralised nationalist narrative. This will be explored in relation to the rejection of the nationalist meta-narrative of the national theatre by local audiences in Belfast and assessed in the context of the perforce emergence of the ULT's regionalist agenda, which sought to elasticise the essentialist paradigm of national identity promulgated by Revivalist cultural nationalism that was unable (or unwilling to) recognise the North's regional differences.

²² Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²³ One of the richest tropes and traditions in Irish literature is the artistic fixation with the local sphere; its landscape, language, placenames, folklore, heritage and history. This tradition stretches back to ancient Irish *dinnseanchas* and is present in the work of many contemporary writers, most notably Seamus Heaney. With regards to the North, it is interesting and illuminating to compare the ULT's connection to place and space with the earlier tradition of Ulster's Protestant weaver poets, whose work also expressed a profound sense of communion with the local, as in the words of poet John Hewitt, (who self-consciously fashioned the same tradition to forge his regionalist poetics and philosophy) each of the weaver poets 'was proud to wear the name of his place, his village, or more commonly his townland, like a honourable title: Orr of Ballycarry, Porter of Moneyslan, Herbison of Dunclug [...] and to feel that in his writing he was performing a socially necessary act.' John Hewitt, 'The Arts: Literature, Drama, Music', in *Ulster Since 1800: A Social Survey*, eds. T.W. Moody, J.C. Beckett (Belfast: BBC, 1957), p. 207. The ULT literally saw themselves as 'performing a socially necessary act', and indeed, a contemporary parallel dramatising this gravitational power of the local is evident in Frank McGuinness' *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, as its cast of eight soldiers, drawn from throughout Ulster ostensibly under the unifying banner of their British identity, remain fiercely proud and protective of their own townlands of Coleraine, Belfast, Enniskillen, and Derry, a loyalty to locality that belies how their identity is bound up with territorial as well as tribal imperatives.

'The Gap of the North': National and Northern Theatre

From the outset, the ULT sought to act as a satellite movement in orbit of the Irish National Theatre Society (INTS) and in 1902, Bulmer Hobson and David Parkhill travelled to Dublin to discuss with their Southern counterparts the possibility of co-producing *Cathleen ni Houlihan* in Belfast. Yeats' coldness towards their project and point-blank refusal of permission to perform his play, and Maud Gonne's hilarious reversal of his edict, is an established anecdote of the ULT's origins, but this is used simply to accentuate the comic outcome of Hobson's choice *en route* home to Belfast, 'Damn Yeats - we'll write our own plays.'²⁴ The significance of this encounter, however, lies not in Yeats' alleged 'antipathy to all things Ulster',²⁵ but in the fact that the two Northerners had to travel to Dublin to request the INTS tour to Belfast in the first place. Their request, and near rebuff, is symptomatic of a wider Southern ellipsis of Ulster in its self-fashioning of national identity and proleptic of the problematic relationship between North and South that prefigures - and fissures - the emergence of a singular coherent nationalist ideology and political state.

Although Belfast was firmly fixed in the theatrical touring circuit of the period, was host to a burgeoning Northern dimension of the Revival and was the largest city in Ireland at the time, it remained beyond the pale of the Revival's cultural consciousness as the contrapuntal complexities of Ulster could not be accommodated within its essentialist configuration of national identity. Therefore, whilst the West had become an idealised stock *mise en scène* of the national theatre, the North was ignored; an imbalance reflected in 'national' tours of the INTS. In the rather ironically titled, *Towards a National Theatre*, Frank Fay fulsomely recounts how the Irish Literary Theatre toured extensively 'outside Dublin' listing theatres in Cork, Waterford, Wexford, Galway, Loughrea, Longford, Dundalk -- London (four times), Manchester (twice), Glasgow (three times), Edinburgh (twice), Aberdeen, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Hull, Cardiff, Leeds, Liverpool, Oxford, Cambridge.²⁶ The theatres of Newry, Belfast, and Derry were not part of this circuit; their absence suggestive of a more general imaginative failure to envisage the North in the nation. Indeed, long after the ULT was founded and had even performed in the Abbey, the 'national' theatre had still not performed in Belfast. As one disgruntled local critic remarked:

²⁴ Bell, *The Theatre in Ulster*, p. 1.

²⁵ Bell, *The Theatre in Ulster*, p. 2.

²⁶ Frank Fay, *Towards a National Theatre: The Dramatic Criticism of Frank J. Fay*, ed., Robert Hogan (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1980).

It took the Abbey Players a long time to nerve themselves for a raid north of the Boyne. They tackled London, Manchester, and Cambridge light-heartedly enough, but they seemed to imagine Ulster was still as fiercely hostile to a Southern invasion as when Cuchulain guarded the passes against the hosts of Queen Maeve, and that above all it would have no truck with Greeks who came bearing gifts.²⁷

Even after the foundation of the Free State and the formal establishment of the Abbey as the 'national theatre', this trend continued. In 1929, in a letter to the Abbey's solicitors, Sean O'Casey claimed that he had 'urged the Abbey theatre to include Belfast in their activities, but no notice was taken of my suggestion.' He also refers to the fact that the Abbey, 'had "The Plough and the Stars" for three years, and, as far as I know, never proposed playing it in Belfast till they heard it was going to be played by the Irish players.'²⁸

During the Irish Revival, however, this neglect of the North and apparent unwillingness to cross the proto-partitionist border is interesting as it reveals that the national theatre was not only remiss in representing the North, (or at least recognising its differences), but unwilling to include Ulster within the imagined community of its 'national' tours. This omission has important implications for any examination of the national theatre's involvement in the processes of nation-state formation and problematizes the tendency of theatre scholars to generically apply Anderson's concept of 'imagined community' in their analyses of this phenomenon.

As one of the most influential theories of nationalism, Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' maintains that heterogeneous, geographically dispersed individuals are united across 'homogeneous, empty time' through the agency of print capitalism into singular, national collectives.²⁹ Thus, the combined forces of capitalism and print culture enable heterogeneous communities to congeal and coalesce. The application of this theory by theatre scholars in their studies of national theatre, however, fundamentally elides the epistemological conditions of theatrical *performance* which has none of the fixity or stability of print, but is an ephemeral, experiential phenomenon

²⁷ 'Grand Opera House', *Northern Whig*, 5 April 1910.

²⁸ O'Casey made his request to the Abbey directors after receiving a letter from the Belfast based Rosano Players who had written to O'Casey to request permission to perform his play. *The Letters of Sean O'Casey 1910-1941*, Vol. 1, ed., David Krause (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 352-3.

²⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 32-3.

determined by spatio-temporal contingencies.³⁰ Paradoxically, this means that theatre can never fully be national for performance will always be local: a national theatre can only imagine its community, extend its constituency, and convert its citizens in those places where it actually performs. Furthermore, when the national theatre *did* perform in regional venues it frequently encountered recalcitrant local audiences, ironically unleashing the fissiparous energies of nationalism that led to the formation of regional theatre companies such as the Ulster Literary Theatre and the Cork National Theatre Society who contested the Abbey's right to represent the nation.³¹

Cathleen Ni 'Hoolihan' in her 'Fourth Green Field'

What Baz Kershaw refers to as the 'widespread nervousness among theatre historians and critics about making claims for the efficacy of performance'³² has not been the case for Irish historians vis-à-vis *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. Yeats' play is axiomatically adduced to be *the* defining moment of modern Irish theatre: the apotheosis of cultural nationalism and political decolonization; dramatic midwife to the birth of an independent state. Its Northern premier in 1902, however, was a less than auspicious occasion. It took place in Belfast, (in spite of Yeats' censure), thanks to the assistance of INTS actors Dudley Digges and Maire Quinn who helped their Northern counterparts produce it alongside Belfastman James Cousins' *The Racing Lug*. Contemporaneous reviews make interesting reading, revealing local audiences to be ambivalent, even alienated by Yeats' *chef d'oeuvre* whilst they warmed to the local Ulster idiom of Cousins' play. Although Hobson had hoped to use the theatre as a 'vehicle of propaganda'³³ *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* fundamentally failed to ignite nationalist opinion, as the play, which had roused such seditious sentiment in the South, was sedately received in Belfast as poet and ULT member Joseph Campbell recalled: 'On the whole, the mood was a static one.'³⁴ Another ULT member, playwright Gerald McNamara, laconically observed:

³⁰ This paradox was explored by Christopher Morash in 'Can Theatre be National?: Theatre, Theatre-History, and the Nation-State', an unpublished paper given at, 'Archives, Historiography, Politics' Conference at NUI Galway, November, 2001 and reworked in 'The Road to God Knows Where: Can Theatre be National', *Irish Theatre on Tour* eds., Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash (Dublin, Carey'sfort Press, 2005), pp.101-115, see 104-6. See also Mark Phelan, 'The Critical "Gap of the North": Nationalism, National Theatre, and the North', *Modern Drama* 47:4 (Winter 2004): 594-606.

³¹ See Morash, *History of Irish Theatre*, pp. 274-76.

³² Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 21.

³³ Bell, *Theatre in Ulster*, p. 3.

³⁴ Campbell, 'Autobiography', p. 85.

The Belfast Public [...] were [*sic*] not taken with *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. Ninety-nine percent of the population had never heard of the lady - and cared less; in fact someone in the audience said that the show was going 'rightly' till *she* came on.³⁵

This indifferent reaction of Northern audiences to the most significant stage entrance of modern Irish drama hilariously highlights the differences between the local spheres of Belfast and Dublin. *Cathleen ni Houlihan* was an epochal moment in Ireland's political and cultural history and in sharp contradistinction to the North's ambivalence was the shocked reaction of Stephen Gwynn³⁶ upon seeing the play in Dublin: 'The effect of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* on me was that I went home asking myself if such plays should be produced unless one was prepared to go out to shoot and be shot.'³⁷ Indeed, the play's author was troubled by the same thoughts many years later, famously expressed in his poem, 'Man and the Echo', 'Did that play of mine send out certain men the English shot?'³⁸ For nationalist P.S. O'Hegarty, the play was 'a sort of sacrament'³⁹ and the rapturous response of actress Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh is frequently invoked:

How many who were there that night will forget the Cathleen ni Houlihan
of Maud Gonne, her rich golden hair, willow like figure, pale sensitive face,
and burning eyes, as she spoke through the closing lines of the Old
Woman turning out through the cottage door.⁴⁰

Even extreme nationalists like D.P. Moran were impressed by the play's propagandist politics. His paper, *The Leader*, (temporarily) ceased its coruscating criticism of the Irish Literary Theatre, commending it for the way *Cathleen* 'appealed to the people' and for creating 'a nucleus of a national drama.'⁴¹ Such a review articulates the differences of reception in Belfast and Dublin while indicating the difficulties that lay ahead, given the fissile potential of the word 'national' in Irish politics.

The indifference of Belfast audiences to 'Cathleen's call' was not a purely plebeian response. Urbane figures like playwright Rutherford Mayne and novelist Forrest

³⁵ MacNamara, cited in Bell, pp. 3-4.

³⁶ Stephen Gwynn was a key figure in the Revival: he invited the ILT to England for a tour in his capacity as secretary of the Irish Literary Society and co-founded Maunsel and Co. publishers in 1905 along with George Roberts and Joseph Maunsel Hone, a firm which became one of the key props of the Revival.

³⁷ Cited in Norman A. Jeffares and A. S. Knowland, *A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats* (London: MacMillan, 1975), p. 512. W.B. Yeats, *Collected Poems* (London: 1961), p. 393.

³⁸ W.B. Yeats, *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 393.

³⁹ Cited in Ó Broin, *Protestant Nationalists in Revolutionary Ireland*, p. 41.

⁴⁰ Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years: Recollections of Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh; As Told to Edward Kenny* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1955), p. 19.

⁴¹ 'Chanel', 'Irish Drama and Literary Drama', *Leader*, 12 April 1902.

Reid, were equally nonplussed; the former perplexedly recalling, 'I'm afraid I didn't quite catch what Yeats was at.'⁴² Their confusion reflected the play's lack of popular purchase on Belfast's public imagination. Rutherford Mayne surmised his confusion over Yeats' message may have been due to the fact that 'the audience seemed to take it as a sort of rather funny peasant play.'⁴³ Indeed, a similar response had been elicited from audiences during the original performances of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* in Dublin, as Yeats remarked in letters to Lady Gregory: 'Its one defect was that the mild humour of the part before Cathleen came in kept the house in such a state of delighted laughter, that it took them some little while to realize the tragic meaning.'⁴⁴ Yet, a couple of days later, he was able to record that 'The audience now understands *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and there is no difficulty in getting from humour to tragedy,'⁴⁵ a transition largely stage-managed by reviews in the nationalist press which helped audiences to 'read' the production for its 'correct' political message. As theatre historian and theorist Marvin Carlson has pointed out, reviews can have an important, if overlooked, function in providing audiences with different reading strategies for decoding the theatrical event and consequently contribute to the emergence of theatrical formations.⁴⁶

As Bill Ashcroft remarks of postcolonial literature, 'Every colonial encounter or "contact zone" is different, and each "post-colonial" occasion [...] needs to be precisely located and analysed for its specific interplay.'⁴⁷ The demographic and socio-geographical contours of the 'contact zone' of Belfast and Ulster were very different from the rest of Ireland and, consequently, any examination of the 'specific interplay' of theatrical production and audience reception must identify and evaluate these influences. The material forces underpinning Belfast's historical, socio-economic and cultural formation meant that it had little of the capital's (relative) religious/political homogeneity and this profoundly affected the dynamics of theatrical production and reception in the city. The citizens (and audiences) of both cities had been conditioned differently so that their 'horizon of expectations'⁴⁸ could never completely converge, as was evident from the contrasting reactions of local audiences in Belfast and Dublin to *Cathleen's* call. Even

⁴² Mayne, *Enter Robbie John*, p. 6.

⁴³ Rutherford Mayne, *Enter Robbie John*.

⁴⁴ Cited in Hogan and Kilroy, *Laying the Foundations*, p. 15.

⁴⁵ Cited in Hogan and Kilroy, *Laying the Foundations*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ Marvin Carlson, 'Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performance', *Interpreting the Theatrical Past*, pp. 95-6.

⁴⁷ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 10.

⁴⁸ The set of historically, psychologically, and culturally conditioned assumptions / conventions implicit in the verbal meaning of a text or the interpretive strategy of a reader.

the nationalist *Irish News* recognised this reality and, on the occasion of the Abbey's first performance of *Cathleen* in Belfast in 1908, stated 'Mr Yeats's work would scarcely be expected to appeal to a Belfast audience with the same force as it would with a Dublin gathering.'⁴⁹

Audiences are invariably constituted (and conditioned) as 'interpretative communities' before they enter the theatre, engendering them with expectations that position them before they even engage with the theatrical spectacle. As Herbert Blau notes, 'an audience without a history is not an audience.'⁵⁰ Northern nationalists, therefore, confronted a more complex colonial climate than their Revivalist compatriots in the capital. The religious and socio-cultural complexity of the North meant that some strains of Southern nationalism were not only ineffective, but woefully inappropriate. For instance, Douglas Hyde's desideratum 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland'⁵¹ sounded dangerously racist to Northern ears and was as impractical in Ulster as the harridan Houlihan's desire to 'put the strangers out of the house.'⁵² The ULT could little afford to extirpate audiences that were already hard enough to come by in Linenopolis. Thus, adverse local conditions of Belfast enervated much of the 'performance efficacy'⁵³ of the national theatre's repertoire and rhetoric, as revealed by the lacklustre reception of Yeats' *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and the ULT's later attempts to ape his Celticist peasant drama. It was apparent to that a different response was needed; one which would reflect and respond to local conditions.

⁴⁹ 'Visit of the Abbey Players: a Notable Performance' *Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 3 December 1908.

⁵⁰ Herbert Blau, 'Odd, Anonymous Needs: The Audience in a Dramatised Society', *Performing Arts Journal*, 10.1 (1987): 34.

⁵¹ 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland', in *The Revival of Irish Literature: Addresses by Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, Dr George Sigerson, Dr Douglas Hyde* (London: Fisher Unwin 1894). See Joep Leersson, *Remembrance and Imagination* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 190.

⁵² W. B. Yeats, *Kathleen Ni Houlihan*, in *Modern Irish Drama* ed., John P. Harrington (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 9.

⁵³ 'Performance efficacy': the potential for performance to ideologically change or transform its audience is a term coined by the theatre theorist Baz Kershaw in his examination of political, alternative and community theatres in *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London: Routledge, 1992).

Ulster as 'Other': Regional Modernity Vs Revivalist Modernism

*'The holy Luthers of the preaching north.'*⁵⁴ (J.M. Synge)

*'The North is not so "black" as it is painted.'*⁵⁵ (Nina Boucicault)

In Chapter One I examined how Belfast emerged from the nineteenth century as a scientific, industrial and technological city, a position which posed considerable problems for Northern nationalists given the profound antipathy to science and modernity⁵⁶ that largely characterized the Irish Revival and nationalist cultural politics in this period. John Wilson Foster's work has done much to recuperate and re-evaluate the cultural history of Irish science⁵⁷ and he makes an incisive connection between industrial 'aesthetics' of the late nineteenth century and one avant-garde strain of modernism: the Futurism propounded by Marinetti and its celebration of speed, technicism and the 'reign of the machine'⁵⁸ as touchstones of the new modern age. As essayist and Ulsterman James Winder Good observed, Belfast was 'a Futurist fantasia that would have delighted Marinetti.'⁵⁹

Futurism's celebration of the interdependence of man and machine, combined with Marinetti's advocacy of technology, speed, war, all of which underpinned the cultural and nationalist politics of Italian imperialism also had a certain purchase in Belfast. After all the city that had constructed the *Titanic* made what many cultural critics later hailed as *the* iconic symbol of modernity: the manifest apotheosis of 'the machine age', and established Belfast as the scientific, mechanical and modernist capital of Ireland. There were qualities inimical with the nationalist discourse that was becoming increasingly hegemonic in Dublin. What Deane defines as 'the presiding opposition' underpinning the Revival, 'between a "spiritual" Ireland and a "mechanical" England'⁶⁰ completely breaks down in the North where the city once acclaimed as 'the Northern

⁵⁴ John Millington Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*, in J.M. Synge's *Plays, Poems, and Prose* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1954), p. 116.

⁵⁵ 'Miss Nina Boucicault in Belfast', *Barrington-Baker Scrapbooks*, vol. 1, p. 125.

⁵⁶ See Greta Jones, 'Catholicism, Nationalism and Science,' *Irish Review*, 20 (1997): 47-61; Gordon Hernes Davies, 'Irish Thought in Science,' in Richard Kearney ed., *The Irish Mind: Exploring Intellectual Traditions* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1985), pp. 295-310; John Wilson Foster, *Recoveries: Neglected Episodes in Irish Cultural History, 1860-1912* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2002), p. 7.

⁵⁷ Significantly, two-thirds of *Recoveries*, Foster's superb re-appraisal of the history of Irish science, is (necessarily) Belfastcentric in focusing on this aspect of nineteenth century cultural history.

⁵⁸ See John Wilson Foster, *The Age of Titanic: Cross-Currents in Anglo-American Culture* (Dublin: Merlin Publishing, 2002), 26, 30-1; 35; 167; 169.

⁵⁹ Good, *Ulster*, p. 253.

⁶⁰ Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, p. 94.

Athens' had transformed itself into 'a monument to Victorian self-help'⁶¹ inhabited by the 'economic man' of Victorian textbooks:

there is probably no city of the same size in the Three Kingdoms which retains so much of the spirit of the early Industrial Revolution, with its childlike faith in the gospel of salvation by machinery and its glorification of the man of business as the real saviour of society.⁶²

Ulster may once have been the home of Cuchulain and the Red Branch heroes of the Celtic twilight, but the modern Calvinist conurbation of slums and shipyards, factories and foundries of its capital, sprawling forth from the banks of the Lagan's 'filthy modern tide', was a reality wholly incommensurable with the Revivalist constructions of nation enacted on the stages of Dublin.

The North's commercial, materialist modernity was anathema to Yeats and incompatible with the profoundly anti-modern, anti-material, and anti-urban precepts of the Revival. So much so that John Wilson Foster caustically classifies 'contempt of Ulster' as one of four structuring principles of the Revival's paradigmatic construction of Irishness, the others being: love of land and special status of the peasant, the special status of the artist, and respect for the aristocratic class. Significantly, all of these were rejected by the ULT. Foster's allusion to Yeats' 'disdain for Ulster [...] with its nasty undisguised urbanism of Belfast, its filthy industrialism, its contemptible Protestant low-church non-conformism'⁶³ certainly resonates with Sam Hanna Bell's description of Yeats' 'antipathy for all things Ulster'⁶⁴ and is further reinforced by an unpublished letter written to Maud Gonne in 1938, in which he mocks Northerners as, 'a horrid lot. Who, within our borders, would sour all our tempers.'⁶⁵

John Francis Taylor Q.C., whom Yeats acclaimed the best orator he had ever heard, inveighed against the iniquities 'of the Protestant Ascendancy and Unionist Ulster' and proclaimed:

⁶¹ A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Ulster Crisis* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), p. 44.

⁶² Good, *Ulster*, p. 256.

⁶³ John Wilson Foster, *Colonial Consequences: Essays in Irish Literature and Culture* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1991), p. 253.

⁶⁴ Sam Hanna-Bell, *Theatre in Ulster*, p. 2.

⁶⁵ This is one of 400 letters owned by Anna MacBride White (Maud Gonne's Daughter) drawn from a fifty year correspondence between Yeats and her mother Maud that were sold to Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, in 2003. This particular fragment was quoted by John Harlow, 'Letters Reveal the Pain of Yeats's Platonic Love', *The Sunday Times* 9 February 2003.

There is nowhere in Ulster where a gleam of national kindness is to be seen [instead there is] gloom, hate, and bigotry [...] Wherever English people have come they blended with the people [...] but these unthinkable Scotch, why indeed were they kept upon the planet?⁶⁶

Robbie Meredith confirms that leading architects of the Revival, like Lady Gregory and Yeats, endured a troubled relationship with the North and notes that both sought to decouple the 'geographical signified'⁶⁷ from folklore so that Yeats could claim 'a woman from the North would probably be a fairy woman [...] and certainly not necessarily at all a woman from Ulster.'⁶⁸ Thus fairies were more amenable to Revivalist rhetoric than 'Nordies'.⁶⁹ Similarly, Lady Gregory surmised: 'knowledge of charms has usually come from the North, but the North may be taken to mean any strange unfamiliar place.'⁷⁰ Her description of a 'strange unfamiliar place' appears apposite, as this was often the experience of Belfast shared by many Southerners, as is especially evident in popular travel literature of the period. For example, the alienation and antipathy to Belfast of ardent nationalist William Bulfinn, who recorded his experiences of cycling across Ireland, are made abundantly clear in *Rambles in Erin* (1902):

Belfast [...] repelled me. As I stood within it I asked myself was I in Ireland [...] I saw churches of all denominations, Freemason and Orange lodges, wide streets, towering smokestacks, huge factories, crowded traffic. And out of the water, beyond the Custom House, dimly seen through the smoke and mist, rose some huge shapeless thing which I found to be the shipbuilding yard where some 10,000 men were hammering iron and steel into great ocean liners [...] in the shadow of a great vibrating towering clanging factory I stood once more and looked for some signs of Ireland [...] it is not an Irish city...simply the creation or the outgrowth of a state of things completely un-Irish [...] it seemed to have a foreign complexion. Its methods, its enthusiasms, its outlook [...] its idealism was anything but

⁶⁶ Cited in Dudgeon, *Black Diaries*, p. 168.

⁶⁷ Robbie Meredith, 'The Shan Van Vocht: Notes from the North', in *Critical Ireland: New Essays in Literature and Culture*, eds. Aaron Kelly and Alan A. Gillis (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), p. 174.

⁶⁸ W.B. Yeats, *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland*, vol. 2 (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), p. 343, cited Meredith, 'Notes', p. 174.

⁶⁹ A derivative moniker used to refer to natives of the North of Ireland.

⁷⁰ Lady Gregory, *Poets and Dreamers: Studies and Translations from the Irish Including Nine Plays by Douglas Hyde* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1974/1903), 274. An amusing incident in the memoirs of the actress Cathleen Nesbitt reflects some light on this matter. She recounts seizing an opportunity to fulfil her ambition of becoming an actress at a fortuitous lunch with Lady Gregory, her nephew and Sir Hugh Lane. Gregory was discussing the forthcoming Abbey tour of America and the company's lack of understudies, especially a young female actress, prompting Nesbitt to volunteer her services and pronounce her knowledge of all the Irish parts. Gregory, initially seemed unconvinced given Nesbitt's accent: 'Are you Irish?' she asked doubtfully. 'Oh yes,' replied Nesbitt a fact she *proves* by proceeding to 'recite a part of *The Playboy* in my best Kerry brogue.' Cathleen Nesbitt, *A Little Love and Good Company* (London: Faber, 1975), p. 54.

Irish [...] There is no Irish geniality about Belfast street life. It is cold, austere, rigid, grim.⁷¹

This profound sense of dislocation and estrangement must have, in part, stemmed from the brutal reality of Belfast's alterity from the Revival's ideological and aesthetic representations of 'Irishness'. Denis Ireland noted that his native city was (in)famously 'forbidding for the stranger or the theatrical in third rate lodgings',⁷² and others shared Bulfinn's antipathy to Belfast, even after the briefest of visits: Tim Healy declared to the House of Commons, 'I know nothing whatever about Belfast. I only spent twenty four hours there in my life, and they were the most unhappy twenty four hours I ever spent.'⁷³ Belfast's accents, architecture, atmosphere, and outlook, let alone its deviant political unionism and different religious demography, made it incompatible with the Revival's essentialised and simplistic counter-hegemonic narrative of nationhood. In *The Truth About Ulster*, Frankfurt Moore also touches upon this remarkable disjuncture, anecdotally recalling the following exchange:

"Is it possible that we are in Ireland?" a distinguished stranger exclaimed, when I had shown him some of the wonders of this city. And that is just what everyone is ready to ask on arriving in Belfast from Dublin. Of course, the only answer is: "No; we are in Ulster now."⁷⁴

The reality of Belfast's scientific, industrial, and technological modernity not only defamiliarized the North from nationalist rhetoric, but operated as an internal Other to the Southern-based Irish Revival's self-fashioning of 'national' identity and concomitantly assisted political unionism's ideological self-fashioning. Belfast's manufacturing prowess and proficiency, in an age underpinned by the *telos* of technological accomplishments and scientific progress, became imbricated within the mythology of the Protestant work ethic, and were crucially important in the formation of

⁷¹ William Bulfinn, *Rambles in Etireann*, vol. 1 (London: Sphere Books Limited, 1981), p. 89; 94. Writing after Partition, Sean O'Faolain's *An Irish Journey* radiates a similar sense of alienation: 'One felt that nothing could, indeed, come out of that nineteenth century Sunday sleep, and the red factories and grey buildings, and the ruthlessness with which the whole general rash of this stinking city was permitted to spread along the waters of the Lough but the bark of rifles and the hurdle of paving stones and the screams of opposing hates [...] what else could be germinated there but the revenges of the heart against its own brutalisation [...] There is no antostocracy – no culture – no grace – no leisure worthy of the name. It boils down to mixed grills, double whiskies, dividends, movies and these strolling, homeless, hate driven poor.'

⁷² Denis Ireland, *From the Irish Shore*, p. 1.

⁷³ Cited in Michael Laffan, *The Partition of Ireland, 1911-1925* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press, 1983), p. 16.

⁷⁴ Cited in Patricia Craig, *Belfast: An Anthology*, p. 331.

unionist identitarian paradigms in this period: the pragmatic, industrious, rational 'Ulsterman' as opposed to the Celticised 'Irishman.'

Examples of these stereotypical identities are legion. James Logan labels 'The Southman' as 'a charming companion for holiday-making or mountaineering, but the Northman excels in a day's work and as a builder of bridges.' He describes the Ulsterman as, 'a man of action rather than of speech'; he is punctual, practical, businesslike, blunt, fair, honest, independent, dutiful, loyal, law-abiding, anti-literary, industrious and has, 'less grace [...] less guile' than Southerners. In support of these claims he cites Lord Leverhulme's observation that, 'character in nations is at its best in highest latitudes and degenerates as we near the equator.'⁷⁵ Such characterisations, though crude, were pervasively held and contributed another stock character to the *dramatis personae* of Irish theatre: the 'Stage Ulsterman', a figure who has received much less critical attention than his 'Irish' cousin.

As David Kennedy observes, this character arrives rather late on stage, 'we have to wait till the twentieth century for the appearance of the stage Ulsterman in the limited sense of an inhabitant of the north-east corner of the island whose speech and thought are coloured by an infusion of Lowland Scots Calvinism.'⁷⁶ Elsewhere, Ulster author Hugh Shearman describes the stage Ulsterman as:

more specifically, a stage Belfastman. According to this mythical interpretation of the Belfastman, he is a "dour" person; he is wholly occupied with making money; his religion consists of objecting to the religion of other people; he is devoid of "culture", and Belfast has only two bookshops.⁷⁷

Although we can trace the origin of the Stage Ulsterman back to *The Famous History of Captain Thomas Stuckley* (1570), ex-docker, poet and playwright, Thomas Carnduff, records how this stereotype later evolved into racist, reductive shorthand for loyalist identity on the Irish stage:

It is in the sphere of drama that the Belfast Orangeman has allowed himself to be most misrepresented by characterisations which are neither credible nor true to life. The Orangeman on the Irish stage is generally depicted as a cheap tavern knight, a braggart, with an aptitude for beating a drum instead of a big opponent. He and his fellow

⁷⁵ Logan, *Ulster in the X-Rays*, p. 41.

⁷⁶ David Kennedy, 'Drama in Ulster', *The Arts in Ulster: A Symposium* ed. Sam Hanna Bell, (London: George G. Harrap, 1951), p. 51.

⁷⁷ Shearman, *Ulster*, p. 159.

countryman, the Ulster 'Servant Man', generally supply the comic position in Irish plays. Even Sean O' Casey's Orangemen in 'The Shadow of a Gunman' represents the half-drunken, bragging, hide-under-the-table-when-the-row-begins type [...] Occasionally when I travel down to Dublin to watch the 'Abbey' put across what is supposed to be a Northern play I come away with a sore head. I feel like shooting the entire cast, including the producer. Why does the Southerner not try to understand us, I think, rather than exploit this tomfool idea of national superiority.⁷⁸

As Carnduff notes, notions of 'national superiority' cut both ways and it was not an entirely facetious question during the Revival period for Shane Leslie to ask, 'can Eire claim the descendants of that dour and undrifting people, whose Aye is Aye and whose Nay is Nay? – Whereas in the Irish language there is no word for Yes and No?'⁷⁹ One of the few leading figures of the Revival who had any sympathetic engagement with the North was AE, an 'Irishman in whom the qualities of North and South were so perfectly balanced',⁸⁰ and who originally hailed from Lurgan.⁸¹ AE's nationalism was informed by the nationalist leader Charles Gavan Duffy, who considered himself to be an 'Ulsterman' first and foremost, and who attacked Southern assumptions that Ulster was, 'the enemy's territory; a territory where Nationality could only appear under some decent disguise.'⁸² AE imagined Ireland in inclusivist terms, arguing that 'Irishness', if anything, was a composite identity. In responding to the question, 'what do we hope to make of Ireland?' he envisaged a 'race marriage' commingling what Duffy described as 'the finer qualities of the Celtic family' with the 'sterner strength of the North.'⁸³ As a mystic visionary,⁸⁴ AE appealed for synthesis, whereas Belfast solicitor, antiquarian, and enthusiast, F.J. Bigger, appealed for sympathy. In 'An Interesting Lecture to the Irish Literary Society of London' reported in *The Irish News*, he appealed to his Southern

⁷⁸ Thomas Carnduff, 'Belfast', *The Bell* (June 1942): 269; 273. See also Gillian McIntosh, *The Force of Culture: Unionist Identities in Twentieth Century Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), pp. 51–2; 157; 221; 222.

⁷⁹ Shane Leslie, *The Irish Tangle for English Readers* (London: MacDonald & Co., 1946), p. 153.

⁸⁰ Forrest Reid, *Private Road*, p. 135.

⁸¹ AE spent most of his literary and political career in Dublin after leaving his native province and observed, 'I have never been sufficiently grateful to Providence for the mercy shown to me in removing me from Ulster.' Cited Eric McElroy, 'George William Russell (Æ) 1867 – 1937', in *Journal of the Craigavon Historical Society* 8.2 (April 2005) <http://www.geocities.com/craigavonhs/rev/mcelroyrussell.html> accessed: 2.10.2005.

⁸² Charles Gavin Duffy, *My Life in Two Hemispheres*, p. 1.

⁸³ Charles Gavin Duffy, 'What Irishmen May do for Irish Literature,' *The Revival of Irish Literature: Addresses by Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, Dr. George Sigerson, Dr Douglas Hyde* (London: Fischer Unwins, 1973), p. 19.

⁸⁴ It is interesting to note that AE's mysticism was disapproved of by fellow artist Jack Yeats, who thought it exercised a baleful influence on his younger brother William. Eric McElroy notes that Jack Yeats' back-handed praise of AE as, 'a saint – but born in Portadown' was both 'geographically incorrect' and reveals 'an intolerance often found among Southern intelligentsia to "the hub of the north"'. McElroy, 'George William Russell', <http://www.geocities.com/craigavonhs/rev/mcelroyrussell.html> accessed: 2.10.2005.

compatriots to understand Belfast's difficulties and insisted that just as Belfast had once led Ireland in 'patriotism and enlightenment of thought and action', the city would again 'lead the way' in Ireland as:

the people of Belfast are now for the first time for many years dwelling upon the hopes and aspirations and sentiments of the other portions of the country with a considerable amount of sympathy, and as they do they should be encouraged and assisted in the effort – for it is an effort – and it would be very well if the other portion of the country would strive as far as in them lies to view – sympathetically view – the peculiar situation of the inhabitants of Belfast, their education, their sentiment, and their hopes.⁸⁵

Nine months later the ULT staged their first productions which sought to further promote Southern understanding and sympathy for the 'peculiar situation' of their Northern compatriots.

