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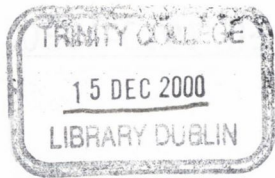


Political Visions: George Russell, 1913-1930

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Dublin

2000



Thesis  
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July 2000.

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TO MY MOTHER, FATHER  
AND BROTHER



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## Political Visions: George Russell, 1913-1930

### Summary

George Russell, poet and author, was a contemporary of W. B. Yeats and a figure central to the Irish Literary Revival. My thesis concentrates on his editorship of two journals, the Irish Homestead and the Irish Statesman, in the turbulent period between 1913 and 1930. I argue that Russell's journalism enjoyed a cultural agency previously under-acknowledged by critics. Russell is now perceived to have been an eccentric, with mystical interests subsidiary to the main course of Irish nationalism. I contend rather that Russell was the central theorist of an Irish cultural doctrine subsequently obscured by post-Civil War political change. Russell's periodical contributions were expressions of his commitment to an esoteric principle of Irish statehood, anathema to an increasingly orthodox Free State.

Political Visions: George Russell, 1913 – 1930 is divided into seven chapters. After a general introduction to Russell's intellectual constitution, the following chapters analyse Russell's literary production between the great lock-out of Dublin workers in 1913 and the failure of his second journal, the Irish Statesman, in 1930. I argue that throughout this period Russell was a writer committed to political intervention. The 1916 Easter Rising, the Anglo-Irish War, Independence, religious toleration and the censorship of publications are all events and themes central to Russell's writing. My study further refers to the wider periodical culture of Ireland, Britain and the United States in the early twentieth century to suggest the degree to which Russell's intellectual interests were typical of an intellectual of the Edwardian period and after. This thesis continually

stresses the importance of a European literary and political context to an understanding of its subject's Irish cultural nationalism. Political Visions: George Russell, 1913 – 1930 is a comprehensive argument for a revised critical estimation of Russell's literary production.



## States of Mind

George William Russell was born in Lurgan, Co. Armagh, in 1867, to a piously Protestant family. What appears to have been a contented childhood was disrupted only by his family's move to Dublin in 1878 when his father, Thomas Elias Russell, accepted a position in the accountancy firm of a family relation<sup>1</sup>. Russell remained in Dublin for nearly his entire life, eventually settling in the suburb of Rathgar, south of the city. But the early move from an Ulster town to the metropolis of late nineteenth century Dublin was the first rupture in the life of a writer who considered himself to be at variance with the world and its conventions.

A clerk in the drapery firm of Pims until 1897, Russell began his literary career by contributing to a wide range of Theosophical journals, newspapers and anthologies. The author of seven books of poetry, Russell's first collection was Homeward; Songs by the Way, published in 1894<sup>2</sup>. Represented in his early career by a variety of publishing houses, including Maunsel and John Lane, Russell transferred to Macmillan permanently with the publication of his Collected Poems in 1913<sup>3</sup>. Russell's literary life was conducted mainly in Dublin. His editorship of the Irish

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<sup>1</sup> George William Russell, 'A.E.', 1867-1935, lived in Dublin until 1933 when he moved to England. The biographical details of his life are best recorded in John Eglinton's A Memoir of AE and Henry Summerfield's That Myriad-Minded Man, to both of which I am indebted.

<sup>2</sup> Russell's eight poetry collections were Homeward; Songs by the Way (1894), The Earth Breath (1897), The Divine Vision (1904), Collected Poems (1913), Gods of War (1915), Voices of the Stones (1925), Vale (1931) and House of the Titans (1934). For a comprehensive record of Russell's published works see Alan Denson's Printed Writings by George W. Russell (A.E.).

<sup>3</sup> Collected Poems consists mainly of selections from Russell's first three volumes. Of its additional poems perhaps the most important is "On Behalf of Some Irishmen Not Followers of Tradition", first published in Sinn Féin, 14 Nov. 1908. This poem is a defence of Russell's unorthodox nationalism: "We would no Irish sign efface,/ But yet our lips would gladlier hail/ The firstborn of the Coming race,/ Than the last splendour of the Gael./ No blazoned banner we unfold -/ One charge alone we give to youth,/ Against the sceptred myth to hold/ The golden heresy of truth"(230).

Homestead, from 1905 to 1923, and its successor the Irish Statesman, from 1923 to 1930, were the mainstay of his economic security.

As editor of the Irish Homestead, a journal formally independent from but entirely sympathetic to the co-operative movement, Russell gained, for the first time in his life, full employment as a writer. The subjects of his journalism were various, ranging from revolutionary socialism to bee keeping. Furthermore, Russell used the Irish Homestead, a conservative, farmers' journal before his editorship, to cultivate elements in Irish nationalism sympathetic to his own, sometimes revolutionary, conception of society. In an editorial career of twenty-five years in total, Russell promoted co-operation, Irish independence, the Anglo-Irish Treaty and, latterly, the Free State itself. A writer committed to opinion forming, Russell's journalism was an expression of his commitment to an esoteric principle of Irish statehood. This study is an attempt to understand such commitment and to place it in context of Russell's cultural and political motivations.

Russell as social activist was ever fortunate in the quality of his personal associations. One of his earliest literary encounters was with his fellow pupil W. B. Yeats, at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin in 1884. The two became close immediately, a fragile enough friendship that was to survive, with more than occasional difficulty, to the end of Russell's life<sup>4</sup>. Russell himself shared many of Yeats's youthful enthusiasms. From the occult theories of Madame Blavatsky to the poetry of Shelley, Russell found in Yeats a suitable counter to his own temperament; a relief, no doubt, to a youth alienated from the conventional thought of Irish society

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<sup>4</sup> Details of the relationship between Russell and Yeats can be read in Kuch, P. Yeats and AE. It also features in Summerfield, H. That Myriad-Minded Man, Brown's The Life of W. B. Yeats and Foster's W. B. Yeats. Russell and Yeats suffered their greatest estrangement after the production of Synge's Playboy of the Western World in 1907. Later reconciled, Yeats contributed occasionally to the Irish Statesman.



and his home background. For Russell was a peculiar individual. A man with a “capacity for waking dreams”(28)<sup>5</sup>, Russell was given to vision and prophecy from adolescence; two talents, one might imagine, not always appreciated in a *petit-bourgeois* Irish home.

Russell’s nineteenth century poems and prose are best categorised as attempts by the author to make sense of such capacities. His first publications in the Irish Theosophist, the house journal of the lodge of initiates in which Russell resided in the 1890’s, have a common preoccupation with the nature and import of their author’s visions<sup>6</sup>. William Blake is the obvious English literary antecedent for such work<sup>7</sup>. Yeats of course co-compiled an edition of Blake’s work which was published in 1893, a work with which Russell was familiar<sup>8</sup>. Russell was to cite proverbs from Blake’s “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell” throughout his career but was unable, for all his insight, to match Blake’s ability to render personal revelation convincingly in poetry<sup>9</sup>. Russell did however share Blake’s belief that the material world is but a shadow of its spiritual reality. In consequence, individuals, or more precisely poets, who can see, as

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<sup>5</sup> Brown, T. The Life of W. B. Yeats.

<sup>6</sup> Russell lived in what came to be known as the ‘Household’, a group of Dublin Theosophists and mystics, in Ely Place for six years from 1891. For an account of this see Summerfield, H. That Myriad-Minded Man. 33-37. During this time Russell contributed frequently to occult journals such as the Internationalist and the Irish Theosophist. One example of Russell’s attempt to recount the peculiarity of his vision may be read in “The Hour of Twilight”, Irish Theosophist (cited subsequently as IT), 1:6, 15 Mar. 1893. 57-58.

<sup>7</sup> With reference to Blake’s influence on the young Russell see Kuch, P. Yeats and AE, passim.

<sup>8</sup> Yeats’s publication of Blake’s works, co-edited by E. J. Ellis, was announced in the Irish Theosophist in October 1892. An extract from Blake’s “There is no Natural Religion”, taken from Yeats’s edition, was published in the journal facing Russell’s “The Hour of Twilight”. See IT, 1:6, 15 Mar. 1893. 59.

<sup>9</sup> Plates Six and Seven of Blake’s “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell” record a walk “among the fires of hell”(150). When the speaker “came home: on the abyss of the five senses... I saw a mighty Devil folded in black clouds, hovering on the sides of the rock: with corroding fires he wrote the following sentence now perceived by the minds of men, & read by them on earth: How do you know but ev’ry bird that cuts the airy way,/ Is an immense world of delight, clos’d by your senses five?”(150). Cited from Blake: Complete Writings. Russell’s second poetry collection, The Earth Breath, published in 1897 and dedicated to Yeats, ends with the following “Epilogue”: “To the stars from which he came/ Empty handed, he goes home;/ He who might have wrought in flame/ Only traced upon the foam”(94). Russell’s disappointed allusion to Blake suggests that even at this early stage of his career Russell felt Blake to possess a quality for poetic revelation that he did not share. Russell did not publish another collection, The Divine Vision, for seven years.



Russell put it, “through the glimmering deeps”(16)<sup>10</sup>, are blessed beyond the talents of the general populace. Able to gauge the latent potential of the human mind, the *savant* has a duty to speak for a future that might, with due effort, unveil itself in all its glory.

This thesis is then partly founded in a fascination with Russell’s visionary capacity, in its relevance to Russell’s own personal predicament as a writer and editor active in Ireland’s revolutionary period. The facility for prophetic statement that powers Russell’s most effective journalism is an integral part of his mind-set. For too long in criticism of Russell’s writing there has been a tendency to relate Russell’s mystic experience to his status as a minor saint in the Irish literary context<sup>11</sup>. If this study hopes to effect anything, it is to provide a series of readings of Russell’s work in a range of contexts that reactivate his vision’s polemical potential.

Not that early descriptions of Russell’s character would have suggested a writer capable of composing effective political prose. Instead, we have Russell as the visionary of Yeats’s Celtic Twilight, first published in 1893 and descriptive of a man who “wished to be always ‘unknown, obscure, impersonal’”(20). Russell serves his function in Yeats’s imagination as the gateway to a “great Celtic phantasmagoria whose meaning no man has discovered, nor any angel revealed”(25). Revelation, in fact, is a defining motif of the relationship between Yeats and Russell in the nineteenth century<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Russell, G. W. “A Vision of Beauty”. The Earth Breath.

<sup>11</sup> Summerfield, particularly, is responsible for this critical tendency. Summerfield’s suggestion that Russell was “a visionary artist akin to Blake”(2) develops into the observation that even when “unlike Blake, who was said to have seen visions in infancy”(2), Russell “resembled Mahatma Gandhi”(2). Cited from That Myriad-Minded Man. In a literary culture so traditionally critical (and often rightly so) of personal reputation as the Irish, such benediction is fatal, as well as misleading.

<sup>12</sup> Russell, admittedly, was perhaps moved more than Yeats by the power of his belief, writing to Yeats in June 1897 of his certainty that the Celtic avatar lived in Sligo, perhaps undiscovered to this day. See Summerfield, That Myriad-Minded Man (77). In the same year, Foster suggests, Yeats encouraged

But by taking his place as one shade in a Celtic dream world, Russell neglected a more traditional set of relationships. Married to the surprise of his contemporaries in 1898 to the English born Theosophist Violet North, Russell's negotiation of domesticity was, like that of John Butler Yeats, unusual<sup>13</sup>. The Russells' home was given over once a week to intellectual gatherings but beyond this public expression of patronage, Russell's home life seems, from his correspondence, to have commanded relatively little of his attention<sup>14</sup>. Evidence perhaps of his deep rooted sense of dissociation from individual affairs, Russell was conscious of his distinctiveness, as the following dedicatory passage to the 1904 poetry collection The Divine Vision suggests:

*The child of earth in his heart grows burning,  
Mad for the night and the deep unknown;  
His alien flame in a dream returning  
Seats itself on the ancient throne.  
When twilight over the mountains fluttered,  
And night with its starry millions came,  
I too had dreams; the songs I have uttered  
Come from this heart that was touched by flame (ix).*

Despite the fault, common in Russell's poetry, of hyperbole, the evangelical sense of his speaker's revelation is seductive. Drawing the reader into complicity with the broad vision of the first six lines, the last two break the poem's grand perspective with their insertion of a distinctly personal voice.

Russell's polemical prose often follows a similar trajectory. In a common trait of the Irish Homestead, the broad point of Russell's argument is often made in a final,

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Russell's enlistment in the co-operative movement as a means to root his imagination in a more circumspect version of reality. See Foster, W. B. Yeats. 185-186.

<sup>13</sup> A compelling account of John Butler Yeats's eccentric domestic associations can be read in the opening chapters of Brown's The Life of W. B. Yeats.

<sup>14</sup> Alan Denson collected, but never published, Russell's letters, all of which are available to read in the typescript of Denson's work donated to the National Library of Ireland. Denson did publish Letters from AE, a selection of Russell's correspondence. Denson, it should be noted, is the scholar most to be thanked for his efforts to research and collate materials relevant to Russell's life.



forceful flourish of personal opinion. Russell's prose technique was practised from an early stage in a variety of independently published journals. His first article, co-authored with Charles Johnson, the son of a Northern Irish Member of Parliament, was published in the Theosophist in 1887. Russell contributed to periodicals throughout the 1890's, his work appearing mainly in two esoteric journals, the Irish Theosophist and its successor the Internationalist, which he also co-edited. The subjects of Russell's articles at this time were various but are nearly all evidence of his attempt to integrate influences fundamental to the exercise of his intellect: namely the spiritual theory of Blavatsky's Theosophy, the historical epic of Standish O'Grady and the poetry of Walt Whitman. Each in their turn needs to be examined, each in its turn a component of the complex persona that Russell adopted in his writings.

Theosophy was, according to its founder H. P. Blavatsky, a Russian *émigré*, "not a religion, nor is its philosophy new; for, as already stated, it is as old as thinking man"(xxxvi)<sup>15</sup>. The first branch of the Theosophical Society was formed in America in 1875, its founders a Colonel Olcott, William Q. Judge and Blavatsky herself<sup>16</sup>. Theosophy's first appearance in the Dublin literary scene is traced by John Eglinton to a discussion held at Dowden's home in the late 1880's. Dowden would not have touched "the Theosophy Movement with a long pole"(45)<sup>17</sup> but, undeterred, Yeats read aloud from A. P. Sinnett's Esoteric Buddhism<sup>18</sup> at the English Professor's home. Russell likewise formed a concrete association with Theosophy when he moved into the lodge of the Dublin Theosophical Society at 3 Upper Ely Place in 1891<sup>19</sup>, where

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<sup>15</sup> Blavatsky, H. P. The Secret Doctrine.

<sup>16</sup> Webb, J. The Flight from Reason. 45-46.

<sup>17</sup> Ludwigson, K. R. Edward Dowden. 45.

<sup>18</sup> Eglinton, J. A Memoir of AE. 11-13.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* 33.

one of his companions was Eglinton's brother, Malcolm Magee<sup>20</sup>. The society held regular lectures on Friday evenings and published The Irish Theosophist on a press that Edward Pryse<sup>21</sup> had brought to Ireland from London.

Theosophy's foundation text was Blavatsky's The Secret Doctrine, first published in 1888. A strange work, The Secret Doctrine is a sprawling, often incoherent, account of human religion. An entire world is contained within its pages, its occult history complete with theories of reincarnation and divination. It is the kind of work that could not perhaps have been written other than in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Secret Doctrine is a tempting illusion, its apparently comprehensive detail hiding its less obvious inadequacies. Blavatsky herself was greatly ambitious for her "new Genesis"(vii), its post-Darwinian foundation myth a grand synthesis of the systemic methodology of Victorian science with the spirituality that the material practice of such science typically displaced.

However, the text was only to be understood as 'new' in context of its reconstitution of some ancient, unitary philosophy rather than in its discovery of new truth. The Secret Doctrine aimed to establish "three fundamental propositions"(14). The first was to assert the existence of "An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable PRINCIPLE on which all speculation is impossible"(14) because it "transcends the power of human conception and could only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude"(14). Blavatsky pictures deity as an absence, its immensity impossible to render imaginatively. In the unknowable Blavatsky finds the indestructible, a belief system immune, as already suggested, from the sceptical inquiries of scientific materialists. Here, Blavatsky states, is a faith unshakeable.

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* 34.



One of many points in the Secret Doctrine where the text shows itself to be more concerned with the contemporary than the eternal, Blavatsky's revolutionary appeal was her ability to conceive of a secret history self-evident when properly perceived.

The Secret Doctrine is in this respect analogous to the Origin of Species in its revelation of a truth previously unsuspected by a general readership<sup>22</sup>. Blavatsky had no comparable method to that of Darwin but both rely, each in their separate manner, on observation and abstraction. In Russell's case, to understand his interest in Theosophy one must also recognise his lifelong interest in science, his obsession with atomic physics evident even in the last years of the Irish Statesman<sup>23</sup>. This is not to claim for Theosophy a rational basis that it does not have. But there is no doubt that the Secret Doctrine affected a part of the public imagination, small perhaps in size, already conditioned to accept the outlandish as fact. For who in the early nineteenth century would have imagined the simian basis of the human race? As few, one might suspect, as later became initiates of Theosophical lodges.

Like a scientific manual, the Secret Doctrine is full of technical phrases, a further attraction to a mind like Russell's, seduced as it was by the power of the arcane. Blavatsky, for example, imagined that "The Eternity of the Universe"(16) existed "*in toto* as a boundless plane"(16). This plane is governed by the "absolute universality of that law of periodicity, of flux and reflux, ebb and flow, which

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<sup>21</sup> Russell respected Pryse, an American Theosophist resident in the Dublin Lodge in the 1890's, throughout his life. Yeats took a different view, dismissing him as an "American hypnotist"(237) in his Autobiographies.

<sup>22</sup> There were of course scientists who approached a definition of evolution before Darwin. Jean Baptiste Lamarck, born 1744 and died 1829, first had the idea that acquired traits are inheritable. Erasmus Darwin, Charles's grandfather, born 1731 and died 1802, published his Zoonomia or the Laws of Organic Life between 1794 and 1796. In it the elder Darwin argued that species modified their physical stature over time to adapt to the natural environment. Alfred Russell Wallace, born 1823 and died 1913, evolved a theory of natural selection independently of Charles Darwin. His 1855 essay "On the Law which has Regulated the Introduction of New Species" was a direct influence on the author of the Origin of Species.

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter Seven. 263-268.

physical science has observed and recorded in all departments of Nature”(17). Here are science and nature in concert, ‘natural law’ dominant as a force which, like the seasons, must be adhered to. Complementary to the corporate authority inscribed in such natural order, Blavatsky’s final law was the assertion of “The fundamental identity of all souls with the Universal Over-Soul, the latter itself being an aspect of the Unknown Root”(17).

This ‘Unknown Root’ is complementary to the indescribable being of Blavatsky’s first principle. The relationship between ‘soul’ and ‘Over-Soul’ necessitates in turn the “obligatory pilgrimage of every soul - a spark of the former-through the Cycle of Incarnation (or ‘Necessity’) in accordance with Cyclic and karmic law”(17). The idea of ‘necessity’ is fundamental to any understanding of Russell’s career. Not only does it provide an insight into the increasingly authoritarian stances of his later prose but it also creates the bedrock for his prophetic voice. To speak with the knowledge of history is critical to a literary self-perception that imagines it is gifted with foreknowledge. Russell’s hope of an avatar, the arrival in Ireland of a spiritual saviour, is easily mocked but his and Yeats’s sense of historical determinism lent tremendous power to their version of Irish cultural nationalism.

The highest ideal indeed in the Secret Doctrine is the reintroduction of a “Golden Age vibration”(18) into the present, “to ameliorate the collective predicament of mankind”(18). For the record, the Golden Age was a period of consciousness with no material form. The apogee of a period of slow decay, Gold became Silver, Bronze and, now, Iron. This is the state of our present predicament, an age that “began over 5,000 years ago and will last altogether for a total of 432,000 years”(18). It is “characterised by widespread confusion of roles, inversion of ethical



values and enormous suffering owing to spiritual blindness”(18). In face of this, Blavatsky’s belief was that “action must be performed, or the frame of things within which the individual can seek salvation will fall apart”(44). The allusions to salvation and private responsibility are, again, typical of wider Victorian discourse. Bizarre as the attraction to Blavatsky’s doctrine might seem to the modern mind, such devotion to the public ideal of private action suggests the relative centrality of Theosophy to particular modes of Victorian expression<sup>24</sup>.

Russell’s second major influence, Standish O’Grady, was similarly a product of the Victorian age. The author in 1878 and 1880 of a seminal two volume History of Ireland, O’Grady was a graduate of Trinity College Dublin, where he excelled at oratory and essay writing<sup>25</sup>. O’Grady was called to the Bar in 1872 but devoted most of his energy to literary criticism in the Gentleman’s Magazine and leader writing for the Dublin Daily Express. He was also during his life author of a large number of adventure novels, the most notable of these perhaps The Flight of the Eagle and The Chain of Gold<sup>26</sup>. Originally a unionist, O’Grady’s support for the Ascendancy weakened as he despaired of its survival. A pugnacious journalist, O’Grady became proprietor of the Kilkenny Moderator in 1898 to popularise his own views on the Irish literary and political situation. When this title failed due to a libel action, O’Grady

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<sup>24</sup> Literary evangelism was a common phenomenon of the nineteenth century. T. W. Heyck observes of the period that “Shelley’s ideal of the poet as ‘a nightingale, who sits in darkness to cheer his own solitude with sweet sounds’ was diluted by Evangelical earnestness and the gospel of work into the ideal of the prophetic man of letters, who like Carlyle preached and warned in broad sunlight directly to the middle class”(193). Cited from The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England. A discussion of the relationship between Victorian social values and literature can also be followed in Collini, S. Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, passim.

<sup>25</sup> A touching, posthumous account of O’Grady’s university life can be read in A. P. Graves “Foreword” to Standish James O’Grady: The Man and the Writer. 9-22.

<sup>26</sup> The Flight of the Eagle was published in London by Lawrence and Bullen in 1897, The Chain of Gold in Dublin by Talbot in 1921. Both were romantic adventures, much in the nature of Robert Louis Stevenson’s Treasure Island and Kidnapped, first published in 1883 and 1886 respectively. It is interesting to note the school audience that O’Grady’s later work addresses, Talbot continuing to republish his work in illustrated editions throughout the nineteen twenties.



founded the weekly All Ireland Review, which ran from 1900 to 1906. A quirky, eccentric publication, O'Grady's journal included poetry by Russell, prose by Yeats and notes on the Irish language<sup>27</sup>. O'Grady's editorials, frequent letters from the likes of John Pentland Mahaffy, Lady Gregory and a dispute between Russell and William Sharp gave the All Ireland Review an admirably cantankerous character.

O'Grady was the son of a Church of Ireland clergyman and his Cork childhood landscape is a definite influence on the History of Ireland<sup>28</sup>. The geography of O'Grady's early surroundings is directly analogous to the contours of the heroic literature that he celebrates in the second volume of this work:

The bardic literature of Erin stands alone, as distinctly and genuinely Irish as the race itself, or the natural aspects of the island. Rude indeed it is, but like the hills which its authors peopled with gods, holding dells of the most perfect beauty, springs of the most touching pathos (39-40).

O'Grady's style is not that of the typical academic historian, but owes a degree of its enthusiasm to the writing of Thomas Carlyle<sup>29</sup>. Constructed in the narrative style of a novel the first volume of O'Grady's History of Ireland is an imaginative rendering of ancient Irish texts. Composed in forty-eight separate chapters, each of a length to encourage the attention of a casual browser, each section boasts a dramatic title like "At the Ford", "Plot" and "Ah Cu!" To a readership familiar with MacPherson's Ossian and Walter Scott, O'Grady's attempt to label his work 'history'

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<sup>27</sup> See for example Russell's poem "Dana", All Ireland Review (cited subsequently as AIR), 1:21, 26 May 1900. 5. Also Yeats's "A Postscript to a Forthcoming Book of Essays by Various Writers", AIR, 1:48, 1 Dec. 1900. 6. Irish language items were published nearly every week.

<sup>28</sup> O'Grady's father was rector of the Church of Ireland parish at Castletown Berehaven in Co. Cork.

<sup>29</sup> The grandiloquent manner of O'Grady's History of Ireland owes much of its flourish to Carlyle's prose style, especially that of On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic. Carlyle's subject was the effect of the heroic on society. His suggestion was that heroes were ciphers for divine inspiration, conduits of the divine, an idea taken up by O'Grady in his depiction of Cuchulain. As Carlyle put it, "All things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realisation and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these"(3). Cited from On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic.

was perhaps understood to be no more than the feint of a clever stylist. O'Grady tried to counter this appearance of a lack of high seriousness in his work. His second volume, for example, increases its use of scholarly apparatus in footnotes to his text. But O'Grady was unable to temper the grand style of his metaphors: "These heroes and heroines"<sup>(vii)</sup><sup>30</sup>, he wrote, "were the ideals of our ancestors, their conduct and character were to them a religion, the bardic literature was their Bible"<sup>(vii)</sup><sup>31</sup>.

Russell first met O'Grady in 1895<sup>32</sup>. Already captivated by Blavatsky's writings, Russell discovered in O'Grady's theory of epic literature a connection between his inner life and Irish historical experience. O'Grady, quite unknowingly, provided Russell with the medium by which he might express his occult vision of Ireland in terms acceptable to an audience definite in its national convictions. O'Grady wrote his history to inspire an ideal of heroic action in his caste, the Anglo-Irish<sup>33</sup>. To do so he created the Ulster hero Cuchulain as a standard of Irish behaviour, to the degree that the History of Ireland is, like the Iliad, dominated by one character's fate<sup>34</sup>. O'Grady did use classical models for sections of the text<sup>35</sup> and his treatment of Cuchulain's character is clearly intended to inspire. A mute hero who

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<sup>30</sup> O'Grady, S. History of Ireland. Vol. One.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Summerfield, H. That Myriad-Minded Man. 60.

<sup>33</sup> An interesting discussion of this point can be read in Mc Cormack, W. J. Ascendancy and Tradition in Anglo-Irish Literary History from 1789 to 1939.

<sup>34</sup> Bernard Knox, in his "Introduction" to Robert Fagles's wonderful translation of the Iliad, notes that "Homer's great epic poem has been known as 'The *Iliad*' ever since the Greek historian Herodotus so referred to it in the fifth century B. C. But the title is not an adequate description of the contents of the poem, which are best summed up in its opening line: 'the rage of Peleus's son, Achilles'"(3). Similarly, O'Grady's History of Ireland is rather a record of Cuchulain's fate than the account of a national territory.

<sup>35</sup> In The Story of Ireland, Dathi is "buried on the right bank of the Shannon in a great mound. His warriors set up a tall pillar over the mound and held funeral games around it"(39). In the twenty third book of the Iliad, "Funeral Games for Patroclus", "all the woodcutters hoisted logs themselves/ ... and they heaved them down in rows along the beach/ at the site Achilles chose to build an immense mound/ for Patroclus and himself"(563).



rarely, if ever, speaks<sup>36</sup>, Cuchulain stands in the History of Ireland as a sign, a warning to the Protestant landlords of Ireland during the late eighteen seventies to respond to the Land League crisis<sup>37</sup>.

Cuchulain's void character was however the basis of his attraction to Russell and his nationalist contemporaries. Capable of being filled with radical nationalist sentiment, Cuchulain became an epic being of political mythology, his new life an instruction to Ireland to recover an ancient past that was in reality a fiction of the late nineteenth century. Appropriately, a sense of epiphany attends Russell's memory of his conversion to O'Grady's epic. Russell felt himself restored to a birthright lost in the fracture of Irish history. After O'Grady's death in 1928, Russell remembered of his first reading of O'Grady's History of Ireland that

I was at the time... like many others who were bereaved of the history of their race. I was as a man who, through some accident, had lost memory of the past, who could recall no more than a few months of new life, and could not say to what songs his cradle had been rocked, or by what woods and streams he had wandered. When I read O'Grady I was as a man who suddenly feels ancient memories rushing at him, and knows he was born in a royal house, that he had mixed with the mighty of heaven and earth and had the very noblest for companions. It was the memory of race that rose up within me as I read, and I felt exalted as one who learns he is among the children of kings (63-64)<sup>38</sup>.

What is striking about Russell's enthusiasm for O'Grady is the similarity it bears to O'Grady's own affection for Walt Whitman. Whitman was the author of Leaves of Grass, a work fundamental to Russell's imagination and first published in Britain in 1868, thirteen years after its first appearance in America. Whitman himself

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<sup>36</sup> Hagan notes that "in both volumes of the History, Cuchulain speaks very little... Almost all we see Cuchulain do is act. Indeed, to paraphrase Carlyle, Cuchulain's deeds are greater than his words"(82). 'High Nonsensical Words': A Study of the Works of Standish James O'Grady.

<sup>37</sup> See for example the extended passage in the History of Ireland that describes Cuchulain's defence of Ulster against the invasion of Maeve, his companions asleep. An allegory of heroic action intended to inspire the Ascendancy to heroic self-defence, O'Grady's main achievement was to furnish a section of Irish cultural nationalism with an epic motivation.

<sup>38</sup> Russell, G. W. "A Tribute". Standish James O'Grady: The Man and the Writer. 63-75.

came to the attention of Irish letters first in the 1870's due to his correspondence with Edward Dowden<sup>39</sup>.

In fact one of the earliest appreciations of Whitman's work outside the United States was Dowden's 1871 article in the Westminster Review, "The Poetry of Democracy". The American poet's subject was the "formation of a noble national character, to be itself the source of all literature, art, statesmanship"(112)<sup>40</sup>. But Dowden's reading of Whitman as the first poet of a great democratic age was based on a certain restrictive set of conditions. American democracy was, in the first place, a tradition of political association not as yet fully formed. Dowden makes Whitman the explorer of a new territory who collates, in the manner of a Victorian scientist abroad, the things he discovers.

Science and democracy appear before Whitman as twin powers which bend over the modern world hand in hand, great and beneficent. Democracy seems to him that form of society which alone is scientifically justifiable; founded upon a recognition of the facts of nature, and a resolute denial of social fables, superstitions, and uninvestigated tradition (490-491)<sup>41</sup>.

Dowden completely ignores the mystical aspects of Whitman's poetry to recast the poet as a Victorian empiricist of the first order, the American's keen mind cutting through the social restrictions of the late nineteenth century. Sensing this last, one can appreciate the minor scandal that Dowden's advocacy of Whitman's poetry caused in his own university, Trinity College, Dublin. Leaves of Grass was withdrawn from the college library's shelves. But Dowden's critics misunderstood the deeply conservative nature of his appreciation of the American poet. Whitman was, to Dowden, a reminder to students of the bustling world beyond the academy.

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<sup>39</sup> Details of their relationship, and of Whitman's opinion of Dowden, can be read in Blodgett, H. Walt Whitman in England. 42-57.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Dowden, E. Studies in Literature.



Whitman was a writer “whose best function”(523)<sup>42</sup> was “to provide stimulus and energy”(523)<sup>43</sup>.

O’Grady too considered that great literature could be restorative to the soul, a palliative to the modern condition. In a piece of advice still relevant to those too inclined to books, O’Grady advised his readers in 1909 to “Get all the sunshine and fresh air that you possibly can into your lives, and all the physical activity that you possibly can”(177)<sup>44</sup>. O’Grady’s response to Whitman was however different from that of another former Trinity student, Edward Dowden. O’Grady’s first essay on Whitman was published in the Gentleman’s Magazine in 1885 and was entitled “Walt Whitman, the Poet of Joy”. O’Grady, unlike Dowden, was less keen to stress the rude vitality of Whitman’s work, suggesting rather that his poetry was for the safe consumption only of the “cultivated classes”(144)<sup>45</sup> as “it is to them that he is beneficial”(144)<sup>46</sup>. O’Grady finally remarks of Whitman that “For the cultivated classes he is a splendid exercise, but to them, and to them alone, does he belong”(144)<sup>47</sup>. O’Grady’s strident tone is a register perhaps of his disillusion five years after the publication of his second volume of the History of Ireland. O’Grady felt that Anglo-Ireland was still ignorant of its fatal dilemma. With no apparent response from the Ascendancy to his call for action and with Irish landlords under increasing pressure from their tenants, O’Grady produces a guarded reading of

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<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Hagan, E. ‘High Nonsensical Words’.

<sup>45</sup> O’Grady, S. “Walt Whitman, the Poet of Joy”. Collected in Clarke, G., ed. Walt Whitman: Critical Assessments. 141-146.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

Whitman's democratic doctrine. Tellingly, O'Grady was anxious, in the All Ireland Review, to promote Whitman simply as a poet of personal inspiration<sup>48</sup>.

Russell shared O'Grady's lifelong devotion to Whitman. He first read Whitman in the late 1880's, referring to the poet as the "new evangelist of love and of universal brotherhood"(25)<sup>49</sup>. Whitman's gospel in Leaves of Grass was bold in its ambition, the speaker of "Song of Myself"

Taking [himself] the exact dimensions of Jehovah,  
Lithographing Kronos, Zeus his son, and Hercules his grandson,  
Buying drafts of Osiris, Isis, Belus, Brahma, Buddha (58).

The active voice of Leaves of Grass gestures towards horizons, physical and mental, which, as we will see, Russell would chart in Ireland. Whitman's ability to render the abstract as an essential part of his public rhetoric was critical to Russell's own project. The American poet created a space from which Russell could speak as a national prophet. Whitman's speaker addressed his readership directly in Leaves of Grass:

You who celebrate bygones,  
Who have explored the outward, the surfaces of the races, the life that  
has exhibited itself,  
Who have treated of man as the creature of politics, aggregates, rulers  
and priests,  
I, habitan of the Alleghanies, treating of him as he is in himself in his  
own rights,  
Pressing the pulse of life that has seldom exhibited itself, (the great  
pride of man in himself,)  
Chanter of Personality, outlining what is yet to be,  
I project the history of the future (7).

The self-reliance espoused by Whitman's American predecessors, by Emerson and the New England transcendentalists, is blessed here with a new vocation - the

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<sup>48</sup> See for example O'Grady's publication of "O Rising Sun! O splendour ineffable! I, if none else, still warble under your songs of unmitigated adoration"(491), AIR, 6:44, 13 Jan. 1906. There may be an ironic aspect to this publication of Whitman's uninterrupted rapture as the All Ireland Review ceased to appear on the tenth of February, 1906.

<sup>49</sup> Summerfield, H. That Myriad-Minded Man.



speaker's place in the world is the locale from which a universal miracle can be wrought. Able, as Whitman put it, to 'project the history of the future', the poet is radically empowered, the practice of his art both a prediction of the future and a responsibility to enact it. Perhaps reminiscent to Russell of his early experience of nonconformist Protestantism<sup>50</sup>, the evangelical impulse of such theory energises much of Russell's later political prose. His attraction to Biblical allusion and archaism is a further register of his religious sensibility.

Russell's early political writing betrays a strong awareness of the power that public prophecy promised the young radical. Contributing to the Irish Theosophist in 1897, Russell harangued Cardinal Logue for his ban of a Parliamentary Party meeting in "Priest or Hero?"<sup>51</sup>. Russell's text is prefaced with a quotation from Whitman:

I think I would turn and live with animals, they are so placid and  
self-contained,  
I stand and look at them long and long.  
They do not sweat and whine about their condition,  
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins...  
No one kneels to another, nor to one of his kind that lived thousands  
of years ago (127)<sup>52</sup>.

"Priest or Hero?" was a blunt introduction by Russell to a career in cultural polemic. Russell's early preoccupations with the mass condition of Irish society were to develop by his late career into a reactionary conservatism, buttressed by an interest in Italian corporatism<sup>53</sup>. But here, before the turn of a new century, is an author elect, self-destined to confront the clerics of Irish Catholicism.

The Ireland of Russell's "Priest or Hero?" is a country forgetful of its heroic past, a nation without adequate spiritual design. Whitman provided Russell with the

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<sup>50</sup> According to Summerfield, Russell's father, a member of the Church of Ireland, had "strong evangelical leanings and used also to attend Primitive Methodist meetings"(3). Cited from That Myriad-Minded Man.

<sup>51</sup> Summerfield, H. That Myriad-Minded Man. 78.

<sup>52</sup> Russell, G. W. "Priest or Hero?" IT, 5:7, 15 April 1897, 127-131, 5:8, 15 May 1897. 148-152.



frontiers of this mental territory, with a belief that Ireland could, like the America of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, be colonised by high idealism. Whitman's rhetoric, powerful enough in context of an American frontier myth as the United States expanded westwards in the second half of the nineteenth century, had revolutionary potential in Ireland. In a country subject to, and indeed in union with, Great Britain, Ireland was, arguably, intellectually colonised from the time of Spenser. The counter myth of a new territory, extant on the discovered land mass of Ireland but having its meaning in the *faery* realm of epic history, provided Russell with the emotional fabric to realign Irish culture on terms independent of organised religion and state politics. Russell's attack on the majority church was not signal of his disaffection from spirituality. Far from it, since "Priest or Hero?" was published in a Theosophical journal, the organ of a sect that believed in the at least partial truth of all religions. Russell is rather on the cusp of a career of prophecy that demanded, in the best Biblical traditions, that he express his individual view, whatever the risk of exile from civic society<sup>54</sup>.

Russell involved himself in literary agitation throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The defining style of each of his contributions to the polemical publications of the Revival period is consolidation, as Russell attempted in each text to create a synthetic vision of his favoured Irish reality. Recurrent in Russell's essays of the period is reference to his earlier influences, to Blavatsky,

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<sup>53</sup> See Chapter Five and Six. *Passim*.

<sup>54</sup> The book of *Isaiah* addresses a "sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged". *Isaiah*, 1:4. The first book of *Kings* records Elijah's solitary despair after the defeat of the prophets of Baal; "he himself went a day into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree; and he asked then that he might die, saying, 'It is enough, now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers'". 1 *Kings* 19:3. Interestingly, John Eglinton, in *A Memoir of AE*, quotes the following from a speech that Russell delivered in later life: "in my young enthusiasm... [I] told the people that the golden age was all about them, that the earth underneath was sacred as Judea"(42).

O'Grady and, as Russell's radical sense of Irish nationalism developed, Whitman. America's political contribution to Irish independence during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries is broadly recognised<sup>55</sup>. But the cultural vocabulary of that territory and its importance to Russell is relatively neglected by critics. The 'West' was a boundary to Russell beyond Ireland's Atlantic shoreline, its association with the qualities of freedom and opportunity hallmark of his dedication to an American poetry congruent with Russell's literary and political pursuits<sup>56</sup>. "Nationality and Imperialism", Russell's contribution to perhaps the classic polemical text of the early Literary Revival, Ideals in Ireland, edited by Lady Gregory and containing D. P. Moran's ferocious "The Battle of Two Civilisations", ends with a stanza from Whitman's "Pioneers! O Pioneers!"

Have the elder races halted?  
Do they droop and end their lesson, wearied over there beyond the  
seas?  
We take up the task eternal, and the burden and the lesson,  
Pioneers! Oh Pioneers! (22).

Russell's contribution to Ideals in Ireland is replete with references to American literary and political culture. In a broad argument that sets a newly resurgent Ireland against decadent England, Russell casts Ireland as an incipient nation, much like the United States of the late eighteenth century. Mixing the mystic with the republican, Russell expresses a belief in the economics of self-sufficiency in the language of American radicalism, asking:

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<sup>55</sup> A good bibliography of such work is Metress, S. The American Irish and Irish Nationalism: A Sociohistorical Introduction. Lanham: Scarecrow, 1995. Also useful is Carroll, F. M. American Opinion and the Irish Question 1910-23: A Study in Opinion and Policy. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978.

<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, the schoolchild narrator of Joyce's "An Encounter", in Dubliners, suggests the attraction of the American West to his own imagination in the following terms: "The adventures related in the literature of the Wild West were remote from my nature but, at least, they opened doors of escape"(18-19). The story indicates that such literature was read in Dublin.



What can it profit my race if it gain the empire of the world and yet lose its own soul – a soul which is only now growing to self-consciousness, and this to be lost simply that we may help to build up a sordid trade federation between England and her Colonies! Was our divine origin to this end? (16-17).

As figured here, Ireland is to repeat America's eighteenth century achievement in asserting its independence, both mental and physical, from what Emerson called "the curse of eight hundred years"<sup>(33)</sup><sup>57</sup>. Importantly however, Russell's vision of a postcolonial Ireland is not simply of a new state of liberty. It is rather the basis for a new Empire, in succession to the British Empire from which it will secede. Hardly a creature of postcolonial anxiety, Russell's Ireland draws its strength from the evangelical impulse of his revivalism. His nation is bound to assert its moral influence over the untracked bounds of the global imagination.

Russell's sense of mission was common in British intellectual circles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Russell's Irish nationalism may mark his difference in political sympathy from many of his English contemporaries, but his compound interests in poetry, the occult and social organisation identify Russell as a late Victorian and Edwardian intellectual, albeit of Irish provenance. For example, English socialist contemporaries of Russell like Edward Carpenter had little problem integrating the arcane with the political. Like Russell, Carpenter, a Cambridge graduate, vegetarian and anarchist, had a twin interest in Whitman and Blavatsky. Carpenter also shared some of Russell's friends, mutual acquaintances including George Bernard Shaw and the journalist H. W. Nevinson<sup>58</sup>.

In a further synchronicity, Carpenter was also engaged as a lecturer on the subject of co-operation for English Theosophical societies, Russell's attachment to

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<sup>57</sup> Emerson, R. W. *English Traits*.

<sup>58</sup> Carpenter, E. *My Days and Dreams*. 246-247.

co-operation was perhaps the most significant political association of his life. Carpenter's autobiography, My Days and Dreams, is a wonderful register of the experiences that formed a radical, late Victorian intellect. Carpenter lists Blavatsky's Theosophical Society alongside the Democratic Federation, the Society for Physical Research, the Vegetarian Society and the Anti-Vivisection movement as evidence of a late nineteenth century impulse to prepare "for the new universe of the twentieth century"(240)<sup>59</sup>.

To read of Carpenter's life and career in English socialism provides an enlightening context for Russell's own achievement. For the perception of Russell's writing as the expression of purely Irish concern obscures the degree to which his intellectual pedigree is to a significant degree that of late Victorian England. Carpenter's interests were various: co-operative production, anarchist social organisation, Thoreau and Morris. He even adapted a design for Indian sandals to provide for extra comfort during the English summer. Russell's mind does not seem so uniquely myriad when compared to that of Carpenter. As the cultural historian of Edwardian England, Samuel Hynes, puts it, the early twentieth century

was a time of undifferentiated rebellion, when many rebellious minds seem to have regarded all new ideas as adaptable if only they were contrary to the new order; one finds individuals who thought it possible to be both Nietzschean and Socialist, fin-de-siècle and Fabian, Bergsonian and Post-Impressionist, and Carpenter himself had no difficulty in being at once a Socialist, a mystic, a scientist, a spiritualist, and an anti-theist (9).

Such iconoclastic eclecticism was pervasive in English intellectual culture. Theosophy, which formed the basis of Russell's belief, was for example the subject of public controversy in England, with the Society for Psychical Research conducting a

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<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*



sceptical investigation into occult phenomena<sup>60</sup>. Importantly, the controversy between Theosophy and the Society for Psychical Research was not one carried out on the margins of English society. By the last decade of the nineteenth century the Society counted among its members Tennyson and the Reverend C. L. Dodgson (better known as Lewis Carroll). All of which suggests that occult investigation was not the folly of lost individuals<sup>61</sup>.

Russell's editorship of the Irish Homestead was further typical of the profession to which an Edwardian intellectual with political motivations might aspire. Journals were a critical late nineteenth and early twentieth century tool by which an individual or group could publicly express a social vision<sup>62</sup>. Audiences for these

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<sup>60</sup> The Society's investigator was Richard Hodgson and the "climax of his exposure came when Hodgson was being shown the Shrine - a wooden box in which messages from Tibet, apports of flowers, etc., were known to appear. His guide, a devoted Theosophist, claimed that the Shrine was entirely solid: to prove his assertion, he struck the back of the construction with his hand - and released a secret trap-door"(52). Cited from Webb, J., The Flight From Reason.

<sup>61</sup> On a similar point, Janet Oppenheim notes that "The impetus behind modern spiritualism came, nevertheless, from the thousands who looked to spiritualism for far more urgent reasons than mere titillation. It came from the men and women who searched for some incontrovertible reassurance of fundamental cosmic order and purpose, especially reassurance that life on earth was not the totality of human existence. While Victorians of a scholarly bent found relief disputing theologically among themselves in the periodical press, spiritualists found their comfort at the séance table. There, in the spirit voices, the spirit hands, faces, and bodies, the messages rapped out on walls, floors, and furniture, or scribbled on slate, spiritualists received proof that the human spirit survived bodily death. With that proof, they liberated themselves from the religious anxiety and emotional bewilderment that had afflicted them and continued to torment countless numbers of their contemporaries"(2-3). Cited from The Other World.

<sup>62</sup> T. W. Heyck's The Transformation of Victorian Intellectual Life in England cites Matthew Arnold as evidence of a nineteenth century writer who felt that "the cultured minority... should be in close communication with the people. Their role would be in the broadest sense instructional. Yet Arnold's frequently repeated wish to make the best ideas *prevail* conveyed the germ of a different notion. Arnold desperately wanted some sense of cultural authority... Culture, according to Arnold, would not only cast fresh light on conventional ideas, but also bring 'some sound order and authority' to the cultural chaos"(213-214). The question of periodical publication is also addressed by Laurel Brake in Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism: Gender and Literature in the Nineteenth Century. Brake reflects Heyck's sense of late nineteenth century disturbance to make a related point: "As professionalism in the practice of criticism and the conduct of the higher periodicals prevailed, the authority of the journal and of criticism waned under the concomitant and more general triumph of scientific relativism and increasing literacy, and the inevitable pluralism and fragmentation in their wake"(7). It is interesting that George Bernard Shaw is however cited by Heyck as one of the few authors able to "maintain the early-nineteenth century link between literature and journalism"(202). Shaw and Russell were two Irish writers intent on reinstating the authority of the cultural journal. Shaw hoped to achieve this through the New Statesman, as discussed in Chapter Five, 156-157, and Russell through the Irish Homestead and Irish Statesman.

publications varied enormously, from a few dozen to thousands. But whatever their circulation, nearly all journals assumed the existence of a readership broadminded and literate, a difference perhaps from the coterie aspirations of the journal's related publication, the little magazine. Illusory to a degree, the democratic façade of popular opinion that journals erected often obscured the reality that the most effective publications were those implicitly addressed to a designated, often powerful, audience. The Irish Homestead and its successor the Irish Statesman both pretended to be journals of popular opinion, with their letters pages, columns of comment on events of the week and reviews of public events all evidence of their civic commitment. But their appearance should never obscure the fact that both journals were concerned, above all, with the promotion of Russell's vision to the most influential strata of Irish society, before and after independence.

In England, the Fabians, a society of social reformers under the direction of the Webbs and George Bernard Shaw, a friend himself of Russell, conducted their media campaigns in the New Age, a journal edited by Russell's contemporary and friend, A. R. Orage<sup>63</sup>. Orage, like Carpenter, was possessed of a range of interests equal to that of Russell. Like Russell, Orage too has suffered from posthumous critical neglect, a pity when one considers the clarity of his criticism. The New Age was a vigorous journal, the vehicle for Orage's evolving belief in the suitability of Guild Socialism for the equitable organisation of the English working classes. A keen reader of Russell's mystical text the Candle of Vision, Orage also wrote ably on, among others, the Irish writers Joyce and Eglinton<sup>64</sup>. The New Age further took its place alongside other Edwardian journals like the Saturday Westminster and the

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<sup>63</sup> For brief reference to the New Age see Gross, J. The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters, 244, and the second volume of Holroyd's Bernard Shaw. 318-322.



Nation, the latter edited by H. W. Massingham<sup>65</sup>. The Irish Homestead was in this respect no different from any of its English contemporaries, edited as it was by an intellectual determined to popularise his own theory of social reform.

The Irish Homestead was first published in 1897 by Horace Plunkett, then a Unionist Member of Parliament and founder of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (I. A. O. S.), the official body of the Irish co-operative movement<sup>66</sup>. Russell's first involvement with the co-operative movement was in the same year, organising credit banks for Irish farmers in the congested districts of the western seaboard<sup>67</sup>. Plunkett sponsored the Irish Homestead until it ceased independent publication in 1923 with its incorporation into the Irish Statesman, thus proving himself central to the creation of a modern Irish periodical culture. Published every Saturday and edited for its first eight years by H. F. Norman, the Irish Homestead was associated in public perception with the I. A. O. S.

In content, the Irish Homestead consisted of a two-page leading article followed by editorial notes, advertisements and letters. All of which might not inspire a reader keen to appreciate Russell's literary motivations. Agriculture, after all, is not the most fashionable of critical subjects. Russell's first contribution to the Irish Homestead was a piece of blank verse in the year following its opening. His involvement with the journal was occasional until his accession to H. F. Norman's editorship in the late summer of 1905<sup>68</sup>. Russell did of course make one important

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<sup>64</sup> See Orage, A. R. Selected Essays and Critical Writings. Eds. H. Read and D. Saurat. London: Stanley Knott, 1935.

<sup>65</sup> Gross, J. The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters. 242-243.

<sup>66</sup> The most comprehensive life of Plunkett is West, T. Horace Plunkett: Co-operation and Politics, an Irish Biography.

<sup>67</sup> Summerfield, H. That Myriad-Minded Man. 88-93.

<sup>68</sup> It is difficult to tell the exact date of Russell's appointment as it was not announced in the pages of the Irish Homestead. It was however, as Summerfield suggests from manuscript evidence, in the late summer of 1905 that Russell first edited the journal. See That Myriad-Minded Man. 124.



contribution to the Irish Homestead before 1905; his sponsorship of Joyce resulted in the partial publication of Dubliners in its pages in 1904<sup>69</sup>.

The Irish Homestead was visually unprepossessing, with a front page presented in two broad columns with minimal adornment of the title. The casual reader might even mistake it for an undistinguished house journal. Its concentration on such matters as the best methods of butter preservation is a further sign of the Irish Homestead's apparent remoteness from the decidedly urban impulses of Ireland's revolutionary period. But by its support of the co-operative idea, the Irish Homestead pitched its agricultural constituency against the traditional practices of both rural and urban capital<sup>70</sup>.

A brief survey indeed of the subjects that vexed the Irish Homestead in the period from 1905 to 1913 suggests that Russell's antipathy to capitalism extended to his dislike of state organisation. In contrast, the improvement of labour relations between manufacturing classes, farmers included, and the promotion of the co-operative ideal, were of paramount concern to its editor<sup>71</sup>. Russell's interest in the conditions in which Irish labour lived combined with his antagonism to state capitalism to form a general sympathy for Irish trade union organisation in the Irish Homestead<sup>72</sup>. Such sympathy manifested itself most clearly immediately before the

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<sup>69</sup> Joyce published two stories under the pseudonym 'Stephen Dædalus' in the Irish Homestead. See "The Sisters", IH, 10:33, 13 Aug. 1904, 676-677, and "Eveline", IH, 10:37, 10 Sept. 1904, 761.

<sup>70</sup> The Irish Homestead's promotion of rural co-operation aroused the antagonism of a rival publication, the Freeman's Journal, a paper closely associated with the Irish Parliamentary Party. The Parliamentary Party was in turn reliant on the votes of that class of Irish citizens antagonistic to co-operative reform, engaged as many of these were in private retail and distribution. The details of this conflict are examined further in Chapter Two. 42-43.

<sup>71</sup> See for example the co-operative movement's funding dispute with the Department of Agriculture in "The Department and the I. A. O. S.", Irish Homestead (cited subsequently as IH), 12:28, 14 July 1906. 565-566. Also "The Future of Irish Farming", IH, 12:29, 21 July 1906. 585-586, and "Self Help or State Aid", IH, 15:6, 8 Feb. 1908. 101-103. An adequate survey of Russell's early contributions to the Irish Homestead is contained in Summerfield, H., ed. Selections from the Contributions to the Irish Homestead by G. W. Russell.

<sup>72</sup> The nature of Russell's relationship with James Connolly is examined in Chapter Two. *Passim*.

First World War. If, as might be argued, the humiliation of labour after the failure of the 1913 Lock Out was a major contributory factor to the growth of militancy in Dublin, then Russell's discussion with James Connolly in the Irish Homestead about co-operative development takes on a new, revolutionary significance. Furthermore, the period between 1911 and 1914 was a restless one in England as individual unions amalgamated into national federations, the Triple Alliance of dock workers, railwaymen and miners formed in 1914<sup>73</sup>. In this British, or even European, context of union organisation, Russell's commitment to co-operation as a form of social reorganisation was, at least implicitly, radical.

Doubtless the Irish Homestead's association with the I. A. O. S., a non-political, all-Ireland, body, limited Russell's scope for explicitly political rhetoric. But co-operation was simultaneously an economic theory and a cipher whereby Russell could express ideas advanced even for the Ireland of the first quarter of this century. The most able short summary of his co-operative theory is contained in an article he contributed on the movement to the Irish supplement of an early edition of the New Statesman<sup>74</sup>. Published with no little irony on the twelfth of July 1913, the supplement was an attempt by the New Statesman (and most notably Shaw) to support its Irish nationalist contemporaries. At the height of the Home Rule Crisis, the New Statesman called its supplement "the Awakening of Ireland"<sup>75</sup>. The title is suggestive of an earlier prose piece by Russell, "The Awakening of the Fires", first

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<sup>73</sup> The Triple Alliance was the product of a general shift in British Trade Union organisation towards national federation. Evidence to some critics, notably George Dangerfield in The Strange Death of Liberal England, first published in 1936, of a rift specific to British society, union activity increased across nearly all of Western Europe in the period between 1911 and 1914. See Mommsen, W. J., and H. G. Husung, eds. The Development of Trade Unionism in Great Britain and Germany 1880-1914.

<sup>74</sup> Co-operation and Nationality, published in 1912, is a more general discussion of Russell's economic theory. It is discussed at length in the final section of the chapter. I have placed my analysis of Co-operation and Nationality after this later passage from the New Statesman as the 1912 text is a summary of broad interests, economic, political and social, whose contexts I establish here.



published in the Irish Theosophist<sup>76</sup>. Whatever the provenance of its title, the New Statesman's supplement was an attempt by the English journal to generate support for Home Rule among its readership.

Russell's contribution to the New Statesman is unusual in terms of his leading article contributions to the Irish Homestead in that its four pages are divided into six separate sections, each dealing with individual but related subjects like "The Foundation of the I. A. O. S." and "The Extension of the Co-operative Idea". In parts technical, dedicated intermittently to figures and statistics, the article is Russell's attempt to mimic the Fabian style of social documentation<sup>77</sup>. Russell shows a debt to Shaw in the opening passage of "The Co-operative Movement" in his use of similarly ironic rhetoric:

Ireland, so far from being revolutionary, is really cursed with moderate men who only want a few trifling changes in the location of government, but who otherwise cling to the old custom and antiquarian economics as the limpet to the rock (2).

Continuing in this vein Russell suggests that Plunkett, the director of the I.A.O.S., was an "Irish revolutionary"(2). A surprise indeed to Plunkett's critics in Ireland; the early dedication of Plunkett to Irish unionism was the standard substance of later criticism by his opponents<sup>78</sup>. But Russell's deliberate myopia about the unionist label attached to his sponsor is an intelligent negotiation of a political culture consumed with the importance of title and association.

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<sup>75</sup> The full title of the New Statesman supplement was The New Statesman: Supplement on the Awakening of Ireland, 1:14, 12 July 1913.

<sup>76</sup> Russell published "The Awakening of the Fires" in two parts in IT, 5:4, 15 Jan. 1897, 66-69, and IT, 5:5, 15 Feb. 1897. 85-89.

<sup>77</sup> The classic prose style of Fabian social reform can be read in Shaw, G. B., ed. Fabian Essays in Socialism, first published in 1889. This edition was reissued in 1911, the year before the publication of Russell's own manifesto, Co-operation and Nationality.

<sup>78</sup> Plunkett suffered politically for his criticism of the Catholic Church in Ireland in the New Century, published in 1904. Even the relatively sympathetic observer John Eglinton made the acute observation of Plunkett that "His indifference to politics betrayed him for a Unionist, just as his indifference to religion betrayed him as a Protestant"(43). Cited from A Memoir of AE.

Russell was brilliant at such manipulation and flamboyant to the point that Plunkett takes his place as the “heir to Michael Davitt, John Mitchel, Robert Emmet, and Wolfe Tone”(2)<sup>79</sup>. This is clearly ridiculous but exaggeration is critical to the success of polemic. Under cover of this Russell subtly places the co-operative movement in direct competition to the relatively conservative Irish nationalism of the Parliamentary Party. At this stage Russell’s radicalism asserts itself, free to do so in the New Statesman, an English journal of international intellectual stature. Russell thus positions co-operation in a constellation of early twentieth century British socialisms:

Now co-operation is one of the half-dozen fundamental principles on which it is possible to imagine a civilisation being based. It may be added to the various forms of collectivism, State socialism, guild socialism, and communism as one of the fundamental ideas by the application of which to a society a whole civilisation could be organised... Co-operation for such an imaginative and logically - minded folk as the Irish was... inflammable stuff (2)<sup>80</sup>.

Russell’s revolution had already begun. Published in a year critical to the development of Irish nationalism and in anticipation of a Home Rule Bill that was to be enacted in 1914, Russell presents co-operation as the modern, efficient tool of organisation in the new state. More than that, it is the basis of a new civilisation, a system of economic organisation beneficial to the moral temper of its adherents. Or, as Russell put it, “As the movement has grown to national dimensions, it has, while improving its economic position, become more humanised”(4)<sup>81</sup>. Like James Connolly, Russell creates the idea of Irish nationality as a social and economic responsibility. What separates Russell’s rhetoric from that of Connolly is its epic awareness, the recognition of national and economic imperatives involved in the

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<sup>79</sup> Russell, G. W. “The Co-operative Movement”, New Statesman (cited subsequently as NS), 1:14, 12 July 1913. 2-5.



creation of the Irish nation, singularly expressed in a voice both prophetic and political. The exercise of this voice was the impetus to Russell's increasing assumption of the position of spokesman of an imminent Irish nation.

Russell's first public contest on behalf of Ireland was his dispute with Rudyard Kipling over the publication of the latter's poem "Ulster: 1912" on the twelfth of April 1912. Kipling, awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1907, was by 1912 in a period of decline; the popularity of his earlier writing was not matched in his subsequent production<sup>80</sup>. Incensed by the Home Rule Bill, evidence he thought of the British Empire's potential instability, Kipling published the poem "Ulster: 1912" at the height of Unionist agitation against the Bill. The signal tone of the poem is set by a preface from the book of Isaiah, reckless in its context: "*their works*"(189) it stated, in reference presumably to the supporters of Home Rule, "*are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands*"(189). Six stanzas of incitement follow, the language of apocalypse, of "Rebellion, rapine, hate,/ Oppression, wrong and greed"(189), combined with plain religious bigotry, "We know"(190) the speaker claims in brutal irony, "the hells declared/ For such as serve not Rome"(190). A fear of Imperial decline feeds the poem's anger, its final stanza resolute in its defiance:

Believe, we dare not boast,  
Believe, we do not fear –  
We stand to pay the cost  
In all that men hold dear.  
What answer from the North?  
One Law, One Land, One Throne.

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<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> A recent biography of Kipling, Rickett's *The Unforgiving Minute*, records Robert Frost's 1913 observation of "how slowly but surely Yeats... eclipsed Kipling"(203) in popularity. The *Athenaeum*, an English literary review of conservative taste, was, in its review of Kipling's *Collected Poems* of 1912, "not sorry to see that some of his recent political verse has been excluded. Truth to tell, the muse agrees but ill with the Eumenides of politics, who, however well-intentioned, are apt to be strident, and Mr. Kipling's verse of the sort has led to an undue depreciation of his powers"(65). *Athenaeum*, 4440, 30 Nov. 1912. 655.

If England drive us forth  
We shall not fall alone! (190).

The organisation of paramilitary bodies independent from state organisation is usually understood to be a salient feature of Irish history in the twentieth century. It is in this respect enlightening to read Kipling, scion of the Empire, propose this precise remedy to political controversy. "Ulster: 1912" is an excellent example of the declamatory uses to which literature can be put. By turns sentimental and despairing, the energy of its relentless metre suggests the violence of its propositions. The Unionist myth of a people separate from the world is manipulated by Kipling to illustrate the perceived danger of imperial disintegration. A product of wider debates about the validity of British Imperialism within English culture, "Ulster: 1912" was, for all that, no less dangerous as polemic in Ireland.

Russell's reply to Kipling appeared three days later. Published in the English newspaper, the Daily News, Russell's open letter to Kipling mixes irony with anger. Russell first addresses Kipling as "brother"<sup>(38)<sup>83</sup></sup>, arraigning him on the charge of bringing poetry into disrepute. That Russell does this in prose is no small irony, but the text continues to criticise Kipling for copyrighting his poem in order to profit from its further publication. A small point, but the work of Russell and many of his Revival contemporaries was often republished in pamphlet form in support of political agitation. This would have been illegal if copyright were insisted upon. Russell develops his criticism of Kipling to state the English poet's disservice to Irish Unionists in his suggestion of their separation from the rest of Ireland: "For, let the truth be known, the mass of Irish Unionists are much more in love with Ireland than with England"<sup>(40-41)</sup>. Unionist differences with nationalists are, to Russell,



insignificant in context of their shared nationality, an ethnic association that Kipling cannot comprehend. Questionable as this assertion is, it is the manner in which Russell conceives of such nationalist feeling that is most surprising:

You have intervened in a quarrel of which you do not know the merits like any brawling bully who passes and who only takes sides to use his strength. If there was a high court of poetry, and those in power jealous of the noble name of poet and that none should use it save those who were truly Knights of the Holy Ghost, they would hack the golden spurs from your heels and turn you out of the Court. You had the ear of the world and you poisoned it with prejudice and ignorance. You had the power of song, and you have always used it on behalf of the strong against the weak... Truly ought the golden spurs be hacked from your heels and you be thrust out of the Court (41-42).

Kipling's expulsion from the high court of letters signalled the end of this controversy for Russell. The archaic style of Russell's polemic is typical of his interest in metaphors that suggest authority by their ancient pedigree. Russell's mind ranged most often to the classical world for examples by which to berate or inspire his own contemporary world. In literature, the royal court is symbolic of artistic integrity. In economics, Russell felt that co-operative societies were best conceived of as miniature city-states, similar to those of ancient Greece. Russell's impulse to reorganise society in decentralised communities bears witness to a strong socialist sympathy typical of late nineteenth century anarchism<sup>84</sup>.

Co-operation and Nationality, first published in 1912, was Russell's first concerted expression of his own personal theory of social organisation. An uneven text, Co-operation and Nationality reads successively like a Fabian social report,

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<sup>83</sup> Russell's "Open Letter to Rudyard Kipling" was reproduced in 1916 in Figgis's AE (George William Russell). Page numbers given here refer to Figgis's edition.

<sup>84</sup> More specifically, Russell drew upon his reading of the Russian anarchist, Peter Kropotkin. The author of Mutual Aid and Fields, Factories and Workshops, Kropotkin was the subject of a laudatory review in the Irish Homestead, "The Spread of Anarchism in Ireland", IH, 19:49, 7 Dec. 1912. 993-994. Kropotkin's basic theory was that human social organisation is co-operative rather than competitive in nature, mutual aid in the modern world being the first step to moral and political regeneration.



complete with figures and statistics, an Irish nationalist polemic and a mystic rapture. Displaying elements of classical appreciation, archaeology, Irish epic history and an interest in feminism, the diffuse concerns of Co-operation and Nationality betray the text's genesis in the leading articles of the Irish Homestead in the seven years before its publication<sup>85</sup>. Arranged over twenty short chapters the text is barely one hundred pages long. But it is Russell's first sustained attempt, during the Home Rule crisis, to outline his vision of Irish society.

The mental geography of Co-operation and Nationality lies between Ireland and the United States, a country whose image is constantly invoked by the text. The America to which Russell refers is not however urban. Constantly referred to, rural America is Russell's model for Irish democracy. It is an America of plain space, the imagined territory once again of Whitman and Emerson. To Russell, "It is not the work which is done which excites Whitman, but the work which is yet to be done – the long vistas and the yet unbridled close"(32). The ideal of free space obsesses Whitman, the long, effusive lines of his poetry in part seem an attempt to populate the clearing that Emerson, in a fit of high romanticism, promised the American poet:

Thou true land-lord! sea-lord! air-lord! Wherever snow falls, or water flows, or birds fly, wherever day and night meet in twilight, wherever the blue heaven is hung by clouds, or sown with stars, wherever are forms with transparent boundaries, wherever are outlets into celestial space, wherever is danger, and awe, and love, there is Beauty, plenteous as rain, shed for thee, and though thou shouldst walk the world over, thou shalt not be able to find a condition inopportune or ignoble (214-215)<sup>86</sup>.

