The Afterlives of the Irish Literary Revival

Author: Dathalinn Mary O'Dea

Persistent link: http://hdl.handle.net/2345/bc-ir:104356

This work is posted on eScholarship@BC, Boston College University Libraries.

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2014

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.
Abstract

THE AFTERLIVES OF THE IRISH LITERARY REVIVAL

Director: Dr. Marjorie Howes, Boston College
Readers: Dr. Paige Reynolds, College of the Holy Cross and Dr. Christopher Wilson, Boston College

This study examines how Irish and American writing from the early twentieth century demonstrates a continued engagement with the formal, thematic and cultural imperatives of the Irish Literary Revival. It brings together writers and intellectuals from across Ireland and the United States – including James Joyce, George William Russell (Æ), Alice Milligan, Lewis Purcell, Lady Gregory, the Fugitive-Agrarian poets, W. B. Yeats, Harriet Monroe, Alice Corbin Henderson, and Ezra Pound – whose work registers the movement’s impact via imitation, homage, adaptation, appropriation, repudiation or some combination of these practices. Individual chapters read Irish and American writing from the period in the little magazines and literary journals where it first appeared, using these publications to give a material form to the larger, cross-national web of ideas and readers that linked distant regions. Until recently, scholars have been disinclined to interpret the Revival in a transnational framework, preferring instead to emphasize the cultural work its literature and drama accomplished on behalf of nationalist politics in Ireland. Yet, as this study demonstrates, the movement was imbricated in a process of cultural exchange extending well beyond Ireland’s borders, resulting in a variety of revivalist afterlives that testify to the movement’s extra-national influence.

I use the term “afterlife” to describe the versions of revivalism produced when the movement’s original impulses and strategies were, in W. H. Auden’s words, “modified in the guts of the living,” in some cases long after the peak of revivialist activity was supposed to have passed. The word confers a spectral quality to the movement, describing the Revival’s re-emergence in new locations and at later dates. Writers in both countries engaged with revivalism, re-animating many of the debates over questions of identity, belonging and cultural authenticity that had originally motivated the movement’s leaders. In doing so, such writers granted the Revival a vital afterlife, demonstrating the relevance of these debates in other national and historical contexts. The relationship this dynamic describes is one of both cross-cultural affiliation, in which intellectuals and writers are actively inspired by the example of the Irish Revival, and one of reverberation – a kind of textual haunting, where the defining features of revivalism echo in later works. The movement survived, in other words, and multiplied, finding new life in Irish and American modernists’ experiments with tradition.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction:</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviving the Revival</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1:</strong></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Joyce in the Pigs’ Paper: <em>Dubliners</em>, the Co-operative Movement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Alternative Communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2:</strong></td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ulster has its own way of things”: Northern Regionalism in <em>The Shan Van Vocht</em> (1896-99) and Lewis Purcell’s <em>The Enthusiast</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 3:</strong></td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 4:</strong></td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“the same thing in different ways happening”: Nashville’s Fugitive Poets and the Idea of Ireland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements:

The rewards of finishing a dissertation are many, but one of the sweetest is having the occasion to publicly thank the communities of family, friends, teachers and colleagues who have helped along the way.

First, I thank my dissertation committee, Marjorie Howes, Paige Reynolds and Christopher Wilson. As both my advisor and the director of my dissertation, Marjorie Howes oversaw this project from start to finish, offering incisive feedback at many pivotal points, guiding me to useful sources, and helping me to think through the tough spots along the way. Her skill as a scholar and a teacher is matched by her kindness. I thank Paige Reynolds for her keen readings of my (many) drafts, her perceptive feedback, her reassuring phone calls and e-mails (particularly towards the end), and her enthusiasm for the project and the process. I thank her, too, for agreeing to serve on the committee, and for making more than a few trips from Providence to Boston for meetings. I am also grateful for Christopher Wilson’s many contributions to the study. Chris welcomed me into the graduate program at Boston College, guided me through the challenges of coursework and teaching and writing my first article, and made himself available for many office meetings and e-mails exchanges over the years. His feedback was always thorough and generous – I am still rewarded by his insight when I revisit my notes from our conversations, and I thank him for pushing me to become a better thinker and writer. What a gift to have had these three as teachers, mentors and advocates, and to count them as friends, too.

I would also like to thank those in the Boston College community whose support and friendship sustained me and helped to make this work possible: Dr. James M. Smith, for his faith in my abilities, his always-open door, and for modeling the kind of joy and dedication I hope to bring to my own scholarship and teaching; Dr. Joseph Nugent, whose humor and sincerity made both his classes and Connolly House that much more inviting; Dr. Phil O’Leary, for patiently enduring many sessions of Irish language translation and recitation; Drs. Robert Stanton and Laura Tanner, whose leadership as directors of the Ph.D. program showed me what it means to truly invest in your students; Gene Gorman, for Athan’s dates, conversation, commiseration and friendship; Joshua Olivier-Mason and Beth Tressler, for sharing in each others’ struggles and successes along the way; Kelly Sullivan, for spending many (frozen) hours working alongside me in our apartment; and Andrew Kuhn, for reminding me to take a break once in a while, and for always being willing to join me.

I am also indebted to a number of friends, who have offered a sympathetic ear, shared a mug of tea, fed me, housed me, taken walks with me, and politely feigned interest in the work that has preoccupied me for the past few years: Corrine Dedini and Kurt Schnier, Sadie Cunningham, Maryrose and Macdara Molloy, Lara Mittaud and Alisa Nichols. I hope I can continue to convey my gratitude.

Lastly, I thank my family. My parents, Denis and Sheila, my sisters, Brigid and Norah, and my grandmothers, Mary and Peg, have kept me grounded and have given me the
love, confidence, and support to always aim high. To my other, Southern family in Alabama, Franklin and Chris: you have welcomed me into your hearts, and your excitement has made completing this project that much more special. Maud and Abby’s companionship at the desk and on many long, contemplative walks was also indispensable. And of course, James and Odhran, the very best parts of my day, every day. All good things begin with you two. This success is as much yours as it is mine. I dedicate this to both of you.
**Introduction:** Reviving the Revival

Now he is scattered among a hundred cities
And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections,
To find his happiness in another kind of wood
And be punished under a foreign code of conscience.
The words of a dead man
Are modified in the guts of the living.

- W. H. Auden, “In Memory of W. B. Yeats” (1939)

When W. H. Auden penned the lines above to mark the death of W. B. Yeats, he intended to convey the Irish poet’s influence, which was both far-reaching and dynamic. The stanza renders Yeats a ghostly presence in modern poetry, describing the process by which his work is consumed and transformed by future generations. In death, the poet becomes his poems, which find new life, as Yeats’s words are dispersed among “his admirers.” Auden conjures a version of Yeats as “the Irish vessel,” describing his poetry as the product of history, rather than its catalyst: “mad Ireland hurt you into poetry. / Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still, / For poetry makes nothing happen….”

The poem’s famous maxim denies the social utility of art, presenting poetry as little more than the symbol of deed or action. Yet the line is followed by a declaration of poetry’s endurance: “it survives,” Auden proclaims, by navigating the topography of human experience, just as the poem’s prose-like rhythms spill over in enjambments. Poetry remains, “it flows south / From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs, / Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives / A way of happening, a mouth.” The lines link the effect of a poem to the experience of reading it, describing Yeats’s poetry as “A way of happening” from which new modes of expression – including Auden’s own elegy – might evolve. Indeed, Auden’s poem is a testament to Yeats’s influence, invoking many

---

of the same stylistic and thematic features of the Irish poet’s work. Yeats’s poetry, Auden implies, does not simply survive but is revived – opening itself up to new interpretations and taking root in new contexts.

Auden’s elegy attempts to come to terms with Yeats’s legacy, interrogating the poet’s relationship to Ireland’s cultural heritage and the social or political value of poetry more broadly. For Auden, Yeats embodies the poet as political instrument – a man “hurt…into poetry” by his country, who transformed suffering into verse. Yet Auden’s focus in the poem is less on the individual poet than on the work that remains, less on Yeats himself than on the wider web of influence his poetry inspires. Yeats’s death is presented as an absence, rather than a loss, as if the poet had assumed the affective quality of his poetry. The impersonality of the elegy’s first section – the “instruments” that record Yeats’s death on “a dark cold day” – belie the Irish poet’s vital presence through his poems. Yeats’s ghost is active, inspiring generations of younger poets and reaching beyond “the provinces of his body” and Ireland’s borders. The elegy implies that influence is both scattered and spectral, spanning generations and crossing national boundaries. This transatlantic quality is evident even in the poem’s composition: Auden, a British poet living in the United States, elegizes his Irish contemporary. The poem thus articulates a complex process of influence that spans national and temporal borders, describing the impact of Yeats’s poetry as it circulates and is revitalized in new contexts.

As scholars have re-evaluated the cultural legacy of the Irish Literary Revival, they have observed a similar phenomenon of aesthetic inheritance, identifying affinities between the movement in Ireland and other twentieth-century cultural renaissances.²

² See, for example, Tracy Mishkin, The Harlem and Irish Renaissances: Language, Identity, and Representation (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997); Kieran Quinlan, Strange Kin: Ireland and
Many of these studies recover the conceptual and material links connecting Ireland and its artists to places as far-flung as Asia, the Caribbean and the American South. Less often does such work think conceptually about the Revival in a sustained way, addressing the different versions of revivalism that emerged in the movement’s wake and what these versions might reveal about the complexity and range of the Revival itself. In both Ireland and the United States, as I intend to show, the movement enjoyed a rich and varied afterlife. Writers and dramatists from both countries worked in dialogue with the structures, themes and methods of the Revival, producing texts that registered the movement’s impact on both a stylistic and thematic level. Collectively, these versions of revivalism – which crossed geographical and temporal boundaries – reveal the Revival to have been as scattered and multiple as Yeats’s ghost.

This study examines how Irish and American writing from the early twentieth century demonstrates a continued engagement with the formal, thematic and cultural imperatives of the Irish Revival. It brings together writers from across Ireland and the United States, whose work registers the movement’s impact via imitation, homage, adaptation, appropriation, repudiation or some combination of these practices. Revivalism in Ireland has long been read as part of a political trajectory leading to independence, and the Revival as a multi-faceted movement concerned with asserting a uniquely Irish national and cultural identity. According to what Richard Kirkland terms the “classic Revival narrative,” the movement began with the fall of Parnell in 1890 and

concluded in 1922 with the publication of *Ulysses*, although some date its endpoint closer to 1930. Feeling disillusioned with parliamentary politics, so the narrative goes, the country’s intellectuals turned to literary and cultural production to supplement the period’s political activities. They collected indigenous folklore and promoted ancient customs, seeking to reclaim Ireland’s folk inheritance and viewing it as the basis for an “authentic” Irishness. Until recently, scholars have been disinclined to interpret the Revival in a transnational framework, preferring instead to emphasize the cultural work its literature and drama accomplished on behalf of nationalist politics in Ireland. Yet, as this study demonstrates, the movement was imbricated in a process of cultural exchange extending well beyond Ireland’s borders, resulting in a variety of revivalist afterlives that testify to the movement’s extra-national influence.

I use the term “afterlife” to describe the versions of revivalism produced when the movement’s original impulses and strategies were “modified in the guts of the living,” in some cases long after the peak of revivalist activity was supposed to have passed. The word confers a spectral quality to the movement, describing the Revival’s re-emergence in new locations and at later dates. Writers in both countries engaged with revivalism, re-animating many of the debates over questions of identity, belonging and cultural authenticity that had originally motivated the movement’s leaders. In doing so, such writers granted the Revival a vital afterlife, demonstrating the relevance of these debates in other national and historical contexts. The relationship this dynamic describes is one of both cross-cultural affiliation, in which intellectuals and writers are actively inspired by the example of the Irish Revival, and one of reverberation – a kind of textual haunting,

---

where the defining features of revivalism echo in later works. The movement survived, in other words, and multiplied, finding new life in Irish and American modernists’ experiments with tradition.

Of course, the concept of a revival itself inherently suggests an afterlife – a process of reviving themes, methods, subjects or styles that no longer exert a vital presence in contemporary modes of cultural expression. Considering synonyms for “revival” allows us to recognize the rich possibilities contained within the term for rethinking how the process of inheritance operates across time and place. A revival, for instance, describes a revitalization, renewal, restoration, resurgence, rebirth, or recovery. The word implies more than simply a spectral presence – the echo or trace of an impulse long dead – but instead suggests the reanimation or rehabilitation of a chain of aesthetic possibilities that linger in the cultural imaginary. The Irish Revival described itself as a movement intending to recover elements from Ireland’s historical past and its distant cultural heritage, and to utilize this material as the basis for a contemporary Irish identity. The movement’s sundry participants were united in their effort to integrate Irish cultural modes into a modern national context, and to demonstrate the relevance of Ireland’s past to its present and its future. When later intellectuals returned to the Revival, I argue, its claims and priorities possessed a certain immediacy: revivalism lent itself to formal and thematic reactivation, that is, in part because the original movement was grounded in the very concept of rebirth. The idea of an afterlife, in other words, was intrinsic to Ireland’s cultural renaissance, making the movement a particularly apt model for other modernists keen to revisit the past – whatever their particular past might include – and to give it new life.
The currency of an afterlife in literary studies, particularly in work addressing the modernist era, is symptomatic of a larger, ongoing effort to redefine the periodicity of the modernist moment, and to explore the persistence of modernism’s legacy. As David James observes, the concept of an afterlife – what he describes variously as continuance, dialogue, recuperation and engagement – is in many ways a more enabling, less hostile means of describing literary influence. Prevailing models of influence, he notes, are predicated on the idea that writers must overtake or abandon their precursors. Influence is figured as a phase or an initiation, a process of “engagement and relinquishment,” or a progression from identification with one’s literary forebears to the assertion of one’s own individuality as an artist. Much of how we understand the process of aesthetic inheritance derives from Harold Bloom’s durable concept of the anxiety of influence, which suggests a fraught relationship between writers and their predecessors. The new poet must clear a creative space for himself through the deliberate misreading – or “misprision,” in Bloom’s terms – of an older poet’s work. Subsequent scholars have identified a number of flaws in Bloom’s theory, yet his central argument remains surprisingly persistent. Even so, his account of influence, with its emphasis on artistic

5 James, Modernist Futures 2.
6 James, Modernist Futures 26.
8 As several critics have observed, Bloom’s theory is patently masculinist: his version of literary history is organized around the concept of the male literary genius, privileging the Romantic period’s emphasis on individual creativity. See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) and
ego and antagonism, leaves little room for writers to engage in a fluid, open-ended and mutually informing relationship with the past.

Instead, we might imagine a more positive formulation of influence as a kinetic and creative process, rather than one that is inherently competitive or destructive. Countering the assumption that the new work must annihilate the old, we can instead reconceive literary influence as a mode of engagement, introducing the idea that a seminal movement, artist or text might enjoy a “replenished moment,” and that its traditions could be both reanimated and re-formulated for new readers. The model of literary inheritance I am describing acknowledges the “echoes, allusions, guests, [and] ghosts of previous texts,” as J. Hillis Miller describes them, but it regards these textual traces less as “parasitical presences” that the new work must overcome than as evidence of mutual engagement. What this concept has meant for modernist studies is a recognition that modernism’s aesthetic strategies survived in later twentieth-century writing, creating an active modernist legacy that expands the assumed temporal boundaries of the movement. By applying this same model to the study of the Irish Revival – our understanding of which is identified closely with a particular place and time – we might similarly acknowledge the movement’s widespread influence and the multiple versions of revivalism it inspired within and outside of Ireland. Moreover,

---


9 James, Modernist Futures 1.

10 Joseph Hillis Miller, The J. Hillis Miller Reader, ed. Julian Wolfreys (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 22. Miller’s model of inheritance repeats many of Bloom’s claims, even as his language resonates with the concept of a literary afterlife. He argues that the “echoes” and “allusions” of earlier texts are present in new work “in that curious phantasmal way, affirmed, negated, sublimated, twisted, straightened out, travestied... The previous text is both the ground of the new one and something the new poem must annihilate by incorporating it, turning it into ghostly insubstantiality, so that the new poem may perform its possible-impossible task of becoming its own ground. The new poem both needs the old texts and must destroy them.”
reading these revivalist afterlives back onto the original movement illuminates the heterogeneity of the Revival, revealing the discrete cultural forms that comprised it.

I. The Irish Literary Revival Reconsidered

Within Irish studies, the Revival period has attracted more attention in recent years, with new work representing a shift away from author- and text-centered scholarship and towards a more expansive understanding of revivalism. This study does not attempt to catalogue the many new analyses of the Revival, but it does briefly summarize general trends in this scholarship to illustrate how recent work within the field makes it possible to identify multiple versions of the movement. Surveying the critical landscape in 2004, and noting a resurgence of interest in the Revival as a whole, Edna Longley argued that understanding the movement “in ‘the totality of its relations’ would make it easier to calibrate the impact of, and Irish impact on, British, European and American literature.”11 Nicholas Allen (2003) likewise called for a greater attention to the “many forms, economical, political and social as well as literary” that the Revival assumed, encouraging scholars “to look at new sources of material, at paintings, journals, letters, pamphlets and posters, across new fields of enquiry, agriculture, anarchism, industry and the environment.”12 Subsequent studies have heeded Longley and Allen’s advice, unraveling the various strands of revivalism to reveal a fuller picture of the movement’s impact and cultural reach. Such work encompasses a range of subjects that together complicate our understanding of the movement as predominantly Anglo-Irish, cultural nationalist and literary. Indeed, as Longley indicates, the interest within Revival

studies in other forms of intellectual expression has shifted our focus away from the movement’s writing and towards its extra-literary components.

Yet attending to the diversity of the Revival – understanding the movement, in P. J. Mathews’s terms, as comprising “a complex network of relationships” between its social, economic and cultural branches – has also arguably enriched our readings of revivalist texts.\(^{13}\) Mathews own research into Horace Plunkett’s Irish Agricultural Co-operative Society, for instance, reveals how certain productions of the Irish Literary Theatre reflected the self-help ethos of the co-operative movement. By linking the “dairies of Plunkett” and the “fairies of Yeats” – and more generally, by demonstrating the interconnectedness of the IAOS, the Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin and the Gaelic League – Mathews’s study unsettles standard accounts of the Revival that deemphasize its civic nationalism.\(^{14}\) His work is an example of materialist re-evaluations of the movement, which collectively call for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between culture and politics within revivalism. According to Margaret Kelleher, editor of the *Irish University Review* Special Issue, “New Perspectives on the Irish Literary Revival” (2003), such scholarship also stimulates “a shift in emphasis away from the biographical studies” and instead towards historicist analyses of the institutions of revivalism.\(^{15}\) Clare Hutton’s essay in the *IUR* Special Issue, for instance, contrasts the National Library scene in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* with a discussion of Irish publishing houses in the late nineteenth century to understand how revivalism was represented in both fiction and in

\(^{13}\) P. J. Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 152.


\(^{15}\) Margaret Kelleher, “Introduction,” *Irish University Review* 33.1 x.
the national press.\textsuperscript{16} Along similar lines, Allen’s essay in the issue conjoins two seemingly separate subjects, demonstrating the centrality of scientific discourse to the Revival’s cultural debates.\textsuperscript{17} In addition to revealing the complex composition of the movement, these materialist approaches and others like them have diversified Revival studies, opening up new avenues of exploration to complement work on the movement’s most familiar figures and texts.

In recent years, other scholars have built upon this work, developing many of the threads of inquiry introduced in the \textit{IUR} essays and advancing a number of new comparative and interdisciplinary perspectives on the Revival. The movement has been variously studied in relation to Irish print culture, Irish feminism, the Gaelic League, public spectacle, anthropology, science and technology, sport, and the occult.\textsuperscript{18} Karen Steele’s \textit{Women, Press, and Politics During the Irish Revival} (2007), for instance, digs deeply into the archives of newspapers and periodicals to probe the relationship between politics and Ireland’s radical press in the years preceding the 1916 Easter Rising.\textsuperscript{19} Her work underscores the important function such publications served as public forums for debate and as the breeding ground for a number of cultural nationalist organizations.

Perhaps more significantly, however, Steele also recovers a vital and understudied history

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{19} Karen Steele, \textit{Women, Press, and Politics During the Irish Revival} (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007).
\end{flushleft}
of women’s involvement in Irish nationalism. Like Catherine Morris – whose 2012 monograph on Alice Milligan contributes to a growing historiography of gender in the period – Steele highlights Irish women’s involvement in the Revival’s cultural, social and political activities.20

Her work and Morris’s both pave the way for a more sustained consideration of women’s roles as mediators of information via print culture, highlighting the part female editors played in marketing the Revival to a range of Irish and American readerships. Studies such as these, that address gender and modernism, make it possible to propose a model for using print culture to interrogate women’s engagement with revivalism – an approach that underscores the important function of newspapers, cultural journals and little magazines as outlets for women’s literary production in the period. Milligan’s journalism and activism on behalf of the Revival – particularly her attempts to recruit a Northern Irish audience to the revivist cause and to refigure the movement as one inclusive of the pre-partition North – have been largely omitted from scholarly accounts of the period. Yet her contributions to the Revival and to the period’s vibrant newspaper and periodical culture parallel in intriguing ways the efforts of other female editors like Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson, whose work at the helm of Chicago’s Poetry: A Magazine of Verse also aimed to use revivalism as a template for asserting a distinctive regional identity. Along these lines, Morris’s work on Milligan is valuable, too, for its focus on the Northern Revival, a regional movement that has typically received less attention within Irish studies. Along with Laura Lyons, Marnie Hay, Richard Kirkland, Karen Vandevelde and more recently, Eugene McNulty, Morris’s

analysis of Northern cultural nationalism and the modes of revivalism operating in the North serves the important function of reclaiming the region for the wider Revival. Such scholarship reveals a vibrant nationalist community in the North, comprised of Northern poets, dramatists, editors and cultural leaders, whose contributions to the Revival undermine earlier interpretations of the Northern movement as derivative of its counterpart in the South. Like work on the Gaelic literary revival, another relatively neglected facet of the broader movement, these studies reveal the multifaceted nature of Irish revivalism.

Collectively, then, these examples lay the groundwork for a fuller, less nation-centric account of the Revival’s diversity and scope, enabling us to write alternative histories of Ireland’s defining cultural renaissance. In particular, by recovering new voices and perspectives to complement the familiar accounts of revivalism, cultural materialist analyses represent a challenge to the postcolonial paradigm in Irish studies, a theoretical approach that has tended to emphasize the movement’s promotion of models of national identity through its drama and literature. This persistent and overriding focus on the nation has resulted in the relative neglect of other forms of community or collectivity, including the region, in much of Irish studies scholarship. Instead, building

---

on the recent materialist turn in the field, I propose a new way of thinking about the Revival as a movement motivated as much by regional concerns as by national ones. Indeed, I would argue that to understand the Revival “in ‘the totality of its relations,’” as Longley proposes, is to recognize the importance of other geographical scales relative to the national. Somewhat surprisingly, little sustained critical attention has addressed the regionalism of the Revival, despite the fact that cultural nationalism in Ireland took as its focus the Irish West, a region enshrined in revivalist discourse as “authentically” Irish, untainted by modernity and in need of preservation. The project of national independence underlying the Revival was in many ways inseparable from the project of regional recovery, which stimulated much of the movement’s literature. At the same time, newly landed peasant farmers in these rural areas publicized the economic realities of the region – realities that many revivalist writers had intentionally glossed over in their literary representations. In the modernist imagination, the movement was associated with an ideal of rural Ireland, and its cultural program guided by a mythology of place that opposed the rootlessness and fragmentation of modernity. Consequently, to fully appreciate the Revival’s appeal within and outside of Ireland, we must consider why the movement’s regional imperatives – its focus on local communities, its celebration of a knowable homeland – resonated with other artists at this particular historical moment.

Conceptually, the emphasis on local communities served as a contrast to the abstract space of the nation: regions had defined geographical borders and an identifiable citizenry, as well as an emotional resonance that registered as nostalgia in some descriptions of regional life. Raymond Williams reads nostalgia as a matter of historical perspective and as a “universal and persistent” feature of literary representation. The
“escalator,” his metaphor to describe the English pastoral tradition, recedes perpetually into history, as the writer glances back to a golden rural age of the “true” Old England.\textsuperscript{23} This persistence of the pastoral mode informs revivalist writing, too, with the region as the seat of rural virtue and the preserve of local cultures. As social change accelerated in this period – as traditional communities felt the modernizing effects of expanded railways and increasing urbanization and centralization – the idea of community, a local network of individuals with ties to each other and to the space they inhabited, gained in prominence in Ireland.\textsuperscript{24} Literary representation and the actual material life of regions were mutually constitutive: as Hsuan L. Hsu argues, we therefore must consider “the ways in which literary works produce, reimagine, and actively restructure regional identities in the minds and hearts of their readers.” As regions evolved due to “migrant flows, transportational networks, and international commerce,” the period’s writing reflected these transformations, sometimes explicitly and sometimes by their omission.\textsuperscript{25} In other words, regions harnessed the literary imagination in this period precisely because of their ostensible disappearance – the threat that they faced from an encroaching modernity and a hegemonic national culture alike. In Ireland and elsewhere, the perceived ephemerality of the region rendered it a valuable site of heritage and history.

Revivalist writing itself testifies to the symbolic importance of the region in Ireland in the early twentieth century. One need look no further than John Millington Synge, whose plays and prose equate an authentic Irishness with a way of life endemic to the West of Ireland. For Synge and other Irish writers of the period, the region served as

\textsuperscript{23} Raymond Williams, \textit{The Country and the City} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 12.
\textsuperscript{24} Stephen Wade discusses the symbolic value of the concept of “\textit{home}” in British writing from this period in \textit{In My Own Shire: Region and Belonging in British Writing, 1840-1970} (London: Praeger, 2002), 14.
\textsuperscript{25} Hsuan L. Hsu, “Literature and Regional Production,” \textit{American Literary History} 17.1 (2005): 36-37.
both a potent literary symbol and as an evocative geographical setting. Synge’s *The Aran Islands* (1907), for instance, is rife with details of the physical landscape, including descriptions of the limestone and cliffs, the vegetation, the gray skies and seascape, and the islands’ relative isolation – the implication being that the islanders’ customs and values are reflective of the landscape they occupy. Material culture is likewise significant: in Synge’s rendering of the West, the “curaghs and spinning wheels, the tiny wooden barrels that are still much used in the place of earthenware, the home-made cradles, churns, and baskets” all testify to “a natural link between the people and the world that is about them.”

In Synge’s account, regional objects possess value inasmuch as they reflect practices specific to the region in their design and use. And regions themselves, like the West of Ireland, serve to measure the differential spread of modernity. Because the Aran Islands, and even Dublin – a periphery of empire – existed on the fringes of modern urban and industrial centers, they occupied what Harry Harootunian describes as a “space of everyday life,” permitting Irish writers “to negotiate relationships between the global and the local, between the rhythms and routines reproduced everywhere that capitalism spreads and the lived or local and contingent experiences mediating them.”

In fact, regional spaces were increasingly the focus of social and economic transformations in keeping with large-scale shifts in geography and commerce in the period. The redistribution of land in Ireland under Wyndham’s Act of 1903, for instance,

---


shifted Irish citizens’ attention to rural regional communities in need of economic and social reform. The period’s interest in the region was a consequence of nationalism, too. “Without a concept of nationhood,” K. M. D. Snell writes, “it was perhaps impossible, or unnecessary, to conceive of ‘regions’ in the usual sense.”

Regional spaces stood in metonymic relation to the nation, construed by some of the period’s thinkers as microcosms of the larger national community and by others as a threat to national unity. Because “geography act[ed] a metonym for social identification,” establishing the region as a determinant in the character of its inhabitants, regional communities provided a ground for identity and a space “both within and without” from which to critique the nation.

Recently, Kevin Whelan has suggested that we might imagine Irish regionalism, in particular, as a nested set of Chinese boxes: “At the center of these boxes is the family farm, the smallest but most potent vector of the territorial imperative in the Irish experience,” with subsequent boxes including the neighborhood or townland, the parish, the social field of community-based interactions, the county, the province, the nation-state and the ever-expanding boxes of the European Union, the global economy and the media. The family farm takes pride of place as the site of emotional attachment and economic dependence in Whelan’s model. Not surprisingly, the farm was also resonant as symbol and setting for many revivalist writers, standing in on a smaller scale for Ireland’s rural regions. Edward Martyn’s play, The Heather Field (1899), for instance,

---

the second production of the Irish Literary Theatre, portrays the protagonist’s relentless and single-minded attempts to reclaim a submerged heather field for agricultural use. In Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), Christie Mahon flees his father’s farm and the stifling life it portends, setting in motion the action of the play. In addition, a number of poets from the period, including Padraic Colum and Austin Clarke, took as their subject rural life in agrarian communities. Their poetry appeared alongside similarly rural-minded stories and articles in *The Irish Homestead* (1895-1923), the journal of Plunkett’s co-operative movement for agricultural reform – the branch of the Revival that dealt directly with farm life and rural regions. Even the peasant farmer, a recurrent figure in revivalist writing, affirms the movement’s investment in the farm and the wider region as symbolic spaces.

By acknowledging the centrality of the region to the Revival’s literary and cultural objectives, we turn our attention to the local communities where revivalism was formed and practiced, and where the debates over Ireland’s national identity were conducted. The Revival began in a period of political crisis and upheaval, with national independence its implicit agenda. Yet as I intend to argue, the region – a contained, knowable community – emerged as the focal point for a national audience in search of its “authentic” origins. As spaces, the region and nation were in fact deeply imbricated in each other: regional communities, with their defined geography and citizenry, provided a counterpart to the abstract space of the nation, whose borders and population were contested. The Revival’s emphasis on place – its deliberate linking of Irish identity to the native land and its reliance on a cultural heritage that itself mythologized the rural landscape – virtually ensured that regionalism would emerge as a dominant strand in
revivalist thinking. The movement’s targeting of regional spaces in revivalist literature and via its programs for social reform also helps to explain the Revival’s appeal outside of Ireland. Ideas of home and community transcended national borders, testifying to the global resonance of the local. We might understand the Revival’s wide-ranging influence, in other words, as a product of its practical and symbolic investment in the region, even as we recognize the importance of the nation in revivalist discourse.

II. The Irish Case

The homology of distant regions – from Dublin, to Connemara, to Belfast, to Nashville, to Chicago – is the basis of the comparisons that comprise this study, permitting me to read specific artists and texts as part of a wider transnational network. Without discounting the importance of the Revival’s original contexts, I aim to read revivalist writing as part of an economy of exchange, revealing the ways this writing was implicated in modern circuits of trade and marketed as a commodity to Irish and American audiences alike. Yet a comparative project such as this one raises the question of the movement’s appeal in America, in particular. Why did the Irish example resonate with writers in Northern Ireland and the United States, particularly when American writers could look to other examples of cultural movements closer to home? What made the Revival so captivating and influential? The answers to these questions form the substance of the following chapters. Yet we might hypothesize, in a more general way, that Ireland’s appeal in the United States was partly a function of the two countries’ shared status as peripheries in what Pascale Casanova terms “the world republic of letters.”31 In her ambitious and provocative study of the world literary system, Casanova

argues that literary value circulates unevenly between metropolitan centers like London or Paris and culturally penurious peripheries, whose position in the hierarchy of the literary world governs the forms and aesthetics of the writing their artists produce. The world literary capitals bestow legitimacy on writing from the peripheries – a dynamic that compels writers living outside the metropolitan cores to choose between one of three options: the rejection of their national heritage, the acknowledgment and transformation of this heritage, or the affirmation of the “difference and importance of a national literature.” In this system, Irish and American writers alike struggled to navigate both the national and international literary arenas, striving to achieve world status while simultaneously attempting to fulfill the role of national artist. Particularly in Ireland, the period witnessed an escalating struggle for political and cultural independence from Britain, which complicated Irish writers’ attempts to reconcile their cosmopolitan literary ambitions with the urge to celebrate aspects of their own national cultures.

Casanova cites the Irish Literary Revival as paradigmatic of “the revolt against the literary order,” arguing that artists like Yeats, Synge, James Joyce, George Bernard Shaw and Samuel Beckett illustrate the challenges faced by peripheral nations seeking recognition in a world literary market. She explains:

The distinctive quality of the Irish case resides in the fact that over a fairly short period a literary space emerged and a literary heritage was created in an exemplary way. In the space of a few decades the Irish literary world traversed all the stages (and all the states) of rupture with the literature of the center,

---

32 Casanova, 10.
33 Casanova, 304.
providing a model of the aesthetic, formal, linguistic, and political possibilities contained within outlying spaces.\footnote{Ibid.}

Referring to the Irish case as the “Irish ‘miracle,’” Casanova finds in Ireland’s literary history examples of the various options open to literary “rebels” from small nations, who somehow succeeded in meeting the international standards of value. Irish studies scholars, including Joe Cleary, Emer Nolan, and Michael Malouf, have critiqued Casanova’s “Irish paradigm” as an “overused example,”\footnote{Joe Cleary, “The World Literary System: Atlas and Epitaph,” \textit{Field Day Review} 2 (2006): 204.} “a reformulated version of the standard reading of this period,”\footnote{Emer Nolan, “Postcolonial Literary Studies, Nationalism, and Feminist Critique in Contemporary Ireland,” \textit{Éire-Ireland} 42.1 (Spring 2007): 350.} and as dependent upon “a formulaic image of Irish literature.”\footnote{Michael Malouf, “Problems with Paradigms: Irish Comparativism and Casanova’s \textit{World Republic of Letters},” \textit{New Hibernia Review} 17.1 (Spring 2013): 49.} Malouf, in particular, faults Casanova’s account of the Irish Revival for “reduc[ing] a range of intellectuals and artists to only extensions of the ethnographic and folkloric enterprise instigated by Yeats and Lady Gregory.”\footnote{Malouf, “Problems with Paradigms” 55.} By neglecting non-canonical figures like George William Russell (Æ) and Standish O’Grady – writers less concerned with earning an international reputation – the paradigm offers a very narrow account of Irish writers’ engagement with their country’s politics and culture. In contrast, as both Malouf and Nicholas Allen have observed, literature was only one among many forms of intellectual expression in the period, thus Casanova’s privileging of Ireland’s most recognized and celebrated writers forecloses “any alternative genealogy of the Irish intellectual revival.”\footnote{Malouf, “Problems with Paradigms” 56. See also Nicholas Allen, \textit{George Russell (Æ) and the New Ireland, 1905-1930} (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013).}
These critiques of Casanova’s Irish paradigm are valuable, not only for addressing the shortcomings and biases of her approach, but also for revealing the limitations of Irish studies itself. According to Malouf, Casanova’s methodology – despite its flaws – in fact opens the way for a more meaningful Irish comparativism. The world literary system she describes is focused on the flow of cultural capital between center and periphery, yet as Malouf suggests, her model might instead be profitably adapted to make illuminating comparisons between the peripheries themselves. “It is possible to salvage her theory for inter-peripheral comparativism,” he writes, “not by taking the center out of her system, but rather, by redirecting her system of literary networks as they function through and around a multiplicity of centers (and of course, ‘center’ here does not only refer to Paris, but to any site of literary consecration).”

Malouf imagines an approach to postcolonial criticism based on a “suspension of knowability of what is ‘Irish’ about Irish literature” – an approach, in other words, that addresses Ireland as similar to other peripheries rather than as anomalous, in much the same way that the present study attempts to do.

Until recently, the majority of scholarship on the Revival was concerned with exploring how the movement imagined Ireland, and less so with how artists and intellectuals outside of Ireland imagined the country and its defining cultural renaissance. Revisionist historiography and cultural materialist approaches within Irish

---

40 Malouf, “Problems with Paradigms” 62.
41 Malouf, “Problems with Paradigms” 66.
42 For instance, we might consider how seminal studies of the Revival emphasize the movement’s nationalism at the expense of transnational comparisons. Seamus Deane (1985) described the Revival as “a movement towards the colony and away from the mother-country, a replacement of ‘Englishness’ by ‘Irishness’” (Celtic Revivals, 48). Similarly, Edward Said (1988) identified the project of the Revival, articulated in Yeats’s poetry, as “announce[ing] the contours of an ‘imagined’ or ideal community, crystallized not only by its sense of itself but also of its enemy” (“Yeats and Decolonization, 86). Although Said reads Yeats in the context of other cultural discourses of decolonization, his interest is in presenting parallels to Ireland, rather than in identifying instances of cross-cultural dialogue. Luke Gibbons, Declan Kiberd, David Lloyd and others have also contributed similar accounts of the Revival and its literature, in
studies – while valuable for uncovering new voices and perspectives in the period – still largely occlude Ireland’s transnational ties, giving further support to a version of Ireland as insular and anomalous. Subsequent studies have devoted more attention to the international cross-currents that influenced the Revival, demonstrating, in Paige Reynolds’s words, “how concerns seemingly indigenous to Ireland were in fact widespread.” Yet Irish studies scholars would also benefit from recognizing, as Amanda Claybaugh puts it, “the need for a transatlanticism that is as attentive to the connections across national boundaries as to the differences between nations, as attentive to the concrete collaborations of individuals and groups as to the imaginings of nations as a whole.” One method of achieving this type transatlanticism is via cross-cultural comparisons, which reveal the dynamic processes of cultural exchange that involved Ireland in the early twentieth century.

Reading Ireland’s cultural renaissance in light of similar movements outside of the country entails understanding how the literature of the Revival was understood and re-imagined by other writers. Writers from the literary peripheries shared a sense of their


As Joe Cleary observes in *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2006), “In Irish literary history, as in other forms of history writing, the tendency to think of Irish history as a somewhat anomalous or strange regional variant of a British (read English) historical ‘master narrative’ is settled and pervasive. Hence the predictable and recurrent emphasis in Irish history generally on the manifold ways in which Irish society ‘failed’ to reproduce the social and cultural patterns of its more ‘modern’ neighbor” (48).


marginality and of the secondhand quality of their literature. As Ezra Pound remarked, with typical smug insouciance, “No one in London cares a hang what is written in America. After getting an American audience a man has to begin all over again here if he plans for an international hearing. He even begins at a disadvantage.”  

T. S. Eliot echoed Pound’s sentiments, criticizing “the lack of an intelligent literary society” in America and “the starved environment” it offered its artists. “What the Americans did, in point of fact, suffer from was the defect of society in the larger sense,” he explains, “not from the exiguity of intelligentsia – intelligentsia would have spoiled their distinction. Their world was thin….Worst of all, it was secondhand; it was not original and independent – it was shadow.”  

Ireland served as a crucible for literary experimentation in the period, providing a model for other writers, including those in America, who were intent on asserting a counter-tradition to challenge the dominance of the metropolitan centers. The remarkable efflorescence of literary activity in the country proved Irish literature to be more than simply the outgrowth of a British tradition – a tradition that appeared increasingly insular and moribund by comparison. By exploring Irish and American writers’ use of revivalist themes and texts, we are better able to appreciate precisely how the Irish example was instructive for artists from other peripheral communities. This method puts the peripheries in conversation with each other, revealing how literary influence and value were cultivated on the margins of the world literary system as well as in its centers.

Moreover, as I hope to show, a comparativist approach de-familiarizes standard accounts of the Irish Revival and its literature by demonstrating how the movement and

---


47 Quoted in Tony Tanner, “American Canon,” boundary 2 (Summer 2010): 73.
its writers were reinvented in different national and aesthetic contexts. Surveying Ireland’s extra-national sense of itself – the combined ideas of Ireland based on outsiders’ interpretations – thus provides us with a new way of understanding cultural nationalism in the period. Rather than describing a singular Revival promoting a singular national ideal, in other words, this approach posits a complex, multi-layered movement comprised of many strands and attracting an equally diverse audience. Returning again to Malouf, I am suggesting a method of comparison that studies “how Irish literature [wa]s received and appropriated through cross-cultural” exchanges. This approach identifies parallels between Ireland and other local and postcolonial cases, but it also aims to read other artists’ revisions of revivalist material back onto the original movement. Reading these revivalist afterlives alongside each other and against the Revival, as it promoted itself within Ireland, calls our attention to the complexity and contingency of the original movement – revealing, for example, how and why different strands of the Revival took root in different locations.

III. The Print Network

To begin tracing the Revival’s influence, I heed Claybaugh’s advice that a meaningful comparative study of the Anglo-American world must “excavate the material networks that constituted it,” even as such an approach “focus[es] on relations that are imagined, not material.” Indeed, the transatlantic links connecting Ireland to the United States and facilitating the Irish Revival’s influential spread were as much material as they were ideological. The Revival gained cultural currency by circulating in an

---

48 Malouf, “Problems with Paradigms” 64.  
49 Claybaugh, 443.  
50 Maud Ellman and Michael Rubenstein each offer alternative ways of understanding the relationship between modernist writing and material networks. Ellman’s study of modernist fiction in light of
international market in much the same way that other national literatures participated in a global economy of letters. As Brad Evans argues, regional writing “had less to do with a sense of place than with a dynamic of circulation.” His comments suggest that culturally specific texts, like revivalist literature and drama, were implicated in modern circuits of trade and marketed as commodities. The dislocation and transmission of such writing provide a basis for cross-cultural comparisons: the Abbey Theatre’s tours—particularly in the United States, where the company helped to inspire the little theatre movement—are an obvious example of this phenomenon. The Irish Players performed a nationalist version of Irishness for American audiences, who identified with the Theatre’s ambition to create and promote a specific national identity. The example of the Abbey demonstrates, in line with Evans’s claim, that any national or regional writing was both locally rooted and potentially resonant in a global context.

As such, both Claybaugh’s and Evans’s comments compel us to consider the circulation of literature in the period’s magazines and literary journals. Because such publications were generally dialogic, embedding the writing they contained in the period’s social and political discourses, they serve today’s readers as an important access point to literary and cultural history. In many cases, these publications were the first venues for revivalist writing, and they helped to define and market the Revival itself.


Magazines like *Beltaine* and *Samhain*, or cultural journals like *The Irish Homestead*, for example, presented the Revival in its own terms, documenting the movement as it grew and evolved. Such publications framed the period’s writing as both the product of a particular cultural and historical moment, and as part of a broader dialogue, encouraging readers to view such texts as participants in a larger modernist network. In providing a forum for artists and their audiences, magazines and periodicals accomplished the paradoxical tasks of uniting disparate voices while respecting and affirming their heterogeneity. Revivalist texts, like fragments, were presented as part of a bricolage, inserted into a discontinuous, open-ended system of relations, to be made sense of by the reader. Such material acquired its meaning partly via adjacency – by virtue of its placement in a rich and varied print context, rather than according to any internal logic of organization. The fragmentary experience of reading a magazine thus resists any attempt to homogenize its contents, and instead offers us potentially richer ways of conceptualizing the assortment of voices that comprise the whole.

Indeed, recent scholarship on modernist print culture attests to the importance of understanding periodicals as more than simply context for primary source materials. As this project demonstrates, little magazines, newspapers, cultural journals and mass-market publications in fact played a vital role in creating the institutional and material forms of culture. Importantly, such publications also serve as a material analogue of the

---

transnational network this study describes, which connected Ireland to other places. In her cross-regional study of Ireland and the American Midwest, Cheryl Temple Herr offers a way of understanding this network with parallels to the periodical form. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Herr conceives of the connections between distant places as an “assemblage,” by which she means “a construction composed variously of elements from regions that history has twinned.”\(^{53}\) The assemblage describes the cross-regional exchange between places that are “‘aware’” of each other, although they may occupy different geographical or even temporal locations.\(^{54}\) As a concept, the assemblage is defined “in terms of its dynamic relationality and its aggressive way of organizing historical details and intersocial connections.”\(^{55}\) It allows us, in other words, to conceive of a space between – an interregional space linking disparate and distant places – “that is neither utopianly totalizing nor a mere negation of existing structures.”\(^{56}\)

The assemblage, like the material and ideological networks I am addressing, permits us to study the exchange and mediation of information between locations, while still respecting differences of nationality, race, culture or political circumstance.

The concept is also helpful in describing the form of the little magazine itself, and in appreciating how such publications influenced the spread of revivalism within and outside of Ireland. Like the assemblage, the periodical form enacts a process of collecting and putting into conversation the discrete parts that comprise it. By giving readers a sense of both the broader historical developments surrounding the Revival and of Ireland’s transatlantic ties, these publications present Irish culture, in Ann Ardis and

\(^{54}\) Herr, 24.
\(^{55}\) Herr, 11.
\(^{56}\) Ibid.
Patrick Collier’s words, as “rich with local particularities but multiply connected to both England and America.”\textsuperscript{57} As Ardis and Collier remark, Ireland was unique for having witnessed “[a movement] for self-definition carried out through print culture in the period.”\textsuperscript{58} Their observations call our attention to the role print materials played in not only staging debates over national identity, but also in creating the transatlantic circuits of exchange that enabled revivalism to spread beyond its points of origin. By exploring how periodicals produced and mobilized national and regional identities – and how such publications connected readers to networks beyond their local communities – we are better able to appreciate the role these publications played in shaping the versions of revivalism this project addresses.

Beyond this, I wish to call attention to the materiality of individual little magazines – to their function as physical objects that served as a center for the energies, ideas, and expressions of contributors and readers alike. Numerous studies of both the genre and of specific publications attend to the physical features of a little magazine – its size and shape, the paper used to print it, its advertisements and images – and to what these details communicate about the circumstances surrounding a magazine’s publication and its intended and actual readerships. We take it for granted that the physical make-up of a little magazine is fundamental to its function as a representational medium. Yet few scholars have theorized the materiality of the magazine form as a whole – considering, for example, how culture is lodged in the print artifact, and how the magazine-as-object embodies the intellectual and artistic milieu out of which it emerges. For my purposes, I wish to explore the productive tension that arises when the ephemerality of the

\textsuperscript{57} Ardis and Collier, 8.
\textsuperscript{58} Ardis and Collier, 9.
magazine’s form and of the modernist writing it contained rubs up against the materiality of the printed object as cultural artifact. As the following chapters demonstrate, little magazines and other modernist publications allowed readers to literally grasp a piece of their cultural moment. Concerned as they were with “now-ness” – with the present moment, including current trends in art and literature – these publications encapsulated contemporary culture, turning modernist texts, graphic images, manifestos, news items, readers’ letters, editorials, and advertisements into portable, consumable print objects. Because magazines were often the vanguard of the period’s intellectual movements, they told the story of the local communities where these movements first originated, documenting specific regions’ contributions to wider aesthetic developments. Such publications captured history as they helped to write it, serving as snapshots of specific times and places and as cheap, accessible and disposable cultural records. By wedding modern print technology to content that often drew explicitly on traditional, sometimes ancient materials, the little magazines and modernist publications at the heart of this study reflect the same mode as the Revival and its afterlives, which were likewise characterized by a provocative blending of the old and the new. A formal approach to the study of modernist magazines thus allows us to organize our thinking about the Revival and the mechanism of its influence by illustrating how a particular movement was picked up, altered, and reimagined in new forms by the period’s intellectuals.

Eric Bulson’s study of the little magazine’s form is also instructive in this regard. Bulson describes the form of the magazine as both mobile and malleable, debunking the
“myth surrounding the little magazine’s mobility” by arguing that the medium – rather than specific publications – traversed national borders.⁵⁹

Throughout the [twentieth] century, versions of this medium popped up on five continents. It was not a particular magazine moving across international boundaries so much as it was the form of the magazine itself. Writers, editors, critics, and translators were quick to realize that the magazine was an effective way of consolidating literary energies both at home and abroad. Some magazines were more international that others, but all had the potential to tap into an ever-expanding network.⁶⁰

In this way, the little magazine – which, in many cases, began as a regional document – ultimately became a “world form,” modified to suit the particular needs of different cultural contexts and readerships.⁶¹ The variety of magazines that existed in the twentieth century is a testament to both the durability and adaptability of the form – an ironic characteristic of the genre, given the ephemerality of individual publications. For the purposes of this project, the process of formal adaptation that Bulson describes parallels the process of influence or appropriation that I trace with respect to the Irish Revival. In much the same way that the form of the little magazine was adapted by different editors and contributors, so too did the ideas popularized and debated in revivalist discourse circulate and transform in different cultural and literary settings. In addition to providing important context – allowing us to reconstruct the material network that permitted revivalist writers to market themselves and their movement – these publications thus also

⁶⁰ Bulson, 271.
⁶¹ Bulson, 267.
serve as an analogy for the process of transatlantic influence I am describing. In the movement of the magazine’s form across international borders, and in the diverse range of publications that sprung up as a consequence of this mobility, we find a model for the spread of revivalism and the variety of revivalist afterlives that resulted.

