

**THE GAEL ABROAD:
IRISH-AMERICAN PARTICIPATION IN IRELAND'S SECOND CULTURAL
REVIVAL, 1892-1920 AND BEYOND**

by

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ABSTRACT

The end of the nineteenth century witnessed a revival of language, history, literature, and folklore in Ireland as a means to justify claims of national identity. In this period, the Irish struggled to gain independence from Great Britain both politically and socially, and therefore sought to establish a culture that was distinctly Irish. I find particular interest in the ways that the Gaelic Revival contributed to the cultural identity of Irish people both in Ireland and the United States. This thesis explores the connection Irishmen abroad held with their homeland during this period, as well as their participation in the cultural revival through literature, theatre, and language. This work is done by utilizing small Irish-American publications to examine the presence of the Revival in the States, its impact on local culture, and how it served as a connection to Ireland, and will focus on the literature, theatre, and language that flourished during the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century in Ireland.

Chapter 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE GAELIC REVIVAL

In order to understand Ireland's 'Gaelic Revival' in the late nineteenth century, it is important to also appreciate the historical events that lead to and surrounded the cultural revival. I will allow Geoffrey Keating to explain the history of Ireland through the seventeenth century, but for the purpose of this chapter I will describe in the greatest detail allowed the historical background of the Gaelic Revival and what Ireland's history signifies about the relation between history and culture. This chapter will also give a brief introduction to the history of the Irish in America that will provide orientation for the time period.

Political Torment through the Ages

Ireland's struggle for some version of autonomy lasted nearly 800 years. Prior to the arrival of the English, Ireland was composed of petty kingdoms ruled by various kings. The Normans arrived in Ireland one hundred years they arrived in England, but a full conquest never took place on the island. However, by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there were already English settlements in place. In 1399 Richard II, the last medieval English king to visit Ireland, led an unsuccessful conquest of the island. The English colony in Ireland began to shrink in size as the Gaelic areas ruled by chiefs expanded. As the Gaelic Irish were advancing into the English held territory,

the bitter Wars of the Roses were waging in England that meant little attention (or funds) were paid to the Irish problem.¹

In 1541 Henry VIII was declared King of Ireland by an Act of the Irish Parliament and centralized the governmental rule of the entire island within England. The Tudor conquest of Ireland and the subsequent Plantation of Ulster during the reign of James I would shape the history and culture of Ireland for centuries to come. Several unsuccessful rebellions were staged through the years, such as the Revolt of Silken Thomas in 1534, the Nine Years War between 1594 and 1603, and the Rebellion of 1798, but none were ever resulted in a lasting threat to England's control. Indeed, the cultural conflicts of later years were firmly established during the period of the plantations.²

Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century

The Home Rule movement in Ireland first began in the years after the Acts of Union of 1800. These two acts served to abolish the Parliament of Ireland and shift control to the Parliament the United Kingdom in Westminster, uniting the two countries as The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Passed in the aftermath of the Rebellion of 1798, another failed uprising against British rule, the Union was established to ensure against future rebellion in the wake of the American and French revolutions. The Union was passed by members of the Parliament of Great

¹ T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin, *The Course of Irish History*, (Cork: Mercier Press, 1995) 134-152.

² John Patrick Montano, *The Roots of English Colonialism in Ireland*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Britain as well as the Irish Parliament, a select group from the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. . Of the 658 members in the Parliament at Westminster, only 100 represented Ireland, an arrangement that was sure to neglect the needs of the Irish people, while ensuring a solid Protestant majority. The Act of the Union may have provided benefits for Ireland, being connected to the wealthiest nation in the world, but at the same time it took the control of Ireland's destiny away from the Irish, depriving them of political power.³

In the 1840s Daniel O'Connell, who two decades beforehand successfully led the agitation for Catholic Emancipation in Ireland, led the Repeal Association, committed to repealing the Act of Union and restoring the Irish Parliament to Dublin. O'Connell already had the support of most Irish people following his success in gaining the right to vote for some Irish Catholics, and in 1840 the Repeal Association was able to muster large crowds to its aptly named "monster" meetings. The purpose of these massive gatherings was to prove to the British authority that the Repeal Movement had the support of the vast majority of people in Ireland and was potentially a threat to public order. Though a dull threat of war loomed in Ireland, the Parliament remained committed to ensuring the Act of Union was not repealed. O'Connell's movement ultimately failed, but gave rise to a new group of Nationalists called Young Ireland, who helped to shape the political landscape of Ireland throughout the rest of the nineteenth century.⁴

After 1850 the Union with Great Britain became associated with poverty, backwardness, and the catastrophe of the Famine, and new and more serious efforts

³ Moody and Martin, *Irish History*, 204.

⁴ Ibid., 204-217.

were taken to establish Home Rule, a political movement dedicated to the restoration of a Parliament in Dublin. The Irish Republican Brotherhood was established concomitantly in Ireland and in the United States, and advocated physical force as the most effective means to gain independence. These republicans were not opposed to Home Ruler, but considered nothing more than a stepping stone to their ultimate goal of independence rather than some limited form of autonomy within the Empire. For this reason it did not gain support from those who wished to win greater autonomy within a federated system by relying on parliamentary or “moral force” means. A more subtle political leader was needed. In 1875 a newly elected member of Parliament, Charles Stewart Parnell, began to gain support in Ireland for his obstructionist parliamentary tactics that helped to make the Home Rule Movement a more serious problem at Westminster. “The Chief” quickly became a revered figure in politics and culture, for his defiance of British authority, his support of the Land League and his time in Kilmainham Gaol. As a popular leader, a thorn in the side of Westminster politicians and a martyr to the unjust British legal system, Parnell joined the ranks of heroic defenders of Ireland and remained a much-admired figure in some circles, with his eventual ruin serving as the subject in one of the stories in James Joyce’s *Dubliners* some twenty years after his death.

The first of four Home Rule Bills was introduced into Parliament in 1886, but was ultimately rejected after a group of Liberal Unionists defected at the third reading. After Parnell lost favor in the Irish Party when Gladstone and the English Liberal party refused to work with a man accused of Criminal Conversation with the wife of another member of his party, he met a premature death fighting to recover his leadership. The Second Home Rule Bill was defeated in the Lords and the cause was

seriously injured once the electorate realized it would never pass the permanent conservative element of the Upper House. The situation was not helped by the Irish Parliamentary Party splitting into Parnellite and anti-Parnellite factions. During the following twenty years the movement saw less vigorous support and a cultural revival began to emerge in its place.

Revolution

It would be unwise to discuss the Gaelic Revival without also giving attention to the political revolution that took place in the early twentieth century because the cultural movement feeds into the political happenings. In 1905 Arthur Griffith, editor of the newspaper *The United Irishman*, founded the political organization Sinn Féin, whose original policy was "to establish in Ireland's capital a national legislature endowed with the moral authority of the Irish nation".⁵ The idea was based of the model of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise that allowed for a dual monarchy. Within the following few years the organization soon became the focus of Nationalist politics in Ireland, while several other organizations joined together in the Sinn Féin movement.

The revolution itself began with the Ulster Crisis of 1912. Ulster, the upper nine counties of Ireland, was split between Protestants and Catholics, and therefore between Unionists and Nationalists. Unionists in the North demanded that the Ulster counties be excluded from the impending Home Rule Bill so that they can remain part of the United Kingdom. They feared losing ties with Britain as well as being governed

⁵ Arthur Griffith, *The Resurrection of Hungary: A Parallel for Ireland*, (Dublin: UCD Press, 2003), 161.

by a largely Catholic Parliament that would exclude their interests as Protestants. In order to enforce their opposition to domestic self-government some 100,000 locals formed the Ulster Volunteers, a militia that vowed to resist any attempts for the establishment of a Home-Rule government. This religiously-driven political sentiment presents a threat to the Home Rule movement in Ireland. In reaction to the establishment of the Ulster Volunteers, nationalists in Dublin raised an organization called the Irish Volunteers the following year in 1913. Its primary goal was to “secure and maintain the rights and liberties common to the whole people of Ireland.”⁶ To Nationalists, any partition in Ireland would be unacceptable because they saw it as the mutilation of the great Irish nation. Though at the beginning of the revolution in 1912 it seemed that Home Rule could be achieved for all of Ireland, with the Bill due to become law in 1914. However, the crisis in Ulster was starting to make it seem that resistance was likely. Another result of the conflict was that the British government in Ireland came to appear less legitimate in Nationalist eyes because its laws were being defied by the Ulster Unionists and the government appeared unwilling or incapable of offering a response.