Yeats for one was suspicious of the power of such simple annunciations and was later to regret the influence that Emerson and Whitman held over Russell's

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<sup>85</sup> Summerfield notes that "More than a third of this work consisted of passages from his leading articles and 'Notes of the Week' incorporated with only the slightest variations... Much of the book is written in the vigorous, natural and often witty language of AE's *Homestead* articles, sliding easily, without any obtrusive transition, into a more impassioned style"(139-140). That Myriad-Minded Man.

youth<sup>87</sup>. But the occult deficiencies of Emerson's transcendentalism, crucial to Yeats's disquiet, were of secondary importance to Russell. What Emerson imagined was a physical territory enhanced by its spiritual potential. This ideal, when translated by Whitman into popular demagoguery, was critical to that section of the Irish Literary Revival represented by Russell. Provided with an imaginative territory clear of the binds of class and religious association, Russell was able to picture in Ireland a new nation, dependant for its existence on the exercise of his intellectual commitment.

In Co-operation and Nationality, Russell uses his cleared space to conceive of his ideal "social order"(36), an order composed, like Emerson's American Scholar, of three qualities, "economic development"(36), "political stability"(36) and a "desirable social life"(36). An analysis of each illustrates the degree of Russell's political syncretism. Economic development was one of the prime directives of Arthur Griffith's *Sinn Féin*, political stability the obsession of *Sinn Féin*'s antagonist the Irish Parliamentary Party, and a desirable social life the individual product of Russell's own imagination.

By a suspension of all three in the supposedly non-political medium of co-operation Russell attempts to create a new caucus within Irish society. Success for this new medium depended on Russell's ability to present its attraction and inspiration coherently in Co-operation and Nationality. Russell's desire for economics to appeal to a popular readership lends his prose a curious quality. Its

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<sup>86</sup> Emerson, R. W. "The Poet." Ralph Waldo Emerson. 197-215.

<sup>87</sup> In his Autobiographies, Yeats wondered what Russell "would have been had he not met in early life the poetry of Emerson and Walt Whitman, writers who have begun to seem superficial precisely because they lack the Vision of Evil"(246).



moral argument against the evils of capitalist individualism is interspersed with almost conversational reflections on the nature of being:

Sometimes one feels as if there were some higher mind in humanity which could not act through individuals, but only through brotherhoods and groups of men. Anyhow, the civilisation which is based on individualism is mean, and the civilisation built on great guilds, fraternities, communes and associations is of a higher order. If we are to have any rural civilisation in Ireland it must spring out of co-operation (44).

Co-operation and Nationality is a series of feints, its gestures to other modes of political thought implicit in references to Orage's guild socialism and Kropotkin's anarchism. More notable perhaps is Russell's meditation on the importance of fraternity to Irish civilisation. Embedded in Russell's democratic theory (if democratic is a suitable word to describe the forms of social association that Russell promotes) is a cult-like fascination with secret organisation and the ordination of superior intellect. This interest is obscured by Russell's insistence on a generally inclusive rhetoric but is exposed in the language of racial superiority that infects Russell's vision of the Irish future. To return again to America, so often in this text the template for a projection of the Irish nation's future, Russell predicts that a "great civilisation"(84) will yet arise.

What Whitman called their 'barbaric yawp' may yet turn into the lordliest speech and thought, but without self-confidence a race will go no further. If Irish people do not believe they can equal or surpass the stature of any humanity which has been upon the globe, then they had better all emigrate and become servants to some superior race, and leave Ireland to new settlers who may come here with the same high hopes as the Pilgrim Fathers had when they went to America (84).

The disturbingly impersonal aspect to Russell's thought, the celebration of territory over people, is an early indication of the basis on which Russell later offered his support to the Free State when its sovereignty was challenged during the Civil War. Setting himself against former friends, Russell's prime imperative after the



separation of the six Northern counties was to maintain an ideal of Ireland able to sustain itself alone in the power centre of Dublin. Before partition, Ireland itself is figured as the holy city in Co-operation and Nationality. Russell's concept of nationhood is at one with his belief in its divine origin. William Blake had exhibited a similar faith to that of Russell in "Jerusalem". The English poet's radicalism was a spur to Russell's own empowerment, his work a key to Co-operation and Nationality's agricultural nationalism. Russell observed that it was "an English poet"(86) who wrote that:

I will not cease from my mental fight,  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green and pleasant land (86).

Blake's "Jerusalem" is the poem commonly associated with the British Labour movement. But Russell's radical presumption was that land itself was the basis of his plan for national regeneration, Ireland the Eden of his future reform. The irony of England's appearance as the stimulus to the sentiment of militant Irish nationalism is apparent. But critical to Russell's identification with Blake is his personal assumption of responsibility for creating the new Jerusalem in Ireland's 'green and pleasant land'. This is exactly the point where co-operation and nationality meet, land previously the preserve of Irish agriculture now the cradle of a new humanity. Blake's vision provides the bridge by which Russell's national and economic interests contact his epic imagination. Ireland is transported into a new era, its actual history baptised into a new tradition. The nation can leave behind its "thousand years of sorrow and darkness"(95-96) to enjoy "as long a cycle of happy effort and ever-growing prosperity"(96). Its people enter a world between the material and abstract:

The country people carry quietly about with them, unknown to themselves, divine powers and tremendous destinies, as children

predestined to greatness carry, unknown to themselves or others, powers that will make beauty or stormy life in the world hereafter (102).

Sentiments similar to the above can be found earlier in Russell's writing but nowhere previously are they allied to a program of social action with relevance to the entire population. Russell blesses co-operation, a huge movement of agricultural reform, with a destiny beyond its adherents' imagination. Russell's best writing occurs when he escapes the self-indulgence of his own rhetoric to create the vision of an ideal previously obscure. Co-operation and Nationality is such a rhapsody on Ireland's economic and spiritual potential. "We have"(96), Russell wrote, "all that any race ever had to inspire them, the heavens overhead, the earth underneath, and the breath of life in our nostrils. I would like to exile the man who would set limits to what we can do"(96). Indeed Russell exercises rhetoric reminiscent of Pearse in its devotion. There is a sense moreover that Russell and Pearse were engaged on parallel projects, the popular assumption of a heroic social code<sup>88</sup>. Inspired by epic, as history and religion, and preceded by O'Grady and Blavatsky, Russell imagined himself as the precursor to a new order, the avatar himself, his insight the guarantee of change.

So Russell dedicates Co-operation and Nationality to "those who are working at laying deep the foundations of a new social order"(96). There is a missionary zeal to Russell's prose, the adventure into the remote depths of the Irish mind reminiscent of the Victorian missions to the 'Dark Continent', Africa. The evangelist's problem

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<sup>88</sup> Pearse's morality play "The Singer" works to such effect. The play, set in early Ireland, casts personal sacrifice as a communal duty and hopes to instil improved social cohesion by force of individual will. The character Mac Dara ends the play by marching to battle: "One man can free a people as one Man redeemed the world. I will take no pike, I will go into the battle with bare hands. I will stand up before the Gall as Christ hung naked before men on the tree!"(44). In his poem "The Fool", Pearse's speaker wonders if such a project could ever be successful: "the wise have pitied the fool that hath/ striven to give a life/ In the world of time and space among the/ bulks of actual things,/ To a dream that was dreamed in the heart,/ and that only the heart could hold"(335). Both texts cited from the posthumous edition of the Collected Works of Patrick H. Pearse, first published in 1917.



is that his message must forever be directed to an audience remote from the beliefs he commands and the style of Russell's own rhetoric often implied his distance from the constituency that he addressed. The sense of dissociation from the commonality of Irish life that this suggested was a weakness in the avatar's project of national rejuvenation. While crusading on behalf of the people, Russell was never quite of them<sup>89</sup>. Part of the prophet's gift is the singularity of his voice. But Russell's individual perspective on Irish culture left him vulnerable to criticism. With a career of fully twenty years before him the potential weakness of Russell's mission was already inscribed in his prose, the distance between the writer and his constituency a site of constant negotiation.

Russell chose to bridge this gap in the immediate period after 1912 by support of Irish revolutionary socialism. Irish socialism, in the personal form of James Connolly, was equally interested in Russell as the editor of the Irish Homestead, its agricultural constituency included. Relations between the two men developed steadily from 1913 until Connolly's death three years later. The next chapter finds its place in a Dublin embittered by industrial dispute, a city whose poverty sustained a degree of social militancy. In this crucible we find Russell at his most radical, the revolutionary advocate of social reform finally confronted with violence.

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<sup>89</sup> The polemical Catholic Bulletin exploited this weakness in Russell's later career. The journal derided Russell as a member of the "Mutual Boosters of Dublin"(1) and the "Augustan Ascendancy of the Aesthetes"(4). "Editorial", Catholic Bulletin, 15: 1, Jan. 1925. 1-17. The term 'mutual boosters' was used to suggest that Russell and Yeats were primarily concerned with the success of their literary clique above the veneration of Ireland in a national literature.



## National Beings: 1913-1917

Russell held an important public position as editor of the Irish Homestead. The journal was, for nearly twenty years, the main expression of his cultural ambitions. Russell's political independence in the Irish Homestead was assured by the close relationship he shared with his proprietor, Plunkett. Plunkett was sympathetic to the Literary Revival, forging an early association with Yeats and, subsequently, Russell. Plunkett had near complete faith in Russell's ability as editor, a fact that allowed Russell great latitude in his contributions to the journal. Russell had the further advantage of a relatively stable and widespread audience for the Irish Homestead through its association with the co-operatives<sup>1</sup>. By the end of the decade the I.A.O.S. had a turnover of fifteen million pounds and a membership of one hundred and fifty thousand<sup>2</sup>, a sizeable proportion of Ireland's adult population.

Russell's ability to influence a readership that doubled as a dominant rural constituency guaranteed his and his journal's interest to Irish political activists. Prime among these in the three years before 1916 was James Connolly. As a journalist Russell established a political dimension to his cultural interests that has, in context of his relationship with James Connolly, been entirely neglected in critical study. Connolly, labour activist and union organiser, was executed for his part in the 1916

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<sup>1</sup> Exact circulation figures for the Irish Homestead are unknown. The publishing contracts of Cahill's, the Dublin printing firm most likely responsible for the journal's production, are now lost. A reasonable guess can however be made. An advertisement in the Freeman's Journal, 11 Sept. 1923, promises potential advertisers a guaranteed circulation of 10, 000 copies for at least the first six issues of the Irish Homestead's immediate successor, the Irish Statesman. This total may exceed the normal print run of the Irish Homestead but it does offer some indication of general circulation. The question of audience is, of course, a fraught one for periodicals. Russell combined, I would argue, a broad appeal to his general readership in the Irish Homestead with an inclination to a specific political constituency, of the kind that I examine here.

<sup>2</sup> Figures given by Russell in his "Foreword" to The Trinity Co-Op.: 1913-1921 and After. 3.

rebellion. But Connolly was also, like Russell, a journalist, author of pamphlets and political polemic.

The occasion of Russell's first meeting with Connolly was a demonstration held at the Royal Albert Hall in London on the first of November 1913, to protest against the imprisonment of Jim Larkin for sedition four days previously. Larkin was incarcerated specifically for his address of a proscribed meeting in Dublin to support striking workers. Larkin was head of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (I. T. G. W. U.) and had been instrumental in the consolidation and expansion of his union among the Dublin working classes. But Larkin had formidable opponents. William Martin Murphy, a local magnate, in particular tried to stop union agitation among his tram workers. These workers struck in retaliation in Horse Show week of August 1913. Thereafter James Larkin called the protest meeting at which he was arrested and the eight month lock-out of Dublin workers by a confederation of city employers started. In November, Russell and Connolly found themselves sharing a platform to petition for Larkin's release. In this they were successful as Larkin was released on 13 November 1913 despite a sentence of seven months imprisonment<sup>3</sup>.

Russell however could not take immediate credit for the effect of his speech. He did not project his voice from the stage, with the result that a large portion of the audience could not hear him<sup>4</sup>. But Russell was explicit in his criticism of Dublin employers, mocking a race of capitalists who imagined they were "superhuman beings"(1)<sup>5</sup>. Subversively, Russell excoriated the actions of police who had, he suggested, "set upon and beaten"(1)<sup>6</sup> workers at the command of Dublin's merchant

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<sup>3</sup> Details of this dispute can be read in Ryan, W. The Irish Labour Movement from the 'Twenties to the Present Day. 214-233.

<sup>4</sup> Summerfield, H. That Myriad-Minded Man. 163.

<sup>5</sup> Russell, G. W. "A Plea for the Workers", The Dublin Strike.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*



*élite*. Russell's speech is remarkable in its consistent connection of the apparatus of civil government to the interests of industry and its placement of both in opposition to the democratic rights of organised labour. He damned the attitudes of those, including the vocal Archbishop of Dublin, William Walsh, who forcibly halted the temporary fostering of locked-out workers' children with sympathetic families in England and the North of Ireland:

You see, if children were even for a little out of the slums, they would get discontented with their poor homes, so a very holy man has said. Once getting full meals, they might be so inconsiderate as to ask for them all their lives (1)<sup>7</sup>.

Russell continued his attack with reference to Larkin's incarceration. The employers, he imagined, were engaged in an attempt to sound the depths of human poverty in Dublin. Only Larkin had the courage to interrupt "their interesting experiments towards the evolution of the underman and he is in gaol"(2)<sup>8</sup>. The state is portrayed, as Russell was so fond of writing, echoing Nietzsche, as the coldest of all cold monsters. Russell himself was sure who should be imprisoned in Larkin's place: "If our Courts of Justice were courts of humanity, the masters of Dublin would be in the dock charged with criminal conspiracy"(2)<sup>9</sup>. For the "greatest crime against humanity is degradation"(2)<sup>10</sup>, a degradation that first afflicts those in service of the state. In his speech Russell takes nearly all the instruments of civil and political authority (the police, the judiciary, the owners of capital and the representatives of organised religion) and challenges their privileged position.

It is at this point that the reality of Russell's self image as an agent of evolutionary change becomes apparent. By designating a certain action or group of

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

people as 'unconscious', Russell legitimises any further action taken towards them. They are, by their unconscious nature, not part of his evolutionary plan. Accordingly, the police are dehumanised and become mere "wild beasts that kill in the name of the state"(3)<sup>11</sup>. Even the Ancient Order of Hibernians, an organisation that stopped children of the locked out being sent to Liverpool, become "wild fanatics who will rend"(3)<sup>12</sup> the workers "in the name of God"(3)<sup>13</sup>.

Russell's speech caused fury in the Freeman's Journal and the Leader, two Irish nationalist papers sympathetic to the Parliamentary Party and Irish capital organisation. Both papers criticised Russell's involvement in an English socialist demonstration as evidence of his secret anti-Irish sympathies<sup>14</sup>. Furthermore, the antagonism of the Leader's editor, D. P. Moran, to Russell was longstanding. Moran had co-operated with the Freeman's Journal in a campaign to relieve the I. A. O. S. of its government subsidies, a dispute only settled in the co-operatives' favour in 1913<sup>15</sup>. Russell's Albert Hall speech was therefore the perfect opportunity for his opponents to question the co-operative movement's national motives. The Freeman's Journal observed of the I. A. O. S. that:

Mr. Russell, almost as much as Sir Horace Plunkett, stands in the public eye for that organisation. Are the members of the I. A. O. S.

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> The Freeman's Journal of Monday, 3 Nov. 1913, reported that the "meeting applied itself in the main to denunciation of the priests of Dublin and threats against the regular leaders of the Labour movement"(6). The Leader noted on the same date that "Some English Socialists are only too glad to exploit the sorrows of Dublin for their own purposes. The Mr. Russell, who calls himself A.E., has been to the Big Brother and made Johnny Bull laugh"(299).

<sup>15</sup> After his election to the post of Vice President of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction in 1899, Plunkett used his position to fund the I. A. O. S., much to the disgust of his unco-operative opponents. T. W. Russell succeeded Plunkett in his post in 1906 and began to cancel the subsidies. The situation was resolved in Plunkett's favour in 1913. That it was still a source of bitterness between The Leader and Russell in 1913 is evident from the paper's assertion that "In these abnormal times the Hairy Fairies, on the strength of a British Government subsidy, are able to appear more important than they really are. In the Home Rule future they will have their work cut out for them"(256). The Leader, 25 Oct. 1913. The 'Hairy Fairies' referred to are Russell and his associates.



in agreement on this occasion with their industrious spokesman? Will the society assume any responsibility for the campaign? That is a question which the Irish public, without distinction of Party would like to have answered immediately (6).

Plunkett, of course, remained silent throughout the controversy and Russell survived in his post as editor of the Irish Homestead. Russell indeed was fortunate that criticism of his Albert Hall speech was limited mainly to that section of the Irish press already known to be antagonistic to his opinions. Advanced nationalist journals like Sinn Féin and Irish Freedom<sup>16</sup> were unwilling to enter a partisan controversy and co-operators familiar with the Irish Homestead were reluctant to sacrifice its editor to their opponents' interests.

But the militant tone of Russell's speech was a definite acknowledgement of the potentially revolutionary social reconstitution that he wished to promote in Ireland. It was simply not politic for him to acknowledge these implications explicitly in the Irish Homestead. In a letter of explanation written after his speech Russell did express himself in more moderate language but still maintained that violence was the inevitable product of social discontent. Significantly, the letter was published in the London Times as all the Irish papers refused to print it<sup>17</sup>. In it Russell suggested his sole dedication to the evolutionary development of Irish society.

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<sup>16</sup> Arthur Griffith's Sinn Féin had previously offered a national solution to a class problem, suggesting to workers that they find freedom through the "nation and not outside of it"(3). In an unlikely revelation, labour would thus "regain all they have lost since the black shadow of foreign rule fell upon their country and struck down that civilisation of our Gaelic ancestors in which Capital prayed on Labour a blessing on each work undertaken and Labour gave the blessing in token of the satisfaction with the recompense"(3). "Sinn Féin and the Labour Question", Sinn Féin, 25 Oct. 1913. Irish Freedom, the journal that contained Patrick Pearse's monthly notes "From a Hermitage", expressed its "desire to regard the whole question from the national point of view and not from the exclusive point of view of any class or party within the nation"(5). It did offer some succour to Russell in its belief "that the only solution to the issue between capital and labour is the co-operative solution"(5). "Capital and Labour", Irish Freedom, November 1913. 4-5.

<sup>17</sup> The unsigned introductory note to the letter in The Dublin Strike makes this assertion. 7.

But the limits of his peaceful intentions are clear. Russell wanted stability in the country but was

not with those who wish to bring about in Ireland a peace of God without any understanding, and I and all free spirits will fight with all our power against the fanatics who would bludgeon us into their heaven, to bow to their savage conception of a deity. The deity of the infuriated bigot, call him by what holy name they choose, is never anything but the Old Adversary (8)<sup>18</sup>.

Russell portrays his enemies as agents of the devil. The devil, of course, takes many guises and in this instance he is embodied in the Irish political and economic establishment. Russell searched for a divine light in the working classes of Dublin and his concern for them brought Russell to the further attention of James Connolly.

Connolly was born in Edinburgh in 1868 to immigrant Irish parents. He left school at eleven and served for a period in the British army. Connolly deserted and devoted himself thereafter to socialist organisation. He was also a formidable theorist, his talents all the more remarkable when one considers that he was almost entirely self-educated. Connolly was invited to Dublin in 1896 and remained to set up the Irish Republican Socialist Party but left disillusioned for the United States in 1903. He returned to Ireland in 1910 and was involved in a successful strike in Belfast, where he lived, on behalf of firemen and sailors against the Shipping Federation<sup>19</sup>. W. P. Ryan also credits him with improving the dockworkers' conditions in the city<sup>20</sup>.

Connolly eventually returned to Dublin in 1914 to replace Larkin, now departed for America, as acting secretary of the I. T. G. W. U. Connolly then devoted his time to the increasingly militant agitation of Dublin's workforce, his assumption

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<sup>18</sup> Russell, G. W. "An Appeal to Dublin Citizens", The Dublin Strike. 7-8.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* 193-194.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* 194.



of control of the Irish Citizen Army typical of his radical motivation<sup>21</sup>. Known as the 'Runaway Army' after an early clash between some of their number and the R. I. C. in 1913, their later actions proved how ill deserved their nick-name was. Their detachment at the College of Surgeons in 1916 was one of the last of the rebel units to surrender, five days after the Rising started. Connolly's development of the I. C. A. is evidence of his shared belief with Russell in political self-sufficiency. Both Connolly and Russell, by their involvement with unions and co-operatives respectively, created parallel institutions within the state, designed primarily to defend the interests of their members.

The mutual drive to encourage workers to adopt either co-operative or union methods ensured a degree of rivalry between the two movements. During 1913, Russell described trade unionism as "an imperfect form of co-operation"(509)<sup>22</sup>. Co-operation between workers and producers in rural areas had allowed its adherents to "save a stage in the process"(509)<sup>23</sup> of capital transactions in order that co-operators might "divide among ourselves what that stage formerly cost us"(509)<sup>24</sup>. In contrast, trade unionists were, according to Russell, "weak individuals who have not brought their organisation to its full and perfect state"(509)<sup>25</sup>. Trade unionism was, to Russell, a complement of, rather than an alternative to, capitalist economics<sup>26</sup>. Union

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<sup>21</sup> Connolly's association of the I. C. A. with militant nationalist organisations such as the Irish Volunteers and Irish Republican Brotherhood was not entirely popular with its members. Sean O'Casey, for example, resigned as secretary of the movement in protest. See Mitchell, A. Labour in Irish Politics 1890-1930: The Irish Labour Movement in an Age of Revolution. 68.

<sup>22</sup> Russell, G. W. "Co-Operation and Trade Unionism", IH, 21 June 1913. 509-510.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Russell's opinion of trade unionism was similar in this respect to Arthur Griffith's wider prescription of socialism in Sinn Féin; "I deny"(2), Griffith wrote, "that Socialism is a remedy for the existent evils or any remedy at all. I deny that Capital and Labour are in their nature antagonistic – I assert that they are essential and complementary the one to the other"(2). "Sinn Féin and the Labour Question", Sinn Féin, 25 Oct. 1913.

subscribers were thus unable to “dispense with their employer”(509)<sup>27</sup> and were involved only in a process of mediation whereby the workers “cut down... profits a little”(509)<sup>28</sup> and prevented their employer from “exploiting them so much as he would if he dealt with them singly”(509)<sup>29</sup>. Russell criticises the unions in order to make a positive point on behalf of co-operation. He concentrates his attack on the theoretical foundations of Irish labour organisation. Russell argues that such organisation cannot be described as either socialist or syndicalist because:

Socialism demands the nationalisation of land, factories, mines, and all the agencies of production and distribution and the transference of ownership and control from private individuals to the State. We have heard no such claim urged by labour in Dublin. The syndicalists' object is to eliminate private ownership of industry, but they do not wish the State to own or direct the industry, but the organised workers. We have heard no claim put forward put forward by Irish labour leaders (777)<sup>30</sup>.

Russell's analysis of both socialism's and syndicalism's basic intentions is correct. He does however ignore the fact that Connolly's belief in syndicalism thrived in Ireland in what O'Connor describes as an “advanced but structurally undeveloped”(2)<sup>31</sup> labour movement. Connolly agitated in a “movement syndicalist in style and method”(2)<sup>32</sup> but not in name. It was therefore unfair of Russell to criticise Irish labour for not being explicit about its aims since labour was, by necessity, more directly engaged with the tactics of syndicalism than its philosophy. Bearing in mind Russell's sympathy for labour during the lock-out, it is reasonable to assume that Russell's criticism is actually propaganda for the co-operative movement.

For Russell

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Russell, G. W. “The Parable of Labour”, *IH*, 20 Sept. 1913. 777-779.

<sup>31</sup> O'Connor, E. *Syndicalism in Ireland 1917-1923*. 2.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*



The co-operative state is like to the kingdom of Heaven in the parable. All are invited voluntarily to fulfill (sic) the law of their own being, which is to be sociable, brotherly, and friendly. If they will not listen, nature will still have its way and its laws will be enforced by a multitude of bureaucrats carrying out orders, and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (779)<sup>33</sup>.

Connolly responded to Russell's considerations in The Re-Conquest of Ireland, published in 1915. He devoted the eighth chapter of the book to the question of "Labour and Co-operation in Ireland". Connolly's comparison of the two movements stresses their common experience of relative disadvantage in Ireland, the I. A. O. S. and labour movement equally disdained by the dominant Parliamentary Party. As Connolly remarked, the co-operatives had encountered "no more bitter enemies than the political representatives of the Irish people, regardless of their political colour"(315). Likewise, the I.T.G.W.U. had little support in 1913, with almost the entire Irish press and political establishment ranged against them<sup>34</sup>. Connolly is further mindful of his experiences in the lock-out when he writes of the "benificent (sic) activities of the co-operative societies"(320) during the dispute<sup>35</sup>. The co-operatives' supply of food left "such an impression upon the minds of the workers of the Dublin Labour Movement"(320) that he expected many new societies to be formed "under the auspices of that movement"(320).

Connolly's praise was genuine but conditional. In the first place, Connolly is very precise in his description of the Dublin co-operatives' functions; they are 'distributive bodies'. That they are not to be concerned with applying the theory of

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<sup>33</sup> Russell, G. W. "The Parable of Labour", IH, 20 Sept. 1913. 777-779.

<sup>34</sup> Lynd's introduction to Connolly's Labour in Ireland: Labour in Irish History: The Re-conquest of Ireland suggests that in 1913 Connolly "had the intellectuals and the poor on his side, but he had all the Press and all the parties against him"(xxi).

<sup>35</sup> The Irish Agricultural Wholesale Organisation (I. A. W. S.), an offshoot of the I. A. O. S., provided credit for those unemployed during the dispute. The ever jaundiced Moran was prompted to ask "Is there a deal here?... now the I. A. W. S. are getting a big slice of business... Some of the Hairy Fairies weren't born yesterday"(276). The Leader, 1 Nov. 1913.

co-operation to the methods of production of goods sold signals a revival of an earlier debate between Russell and Larkin. Larkin opened a number of co-operative stores after the lock-out, whose concern was only to retail goods co-operatively without attending to co-operative production. Russell criticised this aspect of Larkin's venture. When their business failed Russell blamed the stores' collapse on Larkin's misunderstanding of co-operative business theory<sup>36</sup>. Secondly, Connolly argues that any new co-operatives in Dublin will be organised under the auspices of what he calls the 'Dublin Labour Movement' (presumably the I. T. G. W. U.) and not the I. A. O. S. Just as Russell called for trade unionists to join the co-operatives so does Connolly try to make co-operation a tool of the unions.

The potential of a union between labour and co-operative movements was not solely an Irish subject. Russell reported favourably in 1913 on a conference held between the British Labour Party, which had nearly fifty seats in the House of Commons, the Trades Union movement and the English co-operatives<sup>37</sup>. Russell described the meeting as an industrial augur, hoping that it would "come to be regarded in future years as the most important political event in the century"(121)<sup>38</sup>. The conference proposed to combine parliamentary agitation for workers' rights with a policy of strike action if suitable legislation was not forthcoming. Russell's response to the plan showed that his disdain for politicians was not restricted to its Irish adherents. He dismissed the Labour Party's involvement in the pact; any successful constitutional reform ceded to them would be a "soup of their own tails

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<sup>36</sup> Further details of Larkin's co-operative venture can be read in Larkin, E. James Larkin: Irish Labour Leader 1876-1947. 167-168. See also Summerfield, H. That Myriad-Minded Man. 165.

<sup>37</sup> Russell, G. W. "A Momentous Conference", IH, 15 Feb. 1913. 121-123.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*



disguised in flavour to make it appear to be composed of their employers' tails"(123)<sup>39</sup>.

In preference, Russell concentrated his attention on the potential of industrial action. In preparation for any strike that might occur, the unions would invest their subscriptions in a co-operative movement that would in turn supply union members engaged in industrial action. Typically, Russell was optimistic of this plan's possibility. He argued that "War will not be declared so readily"(122)<sup>40</sup> on labour if the employers knew "that the enemy is well provisioned and can hold out for a indefinite period"(122)<sup>41</sup>. As the two sides became closer in power there would "in all probability... be fewer strikes"(122)<sup>42</sup>. In context of Russell's comments on the background to the First World War this argument seems a little disingenuous. Germany and England had armed themselves from the start of the century in order to be able to match each other's influence, all in support of global economic interests. Russell was critical of this militarist tendency in his New Year leading article in the Irish Homestead of 1913. He wrote that:

All the members of the European family... have exhibited for ten years or more all the signs of suppressed lunacy or homicidal mania. They have been furbishing up their weapons, looking gloomily at each other, and when people do that for a long time one expects an outbreak finally (1)<sup>43</sup>.

This passage could equally describe the potential situation that would arise between the forces of labour and capital if the plan proposed between the Labour Party, the unions and the co-operatives ever came into effect. The simple explanation for Russell's blindness is his partiality to Irish labour.

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<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Russell, G. W. "New Year Anticipations", IH, 4 Jan. 1913. 1-2.

Connolly responded in print to Russell's 1913 article on the English conference two years later. He did not share Russell's hope that an understanding between co-operators and the unions would result in a period of stability, perhaps because Connolly had himself prepared for rebellion since the start of the war<sup>44</sup>. Connolly did agree with Russell that unions should help co-operatives by purchasing "the products of the agricultural co-operative societies in time of industrial peace"(323)<sup>45</sup>. All this was to create a bond of mutual interest, a union that would see co-operatives provision workers during the future revolution that Connolly predicted. The "workers"(323)<sup>46</sup>, Connolly claimed, would thus "enjoy their credit in time of war"(323)<sup>47</sup>. Once again Connolly sees the co-operatives as a useful tool in his struggle. The co-operative movement was an obvious ally, firmly established in rural Ireland as it was by its development of farmers' productive efficiency. Connolly felt that the co-operatives could heal the "latent antagonism between town and country"(331)<sup>48</sup> which had existed "Almost throughout all historic periods"(331)<sup>49</sup>. As a socialist he favoured his own methods to put

an end to that antagonism by bringing the advantages of the city to the toiler in the country; Mr. Russell foresees, however, a co-operation in which the city and the country shall merge in perfecting fraternal methods of production and distribution (331)<sup>50</sup>.

Connolly had starker intentions for rural producers than Russell's ideal of fraternity between town and country. Connolly suggested that the rural co-operators

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<sup>44</sup> See for example Connolly's comments in Forward, 15 Aug. 1914: "Is it not clear as the fact of life itself that no insurrection of the working class, no general strike, no uprising of the forces of Labour in Europe could possibly carry with it or entail a greater slaughter of Socialists than will their participation as soldiers in the campaigns of the Armies of their respective countries?"(27). Collected in A Socialist and War 1914-1916 Ed. P. J. Musgrove.

<sup>45</sup> Connolly, J. Labour in Ireland: Labour in Irish History: The Re-Conquest of Ireland.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*



might provide the bedrock from which the urban workers could work their revolutionary ends:

Thus when to the easily organised labourers of the towns is added the immense staying power of the peasantry... the Party of Labour which will thus manifest itself will speak out with a prophetic voice when it proclaims its ideal of a regenerated Ireland - an Ireland re-conquered for its common people (325)<sup>51</sup>.

This passage is extremely optimistic in its revolutionary view of rural and urban Ireland. It is obvious that Connolly avoids a number of issues. The first problem lies in his assumption that farmers who have collaborated together under the auspices of the co-operative movement will collaborate with revolutionary workers. Since Russell had to warn his readers in 1913 not to say anything political at their co-operative meetings for fear of disruption<sup>52</sup>, Connolly's proposition seems unlikely. He put too much faith in "Mr. George Russell, the gifted editor of the *Irish Homestead*"(321)<sup>53</sup> when he accepted at face value Russell's assertion "that the overwhelming proportion of Irish farmers employ no labour but generally work their own farms"(321)<sup>54</sup>. This made Connolly sure that the farmers would not be "hostile to the claims of labour"(321)<sup>55</sup>. He accepted as fact this part of Russell's propaganda on behalf of the co-operatives, a propaganda aimed at lifting co-operators from complacency. Indeed Russell was driven to criticise farmers during the lock-out for attitudes they held towards the labour they did employ:

We find some farmers hinting that they will give in now labour is necessary for the harvest, but once let that be over and they will have their turn for stopping work. What, then, if next year they have no labour at all? (738)<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Russell, G. W. "The Policy of Strikes and Batons", *IH*, 6 Sept. 1913. 737-738.

<sup>53</sup> Connolly, J. Labour in Ireland: Labour in Irish History: The Re-Conquest of Ireland.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Russell, G. W. "The Policy of Strikes and Batons", *IH*, 6 Sept. 1913. 737-738.

Connolly and Russell were in closer agreement in their belief that Europe was vitally important to Ireland. The ideal of 'Europe' as the basis of a moral constituency with relevance to Irish experience was frequent in both men's writings. After Connolly's death in 1916 one of Russell's first questions in the Irish Homestead was "Are we in this distracted country thinking as Europeans and citizens of the world?"(353)<sup>57</sup>. On the outbreak of war Connolly wrote in the Irish Worker that if "the working classes of Europe, rather than slaughter each other for the benefit of kings and financiers"(2)<sup>58</sup> decide "to erect barricades all over Europe"(3)<sup>59</sup> then "we should be perfectly justified in following such a glorious example"(2)<sup>60</sup>. Connolly viewed the war as an opportunity, almost as a prerogative, and had established Ireland's right to rebel in response to unrest on the continent in Labour in Ireland, first published in 1910.

In this text Connolly presented the rebellions of 1798 and 1848 and the growth of Fenianism as Irish movements inspired by Europe. The "'98 was an Irish expression of the tendencies embodied in the First French Revolution"(208). The "'48 throbbed in sympathy with the democratic and social upheavals on the continent of Europe and England"(208) to make "Fenianism a responsive throb in the Irish heart to those pulsations in the heart of the European working class which elsewhere produced the International Working Men's Association"(208). Connolly connects the landmark struggles of Irish nationalism to a wider class conflict. It is his attempt to legitimate socialism in Irish terms; a movement criticised by Russell as an unsuitable

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<sup>57</sup> Russell, G. W. "Lessons From the War", IH, 10 June 1916. 353-354.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in O'Brien, W. "Introduction". Labour and Easter Week: A Selection from the Writings of James Connolly. 1-21.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*



growth for Irish soil<sup>61</sup>. Connolly's analysis of European events provides him with access to a history of "common exploitation"(216) which would make "enthusiastic rebels out of a Protestant working class"(216) and "earnest champions of civil and religious liberty out of Catholics"(216). Connolly's clever inversion of the stereotypes of 'rebellious Catholic' and 'liberty loving Protestant' suggests that rebellion and the pursuit of liberty are common acts in pursuit of social justice.

But even though Connolly and Russell disagreed on the best structural alternative to the state in which they found themselves, their common aim was, according to Connolly, "to combat capitalism and finally to supplant it"(331)<sup>62</sup>. In this struggle the labour leader promised Russell the "constant support of every friend of progress in Ireland"(331)<sup>63</sup>. Connolly located in Russell's rhetoric an acknowledgement of a common enemy, capitalism. Russell was indeed critical of Dublin's business elite during the 1913 lock-out, with most of his bile reserved for those also involved in the refusal to set up Hugh Lane's gallery<sup>64</sup>. They became, through their lack of artistic appreciation, symbols of Ireland's isolation from the rest of Europe, agents of the unconscious become animal in their ignorance: "The 'practical men' of Dublin came out against the waste of money on such things as art. These ignorant donkeys... who call themselves 'business men'... do not seem to

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<sup>61</sup> Russell, G. W. "Notes Of The Week" (cited subsequently as "NOTW"), *IH*, 5 April 1913. 273.

<sup>62</sup> Connolly, J. Labour in Ireland: Labour in Irish History: The Re-Conquest of Ireland.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Brown notes that Lane "had generously offered to the city a collection of paintings (including work by French Impressionists, then less universally regarded as they subsequently became), provided the municipal authorities would earmark funds for a suitable gallery. By 1912, despite some movement in that direction by the municipal authorities, Lane was losing all patience. A subscription fund was established to augment what the public purse would provide. A sense began to get abroad that the whole scheme was an act of Ascendancy condescension to Dublin's citizenry... By the autumn of 1913 Lane had withdrawn his offer and the bequest seemed lost to the city forever"(201). Cited from The Life of W. B. Yeats.

realise that half of the backwardness of Ireland in industry is due to its neglect of and contempt for the arts”(740)<sup>65</sup>.

Russell sets these individuals apart from the Irish civilisation which he hoped to create, although he stops short of offering a radical method for their disposal: “The Lord may forgive them for their work because no patriotic Irishman ever could”(740)<sup>66</sup>. If the arts were to be the signal expression of the Irish intellect, then those who did not accept their importance became, to Russell, the enemy. Their ‘ignorance’ signified to him the dangers of unconscious action. Russell’s belief in the arts is more than an aesthetic position; the ‘arts’ become the cipher by which a social and economic realignment of Irish culture is imagined. This is the site of Russell’s divergence from Connolly, despite the latter’s adoption of the language of high culture to confer legitimacy on the class struggle. To Connolly “labour alone in these days is fighting the real *war for civilisation*”(90)<sup>67</sup>. By this logic the “capitalist class”(42)<sup>68</sup> were the “natural enemy of... national culture”(42)<sup>69</sup>. Russell agreed with Connolly that capitalism was antithetical to Irish national development but hoped that such development might be achieved by continual propaganda, backed, no doubt, by the threat of violence. Connolly did not observe such distinctions and committed himself to revolution.

Russell voiced his most trenchant criticism of the society in which he found himself in poetry, especially in The Gods of War, published privately for the author in

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<sup>65</sup> Russell, G. W. “NOTW”, IH, 6 Sept. 1913. 738-742.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Connolly, J. “A War for Civilisation”. Labour and Easter Week: A Selection from the Writings of Easter Week. 86-90.

<sup>68</sup> Connolly, J. “A Continental Revolution”. Labour and Easter Week: A Selection from the Writings of Easter Week. 38-42.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*



1915<sup>70</sup>. Not a typical collection in that it exists only in proof form, the fourteen poems that comprise The Gods of War have one common theme, the effect of conflict on Russell's contemporary world. The tone is more various. The elegiac "Continuity" wonders if "the ruins shall be made" into "Some yet more lovely masterpiece". "Battle Ardour" in contrast is frenzied, with its picture of a "mighty hunter" that tramples "to dust the cities of our pride". The disturbed nature of this collection possibly convinced Russell, as the editor of the Irish Homestead, not to submit it for general publication. His poetry allowed him to express his concerns in terms different from his journal articles. The Gods of War is further interesting because it bears the author's corrections. The title poem of "Gods of War" addresses Christ. It laments "How wanes thine Empire, Prince of Peace!" as the "ancient gods their powers increase" and "thine own anointed ones/ Do pour upon the warring bands/ The devil's blessing from their hands". Russell connects the clergy with the war effort (many indeed had blessed the troops before they were shipped across the English Channel) in order to stress their partiality. They are linked to the governments of Europe as if they have made a pact with an ancient, maleficent power ("This is the Dark Immortal's hour"). Russell's speaker looks outside the bounds of established authority for his inspiration and asks "Who dreamed a dream mid outcasts born/ Could overthrow the pride of kings?" The 'dream' is a symbol in Russell's poetry of power coming into being; imagination, and not material production, is the force which drives society.

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<sup>70</sup> The poems in The Gods of War were first collected by Russell in one volume in September 1915. One hundred copies of the text were made and circulated among Russell's friends and admirers. For full details see Denson, A. Printed Writings by George W. Russell (AE). 74. The copy from which I take the following quotations is collected unbound and unpaginated in the National Library of Ireland. Thus there are no page references available for the lines referred to. Russell's corrections to the text are undated.

In this case the poem sets up a rhetorical framework which anticipates the terms of Russell's economic analysis of the Easter Rising the year following. The dove of Christ spreads "its gold and silver wings" to nest "in flame/ In outcasts who abjure his name". The dove, symbolic of peace, finds a new home in the company of rebels. It sits phoenix-like in the fire of industrial unrest to rise upon the victory of the workers. It is further symbolic of the imagination that drives the labour leaders. Russell had used the image of a bird to symbolise the expression of labour's discontent before. In 1913 "Labour, long voiceless... found a voice"(777)<sup>71</sup> in the cries of a "stormy petrel"(777)<sup>72</sup>. The bird "who has just set Dublin in a blaze, has told us that he feels a divine mission to awaken discontent. To that we can have no objection"(777)<sup>73</sup>. It is not clear in the "Gods of War" whether the workers will triumph; "O outcast Christ, it was too soon/ For flags of battle to be furled/ While life was still at the hot noon".

The establishment of labour's cause as an extension of the will of a universal divinity suggests that for the reader to concentrate on a purely Irish context for Russell's poetry is to obscure the hold which the wider European conflict held on his imagination. In The Gods of War as a whole the national movement in Ireland becomes a passing, if not invisible, player in the wider theatre of conflict. The last poem of the collection, "Apocalyptic", is a case in point. The poem's first stanza acknowledges the social dislocation that the war caused and laments the passing of a world that the speaker formerly knew:

Our world beyond a year of dread  
Has paled like Babylon and Rome,  
Never for all the blood was shed

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<sup>71</sup> Russell, G. W. "The Parable of Labour", IH, 20 Sept. 1913. 77-79.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*



Shall life return to it as home.

The speaker concentrates on the power of sacrifice to change society. Regardless of the war's outcome all will be different afterwards: "No peace shall e'er that dream recall;/ The avalanche is yet to fall". The poem is a prophecy of a doom to come. Russell predicted in the Irish Homestead that the end of the war would merely signify a massive outbreak of labour trouble as millions of demobilised men were put back into society, having made the greatest of sacrifices without any reward<sup>74</sup>.

Peace would in reality be a "battlefield", a "grave/ Either for master or for slave". In preparation for this conflict the speaker chooses sides. It will "be better to be bold/ Than clothed in purple in that hour". The speaker relishes the possibility of making his voice a mouthpiece for resistance. His readers are advised to laugh "with disdain" if the "black horse's rider reign,/ Or the pale horse's rider fire/ His burning empire". These agents of the apocalypse are robbed of their symbolic force as they bring destruction only to those "who have made of earth" their "star". The audience that the speaker addresses is destined for a higher fate as they have already proved their spiritual worth by suffering. The following lines suggest this:

only those can laugh who are  
The strong Initiates of Pain,  
Who know that mighty god to be  
Sculptor of immortality.

The speaker loses himself in ecstasy. He sees the coming battle that he predicts between master and slave as a necessary step towards the freedom of humanity, the "last test which yields the right/ To walk amid the halls of light". The image of the war as a test was common among English poets in the early years of the

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<sup>74</sup> Russell, G. W. "Economy of Production", IH, 15 July 1916. 437-438.

war<sup>75</sup>. Many welcomed it as a chance to prove the value of their generation but few envisaged it as a preparation for a wider struggle. The war to end all wars was to Russell the omen of a revelation only yet partially perceived.

A sense of new beginning is evident in Russell's final publication of 1915, Imaginations and Reveries. A collection of twenty-four pieces of prose and drama, the text is a retrospective of Russell's political and occult interests since the 1890s and was published by Macmillan probably to mark Russell's 1913 contract with the company<sup>76</sup>. Perhaps the most popular of Russell's works included in Imaginations and Reveries is Deirdre, the play first performed with Yeats's Cathleen ni Houlihan in 1902<sup>77</sup>. Also reproduced is the fiercely evangelical essay, "Hero in Man"<sup>78</sup>. The author's preface to Imaginations and Reveries is revealing of Russell's state of mind at the end of 1915. Aware of his inability to compile a collection "with only one theme"(ix), Russell admits that despite a personal desire for contemplation, "My conscience would not let me have peace unless I worked with other Irishmen at the reconstruction of Irish life"(ix). But

To aid in movements one must be orthodox. My desire to help prompted agreement, while my intellect was always heretical. I had written out of every mood, and could not retain any mood for long. If I advocated a national ideal I felt immediately I could make an equal appeal for more cosmopolitan and universal ideals. I have obeyed my

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<sup>75</sup> See for example Rupert Brooke's poem "Peace" or Laurence Binyon's "The Fourth of August": "We step from days of sour division/ Into the grandeur of our fate"(7). Cited from Up the Line to Death.

<sup>76</sup> See Chapter One. 1.

<sup>77</sup> Deirdre is Russell's adaptation of the legend of Naisi's love for Deirdre and its tragic consequences for the Red Branch of Ulster. The play ends with the death of its two main characters. Russell wrote the play to inspire heroic self-abnegation in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century. As the Ulster King Concubar suggests, "Deeds will be done in our time as mighty as those wrought by the giants who battled at the dawn; and through the memory of our days and deeds the gods will build themselves as eternal empire in the mind of the Gael"(207). Cited from Imaginations and Reveries. Deirdre and Cathleen ni Houlihan were first produced on 2 April 1902. See Summerfield, H. That Myriad-Minded Man. 112-113.

<sup>78</sup> "Hero in Man" is an 1897 treatise on human suffering. Russell argues that our ability to conquer pain is evidence of a divine trait. "All knowledge"(145), Russell suggests, "is a revelation of the self to the self, and our deepest comprehension of the seemingly apart divine is also our furthest inroad to self-knowledge; Prometheus, Christ, are in every heart; the story of one is the story of all; the Titan and the Crucified are humanity"(145). Cited from Imaginations and Reveries.



intuitions wherever they drew me, for I felt that the Light which is within us knows better than any other the need and the way (ix-x).

Russell found his way in the spring of 1916 to Edward McLysaght's home in Co. Clare to spend the Easter weekend with him<sup>79</sup>. Russell left Dublin on Good Friday, 21 April 1916. He heard the first rumours of unrest in the city when he tried to return to it on Tuesday 25 April. Russell reached the capital on 26 April, a Wednesday, the day before the first rebels surrendered. He entered a town wracked with rumour. James Stephens, in his account of Easter Week, recalled meeting one man "who spat rumour as though his mouth were a machine gun"(32)<sup>80</sup>. This individual claimed variously that:

the Germans had landed in three places... the whole city of Cork was in the hands of the Volunteers... German warships had defeated the English... the whole country was up, and the garrison was outnumbered by one hundred to one (32-33)<sup>81</sup>.

Confused and lacking objective reports of the rebellion in the Dublin press, Russell, like nearly everyone else, had to rely on his knowledge of Dublin prior to the insurrection to write about it in the aftermath. Russell's first report in the Irish Homestead on the Rising appeared on the thirteenth of May 1916. This edition of the paper was actually three issues in one as earlier publication was made impossible by the destruction in Easter Week of the Irish Homestead's office; anyway, as Russell wryly remarked, "if it had been published it would not have been read"(286)<sup>82</sup>. This time lapse perhaps accounts for the fact that "The Hope that Remains", the leading

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<sup>79</sup> Summerfield, H. That Myriad-Minded Man. 177.

<sup>80</sup> Stephens, J. The Insurrection in Dublin.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Russell, G. W. "NOTW", IH, 13 May 1916. 286-289.

Irish Homestead article of 13 May spends only its first four lines concentrating specifically on “one of the most tragic episodes in Irish history”(285)<sup>83</sup>.

Russell’s further response was to identify the Rising as being the final expression of a set of grievances long identified by the Irish Homestead. The Rising was in Russell’s opinion the logical expression of the working classes’ discontent with their conditions<sup>84</sup>, a portent of the “social revolution many people fear”(354)<sup>85</sup> and a timely warning that labour’s grievances had not been settled in 1913<sup>86</sup>. Russell further remarked that if “journalists and politicians”(285)<sup>87</sup> did not “discover some humanity in themselves, and try to understand those whom they have attacked for so many years”(285)<sup>88</sup> then “they will keep Ireland in hostile camps for generations to come”(285)<sup>89</sup>. His hope lay in the ““average man’... a more intellectual and humane being than the people... on platforms, in Parliament and the Press”(286)<sup>90</sup>.

Russell spent the main body of “The Hope that Remains” promoting the co-operative movement as the only “camp of reconciliation”(285)<sup>91</sup> in which the Irish people could escape the burden of their past. They had been “separated by tradition for centuries”(285)<sup>92</sup> and it was time for the Irish to “unite upon some common ground”(285)<sup>93</sup>. In turn, Russell criticised journalists of partisanship, using the rebellion as an opportunity to lodge “in court as evidence in support of their contentions the ruins of the city of Dublin”(285)<sup>94</sup>. Russell’s criticism of the press

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<sup>83</sup> Russell, G. W. “The Hope that Remains”, IH, 13 May 1916. 285-286.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Russell, G. W. “NOTW”, IH, 10 June 1916. 354.

<sup>86</sup> Russell, G. W. “NOTW”, IH, 13 May 1916. 287.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*



reaction to the Rebellion is relevant to his sympathy for Connolly. For the Irish Independent, the newspaper owned by William Martin Murphy, organiser of the employers' lock-out in 1913, was in 1916 the only Irish nationalist paper to press for Connolly's execution<sup>95</sup>; proof, if it were needed, of the bitter legacy left by the 1913 trade dispute among all sections of Dublin society.

National disunity was but one of the questions addressed by Russell's first prose publication after the Easter Rising, the National Being in September 1916. Started two years before, in March 1914, the National Being was a discourse on Russell's esoteric sense of Irish nationality in a period of abnormal social and economic conditions. Composed of twenty chapters, the central premise of the National Being is that Ireland possesses a distinct national identity that must be nurtured to ensure the future success of its civilisation. Written in a generally measured style, the National Being combines mysticism with economics to create a compelling vision of Ireland's potential. Unsurprisingly, the text is also deeply concerned with the First World War and its relevance to the Irish situation, the institution of Home Rule suspended from the outbreak of the conflict. The war, a disaster for European culture in general, casts a long shadow over the National Being's deliberations. The strikes and social disorder that Russell was engaged with in the previous three years become in the National Being portents of a global realignment of spiritual and political order. The text is Russell's reading of the signs

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<sup>95</sup> The Irish Independent labelled the Easter Rising "insane and criminal"(2). "Criminal Madness", Irish Independent, 4 May 1916. 2. Thirteen insurgents were executed on or by 9 May 1916. In response to appeals for clemency from constitutional Irish politicians, the Irish Independent argued that "Some of these leaders are more guilty and played a more sinister part in the campaign than those who have already been punished with severity"(2). Therefore, "Let the worst of the ringleaders be singled out and dealt with as they deserve"(2). "The Clemency Plea", Irish Independent, 10 May 1916. 2. James Connolly and Sean MacDermott were shot on 12 May. There were no more executions in Ireland. It is perhaps significant that the day of Connolly's death saw the newspaper predict that "the penalty of capital punishment shall not, we think, be inflicted in any other case"(2). "After the Rebellion", Irish

that foretell apocalypse, his prose an offering to the gods of war that he addressed poetically in 1915.

The epic setting of the National Being's first pages hint at the visionary aspect of Russell's ambition. "Hercules"(2), Russell wrote, "wrestled with twin serpents in his cradle"(2), just as the young Ireland struggled with the ideologies of unionism and nationalism. The National Being is, like the Iliad and Odyssey, partly instructional in nature, a text meant, to "reveal character... and the will which is in it"(3). The ideal character that Russell presents to his reader is national and not individual. Economics and politics are the substance of its material constitution. Its national soul is occult, the divination of Ireland's character the responsibility of its intellectual class. Delayed at birth, the urgent need of the state's delivery was evident to Russell from the outbreak of revolutionary violence in Dublin. Russell accordingly dedicates himself in the National Being to an "imaginative meditation"(2) upon the thought that "The State is a physical body prepared for the incarnation of the soul of a race"(2).

After two introductory chapters, Russell's meditation exposes itself to be primarily economic propaganda for the Irish co-operative movement. Co-operation was, as we have seen, the basis of Russell's ideal social organisation. By providing each class of the nation's producers and consumers with an interest in the products of their trade the national interest would be bound by common concern. Russell's vision of the co-operative commonwealth in the National Being differs little from that espoused in the Irish Homestead over the ten years previous. Organised around small-scale co-operative societies, each division of the movement would be responsible for its members' entire well being. Patronising to a degree, Russell presents the reader

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Independent, 13 May 1916. 2. Roger Casement was however hanged for treason in Pentonville Jail on 3 August 1916.



with the typical Irish character whose lot will be improved by the working of the co-operative miracle. Named Patrick, the character Russell describes is a rural smallholder. Co-operation is the cement of his individual life as it “connects with living links the home, the centre of Patrick’s being, to the nation, the circumference of his being”(27).

Within this circle of national association, the National Being considers Ireland’s cultural condition. There is, surprisingly, less confidence in Ireland’s achievement in this sphere. Russell declares himself dissatisfied with post-Revival literature and calls upon his contemporaries to reinstate a sense of wonder in their audience. The author’s dissatisfaction with Irish literature is, in part, a pose, his declaration of the superiority of classical culture a common feature of polemical criticism. But, in September 1916, the date of the National Being’s publication, Russell’s literary prescriptions take on a novel political context:

In ancient Ireland, in Greece, and in India, the poets wrote about great kings and heroes, enlarging on their fortitude of spirit, their chivalry and generosity, creating in the popular mind an ideal of what a great man was like; and men were influenced by the ideal created, and strove to win the praise of the bards and to be recrowned by them a second time... in great poetry... It is the great defect of our modern literature that it creates such few types. How hardly could one of our public men be made the hero of an epic (13-14).

Russell’s readership might have been surprised to read this passage five months after the Easter Rising, when Pearse’s heroic vision of Cuchulain inspired him to die for an Irish Republic alive only to his imagination. Russell’s contemporary Yeats composed his response to the Rising, “Easter 1916”, in the late summer and autumn of that year, in the same period in which the National Being was first

published<sup>96</sup>. Yeats's poem tried to capture the rebellion's sacrificial integrity by its incantatory effect, his need, as Yeats put it, to "write it out in a verse"(288)<sup>97</sup>. "Easter 1916" may, as Terence Brown has suggested, in part be Yeats's attempt to ascribe a numerological pattern to the process of history<sup>98</sup>. The National Being is less subtle a construction but is certainly schematic. The text is part of Russell's attempt to reconstitute a unitary national body from the disparate limbs of its political factions. To achieve this Russell must first contain the influence of revolutionary Irish nationalism. A bold move in light of the effect that the executions had on public opinion, Russell determines that

Few of our notorieties could be trusted to think out any economic or social problem thoroughly and efficiently. They have been engaged in passionate attempts at the readjustment of the superficialities of things. What we require more than men of action are scholars, economists, scientists, thinkers, educationalists, and littérateurs, who will populate the desert depths of national consciousness with real thought and turn the void into a fullness (5).

Russell's allusion to passion is, in retrospect, Yeatsian, a forewarning of the "passionate intensity"(294)<sup>99</sup> that marks the negative aspect of "The Second Coming". As figured here by Russell, intellectual reason is passion's antidote, the poet a citizen of the ideal Republic that the National Being here proposes. Curiously, for a text published in its immediate aftermath by an author who knew James Connolly and at least two of its other executed leaders, the uprising itself merits only a footnote in the National Being<sup>100</sup>. The simple explanation for this omission is that

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<sup>96</sup> Brown notes that "It is not certain when this poem was composed. It is dated September 25 in the typescript which was used in 1917 to print 25 copies... we can assume it was much on his mind through the summer and early autumn of 116"(228). The Life of W. B. Yeats.

<sup>97</sup> Yeats, W. B. "Easter, 1916". Yeats's Poems. 287-289.

<sup>98</sup> For Brown's reading of the poem see The Life of W. B. Yeats. 229-236.

<sup>99</sup> Yeats, W. B. "The Second Coming". Yeats's Poems. 294-295.

<sup>100</sup> Referring to the general argument made by the National Being, Russell observed that "Since this book was written Ireland has had a tragic illustration of what is urged in these pages"(135). It seems likely that the National Being was already in proof copy by the time the Easter Rising occurred. Yeats



Russell had completed the manuscript for the National Being before the Easter Rising occurred. Neither was Russell, in contrast to Yeats, an inveterate reviser of his work.

But more revealing of Russell's attitude to the Easter Rising was his observation in the Irish Homestead that the rebellion was an outbreak of national fever at a time of European sickness. The National Being dedicates more than half its space to the description of the national body and Russell admits to it no risk of contagion; his political anatomy of the Irish soul is to be conducted in an environment sterile of revolutionary infection. Russell's republicanism is that of the Enlightenment, his senate called a "National Assembly"(120) after the French model. But Russell's discussion of the free rights of the Irish citizen distracts the reader from the reality of Ireland's Imperial association. The National Being, as Russell freely acknowledges at the end of the text, never discusses "the relations of Ireland with other countries"(150). Ireland is in this sense a country of Russell's imagination, a state of mind but not of reality.

The first twelve chapters of the National Being present the reader with what in contrast seems to be a concrete, rational analysis of the Irish economic situation. Each chapter discusses a particular class or problem - the condition of farmers, agricultural labourers and the urban working class are all considered. Divided by what Russell calls sectional interest, each class is unable to secure for itself an equitable relation to national society. Russell, of course, proposes a co-operative economic solution to their problems. If each class would recognise its interdependence with at least one other, then the nation would be bound to a stable, undivided entity; all, in fact, that Ireland was not in September 1916. Russell

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must have been encouraged to discover that he was not the only Irish writer to be caught unawares by the rebellion.

however was hopeful for his plans. At the end of the twelfth chapter, the narrator reflects on “what we have come to”(97). He considers that co-operation means more

than a series of organizations for economic purposes. We hope to create finally, by the close texture of our organizations, that vivid sense of the identity of interest of the people in this island which is the basis of citizenship, and without which there can be no noble national life (97-98).

The downside to Russell's optimism is severe. The body of the national being, like the human body after which it is ordered, is capable of malformation. “Hardly”(1), Russell suggests, do Irish nationalists know if an independent Ireland would “be deformed if it survived”(1) its birth. In the National Being only a strong intellectual order can stop such a social miscarriage. Appropriately, the National Being contains a blueprint for civic conscription, a method whereby Irish citizens might participate in the practical nurture of their nation. Russell compares such recruitment to the experience of conscript soldiers in the battlefields of France. But as Russell considers the combatants' motivation an occult sense of his national plan emerges:

Men in a regiment have to a large extent the personal interests abolished. The organization they now belong to supports them and becomes their life. By their union with it a new being is created. Exercise, drill, manoeuvre, accentuate that unity, and *esprit de corps* arises, so that they feel their highest life is the corporate one; and that feeling is fostered continually, until at last all the units, by some law of the soul, are as it were in spite of themselves, in spite of the legs which want to run, in spite of the body which trembles with fear, constrained to move in obedience to the purpose of the whole organism expressed by its controlling will; and so we get these devoted masses of men who advance again and again under a hail more terrible than Dante imagined falling in his vision of the fiery world (138).

Russell's interest in a ‘controlling will’ is revealing. Such a force motivates the soldiers and is strong enough to overcome their physical reaction to it. It is the impetus to an advance that, as Russell suggests, approaches the mouth of hell. The



standard precepts of social organisation in early twentieth century Europe are powerless before such arcane national expression. Politicians, regents and soldiers alike are slaves to an order invisible to material social analysts. In the National Being, Russell thus observed of the First World War that:

The great tragedy of Europe was brought about, not by the German Emperor, nor Sir Edward Grey, nor by the Czar, nor any of the other chiefs ostensibly controlling foreign policy, but by the nations themselves. These men may have been agents, but their action would have been impossible if they did not realize that there is a vast body of national feeling behind them that is not opposed to war (153 – 154).

The apocalypse that Russell considers is the product of misdirected national will. Russell suggests to the reader the existence of an *animus* similar to that *daemon* later perceived by Yeats in the “Second Coming”<sup>101</sup>. Russell reminds of Yeats regularly throughout the National Being, writing, for example, of the First World War that “Now the hammer of Thor is wrecking our civilizations, is destroying the body of European nationalities, the spirit is freer to reshape the world nearer to the heart’s desire”(129). The Land of Heart’s Desire was a Yeats play of 1894 and an invocation of a *faery* other world beyond the realm of everyday sense. A “poignantly fantastical”(20)<sup>102</sup> work as Brown describes it, The Land of Heart’s Desire is invoked by Russell in the National Being as evidence, again, of the power of compulsion. Yeats’s play is the story of a peasant woman tempted away to the land of *faery* by a child who is allowed to enter her family home. The mysterious child calls the woman, Mary Bruin, to her by a force of will:

You shall go with me, newly-married bride,  
And gaze upon a merrier multitude.  
(White-armed Nuala, Aengus of the Birds,

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<sup>101</sup> Yeats’s speaker feels that “surely some revelation is at hand;/ Surely the Second Coming is at hand./ The Second Coming! Hardly are these words out/ When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*/ Troubles my sight”(294). Famously, the vision is of a “rough beast, its hour come round at last”(295). “The Second Coming”. Yeats’s Poems.

<sup>102</sup> Brown, T. The Life of W. B. Yeats.

Fiachra of the hurtling foam, and him  
Who is ruler of the Western Host,  
Finvara, and their Land of Heart's Desire,)  
Where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood,  
But joy is wisdom, time an endless song.  
I kiss you and the world begins to fade (69)<sup>103</sup>.

Yeats's passage is the perfect aesthetic complement to Russell's political vision in the National Being. The world into which Mary Bruin enters is a world ordered by an occult knowledge, a wisdom that transcends time and the natural order of perception. Equally, the Ireland that the National Being describes attracts its subjects into its new order by its revelation of a perfect vision before them. The co-operative movement, Russell's material equivalent of Yeats's *faery* land, exercises its seductive will on the Irish population. The only danger to this gradual revelation of Russell's social order was an Irish revolution, such as that presaged by the Easter Rising. A disruption of the National Being's vision, the Rising upsets the natural balance of Russell's co-operative state, much as the "Hearts with one purpose alone"(288)<sup>104</sup> trouble Yeats's "living stream"(288)<sup>105</sup> in "Easter, 1916". Russell did declare himself in the National Being to be a "friend of revolt if people cannot stand the conditions they live under, and if they can see no other way"(80). Russell's caution concerned the

danger in revolution if the revolutionary spirit is much more advanced than the intellectual qualities which alone can secure the success of the revolt. These intellectual and moral qualities – the skills to organize, the wisdom to control large undertakings, are not natural gifts but the products of experience. They are evolutionary products (80-81).

We are at the crux of Russell's revolutionary dilemma. Russell, for all his sympathy for Connolly and his cohorts, is solicitous of the power of the natural

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<sup>103</sup> Yeats, W. B. "The Land of Heart's Desire". Collected Plays.

<sup>104</sup> Yeats, W. B. "Easter, 1916". Yeats's Poems. 287-289.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*



revelation that revolution interrupts. His national being has a will of its own, its power unlimited in comparison to the agency of its subjects. In this context, Pearse and Connolly were precipitate in their action, the Easter Rising a misguided attempt to call into being a nation not yet fully ordered. As Russell puts it in the National Being:

There are no nations to whom the entire and loyal allegiance of man's spirit could be given. It can only go out to the ideal empires and nationalities in the womb of time, for whose coming we pray. Those countries of the future we must carve out of the humanity of to-day, and we can begin building them up within our present empires and nationalities just as we are building up a co-operative movement in a social order antagonistic to it. The people who are trying to create these new ideals in the world are outposts, sentinels, and frontiersmen thrown out before the armies of the intellectual and spiritual races yet to come into being (156).

Pearse and Connolly come to mind again in Russell's premonition of a future state called into being by the vision of a perceptive *élite*. The Easter Rising was itself an example of such a vanguard action, its participants engaged in the creation of a republic without popular sanction. Russell's adepts in the National Being are the spiritual corollary of the Volunteer units, with Russell's ideal Irish nation as distant from reality in 1916 as the Republic that Pearse summoned to his presence in Sackville Street.

The end of the National Being recovers the revolutionary legacy of Irish nationalism that was lost, so Russell thought, to the firing squad. The text's final two chapters summon a vision of Ireland that invokes its sacred character. In part an attempt by Russell to adapt the tenets of the Literary Revival to the demands of the modern state, with the practice of science and of industry, the National Being commits itself to a future evolved beyond the vision of any of Russell's republican contemporaries. The National Being is a generally accessible introduction to

Russell's cultural and economic ideals. It is one of his least obscure books and occupies an important place in the canon of the Literary Revival as Russell's exploration of the possibilities of a future Irish state. But for all its pragmatism the National Being is, finally, Russell's spiritual contract with the Irish nation. For

If the spirit of man has likeness to Deity, it means that if it manifests itself fully in the world, the world too becomes a shadowy likeness of the heavens, and our civilization will make a harmony with the diviner spheres... Then arise the towers, the temples, the cities, the achievements of the architect and engineer. The earth is tapped of its arcane energies, the very air yields to us its mysterious powers. We control the etheric waves and send the message of our deeds across the ocean (172-173).