Bulson’s argument is also valuable for articulating an alternative to Casanova’s center-periphery model of the world literary system, which privileges what Bulson describes as the “global book business.” Because the magazine form “does not belong to a single nation, continent or hemisphere,” he argues, the publication offers us a “decentered literary universe,” allowing writers and readers to imagine themselves as part of an international community. The movement of magazines across national borders thus accomplishes the paradoxical feat of affirming specific cultural identities while simultaneously enabling these identities to circulate in international networks of communication. A study of the magazine’s form – not only its materiality, but also its structure, design, formatting strategies, contributors and contents – therefore facilitates a comparative approach by focusing our attention less on specific national cultures and more on the ways in which the little magazine negotiated both local and global literary markets.

IV. Revivalist Afterlives

Through close textual and visual analyses of archival material, I explore how the period’s writers understood, imitated, interrogated, borrowed from and repudiated the central claims and practices of the Irish Revival. I argue that the Irish example was central to many modernists’ debates over questions of identity, national and regional

---

62 Bulson, 270.
affiliation, and cultural authenticity. In particular, I aim to address the cultural work accomplished by the idea of revivalism as it appears in the literature of other peoples and places. In the United States, for instance, revivalism’s emphasis on regional communities was instrumental for writers seeking to define the place of their specific region within the wider national community. The Irish example provided these writers with a model for thinking through the imperatives of nationalism at a time when the category of the nation was fluid and contested. Intellectuals in Northern Ireland likewise struggled to balance an indigenous identity against the competing claims of cultural nationalism in the South, and the Revival served these writers and intellectuals as both a blueprint for the region’s own cultural renaissance and as a counterpart to a distinctly Northern version of revivalism. To read Ireland’s defining cultural movement in light of similar movements occurring outside the country is to illuminate the tensions between local, national and international concerns within the Revival, leading us to fresh interpretations of the movement. By conducting these comparisons, I am suggesting that the Revival and the conceptual and stylistic afterlives it inspired should be studied as local and contingent, shaped by and for regional audiences but also subject to extra-regional influences. This approach affirms the value of an international perspective within Irish studies while still acknowledging Ireland’s particular experience of modernity. In other words, by studying the Revival as a “phenomenon both of content and circulation,” we can better appreciate both the rich dialogue between other writers and the literature and drama of Ireland’s renaissance, and the specific revivalist afterlives this dialogue produced.63

---

63 Matt Cohen “Plantation Modernism,” *Mississippi Quarterly* 60.2 (Spring 2007): 387.
In the chapters that follow, I examine four of these afterlives in Ireland, Northern Ireland and the United States, addressing writing from 1896 to 1925 – a period roughly coinciding with the years of the Revival itself – to understand why the movement remained enabling for other writers. The concept of an afterlife typically denotes a reactivation or reincarnation “after the fact,” and although certain of the artists I address adapted the tenets and practices of revivalism after the movement had effectively ended, others were contemporaries of the Revival’s architects. More than the idea of reanimation, then, the term is valuable to me for its flexibility and range: an afterlife, like a revival itself, may involve formal imitation, the reimagining of an historical or cultural event, or a rejection of the imperatives that defined the Revival’s project.\footnote{David James identifies the versions that a dialogue with the past might take in a paper delivered as part of the Contemporary Fiction Research Seminar: Modernist Afterlives, February 2013, The School of Advanced Study, University of London.} In addition, in at least one instance, the notion of an afterlife furnishes an appropriate metaphor to illustrate the way elements of the movement haunt later Irish writing. As a way of describing influence, the concept of an afterlife is thus fluid and capacious, allowing us – in James’s words – “to observe how artistic precedents are regenerated, their initiatives redeployed, and their styles not simply mimed but reanimated for the markedly different characterological, descriptive or political concerns of the appropriating artist.”\footnote{James, \textit{Modernist Futures} 31. James is writing in reference to Julie Sanders’s work on appropriation and adaptation studies, which similarly describes influence as kinetic and open-ended rather than a process of straightforward imitation, modification or rejection of the past. Sanders, \textit{Adaptation and Appropriation} (London: Routledge, 2005).}

The magazines, journals, and newspapers that feature in each of the following chapters facilitate this analysis of the Revival’s transmission, demonstrating that the movement’s objectives and methods were consonant with other artistic projects, even outside of Ireland. Reading the writing I study in its original print context, in the little
magazines and periodicals that first published it, allows me to access specific historical moments and to reconstruct what John Klancher describes as the “phantom social world” of a text.⁶⁶ A magazine’s contents, advertisements, production details, contributor list and editorial policy, among other features, provide information about the constellation of writers and readers that surrounded the publication, and about the particular places where the publication originated and was read. Magazines and journals thus provide me with an object and medium for conceptualizing the contingency of modernist writing, highlighting the embeddedness of these ostensibly mobile objects in specific regions. The region, as we have seen, possessed a powerful symbolic and artistic value within the literature of the Revival, and any study of the movement’s afterlives must therefore address how revivalism’s investment in place was adapted and interrogated by other writers. Indeed, the link between national identity and landscape was foundational to cultural nationalism in Ireland: it compelled many of the movement’s writers to lionize the rural peasantry and to romanticize the Irish West as an area free from the corrupting effects of modernity, urbanization and industrialization. In the following chapters, my exploration of specific revivalist afterlives thus also involves interpreting the construction of place and its consequences for the assertion of national and regional identities.

Taking cultural nationalism’s idealization of rural Ireland as a starting point, the first chapter explores James Joyce’s engagement with the national community envisioned by many writers of the Revival. In particular, I argue that the rural village at the center of nationalist discourse served as a blueprint for Joyce’s rendering of Dublin in Dubliners and Ulysses. This argument is facilitated by reading Joyce’s writing in the Irish

---

Homestead (1895-1923), the official journal of Ireland’s agricultural co-operative movement, which published three of Joyce’s stories in 1904. By presenting rural Ireland as both a repository of Irishness and as the site of a modern community, co-operation modeled an alternative to the kind of national community portrayed in revivalist writing. Homestead editor George William Russell (Æ), in particular, imagined an independent Ireland bound together by an economic network of villages and towns, populated not by the idealized rural peasant, but by an emerging middle class. Understanding the ways Joyce’s modernism was haunted by the Irish countryside and its political associations uncovers the similarities between Russell’s co-operative vision for rural Ireland and Joyce’s representations of Dublin. This approach also reveals a continuity between the Dublin of Dubliners and the dynamic metropolis of Ulysses, countering a longstanding assumption in Joyce scholarship that the two cities are distinct.

Like Joyce, participants in the Northern Revival also challenged the homogenizing ideology of Irish nationalism. The second chapter addresses two expressions of Northern regionalism, the first in Alice Milligan’s nationalist journal The Shan Van Vocht (1896-99) and the second in Lewis Purcell’s play The Enthusiast (1905) for the Ulster Literary Theatre. While much of the scholarship on the movement interprets the Northern Revival as little more than a regional variant of its Southern counterpart, Milligan’s journal and Purcell’s play in fact registered a more ambivalent response to the broader Revival. To illustrate this claim, I address the internationalism of The Shan Van Vocht and the satire of the Ulster Theatre as complementary tactics intended to circumnavigate the pitfalls of Northern regionalism – sectarianism, dissension, conflict – and in doing so, to create a space for the North in the Southern
Revival’s narrative of the nation. Just as Joyce and Russell borrowed from the model of nationalist community they sought to critique, both *The Shan Van Vocht* and Purcell’s play harness the affective tropes of cultural nationalism. But they do so to present a version of revivalism that acknowledges regional difference in thinking through the problematic of the nation. The practices and politics of *The Shan Van Vocht* and the Belfast theatre thus not only present a more complete picture of cultural nationalism’s foothold in the North, but also suggest new ways of understanding the Northern Revival as a movement at once regionally motivated and integrated into broader national and international cultural currents.

Shifting my attention to the United States in the third chapter, I consider how the poet and the wider Revival were interpreted, packaged and reimagined in the United States, particularly in the discursive statements of Harriet Monroe and Ezra Pound, many of which were published in *Poetry* magazine. Yeats’s appearance in the magazine in fact highlights a tension within *Poetry*, I argue, between a kind of revivalist logic that valued regional writing and an impulse towards a more cosmopolitan, international modernism. The magazine positioned Yeats as a leading figure of the modern poetry movement, using him to create what Alan Golding describes as a “transatlantic axis for modernism”: publishing poets like Yeats alongside native, often unknown writers allowed the magazine to assert its internationalism and to mediate between the avant-garde and more mainstream verse. Yet reading Yeats in the context of *Poetry* also reveals a version of revivalism operating within the magazine that has been overlooked in scholarship emphasizing the publication’s cosmopolitanism and its status as an iconic little magazine.

In fact, as I address in the chapter, *Poetry* demonstrated a provocative engagement with regional writing, featuring a number of local or regional poets and devoting special issues to specific regional and ethnic groups. Examining the magazine’s, and particularly Monroe’s, regionalism thus allows me to tease apart the complex and interesting ways that the Irish Revival had an afterlife in this important modernist publication. In addition, reading Yeats in this context focalized the differences between *Poetry*’s editor and its foreign correspondent, providing us with a more nuanced picture of Monroe and Pound’s professional relationship.

The final chapter then examines the strategic influence of Ireland on the way the Fugitive poets of Nashville not only imagined modernism, but practiced it. The group’s key members – John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren – relied on a complex, admittedly fictive notion of Ireland as a backward traditional society – an invention that complemented the poets’ perception of their own region as outmoded and insular. The group’s members saw themselves as sharing with Yeats, in particular, the practice of looking critically at one’s own society, cultural inheritance, and literary tradition. Indeed, in the Fugitives’ account of revivalism, the ghost of Yeats loomed large, yet theirs was a version of the poet minus much of the political and historical context for his work – a version, I argue, that was heavily indebted to modernist print culture, including magazines like *Poetry*. By returning to the poets’ intellectual moment and by revisiting the archives of the little magazines they read, I explore how the Fugitives’ use of the Irish example involved them in a series of theoretical formulations concerning the relationship between their poetry and their region. To further clarify the stakes of this argument, I also return to a debate, addressed
in *The Fugitive* magazine, that erupted between the poets and Harriet Monroe over the style and subject of modern Southern verse. Although the group’s poetry has tended to receive less critical attention than their subsequent Agrarian and New Critical pursuits, this early phase of the Fugitives assembly is significant for highlighting the dynamic international exchange of modernist themes and practices that occurred in this period.

Taken together, the chapters conduct a cross-regional study of the Irish Revival, illustrating both the variety of afterlives the movement inspired and the diversity of the original movement itself. Challenging the association of the Revival with a blanket, undifferentiated cultural nationalism, this study instead uncovers multiple strands of revivalism that were variously animated, reimagined, and contested by the period’s writers. The resultant versions of revivalism attest to a dynamic process of cultural exchange involving Ireland, which emerges in these chapters as a vital participant in the global literary marketplace, despite its alleged peripheral status. The breadth and extent of the Revival’s influence in fact encourages us to view the movement as a catalyst, stimulating innovative forms of modernist expression for practitioners whose political orientations and cultural contexts varied widely. Additionally, the project’s approach allows us to historicize modernist writing by tracing its debts to the Irish movement. While there are still other revivalist afterlives to be explored, the following chapters take the initial steps in bringing to bear on Irish studies some of the provocative and enriching questions that have motivated recent critical inquiries in modernist studies generally. What this work underscores is the value of cross-cultural comparisons to our understanding of the Revival and its place in the wider networks of twentieth century writing.
Chapter 1: James Joyce in the Pigs’ Paper: *Dubliners*, the Co-operative Movement and Alternative Communities

James Joyce’s relationship to his “dear dirty Dublin” has been at the center of much of Joyce scholarship. Critical accounts of Joyce’s ambivalent affiliation with Ireland are often organized around his representation of the city, with many critics citing his unflattering portrayal of Dublin as evidence of his opposition to Irish nationalism and its reverence for tradition and community. Certainly, his famous description of the city as “the center of paralysis” in Ireland has done little to counter the idea of Joyce as the exemplary cosmopolitan exile who repudiated the rhetoric of the Irish Literary Revival. Yet the language of even the most persuasive readings of Joyce’s Dublin suggests his indebtedness to Irish nationalism, particularly its focus on rural Ireland as the site of an ideal national community. Frederic Jameson, for instance, describes the Irish capital in Joyce’s work as “that great village,” while Seamus Deane calls it a “modern city which was also a knowable community.”¹ More recently, P. J. Mathews observes that while the city generally “wear[s] the mask of the Irish metropolis” in Joyce’s fiction, it often “appears more like a large rural market town.”² These descriptions reveal the trace of rural Ireland in Joyce’s urban landscape, complementing studies by Deane, Emer Nolan, Marjorie Howes and others that persuasively challenge the longstanding opposition between the discourse of nationalism and Joycean modernism.³ Critics do routinely

---

³ Emer Nolan, *James Joyce and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1995) and Marjorie Howes, “Goodbye Ireland I’m going to Gort”: geography, scale, and narrating the nation,” in Derek Attridge and Howes (eds.), *Semicolonial Joyce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 58-77. See also the other essays in the collection.
recognize the Irish village in Joyce’s writing as an object of satire. But as I intend to argue, his descriptions also illustrate the rich and varied ways he contested the kind of community envisioned by Irish nationalism. By implying a continuity between the rural village – presented as a knowable and dynamic space – and the urban metropolis of Dublin, Joyce complicates the pastoralism of the Revival without entirely rejecting it. Moreover, although he criticized the fetishized version of Ireland evident in much of revivalist discourse, Joyce’s Dublin offers readers an alternative figuration of the local, and one that borrows from the very movement he renounced.

The present argument is facilitated by reading Joyce in his original print context in the *Irish Homestead: A Weekly Newspaper for Farmyard, Field and Fireside* (1895-1923), the official journal of Ireland’s agricultural co-operative movement. Literary editor George William Russell (Æ) solicited work from Joyce for a section of the paper entitled “Our Weekly Story,” which featured stories only semi-regularly and often by unknown and previously unpublished writers. Russell encouraged Joyce to submit something “simple, rural?, livemaking?, pathos?, which could be inserted so as not to shock the readers…. [T]he editor will pay £1. It is easily earned money if you can write fluently and don’t mind playing to the common understanding and liking for once in a way.”  

The *Homestead* published three of Joyce’s stories – “The Sisters” (13 August 1904), “Eveline” (10 September 1904) and “After the Race” (17 December 1904) – before the editor cited reader complaints and requested that Joyce refrain from further submissions. Joyce dismissively referred to the *Homestead* as “the pigs’ paper,” preferring to use the pseudonym Stephen Dædalus, and he disparaged the writing in an

---

early Christmas issue as “unbearably bad,” complaining in a letter to his brother, “What is
wrong with all these Irish writers – what the blazes are they always sniveling about?...O,
blind, snivelling, nose-dropping, calumniated Christ wherefore were these young men
begotten?” (Letters II, 51). Rejecting what Ezra Pound would later describe as the
“promotion of Irish peasant industries,” Joyce’s stories oppose the paper’s seeming
idealization of rural life and its embrace of nationalist ideology.\(^5\)

But owing to its practical co-operative platform, the Homestead in fact shared
Joyce’s skepticism of the mystical pastoralism of the Literary Revival. The co-operative
movement, popularized in Ireland by Horace Plunkett in the 1890s, rejected the fantasy
of a non-modern, rural community as the bearer of an authentic Irishness, aiming instead
to reform the Irish countryside. Plunkett promoted agricultural industry and the
development of a modern economic infrastructure in local communities that were
typically neglected by politics and sentimentalized in revivalist literature and drama.
While many nationalists were at pains to link the country’s economic development to its
cultural revival, the progressive agenda of the co-operative movement was unique in its
focus on the region within a wider national framework. In recent years, literary critics
and historians have interpreted Irish co-operation in the context of the broader cultural
revival, recognizing what Mathews describes as the “progressive self-help ethos” of
programs like the Irish Agricultural Organization Society (I.A.O.S.), the Gaelic League,
and even the Abbey Theatre.\(^6\) However, such studies assume too strict a divide between

\(^6\) P. J. Mathews, Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 2. See also Leeann Lane, “‘It Is in the Cottages and Farmers’ Houses That the Nation Is Born’: AE’s Irish Homestead and the Cultural Revival,” Irish University Review 33.1 (Spring-Summer 2003): 165 and “Female Emigration and the Cooperative
the literary construction of Irish rural communities and the economic model of co-operation. To fully appreciate the co-operative movement’s engagement with cultural nationalism, we must recognize that its advocates – including Plunkett and Russell – viewed the rural village as both a repository of Irishness and as the site of a modern community. In this way, the co-operative village modeled an alternative to the kind of national community envisioned in nationalist discourse. For Russell, in particular, the modern and the traditional coexisted: as editor of the *Homestead*, he imagined an independent Ireland bound together by an economic network of villages and towns, and populated not by the idealized rural peasant, but by an emerging middle class.

For his part, Joyce preferred to dramatize the alienation of urban life and his characters’ failure to create or sustain a regenerative community. Yet even so – despite their Dublin setting and stylistic differences – Joyce’s contributions to the *Homestead* shared with the co-operative-themed fiction an emphasis on local details and traditions. As Maria Tymoczko explains, “Joyce begins with the impulse toward localism that is characteristic of the Irish literary revival as a whole,” albeit with a focus on urban rather than country life.⁷ Like other revivalist writers, he captures the topography, dialect and traditions of his setting. Unlike writers such as W. B. Yeats or J. M. Synge, however, he depicts the estrangements of modern life without recourse to sentiment or imagination. Joyce’s “unflinching localism,” as Nolan describes it, thus seems to disrupt the homogenizing ideology of cultural nationalism largely embraced by the *Homestead’s*

---

readers.\(^8\) And yet, his writing exhibits the same preoccupation with communal belonging that motivated the wider Revival. Less visibly, that is, nationalism’s representation of the rural village served as a blueprint for Joyce’s own imagining of Dublin. Indeed, understanding the ways his modernism was haunted by the Irish countryside and its political associations reveals the similarities between Russell’s co-operative vision for rural Ireland and Joyce’s representation of the city.

I. Better Farming, Better Business, Better Living: The Co-operative Philosophy

As editor of the Homestead beginning in 1905, Russell was attentive to the material realities of life in rural Ireland, and he shared with Joyce a desire to challenge cultural nationalism’s idealization of the Irish countryside. Russell’s involvement with the Irish Literary Revival made him uniquely qualified to link the “dairies of Plunkett” and the “fairies of Yeats” in order to demonstrate that both economic and cultural initiatives were vital to Ireland’s decolonization.\(^9\) Although co-operation aimed to bolster Ireland’s economy via agricultural reform on the local level, its leaders also intended the movement to provide the Irish farmer with “a higher and nobler outlook on life, on citizenship, on fellowship with his neighbors.”\(^10\) T. R. Tholfsen describes the co-operative philosophy as a kind of “gradualist utopianism” and notes “the rhetoric of aspiration” that characterized its efforts to reconfigure society.\(^11\) The idea of a co-operative commonwealth based on class harmony and financial stability indeed had an element of utopian thinking that also extended to the movement’s initiatives to enrich the

\(^{8}\) Nolan, 29.
\(^{9}\) Cited in Mathews, Revival 63.
intellectual life of rural villages. But, crucially, co-operation maintained a practical view of rural Ireland, stressing that any advancement on the national level must begin with regional reform. The co-operative slogan – “Better Farming, Better Business, Better Living” – linked agrarianism to the national economy, but also to standards of living: what would benefit the farmer and his local community would ultimately benefit the nation.12

While a comprehensive history of the Irish co-operative movement is beyond the scope of this argument, it is useful to consider how the movement’s origins and objectives contributed to its perspective on rural Ireland. Declan Kiberd describes Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century as a “periphery-dominated center,” and Ben Levitas likewise notes that Wyndham’s Land Act (1903) “kept attention on the social issues of the country rather than the city.”13 The Land (Purchase) Act, sponsored by the Chief Secretary for Ireland, George Wyndham (1863-1913), sought to end landlordism and to facilitate tenants’ purchase of land, providing Irish farmers with greater financial independence. Leaders of the Land League and the Irish Parliamentary Party devised the Act at the Land Conference of 1902, which assembled landlord and tenant representatives to develop a plan for the transfer of Irish land. Land purchase was designed to appeal to both parties, with the government providing treasury stock to tenant farmers to meet the landlords’ asking prices. The Conference agreed “that the new owners should have a fair start and a reasonable prospect of success; that the landlords

12 Kennelly suggests that the co-operative slogan was “no doubt consciously echoing the ‘Three F’s’ of the Land League [Fair Rent, Fixity of Tenure and Free Sale]” (71), but the three F’s in the Homestead’s subtitle seem to provide a better parallel.
should receive some special inducement to sell; and that for the benefit of the whole community ‘it is of great importance that income derived from the sale of property in Ireland should continue to be expended in Ireland.’”\(^{14}\) Tenant farmers availed of the opportunity in large numbers, resulting in the sale of nearly nine million acres between 1903 and 1920.\(^{15}\)

The Act reconfigured more than the physical landscape: along with a host of social and legislative changes dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, it signaled the decline of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy class and forced the country’s politicians and intellectuals to reconsider the role of the Irish peasantry and the rural West in national development. Land reform also led to the emergence of a rural Catholic middle class, whose growing political significance Plunkett recognized. Co-operation thus sought to reform Irish society via a progressive process of economic and cultural development that operated on a smaller geographical scale, and which addressed itself to this emerging class of peasant-farmers. As Mathews observes, the movement was in fact as much a “project of social reform that constantly pitted a desirable middle-class propriety against the uncouthness of certain traditional practices” as it was a program for economic growth.\(^{16}\) It sought to modernize agricultural and social habits in the countryside, and in so doing, to transform rural life in Ireland. The West of Ireland retained a symbolic value for Irish nationalists, even as co-operative societies worked aggressively to modernize the region and its residents and to contest its literary depiction as stubbornly traditional and outmoded. The region as geographical space was thus increasingly the focus of the

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
\(^{16}\) Mathews, “‘A.E.I.O.U.’” 161.
period’s cultural and political initiatives: it served as a counterpart to the nation, reconfiguring the idea of community on a local scale, and it emerged in the co-operative movement as a space vital to Ireland’s economic growth and stability.

From the outset, in fact, co-operation was explicitly regional, targeting rural communities in Ireland and proposing reform on the local level first. The Irish West was to be the basis of a new social order, with the interests and loyalties of co-operative societies taking precedence over national debates on Home Rule. Not content simply to improve agricultural practice, Plunkett also expected his movement to provide the Irish farmer with “a higher and nobler outlook on life, on citizenship, on fellowship with his neighbors.” His ambitions were both economic and social. According to F. S. L. Lyons, Plunkett saw co-operation as an “efficient way of utilizing the resources of the country,” but also as “a means of restoring the Irishman’s self-respect, sapped, so it seemed to [him], by many years of coercion and eviction and also by the demagoguery of nationalist politicians.” While the Abbey Theatre’s “peasant plays” capitalized on the symbolic potency of rural Ireland for a Dublin citizenry often only a few generations removed from the country, the co-operative movement instead emphasized practical methods for regional reform. At the same time, the movement was premised on the idea of a rural civilization – an ideal social order that was, in many respects, as improbable as the Literary Revival’s construction of the Irish West. As John Hutchinson explains, co-operation aspired to create “the modern democratic equivalent of the old Celtic social order.” In sensing the radical potential of the past – the ability to use the country’s

17 Anderson, 39.
18 F. S. L. Lyons, 202-3.
cultural history as inspiration moving forward – the movement distinguished itself from strains of nationalism that viewed the traditional and the modern as antithetical. Mathews defines the alternative modernity of the Revival against that of parliamentary politics, but the co-operative movement promoted a modernity alternative even to that envisioned by other revivalist projects by embracing this dualism. In other words, by wedding its practical and economic objectives to the fantasy of community endorsed by cultural nationalism, co-operation produced a kind of pastoralism infused by modernity – the counterpart to Joyce’s own attempts at re-presenting the rural village.

II. The Pigs’ Paper: Revivalism and Practical Reform in the *Homestead*

The two streams of thought were evident in the *Homestead*, in which the literary construction of rural Ireland supplemented the co-operative movement’s economic agenda. Although much of the journal’s contents seem on the surface to reinforce the Revival’s emphasis on an idyllic Irish countryside, the paper also addressed a host of subjects endemic to rural Irish life at the turn of the 20th century that were routinely glossed over or omitted in mainstream revivalist writing. For instance, in addition to nationalist poems and stories celebrating the rural peasantry, the journal featured articles on dairy management and the care of livestock, and prescriptive commentary on the importance of maintaining a clean and well-decorated cottage. Its editorials likewise tackled rural depopulation and emigration, poverty, the proper role of women in the home and community, rural education, hygiene, and intellectual and spiritual stagnation in the country.

Leeann Lane argues that the co-operative program for reform and the cultural revival together comprised the “fundamental contradiction” of the publication. “While
Irish agricultural co-operation may be read as forward-looking and concerned to mold Irish society in a way which placed the farmer competitively in the nexus of world trade and commercial competition,” she writes, the Homestead – and Russell, in particular – also voiced, on behalf of the Anglo-Irish, “a nostalgia for an idealized hierarchical past.”20 Lane astutely identifies an attitude of noblesse oblige in the co-operative movement’s agenda, but the relationship between co-operation and the Revival in the journal perhaps begs more nuance. I mean to argue that what Lane describes as “the spiritual vision of Ireland” promoted by the Revival was in fact fundamental to co-operative ideology, not contradictory to it.21 Co-operation, in other words, encompassed elements that merely appeared inconsistent, but which were instead complementary components of a progressive reform agenda. When Russell outlined his utopian vision for rural Ireland, he offered it not as an alternative to an emerging democratic middle class, but as a goal to be achieved via the co-operative movement’s practical means. As I will attempt to show, the Homestead was not only capable of accommodating both perspectives on rural Ireland, but like its parent movement, it linked the traditional and the modern in envisioning a regional community. Read in this light, the nationalist underpinnings of the co-operative movement were more than simply nostalgia for a bygone way of life. On the contrary, the journal in fact re-conceptualized the Irish peasantry and countryside as participants in Ireland’s developing modernity.

According to its first editor, T. P. Gill, the Homestead was founded chiefly “to support, by every means, which a newspaper can command, the efforts of the great body of Irish farmers” but also to “furnish…pages of pleasant and instructive matter which the

20 Lane, “AE’s Irish Homestead and the Cultural Revival” 165.
21 Ibid.
young may read with pleasure and profit, and over which the old may unbend from the sterner cares of life.”22 The paper ran from 1885 to 1923, when it was incorporated into the *Irish Statesman* (1923-1930), the years of its print run coinciding roughly with those of the “classic Revival narrative” described by Richard Kirkland.23 Its opening editorial proclaimed the importance of a movement having its own newspaper “to publish its message through the medium of its own press,” and discussions of the *Homestead* at early annual meetings of the I.A.O.S. addressed how best to utilize this resource and how to boost circulation.24 The movement’s leaders suggested sending gratis copies to members of co-operative societies, noting that although “it was extremely difficult to get farmers to take in a newspaper,…if you could only persuade them to take it once they became permanent subscribers.”25 Another suggestion was to include “a little more local coloring” by supplementing agricultural articles with notes from the various co-operative societies, and Plunkett later expanded this strategy to incorporate revivalist literature and discussions of the movement’s cultural initiatives in the publication.26

Nonetheless, the *Homestead*’s principle focus remained on agricultural matters, and in this, the publication was comparable to the other Irish weeklies, most of which were specialized and included only minimal discussion of the Revival.27 Malcolm Ballin divides the period’s print materials into two categories: the first “a range of weekly

---

26 Ibid.
journals, typically priced at one penny,” which included the *Homestead* and nationalist weeklies, and the second “the more expensive monthly or quarterly publications, many of them priced at sixpence.”

Publications in both categories often adopted conflicting viewpoints and courted different readerships, but all were concerned with defining Irishness for their audiences. And their audiences were indeed growing, as advances in print production and distribution made this material available to a wider popular market.

To stimulate and retain a middle class readership, the *Homestead* needed to address more than agriculture – hence its allusion in its subtitle to the domestic fireside and its editors’ decisions to publicize the Revival.

The journal’s engagement with nationalism’s idealized rural community is evident even on the cover page of initial issues. The *Homestead*’s masthead depicts an idyllic rural scene enclosed by a vine-like border: farmers, a fisherman, a dairymaid, and a weaving woman at her wheel perform their tasks in the foreground, while a tidy rural cottage and a larger home, smoke billowing from its chimney, sit nestled in the trees in the distance. An inverted horseshoe appears at the top of the image bearing the words UNION • INDUSTRY • PLENTY. The masthead represents the various sections of the *Homestead*: the farm section, dealing with livestock, poultry, dairy and news from local co-operative societies; the field notes relating to crops, gardening and produce markets; and the fireside section, which often featured a household hints column, notes on

---

28 Ballin, 242.

29 William Donaldson, “Popular Literature: The Press, the People, and the Vernacular Revival,” in Douglas Gifford (ed.), *The History of Scottish Literature III: The Nineteenth Century* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989) writes: “The automation of paper-making, mechanical typesetting, high-speed steam-driven rotary presses, and the growth of the railway network, combined to make cheap reading matter available on a hitherto undreamed-of scale. Major advances in popular literary and increasing affluence in the rapidly expanding upper working and lower middle classes created a new reading public and a new mass popular literary market” (203). The advances were slower to arrive in Ireland than elsewhere in Europe, but they were a factor in the growth of penny weeklies at the turn of the twentieth century.
domestic hygiene and beautification, and a discussion of rural industries such as lace-making and needlework. The image takes pride of place at the top of the journal’s cover page, eclipsing the date and purchase price and commanding the reader’s careful attention in its detail. It capitalizes on romanticized versions of a rural peasantry and a pastoral landscape, projecting a wished-for Irish countryside, populated by industrious and healthy citizens.

But the cover also features an advertisement for a mechanical cream separator, which occupies an even larger space at the bottom of the page and provides a visual and ideological counterpoint to the masthead. The Petersen Cream Separator is rendered in as precise detail as the rural imagery above it; the drawing shows a cross section of the machine, its inner workings exposed and its various parts labeled with letters. While the masthead evokes an idyllic rural scene, the separator stands as a testament to industry and technology. The two images, one depicting a co-operative countryside and the other a symbol of industrial development, sit adjacent to each other on the page. The machine promises to revolutionize dairy practice, and in so doing, to produce the Ireland depicted in the masthead by increasing productivity and strengthening the rural economy. The correlation of these images belies the apparent discrepancy between them: both of them represent modern Ireland as conceived by the co-operative movement, a developed but bucolic rural society. Indeed, the masthead itself contains an image of industrial Ireland in the form of a train in the distance. Ireland’s rail network was part of a modern infrastructure. Train tracks opened remote rural areas to tourism, facilitating emigration,

---

30 Between these images, the cover page also features advertisements for “Thrifty” Close-Fire Ranges, which “[make] cooking a pleasure,” and Walpole Brothers Irish Linen and Damask. These ads, like the masthead and drawing of the cream separator, also contrast the mechanical with the homespun, the industrial with the domestic.
creating competition for local industries, and leading to the construction of new bridges, tunnels and train stations.\textsuperscript{31} The train in the masthead alludes to the modernizing industrial forces it represents, and it complicates the pastoral fantasy of the Irish countryside.

Together, the cover images describe a rural landscape that is both traditional and modern, blending qualities that would seem to be at odds in the Homestead’s reimagining of rural Ireland. The journal in fact deliberately positioned itself as agent and object of the alternative modernity it envisioned. From the outset, the Homestead promoted itself as a “paper of general interest and utility to all concerned in the promotion of Irish Agriculture and Industries, in the advancement of practical and technical education, the development of Ireland’s resources generally, and in all forms of effort for raising the economic and social condition of Irish men and women.”\textsuperscript{32} The Homestead’s target audience was an emerging class of rural peasant-farmers, and although the bulk of the its contents addressed agricultural practices and developments in the dairy industry, portions of the paper were also devoted to domestic management and hygiene, rural education and the arts. As Russell explained in an editorial, the paper was “written mainly for people who have done a little thinking. We want them to think a little more, for it is by thinking that the world advances to new and finer things.” He continues:

We know very well that the man on the bog cannot be expected to do this. He goes to the bog to cut turf. He does not read his Homestead there, but at his turf fire in his cabin, and there we are afraid he too often falls asleep over his newspaper (and small blame to him) unless he has something piquant to startle

\textsuperscript{31} Andrew Kincaid, Postcolonial Dublin: Imperial Legacies and the Built Environment (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxvii-xxviii.

\textsuperscript{32} Quoted in Joseph Kelly, Our Joyce: From Outcast to Icon (Austin: University of Texas, 1998), 33.
him into wakefulness — a local murder or a ‘scene’ in the House of Commons. Apart from our editorials, we maintain that the Homestead in its agricultural, creamery and co-operative news departments contains just the things the reading farmer wants, or ought to want, and the continued progress which the paper makes with the public we take for proof of this.\textsuperscript{33}

The editorial — incidentally, much like Yeats’s drama — seeks to instruct its audience in what they “ought to want,” but unlike Yeats, Russell’s appeal targets a rural middle-class readership. This decision was of course a function of Russell’s position: as editor, he needed to attract and sustain a broad readership both to ensure the success of the journal and to spread the gospel of co-operation. But the Homestead’s readership was also central to the paper’s modernizing vision, which relied on Ireland’s small farmers to organize and uphold a sound economic basis for the country. The Land Act had created the rural farmer as a new kind of Irish citizen, distinct from the peasant in owning his own land and in laboring to maintain it and to participate in the wider economy. The paper’s focus on this class of rural citizenry complemented the Literary Revival’s construction, in R. F. Foster’s words, of “the disappearing type of ‘pure’ Irish peasant,” a mainstay of the Abbey’s stage.\textsuperscript{34} In some respects, the Homestead’s emphasis on educating and empowering Ireland’s small farming class via a program of economic and social reform undermined the revivalist ideal; and in others, the journal’s efforts to modernize the Irish countryside were also an attempt to transform the peasant “type” into the small farmer.

\textsuperscript{33} George Russell, “‘Ourselves as others see us,’” Irish Homestead (20 June 1914): 497.
\textsuperscript{34} R. F. Foster, “Protestant Magic: W. B. Yeats and the Spell of Irish History,” in Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History (London: Allen Lane, 1993), 228.
To that end, much of the writing featured in the paper was in fact instructive in tone: its articles and literary selections were chosen expressly to engage and educate a rural readership. The “Homestead Readings” section, for example, appeared towards the end of each issue and included cultural notices and summaries of agricultural publications, short historical accounts, news items from around the world, jokes, and an occasional local color essay on rural life in Ireland, often from the perspective of an urban visitor. The paper also published humorous, propagandistic articles, routinely written in Hiberno-English and featuring titles such as “On the National Importance of the Hen” or “On the Use and Abuse of Manure.” The conceit of these pieces, in which a co-operative agent infiltrates and reforms villages, reveals how explicitly prescriptive much of the paper’s writing was. The goal of the “Homestead Readings,” regardless of topic, was twofold: to attract and sustain a rural readership and to teach them how to be modern in the co-operative way. Early issues of the journal also featured lyric poetry by the English Romantic poets and traditional Irish verse, and beginning in December 1901, the paper published Irish-language poetry with translations. The editorial note promised to print “[o]nly true Irish poetry” and to provide a translation so that readers might access the “spirit and meaning” of the work. In a letter to the editor, Irish poet and writer T. W. Rolleston expressed his approval of this new feature, suggesting that readers cut out and save each week’s poem in an album to begin their own collections of verse.


The “Homestead Readings” section eventually evolved into “Our Weekly Story,” which featured an occasional story or poem at the back of the issue. Despite its ostensibly literary value, the fiction published in this section was also intended to educate a rural readership in co-operative methods and to recruit small farmers to the co-operative cause. Consequently, more often than not, the Homestead’s stories affirm the value of community, describing farmers who enthusiastically participate in a collective decision-making to improve their circumstances. The characters’ exaggerated commitment to working together contributes to the humor of these stories, but the emphasis on community in such co-operative fiction can also be read as an alternative to the cultural nationalist rural ideal: the stories in fact propose a model of community in which citizens are bound together, not by affective bonds of patriotism or proximity, but by the decision to co-operate for the benefit of the group. These types of stories thus recreate a version of the nationalist pastoral fantasy, but one that emphasizes the practical means necessary to make the fantasy a reality.  

This strategy is evident in the paper’s annual Christmas supplement, a popular feature begun in 1897, which editor T. P. Gill billed as an “attempt to illustrate the sympathy between…two streams of tendency in Ireland, the economic and the spiritual.” In seeking to wed the practical and the ideal, the Christmas issue featured representative examples of writing from the “Celtic Movement” in addition to

37 Despite the obvious differences between Joyce’s stories and others published in the paper, his contributions also a number of stylistic share similarities with the more traditionally revivalist fiction. Joyce’s pairing of provincial characters with an urbane narrator and his use of what Joseph Kelly describes as “non-narrative figurations,” for example, link his stories to other revivalist writing in the Homestead: the provincial relates an extraordinary tale to the narrator, who interprets it for the reader, and the story often lacks causal links between the events it describes. Likewise, the residual folktale elements — references to “a whimsical kind of Providence” and the “ceremonious candles” that indicate the priest’s death at the opening of “The Sisters,” for example — are of a piece with much of the fiction published in the paper.

work "bearing directly upon the movement of which the Irish Homestead is the organ."\(^39\)

The "co-operative" contributions, in contrast to their revivalist counterparts, were frequently humorous and featured rural characters speaking in dialect. The titles of these pieces – including, for example, "Tales of a Kerry Creamery," "My Co-operative Fishing Society," "How I Failed to Organize Kilgilligan," "Seeding Song," and "The Colonel’s Motor Car" – indicate their prescriptive plots, which often presented rural communities in the process of modernizing via co-operation. "The Kilnogger Conference," for instance, reports on the "Important Proceedin’s" of a co-operative meeting, in which small farmers debate the formation of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (D.A.T.I.). Founded in 1900, the D.A.T.I. was a ministry for agricultural devised by Plunkett, who lobbied Unionists and Nationalists alike for its creation and served as its first Vice President. The fictional farmers of the story desire "eddication for their children," experimental agricultural plots to "tache min betther farmin’,," "lethers" from "experts in all kinds av farm operation," and "an agricultural bank or two in ivery parish."\(^40\) It is their hope that the new department will meet these needs, so that, as one farmer proclaims, with the help of co-operation, "the fair fame av ould Ireland as the ‘Island av Saints an’ Scholars’ – in this case, agricultural saints an’ agricultural scho’ars – ‘ud wanst more stan’ out before the wurild.”

The farmer’s Hiberno-English dialect contrasts sharply with Standish O’Grady’s lofty prose in “The Death of Cuchulain” or Alice Milligan’s “Lyrics In Memory of a Sea Lover,” both of which were published in the same issue. Predictably, the content of the co-operative material also differs from the revivalist pieces, presenting readers instead

---

\(^39\) T. P. Gill, “Editor’s Note” (1898): 1.

with a starker, less romantic kind of pastoralism that embraces modern change. Despite sharing themes and settings with revivalist writing, that is, the co-operative fiction offers an alternative way of conceptualizing the Irish peasantry and the country’s rural regions. Lane identifies “traces of ‘Paddy and Miss Erin’” in the genre, interpreting the small farmers of the stories as “Stage Irish – not the threatening simian types of *Punch* but of the rustic, guileless type not fully conversant with the ways of the modern world and needing to be led to economic enfranchisement by their social superiors.” Yet, while the characters are undoubtedly one-dimensional, and the stories lack the polish and literary quality of the revivalist contributions, the version of rural Irish life they present is far from stereotypical. More often than not, the farmers are savvy and progressive, eager to “spake up for our own side av the country” and to initiate reform on the local level. “The Kilnoggery Conference,” for instance, describes a rural community that embodies the co-operative movement’s self-help credo. The farmers rely on their own collective efforts rather than patronage; even in matters of culture and education, they request money from the newly formed D.A.T.I. to build schools and to invite lecturers. Despite the humor and “‘thick-set idiom” of these pieces, the co-operative writing imagines ideal Irish citizens of a different sort than those presented on the Abbey’s stage: broad-minded and proactive, if no less fictional than the peasantry of revivalist drama. Even the village itself is vibrant and evolving – neither a stagnant country backwater nor the untainted, anticapitalist seat of tradition envisioned by cultural nationalism. Together, the characters and setting in fact comprise a community that borrows from the nationalist version while revising it in important ways.

---

41 Lane, “AE’s *Irish Homestead* and the Cultural Revival” 176.
III. Joyce’s Dublin: The Urban Village

Joyce’s fiction likewise offers readers an alternative model of community that, despite its obvious differences, is also informed by the nationalist ideal. As many critics have noted, the model of connectivity or collectivity at stake in Joyce’s texts is not a positive one: his writing describes social affiliations that are, at best, partial and fleeting. Nolan observes, for instance, that while a knowable community is absent in Joyce’s fiction, there is instead “a notion of community, one which is bound together in acquaintance and even intimacy, but not, invariably, affection.”42 This is a kind of improvised social organization sustained by gossip and rumor, forms of conversation that she describes as both “aggressive as well as bonding.”43 Along similar lines, Jessica Schiff Berman argues that discourse in modernist writing, particularly conversation “fraught not only with difficulty but also with the constant making and un-making of human inter-connections, provides the means by which these narratives will construct radically modern versions of community.”44 Joyce’s writing performs and reflects its own version of a modern collectivity – a mode of social organization inconceivable within a realist or a nationalist framework, both of which assume that community must be a unified whole. Berman’s analysis suggests that the recurrent focus in Joyce’s stories on the breakdown of communication or the failure of language to convey its intended meaning paradoxically serves to forge a new vocabulary for describing collectivity. Joyce’s characters’ use of language, in other words, gestures both to the missing

42 Nolan, 86.
43 Nolan, 88.
community imagined by nationalism and to the defunct community that does exist – one which is fragmented, disconnected and incomplete.

Yet I would argue that the shadow of a more traditional community is also discernable in Joyce’s writing. As many have observed, the general discontent of Joyce’s Dubliners in fact seems largely the result of their collective longing for a more genuine form of affiliation akin to the face-to-face community nationalism describes. His characters’ unsuccessful attempts to connect personally with those around them – to share experiences as a form of communal bonding and to achieve a kind of solidarity with their fellow citizens – is the most obvious signal of this desire. The dysfunctional urban community Joyce describes masks his debt to the nationalist ideal – a debt that is revealed by reading Joyce’s stories in the Homestead and in the context of the co-operative movement. Encountering Joyce’s Dublin in this original print context, in other words, illustrates his deliberate engagement with the fantasy of a restorative community, and casts the city itself as the site of a potential alternative community to complement the co-operative scheme.

Significantly, this approach also reveals a continuity between different strands of Joyce scholarship that address the city in his writing. Generally speaking, critics have accepted the premise that the Dublin of Dubliners is distinct from the lively metropolis described in Ulysses. Joep Leerssen’s candid description of “the stagnant Dublin of Dubliners” versus “the vibrant Dublin of Ulysses” is a representative example of this strand of scholarship. “The Dublin of Dubliners, with its constant emphasis on stagnation and paralysis, is a provincial town,” Leerssen maintains, “stifling individual
initiative under a smothering blanket.”45 The urban setting in these stories “lacks the vitality and energy of a proper city,” a condition reflected in its narrow streets and dilapidated buildings. In contrast, the Dublin of Ulysses is characterized by “dynamism and movement” and by the complex and intersecting trajectories of its inhabitants. Leerssen describes this Dublin as “the quintessential twentieth-century city: a center rather than a periphery, and quite redeemed from its stagnation and paralysis as described in Dublín.”46 Undoubtedly, there are clear differences between the near-total inertia of the Dublin of Joyce’s stories and the lively, interconnected city in Ulysses. These differences reflect, among other things, Joyce’s changing attitude towards his native city, as his geographical distance from Ireland increased. But by reading his stories in the Homestead, with its own complex relationship to the community described by cultural nationalism, we uncover the shadow of something positive and cohesive in the Dublin of Dubliners, suggesting that even in the absence of activity or movement or meaningful connection, the ghost of a knowable community remains.

Both Mathews and Katherine Mullin have interpreted Joyce’s work in the context of the agricultural paper, arguing that while his stories engaged topics of interest to the co-operative movement, his writing was at odds with the journal’s ethos.47 Their analyses highlight Joyce’s skillful disobedience – his use of familiar themes put to unfamiliar purposes – in interpreting Russell’s directive to submit a “simple” and “rural” story. Yet the success of this strategy, of course, depended upon Joyce’s knowledge of both the publication and the co-operative agenda for economic reform. His “interest in

46 Leerssen, 228.
matters agrarian,” as Mathews describes it, appears even in *Ulysses*, when Mr. Deasy asks Stephen to get his letter on foot-and-mouth disease published in the *Homestead*.\(^{48}\) Joyce himself later adopted the same subject in an article for the *Freeman’s Journal*, and no doubt was acquainted – thanks to his friendship with Russell – with the co-operative movement’s progressive and practical outlook on agrarian Ireland. His stories in the *Homestead*, however incongruous they may seem, were thus the product of a mind conversant in co-operative subjects and were intended to be in dialogue with the other fiction in the journal.

Perhaps as a result, the Dublin Joyce describes in these stories bears a surface resemblance to the rural villages and country towns featured in the *Homestead*’s stories and articles. The city is small, self-contained and familiar. Eveline, for instance, remembers playing in a field near her house with the other “children of the avenue,” and the street itself is home to her memories of former neighbors – “the Devines, the Waters, the Dunns, little Keough, the cripple” – who have long since grown or moved away.\(^{49}\) In weighing her decision whether to stay in Dublin or to depart with Frank, she notes wistfully, “she had those whom she had known all her life about her” (21). The young narrator of “The Sisters” likewise belongs to a kind of community on Great Britain Street. The story itself centers on gossip that the characters share in vague, ambiguous conversations – a situation we might expect to find in a small town, where the citizens’ secrets are known to each other and circulate among the neighbors. Similarly, in “After the Race,” arguably the most cosmopolitan of the three stories, Jimmy Doyle is


\(^{49}\) James Joyce, *Dubliners* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991), 20. Joyce revised the *Homestead* version of all three of stories from *Dubliners* that were published in the journal; unless otherwise noted, all quotations are taken from the revised versions and are cited parenthetically.
surrounded by familiar faces. Indeed, he revels in the fact that “[h]e had been seen by
many of his friends that day in the company of these Continentals,” his French and
Hungarian companions for the race (25). Joyce’s characters in fact routinely recognize
each other, frequently crossing paths with acquaintances and friends, and creating the
impression of Dublin as a face-to-face community. In other stories in the collection, too,
Joyce focuses on specific locations within the city, describing small, circumscribed
neighborhoods or settings within the capital, not unlike small towns.