By 1913 the various groups in Ireland - the IRB, the members of the literary movement, the Gaelic League, and other cultural organization to be discussed in the next chapter along with Sinn Fein - were all working together towards a common social, cultural and political ideal. The interaction of all of these forces effectively changed the mental climate of Ireland in the early twentieth century, but in August 1914 the First World War broke out and the Third Home Rule Bill was suspended

⁶ Michael Foy and Brian Barton, *The Easter Rising*, (London: Sutton, 2004), 7–8.

until the conflict was resolved.⁷ On the most conservative fringe of the Nationalist groups, Irish participation in the Great War was rejected, though other groups thought not only that fighting to protect Europe was their duty, but that ending the war as soon as possible would turn attention in Great Britain back to the Home Rule Movement.

Some of the most powerful political groups in Ireland refused to wait until the War was over, and the IRB, the Citizen Army, and the Irish Volunteers planned a rebellion. The Rising took place on Easter Sunday 1916, a day that symbolized rebirth and renewal to a land suffused in religious sentiment. The provisional government took up arms in the General Post Office in Dublin, while several other rebel posts were established around the city. Padraig Pearse, representing the rebels, gave a speech outside the GPO declaring the right of the Irish people to seize control of Ireland, drawing together the politics, history and culture from the Gaelic Revival.⁸ Later in the week the British deployed artillery against the rebels at the GPO and following surrender, fifteen of the rebels were executed.

By December 1918 the country had undoubtedly moved toward Sinn Fein: the party won seventy-three seats in Parliament in the General Election following the armistice. Though the party pledged itself to passive resistance, the Anglo-Irish War broke out in 1919 and lasted until halfway through 1921. At the end of the war the British conceded dominion status to the twenty-six counties in Southern Ireland. The Fourth Irish Home Rule Bill was passed that allowed Ireland to be a self-governing body within the United Kingdom. Independence in the lower counties was not gained until the next year with the passing of the Irish Free State Constitution Act of 1922.

⁷ Moody and Martin, *Irish History*, 254.

⁸ Richard Killeen, *A Short History of the Irish Revolution: 1912-1917*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2007), 62-74.

Though part the political goal⁹ had finally been achieved, but the political and social ideals of the movements were not yet realized. The dreams of Arthur Griffith's self-sufficient dual-monarchy, Douglas Hyde Irish-speaking nation, the republic of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, nor WB Yeats' literary conscious public had not been able to see the light of day and Ireland still had a lot of work to do to achieve its ideal nation.

Ireland's Cultural History

Poetry and music has been an important aspect of Gaelic culture since at least the first century CE, when bards and *filid* were of an elite status. Prior to the Tudor Plantation of Ireland, the *filid* were an elite class of poet scholars in Gaelic society who maintained the oral tradition of Ireland in verse. Similar to *filid* but in a lower class, bards were also learned in the history and traditions of Ireland but were employed by individual clans to recite the history of ancestors. Bards and *filid*, along with other various artists made up the *Aes Dana*, the 'people of the arts' who advised kings and chiefs. In this way they were not only important culturally, but politically as well. The cultural emphasis on music and poetry, as well as the celebration of poets as national heroes has continued from the earliest bards to Thomas Moore to Yeats to the men who fought in the Easter Rising.

Around the turn on the nineteenth century one of the non-political movements emerging in Ireland was the Anglo-Irish Literary Revival. Led by the poet William Butler Yeats, the movement consisted of some of the most talented Irish and Anglo-

⁹ Unfortunately the goal of a United Ireland and the creation of a republic was not fully realized.

Irish figures in contemporary literary society: Lady Augusta Gregory, George Russell, Douglas Hyde, George Moore, Standish O'Grady, John Millington Synge, and others. The purpose of the movement, as defined by Yeats himself, was to cater to intellectual needs of Ireland's literary society, rather than the material needs of Ireland. The writers revived and romanticized the old legends and history of Ireland, while also producing new literature that reflected Ireland's current state. Though the movement had both nationalist and separatist impact, it was confined mostly to the literary elite in the early years.

Because the literary movement catered primarily to an elite class, it lacked popular appeal in Ireland, but the Gaelic League made up for this. Founded by Douglas Hyde and Eoin MacNeill in 1893, the purpose of their organization was to keep the Irish language alive where it was still spoken, and to promote its use within the areas that had been infiltrated by the English tongue. Restoring Irish as the spoken language of Ireland would help to establish a separate cultural nation that was worthy of governing itself. The Gaelic League soon became more than a language association, however, because it disseminated ideas of self-reliance and self-respect that inspired many nationalists. Though the League claimed to be a non-political entity, it provided the best reasoning for Irish Home Rule the country had yet seen.¹⁰

The Link between Art and Politics

It becomes clear in the discussion of the politics of early twentieth-century Ireland and the country's cultural history that art and politics are inevitably linked. A

¹⁰ Moody and Martin, *Irish History*, 246-248.

nationalist school of Irish verse was already in development as early as 1801, after the Acts of Union. In 1815 Thomas Moore, the famed Irish poet and songwriter, published a book called *Irish Melodies* that contained some of the country's most memorable and long-lasting ballads. Many of the melodies were political in the way that they gently embraced defeat (i.e. the Union).¹¹ In the same period Thomas Davis, the writer who organized the Young Ireland movement, wrote political ballads as well as histories and is credited with constructing the culture of Irish nationalism that was seen throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Much of modern Irish literature was created as a result of politics. Into the twentieth century, writers like W.B. Yeats were producing poetry with nationalist undertones and inspirations. Poetry, literary journal publications, and plays at the Abbey Theatre all served to reflect on political events as well as sway audiences toward the nationalist cause. Not only did the literature produced in early twentieth-century Ireland reflect politics, but it was created as a result of political turmoil. The need for a distinctly Irish literature arose in response to the independence movement because a national art form would help to cement the nationalist claim to self-governance. With a distinct language, theatre, literature, and art, Ireland would be comparable to all other small European nations who ruled themselves.

A Brief Account of the Irish in the United States

The industrial revolution that came to define English society had little effect on Ireland, and the island's domestic industry could not compete with England. Irishmen

¹¹ Malcolm Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature: from Thomas Davis to W.B. Yeats*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), 111-112.

with enough money made their way to America with the hope of better economic opportunity. When the Famine reached a peak in the late 1840s the number of emigrants leaving Ireland soared. There were, of course, Irish in the United States before this wave of immigrants, but it was the largest movement up until that time.

By the time of the Gaelic Revival there were already several generations of Irish in the United States, and many of the children and grandchildren of famine-fleeing immigrants took every opportunity to rise to positions of influence, prosperity, and power, and as Carl Wittke suggests, were some of the most American of Americans.¹² Though leaving their homeland would have been a momentous occurrence, once the Irish became established in the United States they did not return to Ireland when they had enough money. Instead, they sent remittances home to bring more of their fellow countrymen to the United States. Irish relief meetings were held in major cities and contributions to the cause were astounding.¹³

Within the Irish immigrant group there were also a number of political figures fleeing persecution. After the Rebellion of 1798, America received its first wave of political refugees from Ireland, and again following the Young Islander Uprising of 1848. These “men of ‘98 and ‘48” became successful in the United States and helped to organize support for Irish causes. The “Forty-eighters” especially were men of intellectual ability and achievement, and were able to become important and influential in their new land. Some even started newspapers in the United States, like *The Nation* in New York which already had a branch in Dublin.

¹² Carl Wittke, *The Irish in America*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), 40.

¹³ Wittke, *The Irish in America*, 51.

The arts of Ireland remained intact among Irish American communities. Though new Irish immigrant literature was being produced, the poetry and stories of the homeland remained important to Irishmen abroad. In addition, Irish dance and song endured in immigrant communities and stayed a staple of public entertainment. In New York especially the “merry dance” of Ireland was popular even outside of the immigrant communities, finding its way into minstrel shows and various other wide-reaching forms of entertainment.¹⁴ The connection immigrants held with the Irish arts proved important to their participation in, and support of, the Gaelic Revival of the late nineteenth century.

By the time of the Easter Rebellion of 1916, political figures were agitating in both Ireland and the United States for independence. Eamon de Valera, a former resident of New York, not only participated in the Rebellion, but was a Sinn Féiner, a leader in the Irish Civil Wars and the War for Independence, and even served as the President of the Republic as well as the President of *Dail Eireann*, the Irish parliament. In the United States, Irish-American organizations appealed for financial support for the nationalist movement, moving past just the goal of Home Rule and advocating for complete independence for Ireland. The support from abroad proved helpful when independence was finally won in 1922.