As Ireland settled for a brief period between the Easter Rising and the Conscription Crisis of 1918, the National Being's prescriptions retained some possible currency. Russell's evolutionary optimism was heightened by the announcement of the formation of a national convention to discuss the possibility of Home Rule in May 1917. Lloyd George's Government offered two possible solutions to the Irish question to John Redmond's Parliamentary Party. The first of these was the gift of Home Rule to Ireland on condition of Ulster's exclusion for a minimum period of five years. The second was the creation of a national convention to be attended by every Irish political party. The purpose of this convention was to debate a compromise between Nationalist and Unionist Ireland. John Redmond, leader of the Parliamentary Party, preferred the second option. The British Prime Minister announced the institution of the Irish Convention on 21 May 1917<sup>106</sup>.

Lloyd George stressed in the Irish Times that the success of the Irish Convention depended on the participation of every Irish party in its business<sup>107</sup>. "It is

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<sup>106</sup> The primary resource for study of the assembly is Horace Plunkett's Irish Convention, a confidential report delivered to the King on 9 April, 1918. Two excellent secondary resources are McDowell, R. B. The Irish Convention, 1917-1918 and T. West, Horace Plunkett, Co-operation and Politics.

<sup>107</sup> McDowell notes that "Politically speaking the 95 members who accepted invitations were divided as follows: 52 were nationalists (two of whom, MacLysaght and Russell, were in advance of the others),



very important”(5)<sup>108</sup>, he said, “that the representation should be of a character that would command the confidence of the Irish people”(5)<sup>109</sup>. The Convention was to be an Irish solution to an Irish problem, a significant concession in itself to nationalist opinion. There was however immediate trouble. After delegations were agreed from the Irish Unionists, both North and South, and the Parliamentary Party, *Sinn Féin* declined its invitation to participate. *Sinn Féin* hoped instead to send a delegation to the Peace Conference that they envisaged would follow the end of the First World War, a prospect still distant in May 1917. At the Peace Conference *Sinn Féin* delegates would sue for the creation of an Irish Republic as the logical outcome of a war fought, supposedly, for the rights of small nations. The likelihood of such an outcome was, in retrospect, improbable, but its promise was enough for *Sinn Féin* to boycott the Irish Convention. Desperate for the assembly to retain its credibility the British Government sought to appoint delegates sympathetic to, but independent of, the extreme nationalist position.

The two candidates chosen were Russell and his companion in Co. Clare on the Easter weekend of 1916, Edward MacLysaght. Both were nominated to express advanced nationalist opinion<sup>110</sup>. But Russell’s nomination was also the result of a more recent political intrigue. Five days after the Irish Convention was announced, Russell published the first of three memoranda on the state of Ireland in the Irish Times. The first of Russell’s “Thoughts for a Convention” was published on Saturday

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two were liberals (Granard and MacDonald), six were labour, nine were Southern unionists, Mahaffy is hard to label, and Plunkett... strove to be detached. Grading the members theologically – which many Irishmen at this time would almost automatically attempt to do – there seems to have been 52 catholics and 42 protestants”(100). Cited from The Irish Convention, 1917-1918.

<sup>108</sup> “Statement by Mr. Lloyd George”, Irish Times, 26 May 1917. 5.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> McDowell, R. B. The Irish Convention, 1917-1918. 113.

the 26 May, the second and third on the following Monday and Tuesday. Presented in point form, Russell's "Thoughts for a Convention" constituted an agenda for the national assembly. Keen to participate in such a venture, "Thoughts for a Convention" were the substance of Russell's political credentials to do so.

Each of the three sections of "Thoughts for a Convention" was prefaced by a disclaimer by the newspaper's editor. A generally conservative publication, the Irish Times was a main organ of Irish unionist opinion. Its editor stated that "We take no responsibility for Mr. Russell's opinions, many of which we disagree with"(4)<sup>111</sup>. The Irish Times felt it important to publish Russell's thoughts as "Irish Unionists should have the understanding of the various currents of Nationalist opinion that this Memorandum outlines"(4)<sup>112</sup>. "Thoughts for a Convention" had a total of twenty points. Its first was a general synopsis of Ireland's national condition in 1917. Russell declared:

There are moments in history when by the urgency of circumstance everyone is drawn from normal pursuits to consider the affairs of the nation. Ireland is in one of these moments of history. Circumstances with which we are all familiar and the fever in which the world exists have infected it, and it is like molten metal the skilled political architect might pour into a desirable mould (4)<sup>113</sup>.

The intractable traditions of Irish national or unionist politics are immediately made fluid, Russell laying Ireland out before his readers like a sick patient. Russell's anatomical concerns are registered further in his precise dissection of Irish political ideologies. Irish Unionism is the first to be examined and Russell, in acknowledgement of the split that existed between its Southern and Northern factions, detailed those who "have grown to love their country as much as any of Gaelic

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<sup>111</sup> Editorial Comment, Irish Times, 26 May 1917. 4.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Russell, G. W. "Thoughts for a Convention", Irish Times, 26 May 1917. 4, 6.



origin”(4)<sup>114</sup>. Russell finds these presumably Southern aristocrats “much more akin to their fellow countrymen in mind and manner than they are to any other people”(4)<sup>115</sup>. To bridge the gap to Ulster’s Northern Unionists Russell introduces “a class economically powerful”(4)<sup>116</sup> whose main concern is that “security for industry and freedom for the individual can best be preserved in Ireland by the maintenance of the Union”(4)<sup>117</sup>.

Russell continues his survey with an outline of the *Sinn Féin* position. Adherents to this party, he suggests, “regard the maintenance of their nationality as a sacred charge, themselves as a conquered people owing no allegiance to the dominant race”(4)<sup>118</sup>. Russell casts *Sinn Féin*’s political association in context of a centuries old racial conflict. This adds a certain sense of historical importance to the occasion but is hardly conducive, one might think, to the creation of trust between the Convention parties. Of course Russell’s description of *Sinn Féin*’s ideology might be founded in a different set of principles than those the political party actually followed. The nature of Russell’s self interest in his analysis of *Sinn Féin* is soon apparent:

Their mood is unconquerable, and, while, often overcome, it has emerged again and again in Irish history, and it has, perhaps, more adherents to-day than at any period since the Act of Union. This has been helped on by the incarnation of the Gaelic spirit in modern Anglo-Irish literature and by a host of brilliant poets, dramatists and prose writers who have won international recognition, and have increased the dignity of spirit and self-respect of the followers of this tradition (4)<sup>119</sup>.

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<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*

*Sinn Féin* are, in Russell's formulation, but the medium of an ancient national will, of the type discussed previously in the National Being. The Literary Revival played its equally important part in an Irish revolution that expressed itself forcefully in the Easter Rising. Russell, as the spokesperson for this Revival, assumes responsibility here for *Sinn Féin* too. The Parliamentary Party in contrast does not merit much of Russell's attention in "Thoughts for a Convention". Russell's dismissal of Redmond, by whose agreement the Convention was in fact established, is strategic to Russell's appropriation of *Sinn Féin*'s revolutionary integrity. The Parliamentary Party are not even named properly in Russell's text, referred to as the "Middle Party"(4)<sup>120</sup>, responsible for the success of "most of the reforms in Ireland since the Union"(4)<sup>121</sup>.

That granted, Russell develops the last two sections, published on the following Monday and Tuesday, of his "Thoughts for a Convention" into a political manifesto. Russell proposes that the only compromise to be found between Northern Unionism and Irish Republicanism is Dominion status in the British Commonwealth. This would allow for the security of Unionist economic and social interest within a framework of Imperial association while granting nationalist Ireland "the power they desire to create an Irish civilisation by self-devised and self-checked efforts"(4)<sup>122</sup>. A clever formula, Russell's theory of colonial self-government depended for its success

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<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Russell, G. W. "Thoughts for a Convention", Irish Times, 29 May 1917. 4.



on compromise by the Convention's delegates. Compromise, as the Convention was later to discover to its cost, was not forthcoming<sup>123</sup>.

Just two days after the publication of the final section of "Thoughts for a Convention" Russell confirmed support for his memoranda by means of a letter sent to the Irish Times. This letter contained fifteen signatories who attached their names to "express general agreement"(5)<sup>124</sup> with Russell's "conclusions and with the argument by which they are reached"(5)<sup>125</sup>. Prominent among those listed were the Archbishop of Dublin, William Walsh, The Lord Monteagle, Lady Gregory, Alice Stopford Green, Douglas Hyde and, crucial to Russell's Convention nomination on behalf of *Sinn Féin*, George Gavan Duffy<sup>126</sup>. Provided with this imprimatur, Russell entered the Convention's first sitting in Regent House, Trinity College Dublin, on 25 July, confident of its prospects.

Russell in fact nominated the Convention's Chairman, his sponsor in the Irish co-operative movement, Horace Plunkett. The first business of the delegation was conducted on the 21 August and Russell's maiden speech to it was delivered two days later. In it Russell expressed his high hopes for the Convention's success, proposing the creation of a new Irish educational system as a remedy to the country's distress. Russell repeated his earlier point that the Irish question had to be settled between the

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<sup>123</sup> The reason for this was the promise, alluded to by Russell in his resignation later from the Convention, made to the Ulster Unionists by the British Government that they would not be coerced into a Home Rule Ireland. This effectively provided the Unionist minority with a Convention veto.

<sup>124</sup> "Thoughts for a Convention: Agreement with AE", Irish Times, 31 May 1917. 5.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Walsh's inclusion in the letter is most surprising when one considers Russell's antagonism to him during the 1913 Lock Out. Walsh was a nationalist delegate to the Convention. Monteagle was long a friend of Horace Plunkett, his home in Limerick the place where Plunkett founded the co-operative movement. Of the others, Lady Gregory, Stopford Green and Hyde were all veteran companions of Russell. Each of course had a certain nationalist integrity, Lady Gregory for her cultural work, Stopford Green for her historical study, especially Green's 1908 The Making of Ireland and its Undoing, and Hyde for his Irish language enthusiasm. The most significant political signatory was perhaps Gavan Duffy, a member of *Sinn Féin* and the executed Roger Casement's solicitor.

country's two main factions, both Unionist and Nationalist. Russell's speech, recorded in third person by Plunkett in his subsequent confidential report of the Convention to the King, did however contain a jarring note. Russell

knew many of the extremists who were not represented in the convention. These men were quite prepared to accept any reasonable settlement, but they were very determined, and if failure followed our deliberations he almost felt that he could 'hear the whistle of flying bullets in the street; see the gutter filled with blood while the souls of young men sent prematurely into the presence of their God protested against the Convention and its want of wisdom' (16)<sup>127</sup>.

Russell's apocalyptic vision of the Convention's failure was well founded. Between Russell's August speech and the suspension of the Convention *sine die* on 5 April 1918, little progress was made in direction of the settlement that Russell had proposed in his optimistic "Thoughts for a Convention". Conducted, as Joe Lee suggests, "at a high level of civility and intelligence"<sup>(39)</sup><sup>128</sup>, the assembly was hamstrung by Northern Unionist scepticism and *Sinn Féin* self-exclusion. Russell had failed in his attempt to direct revolutionary nationalist enthusiasm to the form of Dominion status that he favoured in his memoranda and, frustrated at the Convention's inability to negotiate what he perceived to be Unionist intransigence, resigned from the Convention on 1 February 1918.

Russell's letter of resignation to the Convention's chairman, his friend Horace Plunkett, was pessimistic and depressed in tone. Russell's great hopes for the national assembly that he had imagined to be a critical component of the National Being had failed to overcome sectional interest in the name of national unity. Russell declared to Plunkett that "I have come to believe that the Convention, constituted as it is, and hampered by the pledges of Ministers to the people of Belfast, cannot be the

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<sup>127</sup> Cited from Plunkett, H. The Irish Convention.

<sup>128</sup> Lee, J. J. Ireland.



instrument by means of which an Irish settlement can be attained”(80)<sup>129</sup>. In a radical shift from his support of Imperial association just eight months before, Russell sensed that “A much bigger measure is required, giving Ireland complete control over Irish affairs”(80)<sup>130</sup>. Russell completed his resignation with a provocative flourish. “I view”(81)<sup>131</sup>, he wrote, “with gravest foreboding the future of Ireland, and I do not think I have any part to play politically in a country ravaged by such passions”(81)<sup>132</sup>. An Irish settlement was now beyond the power of Irish politicians, “World circumstance”(81)<sup>133</sup> the determinant of “conditions which the wisdom of man could not bring about”(81)<sup>134</sup>.

World circumstance was changing rapidly by 1918. What remained constant was Russell’s apocalyptic vision of the future, reinforced by the Russian Revolution of February 1917 and the Bolshevik coup of October that year. Russell also anticipated social disharmony on the demobilisation of conscript armies at the end of the First World War. Fired by the portent of these great changes, Russell returned to public expression in the Irish Homestead, the journal that he edited ever a refuge for his thoughts. But Russell could not ignore his active political instincts for long. Pushed by the end of the decade to a defence of his co-operative ideal Russell became, as the decade closed with an Anglo-Irish War, a nationalist radical by even his own previous standard.

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<sup>129</sup> Cited from Plunkett, H. The Irish Convention.

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*

## World Circumstance: 1917-1921

Russell's resignation from the Irish Convention in February 1918 disappointed its Chairman, Horace Plunkett<sup>1</sup>. But signs of Russell's discontent with the assembly had been apparent from the end of the previous year. December 1917 saw Russell again use the Irish Times to publish his reflections on the Irish situation, just as he had with his "Thoughts for a Convention". But the differences between Russell's December letter, titled "The New Nation", and his previous memorandum to Plunkett's Irish assembly, are great. The latter document was a discourse on Ireland's economic and political situation. "The New Nation", with its postscript, the poem "To the Memory of Some I Knew Who are Dead and Who Loved Ireland", proclaims Russell's belief in a new Ireland separate from that conceived of in the Irish Convention. Aware that the assembly was failing in its attempt to create a pan-Irish consensus, Russell rewrites the terms of Irish controversy to create aesthetic unity where none existed politically.

"The New Nation" first reflects that Christmas is traditionally a time of truce between enemies. Proposing to use this time of quietened emotion to consider Ireland's future, Russell first admits the intractability of Ireland's political problem. Unionism and nationalism are the constant themes of a dispute that would not be solved even by Partition. Separation itself is "no settlement, because there is no

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<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Russell dated 6 Feb. 1918, Plunkett acknowledged that "while your resignation may be a very serious blow to the Convention in Ireland, in England, and perhaps most of all in America, I am using what I can sincerely say of your character, intellect and knowledge to bring it home to the Government that they must deal seriously, radically and immediately with the situation". Cited from the Denson Typescript. 332.



geographical limitation of these passions”(6)<sup>2</sup>. Russell attempts to negotiate Ireland’s political situation rather by a redefinition of the terms of Irish nationality. Perhaps inspired by the season of the nativity, Russell announces the birth of a new race. “We have been told”(6)<sup>3</sup>, he wrote, “that there are two nations in Ireland”(6)<sup>4</sup>. This is “not true to-day”(6)<sup>5</sup> as the union of “Saxon and Celt which has been going on for centuries is now completed”(6)<sup>6</sup>. Russell thus determines the existence of “one Irish character”(6)<sup>7</sup>, that of “a new race”(6)<sup>8</sup>.

This is a bold claim and Russell’s basis for it is hardly less surprising. He admits the pain of Ireland’s colonial experience but suggests that it racially revived both the indigenous and invading peoples. Russell found the “invasions of Ireland and the Plantations, however morally unjustifiable, however cruel in method... justified by biology”(6)<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, the “invasion of one race by another is nature’s ancient way of reinvigorating a race”(6)<sup>10</sup>. Russell’s evidence for this in modern times was Pearse’s rebellion against British power in Ireland, despite his half-English parentage<sup>11</sup>. Whatever the scientific merit of Russell’s biological theory it does, in December 1917, illustrate the depth of his disillusion with the senatorial process of the Irish Convention. Russell saw in its irresolution the inertia of a dying culture. He remarked that:

Mr. Flinders Petrie, in his ‘Revolutions of Civilisation’, has demonstrated that civilisation comes in waves, that races rise to a

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<sup>2</sup> Russell, G. W. “The New Nation”, Irish Times, 19 Dec. 1917. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Russell noted that “Pearse himself, for all his Gaelic culture, was sired by one of the race he fought against. He might stand as the symbol of the new race which is springing up”(6). “The New Nation”, Irish Times, 19 Dec. 1917. 6.

pinnacle of power and culture, and decline after that, and fall into decadence, from which they do not emerge until there has been a crossing of races, a fresh intermingling of cultures. He showed in ancient Egypt eight such periods, and after every decline into decadence there is an invasion, the necessary precedent to a fresh ascent with reinvigorated energies (6)<sup>12</sup>.

Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie was an English Egyptologist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century<sup>13</sup>. The author of several scholarly studies of ancient Egypt and the archaeologist of many Pharaonic sites, Petrie was author, in 1911, of the book to which Russell refers above, Revolutions of Civilisation. Based on his analysis of cultural change in the ancient world, Petrie's book was an attempt to chart the rate of global human progress. To this end he created a timetable for cultural development and decline, periods of growth followed by retrenchment and, finally, destruction. Petrie was a scholar of the period of high empire, his belief secure in the scientific method and unmatched resources of his discipline. Finding himself gifted with a wider, more schematic, knowledge of antiquity than any of his forbears, Petrie was moved to ask in Revolutions of Civilisation if we can

extract a meaning from all the senseless turmoil and striving, and success and failure, of these thousands of years? Can we see any regular structure behind it at all? Can we learn any general principles that may formulate the past, or be projected on the mists of the future? (2).

The rest of the text provides Petrie's answers to these questions. In it he suggests that failure is inscribed in the success of any human culture. Humanity declines when it becomes too comfortable and must be shocked into a new sense of itself; the barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire, for example, were the predictable outcome of earlier Roman hegemony. Russell further learnt from Petrie

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> For details of his interests and achievements, both of which were various, see Petrie, F. Seventy Years in Archaeology. London: Sampson Low, 1932.



that race conflict between indigenous and invading races was inevitable in the first stage of civilisation and that in the second stage, union between the two former antagonists was possible<sup>14</sup>. In “The New Nation”, Russell casts the Irish Convention and its adherents as the immobile standards of an old order, as glory decays. They will be superseded by a new Irish race, forged from the conflict between Gael and Planter since the sixteenth century. This race has silently matured, to announce itself in the Easter Rising. The rebellion is the first act of patriotism on behalf of a new nation, comparable in honour to the death of Irish volunteers in the First World War. Much to the disgust of the Irish Times<sup>15</sup>, Russell claimed that “No one has more to give than life, and, when that is given, neither Nationalist nor Imperialist in Ireland can claim moral superiority for the dead champions of their cause”(6)<sup>16</sup>.

Russell’s letter is post-scripted with the poem “To the Memory of Some I Knew Who are Dead and Who Loved Ireland”. An extended version of an earlier poem, “Salutation”, which dealt only with the Irish rebellion, “To the Memory of Some I Knew” has seven stanzas, the first six of which speak alternatively of the Easter Rising and the Great War. The final stanza attempts in literature the political miracle of reconciling the differing opinions of the previous six. The premise of “To the Memory of Some I Knew” is that both Republicans and Irish volunteers in service of the Crown shared the same motivation, patriotism. Patrick Pearse is the subject of

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<sup>14</sup> Petrie argued that “The rise of a new civilisation is conditioned by an immigration of a different people. That is to say, it arises from a mixture of two different races. That effect of mixture cannot take place all at once. There are barriers of antiquity, barriers of creed, barriers of social standing, but every barrier to race-fusion gives way in time, when two races are in contact”(128). Cited from Revolutions in Civilisation.

<sup>15</sup> The Irish Times printed Russell’s letter because he “is a member of the Irish Convention, and the views of members of that body, whether wise or foolish, have more than a personal importance; and because we wish to state, clearly and promptly, the attitude of all Irish loyalists to his appeal for what we may describe as a moral amnesty”(4). That attitude was, understandably, negative. Russell’s opinions were “not held by the... Irishmen who have died in Flanders and Gallipoli. To most of them Mr. Russell’s appeal... is inexpressibly painful”(4). “The Only Way”, Irish Times, 19 Dec. 1917. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Russell, G. W. “The New Nation”, Irish Times, 19 Dec. 1917. 6.

the first stanza. Despite the speaker's declaration that Pearse died for a "dream, not mine"<sup>(6)</sup><sup>17</sup>, his sacrifice yet managed to turn "life's water into wine"<sup>(6)</sup><sup>18</sup>. This image of communion, with its presentation of wine as the blood of Christ, made possible by death, is central to the poem's meaning. Death becomes the shedding of the physical self in pursuit of a higher spiritual consciousness. The fact that life is given up voluntarily is sanction to the ideal left behind. Pearse's final ideal was, put simply, an independent Irish Republic. With Pearse dead, the speaker revises the republican ideal: "my spirit rose in pride,/ Refashioning in burnished gold/ The image of those who died"<sup>(6)</sup><sup>19</sup>. The speaker is left with a totem, speechless in its golden casket. Russell makes the individuals addressed in the poem icons for his new race, violence treated symbolically as a stimulus to Ireland's intellectual development.

The second stanza concentrates on the death of Alan Anderson, son of R. A. Anderson, secretary of the I. A. O. S. He fell on the "*fields of France as undismayed*"<sup>(6)</sup><sup>20</sup> by death as Pearse in Dublin. The speaker insists that Anderson died content with the "*thought of some thing for Ireland done*"<sup>(6)</sup><sup>21</sup>. This ideal "*lured*"<sup>(6)</sup><sup>22</sup> him to his death on the "*long heroic barricade*"<sup>(6)</sup><sup>23</sup>. Russell's description of the trenches as an 'heroic barricade' is a romantic fudge. In order to elevate Anderson's death to a symbolic level Russell is, ironically, forced to ignore the horrific reality of his last moments. The same is true of the poem's third stanza address to Thomas MacDonagh, another executed leader of the Rising. MacDonagh's

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*



“high talk”(6)<sup>24</sup> is transformed after the rebellion. It “grew/ To nobleness by death redeemed”(6)<sup>25</sup>. At this point the poem’s rhetoric is on the verge of collapse. The power of speech becomes meaningless before MacDonagh’s symbolic death; “Life cannot utter words more great/ Than life may meet by sacrifice”(6)<sup>26</sup>. Rhetoric is exposed as the route to a symbolic dead end as “high words were equalled by high fate”(6)<sup>27</sup>. The speaker acknowledges this development but his recognition of violence and death as powers equal to dialogue and discussion sets a dangerous precedent.

Frightened by such a possibility, the speaker retracts. Those Irishmen who fought in the European war “*proved by death as true as they [the rebels],/ In mightier conflicts played your part,/ Equal your sacrifice may weigh*”(6)<sup>28</sup>. The speaker’s use of ‘may’ is a crucial qualification to his argument that both conflicts will occupy an equal part of the Irish imagination. The speaker becomes defensive, asserting that “*That other Ireland did you wrong/ Who said you shadowed Ireland’s star*”(6)<sup>29</sup>. But poetic unity is, finally, impossible. It becomes the speaker’s duty to provide the dead of the First World War with “*laurel wreath*”(6)<sup>30</sup> and “*song*”(6)<sup>31</sup>, the slain silent beneath the poet’s valediction. Pearse and MacDonagh share the same fate, heroic in death and amenable to eulogy only because of their silence. The only individual blessed by Russell with a future is Connolly, the emissary of a hope that “*lives on age after age*”(6)<sup>32</sup>, that “*Earth with its beauty might be won/ For labour as a*

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

heritage”(6)<sup>33</sup>. Cast as a Christ-like figure, Connolly triumphs over death, to be celebrated in evangelistic terms by the speaker. Importantly, Connolly is credited with closure in the poem, to “cast the last torch on the pile”(6)<sup>34</sup>.

Of all the icons created in “To the Memory of Some I Knew”, Connolly is the only one associated with any vital force. In the Irish Homestead immediately after the Rising Russell had written that “Of course a hundred other streams fed the revolt, streams of history, culture, politics, etc., but this group of dissatisfied labour held the inflammatory spark which set fire to all”(537)<sup>35</sup>. In “To the Memory of Some I Knew”, Connolly is the keeper of the flame and by his sacrifice he ensures its continued existence. Of all the dead who “put life by with a smile”(6)<sup>36</sup>, Connolly remains “my man”(6)<sup>37</sup>. The speaker’s identification with Connolly weakens the final stanzas. The speaker’s address is vague (“*You, too, had Ireland in your care,/ Who watched o’er pits of blood and mire*”(6)<sup>38</sup>) and romantic (battlefields become “*Wild forests, magical, of fire*”(6)<sup>39</sup>). Those killed in the War become simply the “*gallant dead*”(5)<sup>40</sup> as if their very number defies the speaker to deal in anything but platitudes<sup>41</sup>. Finally, the speaker lays a wreath for William Redmond “*on your clay*”(6)<sup>42</sup>.

Russell was prescient in his assignment of constitutional Irish nationalism, in the form of William Redmond, to history, for John Redmond’s Irish Parliamentary

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Russell, G. W. “NOTW”, IH, 26 Aug. 1916. 534-536.

<sup>36</sup> Russell, G. W. “The New Nation”, Irish Times, 19 Dec. 1917. 6.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Forty-nine thousand and four hundred Irishmen died in Irish regiments of the British Army in the First World War. For a record of their involvement see Johnstone, T. Orange, Green and Khaki: The Story of the Irish Regiments in the Great War, 1914-1918.

<sup>42</sup> Russell, G. W. “The New Nation”, Irish Times, 19 Dec. 1917. 6.



Party collapsed under *Sinn Féin* pressure in the 1918 election. In contrast, neither Connolly's execution or burial is mentioned in "To the Memory of Some I Knew". The speaker promises instead that "One river, born from many streams"(6)<sup>43</sup> will "Roll in one blaze of blinding light"(6)<sup>44</sup>. United behind Connolly the torchbearer, Irish nationalism was bound to a social awareness its adherents had previously neglected<sup>45</sup>. In context of Russell's intellectual development between 1913 and 1917, "To the Memory of Some I Knew" marks a significant progression. The poem is a declaration of Russell's increasingly partisan and radical association with socialist elements in Irish nationalism. Connolly was Russell's prophet, a precursor of a new order whose cultural edifice was to be constructed by sympathetic intellectuals.

Freed meanwhile from his responsibilities at the Irish Convention, Russell spent the majority of 1918 at work on the Candle of Vision. Published in November of that year, the book is part an autobiographical account of Russell's early life and part prophecy. Divided into twenty separate chapters, the Candle of Vision was one of Russell's more successful books commercially<sup>46</sup>. The first section of the text treats of Russell's youth and manhood. It is the closest that Russell ever came to writing a sustained reflection on his early experience<sup>47</sup>. After three chapters the Candle of

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> To understand the significance of the change that Russell perceived to have overcome Irish nationalism after Connolly one must be aware of the Irish Homestead's difficulty with Irish constitutional nationalism, and specifically Redmond's Irish Parliamentary Party, in the years previous. The co-operative movement was a direct economic threat to the Irish Parliamentary Party's merchant constituency and the Irish Homestead reported regular attempts by its opponents to attack the I. A. O. S. For Russell's opinions on the preference of co-operative economic models over those prevalent in rural Ireland see chapter four of The National Being.

<sup>46</sup> In a letter to Charles Weekes of 7 Feb. 1919, Russell confessed to be "rather astonished about the Candle going into a third edition. I expected to sell about 500. I would have made the book twice the size but I got scared, though I think now I might have gone on". Cited from the Denson Typescript. 347.

<sup>47</sup> One of Russell's early personal joys was his friendship with Yeats: "I had just attempted to write in verse when I met a boy whose voice was soon to be the most beautiful voice in Irish literature... The occurrence of our personalities seemed mysterious and controlled by some law of spiritual gravitation,

Vision becomes a more general dissertation on the nature of perception, the origin of human language and the relation of matter to spirit. But the text's dominant theme is Russell's fascination with the nature and exercise of power. Chapters on meditation, poetry or vision all lead to a similar conclusion, that

What we are alone has power. We may give up the outward personal struggle and ambition, and if we leave all to the Law all that is rightly ours will be paid. Man becomes truly the Superman when he has this proud consciousness. No matter where he may be, in what seeming obscurity, he is still the King, still master of his fate, and circumstance reels about him or is still as he, in the solitude of his spirit, is mighty or humble (17-18).

It is hard not to read these lines in context of Russell's experience of the Irish Convention in the year and more previous. Russell's frustration at the failure of the assembly to acknowledge the relevance of *Sinn Féin* to the contemporary situation bred in him the belief that change, if it were to occur at all, would have to happen at an individual level. To effect this transformation, Russell constructed the Candle of Vision as a psychological primer, written to equip the reader with the skills for adequate self-perception. Meditation is prescribed as the primary means to enlightenment. With its practice

We learn our hitherto unknown character. We did not know we could feel such fierce desires, never imagined such passionate enmities as now awaken. We have created in ourselves a centre of power and grow real to ourselves. It is dangerous, too, for we here fling ourselves into the eternal conflict between spirit and matter, and find ourselves where the battle is hottest, where the foemen are locked in a death struggle (22-23).

The Candle of Vision was written to help us see and the truth that Russell wishes to illuminate is that literature has a sacred duty of more immediate relevance

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like that which in the chemistry of nature makes one molecule fly to another"(16-17). Russell did leave one fragment of autobiography to be published posthumously. See "The Sunset of Fantasy", Dublin Magazine, 13:1, Jan. 1938. 6-11.



to Ireland than party organisation. Russell wonders if, after due self-consideration, we would

fully come to ourselves, [and] be like those beings in the Apocalypse full of eyes within and without? Would we, in the fulness of power, act through many men and speak through many voices? Were Shakespeare and the great masters unconscious magi, blind visionaries, feeling and comprehending a life they could not see or who, if they saw, thought it was their own creation...? (52-53)

This passage reiterates a recurrent theme in Russell's writing: the idea that literature is a medium for occult force. His interest in Shakespeare is of great importance to this section of the Candle of Vision. By connecting Shakespeare to prophecy, Russell suggests that in troubled times the artist can perceive in advance a disturbance of the material world. In periods of disruption a writer can divine the dominant spiritual force behind physical reality, the trembling, as it were, behind the veil. Russell was inspired to this idea by the Romantic poet Shelley, whose Prometheus Unbound is a direct influence on the Candle of Vision<sup>48</sup>.

Prometheus Unbound was Shelley's adaptation of Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound. It was first published in 1820. The substance of the original myth was that Prometheus the Titan was condemned to suffer punishment by Zeus because of Prometheus's gift to humankind of fire and the arts. For this the Titan was bound to a rock for an eternity before being plunged into an abyss. Shelley alludes to this possible fate in Prometheus Unbound as his hero, unbroken, states that

I would fain  
Be what it is my destiny to be,  
The saviour and strength of suffering man,  
Or sink into the original gulf of things (107).

<sup>48</sup> Shelley is mentioned twice in the Candle of Vision. "We are overcome"(17), Russell writes, "when we read Prometheus Unbound, but who, as he reads, flings off the enchantment to ponder in what state was the soul of Shelley in that ecstasy of swift creation [?]"(27-28). Later Russell wonders if second sight is the substance of "Poetry or fantasy. It has visited thousands in all ages and lands, and from such visions have come all that is most beautiful in poetry or art. Their forms inhabited Shelley's cloudland"(169).

Shelley's play differs from that of Aeschylus in that Prometheus is unbound from his rock while Jupiter, who is Zeus in Greek myth, is overcome by the mysterious figure of the Demogorgon. As a symbol of the oppressed, Prometheus is, to Shelley, an embodiment of a republican energy that promises humanity a new dignity. The Demogorgon, an embodiment of an original primal god, alive before Olympian or Titan, ends the play with the following refrain:

To defy power which seems omnipotent;  
To love, and bear; to hope, till Hope creates  
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;  
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent:  
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be  
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;  
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory (233).

Shelley's resolution is boldly idealistic. But for Shelley to have given such a radical voice to the gods, Russell felt that he must have been under divine influence. Shelley had, Russell felt, divine sanction for his vision. He had created a holy book, just as Russell wished to in the Candle of Vision<sup>49</sup>. Shelley's hero, Prometheus, is furthermore a combination of suffering, nobility and triumph, each of which attributes appealed to Russell as ideal aspects of Irish character. Russell's mind was fond of archetypal creations and Prometheus was especially attractive in the connection the Titan offered between art and the masses, between individual heroism and the general population. Shelley himself acknowledged in his Preface to Prometheus Unbound that his play was more than an entertainment.

The great writers of our age are, we have reason to suppose, the companions and forerunners of some unimagined change in our social condition, or the opinions which cement it. The cloud of mind is

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<sup>49</sup> Russell wrote in the Preface to the Candle of Vision that "These retrospects and meditations are the efforts of an artist and poet to relate his own vision to the vision of the seers and writers of the sacred books"(vii-viii).



discharging its collected lightning, and the equilibrium between institutions and opinions is now restoring, or about to be restored (41).

Russell had a more disturbed, and in the immediate sense less optimistic, vision than Shelley. But both believed that the artist had a gift to motivate the collective consciousness of his audience. Russell chose to stimulate Irish perception by devoting a central section of the Candle of Vision to the description of a vision he had seen in 1897<sup>50</sup>. In a letter to Yeats of June that year, Russell described an avatar who lived in a cottage in Sligo and was ““middle-aged””(77)<sup>51</sup> with ““a grey golden beard and hair (more golden than grey), face very delicate and absorbed. Eyes have a curious golden fire in them, broad forehead””(77)<sup>52</sup>. Russell, like Yeats, to whom he first told of his experience, was thrilled with the possible arrival of a Celtic avatar. Recalling that time in the Candle of Vision Russell remembers that “I was meditating about twenty-one years ago in a little room, and my meditation was suddenly broken by a series of pictures which flashed before me”(97). Now in its twenty-first year, Russell’s vision has attained its majority and Russell reveals the full extent of its potential significance for the first time in the Candle of Vision.

The vision has four parts. The first is familiar from the correspondence between Russell and Yeats in the late eighteen nineties. It records Russell’s imagining a figure who descended from the sky to an unspecified rural district, “broad and noble in type, beardless and dark-haired”(99). The avatar was of great physical presence, having a face “in... breadth akin to [that] of the young Napoleon, and I would refer both to a common archetype”(99). Never one for self-restraint, Russell

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<sup>50</sup> See Chapter One. Footnote 11.

<sup>51</sup> Summerfield, H. That Myriad-Minded Man.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.* Coincidentally, the figure of Russell’s vision bears a remarkable resemblance to an individual described in Whitman’s “I Sing the Body Electric”. Whitman’s speaker relates a man “of wonderful vigour, calmness, beauty of person”(124) and celebrates “The shape of his head, the pale yellow and

describes his second vision as the appearance of “a woman with a blue cloak around her shoulders, who came into a room and lifted a young child upon her lap, and from all Ireland rays of light converged upon that child”(99). Russell’s revelation is, up to this point, predictable. Its first character might be one of the *magi* appearing before the second vision’s nativity scene. The Christ-like associations of the child are obvious, with the mother dressed in the blue so favoured by iconographers of the Virgin Mother. Meanwhile the rays of heaven’s light sanctify the whole affair. The vision is powerful only when Russell describes its latter sequence:

I was brought from Ireland to look on the coronation throne at Westminster, and there sat on it a figure of empire who grew weary and let fall of sceptre from its fingers, and itself then drooped and fell and disappeared from the famous seat. And after that in swift succession came another scene, and a gigantic figure, wild and distraught, beating a drum, stalked up and down, and wherever its feet fell there were sparks and the swirling of flame and black smoke upward from burning cities (99).

In a letter of July 1918 to St. John Ervine, Russell claimed that the Candle of Vision would “finally make it impossible for me to take part in politics in Ireland as it is full of religious heresies”<sup>53</sup>. Certainly the adoption of the Virgin and Christ to Russell’s own personal doctrine was distinctly unorthodox. But Russell’s suggestion that the Candle of Vision would end his political career was misleading. The text is in fact Russell’s attempt to reposition himself after the failure of the Irish Convention the year before. Disillusioned with the legislative process, Russell establishes his new status as an outcast prophet, much in the Old Testament manner<sup>54</sup>. He predicts the

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white of his hair and beard, the/ immeasurable meaning of his black eyes, the richness and breadth of his manners”(124). Cited from Leaves of Grass.

<sup>53</sup> Cited from the Denson Typescript. 338

<sup>54</sup> The Candle of Vision bears two quotations from the Bible on its title page. The first is from Proverbs: “The spirit of man is the Candle of the Lord”(iii). The ‘Candle of the Lord’ was the text’s original title until Russell discovered that another book published by Macmillan shared the same title. See the Denson Typescript. 339. The second quotation, appropriately, is from Job: “When this candle shined upon my head and by His light I walked through darkness”(iii).



arrival of a saviour and interprets his vision of 1897 as a premonition of the Messiah's imminent birth:

All that I could make of the sequence was that some child of destiny, around whom the future of Ireland was to pivot, was born then or to be born, and that it was to be an avatar was symbolised by the descent of the first figure from the sky, and that before the high destiny was to be accomplished the power of empire was to be weakened, and there was to be one more tragic episode in Irish history (100).

Russell has a powerful sense of Irish salvation. In Biblical tradition prophets proved themselves to be unmoved by popular condemnation. Russell likewise speaks as an individual who has renounced the responsibility of collective decision-making to speak from the margins of Irish culture. His message is simple. The Irish are a blessed race and their nation is held, not by the British Empire, but in trust of a higher spiritual sanction. Conflict and martyrdom are, in turn, two necessary aspects of national rejuvenation. It is tempting to think that what Russell perceived in his vision was less the coming of an Irish Christ than an acknowledgement of the determination in the imminent Anglo-Irish war of a relative minority to achieve independence. Elements of Russell's faith did indeed coincide with certain articles of Irish nationalist dogma. Russell, like many Irish Republicans in the period, made a fetish of heroic leadership. The Candle of Vision was written in the period when Pearse, and to a lesser degree Connolly, were first elevated to secular sainthood<sup>55</sup>. Russell concluded the report of his own premonition with the observation that "I look

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<sup>55</sup> Pearse's posthumous public standing was secured partly by the wide edition of his works in the years immediately after his death. Padraic Colum and E. J. O'Brien for example edited Poems of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood: Thomas MacDonagh, P. H. Pearse (Padraic MacPiarais), Joseph Mary Plunkett, Sir Roger Casement in July 1916. A second edition was published in America just four months after the executions took place, evidence perhaps of early sympathy for the rebels. Pearse also had his Poems issued in Dublin by Maunsel in 1918. Connolly's works were reissued by Maunsel in 1917 and are discussed in Chapter Two. *Passim*. Connolly was a favourite subject for dedications from Irish revolutionary authors. Aodh de Blacam addressed his Towards the Republic: A Study of New Ireland's Social and Political Aims, "To the Irish Democracy in Memory of James Connolly"(n.p.).

everywhere in the face of youth, in the aspect of every new notability, hoping before I die to recognise the broad-browed avatar of my vision”(101).

The Candle of Vision is Russell’s prophecy of a new order whose avatar is in waiting. It is a fascinating book and its series of short sections allow for discussion of subjects various as Russell’s theories of language, symbolism and dream interpretation. Its general division into short chapters contributes to an occasional lack of sustained focus but the text finishes on an inspirational note. The Candle of Vision demands participation from its readers, whose duty it is to make “this world into the likeness of the Kingdom of Light”(169). The temptation is to read Russell’s religious rhetoric as evidence of innocent aspiration. But Russell’s evangelism was deeply rooted in his awareness of material conditions contemporary to the publication of his text. The Candle of Vision, it will be remembered, was issued at the end of October 1918, less than a month before the end of the First World War. As Western Europe considered the nature of its post-war dispensation, Russell suggested sympathy for socialism in his desire to reverse established social orders. Appropriately, the Candle of Vision’s last chapter imagines a continent peopled with “fierce things made gentle, and timid things made bold, and small made great”(174).

“The Coming of Trusts”, Russell’s first editorial after the Armistice was signed in 1918, clearly identified Russell’s post-war antagonists<sup>56</sup>. In it he argued that with the end of the war the “old world empires are ending”(749)<sup>57</sup>. They were to be replaced by “new world empires”(749)<sup>58</sup> whose influence would derive from their

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<sup>56</sup> The ‘Trust’ policy that Russell here refers to is the conglomeration of formerly competing companies into one capital entity to dominate a market. Russell probably has the American corporate model in mind, thus his use of the word ‘Trust’ to describe such monopoly companies.

<sup>57</sup> Russell, G. W. “The Coming of Trusts”, IH, 16 Nov. 1918. 749-750.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*



“economic and industrial”(749)<sup>59</sup> strength. These powers would aim to control a country’s resources, rather than lay claims to its territory. With this in mind, Russell warned that “these forces... are bestowing some attention to Ireland, and... may upset our efforts to secure an Irish control over Irish industry and agriculture”(749)<sup>60</sup>. If Ireland’s material assets were allowed to be dominated by foreign competition then the Irish people would be reduced to working “for others and relinquishing to them the profitable part of... business and retaining for themselves the bare pittance as allowed as necessary for subsistence”(750)<sup>61</sup>.

Such analysis is part of Russell’s general argument that the achievement of Irish political independence without adequate economic development would be pointless. It would merely be the exchange of one kind of oppression for another. Accordingly he warned that Trusts would be more than happy to “leave us our spiritual ideals, because they will have our material cash, which is their political ideal”(798)<sup>62</sup>. Russell proposed that it would be “quite possible for Ireland to be an independent Republic and... be economically enslaved by foreign capitalists”(798)<sup>63</sup>. The immediate context for Russell’s antagonism to corporate capitalism in the Irish Homestead was the end of the First World War. But Russell had another event in mind when he agitated in his journal for a redefinition of the Irish economic system. The Russian Revolution of the year previous had left a definite mark on Russell’s mind, not least because he interpreted it to be a continental echo of the Easter Rising<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Russell, G. W. “Going On Or Going Under”, IH, 7 Dec. 1918. 797-798.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Russell’s first report on the Russian Revolution appeared in the Irish Homestead in May 1917. He immediately compared it to the Easter Rising which had been to him an economic rebellion “on a smaller

Russell expressed his public admiration for the Russian Revolution in an address that was meant to be read at a November 1918 meeting at the Dublin Mansion House held to celebrate the 1917 revolution. The speech was not delivered but Russell did send it in a letter to William O'Brien, the Treasurer of the I. T. G. W. U.<sup>65</sup>. The letter was printed in turn in the Voice of Labour, a journal edited by Cathal O'Shannon, in November 1918. O'Shannon was born in Randalstown in Co. Antrim and had contributed the 'Northern Notes' to Connolly's paper, The Workers' Republic<sup>66</sup>. He had worked in Belfast and Cork, as an official of the I. T. G. W. U., and from March 1918 became the editor of the Voice of Labour, to be followed after its suppression by the Watchword of Labour. Although enthusiastic about Ireland's right to national self-determination, O'Shannon, like Russell, was less convinced of the integrity of Irish constitutional politics<sup>67</sup>. Both O'Shannon and Russell brought an international perspective to their political analysis of Ireland. The substance of O'Shannon's friendship with Russell in the disturbed period after 1916 was their mutual interest in continental socialism.

In his letter to O'Brien, Russell meanwhile applauded the "heroic efforts... being made to organise Russia, to build up a new social order on democratic and co-

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scale"(386). Russell explicitly connected the aspirations of the Russian to the Irish working-classes. To Russell the events in Russia were evidence of the fact that "Nature has a way of ensuring that no one section of humanity can for long remain indifferent to any other section without being disagreeably reminded of its existence"(386). Cited from Russell, G. W. "Preparedness", IH, 26 May 1917. 385-386. The Bolshevik coup took place in Petrograd in October. For further details see Acton, A *et al*, eds. Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution 1914-1921.

<sup>65</sup> William O'Brien was born in 1881 and died in 1968. A trade union activist, he helped found the I.T.G.W.U. in 1909. O'Brien was prominent in the 1918 campaign against conscription in Ireland and in the nineteen twenties became a *Dáil* representative for Dublin South City and Tipperary.

<sup>66</sup> Greaves, C. D. The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. 147

<sup>67</sup> Just four months before the 1918 general election, O'Shannon warned his readers in the Voice of Labour to "Beware the cloven hoof, whether it be wrapped in Orange or in Green. Red is Labour's colour"(395). "The Workers' Republic", Voice of Labour (cited subsequently as VoL), 31 Aug. 1918. 395. Russell contributed on several occasions to the Voice of Labour. One article recorded his opinion that "I do not myself believe the workers will get anything out of Parliaments before they have got the best out of themselves"(2). For labour to appeal to the legislature for help was "like a lion looking to a



operative lines”(497)<sup>68</sup>. He argued that although the leaders of the revolution had been “Marxians”(497)<sup>69</sup> the mass of the people “with ideals of life begotten in the Mirs and their co-operative movement, desired a social order combining more freedom with democratic solidarity”(497)<sup>70</sup>. The co-operative societies enjoyed a further advantage in that they were the only organisation to survive the revolution with an extensive practical knowledge of how to conduct business democratically. To Russell they were therefore in a position to direct Russia’s future; “the Revolution, through their guidance, is tending to make of Russia a vast network of co-operative industrial and agricultural societies”(497)<sup>71</sup>. The creation of such a network involved a devolution of power, with the “central government... more and more delegating the work of production and distribution”(497)<sup>72</sup> to the societies.

O’Shannon described the letter as “the voice of the most western hailing the most eastern people of Europe”(497)<sup>73</sup>. It is surprising that a self-proclaimed “Irish Bolshevik”(216)<sup>74</sup> such as O’Shannon should support Russell’s ideas. Russell is after all advocating the practical seizure of revolutionary ideals by the co-operative movement. However, O’Shannon saw the co-operatives as a useful tool to be used in the creation of an ideal state. It offered the workers an environment potentially free from exploitation, as they were shareholders in their own enterprises. In addition to this the societies could also offer themselves as a useful ally during periods of industrial unrest. A strike at Ballina in 1919 proved this very point. During the

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mouse to get it out of the trap... the mouse as a rule prefers the lion in the trap”(2). “Paths to the Co-operative Commonwealth”, VoL, 1 May 1919. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Russell, G. W. “A.E. on the New Order in Russia”, VoL, 23 Nov. 1918. 497, 502.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Greaves, C. D. The Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union.

dispute the principal traders of the town organised a blockade of strikers who in turn appealed to the Dublin Co-operative Society to help them. The Society did so, backed by a financial guarantee from the Executive of the I. T. G. W. U., and even went so far as to open a co-operative store in Ballina for the duration of the strike. O'Shannon reported joyfully that "Thus co-operation has raised the siege and proved itself an indispensable ally of the fighting trade union movement"(1)<sup>75</sup>.

Such an understanding between the two organisations had been proposed before; Connolly and Russell had both touched upon the matter in their writings<sup>76</sup>. It was, to an extent, an alliance created by necessity; the unions especially needed the guarantee of supplies during any long and protracted strike action. The most vivid expression of the possible outcome of an alliance between labour and the co-operative societies was outlined by Russell in the Voice of Labour itself. In the May Day issue of 1919 he published an article which stated that:

When the unions have a monopoly of labour they control the most important asset in the country. That is the organisation of the army. Second comes the co-operative store. That is the organisation of the commissariat. When the army is recruited and the commissariat in order then the campaign can begin (2)<sup>77</sup>.

Russell's militant language was accompanied by a qualification of his earlier belief that Ireland was in need of social evolution rather than revolution. He admitted that such evolution needed to be "urged on as rapidly as is consistent with safety"(2)<sup>78</sup>. The vagueness of this statement is suggestive. It would be difficult to know when the limits of safety had been reached and in a climate of widespread industrial agitation it would be difficult to stop any escalation in violence.

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<sup>75</sup> O'Shannon, C. "Ballina in Blockade: Co-op. Comes to the Rescue", Watchword of Labour, 13 Dec. 1919. 1-3.

<sup>76</sup> See Chapter Two. 45-48.

<sup>77</sup> Russell, G. W. "Paths to the Co-operative Commonwealth", VoL, 1 May 1919. 2.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*



Russell's radicalism suggests that by May 1919 he was comfortable in his role as a socialist prophet. Russell's words were regularly taken up by O'Shannon, who had located with Russell a common enemy in the agents of "autocracy in industry"(2)<sup>79</sup>. O'Shannon re-printed editorials from the Irish Homestead in full and suggested that if he were a millionaire his first task "would be to send all over Ireland a fleet of aeroplanes scattering broadcast in leaflets AE's editorials"(2)<sup>80</sup>. O'Shannon even took to using sentences from Russell's texts as banner headlines above the Voice of Labour's 'Co-operative Notes'<sup>81</sup>. Thus Russell was temporarily elevated to the position held by theorists such as Desmoulins and Connolly in the paper, both of whose revolutionary maxims were printed throughout its pages. Russell and O'Shannon were willing to sideline their immediate differences in the name of a common cause, an attack on established capital. They were able to do this by leaving the terms of their understanding vague enough that each could take what they wanted from the other's comments. Thus O'Shannon could write that labour was "at one, on broad and general grounds at least, with the best of the pioneers of co-operation whom we know in Ireland"(2)<sup>82</sup>. He implicitly refers to Russell by writing that "Those pioneers may prefer to call their goal a Co-operative Commonwealth, and Labour may prefer to call it the Workers' Republic"(2)<sup>83</sup> but

in the long run it will be found that they and we are travelling towards the same City of Lights, and indeed that some of us are travelling towards it by the same road, although we may not always be in sight of each other (2)<sup>84</sup>.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Quoted from O'Shannon's introduction to "Paths to the Co-operative Commonwealth", VoL, 1 May 1919. 2.

<sup>81</sup> See for example the quotation from Russell ("Our Task is Truly to Democratise Civilisation"(313)) placed above the "Co-operative Notes", VoL, 29 June 1918. 313. This quotation is itself taken from The National Being. 60.

<sup>82</sup> O'Shannon, C. VoL, 29 Nov. 1919. 2. This was a double issue dedicated to the question of 'Ireland and Co-operation'.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*

O'Shannon effectively does in reply to Russell what Russell did to him in his own analysis of the Russian Revolution. O'Shannon now makes a counter-claim to Russell's co-operatives. He does so in a subtle manner but his ambition complements that of Russell and has the further merit of being accompanied by some sly humour. O'Shannon and Russell were 'not always in sight of each other' because O'Shannon was on the run from the R. I. C. Neither did Russell contribute to the Watchword of Labour, a paper regularly suppressed by the government.

O'Shannon's interpretation of the meaning of the 'Co-operative Commonwealth' illustrates the flexibility of the terms by which he and Russell both expressed their beliefs. This was not an attribute unique to these two writers. Elsewhere in the Watchword of Labour, O'Shannon showed how his Workers' Republic could be adapted to complement the ideals of *Sinn Féin*. His comments were made in context of the 1920 municipal elections in Dublin to which the I. T. G. W. U. nominated six candidates. To support them O'Shannon wrote that, "They stand for the Republic; and that Republic the Irish Republic; and that again the Workers' Republic"(258)<sup>85</sup>.

There was a point indeed where *Sinn Féin's* drive for Irish self-sufficiency benefited both the labour and the co-operative causes. *Sinn Féin*, militant labour and the co-operative movement shared the common interest of economic re-organisation in the revolutionary period. It is certain that Russell's economic ideas complemented certain political aspirations of *Sinn Féin*; their mutual stress on the need for Irish self-determination, whether economic or political, is the most obvious. This suggests that

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<sup>85</sup> Cited from Greaves, C. D. The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union.



although the co-operative movement could not ally itself to any one political movement it could adapt itself to a new dispensation. Russell did remind his readers in the Irish Homestead that, as committed co-operators, they should “keep continually before us the idea that whatever be the means adopted, a particular kind of civilisation is the object”(256)<sup>86</sup>. But his ensuing comment that “nations cannot exist on raids alone”(256)<sup>87</sup> acknowledges implicitly the reality of militant separatism and its role in the foundation of an Irish state. Russell hints at this acknowledgement further when he writes, “we should have a national economic policy, to be pursued energetically through the day, however and in what adventures the nights of the idealists be spent”(256)<sup>88</sup>. Russell’s separation between the events of the night and day is telling. The ‘national economic policy’ is allowed to stand clear and unimpeachable in the light of scrutiny while the darkness that follows covers a rebellion that might make the theory of a national policy practice. Light and darkness are, of course, both part of the same day.

The British administration in Ireland was not ignorant of this fact. No less a person than the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Sir Hamar Greenwood, described Russell as an extreme advocate of *Sinn Féin* in the House of Commons in 1920<sup>89</sup>. There was justification to Greenwood’s accusation. Russell was not a member of *Sinn Féin* but there were correlations between a number of his beliefs and the aspirations of separatist nationalism, especially with regard to the necessity of nurturing an

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<sup>86</sup> Russell, G. W. “NOTW”, IH, 10 April 1920. 256-260.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Greenwood’s attack on Russell is recorded in Summerfield, H. That Myriad-Minded Man. 202. Greenwood was appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland in April 1920 and was the last person to hold this post. Greenwood, unsurprisingly, was unable to contain the Irish situation and Lloyd George announced the Anglo-Irish Truce without his Chief Secretary’s consent on 11 July 1921.

independent Irish industry<sup>90</sup>. Implicit in Russell's call for the transfer of industry and agriculture to a system of co-operative organisation was the assumption that an increased measure of democracy would result for the labouring classes. This is the major reason for O'Shannon and Russell's mutual regard. Contact between the two was disrupted by O'Shannon's arrest in 1920. He was released after going on hunger strike<sup>91</sup> but the authorities must also have been aware of Russell's contributions to the Voice of Labour and his consistent support of the Russian Revolution. They paid the paper close enough attention to suppress it the day after it published an advertisement of the *Dáil's* National Loan on 20 September 1919<sup>92</sup>. It is hardly surprising therefore that Greenwood should have described Russell as extreme.

What did surprise Russell were the assaults by Crown troops on rural co-operatives in 1920. There is no evidence extant to suggest that societies were attacked because of Russell's political opinions. More likely, soldiers destroyed creameries to retaliate against an elusive enemy. The first report in the Irish Homestead of assaults made by Crown forces on co-operative societies appeared on 5

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<sup>90</sup> It is important to realise how Russell's rhetoric might have appealed to *Sinn Féin*. Aodh de Blacam, a *Sinn Féin* propagandist without official party position, wrote to the Irish Homestead in 1920 to urge "Gaels"(130) to "study the possibilities of the co-operative movement as a means to liberate Irish-Ireland from its economic bonds"(130). De Blacam remarked further that "Anglicisation and capitalism have progressed together. To restore democracy in economics is clearly the first step to liberating Irish culture"(130)<sup>90</sup>. De Blacam, A. "The Gaeltacht v. Co-operation", IH, 21 Feb. 1920. 128-130. De Blacam's enthusiasm for co-operation suggests that Russell had manoeuvred the movement into an enviable position. Russell could afford to leave propaganda on behalf of national self-determination and the political achievement of an Irish Republic to *Sinn Féin*. At the same time he enjoyed the implicit understanding of a portion of his readership in the Irish Homestead that his attacks on capital were made on behalf of that other political struggle.

<sup>91</sup> Greaves, C. D. The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. 264-265.

<sup>92</sup> *Sinn Féin* inaugurated the first *Dáil* of the Irish Republic on 21 January 1919. Cathal Brugha was elected first President due to the imprisonment of Eamon de Valera, Eoin MacNeill the Finance Minister, Michael Collins the Home Affairs Minister, George Noble Plunkett as Foreign Affairs Minister and Richard Mulcahy as National Defence Minister. De Valera was elected President in April 1919 after his escape from Lincoln Jail. The first *Dáil* functioned under extreme stress as a revolutionary alternative to the British administration in Ireland. For a detailed account of its actions see Mitchell, A. Revolutionary Government in Ireland.



June 1920. Russell was caught unawares by this development. He probably felt that an officially apolitical agricultural organisation would be safe from reprisals, despite the campaign of political assassination being carried out in the countryside around it. He was so confident of the movement's security that the week before the first attack he praised the efforts of his "countrymen"(399)<sup>93</sup> who were "by whatever roads, turnings and indirections, moving steadily towards the creation of a civilization and social order which will be democratic and co-operative"(399)<sup>94</sup>. Russell did not imagine that the co-operative societies themselves would suffer because of revolutionary activity. This explains why his first reaction to the destruction of three creameries in Tipperary was so mild. He lamented the fact that they had been damaged by "persons whose official functions are to prevent anything of the kind taking place"(420)<sup>95</sup>. But Russell was prepared to make "no comment"(420)<sup>96</sup> until a "statement is made... to clear the persons accused or to give reparation for the wrong done"(420)<sup>97</sup>.

The matter rested until the start of August, by which time nine more creameries had been attacked. Russell's response was robust and polemical. However, instead of presenting the co-operative societies as innocent victims of the Anglo-Irish war, Russell again exposed his radical sympathies by locating their plight in context of an international economic struggle. Russell felt that the "centre of power"(591)<sup>98</sup> in European society was shifting "from legislatives and so-called representative assemblies to the great economic organisations of capital and

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<sup>93</sup> Russell, G. W. "Co-operative Land Purchase", *IH*, 29 May 1920. 399-401.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Russell, G. W. "NOTW", *IH*, 5 June 1920. 419-422.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Russell, G. W. "NOTW", *IH*, 7 Aug. 1920. 591-596.

labour”(591)<sup>99</sup>. The state had so far allied itself to capital as the element “most powerful”(591)<sup>100</sup> in the body politic. Parliament was “ready to execute”(591)<sup>101</sup> capital’s “wishes, as it realises that the consciousness of power has shifted from itself to the new organisations”(591)<sup>102</sup>. Since Russell had earlier declared the co-operative movement to be against the individual ownership of industrial capital, the attacks on the movement in Ireland signalled a change in labour relations in Europe as a whole. “Extra Parliamentary action”(591), he wrote, “is becoming more common, and we are in for an era of direct action in politics and economics”(591)<sup>103</sup>.

Having offered the Irish Homestead’s readership this analysis of the reasons for attacks on their property, Russell remarked cryptically that “We have thrown out these suggestions because we know that the HOMESTEAD is read not only by farmers but also by some labour leaders”(594)<sup>104</sup>. He is, in other words, urging labour to support the co-operatives in a joint plan of direct action; Russell suggests that the attacks on the co-operative creameries could, in theory at least, be answered by direct action from farmers and labour. What form this action would take is not specified, but it is important to realise that if the co-operatives did organise to retaliate economically against Crown forces they would simultaneously be fulfilling a *Sinn Féin* objective.

The co-operatives, labour and the nationalist movement travelled a narrow path in 1920. The Irish Homestead, for example, carried a strike notice on behalf of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress for two weeks at the end of July.

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<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*



This advertisement called upon the readers of the Irish Homestead to support nearly one thousand railwaymen who had been locked out of work for refusing to operate trains used to transport munitions and soldiers. It stressed that “This is not a Railwayman’s fight, nor a Trade Unionist’s fight- it is the Nation’s fight- IT IS YOUR FIGHT!”(568)<sup>105</sup>. Labour’s appeal to the national sentiments of Russell’s readership partially obscures the fact that their call for solidarity between co-operators and the workers is almost identical to Russell’s previous call for support from labour. With attacks on the creameries increasing it was possible that such a union might be forced upon the co-operatives. Regardless of whether the appeal for solidarity was made in nationalist or economic terms, the net result would have been the same, open insurrection.

Russell meanwhile continued to report in the Irish Homestead on the attacks on the societies. In an attempt to contain the situation, Russell tried to understand why soldiers should desire to destroy creameries. He suggested that their rage was a product of their having to operate “in a country where so many people are hostile to them and life has been taken”(606)<sup>106</sup>. Russell expresses his anger only in irony; there is “no evidence at all, nor could there be, to show that the creamery wrecked the barracks”(606)<sup>107</sup>. Despite his apparent moderation, Russell could not help but compare the attacks to the destruction of an earlier Irish industry. He warned the Government that the “suppression of the woollen industry in Ireland by Act of Parliament, long ago, has left bitter enough memories without adding to that the destruction of the dairy industry”(606)<sup>108</sup>. Russell’s prose is cunning in its frank call

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<sup>105</sup> Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress. “Munitions of War”, IH, 24 July 1920, 568, and IH, 31 July 1920, 588.

<sup>106</sup> Russell, G. W. “Rain and Ruin”, IH, 14 Aug. 1920. 605-607.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*

for the government to take responsibility for its soldiers' behaviour; if it did not do this then "future historians of Ireland"<sup>109</sup> would interpret the attacks on the creameries "as instances of the same policy surviving from century to century"<sup>110</sup>.

Russell is keen to show that the co-operative societies have no relation to the trouble around them. At the same time he is not averse to appropriating the vocabulary of Irish nationalism with his suggestion that colonial economics caused the destruction of the woollen industry. Russell cleverly distances the co-operatives from the actual mechanics of political action while benefiting, when he has to, by appeals to its 'national' stature within Ireland. As the attacks increased, the distance between politics and co-operation narrowed. Russell continued to argue that the creameries were the property of innocent civilians. But their destruction meant that if "the committee of a creamery whose premises are wrecked meets at all"<sup>111</sup> then "its very first activity in regard to its own existence must of necessity make it have a strong political bias"<sup>112</sup>. With the possibility that the co-operative movement as a whole could be destroyed, both Russell and Horace Plunkett began a series of appeals to England.

Their joint campaign started through the offices of Plunkett, who tried to make the government take responsibility for the destruction of creameries, to initiate a claim for damages. Plunkett addressed his correspondence to Greenwood, the Chief Secretary of Ireland, and it was published in the Irish Homestead<sup>113</sup>. Russell generally treated the government's replies with disdain, even when Greenwood promised

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<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Russell, G. W. "The Burning of Co-operative Creameries", IH, 28 Aug. 1920. 641-642.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> This correspondence starts in IH, 28 Aug. 1920. 646.



Plunkett that he would personally ensure that the campaign of reprisals against the co-operatives would stop. Russell's comment on this assurance was that Greenwood's "promises seem to be as vain as Sir Neville Macready's sermon to the troops on the iniquity of reprisals"(658)<sup>114</sup>. He felt that neither official was able to provide security for the movement and tried instead to influence his co-operative counterparts in Great Britain to agitate on his behalf.

The start of this new phase of Russell's media campaign began in September 1920 when he reported on the annual Co-operative Congress in Great Britain which had just taken place in Preston. A pamphlet condemning the outrages in Ireland was circulated to delegates at the conference. In the Irish Homestead Russell urged his English counterparts to come quickly to their aid "or there will only be a bitter memory of co-operation in many counties in Ireland"(710)<sup>115</sup>. Furthermore he argued that the soldiers who carried out the attacks in Ireland might be transferred to England at a later date. This is evidence indeed of the particular benefits of Russell's international perspective of the Anglo-Irish conflict. By citing the possibility of class conflict Russell is able to gain sympathy from a constituency that might otherwise be antagonistic to Irish nationalism. To dramatise his point, Russell prophesied that the "training in wrecking co-operative enterprises here may fit men for executing similar work in Great Britain in labour struggles in the future"(710)<sup>116</sup>. Russell did this because he sensed a natural affiliation between the interests of labour and the co-operative movement in both countries; "we believe"(710)<sup>117</sup> he wrote "that labour in Great Britain regards the co-operative stores as its commissariat department"(710)<sup>118</sup>.

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<sup>114</sup> Russell, G. W. "The World We Are Living In", IH, 4 Sept. 1920. 657-658.

<sup>115</sup> Russell, G. W. "NOTW", IH, 25 Sept. 1920. 708-712.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*

Russell reminded his readers that “in a fierce struggle between capital and labour”(710)<sup>119</sup> there could be nothing “more natural... than the wrecking of stores or factories which supplied labour with the necessaries of life”(710)<sup>120</sup>.

Russell’s insistence on the alliance of the state with capital and on their joint antagonism to labour suggests his socialist sympathies. Russell played upon the anxieties of the congress’s English constituency and warned that democratic industrial interests in England might be attacked after the success of reprisals in Ireland. Russell’s appeals were made in the immediate context of a miners’ strike in Great Britain, a dispute which had not long been settled<sup>121</sup>. In a climate of British industrial unrest, the spectre of the state attacking the forces of labour must have seemed real indeed. Such events strengthened Russell’s argument and led him to point out that the Government should award damages to the creameries. If they did not, the “same atrocities may arise in England if a Government, controlled by capitalism, finds it convenient to elude enquiry”(710)<sup>122</sup>. This argument was itself not without precedent. Marx had suggested that Ireland suffered first what later happened in England and in 1919 Erskine Childers warned the British Labour Movement that the military were being trained for breaking strikes in the rest of the United Kingdom<sup>123</sup>.

