Student Number: 1202259

Revival to Revolution:
Medieval Narratives in Irish Republicanism

Caitlyn Brinkman-Schwartz
Supervised by Mark Williams and Ian McBride

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Dedicated to Anna, Christiana and my parents

Names and Terminology

Historical and mythological figures may have multiple forms of their name. The earliest form will be used (e.g. ‘Medb’, not ‘Meadhbh’ or ‘Maeve’). Spelling in quoted text will not be altered.

Irish birth-names (e.g. ‘Gráinne Mhaol’) will not be Anglicised (e.g. ‘Grace O’Malley’).

In cases where a person Gaelicised their name, the version most common in historiography will be listed, with a preference for the Irish version when this cannot be determined.

Pen names will be identified and connected to legal names when they can be determined.

Translations

All Latin and Irish translations are the author’s own unless otherwise noted.

Abbreviations

ICA	Irish Citizen Army (Irish: Arm Cathartha na hÉireann)
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood
IV	Irish Volunteers
Táin	*Táin Bó Cúailnge*

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Abstract

Medieval narratives that had been celebrated in the Gaelic Revival (c.1880-1916) became a tool of republican self-fashioning in the revolutionary era (c.1912-23). As revolutionary nationalism developed into a movement distinct from Revivalism, it acquired its own flavour of engagement with medieval history and literature. This project argues for the continued cultural relevance of medieval narratives throughout the revolutionary period. Employing a hybrid methodology and incorporating a wide range of source material, this study adds nuance to our understanding of the transition from Revival to Revolution. The project demonstrates that medieval narratives not only remained a part of revolutionary culture after the Rising, but were selected, reimagined and deployed in ways specific to this context.

This project brings together the fields of medieval Irish literature, nineteenth and early twentieth century translations and twentieth century Irish history. Ultimately, it is a historiographical project, but an interdisciplinary one. The project interrogates how literature and mythology circulated in the national imaginarium and shaped identity. The research framework suits the multifaceted nature of the subject.

As Joep Leerssen wrote in *Remembrance and Imagination*, 'tradition' is not 'a discreet heirloom' but 'a vast and chaotic curiosity shop.' *Fin de siècle* revolutionaries in Ireland inherited a wealth of narratives that took multiple forms in the middle ages and were then passed through centuries of time and translations. Entering twentieth century culture, the tales were mediated not only through translation but through their modern audiences' values. New translations, retellings, and derivative works of art–and the context of each reader's own particular *Weltanschauung*–all create new frameworks for using old narratives in the service of identity.

Following the Revival, the medieval cultural inheritance continued to solidify identity and advance the political case for independence. Medieval narratives allowed people to understand, define and legitimise the present in terms of the past.

Long Abstract

Medieval narratives that had been celebrated in the Gaelic Revival (c.1880-1916) became a tool of republican self-fashioning in the revolutionary era (c.1912-23). As revolutionary nationalism developed into a movement distinct from Revivalism, it acquired its own flavour of engagement with medieval history and literature. This project argues for the continued cultural relevance of medieval narratives throughout the revolutionary period. Employing a hybrid methodology and incorporating a wide range of source material, this study adds nuance to our understanding of the transition from Revival to Revolution. The project demonstrates that medieval narratives not only remained a part of revolutionary culture after the Rising, but were selected, reimagined and deployed in ways specific to this context.

The Revival

The Gaelic Revival sought to revivify Irish culture, infusing it with medieval images and themes. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Revival was, for many, a pursuit that expressed patriotism without separatism. Revivalists were frequently middle class, metropolitan intellectuals with an interest in antiquarianism. They leveraged medieval literature, history and material culture to enhance the expression of Irish uniqueness and cultural value. Although the movement included prominent revolutionary activists, the cultural products of the Revival often entrenched existing socio-political power structures,

Some medieval literary narratives had fallen from a living tradition and re-emerged in the nineteenth century via translation. In his introduction to Standish James O'Grady's 1894 *The Coming of Cuculain*, George Russell wrote: 'We praise the man who rushes into a burning mansion and brings out its greatest treasure. So ought we to praise this man who rescued from the perishing Gaelic tradition its darling hero and restored him to us...' This interpretation lauds the nobility of saving cultural material from a conflagration whilst neatly avoiding the question of who started the metaphorical fire.

Considerations of cultural ownership, cultural degradation and authenticity are inherently political. Despite its characterisation in historiography as a 'cultural' (or sometimes 'romantic') movement, the Revival could not be divorced from politics. For some participants, the Revival was a rescue mission in which ostensibly degraded or lost tales of a noble past were resurrected in service of Anglo-Irish elites, entrenching their connection to Ireland and their status within it. At the other extreme, some utilised the Revival as a scouring agent, removing perceived cultural contamination. Thus the Revival contained manifold ways to engage with the medieval inheritance.

Revival to Revolution

This project interrogates the transition of medieval tradition from the Revival to the revolutionary era (c.1912-23). The revolutionary era is dated most convincingly to the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in 1912. It encompasses the 1916 Easter Rising, the War of Independence, which began in 1919 and ended with the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty and the establishment of the Irish Free State. Conflict over the resolution of this war set off the 1922 Civil War, which ended with the 1923 ceasefire.

The historiography tends to characterise the Revolution as a move from romanticism and nostalgia toward unvarnished violent conflict. But such transitions are neither neat nor instantaneous, and realism and poetry need not be diametrically opposed. Although the

medieval inheritance had moved from the forefront of culture, it remained a feature of republican self-fashioning. The revolutionary engagement with this material was dynamic: new meanings were drawn from old tales. Employing cultural artefacts of the Middle Ages, nationalists after the Rising continued to develop an identity that incorporated a history of self-government, a native literary tradition, and a golden age of heroes who had had championed their people. The stories and figures they emphasised and de-emphasised in constructing this identity are distinct from earlier eras: remembrance required re-imagination.

Structure

The thesis consists of seven chapters. After the introduction, the second chapter deconstructs the idea of the 'Celt'. It outlines the history of the Celt as a racial construct and how this was deployed to support national independence. Ideas of 'Celticity' so thoroughly permeated discussions of Irish history and identity and has such layers of meaning, that problematizing this word builds a framework of understanding for further chapters. The third chapter argues that reflexes of the Middle Ages are not necessarily regressive or anti-modern. This chapter builds on the ideas explored in postcolonial theory to create an original framework for thinking about time. The fourth chapter approaches the different functions of medieval narratives through four case studies. It considers a quartet of figures: Brian Bóruma, Cú Chulainn, Queen Medb, and the Sovereignty figure. This chapter explores the diverse ways in which these figures participate in self-fashioning. The fifth chapter explores the landscape as a site of memory and mythology. Political realities relating to land were hopelessly disunified and republicanism contained irreconcilable interests with regard to land rental, purchase and use. Presenting the land as a site of communal memory is a way to paper over policy divisions. The sixth chapter explores the medieval (and pre-medieval via medieval texts) influence on fashion and the idea of a national Irish dress. This chapter argues there was a change in cultural ownership of women's 'Celtic' dress, and it considers the use of medieval and pre-medieval garments and motifs by men as an expression of non-British masculinity.

Framework and methodology

This project brings together the fields of medieval Irish literature, nineteenth and early twentieth century translations and twentieth century Irish history. Ultimately, it is a historiographical project, but an interdisciplinary one. The project interrogates how literature and mythology circulated in the national imaginarium and shaped identity. The research framework draws from multiple fields, which suits the multifaceted nature of the subject. This project thus takes a different focus from memory studies as it does not focus on the memory of real events, but the evolution and effect of events both real and nonreal.

Findings

As Joep Leerssen wrote in *Remembrance and Imagination*, 'tradition' is not 'a discreet heirloom' but 'a vast and chaotic curiosity shop.' *Fin de siècle* republicans in Ireland inherited a wealth of narratives that took multiple forms in the middle ages and were then passed through centuries of time and translations. Any narrative holds a field of possible meanings. Entering twentieth century culture, the tales were mediated not only through

translation but through their modern audiences' values. New translations, retellings, and derivative works of art–and the context of each reader's own particular *Weltanschauung*–all create new frameworks for using old narratives in the service of identity.

This study comes to three conclusions: First, medieval narratives did not slip from republican culture after the Revival; they remained a component of republican self-fashioning through the remainder of the revolutionary era.

Second, the selection and interpretation of medieval narratives was not a simple continuation of Revivalist culture. Works are not merely received and recapitulated, but *used*. Narratives were selected and retold to suit the political ends of the revolution. The tales that were prominent in republican culture advanced values such as women's enfranchisement, adult heroism, and connection to the land.

Third, the nature of these narratives varies according to context. Political pamphlets drew on pride and attachment to medieval kings to tell people how to vote. Prisoners created documents in the style of illuminated manuscripts as a continuation of a medieval tradition cut off by invasion. Self-fashioning is an artful process and at times the use of the medieval inheritance is self-conscious.

Following the Revival, national symbols did shift away from references to mythic or past heroism. But the cultural inheritance continued to solidify identity and advance the political case for independence. Medieval narratives allowed people to understand, define and legitimise the present in terms of the past.

1. Introduction: Remembrance is re-imagination

In a 1920 article in the radical magazine *The Red Hand*, Finn mac Cumhaill sits in a jail cell with his companions, contemplating their imminent execution. 'Tomorrow we die,' he says. He turns to his imprisoned companions—not his warrior band of the sagas but men one might meet on the street. 'And 'tis hard that you, Aedeen, young and with a fame to make; you, Conor, with a bride of a month to watch in vain for your return; you Flann, with children who listened for your footsteps; and you, Donagh with life before you, a name already sweet in warriors' ears, 'tis hard that ye should die.' And they do die, bravely, in the cell, sharing a drink of poison rather than join the army of an enemy queen.[1]

In the struggle for independence, the heroic medieval narratives that had been celebrated in the Revival became a tool for republican self-creation. In some instances, the narratives were deployed in a self-conscious and deliberate way. In others, the connection was more intuitive, with medieval narratives forming a reservoir of precedents and symbols drawn on to construct an understanding of the present. The medieval cultural inheritance is not a monolith but a series of potentially contradictory gestures. As people defined and participated in 'tradition', whether it be wearing 'Celtic' clothing or telling stories of the landscape's history, they reimagined it in service of the present.[2] The material of the past

[1] M. New [pseudonym], 'The Cup of Death', *The Red Hand* (1 Nov 2020), 14.
[2] In this thesis' usage, 'tradition' refers to a normative mode of knowledge through which an image of society's relationship to time is understood and through which ascribed linkages to the past are conceived as sources of authority for institutions and actions in the present. D. Klusmeyer, 'Hannah Arendt on Authority and Tradition', *Hannah Arendt: Key Concepts* (London, 2014), 138-52. 138.

included the mythic or fictional as well as the factual, and the process of reimagining and reintegrating this material into *fin de siècle* society blended the categories of myth and history.

This project interrogates the transition of medieval tradition from the Revival to the Revolution. It adds nuance to our understanding of the end of the Revival, seeing it not as a movement that skids to a stop in the revolutionary era but as a movement that informs the republican engagement with the past, even after 1916. The historiography tends to characterise this as a move from romanticism and nostalgia toward unvarnished violent conflict: 'The poets had done their part, now it was time for the realists to take over'; 'fact replaced myth'.[3] But such transitions are neither neat nor instantaneous, and realism and poetry need not be diametrically opposed. Although the medieval inheritance had moved from the forefront of culture, it remained a feature of republican self-fashioning. The republican engagement with this material was dynamic: new meanings were drawn from old tales. Post-Rising revolutionary nationalism moved away from tropes that had been popular in the Revival: the sensual Óengus Og and the youthful Cú Chulainn to some extent lost their function, and Medb was more useful as an exemplar than a villain. Employing cultural artefacts of the Middle Ages, nationalists after the Rising continued to develop an identity that incorporated a history of self-government, a native literary tradition, and a golden age of heroes who had had championed their people. The stories and figures they emphasised and de-emphasised in constructing this identity are distinct from earlier eras, demonstrating that remembrance requires re-imagination.

[3] W. Thompson, *The Imagination of an Insurrection* (West Stockbridge, MA, 1982), 107-8. This historiographical viewpoint is most often expressed through omission: works on the Revolution do not analyse medieval narrative and works on fin de siècle medievalism do not analyse the Revolution.

As readers of this dissertation will belong to several audiences, I will introduce both the historical and literary context. These will provide points of orientation for the later chapters.

The Revival

The Gaelic Revival sought to revivify Irish culture, infusing it with medieval images and themes. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Revival was, for many, a pursuit that expressed patriotism without separatism. This movement, loosely defined as 1880 to 1916, engaged exuberantly with medievalism.[4] Revivalists were frequently middle class, metropolitan intellectuals with an interest in antiquarianism.[5] They leveraged medieval literature, history and material culture to enhance the expression of Irish uniqueness and cultural value. Although the movement included prominent revolutionary activists, the cultural products of the Revival often entrenched existing socio-political power structures, as when Ishbel Aberdeen, the Lady Viceroy of Ireland, commissioned a dress inspired by the Book of Kells, or when antiquarians congratulated themselves on extracting and preserving Irish tales from a 'corrupted' oral tradition.[6]

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[4] The bounds of the Revival are flexible and are often cited without exact dates. 1880, the founding of the Gaelic Union, may be considered a start; but other start dates are possible, such as the 1893 founding of the Gaelic League. The movement's end tends to be placed between 1916 and 1923. K. Collins' *Catholic Churchmen and the Celtic Revival in Ireland* uses 1848 to 1916; D. Kiberd and P.J. Matthews choose the dates 1891 to 1922 in *Handbook of the Irish Revival*; J. Murphy's *Grand Opportunity* uses the dates 1893 to 1910. P. O'Leary's *The Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival* sets the dates 1881 to the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, while his earlier work used 1882 to 1916: 'Children of the Same Mother', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 6 (1986), 101-130.

[5] S. Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature, 1880-1980* (London, 1985).

[6] M. Williams, *Icons of Irishness from the Middle Ages to the Modern World* (London, 2012), 59. See also: S. O'Grady, *The Coming of Cuculain* (Dublin, 1894), xx.

Some medieval literary narratives had fallen from a living tradition and re-emerged in the nineteenth century via translation. The translations and histories of Standish James O'Grady, Standish Hayes O'Grady and Eugene O'Curry were particularly important in building a narrative dock from which the Gaelic Revival could be launched. Standish James O'Grady's two-volume *History of Ireland* (1878 and 1880), Standish Hayes O'Grady's 1892 literary collection *Silva Gadelica* and Eugene O'Curry's 1873 *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish* all captured the public imagination.[7] In his introduction to Standish James O'Grady's 1894 *The Coming of Cuculain*, George Russell wrote:

> We praise the man who rushes into a burning mansion and brings out its greatest treasure. So ought we to praise this man who rescued from the perishing Gaelic tradition its darling hero and restored him to us, and I think now that Cuculain will not perish, and he will be invisibly present at many a council of youth, and he will be the daring which lifts the will beyond itself and fires it for great causes, and he will also be the courtesy which shall overcome the enemy that nothing else may overcome.[8]

This interpretation lauds the nobility of saving cultural material from a conflagration—whilst neatly avoiding the question of who started the metaphorical fire. Russell's introduction, expressing a view typical of his literary milieu, describes a change in ownership of the medieval cultural inheritance, which must be saved from obscurity.

This cultural inheritance was also under threat, thought some, not only from obscurity but from degradation. In a meeting of the Breifney Antiquarian Society, a member wrote:

> As a rule the heroic tales that have survived locally are corrupted into wild fairy tales of giants. For instance, the fine story, 'Tain Bo Flidias', was found in West Mayo as a folk-tale of local giants, and the same thing occurred in the tradition of Fionn Mac

[7] Alongside a variety of other influential works of the time by authors such as Whitley Stokes and John O'Donovan.
[8] O'Grady, *Cuculain*, xx.

> Cumhail. It is well to remember that in looking for the traces of a story the people should be asked for their traditions before giving any hint of what the story is.[9]

This interpretation echoed those in England. In 1886 a London publication claimed Irish knowledge of 'pagan literature' had descended to 'the peasantry' as a 'a mass of confused but vital ideas, all but lost with the decline of the language' and that this was proof the people of Ireland 'as a rule, know no Irish history. They are, perhaps, more ignorant of their own history, of their own writers and eminent men, than any other people in the world.'[10]

Alongside this, other writers and artists created work that expressed their nationalist politics. The writer William Rooney co-founded the Celtic Literary Society in 1893 and co-founded the nationalist political organisation Cumann na nGaedheal in 1900. The artist Beatrice Elvery created paintings that later inspired nationalist commitment to self-sacrifice in the revolutionary era.[11] Pádraig Pearse organised costumed youth pageants that retold saga tales in service of his vision of revolutionary boyhood.

Considerations of cultural ownership, cultural degradation and authenticity are inherently political. Despite its characterisation in historiography as a 'cultural' (or sometimes 'romantic') movement, the Revival could not be divorced from politics. [12] For some participants, the Revival was a rescue mission in which ostensibly degraded or lost tales of a noble past were resurrected in service of Anglo-Irish elites, entrenching their connection to Ireland and their status within it. At the other extreme, some utilised the Revival as 'a scouring agent, removing from the Irish people all the impurities acquired from

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[9] 'Breifney Antiquarian Society', *Anglo-Celt* (20 Nov. 1920), 10.
[10] W. G. 'Transformation of the Irish Character', *Graphic* 876 (11 Sep 1886), 286.
[11] Her oeuvre is discussed further in Chapter 4a.
[12] D. Dwan argues convincingly for this in *Great Community: Culture and Nationalism in Ireland* (Dublin, 2008) and his article 'Romantic Nationalism: History and Illusion in Ireland', *Modern Intellectual History*, 14:3 (2017), 717-45.

[external] contamination.'[13] Thus the Revival contained manifold ways to engage with the medieval inheritance.

The revolutionary era

The revolutionary era can be defined in several ways. The era encompasses a 'series of political ruptures which culminated in the end of the Union between Great Britain and Ireland'; but the label and its parameters remains problematic, 'not least because Ireland's revolution was unbuttressed by a coherent ideology and held together only very loosely by the determination of its foot soldiers to create a "free Ireland".'[14] The start of the era is dated most convincingly to the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in 1912. This was a 'tripwire force' created to block Irish self-government.[15] The reaction to the formation of this loyalist paramilitary group set the era's revolutionary confrontations in motion. The revolutionary period encompasses the War of Independence (also called the Anglo-Irish War), which began in 1919 and ended with the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty and the establishment of the Irish Free State. Conflict over the resolution of this war set off the 1922 Civil War, which ended with the 1923 ceasefire.

Although the revolutionary era refers to c.1913-23, the preceding period had itself been revolutionary. The conservatism of the revolutionary era, particularly with regard to

[13] L. Gibbons, 'Race Against Time: Racial Discourse and Irish History', *Oxford Literary Review* 13:1/2 (1991), 95-117. 103. The idea of cultural contamination was, of course, focused on England, but could include other foreign influences such as American jazz music.
[14] S. Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women 1900-1918* (Cambridge, 2013), 10.
[15] M. Mulholland, 'Political Violence', *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland* ed. R. Bourke and I. McBride (Princeton, 1916), 382-402. 390.

the redistribution of land and wealth, was partly the result of the social revolution having already taken place.[16] The 1879-82 Land War had broken the power of the landlord class, reforming tenancy practices and making land purchase substantially more accessible for tenant farmers.[17] The 1906-9 Ranch War then attempted to redistribute ranch holdings amongst small farmers and landless men.[18] Hoping to avoid separatism and further violence, the government had soothed agrarian grievances by overhauling the system of land ownership. By the 1910s, an agrarian revolution had already occurred.