¹⁴ Ibid., 241.

Chapter 2

Irish Language in the United States

The end of the nineteenth century witnessed a revival of language, history, literature, and folklore in Ireland not only to restore pride in Irish culture, but as a means to justify claims of nationalism. In this period, the Irish struggled to gain independence from Great Britain, and at the same time sought to establish a national identity that was distinctly Irish, outside of English influence. The primary concern of the Gaelic Revival was the Irish language, and there is evidence indicating that the language revival in the United States was just as strong, if not more so, than that in Ireland. In this chapter I will discuss the history of the Irish language up until independence and how the revival manifested itself not only in Ireland, but in Irish-American communities.

The Irish Language

The Irish language is an ancient one, developed in central Europe and spread to the British Isles along with the other Celtic languages.¹⁵ Though it bears similarity to Scots Gaelic, it exists as a distinctly different dialect. Being a Celtic language, it descended from a common tongue from which Scots-Gaelic, Manx, Breton, Welsh,

¹⁵ Charles Vallancey, *An Essay on the Antiquity of the Irish Language*, (London, 1818).

and Cornish are also derived.¹⁶ Beginning during the Gaelic Revival the name of the language has changed from Gaelic to Irish in order to cement its usage within Ireland and to promote it as the national tongue. For the purpose of this paper I will be referring to the language as ‘Irish.’ With the arrival of Christianity in the Fifth Century the Irish people achieved a means of writing their language down. Both before and after this period, however, the memory of the great Irish heroes and semi-divine figures from even earlier were preserved in the collective memory of the Irish through oral tradition.¹⁷ The tales of the “gods and fighting men,” (as Lady Gregory refers to them)¹⁸ from the many petty kingdoms of Ireland were passed down for centuries by Irish countryfolk through prose and verse, which committed to memory, could easily last generations. These ancient stories were the ones later collected by Gregory and Douglas Hyde in the late nineteenth century, which they translated into English and made available for people all over Ireland.

By the 13th century a standard literary form of the Irish language was established and in use by the bards and *fíli*. Old Irish bards were poets and storytellers with allegiance to a particular house, whose job was to recite verse about the historic lineage of the family. They not only held extensive knowledge of Irish history, but were expected to compose eulogies for occasions such as birthdays, funerals, weddings, and victories in battle. The literary language that the bards used remained

¹⁶ Edward Purdon, *The Story of the Irish Language*, (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1999).

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 42.

¹⁸ In 1904 Gregory published a collection of tales called *Gods and Fighting Men* which retells, in two volumes, stories from the Irish Mythological Cycle as well as the later Fenian Cycle. She acquired these tales both from the oral histories of those in the west, as well as previously published material.

practically unchanged for nearly four hundred years, the period of Classical Irish.¹⁹ This language was slightly different from the spoken word of the everyman, but nonetheless it helped to preserve a standardized version of the language.

By 1601 Early Modern Irish was one of the oldest and most sophisticated languages in Europe, because it had developed over a thousand years of speaking and poetic composition. That which we now call Modern Irish began around 1600 and continues to be used today. 1601 marked the fall of Gaelic Ireland with the conquest of the English, and consequently the collapse of the literary language. Poets and writers turned from the elite language of the official literature to the vernacular tongue of the everyman. The history of British rule within Ireland between 1601 and 1850 kindled a gradual increase in the use of English within the country and saw the slow diminishment of the use of Irish.²⁰

By the time of the Great Famine in the mid-nineteenth century, Irish was no longer a language of the elite and powerful class in Ireland. It was removed from parliament, courts of law, and civil service exams, but survived largely in rural areas in the west of the country. One of the factors that contributed to the decline of the language was the association between it and the British-born stereotype of the Irish as either drunk and rowdy or, in the words of the Clancys, “savage fierce, and wild.” Many Irish were ashamed of speaking it because, as Matthew Arnold noted, it became “the badge of a beaten race,” associated with benightedness and destitution.²¹ The

¹⁹ “Classical Irish” is interchangeable with “Early Modern Irish.” These each describe the language as it was used between the 13th and 16th centuries.

²⁰ Purdon, *History*, 26.

²¹ Matthew Arnold and R. H. Super, *English Literature and Irish Politics*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973) 22-23.

Irish were in fact beaten, as the famine decimated the population, but the language, along with many other aspects of Irish culture, still survived in the west of Ireland where it would later be recovered by language scholars.

The ‘Gaelic’ Revival

The need for a “Gaelic Revival” arose in the late nineteenth century, with language as its focus. Not only did it garner support for the independence movement by stirring up national pride, but it became equally as important for the Irish to re-establish themselves as a people to prove they were capable of governing independently. They did this by resurrecting the ancient traditions of their strong and heroic Gaelic ancestors. Douglas Hyde commented in his essay *The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland*, which he gave as an address before the Irish National Literary Society in Dublin in November of 1892, that the Irish had no business scorning the English if the Irish people would to continue imitating them in speech. He asked “How can [Ireland] produce anything good in literature, art, or institutions as long as it is actuated by motives so contradictory?”²² In this way, the language revival reached into other parts of the cultural resurrection and resonated equally with those involved in the Anglo-Irish literary movement. So, with great vigor did the leaders of the language revival push their fellow Irishmen to learn and speak in the country’s native tongue. The goal of the language revival was three-fold: to restore Irish as the national language of Ireland, to increase its use as a spoken tongue, and to cultivate a new literature in Irish.

²² Declan Kiberd and PJ Mathews, *The Handbook of the Irish Revival*, (Dublin: Abbey Theatre Press, 2015).

To many fervent Irishmen during the Revival, the language was essential to re-establishing a national identity. Many saw the English language as an invasive trait pushed upon the Irish that was neither desired nor needed. Douglas Hyde described why it was necessary for the Irish to cast off the English tongue in his essay: “in Anglicising ourselves wholesale we have thrown away with a light heart the best claim which we have upon the world’s recognition of us as a separate nationality.”²³ To suggest that the Irish were blithely throwing away their cultural heritage was enough to inspire a passionate resistance of the decline of the language.

The Gaelic League, or *Conradh na Gaeilge*, was founded in 1893 by Douglas Hyde, who served as its first president. It was the leading institution for promoting all aspects of the Gaelic Revival, especially the language. There were several movements and organizations within Ireland that helped to push the language revival forward: The Gaelic Athletic Association, the Irish Literary Theatre, and the Gaelic League all worked independently of one another, but nonetheless drew on the sense of national pride and cultural change that characterized the period to support the movement. There were also several precursors to the Gaelic League, such as the Gaelic Union (1880) and the Society for the Preservation of Irish Language (1876). Each of these organizations had generated enough encouragement for Irish games, arts, and literature to ripen the cultural landscape for the re-introduction of Ireland’s language.²⁴ Lady Gregory was another major player in the movement: she worked within the literary movement as well as the language revival, collecting folktales from Irish

²³ Ibid., 72.

²⁴ In Irish there is a name for these organizations: *reamhconraitheoirí*, or ‘League precursors’

peasantry in the west and forming the stories into plays she produced at the Abbey Theatre.

Despite its popularity, the language movement was not without opposition from the literary elite in Ireland. W.B. Yeats admired Hyde as a folklorist and believed him to be a great aid to the literary movement, but had objections to his speech *The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland*. In a letter to *United Ireland*, Yeats wrote that the problem of de-nationalization that Hyde discusses could still be reversed even if the Irish language died out. He suggested that writers could continue to utilize English because it would still have an “indefinable Irish quality of rhythm and style.”²⁵ He felt the language revival would impede upon the literary movement, his primary concern, because it would lack international appeal. However, Yeats had misunderstood Hyde’s intentions: Hyde was interested in cultivating a new literature in Irish, but did not intend to interfere with the style of Irish literature in English.²⁶

The Irish Language in the U.S.

It is well known that many Irish immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century were fleeing famine in Ireland. The famine affected the west of Ireland most, where people were dependent on their own crop for sustenance, and where there was highest concentration of native speakers. Many of the emigrants were from these regions and therefore were likely to have been Irish speakers. Irish immigrants in the United States as well as England were encouraged to speak English to make themselves more

²⁵ Phillip L. Marcus, *Yeats and the Beginning of the Irish Renaissance*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 198.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 199-200.

employable. Despite this, much of the evidence of the presence of the language in the United States began to appear several years after the last wave of famine-fleeing immigrants: there was a new class of Irish Americans interested in the Revival. Evidence from newspapers, journals, translation books, and other small publications indicates that the language was still in use among Irish immigrants when they moved to the United States. However, what is more significant than the language being sustained by immigrants is the evidence that some Irish Americans were actively trying to learn the language from scratch. This implies that some Irishmen abroad were seeking to participate in the Revival despite their distance from its center.

