

Introduction

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The phrase, Irish Revival, is like a net that has been cast over a whole series of movements that swept across the cultural landscape of Ireland at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. These include: the Irish language revival spearheaded by Douglas Hyde's Gaelic League; the Co-operative movement with which Horace Plunkett and Æ were associated; the Anglo-Irish literary revival of Yeats, Gregory, and Synge; D.P. Moran's trenchant Irish Ireland; and new political movements such as Arthur Griffith's Sinn Féin.

Two aspects of the Irish Revival explain the scholarly interest in it. Firstly, its movements flourished during that crucial period of political and social transformation that produced the Ireland of today. Struggle and controversy marked the Revival decades. Voices contested national and linguistic identities, the roles of religion and culture, and the economic and political shape of the future. Such struggles led to the island's partition into the six northern counties still linked with Britain and twenty-six counties of the Irish Free State, later the Republic of Ireland. Secondly, the period produced a number of writers who remain prominent in the international canon of literature in English. Most notable of these are Yeats and Joyce who still continue as subjects for outstanding scholarship such as Marjorie Howes' *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class and Irishness* (1996) and John McCourt's *The Years of Bloom: James Joyce in Trieste, 1904–1920* (2000).

Clearly, a thoroughgoing reappraisal of the Irish Revival is a tall order. A collection of seventeen essays such as this cannot fully achieve such an objective, but it can begin the process. As a product of the tenth international conference of the Society for the Study of Nineteenth-Century Ireland, held at All Hallows College, Dublin, 28–30 June 2000, the volume offers a reappraisal of the Revival that advocates a widening of the lens. That is, it is a call to include more, to expand the number of individuals, movements and viewpoints within the panorama of what constitutes the Revival. Such a reappraisal provides openings to the highly complex cultural environments in which the Revival movements flourished.

The naming above of movements and individuals conventionally associated with the Irish Revival was deliberately done. Several essays scrutinize some of the figures associated with the Irish Revival, such as Æ, Yeats, Synge and O'Casey; however, attention, is also paid to other figures who have hitherto been thought of as marginal or have never been featured before. Among them are Charles Johnston, Seosamh Laoide, Alice Hart, Evelyn Gleeson, Robert Lynd, Joseph Campbell, Thomas William Rolleston and Katherine Frances Purdon. Another such figure is Ishbel Aberdeen, whose advocacy of Irish industry and design is

reflected in several essays. Her presence attests to the challenge that these essays make to traditional notions of the Irish Revival, not because she was the wife of the British viceroy but because of her interests in neglected dimensions of the period.

The Revival occurred during a period of significant transition and transformation in Irish society, a period that was marked by negotiations on all cultural fronts for personal and national identities. Stimulated by this transitional context, the approaches in these essays reflect an exploration of historical and critical intersections concerning revival movements. In part, the shared agendas of the contributing writers arise from evolving responses to cultural similarity and difference, responses that reappraise the cultural contexts of the Revival which includes both the cosmopolitan and provincial. As will emerge from many of the essays, the intersection between the cosmopolitan and the provincial was a prime cause of tension within a number of revival movements.

The first section, 'Idealism and Activism', explores some of the communities and institutions traditionally associated with the Irish Revival as vehicles of negotiation between individual commitment, collective political agendas, and ideologies of Irishness, both cosmopolitan and provincial. Selina Guinness explores the popularity of theosophy from the perspectives of both the metropolitan centre of empire and the empire's margins. In British India, it contributed to the deconstruction of the imperial mindset. In the Dublin context, it allowed some individuals to escape from the fixed narratives of identity then available to Irish Protestants. She thus reads Charles Johnston's commitment to theosophy as enabling him to effect a transition between unionism and separatist nationalism.

On the other hand, Leeann Lane argues that the idealization of the Irish peasant by Æ and his own theosophical pursuits resonated with his desire for perpetuating an Anglo-Irish leadership, a perpetuation of political power which was seen as a bulwark against a perceived philistine Catholic middle class. In the end, Lane finds Æ's depiction of the Irish peasant as patronizing and plainly ignorant of the harsher realities of rural Irish life.