Even the vibrant city of Ulysses is a self-contained community that illustrates
what Fintan O’Toole defines as Irish writing’s investment in rural forms. O’Toole
identifies the features of Irish writing that signal its emphasis on the rural, including “the
pull of the past” and “the impulse towards a knowable community in which the individual
has an identifiable place.” In adhering to these features, Joyce’s Dublin – the lively,
kinetic metropolis that is as much character as backdrop in the novel – effectively
recreates the rural mode of the Literary Revival. As he had in Dubliners, Joyce describes
a city that is small and circumscribed, its perimeter defined by the characters’ wanderings
and intersections. Bloom and Stephen encounter familiar faces in the course of the day,
traversing a mappable segment of the city and seeming always to cross paths with friends
and acquaintances. Stephen remarks, “We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers,
ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love, but always meeting

50 Fintan O’Toole, “Going West: The Country Versus the City in Irish Writing,” The Crane Bag 9.2
(1985): 114. He also identifies a third feature, namely Irish drama’s “need to convince the audience that
what they are seeing is real.”
51 Enda Duffy, “Disappearing Dublin: Ulysses, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Space,” Semicolonial
Joyce, observes, “Although the mass of detail may appear to provide even an excess of data on Dublin, it
can also divert us from how much of the physical city is omitted from the text” (46). Recent efforts to map
Joyce’s Dublin – including Joseph Nugent’s JoyceWays iPhone App, a walking guide to the Dublin of
Ulysses – also reveal how circumscribed the characters’ wanderings are in the course of the day.
ourselves.” He might well be describing the uncanny feeling of familiarity and the sense of convergence that define the characters’ experience of the city. According to Augustine Martin, “everyone in the fictional milieu tends to know everything about the others by the dint of guess, gossip, observation, innuendo and slander.” So, for example, we observe the patrons of Barney Kiernan’s pub wondering why, if Bloom has won the Ascot Gold Cup by betting on Throwaway, he will not stand them a drink. In truth, Bloom had mentioned to Bantam Lyons earlier that he intended to “throw away” his copy of the *Freeman’s Journal*, but Lyons mistakes the comment for a tip on the horse race, resulting in a rumor that follows Bloom for the rest of the day. “What a town Dublin is!” Joyce once remarked. “I wonder if there is another like it. Everybody has time to hail a friend and start a conversation about a third party.” And indeed, a majority of the conversations that occur within the book concern rumors or assumptions, lending some truth to Jameson’s claim that in Joyce’s Dublin, gossip dominates the networks of communication.

This sense of intimacy is compounded by the eruption of history or the past into the characters’ lives: Stephen Dedalus is tormented by memories of his dead mother, and Bloom is visited by an apparition of Rudy, his son. Personal, private memories alter the two men’s experience of the city, as specific details, events and locations remind them of the past. An advertisement for a Zionist colony, for instance, catches Bloom’s eye in one scene, causing him to reflect on the history of Jewish persecution, while later, Paddy Dignam’s funeral procession calls to mind his own father’s suicide. The tumult of

---

movement and colliding lives that fills the book is, in one sense, a kind of distraction from the narratives of personal and national history that form the backdrop of *Ulysses*. These narratives collide in “Cyclops,” in which the Citizen’s belligerent and blinkered nationalism causes Bloom to reflect on his own hybrid Irishness and to define nationality in a way that includes him: as “the same people living in the same place” (331). Joe Hyne’s handkerchief, described in humorous detail in the same scene, literalizes the complex web of historical associations that appear in the book, and which Joyce weaves into the characters’ intersecting plots. The pull of the past is evident, too, in the many landmarks of Ireland’s colonial history that dot the cityscape: from Nelson’s Pillar to the General Post Office to an unfinished memorial to Parnell, the materiality of Irish history is embedded in the physical landscape Joyce describes. The story begins in the Martello Tower, a symbol of British colonial power, and the location serves as a physical and historical vantage point from which Stephen surveys Dublin Bay. From here, the text charts a series of complicated movements as characters roam throughout Dublin, haunted by the past in much the same way the city is shadowed by the ostensibly pre-modern, rural community its topography evokes.

In retaining the qualities of a village or market town, the Dublin of both *Ulysses* and *Dubliners* blends elements of both the rural ideal and an urban metropolis. As Marjorie Howes explains, Dublin’s uneven development in the late nineteenth century in fact had its counterpart in the “perverse modernity” of Ireland’s rural villages, which – like the city itself – occupied a middle ground between “modern anonymous collectivities” and “knowable, face-to-face communit[ies].”

The specific avenues and

55 Howes, “Goodbye Ireland I’m going to Gort” 64.
neighborhoods within Dublin that serve as the settings for Joyce’s stories simulate the
villages of the Irish countryside, each a nodal point in a wider web, extending even beyond Ireland’s national borders. As a result, the city in these stories is both contained and traversed by external forces. This dynamic is literalized, for instance, in the opening paragraph of “After the Race.” The story is set in July 1903 at the Gordon Bennett Cup Race, the first international motor race held in Ireland. “The cars came scudding in towards Dublin,” the opening paragraph begins. “At the crest of the hill at Inichore sightseers had gathered in clumps to watch the cars careering homeward, and through this channel of poverty and inaction the Continent sped its wealth and industry” (24). Jimmy’s intoxication (literal and otherwise) in the company of these men of status informs his perception of Dublin as a busy metropolis, not unlike other European capitals.56 In his view, Dublin is a center, not of immobility and insularity, but of rapid movement and the promise of wealth. Cars and people speed through streets “busy with unusual traffic,” and the city wears “the mask of a capital” (27), its perceived cosmopolitan-ness barely disguising what Joe Cleary describes as “a ‘naturalist’ and unsophisticated down-at-heel Dublin.”57

The provincialism of Dublin is also matched by the provincialism of Joyce’s characters, who resemble the comedic rural peasants of the Homestead’s co-operative fiction in lacking the same economic and cultural capital as their more worldly counterparts. Jimmy, for instance, is the representative local Dubliner, outstripped and

56 Appropriately, the same issue of the Homestead that featured “After the Race” demonstrated this international outlook by including an article on the economic similarities between Ireland and Denmark, which urged rural Irish co-operatives to adopt Denmark’s successful agricultural practices.

57 In the Homestead version of the story, Joyce wrote that the city wore “the air of a capital.” The difference is subtle, yet one could argue that the original version is less sarcastic, and that “air” accords a bit more capital status to Dublin than “mask.”
outsmarted by his Continental cohort; the narration charts his confusion and embarrassment as he is beguiled and perhaps swindled by his companions. Indeed, as Joe Cleary observes, the story “turns on the sense that the provincial figure is invariably vulnerable in an upper-crust cosmopolitan milieu because an infatuation with the glamor of that scene blinds the provincial to its real dynamics and because the metropolitan upper crust always bring to such encounters a degree of worldly cynicism that the provincial invariably lacks.”

Despite his pretensions to wealth and worldly sophistication, Jimmy is out of his depth, a fact reinforced by his recurrent inability to comprehend the conversations and events that involve him. He struggles to hear Segouin and Riviere’s “light words” in the front of the car, “strain[ing] forward to catch the quick phrase” and attempting “to make a deft guess at the meaning and shout back a suitable answer in the face of a high wind.” When Segouin introduces him to the one of the French drivers, Jimmy manages only a “confused murmur of compliment” (25). And his bewilderment and misperception prove his financial undoing in the game of cards he later plays, in which he cannot keep track of who is winning and “frequently mis[takes] his cards,” leaving the other men “to calculate his I.O.U.’s for him” (28). These hindered attempts at conversation stand in for a more general absence of connection and community: Jimmy is ill-equipped to keep pace with his cosmopolitan crew, and perhaps more damningly, he suffers from the lack of his own society, such that he feels compelled to seek it elsewhere, among those “who had seen so much of the world” and possess a wealth and savvy he cannot comprehend.

---

Similarly, as the symbol of cosmopolitanism in “The Dead,” Gabriel Conroy stands outside of his community, distanced from the other characters in the story by his politics, class and schooling. He is well-traveled and well-read, and as the narrative informs us, possessed of a different “grade of culture” and a “superior education” as compared to the other guests at his aunts’ holiday party (122). Yet, in some respects, Gabriel is as provincial as Jimmy Doyle: both men demonstrate the kind of narrow-mindedness that results from failing to recognize the complexity and modernity of their native culture. This failure is especially evident in Gabriel’s encounter with Molly Ivors, who challenges him on his relative disinterest in the Irish landscape and language. When Molly teasingly chides Gabriel for being a “West Briton” (127), for instance, he “[does] not know how to meet her charge”; he thinks of the things he wants to say but decides that “he could not risk a grandiose phrase with her.” Instead, “He continued blinking his eyes and trying to smile and murmured lamely that he saw nothing political in writing reviews of books” (128). As in “After the Race,” the story in fact is replete with references to thoughts and emotions that Gabriel cannot articulate or chooses to keep silent, as he struggles to find the appropriate words to say what he means. His unease in conversation – which begins in the story’s opening scene, when Gabriel unintentionally offends Lily the servant – signals his inability to read and connect with his audience, despite his pretensions to an urbanity and intelligence he claims his fellow partygoers do not possess. Gabriel, in fact, is no less a stock figure than the stereotypical rural characters that populate the co-operative fiction: he is somewhat bumbling and awkward, prone to misunderstandings and uncomfortable encounters – although without the humor of the co-operative stories – and a product of his environment. Like Jimmy, he is a
Dubliner with aspirations to a level of sophistication, respectability and belonging – a sense of camaraderie with those around him – that he cannot quite attain. Even Gabriel’s after-dinner speech, the result of belabored preparation, fails to provoke as profound a response from his listeners as Bartell D’Arcy’s later performance of the “The Lass of Aughrim.” The song stirs not only a memory of Gretta Conroy’s former love for Michael Furey, but a more general nostalgia in both Gretta and Gabriel for rural Ireland and its national(ist) associations.

In fact, the most cosmopolitan aspect of the story may be, paradoxically, its invocation of the Irish West – a space beyond Dublin’s borders that is both more immediate and more relevant for the story’s characters than the Continent, a recurrent place of reference throughout Dubliners. Like Joyce’s Dublin, the West is not reducible to a fixed geographical location with a single or stable meaning. Instead, it is a multiple and mutable region – both the site of the nationalist rural fantasy and a dynamic and varied location to complement Joyce’s urban village. Joyce’s engagement with this fantasy is at its most explicit in “The Dead.” The story acknowledges the powerful appeal of the Irish West, but the text also suggests the impossibility of achieving the ideal community it represents. Gabriel’s apparent surrender to an imagined scene at the story’s end and his resolution to “set out on his journey westward” suggests an epiphany, hinging on his assent to the rural fantasy. Yet his desire for Gretta, his wife, bleeds into a less precise desire to enter “that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead” (152), and his apparitions become ever more abstract as the story ends, until he is swooning to the

59 As Howes observes in “Joyce, colonialism, and nationalism,” in The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce, “Joyce’s Dubliners have what we might call diasporic imaginations” (266), regularly daydreaming about life outside of Ireland’s capital city. Nolan likewise remarks of his characters, “They are afflicted by fantasies about better places (Buenos Ayres, the Orient, the Wild West, literary London), but because they enjoy no material access to the international realm, they have no real imaginative access to it either” (31).
sound of snow falling throughout the universe. Although Joyce acknowledges the potency of the fantasy, the vision of the West he gives us is deflated, no more regenerative than Michael Furey’s fruitless death.

In making this argument, I fall in line with what Nolan describes as “traditional” readings of “The Dead,” which address the “revivalist sub-text” of the story. Much of the scholarship on “The Dead” – and indeed, Irish nationalism generally – has explored the symbolic potency of the West of Ireland, assigning various meanings to the region in the story and debating the success or sincerity of Gabriel’s final transformation. The emphasis in such critical analyses is on the region as both a symbolic and a geographical space, and as the location of a national community. Less often do scholars remark on Dublin as a counterpart to the West – a location equally freighted with significance for Joyce, and one that also bears the traces of Ireland’s history and tradition. Yet, as Luke Gibbons observes in his provocative reading of the story, the city is a haunted hinterland, whose modernity is troubled by the “‘anachronistic’ features” of local, peripheral communities. It is a city of the verge of modernizing, electrified only recently by a “ghostly light from the street lamp” (147) and ultimately indistinguishable from the rural midlands. The snow that blankets Dublin in the story’s final scene transforms the city into a blank canvas, on which Gabriel reads the rural West. The topographical features of urban development – the river and park, the Wellington Monument, the street lamps, the Four Courts – become a series of landmarks in the Irish countryside: “the dark central

---

60 Nolan, 29.
plain,” “the treeless hills,” the “Bog of Allen,” the “mutinous Shannon waves,” and “the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried” (152). Rural Ireland casts its shadow over “Doublin,” as Joyce once referred to it, rendering the city both modern and traditional, national and universal.

Critics generally agree that Joyce’s rejection of the precepts and ideals of cultural nationalism forestalls any nostalgia on his part for a genuine or restorative community – and certainly, nostalgia seems too strong a term to apply to the writer whose affection for Dublin and its citizens was accompanied by a trenchant critique of the city he so painstakingly describes. Yet, as his stories demonstrate, the contours of the rural fantasy are nevertheless palpable beneath the surface of his urban landscape. We might then interpret Furey’s ghost as an emblem of the fantasy Joyce so diligently disavows: unbidden, persistent and elusive, he troubles Gabriel’s attempts to distance himself from his wife’s past and from the brash cultural nationalism of Molly Ivors. In much the same way, I am suggesting, the Irish countryside and its political associations underlie Joycean modernism, unsettling even Joyce’s best efforts to define himself as a secular and international writer, distinct from the writers of the Revival.

By borrowing rural themes and forms from Irish nationalism, but divesting them of their standard romantic associations, Joyce imagines a national community free from what Enda Duffy describes as the “territorial imperative of nationalism.”63 If nationalism is premised on the belief that community corresponds to a specific territory, then Joyce’s Dublin unsettles this equation by superimposing features of the rural village – the seat of an authentic Irish identity in nationalist discourse – onto an urban environment. The city

63 Duffy, 37.
he describes imitates the Irish community envisioned by writers of the Literary Revival while also pointing out the impossibility of one region representing the entire nation. The complex and multilayered urban village that results from his adaptation of the rural form destabilizes any attempt to locate Irishness in a precise geographical space. Moreover, reading rural Ireland back through the lens of Joyce’s Dublin suggests a more complex understanding of the Irish West, a region whose symbolic value typically overshadows its materiality in nationalist discourse.

IV. A Rural Civilization: Reimagining the Irish West

Like Joyce’s writing, Russell’s contributions to the Homestead also critiqued the nationalist version of community, challenging representations of the Irish West that oversimplified the region’s history and its potential significance in modern Ireland. Joyce shared with Russell an inherent skepticism over the symbolic value assigned to the West of Ireland and its inhabitants, and both men resisted nationalism’s fetishizing of the region in their writing. Yet Joyce’s portrayal of Russell in Episode 9 of Ulysses ironically overlooks the two men’s similarities, and misrepresents Russell as anti-modern and nostalgic. Set in the National Library, the episode satirizes the Dublin literary scene, with John Eglinton and Russell as caricatures of their public personae. Their eccentricities lend the exchange its humor and betray more than a passing familiarity on Joyce’s part with the men he describes, as in Russell’s response to a comment on contemporary Irish poetry:

People do not know how dangerous lovesongs can be, the auric egg of Russell warned occultly. The movements which work revolutions in the world are born out of the dreams and visions in a peasant’s heart on the hillside. For them the
earth is not an exploitable ground but the living mother. The rarefied air of the academy and the arena produce the sixpenny novel, the music hall song, France produces the finest flower of corruption in Mallarmé but the desirable life is revealed only to the poor of heart, the life of Homer’s Phœacians. (186-187)

Joyce’s satirical description of Russell is incisive but incomplete. By emphasizing Russell’s interest in mysticism and his preference for rural subjects and themes in literature – a frequent focus of Russell’s book reviews and editorials in the *Homestead* – Joyce ignores Russell’s role as modernizer and progressive reformist.64 Instead, the fictional Russell’s comment alludes to the tenets of cultural nationalism as defined by David Lloyd: “the desire for the masterwork; the opposition between the spirit of peasant song, ‘racy of the soil,’ and the hybrid ‘flowers of corruption’; the turn to Homer as the figure representing the unification of the work of genius with the ‘genius of place.’”65 As mouthpiece for the Literary Revival, Joyce’s Russell sentimentalizes the Irish West and the peasantry, even as his observations place the movement in a transnational and transhistorical context, in keeping with the varied “cultural transactions” that occur in the

64 Despite his ties to the Literary Revival, Russell’s book reviews were often influenced by the co-operative movement’s practical outlook on rural Ireland. For example, in a review of Padraic Colum’s book of poetry “Wild Earth” in the 14 December 1907 issue, Russell writes: “Padraic Colm [sic] is the first Irish poet who has chosen to write of the common life. He has not gone, like W. B. Yeats, to fairyland for his inspiration, nor taken any obscure light of the soul to mean the light of the world. He has not looked down on his people like Mr. Synge and the writers of his school, to whom life is only a subject for art. He has not looked up to them, unwisely idealizing his characters, like so many sentimentalists, who write as if every Irish peasant was only a little lower than the angels. Padraic Colm [sic] is in love with the normal. He feels with truth that there is the substance of more noble poetry in the divine average than in the exceptions. He walks among his people, accepting them for what they are, in the same way as Whitman, Burns, and the great masters of everyday life. He writes of his people with love, the rarest of all sentiments in literature.” Russell’s emphasis in the review is less on the literary merits of the work than on Colum’s refusal refuses to sentimentalize rural Ireland and the Irish peasantry – an artistic decision that Russell commends.
episod**e**. Russell’s references to Mallarmé and Greek poetry, for example, challenge descriptions of the Revival as insular and monolithic. These modest concessions aside, Joyce’s text presents is a version of Russell that only hints at the real man’s practical outlook and his commitment to modern economic reform in rural Ireland.

In fact, as Joyce would have been well aware, Russell used the *Homestead* and co-operation as tools to counter ahistorical and non-modern versions of rural Ireland, and to inspire the general improvement of cultural and intellectual life in Ireland’s country towns. His articles and editorials urged farmers to adopt modern agricultural methods while also encouraging the establishment of local libraries and promoting the Revival’s cultural initiatives in rural communities. As he explained in an editorial, Russell viewed the co-operative movement as “more than a business movement, important as the business side of it is; it is the building up of a new social order, an effort to create a distinctive Irish civilization.”

This civilization was founded explicitly on the values of the small farmer: closeness to nature, an innate spirituality, simplicity and anti-materialism – what Russell considered the natural consequences of co-operative reform. His intention was not to retreat from modernity into a pre-modern period in Ireland’s history, but rather to propose an alternative modernity – a rural civilization akin to the ancient clans but with “science, electricity, steam, mechanical contrivances and a thousand things to help them which were unknown to the ancients.”

Through his editorship of the *Homestead*, he therefore attempted to create a reading audience of

---

66 See ibid., in which Lloyd notes “the thoroughly hybridized culture of ‘West Britain,’ where Irishmen discourse on English, German and Greek culture while and Englishman, Haines, studies the Celtic element in literature and [Douglas] Hyde regrets the necessity that forces of him to exemplify a Gaelic meter in lean, unlovely English.”
enlightened rural citizens and to counter the literary construction of the peasant as primitive national icon.

Yet, like Joyce, Russell also recognized the need to appeal to a readership accustomed to the regional tourism of the cultural Revival. Russell himself embodied this duality, blending the practical and the ideal in his roles as co-operative organizer and revivalist writer. Acting on the advice of Yeats, Plunkett had initially recruited Russell, then a £60-a-year clerk at Pim Brothers, a Dublin draper and haberdasher, to serve as a bank organizer in the Congested Districts of rural Ireland beginning in November 1897.69 Plunkett was delighted with his choice, often referring to Russell as “that wonderful mixture of seer, artist, poet, philosopher and economist.”70 The co-operative founder also praised his new “poet organizer” for his idealism and his “shrewd business judgment.”71 Russell, however, was disillusioned by his co-operative tours of Ireland, which revealed to him the realities of rural life in Ireland – a sharp contrast to the fairy-filled, pastoral landscape constructed in revivalist writing. He wrote to Yeats in January 1898: “It may be as you say that I will gradually absorb and harmonize these things and something new will grow out of them. I hope so. But at present no vision, no inspiration visit me.” He lamented the fact that the places he had visited were “not beautiful,” and glumly observed, “I explain to starved looking peasants how advantageously they could buy pigs

69 In a letter to Lady Gregory (17 November 1897), Yeats writes: “There is a possibility of George Russell becoming of all things in the world one of Plunketts organizers. They want a man to organize agricultural banks & I suggested him. He seems to combine the three needful things — business knowledge, power to make a speech, enthusiasm. […] I would not have urged him to give up a certainty like Pim’s for an uncertainty like Plunkett’s did I not know that he was going to leave Pims’ in any case. […] T P Gill backs up Russell strongly so that I think he will get it if he will take it. It would give him a great knowledge of Ireland & take him out of the narrow groove of theosophical opinion.” Quoted in Allen Wade (ed.), The Letters of William Butler Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1995), 291.
71 Digby, 103.
under the benign influences of a rural bank!” Yet Russell’s tours also cast into sharp relief the prevalence and consequences of the Revival’s pastoral fantasy, an ideal that seemed to infiltrate even the underdeveloped Irish countryside that it took as its object.

In his correspondence with fellow organizers, for instance, he conveyed his frustration at the small farmers’ reluctance to embrace reform: “It was sacrilege to talk about banks as I did below Mount Nephin,” he writes, “which is largely stocked with gods, immortals and fairies. I am sure they felt civilization was threatening them and fought vainly against it.”

His comments capture the intransigence of rural Ireland in its citizens’ blind commitment to “gods, immortals and fairies,” a belief system that many rural reformers regarded as outmoded and an obstacle to progress.

In contrast, Russell’s modernizing vision for Ireland instead entailed opening the country to international influences and ideas. The Irish West was foundational to this plan, retaining its significance as a site of national identity but also positioned via co-operation in a broader international context. Co-operation linked the West to places like Denmark, which established co-operative creameries in the late nineteenth century, and to the American West, where the Granger movement first inspired Plunkett to reform Irish agriculture. Through explicit comparisons of Ireland’s history and economy with those of other regions, the Homestead in fact often attempted to bring the local and the international into simultaneous view. Russell routinely urged his readers to remain

---

72 George Russell, letter to W.B. Yeats, 2 January 1898 in Alan Denison (ed.), Letters From A.E. (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1961), 24-25. Russell nonetheless attempted to find in the Irish West evidence of Ireland’s cultural history and folkloric heritage. In another letter to Yeats (10 February 1898), he writes: “I have found that around Mt. Nephin the atmosphere is so thick with faerys that you drawn them in with every breath. I spoke to a farmer named Caden More living two miles or so from Crossmolina. He when a young man of twenty-three spent a whole night with the fairies in a great place below Nephin. He remembers it all most distinctly and have me a vivid account of his reception his feelings and his behavior.”

receptive to foreign ideas and to resist masking insularity as self-sufficiency. Ireland would be revitalized, he argued, by the influx of new ideas, but its citizens needed to be conditioned to desire intellectual stimulation. “The best nation is the nation which accepts and applies the best ideas wherever those ideas have birth,” he explained in one editorial. “If they are their own, so much the better. If they are not their own, it is their business to make them their own.”

In a later editorial, Russell refuted the claim that nationality was diluted “by absorbing into itself new elements.” Without the stimulation of ideas from abroad, he argued, “the national life tends to get enfeebled, its thought thin and weedy, its vitality impaired like herds where there is too much inbreeding, and we must, if we are to build up an Irish civilization, absorb the best in the aged and the new thought of the world” to avoid becoming a nation of “parochially-minded peasants.”

To counter parochialism, Russell argued for the economic and intellectual development of the Irish West. In the Homestead, he initiated campaigns for rural beautification and hygiene, calling for the construction of village libraries and social halls to host co-operative meetings, and he promoted the growth of cottage industries like lace-making and bee-keeping. The paper presented the domestic space and rural village as microcosms of the nation, urging farmers and their families to cultivate beauty and a vibrant social life in their communities. As Russell maintained, “All fine civilizations begin at the bottom and not at the top, at the cottage and not at the castle.”

Accordingly, articles in the journal encouraged Irish housewives to plant flowers, remove

---

animals from the home, and whitewash the walls. Even minor improvements, Russell argued, would dispute the association of Irish cottages with the “primitive characteristics of untidiness and dirt” and would prevent rural citizens from “furnishing ‘copy’ for the professional humorist.” By encouraging improvements on the local scale, Russell hoped ultimately to create a sound foundation for Ireland’s economy: focusing on the local would inspire Irish farmers to organize, he reasoned, linking regional concerns to the larger project of national independence. His attention to small, rural communities, in keeping with the ethos of co-operation, was novel at a time when Irish citizens were called to declare their allegiance to the nation. Yet, anticipating Patrick Kavanagh’s faith in the parish as the basis of civilization, Russell (like Plunkett) viewed the development of Ireland’s rural districts as a blueprint for the country’s future modernity.

The Homestead thus became an agent of the alternative modernity Russell envisioned: by publishing a mix of practical, agricultural news alongside literature, cultural notices, opinion pieces, and domestic advice, the paper married co-operation and the cultural revival for its readers. Consequently, rather than advancing a single editorial vision or program, as we might expect to discover in a publication devoted explicitly to agrarian reform, the Homestead featured multiple, sometimes conflicting agendas. The co-operative journal’s efforts to link economic reform to the cultural and intellectual

77 Women played a central role in Russell’s plans for the development of rural Ireland; they served as the custodians of culture and character, and their work in the home ensured the health of the nation. MacPherson provides an in-depth analysis of the role of women in Russell’s rural philosophy. See also Lane, “Female Emigration and the Cooperative Movement.”

78 George Russell, “The Irish Cottage,” Irish Homestead (29 April 1899): 277. On the subject of rural hygiene, see also Joseph Nugent, “The Human Snout: Pigs, Priests, and Peasants in the Parlor,” The Senses and Society 4.3 (November 2009): 283-302, in which he argues that “modern registers of sensory perception were introduced and disseminated [in the nineteenth century] by a rising Irish middle class for whom the stench of their peasantry had become a shameful marker of national backwardness.” The home became the site of a “contest between a pre-bourgeois culture and an emergent ideology of modern domesticity” (283). Russell seems to have revived this discourse of domestic hygiene at another pivotal moment in Ireland’s debates over how best to modernize.
initiatives of the Revival meant that the publication had to reconcile contradictory views of the Irish West as, on the one hand, a region rich in undeveloped natural resources, and on the other, an area separate from the corruptions of mass culture. As editor and an advocate for co-operative reform, Russell attempted to resolve the different viewpoints by arguing that co-operation was the practical means of achieving the ideal society envisioned by the Literary Revival. The *Homestead*'s ability to contain these competing perspectives is in fact also a helpful analogy for understanding Russell’s view of the Irish West as a space both modern and traditional – a region that could retain its symbolic value but not at the expense of its participation in Ireland’s political and economic future.

As his editorial practices and contributions make clear, the alternative modernity Russell described was grounded in a realist version of the Irish countryside. Synge is commonly cited for his realistic descriptions of rural Ireland and its peasantry, but Russell’s editorials and criticism outdo Synge’s accounts in their unforgiving descriptions of the region. Having visited Ireland’s small farming communities as a co-operative organizer, Russell exercised a fidelity to the harsh economic reality of rural life that Synge, whose objective was chiefly aesthetic, did not. Moreover, Russell was committed to seeing the region in a decidedly modern context. In a series of articles on Ireland’s traditions, for instance, Russell balanced his readers’ need to keep alive “the story of their race” against the imperative “to set our faces to the future and try to make our dreams of that lordlier future more than our memories of the past.”79 The danger of custom, he warned, lay in its tendency to calcify in the minds of Irish citizens and to obstruct the national imagination. “There is no Black Magic more black than custom,” Russell

explained, “which lays the most unholy spells on people, making the mind sluggish and killing out the imagination, which is the highest faculty in man....After a time what has continued for long is regarded almost as sacred, as a national characteristic, and the man is a national enemy who dares suggest a new order of things.”

As if to illustrate his point, he professed his faith “in the future of the west of Ireland. With its endless harbors, its face turned to the Atlantic, the Gateway of Europe to the New World will not be neglected, its fisheries may be developed, and with increasing co-operation the population along the coast may well become adventurous and aspiring and imaginative in their economics.”

The modern region he describes is indeed a far cry from literary constructions of the West as insular and primitive.

Russell’s comments were included in a 1916 article in the *Homestead* on the future of Ireland’s rural regions. Four years earlier, in a 1912 essay published in a Triestine newspaper, Joyce himself reimagined the Irish West in much the same way—as a region possessing, in Howes’s words, an “ambiguous and uneven modernity.”

“The Mirage of the Fisherman of Aran” is noteworthy both for the pose Joyce adopts as foreign correspondent and for his description of Galway as an historically cosmopolitan and multicultural city. The essay borrows many of the conventions of travel writing, opening with a description of the journey by boat from the Galway to Aranmore, “the

---

80 George Russell, “The Black Magic of Custom,” *Irish Homestead* (17 January 1914): 43-44. He writes elsewhere, “What a nation thinks it is. What it imagines it will be it will be.”
82 Howes, “Goodbye Ireland I’m going to Gort” 68. Beginning in 1907, Joyce wrote a series of nine articles for the Italian paper *Il Piccolo della Sera* over a period of five years, acting on the suggestion of the paper’s editor, Roberto Prezioso, and stimulated by events in both Ireland and Italy. The final two articles, including the article on Aran, were inspired by Joyce’s last visit to Ireland in mid-July 1912; he spent several weeks in the west, visiting Galway city and Oughterard — home to some of Nora’s family — and touring the Aran Islands. Joyce found a sympathetic readership among Italian-speaking Triestines, who were engaged in a nationalist movement analogous to Ireland’s own, but he was less interested in drawing explicit comparisons between the two groups than he was in describing Ireland, as much for a “lazy Dubliner, who does not travel much and knows his country only by hearsay” as for an Italophone audience.
holy island that sleeps like a great shark on the grey waters of the Atlantic, which the islanders call the Old Sea.” 83 Like Synge before him, Joyce describes the island’s topography and its residents, commenting on the islanders’ clothing, language and conversations. But these are not the peasants of Synge’s travel narrative: one of the islanders, “who speaks an English all his own,” dutifully “looks away when he has spoken and lets the eager enthusiast jot down in his notebook the astounding fact that yonder hawthorn tree was the little tree from which Joseph of Artimithea cut his walking stick” (138-139). Joyce’s tongue-in-cheek account extends even to the article’s end, when he and his companions attempt to read by “twilight” the names of ports as it rains “as it can rain only in Ireland” (139).

In such moments, Joyce parodies the romanticizing impulse of the travel sketch and the element of fantasy in descriptions of the region generally. His interest is in demonstrating that “Galway, its peoples, towns, harbors, and islands still afford ingenuity, industriousness, and inventiveness within the sort of cross-cultural and international lines of connection that have been evident for centuries.” 84 Borrowing from a 1912 prospectus for a Galway harbor scheme, Joyce traces the city’s multicultural roots, noting “the long friendship between Spain and Ireland” (137) and “the Danish hordes who burned the city of Galway in the eighth century” (139). In language anticipated Russell’s own, he emphasizes the potential for modern development latent in the region: “The old decadent city would rise again. From the new world, wealth and vital energy would run through this new artery of an Ireland drained of blood” (139). The optimism of Joyce’s pronouncements foreshadows Russell’s article in its assumption

84 Brian G. Caraher, “Trieste, Dublin, Galway: Joyce, Journalism, 1912,” in Joyce on the Threshold, 137.
that the key to modern Ireland is simply waiting to be accessed in this remote rural region. Galway is a crossroads in Joyce’s estimation – the site of potential economic development and trade, the nexus of past and future cosmopolitan exchange, and the solution to Ireland’s stagnant social and cultural status. Moreover, as he diplomatically indicates – affirming Ireland’s political value as Europe’s frontier – the region could serve “as a safety valve for England in case of war” (137). Yet, importantly, the West also retains something of its charm in Joyce’s article, despite his satiric tone. This is a man, after all, on whom the appeal of the region was not lost. Facing a trip to Cork in 1909, for instance, he wrote to Nora, “I would prefer to be going westward, toward those strange places whose names thrill me on your lips, Oughterard, Clare-Galway, Coleraine, Oranmore, towards those wild fields of Connacht in which God made to grow ‘my beautiful wild flower of the hedges, my dark-blue rain-drenched flower.’”

V. Alternative Irish Communities

As Russell’s and Joyce’s articles make clear, the two men shared a desire to undermine versions of the Irish West based on sentiment and distortion: for Russell, this entailed reimagining the region as a nodal point in a broader, international economic network, while for Joyce, it involved satirizing the nationalist idea of community located by writers of the Literary Revival in Ireland’s rural peripheries. Joyce’s stories in the *Homestead* may seem out of place in the journal, especially in light of the revivalist and co-operative fiction it featured, and considering his ambivalent relationship to Ireland. Given his rejection of Yeatsian cultural nationalism, it is tempting to read Joyce in opposition to the Revival and its notion of an essential national identity. Certainly, he

---

refuted the idea that literature should intersect with propaganda or politics, and his
decision to represent the urban middle class in his writing was, among other things, a
pointed critique of its absence in revivalist writing. Yet reading Joyce in the original
print context of the *Homestead* reveals his preoccupation with many of the same
questions that informed the Revival, and in particular, Russell’s work on behalf of the co-
operative movement. Both men debated the problematic of national identity and the
symbolic and economic role of the Irish West in the country’s eventual development as
an independent nation. In answer to the pastoralism of the Revival, both men also
constructed communities in their writing to challenge the imagined community of Irish
nationalism, even as their versions borrowed from the model they set out to critique.
What results in both Joyce’s fiction and Russell’s contributions as editor of the
*Homestead*, then, is an alternative figuration of the local as a space both enclosed and yet
existing in dynamic relation to external forces.

This version of the local deviated from both the nationalist imagining of
community and from a more general tendency on the part of writers in the period to
represent regions as insular and contained. In a 2009 essay, David McWhirter notes that
many writers of the early twentieth century miscast regions simply as “spaces of
resistance to modernity,” obscuring the extent to which these locations participated in
popular culture and in the larger literary project of modernism itself. He writes, “In the
modernist period, region was often configured as countermodern, antibourgeois, and
anticapitalist, the locus of a kind of homegrown primitivism, a place apart from the
corruptions of national and global mass culture.”86 While many writers associated with

86 David McWhirter, “Eudora Welty Goes to the Movies: Modernism, Regionalism, Global Media,”
the Literary Revival were guilty of this misreading, effectively denying the West of Ireland’s political relevance and its claims to modernity, Russell and Joyce instead highlighted the region’s cosmopolitanism. The Dublin of “After the Race” or *Ulysses* and the Irish West of “The Dead,” although geographically distant, are both incorporated into larger cultural and historical systems: the people, commodities, print materials, ideas and practices that circulate in Joyce’s texts testify to each space’s participation in broader networks, despite the idea that each is enclosed and disconnected from wider circuits of exchange. In calling attention to the duality of these spaces, Joyce’s communities preserve a link between modernity and the past, much like Russell’s version of revivalism balances the modern and the traditional.

Both men also attend to the ways in which rural Ireland resisted the imagined geography of the Literary Revival, while still acknowledging the traces of history and mythology that adhere to this space. For Russell, in particular, the region’s economic and social reorganization was vital to Ireland’s independence, and he actively aimed to reinsert the Irish West into what Catherine Nash describes as the “historical, imaginative and material geographies of Irish identity.”

To achieve this, his efforts on behalf of cooperation and his articles and editorials in the *Homestead* targeted a rural readership, but the journal was also read by his revivalist contemporaries and others in Dublin, whose attitudes towards rural Ireland were often based on little more than speculation and literary tourism. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Russell’s model of a rural civilization met

---

87 Catherine Nash, “Visionary Geographies: Designs for Developing Ireland,” *History Workshop Journal* 45 (Spring 1998), 51. Nash also observes that Russell’s “version of nationhood was grounded in a federal political geography and based on a combined sense of local affiliation and global collective consciousness. It thus prefigured today’s efforts to rethink Irish nationhood of ‘postnationalism’ through European federalism of the global community of the ‘Irish Diaspora.’” For Russell, both local political structures and a sense of global solidarity could be more significant than conventional state boundaries” (69).
with some resistance. John Eglinton, for instance, wondered, “Rural civilization? Does it not seem almost a contradiction in terms? The country is the country and the town the town, and if you like the country you will hardly wish it civilized. Town and country are magnetic contrasts, necessary to one another.”\textsuperscript{88} Likewise, some of the Homestead’s readers expressed their concern that co-operation would transform Irish country towns into replicas of their urban counterparts, and that increased industry and commerce would threaten rural life. Such reservations reflect the ethos of the Revival and the anxiety it generated that Ireland’s culture and traditions were in jeopardy. The symbolic appropriation of the Irish West ensured that the region’s emerging middle class and agrarian economy would not disrupt the idealized national community premised on a traditional and unadulterated countryside. In contrast, co-operation imagined a new social order based on the development of Ireland’s rural periphery.

This re-imagining challenged accepted definitions of modernity in the period, which perhaps goes some way towards explaining the resistance encountered by the idea of a co-operative commonwealth in Ireland. As Jolene Hubbs argues, the modern has conventionally been understood as an urban phenomenon, and the country, as a result, “used as a foil against which urban modernity is defined.”\textsuperscript{89} This formulation leads to a narrow definition of the modern that fails to recognize rural spaces, citizens and traditions as part of the modern world. Residents of rural areas suffer a kind of “perennial obsolescence,” in Hubbs’s words: the idea that they “are seen not in terms of certain practices and objects that might be outmoded but rather as uniformly and perpetually

\textsuperscript{88} Eglinton, 80.
\textsuperscript{89} Jolene Hubbs, “William Faulkner’s Rural Modernism,” \textit{The Mississippi Quarterly} 61.3 (Summer 2008), 461.
As a result, rural citizens are politically marginalized, economically suppressed and socially subordinated. To view the country or its inhabitants as anything other than obsolete jeopardizes not only standing definitions of the modern, but also the social and political hierarchies that derive from them.

Co-operation posed just such a challenge to existing hierarchies in Irish society: its success depended on recognizing and encouraging the modernity of rural Ireland. Read in this way, it is possible to interpret the pastoral fantasy of the Literary Revival as an attempt on the part of the movement’s Anglo-Irish leaders to highlight the rural peasantry’s signs of “obsolescence” – their outmoded practices, idiomatic speech and traditional beliefs – as a way of affirming the ascendancy’s own modernness. The co-operative movement, in other words, presented a series of potentialities that ran into Anglo-Irish anxieties regarding class and political agency. After all, agricultural reform addressed not the familiar figures of modernity, but rather the small farmer, symbol of the non-modern. Relatedly, co-operation also troubled the existing political geography of the nation, which marginalized the peripheral communities of rural Ireland and denied their material reality. If nationalism imagined modernization as a centrifugal or disintegrative force that rendered certain locations insignificant, agricultural reform instead targeted those very regions, calling attention to the small communities engaged in complicated movements of preserving and modernizing. Considering these factors, the idea of a rural modernity was perhaps too progressive for a society so politically and culturally invested in protecting the imagined purity of the Irish West and its residents.

---

90 Hubbs, 464.
Moreover, acknowledging the materiality of the region meant foregrounding the local at a time when the national scale was foremost in Ireland’s political consciousness. By calling attention to rural areas and citizens, and by encouraging regional reform, the *Homestead*’s contents and Russell’s efforts on behalf of co-operation suggest a more complex picture of the Revival as a national movement with a regional focus. This version of the movement challenges scholarship that takes the Literary Revival as metonymic of the entire cultural project, and which neglects or minimizes nationalism’s investment in Ireland’s small farmers and rural districts. The Revival reconsidered from a co-operative perspective also allows us to identify similarities between the aims and ideals of co-operation and Joyce’s fiction, which likewise challenged the familiar geography and associations with place that have defined Irish nationalism in the period. Perhaps more than writers of the Revival, Joyce understood the intimate connection between place and identity: the city is inherent in the identities of his protagonists, their personalities and desires determined largely by life in the colonial capital. Yet for Joyce, Dublin was valuable as more than a setting: like the work of the co-operative movement, his focus on the city shifts our attention to the geographical and political margins of empire, opposing many of the stereotypes that fueled revivalist representations of Ireland and her citizens. Where much of revivalist writing attempting to encourage national allegiance by promoting an idyllic Irish West as the basis of its narrative of nationhood, Joyce’s fiction and the work of the co-operative movement instead imagined alternative communities, both rural and urban, that intentionally

---

91 As Joyce explained to Grant Richards, “the expression ‘Dubliner’ seems to me to have some meaning and I doubt whether the same can be said for such words as ‘Londoner’ or ‘Parisian.’” Quoted in Ellman, *Select Letters* 79. He expressed a concern in the same vein to his brother Stanislaus that his stories would interest only Dubliners, rooted as they were so firmly in the eponymous city, and indeed early reviewers commented on the difficulties facing a reader unfamiliar with Dublin’s landmarks and customs.
complicated the pastoralism and fantasy of rural Ireland. By challenging the prevailing geography of Ireland’s political imagination, these alternatives reveal the instability of the Revival’s communal ideal, despite its potency. Even for Joyce, the exiled urban modernist, the rural village proved inescapable, leaving traces of its history and character across his “dear dirty Dublin.”
Chapter 2: “Ulster has its own way of things”: Northern Regionalism in The Shan Van Vocht (1896-99) and Lewis Purcell’s The Enthusiast

When Lewis Purcell’s satire The Enthusiast premiered in the Clarence Place Hall in Belfast on 4 May 1905, it signaled a new kind of Irish drama, depicting a rural community quite different from the one imagined by cultural nationalism in the South. The play describes the efforts of its idealistic protagonist, James McKinstry, to persuade farmers in County Antrim to undertake co-operative land reform. Despite the protagonist’s eagerness, his plans are undermined by sectarian conflict when the meeting he organizes in his father’s field descends into confusion and violence. “[W]hat else could ye expect but a fight,” his Aunt Marget inquires, “bringin’ Home Rulers an’ Catholics, an’ Dippers, an’ tramps, an’ a’ the riff-raff o’ the country into the same field. It’s flyin’ in the face o’ Providence!”¹ The remark – intended in the play to highlight James’s foolishness and naïveté – also gestures to the factionalism and diversity across Northern society. James’s desire to encourage local farmers “to combine their farms and work them on a large scale, as they do, for instance, in America” (31) results, not in the utopian rural community envisioned by the co-operative movement, but instead in “yin o’ the grandest fights ivir wuz seen in the country side!” (33). In his assessment of the play for Ulad, the Ulster Literary Theatre’s magazine, Joseph Power praised Purcell for his ability to satirize the region’s “ancient prejudices…with the genial raillery of Renan rather than with the incisive vindictiveness of Voltaire.”² However, Purcell’s comic lampooning of the traditional divisiveness in the region was as much a strategic move – a suggestion that these inheritances should be put aside – as it was an artistic decision. As I will argue in

¹ Lewis Purcell, The Enthusiast, Ulad 3 (May 1905): 32-33. All further quotations are from this source, cited parenthetically.
what follows, the satire of the Ulster Theatre was in fact a tactic intended to circumnavigate the pitfalls of northern regionalism – sectarianism, dissension, and conflict – and by doing so, to suggest a different space for the North in the future of the nation.

A decade earlier, Alice Milligan provided a complementary critique of the Dublin-based Revival to Purcell’s own, via her editorship of *The Shan Van Vocht* (1896-1899), a nationalist paper with a decidedly international outlook. Specifically, the journal’s internationalism functioned, much like the Belfast theatre’s use of satire, to gently chide the region’s divisive politics and to play down its ideological differences from the rest of Ireland. As the founder of several nationalist organizations and initiatives in 1890s Belfast, Milligan was aware of both the political tensions and cultural ferment unique to Northern Ireland in the period, and of a broader international atmosphere motivating revolutionary cultural activity around the globe. She sought not only to reconcile the North with the larger revivalist project, but also to establish Ulster’s likeness to other peripheral communities abroad. As a result, *The Shan Van Vocht* was aware of itself and of Ulster as participants in a wider, international cultural network. The journal addressed subjects as diverse as the activities of the Gaelic League and the London Irish Literary Society, and further from home, guerilla warfare in Cuba – views absorbed by its wide-ranging readership, spanning Ireland, Britain, Scotland and the United States, as well as a few subscribers in Mexico, Argentina and South Africa. In

---

3 Recent scholarship has credited Milligan with nurturing northern cultural nationalism, and has acknowledged her as a key figure in the development of the Irish Revival, as well – a woman one of her contemporaries described as “the infant nurse” of the movement. See Catherine Morris, *Alice Milligan and the Irish Cultural Revival* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012), 22. Morris’s important study of Milligan’s life and work reveals the significance of her cultural and political activities to this period of Ireland’s history, and it gestures to her role in the prehistory of the Ulster Literary Theatre.
seeking to shift the focus from the imperial center of London to the peripheries of empire, including Ulster itself, *The Shan Van Vocht* routinely diverged from the provincialism of other Irish publications, instead reporting on revolutionary cultural activities abroad to complement coverage of its own region’s activities. Along with poet Anna Johnston (Ethna Carbery), the paper’s co-founder, Milligan promoted Irish decolonization and encouraged the development of northern cultural nationalism, but with an eye to presenting the commonalities the Northern Revival had both with the movement in the South and with contemporaneous movements abroad.

This chapter explores these two expressions of northern regionalism: *The Shan Van Vocht* and the Ulster Theatre’s drama, here represented by Purcell’s play. While much of the scholarship interprets the Northern Revival as merely a regional variant of its Southern counterpart, Milligan’s journal and Purcell’s play in fact registered a more ambivalent response to the broader revivialist movement. Just as Joyce and the *Irish Homestead* borrowed from the model of nationalist community they sought to critique, both *The Shan Van Vocht* and Purcell’s play harness the affective tropes of cultural nationalism. But they do so to present a version of revivalism that acknowledges regional difference in thinking through the problematic of the nation.

Many studies of the Northern Revival argue that the movement was both derivative of the South’s cultural nationalism and thus fundamentally provincial, its regional identity meant merely to counter the Abbey Theatre’s version of Irishness. The

---

4 This is particularly true with respect to scholarship on the Ulster Literary Theatre. See, for example, Sam Hanna Bell, *The Theatre in Ulster: A Survey of the Dramatic Movement in Ulster from 1902 until the Present Day* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1972); Ophelia Byrne, *The Stage in Ulster from the Eighteenth Century* (Belfast: The Linen Hall Library, 1997); Laura Lyons, “Of Orangemen and Green Theatres: The Ulster Literary Theatre’s Regional Nationalism,” in Stephen Watt, Elileen Morgan and Shakir Mustafa (eds.), *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press,
bid in recent years to recover early twentieth-century Northern Irish drama is in fact part of an ongoing project to challenge Dublin-centric accounts of the Irish Revival and to understand the movement instead as one motivated by diverse political opinions and comprising a range of cultural activities all across Ireland.\textsuperscript{5} Ironically, the supposed Irishness of the Southern Revival was arguably more regional and homogeneous than that of its Northern counterpart. The cultural nationalism of the South, after all, was based in a geographical imagination that, in Marjorie Howes’s words, “appropriated the Irish countryside, and especially the West of Ireland, symbolically, as an ahistorical and antimodern repository of Irishness.”\textsuperscript{6} In this formulation, as we have seen, the West became a synecdoche for the nation, sidestepping regional diversity in favor of an imagined cultural homogeneity. In contrast, the Northern Revival reimagined the national as a collection of regions, including Ulster, and thus constructed a form of Irishness that was less homogeneous, less nostalgic and less provincial.

Returning to the roots of the Northern Revival in both \textit{The Shan Van Vocht} and Purcell’s play broadens our understanding of the movement by revealing, especially, the

\begin{small}
\textsuperscript{5} Such work succeeds both in writing the Ulster Literary Theatre back into the period’s history, and in casting new light on the Abbey Theatre’s claims to represent an “authentic” and inclusive Irish culture. Indeed, these attempts to understand the Northern Revival in the context of its southern counterpart reveal the gaps and exclusions in the southern Revival’s narrative of national identity, which did not account for the North – a region that William Butler Yeats, in particular, dismissed as anathema to the ruralism and anti-materialism of the Revival. For recent work in this vein that addresses the Northern Revival specifically, see Margaret Keller (ed.), \textit{Irish University Review} 33.1 (Spring-Summer 2003), Special Issue: New Perspectives on the Irish Literary Revival, particularly Richard Kirkland’s article, “Dialogues of Despair: Nationalist Cultural Discourse and the Revival in the North of Ireland, 1900-20,” 64-78; Karen Vandevelde, \textit{The Alternative Dramatic Revival in Ireland, 1897-1913} (Dublin: Maunsel & Company, 2005); Eugene McNulty, “Revival’s Limit, or a Post-revival Space? Gerald MacNamara’s ‘Christmas Laughter,’” \textit{Irish Studies Review} 15.2 (2007): 219-232. See also Mary Burgess’s forthcoming work on the impact of partition on the modern Irish canon.