As a result of the Great Famine in Ireland, millions of Irishmen fled to either the United States or England. America has had an Irish presence since the establishment of the colonies, but in the mid-nineteenth century the minority group swelled. The highest concentration of Irish immigrants existed in east-coast cities and this is where much of the evidence of the language revival can be found.

One of the major groups that contributed to the spread of the Irish language in the United States was the Gaelic League, which had branches in major cities. The organization sponsored language programs, workshops, and other types of classes in New England, New York, and Detroit. It also sponsored Irish-American and Irish language publications, most notably *An Gaodhal*. The Gaelic League, and organizations like it, produced many publications that now exist within University archives. These publications include joke books, advertisements, flyers, songbooks, and more. Books about the Irish language were on sale in the United States as well: the Irish Bookshop in New York City, which has only recently closed, stocked a

wealth of materials for language learners.²⁷ Though it is difficult to determine how popular these materials were among Irish Americans, the presence of the workshops, lesson books, and themed publications reveals the importance of the language to Irish immigrants.

The leaders of both the language and literary movements had a presence abroad as well as in Ireland. Several political and cultural leaders made appearances in the United States when the cultural movements were young. Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats toured the country in the early twentieth century giving lectures at educational institutions, like the Catholic University of America in the nation's capital and even as far as San Francisco.²⁸

There is evidence that the movement in the United States did not lose steam until the 1940s, while the one in Ireland was nearly defunct after partial independence was gained. The cultural movement lived beyond its original purpose, of stirring up pride for the independence movement, but only abroad where it served purposes beyond nationalism. The movement allowed immigrants a connection to the changing cultural environment of their homeland.

The Abbey's Irish Plays²⁹

The Abbey Theatre was extraordinarily important to the Gaelic Revival in Ireland because it supported not only contemporary Irish literature, but the language

²⁷ Via the Mick Moloney Collection at the archives of the Tamiment Library at New York University

²⁸ WB Yeats and Denis Donoghue, *Memoirs*, (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 122.

²⁹ This chapter introduces the Abbey Theatre, but a later chapter following will discuss the tours more broadly.

revival as well. The foremost leaders of the language movement either supported the theatre by contributing plays or essays for the Abbey's publication, *Samhain*. W.B. Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory, Douglas Hyde, and Sean O'Casey wrote for the magazine, and Gregory supported much of the early activity herself. The importance of a national theatre to a country desperately trying to establish a cultural identity cannot be understated. The Gaelic Revival was equally as political as it was cultural because the two are inevitably linked: the cultural movement stirred up support for the independence movement, while the political climate gave new material to the artists. The theatre was no exception to this. Irish writers strayed from the fanciful theatre of England as a protest and wrote about specifically Irish themes, including ancient legends and myths, the romanticized West, and contemporary Dublin life.

Especially in the earliest years of the Irish National Theatre Company³⁰ the producers staged plays in the Irish language. A young James Joyce (among others) in Ireland, was opposed to the Theatre focusing on Irish language and myth because he viewed it as a surrender to popular will. He hoped the national theatre would be able to compete with others on the continent and stage contemporary European drama as well as Irish plays. W.B. Yeats was also opposed to the Irish language being used in theatre.

In 1911 the Abbey Theatre Players toured the United States for the first time. Making stops in cities all along the northeast, they put on a variety of the same plays which saw popularity in Ireland. They brought with them several plays including John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, W.B. Yeats' *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, and several written by Lady Gregory. However, not one of the Irish

³⁰ The name of the Abbey Theatre Company in its earlier form.

language plays put on at the Abbey were performed on tour in America. This is likely because the tours were targeted to an American audience, with the intention of advertising Ireland's new national art form to the world, and the organizers wanted the material to be accessible to those outside the reach of the movement.

Several plays, despite being put on in English, were about rural western life in Ireland and therefore featured dialects that would have aided Irish American language enthusiasts. Gregory used her own invented western dialect that she called "Kiltartanese" for her plays. Though it may not have been absolutely authentic, as some critics claim, it would have helped Irish Americans with their language skills nonetheless because it provided an auditory example that was otherwise not present. *The Gaol Gate*, one of Gregory's plays staged on tour, displays the dialect and was performed on multiple occasions.

An Gaodhal

One of the publications most important to the language movement in the United States was *An Gaodhal*, a bilingual journal published between 1881 and 1904. As the frontispiece states, it is a "Monthly Bi-Lingual Magazine Devoted to the Promotion of the Literature, History, Language, Art, Music, Industries, etc. of Ireland."³¹ It began as a simple sixteen page black-and-white magazine, but progressed to a long and colorful journal filled to the brim with stories, illustrations, reading lists, jokes, translations, opinion pieces, poems, and advertisements. The earliest issues even had vocabulary lists, acting as a direct tool for language students.

³¹ *An Gaodhal* via the Boston College Libraries

A writer of a master's thesis at UCC makes an excellent observation about the magazine, stating that

An Gaodhal gives us a crucial insight into the mind of the enthusiast. Its approach to the promotion of the language was two-toned. On the one hand, it elevated the language, praising its richness, beauty and antiquity, hoping to persuade people of the great benefits to be derived from Irish. On the other hand, it denigrated non supporters of Irish, accusing them of being traitors to their country and ultimately to themselves.³²

This magazine also served as the Irish American's connection to their homeland, keeping the reader up-to-date on the latest issues in both Ireland and in the local Irish American communities. The magazine featured much to allure the Irish reader: re-tellings of old Irish myths, a section of Notes from Ireland (to keep the reader updated about news from the home country), stories, histories, maps, and contributions from popular Irish writers. The content of the magazine is truly sweeping: it ranges from tales of ancient Irish history to articles about the modern times. One of the more interesting items is the reading lists provided in nearly every issue. Though they were not exclusive to the magazine and were published elsewhere, they would have been extraordinarily useful to anyone embarking on a self-motivated intellectual journey through Ireland's history and literature. They recommend a wide

³² Gillian Ní Ghabhann, *The Gaelic Revival in the U.S. in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cork: University College Cork, 1998).

variety of books with Irish themes, including some on music, like *The Songs of Erin* or *The Irish Melodies of Thomas Moore*. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Thomas Moore was one of Ireland's celebrated poets and songwriters of the early nineteenth century. Also recommended are several history books like *The Life and Times of Robert Emmet*. Emmet was a member of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy class who sympathized with the Irish Catholics and led a rebellion against British rule in 1803 and was executed for his part in it. He is remembered today as one of Ireland's great revolutionary heroes, though his family is remembered in the United States as well for their support of the American Revolutionary War. The rest of the books range from children's history books to old Celtic romance stories, further showing the scope of Irish-American readership.

In addition to the printed content of the journal, *An Gaodhal* featured various advertisements on the front and back boards. Some advertised things like typewriters, soothing syrups, and gramophones (all typical of the time period) but many of them were directed specifically to the Irish American. For example, ads appear for *O'Growney's Revised book of Simple Lessons in Irish*³³ by the same publisher, which provided elementary translation exercises for the beginner. Speaking to an even larger interest, one advertises for "The Celtic Association," an organization that publishes writings in Irish, Gaelic, Manx, Welsh and Breton. There are other items advertised as well, such as an *Irish Copy Book*, which would enable readers to learn to read and

³³ Eoghan O'Growney was another key figure in the language revival. Before published in book form, his *Simple Irish Lessons* were printed in the Irish periodical *The Weekly Freeman*.

write in the Gaelic type,³⁴ particularly helpful to those devoted to learning the language in an authentic and historical fashion. Yet another advertisement broadcasts a publication of “The News of the Week in Irish” that includes not only literary articles and songs, as it states, but Reports of the Gaelic League Branches and of the Progress of the Movement, all in Irish.³⁵ This in particular displays not only that there was a market, but that there were advanced readers and speakers of Irish in the United States. In addition, this finding emphasizes that there were Irishmen abroad who were concerned with the movement in Ireland.

Through one publication, *An Gaodhal*, I was able to discover a wealth of information about other Irish-American organizations by simply looking at the advertisements. This reflects how people reading the magazine would have experienced the language movement as well. It becomes clear that the Revival in the States had a very close community where information was shared and distributed very easily.