Russell followed his appeal to British co-operators by a broader call “to the British people”(900)<sup>124</sup> in “A Plea for Justice”, first published in the Irish Homestead on the 18th of December 1920. Having found the official system of the courts in Ireland to be inadequate for the purpose of convicting those responsible for reprisals,

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<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> For a Report of this see “NOTW”, IH, 11 Sept. 1920. 674-678.

<sup>122</sup> Russell, G. W. “NOTW”, IH, 25 Sept. 1920. 708-712.

<sup>123</sup> Childers, E. “A Strike-Breaking Army at Work”. London: Daily Herald, 1919.



Russell relied on the British people's "sense of fair play to judge between Irish co-operators and the Government"(900)<sup>125</sup>. Russell immediately refuted the Chief Secretary's accusation that the societies were "centres of revolutionary propaganda"(900)<sup>126</sup>. He repeated the warning that he had already made to British co-operators; the British people would "lay up a hell for themselves in their own country"(900)<sup>127</sup> if they did not exert pressure on the government to institute an inquiry into the attacks.

It is ironic that Russell, acting as spokesman for an organisation which had been condemned by a British official as a focus for revolutionary activity, should further appeal to the British tradition of parliamentary democracy to vindicate his own position. By their actions the police and soldiers were "tearing up all the safeguards of justice won through centuries of struggle"(900)<sup>128</sup>. Again he warned "there are too many interests minatory to democracy in power to allow them the advantage of such precedents"(900)<sup>129</sup>. It is interesting to note the measured tones of Russell's voice in this text. There is not one mention of 'labour' or 'capital' in "A Plea for Justice" although both words appear with regularity in the editorials of the Irish Homestead. It seems that Russell did not want to prejudice the co-operative case to the general British public by petitioning them in a language that might be associated with socialism. Russell ends his plea to state bluntly that "It may be we Irish are scoundrels, but if we are let us be tried openly for our crimes"(900)<sup>130</sup>.

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<sup>124</sup> Russell, G. W. "A Plea for Justice", IH, 18 Dec. 1920. 899-901.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*

This is the last line of a masterful piece of political prose. It immediately confronts any prejudices that its potential readership might have against the writer or the movement he represents. It does so in order to place the text within the mainstream of 'fair-mindedness' to which it appeals. It effectively takes for itself the standard of impartiality that its very antagonists have previously claimed for themselves. Up to this point in time Sir Hamar Greenwood had insisted that individual co-operative societies should take their claims for damages to the courts. Russell knew well that the submission of evidence and witnesses to these courts was almost impossible in Ireland due to intimidation. Indeed many Irish courts had ceased to function effectively after they were superseded by a rival legislative system instituted by the *Dáil* in 1919. Russell's alternative to Greenwood's proposition is that the British people act as the jury for the case that he presents. In doing so he makes the same allusions to 'fairness' and 'reason' that a barrister might make to a jury. Within this rhetorical framework he is able to make accusations without the burden of proof required by law. The strength of Russell's propaganda is that it looks impartial but is definitely committed.

Russell's appeal to the English people was supplemented at the start of January 1921 in Westminster by a delegation of M. P.'s from both the Co-operative and the Labour Parties<sup>131</sup>. They met the Chief Secretary in order to petition the government on behalf of the Irish co-operative movement. Greenwood promised the M. P.'s that the attacks on the co-operatives would cease, but it was a promise that the Chief Secretary must have known he was unqualified to keep<sup>132</sup>. Russell reported that this Joint Parliamentary Committee was going to continue to agitate on Ireland's

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<sup>131</sup> The Co-operative Party was formed in 1917 and had one member elected to Parliament in December 1918. See Cole, G. D. H. A History of the Labour Party from 1914. London: Routledge, 1948. 83



behalf but added that the “only doubt in our mind is whether those who at present sit in the seats of the mighty are not at enmity with all democratic movements”(24)<sup>133</sup>. He regarded the attacks in Ireland and the government’s inability (or, as Russell might have argued, lack of will) to stop them as a prelude to a military campaign in Britain which would “enfeeble”(24)<sup>134</sup> labour movements “to make way for trusts and big business on capitalist lines”(24)<sup>135</sup>. Accordingly Russell relied on his own propaganda and “A Plea for Justice” was published as a pamphlet to be distributed throughout Great Britain<sup>136</sup>. Russell urged Irish co-operators to “send copies... to persons they trade with in Great Britain and to point out the effect of this policy on unemployment there”(53)<sup>137</sup>. For in “Great Britain they are thinking of little else than unemployment, and in so far as the plight of Ireland bears upon unemployment then the plight of Ireland will receive attention”(53)<sup>138</sup>.

To supplement this media drive in Britain a new column was started in the Irish Homestead on the 15th of January called ‘Notes from Overseas’. It was supposed to report foreign events that might be of interest to the journal’s readership. Since Russell’s weekly ‘Notes and Comments’ already covered this territory adequately, it seems obvious that the column’s real purpose was to supplement the Irish co-operative movement’s propaganda efforts in England. ‘Notes from Overseas’ first reported the visit of a representative commission of the British Labour Party to Ireland. On its return to Britain the commission organised “meetings at eighty great

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<sup>132</sup> Greenwood’s assurance is reported in “NOTW”, IH, 8 Jan. 1921. 20-24.

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Russell makes this claim in the above article.

<sup>137</sup> Russell, G. W. “NOTW”, IH, 22 Jan. 1921, 52-56.

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*

centres of population”(56)<sup>139</sup> to raise public awareness of the Irish co-operatives’ plight. The meetings enjoyed the joint support of the Co-operative Party and M. P.’s from both groups addressed the crowds “specifically with the subject of the attacks on the Irish societies”(56)<sup>140</sup>.

The next weeks brought some comfort to Russell and his readers as resolutions in favour of the Irish co-operators were passed regularly and unanimously at meetings<sup>141</sup>. The campaign organised by the Co-operative and Labour Parties reached its climax with a mass meeting at the Albert Hall on the 15th of February 1921. Unfortunately its effectiveness in propaganda terms was damaged by the fact that the “metropolitan press practically boycotted the meeting”(136)<sup>142</sup>. The only published reports of the meeting appeared in the Daily Herald, a radical labour paper whose editor, George Lansbury, had published articles in the Voice of Labour, and the Co-operative News, both of whose readership might already have been sympathetic to the Irish co-operators’ case.

The Labour Party commission, whose visit to Ireland had led to the rally at the Albert Hall, had meanwhile published the results of its inquiry into the destruction of a creamery at Ballymaceligott. The commission refuted the official version of events that claimed soldiers were shot at from the creamery premises. It did “not believe there was any ambush”(86)<sup>143</sup>. To Russell, the findings of this body, which included a retired General and three sitting M. P.’s in its number, was proof of the justice of his cause; “After all”(86)<sup>144</sup>, he wrote, they “are all Englishmen, and... not likely to weigh

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<sup>139</sup> Anon. “Notes From Overseas”, IH, 15 Jan. 1921. 56.

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> See for example “Notes From Overseas”, IH, 29 Jan. 1921. 72-74.

<sup>142</sup> Anon. “Notes From Overseas”, IH, 26 Feb. 1921. 136-138.

<sup>143</sup> Russell, G. W. “NOTW”, IH, 5 Feb. 1921. 84-88.

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*



the balance of judgement against themselves and their own country”(86)<sup>145</sup>. Russell’s bitterness is suggestive of his increasingly extreme sense of Irish nationalism in this period. In his anger over the attacks on co-operatives, Russell’s anti-Government polemic found him new audiences. *Sinn Féin* reproduced Russell’s pamphlet, The Inner and the Outer Ireland, in Ireland in July 1921, after its first publication in the American Pearson’s Magazine, edited by Frank Harris, in May of that year<sup>146</sup>.

The Inner and the Outer Ireland asks two basic questions, namely, what is the cause of the “Irish trouble”(4)<sup>147</sup> and why has it continued? The simple answer to the first question is that the “Irish people want to be free”(4)<sup>148</sup>. The answer to the second is that they “feel in themselves a genius which has not yet been manifested in a civilisation”(4)<sup>149</sup>. Russell argues that the ancient Greeks achieved greatness because they “externalised their genius”(4)<sup>150</sup> in “a society with a culture, arts and sciences peculiar to themselves”(4)<sup>151</sup>. He uses these expressions of culture to introduce the idea that the Irish people rebel by virtue of a “biological and spiritual necessity”(5)<sup>152</sup>. Such ‘necessity’ drives their antagonism towards their British rulers. They could not be content with the “character in which British statesmen would mould them”(5)<sup>153</sup>.

The introduction of a racial element to Russell’s analysis of the Irish struggle for Independence is signal of a general change in attitude towards violence that the

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<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> The Inner and the Outer Ireland is reprinted in full in the section that describes Russell in Harris’s 1927 book Latest Contemporary Portraits, a text that also contains essays on Shaw, Wilde and Yeats.

<sup>147</sup> Russell, G. W. The Inner and the Outer Ireland. All page numbers refer to the 1921 Talbot Press edition of this text

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*

previous two years had conditioned. Russell wonders whether violence is “good or evil”(4)<sup>154</sup>, a question that led him to contrast the “moralist”(5)<sup>155</sup> with the “artist”(5)<sup>156</sup> in his character. The ‘moralist’ found “race hatreds... abhorrent”(5)<sup>157</sup>. The ‘artist’ “delights in varieties of culture and civilisation, and... tells me it is well worth some bloodshed to save the world from being ‘engirded with Brixton’”(5)<sup>158</sup>. It is soon clear that the fictive ‘artist’ has won Russell’s affections because he continues to celebrate the power of the Irish race; “in spite of all the proddings of British bayonets the people born in Ireland will still be Irish”(5)<sup>159</sup>. Russell extends this durability back into the distant past. He writes that the Irish character has remained unchanged for centuries and argues that the widespread use of the English language “has but superficially modified Irish character... Gaelic culture still inspires all that is best in Irish literature and Irish life”(5)<sup>160</sup>.

This is a remarkable comment from a writer who had just the year before defended the co-operative movement from Aodh de Blacam’s charge that “It is deplorably true that the propaganda part of the movement is run on Anglicising lines”(8)<sup>161</sup>. De Blacam was referring to the fact that the greater part of the I. A. O. S.’s promotional literature was printed solely in English and this despite the fact that the co-operative movement’s model society at Templecrone was in an Irish speaking area of Donegal. Russell answered de Blacam by writing that since Ireland already had a plethora of organisations teaching “Gaelic, English, Unionism, Home Rule,

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<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> De Blacam, A. “Co-operative Propaganda and the Gaelic language”, *IH*, 3 Jan. 1920. 8.



Republicanism and religion”(20)<sup>162</sup> there was no need for co-operators to add to the confusion. Anyway, the I. A. O. S. could “not regard any other propaganda as more important than its own”(20)<sup>163</sup>. Russell’s dismissive tone suggests that he is referring to a different, more specific definition of ‘Gaelic’ than de Blacam when Russell mentions it in The Inner and the Outer Ireland. It seems that Russell’s reference to the ‘Gaelic’ language is merely convenient to his introduction of the pamphlet’s main point. For the “last great champion of the Gaelic tradition was Padraic Pearse, who led the astonishing enterprise of Easter Week, 1916”(6)<sup>164</sup>. Pearse “made his soul out of the heroic literature of the Gael”(6)<sup>165</sup>. His actions led Russell to think of “Standish O’Grady, an earlier prophet of the Gaelic tradition”(6)<sup>166</sup>.

O’Grady was, as we saw, the inspiration of much of Russell’s early work<sup>167</sup>. By establishing a connection between Pearse and O’Grady, Russell gains access to Pearse. But it is relevant to note that in making the connection Russell does not mention Pearse in a literary context, even though this might be the most obvious link between the three men. Russell was aware of Pearse’s literary output<sup>168</sup>. But he prefers to stress that Gaelic literature affected Pearse in an internalised way; it created his ‘soul’. Russell saw the same condition in other “political rebels”(9)<sup>169</sup> he had met. They were “determined”(9)<sup>170</sup> and had overcome what Russell describes as the

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<sup>162</sup> Russell, G. W. “NOTW”, IH, 10 Jan. 1920. 18-22.

<sup>163</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Russell, G. W. The Inner and the Outer Ireland.

<sup>165</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> In “A Tribute by AE”, published in 1929, Russell wrote of O’Grady’s History of Ireland that no other book had ever “excited my imagination more than Standish O’Grady’s epical narrative of Cuculain”(63).

<sup>168</sup> The Collected Works of Pearse (Dublin: Maunsell, 1917) were reviewed in IH, 14 July 1917. 522-525. Pearse had “a purity of spirit which is rare in any literature”(525).

<sup>169</sup> Russell, G. W. The Inner and the Outer Ireland.

<sup>170</sup> *ibid.*

Irish “power of sympathy and understanding”(9)<sup>171</sup> which previously “made them politically weak”(9)<sup>172</sup>. The “oppression of the last six years... has strengthened the will”(9)<sup>173</sup>. Russell senses in Ireland a triumph of force over speech; “Ireland has become for the present all will”(10)<sup>174</sup> and its political activists are “so little given to speech that it is almost impossible to find among Sinn Feiners an orator”(10)<sup>175</sup>.

Russell’s analysis was astute. Ernie O’Malley, a senior commander in the I. R. A. in the War of Independence, described himself in similar terms; he wrote that in the period of his military action “I lived on a mountain top where there was no need for speech, even. I felt an understanding, a sharing of something bigger than ourselves, and a heightening of life”(53)<sup>176</sup>. Russell commented on this condition recurrently in the period. His poem of September 1920 in the Times to commemorate the death of Terence MacSwiney, the Lord Mayor of Cork and member of the *Dáil*, following a hunger strike, is a good example. The speaker suggests of MacSwiney that the “Promethean will,/ The Uncreated Light,/ the Everlasting Fire,/ Sustains itself against the torturer’s desire”(517)<sup>177</sup>.

If force of will dominates such activists they must be in need of a voice by which to speak their mind. This is Russell’s opportunity to exercise his prophetic voice once more. Russell ends The Inner and the Outer Ireland with the assumption to himself of the national character: “I am only trying to interpret the mood of my countrymen rather than to express my own feelings”(15). Russell is the conduit for the national will, the medium of a divine inspiration. His occult perception of Irish

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<sup>171</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> O’Malley, E. On Another Man’s Wound.



national motivation expresses itself in political prose but remains, for all that, arcane. Russell is an interpreter of Irish nationality and as such took the responsibility to speak to the wider world of his nation's cares. The Inner and the Outer Ireland was followed in September 1921 by appeal to a British audience with the publication of Ireland and the Empire at the Court of Conscience in the Manchester Guardian<sup>178</sup>. In this publication, Russell's occult sense of Irish nationalism did not confuse his political instinct. Ireland and the Empire was issued in the middle of the Treaty negotiations between Collins and Lloyd George; the pamphlet was Russell's stake in the creation of a new post-Treaty Irish identity<sup>179</sup>.

After a brief introductory passage, the text consists of a dialogue between two opposing voices in the 'House of Reason'. Each voice is meant to represent a different element of Irish nationalist opinion, the second being more extreme than the first. Russell described his text as an attempt to explain to the British people why there was such uncertainty in Ireland over how to respond to the government's offer; he felt compelled to "break silence on behalf of these millions"(2)<sup>180</sup> who faced "an agony of conscience"(2)<sup>181</sup>. Once again Russell elects himself to the position of national spokesperson, except that on this occasion he comes to imagine himself almost as the embodiment of the nation itself. He takes his "own doubts, hesitations, and ponderings as typical of the mood of the majority of my countrymen"(3)<sup>182</sup>.

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<sup>177</sup> Russell, G. W. "Brixton Prison: August 31, 1920", Studies, Dec. 1920.

<sup>178</sup> Interestingly, the Manchester Guardian and the Times were papers praised by O'Malley in On Another Man's Wound for making "discord in the general chorus of newspapers which made the most of gunmen shooting troops in the back"(270). Russell's poem for MacSwiney, "Brixton Prison", was first published in the Times.

<sup>179</sup> For details of this period see Curran, J. M. The Birth of the Irish Free State: 1921-1923.

<sup>180</sup> Russell, G. W. Ireland and the Empire.

<sup>181</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> *ibid.*

Russell presents these feelings to a British audience so that “what underlies acceptance or rejection may be known to others as it is to ourselves”(3)<sup>183</sup>.

The division between the two voices in the text is at first easy to sustain. The first voice represents *Sinn Féin* before 1917<sup>184</sup>. The voice associates itself with non-violence and is generally reconciled to an agreement with the government. It argues that the offer from Lloyd George will allow future generations of Irish people to be grafted on to the “Gaelic root”(4)<sup>185</sup> in a way in which the present generation could not be, “perverted as it was in youth by concepts alien to the Irish nature”(4)<sup>186</sup>. This argument foreshadows Arthur Griffith’s actual comment in the *Dáil* debate over the Treaty at the start of 1922. In defence of the agreement that the Irish delegates had signed, Griffith stated simply that its terms were no more final than his was the last generation of Irishmen. Both the first voice and Griffith share a gradualist approach to the redefinition of Irish identity.

The second voice in the text is more impatient. It argues that “The national genius cannot inspire if we first give allegiance to the spirit of empire”(5)<sup>187</sup>, anticipating De Valera’s refusal to take the oath of allegiance to the British crown which was included as a clause in the eventual Treaty. This second voice stresses a point that Russell himself had earlier made in The Inner and the Outer Ireland, that the Irish were compelled to rebel against British rule by “biological and spiritual

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<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> I base this assumption on Fitzpatrick’s direction that *Sinn Féin* did not become the organisation of local political clubs, distinct from the *Dáil*, for which it was known in the Revolutionary period until the summer of 1917. Before this *Sinn Féin* consisted first of the followers of Griffith and second of a disorganised opposition to the Parliamentary party. See Politics and Irish Life, 319.

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> Russell, G. W. Ireland and the Empire.



necessity”(5)<sup>188</sup>. The first voice criticises the second for its dogmatism; “You speak... like those impossible people who will have all or nothing”(7)<sup>189</sup>. It mocks the hopes of the second voice which it claims expects “Great Britain to allow complete independence because of a revulsion of feeling which has taken place suddenly within four or five years”(8)<sup>190</sup>. It rationally asserts the depth of “cultural and economic ties”(8)<sup>191</sup> which bind a majority of the population in North East Ireland to Britain.

It is at this point, where the first voice is at its most logical, that Russell’s affiliation with the second voice becomes apparent. It replies to the first by arguing that the “insurrection of Easter Week was based on human intuition and not human reason”(8)<sup>192</sup>. It was, in empirical terms, an irrational act. In Theosophy this is exactly how the divine will works through humankind<sup>193</sup>. The rebellion itself was sanctified by “Pearse and his companions”(9)<sup>194</sup> who “sounded the last trumpet of the Gael”(9)<sup>195</sup>. Pearse is transformed into a Christ-like figure, raising the “dead... from the graves of fear, unbelief or despair, and out of a deep sense of identity... they reeled after the shepherds who called”(9)<sup>196</sup>. Russell had already described in The Inner and the Outer Ireland how Pearse was of the same Gaelic race as O’Grady. Both Pearse and O’Grady are to be understood as scions of the same cause; Pearse’s actions are a physical extension of O’Grady’s literary works. It is no coincidence that the second voice is the first to mention Pearse in the text. It is also privileged to recite almost *verbatim* one of Russell’s central defences of the legitimacy of the co-operative

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<sup>188</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> Blavatsky, H. P. The Secret Doctrine. xxxvi.

<sup>194</sup> Russell, G. W. Ireland and the Empire.

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.*

movement, that it was an organisation ideally suited to the Irish way of life. The second voice argues that “The evolution of a more democratic and humane social order in Ireland would be hampered unless we were free to adopt any trade policy and industrial system to which our interests and our natural humanity may dispose us”(10-11)<sup>197</sup>.

The first voice replies pointedly that to adopt a “national theory of economics”(11)<sup>198</sup> would be to increase the risk of partition, as Northern industrialists feared a potential bias towards the agricultural South in an Irish assembly. The second voice has no adequate reply to this charge and can only suggest that “at some crisis”(13)<sup>199</sup> in the future the inhabitants of Ulster will find “unsuspected depths in their being”(13)<sup>200</sup>. The first voice dismisses this as mere “intuition or surmise”(15)<sup>201</sup>. It asks whether or not the second voice is prepared to risk the partition of Ireland in pursuit of its “whole demand”(15)<sup>202</sup> for complete independence. The second voice resorts to a racial argument; it cannot imagine that the “conscience of the world will permit the extermination of a white race because it refuses to acknowledge the sovereignty of another people”(15)<sup>203</sup>. The implication is that the world would be quite happy if this were to happen to a non-‘white’ race. Such an argument is both extreme and irrational but it illustrates, in a vulgar manner, what Russell stressed as the importance to Ireland of what he called “world circumstance”(15)<sup>204</sup> at the end of The Inner and the Outer Ireland.

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<sup>197</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> Russell, G. W. The Inner and the Outer Ireland.



Both texts suggest the possibility of outside intervention in the Anglo-Irish conflict. Such intervention did not need to be military. It rather related to a change in world economic circumstances whereby England would be unable to hold Ireland. Thus at the end of The Inner and the Outer Ireland Russell imagines an Ireland freed by the “mills of God”(15)<sup>205</sup> which “come at last in their grinding to the British Empire as they came to the Roman Empire... and other empires whose sins and magnificence have sunk far behind time”(15)<sup>206</sup>. Russell’s language is increasingly apocalyptic as the second voice is given the final say in the text. It suggests that “It might be better for us to face one final ordeal and have the terror over than leave such an agony for our children”(16)<sup>207</sup>. It desires the sacrificial release that “Brixton Prison”, the poem which Russell wrote about Terence MacSwiney, also called for; the speaker celebrated MacSwiney’s achievement in letting the Irish

know  
 There is that within us can triumph over pain,  
 And go to death, alone, slowly and unafraid.  
 The candles of God are already burning row on row -  
 Farewell, Lightbringer, fly to thy heaven again (517)<sup>208</sup>.

The pretence that the second voice is separate from that represented as Russell’s own in the introductory section of Ireland and the Empire at the Court of Conscience collapses in the final lines of the text. But in its conclusion the second voice does not merely summarise the previous arguments with which it has been engaged. It rather introduces a new element into the text. The second voice promises resolution of Ireland’s political problems by suggesting that a spiritual awakening will redeem the country. It argues that “the deciding factor”(16)<sup>209</sup> as to whether the

<sup>205</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> Russell, G. W. Ireland and the Empire.

<sup>208</sup> Russell, G. W. “Brixton Prison: August 31, 1920”, Studies, Dec. 1920.

<sup>209</sup> Russell, G. W. Ireland and the Empire.

government's offer will be accepted or not will be decided by a measurement in the "scales"(16)<sup>210</sup> of justice in a "transcendent sphere"(16)<sup>211</sup>. The second voice sanctifies what will be a political judgement by suggesting that "The will of Heaven will be in our resolve"(16)<sup>212</sup>.

Russell's belief in the divine sanction of the Irish nation was soon tested. The Anglo-Irish Treaty passed the *Dáil* by a narrow majority on 7 January 1922. After the Provisional Government of the Irish Free State took office Russell was, for the first time in his life, confronted with the reality of an Irish state. His theory of nationality developed over the previous thirty years had to adapt to the new dispensation. To complicate matters further, Civil War broke out in 1922 after a section of *Sinn Féin* refused to accept the Treaty. Russell was immediately confronted with the possible failure in its first year of the state whose arrival he had long awaited. For a man who saw independence as the opportunity to release a wave of "pent-up intellect and idealism in Ireland"(842)<sup>213</sup> this was a grievous prospect. To avoid it Russell redefined his sense of Irish nationalism. Russell, sympathetic to revolutionary nationalism pre-independence, was a writer of very different sensibilities post-1922.

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<sup>210</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> Russell, G. W. "The New Era", *IH*, 17 Dec. 1921. 841-844.



### The Interpreters: 1922

George Russell's The Interpreters was published in November 1922, just one month before the first ever sitting in December of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State. Ten months only had passed since the *Dáil* voted to accept the Anglo-Irish Treaty on 7 January 1922, but much had changed. Eamon De Valera had resigned as *Dáil* President, his successor Arthur Griffith was dead and a Civil War that lasted from June 1922 until April 1923 wracked the country. Fought between pro- and anti- Treaty factions, the Civil War was bitter and fractious<sup>1</sup>. Russell himself supported the Treaty side. Published at a critical time in the history of the Irish State, The Interpreters, Russell's major prose work of the nineteen twenties, is Russell's proposal for a new, politically decisive, relationship to be forged between the Free State and its intellectuals.

The Interpreters is a political fantasy in which six main characters, imprisoned in a cell, debate the fundamentals of their revolutionary doctrines. The text is set in a future century in which airships dominate the earth on behalf of a global imperial power. The Interpreters is similar in this respect to Standish O'Grady's pseudonymous novel of 1900, The Queen of the World. A weird imagination of life in the twenty-second century, O'Grady's novel is an adventure into a world empire of the future<sup>2</sup>. Imagining flight

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<sup>1</sup> The exact number of fatalities occasioned by the Civil War is uncertain, although the intimacy of its combatants meant that each death or injury had a significance that was to mark Irish life for the following decades. J. J. Lee reckons a "probably exaggerated estimate of 4000 casualties"(69). Cited from Ireland 1912-1985. The best single account of the Civil War is Hopkinson, M. Green against Green: The Irish Civil War.

<sup>2</sup> O'Grady published The Queen of the World under the pseudonym Luke Netterville. A fascinating book, O'Grady's text is supposed to be the account of the occult philosopher Gerald Pierce de Lacy's time travel to 2179 by the magic of a Bohemian mage. Once there, Lacy inspires the subjects of the Tyranny to

before the Wright brothers successfully attempted it in 1906, The Queen of the World is a prophetic novel of the type that H. G. Wells made popular at the end of the nineteenth century. The Queen of the World indeed recalls Wells' The Time Machine, first published in 1895, in its use of time travel to project its central character, a Gerald Pierce de Lacey, into the future.

It was in fact to Wells that Russell first suggested the idea of The Interpreters. Writing to the English author in 1909 in advance of a trip by Wells to Ireland to meet Horace Plunkett and Lord Dunsany, Russell wondered if his correspondent had ever thought "of writing a symposium upon science like the *Banquet of Plato*"(68)<sup>3</sup>. This symposium would consist of a debate between a group of characters "imprisoned in a revolution"(68)<sup>4</sup> who are "to be executed the next day "(68)<sup>5</sup> and "spend the night in hope and prophecy"(68)<sup>6</sup>. Wells' reply has not survived but his novel of 1914, The World Set Free, is the closest of his contemporary works to Russell's suggestion<sup>7</sup>. The novel predicts the destruction of traditional society by atomic bombs, a cataclysm that inspires a French ambassador to gather like-minded individuals to resolve the conflict by the formation of a world government<sup>8</sup>. Wells' novel was reissued in 1921, the year before The Interpreters was published. Wells noted in its Preface that "The dream of The World

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rebellion. Exotic in detail and bizarre in conception, The Queen of the World reveres the heroism of noble character that mark as individual O'Grady's inspirational two volume History of Ireland.

<sup>3</sup> Letters from AE. 68.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> It is possible that The Interpreters' title was suggested to Russell by the character of Lieutenant Kurt in The War in the Air. Kurt, half German and half English, interprets the events of the novel to Bert Smallways, the Cockney everyman of the text. Russell wrote an appreciation of Wells in the Irish Homestead in 1910, "The Dialogue of Mr. Wells", IH, 28 May 1910. 442.

<sup>8</sup> Wells specifically mentions a "big atomic bomb"(70) in The World Set Free. His prediction of the destructive power of such a weapon is unnerving when one considers that the discovery of nuclear fission was not announced to the public until 1939. The Manhattan Project followed with the outbreak of the



Set Free, a dream of highly educated and highly favoured leading and ruling men, voluntarily setting themselves to the task of reshaping the world, has thus far remained a dream”(6).

The Interpreters develops Wells’ vision of enlightened leadership at a critical point in Irish history. For just as the Free State is formed, Russell publishes a text that describes how six revolutionary characters act as the catalyst to a new Irish political and cultural dispensation. An echo of Russell’s earlier admonition to Wells in 1909 to write a Platonic ‘Banquet’ can be detected in The Interpreters’ own Preface. In it Russell describes his own text as a symposium, a debate over a general principle by a group of characters, such as might be found in Russell’s formal model, Plato’s Symposium. A further classical allusion can be read in the dedication of The Interpreters to Stephen MacKenna, the translator of Plotinus and good friend of Russell’s early discovery James Stephens<sup>9</sup>. MacKenna was a Republican antipathetic to the use of violence by the anti-Treaty side in the Civil War. MacKenna and Russell were well known to each other and both men remained friends despite their political differences, a not inconsiderable achievement during this acrimonious period<sup>10</sup>. Russell’s dedication is an early signal of The Interpreters’ political dimension. For, notwithstanding the text’s philosophical

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Second World War and the first self-sustaining nuclear reaction achieved in 1942. Nagasaki and Hiroshima were the first victims of the new weaponry in 1945.

<sup>9</sup> E. R. Dodds compiled a memoir, complete with letters and journal extracts, of MacKenna after his death in 1934. MacKenna led a various life, as a journalist in Russia who reported on the insurrection on the Potemkin in Odessa in 1905 and as a volunteer on the Greek side in their war against the Turks. The man that emerges from this account is melancholic, his moods tempered by great gifts of speech and compassion. Russell attended MacKenna’s evenings with, among others, James Stephens and Padraic Colum. See Dodds, E. R., ed. Journal and Letters of Stephen MacKenna.

<sup>10</sup> Dodds notes that “To the surprise of many of his friends, MacKenna declared himself unhesitatingly for repudiation of the Treaty”(60-61). Dodds further remembers that MacKenna’s “friendship with men like Curtis and myself continued unbroken, and ‘A. E.’ remained for him ‘a noble gentleman despite his utter inability to see our republican point of view”(62). Edmund Curtis was to become Professor of History at TCD. He later reviewed historical books for the Irish Statesman. Cited from the Journal and Letters of Stephen MacKenna.

pretensions, The Interpreters is primarily a symposium on Ireland's post-revolutionary status.

Not that The Interpreters' first readers detected any such clear intention on its author's behalf. Reviewers especially were confused, unsure of whether to read The Interpreters as a contemporary political allegory, as a statement of Russell's own spiritual beliefs or as an uneasy mixture of the two<sup>11</sup>. Puzzlement on behalf of its readers was similar to the bewilderment that Yeats imagined might accompany the first publication of A Vision in 1925<sup>12</sup>. Unlike Yeats, who published A Vision in a strictly limited number of copies, Russell risked his work on the general public, a gamble that resulted in the most disappointing sales of his mature career. The Interpreters is a symposium but, in context of Russell's political and literary work in the nineteen twenties, it is also a manifesto. The Interpreters, despite its narrative fictions of spiritual discovery and political revolution, is a proposal for Irish cultural nationalism to evolve in response to the advent of Irish statehood in 1922.

The Interpreters appeared just two months before the first publication of Yeats's "Meditations in Time of Civil War" in the Dial<sup>13</sup>. Both pieces are closely informed by their immediate context, the Irish Civil War, a conflict precipitated by the June 1922 Free

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<sup>11</sup> The Irish Times felt that Russell's "theorisings follow so hard on the heels of fact that the most philosophically minded reader will be unable to keep the two divorced"(2). "Books of the Week", Irish Times, 29 Dec. 1922. 2. John Eglinton expressed his dissatisfaction with The Interpreters in a damning review in his "Dublin Letter: January 1923", The Dial, 74: 2, Feb. 1923. 188-192. For further details of Eglinton's opinion of The Interpreters see Footnote 16.

<sup>12</sup> In his "Dedication" to the 1925 edition of A Vision, Yeats wrote that "I have moments of exaltation like that in which I wrote 'All Souls' Night', but I have other moments when remembering my ignorance of philosophy I doubt if I can make another share my excitement... I most fear to disappoint those who come to this book through some interest in my poetry and in that alone"(xii).

<sup>13</sup> "Meditations in Time of Civil War" was published as seven individual poems, rather than as one poem in seven sections as in The Tower in 1928, in The Dial, 74: 1, Jan. 1923. 50-56. Also in the London Mercury, 8:39, Jan. 1923. 232-238. For ease of reference, page numbers given here refer to the version published in Yeats's Poems.



State attack on the Republican garrison in occupation of the Four Courts since April<sup>14</sup>. Yeats's poetry comes to a very different conclusion from The Interpreters however, his speaker meditating on the death of civilisation, with the Irish Civil War symbolic of a wider collapse. The retreat Yeats's speaker offers as an alternative to violence is claustrophobic, the refrain of the poem's sixth section to "Come build in the empty house of the stare"(312) an invocation to nature for the reconstruction of a disturbed order:

We are closed in, and the key is turned  
On our uncertainty; somewhere  
A man is killed, or a house burned,  
Yet no clear fact to be discerned:  
Come build in the empty house of the stare (312).

There is little such explicit suggestion of uncertainty in The Interpreters. The post-revolutionary period is as much a motivating factor for Russell's text as it is here for Yeats but the two writers emerge with radically different responses to it in their work. If one did not know the context of The Interpreters' publication one might not even realise that a Civil War was in process at all, a fact inescapable from the simple fact of Yeats's title. But whereas Yeats takes the aftermath of revolution as his subject, with the "dead young soldier in his blood"(312), The Interpreters addresses the problems of the period before revolution. It is set on the very cusp of rebellion as the text opens with one of its six main characters, the poet Lavelle, crossing an unnamed city to witness the outbreak of an uprising. The poet was "but dimly aware of his fellow citizens"(1) and felt "raised above himself by the adventure on which he was bent"(1). This opening passage sets the tone for much of the following text. Unlike the squalor through which the protagonist moves in the opening passage of Liam O'Flaherty's 1925 novel of the Civil War, The

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<sup>14</sup> For an account of this see Hopkinson, M., Green Against Green. 115-122.

Informer<sup>15</sup>, Russell's character is 'bent' on 'adventure'. The romantic appeal of these words suggests that the examination of the grisly mechanics of revolution is not The Interpreters' concern. Such avoidance of practical reality further explains Russell's choice of a symposium as the medium for his narrative. Masquerading as a philosophic discourse, The Interpreters debates the fundamentals of political revolution without ever having to sully itself with violence.

The Interpreters is set in a prison cell, an environment with deliberate echoes of the aftermath of the 1916 Easter Rising, with the general population unaware of the significance of the rebels' initial assembly and an uprising fought against superior military organisation. The generally peaceful demeanour of the characters in the night before their death has something of the resigned quality of Pearse's last poem, "The Wayfarer", written just before his execution<sup>16</sup>. But each moment the prisoners wait, like the condemned Volunteers of 1916, for their death the next morning is signal of the text's attempt to rewrite the scene of Irish revolutionary nationalism's most revered moment. By 1922, Irish nationalism traced the stations of Pearse's life from his Proclamation of the Republic to his execution at Kilmainham. The reality of Pearse's sacrifice was one of the unchallenged tenets of Irish nationalism, even during the Civil War. In effect, The Interpreters creates a new myth of origin for post-revolutionary Ireland from a tradition of martyrdom that was crowned by the sacrifice of Pearse and company in 1916.

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<sup>15</sup> The Informer's main character, Francis Joseph McPhillip, is on the run after committing an assassination. He enters a Dublin hostelry at the start of the text to see "Men sat at all the tables. Some read. Others played games. The majority, however, sat in silence, their eyes staring vacantly in front of them, contemplating the horror of their lives"(11).

<sup>16</sup> "The Wayfarer" regrets that "The beauty of this world hath made me sad,/ This beauty that will pass"(341). After a vision of pastoral tranquillity, the speaker's "heart hath told me:/ These will pass,/ Will pass and change, will die and be no/ more,/ Things bright and green, things young and/ happy;/ And I have gone upon my way/ Sorrowful"(341). Cited from Pearse, P. H. Poems.



Tellingly however, Russell replaces the sixteen dead of the Easter Rising with six main characters of his own, each of whom has a chapter of The Interpreters devoted to an exposition of his individual ideal. Lavelle, the first character to whom the reader is introduced, is a poet. Leroy, Lavelle's first companion in the cell, is an anarchist, accompanied by Culain, the labour leader, Brehon, the historian, Rian, the architect and Heyt, an imperial businessman wrongly arrested by state security. Each character has a limited individuality in that each speaks in a voice often indistinguishable from that of the narrator. The Preface directs that "*The Interpreters* may be taken as a symposium between scattered portions of one nature dramatically sundered as the soul is in dream"(viii), an assertion that delimits potential difference between individual speakers. The resulting similarity of each character's voice is a problem for the reader. It minimises debate between rival ideas and makes long passages of dialogue difficult to follow as the reader soon forgets which character is actually speaking. This contributes to the feeling of pointlessness that Eglinton noted in his reading of The Interpreters<sup>17</sup>.

To perceive The Interpreters as apolitical myth consciously created helps the reader negotiate Eglinton's dismissal of the text: the foundation of Russell's post-Treaty doctrine inevitably involved a repetition of much of what the writer had considered in the previous decade. Myths are motivated by heroic action. Accordingly each character in The Interpreters exhibits some heroic aptitude. Culain's name is an obvious derivative of the Irish legendary hero Cuchulain and the historian Brehon is reminiscent of Standish O'Grady. Russell referred to O'Grady as the inspiration for the Irish literary revival with

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<sup>17</sup> Eglinton wrote that "True seriousness, above all in philosophical dialogue, should be debonair, sympathetic, ironic, and so more convincing than when it is declamatory and hierophantic; and in reading A.E., one has the feeling - for want, no doubt, of some preliminary and shining Socratic examination of the

his publication of History of Ireland, an imaginative account of the heroic legend of the Red Branch<sup>18</sup>. Neither are the main characters the only focus of Russell's epic attention. With Lavelle's arrest the reader is briefly made aware of the prison's other inhabitants. These rebels acquire heroism as they approach death, just as Russell celebrated the Republican Terence MacSwiney's hunger strike in Brixton Prison during the Anglo-Irish War<sup>19</sup>. One prisoner shouts "All here for Valhalla!"(10) as Lavelle enters the cell, to which the poet replies "I also am a traveller"(10). The reference to Norse epic is odd but the necessity for heroic action to be universal may be because the narrator can make no direct reference to Ireland, wracked in schism by 1922.

In similarly epic terms, each character presents himself to his audience in the cell with an account of his lineage, a feature common to heroic literature. The architect Rian asserts that "We artists built first for the gods and we did our best work for them"(38). After years of service to individuals the architect promises art to the multitude since "To work for the world will be like working for the gods again"(38). The narrator provides a lineage for Brehon and Lavelle by suggesting that "The historian had been followed by creative writers like Lavelle, in whom the submerged river of nationality again welled up shining and life-giving"(41). It is relevant to note Russell's use of water as a metaphor for rejuvenation in this phrase. Yeats uses the fountain as a symbol of life's abundance in his later poetry, an image of continual imaginative replenishment<sup>20</sup>.

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meaning of the terms employed - that it is an attempt to grapple with problems which do not exist"(189). "Dublin Letter: January, 1923", The Dial, 74: 2, Feb. 1923. 188-192.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter One. 12-13.

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter Three. 114.

<sup>20</sup> See for example the female figure who "can seem youth's very fountain,/ Being all brimmed with life"(338) in "The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid" and the first section of "Meditations in Time of Civil War" in which the "abounding glittering jet"(308) of "a fountain"(308) is in contrast to the "empty sea-shell flung/ Out of the obscure dark of the rich streams"(308). Cited from Yeats's Poems.



Russell replicates Yeats's interest in permanency in his creation of a heroic mode in The Interpreters. It is part of Russell's attempt to ensure the survival, in the Bakhtinian sense, of epic, or closed, time<sup>21</sup>. To allow the nation of his narrative to achieve statehood would be for Russell, as Lloyd argues, to allow the death of heroic time by the fulfilment of the nation's destiny<sup>22</sup>. To keep the nation forever without a state is to provide the writer with an environment in which a fiction of unity can be maintained. What the rebels are faced with in The Interpreters is the possibility of their nation achieving statehood. It is this possibility that haunts each character. Statehood is the text's pivotal concern. It marks the end of a heroic mode of national struggle and hails the start of new forms of state power consolidated in a state structure. This possibility emerges in the debate, for in The Interpreters each revolutionary character faces his own redundancy, a fact with which the logic of each individual's discourse must struggle. The fitness of an individual's commitment to survive the transition between nation and state is the determining criterion for success in the philosophical debates of The Interpreters.

Such a transition is charted in each of the six main individual's contributions to the text. Each character is introduced to us in sequence and their narrative order of appearance provides the reader with an initial key to understanding their final importance to Russell's text. There is a similarity between this schematic aspect of The Interpreters composition and the twenty-eight embodiments of A Vision, each being representative in Yeats's work of one stage of human development. Russell was listed in phase twenty-

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<sup>21</sup> In "Epic and Novel," Bakhtin argues that in the epic "the respected world of the heroes stands on an utterly different time-and-value plane, separated by epic distance. The space between them [*the singer and listener*] is filled with national tradition"(14). Cited from Dialogic Imagination. By use of such an epic context, Russell places his characters in a safe, because inaccessible, place.

<sup>22</sup> Lloyd writes that "The foundation of the state puts an end to the epic of its historical destiny in a performative act that abolishes history at the same time as it allows the epic to be fulfilled"(73). Cited from Anomalous States.

six, alongside Calvin, Luther, Cardinal Newman and George Herbert. Despite Russell's puzzlement at A Vision, Yeats's placement of intellectual and psychic development within a schema designed to relate human endeavour to esoteric influence is not far in inspiration from Russell's creation in The Interpreters. For each character's speech in Russell's 1922 text is presented to the reader in an order as rigorous as that preserved in A Vision. The substance of each writer's opinion on the relation of the eternal to the immediate differs greatly but their basic impulse is similar, to trace a spiritual history of human achievement. Russell's dedication to this task in The Interpreters symbolises his belief that, with the construction of a system that related vision to actuality, the future of Irish civilisation could be anticipated. In The Interpreters' immediate context this future charts the evolution of Irish cultural nationalism's accommodation with Irish statehood.

The primary political struggle in the text occurs between capitalism and what Russell describes as state socialism. Heyt, the autocratic industrialist, is a symbol of individual character grown dominant over weaker, less conscious individuals. Heyt's political attitudes exemplify Russell's later assertion in the Irish Homestead that "The old aristocratic idea has reincarnated as capitalism"(2)<sup>23</sup>. The labour leader Culain is in contrast a modern character, whose existence depends on industrial, rather than feudal, organisation. He represents a reaction against aristocracy and is the individual focus upon which "the workers of the nation had been brought to take part in the revolt"(34). Considering Russell's dialogue with radical labour elements in Irish nationalism in the period since 1913 it is no surprise to find that Culain can be identified with James Connolly, whose Irish Citizens' Army took a major part in the Easter Rising<sup>24</sup>. But this

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<sup>23</sup> Russell, G. W. "Shaping the Future", IH, 6 Jan. 1923. 1-4.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of Russell's relationship with Connolly see Chapter Two. *Passim*.



relation is purely symbolic as Culain says little that might be associated with Connolly's ideology. In the epic terms deployed by The Interpreters the connection between the names of Culain and Cuchulain is, as has already been suggested, more apposite. From his first description Culain is attributed with having the same concentration of energy about his character that caused Cuchulain to change form in the midst of battle<sup>25</sup>.

Cuchulain is the hero of O'Grady's History of Ireland and is the definite symbol, to Russell, of Irish identity. To associate Culain with Cuchulain is then to associate labour with nationalism. Culain is a composite of the revolutionary energy that redefined Ireland in the nine years from 1913 to 1922 and loses his individuality in the process. He is an archetype, the mould into which a future national consciousness can be poured. Accordingly, Culain's power over the working class derives from his being "an almost superhuman type of themselves, a clear utterer of what in them was inarticulate"(35). The labour leader is gifted with a powerful voice but is left in an imaginative limbo. He can speak on behalf of the working class but cannot speak with them. Accordingly, Culain describes his political inspiration in terms that defy rhetoric: "As between myself and Heaven it was the intuition of the unity of humanity which led me to become communist"(95). His ideological antecedents are religious rather than political and he relates his faith in humanity to "Christ"(95) and "Buddha"(95). The narrator finally undermines the labour leader's ideas as utopian and impractical; the first response by a prisoner to Culain's speech is "I do not understand"(99). Culain's vulnerability is apparent from this narrative intrusion and the description of him as 'almost superhuman',

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<sup>25</sup> When Cuchulain first met the Kings of Erin they "were astonished... for smooth and pleasant was his countenance, and his stature not great"(165). When he later duels with Ferdia at the ford, "straightaway there arose a spray and a mist from the trampling of the heroes, and through the mist their forms moved

his weakness deriving from his inability to traverse successfully the distance between individual and mass life.

John Eglinton was irritated by The Interpreters' presentation of political argument in such abstract fashion, feeling that the conduct of a debate between labour and capitalism was irrelevant to a state enduring Civil War. Eglinton's impatience is understandable as The Interpreters debates theory at a time when the new state was in danger of collapse, with the possibility of renewed British occupation in the event of Republican victory<sup>26</sup>. But what Eglinton misses in his reading of The Interpreters is the fact that in 1922, under cover of philosophical abstraction, Russell changes sides. Russell, once a confidant of James Connolly, had been faithfully sympathetic to Irish labour in the previous decade of his editorship of the Irish Homestead. Similarly, Russell's aversion to Irish capitalism is well registered in his polemic against William Martin Murphy during the 1913 Lock Out<sup>27</sup>. The Interpreters marks Russell's farewell to radical labour activism. Distrustful of the common mass of the revolutionary army whose fate its narrator determines, The Interpreters is deeply sceptical of what Russell, just six years before in The National Being, perceived to be a "general will"(107) that "always intends the good"(107). The fact that Culain's socialism fails Russell's test of political relevance to the new order is apparent from the narrator of The Interpreters' following observation:

A silence followed during which Rian watched that prisoner of puzzled countenance who could not understand Culain, and whose expression

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hugely, like two giants of the Fomoroh contending in a storm"(236). Cited from O'Grady, S. The History of Ireland.

<sup>26</sup> The British Government nearly attacked the Four Courts and put the Free State government under an enormous amount of pressure to act against Republican forces with the suggestion that it would enforce the Treaty in Ireland if its own native government could not. See Hopkinson, M., Green Against Green. 115-122.

<sup>27</sup> See Chapter Two. 40-42.



indicated that now less than ever could he relate the politics of time to the politics of eternity. The sullen eyes, knit brow, and impatient feet grinding on the floor, betrayed the anger of one at home in practical action who finds himself trapped in a web of incomprehensible abstractions (119).

The working class is relegated to inferior status by its inability to perceive a complex reality. The rebels in the cell, other than the six main characters, assume the status of the general population after a revolution - important as the basic fabric of society but with little actual power. Appropriately Culain's only vocal supporter in the cell is Rian, the architect, an artist whose skill depends on his ordering of raw material into a functional edifice. The reader is left with the impression that the working class will be simply the human material in the post-Interpreters state project.

In contrast, Heyt, Culain's antagonist, is representative of all that Russell was previously against. He is anti-democratic, capitalist and denies the importance of national identity. But Heyt is capable of engendering a sense of social cohesion that the revolutionary characters cannot. Heyt is in fact a representative of the deep aversion to popular democracy that Russell developed during the Civil War<sup>28</sup>. The capitalist is Russell's alternative to the anarchy he associated with popular activism, the pivotal figure around which Russell's post-revolutionary state can rearrange itself in an orderly, efficient corporation. Thus Heyt has the ability to converse with the poet and the other prisoners on their own terms and in their own language. The narrator reckons that:

Everyone in this age sought for the source and justification for their own activities in that divine element in which matter, energy, and consciousness when analysed disappeared. It was an era of arcane speculation, for science and philosophy had become esoteric after the

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<sup>28</sup> Russell's mistrust of democratic society's ability to legislate safely for itself was pronounced during this period. Russell had elsewhere argued that he would rather have "one autocrat with good intentions than several millions who don't know what is wise and what is foolish"(669). "NOTW", IH, 1 Oct. 1921. 668-670. This was not an isolated remark; "one can only pray that Heaven will send us a powerful autocrat with ability to govern and a real desire to lead and educate the people so that they will be able to govern themselves"(362). "Democracy on Trial", IH, 10 June 1922. 361-362.

visible universe had been ransacked and the secret of its being had eluded the thinkers (70).

This commentary provides the required element in the text by which capitalism, in the form of Heyt, can be made amenable to culture. It shows that Heyt's autocratic vision allows a response to artistic intervention. Such interaction depends on the acquisition of a spiritual dimension by capitalism. Heyt duly insists that he is not a materialist: "The power I spoke of does not lie in the generation of mechanical force but in the minds which organise control"(67). It could reasonably be argued that The Interpreters is in effect a primer for state sponsored action, with capitalism being trained by an unlikely new master, the intellectual.

The Interpreters' exhibits a similar obsession with order in its debate on cultural imperatives, conducted mainly by two characters, Lavelle and Brehon. The narrator describes Brehon as the inspiration of a cultural Revival identical to Ireland's in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Brehon, like Standish O'Grady in the Literary Revival, is accredited with bringing the nation "forth young and living from its grave"(41). The historian's achievements were "followed by creative writers like Lavelle, in whom the submerged river of nationality again welled up shining and life-giving"(41). This river was "bathed"(41) in by the "youth of the nation"(41) who, once cleansed, rebelled against the "empire, its mechanical ideals, and the characterless culture it imposed upon them"(41). This is an impressive, if thinly veiled, attempt to record a definitive impression of the history of Irish literature in English and its effects on Irish politics from 1870 until Independence. Russell uses his narrative voice to codify this interpretation of the past as the dominant context for the ensuing monologues, rather than have such a context established by dialogue between characters. The narrator's sense of



history is definitive as it sets the parameters by which the various characters can judge their own respective motives for becoming involved in rebellion. This idea makes the reader further aware of how deeply all the main speakers' ideas are connected to the narrative's foundational fictions. There is simply no room in The Interpreters for deviation from the history that it represents.

Appropriately, Brehon presents the relationship between himself and Lavelle, the historian and poet, as natural, combining as they do between them two of the main functions of the epic, the exercise of memory and its articulation in the imagination. Brehon does not need to rehearse the details of their relationship in a manner in which any reader of Russell's prose over the previous decade and more would be familiar. He does not reiterate the fact that Lavelle's cultural revival was inspired by Brehon's retrieval of the epic. Brehon rather details what he achieved after the publication of his history. Brehon became disenchanted with culture and turned his imagination to a discovery of "that vast life which is normally subconscious in us"(138). Brehon's interest in the subconscious parallels his growing belief in a universal organisation of human society as "the lure of national ideals began to be superseded by imaginations of a world state"(138). To Brehon, the expression of human consciousness and the organisation of human political association become one, as a definition of the subconscious will lead to a mechanism whereby human desire can be charted. The expression of Brehon's ideas is arcane but it contains a disturbing political subtext. The historian acted in concert with a number of other mystics and

the will of many in unison was powerful enough to transcend the bodily life so that in meditation together consciousness rose like a tower into heaven, and we were able to bring back some knowledge of the higher law (139).

Meditation results in the perception of a new order. As Brehon says elsewhere in The Interpreters, “The apprehension of law is but the growth in ourselves of a profounder self-consciousness”(131). Brehon’s idea of law binds together the concepts of self-regulation and self-perception in a potentially authoritarian manner. But his idea of order would remain secret without the creative power of Lavelle, the poet. The historian’s discussion with Lavelle is Brehon’s preparation of the artist for a commitment to a new Revival, this time based on science and international association rather than literature and nationalism. Lavelle questions Brehon’s intentions, aware that the historian’s ideas will result in the death of “our nation, its culture and ideals”(134) with its replacement by “an unresisted materialism”(134). But as the poet is convinced of the historian’s logic, The Interpreters resolves itself into a programme for a new Revival. All the pre-Revolutionary elements of Irish nationalism, political, cultural and literary, are refined down to the basics of Russell’s post-Civil War doctrine of intellectual and Free State authority.

This is the remarkable point of The Interpreters. The text, I would argue, marks Russell’s accommodation with forces deemed necessary to the survival of the new Irish State, with industry, share options and the attraction of foreign capital. This is a change of substantial cultural importance to post-Treaty Ireland as Russell jettisons his Revival rhetoric of national inclusion to create a critical vocabulary partisan in its vision of social order. The Civil War was the definite impetus to the reactionary nature of much of Russell’s political theory post 1922. But its lessons mapped a new territory for Russell in the final phase of his literary career, when his increasingly authoritarian cultural polemic



was expressed in support of European corporatism and a conservative, even reactionary, Irish polity.

The Interpreters would be dull if its two artists were engaged together in a struggle for supremacy over the capitalist Heyt. The text would be victim of a dialogue that poses the familiar opposites of the spiritual and material, the heroic and pragmatic, arguments regularly rehearsed since the start of the Irish Revival. Equally, Irish nationalism was, since 1916 at least, equally preoccupied with the possibility of noble sacrifice vanquishing superior force. Neither does it take much imagination to see how such a minority inspired argument might propel outnumbered Republican columns to fight against a better-equipped Free State army. The interesting point of The Interpreters is the change that occurs in the relationship between Lavelle and Brehon, a change of substantial cultural importance to post-Treaty Ireland. Russell establishes his terms carefully, stressing the relative inadequacy of his words to offer any suitable explanation as to the nature of either nationality or identity. For Brehon does not think that “words”(121) can “ever represent, to one who has no direct vision or intuition of his own, what the words signify”(121). Brehon suggests that he will be speaking to an audience already clairvoyantly aware of his ideas and indicates that actual words will only complicate matters further:

Speech is not like a mirror which reflects fully the form before it; but in speech things, which by their nature are innumerable and endless, are indicated by brief symbols. For speech to convey true meanings there must be clairaudence in the hearing (122).

What Brehon offers is a partial insight into the structural linguistics of a theorist like Saussure. But instead of suggesting that symbols (or signifiers) can only hold a contingent relationship to that which they represent (the signified), Brehon instead argues

that the true value of what he says exists at an intuitive level, beyond the sign<sup>29</sup>. Meaning and understanding already pre-exist within an adequately evolved individual's consciousness. Thus, Brehon can only speak to the converted, a fact that means that all those characters who listen and understand in The Interpreters are engaged in a privileged, even elite, discourse. Indeed as Brehon continues to speak, the full implications of this point become clear. The historian remarks that, of the four speeches that have preceded his, only three had their basis in spirituality. Rian asks if it is "Leroy's anarchic ideals that have no spiritual foundation?"(124). Brehon answers that this is so because anarchists will not "attain their full stature until they comprehend the spiritual foundations on which other political theories rest, and can build on them as do the devotees of beauty or love or power"(125).

This is fundamental to The Interpreters. Beauty, love and power are represented each in their turn by Lavelle, Culain and Heyt. They correspond in number to the three "fundamentals"(122) of the universe which Brehon has already described, "matter, energy and spirit"(122). Indeed, "We can surmise beyond these nothing except that transcendental state where all raised above themselves exist in the mystic unity we call Deity"(122-123). Since the ascension to Deity is only possible in death then what the reader is left with is an explication of a political rationale that relies for its success on the creation of three elements within it, beauty, love and power. The definitive factor in this equation is the belief put forward by Russell in The Interpreters that humanity is in the Iron Age, that part of the Theosophical time frame which signifies materialism and a supreme distance from the Deity. Since all the characters inhabit this Iron Age, the

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<sup>29</sup> For an essay that refers to the relationship held between signs and what they represent see Benveniste, E. "The Nature of the Linguistic Sign". Debating Texts: A Reader in Twentieth Century Literary Theory and



central most important figure must be Heyt, already himself a successful adherent to its laws. In this one sense the interpreters are the characters around Heyt, specifically Lavelle and Culain, as they pass on the knowledge of beauty and love to the agent of power who remains mute throughout the rest of the text. In this respect at least The Interpreters is highly deterministic, intent on the amelioration rather than the redefinition of the material conditions in which it imagines itself to exist.

As the conversation changes to a discussion of the morality of physical force, Brehon is further privileged by his interpretation of events for Heyt. The historian remarks of a state that if it is won by force then it must be sustained by force. This ensures that “there is no real freedom”(141). If on the other hand there is a “reliance on spiritual law”(141) then “we draw others naturally to seek for a like fullness of their own being”(141). This is similar to Culain’s earlier statement, which was undermined, that a spiritual change must occur before a material revolution can be successful. It becomes acceptable in Brehon’s formulation because it is framed against the perception of an external ‘spiritual’ concept that Culain did not share. Brehon redefines Culain’s ideals to introduce an element of control into them, an element that did not exist previously. Thus Brehon’s remark that ‘we draw others naturally to seek fullness of their own being’ operates on the level where ‘the others’ maintain their anonymous qualities and ‘we’ work as archetypes in whose image those following into consciousness later will be cast.

Between the discussion of culture and politics in The Interpreters by Culain, Heyt, Lavelle and Brehon, there are two characters deemed by the narrator to be outside the main current of debate. The first is Rian, the architect already dismissed by Brehon because of his sympathy with Culain, the labour leader relegated below Heyt. The

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Method. Ed. R. Rylance. Milton Keynes: OUP, 1987. 77-81.

second is Leroy, the anarchist. Brehon remarks of Leroy's anarchism that "It is heroic to defy the universe. I admire but I cannot follow"(115). Anarchy is never defined politically by Leroy in The Interpreters despite the fact that Russell was well read in the works of one of its major early theorists, Kropotkin, to whose work he referred in the Irish Homestead<sup>30</sup>. Leroy's dismissal is in fact evidence of Russell's subtle discrimination against the anti-Treaty side in the Civil War. Under direction of William Cosgrave, successor to Michael Collins as the chairman of the Free State Executive Council, Republican forces were designated as 'Irregulars' by the Irish press<sup>31</sup>. 'Irregulars' of course lack the order and authority of the state, a condition also shared by anarchists. The fact that Leroy has no place in the post-revolutionary terrain mapped out in The Interpreters is an early indication of the antagonism that Russell would express against Republicans in the Irish Statesman until the end of the decade<sup>32</sup>.

It is fitting that the main body of the symposium ends with a consideration of the qualities of the other prisoners in the cell. As Brehon finishes his speech, Leroy asks of the others "What do you think of all this?"(156). Notably, Rudd's answer is not recorded in direct speech but through the words of the narrator. This prisoner "broke out with

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<sup>30</sup> Kropotkin was the author of Fields, Factories and Workshops, first published in English in 1899, and Mutual Aid, first published in English in 1902. Kropotkin argued in Mutual Aid that the village community was "a union of common culture, for mutual support in all possible forms, for protection from violence, and a further development of knowledge, national bonds, and moral conceptions"(121). In the National Being, Russell suggests that "The word 'community' implies an association of people having common interests and common possessions, bound together by laws and regulations which exercise their common interests, and define the relation of the individual to the community"(34-35). An early reviewer of the National Being, 'J.K.', observed of the text that "one is reminded of some of the most gifted exponents of Socialism, and even more vividly of Kropotkin the eloquent prophet of Anarchism"(622-623). Studies, 5:4, 1916. Mutual Aid was in fact reissued in 1914, the same year in which Russell started to write the National Being.

<sup>31</sup> Hopkinson notes that "Cosgrave's Government put a heavy stress on authority – circulars to the Press ordered that the Government should be referred to as 'The National Government' and not 'The Provisional Government', and that the Republican opposition, of all shades, should be known as 'Irregulars'"(180). Cited from Green Against Green.

<sup>32</sup> See Chapter Five, 176-177, and Chapter Six, 210-213.



much profanity that he had never heard so much folly”(156). It is made plain to the reader that the psychological change for which Brehon had called for has not taken place as Rudd remains “baffled in his efforts to understand things remote from his mentality”(156). The prisoner continues his polemic on the previous discussion by arguing that “one world was enough for him; one small county all he could think about”(156). Rudd’s tirade ends with his retreat to a far corner of the room to be followed by Rian’s sympathy that his “emotions”(157) have overcome him.

This word is important because it relates Rudd’s character to that of the young men whom Russell thought kept the Civil War going in 1923 by joining political clubs and having “their emotions... whipped up like cream”(494)<sup>33</sup>. There is a constant tension in Russell’s journalism in the years immediately after 1921 between the appearance of a new generation used to violence because of the First World War and the generations that preceded it. This helps explain why so much of Russell’s writing in 1921 and 1922 stresses the important foundational work of movements or organisations that had been formed around the turn of the century. In a speech to the Sociological Society in London at the start of 1922 Russell was keen to point out the influence of the co-operative movement, the labour movement, *Sinn Féin* and the Literary Revival on his contemporary Ireland<sup>34</sup>. All of these were of course in place before 1914.

In The Interpreters it seems as if this new generation is to be summarily dismissed from history. Since Rian cannot think of Rudd as being “influenced by beauty or any of the other divinities”(157) he decides that this prisoner “belongs to your household,

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<sup>33</sup> Russell, G. W. “NOTW”, IH, 4 Aug. 1923. 490-494.

<sup>34</sup> Russell claimed that “These movements in their spiritual blending and interaction represent the stage of self-realisation the national Absolute has reached in Ireland to-day. If the leaders were dead the movements would continue”(9). Cited from Ireland, Past and Future.

Leroy”(157). Leroy replies “I accept him”(157). Ignoring for the moment the pretence that Leroy, or indeed any of the other main speakers in The Interpreters, is in a position to accept anyone into their ranks, it is important to realise the full political significance of this gesture. Leroy is an anarchist and government propaganda during the Civil War consistently referred to the anti-Treaty forces in similar terms. It is instructive in this case to read the press censorship guide issued by the pro-Treaty forces during 1922 to see just how political such labelling can be. The directive ordered for example that “The Army must always be referred to as the ‘Irish Army’, the ‘National Army’, ‘National Troops’, or simply ‘troops’”(2)<sup>35</sup>. On the other hand “The Irregulars must not be referred to as the ‘Executive Forces’, nor described as ‘forces’ or ‘troops.’ They are to be called ‘bands’, or ‘bodies’ of men”(2)<sup>36</sup>. The placing of the youth Rudd with the anarchist Leroy held a great deal of contemporary political significance, one which is partially obscured by the formal register of the text’s language, supposed as it is to represent a degree of objectivity.

Rian asks a prisoner called Brugha why he joined the imagined rebellion. The prisoner’s name is an obvious reference to Cathal Brugha, the anti-Treaty leader shot in O’Connell Street. Brugha answers Rian by saying “I heard rebellion talked since I was a child. It was so with my family for generations. They were in every insurrection. It was a tradition with us”(158). Research into the Treaty debates suggests the degree to which Brugha’s words are based on those of Austin Stack, the former associate of Michael Collins and anti-Treaty leader who was also killed in the Civil War. In the *Dáil* debate

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<sup>35</sup> The directive from which the preceding quotation is taken was published for propaganda use against the Pro-Treaty Government in the Republican War Bulletin, 1: 3, 12 August 1922. 2. The two quotations that I give are the first two points of twelve in the directive, apparently issued by the Publicity Department of the Pro-Treaty Army at the Beggars Bush Barracks.



over the Treaty at the end of 1921 Stack rose to speak in support of De Valera and proclaimed that:

this question of the oath has an extraordinary significance for me, for, so far as I can trace, no member of my family has ever taken an oath of allegiance to England's king... I was nurtured in the traditions of Fenianism (28)<sup>37</sup>.

The similarity between Stack's remarks in the *Dáil* and those of Brugha in The Interpreters is striking. Stack's reference to the oath, the symbolic central issue over which the two sides fought, adds another level of meaning to Brugha's remarks. It suggests that Russell is making an attempt to disable part of the foundations of the anti-Treaty cause in The Interpreters; thus Rian dismisses Brugha for "ancestor worship. I could not place you in any of our categories unless I knew the mood of the first ancestor. He may have been another Leroy"(158). At this point the symposium closes with the redundancy of Brugha and the ideology which he implicitly represents, sidelined even by Leroy, a character who is himself represented as being outside the mainstream of The Interpreters defining moments.

The end of the symposium is not however the end of The Interpreters as the text finishes with a poem, "Michael". This is significant as the debate of the previous pages is brought to closure poetically. Since the text as a whole is concerned with the possibility of artistic intervention in the post-revolutionary state, it is important to read "Michael" as Russell's concluding assertion of Irish literature's ability to speak for the new polity. This is a massive gesture and, ironically, to carry it through Russell relates his work to one of the canonical figures of English poetry. John Butler Yeats compared

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Official Report: Debate on the Treaty Between Great Britain and Ireland Signed in London on the 6<sup>th</sup> December, 1921. Session Dec. 1921- Jan. 1922. Dublin: Talbot, 1922.

the style of Russell's poem to Coleridge<sup>38</sup> but it is to Wordsworth, who published a poem called "Michael" in his Lyrical Ballads in 1800, that Russell looks.