\textsuperscript{6} Marjorie Howes, “Goodbye Ireland I’m going to Gort”: geography, scale, and narrating the nation,” in Derek Attridge and Howes (eds.), \textit{Semicolonial Joyce} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 65.
\end{small}
tactics its practitioners employed. Where *The Shan Van Vocht* turned to internationalism to negotiate the factionalism and conflict inherent to its day, Northern drama turned to satire. Each strategy provided a kind of cover for opinions that might otherwise seem too partisan, and in doing so, created a space for alternative and divergent voices to emerge.

In the first part of this chapter, I revisit Milligan’s journal – its origins and the cultural movements in 1890s Belfast that shaped its publication, its diverse contents and wide-ranging circulation, and its editors’ intention to position the North alongside international revival movements. Building on recent studies by Eugene McNulty, Catherine Morris and Robbie Meredith that address the publication, I highlight *The Shan Van Vocht*’s international associations and ambitions, views which have tended to be eclipsed by its obvious engagement with cultural nationalism and by Milligan’s extraordinary contributions to the history of her region and of the Irish Revival generally.7 The remainder of the chapter addresses the satire of the Ulster Literary Theatre as a corresponding response to revivalism in the South, returning in particular to *The Enthusiast* as an early example of Northern drama that borrowed from the Abbey Theatre repertoire while still diverging from it. Examining the practices and politics of *The Shan Van Vocht* and the Belfast theatre not only presents a more complete picture of cultural nationalism’s foothold in the North, but also suggests new ways of understanding the Northern Revival as a movement at once regionally motivated and integrated into broader national and international cultural currents.

---

I. “Staunch and energetic nationalists”: 1890s Belfast and *The Northern Patriot*

The internationalism of *The Shan Van Vocht* was a deliberate reaction against the insular nature of Northern cultural nationalism in 1890s Belfast. In this period, in particular, the North occupied what McNulty describes as an “inside/outside” position relative to the rest of Ireland: Northern cultural nationalists sought to integrate Ulster into wider revivialist practices, while at the same time celebrating its historical, political and cultural differences. Rapid industrial development in the mid-nineteenth century altered the socio-cultural and physical landscape of Ulster, transforming the region into a manufacturing center with strong economic ties to England. Ulster writers were particularly preoccupied, therefore, with defining a native culture in the face of pervasive Anglo-Irish and English influences. As Peter K. McIvor explains, the question of regional identity was prevalent in Ulster periodicals, as writers wondered to what degree Ulster literature would “reflect the province’s unique heritage” or “become submerged in an aesthetic promulgated from Merrion Square or Coole Park.” The challenge of defining a Northern identity was compounded by Ulster’s divisive political situation: Ulster unionists opposed Irish cultural nationalists in the region, creating an atmosphere of antagonism that stymied many nationalist organizations and initiatives. Northern nationalists thus struggled to negotiate their political position within Ulster at the same time as they strove to participate in the wider revivialist movement. As a culturally and

---

8 McNulty, *The Ulster Literary Theatre and the Northern Revival* 8.
9 See Peter K. McIvor, “Regionalism in Ulster: An Historical Perspective,” *Irish University Review* 13.2 (Autumn 1983): 180-88, in which he credits the Northern Revival’s nostalgia for “Old Belfast” to the region’s swift industrial development.
10 McIvor, 181. The slippage in McIvor’s formulation between the regional (Ulster) and the local (Merrion Square and Coole Park) reveals a similar impulse in scholarship to think through the problematic of national identity in spatial and geographical terms. It also indicates the porousness of these spatial scales and the challenge scholars face of imagining the region and its place within the nation, as McIvor equates Ulster to two affluent local sites in the South of Ireland. His geography illustrates the ambiguous spatial logic governing regional imagining.
politically contested space – an anomalous region within the larger nation – Ulster occupied a place in nationalist discourse not unlike the American South did in the post-Civil War Reconstruction era.

It was precisely these differences from the rest of Ireland that often led to the region’s exclusion from the Southern-revivalist narrative of nationhood, and which contributed to Northern cultural nationalists’ efforts to redefine a distinctive Ulster heritage and community in response. Even today, Nicholas Allen and Aaron Kelly explain, representations of the region are “supersaturated with images of strangeness, anomaly and deviance,” in part because its development along industrial lines has historically “threaten[ed] the social cartographies and restrictive spatial visions of Irish nationalism and unionism, both rooted in a rural idealism that limits representations of place and society in Irish culture.”\(^\text{11}\) The Southern Revival’s version of an essentialized, pastoral “Irishness” originating in the rural West could not accommodate the commercialism and urbanism of the North. W. B. Yeats, in fact, frequently voiced his distaste for Ulster, describing Northerners as “a horrid lot. Who, within our borders, would sour all our tempers.”\(^\text{12}\) His antipathy perhaps influenced the Abbey Theatre’s touring schedule, which failed to include theatres in Belfast, Derry and Newry in its early circuits.\(^\text{13}\) The neglect of Ulster affirmed the region’s separateness, establishing a \textit{de facto} border several years before partition. Reciprocally, that disregard resulted in a

\(^{11}\) Nicholas Allen and Aaron Kelly (eds.), \textit{The Cities of Belfast} (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 8.


defensive posture on the part of Northern nationalists, who longed to be seen as full participants in the Dublin-based Revival.

This insular defensiveness occasionally made itself felt in the cultural initiatives undertaken by Northern nationalists to create a space for Ulster in the revivalist imaginary. Organizations like the Young Ireland Society, the Belfast Naturalists’ Field Club, the Belfast Gaelic League and the Irish Women’s Association were established to counter the Revival’s hegemonic narrative and to harness the movement’s cultural energy in Dublin. Yet the region’s political dynamic, coupled with the North’s exclusion from the wider nationalist project, gave rise in some cases to a separatist mentality. Cultural nationalists within Ulster were distrustful of both Northern Unionists, who resisted and misrepresented the nationalist cause, and of nationalists outside the region, who contributed to the North’s isolation. The tendency of certain societies to emphasize Belfast’s revolutionary, anti-colonial history as a means of bolstering the region’s nationalist credentials paradoxically further served to affirm Ulster’s difference.

The Henry Joy McCracken Literary Society – which gave rise to Milligan and Johnston’s first publication, The Northern Patriot – was one such organization that practiced what might be best described as a “regionalist nationalism.” This is a term used by both Morris and Laura Lyons to define Ulster regionalism in the period as, in Lyons’s words, “one that could take account of the different circumstances under which any nationalist ideology would be received in Ulster.” Borrowing this term, I mean to highlight the limitations of such regionalism – particularly for Northern nationalists – when a provincial and uncritical defense of regional culture supplanted the positive

14 Laura Lyons, 40.
recognition and celebration of regional differences, as was the case with the McCracken Society. The Society was founded in January 1895 with the stated aim of making Ireland “national in literature, and national in art, language and song”; to that end, it organized an Irish language class and a series of lectures on Irish culture, and it established a reading room in Belfast and a rural home reading scheme to make books “of national character” available to its members.\textsuperscript{15} The organization was the outgrowth of Belfast’s Ardrigh group, a gathering of Northern cultural nationalists who met at Ardrigh, the residence of Francis Joseph Bigger, to discuss Irish culture and history. F. J. Bigger was a solicitor, antiquarian, archaeologist and philanthropist, and his home had served as the seat of Belfast’s social and cultural life in the late nineteenth century, hosting regular meetings of likeminded northerners dedicated to reviving and preserving Ulster’s heritage. Prefiguring modernist coteries later arising in other locations, this assembly acted as a social forum for diverse individuals to gather, collaborate and share ideas. But the existence of such a group was all the more remarkable in Ulster, where the divisive political climate meant that there were fewer opportunities for nationalists to assemble. In addition to Milligan, Johnston and Bigger, the Ardrigh circle included James Connolly, John Campbell, Roger Casement and Cathal O’Byrne, among others. Bigger’s personal interest in the United Irishmen and the 1798 rebellion had led him to amass an extensive collection of materials associated with the event, and it inspired him to fund the McCracken Society, a group dedicated in part to reminding Belfast of its anti-colonial history.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{The Northern Patriot} (15 October 1895).
In anticipation of the centenary anniversary of the 1798 Battle of Antrim, the Society organized a series of cultural events and launched a monthly journal in October 1895 to report on the group’s activities.\(^{16}\) Milligan and Johnston were selected as co-editors – the former likely due to her background in journalism – and the two women would contribute the majority of articles, stories and poems to be published in the paper. As its title suggested, *The Northern Patriot* would be a regional voice for a brand of nationalism that resisted, in Morris’s words, both “the undemocratic rule of empire but also Irish nationalists outside Ulster.”\(^{17}\) It would be, its lead editorial announced, “the voice of a body of staunch and energetic nationalists, speaking out boldly,” despite being “surrounded by an overwhelming majority of opponents.”\(^{18}\) The McCracken Society was in fact motivated to publish its own journal in part by what Milligan perceived as the scant coverage granted to Northern revivalism in the Irish nationalist press. The journal thus adopted a defensive posture early on: the Christmas greeting of the December 1895 issue, for instance, expressed the “hope that in the years to come our brother patriots of the other three provinces will drop a tone of distinction which they too frequently adopt, and cease to speak of the North, as if it were an alien-colonized district of Ireland….\(^{19}\)

Even the journal’s appearance proclaimed its regionalism: the bold title and the paper’s motto, a ballad excerpt from the Battle of Antrim – “How is Old Ireland? / And how does she stand?” – announced the paper’s Belfast origins. Advertisements in the Christmas issue promised articles on “The Story of Henry Joy McCracken,” a founding member of


\(^{17}\) Morris, 162.

\(^{18}\) *The Northern Patriot* (15 October 1895).

\(^{19}\) *The Northern Patriot* (December 1895).
the United Irishmen, and “The Battle of Antrim,” declaring in bold font at the top of the page, “The North is Up!”

Milligan and Johnston’s intention was to “put [the journal] in a quite independent position” relative to its parent organization – in effect, to distance themselves from the McCracken Society’s hostility towards cultural nationalists outside of Ulster. Ironically, however, they were undermined by internal divisions within the Society itself, and by the Society’s increasing politicization.20 In a diplomatic letter to the Irish Weekly Independent, Milligan explained the two women’s departure from the Society and their editorial positions in 1896, noting her hope that “our former associates…will remember that Irish men and women should look but toward one foe, and that a strong one which all our efforts are required to combat.”21 In truth, the two women parted company with the McCracken Society on unpleasant terms – or were forced to do so, as a result of the editors’ open support for the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the amnesty campaign. However, the Society’s preoccupation with Ulster’s cultural isolation was also a motivating factor in the split.22 The founding of The Shan Van Vocht would follow closely on the heels of this falling out.

II. The Internationalism of The Shan Van Vocht

Milligan and Johnston’s decision to produce and edit their own publication, The Shan Van Vocht, was in large part a rejection of both party politics in Ulster and of an insular cultural nationalism that had, despite its declarations, neglected the development of a vibrant cultural community in the North. Breaking ties with the McCracken Society

---

20 The Northern Patriot (23 November 1895).
21 Irish Weekly Independent (18 January 1896).
22 For a full account of the events surrounding Milligan and Johnston’s break with the McCracken Society, see Morris, 162-169.
freed the two women to engage new voices, new perspectives and even new cultural traditions in their bid to foster such a community, proving wrong the Society’s claims that Ulster was cut off from the currents of change shaping Irish nationalism in the South. In founding a new journal, Milligan intended not only to assert her region’s role in the wider revival and the fight for Irish independence, but also to promote both causes on local, national and international scales. On the one hand, *The Shan Van Vocht* demonstrated the same interest in Ulster’s regional culture that had motivated *The Northern Patriot* – featuring, for example, a number of articles related to Belfast’s role in the 1798 rebellion, as well as allegorical interpretations of Celtic mythology in light of contemporary events in the North. On the other, the journal’s regionalism was complemented by editorials on national issues like Irish education and self-help initiatives, as well as reports on lectures and events both in Ireland and abroad, poetry and prose in English and Irish, and articles on revolutionary and nationalist activities in places as far away as Cuba and South Africa. Like other nationalist newspapers and print materials, Milligan’s journal was able, in Mary Burgess’s words, to “bridg[e] the geographical distance separating Belfast’s nationalists from those in Dublin, London or the United States….“ In so doing, it balanced its local and regional affiliations with an international flavor uncommon to Northern nationalism in the period.

The publication achieved this balance in two ways. First, it honored the geographical and ideological diversity of the North, demonstrating an optimistic embrace of regional difference while still seeking to connect with and participate in the Southern Revival. Rather than attempting to present Ulster as *the same as* – to accommodate the

---

23 Mary Burgess, “Belfast carnivalesque: the satires of Gerald MacNamara,” in *The Cities of Belfast*, 76.
region to a form of nationalism that emphasized cultural homogeneity – Milligan instead sought to represent the North as part of a nation composed of discrete regions, and beyond this, as a participant in an international cultural network. The nationalism promoted in the publication left space for regional variation, expanding the geographical imagination of the Irish Revival to include not only the local and the regional, but also the international – a broader and more inclusive set of spatial scales through which to think the problematic of the nation.

Secondly, on a more practical level, *The Shan Van Vocht* linked regional concerns and practices in Ulster with their international counterparts, describing, for instance, the efforts of other cultural and political peripheries to declare their autonomy. What the Southern Revival attempted to accomplish by appealing to a shared, ancient culture – namely the erasure of sectarian divisions – Milligan endeavored to achieve via international comparisons. She and many of her contributors borrowed the rhetoric of cultural nationalism from the Revival in the South – recovering history and mythology as modern blueprints, celebrating the idea of a unified (if not uniform) nation – but they tended to position such material in an explicitly international context. In so doing, the publication presented internationalism as an alternative to a kind of nationalism that failed to recognize regional difference, and which was founded on a pastoral ideal that could not accommodate an industrial or sectarian North.

This is not to suggest that the publication’s internationalism eclipsed its engagement with cultural nationalism entirely. On the contrary, *The Shan Van Vocht* was among the first of what has been described as the advanced nationalist journals to be published in Ireland in the late nineteenth century. Karen Steele defines the advanced
nationalist press as a subset of print culture concerned with “the extreme articulation of Irish nationalism.” Such journals “focused on transforming Ireland through cultural and revolutionary means,” she explains, encouraging the country’s political and economic autonomy through their content and featuring “a wide spectrum of Irish patriots, from militants…to socialists…to feminists.” 

Because such publications often served as “a textual meeting place” for these diverse voices, the advanced nationalist press was particularly dialogic in nature, encouraging its contributors and readers to participate in the conversations it initiated through letters, guest columns, contests and submissions.

The editors of such journals often contributed a majority of the content, in addition to serving as copywriters and reporters, and although some publications emphasized their editors’ particular preoccupations, many advanced nationalist papers addressed a range of topics related to the Irish nationalist movement, including the Gaelic League, Irish mythology, educational and self-help reform efforts, and literature. As Virginia Glandon explains, daily and weekly newspapers were of critical importance in the early years of the Irish Revival, serving as the primary source of information on the country’s political and cultural developments for citizens across the country.

In addition to shaping political sentiment and encouraging revolutionary nationalism, such publications also promoted the Revival’s literary and cultural activities by featuring reviews and notices of societies and events. Through their contents, these print materials urged Irish citizens to

24 Steele, 2-3. She also notes that Irish women found the advanced nationalist press to be “a particularly receptive venture for various forms of national expression,” as its dialogic nature allowed “afforded women radical potential for challenging oppressive and repressive models of feminist behaviour, national character, and class identity” (4, 6). See also Crossman. Milligan and Johnston’s co-editorship of The Shan Van Vocht is of course a notable example of this phenomenon.

25 Steele, 10.

become active participants in the national cause, providing readers with several avenues of access to nationalism in the period.

The Shan Van Vocht adhered to many of these same practices, much like the Irish Homestead under the direction of George William Russell (Æ), and both Russell and Milligan viewed their publications as conduits for revolutionary political and social ideas to enter Ireland. But unlike Milligan, who saw internationalism as a strategy for navigating the divisions within Northern society, Russell considered it part of a larger effort to improve the intellectual life of the rural communities targeted by his paper.27 Like The Shan Van Vocht, the Homestead was dominated by a singular editorial vision: Russell’s agenda for the reform of rural Ireland aligned with the co-operative movement’s own program, and the publication was accordingly less dialogic than Milligan’s own. Although Russell had some latitude to engage conflicting opinions, and although he encouraged discussion of contemporary social and political issues in the paper’s pages, his chief objective was to promote the co-operative movement’s reform efforts. Like Russell, Milligan saw herself as an active agent in the transformation of Irish society and was, as a result, accepting of new, international influences – many of which found their way into The Shan Van Vocht via her articles and editorials. But because her publication was unaffiliated with a specific group or political organization,

27 Another important difference between the two publications, and one relating to their editors’ willingness to celebrate political and cultural developments outside of Ireland, was their respective stances on emigration. Emigration, of course, was less of a concern in The Shan Van Vocht. Milligan, in fact, embraced the Irish diaspora in her paper, viewing Irish emigrants as participants in the Revival and in Ireland’s struggle for independence, despite their geographical distance. Russell, in contrast, was avowedly anti-emigration, fearing it would lead to the depopulation of rural Ireland and the failure of the co-operative program’s agenda for social and economic reform. As such, he was often quick to highlight the superior quality of life in rural Ireland and to downplay the appeal of cities or, more broadly, of America. For an insightful discussion of the Homestead’s stance on emigration, particularly the emigration of women, see Leeann Lane, “Female Emigration and the Cooperative Movement in the Writings of George Russell,” New Hibernia Review 8.4 (Winter 2004): 84-100.
Milligan was free to support the cultural initiatives that interested her personally without adhering to any external agenda.

*The Shan Van Vocht* was produced in a “cottage industry fashion” on Great George’s Street in Belfast, with Milligan serving as the editor and Johnston as the secretary. 28 “For three and a half years these two girls edited the magazine and managed it,” Seamus MacManus recalled. “They themselves wrote almost all of the magazine…They read the proofs. They kept the books. They sent the bills. They wrote the letters. With their own hands they folded and addressed every copy that was to go out, and licked every stamp…”29 MacManus’s comment reveals Milligan and Johnston’s intimate knowledge of the contents and management of their publication – an intimacy paralleled by their familiarity with the region they addressed and described. The cost of *The Shan Van Vocht* was 2 pence per issue or 2s. 6d. per year, and new issues went on sale on the first Friday of every month. In addition to poetry and prose – most of which adhered to the hallmarks of revivalist or nationalist style – the journal featured reports of cultural events and organizations throughout Ireland and England, and further afield; an Irish-language column and Irish-language writing in translation; articles on the self-help movement, educational reform, and Irish industry and trade; historical sketches on Northern Irish events and figures; book reviews; and a column entitled “Other People’s Opinions” that permitted writers of various political sympathies to debate Irish nationalism. 30 As Steele suggests, the journal targeted an audience of middle-class Irish nationalists, featuring advertisements that “appealed to consumers who viewed each

28 Morris, 183.
29 Quoted in Morris, 183.
30 The column premiered in the November 1896; in 1897, it featured James Connolly, who critiqued the literary movement and promoted the idea of an Irish socialist republic. Milligan disagreed with Connolly’s views but published them nonetheless as evidence of her democratic editorial policy.
simple purchase as a political act aimed at Irish economic and cultural independence from Great Britain.” Ads for Irish-made accessories and hotels in Belfast and Dublin, for example, appeared alongside those for books by Irish publishers and reviews of other nationalist publications – all of which were intended to attract and establish a network of likeminded readers within Ireland.

Yet Milligan’s pursuit of an Irish audience was also supplemented by her efforts to attract a broader readership via international circulation and coverage. Subscription lists included readers in Ireland, England and Scotland, as well as in the United States, Mexico, Europe and South Africa. Morris notes that by the journal’s second year, “400 papers were being distributed across America” by a New-York based distributor, M. J. O’Brien, in addition to agents in Belfast, Dublin and Londonderry. Indeed, The Shan Van Vocht was well-regarded by the Irish-American press: The Hibernian and The Young Irishmen in Chicago and The Irish Republic in New York printed favorable reviews of Milligan’s journal soon after its debut and occasionally republished articles in full for nationalist expatriates. The editors of The Irish Republic urged its readers to “[s]how some of the old spirit of Irish chivalry towards the two brave young ladies” by subscribing to “the one magazine that is doing genuine work for the common cause.” Readers also wrote in from Mexico, India and South Africa, contributing articles on current events in these countries and praising the journal’s reach into such far-flung places. Beginning with the May 1897 issue, the publication featured a regular column, “From Over the Sea,” dedicated to such communications from subscribers abroad: it

31 Steele, 32.
32 Morris, 176.
34 Quoted in Morris, 176.
addressed the founding of new nationalist societies in the United States and South Africa; reports of St. Patrick’s Day celebrations in these and other countries; acknowledgement of the favorable notices given to *The Shan Van Vocht* in various newspapers and magazines; and Milligan’s gratified recognition of new subscribers. As the editor explained in one such column:

> It is always a pleasure to us to make public, as well as private, acknowledgement of the many kind letters we received daily from all corners of the earth. The “Shan Van Vocht” numbers amongst its friends a host of Irishmen worthy of the Land that bore them, who, though their lot may be cast in exile, have carefully cherished the holy and hopeful desire which has burnt for centuries in the hearts of the scattered Gael….\(^\text{35}\)

The Irish-American interest in the journal was especially meaningful, as evidenced by the letters *The Shan Van Vocht* published from readers in Ohio, Texas, New York, Illinois, Colorado and Massachusetts, among other locations in the United States.\(^\text{36}\) Irish “friends in America,” as Milligan described them in one article, lent financial and moral support to the cause of Northern cultural nationalism, celebrating Belfast’s historical events and figures while abroad – including, most significantly, the 1898 centenary – and fundraising for the Irish language movement, the restoration of historically significant graves, and the establishment of public monuments.\(^\text{37}\) The record of expatriates’ support thus challenges the narrow regionalism so often associated with the movement in Ulster. As Milligan implored her Irish-American readers, “treat us with

\(^{35}\) “From Over the Sea,” *The Shan Van Vocht* III.2 (7 November 1898): 214.

\(^{36}\) Irish-American support for the nationalist cause is well documented with respect to the Irish Literary Revival but has received significantly less attention in scholarship on the Northern Revival.

\(^{37}\) See Morris, 182.
confidence and in answer to the invitation we have sent you [to work together for the
cause of Freedom] let your response come promptly….‘For this make ye known, / We
shall stand not alone, / When on breeze from the hillside our banner is blown, / For our
exiles are true / The world’s continents through / To the cause that hath martyrs like
Emmet and Tone.’”

Her comments capture the publication’s appeal among Irish exiles, in particular –
often nostalgic and eager for political news from Ireland – yet they also reveal the
journal’s international reach and its editor’s efforts to cultivate, in line with Benedict
Anderson, an exilic Irish “nation” via the printed text.39 As one contributor to the journal
put it, “There is an Irish nation, and it is not geographically confined to the mother isle.
It is scattered over all the habitable globe….You can pick out an Irishman anywhere by
the native accent which he never loses, and if you round on him you will find him loyal
to the National ideal of his country.”40 The varied contents of *The Shan Van Vocht* and
Milligan’s deliberate appeal to readers abroad are indications of the local, regional and
international communities of nationalist solidarity that she strove to promote. Her
deliberate decision to employ the essentialist rhetoric of Irish cultural nationalism and to
harness the same affective tropes used by revivalist writers in the South signaled her
desire to participate in the wider Revival and to converse with her readers in language
that was both familiar and politically charged. After all, as Milligan articulated

38 “To the Irish in America,” *The Shan Van Vocht* II.7 (5 July 1897): 122.
39 See Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*
(London: Verso, 1998), 62-65, in which he construes geographical displacement (among other forms) as a
type of exile. He interprets nationalism as a compensation for the exile’s distance from home, arguing that
nostalgia for the local is mitigated when its energies are transferred to the national scale instead.
Nationalism in this sense is facilitated by “long-distance transportation and print capitalist
communications,” conditions of modernity that arose in the nineteenth century.
frequently in her journalism and writing, she viewed political independence as the primary objective of the cultural initiatives in Ulster and the South alike. International readers – many of whom had ties to Ireland through immigration or ancestry – constructed their own diasporic nationalism via *The Shan Van Vocht*, following news and cultural events, clipping nationalist poems to save, and writing in to express their support.

As this internationalist reach suggested, Milligan recognized the tensions and limitations within a too-narrow application of nationalist rhetoric. The publication’s internationalism countered what she identified as the conflicted relationship between the region and the nation, often configured in scholarship as one of subordination or containment. If, as Alan Confino explains, the region serves as a repository for nationalism, or is rendered intelligible only within a national context, then the region is useful only as a mediator for the nation; local, regional and national spatial scales simply overlap in a hierarchy, and identity trickles down.\(^{41}\) Milligan, in contrast, recognized the porousness of the region, demonstrating through explicit international comparisons that a range of national and extra-national influences inform regional identity. By embracing an internationalism in *The Shan Van Vocht* that acknowledged identity as a function of embedded and mutually informing scales, not a scalar hierarchy, she shifted the terms of the national debate away from cultural nationalism’s insistence on homogeneity.

The journal’s international outlook was also reflected in its material form, including its masthead. The title, for instance, written in large, bold font, is set against the image of a new dawn: the sun rises over the ocean, centered between Ireland (depicted as an island) on the left and a large ship, its sails at full mast, on the right.

Seagulls fly in the foreground, above the ship, and the upper right corner of the page is adorned with a spray of clovers. While the Irish-language title and the clovers announce the publication’s Irishness, the sailing ship evokes travel and trade – circuits of cultural and commercial exchange linking Ireland to the rest of the world – and the ocean, which comprises half of the image, is the avenue by which the journal’s message and ideas might spread beyond Ireland’s borders. The image is not drawn to scale: Ireland and the ship occupy roughly the same space on the horizon, suggesting a balance between the national and the international. The country’s depiction as an island perhaps gestures to its perceived isolation – a particular preoccupation of some northern cultural nationalists – yet the image as a whole is an optimistic one. The sunrise symbolizes new beginnings, both for Milligan and Johnston and – the editor hoped – for Ireland.42

This optimism is echoed in the refrain from the journal’s title song, which is featured prominently at the center of the banner’s image: “Yes Ireland shall be free / From the centre to the sea, / And hurrah for Liberty / Says the Shan Van Vocht.”43 The song, a ballad associated with the 1798 rebellion, appears on the title page of the first issue, announcing both the journal’s revolutionary stance, and less obviously, its editorship by a female activist – at that time, a radical undertaking for Milligan.44 Earlier versions of the song describe an impending French invasion, intended to bolster the

42 Morris suggests that the rising sun was also “a coded visual nod to the revolutionary politics of Fenianism” (179).
43 The journal’s title is the phonetic spelling of the Irish “An tSean-bhean Bocht,” meaning “the poor old woman.” The eighteenth-century song of this name was the inspiration for Yeats’s nationalist play, Cathleen Ni Houlihan (1902).
United Irishmen on the eve of rebellion. The version that appears in the journal, however, omits any mention of either the French or an invasion, instead describing hopeful “news from o’er the sea” from “the land of liberty,” assumed to be the United States.\textsuperscript{45} Milligan’s explicit positioning of the journal in a revolutionary and international context signals her desire to capitalize on Belfast’s unique political history while at the same time locating Ireland in ongoing debates, extending beyond regional and national borders, over social and political reform.

Dismissing the patriarchal nationalist trope of “the poor old woman,” an tSean-bhean Bocht, Milligan instead reimagines her as an agent confidently anticipating change – as “the queen no foe could tame.” She is reclaimed as a hopeful figure, predicting “the dawn of Freedom” that the message from abroad portends. The journal’s opening editorial likewise forecasts change in a hopeful tone: revisiting the image of a new dawn, the paper declares that “a new year has come and with it the hope that before its course is run…it may be given to our eyes to behold the first beams of the daybreak dispersing forever the gloom of our long penitential night of sorrow.”\textsuperscript{46} The editorial serves as both a call to action and a refutation of the apathy that Milligan perceived as characterizing Irish nationalism in the years following Parnell’s death, both in Ulster and the South. Irish citizens, it continues, “must be worthy and they must be ready before that bright gift [of freedom] comes to them….”

As the editorial makes clear, Milligan intended to galvanize her readers into action and to inspire them to revolutionary nationalism, yet she recognized the dangers of politicizing her journal in a region prone to factionalism. To circumvent this problem,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{45} “The Shan Van Vocht,” \textit{The Shan Van Vocht} I.1 (15 January 1896): 1.
  \item \textsuperscript{46} “For the Old Land,” \textit{The Shan Van Vocht} I.1 (15 January 1896): 8.
\end{itemize}
she relied instead on international comparisons as a means of highlighting her region’s revolutionary potential without making it the explicit subject of her articles and editorials. This approach granted Milligan the latitude to celebrate Ulster’s history and culture within a comparative framework, redirecting her readers’ focus away from the region’s problematic differences and instead towards its similarities with other marginalized, revolutionary communities outside of Ireland. In the September 1896 issue, for instance, she asserts:

It is time that someone should speak out boldly to break through THE CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE into which the Dublin Press seems to have entered with regard to the progress of the National cause outside the narrow fighting ring of party politics. We are not at liberty to preach revolution, but there is no restraint put upon our reporting the doings of revolutionists, insurgents, conspirators in Matabeleland, Johannesburg, Cuba, Canada, and elsewhere, so long as their proceedings come before the public and are matters of general interest. We have a perfect right to do so, and we shall henceforth avail ourselves of that right…In a few pages we can monthly compress a record of every incident which is of permanent importance to “the cause,” and which will give our readers a right understanding of the events of the day as they affect the destiny of Ireland.47

Framing the nationalist cause as part of a wider, transnational fight for democracy and political and cultural autonomy allowed Milligan to challenge the provinciality of Northern cultural nationalism and to sidestep the sectarianism of the North. The strategy

also allowed her to avoid the suppression and censorship that plagued other overtly political publications. The next issue of the journal, for instance, featured an article entitled “How They Are Fighting in Cuba,” which detailed guerilla military tactics and made explicit the parallels with Ireland’s fight for independence. “We are reminded by [the Cuban islanders’] method of warfare of the cautious and patient tactics of our great Irish chieftain, Owen Roe O’Neill,” the article asserts, “who pursued a policy of wearying and bewildering the enemy, training his men carefully, giving them confidence and experience of fight, in dashes from ambush, and cattle raids, never risking a pitched battle for mere bravado.”

The same issue featured an article criticizing Europe’s indifference to the Hamidian massacres of 1894-96, in which the Ottoman state, led by Sultan Abdul Hamid II, oversaw the systematic killing of its minority Armenian subjects. While exhorting Irish and Ulster citizens alike to protest “on behalf of suffering fellow-men,” the article returns to Ulster’s history to remind readers of their primary political objective:

There was a chief in our own Ulster, two hundred years ago – Owen, the Victor at Benburb – who dedicated his sword first to the liberation of Ireland, then to driving the Turk from Europe. Ulstermen, who have raised your voices on behalf of Armenia, strive no longer to influence the councils of England, but join with us to give our own Ireland, Freedom, and a Nation’s right to lift her banner and draw her sword for the succor of the oppressed.

*The Shan Van Vocht*’s coverage of international events such as these extended beyond mere reporting: these were directive pieces, instructing readers in how to interpret

---

these events and how to apply the lessons learned in other countries to Ireland’s own political situation. Yet such comparisons did more than encourage Irish citizens to embrace revolutionary activism; they also worked to unite readers North and south in a shared campaign for Irish independence, bypassing factionalism in Ulster by refocusing the conversation on the country’s colonial condition rather than on the region’s perceived cultural isolation. Moreover, addressing Ireland’s circumstances in an international context – not as a singular case, but as representative of other contemporaneous instances of oppression and political imbalance – challenged the myth of Irish exceptionalism perpetuated by cultural nationalism in the period. Milligan was prescient in recognizing both the limitations of essentializing Irish culture and the benefits of encouraging mutually enriching, cross-cultural dialogue. An article by F. Hugh O’Donnell in the June 1897 issue, for instance, condemns “the silence or complicity of American opinion in face of the English plot” against the Transvaal Republic. “If the United States can do a prosperous business with the English markets, all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds,” O’Donnell writes. Why would the country trouble itself, he cynically inquires, by empathizing “with oppressed peoples devoured by the land-and-gold hunger of English pirate policy?”

Contrast this to an earlier report on Irishmen in the Transvaal, which praises “the men of Ulster, Leinster, Munster, and Connaught” for banding together as an Irish brigade in defense of the Republic, despite political differences. “It is an augury that Ireland will survive all denationalizing tendencies, and will yet repair the ruin of centuries,” the article optimistically declares. The comparison of Irish and American responses to the turbulence in South Africa serves not only as an indirect

indictment of the United States for allowing economic gain to dictate its political
sympathies, but also as an inducement to Irish citizens throughout the country to set
sectarianism aside in pursuit of the worthier goal of Irish independence.

International comparisons such as these were not limited to newsy articles; the
journal also occasionally published poetry and prose on these themes, as well. The
February 1896 issue, for instance, featured a poem describing the sacrifices of “Ireland’s
sons” during the Civil War and imploring America to heed Ireland’s call for assistance:
“In memory of old times, that were, / Of those who fought, and fell, and died, / Your
rapture or your grief to share, / Let not our pleading be denied.” 52 A poem, “Mick from
Garrygown,” in the June issue of the same year likewise addresses Irish martyrdom,
narrating the title character’s death in an attempted Fenian invasion of Canada. 53 Such
literary contributions – which appeared at the beginning of every issue – served not only
as evidence of the journal’s relevance to the literary movement in Dublin, given that the

53 Mac, “Mick from Garrygown,” The Shan Van Vocht I.6 (5 June 1896): 101. The poem is a
representative example of the type of sentimental, nationalist verse often featured in the publication.
Before describing the title character’s heroic death and burial on “a patch of farm” near Limerick, the
verses evoke many of the standard tropes of cultural nationalism, including the emigrant’s nostalgia for
home, the patriotism of the young Irishman, and the representation of Ireland as women. The poem begins:

Near the Canadian border, where gently sloped the sward,
Full weary men, we halted us, told off a trusty guard,
And gladly laid our aching limbs on carpet soft and green,
And greeted warm the cloak of rest eve wafted on the scene,
We thought of Ireland far aware,
And every eye was dim –
We thought upon the morrow’s fray, and every look was grim –
Our reverie was broken by the sentry’s ringing tone,
“Halt! Who goes there?” and soft reply, “I’m Mick from Garrygown.”

Loose-limbed, and big, and soft, and young, with wealth of flaxen hair,
Half-awkwardly, with rising blush, he walked among us there,
The lights that dance on Shannon’s waves still played about his eyes,
In their bright depths we knew the blue he caught from Irish skies,
The smile around his mouth was meant to grant that he was raw –
But it’s earnest pleading warmth the sternest heart to him might thaw,
“It’s tould me, boys, ye mane to place ould Grania on her throne,
So here I am to help ye!” said Mick from Garrygown.
poems and stories were often derivative of the Southern Revival’s style and themes; they also functioned as examples of the kind of patriotic sacrifice, cross-cultural collaboration and national unity that Milligan strove to highlight elsewhere in the publication. Indeed, she recognized the power of literature to override political and religious differences—a viewpoint shared by contributor John R. Whelan in his two-part essay, “Literature and Nationality.” Following a comparison of various national literary traditions, Whelan turns his attention to Ireland and determines that “[t]here can be but two classes in the nation—those who work for its advancement and those against it. To the former belongs its literature, for all that is worthy in man…has its source in sentiment and in devotion to the land which has been the home of his fathers and the inheritance of himself.”

Presenting poetry and prose as an extension and expression of nationality in *The Shan Van Vocht* allowed Milligan to publicize Ireland’s Literary Revival as one component of a broader battle for cultural and political autonomy, and to address the movement without succumbing to the defensive regionalism that often plagued cultural nationalism in North and South alike.

It was the journal’s deliberate rejection of insular or factional politics in the North, coupled with its international consciousness, that became its most significant contribution to the Northern Revival—a movement that sprouted in the pages of *The Shan Van Vocht*. As a seminal text of Ulster’s cultural renaissance, the publication taught its readers to recognize the local as a space imbricated in broader international networks, and to learn from other countries’ analogous political circumstances. Recovering the internationalism of *The Shan Van Vocht* thus, paradoxically, allows us to appreciate the

---

Northern Revival as the regional expression of a widespread cultural moment, not as simply derivative of the Dublin-based movement. Such an approach also highlights the publication’s optimistic embrace of diversity, and its use of alternative spatial scales to reimagine the nation as Joyce does in “Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages” – as “a vast fabric, in which the most diverse elements are mingled.”

Although Milligan and her collaborators borrowed themes and practices from their Southern counterpart – and indeed sought to create a space for the North in the Irish Revival – the Belfast group was arguably more aware of the broader cultural and political communities that contained them. *The Shan Van Vocht* was significant for popularizing Ireland’s cultural renaissance within Ulster and far beyond its borders, extending the influence of the Irish Revival abroad and revealing Milligan’s sophistication and cosmopolitanism in thinking through the question of national identity in geographical terms.

**III. The Beginnings of the Ulster Literary Theatre**

*The Shan Van Vocht* was likewise influential in the development of the Ulster Literary Theatre, perhaps the most prominent cultural byproduct of the Northern Revival. The journal’s deliberate blend of regionalism and internationalism appealed to an adolescent Bulmer Hobson, one of the Theatre’s founders, who became a subscriber...
while still a student. “[I]n the Shan I came for the first time in touch with the new forces 
that were beginning to stir in Ireland,” he explained. The topics and debates engaged in 
the paper, along with Hobson’s involvement in cultural nationalist organizations in 
Belfast, set the frames of reference for the Ulster Literary Theatre – particularly in its 
early years, when its two founders envisioned the organization as a vehicle of political 
propaganda.

A full account of the Theatre’s founding is beyond the scope of this argument, but 
I do wish to illustrate the Ulster company’s ambivalent relationship to its counterpart in 
the South, which itself results from the Northern theatre’s beginnings. Hobson and 
Purcell (the pseudonym of David Parkhill) intended to establish an Ulster Branch of the 
Irish Literary Theatre in 1902 in an effort to represent the nationalist cause in their 
region. “We wanted permission to put on some of their plays and help from some of their 
actors,” Hobson recalled of the two men’s visit to Dublin. Yet when Yeats responded 
coolly to a proposed sister-branch of the Irish Literary Theatre in Belfast, the two men 
were undeterred. “Damn Yeats, we’ll write our own plays!” Hobson declared on the train 
ride home, prefiguring both the rivalry and the regionalism that would characterize the 
Belfast-based theatre for years to come. Karen Vandevelde argues that the Ulster 
Theatre’s playwrights emphasized regional identity as a means of negotiating sectarian 
divisions: 

The Ulster company’s provincial focus aspired to an elastic concept of the nation 
that acknowledges difference. While the Abbey Theatre created a national

57 Hobson, 1–2. 
58 Quoted in Bell, 2. 
59 Quoted in Bell, 1.
identity on the basis of an image of the west of Ireland and Kiltartan dialect, the Ulster Literary Theatre forged its own sense of regional identity inspired by a variety of northern dialects and customs. While the INTS [Irish National Theatre Society] constructed a unitary notion of Irish identity, the Ulster artists argued that regional, social and political differences could not and should not be transcended.  

Her comment points to the struggle Northern nationalists faced in acknowledging Ulster’s differences from the rest of Ireland – namely, celebrating the region’s history and heritage – while simultaneously attempting to redirect the focus away from sectarianism, which many Northerners viewed as a distraction from the larger political struggle for Ireland’s independence.

To achieve a balance between the regional and the national, the Theatre worked within and against the model of the Southern Revival, as Milligan had done in *The Shan Van Vocht*. Playwrights like Purcell, Rutherford Mayne and Gerald MacNamara followed in the footsteps of their southern counterparts, writing peasant comedies in rural settings and using dialect as a marker of “authentic” culture. Hobson and Parkhill in fact originally envisioned their group as a sister-branch of the Irish Literary Theatre in Dublin, and the two men were explicit in soliciting drama that would be the regional expression of a national sentiment. Like Milligan, the Northern group was motivated by conflicting desires at the outset: to express a distinctive Ulster identity, to participate in the Irish Revival, and yet to distinguish itself from Dublin-based revivalism and the Irish

---

Literary Theatre, in particular – the company that had, after all, rejected the Belfast founders’ federalist vision for Ireland’s national dramatic movement.

Nevertheless, as the Ulster Branch of the Irish Literary Theatre, the group launched its inaugural season in November 1902 with performances of Yeats’s *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and James Cousins’s *The Racing Lug*. Premiering to small audiences in Belfast and borrowing actors from Dublin’s theatre, the fledgling group understood their project as part of a broader attempt to encourage revivalism in the North and to establish a dialogue between their region and Dublin. Yet according to Sam Hanna Bell’s account of the Belfast theatre’s early years, the company’s efforts continued to meet with clear disapproval from Yeats and his colleagues. In 1904, George Roberts, the secretary of the Irish National Theatre Society, “demanded royalties from the impoverished company” and informed Parkhill “that the Belfast actors had no authority to state that they were a branch of the Irish National Literary Theatre.”\(^6^1\) In response, the Belfast group re-named itself the Ulster Literary Theatre, severing both financial and cultural ties with the Dublin company. When the group resurfaced in December 1904, it was with a more emphatically regionalist agenda.\(^6^2\)

\(^{61}\) Bell, 4.

\(^{62}\) The Theatre’s regionalism remains the focus of the bulk of scholarship addressing its history and drama, much of which reveals the distinctly northern affective register that its plays performed to counter the Abbey Theatre’s pastoral, peasant ideal. In his valuable book-length study of the movement, for example, Eugene McNulty argues that the Revival in Ulster “operated as an uncanny doppleganger” (9) of its counterpart in the South, and that the plays of the Ulster Literary Theatre “attempted to ‘northernise’ the revival as well as to bring revival north” (10). Such studies occasionally run the risk of presenting the expression of a regional identity as parochial, as derivative of cultural nationalism in the South, or as a defensive posture in response to Yeats’s deliberate exclusion of the North from the Revival’s narrative of nationhood. But we might also read the Belfast theatre’s regionalism as an alternative to the nationalism of Dublin’s theatre, or more precisely, as an intentional shift from the national to the local scale. Embracing an alternative scale enabled the Ulster Literary Theatre’s expression of a specifically northern regional identity, and it allowed northern playwrights to critique the cultural nationalism of the Abbey Theatre while still borrowing from the southern movement.
Admittedly, this decision was as much practical as ideological. Without access to the Abbey’s financial resources or actors, the Ulster Theatre was forced to rely on local talent and contributions from its members. As Mayne explained, describing the shift from branch-status to regional theatre, the expenses the group incurred renting halls for performances and providing scenery, advertising the plays, and paying royalties left the young company in debt from the outset. “[T]he Theatre Committee, being Ulsterman born and bred,” he elaborated, “determined to cut down expenses by writing their own plays and so save the authors’ fees…. I might add that no royalties were paid to their authors by the Ulster Literary Theatre if they were members until after 1916, and then only if there was no loss incurred.”63 In keeping performance and production at home, the Belfast theatre again borrowed its strategies from Milligan, who deliberately targeted local communities receptive to cultural nationalism with her initiatives, organizing plays and magic lantern lectures and promoting the language and dramatic movements in the villages she visited.64 The community-based approach encouraged local residents to participate in and contribute to the Ulster company’s performances – whether serving as actors or audience members, craftsmen, or advertisers – and it localized the experience of a national theatre by featuring familiar Northern accents, characters and settings.

The Ulster accents and settings, however, were in many ways only surface emblems of regional identity that marked the theatre and its drama as different and distinctly Northern, despite its imitation of the Abbey. Even the Ulster Theatre’s journal, Ulad – intended to declare the group’s regionalism and to publicize performances – was modeled explicitly on Yeats’s theatre publications, Beltaine and Samhain. Debuting in

---

64 See Morris, particularly 221-277, for additional information on Milligan’s efforts to spread cultural nationalism via community performances and productions.
1904, *Ulad* consisted on four issues, published to coincide with the Irish seasonal festivals – *Samhain* (November 1904), *Feil Bridghe* (February 1905), *Beltaine* (May 1905), and *Lughnasa* (September 1905). Each issue featured a blend of editorials, theatre news, criticism, cultural and political debates, poetry and prose, and transcripts of plays. Like *The Shan Van Vocht*, the journal encouraged cultural nationalism in the North by publishing Irish-language texts and articles on cultural and intellectual initiatives in the North, and by devoting space in each issue to frank appraisals of the Theatre’s performances as the region’s chief nationalist institution. *Ulad* also included articles on Belfast’s cultural history, striving to validate the city’s and its region’s contributions to Irish culture generally, and just as Milligan had done, contributors often sought to trace the Ulster origins of Irish mythology, reclaiming such material for the Northern Revival.

Yet despite its separatist intentions, the publication could not escape cultural nationalism or the movement in the South. The journal’s opening manifesto, for instance, defined Ulster and its theatre in the context of Dublin and its drama. Penned by W. B. Reynolds – music critic of the *Belfast Evening Telegraph* and editor of *Ulad* – the article assumed an oppositional stance:

*Ulad* means Ulster. It is still often necessary to state as much; we intend to insist. Draw an imaginary line across Ireland form that great bight, Donegal Bay, in the west, to Carlingford Lough, on the east, and draw it not too rigidly; 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, still keeping on Irish land.\(^\text{65}\)

\(^{65}\) Bell, 1.
By insisting on regional difference and defining the movement’s geographical territory, the group affirmed its Northern identity as foundational to the Belfast theatre’s project and to the drama it sought to produce. Carving out a specific geographical space – defining the region’s boundaries clearly yet “not too rigidly” – allowed the Theatre’s founders to assert Ulster’s unique contribution to the broader cultural movement while still preserving the region’s separateness. In Reynolds’s words, “Ulster has its own way of things.” As McNulty observes, Reynolds’s editorial addresses both a readership of cultural nationalists within Ulster, who sought to bridge the gap between Ulster and the rest of Ireland, and nationalists outside the region, who were unsure of what the North might contribute culturally or politically to the nationalist cause.66 The value of regional difference – a difference made explicit in the geography Reynolds outlines – would ultimately become the focus of many of the articles in Ulad and of the plays the Theatre produced.

Further, the editorial’s recasting of the Irish Literary Theatre as “a fairly defined local school” challenges the Dublin movement’s claims to represent the Irish nation as a whole, and instead proposes a network of linked regional theatres, in which Ulster and Dublin would be equally capable of performing Irishness.67 The expression of a distinctly local temperament, faithful to the realities of the Northern experience, would permit the company to distinguish its drama from that in Dublin on the basis of an accurate and representative portrayal of Ulster life. And indeed, the Belfast theatre’s regionalism was, as Laura Lyons suggests, a direct “challenge to the regionalism that the

---

Abbey was attempting to parlay into a national cultural consciousness."⁶⁸  Writers and dramatists of the Northern Revival, for instance, refused to project an imagined national geography onto the Ulster landscape, electing instead to confront the social and material conditions of life in North. By presenting the North as an alternative to the West of Ireland – the site of an authentic Irish identity in much of revivalist discourse – such contributors sought, in Mark Phelan’s words, “to renegotiate the fixed, cultural coordinates of the Revival’s imaginative geography” and to dispute their region’s peripheral status relative to Dublin.⁶⁹

To that end, the plays of the Ulster Literary Theatre threw into sharp relief the realities of life in an increasingly urbanized and industrialized North, revealing gaps in the Dublin Revival’s narrative of nationhood, which by contrast celebrated the rural peasant as a national icon to counter these very trends. Northern drama challenged picturesque misrepresentations of modern Irish life, focusing instead on rural poverty, on the decline of agriculture, on political impotence and oppression, and on Ulster’s modernity relative to the rest of Ireland. By embracing, in Rutherford Mayne’s words, “an utter and violent distaste for platitudes” and “stories of low life in Belfast,” the Ulster Literary Theatre redefined authenticity as the accurate, sometimes ugly presentation of provincial life in a region rife with religious and political conflict.⁷⁰  According to Ophelia Byrne, as the company developed, “the nationalist component of plays disappeared very rapidly” in favor of social realism “on a domestic scale, with none of

⁶⁸ Laura Lyons, 34-35.
Yeats’s vistas of poetic barony.” 71 Like the Abbey Theatre, in other words, the Ulster company favored realist plays, albeit it with a different, less rural setting. The Northern dialect and Ulster backdrop – what others have cited as the true mark of Northern regionalism in the company’s performances – were thus, in a sense, only superficial differences that gestured to the more significant ways in which Northern drama departed from the plays of the Abbey.