Decline of the Language in the States

One scholar suggests that the Irish language lost popularity in the United States during World War I because cultural dissent in America became unthinkable.³⁶ The truth is that the movement was losing steam in the States as early as 1903, when *An Gaodhal* began to quietly reduce the amount of content in Irish, but prior to this there

³⁴ Some may refer to this as the Irish alphabet or character. This script was used as early as the sixteenth century and was a popular typeface for Irish related material well into the twentieth.

³⁵ Via archival collection in the Boston College Library.

³⁶ Ní Ghabbann, *Gaelic Revival*.

was a tremendous amount of interest in the language. While the movement mirrored the one in Ireland to this extent, it managed to survive with a small following into the 1940s, when language workshops were still being offered at cultural centers in Boston and New York.

The cultural revival and militant nationalism became closely linked in early twentieth-century Ireland, and after the establishment of the Irish Free State it lost its purpose. The movement abroad did not face such an abrupt decline because it served other purposes: it gave immigrants an opportunity to connect with their homeland and to retain their national identity in a new place. In Douglas Hyde's speech, when he urges that "Every Irish-feeling Irishman . . . should set himself to encourage the efforts, which are being made to keep alive our once great national tongue,"³⁷ he was speaking to more than just those members of the literary elite who stood in front of him. The sense of pride he evokes for Ireland and her cultural heritage resonated Irishmen all over the world.

³⁷ Kiberd and Mathews, *Handbook*, 122.

Chapter 3

The Significance of Irish Literature in Irish America

Beyond the theatre tours that I will talk about in the next chapter, I have found sources indicating that Irish Americans during the time of the Gaelic Revival were also interacting with contemporary Irish literature. Among these sources are literary magazines, bookshop inventories, and bulletins from Irish organizations. In this chapter I will discuss popular Irish literature, the ways in which it was encountered in the United States, and how connecting to this material allowed Irish Americans to learn about and participate in the literary revival, and the Irish cultural movement at large.

Irish Literature: The Bards - the Gaelic Revival

The importance of literature and poetry in Irish culture dates back to their ancient history, when bards, poets, and scholars were praised as some of the most prestigious figures in society. With an extraordinary love of poesy, myth, and travel, the Irish were among the first to produce pocket-size books that could be carried with them.³⁸ With the arrival of Christianity, the Irish began recording their histories, myths, and new literature in written as well as oral ways. The “indefinable Irish quality of rhythm and style,”³⁹ in literature that W.B. Yeats so admired was even

³⁸ Robert E. McNally, *Old Ireland*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1965), 124.

³⁹ Marcus, *Yeats and the Beginning*, 198.

present in these early Gaelic texts, as McNally explains that the ancient manuscripts possess “an erratic wayward charm, an engaging manner, and . . . an unexpected depth and subtlety.”⁴⁰ In its artful style at least, one could say that Irish literature has changed little since its beginnings.

In the early twentieth century, Ireland was already established as a well-known literary powerhouse. For such a small island, Ireland was producing a national literature on par with any other country. Before the Irish Free State was established in 1922, Ireland was dominated by the English for more than 700 years. In the early twentieth century, the Irish were engaged in several political wars fighting for the right of self-governance. The Home Rule Movement, which has roots as early as 1801 after the parliament in Ireland was moved to England, and continued until independence was gained, sought to relieve Ireland of Britain's political control. However, this movement needed more support than politicians could give; an interest was generated among Irish people to revive their ancient language, mythology, history, and music, in order to stir up national pride and social support. Thus the need for a national literature arose as well, and came from the same place as the language revival: in order to establish and govern themselves, the Irish needed a distinct national art form that differed from that of the English. Similar to the purpose of the national theatre, though less structured, a national literature would help to define the Irish as their own people outside of the influence of British imperialism, and to reclaim their once great heritage. For this reason, the literary revival coincided with the Independence Movement, the language revival, and the cultural revival.

⁴⁰ McNally, *Old Ireland*, 149.

The purpose of this movement is best exemplified in Douglas Hyde's well-known speech "The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland," which he gave as a lecture in 1892 at the founding of the National Literary Society. His motivations for the movement were not political, but cultural, as we see in his closing remarks below:

I would earnestly appeal to everyone, whether unionist or nationalist, who wishes to see the Irish nation produce its best — surely whatever our politics are we all wish that — to set his face against this constant running to England for our books, literature, music, games, fashions, and ideas. I appeal to everyone whatever his politics — for this is no political matter — to do his best to help the Irish race to develop in future upon Irish lines, even at the risk of encouraging national aspirations, because upon Irish lines alone can the Irish race once more become what it was of yore: one of the most original, artistic, literary, and charming people of Europe.⁴¹

Douglas Hyde was also a founder of the Gaelic League, as well as the first president of the Irish Free State. Despite this, his motives in working towards establishing a national literature, as well as reclaiming the ancient language, were non-political. He criticizes those the Irish people commonly called "West-Britons," who show an interest in the culture and politics of England over those of Ireland. This

⁴¹ Kiberd and Mathews, *The Handbook*, 46.

passage is especially significant because he mentions, among other things, Ireland's apparent reliance on English literature. Later in this same lecture, Hyde also encourages the use of Anglo-Irish literature over English literature, including periodicals. He does not shun the Anglo-Irish just because they are English by background, but confirms that even with Saxons in the north, Ireland "*is and will* ever remain Celtic at the core."⁴²

A national literature is not to be confused with an Irish-language literature. Though some authors and playwrights were composing original works in Irish, the majority of this new literature was written in English, making it more accessible. Though the language movement had many supporters in the earlier period, it was not able to sustain throughout the early twentieth century because it was too difficult for some to learn the language. Nonetheless, writing in English made the writings accessible to an international audience. Despite being written in English, these works were on particularly Irish subjects: working-class struggles, life in Dublin, national identity, history, and myth.

The writers of prominence during the literary revival were also some of Ireland's most celebrated playwrights: W.B. Yeats, John Millington Synge, and Sean O'Casey wrote some of the most notable and long-surviving poems and prose of the period. In addition, several poets who would eventually become revolutionaries were popular, such as Joseph Mary Plunkett, Patrick Pearse, and Thomas MacDonagh.⁴³ There were also some female writers of great acclaim, most notably Elizabeth Bowen and Lady Augusta Gregory. Many of these writers were especially important to both

⁴² Ibid., 137.

⁴³ Pearse, Plunkett, and MacDonagh were among the sixteen men executed for their part in the Easter Rising in 1916.

the cultural revival as well as the independence movement because they wrote works that inspired nationalist sympathies. Yeats, however, began to move away from the literary movement when he saw it becoming increasingly political. He felt that the new Irish drama and poetry should be created for the purpose of art, not to serve a political agenda. Despite his fears, the movement went on without him and continued to inspire nationalist passion among Irish audiences.

Some of the earliest nationalist (i.e. politically-motivated) literature in Ireland was produced in the late 1830s through 1840s by Thomas Davis, who organized the Young Ireland Movement, one of the earliest nationalist social and cultural movements in Ireland. Davis was one of the earliest modern nationalists, and composed a series of nationalist ballads, poems, and essays. In Ireland, as in many other countries facing social and governmental turmoil, literature became a mode for political activism. In Irish society, a writer could be a hero and an activist: three of the sixteen men executed in connection with the Easter Rising were established poets and playwrights. In response to this event, W.B. Yeats composed the poem "Easter 1916," which reflected on his earlier writings and whether they had inspired young men to fight for the independence movement.

The nationalist themes in much of the Irish literature produced in the early twentieth century resonated with Irish Americans for a couple different reasons. First, many in the United States still considered Ireland to be their home, despite living across the Atlantic, and were therefore still invested in the cultural and political happenings. Second, beginning during WWI and onward, national pride in the United States was at a peak, and the Irish served as a fine example of patriotic behavior for new immigrants. Additionally, the literature reached beyond just Irish Americans: to

an American, Irish literature was international and exciting, but was still accessible because it was written in English. Many of the writers to come out of Ireland in the early twentieth century were known internationally, and their work was sought after by the literati abroad.

Returning once more to the bards of old Ireland, the importance of arts and culture has been a defining quality of the Irish race since its beginnings. From the landed class all the way down to the poor tradesmen, music and poetry are inseparable parts of the Irish being. The great ballads and rebel songs from two hundred years ago are still sung frequently in the Irish public house. They sing of their heroes, of their troubles, of love and folklore, and most importantly, of the love for Ireland. It was not uncommon for a sing-song⁴⁴ to break out in an Irish pub during the Gaelic Revival (or now, for that matter). One of the common evening entertainments was going down to the pub with friends and singing a few songs. This happens even in the United States when several Irishmen are gathered together in one place. The presence of this practice indicates that the Irish in America were not able to separate themselves from their Irish being, and still longed for the musical culture of their homeland.