The revolutionary era may be said to begin with the conflicts set off by the establishment of the Ulster Volunteer Force. In the years preceding World War I, Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) politician John Redmond had made progress in lobbying for Home Rule: self-governance without full independence. The IPP was the constitutional nationalist party, formed in 1874 and predating Sinn Fein. In 1913 the IPP's efforts came up against unionist resistance in the form of the Ulster Volunteer Force, a paramilitary organization founded to block the implementation of Home Rule. Within months, nationalists, led by the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), had brought into existence the Irish Volunteers, a parallel paramilitary organisation with 175,000 members.[19] The Volunteers were a paramilitary organisation formed as a counterpoint to the UVF. Whilst Redmond had not

[16] The extent to which the era is revolutionary is problematised by both Aidan Beatty and Marc Mulholland. A. Beatty, 'An Irish Revolution without a Revolution', *Journal of World Systems*, 22:1 (2016), 54-76. A. Mulholland, 'How Revolutionary was the Irish Revolution?', *Éire-Ireland* 56:1-2 (Spring-Summer 2021), 143-79.
[17] T. Varley, 'The Politics of 'Holding the Balance': Irish Farmers' Parties and Land Redistribution in the Twentieth Century', *Land Questions in Modern Ireland* ed. F. Campbell and T. Varley (Manchester, 2013), 238-65. 238.
[18] F. Campbell, *Land and Revolution: Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland 1891-21* (Oxford, 2005), 49.
[19] M. Hopkinson, *Green against Green: The Irish Civil War* (Dublin, 2004), 2. The IRB was a secret fraternal organisation that emerged in 1858. After a decline, it was revivified in the early twentieth century under the leadership of men such as Bulmer Hobson.

created the Irish Volunteers, he and his party took control of it in order to keep it from challenging their own authority.[20]

The 1914 Government of Ireland Act (also known as the Home Rule Act) passed but its implementation was delayed by the World War.[21] Redmond wanted a 'fully self-governed and self-reliant nation'; unlike his more radical contemporaries, he hoped to secure it through cooperation with Britain and advocated for participation in the war.[22] This split the organization in 1914, with the majority of Irish Volunteers supporting Redmond's position and re-forming as the National Volunteers.[23] After the split, the remaining Irish Volunteers, led by Eoin MacNeill, officially held a neutral position on the war. Some republicans wished only to be uninvolved in the war, whereas others hoped for British defeat. [24] The women's organization Cumann na mBan also split in 1914, several weeks after the Volunteers split

[20] Hopkinson, *Green against Green,* 2
[21] Hopkinson, *Green against Green,* 2.
[22] 'Gaelic League in Co. Wicklow' *Freeman's Journal* (26 Sep. 1911), 5. J. Redmond, *Account of a Visit to the Front of J. E. Redmond, M.P. in November 1915* (London, 1915).
[23] Hopkinson, *Green against Green,* 2. As the war progressed, the National Volunteers dwindled and eventually they rejoined the Irish Volunteers.
[24] G. MacAtasney, *Sean MacDiarmada: The Mind of the Revolution* (Manorhamilton, 2014), 74. Sean O'Farrell expressed a similar view in his 1915 song 'The Recruiting Sergeant', declaring 'Let Englishmen fight English wars'. S. O'Farrell, S. (1915). 'The Recruiting Sergeant' [song] https://mainlynorfolk.info [9 Feb. 2020]. Sean McDermott of the Irish Republican Brotherhood expressed a common republican sentiment when he told a crowd in Tipperary in 1914: 'The Volunteers were not brought into existence to fight for England. To hell with England! Let her fight her own battles. The Volunteers are only intended to fight for Ireland!'. Quoted in Feeney, B. *Seán MacDiarmada: 16 Lives* (Dublin, 2014), [unpaginated]. Irish Republican Brotherhood member Desmond Fitzgerald later reflected: 'I think our first reaction [to the war] was one of jubilation. England would now be beaten and resurgent Irish nationalism would assert and make effective our claim to real autonomy.' D. Fitzgerald, 'The First World War: A Mix of Despair and Optimism', *The Irish Times* (18 Nov, 2015).

into the National and Irish Volunteers, prompted by similar divisions between moderate and radical elements.[25]

The 1916 Easter Rising was the next watershed event in this era. In 1916, a conglomerate of organisations including the Volunteers, Cumann na mBan and the Irish Citizen Army took control of an area of central Dublin from the 24 through 29 of April and proclaimed a republic. The Rising was a doomed operation, lacking popular support and facing critical responses even from nationalist leaders. Plagued by miscommunications and internal dispute, the event was even smaller than planned, with around 1,200 participating in Dublin and several smaller groups in other locales such as Wexford and Galway.[26] In the aftermath, around 35,000 people were arrested (many for looting, not for insurgency), more than 2,500 were deported to England, and sixteen were executed.[27] Notably, Constance Markievicz escaped execution on account of her gender and Éamon de Valera on account of his American nationality. The Rising is perceived in some historiography as a last stand of a Revival-imbued nationalism, in which myth-possessed men looked to the hero Cú Chulainn as 'a sort of invisible brigade commander'.[28]

The treatment of the Easter Rising's leaders in 1916 propelled popular opinion toward more militant expressions of nationalism.[29] And as Irish casualties accumulated at a disproportionate rate in World War I and Britain made firmer efforts to extend conscription

[25] Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women,* 149. The radical element became still more radical after the 1916 Easter Rising. Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women,* 219.
[26] R. English, *Irish Freedom: the History of Nationalism in Ireland* (London, 2006), 261.
[27] English *Freedom*, 279.
[28] R. Foster *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland* (London, 2001), 10, referring to the ideas of George Russell.
[29] M. Colemann, *The Irish Revolution 1916-1923* (Abingdon, 2014), 39.

to Ireland, nationalist opinion became increasingly critical of the IPP.[30] The 1918 conscription crisis, in which Britain attempted to impose conscription on Ireland in April 1918, met widespread opposition and elicited rallies, anti-conscription pledges and strikes. Military recruitment declined and Sinn Fein flourished as a 'vehicle for Irish discontent' whilst the IPP lost seats in in the 1918 General Election.[31] The year ended with Sinn Féin's sweeping electoral success.

The nationalism that broke away from the IPP was not always republican. This is especially true before the 1918 conscription crisis and subsequent victory of Sinn Féín at the polls.[32] Even Eamon de Valera, future president of the Republic, once commented: 'if there is to be a monarchy in this land it will be an Irish monarchy.'[33] A number of prominent figures, such as Sinn Féin founder Arthur Griffith, were amenable to a monarchical future provided it was not a *British* monarchy.[34] And some were not anti-imperialist, only wishing the British Empire 'behaved itself.'[35] In its October 1917 Convention, Sinn Féin committed

[30] Approximately 44,000 Irish men enlisted at the start of the war, followed by 45,000 in 1915. This dropped to 19,000 in 1916 and to 14,000 in 1917. D. Fitzpatrick, 'Militarism in Ireland' in *A Military History of Ireland*, 388. For more information on casualty rates, see P. Casey's 'Irish Casualties in the First World War', *The Irish Sword* (1997).
[31] V. Crossman, 'Review of *Ireland and the Great War* (Review no. 218)', *Reviews in History* (Oct. 2001). https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/218 [13 August, 2019]; Coleman, *Revolution,* 39. Alongside this, a drawn-out war and mass Irish death fuelled the rejection of the war and, particularly, of conscription.
[32] This electoral success was enhanced not only by the collapse of the IPP but by an agreement made with the Irish Labour Party not to contest seats fielding Sinn Féin candidates. P. Cottrell, *The Irish Civil War 1922-23* (Oxford, 2008), 8. Sinn Féín's success in gaining the support of first-time women voters was also important to the party's victory. P. Hart, *The IRA at War 1916-1923* (Oxford, 2003), 16.
[33] The National Archives**,** CO 904/23/5. Home Rule Convention; Sinn Fein Fein Convention; Irish National Volunteers Convention (1917).
[34] M. Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1999), 21.
[35] K. O'Higgins, quoted in Beatty 'An Irish Revolution', 68. For further information on monarchism see H. Jones, *For King and Country: The British Monarchy and the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, 2021). Also see M. Laffan's *The Resurrection of Ireland.*

itself 'to securing a republic, but once freedom had been won, would allow the people of Ireland to choose between the republic and a monarchy.'[36] Rejection of the IPP and resistance to British rule grew stronger. The War of Independence began in January 1919, with an ambush of Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) officers at Solohedbeg in County Tipperary. On the nationalist side, the war was fought largely by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) which had come into being in 1917-9 as an amalgamation of the anti-Redmondite Irish Volunteers and the trade unionist Irish Citizen Army. The emergence of the IRA as an organisation is a complex, gradual process which cannot be pinned to a specific date; some units continued to use the term 'Irish Volunteers' through to the end of the War of Independence.[37] This conflict was a low-intensity war, employing barracks attacks, ambushes and assassinations to weaken the British-controlled infrastructure. The violence increased in 1920 with larger ambushes carried out by the newly formed 'flying columns', perambulatory IRA units of full-time fighters. Police barracks were attacked and some were abandoned and burned by the IRA. In June of that year, the Dáil Courts were set up, an alternative to the existing judiciary. As the power of British institutions waned, the British increased their use of force. Reprisals became more frequent, and two auxiliary units were established: the special constables of the RIC, known as the Black and Tans, and the Auxiliary Division of the RIC, known as the Auxiliaries.

Late in 1920, several violent events propelled the conflict to further severity. In October 1920, the death by hunger strike of Cork's Lord Mayor, Terence MacSwiney, provoked outcry. Then in November, the RIC conducted a reprisal killing of fourteen civilians at a football match in Croke Park, Dublin, in response to assassinations made by the IRA

[36] Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women,* 224
[37] C. Townshend, *The Republic: A Fight for Irish Independence* (London, 2014), 89.

earlier that day. One week later, the IRA's Kilmichael Ambush killed Auxiliaries in Co. Cork, leading to the burning of Cork and martial law being imposed in large swatches of the southwest. Ambushes and executions continued through the winter of 1920-1. By the summer of 1921, the IRA was short of both active members and weapons but continued to wreck damage on the British infrastructure. Even events that were, on some level, a failure, such as the burning of the Customs House on 25 May 1921, carried symbolic value.[38] When the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in 1921, some of the IRA considered it a truce rather than a permanent arrangement. Others took the opposite interpretation, fearing its terms—which granted Ireland dominion status rather than full independence—would become permanent, hindering eventual independence.

The signing of the treaty on 6 December 1921 was controversial. Whilst the Treaty was welcome to most, the decisions of the five plenipotentiaries to sign the document (and without conferring with the Dáil) created outrage in more dogmatically republican circles.[39] Richard Walsh, a senior IRA officer, wrote bitterly that Arthur Griffith's signature had 'made a lie of his whole life'.[40] The nationalists had pushed for peace, with Dáil president Eamon de Valera writing to Prime minister Lloyd George on 28 June 1921: 'We most earnestly desire to help in bringing about a lasting peace between the peoples of these two islands, but see no avenue by which it can be reached if you deny Ireland's essential unity and set aside the principle of national self-determination.'[41] Any yet under the threat of continued

[38] The operation substantially weakened Dublin's No. 1 Brigade of the IRA, revealed organisation weaknesses, and resulted in the arrest of key members. Hopkinson, *Green against Green,* 9.
[39] The treaty also met with criticism in unionist circles, which is beyond the scope of this study. Many unionists feared this was the beginning of the end for the Union.
[40] R. Walsh, WS #400. Bureau of Military History, 157. The plenipotentiaries had signed under pressure and one of them, Robert Barton, afterward became an anti-Treatyite.
[41] E. de Valera. *Official Correspondence relating to the Peace Negotiations* (Dublin, 1921).

war, with the IRA lacking the resources to withstand an enhanced level of violence, a treaty was signed that did not live up the hopes of the separatists. In Dublin, a student recorded in her diary that the announcement that the Free State was officially created elicited '[n]ot a flag, not a bonfire, not a hurrah.'[42]

The treaty had a number of sticking points. Michael Collins, who had signed the Treaty, reflected later that day that 'These signatures are the first real step for Ireland. If people will only remember that—the first real step', and in the same letter he wrote with prescient frustration: 'early this morning I signed my death warrant.'[43] Amongst the objections to the treaty, the largest was the dominion status of Ireland, which kept Ireland under British rule and removed the authority of the First Dáil. And because the 1920 Government of Ireland Act had by this point partitioned the island, the Treaty allowed those northern six counties to opt to remain fully a part of the United Kingdom (which they immediately did). The treaty also included an oath of allegiance to the Crown, which members of the Oireachtas (parliament) would be required to take. And finally the British Navy retained access to strategic ports.

Republicans were split, with a minority rejecting the agreement. In June 1922, two Sinn Féins competed for votes. The IRA split into pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty factions despite Collins' efforts to keep it unified. The former became the National Army, serving the newly made Free State, and the latter remained the IRA, sometimes referred to disparagingly as the Irregulars. The war was fought not only by members of the National Army and IRA, but by a network of participants. The activities of the IRA in particular were made possible by

[42] Celia Shaw quoted in Hopkinson, *Green against Green*, 35.
[43] Quoted in J. Curran, 'The Consolidation of the Irish Revolution, 1921-1923', *University Review* 5:1 (Spring 1968), 36-50. 36.

people who could provide safe houses, transport weapons, and raise funds.[44] Although the IRA was an all-male organisation, 'Female TDs [Teachtaí Dála, members of the Dáil] formed a key anti-Treaty bloc, and women formed a similarly vital part of Sinn Féin and its public support in 1922 and 1923…Revolutionary republicanism is likely the most female-dependent major movement in modern Irish history.'[45]

The war was waged over who had the right of sovereignty and what the nature of that sovereignty should be. It was brief, lasting less than one year with few large-scale engagements. The war began with the anti-Treaty IRA's 14 April 1922 occupation of the Four Courts complex of government buildings in Dublin. On June 28, the IRA position was attacked by the National Army and the building was destroyed in the ensuing Battle of Dublin.[46] The war spread to other areas, although many parts of Ireland saw little to no violence. This was the conventional phase of the war: a struggle for territory featuring 'set-piece battles, fortified positions, troop movements, ship landings, and artillery shelling.'[47] By August 1922, the IRA had lost its last fixed positions and moved to purely guerrilla tactics including assassination, sabotage and property destruction. In addition to reprisals and informal executions, by the end of the conflict, the Free State carried out eighty-one official executions.[48] There were more deaths in this conflict than in the Anglo-Irish war, but no accurate records exist of either combatant or civilian losses.[49] The anti-Treaty forces had

[44] For example, the Irish Volunteer Dependent Fun was led by women. Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women,* 202.
[45] P. Hart, *IRA at War*, 16.
[46] Some historians see the Battle of Dublin as the first event of the war, e.g. J. Borgonovo 'Cumann na mBan, Martial Women, and the Irish Civil War, 1922-1923' in *Women and the Irish Revolution* ed. L. Connolly (Newbridge, 2020), 68-84. 75.
[47] Borgonovo, 'Martial Women', *Revolution* ed. Connolly, 75.
[48] Enright, S. 'Sentenced to Death: the Civil war Executions', *RTÉ* (26 Sep. 2022).
[49] Cottrell, *Civil War,* 10 .

always been a minority and were frequently characterised as lawless and irresponsible. This characterisation worsened as the conflict progressed.[50]

The IRA lost momentum and the 1922 and 1923 elections demonstrated a strong mandate for the pro-Treaty side. Toward the end of the conflict, anti-Treaty leaders such as Eamon de Valera, Frank Aiken and Tom Barry looked to bring the conflict to a close. A ceasefire was called on 23 May 1923 when IRA Chief of staff Frank Aiken called on fighters to dump their arms and return home. The war ended without official negotiations or surrender.

Medieval Irish literature

At its most generously defined, the medieval period in Ireland spans 400 to 1536, ending with Henry VIII's claim to the Kingdom of Ireland. The earliest Irish literary sources date from around 600. Throughout the medieval period, works were written in Irish, alongside a tradition of Hiberno-Latin. Medieval Irish-language texts include work in Old Irish (c.600-c.900), Middle Irish (c.900-c.1200) and Early Modern Irish (c.1200-c.1700).[51]

The literature used in this dissertation is largely saga material. No saga tales exist from before the eleventh century, though the origins of some texts can be 'assigned with some degree of confidence to the eighth, or perhaps even the seventh century.'[52] Saga

[50] E. O'Halpin, paraphrased in Cottrell, *Civil War,* 79
[51] For a history of the Irish language, see A. Doyle's *A History of the Irish Language: From the Norman Invasion to Independence* (Oxford, 2015). See also P. Russell, 'What was Best of Every Language': the Early History of the Irish Language', *A New History of Ireland: Prehistoric and Early History* I, ed. D. Ó Cróinín (New York, 2005), 405-50.
[52] T. Ó Cathasaigh, 'Between God and Man: The Hero of Irish Tradition', *The Crane Bag*, 2:2 (1978), 72-79. 24.

narratives tell the stories of individual warriors, sprinkled with 'heavy mythic seasoning'.[53] They present 'a complex backstory for the island—like a vast, unspooling tapestry.'[54] Sagas are divided into four cycles (the Ulster, Kings, Finn and Mythological Cycles); but these divisions are post-medieval. In the *fin de siècle* period, saga *scéla* were often elided with folktales and both were presented as, historically, the common property of all social classes. In fact, saga material was the 'intellectual property of Ireland's learned classes.'[55] Literary production was initially monastic, but after structural changes to monastic life in the thirteenth century, monasteries held less literary control and book production passed into the hands of learned families.[56]

A medieval 'work' is a complex entity: it is not only the sum of material witnesses but also the history and oral tradition from which it emerges.[57] The memory of the Middle Ages also carried within it a memory of pre-Christian Ireland. This permeated medieval saga, although the exact nature of this transmission varies by source and is a longstanding subject of debate.[58] Like Russian dolls, pre-Christian material, early Christian material and medieval material nest together in texts. The blurring of the medieval and pre-medieval, the mythic and real, begins in the texts themselves. The question of *when* sagas take place is therefore a complex one. The academic consensus is that the Ulster Cycle (the Cycle that will receive

[53] D. Miller, *The Epic Hero* (London, 2000), 50.
[54] M. Williams, *The Celtic Myths that Shape the Way We Think* (London, 2021), 99.
[55] William, *Celtic Myths*, 99; J. Gantz, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (London, 1981), 166.
[56] D. Wong, 'Literature and the Oral Tradition', *Cambridge History of Irish Literature* ed. M. Kelleher and P. O'Leary (Cambridge, 2006), 635; Ní Mhaonaigh, Ní Mhaonaigh, M. *Brian Boru: Ireland's Greatest King?* (Stroud, 2007), 32-4.
[57] P. Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, trans. P. Bennett (Oxford, 1992), 47. 'Witness' here refers to the diverse physical copies of a text, including manuscripts, editions, translations and quotations.
[58] A classic work in this field is K. McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present* (Maynooth, 1990). Also see K. Ritari, K., and Bergholm, eds. *Understanding Celtic Religion: Revisiting the Pagan Past* (Cardiff, 2016).

the most attention in this project) is set before the fifth century. Details of the narrative, such as the use of chariots in some texts, suggest the story is set centuries before the Middle Ages, as chariot use in the British Isles ended around the first century.[59] And indeed, the internal timeline of the Ulster Cycle tale *Aided Conchobuir* has the king of Ulster dying at the same time as Jesus.[60] The Finn Cycle of tales is set later, around the third century.[61] The flexibility of the texts in the *fin de siècle* is not necessarily simply a case of muddled retelling. Even before translation, the texts were layered with palimpsests of meaning: ambiguous, with unstable boundaries between categories such as history and myth, prose and poetry, hero and anti-hero, pagan and Christian. Flexibility of both chronology and meaning are baked into the tales.

Irish vernacular literature went into decline in the early modern era with the loss of both linguistic knowledge and patronage. From around 1500, Irish ceased to be spoken by the elites of urban centres.[62] In 1541, legislation banned the use of Irish in regions under English rule. In the seventeenth century, Cromwell granted 'adventurers' Irish estates and English yeomen were granted territory in Munster. The settlement of lowland Scottish people in Ulster led to further dispossession.[63] These shifts in power impacted literary production and consumption. With the end of the Gaelic aristocracy in the early

[59] E. Knott and G. Murphy. *Early Irish Literature* (London, 1966), 111.
[60] K. Meyer, *The Death-Tales of the Ulster Heroes* (Dublin, 1906). In his introduction to Augusta Gregory's *Gods and Fighting Men* (London, 1904), x, Yeats placed the life of Cú Chulainn (a central figure of the Ulster Cycle) 'about the time of the birth of Christ'. In 1902, A. Leahy suggests the first century BCE. A.H. Leahy, trans. and ed. *Heroic Romances of Ireland* v.I*.,* (London, 1902), 78.
[61] Knott and Murphy, *Literature,* 115.
[62] A. Doyle, *History of the Irish Language*, 10.
[63] E. Rumpf and A.C. *Hepburn. Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth Century* (Liverpool, 1977), 2.

seventeenth century, aristocratic literature lost its patronage.[64] In 1831, the National Education Act banned Irish language from classroom use.[65] A few years later, the Famine of 1845-52 struck the West hardest, and Irish speakers experienced disproportionate levels of emigration and death.[66] By the latter 1880s, the language was viewed by many separatists 'as a necessity for furthering the cause of independence and nationalism' but learning opportunities were neither common nor evenly distributed across geography and social class.[67]

The literature survived in translation. 'Translation serves innovative purposes in literary systems that are in crisis,' and can act as an 'alibi' for the introduction of difference.[68] Prismed through the lens of translation, the medieval works took on new variations from their Irish sources, as well as new meanings and associations.

Structure

The thesis consists of seven chapters. The work begins with a deconstruction of Celticity as a concept. It then introduces a framework for thinking about time. The next chapter consists of four case studies of figures from medieval narratives: the Sovereignty figure, Queen

[64] For more on this work, see M. Williams *Ireland's Immortals* (Princeton, 2016), 282-6. Important works of literature did continue to emerge in this period. The medieval Mythological Cycle text Lebor Gabála Érenn (Book of Invasions of Ireland) came to its final form in 1631 in Mícheál Ó Cléirigh's recension. Geoffrey Keating then incorporated and interpreted the material in his monumental synthetic history *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* in 1634.
[65] Bennett-Kastor, T. *Multi-Literate Ireland: Literary Manifestations of a Multilingual History* (London, 2015), 2.
[66] Bennett-Kastor, *Multi-Literate,* 19.
[67] Bennett-Kastor, *Multi-Literate,* 66. Education could be had in surprising places: Hyde's education in Irish flourished in London.
[68] M. Tymoczko, 'Translation, Ideology and Creativity', *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series–Themes in Translation Studies* 2 (2021), 27-45.

Medb, Cú Chulainn and Brian Bóruma. Two further chapters offer other lenses of engaging with the medieval past: first, self-fashioning through landscape, and second, self-fashioning through clothing.

After the introduction, the second chapter examines the history of the Celt as a racial construct and how this was deployed to support national independence. Ideas of 'Celticity' so thoroughly permeated discussions of Irish history and identity and has such layers of meaning, that problematizing this word builds a framework of understanding for further chapters.

The third chapter argues that reflexes of the Middle Ages are not necessarily regressive or anti-modern. This chapter builds on the ideas explored in postcolonial theory to create an original framework for thinking about time.

The fourth chapter falls into in four parts. It approaches the different functions of medieval narratives through four case studies. It considers a quartet of figures: Brian Bóruma, Cú Chulainn, Queen Medb, and the Sovereignty figure. This chapter explores the diverse ways in which these figures participate in self-fashioning.

The fifth chapter explores the landscape as a site of memory and mythology. Political realities relating to land were hopelessly disunified and republicanism contained irreconcilable interests with regard to land rental, purchase and use. Presenting the land as a site of communal memory is a way to paper over policy divisions.

The sixth chapter explores the medieval (and pre-medieval via medieval texts) influence on fashion and the idea of a national Irish dress. This chapter argues there was a change in cultural ownership of women's 'Celtic' dress, and it considers the use of medieval and pre-medieval garments and motifs by men as an expression of non-British masculinity.

The issue of national dress is perhaps the most self-conscious of all efforts to use the Middle Ages in identity construction.