The Geographical Imaginary of the ULT

*Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography.*⁸⁶ (Edward Said)

*'Nations [...] are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence upon an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role.'*⁸⁷
(Timothy Brennan)

*'The regionalism of the Northern dramatists corresponds with a definite condition of Irish geography [...] The Ulster playwrights are entitled to be considered apart from their southern contemporaries, even when they have not been identified specifically with the literary movement in Belfast.'*⁸⁸ (Ernest Boyd)

Boyd's brief reference to the ULT's geographical provenance and character suggests that they should be considered 'apart from' their contemporaries in Dublin, but I consider it more productive to examine their regionalism in relation to the Revivalism of their Southern counterparts. In highlighting this relationship between geography and regionalism, Boyd causally connects the former to the different development of Northern drama. However, the spatially distantiative language he uses – 'the Ulster

⁸⁵ 'Interesting Lecture by Mr F.J. Bigger to the Irish Literary Society of London', *The Irish News*, 22 March 1904.

⁸⁶ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 6.

⁸⁷ Timothy Brennan, 'The National Longing for Form', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 49.

⁸⁸ Ernest Boyd, *The Contemporary Drama of Ireland*, pp. 170-1 (my italics).

playwrights are entitled to be considered *apart from* – echoes the eponymous Otherness of another Southerner's later effort to engage with the North, as Dervla Murphy's *A Place Apart*, a 'geographical and psychological travelogue' of Ulster, radiates explicitly the Otherness implicit in Boyd. Both suggest that the North's difference stems from much more than a mere 'condition of Irish geography', an inference especially evident in Murphy's book, written after Partition and the Troubles had further estranged the 'Black North' from the rest of Ireland.⁸⁹

Boyd's claim that the ULT's regionalism stemmed from territorial, physical and environmental realities (whilst true) is only partially correct as this materialist observation obscures the equally important ideological role that cultural and imaginative geography of Southern nationalism, (which had little room for the *mise en scène* of Ulster), played in the *perforce* formulation of the ULT's regionalism. Seamus Heaney tangentially touches upon this connection between the imaginative geography of literature and the cartography of political nationalism in a recent essay, which refers to the importance of localities and literature in representing and *reproducing* nations:

The political arrangement which incorporated Northern Ireland into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was not one allowed for in the envisaging minds of the writers of the Irish Literary Revival. Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory constructed an imagined place that gave eternal life to Gaelic country people of the west and their Anglo-Irish lords and ladies, while Joyce made a divine comedy out of the urban tumult of Dublin. So, both Joyce and the Revivalists, in their different ways, prepared cultural paths for the political facts of Irish independence; and indeed when that independence came it included only those constituencies whom the writers of genius at the turn of the century had written into the imaginative record. The Irish Free State was from the start coterminous as a demographic and geographic entity with the *textual Ireland* of Joyce and the Revivalists – the Ireland, that is, of urban Catholicism, rural peasantry and those of the Protestant ascendancy and the professional classes who were prepared to stay on after the Union Jack came down.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Dervla Murphy, *A Place Apart* (London: Penguin, 1978) Quotation taken from back cover of the book. Significantly, the description/ definition of Northern Ireland as a 'place apart' was also given to it by a BBC journalist struck by the otherness of an Orange march on the twelfth of July: a parade celebrating the 'Britishness' of its participants in what was ostensibly part of the United Kingdom, but which for the British viewer was a bizarre, and estranging encounter. Thus, the North's difference is constructed distinctly 'other' in both British and southern Irish definitions of 'national' culture and identity. See George Boyce, 'Northern Ireland: A Place Apart?', in Eamon Hughes, *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland 1960-1990* (Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1991) 13. Also Hughes' stated remit for the overall book is for its contributors to consider Northern Ireland as a 'place apart from' the rest of Ireland.

⁹⁰ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), pp. 194-5 (my italics).

By tracing the literary co-ordinates of 'textual Ireland' and mapping them onto the geopolitical contours of partition, Heaney highlights Homi K. Bhabha's correlation between nation and narration, whereby nationness is a form of 'social and textual affiliation'.⁹¹ Joe Cleary has also noted that numerous artists involved in the national struggle in the Revival and Counter-Revival periods, such as Frank O'Connor, Seán O'Faolain, Seán O'Casey, Liam O'Flaherty and W.B. Yeats, possessed a geographical imagination 'that was distinctively southern'.⁹² Yet, crucially, as Brennan states above, the imaginative literature of a nation plays an essential role in state formation for it reflects (and reproduces) the larger cultural and political fiction of the nation: a function all the more important for colonized countries in their struggle to assert their independence from imperial powers. In the particular case of Ireland, theatre was a crucially important cultural institution in this process, providing a vital public forum for garnering popular support and galvanising audiences into citizens as part of the broader nationalist movement. Indeed, Irish theatre's role in nation building has been universally acclaimed for its success in helping create an independent Irish state. However, I would argue that the theatrical imaginary of the 'national' theatre at the time was inherently partitionist, whereby, as one Dublin critic sardonically observed: 'plays with the scene laid in north-east Ireland are not often seen at the Abbey Theatre'.⁹³

This neglect supports Heaney's claim that the North was beyond the literary pale of the Revival and excluded from the imaginative cartography of cultural nationalism in this period. Indeed, I would even go further and suggest that Ulster almost represented

⁹¹ Homi K. Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation' in *Nation and Narration*, p. 292.

⁹² Joe Cleary, *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 104.

⁹³ Jack Point, 'New Northern Comedy', *The Evening Herald*, 3 October 1913. Moreover, the few plays staged in the Abbey which were set in the North, notably St John Ervine's *Mixed Marriage* (1911) and *The Magnanimous Lover* (1912) confirmed the North's ineluctable urban, unionist Otherness. Andrew Malone notes, 'Dublin criticism was not favourable to the play [*Mixed Marriage*] and when *The Magnanimous Lover* was produced [...] it became quite definitely hostile. The critic of one Dublin paper dismissed the play in a few sentences, with the comment that he was not a 'sanitary inspector.' In fact, such was the critical savaging received by both plays, that it inspired the incandescent Ervine to write *The Critics* (1914), which was set in the Abbey and turned the tables on his enemies who were portrayed as vacuous, egotistical hacks. Malone, *The Irish Drama* (London: Benjamin Blom, 1965), p. 117. This adverse contemporaneous reaction by Dublin critics to Ervine's Northern plays are invidiously endorsed by the historian when Malone later remarks, 'It is only incidentally, and perhaps accidentally, that St. John Ervine is to be regarded as an Irish dramatist.' p.198. It is an evaluation shared by Ernest Boyd, 'It may well be that his reputation in England is assured, for it is to that public he originally addressed himself, his connection with the Irish Theatre, and his interest in Ireland, being, as it were, an afterthought [...] His plays are not Irish [...] they are not the expression of any profound or essential phase of our national life and being. They have neither the poetic, imaginative quality of Yeats or Synge, nor do they bear the imprint of the folk spirit which is in the possession of Padraic Colum and the genuine peasant dramatists. Whatever their respective merits and demerits, all the writers heretofore mentioned have endeavoured [...] to dramatise those elements of our civilisation which are fundamentally and specifically Irish [...] St John Ervine must be counted among the exceptions.' *The Contemporary Drama of Ireland*, pp. 189-191.

an internalised 'Other' for the Revival's constructions of national identity. The apparent paradox of how such a proto-partitionist mentality developed within a cultural and ideological movement dedicated towards achieving national self-determination can perhaps be explained given the immediate exigencies of decolonisation. One historian has suggested that the political imperative of decolonisation and its concomitant drive for political unity meant that Protestant experience, (and, by implication, Ulster), was strategically occluded from nationalist ideology.⁹⁴ This strategic sectarian occlusion meant that Northern nationalists and, in particular, Northern Protestant nationalists, were excluded from the narration of the nation and left to write Ulster's constituencies, in Heaney's evocative phrase, into 'the imaginative record of the nation.'

Consequently, I would contend that the ULT's regionalism stems not from a simplistic causal connection between the provenance of their authors or actors and the work produced, as argued by Boyd and others, but from their recognition of this gulf between Ulster and the rest of Ireland, which was reinforced by the proto-partitionist cultural nationalism of Dublin-based artists and activists, and which was inimical to the realities of lived experience in the North. The ULT realized that if a truly effective decolonising nationalism was to be developed, it would need to reconcile local and regional differences within a more commodious national framework. Consequently, their fixation on space and place in their plays and in *Ulad*, the alternative dramaturgical forms they developed and their critiques of the essentialist pieties of both the Irish Revival and Ulster's sectarian politics were all part of an overall attempt at creating a new form of nationalist politics: one that could equally appeal to Northern Protestants and Catholics, whilst connecting (and communicating) Ulster to the rest of Ireland and the Irish Revival.

Thus the ULT's aesthetics and politics were profoundly different from those of the Irish-Ireland movement as epitomized by D.P. Moran, as well as the Anglo-Irish movement represented by Yeats, Lady Gregory *et al.*, latterly billed by Lyons as the 'battle of two civilisations.' Historical concentration on this ideological collision between different movements within the larger formation of Irish cultural nationalism during the Revival period has inevitably been reductive and has occluded the equally important dynamic of power relations and political struggle in Ulster. In Belfast, another 'battle' was taking place that was even more destabilising, as the chauvinistic nationalism of Joe Devlin⁹⁵ and the Orange-hued sectarianism of unionist demagogues had a deleterious

⁹⁴ George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 387.

⁹⁵ 1872-1934 ['Wee Joe'], born Hamill St., Belfast, educated Divis St. CBS; worked in publishing, then became journalist with *Irish News*, MP, N. Kilkenny, unopposed, 1902; re-established Ancient Order of

effect by further polarizing community relations and political affiliations in the North. This *local* context of a deeply fractured body politic and increasing division in Belfast had a profound, catalytic effect on the *national* position adopted by the ULT. As an alternative to the North's Orange/Green politics, (as well as the reductive remit of Anglo-Irish and Irish-Ireland movements in the South), the ULT proposed an alternative interpretation of Irish identity, mapped to politico-cultural co-ordinates that traced civic, secular contours instead of ethnic, essentialist and exclusivist ones. Their pluralist, hybridized notion of what constituted national identity resonates in Robert Lynd's definition of Irishness:

The 'Real Irishman' is neither essentially a Celt nor essentially a Catholic. He is merely a man who has had the good or bad fortune to be born in Ireland or of Irish parents, and who is interested in Ireland more than any other country in the world [...] The Orange labourer of the north whose ancestors came from Scotland, has all the attributes of an Irishman no less than the catholic labourer of the west, whose ancestors may have come from Greece or from Germany, or from Spain, or from anywhere you care to speculate.⁹⁶

Lynd's rejection of racial, religious or geographical essentialisms as defining 'real' Irishness demonstrates not only a Shavian logic in its levity⁹⁷ but the particular Northern Presbyterian perspective which characterised the ULT's cultural politics and dramatic praxis. This fluid, flexible approach to identity politics stemmed from the conviction that

Hibernians and served as its President from 1905, indefatigably raising subscriptions against clerical opposition; Home Rule MP for West Belfast, 1906-1918, following interval of 15 years; controlled the United Irish League and Board of Erin from 1905; supported Jim Larkin's strike-call in Belfast, 1907; accepted Home Rule Bill for Northern nationalists, 1914; supported Redmondite enlistment in World War I, offered chair of Irish Parliamentary Party, and bowed to John Dillon, 1918; defeated de Valera in West Belfast constituency in 1918 election; acknowledged leader of Ulster nationalists thereafter, signing agreement with de Valera not to contest Sinn Féin candidacies, May 1921; continued to sit in Westminster, leading the Nationalist party there, and did not enter Stormont until 1925, though refused designation of official opposition; First President of National League of the North, est. 1928; MP for Fermanagh and Tyrone at Westminster from 1929, among 11 seats won by Nationalists; led Nationalists out of Northern Ireland Parliament (Stormont) in protest against Unionist Govt., 1932; re-entered Stormont, Oct. 1933; death marked the end of an era for Northern nationalism.

⁹⁶ Robert Lynd, *Home Life from Ireland* cited in Séamas Mac Páirc, 'Protastúnaigh an Tuaiscirt – Gael Nó Gaill', *Feasta* (August 1975): 3-7.

⁹⁷ Indeed, Lynd's attack on such narrow creeds of nationality echoes Shaw's claim that he was, 'a genuine typical Irishman of the Danish, Norman, Cromwellian and (of course) Scotch invasions'. This is not the only connections between both men. Indeed, it is axiomatically inferred that the reasons why Shaw, Wilde and other exiled Irish playwrights entertained irreverently sceptical attitudes towards the sensitive issue of Irish identity was because they shared a detached, dispassionate perspective on relations between Ireland and England: a disposition engendered by the fact they had remained outsiders of each community. However, the similar inside-outside experience and perspective was also shared by in the unionist Ulster by the North's 'white blackbirds': Protestant nationalists like Denis Ireland, Lynd, Hobson, Parkhill, Good, Hughes, Mayne, the Morrises, and others, all of whom developed a political, polemical perspective that was equally coruscating of unionist and nationalist pieties.

Northern Protestants, and the recalcitrant unionist population of Ulster, could not be accommodated - read acculturated - within a Celticist discourse of racial and religious essence; one that denied diversity and homogenised identity with a specious form of racial or ideological uniformity. As simplistic markers of national identity, the ULT eschewed race and religion in favour of a complex, civic, secular nationalism, one opposed to ethnic and exclusivist claims. Its political articulation of cultural citizenship was couched in terms of territorial appeal, to a local sense of belonging and a broader regional feeling of 'cultural Northernness'⁹⁸: an identity distinctly Irish, but nonetheless different from the rest of the island. This appeal to a regionalized 'imagined community', a territorial rather than an ethno-political identity is clearly outlined in the opening lines of *Ulad*:

Ulad means Ulster. It is still often necessary to state as much; we intend to insist. Draw an imaginary line across Ireland from that great bight, Donegal Bay, in the west, to Carlingford Lough, on the east, and draw it not too tightly; north of that you have Ulster This Ulster has *its own way of things*, which may be taken as the great contrast to the Munster way of things.⁹⁹

This mapping of a regional cultural space is indicative not of some latent, proto-partitionist secessionism but of a desire to re-negotiate the fixed cultural co-ordinates of the Revival's imaginative geography; to reassert the importance of the local and regional spheres in relation to the national. Although this decentred, pluralist philosophy may be seen as an expedient solution to apparently insuperable divisions in the North it was, nonetheless, a political ideology self-consciously recalling the ideals of the United Irishmen. They ultimately sought national self-determination, whilst in the process proposing a third way between the absolutist claims of Ulster's divided communities and bridging the gulf between North and South. In 'narrating' this new cultural space of 'Ulster', the ULT developed, or rather drew upon, a civic and secular vocabulary harkening back to the ecumenical enlightened politics of the United Irish movement, which had emerged from the republican principles of Belfast Presbyterians. Recourse to this 'golden age' of Belfast history was a commonplace during the Northern Revival (see

⁹⁸ Richard Kirkland, 'Northern Revivals: Cultural Nationalism and Political Identity in Ulster 1900-1920', Keynote lecture at "'Its Own Way of Things": The Ulster Literary Theatre & Its Legacy Centenary Symposium', Queen's University Belfast, 22 October 2004.

⁹⁹ *Ulad*, 1:1 (November 1904): 1. (my italics).

earlier descriptions of the 1898 centenary celebrations), but the republican heritage of the United Irishmen was tempered by a commitment to regional difference, and even dissent:

North is North and South is South, irrevocably, and though the line of demarcation be not so firmly drawn as that between the Occident and the Orient, it nevertheless demands recognition. Ulster has 'its own way of things'; Belfast differs as widely from Dublin as Madrid from Seville; and for it to ape the South, East or West were every bit as reprehensible as that the people of those districts should continue in the slavish imitation of things English.¹⁰⁰

This declaration, to use the lexicon of contemporary political science, describes an 'Ireland of the regions' and reveals the contrapuntal geographies of culture and colonialism in its recognition of the conflicting imperatives of region and nation. In directly acknowledging the socio-geographic realities that fundamentally shaped Northern consciousness and identity, this statement is remarkably prescient of the cultural narratives and ideological positions developed by later literary and political figures in the North, from John Hewitt's poetic regionalism¹⁰¹ to John Hume's post-nationalist vision.¹⁰² Although some critics claim that an 'appeal to regionalism can easily be construed as an appeal to conservatism, a Burkean sedative to lull the little platoons into a big sleep,'¹⁰³ the historical context and precise politico-cultural formulation of the

¹⁰⁰ Joseph Power, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *Ulster* 1:4 (Sept. 1905): 5.

¹⁰¹ The poet John Hewitt was a central figure in the regionalist movement in Ulster. In a number of important essays such as 'No Rootless Colonist' he expounded his belief that Planters and Gaels, divided by religion and politics, could be united through recognition of their shared history, heritage and landscape. His regionalist philosophy was informed by his socialist politics and his humane vision and manifested itself in his exploration of Ulster's folk traditions, geography, placenames, the vigour of its speech and the vestigial power of local myths and legends: 'as a region and not as the symbol of any particular creed, can, I believe, command the loyalty of every one of its inhabitants. For regional identity does not preclude, rather it requires, membership of a larger association.' (John Hewitt, 'No Rootless Colonist', *Ancestral Voices: The Selected Prose of John Hewitt*, ed. Tom Clyde (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1987), p. 125. Although influential, his regionalist philosophy differs from that pioneered by the ULT as it was not recognizably nationalist. Indeed, in the wider context of BBC's policy of regionalization in the post war period with a wider British framework, regionalism can be regarded as the cultural manifestation of political unionism; a movement that sought to legitimate Partition, see John Boyd, *The Middle of My Journey* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1990), p. 205. As such, it was suspect to many of the Catholic minority who were treated as second class citizens within the Northern state, as Heaney observes: 'John Hewitt attempted to write into the imaginative record the Ulster Planters' sense of difference and entitlement by deliberately recognising and affirming the colonial nature of the Ulster Protestant experience [...] Hewitt's move was original [...] but it could not wholly reconcile the Unionist mystique of Britishness with the Irish nationalist sense of the priority of the Gaelic inheritance. Hewitt's regionalism sutured the feeling of possession and independence of the empowered Protestants with their own Parliament and fail-safe majority at Stormont more than it could ever suit the sense of dispossession and political marginalisation of the Catholics.' Seamus Heaney, *Redress of Poetry*, 195-6. See also Heather Clark, 'Regional Roots: the BBC and Poetry in Northern Ireland, 1945-55', *Eire-Ireland: Journal of Irish Studies*, (Spring-Summer, 2003): 87-105.

¹⁰² See Richard Kearney ed., *Across the Frontier: Ireland in the 1990s* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1988).

¹⁰³ Kevin Whelan, 'The bases of Regionalism', in *Culture in Ireland - Regions: Identity and Power*, ed., Pnonsias Ó Dónaill (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1993), p. 13.

ULT's regionalism can be seen to be radical rather than reactionary. I intend to interrogate this radical, regionalist ideology in relation to two of its most obvious manifestations: the geographical and spatial politics of the ULT's nationalism and the dramaturgical model they developed to achieve this and I will explore these in relation to the plays of Rutherford Mayne and Gerald MacNamara.

Mapping the North: Rutherford Mayne

One of the most obvious features of the ULT's work is the distinctly Northern geographical imaginary underpinning its work. Most of their plays were written by local playwrights, set in Ulster, and presented a life and locale that had never been represented onstage before as *Ulad's* abstract mapping of cultural Northernness became visually, physically and orally embodied in the *mise en scène* of the Theatre. The Theatre's first amateurish 1902 co-production with the ILT of James Cousin's *The Racin' Lug* was set in Carrickfergus, a predominantly Protestant town on the Northern coast beyond Belfast and a marginalised geographical location in the cultural nationalist discourse of the period. As a garrison town, it was better known as the landing point for generations of colonists arriving from Britain, as well as being celebrated in the unionist community as the original embarkation point for King William prior to his famous victory of 1690. Indeed, this iconic historical moment is recalled in MacNamara's *Susanne and the Sovereigns*, as Act IV opens on Carrickfergus Quay (see Plate 20) where William and his comically seasick commanders Ginkle¹⁰⁴ and Schomberg,¹⁰⁵ arrive in Ireland, 'thank[ing] heaven for solid earth.'¹⁰⁶ The dramaturgical similarities between Cousin's play and Synge's *Riders to the Sea* have been commented on by a number of critics, who have noted the shared thematic concerns of these plays.¹⁰⁷ Both portray two fishing families who cope with the tragic loss of loved ones at sea with stoic, peasant dignity. However, the broader cultural-geographical contrast between Cousin's fisher folk and Synge's Aran Islanders could not be greater. Cousin's play, as one critic pointed out, presented, 'for the first time' onstage, a Northern Presbyterian family and the fatalism with which they endure their tragedy is distinctly Protestant in its sense of providential inevitability.

¹⁰⁴ Godart de Ginkle (1640-1720) A Dutch compatriot of William who fought at the Battle of the Boyne and later became Earl of Athlone.

¹⁰⁵ Fredenck Hermann Schomberg (1618-1690): a German officer who was William's Commander-in Chief and who died at the Battle of the Boyne.

¹⁰⁶ *Susanne*, p. 74.

¹⁰⁷ See Hogan and Kilroy, *Laying the Foundations*, p. 36.

Following this initial co-production the majority of the ULT's plays are set in the demographically diverse location of counties Antrim and Down, which with their mixed communities and divisive party politics, provide the main *mise en scène* for Northern playwrights.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, Boyd singles out Rutherford Mayne's representations of Co. Down for 'achiev[ing] for the North of Ireland what Synge had done for the West'.¹⁰⁹ This connection with Synge, obscures significant differences between the dramaturgical strategies adopted by both playwrights (explored in the next chapter). Moreover, Synge's relationship with the West of Ireland, as with so many prominent figures of the Irish Revival, was almost that of a spiritual tourist,¹¹⁰ who found in the West an agrarian idyll of peasants living in unity with nature. Luke Gibbons describes how this 'idealization of rural existence, the longing for community and primitive simplicity, are the product of an urban sensibility and are cultural fictions imposed on the lives of those they purport to represent' and that this fiction was invented by 'urban based writers, intellectuals, and political leaders who created romantic Ireland, and perpetuated the myth that the further west you go, the more you come into contact with Ireland'.¹¹¹

Mayne, however, refused to idealise rural life or the myth of the wild West, nor did he (or any other ULT playwright) attempt to invent an Ulster equivalent in the Glens of Antrim. In an earlier chapter I explored how the geographical location of the Glens was mapped within the cultural nationalist cartography of the Northern Revival in the same way that the western seaboard had a special significance (and signification) for metropolitan artists such as Yeats, Gregory and Synge. The Glens provided an historical lifeline to an ancient past for Northern nationalists: its legendary landscape marked the location of myriad myths of the Fianna and Red Branch knights, numerous artists and writers visited, or even relocated there to seek inspiration, whilst the massive 1904 *Féis* of the Glens demonstrated how this specific location became a crucial, cultural space within the imaginative discourse of the Revival. However, although the ULT emerged from the proliferation of nationalist societies of the Northern Revival and although the Glens marked an extremely important space within the cultural politics of the Revival movement, they were neither idealised nor utilised as a politico-scenographic setting for its work, in stark contrast to the way in which the West was represented within the political and cultural nationalism of the Irish Revival.

¹⁰⁸ Significantly, they are also the counties most associated with poet John Hewitt's later field work and his cultural project of Regionalism in the 1940s.

¹⁰⁹ Ernest Boyd, *The Contemporary Drama of Ireland*, p. 178.

¹¹⁰ See Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, p. 57.

¹¹¹ Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*, p. 85.

Ironically, though the traditions, language, and lifestyles of the Glensfolk recalled an older way of life and native authenticity, it was more a liminal, hybridized place than a pure repository of indigenous Gaelic tradition. Its physical proximity to Scotland ensured that the area enjoyed a close affinity with the Scottish coast and its people. A ferry ran between Cushendun and Dunaverty in Kintyre from 1709 to 1833¹¹² and it was often easier to travel to Scotland than to access the rest of the county given the bogs, cliffs and hills that separated the Glens from the rest of Antrim. It is this plurality, this historical commingling of Scottish and Irish influences and traditions, that the ULT placed centre stage in their work and which is particularly evident in Rutherford Mayne's drama.

Mayne (see *Plate 21*) has been treated as a rather minor playwright. As John Killen points out, Hogan's *Dictionary Of Irish Writers* (1979) assesses his work in a page, whilst the *Field Day Anthology* (1991) allots a mere three lines.¹¹³ Wolfgang Zach's introduction to a recent collection of Mayne's plays, pays more attention to the author, but he still remains a rather marginal figure in spite of his considerable body of work and prominence in the ULT. Born in Japan where his father worked as Presbyterian missionary, Mayne returned to Belfast in 1900 and worked at a building contractors before graduating as an engineer in 1907. Two years later, he joined the Irish Land Commission where he worked as a junior surveyor and in 1911 - the year fellow Ulsterman St John Ervine's seminal play *Mixed Marriage* opened at the Abbey - Rutherford Mayne, son of a Presbyterian clergyman, married Josephine Campbell, the Catholic sister of the ardently nationalist brothers John and Joseph, his colleagues in the ULT. That same year, Mayne left Ulster to live in the west of Ireland where he spent the next forty years working on the redistribution of land in the west of Ireland. He 'never again resided in Belfast'¹¹⁴ though he frequently returned and remained involved in Ulster Theatre, writing new plays for them and sporadically acting in their productions.

Mayne's professional career as a surveyor and his experiences working for the Land Commission had a profound effect on the geography of his drama, its engagement with land politics and 'the clan feeling of territory'¹¹⁵ that dominated rural Ireland. Land reforms introduced by the Conservative government with the intention of 'killing Home Rule by kindness', commencing with the Asbourne Act (1895) and culminating in the Wyndham Acts (1903) and its successor in 1909, had enormous repercussions as they

¹¹² Cahal Dallat, *Antrim Coast and Glens: A Personal View* (Belfast: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1990), p. 18.

¹¹³ John Killen, *Rutherford Mayne: Selected Plays* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1997), p. 1.

¹¹⁴ 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *The Dublin Magazine* 31:2 (April-June, 1955): 21.

¹¹⁵ Rutherford Mayne, 'Author's Note', *Bridgehead*, in John Killen ed., *Rutherford Mayne*, p. 159.



Plate 21: *Rutherford Mayne, by John Campbell*
Rutherford Mayne Archive

effectively dismantled the system of landlordism to replace it with peasant proprietary. These legislative reforms had the effect, in Mayne's words, of sweeping 'into land purchase by state aid something like two thirds of the tenancy of Ireland,'¹¹⁶ and his job at the Commission placed him in the front line position of implementing these tectonic changes where he spent four decades mapping, measuring, demarcating and redistributing land:

Survey work is what its name at once indicates. Inspecting and checking the boundaries and areas of farms held by tenant purchasers, together with some other details as regards verifying particulars, as regards who was in occupation of this holding etc. This work took me into every County in Ireland, North, East, South and West.¹¹⁷

As the above suggests, his experiences provided him with rich material for his work. His play *Red Turf* (1911) deals with the lethal repercussions of land lust as two peasant families claim ownership of a disputed bank of turf, whilst his finest play, *Bridgehead*¹¹⁸ (1934) portrays the actual work of the Land Commission in overseeing the redistribution of land. Although both plays are set in the west, the fact that the majority of his work is set in Antrim and Down is significant for these were the most intensively 'planted' counties, the least 'pure' region in Ireland, in contrast to the 'uncontaminated' Connemara hinterland so symbolically central to the Irish Revival.

Another fascinating aspect of the geographical *mise en scène* of Mayne's drama is the complex network of affiliative and conflative attachments to Scotland mapped into his work, as characters' names and speech, 'Ach, man, but yon creature would scunder you,'¹¹⁹ are heavily inflected with Scottish influences. This is especially evident in his most famous play *The Drone*, hyperbolically acclaimed as 'perhaps the finest Irish folk comedy ever written'¹²⁰ in which one of the central characters, Donal Mackenzie, is a young Scottish engineer. The fact that Mackenzie is on holiday in Ulster where he is visiting relations and is warmly greeted, 'Yous are all welcome [...] The Scotch is aye welcome,'¹²¹ directly connects the geographical and genealogical associations of both regions. It is perhaps not until Gary Mitchell's *Marching On* (2000) that the diasporic and

¹¹⁶ Mayne, cited Killen, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Mayne, cited Killen, *Selected Plays*, pp. 3-4.

¹¹⁸ A bridgehead is the name given to a portion of land necessary for entry from already acquired land into an area of newly acquired area land.

¹¹⁹ Mayne, *The Drone*, in *The Drone and Other Plays* (Dublin: Maunsell & Co., 1912), p. 20.

¹²⁰ Richard Hayward, *In Praise of Ulster*, p. 32.

¹²¹ *The Drone*, pp. 21-2.

cultural connection between Scotland and Ulster is as clearly articulated again. The play also renegotiates the North's connection with Britain which, instead of being mapped in imperial terms between London and Belfast, is co-ordinated along economic lines to the new urban cities of northern England and Scotland: industrial centres connected to Belfast in terms of trade, technology, and print culture:

- MACKENZIE: (*Proudly*) We're the sole makers of the Mackenzie piston, if you ever heard of it.
- DANIEL: (*Uneasily*) I'm sorry to say I haven't.
- MACKENZIE: And you call yourself an engineer and you don't know about Donal Mackenzie's patent reciprocating piston.
- JOHN: (*Apologetically*) You see we be a bit out of the world here, Mr Mackenzie.
- DANIEL: Yes. Now that's one point. One great point that always tells against me. (*Getting courageous*). It really needs a man to be continually visiting the great engineering centres – Greenock, London –
- MACKENZIE: (*scornfully*) London's not an engineering centre – Glasgow, Hartlepool, Newcastle –
- DANIEL: Well all those places. He could keep himself posted up in all the newest ideas then, and inventions.
- MACKENZIE: But a man can keep himself to the fore if he reads the technical journals and follows their articles. What technical papers do you get? Do you ever get the Scottish Engineers' Monthly Handbook, price sixpenth monthly? I'm the writer on the inventors' column. My articles are signed Fergus McLachlan. Perhaps you've read them?¹²²

This affiliative web of associations with Scotland is further fortified by ubiquitous references to hard work, thrift, industry, practicality, entrepreneurship, qualities associated with the Protestant work ethic¹²³ which would resonate with Ulster (and Scottish) audiences, revealing Mayne's recognition of Scotland as a cognate region that had richly infused the cultural formation of Northern identity. Indeed, much of *The Drone's* comedy stems from this connection, especially in the excruciating confrontation between the eponymous 'drone' Dan Murray, a work-shy, wannabe inventor with a workshop full of newspapers and empty whiskey bottles, and Mackenzie, the personification of Victorian practicality and industry, who claims: 'There's not much about machinery that I dinna ken, Mr Murray, from a forty thousand horsepower

¹²² Rutherford Mayne, *The Drone*, pp. 24-5.

¹²³ Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002)

quadruple expansion engine doon to a freewheel bicycle,'¹²⁴ and who comically interrogates the hapless Drone on the operation and precise specifications of his fictitious invention.

The play can also be examined in the geographical-cultural context of its relationship with the cosmopolis of Belfast. Various historians and critics have argued that one of the defining dynamics of the Irish Revival was its profound antipathy to science and modernity.¹²⁵ However, Belfast, as noted earlier, was a centre of science, industry, and technology:¹²⁶ a city of 'mathematicians, engineers and inventors' as Tom Paulin observes whose heroes were Lord Pirrie,¹²⁷ Lord Kelvin,¹²⁸ John Boyd Dunlop,¹²⁹ Thomas Andrews,¹³⁰ Edward Harland.¹³¹ Richard Kirkland has noted that Belfast produced no modernist writer like Joyce to aesthetically memorialize its thriving urban

¹²⁴ *The Drone*, p. 22

¹²⁵ See Greta Jones, 'Catholicism, Nationalism and Science', *Irish Review*, 20 (Winter/Spring 1997): 47-61 and Gordon Herries Davies, 'Irish Thought in Science', in, *The Irish Mind: Exploring Intellectual Traditions* ed., Richard Kearney (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1985), pp. 295-310; Foster, *Reveries*, p. 7.

¹²⁶ John Wilson Foster has a number of important publications which have examined these qualities of the civic and cultural life of Belfast which he states signifies the city's modernism. 'I wish to rescue for the record the local dialect of modernism, the dialect of my childhood in Belfast. That dialect had been drowned out by the Romantic tones of Irish ruralism, behind which sound occasionally the harsher tones of Irish nationalism. But this dialect was also drowned out by a century old curriculum, one which was founded on 'Matthew Arnold's mid-Victorian distinction between the sciences and the arts (the Two cultures, as they came to be called) and his awarding of the palm to the arts. I was educated into a disdain and distaste for the scientific culture, especially applied science culture. It was this culture to which my relatives, particularly on my father's side, belonged. Harland & Wolff, Short Bros & Harland, Musgrave's, Sirocco Works, Mackie's, Workman, Clark - names that once filled me with a kind of effete dread, now late, ring with the sound of Larkin's metallic and rough tongued bell.' John Wilson Foster, *The Titanic Complex*, cited in Craig, *Belfast*, p. 179.