Úna Ní Bhroiméil and Liam MacMathúna address the revival of the Irish language. In her essay, Ní Bhroiméil examines the trans-Atlantic relationships between the Gaelic League and Irish-Americans. Asserting that Irish-American interest in the Irish language was one of the means to retain their Irish identity within the United States, Ní Bhroiméil concludes that Irish-Americans were ultimately more interested in the identity-centred aspect in preserving the Irish language abroad rather than attending to cultural developments back in Ireland. MacMathúna addresses issues of literacy in Irish and evaluates the successes and failures of the Gaelic League's ideological programmes, programmes that affected both public and private sectors of Irish life. For example, the League was remarkably successful in highly visible, ideological campaigns against official hostility to Irish. Battles to have Dublin street names in Irish, to be able to address letters and parcels in Irish and to have names on handcars in Irish garnered

remarkable support. The League's efforts to make Irish texts available to the public through the publication of journals and books, however, ultimately met with commercial disinterest.

The final essay in Section One is by Mary Stakelum who examines the role of music in national school education and the negotiations between European and Irish musical traditions in the evolving curriculum throughout the Revival period. Her essay comes at the end of the 'Idealism and Activism' section, but its move away from the spoken or written word also heralds a transition to the next section on 'Material Culture'.

In the world of Irish archaeology and museums and that of embroidery and home arts and industries, other trajectories for the term Irish Revival begin to open up. Elizabeth Cooke's essay maps the development of the National Museum of Ireland as a site of assertive cultural nationalism and of struggle with competing institutions in Britain. The controversy over the Broighter Hoard, a trove of golden Irish artefacts, which had found its way into the collection of the British Museum, echoes those of the Gaelic League and foreshadows those of the period which Lucy McDiarmid deals with later on. In an ironic triumph for Irish cultural nationalism, the Hoard was returned to Ireland because it was treasure trove and belonged to the British crown.

A similar irony exists in the role of Ishbel Aberdeen, the once and future vicereine, in Janice Helland's essay on design, embroidery and dressmaking. Aberdeen, a supporter of home rule, fused aristocratic pleasure with Celtic revival. She promoted, through the dresses she had made for herself, the embroidery of Alice Hart's Donegal Industrial Fund with its use of designs from the Book of Kells. The two women, however, fell out and mounted rival Irish villages with competing castles at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

Complementing Helland's work is the essay by Elaine Cheasley Patterson, who examines the Dun Emer Guild. Dun Emer was principally the work of Evelyn Gleeson who was assisted by Lily and Elizabeth Yeats. Concentrating on weaving, embroidery, and hand-press printing, they hoped to encourage women in creating art objects from Irish materials. Paterson sees their work as a form of a cultural nationalism that attempted to elide class differences between the middle-class directors and the lower-class beneficiaries of the enterprise.

'In the Context of the City' views the Irish Revival from the vantage points of Belfast, Dublin and London. Marnie Hay looks at *Uladh*, the journal of literature and criticism which flourished briefly between 1904 and 1905, and sees it as more than simply an offshoot of the Ulster Literary Theatre. It was the work largely of Belfast Presbyterian intellectuals who were either cultural or political nationalists or both and who helped to develop a sense of Ulster regional identity. The relative largeness of the city of Belfast, most of whose population would not have been sympathetic to the enterprise, nonetheless enabled some contributors to remain shrouded in a protective cloak of anonymity. Thus Robert Lynd, who is also the subject of a latter essay in this collection, wrote under the name Riobárd Ua Fhloinn.

Cities can provide the space for new and dissident points of view. However, when dissent becomes a matter of public interest beyond that of sympathetic constituencies, it can become subject to the pressure of public controversy. In her essay, Lucy McDiarmid charts the progress of several key public controversies during the period of the Irish Revival, touching on the role of the Irish language, of art, and of religion in Irish society. The dismissal of Michael O'Hickey from the chair of Irish at Maynooth College for his vehement criticism of clerical opposition to having Irish as a compulsory matriculation subject in the new National University was a national controversy. That between some Catholics and the socialists who wanted to remove a number of destitute Dublin children to England during the 1913 Dublin lockout was, in some ways, an international clash of worldviews. In contrast, the controversy over Hugh Lane's insistence that his generous gift of paintings to Dublin be housed in a gallery which he considered appropriate seemed at first sight a more municipal affair.