Framework and methodology

This project brings together the fields of medieval Irish literature, nineteenth and early twentieth century translations and twentieth century Irish history. Ultimately, it is a historiographical project, but an interdisciplinary one. The research framework draws from multiple fields, which suits the multifaceted nature of the subject. I see my work as a historian of identity and imagination, interested in how literature and mythology circulates in the national imaginarium and shapes identity. This project thus takes a different focus from memory studies as it does not focus on the memory of real events, but the evolution and effect of events both real and nonreal.

This project is primarily concerned with people and organisations supportive of violence to achieve further independence. The project focuses on the Sinn Féin party and on the paramilitary organisations the Irish Volunteers, Irish Republican Army and Cumann na mBan, as well as members of other organisations such as the Irish Republican Brotherhood and Irish Citizen Army, and individuals with no formal affiliation. In the Civil War of 1922-3, the project focuses on the more hard-line anti-Treaty minority. These groups encompass a wide swathe of political opinion, and include those whose views were not doctrinally republican, as well as those whose political ideology was not *consistently* republican. Because the focus of the project is not the nuances of political doctrine, this work will refer to nationalists supportive of violence to gain further independence as 'republicans', including those who did not explicitly wish to establish a republic. This gesture to improve

readability should not smooth over the awareness of the many variations in political ideology.

The research considers medieval heroic narratives largely outside a literary context: stories are recapitulated not only through literary narratives but through political speeches, advertisements, personal letters, jewellery, paintings, songs and other means. The project uses a framework of 'textual mobility'. It adapts the concept of *mouvance*, the idea that medieval narratives are not static and that they expand beyond the boundaries of a single text. This study considers texts as fields of possible meaning rather than strings of static meaning. The study also adapts ideas from Umberto Eco's *Opera Aperta*, 'Open Work'. Every work 'is effectively open to…a range of possible readings, each of which causes the work to acquire new vitality' through new performances and reinterpretations.[69] A text, like a music score, encourages a plethora of readings.[70] Like *mouvance*, this theory was developed in response to a specific literature (literary works of Eco's own time, the mid twentieth century) and is here put to work in a new context. This theoretical approach emphasizes the flexibility of texts, avoiding ideas of an original Ur-text, a degraded text, or other implicitly moralising frameworks.

This project's hybrid framework is loosely informed by postcolonial theory, which is attentive to peripheral voices and narratives. The project focuses on Irish experiences and agency rather than external perspectives; and whenever possible, it engages with the experiences of non-elite participants. The postcolonial reading is extended to considerations of language and translation, with a strong interest in Irish-language sources.

[69] U. Eco, *The Open Work,* trans. A. Cancogni (Cambridge MA, 1989), 21.
[70] Eco, *Open Work,* 18.

The periodisation of this work is prompted by the emphasis on medieval themes leading up to the Rising, and the persistence of these themes, albeit in a reduced way, afterward. The end point of 1923 was a logical boundary given the end of the Civil War, but this project's work could be extended into a wider time frame in future scholarship.

Primary sources

This project draws on a wide range of source material. The study compares translations and retellings against Irish-language sources, and has an understanding of the oral origins, manuscript history and translation history of the works being discussed. The database Collaborative Online Database and e-Resources for Celtic Studies (CODECS) has been an invaluable resource for accessing texts and understanding manuscript and edition histories.[71] Engagement with medieval and early modern sources, particularly Irish-language sources, is critical to understanding modern permutations. Many tales exist in multiple recensions, and this study attempts to familiarise itself with all known recensions. To give one example: The Ulster Cycle *remscél* (foretale) *Longes mac nUislenn* is best known to Celticists in its oldest medieval version, found in the twelfth century Book of Leinster. This was available in a 1902 translation.[72] Yet in comparison with this, Yeats' dramatisation seems to be a significant departure. On further investigation, Yeats appears to have built on the framework of a different manuscript. His story format follows a 1740 work by Andrew Mac Curtin. This manuscript was leant to the Society of the Preservation of the Irish

[71] A.G. van Hamel Foundation for Celtic Studies. Collaborative Online Database and e-Resources for Celtic Studies (2022). https://codecs.vanhamel.nl/Home
[72] Leahy 'The Exile Of The Sons Of Usnach, Book of Leinster Version', *Heroic Romances* v.I*.,* 87-110.

Language, which published a translation in 1914.[73] An awareness of manuscript and translation history thus allows for an accurate weighing of modern alterations.

Although this project focuses on the medieval and modern periods, it also takes into account early modern writing. Primary sources include histories such as Keating's *The General History of Ireland*, drama such as J.S. Knowles' *Brian Boroihme: or, The Maid of Erin: a Historical Hibernian Melo-drama*, and the writing of *aisling* poets.

The bulk of primary sources come from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Textual sources include autograph books, letters, newspapers, and advertisements. Retrospectives sources written later in the twentieth century include witness statements, pension claims, memoir, autobiography and biography. The collection of the Bureau of Military History has been an important resource and Cal McCarthy's introduction to *Cumann na mBan and the Irish Revolution* outlines some of the shortcomings of witness statements for that organization.[74] The Bureau of Military History contains 1,773 'witness statements' recalling the events of 1913-1921. These were collected by the Irish government between 1947 and 1957 in an effort to gather primary source material for the revolutionary period. The Bureau's brief was 'to assemble and co-ordinate material to form the basis for the compilation of the history of the movement for Independence from the formation of the Irish Volunteers on 25th November 1913, to the 11th July 1921.'[75] The statements do not give an even representation of events; of the 146

[73] Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, *Oide Cloinne Uisnig: Fate of the Children of Uisneach* (Dublin, 1914). This is also the basis for Fiona MacLeod's text, *The Laughter of Peterkin* (London, 1897) which credits Eugene O'Curry with inspiring her version of the tale.
[74] C. McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan and the Irish Revolution* (Cork, 2014).
[75] 'Report of the Director', (1957), Bureau of Military History. http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/about.html

Cumann na mBan statements, for example, more than half were from members with a senior role.[76] Anti-Treaty republicans viewed the Bureau with suspicion as a 'Free State project' and many did not participate.[77] The material was also 'heavily weighted to those active in Dublin.'[78] They are also influenced by the political climate of their time of writing: Senia Pašeta notes, for example, how both socialism and feminism were 'deeply suspect in 1940s and 1950s Ireland'.[79] Although the statements are filtered through time and memory, they are nonetheless a rich source of information concerning republican self-fashioning. This work also uses the pension claims made under the Army Pensions Acts of 1923, 1927 and 1932 and the Military Service Pensions Act 1934.[80] The pensions records have been particularly useful in understanding republican women's representation of their actions in the revolutionary era. This collection contains around 300,000 files dealing with post-revolution claims.[81]

Historiography

[76] Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women,* 14
[77] M. Ward, 'Gendered Memories and Belfast Cumann na mBan, 1917-1922', Connolly, 47-67. 48.
[78] Ward in Connolly, *Revolution,* 48.
[79] Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women,* 14. '[O]ne of the major outcomes of the revolution was the introduction of a succession of restrictions on Irish women's social and political rights on the part of the new State.' L. Connolly, 'Women in Ireland's Revolution, 1917-1923: Marginal or Constitutive' in *Revolution* ed. L. Connolly (Newbridge, 2020), 1-14. 1. The pressure of conservative Catholicism produced a regressive environment in which revolutionary feminism was disrespected and disremembered.
[80] Pensions and Awards Database. Óglaigh na hÉireann: Military Archives (2022). http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie
[81] M. Coleman, 'Compensation Claims and Women's Experience of Violence and Loss in Revolutionary Ireland, 1921-23', Connolly, *Revolution,* 129-47. 129.

In order to better understand medieval heroic narratives in the *fin de siècle* republican imagination, this project builds on a wide range of scholarship.

The understanding of medieval Irish society is particularly indebted to the work of Thomas Charles-Edwards.[82] Analysis of literary works builds on the publications of scholars such as Sarah Sheehan, whose research problematises the performance of masculinity and femininity in saga.[83]

Understandings of Irish nationalism and Revivalism in particular are indebted to Jooep Leerssen. Leerssen's work on the nineteenth century in *Remembrance and Imagination* has been an inspiration for this project, which uses a similar framework to examine the transitions of the early twentieth century.[84] This project's framework for considering the Revival as unavoidably politicised is acquired from David Dwan's *Great Community: Culture and Nationalism in Ireland* and his 'Romantic Nationalism: History and Illusion in Ireland'.[85] The project's understanding of Revival literature is shaped by the work of Seamus Deane, Declan Kiberd and Mark Williams.[86] In particular, it builds on Williams' model of considering how superhuman figures of Irish mythology are re-formed in the *fin de siècle* imagination. Whilst Williams' work is Revival-focused and not particularly

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[82] T. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000). See also: T. Charles-Edwards in *Wales and the Britons* (Cambridge, 2000).
[83] S. Sheehan, 'Fer Diad De-flowered: Homoerotics and Masculinity in *Comrac Fir Diad*', *Ulidia 2: proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales ed.* R. Ó hUiginn and B. Ó Catháin (Maynooth, 2009), 54–65. See also: Sheehan, S., 'Loving Medb', *Gablánach in Scélaigecht: Celtic Studies in Honour of Ann Dooley* ed. S. Sheehan, J. Findon and W. Follett (Dublin, 2013), 171–186.
[84] Leerssen, J. *Remembrance and Imagination* (Cork, 1996).
[85] D. Dwan, *Great Community: Culture and Nationalism in Ireland* (Dublin, 2008). See also: D. Dwan 'Romantic Nationalism: History and Illusion in Ireland', *Modern Intellectual History*, 14:3 (2017), 717-45.
[86] S. Deane, *Celtic Revivals.* See also: D. Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of a Modern Nation* (Oxford, 1996). See also: M. Williams *Ireland's Immortals.*

concerned with politics, this project analyses medieval literary material specifically in the framework of republicanism, and takes an interest in the transition from the Revival to the Revolution. The reading of both medieval and modern narratives, both literary and non-, is inspired by several branches of literary theory, including Gerard Genette's theory of narratology and Paul Zumthor's theory of *mouvance.*[87]

This research is made possible by the rich history of the revolutionary era provided by the contributors to the *Atlas of the Irish Revolution*.[88] Also foundational are the histories of Michael Hopkinson and Peter Hart.[89] The work of Senia Pašeta, Roy Foster and Linda Connolly have provided insight into the lives and beliefs of key individuals.[90] Marc Mulholland and Aidan Beatty's research raised questions about the extent to which the revolutionary era was truly revolutionary; and Beatty's work, along with that of Joseph Valente and George Mosse, provided a foundation for the analysis of masculinity.[91]

The dissertation is indebted to several sources for its understanding of identity and self-fashioning. The concept of self-fashioning was initially defined and anatomised by Stephen Greenblatt in his work Renaissance self-fashioning.[92] In considering identity the

[87] Zumthor, *Poetics*. Genette, G. *Narrative Discourse*, trans. J. Lewin (Ithaca, 1972).
[88] Crowley, J., D. Ó Drisceoil and M. Murphy, *Atlas of the Irish Revolution* (New York, 2017).
[89] M. Hopkinson, *Green against Green.* See also: M. Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence* (Ithaca, 2002). See also: P. Hart, *IRA at War.*
[90] S. Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women 1900-1918* (Cambridge, 2013). See also: . Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890-1923* (London, 2014). See also: L. Connolly, ed. *Women and the Irish Revolution* (Newbridge, 2020).
[91] Mulholland, 'How Revolutionary was the Irish Revolution?'. See also: Beatty, 'An Irish Revolution without a Revolution'. See also: A. Beatty, *Masculinity and Power in Irish Nationalism, 1884-1935* (London, 2016), 37. See also: Valente, 'The Myth of Sovereignty: Gender in the Literature of Irish Nationalism', *English Literary History* 61:1 (Spring 1994), 189-210. See also: G. Mosse (1996).
[92] S. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, 2005).

dissertation also utilises classic theories of nationalism such as Anthony Smith's *Chosen Peoples* and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.[93]

The project cautiously engages with postcolonial theory, evaluating how classic texts such as those of Albert Memmi, and more recent writing by scholars such as Achille Mbembe, Ashish Nandy and Rumina Sethi, can be applied to Ireland.[94] The political implications of translation build on the foundations laid out by Maria Tymoczko, who writes about the translation of epic texts through the lens of postcolonial theory.[95] Her work provides a wealth of information on the translation process and aims of translators at the turn of the twentieth century.

Aims

This is a historical study but nonetheless relevant to literary scholarship. The study examines the transmutations of heroic medieval vernacular narratives through time, and how they evolve to serve changing socio-political aims and values.

As revolutionary nationalism developed into a movement distinct from Revivalism, it acquired its own flavour of engagement with medieval history and literature.[96] This project argues for the continued cultural relevance of medieval narratives throughout the

[93] Smith, A. *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford, 2003). See also: B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 2006).
[94] A. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Durham, North Carolina, 2017). See also: A. Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and recovery of the Self under Colonialism* (Delhi, 1983). See also: R. Sethi, *Myths of the Nation: National Identity and Literary Representation* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011).
[95] M. Tymoczko, *Translation in a Postcolonial Context* (Manchester, 1999).
[96] This is not to imply revolutionary nationalism was monolithic. Variation existed amongst different individuals, regions and organisations.

revolutionary era. It anatomises these narratives, considering them as living stories that transmute to support new ideas of identity, finding which narratives continued through the revolution and how they were remembered compared with previous eras. The function of the figures evolved, as did the details of their narrative and the purpose of remembering them. At times the narratives empowered—as when women leveraged a 'tradition' of women in the political arena to insist that women's rights were traditional and local, not a new foreign import. And in other situations the idea of a national unity, a classless mythopoeia, may have been a bromide to people in the throes of the struggle against landlordism. At other times, such as in the language of Celticity, past narratives empowered whilst entrenching essentialist racial discourses.

Whilst not the primary purpose of the work, it is hoped that the examples and methodology will provide opportunity for further engagement and analysis by both historians and literary scholars. For instance, (and thoroughly beyond the scope of this work) there is the unionist relationship with the Middle Ages. Studies in that area will enable a still more complex reading of my work. Such a topic deserves deep engagement, not to be tacked on to a study of republicanism. Future work might also be done on, for example, the nature of commemorating the dead, particularly the interplay between Christian ideas of martyrdom and ideas of dead heroes. The project is interested specifically in mythic and heroic narratives. It does not engage with some religious material (for example, revolutionary references to medieval saints and martyrs) as that would impractically widen the scope of the project. Another topic suitable for future research would be a more granular examination of place. Looking at these subjects with particular reference to Ulster, for example, would be fruitful.

Employing a hybrid methodology and incorporating a wide range of source material, the work adds nuance to our understanding of republican identity in the revolutionary era. It questions the conclusion that medieval narratives ceased to be important in creating and mobilizing Irish identity after the Easter Rising. Throughout these conflicts, republican self-expression and self-creation continued to engage with medieval epic narrative and symbolism through a variety of media including costume, art, gender performance and publishing. The project demonstrates that medieval narratives, both historical and mythic, continue to be continue to be deployed in the post-Rising revolutionary period as part of republican self-fashioning. As Anthony Smith wrote, 'there can be no identity without memory (albeit selective), and no collective purpose without myth'.[97]

[97] Quoted in G. Goalwin, 'The Curious Case of Cú Chulainn: Nationalism, Culture, and Meaning-Making in the Contested Symbols of Northern Ireland', *Studies in Nationalism and Ethnicity* 19:3 (Dec. 2019), 307-324. 309.

2. What is a Celt?: 'Celtic is a magic bag'

As J.R.R. Tolkien quipped, 'Celtic is a magic bag, into which anything may be put, and out of which almost anything may come.'[1] 'Celtic' is a slippery term, at once referring to a linguistic category, an array of cultures originating in the Iron Age, and a racial or cultural group. In the twenty-first century, both the origin of Celtic peoples and the meaning of 'Celtic' remain contested. In the early modern era, the word was used in a linguistic context. In the nineteenth century, it was appropriated by 'race science' and then given a more positive spin by Gaelic Revivalists. In the early twentieth century, revolutionary activists employed the term 'Celt' in a range of writing, from witness statements to poetry to pamphlets and histories.[2] This chapter considers how the term came into being, how it developed through the centuries, and finally how the term's usefulness faded as Ireland moved toward independence.

The Greek name *Keltoí* is first attested around the mid fifth century BCE, referring to people at the source of the Danube at the entrance to the Mediterranean.[3] This designation later appeared in the work of Xenophon in the fourth century BCE, Posidonius in the third and Polybius in the second.[4] Ironically, given nationalist rhetoric of 'Gael against Gaul', the cultural categories of 'Celt' and 'Gaul' overlapped. The Greek word *Keltoí* was plausibly a loan word from a Gaulic term, as suggested by the personal name of Vercingetorix's Gaulic

[1] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Angles and Britons* (Cardiff, 1963), 29.
[2] Witness statements refer to the revolutionary period but are recorded in the mid-twentieth century. Bureau of Military History (1913-1921): Witnesses. Óglaigh na hÉireann: Military Archives, http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie (2023).
[3] K. McCone, *The Celtic Question: Modern constructs and Ancient Realities* (Dublin, 2008).
[4] McCone, *Celtic Question,* 2. It seemed to serve as an umbrella for several ethnic groups.

father Celtillus.[5] When Julius Caesar noted in the first century BCE, '*Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres*' ('All Gaul is divided into three parts'), one of those parts was inhabited by the *Celtae*, a Latinisation of *Keltoí*.[6] Caesar wrote, '*ipsorum lingua Celtae, nostra Galli appellantur*' ('*Celtae* in their own language, they are called Galli by us').[7] Around two millennia later, in revolutionary Ireland, this same term was put to work to describe Irish uniqueness.

Although the *Keltoí* (or Latin *Celtae*) were an attested cultural category in the Iron Age, the identification of Celticity with Irishness came much later.[8] Early Irish written sources do not identify a 'Celtic' past and 'Celt' was not used in Irish self-identification until the eighteenth century.[9] The word first entered the vocabulary of the Anglo-Celtic Isles through linguistics. In 1582 the Scottish scholar George Buchanan identified the shared linguistic histories of Ireland, Scotland and Wales in *Rerum Scoticarum Historia*.[10] In 1703 the Breton abbot and linguist Paul Yves Pezron identified the Welsh and Bretons as the descendants of Celts in his *Antiquité de la Nation, et de Langue des Celtes.* His contemporary in England, Edward Lhuyd, was the first to identity Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx Gaelic as

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[5] McCone, *Celtic Question,* 2.
[6] McCone, *Celtic Question*, 5.
[7] J. Caesar, J *C. Iulii Caesaris Commentarii Rerum Gestarum* [Latin] ed. F. Kelsey (Boston, c.1918), 1. The word 'Galli' later permutes into an Irish word meaning 'foreigner'. In Old Irish, 'Gall' refers to the 'Gauls', roughly 'The Franks'. During the Middle Ages, the word broadens to refer to 'Scandinavians', 'Anglo-Normans', and more generally 'foreigners'. 'Gall', eDIL: Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language, http://www.dil.ie (2022). In modern Irish, the word continues to encompass this list of possibilities. 'Gall', Teanglann: Leabharlann Teanga agus Foclóireachta, https://www.teanglann.ie (2022).
[8] Some scholars date the Celts to the Bronze Age but no written record exists concerning how they identified themselves.
[9] C. De Barra, *The Coming of the Celts AD 1860: Celtic Nationalism in Ireland and Wales* (South Bend, 2018), 19-20.
[10] De Barra, *Celts,* 17. Near the same time, the English scholar William Camden reached the same conclusion.

related to Cornish, Welsh and Breton and to apply the label 'Celtic' to these languages.[11] Throughout the eighteenth century, scholars used the term 'Celtic' in the fields of antiquarianism and linguistics; it was not applied to contemporary national or cultural identities.[12] These uses of the term increased through the nineteenth century; and when the German philologist Johann Kaspar Zeuss published *Grammatica Celtica* in 1853, 'Celtic Studies' became a field. This new field was dominated by continental and Anglo-Irish figures and remained distanced from revolutionary politics. Oxford's chair was an anti-Fenian antiquarian gesture, meant to de-politicise. The endowment of the Chair of Celtic at Oxford University (planning began in the 1850s and the first professor was elected in 1876) was an anti-Fenian antiquarian gesture, intended to 'send, through the gentle ministration of science, a message of peace in Ireland.'[13]

Alongside these developments, the idea of the 'Celt' was crystalising as a racial category. The Celt came into being as a foil for the 'Saxon', and expressed a lesser category of whiteness. And toward the end of the century, the Celt was imagined by Revivalists in less openly degrading, but still patronising, terms. In contrast to the Celt of academic philology and Celtology, the Celt of race science and Revivalism had a stronger influence on Irish popular culture.[14]

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[11] De Barra, *Celts,* 19. This was in *Archaeologia Britannica: an Account of the Languages, Histories and Customs of Great Britain, from Travels through Wales, Cornwall, Bas-Bretagne, Ireland and Scotland,* published in 1707. He called a section of his book 'a sort of Latin-Celtic Dictionary', implicitly labelling the languages Celtic.

[12] De Barra, *Celts,* 19-20

[13] Matthew Arnold quoted in Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'John Rhys and the Jesus Chair of Celtic at Oxford', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 77 (Summer 2019), 33-46. 42.

[14] The construction of the Celt has been much discussed from the point of view of medievalists (and, to a lesser extent, ancient historians interested in the continental Celts), and also by scholars of nineteenth century nationalisms. An overview of the ancient and mediev

After 1916, republican self-creation transvalued race-science and Revivalist conceptions of Celticity. Even when remoulded by republicans, however, the term was overburdened with history and was not always well suited to the aims of republican self-fashioning; it did not return to the frequency of use it saw in the later nineteenth century. Republican identity still looked to conceptions of race and polity rooted in a semi-mythic past, but more frequently used terms such as 'ancient', 'heroic' and 'Gaelic'. As Irish independence became plausibly obtainable, the republican discourse around identity became more forward-looking, political and less concerned with the racial primordialism yoked to Celticity. After introducing the racialist understanding of the 'Celtic' and the Revivalist iterations of Celticity, this chapter will analyse examples of post-1916 republican engagement with these ideas.