¹²⁷ William James Pirrie (1847-1924): born in Quebec into a County Down family; educated Royal Academical Institution, Belfast; 1862 apprenticed to Harland & Wolff's shipbuilding firm; 1874 became a partner and later the chairman; instigated the innovation of design which led to building of large liners; 1896 elected Lord Mayor of Belfast; 1897 made a Privy Councillor, Controller of Shipping during WWI; later Pro-Chancellor of Queen's University, Belfast, and sat in the Northern Ireland Senate.

¹²⁸ William Thomson (Lord Kelvin) 1824-1907: born in College Square East, Belfast; educ. Glasgow University and Peterhouse, Cambridge; 1846-1899 Professor of Natural Philosophy at Glasgow; discovered second law of thermo-dynamics; research on electric currents invaluable to the development of submarine telegraphy and responsible for success of the Atlantic cables; devised more accurate means of determining the size of the earth; invented depth-sounding apparatus, tide gauges, a new type of ship's compass, and instruments for measuring electricity; responsible for the absolute temperature scale; 1866 knighted; 1892 made Baron Kelvin of Largs; 1902 awarded Order of Merit; published prolifically and his works collected as *Mathematical and Physical Papers*; buried in Westminster Abbey and his statue now stands at the entrance of Botanic Gardens. Both of his brothers, James and Joseph, were also successful, celebrated scientists who collectively helped prepare the way for Einstein's theories of relativity.

¹²⁹ John Boyd Dunlop (1840-1921): born Ayrshire, Scotland; educated there and Irvine Academy; 1859 qualified as veterinary surgeon; moved to Ireland in his late twenties and set up a successful veterinary practice in Belfast; though he did not actually invent the pneumatic tyre, he was responsible for inventing the first practical form of it; patent was bought by Harvey du Cros and developed into the Dunlop Rubber Company.

¹³⁰ Thomas Andrews (1873-1912): born in Comber, Co. Down and began work in Harland & Wolff aged sixteen; studied design at night and eventually became managing director in 1907; chief designer of the Titanic and drowned when the ship sank on her maiden voyage.

¹³¹ See p. 21, fn 45.

culture, and Paulin laments the lack of a Walt Whitman figure to celebrate the city's industrial heritage and the creative intelligence of its engineers and inventors. In this context it is significant that the ULT's most popular play, *The Drone*, features an amateur engineer who endeavours to invent a new mechanical 'fans bellows' which he can patent and make his fortune. Mayne's play can thus be positioned in relation to this tradition given its (gentle) critique of the Protestant work ethic, with its protagonist retiring to bed at two in the morning and in rising mid-afternoon.

Foster notes that efficiency was 'a dominant motif in Edwardian culture'¹³² and records how Belfast was regarded as an exemplar of this culture. Harland & Wolff was identified by numerous writers, including Bram Stoker, as embodying Victorian and Edwardian principles of efficiency.¹³³ Historian Jonathan Bardon notes how 'Belfast was particularly proud of those citizens who made inventions of immediate practical application'¹³⁴ whilst Ulster author Hugh Shearman observed, 'A love of the practical and the tangible is very strong in Belfast. Even in theoretical and metaphysical matters, the Belfastman tends to look to the possibility of a practical application.'¹³⁵ As described earlier, in this 'machine age' scientific qualities were transmuted into cultural values, becoming 'cultural imperatives and not just technical ambitions'¹³⁶ and in Belfast, such cultural imperatives were imbricated within the mythology of the Protestant work eth(n)ic and were crucially important in the formation of unionist identity. Mayne's play presents a satirical critique of a society where values of efficiency, frugality, industry, and practicality, are esteemed above all else. As such, the ideal and ideology underpinning the image of the 'practical Ulsterman' is mockingly undermined. In doing so, the play fulfils one of the objectives of the ULT as espoused by Reynold's in *Ulaid*:

is it preferable to say of a race, 'it has woven fine linen and built great ships,' or to say, as Renan did of the Celtic race, 'it has worn itself out in mistaking dreams for realities' [...] Ulster holds by one side in this dispute, while those who have organized the new theatre urge the other. It is absurd to say though, though it has been said, and will probably be repeated with vehemence in the future, that the new movement is an attack on the qualities that have made for the success of the Northern province. It does not attack them, but it does attack that caricature of them that is so complacently accepted as the real thing in Ulster to-day.¹³⁷

¹³² Foster, *The Age of the Titanic*, p. 18.

¹³³ See Foster, p. 18.

¹³⁴ Jonathan Bardon, *An Illustrated History* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1995), pp. 134-5.

¹³⁵ Hugh Shearman, *Ulster*, p. 162.

¹³⁶ Foster, *Reveries*, p. 67.

¹³⁷ James Good, 'The Theatre and the People', *Ulaid* 13 (May 1905): 14.

Both Mayne's professional training and career as a fully qualified engineer, and his artistic interest in theatre, provided him the perfect position from which to observe and represent his native province.

Ideas of practicality, thrift and 'rationality' are ridiculed when taken to extreme lengths, as in the mooted marriage of Dan's parsimonious brother John for whom the sacrament is regarded solely in utilitarian terms as an economic transaction. Peering out from the kitchen window at his potential *paramour*, a 'sour faced spinster of uncertain age,' John romances, 'Sarah's looking bravely. Man, that woman could save me thirty, aye, forty pounds a year if she was here.'¹³⁸ He hurriedly recants his offer of marriage when he finds that her ruthless proposals for financial housecleaning entail evicting his own brother Dan from the family home.

Another fascinating spatial dynamic of *The Drone* is the relation between rural and urban worlds; two spheres traditionally and diametrically opposed in Irish literature and drama of the period.¹³⁹ Although *The Drone* has been hailed as '[t]he prototype of all kitchen comedies,'¹⁴⁰ in many ways it is dramaturgically and politically atypical of this genre, as the urban world of modernity and science is played off against the ostensibly rural remove of the play's county Down setting. This rigid binary is blurred as in this particular country cottage-kitchen all conversation circulates around Dan's invention and the dialogue is replete with references to spanners, threshing machines, gears, patents, engineers, steam drive engines, reciprocating pistons, quadruple expansion engines, compressed air drills, mechanical fan bellows: tools and technology more often associated with the urban sphere. *The Drone* can be read as a fascinating intertextual link to Foster's histories of Belfast's scientific culture and anticipates Denis Ireland's later argument about the role of Ulster Protestant writers in Irish literature:

They speak of factory chimneys, back streets, and bombing raids to an agricultural Ireland still wandering in the time-lag of its history [...] And what these young men are telling you about is the Machine. That is our job in North-East Ulster, because we know more about it, in describing our struggles to re-create human values in a sub-human century, then we shall be doing our job – which is to contribute our peculiar and unique flavour to a New Ireland.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ *Drone*, p. 21.

¹³⁹ See Patrick J. Duffy, 'Writing Ireland: Literature and Art in the Representation of Irish Place' in *In Search of Ireland*, p. 69.

¹⁴⁰ David Kennedy, 'The Theatre in Ulster: 1944-1953' *Rann* 20 (June, 1953): 41.

¹⁴¹ Denis Ireland, 'Books and Writers in Ulster', *The Bell* 4.5 (1942): 321-2.

A close reading of this 'prototypical' kitchen comedy suggests that it is not so prototypical at all. Its multiple allusions to machinery and modernity freight the play with a technological textuality. This disrupts the stereotypical city/country divide, where the urban sphere is associated with commerce, science, modernity and progress, from which the rural sphere offers retreat and sanctuary: a binary trope pervading the Revival's literature and drama. This dramaturgical quality is distinctively Northern and, as Belfast was a city of engineers and innovators, it is appropriate that the protagonist of the ULT's most successful and popular play was an inventor.

Whilst *The Drone* maps the relationship between the North of Ireland and Scotland and the field of influence between Belfast and its surrounding rural regions, within the timeframe of this study, it is Mayne's play *Red Turf* (1911) that deals most explicitly with land politics in its portrayal of a peasant conflict between two small farmers. Martin Burke's small holding is threatened by his land-grabbing neighbour, Michael Flanagan, who sets about expropriating the former's land. A short one act piece, the play inexorably builds to its bloody climax as the timid Burke, provoked by both Flanagan's gloating and his termagant wife's goading, 'You fool soft creature [...] Did I ever see you stand up as a man and fight for your rights [...] You haven't the guts to stand for your rights and to fight for your wife and your children,'¹⁴² shoots Flanagan when he fences off further sections of Burke's turf bank, a cold-blooded murder that bequeaths the play its name.

Mayne's savage, anti-pastoral portrayal of the Irish peasant's violent, avaricious and atavistic attachment to the land is vividly contrasted with the conventional aestheticized representations of pleasant peasants in agrarian idylls. This perhaps explains why it received such disparaging reviews when it toured to Dublin, where there were protests at the play's harsh language, shrewish female character, and the taking of the Lord's name in vain. In his diaries Joseph Holloway decried the play as 'a crude essay in melodrama plus bad language [...] the "damns" are having their day at the Abbey.'¹⁴³ *The Evening Herald* dismissed it as 'nothing more than a squalid row in a Galway kitchen between two farmers over a strip of bog', criticised its melodramatic qualities as a 'by-product of Abbey theatricality' and declared, 'It is not art, for it is the mission of art not only to represent but inspire beautiful thoughts.' Its most damning criticism was acridly

¹⁴² Rutherford Mayne, *Red Turf* in *The Drone and Other Plays*, pp. 124-5

¹⁴³ Joseph Holloway's *Abbey Theatre*, p. 150.

delivered with the final sneer that the play will appeal to 'the applause of a cross-Channel audience.'¹⁴⁴

Such tendentious criticisms unfairly traduced the play which is important for its engagement with the inexorable process of modernisation and the resultant collision between residual and emergent cultures in Ireland, especially in rural areas where this traumatic transition from the traditional world to the modern was often played out with tragic repercussions: a theme successive Irish playwrights from John B. Keane and Brian Friel to Tom Murphy have explored. In Mayne's play, Burke places absolute faith in the 'the agent and an engineer' to rationally and equitably arbitrate on the dispute and to establish his legitimate ownership of the land. However, his virago wife Mary viscerally distrusts the idea of outsiders interfering with modern methods and scorns her husband for subscribing to an alien law that may dispossess them of their rightful inheritance, 'And you'd be letting go the land that my father and my father's fathers had from time was – that was part of my fortune to you.'¹⁴⁵ She asserts her territorial rights are legitimated by her family's ancient ancestral connection to land they have farmed for generations. The turf bank itself was part of dowry to Burke upon their marriage; a traditional tribal connection to the land deemed more authentic than empirical cartographic evidence, 'What needs the map for to be settling it? Isn't it mine, and will be always till time is done.'¹⁴⁶

Aware of her suspicion of outsiders and map makers, an elderly local neighbour, with 'demure malice', infuriates Mary by stating, 'It's wonderful maps is for truth'¹⁴⁷ and provokes her further by suggesting the modern official institutions of the courts and surveyors will fairly settle the boundaries and borders of disputed bogland:

It's the map will do it surely. Isn't it by the maps all the great lords and ladies do be holding of their estates and be buying or selling of them [...] The sappers that come here ten years ago were telling me they had come to look for an acre of land that was missed from the map of the County of Galway, and it the biggest county of Ireland. And where d'ye think now they found it? In John Haverty's purtas! Ah! The maps is the devil surely.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Jacques, 'Just Like the Abbey', *The Irish Independent*, 8 December 1911, cited in Hogan and Burnham, *Rise of the Realists*, p. 137.

¹⁴⁵ *Red Turf*, pp. 123–4.

¹⁴⁶ *Red Turf*, p. 120.

¹⁴⁷ *Red Turf*, p. 121.

¹⁴⁸ *Red Turf*, p. 121.

To borrow Friel's famous phrase from *Translations*, the Burkes now find themselves 'imprisoned in a linguistic contour that no longer matches the landscape of fact'¹⁴⁹ – an apposite connection given that it was nearly seventy years after Mayne's play that the 'devilish' nature of maps and the Ordnance Survey were to be explored again in Friel's masterpiece. Mayne's play is perhaps the first to engage with the momentous changes precipitated by the Ordnance Survey and explores the gap between the 'gallous story and the dirty deed' in the rhetoric of modernisation in its portrayal of the violence unleashed between residual resistant forces and the inexorable emergent forces of progress and modernity.

In light of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that when *Red Turf* opened in Belfast, shortly before it toured to Dublin, it was warmly received. In Dublin, it was dismissed as 'fifteen minutes of preposterous piffle';¹⁵⁰ in Belfast, critics acclaimed its anti-romantic, realistic aesthetic and its visceral anti-pastoral depiction of the violence surrounding land politics:

[I]t runs no more than half an hour, but into that there is compressed more of the stuff of drama than would furnish forth half a dozen theatrical successes. In some ways it is the most striking thing Rutherford Mayne has done [...] It deals with the grimmest side of the Irish land-hunger, the passionate hate that the possession of a piece of land can breed between neighbour and neighbour, and no concessions at all are made to the 'sugar and milk school' The sordid bitterness of *Red Turf* may irritate some people but on others and on those who know Ireland best it will have a tonic effect. It lends itself to bravura acting.¹⁵¹

Red Turf is not only significant for its engagement with the Ordnance Survey but for addressing the pressing issue of land politics, which historians later acknowledged to be the most important dispute in Irish politics throughout the nineteenth century, and which was the source of a series of wars, agrarian disturbances and popular political movements. Mayne's eschewal of the wholesome 'sugar and milk school', his uncompromising depiction of the murderous consequences of landlust and the 'ferocity' of the acting was favourably received by Northern audiences in contrast to its critical mauling in Dublin.

¹⁴⁹ Brian Friel, *Translations*, in *Modern Irish Drama*, ed. John P. Harrington (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991), p. 351.

¹⁵⁰ Jacques, 'Just Like the Abbey', cited Hogan and Burnham, *Rise of the Realists*, p. 137.

¹⁵¹ 'Grand Opera House', *The Northern Whig*, 6 December 1911, cited in Hogan and Burnham, *Rise of the Realists*, p. 162.

The divisions between the two largest cities in Ireland were often crudely characterized as being between religion and politics. Dublin was predominantly Catholic (with a significant Protestant minority) and predominantly nationalist (with a significant unionist population); a dynamic conversely reflected in Belfast. However, this elides the crucial difference that Belfast's Protestants were predominantly Presbyterian, not Anglican. Furthermore, concentration on these twin totems of religion and politics effaces the more important issue of class. Belfast was the only industrialised city in Ireland and possessed a *lumpen proletariat* unique throughout the island as it was overwhelmingly Protestant. This fact is not often recognised or addressed even though, as Austen Morgan correctly claims, 'the protestant working class of Belfast was the most important social force in Ireland'¹⁵² at this time. Moreover, Belfast's *bourgeois* class was also predominantly Protestant; dominated by Presbyterians. These differences need to be considered in relation to the cultural and ideological forces underpinning the Revival and specifically to the point raised above about Belfast's (in)difference to the 'cult of the peasant.'

Numerous scholars have examined the role played by Anglo-Irish Protestant figures in the Irish Revival and the rise of cultural nationalism in the late nineteenth century. Some explain the extensive involvement of the Ascendancy class in the Revival as a clever exercise in constructive unionism, arguing that their power and position was collapsing, so they involved themselves in the Revival as an ideological strategy to secure their position within the (inexorably) changing political scene.¹⁵³ However, Belfast's secure Protestant majority meant that Northern Protestants/unionists had little of the Southern Ascendancy's anxiety about safeguarding their social position, or its enthusiasm for engaging in the conciliationist politics of the Revival project.

Primitivist notions of peasant life had little purchase amongst Belfast's intellectuals¹⁵⁴ who generally did not subscribe to the supposed spirituality or authenticity of the countryside. Given their location in Ireland's only industrialised urban centre, which endured all the attendant social problems of Victorian cities, it is notable that ULT playwrights were perhaps more inclined to stage plays with urban settings. Their first play, Parkhill's *The Reformers*, was set in the debating chambers of Belfast city council and many other plays which followed were set in the city instead of the country. Robert

¹⁵² Austen Morgan, *Labour and Partition: The Belfast Working Class, 1905-23* (London: Pluto Press, 1991), p. 3.

¹⁵³ See Pilkington, *Theatre and State*, especially chapters 1 and 2.

¹⁵⁴ The most notable exception to this is the painter Paul Henry who left Belfast for the Aran Islands *a la* Synge.

Harding's *Leaders of the People* (1908), Rutherford Mayne's *The Captain of the Hosts* (1910), *If* (1913), William Paul's, *The Jerrybuilders*, (1911), *Sweeping the Country* (1912), Mrs M. F. Scott's *Charity* and *Family Rights*, established a tradition of urban drama built upon by later generations of dramatists like St. John Ervine, Thomas Carnduff, Sam Thompson, and Joseph Tomelty. This was another innovative aspect of the ULT's work and critics regularly highlighted the urban aesthetic of the ULT, as they also did the Theatre of Ireland's in Dublin. ULT playwright, William Paul,¹⁵⁵ author of *The Jerrybuilders* (1911), was hailed as 'a pioneer in his way, one of those who hold that city streets are as interesting as the open field and the "parlour house" as rich an emotional centre as the farm kitchen.'¹⁵⁶ Rutherford Mayne's 1910 play, *Captain of the Hosts*, 'the most ambitious bit of work that Rutherford Mayne has yet attempted' was similarly praised, 'his gift of observation does not desert him when he leaves the cottage for the red-brick suburban villa; his city types, from prize fighters to religious frauds.'¹⁵⁷ Set in Belfast, the central character is a terminally ill consumptive Neil Gallina, prompting *The Northern Whig* to comment 'consumptives on the stage are not attractive' although it praised the actor M. Canmer for refraining from delivering 'an essay in the horrible.'¹⁵⁸ As a 'pourtrayal [*sic*] of the capital v labour conflict', Rutherford Mayne's *Industry* is particularly important as it is the first 'Irish industrial comedy' to have been performed on the modern stage, although William Boyle's *The Mineral Workers* (1907) preceded it by a decade. Nonetheless, this shift in the standard *mise en scène* hailed by the *Belfast Evening Telegraph* as a milestone in Irish drama, 'In Mr Mayne's "Industry" we get away at last from that eternal peasant cottage set.'¹⁵⁹ Whilst there were several plays produced at the Abbey in these years which did feature urban settings or themes, notably in Belfast playwright St John Ervine's work,¹⁶⁰ the overwhelming majority of its drama was set in rural locations.

Considered in relation to the later evolution of Ulster drama and in contrast to the work of the early Abbey, the city settings of Purcell, Paul, Mayne and others are important theatrical milestones in establishing an urban *mise en scène* predating that of the

¹⁵⁵ Bell states that little is known of William Paul, but 'reports suggest that he was a serious playwright'. In researching this author I believe Paul was William J. Paul; compiler of a Belfast printed anthology of chiefly minor poets as *Modern Irish Poets* [2 vols.] (Belfast Steam Printing Co. Ltd. 1894; 1897), which included a large selection of Northern writers.

¹⁵⁶ 'Grand Opera House', cited in Hogan and Burnham, *Rise of the Realists*, pp. 163-4.

¹⁵⁷ 'The Grand Opera House', cited in Hogan and Burnham, *Rise of the Realists*, p. 90.

¹⁵⁸ 'The Grand Opera House', cited in Hogan and Burnham, *Rise of the Realists*, p. 91.

¹⁵⁹ *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, 7 December 1917.

¹⁶⁰ See p. 220, fn 93.

Theatre of Ireland's.¹⁶¹ Moreover, in contradistinction to the Theatre of Ireland's repertoire of urban plays, those produced by the ULT were more explicit in their exploration of class and labour politics – and along with Ervine's *Mixed Marriage* (an Abbey production) – pioneered ground later ploughed by O' Casey in his Dublin trilogy which transformed the history of modern Irish drama. In his analysis of the ideological origins and structure of political nationalism Bruce King states that:

Nationalism is an urban movement which identifies with the rural areas as a source of authenticity, finding in the 'folk' the attitudes, beliefs, customs and language to create a sense of national unity among people who have other loyalties. Nationalism aims at [...] rejection of cosmopolitan upper classes, intellectuals and others likely to be influenced by foreign ideas.¹⁶²

The ULT's nationalism ran counter to this. It 'de-Hydrated' this fetishisation of 'folk' culture and frequently displaced the central symbolic space of rural Ireland with an urban *mise en scène*: an achievement all the more extraordinary the extent to which:

Place has played a central and powerful role in Irish Nationalism since the late-nineteenth century, crystallising in a vision of essentially Irish place which explicitly rejects the urban, the industrial, and the non-Gael and non-Catholic.¹⁶³

The ULT rejected these chauvinistic criteria, whereby Catholicism, connection to the land and nationality were claimed by Corkery and others to be the racist pre-requisites of Irishness: the self-same forces that famously drove Joyce's protagonist Stephen Daedalus into exile, 'You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.'¹⁶⁴ Before Joyce dismantled the restrictive, reductive precepts of an increasingly conservative nationalist Ireland through his depiction of Dedalus' struggle for individual freedom, the ULT had already presciently critiqued the dangerous implications of this nationalist ideology. Instead of advocating escape through exile like Joyce, though they espoused a pluralist model of political nationalism which was civic

¹⁶¹ See Nelson Ó Ceallaigh Ritschel, 'The Alternative Aesthetic: The Theatre of Ireland's Urban Plays', in, *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage*, ed. Stephen Watt et al., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 17-33.

¹⁶² Bruce King, *The New English Literatures*, cited in Timothy Brennan, 'The National Longing for Form' in *Nation and Narration* p. 53.

¹⁶³ Bryonie Reid, 'Labouring Towards The Space To Belong: Place And Identity in Northern Ireland', *Irish Geography*, 37:1 (2004): 103 [103-113].

¹⁶⁴ James Joyce, *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 171.

and secular in its orientation.

This pluralist inclusive vision was developed through a sophisticated blurring of geography and politics in the ULT's work. The nationalist character of the movement was markedly different in its engagement with one of the central concerns of all anti-colonial, popular nationalist movements: the return of land to the native population and the reversal of historical dispossession. In this, the ULT entertained no such millenarian visions of planters being extirpated or land being returned to native Catholics. Their nationalism, instead, appealed to a sense of citizenship and was ecumenical and inclusive, rather than ethnic and exclusivist. The territorial dimension of its nationalism was never about recovery or reversal; of reclaiming the fourth green field, but expressed in terms of shared experience. Their pluralist politics can also be traced in the rather robust debate conducted in the pages of their journal *Ulad*.

Regionalism & *Ulad*

*'If the pages are not wholly pathetic today it is principally because they reflect the bravery of revolt – revolt against the tyranny of commercial materialism which weighed upon our native city and in the shadow of which we have all been brought up.'*¹⁶⁵ (Forrest Reid)

*'Most of us, I think, were indifferent to what we regarded as sentimental nationalism.'*¹⁶⁶
(Robert Lynd)

Regionalist feeling in the North was not a form of petty provincialism founded simply on differences in dialect and terrain, but organically evolved, given the particular religious, socio-economic and political development of Ulster over the previous centuries, as discussed in earlier chapters. Consequently, the particular cultural conditions prevailing in the North precluded wholesale identification with the dramatic and nationalist movements based in Dublin. As John Wilson Foster observes in his classic study *Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival*, it was impossible for Ulster to be 'accommodated by a cultural nationalism directed from Dublin.'¹⁶⁷

The colonisation of Ulster and the ensuing cultural domination by political unionism, aided by the integration of Ulster's industrial economy with markets in the imperial motherland, meant that Northern nationalists were confronted with a more complex colonial legacy than that faced by their counterparts in Dublin. 'We in Ulster

¹⁶⁵ Forrest Reid, 'Eighteen Years Work', *The Times (Irish Supplement)*, 5 December 1922.

¹⁶⁶ Robert Lynd, 'James Connolly: An Appreciation', in *Selected Essays*, p. 96.

¹⁶⁷ John Wilson Foster, *Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), p. 176.

have a great deal to contend with' expounded the editor of *Ulad*.¹⁶⁸ It was an understatement. Nevertheless, the ULT persisted with the same nationalist message, although they soon recognised the need for a different approach, as was evident from the different reactions of audiences in Belfast and Dublin to the production of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (described earlier). A different strategy was needed if the Theatre was to maximise their appeal to their fellow citizens, the majority of whom had little sympathy with the nationalist politics of the Irish Revival.

It is in the pages of *Ulad* that this concept of a civic regional identity, which complements rather than contests the broader nationalist ideal, is most clearly evident. Almost a decade before its publication in 1904, the *Northern Patriot* had professed to address the other provinces from 'the darkest part of Ireland, surrounded by the overwhelming majority of opponents'¹⁶⁹ and protested:

We have no national paper within the borders of all Ulster, to speak for us to the rest of Ireland; and in the Dublin press we have no more than a brief notice of anything we attempt.¹⁷⁰

Ulad redressed this problem. In spite of its short life (it ran for only four numbers) it was a remarkable journal, extraordinary for its eclectic range of articles, poems, stories, and illustrations from leading journalists, poets, novelists, artists, and political figures, in both Irish and English, all of which served to explore and articulate Ulster's distinctive regional identity and experience. It was edited by the irrepressible Reynolds and Parkhill and the former's infectious energy and enthusiasm is again recorded by the nonplussed, but impressed, Forrest Reid:

He told me of the Ulster Renaissance; he told me of the new quarterly that had been started; he gave me a copy of the first number, and he asked me to write something for the second. He had already received poems from AE, and Padraic Colum; plays from Joseph Campbell, Parkhill, and Bulmer Hobson; he had been promised articles by Stephen Gwynn and Roger Casement; and the Celtic design on the front cover was by John Campbell. Reynolds was optimistic, and extremely enthusiastic: I felt ignorant, bewildered, and very much out of it.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ W.B. Reynolds, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *Ulad* 1:1 (1904): 7.

¹⁶⁹ *The Northern Patriot*, Vol.1, no. 1, (October, 1895): 10.

¹⁷⁰ *The Northern Patriot*, Vol.1, no. 1, (October, 1895): 10. (my italics)

¹⁷¹ Forrest Reid, *Private Road* (London: Faber & Faber, 1941), pp. 35-6.

Reid, who was one of the very few Irish literary figures who continued to live in Ireland but remained removed from the Revival, casts a characteristically sceptical eye on Reynolds and the 'Ulster Renaissance':

Although Irish, I had never been interested in politics ('a bloody scandal' Good used to say later), had never distinguished in my mind north from south, and the Ulster propaganda did not particularly appeal to me. It was not what you would call to-day propaganda, since it was definitely nationalist, and merely insisted that Ulster should play its part in the Irish Revival. I could see no objection to that naturally, but I could not see why there should be two camps...¹⁷²

Reynolds commissioned Reid to write an article on the future of Irish opera which Reid was reluctant to accept, 'I didn't believe in either the past, present, or future of Irish opera. It was not that I couldn't imagine it; it was rather because I could – in all its dreadfulness...'¹⁷³

In spite of Reid's lukewarm contribution, a lively regional ethos permeates the rest of the articles written in *Ulad*.¹⁷⁴ Even Parkhill's treatise on Belfast's architecture and his condemnation of the failure of local 'architects [...] to produce even the rudiments of a native architecture which would satisfy local conditions, in *local material*'¹⁷⁵ radiates with regional emphasis. His arguments reflect how these young Ulstermen regarded themselves as laying the foundations for a dramatic tradition in Ulster and their belief that even the very bricks of the city would have to be re-fired if, 'a citadel in Ulster for Irish thought and art'¹⁷⁶ was to be constructed. The front cover of the inaugural issue displays the heroic figure of an armed warrior accompanied by a torch-bearing companion¹⁷⁷ (Plate 22). As such, it was symbolically apposite for a publication that sought to illuminate and arouse its readership. Poems by Hobson exalt the North's role in 'leading the way' in the national struggle, and a short story by Joseph Campbell, 'The Sleeper of Aileach Neid'¹⁷⁸ relocates the Cathleen ní Houlihan narrative to the North,

¹⁷² Reid, *Private Road* pp. 35–6.

¹⁷³ Reid, *Private Road*, p. 36.

¹⁷⁴ A more detailed analysis of the cultural and regional politics of *Ulad* is needed. See Marney Hay's M.A. thesis for a fuller investigation of the broader cultural politics of *Ulad*.

¹⁷⁵ Lewis Purcell (David Parkhill) 'The Brick Villa', *Ulad* 1:1 (1904): 15.

¹⁷⁶ Reynolds, 'Editorial', *Ulad*, 1:2 (February 1905): 1.

¹⁷⁷ Interestingly, in spite of the historiographical neglect of the Ulster Literary Theatre, the front cover of *Ulad* adorns the first volume of what is perhaps the most significant Irish theatre history publication, Robert Hogan's *Modern Irish Drama*.

¹⁷⁸ 'The Sleepers of Aileach Neid' was evidently intended to familiarize readers with the Cathleen narrative as an unsuspecting narrator encounters a 'tottering old woman' who transforms into 'a young girl, of full

'Every nation begins by being a geographical expression.'¹

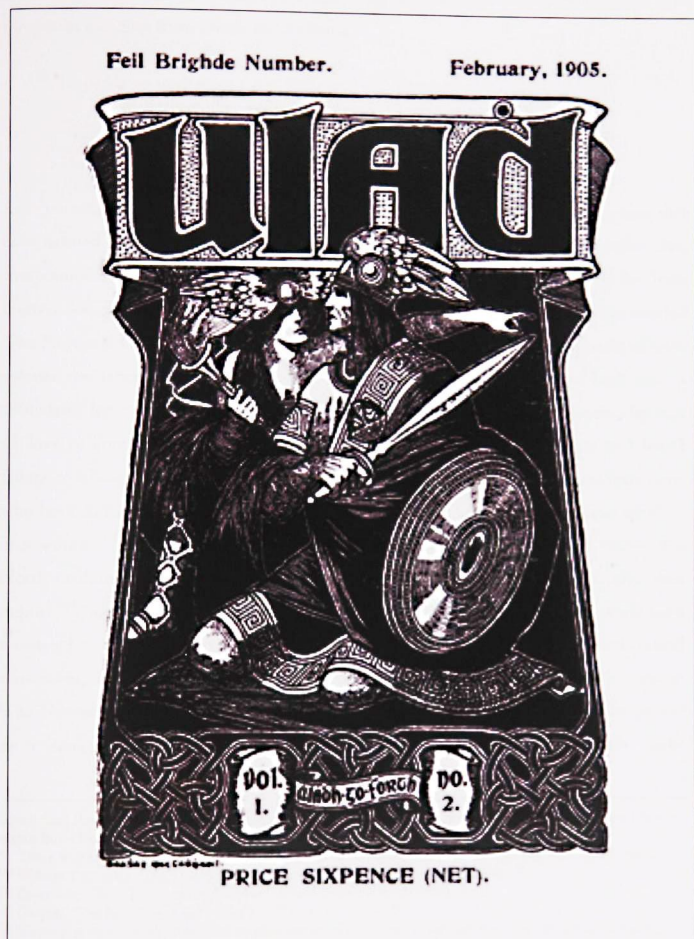


Plate 22: *Front Cover of the second edition of Ulad.*

¹ Robert Lynd, 'Nationalism and Nationality', *The Blue Lion and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1930) 151.

whilst other contributions address themselves to local architecture, myth, music, archaeology, and history.¹⁷⁹ One article reviewing the early productions of the ULT asks for special pleading from critics and audiences:

In order to understand our difficulty it is necessary to remember that we live in Belfast, that we are Presbyterian, or that we are Catholic or Episcopal, with a hard layer of Presbyterian crudeness and repression upon top of that.¹⁸⁰

Another article repeatedly refers to the hybrid commingling of races and cultures that have created a composite Ulster character of cockney, Scotch and Irish influences, compounded by religious differences.¹⁸¹ In contrast to this, the secretary of the Irish Literary Society and later nationalist M.P. Stephen Gwynn, contributed an article entitled 'The Northern Gael' which extolled Ulster's role over the centuries as a fulcrum of anti-colonial resistance - from Red Hugh and Red Owen through to the United Irishmen - a formidable legacy which he claimed was now disabused by the North's present-day lack of 'love of country and a pride of race.' Gwynn attributes this fallen state to Ulster's failure to absorb and acculturate the descendants of settlers from 'Cromwellian days' who have formed an 'alien wedge thrust in' that remains, 'alien, as a spearhead rankling in a wound.'¹⁸² Another article by 'Connla',¹⁸³ in the same edition of *Ulaid* blames the North's cultural paralysis on the 'non-absorption into the national stock of a large alien import.'¹⁸⁴ Both authors were based in Dublin and their racist arguments would have resonated with the nationalist ideology advocated by many within the Irish-Ireland movement, such as Daniel Corkery and Douglas Hyde. The latter's famous lecture on 'The Necessity of De-Anglicizing Ireland' is often referred to by scholars of the period as a seminal moment in the process of decolonisation, but its details make

bosom and flashing eye' as she goes 'forth to rouse the heroes of the North' for 'too long have they lain trance bound and sleeping'. *Ulaid* 1.1, (1904): 6.

¹⁷⁹ There was a similar trend in Ethna Carberry's 'In the North cuntry' series in the *Shan Van Vocht*.