IV. Performing Regional Identity in Lewis Purcell’s The Enthusiast

Satire, in particular, characterized Northern drama – an approach that allowed the Belfast theatre to critique cultural nationalism even as the plays appropriated nationalist themes. Purcell’s The Enthusiast, for instance, shared with Abbey drama its subject, its cast of peasant characters, its domestic setting and its use of dialect. Like the Abbey’s kitchen comedies, the play foregrounds the cottage hearth as the site of the pastoral ideal in contrast to urbanism and materialism. Yet the playwright’s parody of this familiar form – particularly his use of an Ulster setting and dialect – makes the play aggressively and humorously (if superficially) Northern. This satirical impulse also diverges from what F. S. L. Lyons defines as the “PQ” or “peasant quality” of the Abbey aesthetic, the standard by which early audiences evaluated the plays. Authentic dialect, costumes, props and practices were reproduced on the Dublin stage as evidence of both the playwright’s fidelity to native culture and as artifacts of “reality.” 72 In contrast, Mayne, a fellow Northern playwright, described the “simply appalling sense of realism” that typified Ulster drama – a realism characterized by satirical humor and concerned with

71 Byrne, 39.
debunking picturesque misrepresentations of rural Irish life.\textsuperscript{73} This was a realism borrowed from Ibsen and anticipating Joyce’s later critique of the romanticized “authenticity” of revivalist depictions of Irish life. Northern plays like Purcell’s thus might best be understood as both realist and comedic, borrowing the model of the realistic peasant play from the Abbey but finding humor in the complexities and divisions of Northern society.

Reynolds attempted to make the nature of Northern drama’s difference clear in \textit{Ulad}’s opening editorial. “Dreamer, mystic, symbolist, Gaelic poet and propagandist have all spoken on the Dublin stage,” he explained, emphasizing the Abbey Theatre’s – and particularly Yeats’s – preference for lyric and symbolic drama. “We in Belfast and Ulster wish to set up a school; but there will be a difference. At present we can only say that our talent is more satiric than poetic. That will probably remain the broad difference between the Ulster and Leinster schools.”\textsuperscript{74} Reynolds was perceptive in recognizing satire as unique to the Northern theatre. Their “satiric” talent in fact constituted the group’s significant point of departure from and contribution to modern Irish drama in the period, anticipating both the social commentary and myth-debunking of Joyce and of later Irish writing in the 1940s.\textsuperscript{75} Such an approach enabled Ulster playwrights to borrow methods and subjects from the Abbey Theatre while still critiquing the assumptions and omissions informing the Southern theatre’s nationalist project. Beyond this, satire allowed Northern dramatists to address the factionalism of their region by making it the

\textsuperscript{73} Rutherford Mayne, quoted in Morrow 246. Emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{74} W. B. Reynolds, Opening Editorial, \textit{Ulad} I.1 (November 1904): 2.
\textsuperscript{75} Satire has a long history in Irish literature, extending as far back as the ninth century, according to Vivian Mercier, who argues that an uninterrupted comic tradition links Anglo-Irish literature to the Gaelic literature that preceded it. See \textit{The Irish Comic Tradition} (London: Souvenir Press, 1991).
object of farce, turning sectarian tensions into comic squabbles and poking fun at differences that might otherwise upset or offend mixed audiences.

The satirical approach, in other words, served the dual purpose of criticizing and entertaining, its effectiveness deriving in large part from its ability to perform both jobs at once. On one level, it functioned as a critique, permitting commentary on cultural practices and beliefs that might otherwise be held as sacrosanct. McNulty describes the Belfast theatre’s satirical drama as, “[i]f not quite a method of outright resistance,” then at the very least, “a safety valve for nationalism’s repressed energies.”76 He locates satire’s transgressive potential in its ability to target and reimagine social, political and cultural assumptions. In the case of the Ulster Literary Theatre, these assumptions included the mythology and iconography informing plays by Yeats and J. M. Synge, among others, and the cultural nationalist narrative underlying the Abbey Theatre’s larger national project. But Northern playwrights also targeted sectarianism in Ulster, proto-partitionist politics, and stereotypes of Northern character, demonstrating a kind of evenhandedness in selecting their objects for critique. The group’s willingness to satirize the North served, in Lyon’s words, “as an uncomfortable reminder to the Abbey of a set of deeply ingrained regional practices and beliefs that did not lend themselves easily to a homogenized vision of Irish culture founded on another, ostensibly more ‘Irish’ part of the country.”77 Moreover, targeting their own region also enabled Northerners to identify and address, albeit indirectly, the problems in Northern society.

Like the internationalism of The Shan Van Vocht, satire thus provided Ulster dramatists with a means of circumnavigating sectarian tensions to address sensitive and

76 McNulty, The Ulster Literary Theatre and the Northern Revival 139.
77 Laura Lyons, 50.
politically charged subjects. Satirical plays allowed Northern dramatists to engage multiple, sometimes competing perspectives and to stage voices and experiences that often ran counter to the official narrative of the Revival’s imagined nation. Rather than attempting to ignore the familiar oppositions – between Ulster and the South, nationalism and Unionism, Catholics and Protestants – plays like Purcell’s interrogated and lampooned them, satirizing both tensions within northern society and the attempts to bridge or alleviate them. José Lanters observes that the degree to which satire functions as a critique of social and cultural norms is dependent upon the society itself. “In general,” she writes, “certain moments in history, especially periods of cultural turmoil and political change (such as civil war) involving the dismantling of established institutions and the formation of new norms and values, appear to be conducive to the writing of narrative satire.”

Although Lanters is describing post-independence Ireland, her comments hold true for the period of the Revival, as well – particularly in the North, where political instability and conflict determined the social climate. Purcell’s decision to satirize Northern society allowed him to deflate the region’s sectarian tensions by magnifying them to the point of absurdity.

As a result, his satire appealed to audiences in Belfast and Dublin alike. Attendees at performances laughed at the playwrights’ farcical treatment of Irish and Ulster history and of political rivalries, at the use of Northern dialect – until Purcell’s play, an uncommon sound on the Irish stage – and at the familiar comedic plots. As one theatregoer wrote in reviewing Purcell’s The Reformers (1904), for example, “The opinion of the majority of the audience (it was a gratifyingly large one) was that they had

seldom obtained more real enjoyment or more hearty laughter than was provided by this
comedy. It tends to farce occasionally, but, on the whole, the wit, whilst plentiful, is
restrained.” While peasant comedies were standard fare at the Abbey Theatre, Northern
playwrights proposed a new kind of national drama, transforming the genre by addressing
social and political divisions within the community that the Abbey’s drama routinely
overlooked.

It is in this context that we can best appreciate the impact of Purcell’s *The
Enthusiast* and its reception among Irish theatregoers. There is little biographical
information available for Purcell, born David Parkhill, who worked as an architect before
joining forces with Hobson to found the Ulster Literary Theatre. Purcell’s contributions
to the organization were substantial: according to some sources, it was Purcell rather than
Hobson who became the motivating force behind the Theatre and its early management,
serving as the co-editor of *Ulad* with Reynolds and traveling to Dublin to arrange for the
company’s first performances there during Easter week in 1907. Perhaps his most
significant contribution to the group’s project, however, were his plays, which Mayne
claimed “opened the road to success for the Ulster Theatre” in their departure from
Dublin’s standard dramatic fare. Purcell’s first play, *The Reformers* – described as a
“smart, spicy, comedy expose” – debuted in 1904 alongside Hobson’s *Brian of Banba*; it
met with a favorable critical reception, with one reviewer describing Purcell as the
Theatre’s “premiere dramatist.”

---

80 Rutherford Mayne, “The Ulster Literary Theatre” 17.
81 *Nomad’s Weekly and Belfast Critic* (24 December 1904) and *The Irish News* (23 December 1904), respectively. Unfortunately, no transcript of the play has been preserved.
When *The Enthusiast* debuted the following year, it represented a new kind of drama to audiences throughout the country and affirmed the Belfast theatre’s reputation as a promising new enterprise. Some early reviews criticized the pessimism of the play: Padraic Colum, for instance, described Purcell’s satire as “immoral” because it “showed no door of hope opening to the idealist and his dreams.” Other reviewers hailed *The Enthusiast* as inaugurating a new school of drama in Ireland. Affirming the play’s regional bent, Joseph Power praised Purcell for his “insight into the Northern character which could only be possessed by a Northerner.” However diverse the opinions, the general consensus was that the play lent the newfound Ulster Literary Theatre credibility, and that the Theatre itself marked an important intervention in Irish drama. “The Northern Theatre is, of course, too young as yet for any real comparison with that of the Irish metropolis,” Power admitted. Yet plays like Purcell’s “show a difference from the ideals of the metropolis, and of them it may safely be said that they go far to justify Ulster’s claim to have a personality of its own.”

Purcell’s satire distinguished itself most obviously by diverging in both its setting and technique from much of the Abbey Theatre’s realism. The play focuses, in McNulty’s words, on “intercommunal tensions” in Ulster, as its protagonist, James McKinstry, attempts to counter religious and political hostility in his rural Antrim community by uniting Catholics and Protestants in a farming co-operative.

---

82 Padraic Colum, quoted in Bell, 24. Colum later revised his opinion of the play, admitting “I had judged ‘The Enthusiast’ from a wrong standpoint. It is a piece of social satire, and the weariness of the idealist is satirized as much as the prejudice of his neighbors.” Quoted in Levitas, 110-111.

83 de Paor (Power), 7.

84 de Paor (Power), 5, 10.

85 McNulty, *The Ulster Literary Theatre and the Northern Revival* 127. McNulty offers one of the few – and the most recent – discussions of Purcell’s play. He reads the play as a response to the ruralism of the Abbey Theatre, addressing Purcell’s dramatic engagement with sectarian tensions in the North. While I
attempts to effect local reform fail when the meeting he has arranged to discuss the project collapses into sectarian conflict, leaving him both disillusioned and defeated. The sound of a distant Lambeg drum – the instrument of the Orange Order – closes the play and quashes any remaining optimism he had for making a second attempt to organize his village. The play presents the story of communal life in Northern Ireland in the context of the period’s progressive politics: as the previous chapter addressed, Sir Horace Plunkett’s Irish Agricultural Organization Society (I.A.O.S.) advocated agricultural reform as a means of developing Ireland’s rural economy and thereby ensuring its stability and autonomy. By forming co-operative societies of small farmers, the movement intended to educate its members, teach them improved farming techniques, introduce new technologies, and improve rural life. James’s ambition in the play was to enact the same type of reform closer to home.

Purcell’s decision to set his play in a rural Northern community, and to engage both politics in Ulster and broader agricultural reform, established the region and its residents as viable dramatic material for the Belfast theatre. The Enthusiast in fact laid the groundwork for a regional drama specific to the North that represented contemporary Ulster on stage for the first time. This was a drama modeled on the Abbey’s peasant

---

86 It is worth noting that Purcell opted to omit the sound of the Lambeg drum from the play’s performance in Belfast, where its political significance would have been both clearer and potentially inflammatory. As the editorial in the third (Beltaine, May 1905) issue of Ulad states: “We may explain that it is not worth the while of a member of the Ulster Literary Theatre to enter the arena on behalf of one kind of partisanship as against another in Ulster. We are all agreed, no matter what our individual opinions and sentiments may happen to be…that so far as the Theatre and this magazine are concerned, there shall be nothing of that sort. […] The drum is merely a symbol, and a symbol of one of the nuisances of Irish public life. And any nuisance of Irish public life Lewis Purcell rightly considers matter for satire” (2).

comedies – even anticipating Synge’s *Playboy*, which would premiere two years later, in 1907 – but characterized by a Northern affect that was at once regionally specific and satirical. Both features are evident from the first lines spoken in the play by James’s Aunt Marget, who laments her nephew’s sartorial transformation from a country boy to a city boy, following his stay in Belfast:

AUNT: He’s a bigger swell every time he comes hame. Last year it wuz a white indiarubber tap coat. This time it’s yella boots. But maybe he’ll be wantin’ a drap mair tay. (29)

James’s altered appearance, as his family will soon discover, corresponds to a new and foreign outlook, as he explains to his father and brother that his “head’s full of a great idea” (31). The unfamiliar clothing used to signal James’s outsider status, and the threat of intellectual pursuits – symbolized by the books – versus the practical work of farming in an agricultural community were both familiar tropes common to peasant plays in Dublin. Even Purcell’s use of a distinctive regional dialectic – a marked shift from what Ben Levitas describes as the stylized “Synge-song” of the Abbey’s peasant plays – was not uncommon in itself, although it was noteworthy for introducing both an element of humor and for appealing directly to a home audience.88 The naturalistic Northern

---

88 Levitas, 168. Purcell’s use of the Ulster dialect in *The Enthusiast* – in effect, translating the national form of the peasant play into its regional variant – is also in line with Lady Gregory’s own efforts at translation for the Abbey Theatre. Beginning in 1905, Lady Gregory selected four plays by Moliere to translate from French into “Kiltartanese” for performance at the Abbey. “We wanted to put on some of Moliere’s plays. They seemed akin to our own,” she explained in *Our Irish Theatre* (1913). “But when one translation after another was tried, it did not seem to carry, to ‘go across the footlights.’ So I tried putting one into our own Kiltartan dialect, *The Doctor In Spite of Himself*, and it went very well. I went on, therefore, and translated *Scapin* and *The Miser.*” Her decision to use the Kiltartan dialect derived both from her desire to make the plays of a piece with the standard Abbey fare, as well as from her personal interest in native folklore. By choosing to stage a foreign classic in non-standard English, Gregory declared not only the value and vitality of an indigenous dialect, but also the legitimacy of Hiberno-English speakers as dramatic characters. Her use of dialect was thus both a political and an aesthetic choice. On another level, in featuring native characters and a native idiom, Gregory encouraged the performance of folk comedy to complement Yeats’s lyric plays, elevating folk drama to the same artistic plane as the more serious, less vernacular work featured on the Abbey stage. For a discussion of these translations, see Mary Fitzgerald, “Four French Comedies: Lady Gregory’s Translations of Moliere,” in *Ann Saddlemeyer and*
dialogue resonated with local audiences, who had never before seen the Ulster peasantry represented on the stage. Evaluating the play years later, David Kennedy observed that its success “was probably due to the fact that it broke away from the stilted rhetoric of the theatre of the time and used the homely Ulster speech. It was the first breath of naturalism in the Ulster theatre. It was also a frank acknowledgement of the limitations of the Ulsterman as an actor. If he could not rant and soliloquize as to the manner born then let him be his own taciturn self.”

Given that the play premiered alongside Joseph Campbell’s *The Little Cowherd of Slainge* – a prose retelling of a dramatic legend, written in a lyrical style that many Northern theatregoers found inaccessible or flat – the novelty and yet familiarity of Purcell’s characters were all the more apparent. Cathal O’Shannon, the writer and journalist, described his excitement after seeing the play’s second performance at the Toome Feis in County Antrim in 1905: “[W]hat really did impress me was The Enthusiast,” he recalled years later, “because for the first time I saw the kind of people that I knew and loved among in Co. Antrim and Co. Derry were there alive and talking as they talked at home.” Purcell’s use of familiar Ulster characters and speech both legitimized the Northern peasantry as *dramatis personae* and appealed to local audiences comprised of farmers and fisherman, who had responded with bewilderment to Yeats’s *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* in 1902, the Belfast theatre’s opening season. As Gerald MacNamara explained, Northern audiences “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.”\textsuperscript{91} Some theatregoers mistook the performance for a “rather funny peasant play.”\textsuperscript{92} 

\textit{The Enthusiast}, in contrast, was relatable and vital for a Northern audience, who recognized both the political and domestic dynamics at work in the play.

Of course, one reason the audience may have recognized these dynamics was because the play is, in many ways, a typical “kitchen comedy,” concerning a family living in a small rural village and with the action occurring entirely in the domestic space of the McKinstry cottage. Despite its surface differences, the play relies on a familiar form, and theatre audiences in Belfast and Dublin alike would have recognized the set-up and anticipated a play of comical misunderstanding, likely resolving in marriage. In an early scene, for instance, both Aunt Marget and Minnie, James’s sweetheart, mistake his distracted manner for unfaithfulness. “Ah, I see how it is,” Minnie exclaims angrily, when James explains that he can’t accompany her to a local picnic party because his “mind is full of good work” that needs pursuing. “There is someone else; some Belfast girl” (29), Minnie surmises. The play’s conceit is a familiar one, it seems, as James vainly attempts to protest and to explain the cause of his distraction, which in fact has nothing to do with Belfast girls and – as his Aunt suspects – more to do with the books he has been reading.

It is not until the next scene, when the focus shifts to James’s co-operative schemes for the village, that the play’s true conflict – and the objects of Purcell’s satire – become clear. As the audience soon discovers, the play describes neither a romantic nor a land dispute, as was common in other examples of the genre, but instead the

\textsuperscript{91} Quoted in Bell, 4.
\textsuperscript{92} Rutherford Mayne, quoted in Bell, 18.
sectarianism of a divided community and the protagonist’s failed attempts to bridge religious and political rifts – subjects that Purcell critiques in equal measure. James struggles to explain his ideas for communal reform to his father, William John McKinstry, and brother, Sam, both of whom have just returned from the market, but his newfound ideology is bewildering at best to his relatives:

FATHER: Jimmie, there’s something on your mind, you mostly have a lot to talk about when you come home.
JAMES: *rousing himself* And I have a lot to talk about this time also.
FATHER: A mission?
SAM: Sure, Jimmie, you’re not turned religious, are you?
JAMES: Not at all, not at all. My head’s full of a great idea.
FATHER: Full o’ what?
JAMES: A great idea. I want to explain it to you. I have been reading and thinking a lot lately about the old village communities and wondering what would have been the logical outcome of that system in the present day. It was simply a sort of co-operation. And I believe that the same principle could be applied with great advantage. To everybody.

FATHER: Co-operation you say?
SAM: What’s it about, Jamie?
JAMES: You know how bad farming is?
FATHER: Sowl, an’ I do that!
JAMES: As it is at present, everyone is working blindly for himself. Everyone has more work to do than he can accomplish if he wishes to get the best results from his land. Suppose now that a dozen farmers agreed to combine their farms and work them on a large scale, as they do, for instance, in America. You would find that, with properly organized labour, it could be made to pay with one half the sum of the work that is expended on the separate dozen farms. Do you follow me?

_During the foregoing speech Rab [the servant man] comes in and stands listening curiously until the end. Then he sits down on a chair beside table._

FATHER: Weel – I – it’s a quare notion. _Thinks a moment. Then, suddenly to Rab_ Did yet gie the horses their mash Rab? (31)

James’s enthusiasm is deflated when his father fails to appreciate the logic of co-operative reform and instead turns his attention abruptly to the more pressing matter of
feeding his horses. Yet both father and son are the objects of Purcell’s satire – the one unable to grasp an agricultural scheme that might benefit him, and the other, out of touch with the concerns and demands of the very industry he seeks to reform. The Ulster dialect and Purcell’s frank discussion of the realities of rural life – encompassing the political dynamics of the region – are both the substance of his social realism and the source of the play’s humor. Ulster’s economic and political circumstances thus become material for the playwright, who is able to criticize the present conditions of his society with relative impunity.

In fact, Northern politics are at the center of the play’s most humorous scenes, as when Sam and Rab return from the meeting James has organized to report to Aunt Marget on its failure. Tensions between Home Rulers and Unionists – which, in the play, results in mild violence – become dramatic and humorous fodder for Purcell, not a subject to be avoided in the interest of remaining apolitical or inoffensive. Confirming Aunt Marget’s assumption that James’s plans will fail, Rab amusedly recounts the events as “a gran’ meetin’. I never seen a better figh.”

RAB: Oh aye – Weel, as I say, I wasn’t botherin’ my heed much, at the start, but as far as I min, about half a dozen got up in turns an’ said as it might be good things and might be not, they had no knowins. Then Andy Moore got up – no’ young Andy, the oul’ man – an’ he said they were going’ till upset the Crown and Constitution. An at the wind up he axed James if he could gie scripture for it, and Jamie as much as said he cudn’t. Then somebody shouted ‘Socialism,’ and Ned Graham – he wuz drunk – he shouted it was a Fenian thing, an’ he kep’ shoutin’ that the whole time. An sez I to myself, this is going’ to be the warm meetin’. (33)

The sectarian tensions of the community also enter the domestic space of the play, as Rab and Sam relate the scene in the cottage kitchen and William James McKinstry reprimands
his son for disgracing the family in front of the neighbors. James’s naiveté and idealism erode in the face of his father’s anger and in the wake of his own disappointment:

**FATHER:** holding up his hand for silence  Boy, no tryin’ to make excuses! The’s no excuse for ye! I’m disgraced! They’ll think I wuz tryin’ to help ye wi’ your nonsense! Rising angrily  Luk here, why the divil did ye not tell me afore whut kind of thing it wuz? How wuz I to know ye were goin’ to bring down the whole country side on the top o’ my heed? In disgust  You’re a boy!

**JAMES:** But, Father, I did. I tried to tell you a dozen times.

**FATHER:** Thried? Thried, did ye? Why did ye’ no’ tell it to me in plain language? How wuz I to make sense of your high-falutin’ talk? Solemnly  Listen to me, Jamie; if ye try ony mair o’ this lunatic work I’ll wash my han’s of’ ye’, I wull.

**JAMES:** laughing cheerfully  Have no fears of that, Father. There will be no more of it. I have learned my lesson. (34)

The misunderstanding between father and son mirrors the political divisions and lack of communication that prevail in the wider community of the rural Antrim village. James and his father are defined in relation to each other and to their local society: William McKinstry’s concerns are practical and focused on his own standing within the town; and James has misunderstood his father’s position as both farmer and village resident, and has failed to anticipate the likely outcome of his reform efforts in a skeptical and highly politicized community. The characters’ actions are neither symbolic nor romanticized. Instead, they reflect contemporary concerns, places and people largely unrepresented in Dublin’s dramatic movement.

**V. Satire as Strategy**

To put an even finer point on the differences between Purcell’s play and Dublin-based drama of the same type, we might compare his work to Lady Gregory’s *The Rising of the Moon* (1907), which likewise presents characters whose political sympathies are opposed. It is perhaps to Gregory, in fact, that Purcell owes his greatest debt. Her
comedies for the Abbey, as Mary Lowe-Evans has argued, interrogated the “polemic of identity construction,” presenting audiences with “an opportunity to challenge, resist, or collude with the formation of [a national] character.” In a similar way, Purcell’s play exaggerates the divisions within Ulster, blowing them up to comic proportions in order to highlight cultural relations between nationalism and Unionism and between North and South. In other words, his satire exposes not only the limitations of national identity as imagined by the rhetoric of cultural nationalism, but also the pitfalls of a regionalism characterized by sectarianism and violence. Moreover, Purcell and Gregory also shared parallel positions within their societies as figures both within and without the dominant discourse: Purcell’s role as cultural nationalist in Ulster and Lady Gregory’s status as the only woman in a company of men provided each dramatist with a unique dual perspective. As McNulty observes, this duality is “important to how parody works, its very etymology revealing an operation that is ‘multi-directional.’” The inside/outside position they occupied granted both Purcell and Gregory the critical distance necessary to challenge longstanding divisions and assumptions at the heart of identity politics.

Where Purcell differed from Gregory and the Abbey’s drama more generally is in his willingness to address the dynamics and complexities of Northern society as part of a broader critique of the assumptions underlying cultural nationalism’s version of Irishness. Gregory’s one-act play, like The Enthusiast, addresses political differences in a humorous way, but without the double-edged satire with which Purcell treats the same subject. The Rising of the Moon takes its title from a popular nationalist ballad, evocative for both the

94 McNulty, The Ulster Literary Theatre and the Northern Revival 141.
audience and for one of the play’s central characters, a police sergeant charged with tracking and capturing a Fenian fugitive. The play dramatizes the Sergeant’s split loyalty, as he struggles to reconcile his professional duty as a member of the Royal Irish Constabulary with his nationalist sympathies, which are stirred by the fugitive’s rendition of the ballad towards the play’s end. As Gregory explained, “The play was considered offensive to some extreme Nationalists before it was acted, because it showed the police in too favorable a light, and a Unionist paper attacked it after it was acted because the policeman was represented ‘as a coward and a traitor’….”

Despite these minor objections, the play was in fact not terribly controversial, owing in part to its diplomatic resolution. Gregory is careful throughout to toe the line between overt nationalism and a kind of benign Unionism, both of which are embodied by the Sergeant. The Sergeant’s political ambivalence is evident from the beginning of the play, as he expresses something akin to admiration for the fugitive to his fellow officers. Reading a description of the Fenian off of the wanted posters, he observes:

SERGEANT: [reading it]. Dark hair-dark eyes, smooth face, height five feet five – there’s not much to take hold of in that. It’s a pity I had no chance of seeing him before he broke out of gaol. They say he’s a wonder, that it’s he makes all the plans for the whole organization. There isn’t another man in Ireland would have broken gaol the way he did. He must have some friends among the gaolers.

POLICEMAN B: A hundred pounds is little enough for the Government to offer for him. You may be sure any man in the force that takes him will get promotion.

SERGEANT: I’ll mind this place myself. I wouldn’t wonder at all if he came this way. He might come slipping along there [points to side of quay], and his friends might be waiting for him there [points down steps], and once he got away it’s little chance we’d have of finding him; it’s maybe under a load of kelp he’d be in a fishing boat, and not one to help a married man that wants it to the reward.

POLICEMAN X: And if we get him itself, nothing but abuse on our heads for it from the people, and maybe from our own relations.

SERGEANT: Well, we have to do our duty in the force. Haven’t we the whole country depending on us to keep law and order? It’s those that are down would be up and those that are up would be down, if it wasn’t for us. Well, hurry on, you have plenty of other places to placard yet, and come back here then to me. You can take the lantern. Don’t be too long now. It’s very lonesome here with nothing but the moon.6

The Sergeant reiterates the same uncertain commitment to the duties of his job later in the play, in conversation with the fugitive, who has appeared in the guise of a poor ballad-singer and has offered to keep watch with the Sergeant on the dock. “Indeed it’s a hard thing to be in the force, out at night and no thanks for it, for all the danger we’re in,” he explains. “And it’s little we get but abuse from the people, and no choice but to obey our orders, and never asked when a man is sent into danger, if you are a married man with a family” (39-40). The two men pass the time in conversation, with the fugitive commenting on the “queer world” in which the Sergeant might have easily become a rebel himself. And indeed, the Sergeant seems to assume the role at the play’s end, when he allows the fugitive to escape. “You won’t betray me…the friend of Granuaile” (45), proclaims the fugitive, trusting in the Sergeant’s shift in loyalties. Unlike in Purcell’s play, where the characters’ political allegiances are unwavering and a source of conflict, the divide between the two men in Gregory’s play is bridged by a shared national culture. The fugitive’s singing of “The Rising of the Moon” is enough to temporarily unite the two men, erasing the differences that, in The Enthusiast, resulted in violence. Although Gregory is willing to acknowledge the tension between political factions, she ultimately shies away from the realities of these divisions within Irish society. Purcell’s play shares

6 Lady Isabella August Gregory, Spreading the News, The Rising of the Moon (Dublin: Maunsel & Do., Ltd., 1907), 34-35. All further quotations are from this source.
thus with Gregory’s its theme and its humor, but it goes further in addressing sectarianism and its consequences for Ulster.

The differences between the two playwrights is brought further into focus by comparing *The Enthusiast* to one of Lady Gregory’s rural comedies, *Hyacinth Halvey* (1906), which interrogates, in Lowe-Evans’s words, “the burden of respectability, or ‘appropriate’ patriotic behavior” on Irish citizens.97 Both plays satirize the construction of identity and the inflated rhetoric of nationalism, and both rely on humor to neutralize potentially sensitive subjects, but Purcell’s play again is far more cynical, this time in exploring the dynamics of identity formation. *Hyacinth Halvey* describes the title character’s arrival to the village of Cloon, where he is to serve as the new Sub-Sanitary Inspector, having attained the post by providing “three pounds” of letters testifying to his character. The glowing testimonials soon become a burden, when Hyacinth finds himself constrained by his upstanding reputation. As the Sergeant explains to him, sorting through the recommendations, “You are a newcomer – your example would carry weight – you must stand up as a living proof of the beneficial effect of a high character, moral fiber, temperance – there is something about it here I am sure –”98 The remainder of the play concerns Hyacinth’s unsuccessful attempts to discredit his own reputation and the townspeople’s refusal to recognize the young man’s flaws.

In their blind desire for a village hero, the citizens of Cloon become the target of Gregory’s satire. At first, they seem to fall victim to the numerous and persuasive testimonials describing Hyacinth’s character. The Sergeant catalogues the most flattering of the endorsements early in the play, which include testaments to Hyacinth as a

97 Lowe-Evans, 51.
“splendid exponent of the purity of the race” and a “champion of every cause that can legitimately benefit his fellow creatures” (9-10). As Lowe-Evans observes, the litany satirizes the overblown discourse of cultural nationalism and its emphasis on fashioning a respectable Irish national character. Yet Gregory is also poking fun at a community that perhaps knowingly colludes in the construction of Hyacinth Halvey’s faultless reputation. Despite the protagonist’s attempts to perform an alternative, less commendable identity, the Cloon villagers insist on Hyacinth’s role as “an example and a blessing to the whole of the town” (51-52). The identity they construct for Hyacinth is in keeping with the nationalist ideal of Irish citizenhood, and the play thus exposes the burden of sustaining such a character. In contrast, Purcell’s play presents the opposite: an individual attempting to persuade his community to effectively adopt a new collective identity as an agricultural co-operative – an identity, incidentally, more in line with Irish nationalism’s vision of rural Ireland. James’s village, however, fails to make the change, instead falling back into factionalism and violence, the very traits that largely ensured Ulster’s exclusion from the national narrative of the Revival.

Many reviewers interpreted the ending of *The Enthusiast* as pessimistic, and indeed, Purcell is far less hopeful than either Gregory or Milligan in addressing regional diversity and the possibility of reform. The play’s ending might be read as an accurate portrayal of social conditions in the North and the likely outcome of an idealist’s ill-considered plans to unite his divided community in the name of economic reform. This kind of unflinching representation diverges widely from the peasant plays of the Southern Revival in its willingness to exchange the “‘remote, spiritual, and ideal’” of Yeats’s
It is possible, too, that Milligan’s more optimistic embrace of diversity relative to Purcell signaled her hesitation to fully proclaim Ulster’s differences – to assert a regional identity, with all that it entailed – for fear of being considered not “Irish” enough. Yet the same could be said of Purcell’s adaptation of familiar dramatic forms and conventions for the Belfast theatre; this decision, too, suggests an anxiety about marking out too much difference – about calling attention to the fragmentation and dissension so often associated with Ulster. While both Northerners sought to harness the energy of the Southern Revival, it seems both were also wary of making too strong an assertion of Northern regionalism.

Purcell’s play can thus be read in two ways: as an answer to the Abbey’s drama, which – as northern dramatists saw it – reduced Irishness to the rural west and its peasantry, and overwrote the complexities of history and identity shaping northern cultural nationalism; and as imitative of the forms and subjects associated with the southern theatre. The play indeed reveals the influence of a realist tradition, yet it is one made different from the realism of the Abbey in both the playwright’s choice of setting and in his treatment of sensitive political and social concerns specific to the North. We might extend this argument to the play’s claims to represent Ulster. On the one hand, The Enthusiast performs regionalism as an answer to a cultural nationalist narrative that defined Irishness in exclusive terms, limiting national belonging to those regions and citizens that could be incorporated easily into the symbolic space of the nation, which was itself grounded in an imagined rural West. By insisting on regional difference, Purcell and the Ulster Literary Theatre did not so much bypass the national as they did

seek to reimagine this space in more inclusive terms. Yet, on the other hand, the performance of a regional identity in *The Enthusiast* is essentially only on the surface: the core of the play is in line with the Abbey Theatre’s subjects and themes, despite the Ulster dialect and setting. This results in a kind of flattened out or neutral regionalism – one made safe for nationalist audiences outside the North. Interpreted in this way, Purcell’s efforts are at least partly consistent with the Revival in the South, which likewise glossed over inassimilable elements in its construction of Irishness.

Yet in highlighting the shortcoming of both nationalist ideology and Ulster society, the play succeeds in raising questions about how regional identity is performed or effaced, and for what particular ends. On one level, the drama of the Ulster Literary theatre exposed, in Mary Trotter’s words, the “intranational debates about culture and identity being invented and enacted on Ireland’s nationalist stages.”\(^{100}\) Northern plays critiqued the workings of cultural nationalism, specifically the tendency on the part of revivalist writers to exclude and elide regional differences in imagining a uniform Irish nation; such work revealed Irishness instead to be a compound of regional identities. On another level, plays like Purcell’s intended – to borrow Joyce’s metaphor – to serve as the looking glass for Ulster’s citizens, bringing to light the divisions within Northern society that thwarted Northern nationalists’ attempts to participate in the wider Revival. Satire allowed Purcell and other Northern dramatists like Rutherford Mayne and Gerald MacNamara to address these sensitive political issues and questions of identity without alienating their audiences. Milligan’s earnestness in *The Shan Van Vocht* did not translate to the Ulster stage, although both she and Purcell aimed to challenge an entire

---

culture’s way of understanding its politics and history. Together, these two contributors to the Northern Revival raise questions about how the region is metaphorically and spatially constructed, and how regional identity itself is inscribed in the material artifacts and dramatic performances of the North. Considering this identity as it plays out differently in *The Shan Van Vocht* and in Purcell’s play introduces alternative narratives of the nation to challenge and complement the familiar Revival narrative, and it highlights the complex negotiations Northern artists undertook to create a space for Ulster in Ireland’s national community.

On January 31, 1914, William Butler Yeats embarked on a two-month lecture tour of the United States. It was his third visit to the country, following promotional tours in 1903-04 and 1911 as a spokesman for the Irish Literary Revival and the Abbey Theatre. Without the controversy and spectacle of the Irish Players, the third tour received less coverage in the American press than had the previous two, but the visit was nonetheless significant for Yeats, both personally and professionally. Where earlier tours had focused on the theatre and Irish drama, emphasizing Yeats’s role as a leader of the Irish Literary Revival, the poet’s revised lectures for the third tour gave greater attention to trends in modern poetry, his own artistic development, and the importance of a national literature – questions that were central to the writing of his 1914 collection, Responsibilities. In particular, Yeats seemed keen to present himself as a poet-in-transition – a former traditionalist in the act of modernizing – and as the embodiment of a link between his Victorian predecessors and his modernist contemporaries. Days before departing for the United States, for instance, Yeats described himself and Ezra Pound – his friend and one-time secretary – as representing “a school, he at one end of the stocking and I at the other, a very remote antithesis.”¹ Leaving behind the influences of his past and identifying instead with a younger generation of artists, the Irish poet intended to claim his place in a “live tradition,” even as he paid homage to his artistic roots.²

¹ Quoted in R. F. Foster, W. B. Yeats: A Life, Vol. 1, The Apprentice Mage (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 510. The occasion was a dinner on January 18, 1914 that Pound had arranged to honor the poet Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. Yeats’s comments, in response to Blunt’s brief recollection of his own poetic development, anticipate the Irish poet’s later efforts to describe the change in his poetic style. “If I take up today some of the things that interested me in the past,” he explains, “I find that I can no longer use them. They bore me. Every year some part of my poetic machinery suddenly becomes of no use.”

And the tour did solidify both Yeats’s reputation and his relevancy: it was during his visit to Chicago in March 1914, for instance, that he was awarded *Poetry* magazine’s First Guarantor’s Prize at a banquet held in his honor. The prize purportedly recognized Yeats as a modern poet and affirmed both his centrality to twentieth-century poetry and his influence on an emerging modernist poetics in America. Yet the decision to award Yeats the prize had been a vexed one, marking a significant disagreement between Harriet Monroe, the founder-editor of *Poetry*, and Pound, the magazine’s foreign correspondent. Where Pound was eager to recognize his friend’s recent work and to harness Yeats’s celebrity for the new publication, Monroe felt the choice was “unadventurous,” preferring instead to award the prize to local Midwestern poet and newcomer Vachel Lindsay.³ Praising “the young Illinois troubadour” for capturing “an authentic strain” of Chicago in his poetry, Monroe was keen to celebrate what she identified as “the cosmopolitan aspects of such racily local art as Mr. Lindsay’s.”⁴ In contrast, Pound dismissed Lindsay’s poetry as juvenile, insubstantial, and provincial as compared to Yeats’s work, casting Monroe’s regionalism in opposition to an international modernism. Pound’s disagreement with the editor points to important differences, not only between the two figures’ opinions of Yeats, but more generally, between their definitions of modern poetry. In their argument over the First Guarantor’s Prize, Yeats assumed the role of both Ireland’s national poet and exemplary international modernist, ultimately occupying a kind of middle ground between the two poles.

---

³ Ibid.
This chapter considers how the poet and the wider Revival were interpreted, packaged and reimagined in the United States. I argue that these processes come into clearest focus in the discursive statements of Monroe and Pound, many of which were published in *Poetry* magazine. Yeats’s appearance in the magazine in fact highlights a tension within *Poetry* between a kind of revivalist logic that valued regional writing and an impulse towards a more cosmopolitan, international modernism. The magazine was founded only two years before Yeats’s third American lecture tour and the publication of *Responsibilities*, the collection generally seen as marking the poet’s first significant steps towards the style and themes of his later verse. *Poetry* was not the only little magazine that published Yeats’s work, but perhaps owing to Pound’s influence, the periodical had an especially close relationship with the poet, featuring most of the poems of *Responsibilities* in its early issues. Importantly, Yeats’s appearance in the magazine coincided with the publication’s early efforts to define an emerging modernist poetics in the United States. Working collectively with other modernist magazines, *Poetry* aimed to provide an outlet for new poets and to shape public taste by introducing readers to experimental verse. The magazine positioned Yeats as a leading figure of the modern poetry movement, using him to create what Alan Golding describes as a “transatlantic axis for modernism”: publishing poets like Yeats alongside native, often unknown writers allowed the magazine to assert its internationalism and to mediate between the avant-garde and more mainstream verse. Yet reading Yeats and the wider Revival in the context of *Poetry* also reveals a version of revivalism operating within the magazine that has been overlooked in scholarship emphasizing the publication’s cosmopolitanism and

---

its status as an iconic little magazine. In fact, as I will argue, *Poetry* demonstrated a provocative engagement with regional writing, featuring a number of local or regional poets and devoting special issues to specific regional and ethnic groups. Examining the magazine’s, and particularly Monroe’s, regionalism thus allows me to tease apart the complex and interesting ways that the Irish Revival had an afterlife in this important modernist publication.

In addition, reading Yeats in this context focalized the differences between *Poetry*’s editor and its foreign correspondent, providing us with a more nuanced picture of Monroe and Pound’s professional relationship. Although much of the scholarship on *Poetry* magazine emphasizes the fruitful yet fraught rapport between these two figures, few scholars have addressed in a sustained way the differences between Monroe and Pound’s conceptualizations of both the magazine and modern poetry generally. Both figures were eager to position American poetry in an international context – forging links between native writers and their foreign and expatriate counterparts – yet Pound’s preferences often fell in favor of more cosmopolitan artists, including many of his acquaintances abroad. Monroe, meanwhile, aimed to encourage lesser-known and regional poets, and she resisted Pound’s efforts to use *Poetry* as a vehicle for his own interests and associates. Considering the role Yeats played (or was made to play) in the debate over the magazine’s First Guarantor’s Prize illuminates both Monroe and Pound’s sometimes-divergent opinions on modern poetry and their conflicting ambitions for the magazine. In fact, as I will address in what follows, Monroe’s editorial objectives and practices were largely in line with the principles of the Irish Revival – a quality that
emerges by bringing the discourse of revivalism to bear on her early efforts to define *Poetry* for its readers and contributors.

My focus in this chapter lays the groundwork for exploring Yeats’s reception among a younger generation of American poets, many of whom were associated with *Poetry* and are now recognized as key figures in twentieth-century poetry. Several studies have addressed Yeats’s relationship to American poetry, often focusing on the Irish poet’s influence on specific writers. Terence Diggory (1983) and Stephen Matthews (2000), for instance, both identify Yeats as – in Matthew’s words – an “originating presence” in modern American verse, examining his impact on younger generations of poets in the United States.⁶ For her part, Longley uses Yeats to challenge “modernist constructions of modernist poetry,” arguing that Yeats has been misrepresented as either preceding modernism or as somehow divergent from accepted definitions of the field.⁷ Her work highlights, in particular, the cross-cultural dialogue between Ireland and the United States, of which Yeats’s poetry was a vital part. What these studies collectively affirm is the decisive role Yeats played in shaping Anglo-American modernism, particularly for poets who recognized, shared and sought to emulate his relationship with Ireland’s cultural inheritance and tradition.

But what has gone largely unaddressed is how Yeats’s example also influenced modernism’s other contributors, including editor Monroe. By attempting to mediate between modernism and Irish revivalism for an American audience, and by promoting a

---


⁷ Edna Longley, “‘Why Should Men’s Heads Ache?:’ Yeats and American Modernism,” in Steve Clark and Mark Ford (eds.), *Something We Have That They Don’t: British and American Poetic Relations Since 1925* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1925), 32.
kind of regionalism within Poetry that valued regional poets like Vachel Lindsay, Carl Sandburg and Edgar Lee Masters, Monroe “nourished other forms of modernism besides that associated with the Men of 1914.” Generalized definitions of regionalism and modernism obscure significant areas of overlap between the two movements, including the tendency in both kinds of writing to register the effects of modernity. At the time of Poetry’s founding, many writers – including Pound – assumed regional writing to be synonymous with “local-color” fiction, a label meant to designate substandard quality and the deliberate misrepresentation of a rural region or its population for urban audiences. Yet Monroe, in particular, demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between modern poetry and place in ways that link her thinking to the tenets and practices of the Irish Revival. Revisiting her early ambitions for Poetry and her debates with Pound in light of the tensions Yeats embodied on his third lecture tour – between revivalism and international modernism, the traditional and the modern, the regional and the international – reveals an overlooked strand of regionalism in both the magazine and modern American poetry more broadly. The work that follows thus explores a particular instance of the wider Revival’s impact outside of Ireland, and the role Yeats played in illuminating tensions and debates over the regional within an emerging American modernism.

I. “Are you for American Poetry or for Poetry[?]”: The Beginnings of Poetry Magazine

Several studies on modernist print culture have addressed Poetry, which remains one of the best known and most successful little magazines to emerge in the period. The

publication was at the forefront of the modern movement in poetry in the United States, reflecting the period’s debates on verse libre, Imagism, the importance of tradition, and the value of regional writing. Debuting in October 1912, it quickly set the standards for who and what mattered in the field of modern verse, publishing nearly all of the major modernist poets alongside less familiar names, and providing a valuable discursive space for American and European artists engaged in the making of modernism. These feats were largely a consequence of Monroe’s original vision for the magazine and of the subsequent editorial decisions she made. Recent work by Helen Carr, John Timberman Newcomb, Jayne E. Marek and Ann Massa has underscored both Monroe’s significant contribution to the new movement in poetry and the vital role she played in fostering multiple modernisms. As Carr rightly observes, Monroe’s achievements as founder and editor of Poetry have often been eclipsed by Pound’s contributions to the publication – a consequence, in part, of Pound’s own hand in writing the familiar story of modernism. Particularly in his letters, Pound tended to exaggerate his disputes with the editor, describing Monroe as timid, misguided, and out of touch with current trends in poetry, and regularly taking credit for the magazine’s successes. Although his comments were often motivated by his frustrations with Monroe when her editorial preferences deviated from his own, his remarks indicate significant differences between the two figures’


10 Carr, 42.
ambitions for the magazine. Where Pound advocated a more aggressive avant-gardism, Monroe instead tended to be more democratic in her tastes.  

Like other little magazine editors, Monroe envisioned her publication as a forum for poets and readers to converse and to share work, believing that such dialogue would help to create an audience for poetry in America. Her inspiration for the magazine came to her following a trip to China, during which she was struck by the “arresting power” of Eastern art, and the “purity of line and exact rightness of composition in the interpretation (not imitation) of nature and of the actualities and imaginings of humanity.” Such art, she explained, “served as a measuring rod” against which much of Western art appeared to her “blatant and melodramatic,” “absurd,” “over-emphatic and unrefined.” Seeking to cultivate in America some of the subtlety and beauty she had observed abroad, and frustrated by the lack of public support for poetry in the United States, Monroe resolved to create a magazine for the poets, where the art form might “plead its cause with a planned and efficient program of propaganda.” In an editorial in the inaugural issue entitled “The Motive of the Magazine,” the editor elaborated on her reasons for founding the publication:

Poetry alone, of all the fine arts, has been left to shift for herself in a world unaware of its immediate and desperate need of her, a world whose great deeds, whose triumphs over matter, over the wilderness, over racial enmities and distances, require her ever-living voice to give them glory and glamour. . . .

Poetry has been left to herself and blamed for inefficiency, a process as

---

11 This was a dynamic, incidentally, that echoed Yeats’s relationship with Lady Gregory.
unreasonable as blaming the desert for barrenness. This art, like every other, is not a miracle of direct creation, but a reciprocal relation between the artist and his public. The people must do their part if the poet is to tell their story to the future; they must cultivate and irrigate the soil if the desert is to blossom as the rose.\textsuperscript{14}

The editorial positioned poetry within a dynamic and complex modernity, arguing for its place in the modern world and for the value of an art form that could reflect and give voice to a range of experiences. Monroe conceived of the magazine as a gallery or an exhibition space for poets, and she aspired to publish “some of the best work now being done” while also remaining open to new talent. “For years it had become increasingly evident that the present-day poets needed stirring up,” she argued.\textsuperscript{15} To combat an American indifference to poetry and to foster “a new vitality in the art,” she vowed to “search [new poets] out and assemble them, and find the necessary public for them” via her magazine.\textsuperscript{16} Her famous editorial policy promised to accept the best of the work submitted, regardless of its provenance:

\begin{quote}
The Open Door will be the policy of this magazine – may the great poet we are looking for never find it shut, or half-shut, against his ample genius! To this end the editors hope to keep free of entangling alliances with any single class or school. They desire to print the best English verse which is being written today, regardless of where, by whom, or under what theory of art it is written. Nor will the magazine promise to limit its editorial comments to one set of opinions.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{15} Harriet Monroe, \textit{A Poet's Life} 249.
\textsuperscript{16} Harriet Monroe, \textit{A Poet's Life} 250.
Without muzzles and braces this is manifestly impossible unless all the critical articles are written by one person.\textsuperscript{17}

The Open Door policy was one of \textit{Poetry}'s distinguishing features, setting the magazine apart from other little magazines that aligned themselves with specific movements or trends. The policy also facilitated a kind of regionalism in Monroe’s editorial approach, although this quality is routinely overlooked in accounts of \textit{Poetry} that highlight the publication’s cosmopolitanism. For Monroe, as for many writers of the Irish Revival, regionalism and cosmopolitanism were not mutually exclusive: the poetry she published in the magazine was judged on its aesthetic merits, regardless of its source. This democratic impulse lay at the root of the magazine’s relative catholicity, enabling Monroe to feature regional and traditional forms of modernisms that often were excluded from other such publications, and to celebrate native writing in the context of broader, indeed transatlantic artistic networks. She published work from up-and-coming and regional poets, for instance, alongside the poems of more established writers, defending the new but presenting it as part of a longer cultural tradition.\textsuperscript{18} Unlike many of her modernist contemporaries, in fact, Monroe celebrated an inherent connection between poetry and place, believing that modern art could be both the expression of a particular culture or region and still resonant in a global context. In keeping with the Open Door policy, she regularly encouraged poets to draw on subjects, symbols and themes from their local environments, recognizing the aesthetic and social potential of regional writing.