Magazines

During the mid-nineteenth century Ireland saw a growth in nationalism and interest in Irish heritage due to the political movement, and this change manifested itself in the literature produced by the Irish both in Dublin and in London, as well as the small publications, magazines, and organizations being founded. In 1892 W.B.

Yeats founded both the Irish Literary Society and the National Literary Society, the latter being run by Douglas Hyde. In 1894, the *New Ireland Review* was first printed. It was sustained nearly the entire length of the Gaelic Revival and featured writings from some of the most prominent authors in Ireland. In 1901 the Abbey Theatre's publication, *Samhain*, was first printed. Though its primary focus was the national theatre, it featured political writings and short stories as well. The literary revival was advancing at an incredible pace, and small magazines were an important part of the spread of new literature in Ireland, and as we will see, similar magazines in Irish America were equally as important for the dissemination of new Irish works across the Atlantic.

Several organizations (as well as Irish journals distributed in the United States) sought not only to promote the Irish language, but a new Irish literature. The Philo-Celtic Society, founded in 1873 in Boston, promoted language, literature, and music specifically.⁴⁵ A major distributor of contemporary Irish poetry and prose was *An Gaodhal*, the bilingual journal. Though the journal's primary aim was to promote the use of the Irish language in the United States, its literary publications proved important to the spread of popular literature as well.

The Gaelophone of Irish Dialogues, Folktales, and Recitations (mentioned in the previous chapter) includes folktales in addition to language exercises as a way to practice. This signifies that Irish Americans were not only reading new literature from Ireland, but were interested in reading modern translations of ancient folklore. The interest in ancient Irish folklore began early in the Revival: before the establishment of

⁴⁵ Úna Ní Bhroiméil, *Building Irish Identity in America, 1870-1915 : the Gaelic Revival*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 33.

the Abbey Theatre, Lady Gregory was collecting not only language, but myth and folktales from the west. In fact, Gregory was one of the important figures in the collection of folklore from the west of Ireland. It would seem that the stories which were collected from Connaught, workhouses in Galway, and the Aran Islands, made it all the way to the New World.

Many of these writers' works would find their way to the Irish audiences in the United States by way of magazines and the tours of the Abbey Theatre, beginning in 1901. *An Gaodhal* published literature as well as Irish translations, though most of it was not contemporary. In New York, *An Gaodhal* was important for the dissemination of much of this literature, despite its primary purpose of promoting the language. Gillian Ni Ghabhann explains how the importance of the magazine to the movement cannot be understated, that it served as a distributor of information about the revival, as well as the organ for communication between the fifty six Irish-American organizations formed in the United States by 1886.⁴⁶ Most of these organizations were focused on language and culture, but there were several in the United States devoted to study of Irish literature, and the magazine served as an important reference for them.

Irish-American Bookstores

In east-coast cities with large Irish populations, specialty bookstores were established that catered to those interested in Irish literature. These shops are especially significant because they allowed access to Irish literature for any and all Irish-Americans with a casual interest in the Revival. All the other magazines and

⁴⁶ Bhroiméil, *Irish Identity*, 72.

publications I have mentioned catered to those with a strong social investment in the Revival, a more learned and elite class than the average immigrant laborer.

In many ways, reading the news and literature produced in Ireland connected Irish Americans to their homeland. Beyond just being connected to the literary revival, they would have connected to tales of the country on a wider basis. To start, they could read interpretations of events they would have only read about briefly, if at all, in the newspapers. It would seem that to many Irish Americans, especially recent immigrants, the politics of Ireland was very important. During the struggles for independence in the early twentieth century, the country was in severe political turmoil, and staying up-to-date would have been very important. More than just knowing what was happening, Irish Americans sought to feel connected to the political events, even if they could not actively participate. This did not stop them however: much of the support for Ireland's independence movement came from abroad, and the Irish in America were one of the largest displaced Irish populations, next to London. It was thanks to this dissemination of information and literature from Ireland that made this possible.

The literature was also a way for Irish Americans to stay connected to the past. Irish people are sentimental as well as lyrical, and one of the ways they remember the country's past is through song, poetry, and literature. In the United States, the Irish would have had a difficult time keeping this historical connection in tact outside of cultural gatherings. The literature helped to keep them connected by offering materials not only reprinted from historical sources, but new works that re-told ancient tales.

Readers could also feel connected to the land itself while reading descriptions of familiar settings. James Joyce's work may have come toward the end of the cultural

revival, but it was right in the middle of the literary one. His stories and novels are flooded with references to particular, actual locations in Dublin. The stories in *Dubliners* are set in a variety of locations (a bazaar, a party, a quiet hotel room, a pub, etc.) and the settings prove to be very important to the characters in the stories. In a different way, the stories really take place within the mind of their protagonists; few of the stories are dialogue-driven and they mostly focus on the character's internalized thoughts and emotions. In this way, the mind of the characters and the Dublin setting become interchangeable. Therefore, getting into the mind of the protagonists in these stories allows Irish-American readers to understand the city, as well as the Irish people, in a rather personal way.

A new immigrant to the United States would remember these shops, pubs, and streets, and feel instantly re-connected with the city, while Irish Americans would be allowed to image what the home country was like with the vivid depictions. Let's take a look at a particular passage in *Two Gallants*, from Joyce's collection of short stories, titled *Dubliners*:

He walked listlessly round Stephen's Green and then down Grafton Street. Though his eyes took note of the many elements of the crowd through which he passed they did so morosely . . . He turned to the left when he came to the corner of Rutland Square and felt more at ease in the dark quiet street, the sombre look of which suited his mood. He paused at last before the window of a poor-looking shop

over which the words Refreshment Bar were printed in
white letters. 47

This passage describes the character's journey through the streets of Dublin while he anxiously awaits the return of his friend. The places he mentions are real, and you can in fact walk from St. Stephen's Green to Rutland Square via Grafton Street, though Rutland Square is now called Parnell Square, after the famed nineteenth century nationalist, Charles Stewart Parnell. This is not the only part in the story that makes reference to particular locations; the entirety of the narrative takes place outdoors and references twenty four Dublin locations in the nine-page story. Among them are the recognizable places like the College of Surgeons, City Hall, Merrion Square, the Shelbourne Hotel, Duke's Lawn, Trinity College, and a pub that would likely have still been in business in the first half of the century. Joyce, who was raised around Dublin, included these places as passing details to make the story both real and familiar. The story does not rely on the location for structure, but nonetheless it gives the narrative a particularly Irish quality.

Another story, *The Painful Case*, offers a description of Dublin from the top of a hill, where the character is looking down thoughtfully over the city in which he lives:

When he gained the crest of Magazine Hill he halted and looked
along the river towards Dublin, the lights of which burned redly
and hospitably in the cold night . . . He turned his eyes to the grey

⁴⁷ James Joyce, *Dubliners*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 34.

gleaming river, winding along towards Dublin. Beyond the river he saw a goods train winding out of Kingsbridge Station, like a worm with a fiery head winding through the darkness, obstinately and laborious.⁴⁸

This description is one of many in the entire collection of stories, but differs from the previous passage because it is a less objective view. Relating to this description of the city requires a more sympathetic sense because the character is out at night, upset, and despising the city which he is tied to. The stories in *Dubliners* are arranged in an order that allows us to see the characters growing more disconnected with Dublin, but nonetheless the descriptions serve to remind Irish in exile of the place from which they came. Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* describes familiar settings in Dublin as well, but far too many to reference.

Beyond just the description of a familiar setting, the stories are useful for those learning about Ireland because they are set within the time of the Revival, and each describes the conflicting sentiments during the time. As Declan Kiberd points out in his book *Inventing Ireland*, every one of the stories in *Dubliners* represents a character's attempt at freedom, which is ultimately thwarted by the constraints of the English language and culture in Ireland.⁴⁹ In many ways, these stories are representative of the Revival itself, and reading them is essential for understanding the movement if one is not directly involved in it. The stories are very personal, and each

⁴⁸ Joyce, *Dubliners*, 76-77.

⁴⁹ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 330.

character is a familiar and real, causing it to be very easy to understand and sympathize with each problem that arises within them.