¹⁸⁰ William Reynolds, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *Ulaid* 1.1, (November 1904): 7.

¹⁸¹ Reynolds, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *Ulaid* 1.1, (November 1904): 7.

¹⁸² Gwynn, 'The Northern Gael', *Ulaid* 1.2, (February 1905): 10.

¹⁸³ 'Connla' is erroneously identified by all commentators of the Ulster Literary Theatre (Bell, Kennedy, McHenry, Mengel, Johnson) as James Connolly. However, James Connolly could not have seen any of the theatre's early productions as he had no connection with members in these early years, (it was not until 1910 that he made the acquaintance of Robert Lynd on a visit to Belfast), and indeed, was in America at this time. It is more likely that Connla was, Seamus Connolly, the brother of senator Joseph Connolly, who was living in Dublin where he served as the secretary of the Theatre of Ireland. Obviously the correct identity of Connla is of considerable importance to an accurate interpretation of his articles in *Ulaid* as his interest in the ULT stemmed not from any revolutionary nationalist or socialist convictions, but from his concerns for the affect the theatre may have on the future of any 'national' theatre movement.

¹⁸⁴ Connla, 'Festina Lente', *Ulaid* 1.2 (1905): 14.

uncomfortable reading in relation to his analysis of the North, where 'the continuity of the Irishism of Ireland' has been 'damaged' in 'the north-east of Ulster, where the Gaelic race was expelled and the land planted with aliens, whom our dear mother Erin, assimilative as she is, has hitherto found difficult to absorb.'¹⁸⁵ The exclusivist rhetoric undermines the 'liberationist' claims of nationalist ideology and exposes the destructive side of the decolonising process, whereby, in spite of 'the invaluable work of cultural retrieval undertaken by successive nationalist movements, one principal and consistent dynamic of identity formation has been the negation of recalcitrant or inassimilable elements in Irish society.'¹⁸⁶

This racist rhetoric, which characterised Corkery and Hyde's Irish-Ireland cultural revivalism, stands in stark contrast with other articles in *Ulad*, many of which were written by Northern nationalists who were direct descendants of this 'alien stock'. The journal, like the ULT as a whole, recognised the dangers of such reductive identitarian discourse, and rejected it. The ULT sought to develop alternative decolonizing strategies and their rejection of nativism resonates with Edward Said's later criticism that,

to accept nativism is to accept the consequences of imperialism too willingly, to accept the very radical, religious, and political divisions imposed [...] To leave the historical world for the metaphysics of essences like negritude, Irishness, Islam, and Catholicism, is in a word, to abandon history.¹⁸⁷

Ulad's editorials and articles by Ulstermen embodied the 'admixture of secular scepticism'¹⁸⁸ advocated by Said to temper nativism, so that they professed a hybridised politics which eschewed metaphysical essences of ethnicity, race and religion to assert the North's regional difference 'still keeping on Irish lands.'¹⁸⁹

It was this claim and their commitment to produce work that would be 'different from that other Irish art of drama that speaks from the stage [...] of Dublin'¹⁹⁰ that proved controversial and provoked a scathing response from some Southern

¹⁸⁵ Douglas Hyde, 'The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland', 25 November 1892, in Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, KCMG, George Sigerson and Douglas Hyde, *The Revival of Irish Literature* (London: T. Fisher-Brown, 1894), p. 127.

¹⁸⁶ David Lloyd, *Anomalous States*, p. 5.

¹⁸⁷ Edward Said, 'Yeats and Decolonization', in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, ed., Seamus Deane (Derry: Field Day, 1988), p. 82.

¹⁸⁸ Said, 'Yeats and Decolonization', p. 83.

¹⁸⁹ *Ulad* 1.1, (November, 1904): 2.

¹⁹⁰ *Ulad* 1.1, (November, 1904): 2.

correspondents. One correspondent in their sister publication *Dana* was particularly sceptical:

It does not seem to me that Belfast will ever be another Athens; in time it will rather become a sort of Ulster Manchester [...] it is sad to find it positively declaring that Ulster means to foster a separate culture from the rest of Ireland, to deepen the dour provinciality that has been the recognised charge against her for generations. "Ulster has its own way of things" - yes, but is it the best way?¹⁹¹

Stephen Gwynn also admonishes the Northern players against the dangers of this policy, erroneously seeing it as a secessionist step and warning: 'Belfast divorced from Ireland will be squalid, undignified, and contemptible.'¹⁹² Connla also claims that:

Ulster has not sufficiently assimilated the rudiments of *national* culture on which she must base the development of her best *provincial* characteristics [...] until Ulster has absorbed that same genetic spirit that today is moving the rest of Ireland, until she has acquired more notable marks of cultural homogeneity, all merely provincial development will run to seed.¹⁹³

Connla apparently missed the point made by others that the notion of national 'cultural homogeneity' was a non-starter in the North, given its irreducible cultural heterogeneity. Ulster was, and continues to be, an exemplar of the 'inevitable hybridity of internally colonised cultures'¹⁹⁴ described by David Lloyd. The editorial of *Ulaid's* second issue rejects these criticisms and maintains an unapologetically Ultonian stance:

We have not striven to erect a barrier between Ulster and the rest of Ireland; but we aim at building a citadel in Ulster for Irish thought and art achievements such as exists in Dublin. If the result is provincial rather than national it will not be our fault, but due to local influences over which we have no control.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ F.M. Atkinson, 'A Literary Cause', *Dana* 1: 8 (December 1904): 253.

¹⁹² Stephen Gwynn, 'The Northern Gael', *Ulaid* 1:2, (1905): 12.

¹⁹³ Connla, 'Festina Lente' *Ulaid* 1:2 (February, 1905): 13.

¹⁹⁴ David Lloyd, *Anomalous States*, p. 8. A good example of this hybridity is a programme for a cultural event held in the Ulster Minor Hall on 18 Sept 1902 which celebrated the musical history and heritage of the North. The event opened with a lecture by Mrs C. Milligan Fox (the sister of Alice Milligan) on the 'Evolution of the Irish Folk Song.' However, the set programme of performances and lectures is remarkable for its inclusive survey of the hybrid influences that have influenced local music with lectures on 'The Keene', 'The Instruments', 'The Bards', 'The Irish Harp', and 'Church Scales', 'English Influence', 'the Plantation of Ulster', 'Scotch Influence', 'the Psalm Tunes', 'Cromwell in Ireland', 'Irish Music in Strange Places', 'Influence of Settlers', 'Ballads of the Period', and performances of Northern airs, 'The Blackbird', and Scotch psalms, 'Ye Finny Monsters of the Deep'.

¹⁹⁵ *Ulaid*, 1:2 (February 1905): 1.

The geographer Edward Soja notes that the 'expression of the territoriality of locales' and the 'active consciousness and assertiveness of particular regions, *vis-à-vis* other regions' that characterises regionalism are ultimately 'grounded in the geography of power'¹⁹⁶ through its generation of nodal affiliations and identities that renegotiate the larger social and human geographies of nations. Certainly, *Ulaid's* demarcation of Ulster and declaration of a regional position represents an important reconfiguration of the centre-periphery relationship between North and South: its statement 'we shall have our own way, though the differences will always be within the generous circle of one nationality'¹⁹⁷ asserts its resistance to the centralised imaginative sovereignty of the capital's national theatre. The inaugural issue of *Ulaid* dedicates itself to the expression of 'local' intellectual activity [...which] we wish to locate [...] and afford it an outlet [...] striking our keynote through the Theatre.'¹⁹⁸ This explicit commitment to the local sphere was a strategy that enabled it to obviate the centralised authority of the INTS:

We recognise at the outset that our art of drama will be different from that other art of drama which speaks from the stage of the Irish National Theatre in Dublin, where two men, W.B. Yeats and Douglas Hyde, have set a model of Anglo-Irish and Gaelic Plays with a success that is surprising and exhilarating. Dreamer, mystic, symbolist, Gaelic poet and propagandist have all spoken on the Dublin stage, and a fairly defined *local* school has been inaugurated. We in Belfast and Ulster also wish to set up a school; but there will be a difference [...] between the Ulster and Leinster schools.¹⁹⁹

This rather portentous pronouncement refers to the 'Irish National Theatre' only to deconstruct it by reducing it to two different dramaturgical models: Yeats' Anglo-Irish and Hyde's Irish Ireland drama, describing them as 'fairly defined *local* schools' before finally reconstructing them as a provincial phenomenon: a 'Leinster school' of drama. Unfortunately, it is impossible to ascertain if Yeats actually read this description of his theatrical project, but his horror at being labelled provincial rather than national can only be imagined! *Ulaid's* provocative, perspicacious deconstruction of the national theatre, however, accurately identifies the ideology and aesthetic of the early Abbey as a

¹⁹⁶ Edward Soja, *Post-Modern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 150.

¹⁹⁷ *Ulaid*, 1:2 (February 1905): 2.

¹⁹⁸ *Ulaid*, 1:1 (November 1904): 1-2.

¹⁹⁹ *Ulaid*, 1:1 (November 1904): 2 (my italics).

form of regionalism it attempted to 'parlay into a national consciousness'²⁰⁰ and which later became hegemonic. After all, what is Yeats' declaration that 'Connaught for me is Ireland'²⁰¹ other than an unapologetic declaration of regionalism? The difference, though, between Yeats' Revivalist regionalism and that of the ULT, was that the former sought to interpellate the West as a synecdoche for the nation²⁰² whereas the latter interrogated such reductive definitions of nationality.

In subsequent editions of *Ulad* ULT members reinforce the importance of fealty to the local and regional as a precondition of nationality: James Good states that, 'it still does not follow that the people of the North are prepared to adopt out of hand the ideals of the rest of Ireland',²⁰³ whilst Seosamh de Paor advances Good's argument further with an extraordinary analogy, arguing that, just as 'the more genuinely Celtic provinces' decolonised by 'casting off' colonial influences in order to 'clothe themselves in native thought' then 'it is surely unreasonable to ask that the North should continue to cloak its individuality with alien modes of expression.'²⁰⁴ Thus, his argument states that the rhetorical, political and dramaturgical conventions of the Irish Revival are 'alien' to Ulster! Accordingly, he argues, if Ulster is to express itself, even in the name of the national common ideal, it must necessarily express a different point of view: 'North is North and South is South, irrevocably, and though the line of demarcation is not so firmly drawn as between Occident and Orient, it nevertheless demands recognition.'²⁰⁵

There is a 'tragic poignancy'²⁰⁶ in dePaor's reference to a loosely drawn line of demarcation in view of the later Partition of Ulster with 1921 border which removed the counties of Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan from the historical province of Ulster. De Paor's commitment to the idea of separate regional status was symptomatic of a certain type of Ulster mentality epitomized by Henry Joy McCracken, the leading Belfast United Irishman who termed himself a 'Northern'. This keen sense of a distinctively Northern identity was integrated within a nationalist republican framework, but on occasions has

²⁰⁰ Laura E. Lyons, 'Of Orangemen and Green Theatres', *Widening the Stage*, p. 35.

²⁰¹ W.B. Yeats, cited in Declan Kiberd, *Anglo-Irish Attitudes* (Derry: Field Day, 1984), p. 14.

²⁰² A number of studies, however, have challenged the tendency to regard the local as being sublated by the national and have instead argued that the local has actually been instrumental in contributing to the formation and inflection of nationalist ideology. See Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (Sage: London, 1995); Anthony Cohen, 'Belonging: The Experience of Culture', *Belonging: Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Cultures*, ed. Anthony P. Cohen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), pp. 1–17; Alon Confino, 'On Localness and Nationhood', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 23: 2 (2001): 7–28 and 'The Local Life of Nationhood', *National Identities* 4:1 (2002): 7–24.

²⁰³ James Good, 'The Theatre and the People', *Ulad*, 1:3 (May 1905): 13.

²⁰⁴ Joseph Power, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *Ulad* 1:4 (September 1905): 5.

²⁰⁵ Power, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', p. 5.

²⁰⁶ Seumas O'Sullivan, *The Rose and the Bottle*, p. 102.

been mistakenly attributed to the actual Partition of Ireland. For instance, in a symposium on the arts in Ulster, J.N. Browne argued:

The separation of Ulster politically from the rest of the country has had, however, an interesting result in stimulating a regionalist movement, a certain attitude of self sufficiency among artists and writers and in directing their attention to what lies nearest to hand.²⁰⁷

Browne's myopic critique ignores the fact that for many years before the creation of Northern Ireland, this regional self-sufficiency was already well established through the work of the ULT and was founded on their belief that a regional identity must first be explored before any sense of national identity could be embraced.

To understand the gradual development of regional consciousness one must explore the architectonic forces – historical, political, cultural, economic – that influenced this process. It is equally important to record the deterioration of relations between the Northern and Southern dramatic movements as a contributing factor. As a result of personal feuds, professional rivalry and poor communication, the ULT's increasingly acrimonious relationship with the ILT antagonised many individuals and eventually alienated the Northern company as a whole. It was specifically the breakdown of North/South relations that ultimately determined the *extent* of their drift away from their Dublin counterparts leading to the formation of the first regional theatre in Ireland and the lack of rapport was perhaps most evident in the friction between Yeats and Ulster.

Yeats had sought to establish the capital as the centre of a new national drama and the seminal document of the Irish Literary Theatre declared, 'We propose to have performed in *Dublin* [...] certain Celtic and Irish plays [...] and so build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature.'²⁰⁸ He believed that any national dramatic movement must be located in Dublin not simply because it provided a sophisticated metropolitan setting but because such centralization would make it amenable to his control. This helps to explain his coldness towards the plans of Hobson and Parkhill to found a 'Northern branch' of the ILT. Ulster was beyond the pale of his literary jurisdiction and he sought to ensure that the light focused on his theatre in the capital did not spill into the regions. Indeed, Yeats' efforts to assert his control over the national theatre led to various splits, one of which led to the founding of the Theatre of Ireland and the Cumann na

²⁰⁷ J.N. Browne, 'Poetry in Ulster', *The Arts in Ulster: a Symposium* ed., Sam Hanna Bell (London: George C. Harrap, 1951), p. 131.

²⁰⁸ W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn, 'Declaration of Intentions' cited in *Modern Irish Drama* ed., John Harrington (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991), p. viii.

nGaedhael Theatre Company, when Yeats' muse Maud Gonne walked out of the INTS following its 'libellous' production of Synge's *The Shadow of the Glen* (1903). In a heated letter written soon afterwards, Gonne excoriates Yeats for his domineering approach and for forgetting that, 'the existence of the National Theatre Society was originally due to Inghinide na hEireann [*sic*] & Cumann na Gaedhael [*sic*...] you have forgotten it now & have grown to think that it is you & Lady Gregory & her friends who have started the National Theatre Co.'²⁰⁹ It was not just the Ulster players who bridled at Yeats' continual attempts to direct, or dictate, the political agenda.

Although Yeats' resentment of Northern intrusion was evident, it is more difficult to ascertain whether this was due to his alleged 'antipathy to all things Ulster'.²¹⁰ However, there can be no doubt about his hostility to numerous Ulstermen. For instance, the Belfast playwright James Cousins, one of the founders of the Irish National Theatre Society in 1902, was intensely disliked by Yeats and their feud was to become of 'relevance to the relations between Ulster and rest of Ireland'.²¹¹ Yeats had been elected President of the INTS but less than a year into his reign wrote to actor Frank Fay that, 'too much Cousins would make common work out of the question,' and with greater venom, 'Cousins is evidently hopeless and the sooner I have him an enemy the better.'²¹² His wish was soon fulfilled and in a matter of months the hapless Cousins was ousted from the Society he had helped to found. Another Belfastman to attract Yeats' hostility was poet Joseph Campbell whom he referred to as 'The Rushlight Man': a disparaging reference to one of Campbell's well known poems.²¹³

Bell's allegation of Yeats' antipathy to Ulster is understandable but perhaps overstated. His relationship with the North was, at best, indifferent. This was excruciatingly evident during preparations for the centenary celebrations of the 1798 Rebellion when North/South relations collapsed again, courtesy of Yeats. As described earlier, the North had taken the lead in organising festivities as Belfast was the home of the United Irishmen, although Wolfe Tone their leader hailed from Dublin. The centrepiece of Ulster celebrations was to be a huge *feis* in Belfast which was expected to

²⁰⁹ Gonne, *Always Your Friend: The Gonne-Yeats Letters 1893-1938*, p. 177.

²¹⁰ For Yeats' alleged dislike of Ulster see Gerald Dawe and Edna Longley, eds., *Across a Roaring Hill: The Protestant Imagination in Modern Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1985), p. iv; John Wilson Foster, *Colonial Consequences: Essays in Irish Literature and Culture* (Dublin: Lilliput Press 1991), p. 253.

²¹¹ Hagal Mengel, *Sam Thompson*, p. 9.

²¹² Cited in Hogan and Kilroy, *Laying the Foundations, 1899-1901*, p. 51.

²¹³ In a letter to Katherine Tynan, 'The Rushlight' man knows better than the others what a poem is, though not a very interesting sort of poem, but he has not written it yet'. *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade, (London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1954), p. 477.

attract '1500 competitors of all classes'²¹⁴ as well as lectures, parades, sporting and musical events. However, around this time Yeats was also finalising plans and was alarmed that Belfast's '98 celebrations would clash with his intended dates for the first productions of the I.L.T. In an extraordinary letter to Alice Milligan he requested that Northern nationalists postpone their centenary commemorative events until 1899(!) to facilitate the production of his plays for he was, 'anxious to get all classes and [...] to do it in the very month of the celebration would drive many away.'²¹⁵

To add insult to injury, Yeats refused to even consider staging his productions in Belfast as part of the festivities, adamantly maintaining that, 'We cannot go to Belfast for we must begin where the literary movement has done most to prepare the ground.'²¹⁶ Unsurprisingly, the arrogance of his attitude aroused fury among Northern activists. In a heated meeting of Belfast nationalists recorded in the *Shan Van Vocht* vociferous opposition was raised against any further co-operation with the Dublin '98 committee. The paper reports that 'Wee Joe' Devlin, the nationalist representative of West Belfast, objected 'to any gentleman from Dublin coming down to interfere and dictate in Belfast': a complaint still heard in contemporary Northern Ireland but one which, in 1897, was scotched by Alice Milligan's laconic response that the 'interference' of one such 'gentleman from Dublin' was actually responsible for the occasion that they were supposed to be celebrating!²¹⁷

After this debacle things began to settle down and reasonable relations were gradually restored. As described earlier, the ULT received considerable assistance from their Southern contemporaries for their first productions in 1902 and relations between the two appeared quite convivial; their close collaboration and the 'abundant good feeling'²¹⁸ between them reflecting the wider intellectual rapport between North and South in the pursuit of a common national ideal. The YMCA ran trips to Dublin from Belfast for two shillings, a service that proved invaluable in allowing 'poor scholars' like the poets Joseph Campbell and Padraic Colum to travel back and forth. In fact there was considerable traffic between the two cities in the early 1900s, with leading literary and political figures travelling North, many of them staying at Ardrigh. Not without

²¹⁴ *Shan Van Vocht*, 15 May 1898.

²¹⁵ W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats, 1896-1900* vol. II, ed., John Kelly (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 128.

²¹⁶ Yeats, *Collected Letters* vol II, p. 128.

²¹⁷ *Shan Van Vocht*, 6 September 1897.

²¹⁸ Margaret McHenry, 'The Ulster Theatre in Ireland', PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania (1939), p. 28.

justification Campbell remarked that the intellectual 'circuit between North and South was complete.'²¹⁹

The centre was not to hold for long, however, as old grudges resurfaced and new grievances emerged. Hobson and Parkhill never forgot Yeats' rejection and the Southern movement's objections to their well-intended title, 'The Northern Branch of the Irish National Theatre Society', coupled with a demand for royalties which provided the final spur which led to the formation of the ULT. Their idealistic assertion, 'We have not striven to erect a barrier between Ulster and the rest of Ireland, but aim at building a citadel in Ulster for Irish thought and art'²²⁰ appears deeply ironic given the institution in 1921 of a very real barrier and, after Partition, the construction in Ulster of a garrison rather than a citadel. In the light of this more profound schism, it is perhaps appropriate to reflect upon the haunting note of prophecy in Hobson's euphoric essay, 'The New Ulster':

When one speaks of Ulster, one is apt to forget that there are two of them, Irish and English, and many sub-divisions of both [...] but it is of the whole I would speak, for both are altering and both are marching to the point where they must meet and join forces.²²¹

There were indeed two Ulsters, with many sub-divisions, which were altering and most definitely *were* marching, but as for their ultimate shared destination, perhaps only a new century will tell.

²¹⁹ Joseph Campbell, 'Northern Autobiography', *Journal of Irish Literature* 8:3 (September, 1979): 89.

²²⁰ Reynolds, 'Editorial', *Ulster*, 1.2 (February 1905): 1.

²²¹ Bulmer Hobson, 'The New Ulster', *The Nationist* 30 November 1905.

Chapter 6: Dramaturgy

*'Many of the earlier plays of the Abbey school are wearing well, but I think the "Kiltartan" goods are becoming somewhat frayed. It was this style of thing that my friend "Gerald McNamara" had in mind when he wrote "The Moist [sic] That Does be on the Bog" [...] It tickled the Dublin audiences, but it produced no visible effect in the Abbey, where things continued largely in the Kiltartan groove.'*¹

*'Ulster has at last found interpreters able and anxious to give lucid and adequate expression to the life and thought of the people [...] It must have been delightfully and quaintly incongruous to an audience accustomed to the poetic mysticism of Mr Yeats' plays, or the sombre tragedy of Synge, or the more exuberant and volatile humour of Lady Gregory's comedies [...] listening to the strong accents, the dry, ironic humour, and the robust realism...'*²

Background: Scene from *The Mist That Does be on the Bog*

¹ J.A. Power, 'Gossip of the Day', *The Evening Telegraph*, 25 September 1917.

² Hugh A. MacCartan, *Belfast Morning News*, 4 May 1908.

Chapter 6: Dramaturgy

*'The speech of County Down is not so melodious as that of the region covered by the dramatists of the Abbey Theatre.'*¹ (The London Times)

*'In order to understand our difficulty it is necessary to remember that we live in Belfast, that we are Presbyterian, or that we are Catholic or Episcopal, with a hard layer of Presbyterian crudeness and repression upon top of that.'*² (W. B. Reynolds).

The ULT's work is significant not only for its mapping of a distinctly Northern geographical imaginary, but for the particular dramaturgical strategies developed and deployed in their work. In earlier chapters I outlined how various nationalist organisations and activists based in the North formed the vanguard of the complex vortex of cultural practices and political societies which comprised the Irish Revival and it could be argued that Ulster's playwrights were no less advanced in theatre making. Though some commentators have (dis)regarded the ULT as amateur purveyors of kitchen comedies and folk farces, the 'Ulster play' they pioneered was more than a mere vehicle of parochial comedy. The ULT's work was satirically charged with a subtle critique of myriad targets, both local and national, from Belfast's party politics and corrupt municipal authorities to the aesthetics and ideology of the Abbey Theatre and the Irish Revival.

In its first decade, the ULT produced a significant body of naturalist drama. Moreover, though the movement at first operated as a corollary of the ILT, it swiftly developed the confidence to critique aspects of the Abbey's aesthetics and politics. Their work then is distinguished - and distinctive - for its refusal to romanticise the West, to valorize a mythical past and to fetishize peasants or tramps as repositories of national essence. The grim socio-economic realities of rural life, often ignored or sublimated in the work of Yeats, Gregory, Martyn and Synge, were centre-stage in the ULT's drama. *Turn of the Road* addressed peasant philistinism; *Red Turf* portrayed the bloody repercussions of land-lust; *The Troth* tackled agrarian distress, rackrenting, and political assassination; *Sweeping the Country*, *Leaders of the People*, *If!* and *The Reformers* dealt with elections, party politics, municipal corruption, and political chicanery; *The Enthusiast* portrayed the political imperative of economic modernization and the debilitating effects of sectarianism. Gerald MacNamara's satirical extravaganzas *Thompson in Tir na nOg* and *The Mist that Does be on the Bog* playfully deconstructed the dramaturgy of Celticist peasant drama and satirised some

¹ 'Royalty Theatre', *The London Times*, 7 February 1912, cited in Robert Hogan, *The Abbey Theatre: The Rise of the Realists 1910-1915* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979), p. 227.

² William Reynolds, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *Ulaid* 1:1, (November 1904), p. 7.

of the central precepts of Revivalist culture and nationalist politics for their racist, sectarian and reductive delimitations of Irish life.

Although the ULT shared the same decolonizing mission as their Dublin counterparts and sought to dismantle the national caricature of the 'stage Irishman' in favour of more genuine images of nationhood, they pursued their objectives in different ways. Without idealising or Gaelicizing Irishness, the ULT developed a, pluralist, playful notion of regionalism that differed from the ILT's (re)presentation of national identity and rejected Irish-Ireland's narrow notions of nationality. Accordingly, the Northern movement's portrayal of 'Ulstermen' provided the first realistic alternative to the romanticised 'Irishmen' - rural, Catholic and Gaelic - presented by the Dublin Theatre. This achievement was all the more radical, against a background of increasing emphasis on the Gaelic, Catholic ethos of national identity, given the fact that the Irishmen of the Ulster Literary Theatre were invariably Protestant.

In this chapter I will examine some of the key themes, forms, and functions that characterise the dramaturgy of the Ulster Literary Theatre by examining a representative sample of plays.

'Our talent will be satiric'

The opening number of *Ulad* confidently declared that the ULT's dramaturgical politics would be different from those of the Dublin-based theatre movement: 'our talent will be satiric rather than poetic.'³ In spite of some criticism of this approach, the vast majority of their farces, fantastical burlesques and folk comedies are freighted with satirical critiques. To customise Lady Gregory's characterisation of the Irish national temperament, it could be argued that the key characteristic of the Northern movement was its 'incorrigible gift' for demythologising and this was nowhere more evident than in their anti-pastoral portrayal of peasants and tramps.

According to Yeats, 'such people, tinkers and beggars and the unregarded poor, were the true heirs of the Ireland of the kings and bards.'⁴ Throughout the literature, drama and poetry of the Irish Revival, the tropes of pleasant peasants and romantic representations of wandering tramps were ubiquitous. They were also central symbolic figures within the aesthetic tradition of the Abbey Theatre. As the historian F.S.L. Lyons records:

³ *Ulad* 1:1 (November 2004): 2.

⁴ W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight* (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 1981), p. 21.

when their Irish theatre had become an established fact, Yeats and Lady Gregory would have to withstand the ironic criticism of Dubliners who rated each new play by PQ – peasant quality [...] The attitude of these early explorers towards the peasant was essentially romantic, for they saw in him a primal innocence miraculously preserved from the contaminating influences of civilisation.⁵

Tramps and peasants became elevated into ideals; signifiers of national identity and an indigenous Gaelic tradition, reaching their apogee in Christy Mahon's heroic avowal to 'go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgment day.'⁶ Such romantic representations elided the harsh realities of rural life and ignored the brutal economic conditions of Ireland's cottiers, small farmers and landless labourers. The ULT followed a different tack, more reminiscent of Shaw than Synge as they shared the former's Fabian perspective of rural poverty and hardship as well as his scathing opposition to aestheticizing agrarian distress into Arcadian dreams:

make it a fixed rule never to [...] believe in the alleged Arcadian values of the half starved drudges who are sacrificed to the degrading brutalizing, and as far as I can ascertain, entirely unnecessary pursuit of unscientific farming.⁷

As discussed earlier, Mayne's play *Red Turf* dramatises the harsh economics of such 'half starved drudges' who are driven to murder by land hunger, but *The Truth* (1908) is even more notable, as the economics of this play are imbricated with radical politics reminiscent of the United Irishmen's call for unity between Catholic, Protestant, and Dissenter to overthrow the oppression under which they all suffer.

The Truth was first produced at the Crown Theatre in Peckham, London by William Mollison's Company in October 1908, after which it toured to Belfast, Dublin, and Cork, and Mayne originally acted the part of the old man, after joining Mollison's company on the advice of Whitford Kane. The play marked a significant departure from his gentle comedy *The Drone* and the burlesque farces of MacNamara and, although Dublin critics dismissed it as a minor piece of 'Mid-Victorian Irish melodrama [...] deserving no place in the literature of Irish life',⁸ it had a more positive reception in Belfast, perhaps because of the particular political appeal it held for Northern audiences. In many ways, the play signified a return to the explicitly nationalist political origins of the ULT through its

⁵ F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (London: Fontana, 1982), p. 235.

⁶ John Millington Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World* in J.M. Synge's *Plays, Poems, and Prose* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1954), p. 116.

⁷ G.B. Shaw, *Our Theatre in the Nineties* (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1932), p. 31.

⁸ *Dublin Evening Mail*, cited in Bell, *Theatre in Ulster*, p. 35.

portrayal of poor, rack-rented, starving tenants who unite to exact revenge on their oppressive landlord. Interestingly, the Manichaean dramaturgy of melodrama which Mayne used to frame the dialectical struggle of oppressed tenants against their tyrannical landlord is configured along class rather than politico-religious lines, as Presbyterian and Catholic farmers unite to fight their aristocratic (Episcopalian) oppressor.

Set in the mid-nineteenth century against a background of successive poor harvests, peasant distress and political unrest, the play opens in the household of the McKies, who have just been informed that their absentee landlord, Colonel Fotherington, has issued eviction orders for 'all barring one or two' of his tenant farmers. Mrs McKie despairs of the situation to her unsympathetic farmhand, John Smith, a self-confessed 'terrible old Tory'⁹ who ardently supports Fotherington and views the evictions as just desserts for 'them Moores, Maguires and Maginnesses, and that connection, talking and threatening what they'd do to him if he wouldn't let them off the rent this winter.'¹⁰ Smith's gnomic reference to Catholic farming families and agrarian insurgency reveals his sectarian sympathies, but his defence of Fotherington's draconian actions on the basis that he is 'one of the right sort'¹¹ blinds him to the fact that his current employers and co-religionists, are also facing eviction:

MRS MCKIE: Ach. You're always backing up the quality. D'ye not know that every tenant on the state, barring one or two, couldn't pay up and they're every one of them noticed, there's no odds.

SMITH: It's the price of Moore and that lot raising all the bad talk against the landlord. Heth the evicting will soon settle them.

MRS MCKIE: It'll settle more than them, John, I'm thinking.¹²

From the outset, Mayne's play exposes how class solidarity amongst the cottier class is undermined by sectarian divisions, in spite of the fact that 'In Ulster, the Episcopalians represented the Ascendancy, the landed class, the aristocracy. The Presbyterians were tenant farmers and felt the rigours of rack-renting and social domination.'¹³

In contrast with Smith's sectarianism, the McKies fully sympathise with their Catholic neighbours, one of whom, Francey Moore, arrives at their home in a distressed state, for he has left his wife dying in his cottage from which they are due to be evicted in

⁹ Rutherford Mayne, *The Truth*, in *The Drone and Other Plays*, p. 134.

¹⁰ Mayne, *The Truth*, p. 135.

¹¹ *The Truth*, p. 35.

¹² Mayne, *The Truth*, p. 135.

¹³ 'An Ulster Protestant', 'Conversation Piece' in *The Bell* 4:5 (August 1942): 312.

the morning. Divided by religion, the Moores and McKies are united by their grim socio-economic conditions and shared suffering, having lost their eldest sons and heirs, both buried on the same day: 'Mine in the old meeting house green and yours in the chapel graveyard.'¹⁴ The symbolism and symmetry of this sacrifice of sons and the meaning of the eponymous troth – or pact – becomes inexorably clear as Moore and McKie unite in their grief and pledge to avenge themselves on the source of their suffering:

- MOORE: *(his voice trembling with intense passion)* A pound or two might have saved them. Aye. Only a pound or two. And now they're lying rotten under the sod, but their wee souls is crying. You can hear them in the wind crying – crying to the God that made them for vengeance *(McKie raises his head and looks in a startled way at Moore)* Who owned the land that took and wrenched the very food from their mouths? Who was it swore to the sargeant – I'll learn them, says he, to obey me. I've a man for every place that knows how to labour the land, not a lot of lazy, drunken swine.
- MCKIE: *(with anger)* He said that?
- MOORE: I suppose, says he, for all their talking, they'll just go out with their tails between their legs like the lot of cowardly snarling curs that they are.
- MCKIE: *(passionately)* He called us that did he?
- MOORE: Aye.
- MCKIE: *(wildly)* And by God Mr Colonel Fotheringham, there was a McKie put the fear of the Lord in your boasting breed in '98, and there's another will do it again the night.¹⁵

McKie's revolutionary threat is redolent of the rhetoric of the United Irishmen as is their cross-confessional pledge to assassinate their landlord. They agree that if one of them is caught he will claim to be operating alone so that the other can look after his family. However, it is McKie who successfully shoots Fotheringham and escapes, whilst Moore misses and is caught, and as Moore is brought to the barracks where 'he'll hang for it now', McKie returns home and tries to assuage his horrified spouse, 'Peace woman, Moore has no wife.'¹⁶

The play's portrayal of the shared suffering of poor Protestants and Catholics, and the possibilities of solidarity in the face of sectarian division was particularly resonant given the historical context of Belfast's 1907 labour strikes.¹⁷ Organised by Larkin and Connolly

¹⁴ Mayne, *The Troth*, p. 141

¹⁵ Mayne, *The Troth*, p. 140.

¹⁶ Mayne, *The Troth*, p. 144.