\textsuperscript{17} Harriet Monroe, “The Open Door,” \textit{Poetry} 1.2 (November 1912): 64.
\textsuperscript{18} Carr, 41-42 provides an extensive list of the poets featured in the magazine during Monroe’s tenure as editor.
As a consequence, we find in the magazine what Andrew Thacker describes as “a modernism that is not only deeply inflected by regional interests, but also one simultaneously engaged in dialogue with modernist cultural geographies from other regions of America, as well as with locations way beyond the borders of the United States and Canada.” 19 While Pound shared Monroe’s openness to new forms of modernist expression, and her desire to link American poetry to wider international networks, he criticized her editorial policy as too broad and often mistook her regionalism for provincialism. Monroe’s ambition to encourage novice American poets, for example, irritated Pound, who frequently expressed his desire to establish the magazine’s credibility – or, as he put it in an early exchange, “We must be taken seriously at once. We must be the voice not only for the U.S. but internationally.” 20 To achieve this, he argued, Poetry must be linked in readers’ minds with well-respected poets. Although Pound sympathized with Monroe’s desire to boost American poetry, in particular, he tended to mistake the editor’s openness to regional writing for provincialism. As he wrote in his first letter to Monroe, responding to the circular she sent to solicit poetry for the magazine’s early issues: “Are you for American Poetry or for Poetry[?] The latter is more important, but it is important that America should boost the former, provided it don’t mean a blindness to the art. The glory of any nation is to produce art that can be exported without disgrace to its origin.” 21

---

21 Ezra Pound, letter to Harriet Monroe (18 August 1912) in Parisi and Young, 30-32. Pound’s spelling and punctuation have been retained. Monroe’s circular emphasized, among other things, the artists’ responsibility in creating and sustaining a venue for their work. It began: “The success of this first
Like Monroe, Pound was keen to revitalize American poetry by placing it in a vibrant international context, a move that he felt would stimulate a poetic renaissance:

“Any agonizing that tends to hurry – what I believe in the end to be inevitable – our American Risorgimento, is dear to me,” he explained. “That awakening will make the Italian renaissance look like a tempest in a teapot. The force we have, & the impulse, but the guiding sense, the discrimination in applying the force, we must wait and strive for.”

Pound felt an acute responsibility, at the helm of the magazine, to teach the American poet to approach poetry as an art form, believing that this education would revitalize American verse. Yet he also envisioned a magazine with a decidedly internationalist thrust, one that would encourage and promote a cosmopolitan modernism over native or regional art. In his letters to the editor, he expressed his desire for Poetry to serve as an important outlet for the best work available – most of which, he argued, was being written outside of the United States. Appointing himself “Foreign Editor,” Pound set to work almost immediately after making his initial contact with Monroe, requesting poems from Yeats, Rabindranath Tagore and Richard Aldington.

American effort to encourage the production and appreciation of poetry, as the other arts are encouraged, by endowment, now depends on the poets.” It continued by listing three incentives the magazine was prepared to offer contributors: first, “a chance to be heard in their own place, without the limitations imposed by the popular magazine”; second, the opportunity “to print poems of greater length and of more intimate and serious character than the other magazines can afford to use”; and third, payment for poems. Monroe asked that poets submit their “best work,” and often included personal letters with the circulars that – in her words – “refer[ed] individually to the poet’s work or to something I had heard or felt about it.” Fortunately, several poets responded with interest and enthusiasm to her circular, and many of them submitted poems, both new and old, for inclusion in the early issues. Before long, Monroe had a backlog of work and had compiled an impressive roster of contributors. See also Monroe, A Poet’s Life 251-52.

Ezra Pound, letter to Harriet Monroe (18 August 1912) in Parisi and Young, 30-32.

Monroe proposed making Pound her “foreign correspondent,” but he quickly promoted himself to an editorial position. As he wrote to her in September 1912, “All right you can put me down as ‘foreign correspondent or foreign editor.’ if you like, and pay me whatever or whenever is convenient. […] Perhaps you had better send me some stationery and I’ll have my self and address added to the heading as ‘foreign editor’ or what ever I’m to be called…..” Quoted in Parisi and Young, 32.
addition, in his correspondence with Monroe, Pound wasted no time in sharing his editorial vision for the magazine:

My idea of our policy is this: we support American poets – preferably the young ones who have a serious determination to produce master-work. We import only such work as is better than that produced at home. The best foreign stuff, the stuff well above the mediocrity, or the experiments that seem serious and seriously & sanely directed toward the broadening and development of The Art of Poetry.

And “TO HELL WITH HARPER’S AND THE MAGAZINE TOUCH.”

The comments make clear a number of themes that would surface, both in Pound’s relationship with Monroe and in the magazine’s early attempts to set the parameters for what counted as modern poetry. Pound’s objective was to set new (implicitly international) standards for American poets, and to use Poetry as a venue for the particular poets he favored. Monroe, for her part, agreed on the importance of transnational dialogue, but also aspired to support American writing and to avoid privileging the European avant-garde – a decision that vexed Pound, who counted himself among that group’s most important members.

Pound’s portrayal of Monroe in his 1930 article “Small Magazines” further affirmed their differences, highlighting the tension between Pound’s ambition to use Poetry to cultivate poetic experimentation and Monroe’s desire to promote regional verse. The article is effectively a personal attack on Monroe veiled as an assessment of the modernist print landscape, but Pound’s polemical account of Poetry nonetheless gives us insight into his own ideas about what counted as material worth publishing. Declaring that a true little magazine should be unconstrained

24 Ezra Pound, letter to Harriet Monroe (September 1912) in Parisi and Young, 33.
25 As Carr indicates (57-60), Monroe was equally internationalist in her outlook, choosing to represent Bengali, Chinese, Native American, and American aboriginal traditions, among others, in the magazine.
“by considerations as to whether a given idea or a given trend in art will ‘git ads,’” he faults the magazine for failing to select verse on the basis of its intellectual merits as opposed to its “earning capacity.”"26 Reluctantly acknowledging that Poetry “served as a forum from 1912 to 1914, perhaps 1917” (692) he implies that its decline resulted from Monroe’s faulty standards. “Miss Monroe never pretended to adopt either a contemporary, European, or international criterion,” he writes. “Certain principles that Europe had accepted for eighty years have never penetrated her sanctum. It is possible that recognition of these ideas would have prematurely extinguished her magazine” (691). Claiming credit for Poetry’s publication of Robert Frost, Edgar Lee Masters, T. S. Eliot, H. D., Yeats, Richard Aldington, and others, Pound brusquely dismisses the publication as a “meal ticket” (692) and a “meritorious trade journal” (693).

As Robert Scholes has argued, “Pound’s modernism involved accepting without question his own work and the work of others he favored, and rejecting the work of those he looked upon with disfavor.”"27 His preference for European poets and his own friends and protégés often conflicted with Monroe’s more liberal and local tastes, and the two also diverged on the matter of the magazine’s function. Where Pound saw little magazines as creating a privileged space separate from the demands of the mass market – a forum for the exchange of intellectual ideas among a select few – Monroe imagined Poetry as an instrument in the reciprocal relationship between an artist and his or her reading public. She shared this perspective with revivalist writers, who similarly aimed to inspire a national audience via their prose, poetry and drama. As Paige Reynolds

---

observes in her study of the relationship between Irish writers and their audiences, revivalism could not risk “a radical cultural agenda that overtly alienated its consumers, who were imagined principally as citizens needing inspiration and motivation.”

Irish modernism, she argues, thus strategically challenged its audiences to educate and inspire them. In much the same way, I am suggesting, Monroe strove to create an audience for modern poetry in the United States where none had existed – a task that entailed discovering and promoting new poets, wherever they might be found. Unlike Pound, who often typified modernism’s antagonism towards its audience, Monroe sought to build a broad community of intelligent and receptive readers through the print medium, just as Irish writers had aspired – in a version of Yeats’s famous phrase – to transform the “mob” into a “people.”

The publication’s contents and Monroe’s editorial decisions were thus an ongoing source of tension between the two figures, with Pound often censuring both Monroe and associate editor Alice Corbin Henderson for their refusal to accept without question his aesthetic mandates and his choices for publication. Writing in frustration to Monroe in January 1913, Pound pleaded with her to see things from his perspective: “I wish I could make you see the standards I’m fighting for aren’t merely a caprice of my own but they are the standards of the few here who matter.” While Monroe was willing to publish work by novice and mainstream poets, as well as work by more recognized and respected names, Pound was insistent that Poetry establish itself as a “serious” publication both at home and abroad.

II. “the greatest of living poets”: Pound and Mr. Yeats

29 Ezra Pound, letter to Harriet Monroe (27 January 1913) in Parisi and Young, 57.
“Serious,” in fact, was a word that occurred with some frequency in Pound’s correspondence with Monroe relating to Yeats. The Irish poet’s name served as a byword for many of the qualities Pound hoped that Yeats’s contributions would impart to Poetry: credibility, importance, distinction – in short, a kind of celebrity. At the time of the magazine’s founding, Yeats’s status in America had been more or less secured by the success of his early work and by the popularity (and scandal) of the Abbey Theatre’s tours. American audiences and readers knew Yeats as a prestigious cultural leader, and Pound, in particular, intended for Monroe’s magazine to capitalize on its association with such a revered figure. Acting as a foreign liaison for Poetry, Pound secured new poems from Yeats for the magazine, enabling his friend to reach a wider, specifically American audience with his work, and ensuring a readership for Monroe’s new venture. Pound wrote to Monroe in October 1912 to inform her that he had secured “four (possibly five) lyrics from Mr. Yeats” and possibly “a longish-shortish narrative poem that he hasn’t yet finished.” Pound continues, “This ought to be enough to establish the fact (which I have mentioned before, to wit) that we are a serious international publication, to be ‘taken seriously’ by all the elect.”

Pound’s comments convey his ambitions for Poetry, specifically his idea that to be modern and “serious” meant to be international. As Alan Golding observes, Pound’s involvement with American little magazines was part of his attempt to negotiate between a mainstream modernism and a more aggressive European

---

30 Monroe wrote to Yeats a month before Poetry’s debut, requesting his support for her newfound magazine: “I trust that you may be interested in this project for the relief of the muse. It will be a great pleasure and honor if you are willing to testify to that interest by sending us a poem or a group of poems for early publication. Indeed, I can think of no contribution which would delight me more.” Quoted in Parisi and Young, 28.

avant-gardism. Both he and Monroe aspired to create a readership appreciative of poetry, but where Monroe imagined a general reader receptive to modernist experimentation, Pound more often envisioned a reader – in Joseph Kelly’s words – “eavesdropp[ing] on a conversation among a small group of writers.” Pound’s was an exclusive and highbrow audience, in other words, but one still large enough to sustain the publication. Given both Yeats’s reputation and his visibility in America in the years following Poetry’s founding, the Irish poet’s work was instrumental in attracting this “elect” readership.

There is significant work yet to be done on Yeats’s relationship to modernist print culture in the United States, particularly how his publication in American little magazines shaped his reputation and reception abroad. The poet’s involvement with the American press pre-dates his first visit to the country, yet he has never been the subject of a “reputation history,” as has James Joyce, for example. On a practical level, Yeats’s appearance in Poetry and his association with Pound and Monroe allowed him to forge relationships with others artists and intellectuals at the forefront of the modern movement in poetry – connections that were important to the Irish poet’s reinvention and to his claims to relevance on the modernist scene. Yet Pound and Monroe did not always agree in their assessment of Yeats and his poetry: where the editor tended to regard the Irish

---

33 Joseph Kelly, Our Joyce: From Outcast to Icon (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 64.
34 For existing work on this subject, see Yug Mohit Chaudhry, Yeats, the Irish Literary Revival, and the Politics of Print (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001).
35 From 1888 to 1892, Yeats contributed articles on Ireland’s literary movement to the Boston Pilot and the Providence Sunday Journal, intending to target Irish-American readers. He published as the “Celt in London,” eventually collecting his articles in Letters to the New Island (1989). Although his purpose at this stage was only obliquely self-promotional, Yeats recognized America, in Karin Margaret Strand’s words, as a “vast potential audience for Irish literature,” including his own (5). Karin Margaret Strand, “W. B. Yeats’s American Lecture Tours” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1978).
36 This is a term used by Kelly in his own study of the American “Joyce industry.”
poet’s work favorably as an example of the traditional made modern – as the product of a meaningful engagement with one’s cultural heritage and traditional forms – Pound was more inclined to present Yeats’s traditionalism as the remnant of an older, outdated style, and was accordingly reluctant to endorse him wholeheartedly as a model for younger poets to follow. By considering how the two figures interpreted, deployed and promoted Yeats within the magazine, we gain greater insight into the Irish poet’s reception in the United States, and more generally, the tensions within Pound and Monroe’s professional relationship. These were tensions, incidentally, that erupted over the matter of *Poetry*’s First Guarantor’s Prize, with the editor and her foreign correspondent at odds over Yeats’s suitability as the award recipient.

Pound’s attitude towards Yeats was largely a consequence of their personal history. The poets’ time at Stone Cottage – which marked the beginning of Yeats’s self-remaking – became the basis for the version of Yeats Pound marketed to American readers. In his influential study of the Stone Cottage years, James Longenbach revisits this key moment in modernism’s history, illustrating how the two poets’ relationship was mutually beneficial. Yet his account of their pairing tends to subscribe to a Pound-inspired version of events, emphasizing Pound’s influence on Yeats’s poetry and the practical role Pound played in establishing his friend as an important international poet. Instead, I would argue that Pound’s criticism and correspondence suggest that he had a fundamentally different understanding of Yeats’s poetry and persona in this period relative to modernism: the Irish poet’s traditionalism and nationality – what Pound considered vestiges of an older, less sophisticated, less cosmopolitan style – were at odds

---

with the tenets of an international modernism Pound was helping to define. Yeats and Pound had first met in 1909, and again in 1911 in Paris, at a time when the younger poet regarded Yeats as “the only living man whose work has more than a most temporary interest.” Early in their friendship, with Pound’s encouragement, Yeats attempted to renovate his diction and syntax, and to embrace a more vital, direct and indeed modernist language in his poetry. As Yeats once explained in a letter to Lady Gregory, “To talk over a poem with [Ezra] is like getting you to put a sentence into dialect. All becomes clear and natural.” For his part, Pound’s poetry in this period was imitative of Yeats – particularly of the early Yeats, whose style Pound would later denounce as lacking hardness and clarity. Indeed, as their friendship progressed, the two poets’ aesthetics diverged, which had consequences for how Pound represented Yeats’s poetic project.

In his criticism, for instance, Pound often expressed an equivocal opinion of Yeats. In summarizing the state of poetry in London in December 1912, Pound identifies Yeats as “the only poet worthy of serious study.” Yet later in the same article, he declares that “[t]he important work of the last twenty-five years has been done in Paris” (123), and he faults the Irish poet for his Symbolism – for having been “subjective” and for relying on the “glamour and associations which hang near the words” (125), rather than striving for a more precise meaning.

Mr. Yeats’ method is, to my way of thinking, very dangerous, for although he is the greatest of living poets who uses English, and though he has sung some of the moods of life immortally, his art has not broadened much in scope during the past

---

decade. His gifts to English art are mostly negative; i.e., he has stripped English poetry of many of its faults. His “followers” have come to nothing….yet nearly every man who writes English verse seriously is in some way indebted to him.

(125)

Pound compares Yeats unfavorably to Ford Madox Hueffer (Ford), who “would strip words of all ‘association’ for the sake of getting a precise meaning” (125). “Precision,” Pound continues, is the watchword of the Imagistes, a new school of poetry he defines loosely as one opposed “to the numerous and unassembled writers who busy themselves with dull and interminable effusions…” (126). Eschewing sentiment and the conventions of Victorian verse, Pound explains, the Imagists strive instead for an “exact rendering” of the poetic object. The article concludes with an observation, perhaps directed at Yeats: “[I]t is one thing to take pleasure in a man’s work and another to respect him as a great artist” (127).

These comments not only gives us insight into the nature of Pound’s relationship with Yeats, in which the younger poets served as both disciple and critic; but they also reveal Pound’s conviction that Yeats was a poet who had not yet become fully modern. This version of Yeats as a modernist precursor suited Pound, whose efforts to articulate an Imagist aesthetic required an earlier model for the younger generation of poets to revise and ultimately surpass. The dynamic I am describing is the same one outline by Harold Bloom in his persuasive 1973 study of the process of aesthetic inheritance. Influence, Bloom argues, operates via an act of “creative misprision,” whereby a younger poet deliberately misreads his predecessor to clear creative space for his own
Poetic originality, in other words, is a myth generated by younger artists attempting to come to terms with the accomplishments and reputations of their forefathers. Yet for Pound, this process was complicated or made incomplete by the fact that many of his poetic precepts – “to go in fear of abstractions, avoid archaisms, stick to the natural object, speak in images, avoid rhetoric” – were in fact borrowed from Yeats.42

Indeed, Pound’s equivocation in his treatment of Yeats – his praise and admiration for the Irish poet alternating with his criticism of Yeats’s later style – reveal the conflict between Pound’s desire to assimilate Yeats into the category of international modernism and his need to assert his difference from the man who had once served as his mentor. Yeats’s poetry was at once stimulating and original (particularly compared to his earlier work), yet also too traditional, too personal and too Irish to fit neatly into a modernist aesthetic – hence the dichotomy in Pound’s treatment of the Irish poet.

The process of influence was further complicated by the fact that Yeats did not always conform to Pound’s version of him as traditional and outmoded. Even in Poetry, where we might expect Yeats’s traditionalism to contrast sharply with the experimentalism of other contributors, Yeats’s poems often appeared no less modern than many of the others featured in the magazine. We might consider, for example, the first set of poems Yeats published in Poetry in December 1912. The issue opened with five of his recent lyrics: “The Mountain Tomb,” “To a Child Dancing Upon the Shore,” “Fallen Majesty,” “Love and the Bird” and “The Realists.” Revised versions of the poems eventually appeared in the Cuala Press edition of Responsibilities in May 1914, but Poetry served as the first place of publication, due to Pound’s connection with the


In keeping with the theme of artistic transformation that characterized Yeats’s self-stylization in the period, many of these poems describe transitions of one kind or another – a theme also consistent with Yeats’s lectures during the third tour. “To a Child Dancing Upon the Shore,” for example, anticipates the subject’s difficult transition into adulthood. The poem, describing Iseult Gonne, is a vision of innocence that occasions the speaker’s reflection on the struggles that lie ahead for the young girl: “Being young you have not known / The fool’s triumph, nor yet / Love lost as soon as won, / Nor the best laborer dead / And all the sheaves to bind.” “Love and the Bird” (later titled “A Memory of Youth”) likewise imagines a painful transition – this one, the end of a relationship. The speaker and his beloved sit “as silent as a stone,” cold and unfeeling, until he is forced to acknowledge “That even the best of love must die.” The poem contrasts the “pride” and “pleasure” of youthful love with a growing “darkness” that casts a shadow on the glow of an earlier passion. “ Fallen Majesty,” in a similar vein, records and attempts to recuperate “what’s gone.” Recalling Maud Gonne as she had been in the Nineties, when “crowds gathered once if she but showed her face,” the poem is an attempt to document the past as an answer to the diminished present.

Yeats’s contributions to the issue marked a departure from the subjects and themes of his youth, and were the closest his verse had come to the tenets of Imagism described by Pound: clear and common language, a loss of abstractions, a concentrated focus on the image. Rather than seeming traditional alongside the other work featured in

---

43 Yeats later re-titled two of the poems: “To a Child Dancing Upon the Shore” became “To a Child dancing in the Wind” and “Love and the Bird” became “A Memory of Youth” in the published collection. In addition, he revised each of the poems before publishing them in Responsibilities. For a fuller account of these revisions, see William H. O’Donnell, Responsibilities: Manuscript Materials (The Cornell Yeats) (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003). In total, Yeats published twelve of the twenty-nine poems from Responsibilities in Poetry between 1912 and 1914.
the magazine, in fact, Yeats’s poems were of a piece with much of the issue’s contents – and in some instances, appeared more modern than other selections. The issue included, for example, poems by American poets George Sterling, John Silas “Jack” Reed and Clark Ashton Smith, along with four poems by Alice Corbin Henderson and a series of six prose poems by Tagore. With the exception of Tagore’s translations, which were closer to the avant-garde aesthetic Pound aspired to promote, Yeats’s poems were fresh and stimulating. Particularly in comparison to Sterling’s contributions, which relied on conventional forms and imagery, Yeats’s work appeared decidedly modern. Consider, for example, Sterling’s “A Legend of the Dove,” which begins:

  Soft from the linden’s bough.
  Unmoved against the tranquil afternoon,
  Eve’s dove laments her now:
  “Ah, gone! long gone! shall now I find thee soon?”

  That yearning in his voice
  Told not to Paradise a sorrow’s tale:
  As other birds rejoice
  He sang, a brother to the nightingale.44

Appearing only a few pages after Yeats’s “The Realists,” the reader was no doubt struck by Sterling’s outdated imagery, diction and syntax as compared to Yeats’s “dragon-guarded land” and “dolphin-drawn / Sea-nymphs.” The Irish poet’s work was in fact closer in spirit and style to Henderson’s poetry in the issue. Henderson’s “Symbols,” an

eight-line question-and-answer poem, for instance, seems to borrow early Yeatsian imagery, describing “a cradle wrought of gold,” a “druid, chanting by the waters old,” and a “woman, paling in the arms of love.” Yet, as Yeats had attempted to do in his more recent work, the poet deployed these familiar, romantic images to interrogate the nature of creation and representation:

- Who was it built the cradle of wrought gold?
  A druid, chanting by the waters old.
- Who was it kept the sword of vision bright?
  A warrior, falling darkly in the fight.
- Who was it put the crown upon the dove?
  A woman, paling the arms of love.
- Oh, who but these, since Adam ceased to be,
  Have kept their ancient guard about the tree?

Like Yeats’s “To a Child” and other of his later poems, “Symbols” relies on a series of questions for dramatic effect, circling around an unspoken element or idea in much the same way that a symbol itself stands in for something else. Even The Dial noted the likeness between Henderson’s and Yeats’s style: in reviewing Henderson’s collection The Spinning Woman of the Sky (1913), which included the poems featured in this issue of Poetry, the reviewer praised the “music and delicate imagery” of Henderson’s work, which he argued “suggest[ed] not a little the measures of the Celts who have been troubling the poetic waters of late years.”45

Even so, despite the advances Yeats had made towards a more modern style—a shift that is particularly evident in this bibliographic context—Pound was still ambivalent about the Irish poet’s work in his correspondence with Monroe: “I don’t think they’re his absolute best, but they show a little of the new Yeats, as in ‘Child Dancing,’” Pound explained to the editor. “‘The realists’ also tends toward the new phase. ‘Fallen Majesty’ is just where he was two years ago.”46 Pound elaborated on these thoughts in his review of Responsibilities in the May 1914 issue of Poetry, titled “The Later Yeats.” Although he singled out “The Magi” as possessing “a quality of hard light” consistent with Imagism, praising the poem for capturing “the new note” in Yeats’s recent work, Pound’s praise was qualified.47 “What I mean by the new note—you could hardly call it a change of style—was apparent four years ago in his ‘No Second Troy’” (66), Pound explained. He contrasts the “hardness” of some of Yeats’s recent work with the “pseudo-glamours and glamourlets and mists and fogs” (67) that had dominated Yeats’s poetry before, and he celebrates the collection for being “no longer romantically Celtic” (68).

This last remark signals the crux of Pound’s reservations regarding Yeats’s poetry: for Pound, issues of nationality and identity—the substance of much of Yeats’s work in this period—were inconsistent with an impersonal and purely aesthetic focus. Pound tended to regard the inherent Irishness of Yeats’s work as somehow recalcitrant and inassimilable into the category of international modernism, and as incompatible with Yeats’s status as an international artist. As Longenbach maintains, Pound desired “to purge Yeats’s work of its dreamy nostalgia and push it towards the precision of Joyce’s ‘realism’”—a shift that required a “tougher” language and a less sentimental attachment

46 Monroe, A Poet’s Life 264.
to his personal past. Yet Pound also insisted on the primacy of art over politics in a way that misunderstood not only Yeats’s engagement with Irish nationalism, but also the reciprocal relationship between Irish revivalism and modernism. Moreover, as Yeats made clear on many occasions, he sought to consolidate within his poetry an Irish national identity, even as his focus was on style and craftsmanship. The poems of *Responsibilities*, while lacking the hallmarks and imagery of Irish nationalism that characterized much of his earlier work, were arguably still more nationalist than Pound’s modernism would allow. These were public poems, addressing the debates over the proposed Hugh Lane art gallery (“To A Wealthy Man”), the workers’ strike in Dublin (“September 1913”), the political leadership of Charles Stewart Parnell (“To A Shade”), the *Playboy* controversy (“The Attack on The Playboy of the Western World”), and the poet’s own personal dispute with George Moore (“Introductory Rhymes,” “Closing Rhymes”). Although Yeats may have succeeded in purging the Celticism from his work – excising the dreamy otherworldliness and romanticism in pursuit of a sparer style – the collection is still deeply personal and acutely Irish.

Pound’s recurring critique of Yeats’s traditionalism, in fact, seems to stand in for his general unease with Yeats’s Irishness: issues of substance become issues of style in Pound’s reviews and essays addressing Yeats’s poetry, with the younger poet regularly pitting Yeats’s preference for traditional forms, meters and symbols against the experimentalism of his Imagist contemporaries. “‘Is Mr. Yeats an Imagiste?’” Pound posits. “No, Mr. Yeats is a symbolist, but he has written *des Images* as have many good poets before him; so that is nothing against him, and he has nothing against them (*les

---

48 Kelly, 148-149.
Comments such as these cast the Irish poet as a transitional figure, tentatively or inadvertently embracing new trends in poetry, rather than as an exemplar for artists of the younger generation to imitate. Ironically, however, Pound’s conception of tradition was in many ways more in keeping with the revivalist model than we might suppose. By advocating a return to the methods and themes of an ancient past, Pound echoed revivalist leaders’ call for the movement’s artists to draw inspiration from Irish antiquity. Theirs was not the local, recent, usable past of much regional poetry, but rather an older tradition made newly relevant for contemporary poets and audiences. Pound’s own poetry demonstrated his engagement with traditional lyric forms, but as he made clear, his objective was to master the older forms of expression as a foundation for a radically new, experimental poetry. In a similar way, revivalist writers drew from a store of material deemed inviolably and authentically Irish—the legends and songs of a shared Celtic heritage—yet they aspired to use this material to generate a modern Irish national identity. Yeats himself understood his Irishness as both a problem to be solved within his poetry (and within the literature of the wider Revival) and as a rich source of creative inspiration, differing from Pound in his willingness to make nationality and culture the subjects of his work.

III. The Great Yeats Debate: Poetry’s First Guarantor’s Prize

On this last point, Monroe tended to agree with Yeats, recognizing the value and artistic potential of a poet’s native environment and regularly encouraging artists to draw from the material closest at hand. Her openness to regional writing—what Pound considered the editor’s tendency towards provincialism—lay at the root of Monroe’s
dispute with Pound over the recipient of *Poetry*’s First Guarantor’s Prize, a cash award intended for the best poem or poems published during the first year. Monroe and Pound served as the selection committee, along with Henderson and three members of the magazine’s advisory board, and as Monroe recalls in her autobiography, “we had a sufficiently agitating time.”

Pound was insistent that the prize be awarded to Yeats for “The Grey Rock,” published in April 1913, and he began lobbying for his choice soon after the issue appeared in print. Monroe, in contrast, preferred to award the prize to the then-unknown American poet Vachel Lindsay, whose “General William Booth Enters Into Heaven” Pound had dismissed as “rather a good blague,” arguing that the poem was “worth a £20 bonus – just that. It is not worth one jot more.”

Pound’s endorsement of Yeats doubtless was motivated, at least in part, by the two poet’s friendship and by the self-serving realization that any boost to Yeats’s reputation might also serve as a boost to his own, by association. In addition, Pound recognized that *Poetry* would benefit from its affiliation with a poet as celebrated and respected as Yeats, and that the publicity generated by the award – timed to coincide with Yeats’s third lecture tour – would enable Monroe to attract fresh talent of a higher standard. Yet, importantly, Yeats also embodied the process of transnational exchange at the root of Pound’s modernism: the Irish poet was a link between the European avant-garde and a generation of American artists, between the traditionalism of the Victorian period and the innovation of modern poetry, and between the nationalism of the Irish Revival and the internationalism of modernism as Pound conceived it. Where Monroe’s intention was to use the award to recognize and promote work by a local poet – whom she noted was “American, besides,

---

51 Ezra Pound, letter to Harriet Monroe (27 January 1913, 8 November 1913) in Parisi and Young 56, 81.
even Illinois…”52 – Pound was dismissive of Lindsay’s poem, which he viewed as the product of a provincial artist.

Yet Monroe was perhaps accurate in describing Pound’s choice as “unadventurous.”53 Yeats’s poem, while marking a significant shift in his own aesthetic, was arguably less experimental and provocative than his competitor’s entry. Explaining the genesis of “The Grey Rock” in his autobiography, Yeats recalls feeling inspired to “write a poem I had long thought of about the man who left Aoibhinn of Craiglea to die at Clontarf and put in it all the bitter feeling one has sometimes about Ireland.”54 The resulting work, originally titled “Aoife’s Love,” contrasts the goddess’s love for the young Irishman with the Irishman’s patriotic devotion to his country.55 On a personal level, the poem captures Yeats’s artistic resolve in the face of public and personal conflicts – an assertion that he had kept faith with the members of the Rhymers’ Club, who had helped to shape his early aesthetic. It begins with a direct address to his former companions:

Poets with whom I learned my trade,
Companions of the Cheshire Cheese,
Here’s an old story I’ve re-made,
Imagining ’twould better please
Your ears than stories now in fashion,
Though you may think I waste my breath

Pretending that there can be passion
That has more life in it than death,
And though at bottling of your wine

52 Harriet Monroe, letter to Ezra Pound (7 June 1913) in Parisi and Young, 74.
53 Ibid.
55 According to the legend, Aoife falls in love with a young Irishman, who longs to fight in the Irish army. She places a pin in his shirt to prevent others from seeing him, intending to protect him. Fearing that his comrades might discover the charm, the young man discards the pin and is killed. Aoife is heartbroken, and pleads with the Celtic gods to punish her beloved for his betrayal. Yeats’s poem recounts Aoife’s appeal [source?]
Old wholesome Goban had no say;  
The moral’s yours because it’s mine.  

Dense with allusions and biographical details, even Pound acknowledged that the poem was “obscure, but it outweighs this by a curious nobility, a nobility which is, to me at least, the very core of Mr. Yeats’ production, the constant element of his writing” (67).

The poem describes Yeats’s apprenticeship with his “Companions of the Cheshire Cheese,” covering much of the same ground as his 1910 lecture, “Friends of My Youth.”

Appearing at the beginning of Responsibilities, it sets the stage for the poet’s artistic re-making, giving credit to Yeats’s fellow Rhymers while at the same time leaving them behind. Even on a formal level, the poem represents a shift towards a more mature style: Yeats experiments with “an old story,” reinterpreting the Celtic legend of the Battle of Clontarf. The poem’s imagery is both deeply personal and drawn from Irish mythology, and in interrupting his re-telling of the legend with conversational digressions, Yeats blends casual speech and a formal narrative. Soon after setting the scene in the poem’s early verses, for instance, the poet meditates on his deceased friends, who function as a parallel to the drunken gods, “sitting at the board / In their great house at Slievenamon,” “full of wine and meat”:

We should be dazed and terror-struck,  
If we but saw in dreams that room,  
Those wine-drenched eyes, and curse our luck  
That emptied all our days to come.  
I knew a woman none could please,  
Because she dreamed when but a child

Of men and women made like these;  
And after, when her blood ran wild,  
Had ravelled her own story out,  
And said, ‘In two or in three years

---

I needs must marry some poor lout,`
And having said it, burst in tears.

Since, tavern comrades, you have died,
Maybe your images have stood,
Mere bone and muscle thrown aside,
Before that roomful or as good.
You had to face your ends when young –
’Twas wine or women, or some curse –
But never made a poorer song
That you might have a heavier purse,
Nor gave loud service to a cause
That you might have a troop of friends,
You kept the Muses’ sterner laws,
And unrepenting faced your ends,
And therefore earned the right – and yet
Dowson and Johnson most I praise –
To troop with those the world’s forgot,
And copy their proud steady gaze.

The final stanza concludes with Yeats re-committing himself to the follow in Aoife’s footsteps: “I have kept faith, though faith was tried, / To that rock-born, rock-wandering foot,” he declares. The poem describes the speaker’s struggle to balance the demands of the Muse with the needs of his country, and his ultimate resolution to dedicate himself to poetry at the cost of angering Irish nationalists, “the loud host before the sea, / That think sword-strokes were better meant / Than lover’s music….” Longenbach argues that Pound admired Yeats’s idealization of his dead companions as that “tragic generation,” and valued the poem largely for “the attitudes which Yeats ascribed to the Rhymers.”

The notion of transcending one’s artistic forefathers and early influences certainly would have resonated with Pound in this context – perhaps even more so than Yeats’s deliberate juxtaposition of the mythic and the modern, a formal strategy of later modernist poetry.

---

57 Longenbach, 167-168.
“The Grey Rock” was indeed a significant departure for the poet, and Pound recognized it as such, compelling Monroe to acknowledge the importance of the poem in the context of Yeats’s artistic development. Yet by comparison, Lindsay’s poem takes greater aesthetic risks, appearing dramatic, unconventional and strikingly modern – an example of precisely the type of poetry Monroe, in particular, had hoped to cultivate via the magazine. The poem imagines William Booth, the first commander of the Salvation Army, arriving in heaven, flanked by a troop of society’s cast-offs. The opening stanza sets the scene:

Booth led boldly with his big bass drum –

(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

The Saints smiled gravely and they said: “He’s come.”

(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

Walking lepers followed, rank on rank,

Lurching braves from the ditches dank,

Drabs from the alleyways and drug fiends pale –

Minds still passion-ridden, soul-powers frails; –

Vermin-eaten saints with moldy breath,

Unwashed legions with the ways of Death –

(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

Each of seven stanzas is preceded by directions for musical instruments – bass drum, banjo, flute, tambourine – as Lindsay intended the poem to be sung to the tune of “The Blood of the Lamb,” the Salvation Army hymn. The repeating refrain – “Are you

58 Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, “General William Booth Enters Into Heaven,” Poetry 1.4 (January 1913): 101. All further quotations are from this source.
washed in the blood of the Lamb?” – works in concerts with the rhyme scheme to establish a steady, marching rhythm, punctuated by vivid images of the unearthly procession. The military atmosphere is further enhanced by several instances of plosive alliteration: “Big-voiced lasses made their banjos bang” (16) while “Loons with trumpets blewed a blare, blare, blare” (21) as “Booth led boldly” (26).

Indeed, the oral quality of the poem is one of its most striking features, rendered in both Lindsay’s language and in his cues for the poem’s recitation. His notations accompanying the poem, which provide directions for its instrumentation and vocal delivery, indicate the thin line between text and performance. Blending a range of compositional techniques from bardic poetry and popular music, Lindsay attempts to create an atmosphere of energy, drama and reverence on the page, upon which complex and unorthodox rhythms the reader imagines hearing complement the poet’s use of alliteration and onomatopoeia. The second stanza of the poem, for instance, meant to be accompanied by banjos, describes the “Tranced,” “fanatical” and shrieking members of the motley parade, who march with an unconventional rhythm befitting their non-conformity: “Hallelujah! It was queer to see / Bull-necked convicts with that land make free. / Loons with trumpets blewed a blare, blare, blare / On, on upwards thro’ the golden air! / (Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)” The subsequent stanza, in contrast, depicts a somber Booth, “Eyes still dazzled by the ways of God” and with “Eagle countenance in sharp relief,” as he leads the strange procession. A slow and soft bass drum sets the solemn tone before building in a frenzied crescendo in the next two stanzas, as the instruments’ “noise played havoc with the angel choir.” The poem ends with a
lone voice, “reverently sung,” as Christ descends “thro’ the flag-filled air” and Booth kneels, weeping “in that holy place.”

It was the poem’s inherent performative capacity – its reliance on an oral tradition reaching back to the bardic poets of the 17th and 18th centuries⁵⁹ – that appealed to Monroe almost as much as Lindsay’s native roots. As Reynolds has argued, Monroe was committed “to maintaining a link between print and performance in Poetry,” viewing her publication as the material expression of a verbal art form.⁶⁰ Even before founding the magazine, she conceived of poetry as the print embodiment of a spoken tradition and believed that preserving a link between oral culture and modern literature would revitalize modern poetry. Monroe’s enthusiasm for Lindsay’s poetry-as-performance was evident in the introduction she wrote to his 1914 collection, The Congo and Other Poems, in which the editor emphasized the oral and aural qualities of Lindsay’s poetry, describing the poet in her first paragraph as “the young Illinois troubadour” (v). She continued, praising both his Midwestern origins and his bardic ambitions:

It is hardly necessary, perhaps, to mention Mr. Lindsay’s loyalty to the people of his place and hour, or the training in sympathy with their aims and ideals which he has achieved through vagabondish wanderings in the Middle West. And we may permit time to decide how far he expresses their emotion. But it may be opportune to emphasize his plea for poetry as a song art, an art appealing to the ear rather than the eye. The first section of this volume is especially an effort to restore poetry to its proper place – the audience-chamber, and take it out of the
library, the closet. In the library it has become, so far as the people are concerned, almost a lost art, and perhaps it can be restored to the people only through a renewal of its appeal to the ear. (v-vi)

Lindsay’s dramatic delivery of this poem and others sought to accomplish just this objective: through percussive repetition, vocal crescendos, instrumentation, shouts, cheers and bellows, he modernized and democratized poetic recitation, transforming the formal chant into a dynamic event that incorporated the sounds, textures and rhythms of contemporary American life.

For Pound, however, Lindsay’s poetry was all show and no substance. Pound wrote to Monroe of “General William Booth,” “It gets the general public so easily on first reading. Incidentally, there is NOTHING to it on second reading.”61 In contrast, the editor maintained that Lindsay had struck a decisively modern note, and even Yeats praised the poem as one “stripped bare of ornament; it has an earnest simplicity, a strange beauty, and you know Bacon said, ‘There is no excellent beauty without strangeness.’”62 In fact – and somewhat ironically, given Pound’s categorical opinion of the two poets – the value Lindsay placed on oral tradition linked him to Yeats. Along with many of his revivalist contemporaries, the Irish poet maintained that the fragments of a spoken cultural heritage were essential to any modern national literature. In “What is Popular Poetry?,” for instance, Yeats likened the “the poetry of the coteries” to the “true poetry of the people” – the poetry based upon an oral culture – locating the value of each in the fact that both drew from an older tradition “whose ‘ancestors were stout and wise,’ ‘anigh to

---

61 Ezra Pound, letter to Harriet Monroe (12 July 1913) in Parisi and Young, 75.
62 Quoted in Monroe, A Poet’s Life 337.
Paradise’ ‘ere yet men knew the gift of corn.” Lindsay likewise recognized the aesthetic potential of poetry imbued with the rhythms and sounds of a spoken tradition, be it the ritual and chant of folklore or the musical composition and tempo of American jazz. When the two poets met at the Poetry awards banquet in Chicago in 1914, according to Lindsay, they discussed the necessity of “restor[ing] the primitive singing of poetry.” As the younger poet later explained in a letter to Monroe, this objective was to inform his poetic pursuits during the defining years of his career. “I respectfully submit these poems as experiments,” Lindsay wrote to the editor, “in which I endeavor to carry this vaudeville form back towards the old Greek precedent of the half-chanted lyric…. It is the hope of the writer that after two of three readings each line will suggest its own separate touch of melody to the reader who has become accustomed to the cadences.” Lindsay’s performance of “The Congo,” his most famous poem, at the Poetry banquet was an early and defining example of his style and delivery.

Like Yeats, Lindsay combined genres, melding music and poetry to experiment with form, and even attempted a more theatrical approach to public readings. But

---

64 Quoted in Harriet Monroe, “Introduction” vi.
66 Eleanor Ruggles, Lindsay’s biographer, recounts the evening and the poet’s performance: “It was the end of an overlong program. The weary listeners had had enough and some were on their feet ready to go home, but Lindsay’s beginning lines, droning and pulselike, arrested them. ‘Boom Boom Boom!’ ended the first section.
‘That ‘Boom,’” says an ear-witness, ‘shook the room, but Mr. Lindsay chanted on.’ …This was an audience of Lindsay’s peers, one prepared by Yeats’s tribute to receive the strangeness with the beauty. It began to sway in sympathy as he chanted the next lines….And then, transported, and those in front transported with him, as he rocked on the balls of his feet – his eyes blazing, his arms pumping like pistons…– he dropped to a marveling whisper: ‘Mumbo…Jumbo…will…hoo-doo…you.’ The audience burst into applause. The guest of honor, jerked from the misty kingdom of his Celtic imaginings, must have felt like one who pats a kitten and sees it turn into a lion.” Quoted in Gray, 221.
67 As both first-person and later biographical accounts attest, Yeats consciously assumed an authoritative stance during his third American tour, performing the role of the literary master coming to terms with new trends, drawing from his own experience to advise, gently chide, and selectively praise his disciples. Even
where Yeats’s poetry retained the polished and cultured rhetoric of his Victorian predecessors, Lindsay’s reveled in a colloquial diction, conversational syntax, and buoyant rhythm that appeared, by many standards, more modern. Pound’s rejection of Lindsay’s work was thus both surprising and ironic, given the poem’s adherence to many of the artistic principles Pound had devised, and which he himself practiced. “General William Booth” shares, for instance, the same direct language, hybrid form and visceral imagery that made “The Cantos” so startling and original. Yet for Pound, these criteria, it seems, were secondary to Yeats’s status and reputation – and this despite Pound’s reservations concerning Yeats’s suitability as a model for younger poets to imitate. As he had done in the past, in persuading Monroe of the value of Yeats’s work to her magazine, Pound made his case for the Irish poet by emphasizing the seriousness of the award and the honor Yeats would confer to the publication upon accepting the prize:

About the $250 prize. It must be offered to Yeats. If he is so dam’d opulent as not to need it, he will probably return it. As for its not being adventurous to offer it to him, I dont see that it is our job to be adventurous in this case but to be just.

He has fought a long fight and had damn little reward (in the way of cash and comfort). Lindsay isn’t good enough to get ALL the prizes in any case. Also his bearing communicated a certain gravitas and the kind of bored detachment one would expect from a distinguished expert, who patiently endures the admiration of his audience. His closest acquaintances also noted an air of greatness surrounding him: one former neighbor who attended Yeats’s lecture in Montreal observed, “It was not Willie Yeats but William Butler Yeats who confronted me…a man in middle life, a man calm, self-possessed, with an ample dignity of his own, whose tailor was clearly of the highest rank in his profession” (quoted in Foster, 515). J. B. Yeats echoed this sentiment, noting in his son “a subtle change, a something assured, a quiet importance” (quoted in Strand, 132). This self-possession and the showmanship that characterized Yeats’s delivery – what one Amherst undergraduate described as “the stance, the pose, the theatrical quality” of Yeats’s readings (quoted in Foster, 512) – were part of a new persona that emerged during the poet’s third tour, and signaled a more significant artistic transformation coinciding with this visit. R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, Vol. 1, The Apprentice Mage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). See also Emily C. Bloom, “Yeats’s Radiogenic Poetry: Oral Traditions and Auditory Publics,” *Éire-Ireland* 46.3&4 (Fall/Winter 2011): 227-251 for a discussion of the poet’s later performances on the BBC, for which he prepared nine poetry lectures in the 1930s.
there is no reasonable way of putting Yeats ho de concours. Another thing, you
can’t afford to spoil the spirit d’corps of your contributors by picking so
questionable a winner. You can’t give much weight to the award if you make the
first to a poem that half a blague.

If you give it Yeats, you, FIRST, make the giving of this particular prize
serious, you establish a good tradition. The person who receives it after Yeats is
considerably more honoured than if he received it after Lindsay, or after any other
man who can not yet be taken quite seriously as artist…. ⁶⁸

Pound’s mounting frustration was evident in subsequent letters: “Either this rotten £50 is
a honourable award for the best poem, or it is a local high school prize for the
encouragement of mediocrity. Either it must be respectfully offered to Mr Yeats, or the
americans must admit that they are afraid of foreign competition.” The letter continues,
“If you will think what the magazine would have been without the foreign
contributions!!!!!!! There is no american poem worth awarding, anyhow. You CAN not
divide the arts by a political line. Mother of God!!! You accepted Yeats’ stuff. You
hung his pictures. You ought either to have specified the award as local, or you ought not
to have accepted his stuff.” ⁶⁹

Pound’s correspondence makes the terms of the debate clear: the foreign editor
and his “foreign contributions” on the one side versus Monroe and her “local” American
poets on the other. By endorsing Yeats for the prize, Pound emphasized the international
quality of modernism and opposed the inherent regionalism of Monroe’s choice. Yet by
supporting a poet who embraced and modeled regional values – values that, in many

---

⁶⁸ Ezra Pound, letter to Harriet Monroe (July 1913) in Parisi and Young, 74.
⁶⁹ Ezra Pound, letter to Harriet Monroe (3 October 1913) in Parisi and Young, 78-79.
ways, aligned with the objectives of Irish revivalism – the editor was also practicing a kind of transnational modernism. Monroe eventually relented, agreeing to give the prize to Yeats, but she arranged for an additional $100 prize to be awarded for the best American poem. This second prize, naturally, went to Lindsay. In her response to Pound, she made clear her own position regarding both Poetry’s “foreign contributions” and Pound’s implication that the magazine was provincial:

Now that the decision is made, there is no use in discussing the matter further. In a more general way I would say, however, that it is easy for you, living in what one of our papers called ‘the world’s metropolis’ to charge with imbecility us ‘in the provinces.’ If we are provincial, we shall always be so until we cease to take our art and art opinions ready-made from abroad, and begin to respect ourselves. This magazine is an effort to encourage the art, to work up a public for it in America…. America takes English poetry as law and gospel, but England won’t take ours; in a certain sense, the better ours might be, the more slowly and reluctantly England would take it, because of the inevitable instinct of jealousy when any mature man, or nation, feels for his aspiring and assertive offspring.

The letter is remarkable for articulating both Monroe’s and American poetry’s independence from foreign standards and cultural values. By redefining provincialism as the uncritical acceptance of ideas and precepts from abroad, Monroe refutes Pound’s characterization of her magazine as limited and unsophisticated. Their correspondence over the matter of the prize thus captures more than their strained relationship: it speaks to their different aesthetic preferences and objectives, and to the tension these differences

70 Harriet Monroe, letter to Ezra Pound (13 October 1913) in Parisi and Young, 79.
engendered within *Poetry*, as Monroe attempted to strike the right balance between American poetry and what she described elsewhere as “importations.”