Wordsworth's "Michael" is a pastoral poem that dramatises the decline of a traditional set of capital relations in rural England. Michael is a shepherd who works his hill farm in old age with help from his son Luke. Michael's happiness is disturbed by a financial crisis that forces Luke to leave Michael's smallholding. Corrupted by the "dissolute city"(466) in which he works, Luke eventually forsakes his father: "ignominy and shame/ Fell on him, so that he was driven at last/ To seek a hiding-place beyond the seas"(467). Michael dies and the farm is levelled after the subsequent death of his wife Isabel. Russell's "Michael" follows a similar trajectory. Michael is now the son of a fisherman on the west coast of Ireland but leaves his village for the city and becomes lost, like Wordsworth's Luke, in urban anonymity.

But the Michael of Russell's poem is, as we saw, the son, rather than the father of Wordsworth's poem. Relevant to this, the critic Richard Bourke has suggested that Wordsworth's poem represents the failure of a patrimonial line in face of political change<sup>39</sup>. If this is the case, Russell's recasting of "Michael" as a filial voyage of discovery, is an attempt, perhaps like The Interpreters itself, to create a new, living lineage between poetic inspiration of the past and present. The political contingencies of such an enterprise are contained in Russell's ability to redraft the context in which the later Michael rediscovers himself. Bourke also contends of Wordsworth's "Michael" that

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<sup>38</sup> In a letter to John Quinn, dated 19 January, 1920, the elder Yeats wrote that "There is not a word in the poem which is not common sense of the sort which Coleridge called the substance of poetry"(n.p.). Cited from the Denson Typescript. 354.

<sup>39</sup> Bourke suggests that "the unnerving aspects of subjectivity come to haunt the poet's agrarian scheme in *Michael*. Subjectivity, or consciousness, asserts itself in this poem as an unwelcome intruder. It appears with the apparently intolerable characteristics of foresight and anticipation. As we shall see, this intrusion



the poem represents Wordsworth's inability to resolve a late eighteenth century idea of individuality with its English political context<sup>40</sup>. The ideal of individuality Wordsworth proposes had no correlative social status in English society. A development of this problem is Russell's anxiety over the Free State's recognition of the artist as an effective political actor. Russell proposes to resolve this difficulty in his reversal in "Michael" of the dilemma faced by Wordsworth. Russell uses his symposium to articulate a vision of a society willing to accommodate an ideal of individual cultural activism before poetry, introduced at the end of the text, stakes its political claim.

In The Interpreters Russell's poem is recited by Lavelle, who claims to have a "dream about one who died in an old insurrection of our people hundreds of years ago"(159). "Michael" was previously printed privately for Russell in 1919 and was published both in the first, aborted, issue of the Irish Statesman in 1919 and in The Dial in 1920. "Michael" starts with a pastoral description, far removed from the urban cell that the characters inhabit for the duration of The Interpreters. The speaker describes a collection of "fisher folk"(161) who shelter from a storm "snug under thatch and sheltering wall"(161). Michael leaves this communal idyll for the city; Wordsworth's poem contains a similar departure scene before the son of the household, Luke, leaves for London.

Russell diverges from Wordsworth's poem when he describes a vision that comes to Michael, the strength of which lies in the quality of his character's intuition. Michael is drawn to "some deep being"(165) that is hidden to even the most sensitive reader: "Some

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discredits the integrity of the law of patrimonial succession upon which Wordsworth's ideal commonwealth is premised"(78-79). Cited from Romantic Discourse and Political Modernity.

<sup>40</sup> Bourke, again, finds that, in "Michael", "we come up against the central tension operating in Wordsworth's political speculations between action and thought, the *vita activa* and the *vita contempliva*,

mystery to the wise/ Is clouded o'er by Paradise"(165). Michael can never afterwards recall his vision with clarity because even as he tried to remember it his "Imagination still would fail"(165). He has been charged, like the other characters of The Interpreters, with a spiritual inspiration. Michael has met in this heavenly world a series of beings with "countenance divine"(165); in turn "lofty things to him were said/ As to one risen from the dead"(165). Russell's reference to resurrection is a gesture towards Pearse<sup>41</sup>, part of Russell's wider attempt in the poem to create a new poetic idiom not only from Wordsworth but also from revolutionary heroes like Pearse. Russell does this to wrest Pearse and his revolutionary ideals away from the generation which was immediately inspired by him and place the dead rebel, through the medium of "Michael", safely into the care of a poetic lineage. The sense of containment this implies is reflected in Michael's experience of the city, itself the symbolic antithesis of the pastoral in romantic poetry. Michael inhales

the city's dingy air,  
 By the black reek of chimneys smudged  
 O'er the dark warehouse where he drudged,  
 Where for dull life men pay in toll  
 Toil and the shining of the soul.  
 Within his attic he would fret  
 Like a wild creature in a net (166).

Michael is distanced from where he came as his memory of it fades. Like Luke in Wordsworth's "Michael", he is in danger of losing his cultural identity by being cut off from his roots. But where Luke was destroyed by the forces of materialism, Michael is saved from urban anonymity by a chance encounter with "one of that eager kind,/ The

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politics and philosophy: between, on the one hand, a political order and, on the other, a preoccupation with its normative basis; between the republic and an estimation of its legal foundation"(105). *ibid.*



army of the Gaelic mind”(168). It is ironic that Michael should come to the city to be made aware of his own folk traditions but his education symbolises a fusion between the ancient and modern, the rural and the urban that troubled Wordsworth’s “Michael”.

Russell immediately encounters a problem with his poetic synthesis. What Michael is exposed to with his new knowledge is a “story of the famous dead”(168). The pressure of a dominant tradition of Irish nationalist martyrology intrudes upon his new poetic freedom. Since The Interpreters was published at the end of 1922, one might reasonably expect that the list of such martyrs would include Connolly, MacDonagh or Pearse. Russell avoids their presence by casting back to the heroic tradition uncovered by O’Grady in the History of Ireland. His speaker looks to Cuchulain and “the wanderers who set sail/ And found a lordlier Innisfail”(168), a reference to O’Grady’s account of the Milesians’ arrival in pre-historic Ireland<sup>42</sup>. Russell further accommodates the Irish language with a reference to “the vagrant poets, those who gave their hearts to the Dark Rose”(168). The poem then exposes its concern over the influence history exerts on the present: “How may the past, if it be dead, its light upon the living shed?”(168). Russell answers that the past exists to be remade in a series of contemporary productions, to connect those who “wrought... the legend of the Gael”(169) with the “warriors of Eternal Mind,/ Still holding in a world gone blind”(168). Russell resolves his anxiety over the inability of culture to affect the new state by endowing the qualities of heroic characterisation described in “Michael” upon the artist. This is a novel development, as the epic represents the trials of the pen rather than those of its creation, the hero.

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<sup>41</sup> In Pearse’s poem “The Fool”, the speaker asserts his belief in the promise of an afterlife; “Lord, I have staked my soul, I have staked/ the lives of my kin/ On the truth of thy dreadful word... I speak to my people and say... Ye shall call for a miracle, taking Christ at/ his word”(336). Cited from Poems.

<sup>42</sup> O’Grady’s record of the Milesians can be found in his History of Ireland: The Heroic Period. 60-65.

“Michael” next moves forward three years in time to “the season of the risen Lord”(169), and once more the reader is reminded of Pearse in this image of resurrection. The speaker describes rebellion as the ascension of “the Lord in man”(169), freed from the “dark sepulchre of fear”(169). In language reminiscent of Russell’s earlier poem “Apocalyptic”, the fighters in “Michael” stand “wilful, laughing, undismayed,/ Though on a fragile barricade”(169)<sup>43</sup>. The Interpreters is here exposed in one of its subsidiary aims, to incorporate the heroic tradition of Irish revolutionary nationalism to Russell’s own programme of intellectual activism. The immediate effect of such accommodation also serves the need of The Interpreters’ myth to be universal as it occludes the reality of Civil War. This sense of distance is inferred in the lines describing Michael’s death; “he was far away.../ Afloat upon the heavenly seas”(170).

At this point the poem ends. Lavelle now claims that he has added a new gloss to “Michael” which comprises a further two stanzas. He has been moved to do so “by what was said in this room”(170) and leaves it to Rian to decide whether or not this new ending suggests any change in his ideals. This addition of the final two stanzas is a fiction of The Interpreters. Both are included in the 1919 text and neither contains any new material. Russell’s intention is to draw specific attention to these final lines’ ambiguity and to suggest that the nature of the change that has affected Lavelle. The poet is moved in these stanzas to question the impulse behind self-sacrifice as “We choose this cause or that, but still/ The Everlasting works its will”(171). The causes for which an individual will die are now various:

Some for a gentle dream will die:  
Some for an empire’s majesty:

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<sup>43</sup> In “Apocalyptic,” “only those can laugh who are/ The strong Initiates of Pain”(n. p.). The Gods of War, the collection from which this poem is taken, is discussed in Chapter Two. 54-57.



Some for a loftier mankind,  
Some to be free as cloud or wind (171).

In an earlier poem "To the Memory of Some I Knew" Russell tried to synthesise such various impulses into a unified national force<sup>44</sup>. Russell, as we saw, failed to do this in 1917, favouring Connolly over his other subjects. "Michael" contains a similar failure as it admits to the importance of state power to the redefined national project. From The Interpreters' earliest pages Lavelle, the poem's speaker, has been ambivalent about the creations of empire around him; he is described as a potential traitor because of his admiration for a fleet of airships outside the cell window<sup>45</sup>. The airships are perfect examples of the union between 'power' and 'beauty' that underpins Lavelle's attraction to imperial order and, by extension, to Heyt. Lavelle's aesthetic displaces his poem's nationalist sentiments to initiate a new politics ordered by occult divination. Lavelle suggests that Michael died for an abstract notion other

Than that grey island he had known.  
Yet on his dream of it was thrown  
Some light from that consuming power  
Which is the end of all desire.  
If men adore it as the power,  
Empires and cities, tower on tower,  
Are built in worship by the way,  
High Babylon or Nineveh.  
Seek it as love and there may be  
A Golden Age or Arcady.  
All shadows are they of one thing  
To which all life is journeying (172).

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<sup>44</sup> See Chapter Three. 81-85.

<sup>45</sup> On seeing the airships "One of the prisoners cursed bitterly. But with Lavelle, the poet in him made him for an instant almost traitor to the nation, stirred as he was by that vision of the culmination of human power soaring above the planet"(30). Interestingly the central character of H. G. Wells' The War in the Air, Bert Smallways, on board a German airship, wondered if "Indeed, wasn't he a sort of traitor? He wondered how the aerial fleet must look from down there. Tremendous, no doubt, and dwarfing all the buildings"(65).

As "Michael" ends, The Interpreters draws to a close. Only Heyt is freed. Leroy, "always generous"(179), points out his enemy's real identity to his captors. Thus the anarchist, whose politics remain profane because they do not base themselves in divinity, recognises his better in Heyt and motions him to leave. Lavelle too "would have intervened on behalf of the old historian"(179) Brehon but could not because his elder signalled that he would stay. This seems like a heroic gesture on behalf of Brehon but in a formal sense at least his escape would have been impossible, as it would have confused the significance of Heyt's exit. The interpreters have taught the capitalist the virtue of national culture. Trained to the occult control of the national will, Heyt is capable of re-ordering the entire world by his respect of its general principles, the particulars of which have been made clear to him in The Interpreters. Heyt is Russell's symbol of the world beyond the Irish nation as imagined in the Literary Revival, Heyt the scion of a world order of capitalist economics and imperial design. Heyt is in effect Russell's contract with the material world beyond the Free State, Russell's recognition that his idealism had to adapt to a reality more prosaic than that allowed in the early days of national evangelism.

The reader alone is privileged to witness the exit of the "Imperialist"(179) through the words of the narrator; Heyt had been "moved by what he had heard"(179) and was "understanding"(179) of the fact that "these men were different from all he had imagined of them"(179). All the arguments to which Heyt has been exposed act internally and thus require no articulation. Heyt "hesitated for a moment as if he would have said or urged something"(179) but instead "shook his head, as if he realised how impossible it now was to effect anything, and he left them without a word and went out to make the world in his



own image”(179-180). What we are left with is not a speech but with a depiction of an archetype against which the future of his world will be judged.

Russell’s belief in the need for Ireland to follow a dominant idea continued into 1923 with his writing in the Irish Homestead. His first editorial of the New Year was aptly titled “Shaping the Future” and in it Russell reiterates his belief in unity of Irish society: “Nothing great is possible when there is no dominant idea to uphold which men will work for with enthusiasm”(1)<sup>46</sup>. Russell continues in his editorial to rehearse the conflict between capitalism and socialism that takes up part of The Interpreters. He concludes that the only solution is find a middle way:

Half-way between these is the idea of the co-operative state which is an attempt to provide at once for freedom and solidarity and a greater variety and flexibility than seems possible under either of the other two conceptions of society (2)<sup>47</sup>.

Co-operation is put forward as the medium by which Irish society can reunite around a common ideal. But, as has been noted in the previous chapter, co-operation is a concept that Russell adapted to circumstance. In context of the Civil War and Russell’s publication of The Interpreters co-operation becomes a method of social control, a forum whereby individual grievances are resolved in the name of a higher collective ambition.

Confronted with radical change in Europe and struck by the need for the Free State government to survive the immediate post-Treaty period, the format of the Irish Homestead became increasingly redundant. The journal’s limited editorial space and almost complete absence of columns of political opinion meant that its use as a support to the state was limited. Like the characters of The Interpreters, the interests behind the Irish Homestead had to adapt to new conditions. In response, the journal’s founder,

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<sup>46</sup> “Shaping the Future”, IH, 30:1, 6 Jan. 1923. 1-4.

Horace Plunkett, revived the Irish Statesman, a journal that had first appeared under this title in June 1919 under the editorship of Warre B. Wells. Its purpose had been to support the Irish Dominion League, a movement founded by Plunkett and supportive of the “immediate establishment of self-government for Ireland within the Empire”(13)<sup>48</sup>. Despite poetry and prose contributions from Yeats, Shaw and, indeed, Russell, the journal failed for lack of financial support. The last issue of the first series appeared in June 1920<sup>49</sup>. By 1923, Plunkett’s hopes of dominion status for Ireland were impossible. The last issue of the first series of the journal did however contain the following proviso:

It is our hope... that when the coming Irish State enters upon its national and international career, a new series of THE IRISH STATESMAN will be forthcoming to fulfil its mission by offering the same counsel and advice in the building up of the new Ireland that it has submitted to those who are striving to lay its foundations. Should this hope come to fruition, those who may then say that we sowed better than we knew will have underrated our estimate of Ireland’s human and material resources (577)<sup>50</sup>.

Plunkett’s optimism was answered with his publication of the second, more successful, series of the Irish Statesman from September 1923. Plunkett originally intended to employ the essayist and journalist Robert Lynd, who published weekly essays in the New Statesman under the title ‘YY’, as its editor. When Lynd refused, Russell accepted the new post on condition that the Irish Homestead be incorporated into the new publication. Plunkett agreed. After much preparation the Irish Statesman was first published in September 1923. For the next seven years it was the premier journal of post-

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Plunkett, H. “The Irish Dominion League”, Irish Statesman (first series), 1:1, 28 June 1919. 13-14.

<sup>49</sup> Yeats contributed “A Prayer for my Daughter” to Irish Statesman (first series), 1:20, 8 Nov. 1919. 475. Shaw wrote regularly in the Irish Statesman and Russell published “Michael” in the Irish Statesman (first series), 1:26, 20 Dec. 1919. 622-624. It is interesting that Russell should choose to publish “Michael” at Christmas, just as he had submitted “The New Nation”, as discussed in Chapter Three, 78-81, to the Irish Times in December two years previously. The occult significance of the Nativity seems to have been relevant to his sense of the political efficacy of both texts.

<sup>50</sup> Plunkett, H. “Vale Atque Ave”, Irish Statesman (first series), 2:52, 19 June 1920. 577-578.



Treaty Ireland, the popular instrument of political and cultural authority that Russell aspired to in The Interpreters.

## The Irish Statesman: 1923-1924

The first issue of the second edition of the Irish Statesman was published on 15 September 1923. The last issue of the Irish Homestead had promised the previous week that its successor would be a “fresh enterprise in Irish journalism”(570)<sup>1</sup>. This was to prove true, in the sense that no other Irish journal of the period managed to combine political commentary and cultural analysis over such a sustained period of time as the Irish Statesman. Published once a week for seven years, the Irish Statesman was edited by Russell and his two assistants, James Good and Susan Mitchell, until her death in 1926. Each had between them a long publication record in journalism, literature and politics.

Mitchell had been assistant editor of the Irish Homestead for the previous two decades and was primarily responsible for the journal’s literary reviews<sup>2</sup>. Mitchell is perhaps most famous for her 1916 study of George Moore but her association with Russell began as early as 1904 with the publication of six of her poems in his New Songs collection. Good was primarily a journalist with an established international reputation<sup>3</sup> and was leader writer for the Freeman’s Journal and the Independent. Furthermore, his publication of two books on Unionism qualified him to help the Irish Statesman in its desire to treat “all living in Ireland, North or South, as one

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, G. W. “The End of an Old and the Start of a New Enterprise”, IH, 30:36, 8 Sept. 1923. 569-570.

<sup>2</sup> There is some debate as to the exact nature of Mitchell’s relationship with Russell. Hilary Pyle, in Red-Headed Rebel, her biography of Mitchell, maintains that there was no love affair between the two. Adrian Frazier’s life of George Moore suggests otherwise but admits a lack of evidence to prove the case conclusively. See Pyle, H. Red-Headed Rebel. 120-121. Also, Frazier, A. George Moore. 558. Certainly there was uncommon tenderness in Russell’s lament for Mitchell in the Irish Statesman after her death in March 1926. See “In Tirnanogue. *A Dream*”, Irish Statesman (Second series. Cited subsequently as IS), 6:9, 8 May 1926. 232.

<sup>3</sup> For example, H. W. Nevinson, war correspondent for the Manchester Guardian, recalled of the 1918 Conscription crisis that “I found all my conspicuous friends in Dublin united in opposition to the English Parliament’s decree- Mrs. Green, ‘A.E.’”(346) and “James Good, wisest of journalists”(346). Cited from Nevinson, H. W. Fire of Life.



people”(3)<sup>4</sup>. Good was also the Irish correspondent of the New Statesman and a main contributor to the Manchester Guardian's 1923 supplements on the Free State<sup>5</sup>. His publication in the Manchester Guardian is signal of his support for the Treaty as the supplement was prefaced by Cosgrave and contained articles by other leading members of the Government such as Kevin O'Higgins, Vice President and Minister for Home Affairs. Connections such as this were of value to the Irish Statesman, a journal that intended to provide the “best opportunity”(6)<sup>6</sup> for its readers to conduct “free and frank discussion of the political, social and economic problems now clamant for solution”(6)<sup>7</sup>.

Before the publication of the Irish Statesman, political or cultural publications in Ireland tended to be conservative in their design. Within the Free State newspapers generally conformed to the same format with headlines followed by pages of advertising, news articles and sport. A cursory glance at any 1923 issue of the Irish Times, the Irish Independent or the Freeman's Journal will bear this point out. Later literary magazines tended to be either short-lived (like To-morrow<sup>8</sup>) or lacking in political commentary (like the Dublin Magazine<sup>9</sup>). The Irish Statesman differed from its competitors by taking its model from outside the Free State. It looked to the English journal the New Statesman<sup>10</sup>, similar both in title and appearance. Visually both journals are almost identical, with the same type face making up an average of

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<sup>4</sup>Russell, G. W. “A Confession of Faith”, IS, 1:1, 15 Sept. 1923. 3-5.

<sup>5</sup> The Manchester Guardian published a three volume supplement on the Free State under the general title The Manchester Guardian Commercial European Reconstruction Series. Ireland. The publication dates for each were March 15 1923, 10 May 1923 and 26 July 1923. Good published in all three, on subjects as diverse as “Political Parties in the Free State” and “Modern Irish Art.”

<sup>6</sup> Plunkett, H. “The Revival of The Irish Statesman”, IS, 1:1, 15 Sept. 1923. 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> To-morrow was published for two issues in August and September, 1924. It was edited by Frances Stuart and Cecil Salkeld. Its brief life was due to the controversy it aroused over the publication of Lennox Robinson's short story, “The Madonna of Slieve Dun.”

<sup>9</sup> The Dublin Magazine was edited for nearly its entire 36 volumes by Seumas O'Sullivan. It was published from 1923 until 1958.

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed history of the New Statesman see Smith, A. The New Statesman.

four pages of editorial comment followed by columns of opinion, reviews and letters, all interspersed by advertising. Furthermore, the editorial commentary of the Irish Homestead had its name changed from “Notes of the Week” to “Notes and Comments” in the Irish Statesman, in a gesture to the New Statesman’s “Comments.” These weekly “Comments” themselves contained James Good’s reports on Ireland throughout the 1920’s. Neither did the New Statesman’s Irish connections end there. One of its longest serving columnists was Robert Lynd, a native of Belfast and a close friend of Good<sup>11</sup>. The largest individual investor in the New Statesman in 1913 was George Bernard Shaw<sup>12</sup>. Shaw published in the first issue of the Irish Statesman in 1923. He also provided, along with Horace Plunkett, the impetus to the first appearance of a journal under the title of Irish Statesman in 1919 under the editorship of Warre B. Wells. Understanding why Shaw and his associates were interested in the publication of independent (in the sense of non-party) journals in England in 1913 and in Ireland in 1919 is important to any reading of the Irish Statesman in 1923.

The New Statesman was founded in 1913 as Sidney and Beatrice Webb’s attempt to support and direct the Labour Party’s growth in Great Britain. The journal was to remain independent of and yet allied to Parliamentary Labour. The difficulty of maintaining such a policy became apparent in the 1920’s as the New Statesman drifted towards the Liberal Party even as Sidney Webb became in 1923 a front bench spokesman for the British Labour Party<sup>13</sup>. In 1923, the Irish Statesman similarly

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<sup>11</sup> Lynd published a weekly column in the New Statesman under the title ‘YY.’ He was also literary editor of the Daily News. Lynd was educated at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution with Good and remained in contact with him until his death. For a collection of his essays see Lynd, R. Galway of the Races: Selected Essays.

<sup>12</sup> ‘The Statesman Publishing Co. Ltd.’ was established in October 1912. The first issue appeared in 1913 under the editorship of Clifford Sharp with the poet J. C. Squire as literary editor. For details of Shaw’s involvement see Smith, A. The New Statesman. 40-42.

<sup>13</sup> Webb eventually sold his interest in the New Statesman and it merged with the Nation in 1931, its task to revive “democratic socialism in Britain”(245). Smith, A. The New Statesman.



declared itself to be “informative, independent”(6)<sup>14</sup> and “non-partisan”(6)<sup>15</sup> in its interest in Irish politics. It did at the same time support the Treaty, declaring the agreement to be, in the words of Horace Plunkett, “the best settlement obtainable in the conditions”(6)<sup>16</sup>. Such support inevitably sided the journal with *Cumann na nGaedheal* as the practice of politics in the Free State in 1923 still proceeded in nearly every instance from one’s support for or antagonism to the Treaty. That the Irish Statesman’s founder should state his journal’s support of the Treaty so readily is an early indication of the limits imposed on the journal’s independence. The Irish Statesman was never an official organ of *Cumann na nGaedheal* policy but its advocacy of strategies that sustained the Treaty sided the journal with the ruling party. The Irish Statesman was not intended to be “a party journal in any sense in which such a description could be fittingly applied”(5)<sup>17</sup> but the implicit suggestion remains that the term ‘party journal’ applies to some degree.

The Irish Statesman further had the luxury of financial support from wealthy investors. The journal’s initial outlay was provided by a group of “Americans of Irish blood”(6)<sup>18</sup> sympathetic to Horace Plunkett. Many of these men were members of the American political and legal elite<sup>19</sup>. Plunkett himself entertained two American Senators at his residence at Kilteragh in the summer of 1922 and persuaded one of them, a J. S. Cullinan, to contribute \$50, 000 to the Irish Statesman<sup>20</sup>. Cullinan then organised an American fundraising committee for the project chaired by a Judge

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<sup>14</sup> Plunkett, H. “The Revival of The Irish Statesman”, IS, 1:1, 15 Sept. 1923. 6-7.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Russell, G. W. “A Confession of Faith”, IS, 1:1, 15 Sept. 1923. 3-5.

<sup>18</sup> Plunkett, H. “The Revival of The Irish Statesman”, IS, 1:1, 15 Sept. 1923. 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> A full list of their names was not published in the Irish Statesman until 1930.

<sup>20</sup> Exact details of Cullinan’s association with the Irish Statesman are difficult to ascertain. What is certain is that Cullinan first met Plunkett in the United States in 1920. Cullinan was in turn a correspondent of Charles MacCarthy, an American political theorist who was also in touch with Plunkett. See Digby, M. Horace Plunkett. 261. Also, Carroll, F. M. American Opinion and the Irish Question 1910-23: A Study in Opinion and Policy. 23, 252.

Campbell<sup>21</sup>. The success of Plunkett's efforts can be read in the Freeman's Journal's review of the Irish Statesman's first issue. The paper noted that "The format and price are altogether attractive"(7)<sup>22</sup> and that the price of "3d weekly... seems but little short of philanthropy"(7)<sup>23</sup>. If true charity is given without thought, one is entitled to ask questions as to its real nature when money is directed towards the publication of a political review. This point was not lost upon the Republican journal Éire, a publication that appeared in January 1923 to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the foundation of the first *Dáil* in January 1919. Éire remained stubbornly opposed to the Free State until it ceased publication in October 1924. Its anonymous editor remarked caustically, and no doubt jealously, of the Irish Statesman in September 1923 that it had "been raised from the dead by the sort of miracle which British Imperialists can always work. It's done with money"(2)<sup>24</sup>.

The 'British Imperialist' to whom Éire refers is Horace Plunkett. The paper ignores, or is unaware of, the fact that American investors had bought an interest in the political life of the Free State, specifically with reference to the maintenance of the Treaty, this being one of the first issue's main declared aims. Russell demanded full editorial independence for the Irish Statesman<sup>25</sup> but there can be little doubt that he felt the weight of his donors' conservative tastes<sup>26</sup>. Furthermore, the journal was

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Campbell was born in Larne in 1872 and died in America in 1935. He served as a Judge in New York from 1908 to 1917 before practising privately in the city. Campbell met Plunkett and Russell as he administered American White Cross relief to Ireland in 1920 and 1921. He remained a friend to Russell and broadcast an American eulogy for him in 1935. Cullinan's stay with Plunkett is recorded in Digby, M. Horace Plunkett. 261.

<sup>22</sup> "The Irish Statesman", Freeman's Journal (cited subsequently as FJ), 15 Sept. 1923. 7.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> "The 'Irish Statesman'- The New Imperial Push- And Mr. Shaw!" Éire, 1:38, 6 Oct. 1923. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Plunkett promised that "the independence of the Irish management"(6) was "of the very essence of the scheme"(6). "The Revival of The Irish Statesman", IS, 1:1, 15 Sept. 1923. 6-7.

<sup>26</sup> In 1925 Russell wrote to Ernest Boyd in New York: "I thought of you long ago as an American correspondent. I had suggested it to Plunkett and between ourselves he was alarmed lest your radicalism might upset the Americans who contributed the funds to start the Irish Statesman and from



published with the specific intent of influencing and adjusting Free State government policy. The Irish Statesman's 'independence' was conditional upon the fact that its editor did not stray too far from the consensus opinion of the leaders to whom he appealed. It is in this respect relevant to note that the Irish Statesman's main controversy with *Cumann na nGaedheal* was over censorship at a time when, as Denis Gwynn suggests, "the main work of consolidating the new regime was done"(191)<sup>27</sup>.

Shaw had already put forward the idea in 1919 that if a political journal was to be a success, its editorial policy and political attitude must be consistent from the start<sup>28</sup>. Shaw was definite in his demands for the programme to which the first Irish Statesman should accede, arguing that with the advocacy of a federal solution for Ireland's independence the country would gain access to "a share in the higher statesmanship"(618)<sup>29</sup> that Shaw felt only Westminster could provide. Four years later an independent *Dáil* existed and circumstances had changed greatly. But there is no reason to assume that Shaw's belief in the necessity to affect policy at the highest level had also changed. Likewise Horace Plunkett was careful to make both himself and his ideas known to the most senior members of the Executive over the intervening period. He took "pains to interest Cosgrave, then President, and Kevin O'Higgins, the best mind in the Irish Cabinet, in his agricultural policy"(260)<sup>30</sup>. Plunkett "believed, as always, in educating, imperceptibly if possible, the governing mind"(260)<sup>31</sup>. As a

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whom he hopes to get more. You see they promised to pay in three yearly instalments quite a big sum and they are very touchy"(168). Cited from Denson, A., ed. Letters from AE.

<sup>27</sup> Gwynn, D. The Irish Free State.

<sup>28</sup> Shaw wrote to Horace Plunkett, c. 15 June 1919, that "the line to be taken by the paper in its first number will decide our fate: we cannot consider it too carefully"(618-619). Cited from Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Digby, M. Horace Plunkett.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

close reading of the first issues of the Irish Statesman will show, the exercise of such influence was exactly the point of the new journal's existence.

The first and most obvious point to note about the publication of the Irish Statesman is the date of its first issue. It appeared on 15 September, just three weeks after a Free State general election and four days before a new *Dáil* commenced sitting. The journal's appearance can be interpreted to be a kind of opening gambit. Russell pitched the Irish Statesman towards an educated readership that might in turn be able to act upon the new Deputies in the *Dáil*, fresh as the large majority of them were to the practice of elected representation. Russell's interest in these new members was predicated on the fact that he felt many of them to be dangerously inexperienced. He made great play of this problem in the final issues of the Irish Homestead, suggesting that many of the new representatives had no opinions on policy beyond that which referred directly to the Treaty<sup>32</sup>. James Good repeated Russell's misgivings in the New Statesman. Good quoted Russell to the effect that "we shall have a considerable body of deputies who will get into the Dail, and do their thinking afterwards. But how, if from long disuse, the mind will refuse to function?"(562)<sup>33</sup>.

The answer to Russell's question was provided in the pages of the Irish Statesman itself. It was to be the forum to provide both Deputies and the educated classes of Ireland and abroad with guidance on problems of politics and culture. This intention can be gauged from the powerful group that Russell assembled to write for

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<sup>32</sup> Russell recorded his impressions before the election after reading "a bundle of about twenty country papers which report at greater length than the daily papers the speeches made locally by candidates. We cannot say that we were greatly illuminated. In the majority of cases the great asset of the candidates, the main facts on which they relied, were the ill-deeds of their opponents"(521). "Mean Economics", IH, 30:33, 18 Aug. 1923. 521-522.

<sup>33</sup> Good, J. W. "The Free State Elections", NS, 21:541, 25 Aug. 1923. 561.



the journal, “the most famous living Irishmen and Irishwomen”(570)<sup>34</sup> whose number included Yeats, Stephens, Shaw, Gogarty and Lady Gregory. The relative strength of these institutional literary figures was bolstered by the fact that *Cumann na nGaedheal* did not fare particularly well at the August polls, taking only an extra five seats in a *Dáil* enlarged by 25 seats to 153<sup>35</sup>. Disquietingly for supporters of the Treaty, *Sinn Féin*, the Republican Party, took 44 seats when predicted to take only 30. With the pro-Treaty Labour Party taking 15 seats it was true that *Sinn Féin* could not disrupt the business of the *Dáil*, not least because its Deputies refused to take their seats. But the close result did mean that *Cumann na nGaedheal* needed all the support it could muster in order to give the impression of a nation united behind the Treaty.

At such a time the Irish Statesman promised to reach a crucial, educated audience in the Free State with a guaranteed circulation of 10, 000 copies for at least the first six issues<sup>36</sup>. The journal appealed to an “interested clientele, including the wealthiest and most influential Irish citizens- farmers, merchants, professional men, clergy, civil-servants- co-operative officials supplying farm and household requirements to over 150, 000 homesteads”(1)<sup>37</sup>. This last group is especially interesting as their mention illustrates how the management of the Irish Homestead was prepared to hand over its readership in the co-operative movement to a journal that actively supported the Treaty. The co-operative movement was itself avowedly non-political and had protested its innocence from intrigue throughout the previous

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<sup>34</sup> Russell, G. W. “The End of an Old and the Start of a New Enterprise”, IH, 30:36, 8 Sept. 1923. 569-570.

<sup>35</sup> All results recorded in Lee, J. J. Ireland.

<sup>36</sup> See advert placed in the Freeman's Journal on behalf of the Irish Statesman. FJ, 11 Sept. 1923. 1.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*.

five years of unrest<sup>38</sup>. That the Irish Statesman could now openly pledge its co-operative readers to the support of the Treaty illustrates the degree to which the journal's management shifted their independence towards *Cumann na nGaedheal*. This in turn promised a potentially huge inroad into the rural communities for the supporters of the Treaty, communities where Republican forces had often found support<sup>39</sup>. Again the Republican paper Éire reacted angrily to this development: it felt that the "members of the co-operative societies throughout Ireland have grave cause to quarrel with Plunkett House if it allows its purely non-political organ to be merged in a Free State Imperial propaganda weekly"(2)<sup>40</sup>. Éire's attempt to create dissent within the co-operative movement failed but its anonymous editor was right to point out the inconsistency of its independent position.

Russell's first editorial in the Irish Statesman was entitled "A Confession of Faith." Its three pages detail Russell's hopes for and demands of the Free State. His first main point is to reassert the value to his contemporary Ireland of the movements with which he was involved in the period before the First World War. In doing so, Russell sets the intellectual and geographical bounds of the Irish Statesman. For:

Up to 1914... In Europe and America a fresh interest had been quickened with regard to the country because of its literary movements, its poetry and drama, the renaissance of the Gaelic mind, the organisation of its agriculture and industry, and the increasing hope of a national government under which unhampered by any external power, these cultural and economic forces might have full play (3)<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> See Chapter Three. 104-106.

<sup>39</sup> Calton Youger quotes the opinion of General Michael Brennan that it is not "fully appreciated, even now, that outside Dublin 'the whole Civil War really turned on Limerick.' He puts it that 'the Shannon was the barricade and whoever held Limerick held the south and the west'... Liam Lynch believed that by isolating the South, where Republicans were already well entrenched, he could frustrate the setting up of the Free State"(370-371). Cited from Ireland's Civil War.

<sup>40</sup> Éire further re-christened Russell's journal the "Free Statesman"(2). In "The 'Irish Statesman'- The New Imperial Push- And Mr. Shaw!"(2). Éire, 1:38, 6 Oct. 1923. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Russell, G. W. "A Confession of Faith", IS, 1:1, 15 Sept. 1923. 3-5.



Russell repackages the sequence of Irish history to make his point. In the first place, 1914 and not 1916 is the crucial year in the foundation of the Irish state. Russell does this to avoid conflict over the true nature of the revolutionary tradition, a conflict still current in the Civil War with both pro and anti-Treaty forces claiming in their propaganda that each represented the genius of men like Pearse<sup>42</sup>. Russell also sublimates conflict over the nature of a distinctly Irish identity into broader questions of European association. The First World War was symbolic to Russell of a rupture in the growth of European thought. It was the impetus to a growth of what he described as militarism, a state of mind that prevailed not only in Ireland but also in Germany, Russia and Italy<sup>43</sup>. Russell's insistence on the value of the Literary Revival and the co-operative movement is rooted in his wish to stress their distance from such problems and highlight their potentially remedial significance for the Free State. At a time when the protocols of the new state were still to be codified, Russell wanted to make sure that his own interests were appreciated to the degree that they were ingrained in the state's apparatus. This is the crucial point to make about the first issue of the Irish Statesman. It is the platform from which Russell and his associates assert their claim to authority within the Free State. An analysis of the contributors to the first issues is the key by which to understand the type of influence sought by Russell and the nature of the political and cultural alliances he created to do this.

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<sup>42</sup> By 1923 Republican propaganda on 1916 was generally emotive: "The Stupid British. If the British Government had the sense to give Cosgrave and Mulcahy the job in 1916. What short work they would have made of Padraig Pearse and the other irregulars"(n.p.: n.d.). Free State propaganda took the form of rebuttal: "MEANS TO AN END! The Anti-Treatyites are fond of voting the dead who died for Ireland! And invariably they vote them against the Treaty! If Collins, Mulcahy, etc., had died they would be voted 'Anti' also!! Listen to Padraig Pearse himself... 'Home Rule to US would have been a means to an end.' ('The Spiritual Nation'- P. H. Pearse). VOTE FOR THE TREATY!"(n.p.: n.d.). Pamphlet no. 26, O'Brien Collection, NLI LOP117.

<sup>43</sup> To Russell "What took place here was an infection from the high fever in which Europe existed, that our militarism was as definitely of epidemic character as that black influenza which a couple of years before swept over the world"(454). "The Return to the Normal", IS, 1:15, 22 Dec. 1923. 453-454.

The cover of the first Irish Statesman advertised two articles other than the editor's "A Confession of Faith." These were George Bernard Shaw's "On Throwing Out Dirty Water" and James Douglas's letter entitled "The Executive Council and the Dail." Shaw's essay is a supplement to Russell's implicit criticism of the post 1916 revolutionary tradition of Irish nationalism in his editorial. Shaw believed that the war for independence had fostered:

a common opinion in Ireland that the Cabinet in London, untroubled by English problems, and indifferent to the adventures of M. Poincare, Signor Mussolini, and the fall of the mark, occupies itself solely with sending orders to President Cosgrave to arrest and torture that devoted local patriot, Padraig (ci devant Patrick) Soandso, of Ballysuchandsuch (8)<sup>44</sup>.

Shaw's satire is sharp. By reducing the heroes of Irish revolutionary nationalism to figures of stereotype he attempts to minimise their general importance to the practice of European politics as a whole. Yet Shaw's attack on Irish nationalism is not indiscriminate. President Cosgrave had arrived in Dublin from Switzerland only the day previous to this article's publication, to great applause from the Freeman's Journal. The paper noted that "Dublin witnessed one of the greatest demonstrations in its history in the reception given to President Cosgrave on his return to Ireland from Geneva, where he gained the Irish Free State entry into the League of Nations"(5)<sup>45</sup>. By its support of Cosgrave in a broadly European context, Shaw's polemic is guided at Republicans who criticised the validity of the Free State's entry to the League<sup>46</sup>. The Free State did not, in their view, have the independence of action necessary to make international alliance worthwhile. Shaw's argument therefore that "Nationalism

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<sup>44</sup> Shaw, G. B. "On Throwing Out Dirty Water", IS, 1:1, 15 Sept. 1923. 8-9.

<sup>45</sup> "Nation's Hearty Greeting", FJ, 15 Sept. 1923. 5.

<sup>46</sup> A Republican booklet of 1928 expresses the emotion behind this antagonism to international association: "In a moment of weakness, war-weary leaders yielded to the enemy. The nation for whose honour men had given their blood and gladly died... was again betrayed to her despoiler... The dishonour to cleanse which Irishmen had poured out their blood from 1916 to 1923, still stains the fair fame of Ireland. Twelve years after Easter Week Ireland remains, unfree and unredeemed, still bound to the British Empire"(11). 'Seacranaide.' Easter Week and After.



must now be added to the refuse pile of superstitions”(9)<sup>47</sup> is tactical and aimed at one specific instance of Irish nationalist thought in 1923.

The proof of this can be found in a publication of Shaw’s ten years earlier in an Irish supplement to the New Statesman. In this essay Shaw used nearly the exact same words that he did in 1923 but to prove a different point. In 1913 Shaw derided the “old-fashioned romantic nationalism of which the South is so deadly tired”(2)<sup>48</sup>. This line appears in context of Shaw’s argument that the Ulster problem could only be solved by nationalism’s acceptance of Northern Unionism as a legitimate expression of cultural association. In 1913 the Orangeman is portrayed as the irreconcilable whose opinions must be assimilated if there is to be peace. Shaw strikes a recurrent note in 1923 in support of a Free State government that might not have existed at all without ‘romantic nationalism.’ Shaw’s assertion that “we are now citizens of the world”(9)<sup>49</sup> in the Irish Statesman is less a credo of internationalism than a marginalisation of Republicanism. The *Sinn Féin* deputies were after all keenest in their insistence on a Gaelic Ireland independent of an outside influence made tangible to them by the Treaty.

Shaw ends both essays by referring to Moore’s “Let Erin Remember the Days of Old”<sup>50</sup>. In 1913 Shaw declared that the “hackneyed fisherman who saw the round towers of other days in the waves beneath him stirring, pursued his lucrative

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<sup>47</sup> Shaw, G. B. “On Throwing Out Dirty Water”, IS, 1:1, 15 Sept. 1923. 8-9.

<sup>48</sup> Shaw, G. B. “A Note on Irish Nationalism”, NS: Supplement on the Awakening of Ireland, 1:14, 12 July 1913. 1-2.

<sup>49</sup> Shaw, G. B. “On Throwing Out Dirty Water”, IS, 1:1, 15 Sept. 1923. 8-9.

<sup>50</sup> Shaw specifically refers to the second and third verses of the poem: “On Lough Neagh’s bank, as the fisher -/ man strays,/ When the clear cold eve’s declining,/ He sees the round towers of other days/ In the wave beneath him shining; Thus shall memory often, in dreams/ sublime, Catch a glimpse of the days that are over;/ Thus, sighing, look through the waves of time/ For the long faded glories they cover”(187-188). Cited from The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore.

occupation on the banks of Lough Neagh, and was no doubt an Orangeman”(2)<sup>51</sup>. In 1923, Irish Republicanism is Shaw’s target. He associates those who are against the Treaty with isolation and regression. Shaw uses Moore’s romanticism to criticise the apparent unreality of Republican politics. The solution for Ireland’s problems is to “Let the fisherman who strays on Lough Neagh’s bank when the clear cold eve’s declining be thrown into it. And then Ireland will have a chance at last”(9)<sup>52</sup>. Both the fisherman in 1923 and the Orangeman ten years earlier serve as representative types. The image of the fisherman locks into notions of the West of Ireland and the islands off its coast, a landscape of which Shaw is contemptuously aware as he writes. He offers the idea that any “man who divides the race into elect Irishmen and reprobate foreign devils (especially Englishmen) had better live on the Blaskets, where he can admire himself without much disturbance”(9)<sup>53</sup>. Again the stereotypical fisherman brings to mind literary representations of isolation and, by implication, separation.

Such symbolic separation is directly analogous to *Sinn Féin*’s popular appeal to the Irish electorate that the Free State withdraw from the League of Nations, the Imperial Conference and the British Commonwealth<sup>54</sup>. All of these international bodies were in contrast significant to supporters of the Treaty such as Shaw and Russell of the place to which Ireland could aspire if its international obligations were met. As Russell remarked, “When we think of the great figures”(5)<sup>55</sup> of Irish history,

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<sup>51</sup> Shaw, G. B. “A Note on Irish Nationalism”, NS: Supplement on the Awakening of Ireland, 1:14, 12 July 1913. 1-2.

<sup>52</sup> Shaw, G. B. “On Throwing Out Dirty Water”, IS, 1:1, 15 Sept. 1923. 8-9.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Mary MacSwiney expressed *Sinn Féin*’s policy in this area: “the Sinn Fein policy has been defined. It is that all authority in Ireland is derived exclusively from the people of Ireland: that we do not, and will not, recognise any authority of the King of England or any other alien- direct or indirect, real or nominal, in our country”(464). MacSwiney, M. “Sinn Fein and the Future”, IS, 1:15, 22 Dec. 1923. 463-464.

<sup>55</sup> Russell, G. W. “A Confession of Faith”, IS, 1:1, 15 Sept. 1923. 3-5.



we think of those who “have affected powerfully the thought of the world, from the remote missionaries who from Ireland invaded Europe with the Gospel of Christ, down to the era of Swift, Berkeley, Goldsmith, Sheridan and Burke” (5)<sup>56</sup>. At points like this it is easy to see how Russell’s support of the Free State and his interpretation (and indeed creation) of Irish history are co-dependant. The Free State’s international obligations, with its accession to the League of Nations and its participation in the Imperial Conference at the end of 1923 become bound in Russell’s rhetoric to cultural imperatives that are held to have existed from pre-Norman times. Since the Normans were typically held to be the first invaders of native Ireland an appeal to the missionaries’ faith lays a forcefully indigenous claim to all subsequent cultural activity. This means that once again the divisions of religion and culture that are usually thought to have affected the course (if one can accept that there is such a thing) of Irish history are marginalised by Russell’s invocation of a very specific past that perfectly suits his political present.

A further gesture towards the political situation of the Free State can be found in the third article that receives front-page advertisement in the Irish Statesman. James Douglas’s “The Executive Council and the Third Dail” differs from both the essays of Shaw and Russell as a technical article that concerns the *Dáil*’s apparatus. Douglas was himself a Free State Senator and a prosperous Dublin businessman. He was well acquainted with Russell, the two men having accompanied each other on a visit to Lloyd George in 1917 in order to impress upon the British Prime Minister the suitability of full Dominion status for Ireland<sup>57</sup>. Douglas continued his involvement in Irish politics and was close to Michael Collins, sitting on the committee that drafted

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Sexton, B. Ireland and the Crown. 24.

the first, rejected, Constitution of the Free State<sup>58</sup>. Douglas was also summoned in 1923 by De Valera to mediate between *Sinn Féin* and the Government in order to create a cease-fire<sup>59</sup>. Unsuccessful as these talks were, they indicate the high regard in which both pro and anti-Treaty groups held the Senator.

Douglas's article in the Irish Statesman argued that if a motion were to come before the *Dáil* that concerned the affairs of a Ministry that did not sit on the Executive Council then Deputies should have a free vote on that motion<sup>60</sup>. Here lies the importance to the Irish Statesman (incorporating as it did the Irish Homestead) of Douglas's letter. Patrick Hogan, the Minister for Agriculture, did not sit on the Executive Council. Douglas was in effect suggesting that agricultural matters should be voted on in the *Dáil* without government interference. Of course, were the government not to exercise its influence in this matter then Deputies might be more open to outside persuasion. Douglas was at the same time being forward as a member of the Senate in proposing changes to the lower, and more powerful, chamber's protocol. The Vice President of the Free State, Kevin O'Higgins, soon made clear that he did not appreciate the Senate's interest in matters pertaining to the *Dáil*<sup>61</sup>. Cleverly, Russell published Douglas's piece as a letter to avoid the threat of a clash with the Government. The first issue of the first edition of the Irish Statesman in 1919

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<sup>58</sup> The first Free State Constitution drafted by this Committee at the start of 1922 was rejected by the British Government, partly because "Collins informed James C. Douglas, a member of the committee very close to him, that the constitution should be that of an independent state and that a reference to the King or British Commonwealth 'should be left to be inserted by the Provisional Government in so far as it might be considered necessary'"(56). Cited from Sexton, B. Ireland and the Crown.

<sup>59</sup> O'Sullivan, D. The Irish Free State and its Senate. 112.

<sup>60</sup> O'Sullivan explains that "Three Extern Ministers were appointed during Mr. Cosgrave's first administration (December 1922), and all three- Messrs. Patrick Hogan, J. J. Walsh and Finian Lynch- were members of the Dail, holding respectively the portfolios of Agriculture, Posts and Telegraphs, and Fisheries"(89). All three portfolios were subsequently added to the Executive Council in May 1927. Cited from The Irish Free State and its Senate.

<sup>61</sup> In 1926 O'Higgins vetoed Douglas's proposal that Senators be nominated to sit on the Executive Council. See Gwynn, D. The Irish Free State and its Senate. 213.



had similarly used its correspondence columns to publish a letter from Horace Plunkett that outlined the aims and policies of the newly formed Dominion Home Rule Party<sup>62</sup>. That Plunkett founded the journal is not mentioned. Plunkett's letter was published in the correspondence column as if on merit, the editor simultaneously acknowledging his patron's influence while trying to assert a semblance of independence.

The correspondence column of the first issue of the Irish Statesman in 1923 was thus used as a vehicle for members of the Senate close to Russell to air their opinions. This explains the publication of Alice Stopford Green's "Ireland and the League of Nations" beside Douglas's letter. In this Green simply states that as a member of an international community "we may learn much to give in service to Ireland - the generosity which comes of free brotherhood, the high courage of such association, and the sense of common duty"(23-24)<sup>63</sup>. Green's rhetoric is high-flown but her proximity to Douglas in the Irish Statesman betrays a political reality of the Senate. Both Green and Douglas were associated with an Independent group of Senators who met under the chairmanship of Andrew Jameson<sup>64</sup>. They "habitually consulted together in regard to the measures which were to come before the House; but they were not bound by any pledge, and they frequently voted on opposite sides in divisions"(266)<sup>65</sup>.

This lack of formal cohesion has been interpreted to be signal of a fundamental weakness of the Senate's Anglo-Irish members; "unorganised and unsupported by a formal party, the range of political manoeuvre of the individuals

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<sup>62</sup> See Plunkett, H. "The Irish Dominion League", IS, 1:1, 28 June 1919. 13-14.

<sup>63</sup> Green, A. S. "Ireland and the League of Nations", IS, 1:1, 15 Sept. 1923. 22, 24.

<sup>64</sup> O'Sullivan, D. The Irish Free State and its Senate. 266-267.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

was severely limited”(298-299)<sup>66</sup>. The eventual outcome of this lack of institutional support was that the Independents “were forced to identify themselves completely with the pro-Treaty party”(299)<sup>67</sup>. But when one considers the antagonism of central Government figures such as O’Higgins to organised Senate interference with the *Dáil*, it might rather be suggested that Douglas and Green’s ‘disorganised’ method of working might have been the most effective, no matter how difficult its effect is to trace. Their publication in the Irish Statesman might even suggest that they themselves realised this, as each preferred to have their ideas presented in a journal that itself played to the ear of the elected elite. In this sense at least the observation that the Senate was “chiefly a gathering of distinguished public opinion whose opinions cannot fail to carry weight and whose influence is much greater than their actual legislative powers”(206)<sup>68</sup> is rather astute than critical.

Russell’s adoption of important Senate members such as Douglas and Green was part of his wider strategy for the Irish Statesman. The journal was designed to be a vehicle by which Russell’s ideas could be translated into actual policy. The transfer between ideas and actions was not however a simple one. Nothing illustrates this point better than Russell’s interest in Odon Por’s 1923 book Fascism, the English language Introduction to which Russell had written. Russell reviewed the text in the first issue of the Irish Statesman. In its general content the review simply describes Italian Fascism in 1923 as a further example of the unrest caused across Europe by the First World War. It was a reaction against the “chaos”(18)<sup>69</sup> that destabilised Italian politics and industry after the Armistice. The Fascists’ success lay in their co-option of labour into their movement’s autocratic structure. Thus to Russell, Fascist “leaders

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<sup>66</sup> Buckland, P. The Anglo-Irish and the New Ireland.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Gwynn, D. The Irish Free State.



were not really reactionary. Mussolini had been a socialist, and for all we know may still have deep socialist sympathies”(18)<sup>70</sup>. Russell’s sympathy for the Fascists is conditional on his ability to use their achievement to instruct his own Irish readership. For “If the guild movement and the co-operatives had a leader of powerful character who could have harmonised their activities the Fascist movement would never have come to power”(18)<sup>71</sup>. Russell’s interest in guild socialism had been outlined in The National Being but his qualified criticism of the co-operatives is telling<sup>72</sup>. Co-operation is still to Russell the ideal mode of social organisation but in this 1923 review, co-operation means economic organisation independent of political representation. For if “We might say of fascism that it is now using force to bring about an efficient organisation of the Italian democracy and Italian political institutions”(20)<sup>73</sup> then we might also say of the Free State in 1923 that force was also used to challenge traditional authority.

This is not say that Russell supported either Government or Republican violence. But he was not averse to suggesting that violence would certainly occur if economic problems in the state were not addressed. As prophet of this destruction Russell takes the threat of violence from its immediate Irish context and relates it to a European framework. He does this in order to intimidate the Free State legislature with the possibility that a group similar to the Italian Fascists might threaten its authority in Ireland. The Government would in turn have been well aware that a number of the same newspapers that gave it Irish support regularly reported

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<sup>69</sup> Russell, G. W. “Review of Fascism by Odon Por”, IS, 1:1, 15 Sept. 1923. 18, 20.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Russell for example asserts “that there never can be any progress in rural districts or any real prosperity without such farmers’ organizations or guilds”(39). Cited from the National Being.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*

favourably on the Fascists' activity in Italy<sup>74</sup>. In a future period of popular discontent it might be difficult to guess which side the media would support. It is important then to note how the Irish Statesman did react to the first major crisis of the Third *Dáil* in October 1923. The first *Sinn Féin Ard-Fheis* after the August elections was held at the end of September. The Irish Statesman recorded that:

The country desires to have done with the internment camps... (But) the Government requires more authoritative assurances than it has yet received that the liberation of the prisoners will not be a prelude to a revival of the war-makers of the campaign of violence. We trust that the Sinn Fein Ard-Fheis will have the political insight and the moral courage to give these assurances, and the whole nation will be behind them (73)<sup>75</sup>.

The journal's hope for reconciliation with *Sinn Féin* was short-lived. James Good, the Irish Statesman's assistant editor, reported three weeks later in the New Statesman that the "war-makers, who kept in the background during the elections, have recovered their ascendancy"<sup>(35)</sup><sup>76</sup>. At the same time, "some 500 political prisoners in Mountjoy started a hunger-strike to secure their unconditional release"<sup>(35)</sup><sup>77</sup>, a radical tactic, Good suggests, used to marginalise *Sinn Féin* moderates within the *Ard-Fheis*. Good continued to inform British opinion on the hunger-strike over the coming weeks in the New Statesman, pointing out to his

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<sup>74</sup> The Irish Times was steadfast in its support for the Free State Government. It also reported favourably on Mussolini's seizure of power by his march on Rome on 27 October 1922. The Irish Times welcomed the success of the "Forty thousand Fascisti... up in arms"<sup>(4)</sup>. See "Fascismo Triumphs", Irish Times, 30 Oct. 1922. 4. The Irish Independent was initially less enthusiastic. It wondered if "responsibility may have the effect of curbing the wildness of [Mussolini's] party. But it is a big venture, and Italy to-day stands trembling on the edge of a precipice"<sup>(4)</sup>. "Fascismo", Irish Independent, 30 Oct. 1922. 4. The paper's circumspect editorial analysis did not stop the publication of banner headlines such as "The Victory of the Fascisti: Italy Quickly Adopts New Regime"<sup>(5)</sup> in a subsequent issue of 1 Nov. 1922.

<sup>75</sup> "The Prisoners", IS, 1:3, 29 Sept. 1923. 71-73.

<sup>76</sup> Good, J. W. in "Comments", NS, 21:549, 20 Oct. 1923. 33-36.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*



readers that the continuation of the hunger-strikes lay in *Sinn Féin's* prolonged struggle for moral authority in the Free State:

The greatest obstacle to a general amnesty is that Sinn Fein still insists that this is its right as the legitimate government of Ireland, whose powers have been usurped by an unauthorised junta of politicians. So long as every modification of martial law is twisted into a recognition of the sovereignty of the Republic, Mr. Cosgrave and his officials cannot be criticised for their reluctance to stake everything on a policy of conciliation (727-728)<sup>78</sup>.

Good continued to report on the hunger strike until its demise. By the first of December 1923 he welcomed its total collapse as the “reward of the Government’s stubborn refusal to be bullied into surrender by people who, as A.E. said in the *Irish Statesman*, ‘do not think and have only an abnormal and inherited capacity for suffering’”(231)<sup>79</sup>. This is a harsh indictment that suggests where Russell’s sympathies lay in the crisis. For all Russell’s prophecy of a Fascist revolution in his review of Por’s *Fascism*, the hunger strike only resulted in a reiteration of Russell’s support for the *Cumann na nGaedheal* Government. But throughout the hunger strike the only factual observations of the crisis by a member of the *Irish Statesman’s* staff were made by Good and were published not in the Irish paper but in the *New Statesman*<sup>80</sup>. The *Irish Statesman* reported the problem in abstract terms, if at all. The hunger-strike is represented to be a symbolic action, significant of the fact that “if the majority of the population are individualists carrying on petty and personal enterprise, group egomania arises in more violent and ignorant forms”(195)<sup>81</sup>. The hunger strike was therefore a passing phenomenon, a crisis due not to a “flaw in national character”(195)<sup>82</sup> but to the possibility that the Free State was in a certain

<sup>78</sup> Good, J. W. in “Comments”, *NS*, 20:547, 6 Oct. 1923. 725-728.

<sup>79</sup> Good, J. W. in “Comments”, *NS*, 21:555, 1 Dec. 1923. 229-232.

<sup>80</sup> Good’s reports on Ireland throughout 1923 can be found in the last page of “Comments” in every issue of the *New Statesman* under the title “An Irish Correspondent writes.”

<sup>81</sup> “Notes and Comments” (cited subsequently as “N&C”), *IS*, 1:7, 27 Oct. 1923. 195-197.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

stage of “social evolution”(195)<sup>83</sup>. Russell progresses from this assertion to defend, not to criticise, the Government’s martial action to protect itself for even “The more highly evolved nations exhibited in their earlier stages all the ferocity of uncontrolled interests which they condemn in nations like our own”(195)<sup>84</sup>.

Russell’s use of the metaphor of evolution to describe growth in the state is similar to his earlier comparison of Ireland to a child in the National Being<sup>85</sup>. The change in his thinking between 1916 and 1923 concerns the state’s ability to challenge “uncontrolled interests”(195)<sup>86</sup>. Whereas in the National Being Russell imagined the state to be a unified being, or a single identity, he is confronted in 1923 with the fact of a major schism in Irish political society. Russell’s blueprint for national growth cannot deal with this problem democratically. For all of Russell’s insistence on the need for ‘understanding’ and ‘reconciliation’ between pro- and anti-Treaty organisations<sup>87</sup>, Russell’s rhetoric is bounded by its insistent use of metaphors of growth and evolution. Both concepts suggest the existence of a certain end to be achieved. By their supposed relation to the cycles of natural existence they also predicate the future of that which they are supposed to represent.

Only in moments of rupture or chaos does this plan become endangered. The Civil War was to Russell exactly such a break. Thus the meaning for Russell of the apparent paradox that “Dictatorships spring up all over Europe as the direct consequence of a war to make the world safe for democracy; in Italy, Spain,

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<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> The National Being begins: “In the year Nineteen Hundred and Fourteen Anno Domini, amid a world conflict, the birth of the infant State of Ireland was announced”(1). The conceit is developed over the following pages: “so, as the incidents of life reveal the innate affinities of a child to itself, do the adventures of a nation gradually reveal to it its own character and the will which is in it”(3).

<sup>86</sup> “N&C”, IS, 1:7, 27 Oct. 1923. 195-197.

<sup>87</sup>By the end of 1923 Russell desired to “find reconciliations or unities”(454) between Republicans and Free Staters instead of “mere animal conflict”(454). His plea was for a return to “the decencies of normal life”(454). “The Return to the Normal”, IS, 1:15, 22 Dec. 1923. 453-454.



Germany, Russia and in other countries"(163)<sup>88</sup>. The relevance of this to the Free State's experience is that "The muddle in political and economic affairs in Ireland if continued lends itself to the creation of a mood in which dictatorships become possible"(163)<sup>89</sup>. At a time when the Free State had just joined the League of Nations, Russell uses the very idea of Europe as a warning to the Government. Political unrest on the continent is described in terms of contagion, the palliative offered being the influence of the cultured classes:

No doubt there are injustices and wrongs at the root of the conflict between labour and capital. But if reason does not supersede passion in these conflicts the tendency in Ireland will be towards a Fascism which may not be as intellectual as the Italian, and may be much more reactionary (163)<sup>90</sup>.

That Russell can "utter this warning in the interests of Irish democracy"(163-164)<sup>91</sup> suggests the extent to which he has realised the need for authority (symbolised in this case by Italian Fascism) in his own political program. Russell's creation of a Fascist threat is opportunistic and made to satisfy the Irish Statesman's establishment of its own authoritative voice. It seems perverse, but Russell's use of a Fascist motif is equally a sign of his support of the Treaty as his intellectual access to the movements and effects of European politics shadows the Free State's entry into the League of Nations. Russell asserts his independence from the Government by reference to Italy while simultaneously suggesting his support for it by accepting as valid the international framework into which the Free State entered. Thus he can state some six issues later that Ireland is "becoming Fascist. We are one of the least sentimental of people... We are democrats when democracy works. If democracy does not work efficiently, the Irish will give bureaucracy or autocracy its

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<sup>88</sup> "N&C", IS, 1:6, 20 Oct. 1923. 163-165.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*

chance"(356)<sup>92</sup>. In October Russell had described Fascism as a danger to Irish democracy. By December, Fascism was but a logical alternative to it.

On the same date, 1 December, Good reported in the New Statesman that the hunger-strike was over and the same day on which Russell was able to consign the "hunger-strike"(355)<sup>93</sup>, the "rifle, the cudgel"(355)<sup>94</sup> and the "yell at meetings"(355)<sup>95</sup> to past history. With the crisis over, Russell changes his claim to authority. For just at the moment the Government can claim victory over the hunger-strikers so now does Russell claim that "At least two Ministers"(356)<sup>96</sup> have "kicked Irish middlemen publicly for being too many, grasping and inefficient"(356)<sup>97</sup>. It will be remembered that Fascism was, in Russell's mind at least, a reaction against exactly such corruption. Complementary to Russell's praise for the Irish Ministers is one further remark: the "whole of the speech of the Minister for Agriculture was practically an incitement to Irish farmers to bestir themselves and carry out the second part of Sir Horace Plunkett's formula: Better farming: Better Business: Better Living"(356)<sup>98</sup>. It is true that Plunkett was able to exert some degree of influence on the Minister for Agriculture, Niall Hogan: a Bill framed by the Minister was later placed before the *Dáil* and would have passed into law were it not for the collapse of Cosgrave's government<sup>99</sup>. But in 1923, Russell's appropriation of the Minister's words is telling.

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<sup>92</sup> "N&C", IS, 1:12, 1 Dec. 1923. 355-357.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Denis Gwynn wrote in 1928 that "To assist the Co-operative schemes, the Government had decided, before the end of the fourth Dail in April 1927, to introduce a Co-operative Act and also to establish an Agricultural Credit Organisation. Political disturbances have delayed both measures for a time; but Mr. Hogan has succeeded in obtaining sanction from the Dail for an extremely bold stroke of policy which he decided on his own responsibility"(297-298). Cited from The Irish Free State. Whatever the truth of this last assertion Hogan was about to fulfil two of Plunkett's main co-operative objectives.



Throughout the hunger strike Russell rarely, if ever, allowed direct reference to the crisis in the pages of the Irish Statesman. If referred to at all the hunger strikes appeared only as an example in an argument made to support the idea of a wider malaise in Irish society. The Irish Statesman had the potential to publish some of the most informative articles possible on the crisis, as Good's contributions to the New Statesman show. For Good, despite his obvious pro-Treaty sympathies, was conscious of Republican suffering. Interpreting the hunger strikes to be a ploy to influence the proceedings of the *Sinn Féin Ard Fheis* of October 1923, Good was objective enough to also decry the killing of an "active Irregular"<sup>(35)</sup><sup>100</sup>. Good hoped that "This was the last of the ghastly series of murders which disgraced the final stage of the civil war, murders in which both sets of combatants are equally involved"<sup>(35)</sup><sup>101</sup>. That Russell did not let the Irish Statesman benefit from his assistant editor's rational insight suggests something of Russell's instrumental approach to the practice of journalism in the Irish Statesman. Russell's silence over the hunger strike and his manipulation of the terms by which Fascism might be understood by his Irish readership are indicative of the political intrigue in which he was involved. But in order for the Irish Statesman to maintain its 'independent' status, Russell had to cloak his opinions in abstract terms. This was a drawback in times of crisis as the editor's opinion was not often directly expressed. But Russell's silence was a tactical form of self-censorship because as soon as his general interests were secure, then his own authority was reasserted.

This explains the silence over the hunger strikes, followed by the welcome offered to Fascism on their collapse. As soon as the Treaty party was once more

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<sup>100</sup> Good, J. W., in "Comments", NS, 20:549, 20 Oct. 1923. 33-36.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*

secure, Russell's dialogue with it could start again<sup>102</sup>. The irony is of course that Russell's very immediate and very partisan interjections into Irish cultural and political life were veiled in a rhetoric of permanence and objectivity. Indeed, as the "Notes and Comments" of October 1923 show, the more pressing the problem was, the more abstract did Russell's theorisings in the Irish Statesman become<sup>103</sup>. The conditional nature of Russell's support for the government after the hunger strike is symptomatic of his understanding of the nature of political growth in 1923. To Russell, "Political freedom is not, as so many of us in Ireland imagine, an end in itself"(37)<sup>104</sup>. It is rather a process whereby the state cannot function without the intervention of a cultured elite to bring harmony to its actions. The need for this elite to have influence within the Irish State explains the need for the Irish Statesman. This point became so imperative to Russell that it informed his very understanding of what the function of art was in general. Russell came to understand culture as the channel by which

the natural will is always acting on the individual, drawing him out of himself, enlarging his mind, making him a better citizen, civilising him in fact, so that he becomes incapable of joining with others to loot on a large scale, because world opinion is ever present to him, and world opinion of what is proper conduct for civilised people becomes his own opinion (806)<sup>105</sup>.