¹⁷ See John Gray, *City in Revolt: James Larkin and the Belfast Dock Strike of 1907* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1985).

these had created a short-lived class solidarity between Catholic and Protestant workers against their employers; a threat eventually defeated by 'the campaign of religious and political ruffianism initiated by Sir Edward Carson and his accomplices' which Connolly blamed for shattering, 'whatever class solidarity ever existed in this city.'¹⁸ The 'ruffianism' referred to the employers' invidious efforts to stoke sectarian division and its attendant 'damnable suspicion' by tarnishing the trade union campaign as an insidious 'popish plot' designed to bring about Home Rule. The success of this strategy forced Connolly to realise the fundamental difficulty of forging ecumenical, cross-community class solidarity in 'Bigotborough':

All this demonstrates how immensely difficult is the task at present in Belfast. No part of these countries has a part more difficult. It means the propagation of twentieth-century revolutionism amidst the mental atmosphere of the early seventeenth century.¹⁹

The collapse of the temporary socialist alliance between Catholic and Protestant workers had been foreshadowed many years earlier in Purcell's *Enthusiast*, where the same sectarian forces that defeated Connolly and Larkin undermine Jamie McKinstrey in his efforts to establish an agricultural co-operative. Mayne's play is informed by these events and the alliance he dramatises between McKie and the Moores was no mere commemoration of the ideals of '98 but a direct appeal to audiences to connect the past with the present and draw attention to the fact that Catholic and Protestants could unite along class lines, if not on political terms.

Mayne's *Turn of the Road* is similarly informed by its immediate context and is marbled with autobiographical influences in the author's life. Written close to the completion of his engineering degree when the young amateur actor-cum-playwright confronted a crossroads over choosing a respectable financially secure future as an engineer or a socially suspect, unremunerative artistic career? It is a dilemma that troubles his young protagonist Robbie John Granahan - the archetypal artist as a young man - who eventually escapes the puritanical nets of his family's stricture that he forsake music for his farm. As noted earlier, *Turn of the Road* was modelled on Purcell's *The Enthusiast* in its Ibsenite depiction of an idealistic individual against a hostile society and it is also

¹⁸ James Connolly, 'Forward', *Ireland Upon the Dissecting Table*, Cork Workers' Club 1975. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly/1913/08/beldub.htm> accessed 01.04.06.

¹⁹ James Connolly, 'Forward', *Ireland Upon the Dissecting Table*, Cork Workers' Club 1975. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly/1913/08/beldub.htm> accessed 01.04.06.

reminiscent of Padraic Colum's *Broken Soil* (1903).²⁰ Moreover, its portrayal of an artist struggling against a philistine community could also be seen as a wider commentary on the difficulties endured by the ULT in Belfast.

Robbie John, 'a poor misguided creature'²¹ is a gifted musician but a middling farmer. His family fiercely resent his music-making and claim that it makes him neglect his duties, 'I wish someone would stop that boy's fool nonsense wi' his fiddle. He's too fond of playing. It would stand him better to mind his work.'²² Robbie maintains that he can fulfil his duties and play his music, but the crisis comes when he wins the local *feis* at Newcastle and a visiting German Professor from London's Royal College of Music encourages him to pursue music as his career. His family, though impressed by the pecuniary reward for winning the *feis*, remain scornful of his prospects and pressurize him to throw his fiddle in the fire and abandon any ambitions to pursue music professionally. Robbie surreptitiously continues to practise at night until his brother catches him creeping, 'on your stocking soles to the back of the forth ditch, and played there for two mortal hours till I was heart feared they'd miss us out of bed and raise a cry.'²³ Robbie's recidivism forces another confrontation with his father who delivers an ultimatum:

WILLIAM JOHN: [...]For our sake and for you own, we want you to give up that accursed thing and put it from you.

ROBBIE JOHN: Why? What harm does it do you or me?

WILLIAM JOHN: It makes you neglect your work. It makes you think of things you shouldn't think of. It makes you lose sleep of nights sitting up and playing, and then you can't rise in the morning. When you should be polishing the harness or mending a

²⁰ Colum's play was also known as the *Fiddler's House* and numerous critics and historians have likened it Mayne's *The Turn of the Road*. However, the frustrations of the fiddling protagonist of Colum's play, Con Hounican, are not the same as Robbie John's. Hounican feels he cannot settle down to live the life of a small farmer and yearns once again for life on the open road, but is held back by his family as his daughter Maire reminds him of his domestic duties and responsibilities, but she eventually relents and is persuaded to abandon their farm for life to wander the roads: the fate exonerated by Robbie John's father in Mayne's play. However, Robbie John's aspirations are not nomadic; he has no such desire to abandon his family and farm for the 'romance' of the roads roaming the country as an itinerant musician. Instead he travels to London, to be professionally trained in his art at the Royal College of Music. The difference between Robbie John's pragmatism and the romanticism of Colum's play reveals the fundamental difference between the aesthetics and politics of the ULT and their Southern 'milk and honey school'. The ULT refused to romanticise indigence, or to endorse the trope of travelling tramps as repositories of nationality (see *Mist that Does be on the Bog* in Chapter 6) whereas in Dublin critics such as Oliver Gogarty, claimed Colum's play to be 'a national drama in the fuller sense [...] arising out of the temperament, religion, and traditions peculiar to the Irish people.' Cited Hogan and Kilroy, *Laying the Foundations*, p. 90.

²¹ Mayne, *Turn of the Road*, in *The Drone and Other Plays*, p. 79.

²² Mayne, *Turn of the Road*, p. 75–6.

²³ Mayne, *Turn of the Road*, p. 99.

ditch, or watching the cattle, or feeding the poultry [...] What good will it ever do ye?²⁴

Here, as in *The Drone* and *The Enthusiast*, enormous importance is attached to notions of respectability and the Protestant work ethic which sacralises hard work, domestic responsibilities, respect for paternal authority and frugal materialism: 'money's hard of making and if people's soft its them's our fault', all laced with a puritanical disdain for the frivolity of art. Granahan's contempt for his son's artistic inclinations resembles that of Aunt Marget for her wayward nephew in Purcell's *The Enthusiast*:

Jamie McKinstry, but I niver thought ye were goin' to turn out a double-faced yin. Where ye get it, the Lord knows! It's not fae your father, a hard-workin', sensible man [...] This is what comes o' your readin'! If I had a thousan' childer, the' no 'yin o' them I wud wir let within fifty mile o' any book.²⁵

Both Mayne and Purcell relentlessly attack the puritanical, philistine and authoritarian nature of the peasantry and, in doing so, explode essentialist notions of the innately poetic temperaments of the pleasant peasants of Ireland. William John's hypocrisy is also exposed when he justifies his opposition to his son's fiddle playing on the basis that it will lead him to 'take to drink and bad company,' to which his wife responds, 'you're no rid of that yet, William Granahan. Ye mind what way ye came home last Bann Fair on top of the bread cart.'²⁶ His true motives appear to be based more on notions of social respectability as he pushes Robbie to marry 'the best match in whole countryside,'²⁷ i.e. the daughter of the local clergyman who also outlines his opposition to Robbie's music making, 'If your son is to marry my daughter, I'll have none of his music, It's all very well for the quality and the like to go strumming on instruments, but its not meant for the sensible farmer.'²⁸ Mayne's play mirrors the narrative of Yeats' *Cathleen ni Houlihan* as Robbie John follows in Michael Killane's footsteps and abandons his *paramour*, parents and the bourgeois values associated with his arranged marriage, although there is a significant dramaturgical difference as Robbie's Joycean escape is artistic, exilic and individualistic, not nationalistic, communitarian and self-sacrificing; it entails turning one's back on his community instead of fighting (and dying) for it.

²⁴ Mayne, *Turn of the Road*, p. 90.

²⁵ Parkhill, *The Enthusiast*, Ulad 1:2 (February 1905): 30.

²⁶ Mayne, *Turn of the Road*, p. 89.

²⁷ Mayne, *Turn of the Road*, p. 110.

²⁸ Mayne, *Turn of the Road*, p. 106.

In portraying Irish peasants as materialistic, ignorant, suspicious, and selfish, Mayne's play can be associated with Synge's representation of the Irish peasantry for which the latter was often attacked by puritanical nationalists. However, there is a difference between Synge and other Southern playwrights' representations of tramps or peasants and those of the ULT, as is evident from Mayne's depiction of the tramp fiddler in *Turn of the Road*. In an extraordinary scene (see Plate 23a), Robbie's father, in a desperate attempt to persuade his son of the dangers of forsaking work for frivolous art, brings home an itinerant musician on his way back from the market in the hope that he will serve as a minatory moral lesson:

ELLEN: (*Looking out through the window into the yard*) Who's that father has got with him Samuel James? Such a dirty looking rascal!

SAMUEL JAMES: (*chuckling*) Da got a houl't o him at Buckna cross roads, and right or wrong he'd have him home wi' him to show Robbie John what fiddling brings a man till.

ELLEN: (*severely*) It's my mind that you and father have stayed too long in the public house, Samuel James. (*William John Granahan and Tramp Fiddler can be seen outside the window.*) Look at them – coming in! Wait till mother sees the pair of them.

(*William John Granahan comes in leading a ragged-looking bearded tramp with an old fiddle tucked under his arm.*)

WILLIAM JOHN: Now we're hame, and we'll get a drop to drink and a bite to eat, Mr Fiddler. (*He goes over to the fireplace and stands with his back to the fire*) Take a seat by the fire and warm yourself. (*no-one offers a seat to the tramp, who stands puzzled looking and swaying in a drunken manner in the kitchen.*) Ellen get a drop of tay and give this poor misguided cratur something to eat.

(*Ellen evidently disapproves of the tramp and does not offer to obey. The Grandfather rises in disgust and moves his chair nearer the fireplace away from the tramp*)

TRAMP: (*To Ellen*) Your pardon, noble lady, I intrude, Your pardon, signor, I incommode you. Times change and so do men. Ladies and gentlemen, behold in me the one time famous leader of the Blue Bohemian Wind and String Band, that had the honour of appearing before all the crowned heads in Europe.

WILLIAM JOHN: God Bless me d'you say so, mister? D'ye hear that Robbie John? There's a fiddler for you and see what comes of it.

TRAMP: Perhaps with your permission I may venture to play a few extracts from my repertoire. I can play to all tastes from a simple country ballad to a concerto by Brahms or the great Russian composer Tschaiakouski.

WILLIAM JOHN: (*open-mouthed*) Them Roosians have tarr'ble names!

TRAMP: Firstly I shall play that touching little ballad I heard Monsieur warble so sweetly as we rolled homeward in his chariot...

WILLIAM JOHN: (*nervously*) Is your mother out, Ellen?

ELLEN: She's looking after the hens, I think. She won't hear you.

(*William John Granahan starts singing two verses of a folk song, the tramp accompanying meanwhile with a fiddle, always putting in an extra flourish. The rest all join, even the grandfather beats time with a stick. The door opens and Mrs. Granahan appears seemingly astonished at the uproar. All suddenly cease singing except the tramp, who goes on playing. He suddenly notices the cessation.*)

TRAMP: Bravo. A most exquisite little air and beautifully rendered. (*He stops short in seeing Mrs. Granahan, who stands glaring at him*) Your Pardon, Madam. You are the mistress, I take it, of this most noble and hospitable house.

- MRS GRANAHAH: (*ignoring him*) You should be well ashamed of yourself William John Granahan. What will they say about you in the Session I wonder next Sabbath Day. D'you think my house is a home for the dirt and scum of the countryside?
- TRAMP: Your pardon, madam. You owe me an apology. Appearances belie me, but scum I am not. I was at one time the well known and justly famous leader of the Blue Bohemian Wind and String –
- MRS GRANAHAH: Wind and string fiddlesticks. Out you go. Out you will go. I want no tramps in here upsetting my house and making it the talk of the neighbourhood. Out you go at once.
- TRAMP: (*with drunken pride*) I thrust my company on no man or woman uninvited.
- MRS GRANAHAH: Out you go. I want no excuses. Put him out of this Samuel James, The drunken wretch coming in here, A nice place you'd have it, William Granahan with your fine company.
- WILLIAM JOHN: I brought him home here as a tarr'ble and awful warning to Robbie John what this sort of an occupation brings a man till. You see him, Robbie John, There's your great fiddling for you. Be warned in time....
- SAMUEL JAMES: Why don't you give up playing that fiddle of yours and turn your hand to honest work?
- TRAMP: (*proudly*) Desert my fiddle? The fiddle presented me at Vienna by my orchestra. A genuine old Cremona 200 years old! Rather would I wonder in Hades forever. Never! Though the cruel words stab and wound me. (*Half sobbing*) Farewell (*He blunders out*).²⁹

Given the context of the drama of the period, this extraordinary scene needs to be quoted in full. The trope of the tramp musician, a heroic figure harking back to ancient Gaelic tradition and romantically represented in many plays and poems of the Revival, is brought centre-stage in Mayne's play to be mocked and repudiated. The tramp's affected eloquence, affable nature, and bohemian claims are bathetic and the Granahans' grudging tolerance of the 'misguided cratur' soon turns to scorn as he is attacked as 'dirt', 'drunken wretch', 'scum.' William John has invited the hapless tramp home to make a mockery of such men and shock his son by exposing the gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed. Romance further yields to reality when we next hear of the tramp, as we are told he has died in a ditch, cold, wet and alone:

MRS. GRANAHAH: [...] the thing I heerd about him was when a wheen of weeks ago he was got half dead with wet and cold in the Flough Moss. John McKillop was down cutting turf and found him in a peat hole with his hands on the brew, and the ould fiddle beside him.

ELLEN: Yes, The poor soul died the next day, and just before he died, he asked McKillop to bring over his fiddle to give to Robbie John.³⁰

²⁹ Mayne, *Turn of the Road*, p. 78-81)

³⁰ Mayne, *Turn of the Road*, p. 96.



The Tramp Fiddler in 'The Turn of the Road'

"The Turn of the Road."



Photo. by Wm. McLean, Belfast.

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Ulster Literary Theatre.*

There is little room for romance in this terse description of the dead tramp being dug out of a boghole. Moreover, there is a complete absence of sympathy or sentimentality in the Granahans' reaction to the wretched fate of 'yon scarecrow'.³¹ Nevertheless, they respect the dead man's wishes and his fiddle is fatefully given to Robbie John, who decides to follow his vocation and leave for London, which prompts a final violent confrontation with his father:

WILLIAM JOHN: Ye seen what it brought yon man till that was in here. It's a tarr'ble warning till ye [...] I'd jist do with that as I'd do with a sarpint, Trample it under my heels.

ROBBIE JOHN: (*threateningly*) I'll kill the first man that dares to put a hand on it.

WILLIAM JOHN: (*angrily*) You dare talk that way to your father!³²

Robbie John's defiance of his father was, in itself, radical in the current social context of a son's subordinate position to the patriarchal head of the family. In this period, Ulster novelist Frankfort Moore observed that, 'the son is in a worse position than an errand boy'³³ and the theme of generational conflict was resonant in Ulster, as James Good acidly observed: 'the revolt of the new generation against the supremacy of the old, which has become the stock of the later English dramatists, is still on the other side of the Irish Sea, a revolutionary doctrine almost as subversive as Bolshevism'.³⁴ The play concludes with the Joycean escape of the artist into exile, although Robbie's father is less forgiving than Old Mahon in *Playboy* as he curses his son in his final speech:

WILLIAM JOHN: And know if ever you are weary or ahungered or in want of need never look me for any help. (*shouts*) Out you go! Out! Don't dare one of you as much as till take his hand, Out! Out the same as the beggar man gone with the curse of your father on you!³⁵
(*see Plate 23b*)

In this exchange, the itinerant lifestyle of an indigent tramp is indicted not idealised: an approach which exemplifies a key dramaturgical difference between the ULT's realism and

³¹ Mayne, *Turn of the Road*, p. 87.

³² Mayne, *Turn of the Road*, p. 90.

³³ F. Frankfort Moore, *The Ulsterman: A Story of Tò-Dee* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1914), p. 171.

³⁴ James Winder Good, *Ulster and Ireland* (Dublin: Maunsell & Co., 1919), p. 289.

³⁵ Mayne, *Turn of the Road*, p. 112.

the Anglo-Irish romanticism of Yeats, Gregory, Synge and a 'sugar and milk school'³⁶ of playwrights in the South that was later attacked by a new generation of writers such as R.J. Ray (*The Casting out of Martin Whelan* [1910]), T.C. Murray (*Birthright* [1910]), Seumas O'Kelly (*The Shoemaker's Child* [1910]).³⁷ This is further alluded to in a fascinating article by James Good in *Ulad*, entitled 'The Theatre and the People', in which he refers to Belfast audiences which, 'never doubt[s] that a man who lives in a red-brick villa, and spends his days adding up columns of figures in a ledger is greater and better than any peasant, though the peasant may brood over immortal dreams.' He goes on to argue that the bohemian lifestyle and predilections of Verlaine would fill him with 'noisy indignation' and that, 'In the same spirit he would judge Raftery, poor and ragged, tramping the Galway roads with his fiddle and declaiming great verse to peasants gathered round a turf fire.'³⁸ It is significant that the single criticism levelled against Synge's play *The Shadow of the Glen*, when it premiered in Belfast, alluded not to 'immorality', or its 'slandorous' representation of virtuous Irish women, but to the 'very unreal, idealistic tramp.'³⁹

The ULT's often savage anti-pastoral depictions of peasant life and nomadic indigence made a vital, if overlooked, contribution to the development of realism in the Irish Revival, an achievement usually accredited to the Abbey, and often to a(nother) regional collective of playwrights known as the 'Cork Realists' (T.C. Murray, Daniel Corkery, Lennox Robinson and others).⁴⁰ These authors arguably produced a more substantial body of work, however, historians have generally ignored the earlier groundwork of the ULT and their formative role in pioneering Ireland's renowned tradition of naturalistic drama. Their work remains almost wholly elided from Irish historiography, in spite of contemporaneous evidence that critics regarded the naturalistic performance style of the ULT as pioneering new ground, even in Dublin, where some made unflattering comparisons between the Northern players and their Abbey counterparts following performances of *Turn of the Road* and *The Pagan* in 1906:

There has been no better demonstration of the artificiality of the school of Dublin writers who are endeavouring to establish a national school in Ireland, than the visit of the Ulster Literary Theatre. This company, from

³⁶ 'Grand Opera House', *The Northern Whig*, 6 December 1911, cited in Robert Hogan. *The Abbey Theatre: The Rise of the Realists 1910-1915* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979), p. 162.

³⁷ There were, of course, other hard-hitting plays written before 1910, such as Lennox Robinson's *The Clancy Name* (1908), Conal O'Riordan's *The Piper* (1907). But in this specific instance, I am referring to the romantic depictions of tramps, see p. 257, fn 20.

³⁸ James Good, 'The Theatre and the People', *Ulad* 1:3 (May 1905): 13-14.

³⁹ 'The Theatre Royal: The Irish Players', *The Ulster Echo*, 1 December 1908.

⁴⁰ See Andrew Malone, *The Irish Drama* (London: Benjamin Blom, 1965), p. 174, 174-219; Robert Hogan and Richard Burnham, *Rise of the Realists, 1910-1915* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979), p. 41; Welch, *The Abbey Theatre*, p. 52.

Belfast, put on the boards of the Abbey Theatre, on Saturday night, two plays, one dealing with heroic life, and the other with contemporary peasant life. But the outstanding fact, and the predominating merit of both plays, as compared with those produced by our Dublin dramatists, is their essential humanity. They were crude and raw in many respects. The acting was slovenly at times, and sometimes even shown signs of coarseness. But always the spectator felt one great redeeming fact – so wanting as a rule with the Abbey Street playwrights – that here, whatever their defects – one was at least face to face with humanity, and with the facts of life [...] There is no feeling of ultra-modern literary school [...] their excellence is their fidelity to reality. For this we forgive many blemishes! And in this lies the chief deficiency of the Abbey Street dramatists.⁴¹

It must be remembered, however, that there were myriad political, cultural, and dramatic movements opposed to the aesthetics and politics of the Abbey, such as the Theatre of Ireland and the Daughters of Erin who broke away from the Abbey. Many of these disputes emerged from personal and political disagreements with Yeats, but it was Synge's drama that precipitated the most public and divisive protests from those who condemned his work as 'un-Irish' and slanderous. Ultra-nationalist, racist, and religious objections to Synge's work are part and parcel of the mythology around the Abbey disturbances and have been extensively examined by theatre historians and critics. One fascinating dimension to these disturbances and the widespread opposition to Synge's work is the fact that these protests were theatrical in nature.⁴² Para-theatrical clashes between Abbey actors, Irish Irelanders and Trinity College students in the auditorium were highly theatricalized and some nationalists even sought to 'correct' Synge's travesty of peasant life in *The Shadow of the Glen* by publishing *In a Real Wicklow Glen* in the *United Irishman*.⁴³ However, this sanctimonious corrective featuring a virtuous colleen and vapid dialogue was coagulated with a moral earnestness and religious sensibility that lacked the poetry and vitality of Synge's original and was virtually un-performable.

These prudish, quasi-religious, ultra-nationalist critiques are in stark contrast to the playful meta-theatrical *jouissance* that characterizes Northern critiques of Synge's work, as evident in Gerald MacNamara's plays and sketches which satirised its Poetic Quality, florid speechifying and romantic primitivism as the privileged gaze of the spiritual tourist. The ULT's irreverent attitude to Synge is all the more remarkable given that their opposition

⁴¹ 'Maeldûn, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre' *Sinn Féin*, 6 April 1907, p. 3, cited in Hogan and Kilroy, *The Abbey Theatre: The Years of Synge 1905-9* (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1978), p. 182.

⁴² See Ben Levitas, 'Mirror up to Nurture: J.M. Synge and his Critics', *Modern Drama* 47:4 (2004): 572-584.

⁴³ My italics. Written by 'Conn', full text is published in Hogan and Kilroy, *Laying the Foundations* 148-152. In this version, the young wife Norah is unhappily married to an older man when she happens across her former sweetheart, John Kavanagh, whose amorous advances she resists so that her she faithfully remains 'a good wife and mother.'

was not based on *über*-nationalist zealotry or on any perceived offence against race or religion, but on aesthetic grounds. Whilst an enormous amount of scholarship has examined reactions to Synge's work, not only in Dublin in the famous riots but in America, Paris, Berlin and other cosmopolitan centres in Europe,⁴⁴ it is remarkable that historians and critics have ignored how Synge was regarded in Ireland's largest city.⁴⁵

It is a significant fact that Synge's work evoked little controversy in the North. The enthusiastic reception of his work and the responses of Northern playwrights, critics and audiences expose another dimension to the cultural geography of the time. In spite of the city's notorious reputation for volatility and violence, Synge's plays enjoyed a sober, sedate, sophisticated reception in Belfast, in sharp contrast to the infamous Dublin 'riots'. Police *were* present in the city's theatres when the Abbey toured to Belfast in 1908 and 1909, but 'the only necessity for policemen will be to regulate the crowd of enthusiasts at the doors' given the 'keen anxiety to see the *Playboy*.'⁴⁶ *The Northern Whig* reported:

last night Belfast gave the 'Playboy' a welcome such as few modern pieces have received in the city, and a feeble groan or two was drowned in the torrent of applause served to show that if, like everywhere else, we are not free from stupid folk, they are a hopeless minority amongst our theatre-goers. As one listened to the comedy the puzzle was to know why there should have even been a groan. One might as well denounce, 'The Jolly Beggars' as a libel on Scotland as take offence in 'The Playboy', and this super-sensitive nationalism is no more than a veil to cover an entire lack of humour and a disinclination to admit that an artist has a right to draw an Irish peasant that differ from the green collared trim-stockinged automaton of the 'Freemans' coloured supplement' finds it risible that audiences should assume the play 'presents paricide as a popular Irish amusement.'⁴⁷

Both nationalist and unionist press praised Synge's drama and expressed surprise that audiences could take offence at his portrayal of Irish peasants. *The Northern Whig* hailed *Shadow of the Glen* stating that:

Those who imagined that the proper anti-dote to the "Stage Irishman" is a peasant modelled on a "Freeman" cartoon will find cold comfort in this

⁴⁴ Anthony Roche, 'Synge, Brecht and the Hiberno-German Connection' *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 10:1-2 (2004): 9-32; Shaun Richards, "'God, wouldn't they hop!": Synge and the Savage God', unpublished conference paper, IASIL 2006, Sydney.

⁴⁵ Ophelia Byrne's short article marks the first acknowledgement of the reception of Synge north of the Boyne. 'Terrible Truths of our own Making', in *Playboys of the Western World: Production Histories* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2004), pp. 105-115.

⁴⁶ 'Visit of the Abbey Players' *Northern Whig*, 1 December 1908.

⁴⁷ *Northern Whig*, 4 August 1909.

play [...] his women are not the smiling and inane "coleens" who figure in the windows of postcard shops.⁴⁸

The unionist *Newsletter* was particularly perspicacious in its analysis of *The Well of the Saints*, praising its author for, 'pulling aside the veil of sentimental illusion and examining stock conceptions and prejudices under the disconcerting light of day' and stating that, 'in a broader view, the story might stand for Ireland crooning over comfortable visions and cherishing dreams of greatness in preference for facing facts of the present.'⁴⁹ Perhaps both the recent death of the author and the distance from Dublin facilitated such critical clarity, but so too did the fact that they operated in a city where there were many more provocative issues to provoke riots.

Although audiences and critics were generally positive, most Northern playwrights were less fulsome in their praise of Synge, but their criticisms were based on aesthetic rather than ideological grounds. In collating many contemporaneous critical judgements of Synge's work by Northern playwrights and authors a fascinating picture emerges. ULT member and Presbyterian essayist Robert Lynd found Synge, 'a genius of decoration not of psychology',⁵⁰ while Belfast novelist Forrest Reid described him as 'an artist, but certainly not a great writer' as 'his sympathies lay too exclusively with what is exceptional for that.'⁵¹ The redoubtable St John Ervine inveighed against the artifice of his dialogue, 'He is the faker of peasant speech',⁵² his dialogue, 'contrived literary stuff, entirely unrepresentative of peasant speech.'⁵³ He indicts Yeats' championing of Synge and insists: 'It is high time that all this tosh that was formerly spouted about Synge, and still is by sentimentalists late for the fair, was stopped.'⁵⁴ Daniel Corkery laconically comments that this latter criticism is 'of course, from Mr St John Ervine [...who] hails as nearly all the English-listening worlds knows, from Belfast'⁵⁵ (my italics). Corkery also classified these critical salvos launched from Belfast as belonging to a battery of 'artillery of the Black North.'⁵⁶ Of course, these criticisms seem ludicrous today as Synge's work is firmly established in the Irish canon and *Playboy* is internationally regarded as a classic play. It is interesting, however, to note that these Northern figures critiqued Synge's work not because of its supposedly slanderous anti-nationalist politics, but because of the poetic aesthetics of its dialogue and setting.

⁴⁸ 'Visit of the Abbey Players' *Northern Whig*, 1 December 1908.

⁴⁹ *Newsletter*, 6 May 1910.

⁵⁰ Cited Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (Cork: Mercier, 1966), p. vi.

⁵¹ Forrest Reid, *W.B. Yeats: A Critical Study* (London: Martin Secker, 1915), p. 151.

⁵² St John Ervine, *Some Impressions of My Elders* (NY: The Macmillan Company, 1922), p. 202.

⁵³ St John Ervine, *How to Write a Play* (London: G. Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1928), p. 20.

⁵⁴ Cited Corkery, *Anglo-Irish*, p. vi.

⁵⁵ Corkery, *Anglo-Irish*, p. vi.

⁵⁶ Corkery, *Anglo-Irish*, p. viii.

Gerald MacNamara mocked Synge's singsong speechifying with a play whose title, *The Mist That Does be on the Bog* later became a short-hand catchphrase for disparaging poetic peasant dramas.⁵⁷ Interestingly, MacNamara had already launched a few satirical squibs before *Mist* as another sketch on Synge, *An August Day*, was submitted to the Abbey, but rejected. It was never published and no trace of the text remains, although it was read by Joseph Holloway who records in his diaries how W. A. Henderson, secretary of the National Literary Society of Dublin, confided to him that, 'he did not think that the Directors would produce *An August Day*. Synge was dead against it (the new dramatist) treads on his corns too much for his taste I suppose,' although Henderson was 'delighted' with the 'poetic strain running through it.'⁵⁸ Kathleen Danaher Parks in her work on MacNamara queries why *August Day* was rejected when *Mist* was accepted, if Synge was so opposed to this mocking critique of his work,⁵⁹ but the fact that Synge died eight months prior to the performance of *Mist* may have helped. Both *Mist* and *Thompson in Tir-na-n-Og* constitute two of the most prescient, witty and perspicacious critiques of what came to be known as 'the Abbey play' and are all the more impressive as they were written decades before the counter-Revival polemics of Denis Johnston, Patrick Kavanagh, Frank O'Connor, *et al.*

'The Necessity for "De-Hydrating" the Revival'

The Celtic Twilightery that suffused Yeats' esoteric aesthetics and the 'decorative dream world' of his drama⁶⁰ attracted coruscating criticism from some Southern commentators, such as F. Hugh O'Donnell and Alfred Nutt.⁶¹ The former famously fulminated that the Irish Literary Theatre's work was a 'wedding of Madame Blavatsky and Finn MacCumhail. A sort of witch's cauldron of aboriginal superstition and Ibsenite neo-paganism was declared to be the permanent spring of Celtic genius and Celtic religion.'⁶² A less caustic, if no less critical, attitude towards the Revivalist representations of Celtic lore, legend and myth was shared by many Northern nationalists. I referred earlier to Ulster

⁵⁷ For example, Andrew Malone refers to the Celtic Twilight school of the Revival's literature and drama and its esoteric spiritual mysticism as, 'nothing more than "the mist that does be on the bog"' without any reference to MacNamara's play: a sign for how this phrase had become a stock one within theatrical and cultural parlance. Andrew Malone, *The Irish Drama*, p. 82.

⁵⁸ Hogan and Kilroy, *The Years of Synge 1905-9*, (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1978), p. 246.

⁵⁹ Danaher Parks, *Gerald MacNamara: Ulster Playwright*, p. 87.

⁶⁰ *Belfast Telegraph*, 5 December 1906.

⁶¹ F. Hugh O'Donnell published a book vehemently attacking the 'Celtic School of Drama' established by Yeats *et al.* and the nature of his criticism can be gleaned from its title: *The Stage Irishman of the Pseudo-Celtic Drama* (London: John Long, 1904).

⁶² F. Hugh O'Donnell, *The Stage Irishman of the Pseudo-Celtic Drama* (London: John Long, 1904), p. 9.

author Lynn Doyle's observation that the Northern formation of the Revival was significantly different in that:

the Gaelic Revival has not touched us. At least one section of us. That section will have no truck with Maeve and Grania, Cuchullain [*sic*] and Conchubar, the Fianna and the Children of Lir. It looks upon these fabled beings as having their origins not in Ireland [...] and is inclined to suspect them of a past not wholly untainted by the heresy of Home Rule [...] They are too airy and unsubstantial for our Northern imagination.⁶³

Doyle's 'section' of Ulster society that will have 'no truck' with the Celtic Revival is the Protestant unionist community and their deep-seated hostility to the Revival on grounds that it was part of the wider political agenda of Irish nationalism. Rejection of the 'unsubstantial' fairies and folklore of the Celtic Twilight was not confined to Ulster unionists, but shared by many Northern nationalists, such as Denis Ireland who was scathing of the esoteric excesses of Revivalist rhetoric, as evidenced in his lampooning of Yeats' lecture on 'Irish Faery Lore', delivered on one of his rare visits to Belfast:

Willie Yeats brought a trainload of fairies to Belfast. Wide of hat and loose of tie, he arrived in great Victoria Street and, resisting the call of the lake isle of Innisfree (otherwise known as Rat Island), remained just long enough to give us industrial dwarfs and gnomes of the wee black North a hint of things that did be happening beyond the end of our horse-tram lines, our black regiments of factory chimneys, our smug wee red brick villas in the red-brick suburbs.⁶⁴

After an early, ineffective aping of Yeatsian Celticist drama (*Brian of Banba*, *The Little Cowherd of Slainge*), the ULT came to share (Denis) Ireland's sentiments and rapidly evolved from being a corollary of the INTS to presenting a contemporaneous *critique* of the same movement. What is significant about its challenge is that it contemporaneously challenged much of the political and cultural discourse that later became hegemonic. In doing so, it anticipated much of the critique of the 'Counter-Revival' which is traditionally regarded as taking place in the post-1922 period.

Demystifying the Abbey Aesthetic: 'A Fog in One Act'⁶⁵

⁶³ Lynn Doyle, *An Ulster Childhood*, p. 19-20.

⁶⁴ Dennis Ireland, 'The Night Willie Yeats brought the Fairies to Belfast,' *From the Jungle of Belfast: Footnotes to History 1904-1972* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1973), p. 17-19.

⁶⁵ This is the alternative title MacNamara offers for his play *The Mist that Does be on the Bog*.