Celt as a racial category

After being established with reference to a linguistic group and an ancient civilisation, 'Celt' coalesced as a racial category in the nineteenth century. Racial taxonomies are, to a significant extent, socially constructed. 'Not objective, inherent, or fixed, [races] correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, [they] are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient.'[15] The inhabitants of Ireland had been racialised

al material with bearing on the question can be found in K. McCone*, The Celtic Question*, which pays particular attention to linguistic issues. See also the seminal article which traces the connections (and lack thereof) between ancient sources and modernity: P. Sims-Williams, 'Celtomania and Celtoscepticism', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* (Winter 1998), 1-36. See also: R. Bromwich*, Matthew Arnold and Celtic Literature* (Oxford, 1965).

[15] *R. Delgado and J. Stefancic, Critical Race Theory: An Introduction (London, 2001), 7. There is obviously a correspondence between race and certain genetic* traits, but not to the extent ascribed by most nineteenth- and twentieth-century definitions of race.

even before the modern conception of race. Some medieval sources such as Gerald of Wales assigned the Irish inborn traits such as untrustworthiness and barbarity.[16] In the early modern period, perceived Irish savageness had become an excuse for land seizure. A racial taxonomy of the Irish character emerged after the rebellion of 1798, employing linguistics, anatomy and anthropology to define the Irish 'Celt'.[17]

The Irish people identified with the pre-Norman population were swept together in a static 'illusory unity' of race.[18] This race was often identified as 'Celtic', alongside various combinations of the Scottish, Welsh, Manx, French and Italian populations.[19] 'As the Celt was 4000 years ago, so he is now', pronounced the Scottish anatomist and 'racial theorist' Robert Knox.[20] In 1850, Knox published *Races of Men: A Fragment*, in which he framed race as a catalyst for national character.[21] Initially an outsider, by the second half of the nineteenth century many people agreed with his ideas; and even as his work gradually fell from intellectual favour in the twentieth century they lingered in popular culture.[22] As late as 1922, a British officer would declare: 'The Irish problem is a problem of the Irish *race*, and is neither a byproduct of politics nor of environment, but is rooted in the racial characteristics of the people themselves.'[23] Throughout the nineteenth century, the Irish

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[16] B. Nelson, *Irish Nationalists and the Making of the Irish Race* (Princeton, 2012),
17. For information about race in the Medieval period see Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle* (New York, 2018).
[17] J. Kennaway, 'Celts under the Knife: Surgical Fortitude, Racial Theory and the British Army, 1800-1914', *Cultural and Social History* 17:2 (2020), 227-244. 238.
[18] Kennaway, 'Celts under the Knife', 243.
[19]Kennaway, 'Celts under the Knife', 234. Herlihy defines them as also from northern France, the Scottish Highlands and some of Italy, 1. Herlihy, C. *The Celt above the Saxon* (Boston, 1904).
[20] R. Knox, 'Knox on the Celtic Race' *The Anthropological Review* 6:21 (Apr. 1868), 175-191. 186. Knox is considered a founder of modern racism.
[21] Nelson, *Nationalists,* 6.
[22] Kennaway, 'Celts under the Knife', 235.
[23] Captain Hugh Pollard, quoted in Nelson, *Nationalists,* 30.

were portrayed as savages who oscillated between the bumbling Paddy to the subhuman and dangerous ape-man, an 'unruly Caliban'; the shifts in perception largely mirrored the perceived threat of political violence.[24] Knox claimed 'the source of all evil' in Ireland 'lies in the race—the Celtic race of Ireland'.[25] Racial theorists such as Arthur de Gobineau identified the Irish as a decadent ethnicity with such unsavoury characteristics as being innately poor, drunk, and loud.[26] The French philosopher Ernest Renan published *La Poésie des Races Celtiques* (1854) in which he claimed the Celtic race is an essentially feminine race—'*une race esseniallement feminine*.'[27] Depending on the writer, Celts were too dreamy, lazy and disorganised to take action on their needs and desires, or alternatively, an overly active race lacking reflection and philosophy.[28]

Many of these classifications were not specific to Ireland and were part of a list of imperial dichotomies asserted around the world: advanced/backward; superior/primitive; masculine/feminine; industrious/indolent; severe/easy-going; authoritative/dependent.[29] The second half of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth was an era 'marked by imperialism, the handmaiden of white supremacist ideology'.[30] To this end, race was

[24]The use of evolutionary discourse gave rise to the simianisation of Irish subjects in publications such as *Punch,* most famously in relation to the Famine. Nelson, *Nationalists,* 10, 35.
[25] Quoted in Nelson, *Nationalists,* 33.
[26] A. De Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Human Races* trans. A. Collins (London, 1915).
[27] S. Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2004), 24. Patrick Sims-Williams identifies Renan as the first significant scholar to make generalisations about 'Celtic' literature and writes that this was followed by other researchers generalising about Celtic archaeology, and then about Celtic art. P. Sims-Williams, 'Celtomania and Celtoscepticism', 8.
[28] As Knox put it: 'Whilst the Celt talks, the Saxon acts'. R. Knox, 'New Theory of Race: Celt v. Saxon', *The Lancet* (1857), 218-21. 219.
[29] Bennett-Kastor, *Multi-Literate*, 36.
[30] Nelson, *Nationalists,* 53

understood as immutable, with racial determinism justifying 'infinite domination'.[31] The construction of imperial identity required (colonized) others whose vices and deficiencies highlighted English virtues.[32]

At the same time, evolutionary science was establishing the idea of human evolution through progressive stages of humanity, from which it was deduced that not all humans were at the same point in the '[l]adder of civilisation'.[33] Building on the ideas of Charles Darwin, 'race science' established the idea of a progression of races, and an idea that not only were *physical* characteristics inherited but also traits of character.[34] Although Darwin deliberately avoided discussing human subjects in *The Origin of Species*, his ideas were applied to popular ethnology. Alongside this, anthropometrics, a field similar to phrenology, flourished at the end of the nineteenth century.[35]

Thus the idea of the racial Celt developed, to some extent, as a foil for those claiming 'Saxon' or 'Teutonic' heritage. In the nineteenth century, English historiography and identity often looked to an imagined 'antiquity' and the century became a golden age of 'Anglo-Saxonism'.[36] 'The Saxon or Scandinavian race of men' were imagined as 'peculiarly men of progress' while the Irish were taxonomied as wild, indolent and superstitious .[37] In this

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[31] Kennaway, 'Celts under the Knife', 234

[32] Nelson, *Nationalists,* 17. In a 1963 lecture, Tolkien noted the persistence of the myth of 'Celts' and 'Teutons': the wild incalculable poetic Celt, full of vague and misty imaginations, and the Saxon, solid and practical when not under the influence of beer.' J.R.R. Tolkien, 'English and Welsh', *Angles and Britons*, 162-97. 171-2.

[33] Kennaway, 'Celts under the Knife', 234.

[34] These views are sometimes at contradictory: In contrast to white supremacist uses of evolutionary theory, 'race theorists' such as Knox had claimed races of men never alter. Although using different logic, both frameworks existed to entrench existing hierarchies of power.

[35] C. O'Neill, 'Life in a Palliative State: Power and Powerlessness in Northern Ireland'. Notre Dame Irish Seminar (Oxford, 17 Jun. 2019).

[36] Nelson, *Nationalists,* 3; Kennaway, 'Celts under the Knife', 236.

[37] Knox, 'New Theory', 343. Nelson, *Nationalists,* 6.

context, the 'Celt' became a construct with an unstable definition reactive to the idea of the 'Anglo Saxon'. Scottish essayist and noted racist Thomas Carlyle's 'Repeal of the Union' (published posthumously in 1889, after being written in 1848) described 'The Celt of Connemara' as:

> a savage who in his sullen stupidity, in his chronic rage and misery, cannot know the facts of this world when he sees them…brandishes his tomahawk against the laws of Nature…if no beneficent hand will chain him into wholesome *slavery*, and, with whip on his back or otherwise, try to tame him and get some work out of him—Nature herself, intent to have her work tilled, has no resource [sic] but to exterminate him as she has done the wolves and other obstinately *free* creatures before now.[38]

Even in a philo-Celtic context the racial framework meant the 'Celtic' was in danger of veering into discourses on cultural and racial purity. The Revivalist writer George Russell envisioned a framework of 'true' national cultures such as Ireland, Greece and India, 'with traditions going back to the founding of the world' in opposition to debased 'mongrel' cultures such as England, France and Spain with 'no cosmic myths of their own.'[39] And between 'Celtic' peoples, racism could persist, despite some efforts toward macro-nationalism. In 1880 an article in the Welsh *Y Goleuad* asserted the Irishman is 'born to trouble like the sparks fly upward…the most stubborn, ignorant creature is the most troublesome in all of the British Empire.'[40] In 1884 a Welsh writer commented on the Irish man that 'There is a great deal of human nature in him, in a state of suspension, however, rather than solution.'[41] And during the War of Independence, according to Sinn Féín

[38] Leerssen, *Remembrance,* 97-8.
[39] Quoted in F. Flanagan, *Remembering the Revolution* (Oxford, 2015), 144. Quotes are from *The Interpreters*.
[40] De Barra, *Celts,* 72.
[41] De Barra, *Celts,* 73.

politician Kevin O'Shiel, prime minister David Lloyd George 'was a Welshman, with all the emotionalism, the excitability, the tendency to hyperbole and a very liberal share of the trickery and unreliability of his race.'[42]

'Charming barbarism': the Revivalist Celt

The Revival developed Celticity as a cultural category in addition to being merely an assortment of racially typical behaviours.[43] In the Revivalist imagination, Celticity expanded from a static racial presentism ('[a]s the Celt was 4000 years ago, so he is now') to also include a misty nostalgia for a semi-mythical world.[44] When Revivalists considered Celts as a modern race, Celticity was located in the rural West and was appreciated and appropriated through the lens of primitivism. This dynamic is discussed in the final chapter. Additionally, Revivalists identified Celticity with the cultural output of pre-modern Ireland, and they did so with a sense of ownership. And finally, the Revivalists elided Celticity with mysticism and occultism.

In the later nineteenth century, some Anglo-Irish Revivalists saw Ireland's heritage as 'neutral territory on which they could unite with their Catholic compatriots'.[45] Predominantly unionists, they insisted their interventions were politically neutral. They wished for Ireland's literature and history to be given parity to England's but without disturbing the union.[46] In this view, 'Irish glories were all in the past'—and that past was

[42] Quote from 1922. K. O'Shiel, W.S. #1770, Bureau of Military History, 230.
[43] 'Celticity' developed as a cultural category in Wales as well. For more on this, see De Barra, *The Coming of the Celts.*
[44] Quoting Knox, 'New Theory' (1857), 343.
[45] Mattar, *Primitivism,* 12.
[46] Mattar, *Primitivism,* 14.

often a 'disguised version of the contemporary British imperial present.'[47] In works such as Standish O'Grady's *History of Ireland* (two volumes, 1878 and 1880), pre-Patrician Ireland was reconstructed as a prototype of nineteenth-century hierarchies. The Irish past and the 'Celtic' character were imagined as 'an attractively primitive vessel for the reception of determinedly civilized values.'[48] O'Grady was an Anglo-Irish Protestant who hoped for Home Rule with no violence, an inclusive non-sectarian arrangement.[49] His two volumes were especially influential, exerting 'an influence out of all proportion to their lack of commercial success on an entire generation of young Anglo-Irish writers, some of whose politics evolved in entirely different directions to O'Grady's own.'[50] In the introduction to his second volume, he wrote of '*our* claim to the possession of an antique literature' (emphasis mine), placing his class as the inheritors of the tradition.[51] When O'Grady expressed a desire for early Ireland to be a political model, he was envisioning all Ireland under a single ruling class.[52]

The 'Celt', whether in the past or present, was incorporated into the late Victorian 'groundswell of interest' in the mystical and occult.[53] 'This was the product of both earlier race theories and philological inquiries into Ur-mythology. The Revivalist Celtic discourse set the Celt (whether modern, ancient or mythical) in a spiritual plane, with talents and concerns not of this world. Often this discourse was a spin on Anglo-Saxonist ideas, in

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[47] Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland,* 31. Mattar's work refines this, discussing how Yeats, for example, begins to appreciate early Irish literature's incompatibility with contemporary norms. 18.
[48] Mattar, *Primitivism,* 4.
[49] G. Castle, 'Nobler Forms: Standish James O'Grady's History of Ireland and the Irish Literary Revival', *Reading Irish Histories: Texts, Contexts and Memory in Modern Ireland* ed. L. McBride (Dublin, 2003), 156-77. 183.
[50] Williams, *Immortals*, 299.
[51] S. O'Grady, *History of Ireland v. 2: Cuculain and his Contemporaries* (Dublin, 1880), 38..
[52] Mattar, *Primitivism,* 16.
[53] Williams, *Immortals*, 279.

service of a broader cultural interest in occultism, mysticism and Ur-myths. It kept the framework and substituted words: 'backward' became 'traditional' and the over-active imagination ascribed by race theorists became a connection to the mystical.[54] The folklorist Daniel Deeney wrote in 1900 that 'the voices of the inhabitants of the unseen world were 'constantly ringing in Gaelic ears…' and '[t]he 'Gaelic peasant' had 'a great mystic world, which exercises a most potent influence upon every action of his life.'[55]

From an early twentieth-century revolutionary perspective this was mere superstition. One Irish Volunteer witness statement recalls his internment in Frongach Prison after the Rising. The writer recalled sharing his room with 'a crowd of boys…great big young colts from the West of Ireland' who believed their area of the prison to be haunted. He found their attitude gently laughable.[56] In general, revolutionary activists of this era framed fairies, hauntings, and other aspects of folklore as the product of backwards but harmless provinciality. The national community did maintain a mystical status, as discussed in Chapter Five: The Sovereignty Figure, but the idea of a personal connection to an 'unseen world' (outside the context of the Church) did not become part of revolutionary self-identification.

Some Revivalists, most notably Yeats, valued the Irish mythosphere as a link to an Indo-European Ur-mythology accessed through Celtic literature and language.[57] Irish Celtic civilisation was framed as the source of otherworldly knowledge and power that had degenerated with time.[58] Yeats extolled 'Celtic' spiritual power but asserted the mythology

[54] D. Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland,* 32.
[55] D. Deeney, *Peasant Lore from Gaelic Ireland* (London, 1900), x.
[56] T. Pugh, W.S. #397, Bureau of Military History. 14-5.
[57] Mattar, *Primitivism,* 4. By the mid-nineteenth century, comparative philology had linked Irish to Sanskrit and Irish mythology was seen as a doorway to an older Ur-mythology.
[58] Deeney, *Peasant Lore,* 1.

was in 'fragments'.[59] In this context, Celtic mysticism was always an echo or shadow of former greatness, or a signpost toward something else. Not coincidentally, the knowledge that was signposted was only accessible to an educated elite, and 'Celtic' mysticism came to typify class-unconscious nationalism. As the literary scholar Seamus Deane observed: 'Yeats began his career by inventing an Ireland amenable to his imagination. He ended by finding an Ireland recalcitrant to it'.[60]

Revivalist framing of pre-Norman history and cultural inheritance tended to place this inheritance at a remove in time and culture. In these primitivist approaches, the Revivalist is always in control and in a position of power, creating an 'asymmetry of cultural confrontation.'[61] For O'Grady and many Revivalists who came after him, medieval *tales* expressed a 'charming barbarism'.[62] The Celt was an object of interest, not a self-identified subject.

Whiteness

During the War of Independence, John Mahaffy, unionist provost of Trinity College Dublin, referred disgustedly to 'the aborigines of this island'.[63] He was building on earlier racial speculation about whether the Irish were non-white in origin (most often this link was

[59] Williams, *Immortals*, 408. From 1896 to 1902, Yeats attempted to develop an Order of Celtic Mysteries that yoked Irishness to occultism. Williams, *Immortals*, 332.
[60] Seamus Deane, 'Yeats and the Idea of Revolution', *Yeats's Political Identities* ed. Jonathan Allison (Ann Arbor, 1996), 133-44. 133.
[61] F. Stafford, 'Primitivism and the "Primitive" Poet', *Celticism* ed. Brown (Amsterdam, 1996), 79-96. 83; J. Leerssen, 'Celticism', Brown, *Celticism,* 1-20. 9.
[62] M. Brown quoted in Leerssen, 'Celticism', Brown, *Celticism,* 1-20. 18.
[63] L. Gibbons, 'Race Against Time: Racial Discourse and Irish History', *Oxford Literary Review* 13:1/2 (1991), 95-117. 113.

drawn to Africans, not Indigenous Australians).[64] In the colonial dichotomy of white/dark, the whiteness of Irish people had often been perceived as aberrant or incomplete.[65] Victorian concern with 'hierarchical ordering of races' had made it clear that Irishness was toward the bottom of the hierarchy of whiteness.[66] As the English cultural critic Matthew Arnold recalled in 1866: 'When I was young, I was taught to think of the Celt as separated by an impassable gulf from the Teuton.'[67] That assumption of substantial racial difference faded in the twentieth century but did not disappear. When the English writer Wyndham Lewis wrote of the response to Terence MacSwiney's death in 1920, he described the confusion he experienced upon seeing London crowds demonstrating: he felt the principle of 'celticism' should have made it easier to distinguish the English from the Irish.[68]

During and after World War One, equality and self-government, particularly for white men, was a dominant theme in European political culture.[69] African-Caribbean American activist Cyril Briggs looked to the Irish revolution as 'the greatest Epic of Modern History' and Éamon De Valera told an Indian audience they had an 'identical cause' with Ireland. However, the Irish identification with other anti-colonial struggles was limited by

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[64] Nelson, *Nationalists,* 9. For more on portrayals of Irishness, see L.P. Curtis, *Apes and Angels: Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (New York, 1996). Aidan Beatty convincingly argues lack of sovereignty suggests compromised whiteness. A. Beatty, *Masculinity and Power*, 37.
[65] Nelson notes a 1922 claim there was 'a strain of negro blood' in the Firbolga, the mythical early inhabitants of Ireland. Nelson, *Nationalists,* n.31, 37. Seumas MacManus identified the Fomorians as 'African sea-rovers' in contrast to the 'Celtic' races from whom the Irish are descended. Macmanus, S. *The Story of the Irish Race: A Popular History of Ireland* (New York, 1921), 2. Attributing an African origin to an Irish mythological population suggests a suspicion of Irish whiteness.
[66] T.C. Champion*, 'The Celt in Archaeology',* Brown, *Celticism,* 61-78. 71.
[67] Brown, *Celticism,* 12.
[68] W. Lewis, *The Lion and the Fox: The Role of the Hero in the Plays of Shakespeare* (London, 1927), 322.
[69] A. Liebich, *Cultural Nationhood and Political Statehood* (New York, 2022) traces the development of the link between cultural nationhood and the assertion of political self-determination with attention to the period in question.

racism. In 1919 Erskine Childers could make the pointed complaint that 'Ireland is the only *white* nationality in the world…where the principle of self-determination is not, at least in theory, conceded [emphasis mine].'[70] The 1919 Dáil issued a 'Message to the free nations of the world' urging the '*civilised* world' [my emphasis] to support their claim. [71] The language of this gesture entrenched racial hierarchy, expressing a wish to rise in the hierarchy rather than dismantle it. The language of unity is directed toward audiences of colour, whilst the language directed at a white European audiences leveraged Irish qualities of whiteness and 'civilisation'. In 1920 De Valera protested that Ireland was the 'only white nation on earth still in the bonds of political slavery' and 'the last white nation that is deprived of liberty'.[72] IRA commander Sean Moylan described his hometown of Kilmallock, Limerick, as having been 'the happy hunting ground of the ascendancy…The annals of the mere Irish existing in the locality were short and simple – poverty, oppression and that contempt which only the Mississippi negro knows.'[73]

Although Irish nationalists would use the rhetoric of a common cause when addressing audiences of colour, they predominantly used the mistreatment of non-white peoples as a foil for Irish oppression, a way to emphasize the absurdity and disorderedness of the oppression of white people. Although republicans were not unsympathetic to the political struggles of nations such as India, for the most part they bought into the epidermal

[70] Nelson, *Nationalists,* 54.
[71] Nelson, *Nationalists,* 181.
[72] First quote is from 1920 in Alabama, quoted in M. Walsh, *Bitter Freedom: Ireland in a Revolutionary World 1918-1923* (London, 2015), 216. Second quote is from Nelson, *Nationalists,* 234.
[73] S. Moylan, W.S. #838, Bureau of Military History. 2.

schema developed by the British Empire.[74] Whilst rejecting hierarchies *within* whiteness, republicans did not hesitate to leverage their own whiteness for political gain.[75]

'The best literature and the worst government': the dreamy Celt

One recurring feature communicated by both race theorists and Revivalists was the idea of 'the dreamy Celt, the seer of second sight', unsuited to practical activities.[76] The French cultural critic Ernest Renan, for example, had believed the Irish race was incapable of political progress.[77] Such theories were passé by 1890 in academic circles but had a much longer shelf life in popular culture.[78] These characterisations, whether expressed with romanticism or vitriol, all suggested Celtic peoples, and the Irish in particular, were unsuited to self-government. Thus, whilst stereotypes of otherworldliness and innate artistic genius had served cultural nationalists at the turn of the century, they were of little use to republican arguments for self-governance after 1916.