After Independence

Even after the Revival had lost popularity, there was still interest being generated in Irish-America concerning the literature of Ireland as a way to become familiar with the country. Instead of being studied for its literary content, the popular literature of Ireland was recommended for learning more about Ireland itself. In the second bulletin for the Eire Society of Boston in November 1942, the following primary fiction works are recommended:

Ulysses, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, and Dubliners - James Joyce

Never No More - Maura Laverty

I Knock at the Door and Pictures in the Hallway - Sean O'Casey

Three Homes Up and Curtain Up - Lennox Robinson

The Road Round Ireland - Padraic Colum

Collected Poems and Last Poems and Plays - W.B. Yeats

Deirdre - John Millington Synge

Plays of Changing Ireland - Edited by Curtis Canfield⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Eire Society of Boston Bulletin, 2 November 1942. Boston College Libraries.

Sean O'Casey work is recommended here likely because he writes about the struggles of working class life in Dublin, a theme that may have resonated with many Irish Americans as well. Though he is now considered one of the most important playwrights of the early twentieth century, O'Casey was not appreciated by all of those in Ireland. The purpose of establishing a national literature was not to create a new art form, but to unify the Irish people and their literature; because O'Casey (and James Joyce, for that matter) was experimenting with new forms and creating literature different from what was being produced by other Irish writers, he was met with backlash. Other artists were focusing on legendary heroes and mythical love stories, but O'Casey was a realist. He wrote about working class people living in Dublin, or fighting in unpopular wars. This earned him favor among working-class audiences, but the literati were concerned he was bringing down the national literature which they were trying to elevate.

As it turns out, James Joyce's work was very appropriate for Irish-American audiences because he wrote in English. He resisted writing in the Irish language because during the Revival it was used primarily for the retelling of folktales. Though being an important part of the literary revival, Joyce mocks the language movement in his first novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. However, this made his work more accessible. In his later novels, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce injects a small amount of Irish into the dialogues. If Irish-American readers were moving through his work in chronological order, they may have been eased slowly into the way that Irish sometimes finds its way into English speech in Ireland.

In the same bulletin for the Eire Society, the editors recommended reading the following non-fiction works:

Army Without Banners - Ernie O'Malley
The Fays of the Abbey Theatre - W.G. Fay and Catherine Carswell
James Joyce - Herbert Gorman
The Life of W.B. Yeats - George Hone
The Life of Parnell - Joan Haslip
A Servant of the Queen - Maud Gonne MacBride
The Great O'Neill and Wolfe Tone - Sean O'Faolain
The Minstrel Boy (The Life of Thomas Moore) - L.A.G. Strong⁵¹

For Irish-American readers, all of these works would have helped to familiarize them with the great Irish writers and heroes. *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre* would have been a wonderful introduction to the history of the Abbey, especially for those interested in attending the shows on tour in the United States. *Army Without Banners: Adventures of an Irish Volunteer* would have taught readers about the political crises between 1910 and 1922. Ernie O'Malley, the author, was an officer in the Irish Republican Army and a leading figure in the Irish Civil Wars, but he was also a talented writer. The book was published under that title in the United States, but as *On Another Man's Wound* elsewhere. The book details modern revolutionary struggles, and is therefore an important piece of literature when learning about modern Irish history and culture.

The biographies on Yeats and Joyce would have been fine companions to their works recommended in this same bulletin. One of these works in particular, *The Life*

⁵¹ Eire Society of Boston Bulletin, 2 November 1942. Boston College Libraries.

of *W.B. Yeats*, would have been helpful for those learning about the cultural revival. Yeats was initially the most successful and most involved figure in the literary movement, but later parted from the nationalist and moved his own direction. Though his efforts did not extend to the language revival, he was active socially, and wrote some of the most important and representative literature of the early twentieth century. He was an editor for several literary and cultural magazines, and a writer and producer of plays for the Abbey Theatre. Maud Gonne MacBride's autobiography, *A Servant of the Queen*, is another essential piece of material for learning about the Gaelic Revival. She was an educated English-born woman with extreme Irish sympathies. She was a revolutionary, and organized demonstrations against the English, and also founded the women's society, The Daughters of Ireland. Additionally, she was the muse of W.B. Yeats and inspired much of his poetry. For this reason, it was wise to recommend the two works together because their stories intersect.

The reading list included *The Great O'Neill and Wolfe Tone*. Wolfe Tone was a revolutionary who led the 1798 Irish Rebellion, and also helped to found the United Irishmen, which sought first parliamentary reform and later established the Irish Republican Movement. He is remembered as one of Ireland's great heroes. These reading lists offer recommendations that provide a rather comprehensive education on nineteenth and twentieth-century Ireland: The subjects range from history and heroes to poetry and theatre.

This transatlantic spread of literature mattered to both the Revival and the independence movement because both were global efforts. Irishman and sympathetic

revolutionaries from all over the world helped to contribute to the fight for freedom.

Much of the support for Ireland came from people all over the Anglophone world, and the distribution of news and literature from within Ireland helped to disseminate both political writings and creative literature.

Chapter 4

Irish Theatre and the Irish-American Audience

When the Abbey Theatre toured the United States in the early twentieth century, a new outlet for Irish-American participation in the Gaelic Revival was realized. In addition to the Irish literature that was disseminated into Irish America, the tours of the Abbey Theatre were a popular way for the every-man to experience contemporary Irish culture. These tours allowed emigrants to participate in one of the foremost cultural traditions of the Gaelic Revival, and to experience the plays as those in Ireland were seeing them, because they employed the Abbey's actors. Many of these plays were important representative works on the cultural movement, and thus served as connection for Irish Americans with the Revival.

The Abbey Theatre

The Irish Literary Theatre was founded in 1899 for the purpose of establishing a distinctly Irish theatre company that was different from that of the English. However, the company failed after only two years due to financial constraints as well as the fact that they were using English actors instead of Irish ones. Though the plays were by Irish writers, critics saw this as a betrayal of the original mission. The reason for establishing the company in the first place was to create an exclusively Irish art. This was not limited to the playwrights: actors, patrons, set creators, costume designers, etc. needed to be Irish as well. Only then could the Irish Literary Theatre

claim to be an entirely Irish organization. Following this dispute, some of the playwrights involved in the Irish Literary Theatre, as well as the Fay Brothers, two popular actors based in Dublin, founded a new organization called Irish National Theatre Society in 1903. This organization put on plays all around Dublin, but once the company found a permanent location on Abbey Street, the founders renamed it the Abbey Theatre Company. During the early years of the company, the Abbey Theatre productions were tremendously popular and received large crowds at every performance.⁵² Many of the earliest plays to be performed at the theatre remain today as some of the most important literary works to come out of Ireland, namely *The Playboy of the Western World*, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, and *Juno and the Paycock*. It would seem that Ireland's contemporary original art form was thus established.

Many of the people involved in the Abbey Theatre company were also major cultural figures during the Revival. Jack B. Yeats, brother of W.B. Yeats and well-known artist, was commissioned to paint portraits of the actors in the company. The Abbey was also establishing itself as a literary theatre and many of Ireland's most prominent writers were either board members or contributors. W.B. Yeats, editor, poet, and dramatist, as well as John Millington Synge and George Bernard Shaw were members.

As the literary revival was happening in Ireland, so was the language revival. Along with other cultural organizations such as the Gaelic League, from its beginnings the theatre helped to support the movement by putting on plays in the Irish language. Both Douglas Hyde and Lady Gregory wrote plays in Irish which the Abbey staged,

⁵² All information gathered from the Abbey Theatre manuscript collection at the University of Delaware.

but because there was a limited audience capable of understanding the language at the rate the movement hoped to achieve, they were not as popular as the English language plays. This was not, however, a detriment to the literature movement. W.B. Yeats, who did not support the language movement, felt that producing a national literature was enough, and that even though the plays were written in English, they had an Irish quality that was sufficient enough to make them distinctive.⁵³

A national theatre company helped contribute to Ireland's movement for a national literature and in many ways, helped to move the cultural revival, as well as the independence movement, into the twentieth century. The plays were immensely popular, and the theatre company often performed before working-class audiences, allowing more people than just the literati to be involved in the cultural movement. Several plays which the Abbey put on were especially nationalist, and through the stirring up of national pride helped to garner support for the independence movement. Despite this, many of these plays were popular among unionists as well because they were about particularly Irish topics, and many could feel national pride about without political sentiment. When the theatre company began to be too heavily involved in politics, Yeats left the Abbey and went on to more mystical pursuits.

The Theatre was not without opposition from within Ireland during its time as the Irish Literary Theatre, however. While a student at University College Dublin, a young James Joyce published an essay called "The Day of the Rabblement" disparaging the Irish Literary Theatre. His detestation was rooted in his dissatisfaction with the program for the 1901 season: the only two plays to be performed were one in

⁵³ WB Yeats and James Pethica. *Yeats's Poetry, Drama, and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, (New York: W.W. Norton).