In 'Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea', Seamus Deane expounds the need for the critical demystification of Irishness, to dehisce the essentialist, orientalist and nationalist accretions which have obscured the subject and distorted intellectual debate.⁶⁶ The degeneration of identity politics into a self-reflexive and increasingly moribund semiotic game has vitiated much of the critical discourse examining Irish politics, history, culture, and identity in recent years. It is indicative of the imaginative vision of the early ULT that Deane's argument was answered nearly a century earlier by the mercurial MacNamara, especially in his plays *The Mist that Does be on the Bog* and *Thompson in Tirnanog*. *Mist* attacks the aesthetics and ideology of the 'Abbey play' and a particular form of Irish nationalism reliant on what Joep Leerson describes as the 'fairification of Ireland'.⁶⁷ As such, it can be seen as an early precursor to *Stones in His Pockets*' critique of the contemporary 'Ballykissangelization of Ireland'⁶⁸ as promoted by Hollywood cinema and Irish tourist, film and heritage industries. In fact, spanning the century, both plays provide a fascinating diachronic demonstration of how 'Ireland' is a 'concept that is produced more often as a citation than an actuality'⁶⁹ and trace the teleology whereby the political forces of nationalism and globalisation at first cultivated, then commodified, a concept of 'authenticity' in Irish culture and identity. MacNamara's play continually ironises and undermines the very concept of cultural 'authenticity' and critiques the increasingly hegemonic ideology of Irish cultural nationalism in the Revival period.

Numerous scholars and philosophers have highlighted how authenticity is never stable or fixed, but capriciously chimerical and in flux. David Lloyd describes how during period of imperialism, '[O]n the side of the colonizer, it is the inauthenticity of the colonized culture, its falling short of the concept of human, that legitimates the colonial project,'⁷⁰ and the trajectory of his thesis is continued by Colin Graham who observes how during the teleological emergence of a colonised nation into a postcolonial state, the 'role of authenticity alters from being a signifier of the colonised's cultural incapacities to being a marketable sign of value.'⁷¹ Both scholars argue that the professed legitimacy of imperial rule and anti-colonial nationalist resistance, rely upon their conflicting claims to what is culturally in/authentic, as authenticity becomes the battlefield for ideological hegemony.

⁶⁶ Seamus Deane, *Ireland's Field Day* (London: Hutchinson, 1985), p. 57. J.W. Foster also spells out the need for the 'mystique of Irishness' to be dispelled, albeit from a unionist (as opposed to Deane's nationalist) perspective, see *Colonial Consequences*, p. 268.

⁶⁷ Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 163.

⁶⁸ Ruth Barton, 'The Ballykissangelization of Ireland' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 20: 3 (August 2000): 413-26.

⁶⁹ Colin Graham, *Deconstructing Ireland: identity, Theory, Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), cited on back cover. See also xi: 1-27, 132-150; 165-7, 171-2.

⁷⁰ David Lloyd, *Anomalous States*, cited in Graham, *Deconstructing Ireland*, p. 132.

⁷¹ Graham, *Deconstructing Ireland*, p. 132.

The Irish Revival was a broad cultural-political project that sought to describe and define an 'authentic' autonomous Irish culture and identity, during the course of which the west of Ireland and its peasantry were idealised in nationalist rhetoric, thus reversing, (and ironically replicating), the process by which they were orientalist in imperial discourse. In his magisterial study, Leerssen examines how nineteenth century antiquarians, cultural societies, and nationalist political movements celebrated the primitivism of Irish peasant life, commending it for remaining, 'aboriginal and untouched by modernising influences from outside.'⁷² Leerssen laconically describes the interest in leprechauns, fairies, and folklore by conservative Protestant Unionist writers in this period as the 'fairification of Ireland': a precursor to the contemporary condition identified by Barton and which Spurgeon Thompson calls the 'theme-parking of Ireland.'⁷³ As a central cultural institution of the Revival, the Abbey Theatre further consolidated this field work by idealizing the west, elevating it 'to the level of a national ideal.'⁷⁴ However, even though the ULT originally emerged as a corollary of the Abbey theatre, it soon evolved a mocking critique of the ideological essentialism of the Revival and a concomitant critique of the aesthetic excesses of the 'Abbey play.'

The 'Abbey aesthetic' idealised the peasantry, the past, and the 'wild west' and was performed with copious poetic speechifying before 'realistic' peasant sets. The Abbey's aesthetic has been acclaimed for its 'anthropological realism' and 'ethnographic veracity'⁷⁵ given its pursuit of 'authentic' accents, props, and costumes, even to the extent of bringing in to Theatre a young man of Aran to 'revise all details, so that an exact reproduction of the Aran dress is now given.'⁷⁶ Synge was renowned for his scrupulous attention to such details: petticoats were 'made under his direction' and he taught actors how to use spinning wheels properly.⁷⁷ Actors were also trained to mimic peasant accents and perform keens,⁷⁸ with 'real' keeners sometimes imported from the West to 'perform' live onstage. Cloaks, spinning wheels, pampooties (cowskin boots), and props were ordered in from Galway and the Aran Islands to furnish Abbey sets to heighten the

⁷² Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, p. 163.

⁷³ Spurgeon Thompson, 'The Romance of Simulation: W.B. Yeats and the Theme-Parking of Ireland', *Eire-Ireland* 30:1 (1995): 12-34.

⁷⁴ See Luke Gibbons, 'Synge, Country and Western: The Myth of the West in Irish and American Culture', in *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), pp. 23-35.

⁷⁵ Mary C. King, 'J.M. Synge, "National" Drama and the Post-Protestant Imagination', in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth Century Irish Drama* ed., Shaun Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 89.

⁷⁶ 1906 Abbey Tour of England Souvenir Programme, cited Richard Cave, 'The Abbey Tours in England' in *Irish Theatre on Tour* eds., Nicholas Grene and Christopher Morash (Dublin: Caryfort Press, 2005), p. 16.

⁷⁷ See *Irish Literary Portraits*, p. 106.

⁷⁸ A traditional form of lament performed in Gaelic, dramatised to great effect by John Millington Synge in *Riders to the Sea*.

'reality effect' of a peasant *mise en scène* on the metropolitan stage, all of which was deemed particularly effective on tours of England and America.⁷⁹

This reproduction of authenticity (the oxymoron is intentional) can be related to Fanon's seminal essay 'On National Culture' in which he outlines how native artists in colonised countries who labour to, 'create a work of national art shuts himself up in a stereotyped reproduction of details',⁸⁰ and how in the course of representing an 'authentic' indigenous culture, '[H]e sets high value on the customs, traditions and appearance of his people.' However, this can simply represent:

a banal search for exoticism. The sari becomes sacred, the shoes that come from Paris or Italy are left off in favour of pampooties, while suddenly the language of the ruling power is felt to burn in your lips.⁸¹

The resulting paradox according to Fanon is that the 'hall-mark which he wishes to be national [...] is strangely reminiscent of exoticism'.⁸² Such sentiments were shared by the Ulster players in *Mist*'s hilarious send up of what was latterly labelled as the peculiarly Irish condition of 'auto-exoticism'.⁸³ As David Kennedy argues:

The shadowy darkness in which Yeats' imagination swathed this strange world owed more to the theosophic vapourings of Madame Blavatsky than to the clear vision and precise image which are the authentic marks of Celtic literature. Ulster common sense instinctively rejected this charlatanism and guyed it in the *Mist That Does Be Upon The Bog*.⁸⁴

Mist tells the story of three am-dram bourgeois Belfast Protestants, Cissie, Gladys and Frederick, (names never previously heard on the Abbey stage!), who go 'into the west' to rent an 'authentic' Connemara cottage as part of their touristic field trip to research and rehearse their own folk play *What's All the Stir-About?* – a satirical reference to the *Playboy* riots. Their 'play itself is a parodic composite of Synge's life, *Riders to the Sea* and *The Shadow of the Glen* featuring the ubiquitous trope of the wandering tramp, 'you know the tramps in

⁷⁹ See Cave, 'The Abbey Tours in England' in *Irish Theatre on Tour*, pp. 9-54; John P. Harrington, 'The Abbey in America: The Real Thing,' in *Irish Theatre on Tour*, pp. 35-50.

⁸⁰ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1967), p. 181.

⁸¹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 178.

⁸² Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 180.

⁸³ Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, pp. 35-8.

⁸⁴ David Kennedy, 'The Drama in Ulster', in *The Arts in Ulster* ed. Sam Hanna Bell et al. (London: Harrap 1951), p. 55.

these folk plays always have more to say than anybody else on the stage.’⁸⁵ Having hired a cottage from ‘real’ peasants the amateur actors unpack their make-up, costume, props and, to enhance their ‘real’ set, some incongruously expensive extras in the form of delicate Beleck crockery, before they set about rehearsing their play. Gladys and Cissie wax lyrical about their live ‘set’ and enthusiastically throw themselves into their rehearsal, but Fred, who has ‘little sympathy with the new movement in Ireland,’⁸⁶ remains unimpressed with the PQ of their surroundings, likening the place to a ‘pig sty’ and slating the thatched cottage as ‘a rum-looking shanty.’⁸⁷ As the girls perform their peasant roles he distractedly practices his golf swing in the background and complains about having to ‘wear the rags we have for our folk plays.’⁸⁸ Serendipitously, prior to his scripted appearance as the tramp in their folk play, Cissie spies a ‘real’ tramp approaching the cottage and they continue with their performance to see if the tramp will accept them as ‘real’, ‘authentic’ peasants. At this stage, it is worth recalling the fiddler tramp from Mayne’s *Turn of the Road* who protests, ‘Appearances belie me,’ as it transpires that the tramp is *not* a real tramp, but Clarence St John, an aspiring playwright from Rathmines pretending to be a tramp who has also gone into the west in ‘search of local colour’⁸⁹ for his own folk play which he is currently composing. Upon his arrival, Clarence is warmly greeted with ‘authentic’ brogue and hospitality, prompting his aside, ‘This is delightful. I could write a play here in an hour.’⁹⁰ As the comedy unfolds the crepuscular shadows of Synge become clearer as Clarence, smitten by the peasant charms of Cissie, also falls for an actress⁹¹ so that he breaks out of character to declare his love for her. It is an act that shatters the illusion of the scene and, in suitably Syngean fashion, replaces romance with reality:

CLARENCE: How could I understand all this, living in the lap of
luxury in Rathmines?

CISSIE: The lap of luxury?

CLARENCE: Yes, for I am no tramp (*Pulls off whiskers. Cissie starts.*)

CISSIE: Then who are you?

CLARENCE: Clarence St. John is the name my father gave me.

CISSIE: But why are you disguised?

⁸⁵ Gerald MacNamara, *The Mist That Does be on the Bog*, unpublished manuscript, reproduced in Parks, *Gerald MacNamara: Ulster Playwright*, p. 96. *Mist*, Thompson and other plays were subsequently published in the *Journal of Irish Literature* 17: 2&3 (May & September 1988), however, all references are taken from this thesis.

⁸⁶ *Mist*, p. 95.

⁸⁷ *Mist*, p. 96.

⁸⁸ *Mist*, p. 95.

⁸⁹ *Mist*, p. 101.

⁹⁰ *Mist*, p. 98.

⁹¹ The young Abbey actress, Molly Allgood, who featured in a small role in Synge’s *Well of the Saints* later became the playwright’s *paramour*.

CLARENCE: Moira I have not come disguised in order to deceive you – I had an object – I am writing a play. I could weave plots equal, if not superior to any folk play I have seen – but – I am weak in what is called local colour – so I came here. I feared that had I been dressed as I usually am – in Dublin, I could not have gained your confidence, so I came disguised – as a tramp.⁹²

Clarence's confession then prompts Cissie to disrobe her costume and to divulge that she too has been acting a role that is not 'real':

CISSIE: Say no more, for I am also a deceiver [...] my name is not Moira
 CLARENCE: [*surprised*] Not Moira? [*Smiles*] Moira has a sweet sound—but, after all what's in a name? Is it Kathleen?
 CISSIE: No it is Cissie.
 CLARENCE: Cissie [*Winces*] Cissie is a musical name, but why do you hesitate to give me your answer?
 CISSIE: Because—because I have been deceiving you. [*Takes off neckerchief and apron and stands in a fashionable dress*]
 CLARENCE: What does all this mean?
 CISSIE: It simply means that I have been in this cottage only an hour. I am staying with my sister who rented the place for a week [*Holding down her head*] I belong to Belfast.
 CLARENCE: [*Turns away and bangs his head*] Belfast!
 CISSIE: Yes Belfast [*Huffed*] You need not be so shocked—there is nothing the matter with Belfast...
 CLARENCE: Moira – Cissie – I did not mean to hurt your feelings – but I am sure you will forgive me, when you think of the shock that I have had to bear.⁹³

As this vertiginous comedy of errors comes to its conclusion (see Plate 24) the hapless Clarence can no longer differentiate reality from representation, identity from performance, so that prior to fainting he exclaims, 'For heaven's sake tell me – are you real?'⁹⁴ It is a presciently postmodern question.

Mist mocks the very notion of ethnographic and aural authenticity from the outset. The opening stage directions appear to be 'natural' and 'authentic':

A cottage in Connemara. Half door on back wall. Door right. A turf fire left. A stool, table, dresser, spinning wheel, fishing net, etc. on walls. Window close to half door back. An old woman seated at the fire mending a pair of socks.⁹⁵

⁹² *Mist*, p. 101.

⁹³ *Mist*, p. 101. This hilarious exchange again exposes the geographical Otherness of Belfast, discussed in chapter 5.

⁹⁴ *Mist*, p. 104.

⁹⁵ *Mist*, p. 94.



Plate 24: Scene from *The Mist that Does be on the Bog*

However, as with Martin McDonagh's plays this setting is subsequently subverted when it transpires that the 'reality' of this peasant setting has been deliberately 'staged' by the occupants to maximise its touristic appeal, as revealed by the opening lines of dialogue that reveal the pecuniary motives of the two pleasant peasants within:

BRIDGET: I declare to the saints if you would ever put up that card if I didn't remind you.

MICHAEL: Sure, I clean forgot about the card, (*Picks it up*) 'To Let—furnished' – but it's small good that card has done us in the days that's gone.

BRIDGET: Put the card in the window when you are bid. Didn't Father Doran tell us and him just come from Dublin that all the quality in the big world do be searchin' the country over for cottages like this – and them in their motor cars?⁹⁶

This is the cue for the motoring class visitors from Belfast whose arrival prompts Michael to broaden his accent for the benefit of his auditors both outside the cottage and inside the auditorium:

MICHAEL: It's one thing to hear a motor horn when the sun do be shinin' in the blue canopy of heaven and the young ewes do be dancin' in the corn – but it's another thing to hear the toot of a motor horn when the black clouds do be restin' on top of the Slieve Girnin and the white mists do be comin' up from the bowels of the sea.

CISSIE: Oh! Gladys – isn't this delightful – such a picturesque cottage – such poetic language [...] this is just the sort of place I have always pictured in the imagination—we *must* stop here [...isn't it] 'awfully folk'. Wasn't that grand about the 'white mists'?⁹⁷

The acoustic contrast between Ulster posh-Prod and Southern Synge-song signifies the clash between the ULT's regionalism and the Abbey's revivalism and the complex inter-relations between identity and performance, actor and character, reality and representation. The polysemous complexity of performances, both scripted and 'real', accrete palimpsest-like to (re)present contemporaneous constructions of authenticity and identity to be performances of Irishness based on mimicry and role play, all of which freights Douglas Hyde's famous lecture 'On the Necessity of De-Anglicizing Ireland' (1892) with an entirely different valency:

⁹⁶ *Mist*, p. 94.

⁹⁷ *Mist*, p. 94-5.

It has always been curious to me how the Irish continue to apparently hate the English, and at the same time continue to imitate them [...] In the absence of developing our own identity, language and culture, we will become a nation of imitators.⁹⁸

Mist comically stages and satirises the colonial condition identified by Hyde, whereby Irish national identity has become self-consciously and self-reflexively performative: Irishness is (re)played, (re)produced, and (re)presented again and again in a ceaseless, simultaneous series of performances by a cast comprising an entire 'nation of imitators'. The play itself is replete with ironic, intertextual references and self-reflexive jokes shared with its audience. For example, Cissie complains that the 'real' turf fire is stage-right instead of stage-left as signalled in her script, but Gladys reminds her, 'you silly – sure there's no audience, you can turn the other way': a condition Fred complains about, 'I think this is a bit cold-blooded – acting here in broad daylight without an audience or even footlights.'⁹⁹ Moreover, *Mist's* meta-theatricality is not merely confined to playing upon audiences' interaction and expectations, or to its ironic intertextual pastiche of P.Q. tropes, but plays upon the actual physical place of its performance and the spatial politics of the Abbey Theatre where the play premièred in November 1909, a mere eight months after Synge's death! Correspondingly Cissie's cry, 'Oh! Gladys isn't it a picture! If only we could have our stage 'set' like this!'¹⁰⁰ is an extraordinarily loaded line: a meta-theatrical quip with extra kick since they were physically playing on the stage that had invented this peasant *mise en scène*; in the very theatre which calibrated Irish audiences' 'horizon of expectations' to expect such representations of 'reality'. This cat's cradle of intertextual irony is further complicated for it transpires that the Belfast players' pursuit of a 'real' set and their mock-Method approach to acting are (doubly) vain attempts to reproduce authenticity and to improve the verisimilitude of their play-within-a-play, as 'reality' is referenced only in relation to other theatrical representations of peasant life, so that when Gladys worries whether the word 'pub' is the 'right word', Cissie assures her of its authenticity and accuracy by affirming, 'it's all right – they use it in the Cloister Theatre', whilst the tramp is regarded as a 'real' tramp because 'he looks just like the tramp in *The Wishing Bone*.'¹⁰¹

As in Mayne's *Turn of the Road* the figure of the tramp is mockingly deconstructed centre-stage. As Clarence St. John enters the house Cissie remarks, 'Sure it's a tramp you

⁹⁸ Douglas Hyde, 'The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland', cited in F.S.L. Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy 1890-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 42.

⁹⁹ *Mist*, p. 96.

¹⁰⁰ *Mist*, p. 95.

¹⁰¹ *Mist*, p. 98.

are, and I have heard it said that when the bards died out, in the years gone by, they left their spirit to the tramps in the west,'¹⁰² whilst Clarence himself declares himself to be 'destroyed walking' – again, shadows of Synge and Christy Mahon here¹⁰³ – all the way from Rathmines, a place 'in the big world – it's near the big city where there is no rest – where all is strife and the holy religions almost forgotten, in the race for wealth and power.'¹⁰⁴ Clarence's speechifying sets up yet another central cultural trope of the Revival in terms of the dichotomy between the city and country, the urban and the rural, a binary deconstructed by the fact that all four 'actors' are bourgeois Protestant suburbanites, from North and South; 'cultural tourists' who romanticize the supposed simplicity and spirituality of Catholic peasant lives:

CLARENCE: Today I have buried my old self – today I am a peasant. I am one of yourselves. My eyes have opened to the hollow and insincere life I have been leading, when I looked into your innocent and trusting eyes. How could I, Moira, understand the depth and purity of your simple lives, how you struggled with poverty and clung to your religion through times of hardship and suffering. How could I understand all this, living in the lap of luxury in Rathmines?¹⁰⁵

In this way MacNamara's satirical meta-drama deconstructs both the Abbey's representation *and performance* of Irish identity and is precociously postmodern in its 'play-ful', ironised restaging of the theatrical conventions of Irish drama. In itself, the play anticipates the postmodern cultural politics of contemporary Ireland as described by Colin Graham whereby heavily ironised forms of authenticity are prevalent in Irish culture; which themselves question the very idea of essence or authenticity.¹⁰⁶ The complexity of *Mist's* cultural politics are also matched by the sophistication of its aesthetic form as the singularly extraordinary achievement of MacNamara was that he pioneered a pluralist, playful dramaturgy many years before later generations of playwrights and critics like

¹⁰² *Mist*, p. 99.

¹⁰³ When Christy first enters onstage he requests a glass of porter and declares himself to be 'destroyed walking' *Playboy*, in *Synge's Plays, Poems and Prose*, p. 114.

¹⁰⁴ *Mist*, p. 98.

¹⁰⁵ *Mist*, p. 101.

¹⁰⁶ See Graham, *Deconstructing Ireland*, pp. 132–152, esp. 146–150. Graham identifies the search for authenticity as a driving dynamic of Irish culture and in his diachronic survey of literature, culture, tourism, and advertising he describes this search for authenticity as moving through three phases: 'old authenticity', 'new authenticity', and 'ironic authenticity': the latter stage of which is characterized by the postmodern *jouissance* of kitsch culture which, though widely accepted in contemporary Irish society, ironically undermines the very concept of authenticity.

Johnson, Parker, Graham.¹⁰⁷ As one critic noted, 'MacNamara's plays mark a brilliant epoch in that period and established the Ulster Literary Theatre as a company that excelled in his fantastic burlesques,'¹⁰⁸ and perhaps the best example of this is his 1912 play *Thompson in Tir-na-n-Og* an ostensibly comic burlesque which *London's Daily Dispatch* recognized was 'really propaganda in the form of serio-comedy.'¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Nicholas Grene's seminal study examines a number of dramas from a range of playwrights from Boucicault to Friel, all of whom are thematically connected by their 'self-conscious stage representation of Ireland' (*The Politics of Irish Drama*, p. 2.) *Mist* and other plays written by MacNamara very much fit within this thematic tradition in Irish theatre, although their politics are almost postmodern given their reliance on pastiche and their rejection of essence and authenticity.

¹⁰⁸ 'The Ulster Literary Theatre', *The Dublin Magazine* 31.2 (April-June, 1955): 21.

¹⁰⁹ Cited Danaher Parks, p. 117.

Thompson in Tir-na-n-Og

*'The search for authenticity, for a more congenial national origin than that provided by colonial history, for a new pantheon of heroes, myths, and religions [...] along with these nationalist adumbrations of the decolonized identity, there always goes an almost magically inspired, quasi-alchemical redevelopment of the native language. Yeats is especially interesting here. He shares with Caribbean and some African writers the predicament of a common language with the colonial overlord.'*¹¹⁰ (Edward Said)

*'The Gaelic League ensured that some genuine revival took place, but this meant introducing a qualification for Irishness that most of the Revivalists themselves, including Yeats, AE, Standish James O'Grady, and James Stephens, could not, or would not, meet, and so the qualification had to wait for proper elevation after the Revival.'*¹¹¹ (John W. Foster)

*'Certainly plays in English dealing with heroic, legendary or historical subjects cannot be written in dialect.'*¹¹² (Frank Fay)

Yeats' rejection of O' Casey's play *The Silver Tassie* on the grounds that its author had 'never stood on its battlefields' prompted one of Irish theatre's most notorious feuds as an apoplectic O' Casey's blasted the bard of the Abbey:

Do you really mean that no one should or could write about or speak about a war because one had not stood on its battlefields? Were you serious when you dictated that – really serious, now? Was Shakespeare at Actium or Phillipi? Was G.B. Shaw in the boats with the French, or in the forts with the British when St. Joan and Dunois made the attack that relieved Orleans? And someone, I think, wrote a poem about Tir-na-n-Og who never took a header into the land of Youth...¹¹³

Given this splenetic jibe, one can only wonder what O'Casey would have made of MacNamara's satirical extravaganza *Thompson in Tir-na-n-Og*, in which redoubtable Orangeman, Andy Thompson, expires *en route* to the Battle of Scarva and takes a 'header into the land of Youth' to the consternation of its Celtic inhabitants.

Thompson was MacNamara's most successful play; its popular success matched only by *The Drone*.¹¹⁴ It was acclaimed by the *Irish Times* as 'one of the most amusing pieces that has ever been written in connection with the Irish Dramatic Movement,'¹¹⁵ however, the play's comedy is undercut with a withering critique of Revivalist nationalism and Orange

¹¹⁰ Edward Said, 'Yeats and Decolonization', in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 79.

¹¹¹ Foster, *Colonial Consequences*, p. 252.

¹¹² Frank Fay, *Towards a National Theatre*, p. 56.

¹¹³ O'Casey, *The Letters of Sean O'Casey*, p. 271.

¹¹⁴ Indeed, *Thompson* was the only play of MacNamara's that was published.

¹¹⁵ 'The Gaiety Theatre', *The Irish Times*, 17 December 1914, cited in Robert Hogan, *The Abbey Theatre: The Rise of the Realists 1910-1915* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979), p. 349.

loyalism. In his otherwise perceptive study, Hagal Mengel labels the play a 'light-weight satire,'¹¹⁶ but it is much more sophisticated than this and its counter-Revivalist critique of language and identity politics in this period is without parallel.

MacNamara was originally commissioned by the Gaelic League to write the play for their own propagandistic purposes as for several years now they had successfully promoted their work through dramatic performance and had worked closely in collaboration with activists like Alice Milligan. In fact, Milligan choreographed her first *tableaux vivants* for the League back in 1898 which dramatised 'scenes from the story of Cuchulain and the Flight of Diarmuid and Grainne'¹¹⁷ and were 'loudly applauded.'¹¹⁸ However, the 'little masterpiece'¹¹⁹ offered by MacNamara was rejected by the League who felt, 'it held up the Gaelic heroes to ridicule.'¹²⁰ Given the reverential treatment of Gaelic heroes in Milligan's mythic *tableaux* and Yeats' mystical stagings the League had a point.¹²¹ MacNamara's portrayal, 'written in the high-style of the Abbey plays'¹²² must have been shocking, especially its caricaturing of Cuchulain as a violent simpleton and various Celtic heroes as a vicious collection of boastful, bickering 'luneys.' However, Thompson not only mocks the Gaelic League and the Abbey, but even sends up ULT personnel who are parodied in a number of recognizable caricatures. Although Mengel maintains MacNamara 'always hits out at institutions and traditions, never against identifiable individuals,'¹²³ a close reading of the play reveals several satirical sideswipes against erstwhile associates. Cuchulain is a caricature of Bulmer Hobson, 'the most dangerous man in Ireland'¹²⁴ and the co-founder of the ULT, as revealed when Thompson rebukes 'the Great Northern' 'Ach don't bother me ye ould Quaker':¹²⁵ a reference to Hobson's religious background. As a leading radical Hobson was under surveillance by the authorities who were aware of his senior position in the proscribed IRB and his authorship of *Defensive Warfare: A Handbook for Irish Nationalists*, and there is no doubt his activities could have endangered, or at least

¹¹⁶ Mengel, *Sam Thompson*, p. 82.

¹¹⁷ Alice Milligan, letter to *The Daily Express*, 21 January 1899, cited in Hogan and Kilroy, *Irish Literary Theatre*, p. 54.

¹¹⁸ 'The Gaelic League Festival', *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 8 May 1898.

¹¹⁹ Forrest Reid, 'Eighteen Years' Work: The Ulster Players', *The Times, Irish Supplement* 5 December 1922.

¹²⁰ Gerald Morrow, nephew of Gerald MacNamara, cited in Bell, *Theatre in Ulster*, p. 43.

¹²¹ Consider Alice Milligan's romantic representation of the Land of Youth in her short play *Oisín In Tir Na Nog* published three years earlier in *Sinn Féin*. The stage directions describe Tir-na-n-Og as follows: 'An open space among white blossomed trees, behind which are glimpses of sea and sky. Groups of fairy people sit under the trees, making music on light bell branches and curved shells. They are all young and joyful, clad in light colours, the girls in robes of white and azure blue, the youths in kirtles of a hunting green.' Alice Milligan, *Oisín In Tir Na Nog*, in *Sinn Féin*, 23 January 1909.

¹²² Jack Point, *The Evening Herald*, 1 February 1913, cited in Parks, *Gerald MacNamara*, p. 111.

¹²³ Mengel, *Sam Thompson*, p. 151.

¹²⁴ The assessment of British military intelligence, see Chapter 3.

¹²⁵ Gerald MacNamara, *Thompson in Tir-na-n-Og*, in Danaher Parks, *Gerald MacNamara*, p. 131. All later references are taken from this text.

incriminated, his ULT colleagues. Hobson was (in)famous for his implacable nationalism, unpredictable behaviour, and militancy¹²⁶ which are all hilariously parodied in Cuchulain's violent obsession with martial feats. Cuchulain sees himself as a man of action, 'Twas not much Gaelic I ever spoke, my sword spoke for me,' but his simplicity and vanity is patronisingly indulged by his companions: 'Well said Cuchulain, thy words are like a saga.'¹²⁷ In the opening scene of the play Angus hails another hero, Finn, leader of the Fianna, with the following: 'Greetings to the High King of Tir-na-n-Og, and to thee O Finn, Ardrie of Benmadigan and ruler of the lands around Ardglass.'¹²⁸ From Angus' greeting it can be gleaned that Finn is a caricature of the leader of the North's nationalist Fianna, Joseph Bigger, the solicitor and sponsor of nationalist activity in Belfast whose Antrim Road home *Ardriagh* in the shadow of Benmadigan was a fulcrum of nationalist activity, as was his castle in Ardglass which played hosts to various cultural and political gatherings.

Moving from the implicit to the explicit subject of his satire, the play's sardonic title is an eponymous reference to Belfast's Tir-na-n-Og branch of the Gaelic League, and in the opening scene of the play MacNamara mocks the very mission and manifesto of the League itself:

- KING: What has befallen our land this day, this land of eternal youth and happiness – beloved Tir-na-n-Og? O sad is my heart, and my tongue is troubled with speaking in this new and curious language. Can it be that the knowledge has utterly forsaken me, or is it but an evil spell which may soon pass away?
 (Making a low bow) Greetings to thee, O King of Tir-na-n-Og.
 FINN: (Bowing, then aside.) Poor Finn, he's got it too.
 KING: O King, I am in dire distress; I have been stricken with a malady which troubles me to understand. I have lost all words of Gaelic and in their stead I speak this language which must sound curious to thine ears. (King shakes his head.) Ah I see 'tis useless to address the King in such a barbarous language.¹²⁹
 FINN: Stay noble Finn!

¹²⁶ Hobson's mercurial nature and militant nationalism are illuminated in the private correspondence of O' Casey who 'particularly [...] hated Bulmer Hobson.' At the time Hobson was living in Dublin where he was the secretary of the Irish Volunteers, whilst O'Casey was the secretary of the rival Irish Citizen Army. O'Casey fell out with Hobson over his latter's friendship with veteran Fenian leader Tom Clarke; a friend of O'Casey's. Hobson became 'the white-haired boy of Tom Clarke' and when the Dubliner criticised the Quaker, Clarke ejected O'Casey from his shop, 'telling me he "loved Hobson as his own son."' O'Casey recalls an IRB meeting in Dublin during which Hobson 'drew a gun and there was pandemonium.' O'Casey, *The Letters of Sean O'Casey*, p. 697.

¹²⁷ MacNamara, *Thompson*, p. 123.

¹²⁸ MacNamara, *Thompson*, p. 121.

¹²⁹ This may have been a satirical reference to an English critic who sneered that the ULT's 'chief accomplishment is the manipulation of a singularly barbarous dialect.' *The Nation and the Athenaeum* cited in Bell, *Theatre in Ulster*, p. 38.

- FINN: The god be praised, you also speak this language.
 KING: In truth I do, but much against my will. What can be its portent?¹²⁹[...]
 ANGUS: Greetings...
 KING: You also speak this strange tongue. Where hast thy Gaelic gone?
 ANGUS: O King, for reasons, I was forced to exercise my power of casting spells[...]
 KING: I hope you have good reason, for my throat likes not this irritating language [...]
 FINN: But what language is it that you've put upon us?
 ANGUS: I ordered purest English.
 KING: English! What people are the English?
 ANGUS: They hail from beyond the Eastern Sea.
 KING: What! Those barbarians! A people who were wont to paint their bodies red, white and blue?
 FINN: And who, we're told, did eat their near relations.
 ANGUS: From what I hear they've much improved of late.¹³⁰

MacNamara mocks the supposed superiority of Gaelic and Irish-Ireland's insistence on Irish speaking as a prerequisite of nationality. The arrival of Thompson - 'I've never known such a name in Erin'¹³¹ - shatters the tranquillity of Tir-na-n-Og as his very presence, not to mention politics, debunks the Celtic heroes' concept of Ireland with its irreducible Orange otherness. The court druid Angus explains that he has cast the spell of English only as a temporary measure to facilitate converse with Thompson whose incomprehensible language was 'like the bark of dogs.' He also recounts how he cast a spell to 'throw the Gaelic tongue upon him,' but in spite of his prowess as a sorcerer whose spells are 'never known to fail' this proves an 'utter failure.' The explanation, however, is 'not that he *could not* speak Gaelic. 'Twas that he *would not*':¹³² as insuperable a difficulty in Celtic heaven as it was in contemporaneous Ireland where the Gaelic League and Irish Ireland movements 'flew in the face of social reality.'¹³³

Anachronistically resplendent in his Orange regalia, the bewildered Thompson is introduced to the regal figures of the Celtic court and automatically assumes it is an asylum:

- CUCHULAIN: If thou art a fighting man from Erinn [*sic*] thou must have heard of my great deeds?
 THOMPSON: What's your name mister?
 CUCHULAIN: Cuchulain.
 THOMPSON: Koo-hoo?
 CUCHULAIN: Cuchulain.
 THOMPSON: Aye, it's a fine day [...]

¹²⁹ MacNamara, *Thompson*, pp. 121-2.

¹³⁰ MacNamara, *Thompson*, p. 122.

¹³¹ MacNamara, *Thompson*, p. 123.

¹³² Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), p. 51.