It was a central tenet of Anglo-Saxonism 'that the Anglo-Saxon people or race…had a peculiar genius for governing themselves.'[79] And the corollary to this was the idea running through nineteenth century discourse that 'by the inscrutable but invariable laws of nature, the Celt [was] less energetic, less independent, less industrious than the Saxon.'[80] Irish

[74] Nelson, *Nationalists,* and Curtis, *Apes and Angels,* both anatomise Irish whiteness.
[75] This claim is based on primary source material from witness statements, newspapers, and speeches, eg. S. Moylan. See also: n, W.S. #838, Bureau of Military History. See also De Valera's 1920 speech in Alabama, quoted in Walsh, *Bitter Freedom,* 216.
[76] R. Knox, *Races of Men: A Fragment* (Philadelphia, 1857), 21.
[77] 'It does not seem as though in any epoch [the Celtic race] had any aptitude for political life'. E. Renan, *The Poetry of the Celtic Races, and Other Essays* (London, 1896), 7.
[78] Mattar, *Primitivism,* 8.
[79] Nelson, *Nationalists,* 5.
[80] 'London, Wednesday, March 31, 1847', *The Times* (14 Mar. 1847), 4-5.

political violence was sometimes attributed to being easily led.[81] Ireland was also thought to be unable to form a democratic government. Sharon Turner's *History of the Anglo Saxons*, published in 1807 and reprinted four times in his lifetime, proclaimed '[t]he Teuton loves laws and parliaments, the Kelt [sic] loves a king. After a moment of constitutional government, the Kelt reverts, with a speed which the fatalist might call irresistible, to despotism in some form…'[82] His phrase is later used by Goldwin Smith in his 1861 *Irish History and Irish Character*.[83] Nineteenth-century writers imagined the Celtic race embodying that 'vivifying spirit of excess' that made 'the best literature and the worst government'.[84] This schema continued, to some extent, into the twentieth century: In 1913, when Anglo-Irish feminist scholar Sophie Bryant described the 'Celt' as a 'visionary idealist…artistic by temperament,' it was accompanied by a concern for the race's rashness and lack of self-control.[85] A writer for the *Kerryman* in 1914 commented acerbically: 'John [Bull] pays his artists to draw pictures of us, and John's friends who look at them find in the pictures startling proof of the truth of Darwin's theory.'[86]

This coloured even the interpretation of Irish literature. When Yeats compared medieval Irish saga material to Arthurian romance, he found it one-dimensional:

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[81] De Barra, *Celts,* 73-4.
[82] R. Boyce 'The Persistence of Anglo-Saxonism in Britain and the Origins of Britain's Appeasement Policy towards Germany', *Contribution à l'Étude des Circulations Culturelles Transnationales* 15:3 (2011), 110-129.
[83] S. Boltwood, 'The Ineffaceable Curse of Cain": Race, Miscegenation, and the Victorian Staging of Irishness', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 29:2 (2001), 383-396. 384.
[84] Mattar, *Primitivism,* 8. '[v]ivifying spirit of excess' is a phrase used by Yeats.
[85] S. Bryant, *Celtic Ireland* (London, 1889), 35-7. Bryant wrote that the Irish did not have 'the abstract self-control which is so conspicuous in the Englishman'. *Genius of the Gael*, quoted in L. Gibbons, 'The Sympathetic Bond: Ossian, Celticism and Colonialism', Brown, 273-91. 274.
[86] An Seabhac [a.k.a. Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha]. 'Sean Buidhe and our Irish Names', *The Kerryman* (13 Jun. 1914), 18. This is a pen name meaning 'the Hawk'. The article was originally a talk given to the Gaelic League in Killarney.

> When Oisin or some kingly forerunner—Bran, son of Febal, or the like—rides or sails in an enchanted ship to some divine country, he but looks for more delighted companionship, or to be in love with faces that never fade.[87] No thought of any life greater than that of love, and the companionship of those that have drawn their swords upon the darkness of the world, ever troubles their delight in one another as it troubles Iseult amid her love, or Arthur amid his battles.[88]

This assessment requires a meticulously blinkered reading of Irish vernacular literature. Irish medieval tales have a significantly lesser interest in romantic love in comparison to English and Continental Arthurian material. Furthermore, the hero Bran specifically *avoids* the Isle of Joy, a place reminiscent of the Land of the Lotus Eaters in the Odyssey, abandoning a crew member rather than risking going ashore. And whilst *Acallam na Senorach,* the primary collection of Finn material (referenced here in naming Finn's son Oisin), extolls adventure and companionship, it does so within an atmosphere of loss at the end of an era—not unlike Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*.[89] Of course Yeats did not have access to a twenty-first century selection of critical scholarship on this material, and even in the our own century the volume of literary analysis of medieval Irish *tales* is dwarfed by the scholarly resources considering the medieval traditions of other European nations. However, the conclusion that Irish tales are concerned only with unreflective pleasure is a facile conclusion in any era. Yeats' framework de-emphasised kingship and self-rule in a way that was at odds with later republican handling of this material.

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[87] Yeats is referring to eighth century voyage-tale *Immram Brain.* S. Mac Mathúna, *Immram Brain: Bran's Journey to the Land of the Women* (Tübingen, 1985).
[88] Yeats in Gregory, *Gods and Fighting Men,* xvi.
[89] Yeats' references to Ossian presumably refer to the medieval Irish Fiannaíocht (Finn material) and not James Macpherson's Scottish forgery, which had by this time been thoroughly discredited. For more on the impact of the Macpherson's Ossian forgeries during the revival, see J. Barlow 'Celticism, Ballad Transmission, and the Schizoid Voice: Ossianic Fragments in Owenson, Yeats, Joyce, and Beckett' *Irish Studies Review* 27:4 (2019), 473-492.

The English poet Matthew Arnold's 1867 *On the Study of Celtic Literature* framed the Celts as creative, passive, isolated and feminine.[90] This framing was used by Irish American poet Shaemas O'Sheel in 1917:

> They went forth to battle, but they always fell;
> Their eyes were fixed above the sullen shields;
> Nobly they fought and bravely, but not well,
> And sank heart-wounded by a subtle spell.
> …
> Their names are old sad stories in men's ears…[91]

The poem's exaltation of noble sacrifice in a hopeless cause encapsulated the contemporary revolutionary attitude toward the Rising. However, as revolutionary activity grew from a small, doomed rising to an insurgency with statehood on the horizon, this vein of rhetoric no longer yielded relevant expressions of political identity. When Yeats declared 'the work of Ireland is to lift up its voice for spirituality, for ideality, for simplicity in the English-speaking world', an exasperated Arthur Griffith, founder of Sinn Fein, replied 'We believe nothing of the kind.'[92]

When Republicans engaged with Celticity after 1916, they pushed back against the idea of Celts as 'romantic losers'.[93] The romance of hopeless causes faded after 1916. As David Dwan argues in *The Great Community*, 'romantic' could operate as an antonym of 'enlightened'.[94] Thus the idea of the carefree artistic Celt had become wholly incompatible

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[90] Mattar, *Primitivism,* 8.
[91] J. O'Sheel 'They Went Forth to Battle, but They Always Fell', *The Little Book of Modern Verse* ed. J. Rittenhouse (1917), 88. O'Sheel was not from Ireland but actively supported the independence movement..
[92] Nelson, *Nationalists,* 47. Griffith was an ardent nationalist but not a republican. He envisioned an Anglo-Irish dual monarchy and relinquished leadership of Sinn Fein in 1917 as it became clear his views did not align with those of his party.
[93] De Barra, *Celts,* 26-7.
[94] Dwan, 'Romantic Nationalism', 723.

with the national project. An interest in the Celt as a race was largely subsumed by an interest in the Irish cultural inheritance. The interest in Celts is part of a broader interest in a history of political power, political unity, and withstanding invaders.[95] In 1917 the *Derry Journal* advertised a lecture entitled 'The Celtic Race: Its Origin and Antiquity' as 'a Masterly Discourse on Irish Ancestry.[96] In 1918, Eoin MacNeill had planned a series of lectures on topics such as 'The Ancient Irish as a Celtic People', 'Growth of Celtic Consciousness', 'Legend of the Sons of Míl' and 'Popular Tradition of Origin of Gaels'.[97] The American popular historian Seumas MacManus described how the Celts 'dominated the ruder races', emphasising them as a dominant, ruling culture.[98] Although these lectures still used the language of race, their vision of what that race was and why it was important had changed.[99]

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[95] Popular Irish American historian Seumas MacManus wrote of how 'The Celts 'subjugated the German people' and 'a Great Celtic wave…penetrated into England, Scotland and Ireland' c. 1000 BCE. S. MacManus (1921), 7. This was not a new idea. The French historian Marie Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville had written of an 'empire celtique' in the previous century. De Jubainville, M.-H.*Cycle Mythologique Irlandais et la Mythologie Celtique* (Paris, 1884). Heinrich Zimmer of the University of Berlin wrote that Ireland was 'the birthplace and abode of high culture in the fifth and sixth centuries' and made 'strenuous efforts in the seventh century to spread her learning among the German and Romance people, thus forming the actual foundations of our present Continental civilization.' MacManus, *Ireland's Case* (New York, 1919), 18.

[96] 'The Celtic Race: Its Origin and Antiquity', *Derry Journal* (23 Apr. 1917), 2.

[97] 'Migrations of the Celt', *Freeman's Journal* (11 Jan. 1918), 2.

[98] MacManus, MacManus, S. *Ireland's Case* (New York, 1919), 7.

[99] After the Revolution, people continued to grapple with this aspect of identity: 'In recent years,' a newspaper article asked, 'A wave of cynicism has swept over the country…Has the fiery quick-souled Celt been merely bright and . . . ineffectual? Have our enemies been fair in saying that a Book of Kells, a Tara brooch, a sweetly-chiselled chalice;—small things—are our greatest work in art, that in literature we never built a mighty epic, that high-souled though we are, something always held us back from great achievement; a want of grit, of stamina of doggedness? Or may it be that big achievement springs from burning conviction; that to do the mighty thing man must realise its value, and store his mind with thought on mighty things; that only thought—and thought emotion-heated—engenders great and noble doing'? Is that the weakness? And going back but thirty years, have we had a clear

The 'Celtic' failed to capture the post-Rising republican imagination in part because it was a dysfunctional framework. Douglas Hyde, in his famous 1892 speech 'Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland', had called the island eternally 'Celtic to the core'.[100] But even to claim that 'in every respect we shall find the Celtic race compares favourably with the Anglo-Saxon' is to use an externally imposed framework.[101] The Celt had been a vehicle for asserting Irish impracticality; the word became too heavily loaded for a *volte-face*. It was tied to an essentialist and imperialist racial discourse that was out of place in the republican political rhetoric of the late 1910s and early 1920s. After the Rising, republicans invoked Celtic and pre-modern Irish kingship but often eschewed the term 'Celtic' in favour of terms such as 'Gaelic', 'ancient' and 'ancestral'. In 1917 the *Freeman's Journal* notes: 'One hears little nowadays of the superiority of Saxon to Celt…the strife which was originally racial, and then religious,' has finally fallen to politics.[102]

Conclusion

'Celtic' has served as a linguistic, civilisational and racial category. In the nineteenth century, the theory of what one writer called 'the vulgar type of unionism' '…rested upon the theory that the Celt was a curious sort of combination of dreamer, drunkard, and minor poet, in a ruined scene by moonlight. The whole theory consisted in the proposition that the Teutonic

idea of what we want, and a strong, clear conviction—not an empty sentiment…' G. Clune, 'Ireland's Life and Thought', *Irish Statesman* (10 Jan. 1925), 563-4.

[100] Nelson, *Nationalists,* 47.

[101] Herlihy, *Celt above the Saxon*, 14.

[102] 'Celt and Saxon,' *Freeman's Journal* (11 May 1917), 4. During World War I, English identity distanced itself from Teutonic identity, which likely hastened the decline of this framework.

race had a right, or, at any rate a philosophic theory of might, to trample upon a perishing and impracticable stock such as the Celts.'[103] Meanwhile, Revival nationalism retrofitted this Celtic vision to be palatable. Revivalism celebrated the Celt, but in doing this it perpetuated stereotypes; racism was 'sanitized and worn with pride by its very victims'.[104]

Although there was not a dramatic change in the terminology, republicans reoriented the use of 'Celt', attempting to rehabilitate it from stereotypes that did not serve the aims of self-governance. And as De Barra argues in his book on nationalism, 'Celtic identity usually operated as a superficial mask to be taken up or laid down depending on convenience and circumstance.'[105]

Definitions of Celticity came from both within and outside Irish culture and had a diversity of aims. The term was leveraged both in service of racism and as a tool for constructing ethnic and political identities. It was employed in promoting the hierarchies of 'race science', in furthering Gaelic Revival ideas of Irish creativity, and in defining Irish uniqueness for nationalist purposes. In providing an overview of the history of this broad and woolly term, this chapters aims to help readers situate its use throughout history.

[103] 'Teutonic Theory', *Freeman's Journal* (26 Sep. 1918), 4.
[104] Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland,* 32.
[105] De Barra, *Celts,* 8.

3. Modalities of Time: Time is not a 'sequence of events'

The poetry pamphlet *Aftermath of Easter Week* was published for the benefit of the Irish National Aid and Volunteers' Dependents Fund in September 1917. The poem 'The Seanachie Tells Another Story' commemorates the executions of the Rising's leaders through imagery loosely drawn from vernacular saga: [1]

> As sixteen coffins went by Kilgar
> A flaming spear leapt up to a star;
> A sign that the men who lived in death
> Were those who had drawn the hero breath;
> England had bullets and burning lime,
> And Ireland has names that march with time.[2]

The dichotomies presented in republican art and writing such as this—spears against guns, warriors against soldiers, tradition against technology—could appear, superficially, a rejection of modernity.[3] Yet acts of cultural retrieval are not necessarily regressive: it is possible to be backwards-looking without being backwards-acting. This chapter considers the period between the end of the Rising and the end of the Civil War. It identifies four ways

[1] P. Browne, ed. *Aftermath of Easter Week* (Dublin, 1917), 10.
[2] Browne, *Aftermath,* 10. This was the tone of all the work in collection, which included alternative visions such as the dead bivouacked with Wolfe Tone sharing tales of their deeds in a martial afterlife.
[3] This concern existed during the Revival, when John Synge spoke about the need to avoid 'a purely fantastic, unmodern…Cuchulainoid National Theatre'. Quoted in D. Pierce, *Yeats's Worlds: Ireland, England and the Poetic Imagination* (New Haven, Connecticut, 1995), 145. Eoin MacNeill wrote with frustration in 1916: 'There is no such person as Caitlin ni Uallachain or Roisin Dubh or the Sean-bhean Bhocht, who is calling on us to serve her. What we call our country is the Irish nation which is a concrete and visible reality.' For him, these figure were antithetical to the reality of nationalist politics. Quoted in C. Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance since 1848* (Oxford, 2001), 293.

time functions in the process of self-fashioning through medieval narrative. Time is not a 'sequence of events like the beads of a rosary.'[4] Time and identity are layered and latticed, with personal, communal and mythic memory blending. As Walter Benjamin writes in *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, revolution can 'make the continuum of history explode'.[5]

The first lens: an alternative local modernity

First, what returns from the past can be 'the memory and the potentiality of that which was…arrested and put down.'[6] This is expressed in this autograph book quote from a 1923, in which an internee answers the question 'Who are the Irregulars?' (the anti-Treaty republican forces) with a quote from Pádraig Pearse: 'We are the voice of an Ideal which is older than any empire.'

[4] W. Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', 9. Simon Fraser University (2022). https://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/CONCEPT2.html [1 Oct 2022].
[5] Benjamin, 'Philosophy of History', 7.
[6] D. Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin 2008), 7. He describes myth is 'the return of the present to its pasts,' which is a slightly different idea from what is advanced in this chapter. Another expression of this alternative modernity can be seen in the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies (DIAS). Established at the initiative of de Valera in 1940, it was designed to be two 'schools': Theoretical Physics and Celtic studies. Putting Celtic Studies alongside theoretical physics reframes it as a modern and forward-looking practice.

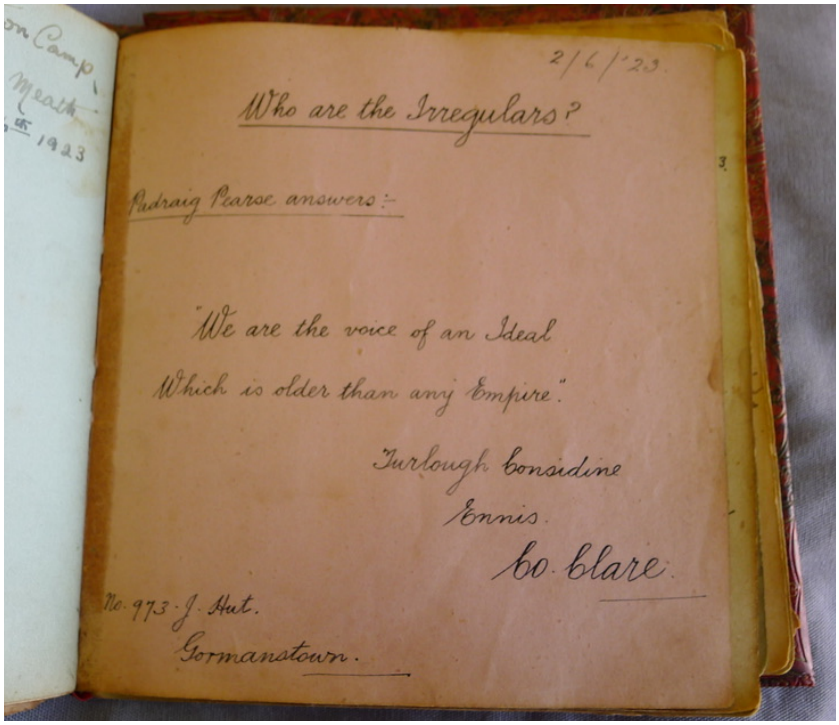


Figure 1. Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS 42,139 Republican Autograph Album Compiled at Ballykinlar Internment Camp by Brian O'Kennedy (c.1919-21).

The invocation of the past, whether real or mythic past, is not merely an anachronism. Such engagements are future-looking as much as they are backward-looking because they aimed to re-establish an identity separate from Britain as part of a project of independence.

An example of this is the illuminated manuscript tradition seen in internment camps. Internees draw on Ireland's distinctive manuscript tradition to create modern texts.



Figure 2. T. Mac Conmara, An Interpretive Guide to Patrick Brennan's Autograph Book. Clare Library (Clare, 2016).

The above is from the prison autograph book of Pádraig Brennan, a leader of the Clare Volunteers, interned in 1916. The manuscript-style page uses medieval spelling, drolleries of animals and Brennan himself, and knotwork. This certificate, made in prison in Belfast and showing the command structure of the Irish Volunteers, also uses medieval techniques:

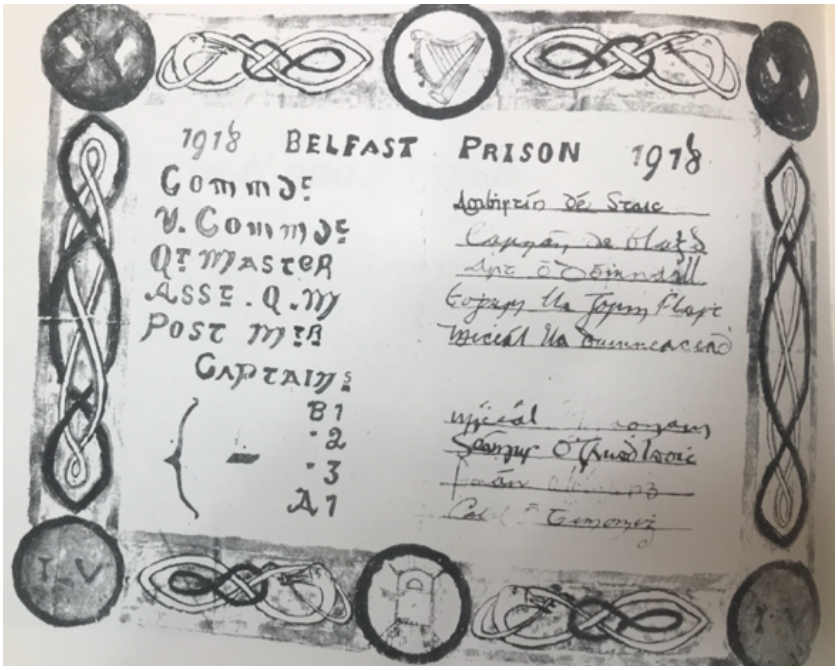
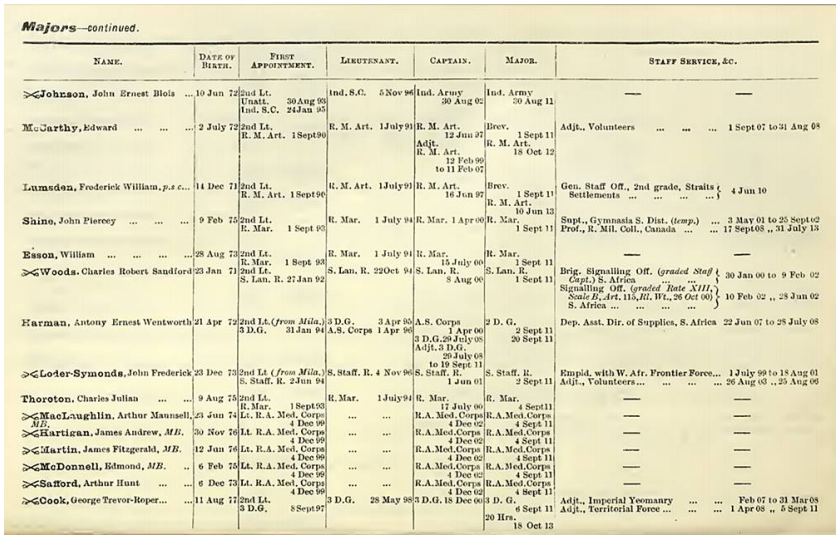


Figure 3. Tim Leahy, Crumlin Road Prison, 1918. In B. Mullins, Memoirs of Billy Mullins (Tralee, c.1983), 176.

In the above design from 1918, Tim Leahy created a document standard for the militaries of this era, as shown below:



Majors—continued.