Russell's concept of culture as put forward here stresses its normalising effect. Culture has the ability, Russell argues, to sedate the citizen. His reference to looting shows the degree to which the Civil War had affected his perception of Irish society,

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<sup>102</sup> It is no coincidence that Mary MacSwiney's exasperation with the Irish Statesman came to a head at the end of December 1923: "some of us hoped that it would at least be a helpful- a fairly impartial journal"(463) she wrote. But "Republicans have been woefully disappointed. Week by week the paper gets worse"(463). MacSwiney, M. "Sinn Fein and the Future", IS, 1:15, 22 Dec. 1923. 463-464.

<sup>103</sup> Russell's abstractions did have their political use. Despite Éire's criticism of the Irish Statesman, the Republican paper "hesitates to believe that Mr. George Russell is deliberately and willingly stage-managing this new anti-Irish campaign. His own contributions to the paper he edits are usually free from unpatriotic utterances and the senseless, carping criticism which characterises most of the remaining articles"(7). "Current Comments", Éire, 2:1, 19 Jan. 1924.



with the widespread destruction of property anathema to his need for a settled society in which culture could act with due process. The association that Russell makes between culture (or, as he calls it, civilisation) and the regulation of anti-social behaviour is important in context of the Irish Statesman's response to the hunger strike. The authority that Russell desires to have is regulatory. But in order to assume this kind of power, Russell created a theory of history that justified his contemporary interventions in Ireland by placing his actions within a scientific framework. History and science act in this formula as the two definitely observable precedents from which culture could work its moral force. Russell had an important precedent for this theory of action in Shaw's preface to Back to Methuselah, published in 1921<sup>106</sup>.

In this Preface Shaw argued that the accepted interpretation of Darwinian evolution was misguided. Shaw proposes the validity of what he terms to be Creative Evolution in contrast to the more popular theory of Darwin's Circumstantial Evolution. To follow the argument more closely is to understand the impact that Shaw's alternative understanding of evolution was to have on Russell's belief in the growth of a cultured elite. Shaw's first point in the Preface is that the idea of evolution was current in Europe for at least fifty years before Charles Darwin published his Origin of Species. Darwin's grandfather Erasmus was aware of such a mechanism in the history of species. So indeed was Goethe. Shaw develops this point by suggesting that the younger Darwin's evolutionary writings were more

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<sup>104</sup> Russell, G. W. "N&C", IS, 1:2, 22 Sept. 1923. 35-37.

<sup>105</sup> Russell, G. W. "Our Barbarians", IS, 1:26, 8 Mar. 1924. 805-07.

<sup>106</sup> Shaw's theory of the relation of culture, history and science to each other in the Preface to Back to Methuselah foreshadowed a general interest in what Oswald Spengler was to call the "logic of history"(361) in The Dial in 1924. Two passages of extracts from Spengler's Downfall of the West were published in The Dial in November and December of that year. Spengler wrote "In this book for the first time an attempt is hazarded at determining history in advance. Its purpose is to pursue, through its still unrun stages, the destiny of a culture, and precisely the one culture on the earth at this time that is nearing completion: that of Western Europe"(361). Spengler, O. "The Downfall of Western Civilisation", The Dial, Nov. 1924. 361-378. In their interest of the effect of culture upon the future history of society Russell, Shaw and Spengler were addressing a very current concern.

widely accepted simply because they were so deterministic and thus more easily understood. Shaw asks, "Why did not Erasmus Darwin popularize the word Evolution as effectively as Charles?"(401). The answer for Shaw is, as I have already suggested, that the younger Darwin's "Circumstantial selection is easier to understand"(401), being "more visible and concrete"(401) than the concept of Creative Evolution as put forward by scientists such as Erasmus Darwin or Lamarck. Their theory of "Evolution as a philosophy and physiology of the will is a mystical process, which can be apprehended only by a trained, apt, and comprehensive thinker"(401). Already one can see the beginnings of the attraction of such a philosophy of progression for Russell. Shaw's ideas complement Russell's own belief in a cultured elite perfectly. Shaw continues to delineate further the potential of this theory of Creative Evolution. He argues that:

Though the phenomena of use and disuse, of wanting and trying, of the manufacture of weight lifters from men of ordinary strength, are familiar enough as facts, they are extremely puzzling as subjects of thought, and lead you into metaphysics the moment you try to account for them (401).

The answer to Shaw's question as to the reasons behind the relative unpopularity of Erasmus Darwin's theory of evolution is that an understanding of it requires an element of creative thought not available to the majority of the citizenry. In a manner similar to Russell's expression of the growth of a world consciousness there is an element of prophecy in all of this. For Shaw, the doctrine that he describes is "Lamarckian evolution, formerly called Functional Adaptation and now Creative Evolution"(405). In the movement from function to creation there exists an act of the imagination which changes the defining features of that which is being described. This in turn underpins the theory of conflict that accompanies Shaw's definitions of creative evolution. In doing so his vocabulary lapses into the rhetoric of evolutionists



who rather subscribed to Malthus's theory of the struggle for survival<sup>107</sup>. For Shaw, "Self-control"(409) becomes "the quality that distinguishes the fittest to survive"(409).

In the end nothing seems to have changed very much between Shaw's theory of evolution and Charles Darwin's except for the fact that survival will be predicated in Shaw's mind on the quality of the individual's will rather than his or her ability to adapt to a new physical environment. Accordingly, Shaw pronounces that in the future "The real Class War will be of intellectual classes; and its conquest will be the souls of the children"(422). Whether consciously or not, Shaw provides Russell with a model by which to relate the growth of consciousness in the select individual to the need for that consciousness to be expressed institutionally by means of an elite. By understanding Shaw's theory of Creative Evolution (for it is really Shaw's rather than Lamarck's or Erasmus Darwin's), Russell admits himself to a cult-like understanding of the world around him. The similarities of the attractions of this admission to the earlier attractions of Theosophy are great. To Shaw:

Creative Evolution is already a religion, and is indeed now unmistakably the religion of the XX century... It will be seen then that the revival of religion on a scientific basis does not mean the death of art, but a glorious rebirth of it. Indeed art has never been great when it was not providing an iconography for a live religion. And it has never been quite contemptible except when imitating the iconography after the religion had become a superstition (425-426).

Two years later Shaw defined Irish nationalism to be exactly such a superstition<sup>108</sup>. Russell's belief was based, like Shaw's in this Preface, partly on the understanding that twentieth century advances in science reinforced rather than

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<sup>107</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus published the first edition of An Essay on the Principle of Population in 1798. Gillian Beer writes of Malthus's understanding that "the reproductive energies of man, if not curtailed, must always outstrip the means of providing him with food. To Malthus fecundity was a danger to be suppressed - particularly by draconian measures among the human poor"(33-34). Cited from Darwin's Plots.

<sup>108</sup> Shaw, G. B. "On Throwing Out Dirty Water", IS, 1:1, 15 Sept. 1923. 8.

challenged their respective beliefs in the ability of the intellect to order the world around it. Shaw's challenge to Darwinian evolution as it is commonly perceived is in this context a repudiation of the influence of the animal or unconscious in human affairs. For Shaw, science becomes only another path to a destination which both literature and religion approach. Russell similarly perceived a connection between science and a mystic appreciation of material phenomena, a fact that suggested the ultimate sanction of spirituality in both. That poetry was for Russell the ultimate approach to these secrets of the universe is suggestive of his perception of his own place in this scheme of things. For Russell the refutation of such an important scientific figure as Charles Darwin by Shaw heralded a significant change in the fabric of society in general:

The doctrine that might is right received scientific sanction for a generation, until the psychologists began to investigate states of consciousness that were not provided for in the Darwinian philosophy, and the scientists themselves began to push their explorations of the atom to a point where it seemed miraculous as spirit, and the reaction from matter to spirit began... The poets may once more sing about the soul without being told on scientific authority that consciousness is only an affectation or imitation of matter (15)<sup>109</sup>.

Once again we can see the relation of this kind of pronouncement to Russell's interest in the translation of the poet's abstract singing into material power. The whole question of science's journey to mysticism is predicated by the perception that science had become in the preceding century valued above the arts. By merging the two Russell hopes to gain something of science's ability to influence society's perception of itself. With the translation of the hard facts of science into the language of philosophical enquiry, there lies the possibility that other modes of pragmatic expression may be brought under the artist's sphere of influence. By extension the state itself becomes "a being with power over life and death, thought and bodily



existence”(742)<sup>110</sup>. The state is in this case the bridge between observable fact and metaphysical suggestion, a unity that can only be maintained by the influence of the artist who perceives the influence of both worlds. The artist’s vision acts as a stimulus to the state’s growth. Accordingly, as the Free State “comes to self-consciousness it must develop within it all the functions, capacities and desires that the greatest of States have developed”(742)<sup>111</sup>. To come to such self-consciousness the Free State must literally forget itself. This is partially because the history to which Russell refers relies for its meaning on psychological suggestion rather than established fact. It is the history of a certain section of an intellectual elite rather than the record of a people. In order to do this Russell appropriates a nationalist rhetoric that supports the belief in a chosen people to confer legitimacy on his own preferred cultural elite. One can see that history is for Russell a means by which the artistic imagination can be proved to have material power. To Russell, the

true history of Ireland would attach as much importance to the creation of bodiless moods as to material events, and be as concerned with literature as with laws, conflicts, warriors, or statesman. What is a nation but an imagination common to millions of people. Is there anything else to it? I doubt it (271)<sup>112</sup>.

Typically, Russell hides his contemporary concerns under a veil of archaism. The designation of conflict in Ireland in the period after 1916 to a domain of ‘warriors’ and ‘statesmen’ softens the criticism that Russell has for their modern equivalents. It also illustrates by its deployment of language infused with literary

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<sup>109</sup> ‘Querist’. “Literature and Life: Art, Science and Civilisation”, *IS*, 2:1, 15 Mar. 1924. 15-16.

<sup>110</sup> Russell, G. W. “The Growth of National Self-Consciousness”, *IS*, 1:24, 23 Feb. 1924. 741-42.

<sup>111</sup> Russell’s most admired states were the early Greek Republics, ruled ideally by philosopher kings. He felt that “We may be able to make another Attica out of Ireland”(7). “Rural Clubs and National Life”, *IS*, 3:1, 13 Sept. 1924. In *The Republic* Plato argued that “there would never be a perfect state or society or individual until some chance compelled this minority of uncorrupted philosophers, now called useless, to take a hand in politics... and compelled society to listen to them; or else until providence inspired some of our present rulers and kings, or their sons, with a genuine love of true philosophy”(235).

<sup>112</sup> ‘Querist’. “Literature and Life: The Antecedents of History” (cited subsequently as “L&L”), *IS*, 2:9, 10 May 1924. 271-72

reference Russell's instrumental use of literature to create identity and power<sup>113</sup>. This can be seen clearly in Russell's response to Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, a play which becomes "history in the making, rather than history dramatised"(272)<sup>114</sup>. To Russell, history is a process that can be affected by, and indeed is predicated upon, culture. He can then ask, "What will come out of *Juno and the Paycock*?"(272)<sup>115</sup>. Furthermore, Russell senses that he is behind the productions of writers such as O'Casey. He thinks of himself as the controlling voice that dictates, quite literally, what will or will not be effective in society at large. This leads Russell to predict that

Yeats, no doubt, will incline the next generation to gravity and beauty, while James Stephens, who is so full of humour and understanding, will save them from being prigs. They will act through many men and women, and the birth of their imaginations will be as important in the evolution of Irish character and nationality as the fight in easter week (sic) (272)<sup>116</sup>.

The comparison of the literature of Yeats and Stephens to the direct action of the Easter Rising seems far-fetched until one considers that the rebellion itself did not function symbolically in the minds of the majority of the Irish population until after the executions. It might also be pointed out that, in retrospective terms at least, there has been no greater argument for an understanding of the Rising as an attempt at blood sacrifice than the poetry of Patrick Pearse. What might also be noted in the context of Russell's argument is the powerfully exclusive nature of his sense of cultural history. To promote Yeats and Stephens, Russell must pitch their work against the competing attraction of the Rising and those who lay claim to its revolutionary heritage. Russell proudly asserts of Yeats that the poet "has made the

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<sup>113</sup> Russell regularly used literary characters to make a political point: "If we did not cut a very heroic figure as the shillelagh-waving playboy of the nations, is it an improvement to change motley for the yellow stockings, cross-gartered with green and white, of Malvolio sick with self love?"(265). "Methods of Controversy", *IS*, 1:9, 10 Nov. 1923. 268-266. Malvolio is the humourless steward to Olivia in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*



name of his country shine in imagination to the rest of the world a hundred times more than any of the political notorieties whose names are on every lip here”(325).

These ‘notorieties’ are exactly the individuals that Republican propaganda celebrated to be the true heirs to Ireland’s past. One contemporary pamphlet includes among its list of “Famous Irregulars... Owen Roe, Red Hugh, Tone, Emmet, Lord Edward, Mitchel, Smith O’Brien, O’Donovan Rossa, Pearse, Tom Clarke, MacSwiney, Cathal Brugha”(n.p.)<sup>117</sup>. All are dead but their silence is their strength. Each individual stands as a silent rebuke to the contemporary order of the Free State, incorruptible in their martyrdom. It is no coincidence that the pamphlet contrasts these ‘irregulars’ to the government: for “They all fought in the same cause. None of them were respectable Colonial Ministers drawing £33 a week”(n.p.)<sup>118</sup>. The reference to Government salaries is significant as it contrasts further the sacrifice of the dead to the greed of the living, a common theme in Republican criticism of the Free State. To combat this caricature of Government relations Russell makes the still living Yeats an iconic figure in order to stand as a symbol of his own ideal order.

Russell’s use of Yeats as a cultural icon complements his belief in the power of a controlling perception in society. Yeats is designed by Russell to function as an archetype to which the rest of society might aspire. Russell’s observation that “A false Irish character has been created, and we have yet to find ourselves nationally”(451)<sup>119</sup> was predicated on his belief that he, and those he created, could provide the basis for a true character. The point of Russell’s polemic on Irish identity rests in the subsequent assertion that “We shall never find our true genius until we can shepherd all those lost sheep of our nationality back to the ancient Irish love of culture

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<sup>117</sup> Pamphlet no. 3. O’Brien Collection. NLI LOP117.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Russell, G. W. “N&C”, *IS*, 1:15, 22 Dec. 1923. 451-53.

and respect for the aristocracy of character and intelligence”(451)<sup>120</sup>. Russell provides his audience with a mission, to bring the Irish people back to their true home. To do this he argues consistently for a ‘respect for the aristocracy of character and intelligence.’ The terms of this reference are necessarily vague and the means of accession to membership of this elite are not made immediately clear. On a first reading, these lines can be read paradoxically as the expression of a meritocratic faith. With character and intelligence, all can aspire to the aristocracy.

That Russell already imagines certain types of character and intelligence as being most fit for his feudal paradigm is only made explicit when he refers to the specific precedents that he imagines such a system as having. He draws the reader’s attention to the “precedent of Denmark”(68)<sup>121</sup> which like Ireland “lost a province”(68)<sup>122</sup> and was subsequently “demoralised as we are to-day”(68)<sup>123</sup>. Russell identifies the three main elements behind a national regeneration. Denmark’s salvation came as its “intellectuals, its writers, its professors united in a crusade to educate and reanimate their despairing countrymen”(68)<sup>124</sup>. Neither is salvation too strong a word as the intelligentsia are invested with what amounts to a sacred mission: “they went over Denmark kindling courage, the facing up of their financial difficulties by work and their ignorance by education”(68-69)<sup>125</sup>.

In this context ‘work’ and ‘education’ are offered to the general population as the subaltern cultural currency of inspiration and knowledge. This sense of Russell’s tailoring the possibilities of high culture for the needs of general society is reinforced elsewhere in the Irish Statesman when Russell writes that “The purpose of

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<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Russell, G. W. “N&C”, IS, 1:3, 29 Sept. 1923. 67-70.

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*



civilisation”(579)<sup>126</sup> is itself to “put a moral skin upon... passions and subdue them to law”(579)<sup>127</sup>. The concept of education is further delineated from that of the wisdom of the elite by the argument made that “It is the lesson of long centuries to put such a skin on society”(579)<sup>128</sup>. Education becomes merely an instrument for the regulation of society by culture. It has no real effect on the beings exposed to it for “if the skin is broken by law, or civil conflict, if the moral compact lose power and prestige, it is at once seen how much of human nature is still savage”(579)<sup>129</sup>. Education then is part of an ongoing process that can be fashioned to suit the requirements of a national ideal<sup>130</sup>.

That culture can be so amorphous so as to be changed according to expediency serves to underline its instrumental nature for Russell. By stressing its expedient nature however, Russell exposes the distance that he holds to exist between the mass of the people upon whom culture will act and the tiny minority who will control its actions upon them. Once more, in stressing literature’s ability to adapt Russell suggests how it represents to him the expression of a higher guiding consciousness, the sign in effect of an aristocracy of character and intelligence. The definition of literature which he gives is accordingly that “The literature a nation needs is a literature the people can live with, which adds beauty and delight to life and interest to character, and which reveals and interprets the nature by which they live”(326)<sup>131</sup>. This begs the question of who Russell refers to when he writes that “Such a literature

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<sup>126</sup> Russell, G. W. “N&C”, *IS*, 1:19, 19 Jan. 1924. 79-81.

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Interestingly, Macmillan reissued Russell’s *Deirdre*, first published in book form by Maunsell in 1907, in 1922 in a schools’ edition. Produced cheaply with a soft back, *Deirdre* was one of a range of texts produced in this year for use in Irish education. The Free State Minister for Education was Eoin MacNeill, himself an authority on Gaelic literature.

<sup>131</sup> Russell, G. W. “Literature and Civilisation”, *IS*, 1:11, 24 Nov. 1923. 325-26.

we have begun to create”(326)<sup>132</sup>. His audience are in contrast part of an “ignorant people”(326)<sup>133</sup> who “do not know of the transfiguration of life and nature which takes place when we have absorbed into our own the spirit of great writers, or how much we lose when we are empty of these nobilities”(326)<sup>134</sup>.

In this context it is the iconic figure of Yeats that becomes central to Russell’s pronouncements on culture in the Irish Statesman. The first requirement Russell had of Yeats was the latter’s assertion that “Mr. Yeats has confessed that he would hardly have thought it worthwhile writing his lyrics if he had not been influenced by imagination of a national literature”(82)<sup>135</sup>. Once again, Russell describes the quality of the poet’s imagination in mystical, religious terms. This is a quality not shared by the rest of the population. As Russell remarked of Yeats’s character, the “majority are not so self-conscious”(82)<sup>136</sup>. Russell’s assistant editor in the Irish Statesman was even more explicit on this point in her review of Yeats’s Noh play At the Hawk’s Well. Mitchell declared herself to be “still doused by my experience and incapable of criticism”(142)<sup>137</sup>. Her profession of semi-consciousness fits well with Russell’s association of poetry with an entrance into a mystical state. The conclusion to this insight follows as Mitchell seeks to assuage the poet’s worries: “Mr. Yeats need not fear that the Noh play will ever be mixed with commercialism. Its beauty is for the few and the chosen”(142)<sup>138</sup>.

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<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> ‘Querist’. “L&L: the Future Development of Gaelic”, IS, 1:3, 29 Sept. 1923. 82, 84.

<sup>136</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> ‘S. L. M.’ “At the Hawk’s Well: An Appreciation”, IS, 2:5, 12 April 1924. 142. Mitchell’s review was of a private production of the play that had been “performed recently”(142) in Yeats’s own drawing room. Incidentally, the first production of At the Hawk’s Well was performed on 2 April 1916 in the drawing room of Lady Cunard. See Jeffares, A. N. and A. S. Knowland. A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats. 83.

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*



Yeats is declared to be the poetic champion, a feeling only reinforced by Russell with the award of the Nobel Prize to Yeats at the end of 1923. Russell welcomed the honour as significant of something more tangible than the acknowledgement of wide literary appeal. For Russell, the Nobel Prize was a symbol of the world's realisation that in Yeats "there was restored to Ireland a spirit which had not existed since the Book of Kells. After a thousand years the spirit of the artist was re-born upon a far higher plane"(325)<sup>139</sup>. The millenarian undertones to this comment are not difficult to hear. The suggestion of reincarnation that Russell makes further suggests the messianic quality which he attributes to Yeats's arrival (while also working as a sly corrective to any personal pride on Yeats's part).

Russell goes on to stress the greatness of Yeats's achievement by contrasting it to the "arid"(326)<sup>140</sup> Ireland of the previous century, alive only to the "animal vitality in Lever, Lover and Carleton"(326)<sup>141</sup>. Such caustic remarks are served only on prose as any attack on the "patriotic poetry"(326)<sup>142</sup> to which he then refers might be construed as an anti-national expression, thus weakening Russell's broader argument for unity among the people under their poetic superiors. Russell continues by placing Yeats definitely within the Revival, as he came from a movement in which "the thoughts of young Irishmen of genius began to turn inward and backward to Gaelic Ireland"(326)<sup>143</sup>, the touchstone since Russell's early reading of Standish O'Grady of all Irish literary inspiration.

Within this movement "Yeats was undoubtedly the greatest artist"(326)<sup>144</sup>. The definition of this greatness is further remarkable. To Russell, Yeats "may be

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<sup>139</sup> Russell, G. W. "Literature and Civilisation", *IS*, 1:11, 24 Nov. 1923. 325-26.

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*

regarded as the pivot around which Irish literature began to take on quality... Through it, as through a transparency, the world received its first revelation of what was beautiful in Irish tradition”(326)<sup>145</sup>. The great artist acts as a pivot. He facilitates the legitimate expression of the race in a manner similar to those “great figures... of heroic legend”(5)<sup>146</sup>, the stories of whom Russell elsewhere described as the reflection of “the imagination of the people”(5)<sup>147</sup>. According to this argument Yeats, as the heroic pivot which Russell creates, becomes himself voiceless as an individual, existing for Russell rather as a symbol of what he admires and, more importantly, what he seeks to promote in Ireland.

Russell spent 1924 consolidating the Irish Statesman's reputation. Keen to avoid too immediate controversy, Russell's main energies were channelled into the promotion of the journal as a suitable forum for the new generation of Irish writers who had begun to publish in the decade previous. Austin Clarke, F. R. Higgins, Liam O'Flaherty and, less regularly, Francis Stuart all contributed to the Irish Statesman in 1924<sup>148</sup>. But Russell's journal did not enjoy unchallenged access to the works of young Irish writers in the period. One early rival to the Irish Statesman was the Klaxon, a journal first reviewed in the Irish Statesman in January 1924. The Klaxon was co-edited by L. K. Emery and F. R. Higgins. It contained contributions from Francis Stuart, Thomas MacGreevy and its two editors among others. Emery's spiky

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<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> Russell, G. W. “A Confession of Faith”, IS, 1:1, 15 Sept. 1923. 3-5.

<sup>147</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> Perhaps the best of all these contributions was Austin Clarke's poem “The Lost Heifer (A Jacobite Song)”, IS, 3:5, 11 Oct. 1924, 138, later collected, like many of the poet's 1924 submissions to the Irish Statesman, in The Cattle Drive in Connaught of 1925. The ‘heifer’ was a Jacobite symbol for Ireland. The poem's second stanza is exceptional: “Brightness was drenching through the branches/ When she wandered again,/ Turning the silver out of dark grass/ Where the skylark had lain,/ And her voice coming softly over the meadow/ Was the mist becoming rain”(138). See also Higgins, F. R. “Shavaun Lavelle”, IS, 2:10, 17 May 1924, 296, O'Flaherty, L. “The Salted Goat”, IS, 1:20, 26 Jan. 1924, 616-617, and Stuart, H. “Art and Energy”, IS, 3:9, 8 Nov. 1924, 270. Francis Stuart signed himself ‘H. Stuart’ throughout this early period of his writing.



editorial announced the arrival of a new generation of Irish artists in language that would have graced any continental modernist manifesto:

We are the offspring of a gin and vermouth in a local public-house. We swore that we were young and would assert our youth with all its follies. We railed against the psychopedantic parlours of our elders and their old maidenly consorts, hoping the while with an excess of Picabia and banter, a whiff of Dadaist Europe to kick Ireland into artistic wakefulness (1)<sup>149</sup>.

The Klaxon favoured Dada for its iconoclastic vitality. Its title page featured a reproduction of what is there described as a “Negro Sculpture in Wood”(n.p.). A simple figure without adornment, this sculpture is an example of the ‘primitive’ style favoured in the early twentieth century as an alternative to the received traditions of Western art<sup>150</sup>. Ethnic art objects like this ‘negro sculpture’ represented pure experience, unspoilt by effete European culture<sup>151</sup>. The sculpture reproduced in the Klaxon reinforces visually the editorial desire to explore the base reality of Irish life. Part of this resolution may be attributed to Emery’s co-editor, F. R. Higgins, whose

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<sup>149</sup> L.K.E. “Confessional”, Klaxon, Winter 1923-1924. 1-2. Francis Picabia lived from 1879 to 1953 and was a French exponent of Dada. His images “have their origins in scientific illustration rather than art”(42). Cited from Brettell, R. Modern Art: 1851-1929. Brettell describes Dada as follows: “If there is an anti-movement in the history of modern art, it is Dada. Its name is nonsensical; its membership was shifting and unpredictable; and its aims had more to do with randomness, total freedom of expression, absurdity, and abandon than with the construction of a new aesthetic system for replication by others”(42). Dada was in context of the Klaxon the perfect symbol of a new generation unwilling to be led by its predecessors.

<sup>150</sup> Harrison notes in English Art and Modernism that “Interest in ‘primitive’ sculpture flourished in England immediately after the [First World] war”(218). Harrison quotes the English art critic Roger Fry’s response to such objects in Fry’s essay “Negro Sculpture”: “So far from clinging to two dimensions, as we tend to do, he actually, underlines, as it were, the three-dimensionalness of his forms. It is in some such way, I suspect, that he manages to give his forms their disconcerting vitality, the suggestion that they make of being not mere echoes of actual figures, but of possessing an inner life of their own”(218). Fry’s occult sense of African sculpture is typical of a Western criticism that interprets non-European phenomena to be ‘other’ and strange. The Klaxon’s reproduction of an African image may be understood in this context as an attempt to shock the journal’s readership with a disturbing, because alien, object.

<sup>151</sup> Interestingly this sculpture is acknowledged in the Klaxon to be the property of Grace Henry. Grace Henry, née Mitchell, was the wife of Paul Henry until 1930. Paul Henry was a famous Irish landscape painter and friend of James Good, the Irish Statesman’s assistant editor. Kennedy suggests in Irish Art and Modernism that Grace Henry was in the early 1920’s “increasingly experimental and forged a distinctly Expressionist manner”(24). The Klaxon was radically different in its promotion of not only Dada but also the Irish Cubist Mainie Jellet from the majority of Irish art criticism, which tended towards the traditional. The extent of this can be gauged from Paul Henry’s later recollection of Dublin in the period: “It is difficult to realise’, he wrote many years later, ‘how deep rooted was the prejudice

poetry of the period betrays a fascination with the primal nature of rural Ireland<sup>152</sup>. Liam O'Flaherty's contributions to the Irish Statesman in 1924 are further evidence of the contemporary fashion for brutal, anti-romantic representations of the peasant experience<sup>153</sup>.

Russell however was unmoved by the Klaxon's call for artistic rejuvenation: "Here"(594)<sup>154</sup>, he wrote in the Irish Statesman, "Irish youth is desperately trying to be wild and wicked without the capacity to be anything but young"(594)<sup>155</sup>. Russell saw no point to the Klaxon's iconoclasm, ending his review with the observation that "The Younger Generation is full of talent not quite sure whether it should be wide awake like its military contemporaries or dreamy like its literary predecessors"(594). Russell shows a lamentable lack of imagination in this response, ignoring the potential of the European avant-garde to Irish culture when its rebellious tendencies threatened his own cultural authority. It was unfortunate too that Russell's consolidation of the Irish Statesman in 1924 coincided with his increasing conservatism in verse. The stilted formalism of Russell's occasional poem, "Ireland, 1924" bears the most serious evidence of this decline.

A nation is whate'er it loves.  
If love be dead it too must die.  
Go, give an offering of doves  
To win its immortality (9)<sup>156</sup>.

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which existed at that time against any form of art which savoured, even remotely, of Modernism"(19-20).

<sup>152</sup> A good example is the slightly later poem, "Secret Love". In it Higgins imagines the desolation of an Irish peasant fooled in love: "So scandal may harry into my bed/ The farm-hand or trader,/ Or any white son of a woman/ That death shall anoint,/ And when I turn to him/ I'll take my empty ring-finger,/ O Mother of God, and tear it/ Off from the joint!" Higgins, F. R. IS, 13:22, 1 Feb. 1930. 434.

<sup>153</sup> See "The Cake", a short story that O'Flaherty published in the Irish Statesman in 1925. Darkly comic, the story tells of the theft by an agricultural labourer called Perkins of a cake made by the local schoolmaster's wife. O'Flaherty, L. "The Cake", IS, 5:15, 19 Dec. 1925. 455-457.

<sup>154</sup> Russell, G. W. "The Younger Generation", IS, 1:19, 19 Jan. 1924. 594.

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> Russell, G. W. "Ireland, 1924", IS, 2:1, 15 Mar. 1924. 9.



Russell's one concession to the editors of the Klaxon was to adapt the Irish Statesman to the instruction of the new generation. Feeling perhaps that new Irish writers were in danger of misdirection, Russell decided to channel their energies<sup>157</sup>. James Stephens was summoned to instruct readers on how to best create character in novels in the "Literature and Life" columns<sup>158</sup>. Yeats published a rewritten version of a poem first written in 1890 and even Lady Gregory made a rare contribution to the journal<sup>159</sup>. Charmingly, Yeats declared in the short preface to his poem that "Even in its rewritten form it is still a sheaf of wild oats"(266)<sup>160</sup>.

The literary authority of Yeats and Russell was restated in the late summer of 1924 with the announcement of the *Aonach Tailteann* literary awards. The *Tailteann* games, as they were popularly known, were first held in the second millennium before Christ under the aegis of King Lughaidh Lamhfada in honour of his foster mother Tailte<sup>161</sup>. They were resumed after an eight-century break by the Irish Free State to celebrate independence. In an Ireland just recovering from Civil War the establishment of a national games was also a welcome tonic for a tired people. Besides athletic competitions the games included literary sections whose most prestigious judge was Yeats. Russell felt that the games were an excellent instrument "to educate Irishmen generally to know what is highest"(719)<sup>162</sup> in literature. The

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<sup>157</sup> Russell's influence over young Irish writers does not seem to have been solely instructional. He claimed in a letter of January 1919 to Charles Weekes that "I get lots of things to vet from all kinds of folk and I try to help them if they show talent. I have discovered in this way, and edited most of the new Irish writers, Stephens, Colum, Seumas O'Sullivan, Austin Clarke, among others". Cited from the Denson Typescript. 345.

<sup>158</sup> See for example, Stephens, J. "The Novelist and Final Utterance", IS, 2:2, 22 Mar. 1924. 140-141. Also, "Growth in Fiction", IS, 2:10, 17 May 1924. 301-302.

<sup>159</sup> Yeats, W. B. "An Old Poem Re-Written", IS, 3:9, 8 Nov. 1924. 266. The poem is a version of "The Dedication to a Book of Stories selected from the Irish Novelists", collected in 1892's The Countess Kathleen and Other Legends. The version in the Irish Statesman substantially varies in incidentals from that published in Yeats's Poems. 80-81.

<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> For details of the origin of the *Aonach Tailteann* see Tailteann Games: Irish Race Olympic. Dublin: n. p., 1922.

<sup>162</sup> Russell, G. W. "The Aonach Tailteann Literary Awards", IS, 2:23, 16 Aug. 1924. 718-719.

Irish Statesman welcomed the “awards announced by Senator Yeats”(719)<sup>163</sup> to Stephen MacKenna, James Stephens and Oliver Gogarty perhaps because, of these three, only MacKenna was not a contributor to Russell’s journal. The awards were a vindication of Russell’s literary editorship of the Irish Statesman, now implicitly recognised to be a cultural journal of national importance.

The year ended with Russell optimistic of the Irish Statesman’s continued success. With Yeats sympathetic to his cause of Irish literary rejuvenation and the correspondence pages of the journal brightened with the occasional controversy conducted by ambitious new writers<sup>164</sup>, Russell predicted a bright future for Irish life and letters. “Unless”(487)<sup>165</sup>, Russell predicted, “something unforeseen recharges the Irish soul with hatred we may expect relations between Irishmen of all parties to become fairly normal in a year’s time”(187)<sup>166</sup>. After a long career of prophecy, Russell was confident enough to welcome in late 1924 a new period of intellectual prosperity. The Irish Statesman, its first stage successfully completed, now faced the challenge of development with the new state.

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<sup>163</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Austin Clarke, F. R. Higgins, Liam O’Flaherty and Francis Stuart enjoyed the indulgence of the correspondence columns of the Irish Statesman in early 1924 to debate the nature of national energy. O’Flaherty’s contribution was the most pointed: “the human race has not advanced from savagery to culture on the feeble crutches of philosophy. What epics have there been written about the disputations of scholars? Did Homer write of philosophy or the hunting of wild boars and the savage wars waged around stone-walled cities? Did Shakespeare live in the days of twenty per cent. (*sic*) interest on oil stocks and the loathsome mouthings of Ramsay MacDonalds at Geneva about Leagues of Nations that are based on fraud, corruption, and the usury of slim-fingered, cultured bankers?” IS, 3:6, 18 Oct. 1924. 171. O’Flaherty’s rage would be a welcome addition to any literature.

<sup>165</sup> Russell, G. W. “N&C”, IS, 3:16, 27 Dec. 1924. 487-489.

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*



## Post-Treaty Projects: 1925-1927

The years between 1925 and 1927 were crucial to the Irish Statesman's consolidation as a journal conversant with all the critical areas of Irish political and cultural activity. The masses of journals, pamphlets and newspapers produced in the period attest to the vigorous debate contested over the Irish language, industry and identity<sup>1</sup>. Conversely, this was a short period of electoral security for the Free State, as Ireland settled into its new order and the *Dáil* functioned efficiently as a legislature. The Irish Statesman responded to this political stability by producing a parallel claim to cultural authority. Russell made the Irish Statesman a publication that based its reputation on its ability to present specialist views on any subject relevant to Ireland's independence.

In an attempt to maintain the consistency of the Irish Statesman's opinion, Russell cultivated the range of writers available to him, adding new recruits such as Séan O'Faoláin when necessary. Each contributor to the journal was an expert in his or her own chosen field; political analysis, for example, was shared between Russell, Good, the assistant editor, and P. S. O'Hegarty<sup>2</sup>. O'Hegarty was a prominent nationalist author and secretary from 1922 of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs.

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<sup>1</sup> The O'Brien collection of journals and pamphlets in the National Library of Ireland is good evidence of the immense activity of the period. Among the journals collected there are Banba (1912-1922), Eire-The Irish Nation (1923-1924), Forward (1924-1943), Irish Worker (1923-1932), Labour Opposition (1925-1926), Nation (1927-1930), New Leader (1923-1932), Voice of Labour (1921-1925), Workers' Republic (1921-1923) and Young Ireland (1919-1923). There are hundreds of pamphlets, the reproduction of articles from journals and newspapers by interested political organisations a common practice of the period.

<sup>2</sup> Biographical sources for the following contributors to the Irish Statesman include Boylan, H., A Dictionary of National Biography, K. C. Bailey, Trinity College Dublin, 1982-1945 and R. B. McDowell and D. A. Webb's Trinity College Dublin, 1592-1952. Among the many memoirs of the period I have referred to are Walter Starkie's Scholars and Gypsies, E. R. Dodds's Missing Persons and

His writing complemented the Irish Statesman's support for the Free State by its often vicious polemic against Republicanism. O'Hegarty's 1924 book, The Victory of Sinn Féin, had excoriated Mary MacSwiney and De Valera for their incompetence and had alleged their personal responsibility for the Civil War. Although his contributions to the Irish Statesman were rarely as pointed, his very presence in the journal was a significant register of Russell's opinion of Republicanism. For economic analysis, Russell relied upon George O'Brien, Professor of National Economics at University College Dublin, and author, between 1918 and 1921, of three highly original economic histories of Ireland from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries<sup>3</sup>.

Edmund Curtis, Professor of History at Trinity College, reviewed Irish historical publications. Curtis further found time to review novels and, strangely perhaps for a Trinity fellow in this decade, drama productions in the Irish language at the Abbey Theatre. The Irish Statesman also counted on the positive support of Alice Stopford-Green, a historian of early Ireland respected by political opinion<sup>4</sup>. Green was a prolific author and a long time friend of the editor, an association continued until her death in 1929. As regards the Irish language, Russell supplemented his own writings on the subject with the opinions of the young Séan O'Faoláin. The editor's friendship with Osborn Bergin, Professor of Irish at University College Dublin, also encouraged this respected linguist to contribute an occasional article, lending an associated status to Russell's own writing on the subject. Art reviews were shared

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Monk Gibbon's account of Yeats, The Masterpiece and the Man. Mary Colum, C. P. Curran and Lennox Robinson also provide valuable information.

<sup>3</sup> O'Brien published The Economic History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century in 1918, The Economic History of Ireland in the Seventeenth Century in 1919 and The Economic History of Ireland from the Union to the Famine in 1921. This last was dedicated to Horace Plunkett, an indication of O'Brien's sympathy with co-operation, a sympathy that extended to O'Brien's contributions to the Irish Statesman.

<sup>4</sup> The Minister for Education, Eoin MacNeill, recommended Green's Irish National Tradition to schoolchildren in "Irish Educational Policy", IS, 5:6, 17 Oct. 1925. 168-169. Green is perhaps most famous for The Making of Ireland and its Undoing (1908) and Irish Nationality (1911).



between Russell and Thomas Bodkin, a Barrister and a Director of the National Gallery from 1927, who contributed occasionally to the journal.

Irish literature enjoyed the attentions of the most varied panel of writers available to the Irish Statesman, a source of occasional irritation to Russell<sup>5</sup>. The editor generally restricted himself to a codification of the terms by which Irish literature might be understood in the "Notes and Comments" and "Literature and Life" columns. Russell's direct appreciation of the literature restricted itself to his reviews of favoured Irish writers. Before her death in 1926, Susan Mitchell's main task as editorial assistant was her provision of regular and astute reviews of fiction. Younger writers such as Frank O'Connor, Monk Gibbon and F. R. Higgins contributed original work and, excepting Higgins, occasional critical analysis. The Irish Statesman also profited from the submission of essays by James Stephens, Forrest Reid and Lennox Robinson. Yeats joined these more established writers even more rarely in the journal's pages. His contributions to the Irish Statesman were predominantly political<sup>6</sup>.

Appreciation of developments in English literature in the journal was limited to occasional controversy between the English poet Herbert Palmer and Frank O'Connor's early associate, Geoffrey Phibbs<sup>7</sup>. Russell contributed appreciations of

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<sup>5</sup> Russell wrote of his contributors to the Irish Statesman that "They all want to write poetry and nothing else, and I who can write poetry as well as any of them have to write political and economic articles which few other people seem practical enough to do"(n. p.). Cited from the Denson Typescript. 415.

<sup>6</sup> The sum of Yeats's contributions to the Irish Statesman in 1925 and 1926 were "An Undelivered Speech", IS, 4:1, March 14, 1925, 8-10, and "The Child and the State (Speech made to the Irish Literary Society on November 30)", IS, 5:13, 5 Dec. 1925, 393-394, concluded in the next issue. The first article concerned divorce and the latter state education.

<sup>7</sup> Palmer is now almost entirely forgotten even though he was the author of several collections in his lifetime. His Vampire and Other Poems (1936) contains a poem, "Through Curtains of Darkness", first published in the Dublin Magazine, and "The Celestial Country", a meditation on one of Russell's paintings given to Palmer by the artist as a present. Geoffrey Phibbs is better known by the name he later adopted, Geoffrey Taylor. Born in England, Phibbs was of a Sligo Ascendancy family. As Geoffrey Taylor he later became poetry editor of The Bell and published, in 1944, Irish Poems of Today: Chosen from the first seven Vols. of 'The Bell'. For Palmer's dispute with the then Phibbs and

Milton and Keats to the "Literature and Life" columns but there was little acknowledgement, beyond occasional positive notice in the brief "Magazines" section, of the achievements of contemporary English literary reviews such as the Criterion<sup>8</sup>. An intellectual appreciation of the matters that concerned these publications is more often to be found in the pages of the Dublin Magazine, edited by Seumas O'Sullivan. Finally, music and drama reviews were conducted by Walter Starkie, a Professor in Spanish and lecturer in Italian literature from 1926 at Trinity College. Starkie's infatuation with Italian culture was important to Russell's appreciation of changes in European politics in the later 1920's. It was, for example, Starkie who interviewed Mussolini for the Irish Statesman and Starkie's wife, an Italian fascist herself, who helped organise it<sup>9</sup>.

All these writers were at the centre of the Irish Statesman's output in the middle years of the nineteen twenties. No other Irish journal of the period could rely on such a distinguished list of contributors. Together they made the Irish Statesman a powerful instrument of authoritative opinion through which Russell published expert analysis on any subject. Discussions of language, literature, economic regeneration and political association were all concerns of the journal. The Irish Statesman seems to have had an opinion on everything, from the American involvement in Panama to the provision of milk for schoolchildren in the Free State. But, as the select nature of the Irish Statesman's contributors might suggest, the journal's opinions were, to a

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O'Connor (mostly a pedantic distraction over poetic form) see his "Anglo-Irish Literature", IS, 5:13, 5 Dec. 1925. 397.

<sup>8</sup> See Russell's "L&L: Keats and his Circle", IS, 4:1, 14 March 1925. 15-16. Also his "L&L: The Anatomy of a Poet", IS, 4:11, 23 May 1925. 338, 340. This last is an extended review of Denis Saurat's Milton, Man and Thinker.

<sup>9</sup> Starkie's personal account of his meeting with Mussolini is fascinating in its suggestion of Mussolini's awareness of Irish political history. At the time of his interview, Kevin O'Higgins, the Vice President of the Executive Council and Free State Minister for Justice, had just been murdered (it will be noted that O'Higgins was styled 'Minister for Home Affairs' until April 1924 and 'Minister for Justice' thereafter). Mussolini remarked simply of O'Higgins that "I admired him"(392). Cited from The Waveless Plain.



great degree, uniform, a result perhaps of the fact that Russell's authority as a cultural commentator was completely vested in it. It is the subtle exercise of this authority that marks the passage of the Irish Statesman through the middle of the nineteen twenties.

Russell used the New Year edition of 1925 to make a definitive statement of his understanding of post-independence Irish culture. Both the article and the reactions it elicited from the Irish Statesman's readership are important registers of the condition of cultural debate in the Free State at this time. In "Old Traditions and the New Era", Russell reiterates the importance of racial blending to Ireland's success as a nation, both in the past and the future, an opinion offered since Russell's first Irish Statesman editorial in September, 1923<sup>10</sup>. The tone of Russell's article in 1925 is however more discernibly militant, asserting that "We cannot exorcise what is blended biologically and culturally beyond recall in the make-up of nine tenths of the people. The pure Celt does not exist"(522)<sup>11</sup>. Russell uses the terms 'Celtic' and 'Gaelic' interchangeably to suggest that the concepts of racial and linguistic purity make for a dangerous combination. Russell does this to argue the weakness of a pure Irish state, adrift from the modernising tendencies of contemporary European thought.

For Ireland:

has given birth, if it accepts all its children, to many men who have influenced European culture and science, Berkeley, Swift, Goldsmith, Burke, Sheridan, Moore, Hamilton, Kelvin, Tyndall, Shaw, Yeats, Synge and many others of international repute. If we repudiate the Anglo-Irish tradition, if we say they are aliens, how poor does our national life become. We have simply nothing to show since the remote days when Gaelic was dominant. There is nothing in our literature, in our science, in our culture, to make Europe take the least interest in us. We become a perfectly undistinguished people (522)<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Russell's "A Declaration of faith", the first Irish Statesman editorial, is discussed at the beginning of the previous chapter.

<sup>11</sup> "Old Traditions and the New Era", IS, 3:17, 3 Jan. 1925. 522-523.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

The sentiments expressed in this passage are crucial to an understanding of Russell's cultural polemic. It contains all the elements that marked Russell's concern over the increasing attention given in the Free State to nativist linguistic projects. With the foundation of the Gaeltacht Commission and the drive to have Irish taught in all levels of state schooling there was a definite possibility that Irish would be institutionalised as the state language<sup>13</sup>. To countermand this, Russell argues that the Irish language is unable to adapt to modern conditions. Thus we find Russell, the apparent mystic, celebrating the empirical achievements of Kelvin and Tyndall<sup>14</sup>.

Russell in effect conceived of Anglo-Ireland as the central modernising tendency in Irish culture, despite its having its roots in the relatively pre-industrial eighteenth century. The achievement of Russell's Anglo-Ireland is its contribution to nineteenth century science. The Anglo-Irish are educated in a practical discipline critical to the success of the Free State's modern development, a caste capable of endowing independent Ireland with the fruits of their specialist knowledge. Russell's construction of this version of Anglo-Ireland was bound to offend. It is indeed relevant that Daniel Corkery defended Gaelic Ireland from the charge of redundancy in The Hidden Ireland, first published in January 1925. Ostensibly a study of Irish language Munster poets of the eighteenth century, The Hidden Ireland was, to its author, an act of reclamation, a recovery of the lost history of a once dominant caste<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> The Commission was appointed by order of the Executive Council on 27 Jan. 1925. General Richard Mulcahy was chair.

<sup>14</sup> William Thomson, Lord Kelvin, was born in Belfast. Holding the Chair of Natural Philosophy at the University of Glasgow for fifty-three years, his principal achievement was the discovery of the second law of thermodynamics. John Tyndall too held a Chair of Natural Philosophy, but at the Royal Institution. Boylan notes that "His main investigations into the properties of radiant heat probably constitute his major scientific contribution"(432). Cited from Boylan, H. ed. A Dictionary of Irish Biography.

<sup>15</sup> Edmund Curtis reviewed The Hidden Ireland in the Irish Statesman in January 1925. Curtis described Corkery's book as "one of the most convincing arguments yet made for the perpetuation of a speech which up to 1600 stood high among the cultivated languages of Europe"(660). Curtis leaves



Implicit in Corkery's literary history was the assumption that the continued revival of Irish was critical to the spiritual integrity of the Free State. Corkery's opponents were those who argued that Irish was a language unsuitable to the requirements of efficient statehood:

To revive Irish cry the Progressives – Progressives! – is to stay the wheels, to put the hands of the clock back. They are filled with a vision of whirring wheels, glistening belts, flying argosies – a mechanical world, its speed ever accelerating, its speed ever increasing! ... If those whose very dreams have become mechanical still see any use for the arts, it can only be that they pay lip-service to old saws. How anyone who cares for literature can bear to see a language, any language, die is a thought beyond us (xii-xiii)<sup>16</sup>.

Corkery's insight was to realise that independence was the greatest danger to the Irish language. The demands of an international capitalist economy whose transactions were conducted in English threatened the revival of a separate national language. Russell's own vision of a scientific, rational Anglo-Ireland is in this context part of a post-Treaty doctrine that, since The Interpreters, accommodated itself with a free, capitalist, Irish state. Russell argued in the Irish Statesman for a "rich tolerance and acceptance"(522)<sup>17</sup> of both Anglo and Irish cultures but, as I have already suggested, he equally felt that Irish speaking, or as he would have it, Gaelic, culture was unsuited to the modern world. The reality of Russell's multicultural ethic is betrayed by the biological metaphor that he employs to describe it. He wrote that:

Nothing could be worse for a country than a dull uniformity of culture. It is the conflict of cultures and ideas which bring about intellectual vitality. They wed together and beget new and vigorous children and prevent that anaemia which comes when ideas of the same kind are inbred and inbred until a kind of imbecility in the progeny results (522-523)<sup>18</sup>.

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open the question of the development of Irish after 1600. Curtis, E. "The Twilight Stars of Gaelic Poetry", IS, 3:21, 31 Jan. 1925. 659-660.

<sup>16</sup> It is possible indeed that Corkery has Russell in mind as one of the 'Progressives' of this passage. His 'flying argosies' are for example strongly reminiscent of Russell's description of airships in The Interpreters. The Interpreters was, as discussed in Chapter Four, the expression of Russell's acceptance of the new, scientific, Irish State.

<sup>17</sup> "Old Traditions and the New Era", IS, 3:17, 3 Jan. 1925. 522-523.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

Flinders Petrie's Revolutions of Civilisation, a book first published in 1911 and discussed in previous chapters, suggested to Russell the correlation between biology and culture that he outlines above. Russell establishes such a link in the Irish Statesman to give scientific validity to his claim that the Free State was in absolute need of Anglo-Ireland's service. Petrie's work is mentioned frequently in the journal as a source of Russell's analysis<sup>19</sup>. Revolutions of Civilisation was Petrie's attempt to systematise his analysis of the growth and decline, as he saw it, of human culture from prehistory to the present. Petrie's idea was to separate periods of advanced human civilisation from those of retrograde achievement by tracing periods of flux between the two standards in disparate individual cultures. His investigation led Petrie to ask under what conditions civilisations flourish, a question whose answer was vital to Russell's hopes for the Irish Statesman as a catalyst to Irish achievement in the nineteen twenties. Petrie's basic finding was that "In every case in which we can examine the history sufficiently, we find that there was a fresh race coming into the country when the wave was at its lowest"(114), the wave in this case being an image of the culture's rise or fall. Petrie's belief is important to Russell's interpretation of the course of Irish history as put forward in the Irish Statesman. The periods that Russell attends to are those of cross-pollination, with his repeated references to Danes, Saxons and, more recently, the Anglo-Irish.

Implicit in both Petrie's and Russell's theories of cultural contact is the idea that one of the two cultures involved must assume a weakened position to allow the newer, more vigorous race to refresh it. Thus Russell creates a vision of Gaelic Ireland feeble in power and lost to communication from the outside world. The

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<sup>19</sup> See for example "The Gaelic and Anglo-Irish Cultures", IS, 3:19, 17 Jan. 1925. 587. See also Russell's reply to a letter called "Mixed Races" by 'Medicus' in which he mentions his support for Petrie, IS, 6:3, 27 March 1927. 71. Also "N&C", IS, 7:14, 11 Dec. 1926. 316.



Anglo-Irish arrive and are stimulated to new achievement by contact with a previously alien culture. The actual dynamics of this relationship are factually untenable. Pressingly, there was the obvious problem of the Anglo-Irish in 1920's Ireland, defeated by the Land Acts and deserting the country in ever-greater numbers<sup>20</sup>. But to point this out is to ignore the contingent fact that Russell's history of the Anglo-Irish is a conscious fabrication. It is a myth of the past intended to fortify a future position. It is the expression of a hope that a resurgent Irish culture in the nineteen twenties can be regulated, not just by a political or religious minority, such as the Anglo-Irish were, but by a cultural one, for which Russell will speak. Petrie's final caveat to Revolutions of Civilisation suggests how Russell's rhetoric of cultural integration is but a holding pattern in preparation for power. To Petrie, it was obvious that:

if the view becomes really grasped, that the source of every civilisation has lain in race mixture, it may be that eugenics will, in some future civilisation, carefully segregate fine races, and prohibit continual mixture, until they have a distinct type, which will start a new civilisation when transplanted. The future progress of man may depend as much on isolation to establish a type, as a fusion of types when established (131).

Russell was influenced strongly by Petrie's belief that racial evolution might lead finally to the creation of a superior breed. In terms of this idea, the Irish speaking natives were, to Russell, far down the order of progress. Russell believed that the Anglo-Irish were one of the superior strains, transnational, and thus somehow more universally human, in their achievement. Ingratiatingly, Russell called the Anglo-Irish a race "of which any country might be proud"(586)<sup>21</sup>. Accordingly, only the "ignorant"(586)<sup>22</sup> would deny their value, just "as savages might throw away precious

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<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of this, see Brown's chapter "The Fate of the Irish Left and of the Protestant Minority", in Ireland: A Social and Cultural History. 102-137.

<sup>21</sup> "The Gaelic and the Anglo-Irish Cultures", IS, 3:19, 17 Jan. 1925. 583-586.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

ores of which they were unable to discern the uses”(586)<sup>23</sup>. The association of primitivism with the opponents of Russell’s version of Anglo-Ireland is significant in context of Petrie’s eugenicist commitments. Petrie predicts the arrival of a culture superior to those previously existing. In Irish terms, Russell attaches the achievements of Anglo-Ireland to a scheme whereby their acceptance into Free State culture will provide the basis for a new and vigorous civilisation. This constitutes the subtlest part of Russell’s polemic and the site of his partial divergence from Petrie. For Russell’s arguments on behalf of the Anglo-Irish are finally concerned less with the practice of eugenics than with the creation of a viable myth whereby the Anglo-Irish can be posited as the nucleus of a new, post-Treaty Ireland. Anglo-Ireland does not provide Russell, as it did Yeats, with noble symbols whose decline represents the “death of culture”<sup>24</sup>. It represented instead the hope of a future resurgence of a superior culture.

The Anglo-Irish become the basis of myth and Russell uses their image in a manner similar to the way in which O’Grady created a new legend of the Red Branch in his History of Ireland<sup>25</sup>. Tyndall, Kelvin, Yeats and Synge rarely, if ever, figure as the authors of individual work in the lineage presented by Russell in the Irish Statesman. Their personal philosophies are, in this context, of little interest, for their collective value was their iconic silence. This value was most difficult to maintain *contra* Yeats and his stubborn resistance to Russell’s attentions can be registered most strongly at exactly those times when Yeats might have been expected to speak responsibly and publicly. Yeats’s submission to the Irish Statesman of the notes to

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Brown, T. Ireland: A Social and Cultural History.

<sup>25</sup> For a full discussion of O’Grady’s influence on Russell see Chapter One. 10-14.



his undelivered Senate speech of February 1925 on Divorce is a strong case in point<sup>26</sup>. For Russell the Anglo-Irish existed as a mythical presence that sustained the Irish Statesman's right to intervene in Free State political debate. But the myth he recounted was the means whereby English and Irish speakers, Protestant and Catholic, Saxon and Gael, could be bound by an orthodoxy amenable to artistic intervention. The myth was valuable because it was indeterminate and emotive. The scientific improbability of Russell's theory of race is, simply, unimportant. The myth's primary function was to act as an assimilative, living legend.

But the decline of Anglo-Irish political authority in the Free State also suggested a weakness in Russell's project. For it ensured that a newly resurgent Irish speaking culture might successfully resist its claims, especially since many of the institutions of the Free State were staffed by individuals prominent in movements such as the Gaelic League<sup>27</sup>. In an attempt to circumvent this problem, Russell published the opinions of writers critical of Irish language teaching. First among these was Sean O'Casey. O'Casey was independent from institutional nationalism but retained a general respect for his continued support for the Dublin working classes. O'Casey spoke for an almost subterranean constituency and his anger over the poor's disenfranchisement from the new state fed his resentment at the time wasted in debating abstract subjects like the Irish language<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Yeats's 'Unpublished Notes' were in fact an attack on Cosgrave's introduction of a Divorce Bill into the *Dáil*, with its subsequent referral to the Senate. Yeats accused Cosgrave of committing "an act of aggression"(8) against the Protestant minority. Russell published the article but was uncomfortable with Yeats's combative stance. Russell depreciated "a discussion on lines which would involve religious controversy"(4). Both writers' opinions can be read in *IS*, 4:1, 14 March 1925.

<sup>27</sup>The most obvious example being Eoin MacNeill, Minister for Education. Russell tried to accommodate MacNeill within the Irish Statesman by publishing an unprecedented four article series of MacNeill's "Irish Educational Policy" in October and November 1925. Russell's manoeuvring was rendered useless by MacNeill's subsequent resignation over the Boundary Agreement with Northern Ireland.

<sup>28</sup> See for example O'Casey's letter "The Innocents at Home" in which he alleged that "the attachment to Irish on behalf of the elders of the nation is a fancy fraud and a gigantic sham. They know it to be a sham, and consequently, want to give it the appearance of reality by forcing it down the throats of the

O'Casey's angry advocacy was supplemented in 1925 with the more balanced polemic of Séan O'Faoláin. What connected both writers to the Irish Statesman was their ability to play the role of internal dissident, of the Irish speaker disaffected with the demands made on the Free State population by the Irish language movement. O'Faoláin was a writer of impeccable nationalist pedigree who had taken the Republican side in the Civil War. He was also a native of Cork and a former close friend of Daniel Corkery. O'Faoláin satisfied the criteria of linguistic ability and political association demanded of any advocate of Irish Ireland. But Russell was intelligent enough to provide the Irish Statesman as a forum for a writer eager to expand his intellectual horizons beyond Cork.

O'Faoláin's first contribution to Russell's journal was a letter published in September 1925. In it he questioned the relation of his contemporary Irish literary tradition to the eighteenth century, a connection that Corkery made in The Hidden Ireland<sup>29</sup>. He disagreed with "those who would like to project the eighteenth century into the twentieth under the impression that they were thereby reviving the real Ireland"(816)<sup>30</sup>. To O'Faoláin, Irish literature in the eighteenth century was merely the record of the final words of an already defeated people. Unfortunately for him this was exactly the tradition promoted by the "Irish revival... of to-day"(816)<sup>31</sup>. O'Faoláin desired to promote an invigorated Irish language tradition. Accordingly, he wrote that:

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defenceless children"(560). IS, 3:18, 10 Jan. 1925. 560-561. For an account of a child's death in the tenements see O'Casey's short story, "Mollser", IS, 4:7, 25 April 1925. 200-202.

<sup>29</sup> The full title of Corkery's book is for example The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century.

<sup>30</sup> O'Faoláin, S. "The Best Irish Literature", IS, 4:26, 5 Sept. 1925. 816.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*



Those who go digging in the Gaeltacht to-day will only get a tradition about a fag-end of a fag-end of a culture, and if they are there seeking culture they will waste much time. But, it is another matter if the educationalists and the revivalists should attempt to force this uneducated tradition on a country like ours, which is already in the European current, and whose literature, in Irish, as in English, will be part and parcel of Europe's gift to the world (816)<sup>32</sup>.

O'Faoláin dismisses the *Gaeltacht* at the same time that an important governmental commission was collecting evidence from around Ireland to secure a policy that would benefit areas designated as Irish speaking. O'Faoláin's commitment to the Irish language is not in doubt, but his criticism of Irish teaching was succour to the Irish Statesman in its effort to secure English as the medium of technical literacy. More importantly, O'Faoláin's recognition of the English language literary tradition in Ireland was a public sign of accommodation with Anglo-Irish literature from a writer previously associated with Corkery.

Another of Corkery's early discoveries was Frank O'Connor, who began to publish regularly in the Irish Statesman in 1925 and 1926. O'Connor's contributions to the journal were mostly English translations from original Irish poetry. His "Sever me not from thy Sweetness!" is part of an excellent sequence of variations on the Mad Sweeney legend that Seamus Heaney was later to adapt<sup>33</sup>. Russell's interest in O'Connor's poetry coincided with the Irish Statesman's promotion of Austin Clarke in 1925. The two writers' poems were high points of the journal's literary output. It is surprising now to read how much the two complemented each other, especially since O'Connor is presently most associated with O'Faoláin as a fellow short story writer and Cork realist. Clarke was at this time heavily immersed in his readings of

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

Irish legend, as his submissions to both the Irish Statesman and Dublin Magazine show. The finest of these is perhaps “The Son of Lir,” published by Russell in July 1925<sup>34</sup>. This poem is playful in the manner of James Stephens’ Irish translations, a quality that Russell appreciated<sup>35</sup>. Clarke wrote in a manner similar to O’Connor, in that both translated from Irish into English while retaining a respect for the original forms of the poetry they translated. Russell felt that their writing was exactly the kind of work that had inspired the first wave of the Revival, as Anglo-Irish literature was infused with what he referred to as the Gaelic spirit<sup>36</sup>. Thus, Russell, in his review of Clarke’s The Cattle Drive in Connaught, declared himself

inclined to rate the poetry in this book... higher than that in any since The Vengeance of Fionn had made us aware that a new poet with authentic vision had come to carry on the tradition of Anglo-Irish literature and enrich it (370)<sup>37</sup>.

Russell responds to Clarke with a view that Anglo-Irish literature exhibits an essential quality. Its authenticity derives from its attachment to the legends of Gaelic Ireland. Russell’s appreciation of Clarke is heavily coloured by his desire to read the younger poet as being derivative of his own concept of Anglo-Ireland. To Russell, Clarke is the voice of a culture constantly enriched by its Irish literary antecedents. The vision, for example, that Russell ascribes to Clarke is reminiscent of that of the *Aisling* poets. The complexities of cultural debate in the decade are realised in an awareness that the *Aisling*, according to Corkery’s Hidden Ireland, was no longer a

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<sup>33</sup> O’Connor, F. “Sever me not from thy Sweetness! (The Mad King’s Song from *Suignhe Geilt*)”, IS, 5:11, 21 Nov. 1925. 330. See also Heaney, S. Sweeney Astray: A Version from the Irish. Field Day: Derry, 1983.

<sup>34</sup> Clarke, A. “The Son of Lir”, IS, 4:18, 11 July 1925. 555.

<sup>35</sup> Stephens’s skill as a translator is apparent in his renderings of O’Bruadair and Raftery, collected in Lennox Robinson’s 1925 Golden Treasury of Irish Verse. Incidentally, Robinson’s introduction credits Russell and Yeats with helping Robinson make his selection for this book.

<sup>36</sup> Russell created a template for his appreciation of such an achievement in his review of James Stephens’s Collected Poems. He wrote that in the book “Perhaps the most perfect poetry judged merely as art are the reincarnations from Gaelic, in which he rarely sets himself the almost impossible task of translating poetry into poetry, but takes an idea, an emotion and gives it a new body”(206). Russell, G. W. “L&L: The Poetry of James Stephens”, IS, 7:9, 6 Nov. 1926. 205-206.



viable medium for national literature<sup>38</sup>. Russell contradicts Corkery in order to brand Clarke with a Gaelic influence, the authentic mark of Russell's Anglo-Irish culture.

Russell's own poetry was almost paralysed by its need for authenticity. Russell published only one new poetry collection in the nineteen twenties, Voices of the Stones, in 1925. Blake is a dominant influence throughout much of Voices of the Stones and Russell was keenly aware of the relative absence of his own voice in the collection. He felt a sense of underachievement with its publication and wrote to James Stephens that he was "a little sad"(32)<sup>39</sup> and thought there were only "half a dozen lyrics of quality"(32)<sup>40</sup> in it. The collection is prefaced by a quotation from The Voyage of Bran, an early indication of its mythic preoccupations. It reads, "The shining rock/ From which arise a hundred strains"(n. p.), the conceit being that poetry finds its inspiration in permanence. The prose poem dedication to Padraic Colum confirms this suggestion as Russell writes "I made these verses in a rocky land"(vii). The remainder of the dedication outlines the dual interest in the relationship between imagination and immutability that marks most of the poems in Voices of the Stones. Only the stones have kept their "purity"(viii) since the Fall. This collection is an attempt to give voice to that essence:

with my cheek  
Pressed to their roughness I had part regained  
My morning starriness, and made these songs  
Half from the hidden world and half from this (viii).

This double vision is, unfortunately, more than half the problem. The poems are generally confused in their choice of imagery and rarely communicate any sense

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<sup>37</sup> Russell, G. W. "Review of the Cattle Drive of Connaught and Other Poems", IS, 5:12, 28 Nov. 1925. 370, 372.

<sup>38</sup> Corkery wrote that "After the terror of 1798 the *aisling* poem is heard no more; though the genre may still survive, it is used now to comfort some lover's heart, and not the heart of the nation"(144). Cited from The Hidden Ireland.

<sup>39</sup> Russell to James Stephens, August 1925. Cited from Finneran, J., ed. Some Unpublished Letters from AE to James Stephens.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

of wonder to the reader. They are too often given over to a romantic poetic language that makes the reader question the individual authenticity of the poet's vision. Even a successful poem like "Magnificence" is haunted by the presence of Blake. The Dublin Magazine noted the decline in Russell's work, its reviewer reading in the collection indications of "a triviality, of a lessening sympathy with human weakness, of a despair that is not real, of a wavering in essentials, not to be found in his previous work"(62)<sup>41</sup>.