- CUCHULAIN: But hast thou never heard of me in Erinn?
 THOMPSON: I'll tell you no lies, Mister, I never did. What are ye, or what were ye?
 CUCHULAIN: I was of the Red Branch, foremost of the fighting men of Ulster.
 THOMPSON: Ulster! Put it there. (*Shakes hands*) Why didn't ye tell me that before?
 (*Brings him down stage to front and whispers*) Man, I took you for a luney
 like the rest (*Points over his shoulder with his thumb*).
 CUCHULAIN: Were you ever in Ulster?
 THOMPSON: Was I ever in Ulster, --was I ever in -- was I ever out of it?
 CUCHULAIN: I hope that Ulster still holds sway in Erinn.
 THOMPSON: I dunno about holdin' sway, but she can hold her own- and more[...]
 CUCHULAIN: What apart of Ulster have you come from?
 THOMPSON: Scarva
 CUCHULAIN: Lies Scarva east or west?
 THOMPSON: It's on the Great Northern
 CUCHULAIN: (*Reflectively*) Once I was the Great Northern¹³⁴ [...]
 THOMPSON: (*Looks at Cuchulain pityingly and says aside*): He's as bad as the rest,
 poor sowl.¹³⁵

As Thompson is interrogated about his identity the unfolding mutual incomprehension of both parties reveals how essentialist definitions of nationality (whether Orange or Green) distort the complexity of the North. As the interrogation proceeds, the absurdity of outdated criteria and concepts of identity become hilariously clear:

- CUCHULAIN: Do you still assert that you are Irish?
 THOMPSON: Of course I do.
 CUCHULAIN: And you admit that do not speak the language of your country?
 THOMPSON: (*Proudly*) The language of my country is English.
 CUCHULAIN: Answer me, Sir. Can you speak Irish?
 THOMPSON: I told you before that I couldn't and [...]
 CUCHULAIN: You affirm that you are Irish. Are you proud of the fact?
 THOMPSON: I am, troth.
 CUCHULAIN: But as you are speaking English, any man might call you "English".
 THOMPSON: Wud he? Well, if he did he wud never do it again.
 CUCHULAIN: Why?
 THOMPSON: Why? I'd break his jaw.
 ANGUS: The remarks of the prisoner are most contradictory.¹³⁶

In this way MacNamara highlights how Irishness is not reducible to Corkery's three criteria¹³⁷ but is a cats cradle of complex, and often contradictory experiences and affiliations. The inhabitants of Tir-na-n-Og's memory of mythic Ireland cannot be

¹³⁴ A satirical reference to the Great Northern Railway line as yet again, the humour of this exchange stems from the anachronistic clash between the mythic and the modern.

¹³⁵ MacNamara, *Thompson*, p. 126.

¹³⁶ MacNamara, *Thompson*, pp. 130-1.

¹³⁷ In his seminal work, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, (Cork: Mercier Press, 1966), Daniel Corkery, the leading advocate of the Irish-Ireland movement, classifies Irishness as being indexed to religion (Catholicism), nationalism, and the land.

reconciled with its modern reality and Grania is forced to concede, 'Many changes must have come o'er Erinn since the days of Cuchulain and Oisín.'¹³⁸ MacNamara's message to Revivalist nationalists could not be clearer. By the same token, the contradictory exchanges also hint at a shared identity as Thompson vociferously professes his Irishness, but vehemently opposes any attempts to yoke this to racial, religious, or political qualifications:

- KING: Is the prisoner at the bar, in your opinion, an Irishman?
 QUEEN: He is not, my Lord.
 THOMPSON: You're a – it's a lie – my father and mother are Irish, and I am Irish too!
 KING: Why are you so convinced that this man is not Irish?
 QUEEN: Because he speaks in a language foreign to Ireland.
 KING: And what language do you call it?
 QUEEN: It is called English.
 THOMPSON: But shure you are speaking English yourself.
 QUEEN: But at present we are under a spell.¹³⁹

This comic, complex exchange brilliantly crystallises the simplistic pieties and inherent paradoxes of the Irish-Ireland movement and its deterministic, dogmatic equation of nationality with language. It also attacks the whimsical notion that the modern English-speaking condition of Ireland is but a spell; a temporary lapse that will be reversed by the de-Anglicization of Ireland and MacNamara acerbically mocks this absurdly Canutian concept of turning the tide of modernity with mythology. The League pursued 'the magically inspired, quasi-alchemical redevelopment of the native language' described by Said as characteristic of decolonising movements, the paradoxical politics of which are pointed out by John Foster as this introduces a 'qualification of Irishness' which many leading members of the Revival could not meet.¹⁴⁰ MacNamara tackled this contradiction head on and challenged the logic of Irish-Ireland's position whereby those who could not speak Gaelic were classified as alien and 'non-Irish.' Language politics were at the heart of the ideological debates about national identity in this period with Seán MacGiollarnáth, editor of the Gaelic League's weekly Irish language paper *An Claidheamh Solais*, arguing:

The revival of Irish would [...] place additional barriers between England and this country [...] that is why Ireland is reviving her language. Up with the barriers, they will protect us against a thousand plagues.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ MacNamara, *Thompson*, p. 129.

¹³⁹ MacNamara, *Thompson*, p. 130.

¹⁴⁰ Foster, *Colonial Consequences*, p. 252.

¹⁴¹ 'Up with the Barriers', *An Claidheamh Solais*, 10 August 1910.

That Gaelic could protect Ireland from the pestilential infections of British imperialism was central to the League's philosophy and laughable to MacNamara. This was already the heated subject of debate not just in the political scene, but the dramatic movement as well with Abbey stalwart Frank Fay maintaining, 'Only in our language can we be ourselves. It is the only barrier which can successfully defy and repel the Saxon Hooliganism and vulgarity which are so rampant wherever English is spoken.'¹⁴² Fay, like many nationalists active within the dramatic movement thought that a national theatre must perform in the native tongue:

The Irish Theatre must, of course, express itself solely in the Irish Language; otherwise it would have no *raison d'être*. For some time to come, however, (and let us hope the time will be short), English will have to be heard on our stage, and it is with regard to Mr Yeats' desire and ability to write English plays on Irish subjects that I want to strike a warning note. Firstly, such plays should be written as to appeal to as large a section of countrymen as possible; otherwise no good can result to us from their production.¹⁴³

MacNamara sought to break away from such reductive assumptions; to prise nationality free from this prison-house of language of fundamentalist positions like Fay's. However, the nationalist movement is not the only subject of MacNamara's satire as the simplistic pieties of Orangeism are critiqued with equal vigour to expose some of the absurd contradictions underpinning loyalist political mythology:

CUCHULAIN: Do you Orangemen rejoice in the victory of a foreign prince over your own countrymen?
 THOMPSON: (*In a tired voice*) Aye.
 CUCHULAIN: And why?
 THOMPSON: Because we don't want Home Rule.
 CUCHULAIN: Are you too lazy to rule yourselves?
 THOMPSON: Ach it's not like that, for there's heaps of them up in the South and West that want Home Rule.
 CUCHULAIN: What kind of people are they?
 THOMPSON: They're no class – a lot of Gaelic Leaguers and Hibernians.
 CUCHULAIN: Are you not a Hibernian?
 THOMPSON: If you insult me like that, I'll strike you.¹⁴⁴

To parody Thompson's loyalist politics was highly provocative, especially in 1912 when the third Home Rule crisis had transformed Belfast into a crucible of inter-communal conflict with the city teetering on the brink of civil war. Half a million unionists had signed

¹⁴² Frank Fay, *Towards a National Theatre*, p. 36.

¹⁴³ Frank Fay, *Towards a National Theatre*, p. 50.

¹⁴⁴ MacNamara, *Thompson*, p. 132.

the Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant¹⁴³ three months prior to *Thompson's* premiere, whilst tens of thousands of others had enrolled in the UVF and pledged themselves to resist the implementation of Home Rule 'using all means which may be found necessary.' Many thousands more had also enrolled in the nationalist Irish Volunteers which was equally committed to supporting the implementation of Home Rule. This mass mobilization of rival paramilitary armies and Belfast's highly militarized state is directly alluded to:

CUCHULAIN: O how I fought for Ulster. (*excitedly*) When the great battle fury was upon me.

THOMPSON: Now don't get excited Mister – I know what the battle fury is – I've had it often – every Twelfth –and Thirteenth.

CUCHULAIN: Whole hosts lay dead and bleeding at my feet [...] Alone I routed an army[...] As I swept into battle with my gold bronze chariot, whole nations have trembled to hear the Ulster war cry on my lips.

THOMPSON: (*Very excited, slapping Cuchulain on the back*) True Blue! Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right!¹⁴⁴ (*Assuming military tone of voice*). Form fours! Left turn! Quick March!¹⁴⁵

Against this volatile and violent backdrop, there were justifiable fears before the play's performance about the possibility of violence:

At that time there was [...] very heavy political tension on. You remember there was a certain period in Belfast when everybody was letting revolvers off on every possible occasion [...] But this night there was an immense booking and there was also an immense crowd waiting to go up into the Gods, and Mr. McCann, who was the manager of the Opera House came round and told us behind not to let off too strong in *Thompson* because he had been informed that there were men up there who had been told that this play made fun of a certain order, and that they were all lined up with rivets and bolts in their pockets.¹⁴⁶

The legacy of 'Irish Nights' lived on. Indeed, in these tense times when many citizens went about their 'business and its pleasure with a revolver in its hip pocket',¹⁴⁷ it is unsurprising that the *Newsletter's* critic expresses anxiety as to the possibility of not-so-divine intervention from the 'gods' in the gallery, 'one trembles to think what they might say if

¹⁴³ Signed 28 September 1912.

¹⁴⁴ Traditional unionist slogan of the anti-Home Rule movement.

¹⁴⁵ MacNamara, *Thompson*, p. 127.

¹⁴⁶ Rutherford Mayne, *Enter Robbie John*, p. 40.

¹⁴⁷ Good, *Ulster and Ireland*, p. 268.

they imagined that beneath his levity there was some sinister motive.¹⁵⁰ Whether or not the Grand Opera House unfurled its giant net to protect the players on stage the expected fusillade did not appear; instead, 'for three quarters of an hour [...] the audience rocked and roared as one has seldom heard theatre-goers in these degenerate days.'¹⁵¹ The *Newsletter* attributes this to the even handedness of the satire, 'last night's audience decided that the honours were equal and gave themselves up to uproarious laughter.'¹⁵²

Nevertheless, the comedy of the play has a chilling dimension for it concludes with the hapless Thompson being sentenced to the 'test of fire' as the final litmus test of his identity.

THOMPSON: But what am I doing on you? What's wrong with me?

KING: That is beyond our ken – perhaps it is your face – but sure we are that you and we cannot exist together in this peaceful land. You must stand or perish in the test.¹⁵³

In this 'peaceful land' the stranger in the house is put to death by being burnt at the stake.¹⁵⁴ As he is dragged offstage Thompson's cry, 'These people are mad and dangerous' ventriloquises MacNamara's view of how easily absolutist nationalism can be transformed utterly into an oppressive orthodoxy, with fascist overtones. Consider Professor Corcoran's – a leading figure of Irish Ireland movement – declaration in 1924:

The Irish nation is the Gaelic nation; its language and literature is the Gaelic language; its history is the history of the Gael. All other elements have no place in Irish life, literature and tradition [...] the Irish nation is not a racial synthesis at all; synthesis is not a vital process [...] We are not a national conglomerate, not a national patchwork specimen; the poetry or life of what Aodh De Blacam calls Belfast can only be Irish by being assimilated by Gaelic literature into Gaelic literature [*viz.*].¹⁵⁵

The quasi-fascist ramifications of racial purity are frightening: assimilation or else. Faced with this choice Thompson opts for one 'murder machine'¹⁵⁶ over another:

¹⁵⁰ *Belfast Newsletter*, 10 December 1912.

¹⁵¹ 'Grand Opera House', *The Northern Whig*, 10 December, 1912, cited in Robert Hogan, Richard Burnham and Daniel Poter, *The Abbey Theatre: The Rise of the Realists 1910-1915* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979), p. 228.

¹⁵² *Belfast Newsletter*, 10 December 1912.

¹⁵³ MacNamara, *Thompson*, p. 134.

¹⁵⁴ In the original typescript version of the play (held in the Linen Hall Library), 'a woodpile is brought onto the centre of the stage and lit,' whereas in the published version, there is a 'blaze offstage' in which Thompson is incinerated. Inexplicably, Danaheer Parks finds the latter 'a marked improvement' (p. 140) as it increases the play's 'lighthearted' and 'comic' character. She apparently misses the point of the play.

¹⁵⁵ Professor T. Corcoran, *Catholic Bulletin* 14: 4 (April 1924): 269, cited in Brown, *Ireland*, p. 53.

¹⁵⁶ 'Murder machine' was the phrase coined by Patrick Pearse to describe the Irish education system under English colonial rule and the title of a collection of his educational essays: *The Murder Machine and Other*

Ach, don't burn me and I'll learn Gaelic, and I'll make the childer learn it – I will sow! and I have a parrot at home that my uncle brought back from foreign parts; it can only whistle "Dolly's Brae", but be heavens' I'll learn it Gaelic too.¹⁵⁷

Like John B. Keane, MacNamara hides within the humour and hilarity of his play a harrowing depiction of a conservative, censorious society. Thompson's death is a chilling reminder of the oppressive forces of political conformity and the violence underpinning their absolutist, essentialist ideologies. As such, *Thompson in Tir-na-n-Og* provides as astute a critique of the inherent violence of nationalism as Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*. Both are salutary warnings as to the savage reality behind romantic speechifying, and though Christy Mahon's has his leg seared with a burning sod by the community that initially welcomes him, Thompson is burnt to ashes at the stake. Signalling through the flames could be glimpsed future fratricidal conflicts: the Civil War, the carnage of WW1, and the spectre of Partition as two mutually exclusivist identities and ideologies can neither communicate nor co-habit with one another.

In 1922, not long after Partition, Dublin's *Freeman's Journal* acclaimed *Thompson* for engaging 'with every issue upon which the North and South are at loggerheads [...] in the light of the special circumstances of the time, it would be difficult to imagine a work of more urgent national importance.'¹⁵⁸ It was belated recognition of MacNamara's

Essays (Dublin: The Mercier Press, 1976). In one essay 'Against Modernism' Pearse states that independence could bring sweeping changes to the Irish educational system including the 'delightful prospect of Orange boys and Orange Girls being forced to learn Irish.' This scenario of, 'the children of Sandy Row being taught to curse the Pope in Irish' is relished by Pearse as 'rich and soul-satisfying' (p. 11). These comments seem at odds with Pearse's genuinely innovative and creative approach to teaching and learning and go against the often more generous grain of his writings on reforming education. Later in the same collection of essays he indicts English imperial education systems as follows:

Our English-Irish systems took, and take, absolutely no cognisance of the differences between individuals, of the differences between localities, of the differences between urban and rural communities, differences springing from a different ancestry, Gaelic or Anglo-Saxon (19).

However, he wilfully ignores the greatest difference in the nation: not the city/country divide, the English/Irish binary, or the geographical dialectic between locality and nationality, but the cultural, political, demographic and imaginative gulf between North and South. This difference is omitted from his totalising nationalism which entirely elides the North from his ideological geography and contradicts his claims that freedom is not the 'freedom of a class [...] not the freedom of a geographical fragment of Ireland, but the freedom of all Ireland, of every sod of Ireland.' (31)

¹⁵⁷ MacNamara, *Thompson*, p. 134.

¹⁵⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, cited Ophelia Byrne, *The State of Play: The Theatre and Cultural Identity in 20th Century Ulster* (Belfast: Linen Hall Library, 2001), p. 18.

achievement, and in 'light of the special circumstances of the time' *Freeman's* fulsome praise could be appositely applied to the work of the Ulster Literary Theatre as a whole.

Conclusion

Quite recently, searching amongst some old papers, we came on a little green cardboard folder with a picture of a jester in a cap and bells on its front page.

*It was our membership card of the ULT and the sight of the little card recalled to us our appearance with the company on its initial visit to Dublin, when *The Drone* was first produced at the Abbey theatre, and how the now thread-bare comedy [...] took the capital city by storm and that at a time when the Abbey was making history with its unrivalled productions. During our stay in Dublin it was a case of "roses, roses all the way." We were feasted and feted everywhere. Yeats, Lady Gregory, George Russell (AE), Edward Martyn, and all the poets and authors of the city – and they were legion – vying with each other, separately and collectively to do us honour. The critics, for once, were unanimous in their laudations of Sam Waddell's comedy, and had nothing but praise for the acting of the Ulster Players."¹*

¹ Cathal O'Byrne, 'Memories Theatrical' *Irish News and Belfast Morning News*, 21 October 1944

to my friends Sam & Mary as a souvenir of Liverpool & the Ulster Players May 8th 1911 from Sam

Conclusion

*'Why, then, are the Ulster players little more than a memory to-day?'*¹ (Richard Hayward)

*'In 1939 Belfast was a cultural desert. One had heard indeed of the ULT but those [...] days were past.'*² (Robert Greacan)

*'[...] one must discriminate between different kinds of political nationalism - those which emancipate and those which incarcerate, those that affirm a people's cultural identity in dialogue with other peoples and those that degenerate into ideological closure - into xenophobia, racism and bigotry.'*³ (Richard Kearney)

Whilst holidaying in Donegal Stephen Gwynn described how he met Joseph Bigger, Herbert Hughes and Joseph Campbell walking near Dunfanaghy. Sharing many of the same literary and political interests, they began talking and Gwynn rhapsodised about his love for Donegal with a self-regarding romanticism that prompted the more hard-headed Hughes to retort, 'I would sooner have a place where a man is liable to have stones clodded at him for his opinions.' It was a response which self-styled Southern sophisticate Gwynn wearily conceded 'was Belfast all over.'⁴

This amusing account sheds some light on the individual temperament of Hughes and, indeed, of the early character of the ULT.⁵ So too, does the purpose of the trio's trip to Donegal where they hiked extensively, took photographs of the spectacular scenery and recorded local traditional music and song. They returned to Belfast with 'a veritable treasure trove of unrecorded airs' which were subsequently arranged by Hughes to the lyrics of Campbell and the design of his artist brother John and published as *The Songs of Ulad*, thanks to the largesse of Bigger, the expedition's financial and artistic sponsor.

¹ Richard Hayward, *In Praise of Ulster* (Belfast: William Mullan & Son, 1943), p. 32.

² Robert Greacan, 'Writing in Wartime Belfast', *Irish Times*, 16 March 1976.

³ Richard Kearney, 'Post-modernity and National: A European Perspective', *Modern Fiction Studies* 38: 3 (Autumn 1992): 586.

⁴ Stephen Gwynn, *Experiences of a Literary Man* (London: Thornton-Butterworth, 1926), p. 238.

⁵ Consider the co-founder of the ULT's accounts of the rather rowdy, sometimes riotous conditions of political activity in this period: 'Our propagandist meetings were, however, our principal activity. They went on incessantly. It was a common occurrence for me to speak at five or six meetings in a week, and the meetings were often quite exciting. In Newry we spoke from a brake in the street and the crowd threw mud, decayed vegetables and stones, our remarks being inaudible above the din. In Castlewella we fled from our infuriated audience. The meeting was on a mountain, on St John's Eve, and we raced down the side of a quarry in the dark with showers / of stones rattling at our heels. In Dungannon, no word of ours could be heard on account of the howling of our hearers. In Monaghan the members of the Irish National Foresters Society tried to rush the platform and their enemies, The Ancient Order of the Hibernians, went for them. I stayed on the platform and let them fight it out. In the end, the Hibernians won and ejected the Foresters; and they cheered my speech by way of crowing over the vanquished. They would have attacked us themselves had the Foresters not made the first move!' Bulmer Hobson, *Ireland: Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Tralee: Anvil Books Ltd., 1968) 25-6. Moreover, most of these rowdy encounters were between different nationalist factions. Hobson's friend and fellow IRB member Dinny McCullough attended a political meeting in West Belfast with constitutional nationalist leader Joe Devlin, during which McCullough was forced to pull a gun on his nationalist 'colleague' when Devlin's supporters rushed the stage and was only able to retreat safely by threatening to shoot Devlin if anyone attacked him.

Produced by Ulstermen, printed on paper manufactured in Ballyclare and published in 1904, *The Songs of Uladh* embodied the profound sense of regionalist self-sufficiency that characterised the Ulster Literary Theatre founded a few months later.

The importance of the ULT's contribution to the history, politics and praxis of Irish theatre has not been recognized or appreciated. The *Field Day Anthology of Irish Literature* dismisses them with a few fleeting lines,⁶ whilst Edna Longley disparages its 'slavish imitation' of their Southern counterparts. The lack of any critical recognition of *Ulad's* important contribution to the cultural politics of the North and its legacy to later literary journals is also indicated by the fact that even Seamus Heaney, who would have shared its espousal of regional identity for nationalist rather than unionist purposes, neglects to mention *Ulad* in his survey of the proliferation of regionalist magazines to have emerged from the North.⁷ John Boyd, the editor of *Lagan* – 'the recognized organ of Ulster regionalism'⁸ – defiantly declared in its opening editorial that its regionalist politics pioneered new ground for 'no vital tradition has been fostered.' A statement which ignored the work of the ULT and its own journal, launched forty years earlier with the artistic manifesto Boyd now claimed as his own.⁹ *Rann*, another important Ulster journal, was launched in 1948 with a similarly self-conscious regionalist remit which again echoes *Ulad*:

we are offering this region an opportunity to find its voice and to express itself in genuine accents in these pages. The future rests with the small articulate communities that will crystallise out of the turmoil of our time.¹⁰

A comparative study of the regionalist politics of *Ulad* and later literary journals (*Rann*, *Lagan*, *Honest Ulsterman*, *Threshold*, etc.) produced in the North in the post-Partition period would provide a fascinating field for further research. Such a study would offer an important diachronic demonstration of how regionalism morphed from a decentred nationalist movement into a cultural mask for political unionism: a shift all the more

⁶ 'The company, amateur to the end, survived into the 1930s and developed in kitchen comedy and tragedy a regional variant of the Abbey's style, of which it was not invariably respectful', D.E.S. Maxwell, 'Irish Drama 1899-1929: The Abbey Theatre,' in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. 2, ed. Seamus Deane (Derry: Field Day, 1991), p. 564.

⁷ Edna Longley, *The Living Stream* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1994), p. 104.

⁸ Seamus Heaney, 'Our Own Dour way', *Trench* 1:1 (April 1964): 3-4.

⁹ John Hewitt, 'The Bitter Gourd: Some Problems of the Ulster Writer', *The Arts in Ulster*, ed. Sam Hanna Bell (London: George Harrap, 1951), p.115. This school of regionalist activity influenced a whole generation of predominantly Protestant writers such as Roy McFadden, John Boyd, Robert Greacen, Michael McLaverty, W.R. Rodgers and Sam Hanna Bell.

¹⁰ John Boyd, 'Introduction', *Lagan* 1:1 (n.d.): 5. (No details are given on this first edition but the holding records of the Linen Hall Library state it was first published in 1944.)

¹¹ Roy McFadden, 'Editorial', *Rann* 10 (1948): 1.

significant as the key figures driving this Janus-like reversal were predominantly Protestant!

In this dissertation I have tried to both reverse and redress the occlusion of the ULT from Irish theatre historiography. It is more difficult, however, to excavate or explain the underlying causes for this critical neglect; to adequately answer Hayward's question, 'why, then, are the Ulster players no more than a memory today?' Myriad factors played a role: the loss of key personnel, the political destabilisation of the North during the 'Ulster Crisis', the movement's gravitation from radical fringe to commercial mainstream (with the attendant influx of less politically motivated members) and its critical failure to find a permanent home or publish most of its repertoire.¹² Moreover, inherent epistemological problems affecting Irish Theatre Studies have also played a role: the positivist, historicist methodologies of theatre historiography; the conceptual conflation of nation with state; the geographic privileging of the national sphere over the local; the canonical relegation of comedy in relation to 'higher' forms; the Dublincentric focus of most scholarship and its fixation on institutional theatre over and above popular forms and traditions, have all invidiously contributed to the incremental historiographical process whereby the ULT has been forgotten. In marked contrast to this lack of recognition is the high praise of poet Seamus O'Sullivan, a close associate of many ULT members:

Looking back on those brilliant first years of the Northern Theatre, I cannot help feeling that it had in it more of the essential qualities of a national theatre than have resulted from the earlier days of the Abbey Theatre.¹³

O' Sullivan's tribute highlights the ULT's true significance and pays homage to their success, which was all the more remarkable given the formidable conditions of cultural and political hostility facing them in Belfast:

When one remembers the limitations within which they have been forced to work one is the more astonished at their success. In Dublin the project for a national theatre was bound to find many more supporters from the first. There the drama has always been a force, and new ideas, even in the darkest days of reaction, have been granted a hearing. Here we guard ourselves against new ideas as against a plague. The theatre is not recognised but merely tolerated, and the idea that the stage may form a

¹² After 1922 one can also add the Theatre's lack of a state subsidy – in marked contrast to their Abbey colleagues – as well as the new state's suspicion of theatre as a subversive, even seditious, threat to the stability and legitimacy of Northern Ireland.

¹³ Seamus O'Sullivan, *The Rose and the Bottle* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1946), p. 102.

medium for the expression of national sentiment [...] would be regarded by thousands as little short of blasphemy.¹⁴

Perhaps the most important explanation as to why the ULT has been forgotten lies in the failure of its objectives with the 1922 Partition of Ireland. They had sought to create a 'citadel' of art in Ulster; but in its place was built a garrison state. The blurred boundary of Ulster it mapped in *Ulaid*, from Donegal to Carlingford along 'an imaginary line' drawn not 'too tightly'¹⁵ was constricted into a 'tourniquet'¹⁶ – a militarised border which midwifed the new unionist political state and atrophied the ancient province of Ulster to separate the North from the rest of Ireland. The trauma of Partition was a devastating blow to their political objectives and cultural ambitions as the ensuing violence of the Belfast pogroms, the polarization of Northern and Southern states, and sectarian conflict between the North's communities rendered the ULT's pluralism redundant, even faintly ridiculous.

I would also argue that the absence of scholarship on the ULT is significant in itself. The lacunae it has left in Irish historiography eloquently testifies to the way in which Partition changed utterly the political and cultural geography of Ireland. The sundering of the nation into two states shattered Northern nationalism, dispersed the cultural energies of the Northern Revival and disillusioned a generation of activists who were abandoned in an alien, hostile state. Alice Milligan became 'a forlorn remnant trapped unhappily amongst Unionists,'¹⁷ whilst the broken figure of F.J. Bigger never crossed the border on point of principle, even to his beloved Donegal. Joseph Campbell, returning from America after a period in exile expressed this sense of displacement in a poignant letter to Seumas O'Sullivan: 'I feel like Oisín after the Fianna. Maybe after a chat with you I shall be able to re-orient myself in Ireland.'¹⁸ His disorientation stemmed less from an exile's displacement than from the bitter disillusionment caused by Partition and its destruction of national ideals: it would take more than a chat with an old comrade to reconcile Campbell to new political realities of his homeland. Some scholars have argued that the 'absence' of a significant body of anti-Partition literature suggests that the 1922 border was widely accepted by the North's nationalist community,¹⁹ or even that this artificial boundary corresponded with a *de facto* border.²⁰ However, the absence of 'evidence' is

¹⁴ James Good, 'The Ulster Literary Theatre' *Ulaid* 1:2 (February 1905): 4.

¹⁵ *Ulaid*, 1:1 (November 1904): 1.

¹⁶ A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster 1609-1969* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press), p. 157.

¹⁷ Dudgeon, *Black Diaries*, p. 166.

¹⁸ Cited, O'Sullivan, *The Rose & Bottle*, p. 101.

¹⁹ Clare O'Hallorahan, *Partition and The Limits Of Nationalism* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1987).

²⁰ M.W. Helsinga, *The Irish Border as a Cultural Divide: A Contribution to The Study of Regionalism in The British Isles*. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1962.

not necessarily the evidence of absence and I would argue that the lack of such a body of literature privileges certain forms of literary and cultural production, as Joe Cleary points out.²¹ Moreover, this 'absence' - like the scholarly neglect of the ULT - actually reflects the hegemonic victory of unionism and Partition's success in vanquishing Northern nationalism and the Ulster Revival.

Consequently, any assessment of the achievement of the ULT must not be based merely on a formalist or literary evaluation of what little remains of their repertoire. Although the dialogue, setting and characterization of many of their surviving plays have dated - though their underlying polemic critiques remain valent - it is vital that scholars move beyond the 'ideology of the aesthetic'²² and assess the ULT in relation to the broader context of the Northern Revival. This heteroglossic network of political, cultural and artistic societies has also been collectively occluded from critical studies of the Revival period as scholarship on twentieth-century Irish theatre generally concentrates on the Abbey given its institutional status as Ireland's national theatre. As I have pointed out, this is problematic as it reinforces the dominant meta-narrative of national theatre and effaces the diversity of dramatic activity in the period from which the Abbey emerged. Although recent scholarship has questioned the singularity of 'national theatre' and emphasises the historiographical heterogeneity of Irish theatrical practice in this period, the ULT still remains marginalised in contemporary scholarship.

Throughout my thesis I have tried to examine how the socio-geographic realities which shaped Northern consciousness meant that Ulster could not be reductively shoehorned into a simplistic model of nationhood. The socio-political, religious, racial and cultural complexities of the North contradicted the nationalist meta-narrative of both the Anglo-Irish and Irish-Ireland movements which attempted to homogenise the nation through idealisations of the past, the invention of tradition and recourse to racialism. The Revival's reliance on primitivist pastoral conceptualisations of the West of Ireland as 'representative of an ideal past [...] and] also as a way to achieve national wholeness in the future'²³ were rejected by the ULT. They recognised that such a politico-imaginary framework could never accommodate the complex cultural modernity of Ulster. They were sceptical of any Celtic 'mist'-ification of identity, and of the Revival's reliance on

²¹ Joe Cleary, *Literature, Partition and the Nation State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

²² This is the term Terry Eagleton uses to describe and define critical evaluations of literary texts on formalist terms with regards to their style, complexity (of plot, characterisation) etc. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. London: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

²³ Jacqueline Belanger, 'The Desire of the west: The Aran Islands and Irish Identity in *Granada*', *Regionalism and Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, edd. G. Hooper & L. Litvack (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), p. 97.

myth and the vagaries of the past, preferring to set their plays in contemporary Ireland. In doing so they sought to strategically obviate what George Cusack later identified as a critical flaw of Revivalist ideology given its failure to provide a 'through line from past-present-future' and its instigation of a 'fundamental disjuncture created by the revivalist rhetoric which constructs an "Ireland" that exists in the past and in the future, but cannot cope with the present.'²⁴ In contrast, the ULT provided precisely such a through-line in both their plays and their politics which focused on the present; its problems and its possibilities.

In an article appropriately titled 'The Theatre and the People' James Good noted, 'Ideal [...] is a word that the average Ulsterman does not love to hear dragged into a discussion [...] It is reality he aims at'; a claim counterbalanced by his declaration: 'it does not follow that the people of the North are prepared to opt out of hand the ideals of the rest of Ireland,'²⁵ a statement that succinctly summarises the paradoxical pragmatism of the ULT, as its critique of the political philosophy and cultural praxis of Revivalist organisations and institutions like the Abbey Theatre and the Gaelic League, stemmed from their perceived failure to recognise the regional differences of Ulster and their inability/unwillingness to accommodate the North within its theatrical imaginary of the nation.

The geographical imaginary of the Revival was inherently partitionist, whereby the 'Black North' held up a cracked mirror for the Irish-Ireland and Anglo-Irish movements to darkly contemplate Ulster as an internal 'Other' for Revivalist self-fashioning. This is bluntly expressed in Cornelius Weygandt's study of Irish drama in this period through his clear distinction between North and South:

The North is generally held to be another country than the rest of Ireland. Ulster is alien alike in race and religion and economic conditions from Connacht and Leinster and Munster. It is Scotch Ireland, Protestant Ireland, industrial Ireland. It is, moreover,—many of its citizens say therefore,—prosperous Ireland. Certainly men would not divide all Irishmen into "Irishmen" and "Scotch Irishmen" were there not many grounds for such a distinction. All other of the immigrants into Ireland have, as a people, disappeared. The Norman has left his mark on the land in his castles and his names, but as a distinctive element of the population he no longer exists, any more than does Welshman or Englishman or Palatinate. Apart from distinctions of class

²⁴ George Cusack, 'Nationalism, Famine and the *Playboy of the Western World*, *Modern Drama* vol XLV no 4, (Winter 2002), 573. [567-92]

²⁵ James Good, 'The Theatre and the People', *Ulaid*, 1:3 (May 1905): 13.

the men of Ireland are "Irishmen" and "Scotch Irishmen," and until yesterday, therefore, Nationalists and Unionists.²⁶

The myopic monologic nature of Southern nationalism derived, in part, from the political exigencies of decolonisation and the need for Irish nationalism to develop a simple, effective narration of nation. This meant, in Declan Kiberd's memorable phrase, that political nationalism had to 'invent Ireland': to construct an oppositional (mirror) image that would distinguish (and differentiate) Ireland from England and establish its cultural autonomy as the stepping stone to political self-determination. However, the nationalist process of 'inventing Ireland' had adverse implications as historian George Boyce observes:

few Irish nationalists denied that Protestants were in some sense part of the Irish nation; but because of the heterogeneous nature of Irish society, its temptation to lapse into fragmentation and localism, nationalist politicians had to strive to create and maintain a core of national unity. This obliged them to stress, not the pluralism of Ireland, but the homogeneous nature of those Irishmen whose loyalty and support were essential to the realization of their political programme.²⁷

Boyce incisively notes how the drive for political unity developed a decolonising nationalist ideology that strategically occluded Protestant experience and thus, I would argue, Ulster, from its political programme. This elision meant that Northern nationalists were forced to write themselves into the nation, to represent the realities of their own experience and identity as no less national. Ironically, what Boyd identifies as political nationalism's fixation on centralization and homogenisation paradoxically unleashed the 'lapse[s] into fragmentation and localism' it sought to avoid, as the ULT emerged as a regional movement which contested and critiqued the Abbey's claims to (re)present the nation.