Name.	Date of Birth.	First Appointment.	Lieutenant.	Captain.	Major.	Staff Service, &c.
Johnson, John Ernest Blois ...	10 Jun 72	2nd Lt. 30 Aug 99 Unatt. 24 Jan 95 Ind. S.C.	Ind. S.C. 5 Nov 96	Ind. Army 30 Aug 02	Ind. Army 30 Aug 11	— —
McCarthy, Edward	2 July 72	2nd Lt. 1 Sept 90 R. M. Art.	R. M. Art. 1 July 93	R. M. Art. 12 Jun 97 Adjt. R. M. Art. 12 Feb 99 to 11 Feb 07	Brev. 1 Sept 11 R. M. Art. 18 Oct 12	Adjt., Volunteers ... ... 1 Sept 07 to 31 Aug 08
Lumsden, Frederick William, *p.s.c.*...	14 Dec 71	2nd Lt. 1 Sept 90 R. M. Art.	R. M. Art. 1 July 93	R. M. Art. 16 Jun 97	Brev. 1 Sept 11 R. M. Art. 10 Jun 13	Gen. Staff Off., 2nd grade, Straits Settlements ... ... 4 Jun 10
Shine, John Piercey	9 Feb 75	2nd Lt. 1 Sept 93 R. Mar.	R. Mar. 1 July 94	R. Mar. 1 Apr 00	R. Mar. 1 Sept 11	Supt., Gymnasia S. Dist. (*temp.*) ... 3 May 01 to 25 Sept 02 Prof., R. Mil. Coll., Canada ... ... 17 Sept 03 ,, 31 July 13
Esson, William	28 Aug 73	2nd Lt. 1 Sept 93 R. Mar.	R. Mar. 1 July 94	R. Mar. 15 July 00	R. Mar. 1 Sept 11	— —
Woods, Charles Robert Sandford	23 Jan 71	2nd Lt. 27 Jan 92 S. Lan. R.	S. Lan. R. 22 Oct 94	S. Lan. R. 8 Aug 00	S. Lan. R. 1 Sept 11	Brig. Signalling Off. (*graded Staff Capt.*) S. Africa ... ... 30 Jan 00 to 9 Feb 02 Signalling Off. (*graded Rate XIII., Scale B., Art. 115, R. Wt., 26 Oct 00*) S. Africa ... ... 10 Feb 02 ,, 28 Jun 02
Harman, Antony Ernest Wentworth	21 Apr 72	2nd Lt. (*from Mila.*) 31 Jan 94 3 D.G.	3 D.G. 3 Apr 95 A.S. Corps 1 Apr 96	A.S. Corps 1 Apr 00 3 D.G. 29 July 03 Adjt. 3 D.G. 29 July 03 to 19 Sept 11	2 D. G. 2 Sept 11 20 Sept 11	Dep. Asst. Dir. of Supplies, S. Africa 22 Jun 07 to 28 July 08
Loder-Symonds, John Frederick	23 Dec 73	2nd Lt. (*from Mila.*) 2 Jun 94 S. Staff. R.	S. Staff. R. 4 Nov 96	S. Staff. R. 1 Jun 01	S. Staff. R. 2 Sept 11	Empld. with W. Afr. Frontier Force... 1 July 99 to 18 Aug 01 Adjt., Volunteers... ... ... 26 Aug 03 ,, 29 Aug 06
Thoroton, Charles Julian	9 Aug 75	2nd Lt. 1 Sept 93 R. Mar.	R. Mar. 1 July 94	R. Mar. 17 July 00	R. Mar. 4 Sept 11	— —
MacLaughlin, Arthur Maunsell, *M.B.*	23 Jun 74	Lt. R.A. Med. Corps 4 Dec 99	... ...	R.A. Med. Corps 4 Dec 02	R.A.Med.Corps 4 Sept 11	— —
Hartigan, James Andrew, *M.B.*	30 Nov 76	Lt. R.A. Med. Corps 4 Dec 99	... ...	R.A.Med.Corps 4 Dec 02	R.A.Med.Corps 4 Sept 11	— —
Martin, James Fitzgerald, *M.B.*	12 Jun 76	Lt. R.A. Med. Corps 4 Dec 99	... ...	R.A.Med.Corps 4 Dec 02	R.A.Med.Corps 4 Sept 11	— —
McDonnell, Edmond, *M.B.* ..	6 Feb 78	Lt. R.A. Med. Corps 4 Dec 99	... ...	R.A.Med.Corps 4 Dec 02	R.A.Med.Corps 4 Sept 11	— —
Safford, Arthur Hunt	6 Dec 73	Lt. R.A. Med. Corps 4 Dec 99	... ...	R.A.Med.Corps 4 Dec 02	R.A.Med.Corps 4 Sept 11	— —
Cook, George Trevor-Roper... ...	11 Aug 77	2nd Lt. 8 Sept 97 3 D.G.	3 D.G. 28 May 98	3 D.G. 18 Dec 00	3 D. G. 6 Sept 11 20 Hrs. 18 Oct 13	Adjt., Imperial Yeomanry ... ... Feb 07 to 31 Mar 08 Adjt., Territorial Force ... ... 1 Apr 08 ,, 5 Sept 11

Figure 4. 'British Army Quarterly Army Lists' Researching WW1 (2022).

Yet instead of following the British format, he placed his work in the manuscript tradition. It includes a variety of features such as borders, emblems, and interlace, carried out in the style of works such as the *Book of Kells*. Elements such as a prison door and an 'I.V.' for 'Irish Volunteers' use medieval Irish artistic techniques to create a revolutionary text. Rather than creating a document that simply mirrored the existing format, shown below, he adapted it to create something that continued a pre-Invasion cultural tradition.

Similarly, a 1921 Irish language certificate from Ballykinlar internment camp shows a medieval inspired border. Michéal Ó Riada of Killarney created the certificate for his Irish students in the camp:

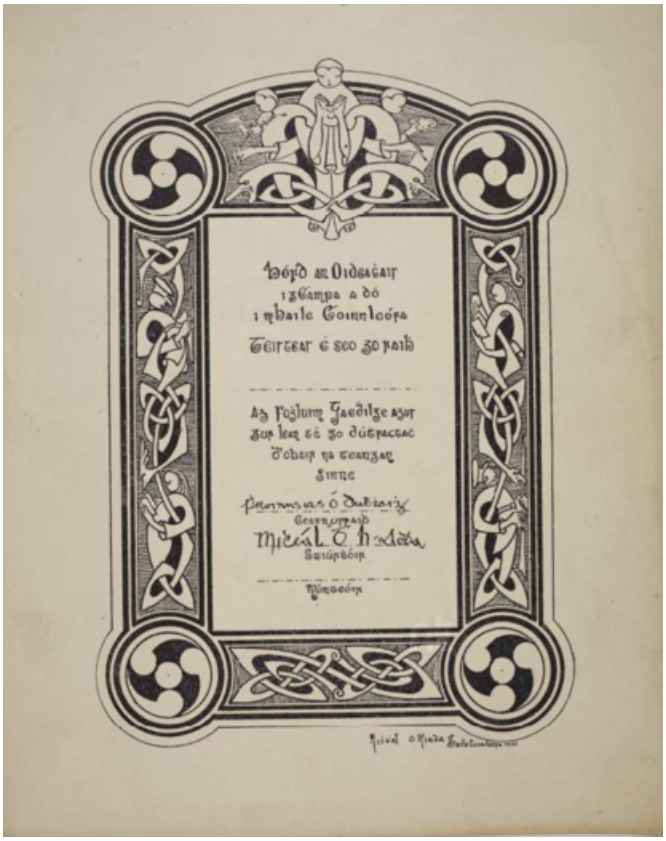


Figure 5. Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS D144, Certificate of proficiency in Irish granted by Phroinnsias O Dubhthaigh, Ceannnarraidh, Micheál O hAodha, stiúrtheoir (1921).

Ó Riada took the familiar format of a school certificate (shown below) and reworked it to create a republican version for his prison-camp teaching.

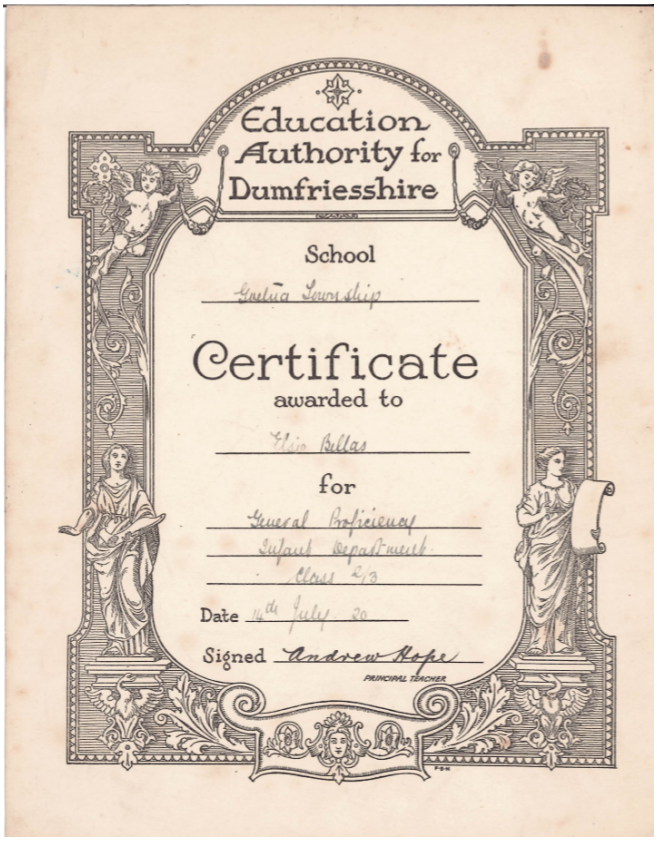


Figure 6. Private Collection, '1900s Certificate School Examinations Higher Division Ida E. Scott Pupil Mrs. S.A. Young Pianoforte Royal Academy Music Royal College Music'

A delightful feature of his certificate is the inhabited border, in which Ó Riada includes a figure of an Irish Volunteer:



Figure 7. Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS D144, Certificate of proficiency in Irish granted by Phroinnsias O Dubhthaigh, Ceannnarraidh, Micheál O hAodha, stiúrtheoir (1921).

While the inclusion qualifies as a drollery (a figure designed for comic effect) its execution is elegant rather than grotesque. It served not only as a droll flourish, but as a way to elevate, celebrate and integrate paramilitaries as part of valuable, authentic, traditional culture. In this and the preceding work, the creator employed a medieval style to add authority to their work and to situate its aims (whether speaking the Irish language or fighting with the Volunteers) as the continuation of a pre-Invasion cultural tradition.

In August 1921 the *teachtaí dála* (TDs) at Ballykinler camp were released to attend the treaty meeting at Mansion House. They brought the album below, had it autographed in Mansion House, then sent it No. 2 Camp. At Ballykinlar, where it was expanded and illuminated by the inmates. Each hut of prisoners had a page and the book contains more than 1000 signatures. Micéal Ó Riada, who created the drollery of the Volunteer, was one

of the artists, although the pages below are from another prisoner.[7] This book, designed as an oversized autograph book, includes medieval manuscript elements throughout.[8] It displays the heraldic devices of the four provinces with their Irish names, representing the modern rather than medieval provinces whilst evoking the people who previously laid claim to these places.[9] The Irish is written with rubrication, decorative majuscules and other features of the local manuscript tradition.



Figure 8. Dublin, Military Archives, PRCN-0020-01-03. Book of Ballykinlar (1921). The text is an affectionate dedication to the camp chaplain in thanks for his work.

[7] Carlow Historical and Archaeological Society. 'The Book of Ballykinlar' *Carloviana* 63 (2015), 43-5 http://carlowhistorical.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Carloviana-No-63-2015.pdf [30 Sep 2022]

[8] It is now held by the National Museum.

[9] The medieval provinces would have also included Mid (Meath).

All these manuscript-inspired works bring the high culture of pre-Invasion Ireland into the twentieth century to create a modern and regionally distinct product. This is a reclamation of a timeline and identity cut short by invasion and colonisation.

This tradition was continued in the commemoration of the revolutionary era by the spectacular vellum manuscript commissioned by the Irish Republican Memorial Society, a group established to create 'a national memorial to the memory of the heroes who have given their lives for the attainment of the absolute independence of Ireland since Easter Week.'[10] *Leabhar na hAiséirghe* or The Book of the Resurrection was created by Art O'Murnaghan (Arthur Walter Murnaghan), an artist of Irish heritage, born in England.[11] It honoured the dead of the revolutionary era. He began work on the first illumination in 1917, and when his art came to the attention of the Irish Republican Memorial Society in 1924 they commissioned a book.[12]

The page of names commemorated the death of Cathal Brugha, chief of staff of the anti-Treaty IRA and former president of the Dáil. Brugha was shot in the occupation of the Fourt Courts in 1922. It also commemorates the Civil War killings of 'the Four Untried Hostages':

[10] S. Heise 'Leabhar na hAiséirghe', *Irish Arts Review* 29:3 (Autumn 2012), 98-103. 98.
[11] Dublin, National Museum of Ireland, Leabhar na hAiséirghe (1924-51).
[12] Heise, 'Leabhar na hAiséirghe', 98.



Figure 9. S. Heise 'Leabhar na hAiséirghe' in Irish Arts Review *29:3 (Autumn 2012), 98-103 101.*

Rory O'Connor, Liam Mellows, Joseph McKelvey and Richard Barrett were executed by a Free State firing squad in December 1922.[13] The above illumination assimilates both medieval and Art Nouveau techniques in representing the names against a prison backdrop. This is a sophisticated twentieth-century project, linked to pre-Invasion culture but not simply reproducing it.

Gestures such as those described above offer an alternative and localised modernity. 'Modernity' was defined by asymmetrical power relationships. Just as the metropole exists only in relation to the periphery, the modern exists only in relation to the unmodern. In Ireland, the definition of modernity emanated from Britain and could function as a tool of

[13] This page displays the names of the signatories of the 1916 Proclamation of the Republic, the document printed and distributed at the Easter Rising to declare the existence of a republic.

categorisation and domination.[14] Modernity was, in some perspectiveness, Englishness. If the Irish did not meet the standards of modernity, went the logic, it must be due to their indolence, stubbornness or inherent failings.[15]

In addition, modernity was shaped by war. The First World War 'constituted the most rapid technological change in history up until that point.'[16] The majority of these changes served to make combat more lethal, sending casualty rates skyrocketing: In World War I, fatalities in combat and from wounds were more than double the equivalent losses in all major wars between 1790 and 1914, and Irish casualties were disproportionate.[17] World War I was brutally impersonal. Mass death and the proliferation of new tactics and strategies (e.g. chemical attacks, the pivot from manoeuvre warfare to entrenchment) led both civilians and military personnel to assert that the conflict was, in some respects, not even a proper war. The war itself seemed to be a vast, autonomous machine that 'enfolded [its participants] with its own logic.'[18] 'War was no longer a contest between two opposing forces of blood, muscle, and bayonets, but now a struggle between two armies consisting of machines'.[19]

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[14] The Turkish sociologist I. Kaya problematises this in 'A Postcolonial Reading on Eurocentrism, Otherization and Orientalist Discourse in Sociological Thought and Its Criticism'. *ULUM Journal of Religious Inquiries* 1:1 (July 2018), 163-188.
[15] This dynamic is discussed further in A. Memmi, *The Coloniser and the Colonized* trans. H. Greenfield (London, 2003).
[16] J. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform*. (Lawrence, Kansas, 1992), 18.; J. Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (London, 2004), 361.
[17] G. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford, 1990), 3. For a discussion of the death toll in relation to other wars, see Pinker, *The Better Angels of our Nature,* esp. 235. Pinker problematises the quantification of military fatalities 228-67.
[18] E. Leed, *No Man's Land. Combat and Identity in World War One* (Cambridge, 1981), 36.
[19] D. Zabecki, 'Military Developments of World War I'. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (7 May 2015) http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net [July 27 2019].

Thus the English 'modernity' of the World War had its drawbacks. The 1919 ballad 'Foggy Dew' described 'Britannia's huns with their long-range guns', framing the fighters as barbarous whilst simultaneously suggesting their power came only from their technology, and perhaps even suggesting a cowardice in their avoidance of closer combat.[20] The use of 'hun' turns England's categorisation of others back on itself, evoking barbarity and suggesting the English belong in the same linguistic and moral category as the belligerent Germans.[21] From 1914, lyrics characterise English fighters as an unworthy and unmasculine opponents, and often as over-reliant on technology. In the *Freeman's Journal* (an anti-Treaty publication, but skeptical of the IRA) in 1921, a writer lamented that no poets will sing of modern warfare 'as men sang of Cuchulain and Maeve': the mechanisation of warfare 'eliminated all the romance that centred round war in those days, when the combat was personal, under a great leader, or between heroes…'[22]

A 1921 entry from a Ballykinlar Internment Camp autograph book reads:

God bless the IRA

[20] C. O'Neill rewrote the music of C. Milligan to an existing song of the same name c.1919. J. Carroll, 'Foggy Dew' Clare County Library, (1922). https://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/songs/cmc/the_foggy_dew_mjcrehan.htm [3 Dec. 2022]. For a discussion of the role of music in republicanism, see R. Parfitt, *Musical Culture and the Spirit of Irish Nationalism, 1848-1972* (Oxford, 2020).

[21] Another pithy example dates from a few decades after World War I. Dominic Behan, the son of a veteran of the Anglo-Irish War, wrote 'Come out Ye Black and Tans' in honour of his father's experience: 'Come out ye Black and Tans, come out and fight me like a man/Show your wife how you won medals down in Flanders/Tell them how the IRA made you run like hell away/From the green and lovely lanes of Killashandra.' The 'Black and Tans', alongside the counterinsurgency unit, the Auxiliary Division, drew much of their manpower from World War veterans—former soldiers in the former organization and former officers in the latter. The Black and Tans were a force of about 9,500 officers and men in 1,397 barracks across the country. Both forces included men from Ireland. D. Leeson, *The Black and Tans*. (Oxford, 2011), 1.

[22] S.L.M. 'A Soldier Poet', *Freemans Journal* (21 May, 1921), 3.

Dauntless and bold in fray
Brave worthy sons of Cuchulian and Conn
Careless of steel or lead.[23]

Republican men of the twentieth century were defining themselves as modern fighters—although some had in fact received their training in the British Army, this framework traces the lineage of their heritage and skills to Irish warriors of the mythic past. Through this logic they produced a local modernity that evaded indebtedness to British modernity.

In memoirs and witness statements, individuals were recast in heroic terms: A man who had been a war chaplain is written of as a 'trained warrior'.[24] Leaders are 'chieftans', sometimes wielding metaphorical 'sword[s]', and the 'old chieftans' are toppled by the young.[25] Thomas Ashe in 1917 was remembered as one who 'bravely took his stand/As Fingall's chief'.[26] Roger Casement is 'a peerless chieftan of the unconquered Gael'.[27] Sean Moylin of the IRA describes an overenthusiastic commander by recounting how 'He built a character for me that I found it impossible to live up to. I had the fighting capacity of Cuchulain, the military knowledge of a Clausewitz'.[28] Alf Monahan of the Irish Volunteers encountered a tall man soon after the Easter Rising and recalled, tongue-in-cheek, that he thought he'd come across 'Fionn MacCumhaill'.[29] A man with a brutal prison experience 'came to be known as 'Fionn after his famous warrior prototype.'[30] At the death of the IRA leader Sean Treacy in the War of Independence, one of his men eulogises him as 'Hero of a

[23] 'A Rallying Song' in Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS 34,954/1A Republican Autograph Book Compiled at Ballykinlar Internment Camp (1920-1921).
[24] P. Doyle, W.S. #807, Bureau of Military History, 48.
[25] N. Whittle, W.S. #1105, Bureau of Military History, 61.
[26] 'Remember Ashe', *Freemans Journal* (21 May 1921), 3.
[27] Benmore, 'A Grand Rally', *Drogheda Independent* (10 July, 1920), 3.
[28] S. Moylin, W.S. #838, Bureau of Military History, 124.
[29] A. Monahan, W.S. #298, Bureau of Military History, 30.
[30] P. Doyle, W.S. #807, Bureau of Military History, 39.

hundred battles!'[31] This is not anachronism, but a local modernity, a continuation of a cultural tradition that had been suppressed.

The philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin wrote epic as a genre is 'congealed and half-moribund', guarding an 'absolute past…walled off absolutely from all subsequent times'…'with a hopelessly finished quality and…immutability'.[32] Nothing could be further from the truth. In the *fin de siècle*, the ideals of Na Fianna Éirinn (the paramility youth group) were cultivated by talks 'on ancient heroic Ireland or of Finn and Ossian and the Fianna of old.'[33] And in a 1920 article in the radical magazine *The Red Hand*, 'May New' crafted a story of Finn Mac Cumhaill.[34] Finn sits in a jail cell with his companions. They have resisted Queen Medb (whom this author brings in from a different saga cycle and time period) by refusing to fight on her behalf, and she has condemned them all to death. Finn's warriors are not his fían from saga, but a band of 'everyman' figures who could be modern. Finn says, 'tis hard that you, Aedeen, young and with a fame to make; you, Conor, with a bride of a month to watch in vain for your return; you Flann, with children who listened for your footsteps; and you, Donagh with life before you, a name already sweet in warriors' ears, 'tis hard that ye should die.' In the style of Socrates, they drink from a poisoned cup and die with dignity.[35] Death in a prison cell, resisting a monarch.