One of the themes which emerges from this collection is that of linkages between the Irish Revival and political and cultural movements in Britain and elsewhere. Alex Davis shows how the process of influence went both ways. He places the literary revival in the context of movements associated with the cosmopolitan, namely Imagism, Vorticism, and Futurism, by focusing on the experiences of the Irish nationalist poet, Joseph Campbell, and his admirer, Thomas MacDonagh. Davis pursues MacDonagh's view that Irish writers such as Campbell who, by rejecting traditional literary models, were actually forerunners of the London avant-garde. Such a view subverts the perceived literary dependence of the provincial on the cosmopolitan centre.

The final two sections of *The Irish Revival Reappraised* complement each other. 'History and the Text' presents plays by three canonically central figures, Yeats, Synge and O'Casey, in an historicizing perspective. 'Other Paths', however, provides introductions to the lives and careers of three individuals who, if known at all, are regarded as being on the periphery of the Irish Revival. The critic Thomas William Rolleston, of whom Maria O'Brien writes, spent twenty-five years involved in various facets of the Irish Revival, before going to London and becoming a literary reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*. He was a central figure in the *Dublin University Review* and the Irish Literary Society of London, getting caught up in the latter in the power-struggle between Charles Gavan Duffy and the young, and as yet politically unsophisticated, Yeats. He was an enthusiastic but skeptical supporter of the Gaelic League and fought hard against what he saw as the spread of sectarianism within the movement. He was also an advocate for the Co-operative movement, though this was not initially with Horace Plunkett but with Isabel Aberdeen's Irish Industries Association.

G.K. Peatling takes up the later career of Robert Lynd, last seen as a contributor to *Uladh*. Lynd carved out a long and successful career for himself in journalism in England. Peatling is interested in the extent to which Lynd 'acted-out' rather than 'worked-through' the debilitating stereotypes of Irishness then

prevalent in England. Brian Giffin's essay on Katherine Frances Purdon raises questions about the privileged geography of certain strands of the Irish Revival. Purdon came from an Ascendancy background in County Meath and wrote fairy stories and rural tales of her home area. Her vision of a homely, rural Ireland contrasts with the more untamed depictions of rural life found in those Revivalist writers who focused on the west of Ireland. Concurrently, such a vision elided the tensions existing among the diverse rural social classes.

In his essay on Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen*, Michael McAteer calls for a fresh critical approach that avoids the more traditional interpretations of the play. Rather than seeing the play as a personal reflection of Yeats's relationship with Maude Gonne or as dramatizing the conflict between materialism and spirituality, McAteer argues that it reflects a colder view. The countess's selling of her soul to the devil in fact signals that everything has its price and heralds the victory of materialism over nobility and civility.

Mary Burke's reading of Synge's *The Tinker's Wedding* has a similar purpose to that of McAteer's reading of *The Countess Cathleen*, inasmuch as both are intent on debunking naïve, humanistic readings of their chosen texts. In the case of *The Tinker's Wedding*, Burke challenges interpretations of the play that celebrate the tinker's unwillingness to conform to social norms for sexual relationships. She traces the creation of the heathen gypsy to eighteenth-century scholarship and the orientalizing of the Irish tinker to the late nineteenth century. The tinker's pagan amorality is thus just as much a social construct as the Christianity which the play presents as its antithesis.

Patrick Lonergan's essay on O'Casey concludes *The Irish Revival Reappraised*. It is a piece which, ironically but most appropriately for this collection of essays, reads the work of one of the most important dramatists of the period as itself offering an early, and often sharp, reappraisal of the Anglo-Irish literary revival. O'Casey, Lonergan argues, was critical of the Literary Revival on the grounds of its narrow exclusion of popular culture and made sure that his own practice as a dramatist challenged that exclusion. O'Casey's criticism reached its climax in his 1940 play, *Purple Dust*, but Lonergan uses that play to detect signs of a similar critique of the literary revival in earlier works, such as *Juno and the Paycock*. O'Casey's belief that the literary revival needed a broader perspective on Irish life is surely an apt point at which to conclude the introduction to a volume of essays whose aim is to foster a broader perspective on the Irish Revival that will penetrate the complex cultural environment in which its movements, authors and advocates flourished.