In agreeing to award the Guarantor’s prize to Yeats, Monroe compromised on her intention to support American writing. Yet in another sense, her choice was more consistent than Pound’s with the transnationalism he advocated: Lindsay’s poem successfully married the innovation of modernist poetics and oral culture with a fragment from American history, reimagining and reinvigorating a traditional form for a modern audience in much the same way revivalist writers aspired to do in their own writing. Moreover, the “cosmopolitan aspects of such racily local art as Mr. Lindsay’s,” in Monroe’s words, were verified for the editor by Yeats’s praise of “General William Booth” (vii). This kind of recognition – what she described elsewhere as a “foreign enthusiasm for the American tang” – was evidence of the transatlantic connections she aspired to forge between Europe and the United States via her magazine (viii). Lindsay’s appearance in *Poetry* following an issue that featured the poems of Tagore, for instance, illustrated these links. As Monroe explained, “the coming together of East and West may prove to be the great event of the approaching era, and if the poetry of the now famous Bengali laureate garners the richest wisdom and highest spirituality of his ancient race, so one may venture to believe that the young Illinois troubadour brings from Lincoln’s city an authentic strain of the lyric message of this newer world” (v). In light of her comments, Pound’s rejection of Monroe’s choice for the prize as provincial ironically serves more as an index of his own provincialism than as a fair assessment of the editor’s practices and philosophy.
In the end, as Pound had predicted, both Yeats and Poetry benefitted financially and professionally from the Irish poet’s association with the magazine.\footnote{As it turns out, Yeats also had a hand in Pound’s success. The Irish poet was informed in November 1913 that he had won the award, and as Pound had predicted, he politely declined the money, returning all but £10, with which he commissioned a commemorative bookplate designed by Sturge Moore. Yet in a letter to Monroe, Yeats also suggested how the remainder of the prize might be used: “Why not give the £40., or a portion of it to Ezra Pound? I suggest him to you because, though I do not really like with my whole soul the metrical experiments he has made for you, I think those experiments show a most vigorous imaginative mind. He is certainly a creative personality of some sort, though it is too soon yet to say what sort.” Yeats’s praise of Pound was qualified, although – expressing a sentiment that might well have come from Pound – he acknowledged that he “would always sooner give the laurel to vigorous error than to any orthodoxy not inspired” (Parisi and Young, 81).} And Yeats’s reputation and that of the publication were buoyed further by Yeats’s appearance at the awards banquet hosted by Monroe in Chicago on the first of March, during the second half of his lecture tour. Invitations were sent out in the name of “the guarantors, contributors and editors of Poetry,” and as Monroe recalls, a distinguished guest list of Chicago’s artists and moguls attended, along with many of the poets who had contributed to the magazine during its first year.\footnote{Monroe, A Poet’s Life 334-335.} Monroe was careful to place a copy of the issue of Poetry containing Lindsay’s prize-winning poem on Yeats’s bedside table in her apartment, where he was staying during his visit to the city, intending both to familiarize the guest of honor with her favorite local “discovery” and to illustrate the quality of the magazine. Her decision paid off: when Yeats took the stage to publicly accept his award, he made a point of praising Lindsay as “a fellow craftsman.” He continued by describing his own attempts to rebel against “the rhetorical poetry of the Irish politicians” and to rid his poetry of rhetoric: “But now, when I open the ordinary magazine, I find that all we rebelled against in those early days – the sentimentality, the rhetoric, the ‘moral uplift’ – still exist here. Not because you are too far from England, but because you are too far...
from Paris.” Yeats’s speech managed to mediate between Pound’s internationalism and Monroe’s commitment to native art, critiquing American poetry for failing to meet the standards set abroad, yet arguing that a poet’s “business is merely to express himself, whatever that self may be.” He concluded by acknowledging Pound and placing himself in relation to the younger poet:

We [in the Rhymers’ Club] rebelled against rhetoric, and now there is a group of younger poets who are to call us rhetorical. When I returned to London from Ireland, I had a young man go over all my work with me to eliminate the abstract. This was an American poet, Ezra Pound. Much of his work is experimental; his work will come slowly, he will make many an experiment before he comes into his own. I should like to read to you two poems of permanent value, “The Ballad of the Goodly Fere” and “The Return.” This last is, I think, the most beautiful poem that has been written in the free form, one of the few in which I find real organic rhythm. A great many poets use vers libre because they think it is easier to write than rhymed verse, but it is much more difficult.

The whole movement of poetry is toward pictures, sensuous images, away from rhetoric, from the abstract, toward humility. But I fear I am now becoming rhetorical. I have been driven into Irish public life – how can I avoid rhetoric?

Reflecting on the banquet and Yeats’s speech, Monroe described the event as “a triumph”: “This also was one of my great days…. I drew a long breath of renewed power, and felt that my little magazine was fulfilling some of our seemingly extravagant
hopes.” Yeats’s endorsement of both Poetry and Lindsay lent esteem to the publication and to Monroe’s efforts to encourage the development of a native art. As Ellen Williams observes, the Irish poet’s recognition was also pivotal in giving Monroe “some serenity in her relationship with Pound,” whose “polarizations of ‘my side of the wet’ and ‘your side’” were at odds with the editor’s more inclusive vision for Poetry. For Monroe, Yeats embodied the regional modernism she had imagined for the magazine: he produced a poetry simultaneously rooted in his personal history and native culture, yet still universal, describing experiences that transcended national boundaries. This version of Yeats – one cultivated in Poetry, and one that downplayed his Irishness in favor of his universal appeal – provided the foundation for his reputation as a modern international poet. Such a characterization, as we will see in the following chapter, also led later poets, including the Nashville Fugitives, to de-historicize Yeats – in Longley’s words, by “folding Yeatsian history into vague ‘world history.’” As a result, Yeats occupied a place both within and outside of mainstream American modernism, his relationship to the movement construed variously as forefather, participant, and opponent. In a similar way, I would argue, Monroe’s regionalism and her vision as editor of Poetry complicated her relationship to modernism, a movement she both helped to define, and in some ways, defied.

IV. The Revivalist Logic of Poetry Magazine

This defiance was linked to her kinship with the tenets and objectives of the Irish Revival. As Monroe’s editorials and criticism make clear, the editor shared with

---

76 Monroe, A Poet’s Life 339.
78 Longley, 35.
revivalist writers a nuanced understanding of modern poetry that valued both the regional and the traditional – specifically, the belief that poetry should remain in contact with the vital cultural tradition at its roots. Her ambition to reconnect modern poets to the history, heritage and landscapes of their regions in fact linked her to many of the architects and artists of the Revival, who likewise aimed to encourage a native literature with roots in Ireland’s past. Along these lines, she admired many of the qualities in modern poetry that Irish artists strove to cultivate in their own writing: the celebration of native culture, a reverence for place, and a respect for the past. This same revivalist logic was evident in the contents of Poetry, which reflected Monroe’s appreciation of the relationship between regionalism and modernism. We tend to regard Poetry, in particular, as an iconic cosmopolitan little magazine, and much of the scholarship addressing the publication emphasizes its notable contributors – poets we retrospectively identify with the modernist movement – and the magazine’s role in defining emerging literary trends for an international audience. Yet Poetry also illustrated the tension in this period between the regional and cosmopolitan – sometimes figured as the traditional and the modern – that shaped modernism as a movement, and which spurred many of the disagreements between Monroe and Pound. This was the same tension, incidentally, that Yeats negotiated in his lectures and poetry from the third American tour, as he worked to transition to a more modern(ist) style and to position himself as both an Irish and an international poet. By reconsidering the contents of Poetry and the artists and issues it featured in light of both this tension and Monroe’s regionalism as editor, we gain a clearer picture of the version of revivalism at play here: one that values the local and the traditional as components of modernism, rather than its opposites.
This version of revivalism was evident even in the magazine’s motto – a quotation from Whitman, “To have great poets there must be great audiences too” – which both summarized Monroe’s desire to cultivate a fit audience for poetry, and served to link the more experimental poetry published in the magazine to what the editor considered the finest work of the past. In her introduction to *The New Poetry: An Anthology* (1917), Monroe elaborated on her definition of the relationship between contemporary and traditional poetry: “The poets of to-day do not discard tradition because they follow the speech of to-day rather than that of Shakespeare’s time, or strive for organic rhythm rather than use a mold which has been perfected by others. On the contrary, they follow the great tradition when they seek a vehicle suited to their own epoch and their own creative mood, and resolutely reject all others.” The introduction continues with a recognition of “the Celtic renaissance” as a seminal movement in the history of modern English poetry – what Monroe describes as “a disturbing influence from afar” that altered the modes of poetic expression in its wake. She writes:

This influence was most powerful because it came to us directly, not at second-hand, through the English work of two poets of genius, Synge and Yeats. These great men, fortified and inspired by the simplicity and clarity of primitive Celtic song, had little patience with the “over-appareled” art of Tennyson and his imitators. They found it stiffened by rhetoric, by a too-conscious morality leading to pulpit eloquence, and by second-hand bookish inspirations; and its movement

---

79 As Pound explained in a letter to Monroe (24 September 1913) in Parisi and Young, 78: “I wish to God you’d take that advertising motto off the magazine and substitute Dante’s “Quem stulti magis odissent” [Whom the stupid hate the most]. After all he was a better poet than Whitman and is more qualified to speak on such a matter....”

they found hampered, thwarted of freedom, by a too slavish acceptance of ready-made schemes of meter and rhyme. The surprises and irregularities, found in all great art because they are inherent in human feeling, were being ruled out of English poetry, which consequently was stiffening into forms too fixed and becoming more and more remote from life. […]

It is scarcely too much to say that “the new poetry” – if we may be allowed the phrase – began with these two great Irish masters. Think what a contrast to even the simplest lyrics of Tennyson the patterns of their songs presents…. Compared with these Irishmen the best of their predecessors seem literary.  

By presenting tradition as evolving and adaptable – contrary to a static traditionalism that would limit poetic experimentation – Monroe redefines modern poetry’s relationship to the past as continuous. Although modern poets may reject literary conventions and diction that seem outdated, she argues, they are in essence continuing the same artistic practices that have shaped poetry for generations by using language and imagery suitable to their time. Her views endorse a version of modernism, in other words, that engages with the past while still remaining relevant in the present, even forward-looking. Tradition, in this sense, is an accessible and vital component of contemporary writing, not a set of methods, themes or qualities to be dismissed wholesale.

Monroe’s assessment of the Revival and its artists, and her praise for the “surprises and irregularities,” the “human feeling” and the extra-literary qualities of revivalist writing that derive from an oral tradition, all align with her conception of poetry as the product of a specific, regional culture and heritage. To promote this type of

work within the magazine, she produced issues of *Poetry* devoted to Chicago and Southern poets, Native American chants, and aboriginal writing, among other subjects; and at one time, she even planned to publish special issues from each state, with resident poets serving as guest editors.\(^82\) Monroe’s commitment to publishing a broad range of material enabled her to feature work from up-and-coming and regional poets alongside the poems of more established writers. As editor, she defended the new but understood it as part of a longer cultural tradition, and her philosophy shaped the mix of established and experimental work featured in the magazine.

Monroe’s catholicity was aided – and according to some accounts, surpassed – by the work of Henderson, who served as her assistant editor from the magazine’s founding until 1922. As Jayne E. Marek has noted, Henderson shared Monroe’s critical acumen and her appreciation for regional writing: it was Henderson, in fact, who “discovered” Chicago poets Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, and Edgar Lee Masters, and arranged for their publication in early issues.\(^83\) It is therefore surprising that, with few exceptions, Henderson’s pivotal role in helping to establish *Poetry* during its initial years has been overlooked in studies of the magazine, although it is arguably in her contributions, as much as in Monroe’s, that we see the publication’s revivalist inheritance most clearly.\(^84\) In fact, it is perhaps owing to Henderson’s support of regional poets – what William

---

\(^82\) As I address in the following chapter, Monroe produced a Southern number of *Poetry*, in which she urged Southern poets to utilize their region’s rich cultural heritage in producing their work.


\(^84\) Marek examines the editorial relationship between Monroe and Henderson, arguing that the two women were equally responsible for determining the magazine’s critical parameters during its early years. She argues: “The cumulative effect of making Henderson nearly invisible and Monroe a foil for Pound fits into a familiar pattern of the way female experiences have been treated in literary history” (27). See also Ellen Williams, who addresses the magazines early editorial policies, including Henderson’s role.
describes somewhat dismissively as the coeditor’s enthusiasm for “middle-western regionalism” – that her role has been conveniently edited out of Poetry’s story.\(^8^5\) Marek is more generous in her account of Henderson’s collaboration with Monroe, noting the significance of Henderson’s regional discoveries, which included the group of Chicago-based poets but also extended to “the ‘cowboy poets,’ the Native American, and the Hispanic-American poets whose oral literatures drew Henderson’s interest after her move to the Southwest” in mid-1916.\(^8^6\) Her “sponsorship of American ethnic literature” complemented her support of more mainstream and established poets, like William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost and others, yet by advocating for a more inclusive, diverse representation of American writers in Poetry, Henderson helped to ensure the magazine’s relevance and importance.\(^8^7\) Marek credits the assistant editor’s regionalism to “a confusion characteristic of the times,” arguing that her interest in particular racial and ethnic traditions “may have been an outgrowth of the interest in primitive art that entered modernism…but which of course involved distortions of the original material.”\(^8^8\) While this explanation is plausible – and serves to position Henderson more fully in an emerging modernist aesthetic – it is also possible to interpret her interest in minority, exotic and ethnic oral and literary traditions as an example of the magazine’s version of revivalism. Specifically, we might read Henderson’s regionalism in its many forms as an illustration of her conviction that American literature should be

\(^{8^5}\) Williams, 230. Marek also notes that personal disputes between Monroe and Henderson over the matter of royalties for the first and second editions of The New Poetry anthology, which the two co-edited in 1917 and 1923, also contributed to Monroe’s decision to downplay Henderson’s contributions to the magazine in A Poet’s Life. Henderson’s virtual absence from Monroe’s posthumously published autobiography, Marek maintains – coupled with the editor’s generous account of Pound – has arguably shaped subsequent critical accounts of Poetry’s early years and editorial practices.

\(^{8^6}\) Marek, 28.

\(^{8^7}\) Ibid.

\(^{8^8}\) Marek, 41.
comprised of a range of indigenous writing, not dictated by artistic precepts or traditions inherited from abroad.

This perspective, which was shared by Monroe, was evident in Henderson’s criticism appearing in *Poetry*, in which she often challenged both the dominance of an eastern regionalism and a Eurocentric worldview. In “Too Far From Paris” in the June 1914 issue, for instance, Henderson argued that American poets must be attuned to native influences, drawing from the particulars of local experience rather than basing their poetry on European models. Noting that American poet most clearly reflects the life of a nation during times of adversity, she calls for poets “who do not need to wait for a threatening fate to move them to song whose spirit is at once national and individual, a realization of life in terms of immediate experience.”

It is easy for us to appreciate the Irishman’s zealous love for Ireland, the celebration of Bengal by the great East Indian poet, of the passionate spirit of the Roumanian folk-songs. Not only have these the direct motive of adversity, the minor note of which has been so much in sympathy with the spirit of the last century’s literary movement, but they are all deep-rooted in that tradition which has had its earliest expression in folk-songs and legends – always an enduring basis for subsequent poets and artists, and an integral part of the blood and bone of the people. (106)

In contrast to poets like Yeats and Tagore, she continues, American writers are cut off from their national heritage: “in the United States we have naturally that direct break with the past which is the artificial feature of the creed of certain revolutionary European

---

artists and poets” (107). Citing Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman and others as examples of truly national poets, Henderson maintains that America’s contribution “to the great international body of literature or art must be largely individual” and must reflect the country’s diverse history (107). She echoes Monroe’s defense of regionalism by suggesting that the threat of provincialism arises less from celebrating and utilizing an indigenous tradition than from imitating “the twilight tone of the Celtic Revival and the English poets of the ‘nineties…, or the modern French school…” (109). Further, she argues, the modern movements in poetry in Europe paradoxically have gained their vitality by borrowing an American tradition exemplified by poets like Whitman and Poe:

“Know thyself” is the first postulate for the poet, as it is for the mystic. The “critical mind of France” has a very great value, but the creative source of much of the modern European movement is American in spirit, or draws its inspiration from that international current of thought of which the fertilizing seeds are not confined to any one nation, and of which the United States has certainly furnished heroic growths. (107)

To end the article, and to illustrate the difficulties facing the American poet who rebels against foreign standards, Henderson contrasts Yeats’s and Lindsay’s readings at the Poetry awards banquet, the two poets representing distinct approaches to the writing of a national poetry.

Supreme in his own art, and a spokesman for his fellow-craftsmen in England and Ireland, Mr. Yeats carried the audience by the power of his poetry as poetry. We were moved with him for romantic Ireland dead and gone, and O’Leary in his grave, although we did not know Mr. O’Leary any more than Mr. Yeats knew
Lincoln. The poems of other writers that Mr. Yeats read were also beautiful. […] But, and I do not believe that Mr. Yeats thought of it, all the poems that he read except his own, however simple and explicit in diction, portrayed poetic fixities, or took their root in past tradition…. So it was naturally with something of a shock that Mr. Lindsay broke the spell with his newly quarried *Congo*.

Mr. Lindsay did not go to France for *The Congo* or for *General William Booth Enters Into Heaven*. He did not even stay on the eastern side of the Alleghenies. […]

We cannot forecast Mr. Lindsay’s future. He is already, as Mr. Yeats said, assured for the anthologies. But his example is valuable. He is realizing himself in relation to direct experience, and he is not adapting to his work a twilight tone which is quite foreign to him, as it is, generally speaking, to the temperament of the nation. He is working out his salvation in his own way. It will be his salvation at any rate, and therefore worth more to him than if he trundled in on the coat-tails of English or French credentials, and much more worth while to the nation. (110-111)

By tapping into something authentically national, both Yeats and Lindsay succeed in inspiring their audiences and in communicating a distinctive cultural identity via their poetry. Yet the challenges facing the American writer are greater, Henderson argues, for he must reclaim and synthesize a vital tradition from the pervasive influence of European models and from the “fragments of earlier cultures” that formed America’s literary heritage.⁹⁰ Although Yeats is presented as a foil to Lindsay’s vibrant and modern

---

⁹⁰ Marek, 37.
aesthetic iconoclasm – as an Irish poet with the benefit of a unified culture upon which to base his work – the two artists in fact shared the sense of having to invent a tradition from scratch. Their contributions to their respective national literatures, despite clear differences, were alike in preserving a link between oral cultures, traditional folklore, and modern poetry. According to Henderson, both Yeats and Lindsay demonstrate that the expression of an individual cultural identity is neither provincial nor limiting, but rather the basis for a truly national art form.

Henderson’s article defined new parameters for modern American poetry, advocating a return to roots for American writers: by emphasizing the value of a poetry based on oral traditions and a native cultural heritage, she echoed the principles of revivalism, even citing the Irish Revival as an example of a model national movement in literature. Her comments in praise of Whitman as a poet who successfully realized his “birthright and heritage of individual genius” (109) were also in line with Yeats’s own estimation of Whitman, which he addressed in his lecture on “Contemporary Lyric Poets” during his third lecture tour. Yeats praised Whitman as a practitioner of “that ancient way” and as a model of the poet as a man of genius, who speaks on behalf of his community.91 Relatedly, he expressed his reservations over formal experimentation and free verse, and his sense that the younger generation of poets lacked the wildness and imagination of his contemporaries. “Poetry is once more full of passion and audacity,” he asserted in an interview published in The New York Times on February 22, 1914. “Yet these young men have not yet clarified themselves. It will be a full ten years before we

shall be able to measure them.” Later in the same interview, Yeats singled out Pound as a promising artist, praising the precision and beauty of Pound’s “good poems” and again designating “The Return” as particularly worthy of admiration.

Although Henderson was an outspoken proponent of free verse – regularly addressing the debate over vers libre in her articles for the magazine – she shared with Yeats the belief that successful free verse poetry was characterized by an innate rhythm and a metrical precision. “Prose rhythms differ from poetic rhythms,” she explained in one essay, “according to the inherent scientific divisions of the rhythmic wave lengths.”

Likening the relationship between free verse and much of modern poetry to that between literature and journalism, Henderson elsewhere defended the importance of technical expertise, arguing that a poet should strive to be both stylistically original yet also mindful of a poem’s internal metrical structures. Carl Sandburg’s “Chicago Poems,” which opened the March 1914 issue of the magazine, were an apt illustration of the kind of poetry Henderson advocated, and are also consistent with the publication’s revivalist logic. The poems were innovative and experimental, yet still rooted in the poet’s individual experience and his locale. As Monroe recalled in her autobiography, “Alice had handed over to me a group of strange poems in very individual free verse, beginning with ‘Chicago’ as ‘the hog-butcher of the world.’ This line was a shock at first, but I took a long breath and swallowed it, and was laughed at scornfully by critics and

92 Ibid.
93 Quoted in Strand, 133.
94 See, for example, Henderson’s “Poetic Prose and Vers Libre,” Poetry 2.2 (May 1913): 70-72 and “Lazy Criticism,” Poetry 9.3 (December 1916): 144-149.
95 Alice Corbin Henderson, “Poetic Prose and Vers Libre” 71.
96 Alice Corbin Henderson, “Lazy Criticism” 144.
columnists when we gave it the lead in March, 1914.” Sandburg’s poems – what he
described as “a chant of defiance by Chicago” directed at the cultural capitals of the
eastern United States and Europe – captured the character and vitality of the city in their
language and buoyant, prose-like rhythms. Even the print layout of “Chicago,” the title
poem, announced it as new and modern, yet Sandburg’s style was also reminiscent of
Whitman’s in its vivid descriptions, its candor, and its unmistakably American
sensibility.

The poem begins in tribute to Chicago, a city of youth and vitality, industry, and
savageness, if not of beauty and culture:

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders:

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen your
painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm boys.
And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is true I have seen
the gunman kill and go free to kill again.
And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the faces of women
and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.
And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at this my
city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them:
Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be
alive and coarse and strong and cunning.

In a litany of adjectives – “Bareheaded, / Shoveling, / Wrecking, / Planning, / Building,
breaking, rebuilding” – Sandburg attempts to convey the spirit of the city, shunning
conventional poetic form and diction to capitalize instead on the organic tempo of

97 Monroe, A Poet’s Life 322.
98 Norman Corwin, The World of Carl Sandburg: A Stage Presentation (New York: Harcourt, Brace and
World, 1961), 32.
99 Carl Sandburg, “Chicago Poems,” Poetry 3.6 (March 1914): 191-192. All further quotations are from
this source.
colloquial speech. The staccato rhythm of the description, in contrast to the fluidity of the enjambed lines, mirror the poem’s imagery: a “tall bold slugger” flings “magnetic curses” like baseballs against “the little soft cities” of the East and the Continent, while he laughs “the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, / Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.” The repetition of “laugh” and “laughing” in the final lines of the poem reinforce the sense of energy and chaos that characterize the scene Sandburg describes.

“Chicago” aimed to the make the vigor of the city and its inhabitants tangible for the reader: the poem was an attempt at indigenous American poetry, and Henderson and Monroe recognized it as such, even in the face of criticism and controversy following its publication. An editorial published in The Dial, for instance, referred to Sandburg’s work as “jargon…intended to be taken as some form of poetry” and “an impudent affront to the poetry-loving public.”

Defending both her magazine – which The Dial had dismissed as “a futile little periodical” – and the decision to publish the local poet, Monroe penned a defiant editorial in the May 1914 issue, entitled “The Enemies We Have Made.” “It is possible that we have ventured rashly in ‘discovering’ Mr. Sandburg and the others,” Monroe writes,

but – whom and what has The Dial discovered? We have taken chances, made room for the young and the new, tried to break the chains which enslave Chicago to New York, America to Europe, and the present to the past – what chances has The Dial ever taken? What has it ever printed but echoes? For thirty years it has

100 Quoted in Monroe, A Poet’s Life 312.
run placidly along in this turbulent city of Chicago…. During all that third of a century it has borne about as much relation to the intellectual life of this vast, chaotically rich region as though it were printed in Glasgow or Caracas. Not only has it failed to grasp a great opportunity – it has been utterly blind and deaf to it, has never known the opportunity was there. Is its editor competent to define the word futile?\textsuperscript{101}

Monroe’s response served to refute mischaracterizations of her magazine and to defend her choices for publication, but as I have attempted to show, it was also part of a larger attempt to set new parameters for modern poetry. By rejecting convention and choosing to publish bold, innovative, often local poetry like Sandburg’s, the editor aimed to offer a new set of poetic principles and a new model for emerging artists and other little magazines alike. More conservative publications, like The Dial, were often quick to impugn Monroe and Henderson’s aesthetic precepts, advocating a greater attention to form and doubting the merits of poetry that appeared to some readers as little more than aimless and foolish experimentation for its own sake. On the surface, the editorial exchanges that involved the two women – and occasionally Pound, as well – were debates over the merits of free verse and the threat of parochialism inherent in encouraging and publishing regional poets. Monroe’s publication of Lindsay and Sandburg (at Henderson’s urging), for instance, lead some readers to accuse the editor of “midwestern preferentialism.”\textsuperscript{102} Responding to accusations that she displayed a regional bent in her editorial policies, Monroe noted that hers was “a natural reaction to the eastern exclusion of [the Midwest],” and she dismissed claims that the publication might

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{101} Harriet Monroe, “The Enemies We Have Made,” \textit{Poetry} 4.2 (May 1914): 63-64. \\
\textsuperscript{102} Marek, 28.
\end{flushright}

199
become too “provincial.” On the contrary, like Henderson, Monroe maintained that American poets could become truly national through the expression of a local consciousness. If such poets were also eager to adopt the practices of an emerging, experimental modernism in their writing, this was all the better: after all, what country other than America, with its diverse history and multiple cultural influences, was more suited to stylistic originality and aesthetic innovation. Henderson’s support of the Midwestern poets and her enthusiasm for the “cowboy poets,” Native American culture, and Hispanic-American poets was more than simple regionalism; it demonstrated an openness to alternative forms of modernism, which was further cultivated by Monroe’s democratic editorial policies and her criticism.

Indeed, implicit in Monroe’s “Enemies” article is a defense of regional modernism, in particular – of a kind of writing akin in spirit and execution to the literature of the Irish Revival. As Henderson remarked in reviewing Edgar Lee Masters’s *Spoon River Anthology* (1915), the American literary tradition, “a tradition more indigenous than that of the colonial New England school, is still in the making.” Writers like Masters and Sandburg in the Midwest or Frost in New England, by creating a myth of their region and “giving an intensely vital meaning to our human environment,” had done for modern American poetry “what the young Irish writers have done for Ireland.” As comments like these reveal, underlying the debates Monroe and her collaborators engaged over poetic form and subject was a broader debate over the

---

103 Quoted in ibid.
character of a national literature – a set of conversations not unlike those that motivated Yeats and his contemporaries to initiate their own movement for cultural self-definition.

Perhaps as a result of the magazine’s progressive stance and its recognition of multiple modernisms, the role played by Poetry in defining a modernist poetics is somewhat ambiguous. According to Carr, “accounts of Poetry in the past have often placed it in a paradoxical relationship to modernism,” depicting its editors as “sub- or perhaps pre-modernist” – a judgment that rests on vague or oversimplified definitions of modernism and the avant-garde. The magazine neither rejected “the bourgeois status quo,” as did other forms of American avant-gardism, nor did it “critique art as an institution,” in Peter Bürger’s sense of the term. On the contrary, Monroe conceived of the publication as a kind of institution-in-print for poets, and by presenting poetry as a reciprocal relationship between an artist and his audience, and as the expression of an artist’s individual experience, she imagined that this particular form of writing might improve and enrich American life. For Monroe, Carr argues, “the whole point of the new poetry was that it reached its audience more directly.” Although the editor succeeded in this objective and in encouraging a broad range of American writing – arguably influencing the canon of American modernism – perhaps the magazine’s greatest unacknowledged contribution to modern poetry lay in its receptiveness to forms of regional expression. Only by re-reading Poetry in light of the practices and imperatives of the Irish Revival can we fully apprehend both the publication’s influence and its debt to revivalism.

---

105 Carr, 50.
106 Carr, 53.
Chapter 4: “the same thing in different ways happening”: Nashville’s Fugitive Poets and the Idea of Ireland

In April 1922, at nearly the same moment that *The Fugitive* (1922-1925) magazine debuted in Nashville, Tennessee, Harriet Monroe, editor of *Poetry* and widely regarded as a leading figure in the emerging cause of transatlantic modernism, selected Hervey Allen and DuBose Heyward to guest-edit a special issue of the magazine called the “Southern Number.” Allen and Heyward were co-founders of the Poetry Society of South Carolina, intended to promote the revival of Southern literature, and the two had jointly published the collection *Carolina Chansons: Legends of the Low Country* at the time Monroe enlisted their help. The special issue, she claimed, was intended to alert Southern poets to their responsibility as curators of culture – to remind them, in her words, “of the heroic history and romantic legendry of [their] region, much of which will fade from human memory unless the poets make it live.”¹ Her editorial was a call to Southern poets, not to preserve the past at the expense of writing modern poetry, but instead to capitalize on their regional culture and to produce “a strongly localized indigenous art.”² Interestingly, just a year earlier, Monroe had repeated many of the same sentiments in her review of Lady Augusta Gregory and William Butler Yeats’s *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland*, a collection of Irish folktales. She praised the collection for assembling “the raw material out of which the modern Irish poets, headed by Synge and Yeats, have shaped masterpieces, and from which their successors will continue to draw so long as there are Irish poets.”³

---

Nashville’s Fugitives poets, however, were vexed by Monroe’s charge and by what they perceived as her misguided advice to Southern writers. Speaking on behalf of the group in an editorial in *The Fugitive*, Donald Davidson quoted the parts of her review that the poets found particularly objectionable:

“Heavy with the burden of the world,” Miss Harriet Monroe speaks an editorial au revoir in the May *Poetry*. She will spend the summer in Europe, and one supposes that American Poetry will have to limp along as best it may in her absence. Much as we admire Miss Monroe’s distinguished labors on behalf of poetry, it is difficult to applaud the limitations she proposes for Southern poets. […] All tribute to Mr. Heyward and Mr. Allen for their achievements!

Undoubtedly the Old South is literary material to those who may care to write about it. But many may not. It is not the province of any critic to dictate the material these many shall choose. They will guffaw at the fiction that the Southern writer of today must embalm and serve up as an ancient dish. They will create from what is nearest and deepest in experience – whether it be old or new, North, South, East, or West – and what business is that of Aunt Harriet’s?⁴

As minor as this contretemps might seem in retrospect, it points to an enduring set of problems in both our understanding of the Fugitive movement and how the Fugitives themselves understood their own project. When the poets assembled in Nashville in 1922, the key members of the group – Davidson, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren – looked to Ireland as a parallel society and to the Irish Literary Revival as a model for the production of a self-critical yet culturally representative

literature. The Fugitive group has been the subject of a number of studies, many of which have focused on the conservatism of the Agrarian movement and the publication of *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), often eclipsing the poet’s literary program and their early meetings at Vanderbilt University. More recently, work by Kieran Quinlan and Kathryn Stelmach Artuso has addressed the Fugitives’ interest in the Irish Revival directly, exploring the historical and intellectual links between Ireland and the American South. Their studies recover significant cultural parallels and common factors that motivated writers in both places, persuasively illustrating the transatlantic influence of the Irish Revival on the Southern Renaissance. Yet very little research has acknowledged that the version of Ireland and the Irish Revival the Fugitives imagined was strangely de-politicized, and in fact revealed as much – if not more – about the poets’ evolving attitudes towards the South as it did about the example of Ireland and its influence. As I will discuss in what follows, the group relied on a complex construction of Ireland – an admittedly fictive, transatlantic formulation that reinforced the Fugitives’ perception of their own region as, in Warren’s words, “firmly organized,” “fixed” and “static.” This was a version of Ireland heavily indebted to modernist print culture, which, as we have seen, marketed the Revival and Irish writers for an American audience, and which served as the Fugitives’ main introduction to the movement.

---


Indeed, the complexity of the poets’ project comes into clearest focus when we reconsider both the Ireland they imagined and its consequences for the modernism they practiced. In particular, the poets’ use of the Irish example involved them in a series of theoretical formulations concerning the relationship between their poetry and their region. Warren described the group as possessing a “European orientation” during the early years of their collaboration. “Our attention was focused on the European writers rather than the U.S. Northern,” he explained, particularly on the Irish, who were likewise writing from “a provincial area, speaking provincial English.”

The poets identified especially with Yeats, whom they imagined as both a modern artist emerging from a cultural periphery and as a traditionalist, whose poetry revitalized familiar forms. As addressed in the previous chapter, this duality in Yeats’s reputation was largely the result of how the poet identified himself to American audiences and of how he was presented by Ezra Pound, Monroe and other modernist figures. In identifying with Yeats, the Fugitives recognized themselves, in one way, as the products of a traditional society subject to the disruptive forces of modern development: the experience of writing from within this cultural shock, they believed, granted them a unique perspective from which to respond to the feelings of fragmentation and dislocation that spurred modernist writing elsewhere. They intended to demonstrate that – like the Irish writers they admired – they could produce a vibrant, modern literature from within a region popularly portrayed as backwards, outmoded and marginal. Moreover, the group saw itself as sharing with Yeats, in particular, the practice of looking critically at one’s own society, cultural inheritance and literary tradition. In another way, the example of Yeats led some

---

members of the group to interpret the Irish poet’s investment in tradition as a simple traditionalism – an understanding that both deemphasized the political and social contexts of Yeats’s poetry, and which inspired some of the Fugitives to pit Yeats against more experimental poets like T. S. Eliot or Pound. Reading the Nashville poets’ activities alongside the Irish Revival and in the context of a regional Southern culture thus serves as a case study in the relationship of the Revival and of Yeats to the American modernist imagination.

To recover the volatile blend of regional assertion and cosmopolitan reach in the Fugitives’ early work, we must return to the poets’ intellectual moment, resisting the temptation to read “back” from the group’s later Agrarian phase. In addition, as I have suggested, we must look closely at the strategic influence of Ireland, and of Yeats in particular, on the way the Fugitives not only imagined modernism, but practiced it. Doing so entails revisiting the archives of the little magazines they read, including Poetry and The Little Review, both of which helped to shape the group’s perception of modern poetry and of Ireland’s literary renaissance. By attending to the publications’ efforts to market Irish writers and the Irish Revival, and by considering the Fugitives’ own poetry and criticism, I will address how the poets drew on the Irish example while still deviating from and misreading it in notable ways. To further clarify the stakes of this project, I also return to the controversy, addressed in The Fugitive magazine, that erupted with Harriet Monroe—who, tellingly, responded to Nashville and Irish poets as if they were of

9 In her study of Southern writers influenced by the Nashville poets, Charlotte H. Beck, The Fugitive Legacy: A Critical History (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001) rightly observes: “The cultural importance of the Fugitives has too often been confused with the narrow politics of Agrarianism and relegated to a reactionary piety for regionalism and dead tradition” (11). Following Beck’s lead, I am suggesting that such characterizations misrepresent the complex relationships between the poets’ regional attachments, their impact on Southern modernism, and their awareness of other – especially Irish – literary revivals.
a piece.\textsuperscript{10} Although the Fugitives’ poetry has tended to receive less critical attention than their subsequent Agrarian and New Critical pursuits, this early phase of their assembly is significant for highlighting the dynamic international exchange of modernist themes and practices that occurred in this period, and for illustrating the version of revivalism that resulted.\textsuperscript{11}

I. The Example of Ireland

We have long known that Ireland was a place of reference for writers across the United States in the early twentieth century: Yeats’s lectures and his promotional tours on behalf of the Abbey Theatre introduced American poets to modern Irish writing, and Pound and Eliot transmitted Yeats’s influence to the younger generation.\textsuperscript{12} But it was Southern writers, in particular, who viewed Ireland as an historically and culturally analogous space – although in different ways, I mean to show, than we have customarily thought. Recent scholarship has pointed to the strategic role that Ireland – and its “strikingly similar historical experience of defeat, poverty, and dispossession” – played in shaping the Fugitives’ intellectual project.\textsuperscript{13} The earliest acknowledgment, however, was likely Warren’s, who wrote in 1969 that the Irish example brought into focus for the poets a more general tension between “the folk and the international.” The idea of Ireland as a parallel to the South – as “a somewhat backward society in an outlying place

\textsuperscript{10} For previous discussions of this controversy, see Rubin, Jr., \textit{The Wary Fugitives} 144; Pratt, 32; Stewart, 39; and Cowan, 114-117.

\textsuperscript{11} In addition to the aforementioned studies of this early phase, see also John M. Bradbury, \textit{The Fugitives: A Critical Account} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958).


\textsuperscript{13} Quinlan, \textit{Strange Kin} 4.
with a different tradition and a rich folk-life, facing the big modern machine” –
stimulated the group’s early efforts to produce a modern poetry with local roots. “There
were three factors in this,” Warren explained:

on the one hand there was the new poetry – Pound and Eliot – which was
appreciated very early there and read in Nashville when it was not read in New
York, and then Yeats and the Irish. Young Tennesseans who had been off in the
First World War, or had studied at Oxford or in Paris, seized on this parallel.14

Other contemporaries and critics, of course, also saw the likeness. The myth of a
non-modern region in fact had great currency on both sides of the Atlantic in the first
decades of the twentieth century. Cleanth Brooks, for example, described the folk
cultures that nurtured Yeats and William Faulkner as “obviously old-fashioned and
provincial – quite out of the mainstream of life in our advanced civilization of the
West.”15 In his review of the Fugitive anthology, Edmund Wilson likewise referenced
the provincialism of Ireland and the South, noting that the region’s “detachment from the
industrial world and its strong local tradition” gave rise to “unique advantages for the
cultivation of literature; it is not impossible to imagine its playing…a role similar in some
respects to that which eighteenth-century Ireland has played in respect to modern
London.”16 In the same spirit, Seán Ó Faoláin compared Faulkner’s Mississippi to his
own County Cork, noting “the same passionate provincialism; the same local patriotism;
the same southern nationalism” that typified life outside of the cultural and intellectual

---

centers of the writers’ respective countries. The political turmoil of Ireland in the early 1920s – the obvious and violent eruption of history into modern life, the presence of a disenfranchised population, the erosion of an agricultural economy – made the country an apt parallel.

The combination of revolt and traditionalism that characterized the Irish Revival likewise resonated with the Nashville poets, who admired aspects of the South’s cultural heritage, even as they subjected this heritage to critical scrutiny. The group used the occasion of their magazine’s debut in 1922 to announce their rejection of the “moonlight and magnolia” school of Southern literature, attempting to clear the field for a new kind of Southern writing. “Official exception having been taken by the sovereign people to the mint julep,” the opening manifesto began, “a literary phase known rather euphemistically as Southern Literature has expired, like any other stream whose source is stopped up.” In what is now a familiar announcement, the poets also declared their independence from political bias. “The Fugitive flees from nothing faster than from the high-caste Brahmins of the Old South,” they proclaimed, rejecting a programmatic approach to poetry yet giving little indication of their intentions in publishing the magazine. As Davidson explained, “This [statement] meant simply that we wanted our poetry to be judged on its merits. We asked no indulgence for our verses on the ground that we were Southerners.” He later pointed to the limitations of Southern culture and the danger Southern writers faced of “being emptily local and sentimental” – a danger the

group sought to avoid in making a clear declaration of its autonomy. The magazine’s manifesto served as both the repudiation of an outdated Southern literary tradition and as the poets’ point of entry into modern literature.

As it was, regional modernists like the Fugitives often had comparatively fewer homegrown publications to feature their work than did their counterparts in places like New York and Chicago, and perhaps a smaller audience of literary-minded readers. The group’s magazine was intended first as an outlet for the poets, used to promote their poetry and to legitimize their efforts on behalf Southern writing for readers in the South and outside it. It also served as evidence of the South’s intellectual activity and budding literary culture, contrary to H. L. Mencken’s and others’ accounts of the region’s provinciality. Criticism of the South in the popular press in fact created a novel challenge for the region’s little magazines and their editors and contributors: such publications were tasked with refuting stereotypes of the South that cast it as culturally sterile, primitive and intolerant. This defensive mode was unique to Southern

---

21 In the early years of the Fugitives’ assembly, the American South suffered from its reputation in intellectual and popular discourse as “backward” – as a provincial and old-fashioned region, ostensibly anomalous in mainstream America. There was, of course, some historical basis for Southern exceptionalism, namely the economic, cultural and social differences between the South and the North. That being said, we have often underestimated the modernization of the region: see, for instance, Edward L. Ayers, The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
22 George B. Tindall, for instance, christened the region the “benighted South,” alluding to the journalistic attacks it sustained in the years surrounding World War I. The most famous of these attacks, of course, was H. L. Mencken’s essay, “The Sahara of the Bozart,” published in 1917 in the New York Evening Mail. In the essay, Mencken emphasized the artistic and cultural sterility of the South and condemned the “Baptist and Methodist barbarism that reigns down there,” and which resulted, in his estimation, in a fundamentalism that discouraged intellectual inquiry. “Down there a poet is now almost as rare as an oboe-player, a dry-point etcher or a metaphysician,” he writes. Instead, the South is “that stupendous region of worn-out farms, shoddy cities and paralyzed cerebrums,” “that gargantuan paradise of the fourth-rate” and a “vast plain of mediocrity, stupidity, lethargy, almost of dead silence” – in effect, a dried-up civilization. In the face of such Northern provocation and misinterpretation, as they saw it, Southern liberals often responded by touting local progressivism and reform. “Progressivism” in the South was, of course,
periodicals, as their Northern and European counterparts lacked the same stimulus to protect and bolster their regions. Ironically, it was this very mode that likewise curtailed the experimentalism and boldness of the Fugitives’ poetry, leading them to write an erudite, dense and sometimes obscure poetry – in the style of poets like Hardy or early Yeats – as evidence of their urbani ty. Their perception of the South as a beleaguered and misunderstood region, excluded from the industrialism of the North, was also the basis of their affinity for Ireland, which the poets imagined as occupying an analogous position relative to England.

Yet what we have not sufficiently recognized is that the Fugitives’ appropriation of Ireland was, paradoxically, both foundational to their poetic project, and yet “invented.” Quinlan has claimed that the relationship between the Fugitives and Yeats, in particular, was one of parallel development rather than direct influence: he maintains that “the very nature of their respective enterprises was such that their cues had to be found in themselves and in the traditions of their own societies, not in one another.”23 I am suggesting, however, that the affinity, although imagined, was a productive one for the Nashville poets, influencing the Fugitives’ poetry, their reception by other modernist poets, and subsequent critical assessments of the group’s contributions to modern poetry generally. In addition, I would argue that the group’s selective identification with Ireland worked reciprocally with their attitudes towards the South – a “fictive” likeness that in turn shaped the aesthetic rationales they applied to their poetry. Their idea of Ireland as a backward, traditional society, in other words, was in many ways an invention that

---

211


complemented the poets’ perception of their own region’s past as outmoded and enclosed. As David McWhirter has observed, comments like Brooks’s and Ó Faoláin’s reflect a tendency on the part of Irish and Southern-American writers alike to “deploy the category of place to naturalize culture,” and to depict regional culture as somehow pure and transcendent. Indeed, the fantasy of a discrete, homogeneous community underwrote the construction of both Ireland and the South in the period’s literature, allowing writers in both places to celebrate regional identity and to selectively emphasize the traditions attached to their communities.

In this respect, the Fugitives’ version of Ireland was potent, generative, and yet also contradictory. In one sense, it allowed the poets to follow Ireland’s example in claiming a space for the South in the modern world. Consciously recognizing Ireland as a cognate region, that is – as it were, reimagining Ireland through a Southern lens – led the Nashville poets to look to that nation, paradoxically, as a model of self-invention and as guide in the creation of a regional tradition. By analogizing the South to a “nation,” the Fugitives posited the Southern Renaissance as a developmental stage in their region’s fight for cultural autonomy, thereby securing its place amid the modern and cosmopolitan, not as an antiquated space left behind by such forces. They viewed themselves – like Yeats and his collaborators – as modern poets writing from within a peripheral culture, engaging many of the same questions that preoccupied their Irish counterparts: What is the poet’s role in a modernizing society? In the absence of a viable literary tradition, how does he invent one? How does he utilize the rich regional resources at his fingertips without succumbing to sentimentalism or local color? Who is

he addressing? And how might he draw upon local and regional networks in order to
distribute his work nationally and internationally?"25

The example of Yeats was especially instructive in helping the group to answer
these questions: like the Fugitives, he wrote from within a minority culture, seeking to
create a viable tradition and to speak on behalf of his people, however selectively or
parochially this group was defined. As the Fugitives saw it, Yeats was both a modernist
and a traditionalist. He favored older forms yet made them contemporary, and he
demonstrated how myth provided a lens through which to view the modern world. The
Nashville poets were in fact among the first to conduct a critical study of Yeats after his
death. In a special issue of *The Southern Review* published in 1942, Davidson, Ransom
and Tate joined other Southern poets and scholars to evaluate Yeats’s contribution to
modern verse. As Edna Longley notes, Tate’s essay, in particular, claims the Irish poet
as a kind of forefather of Southern poetry. Tate defends *A Vision* as a schema that
“broadens out and merges with the traditional insights of our culture,” and he celebrates
Yeats’s poetry as being "nearer the center of our main traditions of sensibility and
thought than the poetry of Eliot or of Pound."26

The essay was published in 1942, long after both the Fugitive and Agrarian
phases of the Southern Renaissance, and Tate’s account of Yeats’s influence is thus

---

25 It is worth noting that the Fugitive’s project was an almost exclusively male enterprise. Although Laura
Riding was briefly associated with the group beginning in 1923 (she was officially accepted as a member in
March 1925), there is a surprising lack of scholarship concerning her contributions to the group’s early
activities and to the later New Critical pursuits of some of its participants. Studies by Amber Vogel and K.
K. Ruthven have sought to fill in this critical gap – addressing both Riding’s often-overlooked
contributions to the group and the gender politics of the Fugitives’ venture more generally – but more work
remains to be done. See K. K. Ruthven, “How to Avoid Being Canonized: Laura Riding,” *Textual Practice*
5.2 (Summer 1991): 242-260 and Laura (Riding) Jackson, “About the Fugitives and Myself” [with note,
“Something Different: Laura (Riding) Jackson’s Response,” by Amber Vogel], *Carolina Quarterly* 47.3

Memorial Issue, VII (Winter 1942): 597, 600 (italics mine). See also Longley, 35.
retrospective. Even still, his comments indicate the extent to which the Irish poet served as a model for the group in many respects. Yeats’s appeal was tied as much to the Fugitives’ sense of a “cultural lag” in Ireland, a parallel to conditions in the American South, as it was to the older poet’s preoccupation with folk culture and loss. The idea of Ireland as a backward-looking, traditional society was especially attractive to the group in 1939, at the time of Yeats’s death: by this time, the members’ collective focus had shifted from poetry to Agrarianism, and the fantasy of an enclosed and marginalized community resonated with their vision of the antebellum South. In Tate’s essay in The Southern Review, written during the ebb of the Agrarian phase, for example, the younger poet identifies Yeats’s Byzantium and the cordial hierarchy of noble and peasant as “versions of pastoral,” seeing in them a resemblance to the Southern planter and yeoman farmer. The Agrarian image of the South achieves the same “concrete relation to life undiluted by calculation and abstraction” that Tate observes in Yeats’s poetry. This image animated many of the Fugitives’ debates, even in the early years, as they looked to the Irish example for guidance. Terence Diggory maintains that the group was inspired by Yeats’s regionalism in their own attempts to reaffirm the value of community; yet in practice, the Fugitives rarely took the South or Southern culture as their subject in poetry, returning instead to an English literary tradition and bypassing rich sources of creative material in their own region and in its history. In fact, theirs was a regionalism concerned more with defending the South against charges of conservatism and anti-intellectualism than with celebrating the region’s culture and traditions.

27 Matthews, 163.
28 Allen Tate, “Yeats’s Romanticism: Notes and Suggestions” 598. See also Diggory, 145.
It is also worth noting that the poets overlooked significant historical and political conditions that distinguished the Irish Revival from their own pursuits, even as they identified it as a model. As a result, they imagined a movement motivated principally by a desire on the part of Irish writers to distance themselves from an outdated literary tradition and to produce a self-critical modern literature. This version of revivalism may have been influenced, in part, by the Irish revivalists’ own emphasis on artistic innovation over politics. When Yeats, Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn formally launched the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899, for example, they intentionally downplayed the political orientation and objective of their project:

We propose to have performed in Dublin, in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written in a high ambition, and so build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure a tolerant welcome, and that freedom which is not found in theatre of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, 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 it outside all the political questions that divide us.\(^\text{29}\)

The group expressed its intention to found an institution rooted in Irish culture and history, and to establish an Irish literary presence in the English language via the Revival. Despite claiming to sidestep politics, the founders’ desire to promote models of national identity through Irish drama and literature was inherently political: cultural nationalism, on one level, was an attempt to speak on behalf of a misrepresented population – an objective that also resonated with the Fugitives, who felt similarly compelled to defend the South against the caricatures and distortions of the Northern press. The manifesto and the title “Irish Literary Theatre” make explicit the link between literary representation and power – the assumption that political independence would follow the assertion of a distinctive cultural identity. Yet by framing the Theatre and the wider Revival as chiefly literary, Yeats and his collaborators shifted the focus away from politics and towards aesthetics. Nearly twenty years later, the Fugitives made a similar move, decoupling nationalism – for which they had no use – from what they perceived to be the artistic objectives of revivalism.