The poem 'The Seanachie Tells Another Story', mentioned at the start of the chapter, commemorates the deaths of leaders of the Rising, situating the story of their death alongside the characters of Irish vernacular storytelling. It, too, imagines the heroes as an

[31] S. Babington, W.S. #1595, Bureau of Military History, 40.
[32] M. Bakhtin, quoted in Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, 43
[33] S. O'Neill, W.S. #1496, Bureau of Military History, 12.
[34] M. New [pseudonym], 'The Cup of Death', *The Red Hand* (1 Nov 1920), 14.
[35] New [pseudonym], 'Cup of Death', *Red Hand,* 14.

alternative modernity in which the keepers of history are the *seanchaithe,* the storytellers and historians of the Irish oral tradition. The *seanchaí*, as a storyteller and historian, was the preserver and transmitter of Irish culture and held significant status before the social upheaval of the seventeenth century. Their power waned from the start of the seventeenth century, when the fall of the aristocratic order that maintained them reduced their role. The role has continued to the present day, although now the tales are frequently related in English.[36] To be part of the *seanachaí'*s story is to become part of culture and memory. Ironically perhaps, 'The Seanachie Tells Another Story' is written in English. However, this could have been done with self-awareness, suggesting that the tale transcends language, or that in the twentieth century English had become a valid vehicle for storytelling. The final stanza of the poem places the events of the Rising in an epic context:

> As sixteen coffins went by Kilgar
> A flaming spear leapt up to a star;
> A sign that the men who lived in death
> Were those who had drawn the hero breath;
> England had bullets and burning lime,
> And Ireland has names that march with time.[37]

[36] P. Ryan, 'Celticity and Storyteller Identity: The Use and Misuse of Ethnicity to Develop a Storyteller's Sense of Self', *Folklore* 117:3 (1 Dec. 2006), 313-328.
[37] Browne, *Aftermath,* 10.



Figure 10. H.R. Millar 'The Spear of Lugh' Celtic Myth And Legend Poetry And Romance *by C. Squire (London, 1905), 62.*

The poem imposes an imagined alternative modernity.[38] The 'flaming spear' is likely a reference to the Spear of Lug, a supernatural figure of medieval saga, 'equally gifted in all the arts'.[39] His character is closely tied to kingship and Mark Williams suggests in *Ireland's Immortals* that 'the purpose of the literary Lug may have been to personify the potent narrative dimension of ideal kingship.'[40] The poem depicts Irish heroes, armed with

[38] Even in the image of coffins, time is not passing as usual. The executions took place at different times. Fourteen burials that did take place in Dublin shortly after the rising, but Thomas Kent was executed in Cork and Roger Casement was executed in London several months after that.

[39] Williams, *Immortals*, 16. For a detailed history of the god, see 16-29. Celtchair also had a fiery spear, but given Lug's prominence in the tales of the Revival (e.g. Alice Milligan's *The Return of Lugh LámhFhada*), this can be assumed to be a reference to him.

[40] Williams, *Immortals*, 23

anachronistic yet supernatural weapons, facing off against bullets.[41] As for the 'burning lime', this is a medieval and early modern weapon largely used in naval warfare. Its presence in Ireland in the twentieth century was not through military conflict but in the disposal of the bodies of those executed for their part in the Rising: their bodies were covered with calcium oxide in an attempt to rapidly decompose them.[42] Bullets and burning lime are thus not military tactics (although the poem plays on that use of these weapons), but the tools of prison executions and the destruction of republican remains, despite which Ireland maintains 'names that march with time'.[43]

In the pamphlet 'Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins', Alice Stopford Green writes of a new modernity that restores connections with a heroic past.[44] She writes of Michael Collins that

[41] Chapter Four addresses the changing relationship with the gods, including Óengus.
[42] It does not, in fact, decompose, but desiccates.
[43] It also evokes the idea later described by Franz Fanon, that violence is a medicine which cannot function as such if the means of violence is borrowed from the opponent. Sometimes the effort to reconnect with the past was self-conscious, betraying a lack of familiarity with medieval inheritance on the part of the writer or audience. The company Gibsol ran an ad in 1908 for a skin cream called Chuchulain, including a variety of embellished episodes from the hero's life. The choice of subject suggests some popular familiarity with the figure, and yet under the title it says 'Pronounced Coo-hoo-lan', suggesting a lack of familiarity with the name and offering only an Anglicised pronunciation. *Irish Examiner* (12 Jun. 1920), 1. Another ad describes him coming to Conchobar's court as a boy and as a young man how he 'held the passages of Ulster against the invading hosts.' It goes on to make the tenuous claim that their herbal treatment 'often defied the attacking hosts of skin disease.' The image of the warrior is a fully grown adult. *Irish Independent* (8 Apr. 1920), 8. This ad ran in papers of all political affiliations. Another ad describes him coming to Conchobar's court as a boy and as a young man how he 'held the passages of Ulster against the invading hosts.' It goes on to make the tenuous claim that their herbal treatment 'often defied the attacking hosts of skin disease.' The image of the warrior is a fully grown adult. *Irish Independent* (8 Apr.1920), 8.
[44] 'Sean Ghall' is H.E. Kenny, a historian. P.S. O'Hegarty WS #839, Bureau of Military History, 6.

> […]his coming to us was like a revelation from the old heroic world of a free Ireland. It might have been the apparition of a Cuchulain in the glory of his courage and generosity, or it might have been Fionn for his deep intuitive wisdom and wide outlook. There was no slave-mind in the making of that ancient Ireland and the new Cuchulain brought with him all the richness of its freedom of soul. Micheal O Coileain will remain one of the loftiest figures in all Irish story.[45]

This invokes a pre-conquest past as a time predating the 'slave-mind'. In linking the heroes of the Ulster and Finn tales to a republican figure of her own time, and by de-Anglicising Collins' name, she excises the time of the Anglo-Norman Invasion (1169) through the Easter Rising. Although she looks to the past, the qualities she celebrates are perfectly suited to the twentieth century: courage, generosity, wisdom and 'wide outlook'.

This modality of time is also at play in non-mythological cultural inheritance: In *Young Ireland* in 1922, a writer reviewing a book on the history of Irish law commented: 'At the present time when a new system of judiciary *is contemplated* in the Irish State a brief survey of the scope and working of the Brehon Laws may be of some interest. […] The great mass of the Brehon code was built on tradition and immemorial custom. […] The loss of these books with countless other literary treasures is due to the horrors of the English.'[46] The writer's interest in Brehon law is not regressive but an interest in building a modern legal system based on the local cultural inheritance.[47]

The second lens: the deep present

[45] A. Stopford Green in S. Ghall, *Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins* (Dublin, no date), 46. The pamphlet is undated but was released after Michael Collins' death in August 1922.
[46] 'The Brehon Laws', *Young Ireland* (30 Sep. 1922), 6.
[47] In some ways the law would have been progressive for the time, e.g. ease of divorce and women's property rights.

The second lens is that of a primordial identity understood to be eternal or outside time. This identity, with its stories and symbols, is not a representation of the past, but of an imagined continuous present.[48] In this framework, time is encompassing and nonlinear; it expands into three dimensions to encompass both real and mythical events.

In the literature itself, saga 'covers a dizzying span of time…'[49] Some tales are placed circa 1200 BCE whereas others are set in the Patrician era. Arguably the central collection of Finn material, *Acallam na Senórach,* has the fifth-century Patrick conversing with figures who are not only from a mythical timeline but from an earlier period. This medieval work already communicates nostalgia for a heroic past: 'Every hill and mound and fort he would wander by, it seemed to him hat two or three or four or five or a band of the Fían would appear, but they were only empty hill and smooth level plains with no hound or boy or warrior on them.'[50]

When stories are brought into the twentieth century, this temporal malleability continues. The literary critic Seamus Deane interpreted *fin de siècle* nationalist relationship to history as engagement with a stasis, a depthless past in which 'Saint Patrick, the eleventh century Brian Ború and the sixteenth century Red Hugh O'Donnell exist cheek by jowl with medieval Round Towers, Ossianic harpists, and contemporary Gaelic-speaking peasants…'[51] But perhaps it is the reverse: not a static point but a broadness, time that is like an ocean to

[48] A. Nandy discusses this idea from an Indian perspective in *The Intimate Enemy*. For a discussion of this concept from a physics perspective, see C. Rovelli, *The Order of Time* (London, 2019), 96-7. The idea of all time being in some sense simultaneous is not merely fanciful: it is explored in Einstein's theory of a 'block universe'.
[49] M. Williams *The Celtic Myths that Shape the Way We Think* (London, 2021), 99.
[50] A. Dooley and H. Roe, eds. and trans. *Tales of the Elders of Ireland* (Oxford, 2008), 102.
[51] Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, 50. The nineteenth century history Standish James O'Grady critiqued the seventeenth century historian Geoffrey Keating for taking legendary people for historical. G. Castle, 'Nobler Forms', *Irish Histories,* ed. McBride, 157.

dip into rather than a river flowing in one direction. It is true that many people did not know or investigate the precise dates of historical events or say for certainly whether some past figures were real, mythological or something in between. But this need not be interpreted simply as ignorance or lack of engagement with the material. This framework collapses the dichotomies of both past/present and real/mythic. Frank Drohan, a commandant in the Tipperary IRA, wrote:

> I was always interested in history, particularly the history of my country…I don't think there was very much of the history of the country—and I went as far back as the Tuatha de Danaan—that I had not studied. I read all about Oisín and such ancient heroes, the coming of St. Patrick and then what I imagined was the best of it, from the time of Brian Boru fown along through the subsequent pages of our history…I was always talking about it as well as reading about it.[52]

The conclusion to be drawn isn't that people couldn't comprehend time or reality, but that there are multiple ways to engage with these things. In this lens, time can be imagined/experienced as what I term the 'deep present', which encompasses things from the past and from outside our standard reality.

This framework allows a unity between present experience and past and mythical experiences.[53] For Terence MacSwiney, the possibly-historical pre-Christian king Cormac mac Airt and the mythical king Conn of ConChetnach (Conn Cétcathach, Conn of the Hundred Battles) were watching with the medieval king Brian Boru from Heaven.[54] With them were sixteenth century Aodh Ruadh Ó Domhnaill (Red Hugh) and seventeenth century Eoghan Ruadh Ó Néill (Owen Roe) all delighted to see 'Clan London hordes' once again

[52] F. Drohan, W.S. #6702, Bureau of Military History, 1.
[53] Ghall, *Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins*, 52.
[54] T. MacSwiney, 'How they Brought the Good News to Heaven (A Dream)' in *The Irish Volunteer* (30 May 1914), 33-7.

defied. This ventriloquism removes barriers between both the real and mythic and the dead and living.[55] Similarly, Oliver St. John Gogarty wrote of the late Arthur Griffith that 'He is with the kinsmen of his soul: Brian of the Tributes and Conn of the Hundred Fighter [sic?]'.[56] It isn't a vision of a Christian afterlife so much as a 'deep present' in which death is not an ending. And an article in *An t-Óglach* in March 1923 envisioned heroes being present, just elsewhere in the space:

> It should be remembered, that Marconi, the inventor of Wireless, is Irish, on his mother's side, and that he selected Ireland for the erection of the very first high-power transatlantic Wireless Station. It is, however, not generally known that the induction coil […] was the invention of an Irishman, Father Callan, of Maynooth College[…]
>
> Perhaps, in some other planetary system which includes Tir na NÓg, Cuchullain, Oisin, Conn of the Hundred Battles, Fionn, the Red Branch Knights, and the others of the Fighting Race who strode down the centuries before us, are 'listening in' […][57]

The 'deep present' is evident in some pages of Art O'Murnaghan's *Leabhar na hAiséirghe*, also discussed in the previous section. One leaf of the manuscript commemorates the work of Erskine Childers in the 1914 Howth gun-running that brought the Irish Volunteers 1500 rifles, as well as the unsuccessful attempt of Roger Casement in 1916 to receive arms from Germany (which resulted in his execution).

---

[55] The most famous instance of the importance of the dead in political identity is Pearse's oration at Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa's funeral: 'the fools, the fools, the fools! They have left us our Fenian dead…' E. Hull, *A History of Ireland and her People* v.II (Dublin, 1931), Appendix II.

[56] Ghall, *Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins*, 52. Gogarty participated in the War of Independence and later became a pro-Treaty senator in service of the Free State. Conn Cétchathach, the legendary high king is Conn of the Hundred *Battles* (emphasis mine). In Irish, there would be no confusion of the words for 'battle' and 'fighter'. This line shows both lack of familiarity with the source, which does not detract from its earnestness.

[57] 'The Radio Service' *An T-Óglach* (10 March, 1923), 11-13. 13.



Figure 11. S. Heise 'Leabhar na hAiséirghe' in Irish Arts Review 29:3 (Autumn 2012), 98-103. 102.

The illumination adapts medieval techniques to make something uniquely modern. On the bottom of the page is a bilingual quote from the medieval *scél Immram Brain* (Voyage of Bran): '*Trenna tuim tudchator ann tar muir glan: ba slúaiged fer Góidil co leir*. Strong the heroes who came there across the clear sea: it was a hosting—men of the Gaels in great number.' The text uses both art and saga to link the actions of Childers and Casement to the mythical voyage of the Bran, mythologising their actions. It must be noted that Art O'Murnaghan's vision of national sacrifice, and his idea of who was mythologizable, was almost solely masculine. He did begin to create a page for Cumann na mBan, but it was never completed. His work is titled 'The Men of the Harbours', yet here is an image from the 1914 Howth Gun running:



Figure 12. Trinity College Dublin MS 7890/8/55 Aboard Asgard: Mary Spring Rice and Molly Childers with guns.

The focus on those who died violently naturally focuses on men; but the lack of portrayal of women's support, sacrifice or grief is nonetheless striking. The opening page lists the names of Ireland and a number of these—Eriu, Banba and Fodla, for example—are female personifications. O'Murnaghan's work celebrates allegorical women but not human ones. The overlay of the voyages of Bran, Childers and Casement, all of which can be imagined taking place in the central depiction of water and waves, presents a masculinist vision of the 'deep present'.

References I consider are often non-specialist and it is no surprise that the time they refer to is often nonspecific. And yet that should not lead us to conclude time is being engaged with as 'flat'. In the *Red Hand* article 'The Intrinsic Value of Myth and Hero-lore', the author assessed that myths, 'because they are partly fictitious, are great realities, being

the products and embodying the trade secrets of that which is greatest in man, namely mind.'[58] The deep present suggests a single sea of space-time in which are mixed the quotidian and the heroic, the present and the mythic past. As Proinnsias O'Gallchobhair wrote in a Cumann n amban pamphlet circa 1922: 'The belief now widely held that Ireland means this generation of Irishmen seems to me to be heretical. It surely is something greater, more majestic, and eternal, infinite thing…'[59]

The third lens: a method of cultural smuggling

The third lens is the use of heroic narratives as a method of cultural smuggling: progressive ideas, often originating outside Ireland, were repackaged as unique Irish cultural heritage. This lens presents something new as a retrieval that is an essential part of Irish identity. This is examined in the Chapter Four discussion of Queen Medb. Translation may act as an 'alibi' for alterations.[60] This is particularly evident in the reimagining of women's roles and in the discussion of historical figures' voting records.

'Ancient Ireland bred warrior women' Constance Markievicz wrote, '[…] today we are in danger of being civilized by men out of existence.'[61] And Sophie Bryant, another nationalist, believed 'powerful queens like the celebrated Meave' and the texts of the seventh century Cáin Adomnaín, also known as Lex Innocentum were evidence of a history of military service.[62] These use of the past is wishfully garbled; its purpose is not to

[58] 'The Intrinsic Value of Myth and Hero-lore', *Red Hand* (1 Sep. 1920), 44.
[59] P. O'Gallchobhair, 'The Real Leaders' in Cumann na mBan, *Seachtmhain na Casga 1916-1922* (Dublin, c.1922), no pagination.
[60] Tymoczko, 'Translation, Ideology and Creativity', 27.
[61] Quoted in Beatty, *Masculinity and Power*, 81.
[62] Bryant, *Celtic Ireland,* 86.

recapitulate history but to advance women's freedom in the present. The medieval Cáin Adomnaín was intended to keep noncombatants, specifically women and children, safely out of the way during combat. Bryant interpreted the law as barring women from continued participation in combat. Her reading presumably stemmed from a desire to find female combatants in Irish history.

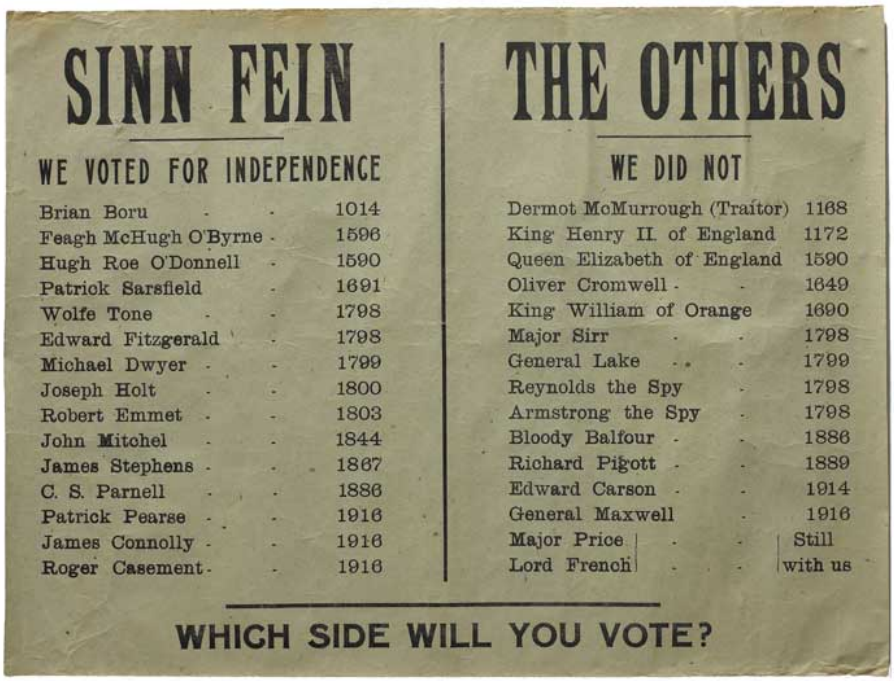
This line of reasoning was also applied to political and social empowerment. In 1916, and *Irish Citizen* editorial claimed that 'as of old', Irish civilisation was based on feminism.'[63] 'In the Gaelic civilisation, which was never quite cast down and trampled out, and which the Gaelic League and Sinn Féin organisation are attempting to rebuild, the woman was the equal of the man in all things; she never was the woman of the harem, but the proud and independent comrade of her mate.'[64] Sidney Gifford (writing as 'John Brennan') described how 'fine old' Irish civilisation 'peeps out through the worn particles of English influence', envisioning English culture as a sort of tarnished overlay.[65] Women's enfranchisement was in this instance presented as a native tradition that had been suppressed rather than as part of a networked international movement with close ties to Britain. Similarly, the 1919 *Rules and Constitution* of Cumann na mBan stated:

> Cumann na mBan is proud that its members rallied under the Republican flag in Easter Week, 1916, and claims that by taking their places in the firing line, and in every other way helping the establishment of the Irish republic, they have gained for the women of Ireland the rights that belonged to them under the old Gaelic Civilisation, where sex was no bar to citizenship, and the capacity with which they were endowed; which rights were stolen from them under English rule…[66]

[63] Quoted in L. Ryan, 'Nationalism and Feminism: The Complex Relationship between the Suffragist and Independence Movements in Ireland' in Connolly, *Revolution,* 17-32. 25.
[64] S. Gifford as 'John Brennan' in 1912 *Irish Citizen*, quoted in Ryan in Connolly, *Revolution,* 25.
[65] S. Gifford quoted in Ryan in Connolly, *Revolution,* 25.
[66] Quoted in Pašeta, *Nationalist Women*, 219.

This style of narrative sought to situate women's political and even military activities

Another context in which modern ideas are smuggled in via the past are political pamphlets citing the voting records of people from history:



SINN FEIN

WE VOTED FOR INDEPENDENCE

Brian Boru	1014
Feagh McHugh O'Byrne	1596
Hugh Roe O'Donnell	1590
Patrick Sarsfield	1691
Wolfe Tone	1798
Edward Fitzgerald	1798
Michael Dwyer	1799
Joseph Holt	1800
Robert Emmet	1803
John Mitchel	1844
James Stephens	1867
C. S. Parnell	1886
Patrick Pearse	1916
James Connolly	1916
Roger Casement	1916

THE OTHERS

WE DID NOT

Dermot McMurrough (Traitor)	1168
King Henry II. of England	1172
Queen Elizabeth of England	1590
Oliver Cromwell	1649
King William of Orange	1690
Major Sirr	1798
General Lake	1799
Reynolds the Spy	1798
Armstrong the Spy	1798
Bloody Balfour	1886
Richard Pigott	1889
Edward Carson	1914
General Maxwell	1916
Major Price	Still
Lord French	with us

WHICH SIDE WILL YOU VOTE?

Figure 13. Private Collection, electoral handbill c.1917

In this framework, history serves to substantiate participation in a relatively new party or organisation. Post-medieval history is leveraged as well:

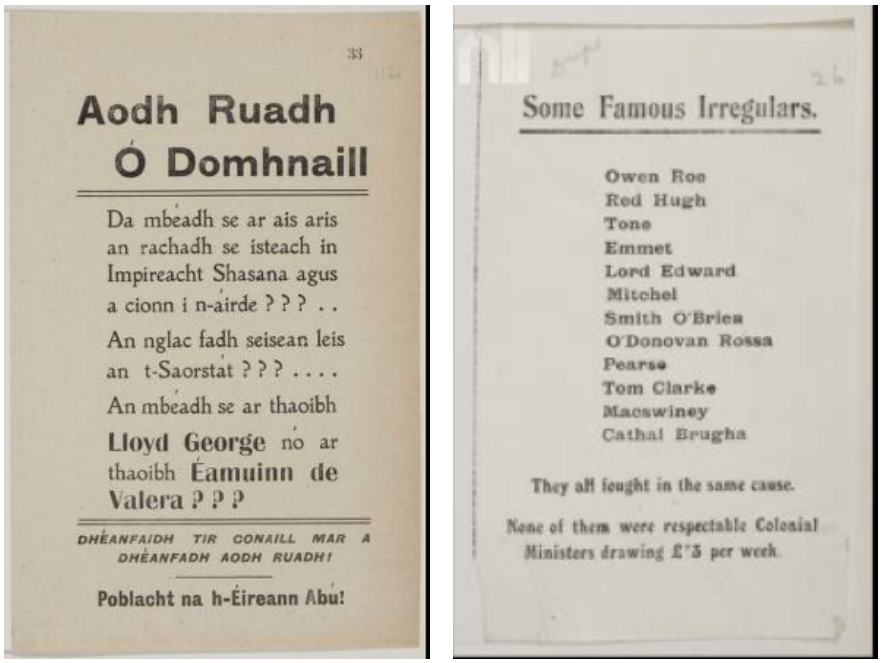


Figure 14 Private Collection, electoral handbill (c. 1919). Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS LO P 117 (51) 1916-1922…a Comparison (1922).