Localism is a profoundly influential and pervasive aspect of Irish culture and society. Its influence on oral and literary traditions is immense, from the ancient placelore of *dinnseanchas* where the 'legendary and the local'²⁸ commingle, to the parochial pull of the parish ever-present in Irish writing. Ireland has sixty two thousand, two hundred and

²⁶ Cornelius Weygandt, *Irish Plays and Playwrights* (London: Constable, 1913), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19028/19028-8.txt> accessed: 12.01.06.

²⁷ George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 387.

²⁸ Seamus Heaney, 'The Sense of Place', *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-78* (London: Faber & Faber, 1980), p. 131.

five townlands, averaging three hundred and twenty six acres each and has greater granularity in its social and territorial structuration than any other European country. Ireland's localized, heterogeneous network of rural communities and lack of any centralizing social mechanisms²⁹ enabled its society and culture to withstand a protracted period of colonial conquest as its tight-knit, decentralized social and spatial matrix made it impervious to the centralising imperatives of imperial control whilst concomitantly inhibiting the emergence of a coherent nationalist consciousness.³⁰ The granularity of the local thus undermined the singularity of the nation in different historical eras, inhibiting both British imperialism and Irish nationalism from imposing its hegemonic control.

Whilst Declan Kiberd has written of the phenomena of localism in Irish literature and society,³¹ he does so only in relation to recent history; assessing the impact of the *gaeltacht* and the rise of local authorities, radio stations, publishing houses, theatre etc. in recent decades. However, the phenomenon of *localism* in Irish culture is altogether more ancient and can be regarded historically as a powerful set of oppositional practices establishing the local sphere as an important counter-hegemonic sphere to the nation/nation-state.³² It is ironic though that localism has received little critical consideration with regards to theatre in spite of its evident importance to our understanding of the production and reception of discrete performances and the discursive development of 'national' theatre formations. Localism underpins regionalism which is itself, as sociologist Anthony Giddens argues, 'an important notion in counterbalancing the assumption that societies are always homogenous, unified systems.'³³ The ULT's regionalist representation of North resonates with Giddens's view and reminds us how nationalist ideology and the institution of a national theatre can have a fragmentary, fissiparous effect on culture and society. Loren Kruger's seminal study of national theatre formations in different countries elaborates on this contradiction:

discursive formations of national theatre as a utopian configuration of the nation united in the theatre are [...] marked by a persistent contradiction – as much political as dramatic – between advocates of a centralised national theatre that might reconcile the nation from above and rival, perhaps

²⁹ See Kevin Whelan, 'The Bases of Regionalism', *Cultures in Ireland- Regions: Identity and Power*, ed. Pádraic Kirby (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1993), pp. 5–62.

³⁰ See Tom Dunne, 'The Gaelic Response to Conquest and Colonization: The Evidence of the Poetry' *Study Hibernica* 20 (1980): 11.

³¹ Declan Kiberd, 'Excavating the Present: Irish Writing Now', <http://www.writerscentre.ie/anthology/kiberd.html>.

³² And in the contemporary context as a site of resistance against the hegemonic influence and encroachment of globalisation.

³³ Anthony Giddens, cited in Edward J. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, p. 147.

antagonistic 'popular' cultures on the social and geographical periphery which resist this reconciliation under duress.¹⁵⁴

In Ireland's case the 'utopian configuration' of nation determined by the Abbey was wholly irreconcilable with the socio-geographic realities of the North and the ULT's regionalism emerged 'under duress' to challenge the centralised authority of the national theatre. This is the fundamental paradox at the heart of the national theatre project, whereby the Abbey's early efforts at cultivating a shared national culture actually sowed the seeds of regional theatre companies which contested, and even critiqued, its remit. It is not without irony that one theatre critic attending the Cork National Theatre's inaugural production of the *Last Irish King*, commends the 'dramatic splendour about the appeal to the Ulster Chief O'Neill [...] to drop provincial jealousies and work [...] for a national ideal'¹⁵⁵ but remains oblivious to the fact that the Ulster Literary Theatre had been launched a few weeks before the CNT. The very emergence of the CNT suggests that 'provincial jealousies' were not solely harboured in the North and that Ulster - like Cork - had its own notion of the 'national ideal'!

It is perhaps unsurprising that Irish Theatre Studies has mainly focused on theatre and the nation in light of the Abbey's acclaimed historical role as an agent and apparatus of decolonisation. Yet, this status is problematic as the historiographical narrative of the Abbey's successful role in Ireland's struggle for independence conflates nation with state, ignores the political fact of Partition, and therefore obscures the fundamental failure of the Irish Revival. Moreover, in the contemporary context of the Celtic Tiger economy and Peace Process, not to mention the impact of European union, globalisation and massive immigration, the continuing emphasis on examining Irish theatre in national terms, merely as a 'mirror up to nation'¹⁵⁶ appears increasingly reductive and redundant.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, it is highly ironic that such an approach remains the primary conceptual and organizational modality of Irish theatre historiography given the putatively post-modern,

¹⁵⁴ Loren Kruger, *The National Stage*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁵ 'Cork National Theatre', *The Cork Constitution*, 13 December 1904 in Hogan and Kilroy, *Laying the Foundations*, p. 127.

¹⁵⁶ See Christopher Murray's seminal book, *Twentieth Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

¹⁵⁷ At an IASIL conference (Galway 2004) I participated in a panel with colleagues from Queen's addressing this specific problem and proposing alternative theoretical paradigms of class, geography, and gender to reconfigure Irish theatre studies. More significantly, Lionel Pilkington's recent essay in a special edition of *Modern Drama* on Irish theatre, critiques the current state of play of Irish theatre historiography and declares the need for 'new theoretical and methodological approaches to be deployed if the field is to flourish' ('Recent Developments in Irish Theatre History', *Modern Drama* 47, no. 4 (2004): 721-731). At present, discussions are also ongoing on the establishment of an Irish Society for Theatre Research (ISTR): an organisation which will have as part of its remit the specific objective of engendering disciplinary debate/development within Irish theatre studies.

post-national context of the Peace Process and Celtic Tiger Ireland, not to mention the decommissioning – with all that term connotes – of the category of ‘national theatre’ from the *Oxford Encyclopaedia of Theatre and Performance*.³⁸

Irish Theatre Studies has remained remarkably dependent on the dominant narrative of the national theatre: a focus which has become increasingly etiolated whilst reinforcing the cultural hegemony of elite theatrical practices at the expense of other theatrical forms, traditions and geographies. This is in sharp contrast to the revisionist revolution which has transformed Irish historiography in the past decade or more. Historian Kevin Whelan claims the dynamic heterogeneity of Irish historiography has been produced by:

renewed tension between a centralised national history, predominantly driven by political imperatives, and fissiparous regional histories, where social, economic and cultural perspectives have been centre-stage.³⁹

The same ‘fissiparous’ scholarship has yet to fully revise or energise Irish Theatre Studies for regional, amateur and popular theatres and performance remain largely banished to the historiographical wings. Although the dominance of the historiographical meta-narrative of the national theatre has been increasingly contested in recent years, it needs to be further critiqued and decentred in order to explore the ‘disjunctive forms of representation that signify a people, a nation, or a national culture.’⁴⁰

All national theatres share the central ideological and aesthetic ambition of forging a nation out of their audience. The political agency of audiences is therefore crucial for theatre historians when assessing the success such movements have in ‘staging the nation’. The fact that theatre was used as an ideological apparatus to represent, or invent, the Irish nation fundamentally calls into question the role of citizen-spectators: were they passive consumers or active agents in this process and, as Loren Kruger proposes, does this require ‘participation or merely assent?’⁴¹ As I have briefly examined in chapter 5, the specific reception of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* in Belfast is significant for it undermines the dominant meta-narrative of Irish theatre historiography which repeatedly affirms the significance of this play as fomenting cultural and political nationalism.

³⁸ Dennis Kennedy, ‘Confessions of an Encyclopedist’ in *Theorizing Practice: Redefining Theatre History*, eds. W.B. Worthen and Peter Thompson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 36.

³⁹ Kevin Whelan, ‘The Bases of Regionalism’, p. 45.

⁴⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 292.

⁴¹ Kruger, *National Stage*, p. 4.

If the grand narrative of Irish theatre history/historiography in the twentieth century has been *thematically* dominated by the question of a 'national' theatre then it has also been *methodologically* dominated by a temporal/historical epistemology at the expense of any examination of space and geography. By analysing ULT and Abbey productions in both Belfast and Dublin, I have tried to explore the dynamics of audience agency and how local geographies invariably condition live theatrical performance and its reception. In my analysis of the imaginative geography of the Revival and the ULT's spatialized cultural politics and performance I have tried to highlight the need to develop a geographical materialism to complement the more traditional historicist methods of examining Irish theatre history.

Such a shift would help Irish Theatre Studies map onto the changing conceptual landscape of Theatre/Performance Studies as whole. For example, in his confessional account of the prodigious process of editing the *Oxford Encyclopaedia of Theatre and Performance*, Dennis Kennedy notes that, 'Convinced that entries on national theatre traditions were inevitably oversimplified and misleading we made what is probably the most controversial decision and eliminated them.'⁴² In decentring the 'nation' in favour of 'cities and regions that are theatrical centres'⁴³ Kennedy maps the critical contours of a geographical hermeneutic that can enable Irish historians to slip the epistemological yoke of a national, modernist historiography that privileges texts over performance, high art over popular culture, professional praxis over amateur activity, institutional theatre over non-institutional drama, and the national sphere over the regional. Such a radical reconfiguration could recuperate myriad occluded histories, rescue many Northern playwrights from the 'canonical homelessness into which the partition of Ireland forced so many writers,'⁴⁴ and may even help reverse 'a long tradition of literary and cultural condescension about North in the South of Ireland.'⁴⁵

To conclude: this study of the Northern Revival and the ULT not only opens up new historical material for scholarly analysis, but helps reshape our understanding of the

⁴² Dennis Kennedy, 'Confessions', p. 36.

⁴³ Kennedy, 'Confessions', p. 36.

⁴⁴ Mary Burgess, 'Belfast Carnivalesque: The Satires of Gerald MacNamara', in *Cities of Belfast*, eds. Nicholas Allen and Aaron Kelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), p. 78.

⁴⁵ Terence Brown, 'Poetry and Partition: A Personal View', *Krino 1986-1996: An Anthology of Modern Irish Writing* eds. Gerald Dawe and Jonathan Williams (London: Gill & Macmillan, 1996), p. 268.

Irish Revival and the fraught cultural politics of North of Ireland whilst establishing the notion of a distinct dramatic tradition in Ulster. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said states that it is ethically and intellectually imperative for critics to develop 'contrapuntal readings' of established literary canons and traditions. This study of the ULT and the Northern Revival seeks to provide such a 'contrapuntal reading' of the politics, culture and drama of this crucial period in Irish history by juxtaposing the ULT's regionalism with the Revivalism of their counterparts in Dublin.

This thesis also examines the imaginative geography of the Ulster Literary Theatre and its journal *Ulad* which blurred the territorial and cultural boundaries of Ulster in its (re)presentation of the North as opposed to the nation. In doing so, the ULT renegotiated the cultural-political geography of Ireland and the centre-periphery relations whereby Dublin dominated Irish political life. I have also argued that the ULT's aesthetics and politics pioneered new ground, not only in terms of their acclaimed realism, but for their anticipation of later 'Counter-Revival' critiques of Irish nationalism and theatrical practice. In fact I would go as far as to argue that the ULT's pluralist political philosophy foreshadows Field Day's ideal of a 'fifth province' of the imagination, Stewart Parker's civic, secular appeal for a 'working model of wholeness'⁴⁶ and even the dialogic inclusivity of the Good Friday Agreement⁴⁷ which has seismically shifted the terms (and terrain) of political debate in the North by enshrining the rights of its citizens 'to be accepted as Irish or British, or both.'⁴⁸ The ULT helped to (temporarily) shift the Manichean terms of political discourse away from England/Ireland, nationalism/unionism, Protestant/Catholic through its investigation of a civic, shared and transcultured space. Their work was a precursor to Field Day Theatre and its utopian objective to explore the 'fifth province' of Ireland – an imaginary, cultural space where Ulster and Ireland's tribal and territorial divisions could be transcended – is an idealistic notion that recalls their predecessors' imaginative invocation of the 'generous circle' of nationality. The ULT's nationalism was neither reductive nor exclusive. It was never yoked to racist myth or religious affiliation, but espoused inclusivity and diversity. Their interrogation of 'Irishness' and articulation of 'cultural Northernness' sought to encompass nationalist and

⁴⁶ Parker, Stewart, *Dramatis Personae*, John Malone Memorial Lecture. Belfast: Queen's University Belfast, 1986, p. 19.

⁴⁷ The GFA eschewed traditional Manichean co-ordinates of identitarian discourse in favour of an inclusive sense of doubleness whereby citizens are entitled 'to be accepted as Irish or British, or both.' *The Good Friday Agreement*, 2.1(vi), <http://www.nio.gov.uk/issues/agreement.htm> accessed 12.02.04. Declan Kiberd, argues that the GFA inherits and inhabits the doubleness that has dominated Irish literature as well as centuries of colonial and cultural experience, see *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000), pp. 629-3.

⁴⁸ *The Good Friday Agreement*, 2.1(vi), <http://www.nio.gov.uk/issues/agreement.htm>. Accessed: 12.02.04

unionist subjectivities and experiences: a policy that was politically visionary and historically validated. Against the repressive, reductive models of identity which emerged after Partition in tandem with the theocratic development of the Catholic Free State and the Protestant statelet of Northern Ireland, the efforts of the ULT to promote 'the generous circle of nationality' are poignantly counterpointed.

Finally, I would argue that the regionalist nationalism of the Ulster Literary Theatre and the Northern Revival should not only be examined in relation to the wider Irish Revival but must be established, in the spirit of John Montague's 'unpartitioned intellect'⁴⁹ as the cornerstone of the North's cultural history over the next century. The theatrical genealogy of the Ulster Theatre, the Northern Drama League, the Belfast Repertory Company, The Group and Lyric Theatres, Field Day and Charabanc can all be traced back to their dramatic progenitor in the Ulster Literary Theatre, as indeed can much of the pluralist politics which have returned to the public sphere in the post-Good Friday Agreement period. In light of this, I would argue that my historical reconsideration of the Ulster Literary Theatre reveals the need for a recognition (and reclamation) of the North's theatrical tradition: fractured, discontinuous and diffuse as it may be, it nevertheless provides a vital interpretive framework for (re)examining Irish theatre history and interrogating contemporary theatrical practice.

⁴⁹ John Montague, *The Figure in the Cave and Other Essays* (Dublin: the Lilliput Press, 1989), pp. 36-41.

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Irish Times

The Dublin Magazine

The Peasant

The Republic

The Ulster Echo

Samhain

Shan Van Vocht

Sinn Féin

Ulad

United Irishman

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LHB	Linen Hall Library, Belfast. (Theatre and Performing Arts Archive).
NLI	National Library of Ireland, Dublin. (Bulmer Hobson Papers)
PRONI	Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.
QUB	Queen's University, Belfast. (Special Collections).
UCD	University College, Dublin. (Denis McCullough Papers).

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Appendix

First Performances of the Ulster Literary Theatre

Play	Writer	Date	Location
The Reformers	Lewis Purcell	7th December 1904	Ulster Minor Hall Belfast
Brian of Banba	Bulmer Hobson	7th December 1904	Ulster Minor Hall Belfast
Little Cowherd of Slainge	Joseph Campbell	4th May 1905	Clarence Place Hall Belfast
The Enthusiast	Lewis Purcell	4th May 1905	Clarence Place Hall Belfast
The Turn of the Road	Rutherford Mayne	4th December 1906	Examination Hall Queen's College Belfast
The Pagan	Lewis Purcell	4th December 1906	Examination Hall Queen's College Belfast
Suzanne & the Sovereigns	Gerald MacNamara and Lewis Purcell	26th December 1907	Exhibition Hall Belfast
The Drone	Rutherford Mayne	24th April 1908	Abbey Theatre Dublin
Leaders of the People	Robert Harding	24th April 1908	Abbey Theatre Dublin
The Troth'	Rutherford Mayne	17 th May 1909	Grand Opera House
The Mist That Does Be On the Bog	Gerald MacNamara	26th November 1909	Abbey Theatre Dublin
Captain of the Hosts	Rutherford Mayne	8th March 1910	Grand Opera House Belfast
Charity	Miss M.F. Scott	4th December 1911	Grand Opera House Belfast
Red Turf	Rutherford Mayne	5th December 1911	Grand Opera House Belfast
The Jerry Builders	William Paul	5th December 1911	Grand Opera House Belfast
Thompson in Tir-na-nOg	Gerald MacNamara	9th December 1912	Grand Opera House Belfast
Family Rights	Miss M.F. Scott	9th December 1912	Grand Opera House Belfast
Sweeping the Country	William Paul	10th December 1912	Grand Opera House Belfast
Love and Land	Lynn Doyle	24th November 1913	Grand Opera House Belfast
If	Rutherford Mayne	25th November 1913	Grand Opera House
Evening	Rutherford Mayne	2nd March 1914	Grand Opera House
Snowdrop Jane	Shaun F. Bullock	2nd February 1915	Grand Opera House Belfast
The Spoiled Buddha	Helen Waddell	1st February 1915	Grand Opera House Belfast
The Old Lady	Bernard Duffy	11th December 1916	Grand Opera House Belfast
The Tumelty Case	William Paul	13th December 1916	Grand Opera House Belfast
The Throwbacks	Gerald MacNamara	3rd December 1917	Grand Opera House Belfast
The Dark Hour	Robert Christie	3rd December 1917	Grand Opera House Belfast
Industry	Rutherford Mayne	6th December 1917	Grand Opera House Belfast
The Skipper's Submarine	Charles K. Ayre	6th December 1917	Grand Opera House Belfast
The Summons	Lynn Doyle	25-Mar-1918	Grand Opera House Belfast
Sincerity	Gerald MacNamara	31st May 1918	Gaiety Theatre Dublin
Away from the Moss	George S. Morshiel	25th November 1918	Grand Opera House Belfast
The Lilac Ribbon	Lynn Doyle	5th June 1919	Grand Opera House Belfast
Felix Reid and Bob	George S. Morshiel	12th November 1919	Grand Opera House Belfast
The Lone Man	Charles K. Ayre	14th November 1919	Grand Opera House Belfast
The Jew's Fiddle	H. Richard Hayward and Abram Rish	18th December 1920	Gaiety Theatre Dublin
Loaves and Fishes	Charles K. Ayre	2nd November 1921	Grand Opera House Belfast

Turncoats	Lynn Doyle	4th September 1922	Liverpool Play House
Fee-Faw-Fum	Gerald MacNamara	2nd April 1923	Opera House Derry
Phantoms	Rutherford Mayne	28th November 1923	Gaiety Theatre Dublin
The Land of the Stranger	Dorothea Donn-Byrne	8th December 1924	Gaiety Theatre Dublin
The Ship	St. John Ervine	10th December 1924	Gaiety Theatre Dublin

¹ Originally premiered by Whitford Kane and William Mollison's Theatre Company in London, October 1908, when the author was a member of the company.

Constitution of the Dungannon Club.



1. That this Club be called "THE DUNGANNON CLUB (No. 1), BELFAST."
2. That it be open to all Irishmen who endorse its propaganda.
3. That its objects are:—

I. The Building up of Ireland

- (a) **Intellectually**—By educating the people by means of Schools, Classes, Lectures, Publications, etc. The establishment of Libraries and every means calculated to educate the country.
- (b) **Materially**—By the fostering of existing and the starting of new industries, by the exclusive use of Irish manufactures and produce, and by nationalised transit services, etc.
- (c) **Physically**—By the popularisation of physical culture and training, by the spread of our national games, and by the training of the boys of the country.

II. The Regaining of the Political Independence of Ireland—

By a passive resistance to the government of this country by any other than the people of Ireland.

By the formation of a national council, obeyed and supported by and working in the interests of the whole people of Ireland.

By a passive resistance to all interference with the working of such a council.

4. That we maintain that the attendance of Irishmen at the English Parliament is inimical to the best interests of the Irish nation by admitting the right of any body other than the Parliament of Ireland to make laws binding on this country.

5. That we will co-operate with men of any class or creed who are working for the welfare of the country, as we believe that the interests of Ireland are above the interests of any creed, or class or party.

Published at the Office of the DUNGANNON CLUB, 7 NORTH ST., BELFAST.

Printed on Paper of Irish Manufacture.



'The Band of Pipers', Glens Feis 1904
by J. Bland
courtesy of Ulster Museum



Programme for Gaelic League Choir, 1902
Barrington-Baker Collection
With kind permission of Belfast Central Library



Members of the Fianna engaged in medical field training.



Cathal O'Byrne as an old and young man.

Will You Help?



34

NA FIANNA EIREANN (or National Boy Scouts' Organisation) was founded with the object of developing the national and military spirit amongst the boys of Ireland.

The Organisation is governed by the boys themselves, and its programme includes every element of military training: Physical Culture, Infantry Drill, Morse and Semaphore Signalling, Camp Life, Scouting in all its branches, First-Aid, and Ambulance Work. Instruction in Irish and Irish History are also included in the course of training: The Fianna is organised in fifty-four centres throughout Ireland.

The Central Council appeals to every Irish Nationalist to help in spreading the movement in every town and village in Ireland. For this great work the Council has instituted an Adult Association, known as HONORARY FIANNA, consisting of Irish men and women who are willing to help in propagating the boys' movement. A small monthly subscription to the Organising Fund is expected from all Honorary Members.

FIANNA HEADQUARTERS,
12 D'OLIER STREET, DUBLIN.

HONORARY FIANNA APPLICATION FORM.

No on Roll.....

I am willing to help, as far as I am able, in pushing the propaganda of NA FIANNA EIREANN throughout Ireland, and I am willing to subscribe * threepence per month or †.....per week to the Fianna Organising Fund. Please put my name on the Roll of HONORARY FIANNA.

Signed.....

Address.....

Date.....

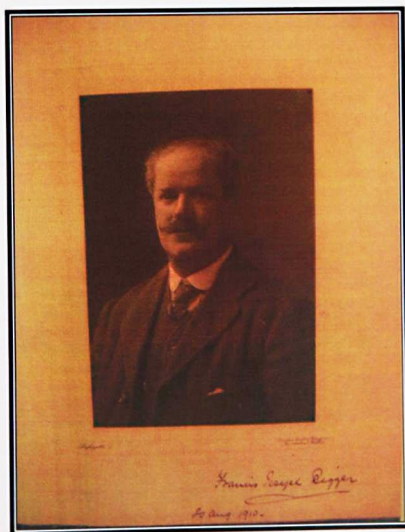
* Strike out the words not required † Fill in amount of weekly subscription, if you desire to subscribe weekly.
A Scout will call regularly for your Subscription.

NATIONAL
LIBRARY OF

Application for the Fianna, circa 1909



The Kitchen in Jordan's Castle (Shane's Castle). Bigger's retreat in Ardglass, Co Down
RJ Welch. Courtesy of the Ulster Museum



Francis Joseph Bigger.

The Neophytes

At Home

Programme

TEA will be served in the Dining Room from 7.30
until 8 o'clock, during which MISS DAVIS will
play the following Aims on the Irish Harp:

- "The Snowy-breasted Pearl."
- "Slieve Gallen."
- "The March of Brian Boru."
- "Believe me, if all those endearing young charms"

In the Library.

Part Song from "King Olaf" (Music by Edward Elgar)
Harp, - "O'Rourke's Farewell," Miss Davis
Essay, - "Life and Work," Herbert Hughes
Song, - "My Love's an Arbutus," Freddy Hughes
Papers, The Kilkenny Play, Will Foster
(Illustrated with Lantern Slides), Gordon Parrett
Herbert Grant
Harp, - Irish Aims, Miss Davis
Song, - "Patrick Sarsfield," Freddy Hughes
Part Song, "Ah, could I with fancy stray"
(Music by J. L. Hatton).

ARDRIE, 2nd January, 1903.

Left: Neophyte Programme
Below: Neophytes exercising outside their tents

Barrington-Baker & Bigger Collections
With kind permission of Belfast Central Library





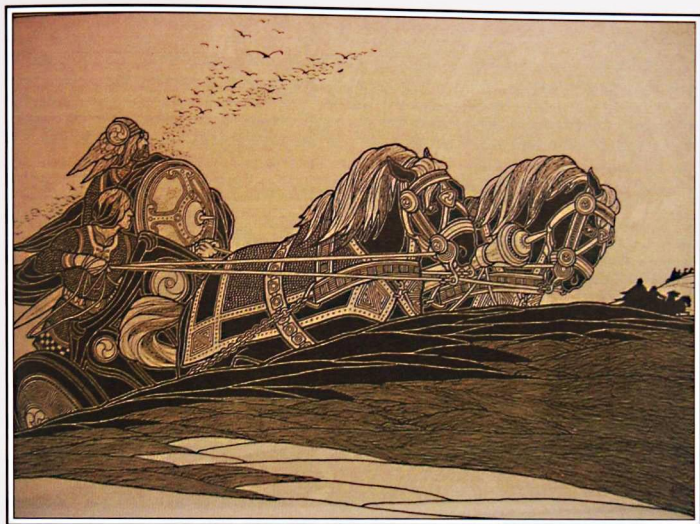
Neophyte attired in heraldic gear
Bigger Collection
With kind permission of Belfast Central Library



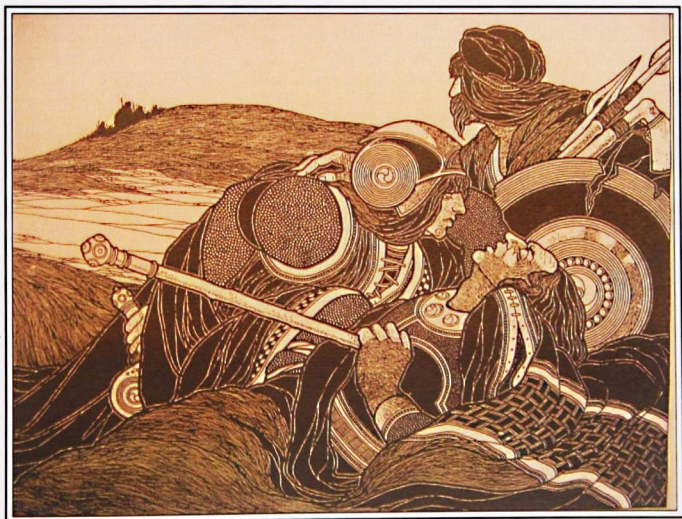
Male Neophyte attired in female heraldic gear
Bigger Collection
With kind permission of Belfast Central Library



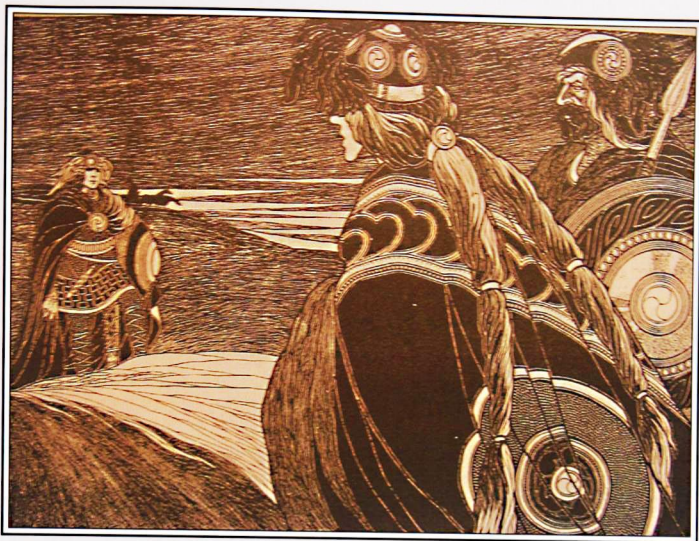
Neophyte in attired in heraldic gear
Bigger Collection
With kind permission of Belfast Central Library



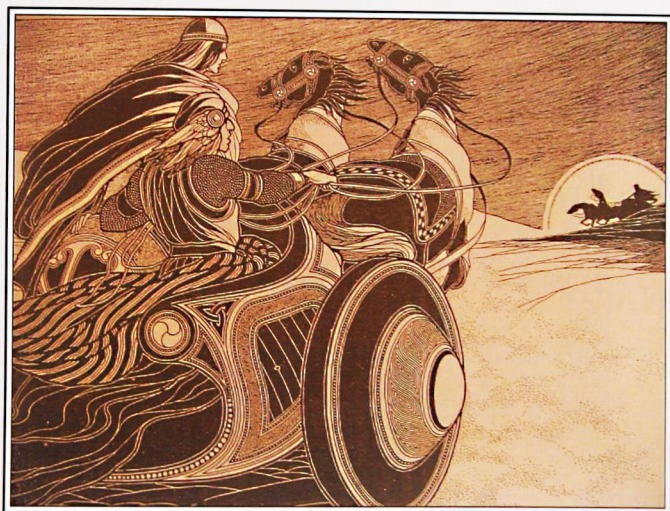
Fergus Goes to Meet Cucullin (sic) by John Campbell



The Death of Faerdeean, by John Campbell



Maer and Fergus meet Cucullin (sic) at Glen Fauban



Maer Rides forth to Speak with her Druid, by John Campbell



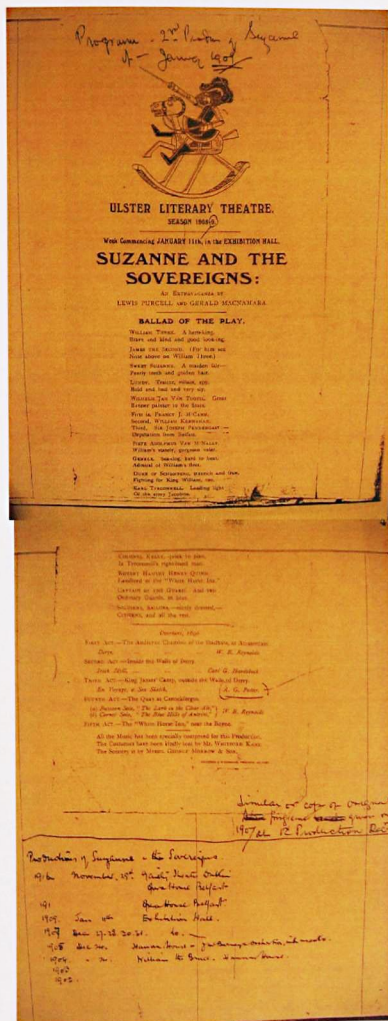
Political Cartoons from Republic by George and John Morrow



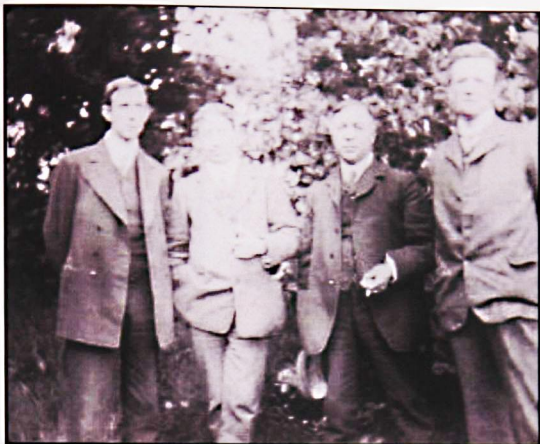
Political Cartoons from Republic by George Morrow



Thompson in Tir-na-n-Og
St Columb's College, Derry, 1915



Susanne and the Sovereigns



ULT members: (from left) David Parkhill, Fred Morrow, Harry Morrow, Rutherford Mayne



ULT members and their Wives, circa 1930.



*Gerald MacNamara
(Harry Morrow)*



*Lewis Purcell
(David Parkhill)*

GRAND OPERA HOUSE

MONDAY, MAY 17th, 1909.

MATINEE SATURDAY, May 22nd. at 2

ULSTER LITERARY THEATRE

THE TROTH

THE DRONE

THE PAGAN

THE ENTHUSIAST

THE TROTH

TURN OF THE ROAD

Prices of Admission:

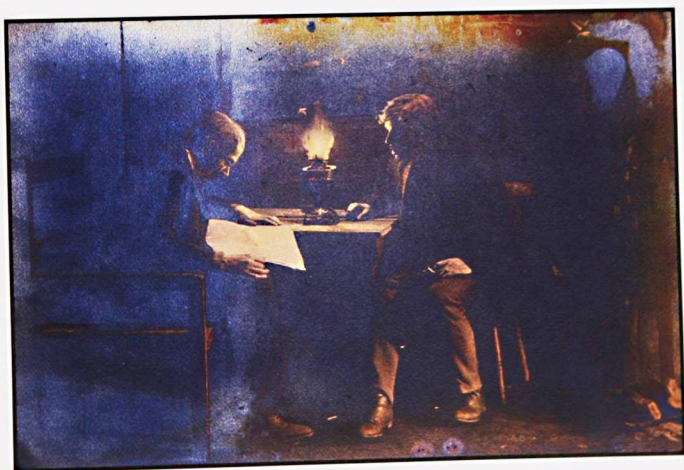
BOXES	5	4	3	2	1	50c
STALLS	2	1	50c	25c	10c	5c

THE PRINCE AND THE BEGGAR MAID

Playbill, Grand Opera House, 1909



Lambegs at Sham Fight at Scarva
13 July 1903



Unknown ULT Production
Theatre Collection
With kind permission of Belfast Central Library



unknown ULT production,