II. The Magazine Version of Yeats

Their understanding of the Irish situation, however, was also influenced by their introduction to Irish writers and the Irish Revival via modernist print culture. Failing to find models in the South for the kind of poetry they hoped to write, the Fugitives turned instead to the Irish movement as it was presented in the pages of little magazines. As the previous chapter addressed, modernist little magazines regularly featured poetry and drama by Yeats, reviews of Irish literature, and references to cultural developments within Ireland. Publications like Monroe’s Poetry were attuned to the literary objectives of the Irish Revival – which, in many respects, mirrored American artists’ own attempts
to cultivate an indigenous modern literature – but such publications naturally were less concerned with the historical and political contexts of revivalism. As a consequence, discussions of the movement as a whole were conspicuously absent from much of modernist print culture outside of Ireland. Instead, little magazine editors tended to focus on individual Irish writers, de-emphasizing the nationalism that informed their work and positioning artists like Yeats, James Joyce and J. M. Synge in a transnational modernist context. By embracing a version of revivalism fashioned by modernist print culture, the Fugitive poets thus apprehended the movement largely from an aesthetic or literary perspective. This understanding of the Revival had important implications for how the group engaged with, deviated from, and imitated the Irish example.

The absence of any historical or political context for the Revival or its artists in American little magazines is not altogether surprising, given the nature of the genre. Such publications were founded mainly as venues for modernist writing; unlike cultural journals or periodicals that served as the mouthpiece of a particular organization, many little magazines eschewed overt political or social agendas, aiming instead to open the door to a wide variety of artistic expression. This is not to suggest that such publications were apolitical. On the contrary, as Suzanne Churchill and Adam McKible argue, the genre was defined, in part, by its tendency to “challenge conventional political wisdom and practice.” The blend of “aesthetic experimentation and political radicalism,” they claim, enabled little magazines to engage a wide, sometimes contentious range of

---

30 To be sure, political developments in Ireland were of interest to some American readers – notably, Irish immigrants and Irish-Americans – but these readers more often relied on explicitly nationalist publications like John Devoy’s Gaelic American and Patrick Ford’s The Irish World and Industrial Liberator, which reflected the cultural and political climate in Ireland to a greater degree than American literary magazines.
opinions on modern poetry, art and politics. While the very act of launching an iconoclastic magazine was inherently political – and although certain magazines embraced a range of political movements – a number of these publications imagined and presented themselves as sacrosanct artistic and intellectual spaces. Many little magazine manifestos voiced deliberate rejections of political propagandizing, and unlike newspapers, most magazines did not include explicit discussions of current social or political events. The idea that little magazines embedded modernist writing “in the literary and social discourses, political debates, and historical events of the day” was thus somewhat of a fiction for many publications. Instead, many magazines presented modernist work on its own terms – exclusive of any biographical, historical, political or cultural context – in a way that in fact anticipated the New Critical approach later advocated by Ransom, Warren and Cleanth Brooks. Monroe’s perception of her own magazine as a gallery space for artists reflected this formalist approach: the printed poem, like a painting or sculpture, could be displayed and evaluated in the pages of Poetry as a purely aesthetic object.

To better appreciate the Fugitives’ early ambitions as poets, we must therefore consider precisely how Ireland’s cultural renaissance and its artists were marketed to American audiences. By the time they assembled to write poetry, the Fugitives had access to a number of little magazines and literary journals intent on shaping an international modernism. The group was well versed in modern literary trends, due both to the number of modernist magazines published and circulating in the South and to the unusually literate culture at Vanderbilt University. Warren described his years at the

32 Ibid.
school as “a strange situation” of dynamic literary activity. As he explained, Vanderbilt students had a voracious appetite for contemporary poetry, in particular. “[I]f an issue of *Dial* would come out,” Warren recalled, “people would line up to get the first one. Freshmen were buying the *New Republic* or *The Nation*, to get the new poem by Yeats or the new poem by Hart Crane.”

Issues of *The Little Review* and *Poetry* sparked lively debates in the group on the merits of modernist experimentation; closer to home, *The Double Dealer* in New Orleans, *The Review* in Richmond, and *The Lyric* in Norfolk led to the re-birth of the poet-critic in the South. Collectively, these magazines provided an access point to the wider literary world, enabling the group to engage the same questions in their poetry as their contemporaries outside the region – questions stimulated in the South, as elsewhere, by technological and social change. When the Fugitives published their own magazine, they sent copies to New York, Chicago, London and Paris, among other places, deliberately courting an extra-regional audience and marketing themselves as modern poets and members of an international community of letters.

The impulse to position themselves and their poetry in an international context was one learned from other little magazines. As we have seen, Monroe’s *Poetry*, for example, encouraged “local” verse with the publication of a Chicago issue and the Southern Number, but the editor was also keen to feature the best work being produced outside the United States – hence her arrangement with Pound, who served as the magazine’s foreign correspondent during its early years. Even within individual issues, Monroe published Carl Sandburg alongside Yeats, or Vachel Lindsay next to Rabindranath Tagore, deliberately balancing submissions from Midwestern poets with

---

foreign “imports,” and creating a productive tension between the local, national and international within her magazine. In a similar way, Margaret Anderson’s *Little Review* featured a diverse blend of writers from across the United States and Europe, including Richard Aldington, Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams and many others. Like Monroe, Anderson promoted modernism in its many forms, accepting experimental writing from across the Continent – again with the help of Pound as foreign editor. *The Little Review* was accordingly cosmopolitan and internationalist in scope, yet it also helped to make Chicago a hub of innovative and experimental poetry, working in tandem with *Poetry* to cultivate a kind of homegrown regional modernism that complemented the contributions from further afield. Both magazines were engaged with intellectual and cultural debates occurring outside of the United States, which their editors believed paralleled and informed the work of American artists. The predominant ethos governing Monroe’s and Anderson’s publications was thus consistent with the impulses of Irish revivalism: the women encouraged American poets to produce a native literature with regional attributes, as they believed Irish writers to have done, but a literature that was simultaneously in dialogue with other forms of modernist expression elsewhere. In keeping with this objective, *Poetry, The Little Review* and other likeminded magazines created the impression that American poets were writing and participating in a wider international cultural arena, and that although they may draw on the material closest at hand, they were also responding to transnational trends in poetry.

---

35 In a early letter to Monroe, in which he offered his own editorial policy for *Poetry*, Pound suggested that the editor “import only such work as is better than that produced at home.” See Ezra Pound, letter to Harriet Monroe (September 1912) in Joseph Parisi and Stephen Young (eds.), *Dear Editor: A History of Poetry in Letters, The First Fifty Years, 1912-1962* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 33.
The focus, in other words, was on presenting such artists as citizens in a global community of letters.

As such publications make clear, modernism imagined itself as an international phenomenon – a network of contemporaneous responses to the varied experience of modernity in places across the world. As a consequence, even artists like Yeats – whose initial reputation in America was staked, in large part, on his Irish nationality – were often presented as cosmopolitan figures, sometimes to the exclusion of nationality.

Consider, for instance, the poems Yeats chose to publish in little magazines, as opposed to Irish newspapers or literary journals. The February 1916 issue of Poetry featured a number of poems from Yeats’s *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919), yet the selections – which included “The Dawn,” “On Woman,” “The Fisherman,” “The Hawk” and others – were arguably less overtly Irish than other poems in the collection. Even the experience of reading Yeats’s poetry in a little magazine – isolated on the page, unaccompanied by editorial comment or explanation – divorced his poems from the fabric of Irish history and politics that enveloped and informed them. The context instead was resoundingly aesthetic – an assortment of other poems, critical essays, literary reviews and advertisements for other modernist writing – such that the individual poem asserted itself, not as a political statement or an historical artifact, but as a literary object. By choosing to publish in modernist magazines, Yeats was staking his claim to a place in the international network of modern poets. Yet identifying as a modernist often entailed downplaying his Irishness, as if Yeats’s Irishness or his nationalism were somehow

---

36 In contrast, consider Yug Mohit Chaudhry’s comprehensive and insightful analysis of “September 1913” in its original bibliographic context in *The Irish Times*. Chaudhry’s reading calls attention to the way the poem is embedded, literally and figuratively, in the political and social discourses of its historical moment, and how this context inflects our interpretation of Yeats’s work. See *Yeats, the Irish Literary Revival, and the Politics of Print* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001).
incompatible with his modernism. Pascale Casanova has addressed the mechanisms of the world literary system, arguing that writers from peripheral nations, like Ireland, could only attain cultural capital by bypassing the national stage and aiming instead for international status. The pressure to achieve international attention thus complicated a writer’s relationship to his national traditions, yet the difficulty was compounded for an artist like Yeats, whose emergence coincided with a period of political and cultural revolution. As Yeats sought to declare his cosmopolitan-ness, in other words – a move facilitated by his decision to publish in a range of international modernist magazines – he simultaneously attempted to fulfill the role of national poet and revivalist leader. For American readers, this meant having to reconcile seemingly contradictory qualities in Yeats’s poetry: the move towards a more universal modernist style and the public nature of his poetry, which tackled issues of Irish nationality and identity.

To solve this problem, many magazine editors and critics transformed the conflict between Irishness and internationalism into one between traditionalism and modernism, deliberately shifting the discussion away from the political content and context of Yeats’s work and focusing instead on his style and status. Pound, for instance, routinely attempted to shoehorn Yeats into the collective of leading modernist artists (according to his standards), describing him, for instance, as “the only poet worthy of serious study” and “the best poet in England.” Anderson likewise acknowledged Yeats’s contributions to modern verse and largely overlooked his Irishness, even in reprinting the speech Yeats had delivered at the Poetry awards banquet in March 1914 – an event that coincided with the Irish poet’s third American lecture tour. Titling the article “William Butler Yeats to

American Poets,” she presented Yeats’s speech as his attempt “to warn his confreres in America against a number of besetting sins.”

Despite autobiographical references to his own development, including the challenge of writing a non-rhetorical poetry in a country as politicized as Ireland, Anderson’s introduction frames Yeats’s speech as general advice from a master craftsman to novice poets.

Even in discussions of Yeats’s more explicitly Irish material, his Irishness was often downplayed or omitted in both magazines. Reviewing Yeats’s work in 1916, for example, Poetry contributor Mary Colum observes, “This later work differs from his early work in vocabulary, and in an impassioned directness of expression acquired through years of working for the theatre. It is an attempt to get nearer the ordinary things of life, an attempt to grapple with common and topical interests – city councils, political intrigues, music hall dancers, etc.” She continues, “In his early work he brought back again the old Irish legends and folk-tales; in his later work he has brought back that imaginative and impassioned satire which used to be the birth-gift of the old Gaelic bards.”

Although Colum acknowledges Yeats’s early Celticism and his work on behalf of the Abbey, she subordinates these details to her praise of the poet’s directness and new vocabulary, and his focus on “the ordinary things in life.”

Colum’s comments echo Pound’s assessment of Yeats’s poetry in his 1914 review of Responsibilities, in which Pound praised the Irish poet’s “harder” style and commended Yeats for producing work that was “no longer romantically Celtic.” The previous chapter acknowledged Pound’s role in shaping Yeats’s reputation in America,

---

demonstrating Pound’s tendency to emphasize Yeats’s aesthetic transformation over his nationality. As he would later do with Joyce, Pound presented Yeats as a cosmopolitan artist and a participant in a wider modernist literary movement – as a writer, in other words, “disengaged with politics” and concerned instead with the “universal human condition in the modern age.”

This strategy is evident, for instance, in Pound’s comments on and reviews of Yeats’s poetry, which regularly emphasized the Irish poet’s commonalities with other modernist writers and downplayed or ignored the Irish content of Yeats’s work. In Pound’s version of Yeats, the poet’s Irishness – including Ireland’s historical experience of fragmentation and discontinuity, and the cultural nationalism of the Revival – was secondary to his technique. As many scholars have observed, Pound’s literary alliances and endorsements were often made in the service of his own aesthetic agenda. In praising Yeats’s poetry for qualities that were essentially Imagist – a natural diction, familiar subjects treated in a realistic way, the absence of sentiment – Pound both presented Yeats as a leading modernist poet and simultaneously claimed him for his own literary program. Yeats’s style and methods were relevant in this regard, but the cultural and political contexts of his work were less so.

The version of Yeats that emerged from modernist print culture in America was therefore varied – he was an exemplar of modern poetry, a traditionalist in the act of modernizing, a cultural leader and a public intellectual – but the focus was more often on his work than his politics, particularly on his relationship to tradition. As Diggory argues, following World War I, the absence of tradition “was acknowledged as the

---

42 Joseph Kelly, Our Joyce: From Outcast to Icon (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 9, 64. Kelly’s comments refer to Joyce, whose reputation, he argues, was similarly “de-Irished” by Pound and T. S. Eliot. His analysis is equally relevant to Yeats’s reputation abroad, which Pound also played a key role in shaping, as the previous chapter demonstrates.
situation of modern art generally,” preoccupying poets in the United States and abroad. “To those for whom tradition is preserved through formal technique,” he maintains, “Yeats shows how the trimeter line of the eight-line stanza can be made freshly contemporary. To those for whom tradition is a pattern of belief, Yeats shows how the modern world can be set parallel to myth.” Diggory’s observations reiterate comments made by Eliot sixty years earlier in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth,” an essay published in The Dial just a year after the Nashville group first assembled. In the essay, Eliot praised Yeats as “the first contemporary” to use myth as “a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.” Without acknowledging that the practice was in fact common to many revivalist writers, Eliot credits the Irish poet with discovering the mythic method, thus clearing the way for later modernists to adopt this technique in their own writing. Yet, in other articles and reviews, he expressed his reservations regarding Yeats’s style and sensibility, seeming at times to define his own explicitly modernist aesthetic against Yeats’s Romanticism – a comparison that further affirmed the version of Yeats as traditionalist. Because Eliot, along with Pound, served as the Fugitives’ primary point of access to Yeats’s work, this is the version of the Irish poet the Nashville group inherited.

It was likely for this reason that the Fugitives were slow to appreciate Yeats as a modernist. When Tate attended a public lecture given by Yeats in Nashville in 1920, for example, he expressed disappointment in the poet’s decision to read from his early poems

43 Diggory, 4, 10.
rather than the poetry of social critique that Yeats had begun to write. By electing to read poetry written before 1900, Yeats also contributed to what Longley describes as the poet’s misrepresentation in “modernist constructions of modernist poetry,” and to the younger generation’s delayed appreciation of his work. Even so, Yeats held a special, if ambiguous appeal for the Nashville poets: his struggle to assemble a fit audience for his poetry and drama attracted the group’s attention, as did his concern with the problem of tradition. Longley contends that the Fugitives “understood Yeats’s access to Irish ‘tradition’ rather literally,” in effect de-historicizing his poetry “by folding Yeatsian history into vague ‘world history.’” Yet in doing so, the poets were simply replicating the strategies of artists like Eliot and Pound or likeminded magazine editors, who regularly overlooked the political function and resonance of Yeats’s work within the specific context of the Revival. As a consequence, the modernism the Fugitives found in Yeats better described their own practice, which sought self-consciously to assemble modern poetry from the remnants of a generalized Anglophone literary tradition. In practicing this kind of modernism, the poets considered themselves as Yeats’s literary heirs, tapping into creative resources from the past and making a virtue of their embeddedness in, as Davidson described it, “a traditional believing society.”

III. A Different Kind of (Southern) Modernism

Their poetic practices, nevertheless, still diverged from the Irish example in significant ways. As is well known, Yeats and Lady Gregory both viewed Ireland’s “traditions” as source material: along with other writers of the Revival, they turned for

---

45 According to Diggory, 136, the title of Yeats’s lecture was “My Own Poetry with Illustrative Readings,” and the selection of poems included “The Lake Isle of Inisfree,” “The Fiddler of Dooney,” “The Song of the Wandering Aengus,” “The Cape and Bells” and “He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven.”

46 Longley, 34-35.

47 Donald Davidson, “The Thankless Muse and Her Fugitive Poets” 228.
inspiration to a distinctively Irish cultural heritage, attempting to produce a representative national literature and to articulate an “authentic” Irish identity. The Fugitives’ selective rejection of their own cultural heritage on the grounds of its tendency towards sentimentality and obsolescence prevented them from practicing the same distinctive blend of curation and innovation that characterized much of revivalist writing. Despite acknowledging, in Davidson’s words, the value of “the old and established things” as the “marks of a native character and tradition,” the poets seemingly found more to draw from in nineteenth-century English and French traditions than in Southern history and culture.⁴⁸ They dismissed, for example, many of the subjects and themes – including nostalgia for the Old South, clichés of Southern romanticism, and stock regional scene and characters – that other Southern poets, like those of the Poetry Society of South Carolina, readily embraced. As comments like Davidson’s make clear, the Fugitives attempted to follow the Irish example by making a virtue of their embeddedness in a particular region, and to imitate Yeats in the production of a self-critical regional literature. Yet in practice, Yeats served them more as an emblem – the modern poet emerging from a peripheral society – than as a model. Further, because the Irish poet’s influence on the Fugitives was a kind of influence by degrees, transmitted indirectly through Pound and Eliot, the Nashville poets more often imitated Yeats’s formal techniques than they did his engagement with the traditions of his native culture. The desire to recover and utilize material from the South’s past was thus largely absent from the Fugitives’ project, concerned as the poets were with asserting their region’s modernity.

This perplexing absence reflected neither a rejection of the South itself and its way of life, nor a wholesale endorsement of urban modernism. Rather, theirs was a rejection of the impulse that they saw in Southern sentimentalism and nostalgia, which could so easily be commodified. By refusing to mythify the South or to manufacture a Southern identity to sell poetry – by considering themselves instead to be social critics and outsiders – the group was better able to express, as one intellectual historian has put it, the “experience of confusion, rootlessness, and alienation” that we associate with modernism.49 In other words, we might say that the “regional” quality of the Fugitives’ poetry – and one component of the basis for their identification with Ireland – lay not in subjects or themes that were recognizably Southern, but instead in the shared experience of writing from the margins – of overcoming what they regarded as the provincialism and cultural insularity of their region to vie for status alongside writers from the world literary capitals. In this, they were regionalists, and they believed themselves to be following in Yeats’s footsteps.

The Irish example, in one sense, thus provided the poets with a language for describing their practice of modernism, which often looked qualitatively different from the kinds of modernisms being practiced elsewhere. Theirs was a modernism that appeared more traditional and conservative – a product of Southern culture, in this respect, yet also in line with Yeats’s influence and his emphasis on traditional forms. Like Eliot and Pound, the Fugitives drew from history, but their poetry often referenced a more immediate and usable, regional past as opposed to the Classical world history of The Waste Land or The Cantos. The group’s poetry addressed, for example, the burden

of history in the South, the challenges of Reconstruction, and the complexity of regional identity, among other subjects; but it did so from a pragmatic, occasionally disillusioned perspective, quite distinct from the romanticism of much local color writing in the South.

The result of this treatment was a self-consciously local modernism – a poetry that referred to the South obliquely but resisted the tendency to celebrate an obvious regional identity for fear of falling victim to empty sentimentalism or kitsch. Citing the example of Ireland – aligning themselves with writers they believed were in an analogous position – allowed the Fugitives to declare their differences from metropolitan poets in New York or Chicago, while still claiming to participate in the same cultural movement happening in other, more cosmopolitan urban centers. In this sense, the group’s modernism was as much an index of Southern modernity as it was a critique.

In another sense, the Fugitives’ poetry, like their later Agrarianism, was an act of cultural defiance – in William Pratt’s word, “a testimony to the imaginative vitality of a region deemed backward in material progress” – in a period when regional identity and the celebration of local communities was too often confused with a belligerent sectionalism. Yeats’s familiar epigram points to the nature of the group’s project: “We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.” In this spirit, Davidson outlined the challenges facing the Southern writer:

The Old South, as Allen Tate has observed, left no culture of ideas that the Southern writer can cheerfully use; he can no more accommodate himself to his fabric than a flapper can put on hoopskirts. And in the new order his situation is equally baffling. He sees industrialism marching on, and can digest the victorious

---

cries of civic boosters even less readily than the treacly lamentations of the old school. [...] He is an alien particle in the body politic. And, by contrast, fresh ideas, new modes, new philosophies come to him from every quarter but the South. What wonder that his gaze flies beyond immediate surroundings to remote regions, and that, if he addresses himself to his locale at all, he often does so with ironic discontent.\(^{51}\)

In an effort to declare their modernity, Davidson implies, the Fugitives distanced themselves from a Southern tradition they considered obsolete, instead looking further afield for models of literary revivals that were similarly focused on cultural renovation. Their interest in Ireland as a cognate space is one example of the Nashville poets’ complex cosmopolitanism: Ireland’s fight for cultural and political autonomy provided the Fugitives with a template for securing the South’s place amid the modern. If the “coterie” model of Yeats and his Dublin-based collaborators also inspired the poets, so seemingly did its rebellious spirit. As if anticipating future complaints about parochialism leveled against the group’s poetry, Warren wrote: “[t]his whole encounter with the outside world from Ireland . . . this is very important to the South, some part of the South, anyway – the image of Ireland as a rebellious minority, and the South as a rebellious minority” inside otherwise-seemingly civilized nations.\(^{52}\)

The comparison to Ireland was therefore instrumental in shaping how the Fugitives understood the relationship between their poetry and their region. All four principal members devoted significant space in their criticism to defining what regionalism should and should not be, which entailed grappling with the question of how

\(^{51}\) Donald Davidson, “The Artist as Southerner” 782.

\(^{52}\) Warren, Talking with Robert Penn Warren 194.
to engage the South as subject. Davidson, for instance, argued that regional literature may be “among other things, a self-conscious expression of the life of a region,” but it should also “confront the total and moving world.” Asserting that regional art was defined by more than its subject-matter, he argued that a writer need only possess “(to quote Allen Tate) ‘the immediate, organic sense of life in which a fine artist works.’” In the same spirit, Ransom dismissed the wide literary use nowadays of the Southern scene, which includes cotton plantations, tobacco farms, piney woods, Charlestons, Deltas, swamps; of Southern stage-properties, such as magnolias and live-oaks, cane-stalks and yams, homespun garments, bandannas, gardenias, banjos; and of stock Southern characters, such as mountaineer distilleries and feudists, darkies, orators, Fundamentalists, as well as persons of ordinary costume and behaviour but given to accents and idioms. Though these materials may make the fortune of authors, they can hardly be said to determine the product as Southern.

To be Southern, he argued, was to possess a particular “character,” or a way of thinking and judging the world consistent with one’s locale. For the Fugitives, this meant writing poetry that was Southern, but not obviously so – placing the poets in a situation that paralleled the complex negotiations Yeats and Lady Gregory undertook in writing a representative Irish literature in English. The difference, of course, is that while the revivalists drew from a shared store of cultural material – using this material to counter British misrepresentations with a distinctively Irish national identity – the Fugitives’ aim

54 Donald Davidson, “Regionalism and Nationalism in American Literature” 53.
was to write a *modern* poetry, regardless of whether it was regionally representative or not. The group in fact drew a fine distinction between regionalism as the uncritical expression of place and regionalism as a local, specifically Southern perspective, but this was a distinction that many readers, critics and editors – and, alas, fellow poets – were often unable to make. In retrospect, the Fugitives recognized similarities between the cultural and creative challenges facing the writers of the Revival and Southern writers alike, citing the Revival as a blueprint for their own literary renaissance. Yet in practice, the poets seemed surprisingly unaware that their debt to the Irish model had more to with Yeats’s emphasis on poetic form and less to do with the debates over language, identity and politics that motivated the movement in Ireland.

As a consequence of this gap between theory and practice, we observe in their poetry a tension between a cosmopolitan, modernist style imitated from Eliot and a surface traditionalism inherited from Yeats. Yeats’s modernism in fact influenced the group before they even recognized it, despite the fact that their early work was more often closer in style to Eliot’s poetry from this period. Diggory notes, for example, a Yeatsian “dialogue between…the modern and premodern” in a number of Tate’s early poems, in particular. This is evident even in “Ode to the Confederate Dead,” in which Tate attempts to weld Eliot’s modernism to Southern history. The poem is often interpreted as a Southern version of *The Waste Land*: it describes a man pausing at the gate of a Confederate graveyard, his mind cycling between his region’s Civil War past and thoughts of his own mortality. As Tate explained in his essay “Narcissus as Narcissus,” “the poem is ‘about’ solipsism, a philosophical doctrine which says that we

---

56 Diggory, 137.
create the world in the act of perceiving it, or about Narcissism, or any other ism that
denotes the failure of the human personality to function objectively in nature and society.”

The “Ode” of the title is ironic, given that the poem is neither celebratory nor
public, but instead deeply private and pessimistic. The graveyard and its dead soldiers
embody both the speaker’s troubled stream of consciousness, and more generally, the
historical situation of the South in the mid- to late-nineteen twenties: the heroism of the
Old South is inaccessible to modern man, who struggles against a bleak determinism.

The poem’s first stanza announces the opposition of the individual and death,
describing a natural order dominated by the rows of headstones, which “yield their names
to the element” with “strict impunity.” This is a landscape that marks the Confederate
deaths “without recollection”: the wind blows dead leaves from the trees, which serve as
reminders of human mortality and as a “casual sacrament / To the seasonal eternity of
death.” The second and thirds stanzas introduce the poem’s protagonist, whose thoughts
turn to historical cycles and the heroism and glory of the dead soldiers:

Autumn is desolation in the plot
Of a thousand acres where these memories grow
From the inexhaustible bodies that are not
Dead, but feed the grass row after rich row.
Think of the autumns that have come and gone!—
Ambitious November with the humors of the year,
With a particular zeal for every slab,
Staining the uncomfortable angels that rot

On the slabs, a wing chipped here, an arm there:
The brute curiosity of an angel’s stare
Turns you, like them, to stone,
Transforms the heaving air
Till plunged to a heavier world below

You shift your sea-space blindly
Heaving, turning like the blind crab.

Dazed by the wind, only the wind
The leaves flying, plunge

You know who have waited by the wall
The twilight certainty of an animal,
Those midnight restitutions of the blood
You know – the immitigable pines, the smoky frieze
Of the sky, the sudden call: you know the rage,
The cold pool left by the mounting flood,
Of muted Zeno and Parmenides.
You who have waited for the angry resolution
Of those desires that should be yours tomorrow,
You know the unimportant shrift of death
And praise the vision
And praise the arrogant circumstance
Of those who fall
Rank upon rank, hurried beyond decision—
Here by the sagging gate, stopped by the wall.

Seeing, seeing only the leaves
Flying, plunge and expire

Eliot’s influence is obvious: in the desolate landscape and the speaker’s isolation, the poem echoes *The Waste Land*’s exploration of the modern human consciousness.

Memory, particularly the remembrance of the dead, links the past and the present in both poems, and Tate likewise borrows Eliot’s suggestion of a crab in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* – “a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas” – to imply mobility without direction, energy without purpose. Tate’s “blind crab,” he explains, is one of two symbols in the poems for “the locked-in ego,” and “the first intimation of the nature of the moral conflict upon which the drama of the poem develops: the cut-offness of the modern ‘intellectual man’ from the world” (139). The focus of this moral conflict, Tate continues, “is the theme of heroism…elevating even death from mere physical dissolution into a formal ritual” (140). The speaker attempts to
praise “the arrogant circumstance / Of those who fall / Rank upon rank, hurried beyond
decision” to early deaths. Yet the ravages of time, captured by the falling leaves of the
refrain, hinder his efforts to celebrate the valor and glory of the Confederate dead. The
heroic past is an alternative to the impotence and fragmentation of the speaker’s present –
captured in the image of the silent, smothered mummy or the “hound bitch / toothless and
dying” – but the vision is one that remains mostly inaccessible:

You hear the shout, the crazy hemlocks point
With troubled fingers to the silence which
Smothers you, a mummy, in time.

The hound bitch
Toothless and dying, in a musty cellar
Hears the wind only.

Now that the salt of their blood
Stiffens the saltier oblivion of the sea,
Seals the malignant purity of the flood,
What shall we who count our days and bow
Our heads with a commemorial woe
In the ribboned coats of grim felicity,
What shall we say of the bones, unclean,
Whose verdurous anonymity will grow?
The ragged arms, the ragged heads and eyes
Lost in these acres of the insane green?
The gray lean spiders come, they come and go;
In a tangle of willows without light
The singular screech-owl’s tight
Invisible lyric seeds the mind
With the furious murmur of their chivalry.

We shall say only the leaves
Flying, plunge and expire

Lines like these – dense with allusion, tortured imagery, irony, and complex syntax –
register what Tate described as “the modern squirrel cage of our sensibility, the extreme
introspection of our time” (140). The speaker’s “mute speculation” finds a voice in a
series of unanswered questions: “What shall we say who have knowledge / Carried to the
heart? / Shall we take the act / To the grave? Shall we, more hopeful, set up the grave / In the house? The ravenous grave?” The atmosphere is one of alienation and desolation, tempered only by the poem’s Classical form: a strophe, anti-strophe and epode impose order on the speaker’s anxious, reeling thoughts, paradoxically heightening their dramatic intensity. The poem is organized into verse paragraphs with a variable iambic meter and inconsistent but effective use of rhyme – formal features that contrast the poem’s subject, sustaining a tension that reinforces the speaker’s own nervous state. The “Ode” ends with an image of the serpent, Tate explains, a symbol of time:

Leave now

The shut gate and the decomposing wall:

The gentle serpent, green in the mulberry bush,

Riots with his tongue through the hush—

Sentinel of the grave who counts us all!

The speaker finds no easy resolution to his dilemma: like the mummy or the ouroboros – the snake biting its own tail – he is trapped in time, doomed to repeat historical cycles and unable to access the heroism of the dead soldiers. He cannot enter the graveyard any more than he could enter the past, hence his to command to leave the “shut gate and the decomposing wall,” barriers between the soldier’s glory and modern man’s decay.

Tate’s “Ode” demonstrates his fidelity to Eliot’s modernism, borrowing heavily from Eliot’s imagery and language, and capturing a sensibility consistent with the narrative voice of The Waste Land. Both poems present the dilemma of a mind confronting its own mortality and finding little comfort in mythology, religion, or nature – older systems of belief that no longer hold sway. In this, the “Ode” also strikes a
distinctly Yeatsian note. Tate’s exploration of historical cycles echoes Yeats’s interest in
the gyre, the Irish poet’s own personal myth of history. The poem dramatizes the
mythologizing process – the attempt to imagine an ideal version of the past as an
alternative to the present – and the ultimate failure of the myth to endure in the face of
reality. Like Yeats had done in *A Vision*, Tate examines the dualism of sense and
intellect, presenting a speaker whose perception of the world isolates him from the
bravery and grandeur of the past. On a formal level, Tate also imitates Yeats in
reaffirming the value of traditional forms. The “Ode” is written in a style that, according
to Davidson, possessed “a quality of cleanness and sureness, like the lines of a fine
statuary.”

Davidson likewise notes “the proper balance between the modern and the
traditional” in Tate’s style, along with the desire to demonstrate strict poetic technique
while still permitting the illusion that the poem resulted from a spontaneous creative
act.

Yet the “Ode” also illustrates key differences between Tate’s and Yeats’s
approaches to poetry. Where Yeats draws on an ancient and identifiably Irish past – a
store of materials indigenous to and representative of his culture – Tate turns instead to a
more recent history, bypassing huge portions of his region’s cultural heritage. In his
attempt to avoid the pitfalls of sentimentalism and nostalgia, Tate rejects an older and
more varied Southern history, including African-American folklore and oral culture, that
served as a rich source of material for other poets from the region. His impulse reflects
the Fugitives’ general silence on matter of race: debates over segregation were absent
from the pages of their magazine, and the poets seemed sadly unaware of the creative

59 Quoted in Thomas A. Underwood, *Allen Tate: Orphan of the South* (Princeton: Princeton University

60 Ibid.
inspiration they might derive from African-American culture – a deficit that their contemporaries, including Monroe, had identified. The Fugitives’ silence on race signaled, too, the South’s divided literary tradition, a result of the de facto social segregation of their university. In contrast, Yeats and other writers of the Revival recognized Ireland’s customs and history as both relevant to the modern moment and as fundamental to the cultural identity they were attempting to articulate. In taking Yeats as a model, however, the Nashville poets focused on the Irish poet’s traditionalism in a more formal sense, abstracting his technique from its context within the Revival and taking Yeats’s investment in tradition quite literally, as Longley contends. Rather than attempting to recover and celebrate what was valuable in their region’s history, that is, the group more often drew from a more general Anglophone literary tradition, imitating Yeats most closely in their formal practices.

In this respect, Ransom’s poetry reflected Yeats’s influence to a greater degree. “Necrological,” for example, featured in the second issue of The Fugitive, describes a friar who wakes in the night and leaves his monastery to visit the site of a recent battle. The poem is based on a medieval account of the death of Charles the Bold, and as its title indicates, it offers a commentary on life and death from the young friar’s perspective. The friar, who has “scourged his limbs” to rid his head of “unruly” thoughts, wanders the body-strewn battlefield, reflecting on the permanence of death and on the disorder of the “gory and fabulous” bodies. His life has been one of devotion and solitude, yet he struggles at the poem’s end to reconcile the grimness of the death surrounding him with his religious beliefs. He sits in silent contemplation:

61 John Crowe Ransom, “Necrological,” The Fugitive 1.2 (June 1925): 62-63. All further quotations are from this source.
The youth possessed him then of a crooked blade
Deep in the belly of a lugubrious wight,
He fingered it well and found it cunningly made, –
But strange apparatus was it for a Carmelite.

Then he sat upon a hill and hung his head,
Riddling, riddling, and lost in a vast surmise,
So still that he likened himself unto those dead,
Whom the kites of Heaven solicited with sweet cries.

The four-lined rhymed stanzas proceed in an iambic pentameter and include dated constructions and strikingly archaic language: words like “raiment,” “yeoman” and “leman” jar against the image of wolf-eaten bodies or of the friar, crouched and “riddling, riddling” as he handles the knife. Like Tate, it is precisely in Ransom’s deliberate combination of traditional forms and subjects with such modern imagery and tone that he imitates Yeats most clearly. The poem borrows its themes – of death, love, youth, transience – directly from Yeats and the late Romantic poets, yet it uses these to examine a more modernist dilemma involving a loss of faith and a lack of religious comfort.

“Necrological” also, in fact, reflects Davidson’s claims regarding the traditional and the modern in a later issue of The Fugitive: “The strangest thing in contemporary poetry,” he writes, “is that innovation and conservatism exist side by side. It will probably always be so!” Indeed, the poem resists an easy opposition between the “modern” quality of its imagery and its conventional form. In a more general sense, it also affirms the value Yeats placed on symbolism, and his belief that a poem’s symbols and imagery required the foundation of a tradition to sustain them and to lend them credence.

The Irish poet’s traditionalism also shaped Ransom’s opinion of modern poetry generally. In “The Future of Poetry,” for example, an editorial published in The Fugitive

---

in February 1924, Ransom defended tradition and criticized Imagism and free verse for their abandonment of form. “We [moderns] forget entirely the enormous technical difficulty of the poetic art,” he explained, “and we do not obtain so readily as our fathers the ecstasy which is the total effect of poetry, the sense of miracle before the union of inner meaning and objective form.”

Yeats was likely among the poets Ransom had in mind when he described a successful poem as one that managed “to play a dual role with words: to conduct a logical sequence with their meanings on the one hand, and to realize an objective pattern with their sounds on the other.” The Irish poet’s commitment to traditional forms and meters provided an important counterweight to the formlessness of Imagism, which failed, in Ransom’s opinion, to create a harmony between the “objective form” of the poem and the “free inner life” of its contents. In this editorial and elsewhere, Ransom advocated instead a return to formalism, honoring Yeats as a master craftsman and rarely acknowledging the historical and cultural density of his poetry.

Yeats served in this sense as a byword for tradition.

Ironically, however, it was Yeats’s faith in Ireland’s “traditional believing society,” to return to Davidson’s phrase, that compelled him, at the helm of the Abbey Theatre, to draw from Irish folklore and mythology as a means both of honoring that tradition and of reenergizing contemporary Irish writing. The Fugitives reluctance to celebrate or address regional culture explicitly, and the relative lack of explicitly Southern content in the their poetry illustrates their partial misunderstanding of this facet of the reviver project. By seeking to sever such links to their own region’s literature and by maintaining a critical distance from their regional heritage, the group practiced

---

instead a modernism that emphasized the poet’s “fugitive” status rather than his belonging. Such an outlook was consistent with Tate’s observation that the Southern writer “must first see himself, if at all, through foreign eyes. For he of all Americans is privy to the emotions founded in the state of knowing oneself to be a foreigner at home.”

IV. Debating “Aunt Harriet”

It was perhaps this deliberate distance from Southern culture that led the Fugitives to resent the very idea of a specifically Southern poetry, as they did the argument that Southern poets should take the South as their subject. As I have suggested, this was the argument they believed Harriet Monroe to have advanced in the pages of *Poetry* magazine. Monroe’s decision to appoint Allen and Heyward as guest-editors of the “Southern Number” seemed a deliberate slight against the Fugitives, who had maintained a friendly relationship with the Poetry Society of South Carolina but disagreed with its founders that Southern poets were under any obligation to write principally and self-consciously about the South. Monroe’s endorsement of the South Carolina poets, coupled with her deliberate exclusion of the Nashville group from the special issue, irked the Fugitives, as did what they perceived as her patronizing tone. “Today especially art needs to concentrate on the locale against the generalizing, scattering tendencies of the age,” she warned, “else it is in danger of becoming vague and diffused and theoretic, or losing precision and vitality.” Writing specifically of the South, she continues,

No one can go talking about poetry through the states of our south-eastern coast, as I did a year ago, without feeling that the local loyalties, always dramatically intense in that

region, are turning with deep enthusiasm toward the arts. The people are beginning to realize what wonderful material has been awaiting observant eyes and creative minds: romantic episodes of early history and legend, involving three strongly contrasted races; plantation life and city life and sea life...; a landscape of languorous beauty...; and a proud people who have always commanded life a bit cavalierly, contrasted with the sweetly indolent, humorous, more or less loyally subservient African.  

Southern poets, Monroe declared, must act as interpreters of their region for the rest of the country, and should feel inspired to make native material the foundation of their poetry, even if “[s]uch art may not produce masterpieces.” Despite the inherent elitism and racism of her closing comment, landscape, history and race form the foundation of modern regional poetry in Monroe’s formulation.

Allen and Heyward’s editorial in the same issue was in fact in keeping with Monroe’s advice; yet, ironically, it appeared to the Fugitives less as a call for local color than as a blueprint for Southern writers to use their region’s “rich store of material” in a meaningful way. Southern poets were stimulated “not by a provincial pride,” the editorial claimed, but by a renewed interest in poetry throughout the country. Describing the South as home to “a European culture, planted by a strong stock in colonial times,” Allen and Heyward predicted that their contemporaries in the South would “accept with modern spirit the new forms in verse, but accept them as being valuable for their loosening effect upon the old rather than as being all satisfactory in themselves.”

Southern poetry, they continued,

---

brings to American poetry a little known but tropically rich store of material, an unurbanized beauty, the possibility of legend, folk-song, romance, historical narrative, glorious landscape, and an untired mood; in short, a content which will save it from that sure sign of literary inadequacy, a too nice preoccupation with form.

In its reference to “landscape” and “legend,” their language echoed Monroe’s and might even have described the project of the Irish Revival, as well. It was perhaps Allen and Heyward’s acknowledgement of the South’s European roots and their reluctance to endorse formal experimentation unreservedly that appealed to the Fugitives and won their approval for the editorial as a whole. Yet the literary renaissance the two men described in fact is closer in spirit to the one Monroe envisions – and to revivalism, as well – than to the Fugitives’ own practices.

When Monroe reviewed *Carolina Chansons* in the May 1923 issue of *Poetry*, repeating her call to Southern poets to make the South their subject, her comments further aggravated what was at best a strained relationship with the Nashville poets. Titling her review “The Old South,” she praised the collection for giving voice to a region that had yet “to discover itself artistically,” despite its “romantic and heroic history and legend.” With very few exceptions, she said, only a handful of writers had made a serious effort to tap the creative vein of the South. “So it is high time that southern poets should accept the challenge of a region so specialized in beauty,” she continued, “so rich in racial tang and prejudice, so jewel-weighted with a heroic past.”

The Fugitives may have been able to forgive Monroe’s slight in once again overlooking their poetry, but her unsolicited

---

advice to Southern poets begged a response. Davidson’s sharp retort – quoted in the opening of this chapter – in which he dismissed Monroe’s advice as prescriptive and unwelcome, appeared as an editorial in the June-July issue of *The Fugitive*. His tone was intentionally antagonistic and dismissive, but noteworthy, too, for its distinctly Southern character: ironically, references to the “Old South,” to the proper “province” of the critic, and – most strikingly – to “Aunt Harriet” mimic the very language of local color fiction that the group sought studiously to avoid.71

On a more serious front, in rejecting Monroe’s “limitations,” Davidson’s response attempted to initiate a critical exchange on the nature of regional and modernist poetry, a debate the Fugitives themselves had undertaken for nearly two years at this point – and one in which Monroe was also engaged, as the previous chapter has demonstrated. Yet his reply also betrays a misunderstanding on the part of the Fugitives, whose defensiveness led them to reject Monroe’s advice out-of-hand without recognizing that the editor was in fact advocating a poetic practice actually much closer to that of the Irish Revival, a movement that succeeded in becoming both recognizably Irish and yet modern and international in a way the Fugitives would not. As her debates with Pound over the matter of *Poetry’s* First Guarantor’s Prize illustrated, Monroe advocated a kind of regional modernism that paralleled the Irish example, and which attempted to marry the innovation and experimentation of modernism with a meaningful, generative relationship to place that often characterized regional writing. In a letter of reproach directed to the Nashville group, Margery Swett, *Poetry*’s business manager, suggested as much, arguing that the Fugitives had misinterpreted Monroe’s comments. Swett defended the editor as

71 In referring to Monroe as “Aunt Harriet,” the Fugitives were also – consciously or unconsciously – mimicking Pound, who likewise used the nickname derisively in correspondence to refer to the editor.
“the last person in the world to wish to limit the poets of any section of the country.”

Tate replied in a tone more diplomatic than Davidson’s, yet he maintained that the group’s dispute with Monroe was not founded on a misunderstanding: “we fear very much to have the slightest stress laid upon Southern traditions in literature; we who are Southerners know the fatality of such an attitude – the old atavism and sentimentality are always imminent,” he explained.

A better Southern literature, the group argued, would reflect a poet’s authentic experience as a member of his community without either appealing to a reader’s “sentimentality or snobbishness” or producing a “touristic regionalism” that exploited a race or a society. In an effort to encourage such writing, the group went on to host poetry contests in The Fugitive, beginning as early as the April-May issue of 1923. The contests were an attempt to attract new poets and fresh talent from within and outside the South, and to publicize the magazine. The Associated Retailers of Nashville sponsored the first competition, The Nashville Poetry Prize, “open only to poets who have not yet published a volume of verse.” Contestants would compete in three preliminary heats, with the qualifying poems from each heat appearing in print in The Fugitive. After the third heat, a “committee of nationally known judges” – comprised of literary critics Jessie Rittenhouse and Gorham B. Munson, and poet William Alexander Percy – would deliberate to determine a final winner of the cash prize. Warren’s poem “Crusade” was

---

72 The group printed excerpts from the letter in the August-September issue of The Fugitive.
73 Quoted in Cowan, 116.
74 These criteria are taken from Robert Penn Warren, “Some Don’ts for Literary Regionalists,” American Review 8 (December 1936): 148-150. The 1936 essay is arguably a nod to Pound’s “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” (March 1913). Warren argues against various kinds of regionalisms, including regionalism that misrepresents a society or culture as primitive and regionalism concerned only with flattering a local market at the expense of legitimate critique.
75 “Prizes,” The Fugitive II.6 (April-May 1923): 63.
selected as a qualifying entry in the first heat, and its publication in the June-July issue of 1923 marks his first appearance in *The Fugitive*.\(^{76}\) The poem, like much of Tate’s work from the period, is derivative of Eliot in its images of death and desolation: the speaker, a crusader, seeks the “Tomb of God” but finds only emptiness, “a hole where once lay sacred bones.” Despite its imitative quality, the poem successfully marries the Fugitives’ devotion to metrical verse, their romantic temperament and sense of history and place with the diction, striking imagery and contemporary themes of other modernist poetry. Warren manipulates the poem’s form – loose iambic pentameter in alternate rhyme – enlivening the rhythm with lyrical and powerful lines, like “The close hush of the rabble as we made our vow” or “The long green wash of breakers moving in.”

Despite these achievements, however, Warren ultimately failed to win the Nashville Prize. His entry, along with Hart Crane’s and Laura Riding Gottschalk’s, was passed over in favor of a tie between “Berceuse for Birds” by Joseph Auslander and “A Song of Death” by Rose Henderson, two fairly conventional poems.\(^{77}\) Crane’s and Riding’s poems were, in contrast, among the more avant-garde submissions in style and theme. Riding’s “Dimensions” was a finalist in the second heat, and like Warren’s entry, it manages to infuse a strict metrical form with a modernist sensibility.\(^{78}\) The poem’s persona undertakes a bracing self-appraisal. She begins:

Measure me for a burial
That my low stone may neatly say
In a precise, Euclidean way
How I am three-dimensional.

---


Yet can life be so thin and small?
Measure me in time. But time is strange
And still and knows no rule or change
But death and death is nothing at all.

Riding’s lines strain against the tetrameter rhythm, spilling over in enjambments and resisting the traditional stresses; the poem struggles to contain its modern cadences – to respect the deliberate “Measure” that opens each stanza – in much the same way the speaker struggles to determine her own dimensions. She resolves in the poem’s final stanza to be “A gage unto myself alone.” Riding’s concrete language and imagery, her use of metered form and alternate rhyme, and her focus on the individual perspective all borrow directly from the poetics of international modernism. Indeed, her contribution to the issue is as accomplished as any of those by the more established and practiced poets, despite her failure to win the judges’ approval.

The final irony, perhaps, might be that Riding’s poetry gestures towards the work the Fugitives might have themselves produced, had they continued refining their poetic practice and had they remained focused on the development of modern poetry in a Southern context, rather than turning their attention to Agrarianism and the publication of I’ll Take My Stand. When The Fugitive folded in 1925 – the poets desiring to unburden themselves of the tasks associated with editing and distributing a little magazine – the men continued to meet to debate literary criticism and philosophical issues and to share poems occasionally. True, the group had never gained the approval of the sophisticated literateurs and avant-garde experimentalists outside the South, owing to the “safe” and

79 “Measure” is also the key word in Yeats’s “To Ireland in the Coming Times.” As Jahan Ramazani notes in The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), “In ‘measured’ verses that offer the poet’s heart to future readers, Yeats plays on the word ‘measure’ until it means the original rhythmic pulse that created the nation, the music and artistic works that sustain the nation, and the future peace that is the nation’s ultimate ambition” (31).
“unfashionable” quality of much of the Nashville poets’ work as compared to the revolutionary, rebellious work of other modernists at home and abroad. Yet the Fugitives’ collective identity as Southerners had allowed them to share in the feelings of disconnection, fragmentation and change that informed other modernist writing, granting them a position from which to critique modernity, even as they claimed to be a part of it. If the version of Ireland they referred to was in many ways fictive, and ultimately drove them to more traditional poetic forms, it nonetheless allowed the poets to identify a transnational model with obvious parallels to their condition in the South. The inspiration they found in Yeats and the Irish Revival had a lasting effect on their later pursuits, as well, contributing to the pastoralism of their Agrarian phase and to the emphasis on formalism that characterized the New Criticism. Understanding the inspiration the Fugitives found in the Irish example thus not only sheds new light on their particular enterprise, but also suggest the vital role Ireland played in the development of twentieth-century Southern modernism more generally.