But the obvious and sometimes laboured artifice of Russell's poetry confirms more than his artistic decline. It is also indicative of the poet's attempt to give his work validity in the Anglo-Irish context that he has created. The references to Bran and the mystic permanency of the stones are evidence of a perception that links nature with spiritual purity. This connection was a common theme in literary descriptions of the West of Ireland during and after the Revival<sup>42</sup>. The West was the symbolic stronghold of the native Irish; Russell's evocation of imagery associated with it is an indication of a calculated failure in his poetry. He sacrifices individual diction to his desire for poetry to fit into his own version of Anglo-Irish literature; epic in timeframe, romantic in sensibility and Gaelic in inspiration.

A similar sense of calculation can be read in two of the final three poems of the collection. These poems, "A Prisoner: Brixton Prison, September 1920" and "Michael", form a coherent political epilogue to the mythic synthesis attempted in the rest of the text. Of these two, "Michael" has been discussed above in the context of its appearance at the end of Russell's 1922 novel The Interpreters<sup>43</sup>. Together they share some common themes with other poems in the collection - the death of spiritual

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<sup>41</sup> "Voices of the Stones. By AE", Dublin Magazine (cited subsequently as DM), 3:1, Aug. 1925. 61-62.

<sup>42</sup> See Brown, T. Ireland: A Social and Cultural History. 94-96.

<sup>43</sup> See Chapter Four. 143-150.



innocence being explored in both “A Holy Hill” and “Michael” for example. The difference between the two final poems and the rest is that their explicit subject is political revolution. In “Michael” the revolutionary moment is the 1916 Easter Rising. In “A Prisoner”, it is Terence MacSwiney’s death by hunger strike in 1920.

Russell had originally written “A Prisoner” in 1920. Strangely, MacSwiney read this lament in the Times before his death<sup>44</sup>. Russell’s renewed interest in the poem is evidence of his attempt to annex MacSwiney’s legacy for his own vision of Ireland. MacSwiney represented for Russell an element of Republicanism acceptable to his Anglo-Irish synthesis. Russell wrote to James Stephens in 1925 that “Republicanism is dust and ashes”(33)<sup>45</sup> while predicting that “a few glimmering sparks... will be kept alive to be blown into flame in some future when the fire is needed”(33-34)<sup>46</sup>. It is suggestive to think that Russell, with his description of MacSweeney as a “light-bringer”(47), imagines his subject to be one of those ‘glimmering sparks’. In effect, MacSwiney’s reputation in poetry will provide an inspirational narrative to orthodox post-Treaty Irish culture.

In contrast to Russell’s poem of the Rising, “Michael”, the full title of “A Prisoner: Brixton, September 1920” is exact as a record of place and time, though MacSwiney is himself strangely absent from the text. He is sacrificed a second time, on this occasion to symbolism instead of the Republic. MacSwiney is the icon designed to focus the energy that Russell associated with Republicanism into a new Ireland. When the poem was first published in 1920, the speaker imagined a unified and independent nation. The Ireland of 1925 had experienced a fracture of the consensus briefly held before the Treaty. Or, as the speaker has it in “Waste”, another

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<sup>44</sup> Summerfield, H. That Myriad-Minded Man. 199.

<sup>45</sup> Russell to James Stephens, August 1925. Cited from Finneran, J., ed. Some Unpublished Letters from AE to James Stephens.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

poem in Voices of the Stones, the Civil War had “spoilt the sacrifice”(44) of the dead for “words hollow as wind”(44). It is ironic to read the Treaty represented as an empty formula in Russell’s poetry since this option was used by de Valera to justify his taking the oath of allegiance to enter into the *Dáil* in 1927. The point however is that by MacSwiney’s sacrifice in 1920, the individual acquired a corporate importance. The speaker urges MacSwiney to “Burn on, shine here, thou immortality, until/ We too can light our lamps at the funeral pyre”(46). The immediate result of this sacrifice will be the reward of an ability to “conquer the dragon pain”(46). Finally, the poem admits the fact of MacSwiney’s death as “the candles of God already are burning/ row on row:/ Farewell, light-bringer; Fly to thy fountain again”(47). In death MacSwiney returns to a source of inspiration common to all humanity.

Such ritual purification was, in 1920, part of the preparation for MacSwiney’s nationalist martyrdom. In 1925 however the poem takes on new meanings as it is subject to different contexts for reading. MacSwiney’s sister Mary was prominent in *Sinn Féin*, an irridentist die-hard who continued with the party to its electoral eclipse in 1927. Mary MacSwiney’s vitriol was often directed at Russell in the correspondence columns of the Irish Statesman. The dismissive answers he afforded her complaints are indicative of the weak position Russell felt she occupied<sup>47</sup>. Russell’s appropriation of the image of her dead brother in 1925 is ghoulish but it is also evidence of his belief that Irish Republicanism was finished as a political force. Its martyrs could be safely sequestered in preparation for the evolution of a new era. Terence MacSwiney had the perfect credentials to be subject to such an act of poetic



coercion as Republican propaganda celebrated his life as a lesson in purity. For example, Daniel Corkery, long a friend of Terence MacSwiney, found succour in the Civil War by writing that

Among all these whisperings, jobbings, hypocrisies, we move with Terence MacSwiney's name on our lips, his words in our ears, his image in our eyes. And we are unperturbed. For we are sure that, did he see all this, he would do as we have done- only more strongly, more wisely, more purely, more religiously, being possessed of so much greater powers of soul and will (2)<sup>48</sup>.

The intensity of feeling that Corkery describes was evidence of the energy that Russell desired to see unleashed in the new state. The revolutionary fervour of the Anglo-Irish and Civil Wars was to be conducted into new channels, away from divisive splits over the Treaty.

Russell's belief in the energy of the new nation might have remained a poetic fancy if he had not had the ability to translate his senses into an appreciation of the practical achievements of the Irish Government. Russell's genius was to adopt *Cumann na nGaedheal's* hydro-electric scheme on the Shannon as the symbol of the birth of a post-Treaty Ireland. The Shannon scheme was to provide the Free State with an indigenous source of energy to power industrial development. Built between 1925 and 1929, the project consisted of a dam and power station at Ardnacrusha in Co. Limerick. Construction photographs of the scheme, with a head and tail race excavated by a huge array of mechanical plant, show a massive landscape of upturned rock and soil<sup>49</sup>. The dam itself sits before the river with its concrete facing and spiral iron turbine casings. The whole edifice is completely functional, indeed almost

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<sup>47</sup> Russell's replies were often brutal. He wrote in September 1925 that he was sure of "one thing"(48) that he had never done. He had "never in his life encouraged Irishmen to kill each other. We wonder if Miss MacSwiney's conscience is as clear"(48). In "Clairvoyance", *IS*, 5:2, 19 Sept. 1925. 47-48.

<sup>48</sup> Corkery, D. "The Light-Bringer", *Poblacht na h-Eireann* (Southern Edition), 18, 25 Oct. 1922. This was a Terence MacSwiney memorial number.

<sup>49</sup> Thirty thousand tonnes of large and small plant were imported to Ireland to construct the scheme. Construction photographs are reproduced in Manning, M. and M. McDowell, *Electricity Supply in*

brutalist, in architectural style. When officially opened by President Cosgrave in 1929 the dam was a formidable presence in the Limerick countryside, its anomalous presence in the Irish countryside stressed in the literature that advertised tours of this new wonder of state progress<sup>50</sup>.

As the prime industrial project of the Free State, the Shannon scheme was the subject of a concerted government publicity drive<sup>51</sup>. Sean Keating, the former pupil of William Orpen, was commissioned to record the construction of the power station and produced a number of paintings on the subject, the most famous of these “Night’s Candles Burnt Out”, first exhibited at the Royal Academy in London in 1929<sup>52</sup>. Suitably, the theme of Keating’s commission was ‘The Dawn of a New Ireland’<sup>53</sup>. Denis Johnston echoed Keating’s interest in the birth of an industrial Ireland in his 1931 play, The Moon on the Yellow River. Set in the shadow of a completed power station, Johnston’s play examines the tensions that the hydro-electric plant introduces to rural Irish life<sup>54</sup>. The Irish Statesman too saw the Shannon scheme as the point of departure between the old Ireland and the new. It would inspire

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Ireland: The History of the ESB. The head race and tail race were the excavations needed to increase the degree by which water approached the turbines to provide a higher energy yield.

<sup>50</sup> Great Southern Railways offered half price excursions to the Shannon development, advertised by a Titan figure holding rods of lightning above the dam with the legend “VISIT THE SHANNON WORKS”. This image combines the industrial with the epic in a manner that can best be described as futurist. Models of the dam were also exhibited at the Dublin Spring Show in Ballsbridge. See Manning, M. and M. McDowell, Electricity Supply in Ireland: The History of the ESB. 42.

<sup>51</sup> The *Cumann na nGaedheal* Government was still so proud of its achievement in 1932 that it dedicated a chapter of the Saorstát Eireann Official Handbook, entitled “Power Supply in the Irish Free State”, to it. 157-162.

<sup>52</sup> Fintan Cullen in fact discusses “Night’s Candles are Burnt Out” in context of Russell’s art reviews in the Irish Statesman. The painting itself details a number of figures set before the dam at Ardnacrusha. Cullen suggests that “Progress is the theme of Keating’s allegory. The mechanical digger (seen on the horizon) has replaced the armoured car (seen behind the group to the left); the eager young family on the right look towards the new source of power, while the corresponding three men on the left either sit immobile on a wheelbarrow, drink buttermilk or use an old-fashioned oil lamp to examine a skeleton... Keating’s Ireland is, to use O’Faolain’s phrase, ‘an unshaped society’, but it is a representation of Ireland facing up to its contemporary condition”(168-169). Cited from Cullen, F. Visual Politics: The Representation of Ireland 1750-1930.

<sup>53</sup> Kennedy, S. B. Irish Art and Modernism. 171.

<sup>54</sup> A brief plot of the play details the attempt by a local force of Republicans under the command of Darrell Blake to destroy a hydro-electric power station in the West of Ireland. Amid much digression, the Republican bid fails with the execution of Blake by the Free State officer Lanigan. The German



the mass of the people into the attitude of mind proper to a self-governing nation, and that can be done by concentrating on constructive policies and paying much less attention to those who still believe they are slaves (38-39)<sup>55</sup>.

The reference to slavery is a repudiation of the Republican maxim that the Free State was in thrall to the British Empire by virtue of its use of the English language and its adherence to the economic terms of the Treaty. The Shannon scheme thus assumed added symbolic prestige as it represented an attempt to create exactly that kind of economic independence that Republicans cited as the main criterion of independence. The scheme's construction also fostered ultra-national commercial associations as a German company helped Ireland take its place among the industrialised nations of the modern world. The Irish Statesman was sure that the "Irish people"(70)<sup>56</sup> would appreciate the attempt to have "one of their great economic problems"(70)<sup>57</sup> solved

in the big modern way. They will feel the engineering genius and knowledge which has gone into its making, the kind of thoroughness which had made Germany one of the greatest economic forces in the modern world, and they will be less inclined to listen with patience to the schoolboy economics of the Sceiligs (70)<sup>58</sup>.

'Sceilig' was a contributor to the Catholic Bulletin, a journal pathological in its dislike of the Irish Statesman<sup>59</sup>. The hope put forward that its readers would

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engineer responsible for the plant is accused of responsibility for Blake's death by the other characters, as the defence of his power station has interrupted the accepted rules of conduct previously held between the play's antagonists. A subtle reflection on the effect of modernity on rural Ireland, The Moon in the Yellow River is uncompromising in its examination of the violence that created independent Ireland. As the Free State office Lanigan says to the German engineer Tausch after the death of Blake, "I suppose you think I enjoy that, when it means a bullet in my own back sooner or later. But enjoy it or not, I've always been taught that it's not words but deeds the country needs, and I'll go on doing what I can, no matter"(138).

<sup>55</sup> "N&C", IS, 4:2, 21 Mar. 1925. 35-37.

<sup>56</sup> "The Shannon Scheme", IS, 4:3, 28 Mar. 1925. 67-70.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.* 'Sceilig' was editor of the Catholic Bulletin.

<sup>59</sup> The Catholic Bulletin was published monthly. Nearly every editorial of its 1925 series contains criticism of Russell or Yeats. It labelled Russell and his contemporaries as the "associated aesthetes"(102) who "consider themselves a *Super-Race*"(102), a criticism that would suggest the Catholic Bulletin paid close attention to Russell's defence of the Anglo-Irish. Interestingly, the journal offered "G. W. Russell and his clique... Daniel Corkery's new book. They will there see how the

repudiate the Catholic Bulletin (and presumably other publications like it) after exposure to the glories of the Shannon scheme echoes the parallel belief of Irish language activists that with the adoption of Irish the country would assume a more 'national' characteristic. The Shannon scheme becomes a very definite symbol of cohesion made possible by a post-Treaty, rather than an Irish speaking or Republican, nation. Russell's concept of a post-Treaty Ireland envisaged a nation where these last two movements were marginalised. Thus, by implication, the creation of a newly industrialised Ireland threatened an entire previous understanding of what being Irish was. The Irish Statesman fully recognised this. In response to the Shannon scheme, its own belief was that

the average Irishman is bored stiff with being primitive, and centuries behind other States with science, culture, and organisation, and once he tastes the fascination of being modern and up to date he will tend to become a perfect glutton for modernity. The Abbey dramatists of the next generation will lose their material, and the living dramatists had better make hay while the sun shines, for the supply of primaevial rustics will tend to diminish, and in the peasant play of ten years hence the farmers will be talking about units of horse-power instead of the mist on the bog or the wind on high lonely hills (356)<sup>60</sup>.

The side-effects of industrial modernity are surprising. The peasant will disappear from drama because his inefficiency makes him uninteresting and archaic. The farmer, in contrast, adapts to modern circumstance and discusses horsepower. The problem for Russell in Ireland however was that in 1925 agriculture still

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Gael, the one Irish nation with the one Irish literature and culture, regards, and dealt with, and will deal with, this mongrel upstart called Anglo-Irish tradition and culture. But the power of the aesthetes to even understand the plain lesson of 'The Hidden Ireland' is what must be doubted. Good judges say that it would be more reasonable to expect a turnip to do thinking than to expect the aesthetes to realise the silly, sordid, and aggregated thing that they are"(102-103). "Editorial", Catholic Bulletin, 15:2, Feb. 1925. 97-108. Evidently the joining together of the letters 'a' and 'e' in reference to 'AE' was the summit of the Catholic Bulletin's prose style. The relationship between the Catholic Bulletin and the Irish Statesman is further discussed in O'Callaghan, M. "Language, Nationality and Cultural Identity in the Irish Free State, 1922-27: the *Irish Statesman* and the *Catholic Bulletin* Reappraised", Irish Historical Studies, 24:94, Nov. 1984. 226-245. O'Callaghan argues particularly that the Catholic Bulletin was atypical in its cultural extremism. O'Callaghan interprets both journals to be involved in "a post-colonial search for a satisfactory 'national character'"(244).

<sup>60</sup> "N&C", IS, 4:12, 30 May 1925. 355-356.



dominated the economy. Even a journal recommended by the Irish Statesman to its readership for the accuracy of its economic analysis recognised this: “In Ireland agriculture is the dog and manufacture a very diminutive tail”(136)<sup>61</sup>. To the Round Table this observation was elementary and any Government that did not recognise it would be in for a “rude awakening”(136)<sup>62</sup>.

But to recognise this is only to recognise the obvious fact that Russell’s version of Anglo-Ireland did not depend for its success on social or economic conditions. It might even be argued that his myth of Anglo-Ireland became more potent the further it was divorced from such reality. Thus we find Russell celebrating his belief in a scientific, mechanical society in a journal incorporating the Irish Homestead and edited from the premises of the co-operative movement in Merrion Square. Similarly, Russell’s vision of Anglo-Ireland was, as I have already suggested, a mirage. It was, in its silence over areas of discourse that it could not integrate, calculatingly dismissive. This in part explains Russell’s hesitancy to address the problem of religious difference in the Irish Statesman. Religion has long served as a symbol of cultural and political association in Irish life. The reason for the Irish Statesman’s ignorance of so fundamental a problem is simple. The journal’s political myth could not accommodate it<sup>63</sup>. Russell’s silence is less due to personal ignorance than to an awareness that, of all the different registers of opinion and ideology in the Free State, religion was the most dangerous because the Churches already had their own myths of association. Religion represented an area in which Russell had

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<sup>61</sup> “Ireland: Events in the Free State”, Round Table (cited subsequently as RT), 16:65, Dec. 1926. 131-145. The Round Table was an English review of international affairs. Its Irish correspondent was J. J. Horgan, a Unionist with great respect for Horace Plunkett. Horgan wrote a memoir of his pre-1918 experiences in Parnell to Pearse.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Reflecting on the absence of religious discussion in the Irish Statesman, Brown suggests that Russell “largely ignored how religion was often regarded as a badge of social, economic and national identity and this may account for his inability to influence the country in any profound way”(129). In Ireland: A Social and Cultural History.

absolutely no authority and his weakness in this area is reflected in the vicious caricature he was subject to in denominational publications such as the Irish Rosary and Dublin Review<sup>64</sup>.

In face of such entrenched opposition, Russell's vision of Anglo-Ireland represented a formidable risk for the Irish Statesman. It was after all the articulation of the vision of a state that had not yet come into being. Russell could afford to take this chance because, unlike the Government, the Irish Statesman was able to idealise without suffering at the polls (unfortunately any evidence of a detrimental effect on the journal's sales no longer seems to exist). The journal's silence on questions of religion ensured its editor received only personal opprobrium. But in promoting concrete projects like the Shannon scheme the Irish Statesman ran the risk of antagonising in fact the very people who would, it hoped, eventually benefit from industrial development. Russell, as with The Interpreters in 1922, tried to envision change before its definite arrival<sup>65</sup>. This was a strategy easier to sustain in a fictive form. Its promulgation as the policy of a journal that relied in large part for its continued existence on sales could, by miscalculation, alienate the Irish Statesman from its readership.

The contract for the scheme was signed with the German engineering firm of Siemens-Schuckert in August 1925. The total cost of the project was to be £5.2 million, a massive sum when one considers that the entire government expenditure for

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<sup>64</sup> The Irish Rosary cast Russell as a low-church demagogue: "George Russell, who might have been a statesman and a leader of the people"(953) was instead "a sort of ponderous, dissenting preacher"(953). "Those Irish Pagans", Irish Rosary, 29:12, Dec. 1925. 952-955. The Dublin Review was equally dismissive: "Let Yeats believe in his fairies, A.E. in his Buddha, with the Irish trade-mark, and James Stephens in his *Uberseele*. It is their affair not ours. We have theological tenets of our own"(192). "Those Irish Pagans!" Dublin Review, 177:355, Oct-Dec. 1925. 179-192. The Irish Review was published by Dominicans in Dublin and the Dublin Review by the Catholic publishing house Burns, Oates and Washbourne of London.

<sup>65</sup> See Chapter Four. 123.



the year 1926 to 1927 was only £24 million<sup>66</sup>. Initially even the radical Voice of Labour welcomed the project. Its construction would alleviate the conditions of the unemployed who, “in common with the Labour Party, are prepared to give the Shannon Electricity Bill a chance, provided that the rights and privileges of their class are safe-guarded”(4)<sup>67</sup>. Trouble soon developed when Siemens offered its Irish labourers a wage of 8d. per hour, an offer improved to £1.12s. per week with free lodging for a fifty hour week. The company argued that this wage was reasonable when compared to that of the average rural labourer, then around 25s. for a 60 hour week. The unions however pressed for a higher, urban industrial wage to be paid to the workers. The two sides remained in deadlock until December, with the union cause substantially weakened by Siemens’ success in the recruitment of strike breaking labour from Limerick City. Defeated in a motion on behalf of a wage increase in the *Seanad* in December 1925 the struggle failed and normal relations were resumed by early 1926<sup>68</sup>.

Despite the Irish TUC labelling the scheme “useless and untouchable”(127)<sup>69</sup>, Russell was unafraid to show where his sympathies lay. In response to claims that wages were too low in Limerick the Irish Statesman replied that “We must have the mechanical foundations laid for the efficient modern State, antecedent to raising the standard of living here to what it is in other countries”(132)<sup>70</sup>. The Irish Statesman reiterated its support for the government’s stance on the matter two weeks later when it praised a speech critical of the unions made by the Vice President, Kevin

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<sup>66</sup> Lee, J. J. Ireland. 109.

<sup>67</sup> VoL, 7:20, 16 May 1925. 4

<sup>68</sup> Details of the disturbance and figures for wages are taken from Manning, M. and M. McDowell. Electricity Supply in Ireland: The History of the ESB. 41-43.

<sup>69</sup> The TUC’s opinion is recorded in “Comments”, NS, 27:702, 9 Oct. 1926. 725-727.

<sup>70</sup> “N&C”, IS, 5:5, 10 Oct. 1925. 131-134.

O'Higgins<sup>71</sup>. In doing so Russell alienated those sections of Labour, from the parliamentary to the radical, that had previously been well disposed towards him. It will be remembered that the Voice of Labour, under the editorship of Cathal O'Shannon, vigorously supported Russell's defence of the co-operatives in the War of Independence<sup>72</sup>. Now it condemned him. For "Nowhere in Ireland - except perhaps in the columns of 'Irish Truth' and 'The Irish Statesman' - are voices to be lifted up publicly in opposition to Labour's welcomed stand"(1)<sup>73</sup>.

The Labour Party fully supported the boycott in the *Dáil*. Indeed, the assistant secretary of the special TUC meeting convened to discuss the boycott in the autumn of 1925 was R. J. P. Mortished, a Labour intellect who contributed several articles to the Irish Statesman in 1923. After the controversy over the Shannon project he saw fit only to submit a letter critical of Russell to the journal and diverted his other writing to a rival of the Irish Statesman set up in Cork in 1926, the Irish Tribune. The Irish Statesman's support for the Shannon Scheme as an agent of modernisation meant that its editorial policy became even more associated with what the Voice of Labour decried as an "anti-Labour Ministry"(4)<sup>74</sup>. But just as Russell's project of industrial modernity, with all its concomitant cultural change, seemed secure as its potential was realised in the defeat of the Shannon boycott, changes within Republicanism posed a further problem. De Valera split from *Sinn Féin* in 1926 to form *Fianna Fáil*. While doing so de Valera continued an overture to Labour that had started the previous year. The journal Sinn Féin noted as early as January 1925 that its party's president had "twice stated the permanent attitude of the party, namely by

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<sup>71</sup> "N&C", IS, 5:7, 24 Oct. 1925. 195-198.

<sup>72</sup> See Chapter Three. 94-100.

<sup>73</sup> "The Shannon Boycott", VoL, 7:48, 28 Nov. 1925. 1.



repeating its adhesion to the Democratic Programme of Dail Eireann and by stating definitely that unemployment must be ended”(5)<sup>75</sup>. *Fianna Fáil* courted Labour, thus marginalising Russell.

This did not concern the Irish Statesman in the period before the 1927 election. The journal gave the impression that it believed Republicanism to be a political relic of the Civil War. Such confidence irked Republicans. A stream of bitterness rankles throughout Sinn Féin's responses to the Irish Statesman. It complained of “incessant misrepresentation”(3)<sup>76</sup> by its rival, a journal composed by “publicists who think they have a divine mission to distort, confuse, and misinterpret the policy and principles of the independence movement, and to call the result Irish statesmanship”(3)<sup>77</sup>. The Irish Statesman had other interests than the decline of *Sinn Féin*. But Sinn Féin was prescient in its criticism of Russell's misrepresentation of its ideas. For the Republican journal conceived of itself as the voice of a relevant political movement with a future. Russell was convinced that it only mouthed an echo of the past. More galling for Sinn Féin, the Irish Statesman desired to appropriate the energy Russell associated with the revolutionary movement that *Sinn Féin* alone felt it represented. Russell agreed with the consensus opinion in 1926 that the Republicans would disappear at the polls. But, as the Round Table suggests, this did not mean that *Cumann na nGaedheal* would assume sole control of the state. For:

With a general election approaching next year and the Government by no means popular, any national leader with a considered policy and a clear record should have little trouble in creating a formidable Opposition, but we doubt if a majority, or even a considerable

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<sup>74</sup> VoL, 7:20, 16 May 1925. 4.

<sup>75</sup> “Unemployment as Great a Threat as Conscription”, Sinn Féin, 3:12, 17 Jan. 1925. 5.

<sup>76</sup> “Events of the Week”, Sinn Féin, 3:24, 11 April 1925. 3.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*

minority, of the electors will be foolhardy enough to present Mr. De Valera with another blank cheque, having regard to the figure for which he filled in the last (587)<sup>78</sup>.

With de Valera and, by association, *Fianna Fáil* so summarily dismissed, it is tempting to ask, as Richard Dunphy has, from where “would the alternative - the force for change - come? Who would provide the leadership in the process of reconstruction, both political and economic?”(62-63)<sup>79</sup>. Dunphy’s answer is, ironically, de Valera. To a contemporary observer such as Russell this alternative was not so readily apparent. Neither was Russell convinced that the Labour party would achieve power. Labour’s R. J. P. Mortished wrote to the Irish Statesman to criticise its “bemoaning lugubriously the lack of an Opposition in the Dail”(684)<sup>80</sup>. He could not “refrain from pointing out... that what the Dail lacks is not an Opposition but a Ministerial Party”(684)<sup>81</sup>. Russell’s reply reveals where he thought the future might lie. He doubted, “considering the vocations of our population, if it will return a majority of labour deputies”(685)<sup>82</sup>. But he did “think it possible the country might give a majority to an ably led Radical Party”(685)<sup>83</sup>. Russell does not elaborate on a definition of what a radical party might be. But his interest in Mussolini throughout this period suggests that he associated radical politics with fascist Italy. There are compelling reasons for this suggestion, to be found in Russell’s celebration of a united national being ten years earlier, a belief that the nation should be united under one leader, to act as one entity. To promote this radical corporatism, he framed his thoughts in the same words used to express the Irish Statesman’s support for the Shannon scheme in 1925. To Russell:

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<sup>78</sup> “Ireland: Events in the Free State”, RT, 16:63, June 1926. 586-589.

<sup>79</sup> Dunphy, R. The Making of Fianna Fail Power in Ireland.

<sup>80</sup> Mortished, R. J. P. “Irish Labour and the Ranch System”, IS, 5:22, 6 Feb. 1926. 684-685.

<sup>81</sup> Russell’s reply to Mortished. *ibid*.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid*.



A young state derives its best vitality from the quality of the futurist imagination in it... In Italy, under the leadership of that political Kaiser, Mussolini, a new organisation of state and nation is taking place... An equally unfettered governing power has been set up in Russia, calling itself a dictatorship of the proletariat, bent on the creation of the socialist state... They have all in common... an organic unity capable of equally swift and powerful action whether at home or in international affairs... A wise autocracy is not unbecoming in a young state (550)<sup>84</sup>.

In effect, Russell is agitating for the creation of a similar movement in Ireland. He provides any potentially radical, as he has it, Irish movement with a rationale that incorporates nationalist rhetoric in an international outlook. It was a flamboyant move and one not entirely appreciated in the offices of the Irish Statesman itself. Just the next week Good was quick to publish his view that the

disease of such communities would be better met by the frankest and most conciliatory acceptance of the democratic ideals, drawing the heterogeneous elements into a unity by fair play and recognition as may be of group sentiments rather than by repression and dictatorships (581)<sup>85</sup>.

Good's unease was due to his association of Italian political violence with Republican agitation in Ireland. Good felt that Ireland had "plenty of would-be Mussolinis"(351)<sup>86</sup> who mercifully "lack both brains and imagination, and their simple minds cannot soar above the idea of holding the nation up with a gun"(351)<sup>87</sup>. With Good's association clear between Fascism and Republicanism it must have been difficult for him to support, let alone understand, his editor's increasing belief that the future rested in a political model that Good felt to be repressive and inadequate.

Good was not alone in his disquiet over his contemporaries' appreciation of Italian fascism. The Irish Tribune, the first journal to be set up in direct competition with the Irish Statesman, worried over a Free State run by a "small coherent group of

<sup>84</sup> "Futurist Policies", IS, 5:18, 9 Jan. 1926. 550-551.

<sup>85</sup> "N&C", IS, 5:19, 16 Jan. 1926. 579-582.

<sup>86</sup> Good, J. W. in "Comments", NS, 24:610, 3 Jan. 1925. 349-351.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*

Mussolinis allied to a set of powerful Civil servants”(5)<sup>88</sup>. The Irish Tribune was established in Cork in 1926 “by an alliance of Cork Republicans and dissatisfied Free Staters led by Alfred O’Rahilly”(91)<sup>89</sup>. O’Rahilly was a T. D. and a Professor in the Economics Department of University College Cork and the Irish Statesman was immediately familiar to him. His brother Thomas O’Rahilly, Professor of Irish at Trinity College before his return to Cork in 1929, clashed with Russell in the Irish Statesman’s correspondence columns in 1925<sup>90</sup>. Alfred O’Rahilly’s colleague in the Cork Economics department was Professor John Busted, author of articles contributed to Russell’s journal on the subject of national finance in 1926<sup>91</sup>.

The Irish Tribune was so familiar with the Irish Statesman that the Cork journal’s appearance was practically identical to that of its rival, with weekly commentaries preceding columns of opinion and literary review. The Irish Tribune further copied the Irish Statesman’s policy of creating a core of experts upon whom its analysis depended. The first of these was Andrew Malone, who was appointed editor of the Irish Tribune by O’Rahilly. Malone’s real name was L. P. Byrne, but he is more commonly remembered for pseudonymous publications such as the 1929 history of the Abbey Theatre. Malone’s political credentials were labour and nationalist. He was also the author of a series of articles on dramatic criticism in the Dublin Magazine in 1925<sup>92</sup>. Political analysis was generally shared between the

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<sup>88</sup> “Is Cumann na nGaedheal Dead?” Irish Tribune, 27, 10 Sept. 1926. 3-5.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> See for example T.O’R’s letter “Gaelic and Irish Nationality”, IS, 3:19, 14 Jan. 1925. 591-592. Notice that O’Rahilly, like his then fellow Trinity Professor, Edmund Curtis, signs only his initials. The Trinity College Board prohibited the college’s address from being attached to any controversial or public articles in the Press. This prohibition must have stretched informally to stop individuals signing copy, an indication of the vulnerable state, both political and financial, that Trinity felt it was in. See R. B. McDowell and D. A. Webb, Trinity College Dublin, 1592-1952.

<sup>91</sup> The Round Table recorded that “Professor Busted of Cork University College has recently published some illuminating articles in the Irish Statesman in our national economic statistics”(596). “Ireland: Events in the Free State”, RT, 16:63, June 1926. 586-599.

<sup>92</sup> See for example Malone’s “The Conservatism of J. M. Barrie”, DM, 2:7, Feb. 1925, 470-479. Also “From the Stalls: The Triumph of Juno”, DM, 2:8, March 1925. 535-538.



editor, Corkery and Alfred O’Rahilly himself. The Irish Tribune’s economist was John Busted. He was a contemporary of George O’Brien, the Irish Statesman’s economist, and contributed a reply to an O’Brien article in Studies in 1930<sup>93</sup>. Alfred O’Rahilly and his brother Thomas were the publication’s Irish language experts. Literary reviews were shared between Malone, Daniel Corkery and, more infrequently and less sensibly, by Alfred O’Rahilly. F. R. Higgins and Frank O’Connor occasionally contributed poetry to the journal.

The Irish Tribune competed with the Irish Statesman from its first issue. Malone’s first editorial was in direct imitation of Russell, the only major difference between the two being Malone’s populism. He did not intend the Irish Tribune “to cater for an exclusive literary set or indulge in high-brow pedantry for the benefit of a select metropolitan coterie”(4)<sup>94</sup>. The Irish Tribune’s central concern was Malone’s “belief and hope that the ultimate and proper vehicle of Irish culture is the Irish language”(4)<sup>95</sup>. This was hardly a novel suggestion. Any number of Irish journals, from the Leader to Sinn Féin, supported the language revival. What is interesting about the Irish Tribune is its attempt, before Malone’s dismissal, to create an independent nationalist journal sympathetic to Republicanism while “Accepting the Treaty position as a fact”(4)<sup>96</sup>. This last point captures the true potential of the journal. For if the Irish Tribune could reconcile these two political opposites to each other on an equal basis it would threaten Russell’s assimilative project in the Irish Statesman. Its revival of a moribund Republicanism into a new alliance with the Free State would put paid to Russell’s nostrums for a post-Treaty Ireland.

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<sup>93</sup> See O’Brien, G. “Agriculture and Employment in the Free State”, Studies, 19:74, June 1930, 177-185. Busted’s good natured response covers the following five pages.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*

In order to create such an alliance the Irish Tribune had to present itself as an impartial platform where the views of rival parties could be expressed. It had great difficulty doing this. Dialogue was too often substituted by the publication from issue to issue of columns of party commentary from either Free State or Republican spokespeople<sup>97</sup>. The journal's editorial latitude extended to the publication of essays on Irish figures as diverse as Tim Healy and Patrick Pearse<sup>98</sup>. The latter features on Patrick Pearse by Desmond Ryan still make for interesting reading but personal reminiscences rarely prove to be the cement upon which new political alliances are made. Russell realised this in his poetry, recasting Terence MacSwiney into a post-Republican hero. The Irish Tribune did not have such insight and, as such, the memoirs of Healy and Pearse were notable politically only because of the identity of their authors, William O'Brien and Desmond Ryan. Both men were heavily involved in the Irish labour movement and their publication in the Irish Tribune suggests the sympathy that Malone had for a working class perspective<sup>99</sup>. Malone's editorship of the Irish Tribune is in this respect an indication of the direction the Irish Statesman might have taken had Russell maintained his interest in the Irish Left after the War of Independence.

As a literary journal the Irish Tribune suffered from the capability of its rivals.

The Dublin Magazine published high quality verse and prose throughout the nineteen

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<sup>97</sup> A good example is P.D.'s rejection of de Valera, "When the Election Comes", Irish Tribune, 19, 16 July 1926, 18-19. See also Frank Gallagher's response, "An Appeal from Republicans", Irish Tribune, 23, 13 Aug. 1926. 9-11.

<sup>98</sup> Ryan, D. "The Pearse I Knew", Irish Tribune, 6, 16 April 1926, concluding the issue of April 30. O'Brien, W. "Tim", Irish Tribune, 1, 12 March 1926, concluding the following issue.

<sup>99</sup> Ryan and O'Brien were to combine later in Ryan's 1949 edition of James Connolly's writings, Labour and Easter Week, to which O'Brien appended an introduction. In the nineteen twenties, O'Brien won a *Dáil* seat for Tipperary in the June general election of 1927 but lost it almost immediately in the subsequent contest in August. He was President of the T. U. C. in 1925. Sean MacLysaght recorded O'Brien's memoirs in Forth the Banners Go, a useful insight into the dedication of this lifelong trade unionist. Desmond Ryan remained active as a historian of the Irish labour movement and of the Easter Rising. Malone had previously published in O'Shannon's paper, the



twenties. The Irish Statesman too offered writers an educated and established audience. Abroad there were a host of literary reviews, the Dial, the Criterion and the Calendar among them. From its first issue, the Irish Tribune failed to rely on creative writing. The simple reason for this seems to have been that few writers submitted their work to the journal. F. R. Higgins' first poem in the journal, "The Grief", was not published in the Irish Tribune until 30 April and Frank O'Connor's first appearance was even later; his short story "Sion" was published on 6 August. Séan O'Faoláin's first contribution was in fact a letter, titled "The National Programme"<sup>100</sup>, and followed by a short story on 14 May. Whatever the reasons for the Irish Tribune's relative lack of literary success, the delay in O'Connor and O'Faoláin's appearance in its pages is still surprising. Their slowness to publish in a journal whose literary editor was their old tutor Daniel Corkery can only be explained by the growing rift between them and their mentor. O'Faoláin did not publish in the Irish Tribune after an argument with Aodh de Blacam about Corkery's The Hidden Ireland, occasioned by a letter critical of the book by Frank O'Connor sent to the Irish

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Voice of Labour, and was supportive of O'Casey because of his labour roots. The first issue of the Irish Tribune included an essay by Malone on "Synge and O'Casey".

<sup>100</sup> O'Faoláin, S. "The National Programme", Irish Tribune, 8, 30 April 1926. 16-17.

Tribune<sup>101</sup>. O'Connor himself did not publish in the journal again until the end of November, just five issues before the Irish Tribune ceased production<sup>102</sup>.

The Irish Tribune's treatment of economics was perhaps less controversial. It recognised immediately that the Free State was "struggling for its economic existence; we are faced with urgent problems of education, unemployment, housing, agriculture, industry"(4)<sup>103</sup>. It approached these problems constructively and intelligently. It promoted co-operation within its pages, a movement that Russell had neglected since the incorporation of the Irish Homestead into the Irish Statesman in September 1923. The Irish Tribune felt that in the Free State there was "a wide sphere for the co-operative credit society. We think that the members of the Cork Agricultural and Economic Society are doing a service to the nation"(4)<sup>104</sup>. Furthermore, the journal advertised the example of "America and other countries"(12)<sup>105</sup> where "great headway has been made in a very brief period where co-operative effort has been aided largely by legislation"(12)<sup>106</sup>. The Irish Tribune's support for the co-operative movement was almost singular in the Irish press. The Irish Tribune's stance was due no doubt to Malone, a writer with a long standing respect for Horace Plunkett and the author of a history of the Irish Agricultural Wholesale Society in 1919<sup>107</sup>.

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<sup>101</sup> O'Connor wrote that "Mr. Corkery would have us believe that until... man makes his peace with The Spirit of the Nation that work will go for nothing. I do not believe it. I do not believe that the spirit of the nation... is a permanent and unchanging thing. I say that if his people did not accept this man and his work, whatever his beliefs, whatever his tradition, his people did not prove themselves worthy of him"(18). O'Connor, F. "The Heart has Reasons", Irish Tribune, 16, June 25 1926. 17-18. Corkery replied that O'Connor had "a very immature mind"(22) to suggest such a thing. Corkery, D. "A Landscape in the West", Irish Tribune, 17, July 2 1926. 22. O'Faoláin defended O'Connor in "The Spirit of the Nation", Irish Tribune, 20, July 23 1926. 23. In the interest of fairness, de Blacam defended Corkery from O'Faoláin by asking "Have We a Literature?" Irish Tribune, 21, July 30 1926. 16-18.

<sup>102</sup> O'Connor wrote reviews for the issues of 26 Nov. and 3 Dec. 1926, and contributed a poem, "Lullaby of Adventurous Love", Irish Tribune, 39, 3 Dec. 1926. 20-21.

<sup>103</sup> "The Oath", Irish Tribune, 2, 19 Mar. 1926. 3-5.

<sup>104</sup> "Agricultural Credit", Irish Tribune, 17, 2 July 1926. 3-4.

<sup>105</sup> Murphy, M. "The Farmer and Co-operation", Irish Tribune, 24, 20 Aug. 1926. 10-12.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> See Byrne, L. P. Twenty-One Years of the I. A. W. S.: 1897-1918. IAWS: Thomas Street, Dublin. 1919.



The journal's development was however stunted by Malone's dismissal from the Irish Tribune at the beginning of June. His departure signalled a further decline in the Irish Tribune's editorial standard, despite the promotion of capable writers such as Corkery to the board. No definite editor seems to have replaced Malone but there is a strong impression that Alfred O'Rahilly was the main concern behind the journal. The reason given for Malone's dismissal was negligent conduct of the Irish Tribune's business accounts. But it is hard not to infer from the journal's editorials after Malone's departure that the other members of the editorial board were unhappy with his free-thinking independence. Malone attempted to create in the Irish Tribune an inclusive sense of Irish identity relevant to his readership. Evidence of this can be read in Malone's brave attempt to collapse the distinction between Gaelic and Anglo-Irish literature in an effort to answer the question "What is an Irishman?"(7)<sup>108</sup>. He suggested that "the Anglo-Irish will claim everyone born in Ireland who attained distinction anywhere as Irish. Those of the Gaelic stream will not"(7)<sup>109</sup>. To Malone, that was "the great dividing line"(7)<sup>110</sup>. The Irish Tribune offered its own answer to the conundrum:

It is not sufficient in order to be an Irishman (for purposes of inclusion in school books) to have been born in Ireland. It is also very important that something outstanding should have been done in Ireland and for Ireland... Those whose 'spiritual home' is England are English - nothing can gainsay that. But it may be neither a good nor a generous policy to keep harping on that string (7)<sup>111</sup>.

This passage was Malone's final contribution to the journal. But his writing is evidence of the Irish Tribune's general effort to redefine a national identity separate from racial purity. Malone's redefinition would allow an alternative, civic identity to grow. His editorial opinion was not typical of the Irish weekly press in the late

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<sup>108</sup> "Week by Week", Irish Tribune, 12, 28 May 1926. 5-7.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*

1920's, a press that tended to be either dismissive of its opponents, as in the case of the Irish Statesman, or abusive, like The Leader<sup>112</sup>.

The journal became more polemical in the months afterwards, exhibiting a tendency for personal slander that Malone had restricted. In one bitter attack on the Irish Statesman, that "organ of Protestant opinion"(5)<sup>113</sup>, a label that would never have surfaced under Byrne's editorship, the Irish Tribune criticised its competitor's support of the American President Coolidge's non-intervention in Mexico<sup>114</sup>. The Irish Tribune found the Dublin journal's support curious, especially coming "from those who are accorded such a full measure of freedom by the Irish Catholic majority"(5)<sup>115</sup>. The Irish Tribune's resort to sectarianism rose perhaps from its sense of frustration at being disenfranchised from the cultural and political centre of Dublin, a centre that partly expressed itself in the Irish Statesman. As the voice of a provincial city, the Cork journal complained that "As things are Dublin has the monopoly"(5)<sup>116</sup>. Culturally it felt marginalised and could "see no reason why selected sections from the Museum and Art Gallery should not be loaned to provincial cities for long or short periods"(5)<sup>117</sup>.

Politically, the Irish Tribune was alienated. It predicted a collapse of the Republican vote in the coming 1927 elections and in compensation attempted to cultivate the attention of J. J. Walsh, Free State Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, who came from Cork. But he withdrew from *Cumann na nGaedheal* in the election

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<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> The Leader was the most entertainingly direct of the three journals. For example, it had no time for "Mr. W. British Yeats, a most superior person since he won the prize for poetry"(152). It saw its duty to be a defence of the Irish Press against "English dirties and cheap jack poets, be they English by birth or by blood"(152). In "Current Topics", The Leader, 50:7, 21 Mar. 1925. 149-152.

<sup>113</sup> "Week by Week", Irish Tribune, 24, 20 Aug. 1926. 5-6.

<sup>114</sup> The Catholic Church was persecuted sporadically in Mexico after the revolution of 1910. From July 1926, there were no church services for three years as the clergy refused to comply with anti-clerical ordinances in the constitution.

<sup>115</sup> "Week by Week", Irish Tribune, 24, 20 Aug. 1926. 5-6.

<sup>116</sup> "Week by Week", Irish Tribune, 10, 14 May 1926. 5-6.



year over a party dispute about Free Trade<sup>118</sup>. In cultural terms too the journal was disappointed. Part of its impetus derived from the promotion within its pages of the Irish language movement, a commitment made stronger by Corkery's promotion to literary editor after Malone's dismissal. But *Cumann na nGaedheal* disappointed the Irish Tribune by its response to the Gaeltacht Commission's report, made public in 1926. It found "the comments of President Cosgrave on the report of the Gaeltacht Commission cruelly disappointing"(7)<sup>119</sup>. The Irish Tribune focussed its disappointment in a polemic on the state of the government machine in general:

This shading and skirting of Free State problems, on the Commission system, will no longer cut ice. An effort should be made to give effect to the recommendations of the Commission, or the State should not be called upon to acquiesce in such useless and costly machinery (7)<sup>120</sup>.

The signal tone of the Irish Tribune was disillusion. It folded in December 1926, after appearing weekly since 12 March of that year, without any notice to its readership that its publication would cease. The Irish Tribune had faltered in its attempt to create a viable alternative to the Irish Statesman after Byrne's dismissal. But the Irish Statesman held all the advantages that the Irish Tribune was denied; a base in Dublin and intimate contact with a range of Free State Ministers, T. D.'s and Senators<sup>121</sup>. The Irish Statesman was edited by an internationally recognised writer and supported by an excellent assistant editor in James Good. Perhaps more importantly it had reasonable access to a generous sum of money to support its expanding sales.

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<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Lee, J. J. Ireland. 119.

<sup>119</sup> "Week by Week", Irish Tribune, 33, 22 Oct. 1926. 6-8.

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Apart from Eoin MacNeill's contributions to the Irish Statesman in October 1925, the journal also received letters from the independent unionist T. D., Bryan Cooper (see IS, 5:14, 12 Dec. 1925), of whom Lennox Robinson later wrote a biography. See too the periodic articles from Senator James Douglas (for example his "Notes on Proceedings in Dominion Parliaments", IS, 5:19, 16 Jan. 1926. 586-587).

Confidence within the Irish Statesman was, by the end of 1926, high, to the point where Russell signalled his interest in an Irish future not bound to *Cumann na nGaedheal*. But 1927 was to be a difficult and surprising year. *Fianna Fáil* took their seats in the *Dáil* for the first time on 11 August 1927 to face a *Cumann na nGaedheal* administration on the defensive and shocked by the July assassination of Kevin O'Higgins. After a second election in September 1927 the *Dáil* was near evenly split between the two main parties<sup>122</sup>. Coincident with this radical change in the political landscape, the debate over literary censorship erupted into bitter controversy. Censorship then became the motion over which the Irish Statesman redefined its agenda a last time before it ceased publication in 1930.

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<sup>122</sup> Dunphy notes of the September 1927 election that although both parties “had secured substantial increases in their vote, eating into the middle ground”(133). But this fact “should not lead us to conceive wrongly that the balance of forces was potentially favourable to both; *Fianna Fáil* was on the offensive, conquering new ground, *Cumann na nGaedheal* was on the defensive, absorbing its old allies”(133). Cited from The Making of *Fianna Fáil* Power in Ireland.



### Intellectual Engineering: 1927-30

The final three years of the nineteen twenties saw *Cumann na nGaedheal* come under increasing political pressure. With the foundation of *Fianna Fáil* and the entrance of Republican deputies into the *Dáil*, the pro-Treaty parties for the first time faced an organised and capable parliamentary opponent. Used to a degree of latitude in their legislative actions due to the numerical weakness of their previous opposition, *Cumann na nGaedheal* reacted to *Fianna Fáil* with panic. The Republican Party's strength was perceived to be its popular idealism and the Censorship Bill can be understood at least in part as a Government attempt to introduce radical legislation to recover political momentum.

By introducing the Bill however, the Government risked alienating part of its previous constituency. The state regulation of ideas had, in Ireland, a popular religious significance, no matter how the Government protested<sup>1</sup>. The inescapable fact was that of the many bodies calling for censorship in the state, the majority were religious. Furthermore, the Lenten pastorals of the Catholic Bishops left no one uncertain of the majority church's official antagonism to certain modes of public discourse, especially

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<sup>1</sup> Speaking after the Bill had passed the *Dáil*, Sir John Keane in the Senate felt that "If ex-Senator Yeats, whom we miss so much, was here to-day he would put this case more forcibly than I could"(71). Keane saw the Censorship Bill as evidence of "despair"(71) on behalf of a Catholic Church that did "not have confidence in its power to control its members"(714), resorting to legal coercion rather than an appeal to faith. The Minister for Justice was "sorry that questions of religion were brought into this matter"(128). *Seanad Debates* Vol. 12, 11 April 1929.

those concerning birth control<sup>2</sup>. The Government's courtship of a rural, Catholic populace was anathema to the Irish Statesman, a journal whose readership was more likely to be middle class, liberal-minded and urban. As the Bishops preached self-abnegation, the Irish Statesman advertised golf equipment and foreign travel, hardly the stuff of nationalist orthodoxy.

The purpose of the Government's Censorship Bill was, as the Irish Statesman's assistant editor James Good noted in the New Statesman, to outflank *Fianna Fáil*<sup>3</sup>. The Censorship Bill offered the Free State Government an opportunity to reclaim the radical political tradition that *Fianna Fáil* had appropriated, enlivening the regular business of fiscal security for the Irish State<sup>4</sup>. The slight to the Irish Statesman that this departure involved was not lost upon its editors. Ever perceptive, Good noted in the New Statesman that the first draft of the Bill was published on the day that the recipients of the literary awards were announced at the 1928 *Tailteann* Games. In these, Yeats was recognised for his achievement in The Tower, Shaw for Saint Joan and Father Dinneen for his Irish language dictionary. That both Yeats and Shaw were two of the most prominent Irish writers to voice their opposition to the Censorship in the Irish Statesman is further evidence of the intimate nature of the controversy. Good interpreted the

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<sup>2</sup> Adams observes of censorship that "the Lenten Pastorals of the Catholic Church, in the year 1924 particularly, were important. The Bishops (particularly of Dublin, Galway, Tuam and Clogher) 'strove to stir the Catholic conscience and to awaken the people to a sense of duty to the vigorous denunciation of the cross-channel unclean press'"(17). Cited from Censorship.

<sup>3</sup> Good suggested that "The fear of the Government is not that they have gone too far, but that when the Bill comes before the Dail next month *Fianna Fáil* may strive to score at their expense by insisting that the screw has not been tightened sufficiently"(132). "The Free State Censorship", NS, 31:801, 1 Sept. 1928. 132.

<sup>4</sup> Good, again, caught the wider mood in his reproduction in the New Statesman of a popular air: "One widely circulated ballad thus describes the *Cumann na nGaedheal* candidates: Once I pictured John Bull as a knave and a liar./ But never, no never will do so again;/ Garryowen is a tune that I used to admire,/ But 'God Save the King' has a greater refrain!/ I will pull down the structure by Griffith erected,/ Uproot the



simultaneous publication of Government and *Tailteann* proclamations to be significant of a shift in *Cumann na nGaedheal* thinking. He wrote of the *Tailteann* Games that:

Most of the Irish writers have worked hard to achieve its success, and some of them flattered themselves that it might serve as the nucleus of an Irish Academy of Letters. This project, which had advanced so far that negotiations were in progress to induce the Free State Government to accord recognition to a representative body of creative literary artists, had been blown sky-high by the Censorship of Publications Bill (632)<sup>5</sup>.

The loss of administrative support for a proposed literary academy was of course significant of more than a lack of government imagination. A split between political and aesthetic considerations in the practice of independent statehood was, to Russell, a disaster. By robbing his voice of authority, the state left a void to be filled by the clamour of an under-educated mob. His detractors' general lack of cultivation made them amenable to subversion and the effects of political manipulation. In rhetoric reminiscent of that used against Republicans during the Civil War<sup>6</sup>, Russell asserted his authority by stressing that the study of literature was a professional practice, open only to its initiates. His opponents were accordingly a "group of fanatics incapable of exercising a critical spirit about literature and shouting vociferously about books whose purpose they are incapable of understanding"<sup>7</sup>(543)<sup>7</sup>.

Russell's ability to use the Irish Statesman as a forum in which to criticise government policy is symbolic of the institutional influence at his command. Far from being the isolated and unread voice of cosmopolitan opinion, the Irish Statesman was an instrument of cultivated judgement, enjoying an educated and well-connected readership.

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foundations and alter the plan;/ Nor rub shoulders with those with foul treason infected,/ Live rich and respected – a practical man"(206-207). "Free State Elections", NS, 29:735, 28 May 1927.

<sup>5</sup> Good, J. W. "The Free State Censorship", NS, 31:801, 1 Sept. 1928. 132.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of Russell's dismissal of Republicanism in the Civil War see Chapter Four. 142-143.

<sup>7</sup> Russell, G. W. "A Censorship over Literature", IS, 7:23, 12 Feb. 1927. 542-544.

Even if there were doubts as to the devotion of the journal's readers, the list of benefactors to the Irish Statesman in 1929 is a formidable collection of Free State luminaries<sup>8</sup>. In turn, Russell's political orthodoxy rested on the ability of cultural institutions to influence the state's development. Intellectuals were guardians of the national faith and any attack made on their integrity was equally an attack on the nation.

To Russell the equation was simple, if arcane:

Let beauty fade, and in some mysterious way, public spirit, sacrifice, enthusiasm, also vanish from society. Its foundations of its morale have been obstructed. If we destroyed in Ireland our National Gallery, our Abbey Theatre, our Feis Ceoil, and our poetic and imaginative literature, the agencies by which the mysterious element of beauty filters into national consciousness, we are certain that in fifty years the nation would be corrupt or dead (227)<sup>9</sup>.

Russell's appeal was made to a Government well aware of the propaganda value of Ireland's literature to the state's international status. The institutions that Russell lists in the above passage are "agencies"(227)<sup>10</sup> able to popularise concepts of Irish political identity. Indeed organisations like the Abbey Theatre were important enough to the function of the Free State to receive official financial patronage. Furthermore, a *Cumann na nGaedheal* government that included such able media manipulators as Desmond Fitzgerald could not be slow to realise the damage that a rebellion by Irish writers might cause<sup>11</sup>. The government's predicament in 1928 can be recognised by the fact that

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<sup>8</sup> The Irish Statesman encountered severe financial difficulties in its defence of a libel action in 1928 arising from a November 1927 review of a collection of Irish songs by Seamus Clandillon. Contributors to a defence fund for the journal included Osborn Bergin, Thomas Bodkin, Lady Gregory, Senator S. L. Brown, K. C., the Marquis of Landsdowne and Senator Jameson. See IS, 11:20, 19 Jan. 1929. 398.

<sup>9</sup> Russell, G. W. "Art and National Life", IS, 10:12, 21 May 1928. 226-227.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> George Morrison's Afterword to The Irish Civil War, a collection of photographs and text, notes of 1922 that "The Sinn Fein Party's Director of Publicity, Desmond Fitzgerald... was one of Ireland's earliest media men with a real appreciation of the importance of photographs in communications"(782). Fitzgerald was a *Cumann na nGaedheal* Minister in 1928. Furthermore, the Government was so anxious about *Fianna Fáil's* efforts to raise funds for a party paper, The Nation, in America that it despatched Cosgrave to



Ministers were willing to take this risk regardless of the consequences. What *Cumann na nGaedheal* did not appreciate was the degree to which Russell imagined the executive powers of the state to be coterminous with the operations of the nation's creative intellects. The collapse of negotiations over the funding of a proposed Academy of Letters is typical of the misunderstanding between the government and the intellectual coterie surrounding Russell that resulted in the bitterness of debate over the Censorship Bill.

The Irish Free State had adopted in 1922 the entire body of British common law<sup>12</sup>. There was no difference between Irish and British legislation on the control of obscene literature in the immediate post-Treaty phase. The first divergence was the Censorship of Films Act in 1923. The censorship of printed matter was in one sense the next logical step for the Free State government to take. It should be noted however that such legislation was aimed specifically at popular entertainment, rather than literature or art. Censorship was not however simply a subject for debate in the *Dáil*. A number of religious organisations involved themselves in the agitation for stricter moral control of newspapers and books, among them the Irish Vigilance Association and Catholic Truth Society. Determined to regularise the state's approach to the censorship of printed matter, the government instituted a Committee of Enquiry on Evil Literature in 1926. Its report was delivered to the government in December of that year and its details published in the spring following. This report formed the basis of the Censorship Bill first published on 13 August 1928.

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publicise the Free State. Conveniently, Cosgrave attended a joint reception for himself and, ironically, Russell. Russell then spoke on the President's behalf to this meeting of the Foreign Policy Association. For a brief account see Summerfield, *That Myrad-Minded Man*. 243.

The Bill was first referred to in the Irish Statesman on the eighteenth of that month, leaving the journal six weeks to respond to Deputies and public opinion before the *Dáil* resumed sitting in October. In his first report Russell was moved to admit of the Bill “that we do not like it, that there are provisions in it that by obscurity of wording may lead to grave interference with liberty of thought”(464)<sup>13</sup>. The Irish Statesman further questioned “the wisdom of these ‘recognised associations’”(464)<sup>14</sup> referred to in the Bill. Such associations were a legacy of the report of the 1926 Committee on Evil Literature and described organised groups of concerned citizens. Each association was able under the terms of the draft Bill to refer offensive or indecent publications to the Minister for Justice. Such publications could then be censored if necessary. Russell had by this early stage identified his two main objections to the Censorship Bill. The first is that the wording of the Bill was inexact, leading to the possibility that censorship might be applied more widely and indiscriminately than its supporters might have envisaged. The second is that the recognition of associations of concerned citizens, unlicensed except by virtue of their collective morality, was a threat to individual liberty.

It will be noticed however that both these objections revolve around the same preoccupation, that of control. For Russell was not an advocate of unfettered free speech. During the Civil War no mention was ever made by Russell of the regular suppression of the Republican press<sup>15</sup>. Equally, the Irish Statesman was itself susceptible to a form of

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<sup>12</sup> A full account of the legislative genesis of Free State censorship can be read in Adams, M. Censorship: The Irish Experience.

<sup>13</sup>“N&C”, IS, 10:24, 18 Aug. 1928. 463-466.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> The Republican press was regularly suppressed during the Civil War. The Free State registered its antipathy towards Republican propagandists in the execution of Ernest Childers, Republican Director of Publicity. It should be noted that Russell was one of many individuals to press for leniency for the



editorship from its American investors, the critic Ernest Boyd being unable to become the journal's American correspondent because of their influence<sup>16</sup>. What Russell is concerned with in his criticism of the Free State censorship is less the freedom of speech than with the method of its control. Russell refers to the criminal law as the appropriate method of censorship as its authority rests in a system that, if not impartial, is at least accessible. Legality affords Russell a critical ally in his attack on the Censorship Bill as its rulings are based on precise renderings of the written word. In this area above all Russell could function at an advantage to his adversaries. It is no coincidence that the word the Irish Statesman most often uses to refer to recognised associations is 'semi-literates'. To label these groups with such a tag is to associate them with the mob and identify them as enemies of a state dependant on legal precedent and formal association for its very existence. One need only think of the Anglo-Irish Treaty itself, and the battles fought over it, to realise the implicit rhetorical power of Russell's legalistic strategy.

Russell invoked a fear of revolution throughout his articles on the Censorship Bill in late August and September of 1928. The main article by which he expressed his discontent was the leader of the twenty fifth of August, "The Censorship Bill". Russell asked of the recognised associations if they were "associations of intelligent and cultivated men? Or are they associations of fanatics, the associations which have been clamouring for a censorship and seizing and burning excellent journals like the *Observer*

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unfortunate Childers. It should also be noted that Séan O'Faoláin briefly succeeded Childers, a strange preparation for his journalistic submissions to the Irish Statesman.

<sup>16</sup> Russell wrote to Boyd in August 1925 to say "I thought of you long ago as an American correspondent. I had suggested it to Plunkett and between ourselves he was alarmed lest your radicalism might upset the Americans who contributed the funds to start the Irish Statesman and from whom he hopes to get more"(168). Cited from Denson, Letters of AE.

and *Sunday Times*”(487)<sup>17</sup>. Both these latter publications were illegally destroyed because of their publication of information on birth control. Russell does not mention this qualification but rather concentrates on the fact that:

We have to be very precise in our definitions. There are thousands of books we read without approving of the ideas. But a disapproval to lead to suppression - that would be revolutionary. Men would conspire against the orthodoxies of opinion the State would impose upon them (487)<sup>18</sup>.

Russell’s identification with the state through the prefix ‘we’ is significant. Russell, and by extension the Irish Statesman, is the voice of authority, responsible not only for the moral state of the general public but actively engaged in the moulding of its national consciousness. Russell’s greatest fear since Independence was the anarchy that might result from the separation of the creative intellect from state power. To Russell, both formations have a shared responsibility to act on behalf of a population that is incapable of regulating itself. The Censorship Bill is an intrusion into this shared nexus, an unwelcome revelation, and indeed repudiation, of the mutual understanding that was previously held to exist between the Irish Statesman and certain sections of *Cumann na nGaedheal*.

Accordingly, Russell reserves his sharpest criticism for the functionaries who would replace him as official censors. He felt their situation would be “very unhappy - their intelligence made transparent to the world”(505)<sup>19</sup>. “We wonder”(505)<sup>20</sup>, he wrote, “what kind of people will have courage to go upon the Board to supervise the reading of their betters?”(505)<sup>21</sup>. September ended in disillusion for Russell, as he feared that the

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<sup>17</sup> Russell, G. W. “The Censorship Bill”, IS, 10:25, 25 Aug. 1928. 486-487.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> “N&C”, IS, 10:26, 1 Sept. 1929. 563-565.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*



*Dáil* would ratify the Censorship Bill with little opposition, fearing that *Fianna Fáil*, the party that had pressed for a quick introduction of censorship throughout 1928, would only worsen its terms. “We confess”(6)<sup>22</sup>, he wrote, that “we have not much hope of modification, for the Opposition in the Dail, so far as we can judge by the utterance of their leaders, are upon this point more illiberal than Ministers who introduce the Bill”(6)<sup>23</sup>.

Seeking to prevent a rout, Russell published an inflammatory article by Yeats in the Irish Statesman, fiercely critical of the censorship. Yeats’s article was a clear attempt to destabilise the Bill before it reached the *Dáil*. The Government was at pains throughout the entire debate to stress that the Censorship was entirely non-sectarian in nature. This position was difficult to maintain, especially after the Lenten pastorals of 1928, vigorous in their dismissal of all immoral forms of public expression. The publication of the Censorship Bill also coincided with a Free State Census that showed a huge decline in the Protestant population of the twenty-six Southern counties since 1911<sup>24</sup>. While the Government tried to present the censorship as the expression of a homogenous public morality, Russell published Yeats’s article, “The Censorship of Publications Bill”, to embarrass the Government over the religious aspects of its legislation.

Yeats obliged Russell by referring initially to the definition of ‘indecent’ offered as the standard for censorship by the Government. Yeats noted that the Bill declared “in

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<sup>22</sup> Russell, G. W. “Freedom and Coercion”, IS, 11:1, 8 Sept. 1928. 6.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> The Irish Statesman reported that the third volume of the Free State Census of Population showed that “From 1911 to 1926 the Catholic population in the Free State declined by 2.2 per cent, the Jews by 3.1 per

its introductory section that ‘the word ‘indecent’ shall be construed as including ‘calculated to excite sexual passion’”(7)<sup>25</sup>. Yeats was further “convinced that this definition ridiculous to a man of letters, must be sacrilegious to a Thomist. I cannot understand how Catholic lawyers, trained in precision of statement and ecclesiastics, could have committed such a blunder”(7)<sup>26</sup>. Yeats’s appreciation of the finer points of Catholic dogma is less the point than is his sly ability to introduce religious dissension into the debate. The Minister for Justice, Fitzgerald-Kenney, was himself a lawyer and Yeats’s attack was personal enough for the Minister to take sarcastic note of it in his introduction of the Bill to the *Dáil* on 18 October 1928:

One gentleman of very high literary ability, whose only fault as a literary man is, I think, that he does not write enough, and who has a great store of personal information, has attacked this definition... on the grounds that the words ‘calculated to excite sexual passion’ are entirely heretical. I would point to venture out that I, personally, can hardly follow the criticism which has been passed upon the use of these three words in this definition, because I cannot understand the class of book which would excite some person just to proper love and might not excite others towards unlawful lust (596-597)<sup>27</sup>.

Russell had in the meantime capitalised on Yeats’s article by subsequently publishing Padraic Colum’s religious criticisms of the Bill. Just five days before Fitzgerald-Kenney was to make his above remarks to the *Dáil*, Colum predicted that a censorship would expose the religious authorities to “resentment and mockery”(107)<sup>28</sup>. The censorship would result in the “movement that countries predominantly Catholic

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cent, while the various Protestant denominations... declined by 32.5 per cent. There were 103, 000 fewer Protestants in the Free State than in 1911”(487). “N&C”, *IS*, 11:25, 23 Feb. 1929. 487-489.

<sup>25</sup> Yeats, W. B. “The Censorship and Thomas Aquinas”, *IS*, 11:3, 22 Sept. 1928. 47-48.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Fitzgerald-Kenney. *Dáil Debates* Vol. 26, 18 Oct. 1928.

<sup>28</sup> Lyster, M. “Padraic Colum on the Censorship”, *IS*, 11:6, 13 Oct. 1928. 107-108.



have most to fear- an anti-clerical movement. This means a division of the people deeper than any division we know of”(107)<sup>29</sup>.

By publishing two separate criticisms of the Censorship Bill for its exercise of religious prerogative, Russell hoped to create as much controversy about the Bill as possible. But behind this propaganda screen there was offered simultaneously to the government the possibility of the Irish Statesman's adoption of a more moderate approach to Censorship. For in the very same issue that Colum predicted religious catastrophe, the journal noted that since “a censorship in some form seems inevitable, we think there should be concentration upon the amendments of the most indefensible clauses”(103)<sup>30</sup>. The editor's sanguine tone is in sharp contrast to Colum's depression at the thought of mass religious dissociation. The ethics of utilising religious controversy to make one's political point are dubious but the publication of Yeats and Colum in debates on this matter were effective enough to ensure that the Minister responsible for the Bill had personally to reply to their criticisms in the *Dáil*.