Irish and another based on Irish legend.⁵⁴ Joyce had hoped that an organization claiming to be Ireland's national theatre would be on par with the rest of Europe's national theatres and stage the best of contemporary European drama, in addition to the Irish plays. He believed that the Theatre was abandoning European drama and surrendering to the desires of the popular audience and therefore had "cut itself adrift from the line of advancement," despite the fact that it originally "gave out that it was the champion of progress and proclaimed war against commercialism and vulgarity."⁵⁵ Joyce was extraordinarily disappointed to see that the Theatre had supposedly abandoned this original promise, a promise that had filled the young artist with so much hope for Ireland's national art. Frank J. Fay, one of the Theatre's actors, responded to this published essay rather comically, explaining that the theatre cannot be stooping to popular demands because there is no evidence that either the Theatre or the Irish language movement were at all popular yet in Ireland. The real reason the Theatre was unable to put on the plays Mr. Joyce wanted was simply a matter of funds, not an abandonment of values.⁵⁶

Abbey Theatre Tours and the Plays Performed

In September of 1911 the Abbey Theatre embarked on their first tour of America, opening in Boston at the Plymouth Theater⁵⁷. 1911 was a relatively peaceful year in Ireland: the arts were thriving and there was little turmoil, though the next year

⁵⁴ Via the Abbey Theatre Collection at University of Delaware Library.

⁵⁵ James Joyce, *James Joyce's First Literary Effort: The Day of the Rabblement*, (New York: New York Tribune, 1922).

⁵⁶ Kiberd and Mathews, *The Handbook*, 45.

⁵⁷ Via the Abbey Theatre online.

saw the formation of the Ulster Volunteers the Home Rule Crisis. The Abbey made two more tours to America in 1912 and 1914, but due to political unrest in Ireland as well as financial issues, they would not tour the United States again until 1931.⁵⁸ Accordingly the discussion here will focus on the plays performed in the United States before and after Irish Independence in 1922.

The plays in this first tour were repeated night after night because the company had only a limited repertoire available to them. The second tour in 1912 brought a similar playbill, indicating that the first plays were popular among Irish-American audiences and would succeed a second time. Again, in 1914, the set list was almost identical. Some of the earliest plays performed on tour were *In the Shadow of the Glen*, *The Playboy of the Western World*, and *Riders to the Sea* by J.M. Synge. These plays were clearly some of the most popular because they were performed much more often than the rest.⁵⁹ Additionally, Yeats' *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* was also performed at the Plymouth Theater in Boston, as well as Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon*.

Among John Millington Synge's works, *The Playboy of the Western World* was a very popular play at the Abbey Theatre throughout the early twentieth century, despite the fact it had to overcome the scandal generated at its first performance.. At the play's opening in Dublin in January 1907, forty dissentients in the audience attempted to disrupt the performance because they were dissatisfied with Synge's "colorful" language. W.B. Yeats defended the play in a public debate shortly afterwards. He denied the idea that the protesters were acting in place of the non-existent censor in Ireland and asked "What right had they to prevent the far greater

⁵⁸ Via the Abbey Theatre online.

⁵⁹ A complete list of the plays performed on the first three tours to America are included in the addendum to this paper.

number who wished to hear from hearing a judging?”⁶⁰ Just as Joyce had criticised Yeats years beforehand, Yeats was defending the rights of artists and audience.

Though its opening nights in both Dublin and Boston were also met with riots, the *Playboy of the Western World*'s popularity began to increase in 1909. Between 1916 and 1931, the years in which the Abbey ceased American tours, the play was performed solely in Dublin, but before and after this period the *Playboy* was performed almost exclusively in London and the United States, where it was very popular. The American riots were sparked by a disapproval of both the suggestive word *shift*⁶¹ and the central theme of patricide in the play: the very same reason it was met with outrage in Dublin. Nationalists in both places found this to be an offensive depiction of the Irish because it made them appear savage and otherwise uncouth. Despite this, it is a very entertaining story, which explains its popularity. The play concerns very Irish themes: a hero at traditional Irish games, a country cottage setting, and a strange, but close-knit, Irish community. These are all things that Irish in America would have not experienced in a long time, and the play, as well as many others by JM Synge, would have reminded them of home.

Riders to the Sea, another play composed by Synge, was performed by the Abbey players eight times of the first tour in 1911, two times on the 1913 tour, and on seven occasions during the 1914 tour.⁶² This play, just as most of Synge's other works, takes place in rural Ireland and captures the poetic dialogue of the west. Along

⁶⁰ William Butler Yeats, "Opening Speech at the Abbey Theatre *Playboy* Debate," Kiberd and Mathews, *The Handbook*, 12.

⁶¹ Even in Ireland, Edwardian audiences found the word *shift* (referring to a woman's undergarments) to be out-of-line.

⁶² Via the Abbey Theatre online.

with Lady Gregory's works, *Riders to the Sea* presented a version of the Irish dialect to Irish-American audiences. Beyond just its benefit to language learners, the play, a one-act tragedy, served as a theatrical representation of the original hopes of the cultural movement. After spending time in the Aran Islands, Synge developed this story as a way to capture the religious sentiments of those who lived there, as the sentimental play showcases the intersection of Catholic and pagan Ireland. The story is not political nor does it involve national sentiment, but is about a family's struggle with the landscape. In this way, *Riders to the Sea* is an unsullied representation of the movement's idealization of the west.⁶³

The play *Kathleen Ni Houlihan* was popular among Irish and Irish-American audiences alike. The play was authored by both Gregory and Yeats,⁶⁴ and is about an Irish legend where an old woman, representing Ireland, calls on Irish men to fight and avenge the loss of her four provinces. When the men are sacrificed in battle, their blood rejuvenates her and she turns into a young beauty. Yeats is thought to have composed this play after being inspired by Maud Gonne, a young revolutionary. The part was written for her and she played the lead of Kathleen in all of the Dublin performances. The play is set in a cottage in Killala during the Irish Rebellion of 1798, but the themes it presents carry over into the early twentieth century. The play is a straight-forward patriotic drama that enthused nationalists and later inspired men to fight for independence both in the 1916 Rising and the later Irish civil wars (or so Yeats thought). Because this play evoked memories of old Ireland, mythical figures,

⁶³ More information on this can be found in *Transformations in Irish Culture*, in which Luke Gibbons devotes an entire chapter to the West in Irish and American culture.

⁶⁴ According to Mary Trotter, this fact was little known until recently and the play was credited to Yeats alone, Mary Trotter, "Gregory, Yeats, and Ireland's Abbey Theatre."

and a heroic rebellion, Irish Americans were able to connect with its sentimental and nationalist nature.

In 1931, the Abbey began touring the United States again. They brought with them several plays that had been written in the seventeen years since the last tour, such as the ever-popular *Juno and the Paycock* by Sean O'Casey, but also brought back some old favorites. *The Rising of the Moon* saw eleven performances on that tour and *The Playboy of the Western World* was revived for six performances.⁶⁵ This shows yet again that even after independence was gained and the cultural movement in Ireland had subsided, Irish Americans were still interested in some of the works that came out of the Gaelic Revival. This can be attributed to the plays' educational and cultural nature, that allowed Irish Americans to learn about and connect with the country from which they came.

Participation in the Literary Movement

One of the reasons Irish Americans supported the Abbey Theatre is the same reason that people in Ireland did. Not only was it meant to be a new indigenous art form, but it was to help counteract the otherwise unpleasant stereotypes about Irish people by proving that they are both capable and artistic. This motivation is best exemplified in The Irish Literary Theatre's first public document:

We propose to have performed in Dublin, in the spring of
every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be

⁶⁵ Via the Abbey Theatre online.

their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. . . We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident in the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us. 66

Gregory, who wrote this proposal, addresses all Irish people, and though she may not have known it at the start of the company, this would come to include Irish Americans as well. It is clear from this passage that accurate representation of their people is important to the Irish, but it is also important for Irish Americans who faced discrimination upon coming to the United States. The Imperial stereotype of the Irish as idle and drunk carried over into American culture. Irish Americans were able to connect with the literary theatre, as well as the cultural movement at large, because the problems it was trying to address were also their problems.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Mary Trotter, "Gregory, Yeats, and Ireland's Abbey Theatre."

⁶⁷ L. Perry Curtis, *Apes and Angels; the Irishman in Victorian Caricature*. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971).

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Appendix A