The Minister for Justice was surprised at the anger that his Bill aroused. He imagined perhaps that Russell and his associates would realise that they were, by virtue of their status, practically immune to the effects of the proposed censorship's prohibitions<sup>31</sup>. The Minister specifically remarked that the Bill “has been attacked... by

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> “N&C”, *IS*, 11:6, 12 Oct. 1928. 103-106.

<sup>31</sup> The Minister made a great effort in the *Dáil* to separate the functions of the Bill from that of a draconian literary censorship. He cited a number of texts to make his case, not altogether convincingly. Thackeray's Vanity Fair would be ignored, despite the fact that the character Becky Sharp was not “entirely a moral woman”(598). Othello too was immune, despite some “very objectionable expressions”(598). The Minister continued “In a famous modern book of verse – ‘The Shropshire Lad’ – there is a poem which... advocates suicide. It would not come under that definition of ‘contrary to public morality’ because it would be entirely different from what this Bill is actually dealing with. This Bill deals solely with questions of sexual morality or sexual perversion”(602). *Dáil Debates* Vol. 26, 18 Oct. 1928.

extremists, demonising it as an unwarrantable infringement on the liberty of the subject and of the rights of free citizenship”(594)<sup>32</sup>. The Irish Statesman was quick to respond to the Minister’s criticism by replying the following week that:

Our protest was made because of the kind of literature attacked by the fanatical reformers and the recognition given by the Bill to associations which were not content to attack the baser sort of journal, which destroyed books by great writers who had never been regarded as indecent, books which could only have been burned because of philosophical or economic or religious ideas which were not those of the reformers. To permit this to go on would represent a grave danger to the intellectual life of the Free State (146)<sup>33</sup>.

The conciliatory tone of the above passage is matched the following week by the appearance of a new series of articles in the Irish Statesman, published under the title “As Others See Us”. Essentially a propaganda vehicle for the journal’s opposition to the Bill, the subject of the first instalment of “As Others See Us”, a series of interviews conducted by Russell’s French confidant Simone Téry<sup>34</sup>, was the President himself, William Cosgrave. A blunt and none too subtle reminder of the public projection of the government that the Irish Statesman could make, the next interview was with the Minister for Agriculture, Patrick Hogan. This panegyric labelled the Minister as “the hardest working member of the Cabinet”(147)<sup>35</sup> and continued the praise that the Irish Statesman had reserved for Hogan since his appointment. As Minister for Agriculture, Hogan was often congratulated in the journal for his appreciation of Horace Plunkett’s co-operative ideals. As Hogan’s Agricultural Bill passed the *Dáil* without division in 1927, for

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<sup>32</sup> Fitzgerald-Kenney. *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 26, 18 Oct. 1928.

<sup>33</sup> “The Debate on the Censorship”, *IS*, 11:8, 27 Oct. 1928. 145-147.

<sup>34</sup> Téry’s friendship with Russell dated from her experience as a journalist in the Irish Civil War. She later authored The Island of Poets which contained a section on Russell. Russell can be found writing warmly of Téry in a letter to L. R. Bernstein of February 1929. See Denson, Letters of AE. 181.



example, the Irish Statesman noted with pleasure that “It is by the proper co-ordination of State aid and voluntary organisation, as Sir Horace Plunkett said, that our agriculture would become prosperous. That co-operation he desired is now becoming a reality”(172)<sup>36</sup>.

Russell’s strategy was to split the *Cumann na nGaedheal* Cabinet over the question of censorship. Hogan’s interview with Tery was published the very week that Hogan resumed debate over the second stage of the Censorship Bill to the *Dáil*<sup>37</sup>. Russell’s policy had some effect as the Minister stated to the assembly that the Bill should instate “a censorship which is limited in the most stringent and specific way”(830)<sup>38</sup>. Like Russell in the Irish Statesman, Hogan felt that it would be “extremely difficult [in this country] to get anyone... fit to censor books”(829)<sup>39</sup>. Having offered these provisos the Minister went on to deliver a witty and savage attack on the morality of the opposition *Fianna Fáil* party, questioning their ability to perceive the truth of an argument after their abandonment of principle to enter the *Dáil*<sup>40</sup>. Hogan’s sally was a public attempt to obscure the divisions that Russell so clearly perceived to exist within the Government party. As the Irish Statesman noted the next week, Hogan was one of the Ministers who listened to the Minister for Justice’s ensuing speech in “a scornful

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<sup>35</sup> Téry, S. “As Others See US IV – Interview with Patrick Hogan and other Ministers”, IS, 11:8, 27 Oct. 1928. 147-149.

<sup>36</sup> “N&C”, IS, 9:8, 29 Oct. 171-174.

<sup>37</sup> It is speculation to suggest that the government picked Hogan to introduce the resumed second reading of the Censorship Bill to the *Dáil* to appease its literary critics. What is certain is that Hogan had before this date taken no previous part in *Dáil* debates on censorship.

<sup>38</sup> Hogan, P. *Dáil Debates* Vol. 26, 24 Oct. 1928.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

silence”(163)<sup>41</sup>. Satisfied that he could embarrass the government by pursuing such tactics Russell consistently vilified Fitzgerald-Kenney in the following months for his inability to construct a suitable censorship. The Minister for Justice was unfortunate in his enemy as Russell’s scorn separated him from the support more generally offered *Cumann na nGaedheal* by the Irish Statesman.

For Russell was of course not foolish enough to imagine that his journal enjoyed a popular support strong enough entirely to disable the censorship. What he managed to do was to identify individual elements within the government, isolate them and then reduce the force of their personal authority. This tactic suited perfectly Russell’s growing belief that Ministers were themselves conduits for a new Irish identity, prompted by independence to an appreciation of state efficiency. Russell noted previously in 1927 that “The tendency to bring about an organic unity in the national being has become the most noticeable thing in the Free State”(107)<sup>42</sup>. Further to this, Russell observed that “Atoms or cells seem to be modelled by some overwhelming instinct which imposes its law upon them. It operates primarily through Ministers”(107)<sup>43</sup>. Russell reifies the function of elected representatives into a paradigm of general order. The Irish Statesman’s cultivation of Hogan, the Minister for Agriculture, is indicative of Russell’s understanding that the government is the proper conduit for the dissemination of his own ideals. This in turn modifies the understanding Russell had of democratic government, as electors choose only the means by which they will be ordered rather than the means by

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<sup>40</sup> Hogan was possessed of a sharp wit: “I listened to this debate very carefully. We were all very virtuous and anxious to make the other fellow virtuous... I suppose the next time we are taking an oath we will call it an empty formula and push the bible two feet away”(830). *Dáil Debates* Vol. 26, 24 Oct. 1928.

<sup>41</sup> “N&C”, IS, 11:9, 3 Nov. 1928. 163-165.

<sup>42</sup> Russell, G. W. “The Dominating Idea”, IS, 8:5, 9 April 1927. 106-108.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*



which order might be changed. In this complex, the Minister for Justice's recommendation in the Censorship Bill that certain associations of lay people be recognised as the first implements of a state censorship is anathema to Russell's belief that regulation should be the preserve of an enlightened elite. Russell's opposition to censorship once again reverts to his disagreement with the Minister for Justice over the means by which media control is to be exerted. Russell's concern over the Censorship Bill's deregulation of state authority to recognised associations was then symptomatic of his broad concern that cultural authority might pass from the directors of the Literary Revival.

An analysis of other European states' efforts to introduce censorship in the latter part of the nineteen twenties further suggests that media control was a directive common to a number of governments. The Free State's attempt to control the media was not, as literary tradition might suggest, a singular, reactionary reflex. Irish literary criticism, citing the prohibition of O'Faoláin, O'Flaherty and, later, Kate O'Brien, suggests that intellectual Ireland was the main target of the censorship<sup>44</sup>. This is not however an accurate representation of the understanding of censorship that existed in the Free State in 1928. The main target for censorship was in fact the literature of birth control promotion. To enact such prohibition the government needed to be able to control the means by which such publications entered the state. In addressing how to do this the Free State reflected an impulse for cultural autonomy shared by states as various as Great Britain, Greece and Italy. That the exercise of such autonomy was equally complementary to reactionary political systems in at least two of these states merely illustrates the manner

in which nationalist rhetoric was employed to marginalise individual dissent over reductions in personal freedom.

As the Censorship Bill progressed through the *Dáil*, Russell kept pressure on the Minister for Justice by publishing a further attack on it by George Bernard Shaw on the nineteenth of November. This was the first major article that Shaw had contributed to the Irish Statesman since its first issue in September 1923 and Russell suggested to Yeats that supporters of the censorship would find its effects “devastating”(n. p.)<sup>45</sup>. Shaw himself had followed a personal interest in the operation of state censorship since the first decade of the twentieth century. Called before a Joint Committee of the British Parliament in 1909, Shaw, like Russell later in the Irish Statesman, argued that censorship must only be exercised under the due process of law. Censorship of drama was at the prerogative of the Lord Chancellor and Shaw found it grossly unfair that this official had “absolutely at his disposal my livelihood and my good name without any law to administer behind him”(4)<sup>46</sup>.

One of Shaw’s interrogators in this Committee was Hugh Law, one time Lord Chancellor of Ireland. Law’s son became a Free State Deputy and spoke against the censorship in the Dail in 1928. The younger Law was also a close associate of Russell, who wrote the preface to his 1926 study, Anglo-Irish Literature. Speaking in the *Dáil*, this latter Hugh Law informed the Minister for Justice that he had made it his

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<sup>44</sup> The effect of censorship on individual writers in Ireland was, nonetheless, devastating. For personal accounts of the experience of prohibition see Carlson, J. ed. Banned in Ireland: Censorship and the Irish Writer.

<sup>45</sup> Russell to Yeats, letter dated 9 Nov. 1928. Cited from the Denson Typescript. 463.

<sup>46</sup> Shaw, G. B. Shaw on Censorship, a Fabian pamphlet produced to publicise Shaw’s criticisms of British theatre censorship.



“business”(621)<sup>47</sup> to consult about the censorship “a great number of people... including writers, a body which I am myself a very modest, humble member”(621-622)<sup>48</sup>. Since Law had often contributed to the Irish Statesman, the inference is that Law speaks with knowledge of Russell’s opinion on the subject. More than that, his associations suggest the degree to which Russell, through figures like Hogan and Law, was able to exert pressure on the *Dáil* by virtue of having access to members sympathetic to his ideas.

Russell meanwhile exerted pressure on the government from the pages of the Irish Statesman by his publication, in November, of Shaw’s essay. Shaw refers first to pre-Independence Ireland in his polemic against Free State morality. Bound to offend, Shaw observed that “Under the feeble and apologetic tyranny of Dublin Castle we Irish were forced to endure a considerable amount of compulsory freedom. The moment we were free we rushed to enslave ourselves”(206)<sup>49</sup>. Shaw refers to Dublin Castle in an allusion to the victory he and the Abbey directors had gained over the Viceroy, the official censor of the Irish theatre, in his staging of The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet<sup>50</sup>. By doing so, Shaw had, according to Russell “set a precedent for intellectual liberty... which allowed a dramatic literature to develop, where in England a censorship is still strangling the drama”(197)<sup>51</sup>. There is little doubt that Russell expected Shaw to repeat the same feat in 1928 with his criticism of the Censorship Bill in the Irish Statesman. Shaw responded to Russell’s expectations by providing an article charged with mockery. First, the author appealed to the Catholic Church to distance itself from the Bill, if only to reassure the

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<sup>47</sup> Law, H. A. *Dáil Debates* Vol. 26, 18 Oct. 1928.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Shaw, G. B. “The Censorship”, *IS*, 11:11, 17 Nov. 1928. 206-208.

<sup>50</sup> For Shaw’s account of this controversy see his Preface to The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet in the twelfth volume of the Constable edition of the Collected Works of Bernard Shaw.

<sup>51</sup> Shaw, G. B. “The Censorship”, *IS*, 11:11, 17 Nov. 1928. 206-208.

Protestant North. Shaw, like Colum, predicted that if this did not happen, a clerical backlash would follow, because “when all these monstrous follies are being perpetuated by way of purifying Ireland the Church will be blamed for it. Already it is said on all hands that the Censorship Bill is the Church’s doing”(207)<sup>52</sup>. Shaw finished by suggesting that if Ireland

having broken England’s grip on her... slips back into the Atlantic as a little grass patch in which a few million moral cowards are not allowed to call their souls their own by a handful of morbid Catholics, mad with heresyphobia, unnaturally combining with a handful of Calvinists mad with sexphobia (both being in a small and intensely disliked minority of their own co-religionists) then the world will let ‘these Irish’ go their own way into insignificance without the slightest concern. It will no longer even tell funny stories about them (208)<sup>53</sup>.

This passage marks a critical point in the Irish Statesman’s response to the Censorship Bill. Shaw’s rhetorical geography consists of a world whose first boundary is England and whose mass is the civilisation of Europe beyond it. The image of Ireland slipping back into the Atlantic, lost beneath a wave of religious dogma is a powerful one. But it is also the product of a political sleight of hand, as Shaw takes onto himself the voice of arbiter between the Irish nation and the outside world. States of course operate through treaties and association, the Free State itself having taken an important role in the League of Nations by the time Shaw’s article was written. Furthermore, the Irish Statesman was aware of the influx of outside capital into the Free State, the journal peppered throughout this period by adverts from the American oil company Texaco<sup>54</sup>. Each advertisement celebrated the arrival of this multinational conglomerate in the Free

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<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> The banner headline ‘Texaco is Coming’ appears above a map of Ireland connected to an oncoming ship by bolts of lightning in the IS, 11:14, 8 Dec. 1928, and IS, 11:15, 15 Dec. 1928.



State by angular diagrams of sophisticated machinery and reports of new flight records set by planes using Texaco fuel.

The Irish Statesman's readership was however well aware that Ireland was in no danger of economic isolationism under the administration of *Cumann na nGaedheal*, not least because of the favourable and regular reports that the Ford factory in Cork received in the journal's pages<sup>55</sup>. What Shaw proposes is a myth of the Free State's potential regression. It is a myth created to empower Shaw, and writers like him, with a prophetic voice by which to influence the politics of a state within which writers had as yet found no formal place. The opening section of this chapter referred to the surprise with which Good reacted to the publication of the Censorship Bill since the Government had been in discussion to set up an Academy of Letters, the very mark of state authority for literature. This move collapsed, leaving Shaw to deride a nation for its inadequacy, when in fact the nation's transition to statehood already made such criticism anachronistic. Shaw's article is a masterful piece of polemical writing but it fails on one critical point. It reads, in context of the adverts for Texaco petrol and Ford Tractors, as out of date, an echo without substance.

The proof of Shaw's irrelevance is that Russell, after the publication of Shaw's article, committed his energy to lobbying for change to the Censorship Bill rather than to Shaw's demand for its complete dismissal. In this Russell was successful. To follow the progress of the Censorship Bill through the *Dáil* between October 1928 and March 1929 is to notice that the areas of the Bill which were most contested were those brought to public attention by the Irish Statesman. There were three specific problem areas for

Russell. The first was with the definition of indecency. As Russell noted in the Irish Statesman, the problem might arise from a broad definition of the term that a secular theory such as evolution might be banned from schools, as it had been in parts of the United States<sup>56</sup>. The second was the power of private associations to refer obscene literature to the Minister for Justice. Finally, Russell was concerned over the number of censors to be elected to the board, primarily because he felt, like Milton, that since so few would be qualified to judge, it would be difficult to appoint worthy candidates<sup>57</sup>. On the first point, Russell was reassured by the time the Bill passed through the *Dáil*. The Irish Statesman accepted the Minister's assurances that the Bill would be applied liberally to literature. Its assistant editor, James Good, reported in the New Statesman that "it is expected that books will be handled cautiously, with the exception of birth-control literature, which is to be automatically banned without reference to the Censorship Board"(783)<sup>58</sup>.

Russell's support of this aspect of the Bill's most draconian provision is interesting, especially in context of Oliver St. John Gogarty's submissions to the Senate on the matter. Russell had long favoured Gogarty and Yeats, as we saw, made him a literary award at the 1924 *Tailteann* games. Gogarty published frequently in the Irish

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<sup>55</sup> Under the subtitle 'Advance Cork' the Irish Statesman noted that the Ford Factory was due to increase its production from forty to one hundred and fifty units a day, making it "the biggest single industry in the Saorstát"(425). See "N&C", IS, 12:22, 3 Aug. 1929. 423-426.

<sup>56</sup> The schoolteacher John Stopes was convicted in Tennessee in 1925 of teaching evolution in what was sometimes referred to as the 'monkey trial'. The state law that banned the teaching of evolution was not revoked until 1968.

<sup>57</sup> Milton's Areopagitica is a classic anti-censorship text. In it Milton argued that "he who is made judge to sit upon the birth or death of books, whether they may be wafted into the world or not, had need to be a man above the common measure, both studious, learned, and judicious; there may be else no mean mistakes in the censure of what is passible or not, which is also no mean injury"(27-28). In the Free State, the Senate revised the *Dáil*'s proposed membership of the Censorship Board from nine to five. The Irish Statesman responded to this in "N&C", IS, 12:9, 4 May 1929. 163-166.

<sup>58</sup> Good, J. W. "Comments", NS, 32:831, 30 March 1929. 781-783.



Statesman throughout the latter part of the nineteen twenties, even going to the length of conducting personal exchanges with Russell through poetry<sup>59</sup>. Crucially for Russell, Gogarty had also been a Senator since 1922. He used his position there to support his associates' attacks on the censorship. Gogarty, like Russell, fiercely denounced aspects of the Censorship Bill that affected creative literature but was, again like Russell, more circumspect when the question of birth control arose. Gogarty in fact noted that:

No one who has any care for a nation's welfare can for one moment countenance contraceptive practices, which are a contradiction of a nation's life. In England the condition of the miners and the unemployed is as it is because England has allowed its capital to go into yellow, brown and black labour, so that the Government tolerates clinics for education in the practice of contraception (87)<sup>60</sup>.

A diagnosis of Gogarty's racism is suggestive of the dubious assumptions that underpin his subsequent opposition to a literary censorship. Gogarty, Russell and Yeats all shared the idea that the cultivated could be trusted to read even the most morally doubtful texts. What is interesting in Gogarty's speech is the way in which the shared assumption of national purification is made explicit through his discussion of birth control, an illiberality that is concealed by the rhetoric of detached criticism when he refers to literature. It is hard not to draw the conclusion that many of the opponents to the Censorship Bill were, like Gogarty, motivated to their defence of free speech by a personal desire to retain control of the outlets for critical debate from the power of the state.

Russell was himself most satisfied with the *Dáil's* rejection of the recognised associations. The "number of Deputies, Fianna Fail, Cumann na nGaedheal and

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<sup>59</sup> For evidence of this mutual indulgence see Russell's "To G. R. and O.G.", *IS*, 8:23, 13 Aug. 1927, and Gogarty's "To AE Going to America", *IS*, 9:20, 21 Jan. 1928. 457. The 'G.R.' of Russell's poem is Graeme Roberts, the contributor of a poem called "Mountain" to the same issue.

Labour”(510)<sup>61</sup>, he observed, “who resisted these proposals and defeated them was a pleasant surprise”(510)<sup>62</sup>. The Irish Statesman now found that the “Bill is much more reasonable in its post-Dail form than most expected who saw it in its first monstrous infancy”(64)<sup>63</sup>. Russell was especially pleased about “the amendment which swept out of the Bill the Minister’s preposterous ‘recognised associations’. This was absolutely the worst aspect of the Bill”(510)<sup>64</sup>. It should be noted however that in Russell’s praise of the *Dáil* as an effective democratic body in its amendments of the Censorship Bill that many of the Deputies who spoke most cuttingly of its weaknesses were friends of the Irish Statesman or associates of its editor.

In the *Dáil*, the Bill’s chief critic was William Thrift, Professor of Physics at Trinity College Dublin, and former member of the Committee on Evil Literature<sup>65</sup>. One of the Irish Statesman’s main contributors on the matter was Edmund Curtis, Professor of History at the same University. Russell was himself awarded an honorary doctorate at Trinity in July 1929, proof, if it were needed, of the private circles that represented the public interest in the Free State. Furthermore, Hugh Law, as already mentioned spoke against the Bill, as did Bryan Cooper, an independent member of the *Dáil* whose unionist background did not affect his desire to serve the new state efficiently. Cooper’s letters were occasionally published in the Irish Statesman and Lennox Robinson, one of the

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<sup>60</sup> Gogarty, O. *Seanad Debates* Vol. 12, 11 April 1929.

<sup>61</sup> Russell, G. W. “Unrecognised Associations”, *IS*, 11:26, 2 March 1929. 509-510.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> “N&C”, *IS*, 12:4, 30 March 1929. 63-66.

<sup>64</sup> Russell, G. W. “Unrecognised Associations”, *IS*, 11:26, 2 March 1929. 509-510.

<sup>65</sup> Thrift held a University of Dublin seat in the *Dáil*. Unionist in politics he was also a friend of the Irish Statesman contributor and Trinity Fellow Walter Starkie’s father. Thrift was Provost of Trinity from 1937 until his death in 1942.



journal's directors, wrote his biography<sup>66</sup>. In the Senate, Sir John Keane lamented Yeats's absence and tried to make up for his loss by aping the controversial tone of Yeats's article in the Irish Statesman<sup>67</sup>. Combined with Keane was Gogarty and the former speaker of the Senate, Sir James Douglas, also a director of the Irish Statesman<sup>68</sup>. With associates like these, Russell may well have praised the efficacy of the Free State parliament, not least because it contained some of his closest political allies.

The Censorship Bill was now modified to what seemed an acceptable compromise between the state and its intellectuals. It proved, even in the short term, to be nothing of the sort. As early as 1932, the letter of invitation to join a prospective Irish Academy of Letters stressed the need for writers to combine in opposition to censorship: "our sole defence"(7) wrote Shaw and Yeats "lies in the authority of our utterance"(7)<sup>69</sup>. Séan O'Faoláin found his Bird Alone banned from 1935 to 1947 and Kate O'Brien her Land of Spices from 1941. Other writers prescribed included James Baldwin, Ernest Hemingway, Christopher Isherwood, Marcel Proust, H. G. Wells and Emile Zola. Considering the list, it is surprising that more people did not volunteer to read for the Censorship Board. The situation improved in 1967 with Brian Lenihan's Censorship of Publications Bill. As Minister for Justice, Lenihan limited the period of prohibition for books to twelve years. Thousands of banned books came back into circulation<sup>70</sup>. Today, the proliferation of

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<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately Cooper died prematurely. Robinson published his affectionate study, Bryan Cooper, in 1931. For examples of Cooper's letters to the Irish Statesman see IS, 5:14, 12 Dec. 1925, and IS, 6:5, 10 April 1926. Cooper spoke as an Independent member of the *Dáil* in the Censorship Debate of 18 October 1928, advising caution in the wording of the Bill.

<sup>67</sup> See footnote one.

<sup>68</sup> For details of Douglas and his connections to the Irish Statesman see Chapter Five.

<sup>69</sup> Cited from Carlson, J. ed. Banned in Ireland.

<sup>70</sup> See Adams, M. Censorship. 199.

electronic media only serves to make effective state control an ever more remote possibility.

Russell meanwhile concentrated on developing his own vision of the future. It must be remembered in this context that the controversy over the Censorship Bill, important as it was as a test of Russell's ability to challenge an institutional threat to his own power, was in itself but part of Russell's wider programme of cultural rejuvenation. The Censorship Bill was no more than a threat to the means of production of Russell's new cultural fabric. The actual material to supply it, both textual and rhetorical, was something that Russell continued to ponder throughout this period. The editor of the Irish Statesman found renewed inspiration for his literary project in his review of Wyndham Lewis's polemical journal, The Enemy, published intermittently from 1927 to 1929. Lewis, an English intellectual and painter, had been the editor of Blast, the seminal Modernist review and response to the Italian Futurists<sup>71</sup>. Russell, whose own Irish Statesman was intoxicated with the mechanical success of the Shannon Scheme in the Free State, responded enthusiastically to Lewis's call for cultural rejuvenation in The Enemy. Russell stated that:

Those only are alive who are Futurist, who belong to that nationality of ours that is still unborn, but who sees images of it lit up by the light which never yet was on sea or land... The man who is truly alive will be original. He will invent new art forms, imagine a new psychology, a new nationality, a new social order, a new civilisation, all glittering from the mint of the living soul. It will all be shocking to the pack, but if the solitary and original have the courage to persist they will bestow beauty even on the mob (66)<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> A good account of this period and Lewis's involvement in it can be found in Butler, C. Early Modernism: Literature, Music and Painting in Europe 1900-1916.

<sup>72</sup> Russell, G. W. "L&L: Enemies of Society", IS, 8:3, 26 March 1927. 65-66.



Russell's distrust of what he imagines to be an average mentality and his valorisation of the individual perspective are typical of a modernist aesthetic that veers towards the proto-fascist. Russell's criticism of the 'recognised associations' during the passage of the Censorship Bill through the *Dáil* can also be seen to reflect his aversion to what he terms here as the 'mob'. But the invention of an entirely new civilisation is the rhetorical flourish of a writer who hopes to achieve authority by osmosis. Instead of revolution, Russell advocates a controlled reaction to democracy. Politically, the energy of the modern artist's radical spirit is channelled through individual members of the state.

Russell's appreciation of the Free State's genesis is accordingly cast in terms that might be unfamiliar to more conventional students of the Anglo-Irish and Civil Wars. For "Cold hard intelligence such as four or five of the Executive Council are gifted with, was needed to shape the Free State and give it its hard bony structure, its political character"(152)<sup>73</sup>. Russell's insistence on terms such as 'hard' and 'bony' reflects the influence of Lewis's rhetoric on his own perception of Irish history. The angular aesthetic of The Enemy, with its allusions to the remorseless progression of modernity through the development of science and art, finds a corollary in Russell's own appreciation of Free State industrial projects<sup>74</sup>. To Russell, the relentless pressure of the

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<sup>73</sup> "N&C", *IS*, 8:7, 23 April 1927. 151-154.

<sup>74</sup> The Enemy was in effect a collage of drawings, journalism and imaginative prose, predominantly attributed to Lewis. The first issue of the journal is prefaced by a passage from Plutarch's *Moralia* that explains its title: "A man of understanding is to benefit by his enemies... He that knoweth that he hath an enemy will look circumspectly about him to all matters, ordering his life and behaviour in better sort... But forasmuch as amity and friendship nowadays speaketh with a small and low voice, and is very audible and is full of words in flattery, what remaineth but that we should hear the truth from the mouth of our enemies?"(iv). The Enemy, 1:1, Jan. 1927. Much of the journal continues in this serious, portentous tone. The first issue is further remarkable for T. S. Eliot's "A Note on Poetry and Belief" and Lewis's illustrations. His "Magellan" on (viii) is especially striking. A black ink drawing of a sail ship amid a series of horizontal lines, "Magellan" is reminiscent to a degree of the fluidity of Umberto Boccioni's 1911 "States of Mind II: Those Who Go". Boccioni's painting is reproduced in Butler, C. Early Modernism: Literature, Music and Painting in Europe 1900-1916.

modern experience could only find its voice in turn in the engagement of Free State writers with the techniques of realism. In his review of O'Flaherty's 1929 novel, The House of Gold, Russell found:

a terrible vision of life in rural Ireland, with lust, greed and fear, superstition instead of a soul of the people. It will enrage many who cannot bear to have Ireland or its people depicted for them in any other way than by the flattering of idealism and dream. Even to those who have more courage it will appear almost a nightmare of furious or ferocious emotions... Our writers are becoming as passionate in their realism as Yeats and his early contemporaries were with their idealism and mysticism (76)<sup>75</sup>.

Since Russell held Yeats to have been the primary voice in the successful creation of a separate Irish cultural identity, his assignation to O'Flaherty of the power to divine a new perspective is significant. Russell believed that an age of realism had followed an era of idealism. O'Flaherty's insight is credited with the unveiling of this new perception of Irish life. O'Flaherty's emotions are intemperate but Russell perceives that O'Flaherty registers through them the birth of a new order. Russell, from his reading of Flinders Petrie and, more recently, Oswald Spengler, was consumed by the idea that Europe was in decline, its culture derivative and its politics emasculated<sup>76</sup>. O'Flaherty's wild style in The House of Gold is alternative evidence to Russell that Ireland might still possess a pre-modern, radical culture. Writing of the Irish interest in folklore, Russell was

Quite certain that the spirit of the modern world and modern education will very soon put an end to the folk imagination and the folk memory. There is perhaps twenty-five years in which the collectors may get their

<sup>75</sup> Russell, G. W. "Review", IS, 13:4, 28 Sept. 1929. 76.

<sup>76</sup> The German language edition of Oswald Spengler's The Decline of the West was discussed in the Irish Statesman in 1926, an early recognition in the English speaking world of its importance. See 'M.J.', "L&L: The Downfall of Western Civilisation", IS, 6:7, 24 April 1926. 183-184. Russell was never entirely convinced of the complexity of Spengler's thought but the German's prediction of European decline conformed to Flinders Petrie's conclusions drawn from research into the decay and development of human cultures.



harvest. After that the farmer's boy will be thinking of scientific farming and his literature will be the modern novel and the daily newspaper (463)<sup>77</sup>.

To negotiate this transition, Russell directed the Irish Statesman's review pages to investigate literary developments outside the Free State. December 1928 saw the journal review both Ezra Pound's Selected Poems and Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms. Russell found Pound's writing improved from his previous work and suspected the influence of Pound's editor, T. S. Eliot, on the poet. Despite his reservation that Pound was a "man of talent"(280)<sup>78</sup> who had only with effort approached the "work of genius"(280)<sup>79</sup>, Russell did concede that "Free verse has never with Pound meant easy verse. I am sure he sweats over six or eight lines of verse like as (*sic*) other poets might over a long narrative"(280)<sup>80</sup>. A Farewell to Arms left the Irish Statesman confused as to the nature of Hemingway's talent. "I imagine"(323)<sup>81</sup>, its reviewer noted, "Mr. Hemingway with his power of writing dialogue in such short and vital sentences, which by their very inadequacy suggest so much, could write an extraordinarily interesting play"(323)<sup>82</sup>. The Irish Statesman responded warmly to Virginia Woolf's Orlando.

Dryden, Pope, Addison, Dr. Johnson and Boswell – the two latter only shadows, it is true – wander across the pages in company with courtiers and kings. We trace the slow flowering of our modern age and of the ages which have gone before, while the person of a young man or a young woman forms the single stems supporting these blooms... Orlando is a book of which any writer might be proud (275)<sup>83</sup>.

The representation of historical and cultural change through the perspective of a marginalised individual consciousness is typical of early twentieth century literature.

<sup>77</sup> Russell, G. W. "Magazines", IS, 13:23, 8 Feb. 1929. 463.

<sup>78</sup> Russell, G. W. "Selected Poems. By Ezra Pound", IS, 11:14, 8 Dec. 1928. 279-280.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> I.H. "Fiction", IS, 11:16, 21 Dec. 1928. 322-323.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

That the Irish Statesman should recognise this in Orlando is a reflection of the attempt by some of its reviewers to come to terms with the 'modern novel'. What Russell understood to be modern was prophetic and realist. Prophecy was modern in the sense that, like O'Flaherty's The House of Gold, it sensed the birth of a new, virile Western consciousness. It was realist because authors like Joyce, writing in a transition period between the folk and modern cultures, recorded the subjective turmoil of their subjects as they adapted to new conditions<sup>84</sup>.

Of course to do this is to invest the concept of modernity in writing with a considerable political significance. If Joyce's detractors, the state censors and literary critics, succeeded in silencing his texts, they would hinder the necessary expression of a new Europe. Russell countered this possibility by compulsion, always a strong, if under-acknowledged, element in his doctrine of co-operation. The political equivalent of the culturally restorative modern novel became the application of a vigorous corporatism. The national being was for Russell a body that required discipline, organisation and education. Accordingly, Russell welcomed the Italian Fascist adoption of a Charter of Labour in 1927 with "admiration and wonder"(272)<sup>85</sup>.

Here is a Government which will stand no nonsense and which issued a communiqué to the industrialists warning them that the cost of living must

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<sup>83</sup> R.M.F. "Orlando: A Biography. By Virginia Woolf", IS, 10:14, 8 June 1929. 275.

<sup>84</sup> Russell reviewed a series of Joyce's works in progress throughout the late nineteen twenties. See for example his reviews of Anna Livia Plurabelle in the IS, 11:17, 29 Dec. 1928 and of Tales Told of Shem and Shaun: Three Fragments from Work in Progress in the IS, 12:18, 6 July 1929. Russell recognised Joyce's talent but declared himself in both these reviews to be confused about the author's intentions. The reason for Russell's inclusion of these texts in the Irish Statesman was in part due perhaps to the editor's friendship with Padraic Colum who also wrote the foreword to Anna Livia Plurabelle. Colum of course supported Russell in his attack on the censorship, as discussed above. Thomas MacGreevy argued for Joyce's importance to Irish literature in a letter, "Anna Livia Plurabelle", to the IS, 11:24, 16 Feb. 1929. 475-476. Perhaps the most striking of MacGreevy's observations is not about Joyce at all: "an essay"(476) MacGreevy noted, "by a Dublin student of Italian literature, Mr. Samuel Beckett, on the influence of Vico (who may be regarded in some ways as the Dante of the Counter-Reformation) on the construction and verbal technique of Mr. Joyce's work is shortly to be published in Paris"(476).

<sup>85</sup> "N&C", IS, 8:12, 28 May 1927. 271-274.



come down... Only the strongest and sincerest government could act in this way. If the Fascists pull through and make a success of their policy the other ancient, mouldy moth-eaten governments will sit up and act also. Dear Heaven, how the world will be drilled in another quarter of a century! (272)<sup>86</sup>.

A pseudonymous letter immediately objected to this section of the Irish Statesman, the correspondent pointing out that the Italian Charter was transparently a document whereby labour could more easily be manipulated by the state<sup>87</sup>. Another letter immediately followed from the Italian Embassy at the Court of St. James in support of the Irish Statesman<sup>88</sup>. That the Irish Statesman should receive such notice from the Italian elite is indication of the regard held for the Irish Statesman's support of the Italian project.

There is no doubt that Russell sustained an interest throughout the latter years of the nineteen twenties in the possible use of state power to regulate internal dissidence. His patience with any form of public opinion that he found objectionable was dangerously diminished. Russell thought, with no apparent sense of irony, that "If we do not discourage our co-ercionists it will be a country only fit for tenth-rate human beings who have no mind, no spirit, and who are only fit to be herded like our cattle"(307)<sup>89</sup>. The idea of a humanity lacking in spirit or intelligence, the two attributes that most make for an individual presence, is, in retrospect, disturbing but in context of Russell's previous writings this passage is but a more blunt extension of his belief in the primacy of elite regulation. It is fitting that Russell found a political form so sympathetic to his own preferences in the form of Italian Fascism in the late nineteen twenties. There is no doubt that the radical brand of co-operation that he had developed over the previous twenty

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<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> 'Politicus'. "The Fascist State", IS, 8:16, 25 June 1927. 375.

<sup>88</sup> Villari, L. "Fascism and Labour", IS, 8:18, 9 July 1927. 422.

<sup>89</sup> Russell, G. W. "The Bull in Irish Politics", IS, 12:16, 22 June 1929. 306-307.

years helped to make him open to the corporatism of the then modern Italian state. Russell was aware of the shortcomings of the Italian administration. Able to admit “The Fascists may have been destructive”(133)<sup>90</sup> he still felt that “the intellectual aspect of the movement should be of interest to us in Ireland, who have by no means come to our ideal state, to marry it and live happily ever after”(133)<sup>91</sup>. The bridal rites of such a union between intellectuals and the nation promised Russell the authority to speak for the Free State, the product, in his mind, of their marriage.

As the Irish state consolidated its independence towards the end of the nineteen twenties, Russell embarked on a new and final phase of his career in the Irish Statesman. In these last two years of the journal’s publication Russell developed an obsession with the possibility of Ireland’s becoming a flight centre for the developing aviation industry. Flights were made between America and Europe for the first time in 1927, one of which was assisted by a pilot of the Irish Army<sup>92</sup>. Russell saw in the development of these flights a means by which even the remotest parts of the Free State might be exposed to global influence. It is ironic that after a bitter battle over censorship and the regulation of information for Free State citizens that the Irish Statesman should further be urging the government to develop a global trade that might have a similar, culturally contaminating, effect, as those pro-censorship would have had it.

The Irish Statesman’s interest in the promotion of flight did however predate the censorship debate as it published an article on the subject in May 1928. Signed simply ‘Viator’ the author of the piece was possibly Gogarty, committed as he was throughout

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<sup>90</sup> Russell, G. W. “L&L: The Making of a Fascist State”, IS, 12:7, 20 April 1929. 132-133.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> An officer of the Irish Army, as reported in the quarterly of that organisation, An t-Oglac, April 1928, accompanied the 1928 flight of the German crew of the *Bremen* across the Atlantic.



this period to the development of Irish aviation<sup>93</sup>. Typically, the article suggested that the provision of a “North-Atlantic air port”(167)<sup>94</sup> would “give great assurance to the public mind and, we may forecast, would rank beside the Shannon scheme in securing for the Irish Administration a reputation for courageous foresight”(167)<sup>95</sup>. This was wise advice, especially in context of the massive growth that European state airlines, Lufthansa predominant among them, had up to then experienced<sup>96</sup>.

One year later the Irish Statesman reiterated that “Ireland is geographically a natural centre for the establishment of Atlantic air-ports”(86)<sup>97</sup>. It further noted that the Irish pilot of the most recent flight to America, a Colonel Fitzmaurice, “as a last counsel implored his countrymen to be less backward gazing and become more futurist”(86)<sup>98</sup>. The date of this article suggests the degree to which Russell was prepared to reassert his drive to Free State modernity after the distraction of censorship. Russell followed this piece by publishing a poem by W. H. Hurley, simply titled “Aviation”. Hurley himself is probably a pseudonymous creation of either Russell or Gogarty, as an author of the same name does not appear elsewhere in the Irish Statesman or any other Irish publications of the period, a fact too fortunate to be coincidental. “Aviation” celebrates the art of flight in the following terms:

They flying swift wings across the waste  
To spread the pulse of life, and bind

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<sup>93</sup> See for example Gogarty’s humorous account of his first flying lesson in “I Pick Up Flying”, An t-Oglac: The Irish Army Quarterly, 3:1, 1930 and “Mid Air” in the IS, 9:7, 22 Oct. 1927. In view of Gogarty’s cavalier attitude to air travel one would be surprised if any reader were ever left with the impression that flight was either safe or convenient.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Viator’. “An Irish Air Port”, IS, 10:9, 5 May 1928. 167.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> R. Lloyd Praeger, the Irish natural scientist and occasional contributor to the Irish Statesman, noted that “The 1928 programme issued by the Deutsche Luft-Hansa (sic) Company... shows more than six hundred daily passenger flights between European cities”(247). “In Praise of Flying”, IS, 13:13, 30 Nov. 1929. 247-248.

<sup>97</sup> “Ireland and Aviation”, IS, 12:5, 6 April 1929. 86-87.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*

The nations close in need and mind,  
Till earth be one, and war outpaced  
Where their sane spirit, scorning fears,  
Shall reach with newer strength to span the spheres (149)<sup>99</sup>.

There is a dual awareness in this poem of the spiritual impulse to mechanical speed. The two modes function together, science working to a higher end than mere mechanism by its creation of a medium whereby the world can, to paraphrase the poem, be bound. Russell had himself been fascinated with flight at least since the publication of The Interpreters in 1922<sup>100</sup>. But he found, in the Cambridge astrophysicist, A. S. Eddington's Science and the Physical World, evidence of a scientific practice that allowed for the operations of the irrational. Eddington's theories dominated Russell's aesthetic perspective in the second half of 1929 as the editor of the Irish Statesman attempted to impel the Free State's futurist direction<sup>101</sup>.

Eddington's book was published in 1929, being the product of a series of lectures first delivered in 1927. The purpose of Eddington's text was to suggest that since all objects are made of single atoms, the appearance of an object as solid to human perception is an illusion, the agglomeration of molecules giving only the substance of reality. As Eddington himself put it, "It is because the mind, the weaver of illusion, is also the generator of reality that reality is always to be sought as the base of illusion. Illusion is to reality as smoke is to the fire"(319). Accordingly, "it is reasonable to enquire whether in the mystical illusions of man there is not a reflection of an undying

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<sup>99</sup> Hurley, W. H. "Aviation", IS, 12:8, 28 April 1929. 149.

<sup>100</sup> See Chapter Four. 121-122.

<sup>101</sup> Details of Eddington's achievements can be read in Crowther, J. G. British Scientists of the Twentieth Century. Eddington was, by the end of the nineteen twenties, something of a popularising, but serious, scientist in the latter day mould of Hawking or Gould. The Macmillan book lists in the New Statesman Literary Supplement for May 1927 lead with a description of Eddington's Stars and Atoms as "A book for the general reader"(I). NS, Supplement to Vol. 29, 21 May 1929.



reality”(319). Eddington developed this idea into a defence of art from the attacks of science:

In the mystic sense of the creation around us, in the expression of art, in a yearning towards God, the soul grows upward and finds the fulfilment of something implanted in its nature. The sanction for this development within us, a striving born with our consciousness or an inner light proceeding from a greater power than ours. Science can scarcely question this sanction, for the pursuit of science springs from a striving which the mind is impelled to follow, a questing that will not be suppressed (327-328).

In response to Eddington, Russell composed the poem “Beauty and Science (*After Reading A. S. Eddington’s Science and the Physical World*)”<sup>102</sup>, published in the Irish Statesman in October 1929. In this prose poem Russell reflects on the suggestion that “The apparition of earth and we ourselves/ are builded”(128)<sup>103</sup> is “From these frail, fiery infinitesimals”(128)<sup>104</sup> or atoms. The speaker denies this sole possibility, suggesting that “we can prove their mathematic to have/ erred”(128)<sup>105</sup> as a light within the psyche consumes the atomic power:

For, at the first thought of that loveliness  
Within the psyche, the image began to shine  
As if those delicate lights had ceased to circle  
Around their suns, and hurrying to the image  
They had grown still within it, lighting there  
Myriads and myriads of their fairy fires (128)<sup>106</sup>.

Bizarre as this rendering of atomic theory into the vaguest realms of mystical poetry is, one must still realise that Russell is engaged in a debate then current in the British periodical The Realist. Russell’s line for example that states “we can prove their

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<sup>102</sup> The careful reader will of course note that in his dedication Russell carelessly refers to Eddington’s ‘Science and the Physical World’ when he should refer to its actual title, The Nature of the Physical World. The mistake is perhaps significant of the impression Eddington’s discourse on science and art made upon the poet.

<sup>103</sup> Russell, G. W. “Beauty and Science”, IS, 13:7, 19 Oct. 1929. 128.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*

mathematic to have erred”(128)<sup>107</sup> has its source in a May 1929 article in The Realist by a Professor H. Levy called “Is Science Credible?”<sup>108</sup> We can assume that Russell became aware of The Realist as its literary editor, Gerald Heard, reviewed H. G. Wells’ Meanwhile in the Irish Statesman in August 1927. In his own article, Levy was less moved than Russell by Eddington’s submission that since atoms are invisible to the human eye it must take faith to believe in them. Instead of insisting on the physical reality of these objects, Levy solved Eddington’s problem by stating that the existence of atoms was, whether verifiable or not, a logical necessity of Einstein’s Theory of Relativity.

Complicated as this sounds, Levy’s argument is simplicity itself. It is that, while trying to formulate a unified theory of the functions of the universe, the scientist must accept the inadequacies of both his senses and his equipment. These deficiencies noted, “The object of science”(137)<sup>109</sup> was, as Levy quoted from Einstein, “to co-ordinate experiences, and to bring them into a logical system”(137)<sup>110</sup>. This article was critical to Russell’s appreciation of Eddington as it provided the scientist and the intellectual with equal status, each equipped with inadequate tools by which to explore the eternal. In this mutual respect, Russell’s description of Eddington as one of the great “intellectual engineers”(251)<sup>111</sup> is fitting both to Eddington and to Russell, since the course of the

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<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Levy wrote that “Mathematical reasoning is recognised as logic in one of its purest forms, for into the English language there has crept the custom of confusing the two words ‘mathematical’ and ‘logical’. It is, therefore, something of a shock to the outsider when he learns that even in pure mathematics there is a history of error”(133). In “Is Science Credible?” The Realist, 1:2, May 1929. 130-143.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Russell, G. W. in reply to O’Casey, IS, 13:13, 30 Nov. 1929. 250-251.



latter's career in the Irish Statesman was the careful exercise of a literary instrument in pursuit of a cultural construction.

In this respect, it is relevant to note Patrick Kavanagh's first ever publication was beside Russell's "Beauty and Science" in the Irish Statesman. For Russell must have picked Kavanagh's poem "The Intangible" deliberately as a companion piece to his meditation on Eddington's work. In it Kavanagh invokes images of "Indian/ Vision of thunder./ Splendours of Greek,/ Egypt's cloud-woven glory"(128)<sup>112</sup>. The young poet reads like Russell's adept, the speaker's classical allusions not yet prepared for the irony of later poems like "Epic"<sup>113</sup>. There is a suggestion of the speaker's distrust of the ancients' "thread-worn story"(128)<sup>114</sup> but the last two lines of "The Intangible" are those most relevant to Russell's response to Eddington in "Beauty and Science". Kavanagh states in these that "Two and two are not four/ On every shore"(128)<sup>115</sup>, a simple yet elegant discourse against empiricism. To read these lines in context of Russell's reference to Levy in The Realist is to recognise the fact that, unwitting or not, Kavanagh is, like O'Flaherty with The House of Gold, to be co-opted into Russell's great post-national project. The irony of Kavanagh's election to such elevated status is played out well in Kavanagh's memoir The Green Fool, as the country intellectual arrives half-starved in Russell's presence, the only sustenance offered a discussion of Whitman and Emerson<sup>116</sup>.

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<sup>112</sup> Kavanagh, P. "The Intangible", IS, 13:7, 19 Oct. 1929. 128.

<sup>113</sup> Kavanagh's "Epic" starts with the declaration that "I have lived in important places, times/ When great events were decided"(238) to compare the record of a rural Irish squabble with Homer's Greece, a poet whose ghost suggests "I made the Iliad from such/ A local row"(238). Quoted from The Complete Poems of Patrick Kavanagh.

<sup>114</sup> Kavanagh, P. "The Intangible", IS, 13:7, 19 Oct. 1929. 128.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> The limits of Russell's success in the enlistment of new Irish writers can be read in Kavanagh's account of their first meeting in 1932. Kavanagh remembered that "I wasn't listening to AE. I was worried over

Added to Kavanagh and O'Flaherty in the vanguard of a new Irish consciousness were to be the twin characters of O'Casey and Yeats, each of whom posed a separate problem for the Irish Statesman. O'Casey was the first to split publicly with Russell, the seeds of their antagonism laid in Russell's siding with Yeats and the Abbey directors in their rejection of O'Casey's The Silver Tassie<sup>117</sup>. The slight to O'Casey was magnified by the Irish Statesman's publication of a negative review by Séan O'Faoláin of the eventual London production of O'Casey's play<sup>118</sup>. In response to the playwright's letters to the Irish Statesman on the subject Russell rather patronisingly suggested that O'Casey read Eddington's Science and the Physical World. This is significant, not least because it suggests the way in which Eddington's text was by late 1929 to serve a similar purpose to the work of O'Grady in the earlier stages of Russell's career. Russell's evangelism was spoilt by his offensive suggestion to O'Casey that a reading of the book "may complete your education about the complexity of human nature"(251)<sup>119</sup>. The clear implication was that O'Casey's earlier plays, with the Dublin tenements as their subject, dealt only with the simple facts of external life. O'Casey reacted bitterly. Referring to an art review by Russell in the Irish Statesman, O'Casey suggested that if Russell could "get a connection

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the poor impression I was making. I was hungry – for poetry? Yes, but I was also physically hungry, and an empty stomach is a great egoist, and a bad listener to anything save the fry of rashers in a pan"(229). Cited from The Green Fool. Russell's distraction was due in part to the terminal illness that afflicted his wife. Violet Russell died two months subsequent to George Russell's meeting Kavanagh. See Summerfield, H. That Myriad-Minded Man. 263.

<sup>117</sup> In their capacity as Directors of the Abbey Theatre, Yeats and Lennox Robinson returned the typescript of Sean O'Casey's The Silver Tassie to the playwright for revision before they would consider it for production. O'Casey sent their entire correspondence, which also implicated Walter Starkie and Lady Gregory in the controversy, to the Irish Statesman with a demand that it be published. Russell submitted to O'Casey's will but not before warning Yeats privately of O'Casey's intention. O'Casey was outraged by the Irish Statesman's refusal to condemn the Abbey's decision. This marks the start of O'Casey's deep antipathy to Russell, ungenerously expressed in his later autobiographies. See the Correspondence columns of the IS, 10:14, 9 June 1928.



between the discoveries of Eddington in protons and electrons, with your discoveries in Art, then, I'm afraid, you know as much about Science as you do about Painting"(298)<sup>120</sup>. Cuttingly, O'Casey ended his correspondence with a mockery of Russell's pretensions to the recruitment of a new Irish literary school. "Remember me"(298)<sup>121</sup> he wrote, "to all the boys and girls"(298)<sup>122</sup>.

Russell's understanding of Yeats's role in the new state matured in tandem with his response to Eddington's work<sup>123</sup>. Russell began to find in Yeats the evidence of a character sufficient to speak on behalf of the elite to the mass. By 1929 Yeats had become to Russell the embodiment of a modern Cuchulain, the conduit, like the earlier hero in O'Grady's histories, of forces summoned from the collective unconscious<sup>124</sup>. Russell's review of the 1929 edition of Yeats's Selected Poems is in this respect revealing. Generally avoiding specific reference to Yeats's actual work, Russell suggested that:

There is in every work of genius not only what is consciously in the mind of the genius, but much of what is unknown to himself. Emerson speaks of the great architect as building better than he knew, and Socrates says that in the mind of the poet there is a daemon who speaks through him truths from a profounder life than the conscious (191-192)<sup>125</sup>.

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<sup>118</sup> O'Faoláin disdainfully remarked of the first production of The Silver Tassie in England that the play was not "good theatre as we understand the term in these islands"(135). In "The Silver Tassie Staged", IS, 13:8, 18 Oct. 1929. 134-135.

<sup>119</sup> Russell, G. W. in reply to O'Casey, IS, 13:13, 30 Nov. 1929. 250-251.

<sup>120</sup> O'Casey, S. "Contradictions", IS, 13:15, 14 Dec. 1929. 296, 298-299.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Yeats was also interested in Eddington. He discussed the scientist's merits with the poet Thomas Sturge Moore in the late nineteen twenties. "Eddington"(63), Yeats noted in January 1926, "said lately that all we have a right to say of the external world is that it is a 'shared experience'"(64). Moore replied in March 1926 that Eddington's work "entirely accords with the common-sense view that science is a description of those properties of reality which can be abstracted, but the remainder, which Eddington sums up under the head Actuality, remains intractable to scientific method and contains most of the values of experience"(79). Cited from Bridge, U. ed. W. B. Yeats and Sturge Moore.

<sup>124</sup> For a discussion of O'Grady's influence on Russell and the relevance of the figure of the hero to Russell's own writing see Chapter One. 10-14.

<sup>125</sup> Russell, G. W. "L&L: The Reading of Poetry", IS, 13:10, 9 Nov. 1929. 191-192.

Yeats's gift is his ability to articulate the unconscious desire of the audience that he addresses. Russell in turn sees Yeats as the precursor, the voice of a new order not yet come into its full power. The *daemon* that speaks through the poet offers a higher sanction to the actions of his devotees than that of democratic election. Since there is no conscious choice in the poet's selection of his voice, there can be nothing but compulsion in the following of its dictates. The fulfilment of its promise was a new civilisation, the reward to its devotees engaged in a realignment of European politics. Russell was aware of the consequences of this vision. Writing in the Irish Statesman just two months before the journal's final edition he predicted that because

The nationalities in Europe are old and have got so fixed it is possible the only way in which the United States of Europe could be brought about would be by the emergence of some conqueror of the Napoleon or Caesar type who would bring them all by force under our Government. It would, doubtless, be very unpleasant for a century or so, but it is possible that the great-grand-children of those dragged into a European confederation might look back on the conqueror as the greatest European who ever existed. I have no doubt in the future we shall have the United States of the World (562)<sup>126</sup>.

Russell finds in his confirmation of a world federation the promise of mass consciousness working to one end that he perceived in O'Grady's Cuchulain and in his own version of Yeats in the Irish Statesman. The dictatorship of the mind that Russell imagines is but another step in the evolution of consciousness that he traces from the primitive to the advanced, its progress measured through the state's own attempts at scientific development. The Shannon Scheme, like flight, is the physical equivalent to Yeats's poetry, the impetus to a new cultural arrangement that will be vigorous in the

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<sup>126</sup> Russell, G. W. "Review of Oscar Neufang's *The United States of the World*", IS, 13:25, 22 Feb. 1930. 501-502.



application of its ethics. Russell is in this final sense himself an intellectual engineer, the term by which he described the physicist Eddington.

But the impression remains that the Irish Statesman, so forceful in its prescriptions of Irish culture throughout the majority of the nineteen twenties, was a chimera, the potential of its projections disturbing when read unmediated by preconceptions of Russell's intrinsic liberalism. The Irish Statesman was, in essence, a review late Victorian in style and news content with some modernist pretension, its contributors significant figures in both Irish and European literature. Russell was its editor and grand engineer, the architect of both its appearance and direction. Perhaps like all inventions, the Irish Statesman became redundant and by its close in March 1930 had lost much of its original energy. But, for the major period of its publication, the Irish Statesman was a publication unique in Irish culture. Learned, by turns radical and conservative, the Irish Statesman was the highest expression of Irish intellectuals' negotiation of Ireland's transition from nation to Free State.

The closing of the Irish Statesman was Russell's farewell to the business of journalism and editing. Exhausted from twenty-five years of copy, proofs and commissions, Russell engaged himself in the remaining five years of his life with the publication of three volumes of poetry and a volume of prose<sup>127</sup>. He was also Honorary Secretary for the Irish Academy of Letters that he helped Yeats to found in the autumn of 1932<sup>128</sup>. But there was disappointment too. De Valera, Russell's long time political

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<sup>127</sup> The poetry collections were Vale and Other Poems (1931), Song and its Fountains (1932) and House of the Titans and Other Poems (1934). The Avatars (1932) was prose. Macmillan published all four. It further issued posthumous Selected Poems in September 1935.

<sup>128</sup> Russell discussed the Academy with Yeats and Lady Gregory at Coole in 1931. Russell's interest in the project waned as his mind tired in years subsequent. See Summerfield, H. That Myriad-Minded Man. 262-266.

antagonist, formed his first *Fianna Fáil* government in March 1932. Censorship, the subject of Russell's final controversy in the Irish Statesman, took real effect in the first half of the 1930's. Most troubling were the deaths of his closest friends and relations in the decade previous: Susan Mitchell in 1926, James Winder Good in 1930, Horace Plunkett and Violet Russell in 1932. Russell left Dublin in 1933 to spend the last two years of his life in England. He died in Bournemouth on 17 July 1935 attended by Constantine Curran and Oliver St. John Gogarty.

There is no doubt that Russell's last years, when read in such short summary form, were unproductive in comparison with his active life of the preceding decades. Russell's posthumous popularity has faded with his literary reputation; his writings are out of print and little read. Russell's poetry, likewise, is critically invisible in comparison to that of his contemporary Yeats. Doubtless, the majority of Russell's verse is romantic and rhetorical. It also relies on a stock variety of archaic phrases that grate with even a sympathetic reader. But Russell's poetry shares one quality with his prose. Both types of writing register Russell's intellectual interests in ways that provide new contexts to our critical understanding of Irish literature and its cultural ambitions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Russell was interested in mysticism, epic, co-operation, socialism, fascism and science. His poetry and prose were the tools for Russell's exploration of these subjects and both offer the modern reader a fascinating insight into the period's intellectual topography.

Which brings us to a final appraisal of Russell's journalism. Russell edited and contributed to the Irish Homestead and Irish Statesman in difficult conditions. Weekly deadlines, word counts and an expectant audience all made their demands on his work.



But to read Russell's contributions to his two journals is to discover a lost world of intellectual endeavour whose style of composition and tone is reminiscent of the late nineteenth century. What Russell achieved in the period of this study was the conduct of cultural commentary in a literary journal whose style had seemed lost to the Victorian age. Russell was the editor for almost three decades of the Irish Homestead and Irish Statesman, two of Ireland's most important weekly publications. Russell's vision of Ireland is now lost to time and the dusty pages of these two long dormant journals. My final argument is for the recovery of that vision in the pages of this thesis.

## Appendix

- (a) Cover page of the Irish Homestead, 1 January 1916.
- (b) Title page of the Irish Homestead, 13 May 1916.
- (c) Cover page of the Irish Statesman, 15 September 1923.
- (d) Title Page of the Irish Statesman, 15 September 1923.
- (e) Promotional literature for the Shannon hydroelectric scheme reproduced from Manning, M. and M. McDowell, Electricity Supply in Ireland. 42.
- (f) Lewis, W. "Magellan". The Enemy: A Review of Art and Literature, 1, Jan. 1927. viii.



(a)

# THE IRISH HOMESTEAD

The Organ of Irish Agricultural and Industrial Development.

Reg. as a Newspaper.

JANUARY 1, 1916.

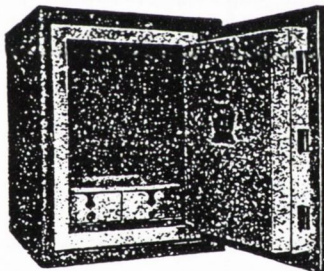
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SATURDAY, APRIL 29, MAY 6-13, 1916.

[ONE PENNY.]

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## THE IRISH HOMESTEAD

SATURDAY, APRIL 29, MAY 6-13, 1916.

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### THE HOPE THAT REMAINS.

That the publication of this paper should be interrupted during two weeks is an event of but slight importance to chronicle after one of the most tragic episodes in Irish history. We take up the duty which perforce had been dropped to promote again the movement which we are convinced is the main hope of this unhappy country. If anything occurred to split up the co-operative movement we would despair of Ireland, for it alone of all movements has progressed during a quarter of a century, gathering into a friendly union in its ranks men of all parties, even the extremists of both sides, and neither they nor the movement has been hurt by their alliance upon this neutral ground. It has been our belief for many years, and it now is more than ever our hope, that as the co-operative movement widens and perfects its organisations it will become the camp of reconciliation where the vast majority of Irish people separated by tradition for centuries may meet and unite in an economic brotherhood. If people in Ireland cannot so unite upon some common ground, they can never learn to know each other, never gain confidence in each other, and in their isolation and ignorance must beget hatreds which have blazed out in every generation. It is not in the scope of this paper to make partisan political comment on recent events in Ireland. That is being done on the old party lines by the Irish Press, each party vindicating itself and its

policy and their hack journalists, the moment they can get printers and presses to work, take up their ancient briefs, and each lodges in court as evidence in support of their contentions the ruck of the city of Dublin. The most terrible events have not quickened their imaginations or discovered either a mind or a heart in these people.

People in Ireland are uneducated in the worst sense of the word. That is, they know nothing about each other. They can read and write, and in that sense are not illiterate, but they are segregated into camps which have no communication with each other and know nothing of the feelings and ideals of people in other camps or how they work and live. All they learn of the life of other sections is from looking in the distorted mirror of party journalism, which reveals truth about parties hostile to them no more than do German, French, Austrian, Italian, Russian or English papers write impartially about the peoples with whom they are at war. So in Ireland the body politic has become like a man whose nervous system is paralysed and the brain is dumb to sensations in the feet and the limbs and other organs act independently of each other. The hand is burnt and the rest of the body does not feel it. The stomach is starved and perishes and the intellect is unaware and seeks for a remedy. Twice or thrice in our life we have met Irishmen who tried sympathetically to understand the views of other Irishmen, to discuss them impartially without flying into a rage, who wanted to know the grievance of labour, how it lived, what its wages were; who wanted to know the root facts on which Ulster Unionists based their policy, and at the same time desired to understand National opinion and policy and its economic and cultural ideals; who went with an enquiring mind everywhere, not turning sour faces on fanatics or bigots of any party, but trying to comprehend. Twice or thrice in our life we have met such people, but not more often; and it is in this human sense Irish people are uneducated; and unless our journalists and politicians can discover some humanity in themselves and try to understand those whom they have attacked for so many years, they will keep Ireland in hostile camps for generations to come. Unless some fundamental human kindness breaks through the mould in which their minds have been bred, the events of the past fortnight will keep Ireland more stunted than ever. The only hope we can see apart from the Lord



(c)

# The Irish Statesman

Edited by  
G.W. RUSSELL (Æ).

3d.  
WEEKLY

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*A Confession of Faith*

The Editor

*The Executive Council and the Dail*

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etc., etc.

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[THREEPENCE

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### A Confession of Faith.

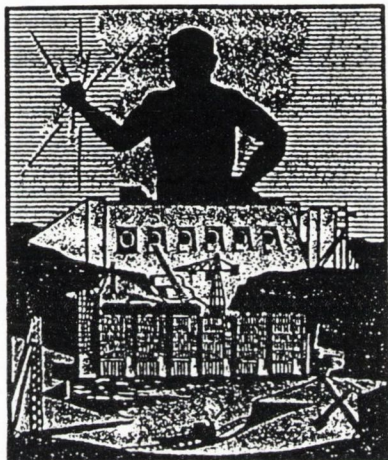
IT IS fitting when a new journal appears in Ireland that the faith in which the Editor undertakes the task entrusted to him should be made clear. It is his desire first of all to conduct a journal in which whatever comment or criticism might be made, there should be nothing of personal bitterness; a journal which would be national in this sense, that it would regard all living in Ireland, South or North, as one people, and strive to bring about unity through mutual understanding and friendship. He desired secondly to re-awaken interest in many ideals and causes which had become obscured somewhat during the past seven years, when the European war, the destinies which hung upon its outcome, and our own national and civil conflicts, turned the thoughts of the majority from the arts of peace so that they were stayed in suspense upon international or civil war. Up to 1914, and for nigh a quarter of a century before that, the Irish imagination had begun to work with more intensity on the problem of building up a civilisation with a social order in accordance with national character. In Europe and America a fresh interest had been quickened with regard to this country because of its literary movements, its poetry and drama, the renaissance of the Gaelic mind, the organisation of its agriculture and industry, and the increasing hope of a national government under which, unhampered by any external power, these cultural and economic forces might have full play. In achieving the last aspiration too many have lost sight of the end owing to the means employed. We think few will assert that during the later years there has been the old interest in these things which are most important in national life and to foster which the State exists. It is not too late to re-unite the links. All but the youngest can remember that period so rich in intellectual and economic activity. It is our desire to re-awaken interest in these movements, for not all that was born in Ireland under the old regime was either anti-national, slavish or to be forgotten. If it were so we must obliterate seven hundred years of life and national memory. It is only too often true in the life of nations, as well as individuals, that the dream or

aspirations we must recall to memory those ideas which made Ireland in the pre-war days so intellectually interesting to ourselves and to other nations. The writer believes in the genius of his countrymen, and that they will justify to the world the long struggle and the sacrifices made to secure national emancipation. But he is convinced that justification will come to ourselves and others only when we pursue the arts of peace with more than the intensity we have been devoting to warfare. He is even more interested in the future than in the past, and he hopes that this journal may help to create alluring images of the future society and the moulds into which it will be cast, and for this purpose he has enlisted the co-operation of many of the best writers and thinkers in this country.

HE IS aware that there are many dissatisfied with the constitutional status of Ireland under the Treaty, and they are rightly so, if for no other reason than the political partition of Ireland. If the Free State uses the powers it has under the Treaty and fashions a fiscal policy based on its own needs, this may involve also the economic partition of a small country which hitherto had the most complete freedom of trade within its boundaries. Already there has been injury to economic interests on both sides of the artificially created border. Still worse, a bitterness only too likely to be deep and enduring has been created among large communities in the Northern area who desired inclusion in the Free State. The history of Europe shows how long enduring are national sentiments. There is perhaps no case on record where large groups of nationals forced against their will into political communion with a people of different character have become really reconciled. Such groups are always a danger to peace. Their very persistence in nourishing hopes of re-union with the nation from which they are severed begets hatred towards them by the State whose ideals they refuse to accept. Almost inevitably vindictive action is taken against them, and this again stirs profound feeling in the nation to which the suppressed community wishes to be allied. The history of the Irish, the Poles, the Serbs, the Greeks or any other nationalities which suffered total or partial



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