One 1917 IRA pamphlet asks rhetorically how the late sixteenth leader Aodh Ruadh Ó Domhnaill would have voted. It asks: '*da mbeadh se ar thaoibh **Lloyd George** no ar thoibh **Éamiunn de Valera** ???*' ('if he is on the side of **Lloyd George** or on the side of **Eamon de Valera** ???'). Similarly, a recruitment advertisement for the anti-Treaty IRA invokes the name of Eoghan Ruadh Ó Néill, and early seventeenth century leader of the Ó Néill, dynasty (whose rule dated back to medieval times). This is an apt reference, as Eoghan Ruadh rejected a 1646 treaty that had been signed between a faction of Catholics and the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, which would have compelled them to aid the Royalists during the English Civil War. Eoghan Ruadh fought against fellow Catholics rather than accept the Treaty some of his co-religionists had made with the Royalists. But were the men on this list 'Irregulars'? Both texts set up false equivalencies, inviting readers to associate their approval for past heroes with approval for current politicians.

The fourth lens: humanity and self affirmation

The fourth lens through which we can understand time is the need to look back to the past, real or imagined, to prove communal humanity and dignity in the present. The past is thus retrieved and reworked for the benefit of self-affirmation and self-fashioning. A feature of colonial dynamics is that the dominant power refuses to recognize any past but their own. As Albert Memmi wrote of the educational experience in a country under foreign rule: 'The history which is taught him is not his own.'[67] This denial creates a need to declare: 'We have a glorious past that proves our humanity'.[68] As Clinton Fluker discusses in his work on Afrofuturism, past glories have the potential to become a 'sand-trap'; they can keep a population over-focused on the need to prove their value through their past cultural achievements.[69] However, in an early twentieth century republican context, past prides and golden ages are not a sand-trap of the past but a springboard toward the future.

Revolutionary magazines such as *The Red Hand, an t-Óglach* and *Young Ireland* included substantial references to the medieval past as they looked to shape the future. Whether reprinting selections from authors such as Daniel Corkery (author of *The Hidden Ireland*) or retelling and reshaping myths through prose and poetry, the radical press incorporated the past into its vision of the future. *The Red Hand* ran a poem in November 1920 entitled 'Sinn Féin', asking readers:

> *Dá bhfilleadh Fionn Mac Cumhaill, go láidir laochta,*
> *A's Osgar le n-a thaobh a's Goll Mac Mórna,*
> *Goidé an gníomh do b' urur dóibh sa bhFódla*

[67] Memmi, 146, 149
[68] A. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Durham, North Carolina, 2017), 89
[69] C. Fluker, Some Formal Remarks Toward a Theory of Afrofuturism: Designing Liberation Technologies in Black Speculative Fiction (PhD thesis, Emory University, 2017).

Nach féidir liom, nach féidir leat, do dhéanamh?[70]

If Fionn Mac Cumhaill returned with valorous strength,
And Oscar at his side and Goll Mac Mórna,
What would be the deed accomplished by them in Ireland
Which it wouldn't be possible for me, for you, to do? [my translation]

The poem does not revel in past glories but uses the past to impart pride and a dedication to forging the best possible future.

The activist and historian Alice Stopford Green wrote in 1908 she had not met an educated man in Europe 'who does not *know* that Ireland was savage till the good Elizabeth…gently lifted it into the ranks of civilized peoples.'[71] Not only that, but the Irish were believed resistant to history: 'They are, perhaps, more ignorant of their own history, of their own writers and eminent men, than any other people in the world.'[72] Rather than recognising this as the result of an 'unequal economy of knowledge' it was seen as an inherent fault.[73] Alice Stopford Green saw 'mythistory' as part of preparation for independence and she was concerned with how things are framed. [74] She took medieval

[70] W. O'R. *The Red Hand Magazine* (1 Nov. 1920).
[71] Quoted in A. Mitchell, 'Historical Revisit: Mythistory and the Making or Ireland: Alice Stopford Green's Undoing' in *Irish Historical Studies* 44:166 (2020), 349-73.
361.
[72] G., 'Transformation',286
[73] G. Desai, *Subject to Colonialism: African Self-Fashioning and the Colonial Library* (London, 2001), 124.
[74] Pro-treaty publications engaged with similar identity projects. As the National Government grappled with government-building, *The United Irishman* considered law and citizenship in a historical context: 'It does not mean that full privileges of citizenship will 'be confined to those of pure Gaelic blood, for no such persons exist today. It does not mean that the 'Brehon; laws will be restored in their entirety as the common law of Ireland, although it is quite possible that they contain valuable legal principles worthy of investigation by our legislators. It does not mean that any attempt will be made to hinder the march of progress by restoring any obsolete social usages or to move back the clock to the period of the Tain Bo epic. But it does mean a whole-hearted recognition of the fact that Ireland is a 'mother country.' That Great Britain is not in that position as regards Ireland; that Irish children will be brought up to reverence all that is worthy of respect in Ireland's history; to be proud of the old heroic tales of the 'Ulster Cycle' and the Fianna, of the

Ireland out of an Anglocentric framework to replace it with notions of legitimate independent political entity.[75] The centenary of 1798 was a high point in public pressure to include more Irish history in the school curriculum and in 1908 history was announced to be a required part of the National University of Ireland curriculum from 1914.[76]

The author Eimar O'Duffy depicts his protagonist being given *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*. The young character reads and rereads the book. Tongue in cheek, O'Duffy says it captures him like the Catalogue of Ships, which is the densest and driest section of the *Iliad*, the hardest to love: perhaps a comment on the difficulty of getting to grips with challenging medieval texts. 'Up till then his favourite heroes had been Sir Walter Raleigh, Nelson, Wellington, and lord Roberts, but now Cuchulain and Conal and Fergus and the rest displaced them entirely. They were more heroic, more lovable, and infinitely more real.' The youthful protagonist wants to ask his uncle about this 'strange discrepancy with accepted history.'[77] Although satirical, the work effectively communicates the experience of encountering one's own history. O'Duffy was critical of sentimental nationalism over-focused on Irish uniqueness but did believe Irish cultural achievements should be

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beacon light of religion and learning held up by Ireland to Europe from the sixth century onward, of the struggle against the pagan Dane, and the Anglo-Norman, of the siege of Derry as well as of the siege of Limerick.' 'Gaelic Civilisation', *The United Irishman* (1 Sep. 1923), 3.

[75] Mitchell, 'Historical Revisit', 372-3.

[76] L. McBride, 'Young Readers and the Learning and Teaching of Irish History, 1870-1922' in L. McBride, *Reading Irish Histories: Texts, Contexts and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2003), 80-117. 97-98. The Christian Brothers emphasized Irish subjects and launched the magazine *Our Boys* in 1914 to 'enlighten and entertain.' McBride, 'Young Readers' in McBride, *Irish Histories,* 94 and 107. See also: B. Walsh, 'Schooling, the Gaelic League, and the Irish language Revival in Ireland 1831–1922', *Paedagogica Historica* (2021), 1-18.

[77] E. O'Duffy, *The Wasted Island* (London, 1929), 25.

appreciated and assessed in an international context and that, for example, the *Táin* was 'greater than the Aeneid'.[78]

Elizabeth Bloxam, a member of the Cumann na mBan executive, recalled 'Ireland's ancient culture was forgotten, and debased English standards had taken its place. The word literature applied only to English literature and precious little of what was great in that literature was read.'[79] The mythic childhoods of Fionn in the Fenian Cycle—and his counterpart from the Ulster Cycle, Cuchulainn—provided writers in the early twentieth century with the means to communicate ideologies of nationhood, independence, and civic duty to young readers…inducting a new generation of citizens into the dialogue surrounding Irish independence.[80]

The Irish-oriented curriculum of Pearse's school St. Enda's was depicted in Kenneth Sheils Reddin's recollection of his time at the school. Even as late as 1918 the awe and reverence of encountering one's native culture echoed:

> I peered in.[…]Then the voice came clear, soft, eager. At once I recognised it. - It was the voice of An Ard-Maghistir [the head teacher, i.e. Pearse], and it rehearsed one of the great epic tales of Finn; one of those tales which set the hero-figures silhouetted with sudden starkness against the white of an old heroic dawn.[…]I felt that perhaps I was an intruder- and made to escape to the Library. I bungled into something as I passed out. It creaked! "Ce ta annsin? Tar igteach,- tar igteach! ['Who is it? Come in – come in'] An Ard-Maghistir himself. I saw him rise from the fire. The tall figure reached the middle of the floor, and lighting a match flooded the Hall with light. I looked about me. Under the flaring gasolier stood the Head-master. There was a blush on his face, but he was smiling. [81]

[78] F. Flanagan, 64. For a discussion of O'Duffy's republicanism, see Flanagan's chapter, 'Eimar O'Duffy and the Waste of 1916', 65-80.
[79] E. Bloxam, W.S. #632, Bureau of Military History, 5.
[80] R. Long, 'Stories of Ancient Days': Mythological Constructs of Childhood in Independence Ireland' in C. Boylan and C. Gallagher, eds. *Constructions of the Irish Child in the Independence period, 1910-1940* (Basingstoke, 2018), 187-203. 188.
[81] 'Two Stories of St. Enda's', *New Ireland* (28 Dec. 1918), 10-11.

Irish Volunteer and Irish Republican Brotherhood member Joseph Lawless also recollected hearing stories of Finn. In the records of the Bureau of Military History, Joseph Lawless recalls his arrest in December, 1920. He was imprisoned and describes time spent with his cellmate, a similarly idealistic young man: 'We spoke of the ancient sagas of the Gael, the Red Branch and the Fianna of old, and we tried to conjure up mental pictures of the various Irish armies through the long history of our land in their victories and their defeats.'[82] In this recollection, the Finn material appears to have been a source of comfort and inspiration. The prisoners imagine the timeline of Irish conflicts, implicitly placing themselves on a timeline that includes famous battles and heroes. Lawless presents himself as the inheritor of this tradition, mixing ideas of history and saga literature.

Reflecting on his release from internment in 1923 Frank O'Connor wrote that since he 'had taken the loser's side' in the Civil War jobs were hard to come by. 'I set out for Dublin on my way to the west,' he wrote, 'like Cú Chulainn setting out for Armagh at the age of seven, though I was fourteen years older and had nothing of the heroic Spirit.'[83] Even failing to measure up to the hero, he echoes him. The use of the past, even when one doesn't measure up, reframes the present in a heroic light.

Conclusion

[82] J. Lawless, WS #11043, Bureau of Military History, 393.
[83] F. O'Connor, *An Only Child and My Father's Son* (London, 2005). O'Connor had been involved with the IRA in the War of Independence and (anti-Treaty IRA) in Cork during the Civil War. He was interned in Cork 1922-3. It's a particularly self-deprecating comparison as Cú Chulainn is supernaturally powerful age seven, whereas this man at twenty-one is defeated.

In the context of Ireland, '"modernity" is stripped of its semblance of obviousness'.[84] The postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe describes the need 'to activate those potentialities that were crippled' and this is evident here.[85] The importance of medieval tales to the republican imagination was not, in itself, un-modern or anti-modern. The retrieval of the imagined past can be a means of establishing a local modernity and imagining a national future; a means of fashioning an identity outside a linear understanding of time; a means of packing progressive ideas for wider appeal; a means of building national identity, history and dignity.

[84] J. Cleary, 'Introduction: Ireland and Modernity', *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture* ed. J. Cleary and C. Connolly (Cambridge, 2006), 2.
[85] A. Mbembe, 'Conversation with Achille Mbembe and Theo Goldberg on *Critique of Black Reason*', *Theory, Culture and Society* (3 July 2018) http://www.theoryculturesociety.org [4 Sep. 2019]. This idea builds on the work of Franz Fanon. For more information on violence in this era, see G. Clark *Everyday Violence in the Irish Civil* War; D. Fitzpatrick, *Terror in Ireland 1916-1923* (Dublin, 2012); and G. Foster *The Irish Civil War and Society: Politics, Class and Conflict* (Basingstoke, 2015).

4a. The 'Woman of Sovereignty' Reimagined: 'She'll get her divorce all right in the end'

In Cork Jail in June 1919, Constance Markievicz wrote to her sister Eva of 'Kitty' getting divorced. 'Kitty seems to be having a great look-in just now. Everyone seems to want her: I think she'll get her divorce all right in the end. No one can say she is not entitled to it.'[1] 'Kitty', an abbreviation of 'Kathleen Ni Houlihan', refers to Ireland separating from the United Kingdom. The shorthand, used to avoid the jail's censors, was also a refraction of something much older: the Sovereignty. In comparison with European personifications of nation such as John Bull, Polonia, or Marianna, this one is unusually old.[2] The figure is not a modern construction but a persistent component of Irish communal identity. The woman of Sovereignty is present in written culture from the medieval period onward as 'a metaphor that the early Irish liked to think with.'[3] Rather than being 'revived' in the Revival, the figure was still part of living culture and continued to transform to suit the requirements of the era.

Sometimes the figure is a nonspecific goddess, but more often she is named: Ériu; Banba; Fodla; the Sean Bhean Bhocht; Caitlín Ní hUallachán; Gráinne Mhaol; Moirín ní Cullionain; Sheila ni Connolan, Sigile ni Gara; Maggy Laidir and Róisín Dub.[4] She is also

[1] L. Naughton, *Markievicz: Prison Letters and Rebel Writings* (Newbridge, Kildare, 2018), 109.
[2] The abbreviation was likely chosen to get past the censors. Analogues exist outside Europe as well, such as the Jade Emperor of China. See pages 109-114 in B. Schachter, 'Beyond the Kingly Metaphor: A Sociological Reading of the "Scripture of the Jade Sovereign"', *Journal of Chinese Studies* 60. 95-156. Within Europe, some nations do have embodiments of the nation that have been in existence more than a millennium, such as Italy's 'Italia Turrita'; but these are the exception not the rule.
[3] Williams, *Celtic Myths*, 228.
[4] The spelling of nearly all these names varies over time.

known by the title the 'Sovereignty' or Flaith Érenn (the Sovereignty of Ireland). The history of the figure is opaque and enigmatic; the Sovereignty straddles the fields of religion, civil religion and the creative arts. She manifests in nationalist culture through art, music, drama and literature and is referenced in letters and memoirs. Her personification as an otherworldly or divine woman is a persistent tradition in early Irish saga; through the centuries her tradition undergoes so many mutations and shifts of emphasis that it is not at all coherent.

On the surface, this motif looks continuous: she appears in the cultural artefacts of every century, and many of the names and characteristics of the figure are consistent through time. Yet she is not a static representation of the nation. The meaning of sovereignty itself changes: in different contexts, sovereignty has been understood as residing with a homogenous ethnic group, with the inhabitants of a territory or with a divinely selected ruler, to give but a few examples. An examination of the motif reveals a palimpsest of meanings of sovereignty, as well as changes in the cultural ownership of the Woman of Sovereignty. Scholarship on the Sovereignty focuses on specific periods and iterations; she has not been considered in the broad multi-era context nor in the context of republicanism apart from discussions centred on Yeats' *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*.[5]

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this Woman of Sovereignty functioned in the national imaginary as a way to concretise the values of the emerging state and to understand, communicate, and challenge the relationship between the individual and the national community. The figure embodied ideas of sovereignty, gender and identity

[5] G.F. Dalton 'The Tradition of Blood Sacrifice to the Goddess Éire', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 63:252 (Winter 1974), 343-54. 352. Dalton does note that Yeats and his cohort draw on a tradition dating from pre-Christian Ireland.

and served as a tool and focal point for nationalist devotion.[6] In the revolutionary period, kingmaking would have seemed outmoded, oppressive, even immoral. The Sovereignty was therefore retrofitted to become part of a new identity. As a republican figure, the Sovereignty's function was no longer to bestow sovereignty upon a king. She was now imagined in terms of service, friendship, chivalric love, romance, and motherhood. This chapter will trace her evolution as an instrument of politics and identity, how she metamorphosed in order to define and serve the identities of different eras and segments of Irish society.

Origins

The Sovereignty has 'startling longevity' in underpinning political power.[7] The origins of the figure may be a Neolithic goddess; but the lack of pre-medieval narrative writing means her Neolithic and Iron Age origins are open to conjecture.[8] Although Celticists have long attempted to reconstruct the details of pre-Christian rituals and belief systems, the limited artefacts and writings from this era mean it is unlikely we will ever have a solid understanding of the figure's early history.

[6] 'Woman of sovereignty', 'sovereignty goddess' and 'sovereignty figure' are modern scholarly terms not used by medieval or early modern writers. However, the figure may be identified as 'The Sovereignty' within a medieval text, as in *Baile in Scáil,* in which the figure identifies herself with the title 'Flaithi Érenn', 'The Sovereignty of Ireland'. Whilst it is plausible all versions of her are echoes of an original goddess or goddesses, this is not certain, and if she is a goddess she spends much of her history in reverse-euhemerism, this chapter refers to her as a 'figure' rather than a goddess.

[7] Williams, *Immortals*, 53.

[8] B. Freitag considers the figure's origins in *Sheela-na-Gigs: Unravelling and Enigma* (New York, 2004).

Initially, the function of a woman of Sovereignty appears to have been to validate a man's rule. Embodying the land, the figure 'controlled the fertility and prosperity of a territory and granted a king power to rule over its inhabitants.' [9] As Miranda Green infers in *Celtic Goddesses*, 'She was the goddess of the land, the spirit or essence of Ireland itself, and on her depended the fortunes, fertility and prosperity of her territory.'[10] She goes on to write, perhaps with too much confidence, that 'the nature of the goddess embraced not only guardianship of the land but also promiscuous sexuality, fertility, physical force and death'.[11] The figure encompassed dualities such as violent death and the flourishing of the land and community.[12] She is likely a crucial aspect of how pre-Christian Irish communities envisioned the acquisition and maintenance of royal power.[13] The precise nature of her cultural role is debated, as is the extent to which her cultural importance was religious.[14]

The Medieval Woman of Sovereignty

It is a plausible hypothesis that in pre-Christian Ireland, the Sovereignty was understood to be a goddess (or multiple local goddesses). However, by the time she appeared in medieval texts she, like other divine figures, had been reverse-euhemerised—demoted from divine

[9] M. Green, *Celtic Goddesses* (London, 1995), 70.
[10] Green, *Goddesses,* 70
[11] Green, *Goddesses,* 70
[12] These dualities are sometimes drawn together through the blood having a fertilising function.
[13] Williams, *Immortals*, 52. D. Bessai claims other Celtic cultures have evidence of a goddess whose primary concern is the flourishing of the land; but this figure appears more frequently in Ireland than in other places. D. Bessai, 'Who was Cathleen Ni Houlihan?', *The Malahat Review* 42 (Apr 1977, 115. Green, *Goddesses,* 70. For an example of this motif in another culture, see the marriage of Prydain and Britain in twelfth century poems of Prdydd y Moch as discussed by T. Charles-Edwards in *Wales and the Britons,* 325.
[14] Williams, *Immortals*, 52.

status.[15] For her subsequent history she is not a goddess but 'an ideological personification.'[16] The Woman of Sovereignty is present in written culture from the medieval period onward and it is difficult to know how she was understood in the medieval tradition, whether as a literary motif or a 'ghost of a forgotten religion' or both.[17] In medieval Ireland, writing and book production took place in a Christian environment, which impacted the nature of the written material.[18]

The woman of Sovereignty in medieval tales emerged from a tradition of pre-Christian sacral kingship, meaning her relationship with a king (often through a *hieros gamos*, sacred marriage), made him an agent of sacred or otherworldy power.[19] 'The wellbeing of the social and cosmic order at large is connected to the person of the king and his ability to rule', and the goddess mediated this process.[20] By the medieval period, however, narratives of the woman of Sovereignty were likely conceived of more as a part of cultural imagination than a living, literal cultural practice.[21] In *Irish Kings and High Kings,* Francis Byrne argues that attempts to Christianise Irish kingship amounted to 'little more

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[15] A notable version of a sovereignty figure not considered here is Saint Brigid. Brigid appears as a representation of Ireland or its sovereignty, but space constraints prevent a specific discussion of her here. For more on Brigid as a sovereignty figure, see P. Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology* (London, 1983), 93.
[16] Williams, *Immortals*, 228.
[17] R. Breatnach, 'The Lady and the King: A Theme of Irish Literature', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 42:167 (Autumn 1953), 334.
[18] Williams, *Immortals*, 46.
[19] D.A. Binchy, ed. *Críth Gablach* (Dublin, 1979). In the medieval period, these tales coexisted with a legalistic understanding of kingship. The legal tradition addresses kingship through works such as the law text *Críth Gablach*, which lay out a framework for good governance.
[20] T. Sjöblom, 'On the Threshold: the Sacredness of Borders in Early Irish Literature', *Ulidia*, ed. J.P. Mallory and G. Stockman (Belfast, 1994), 159-65. 160.
[21] A queen's relationship to her king indicated the integrity of his sovereignty in the medieval literary tradition. E. Gray, 'The Warrior Poet and the King: "The Three Sins of the Warrior" and "The Death of Cú Roí", Nagy, Joseph and Jones, eds. *Heroic Poets and Poetic Heroes in Celtic Tradition* (Dublin: 2000), 74-90. 84.

than enamelling'.[22] However, the literary evidence suggests early Irish kingship was strongly shaped by Christianity. The literary genre of *tecosca ríg* ('advice to kings') literature views kingship in a Christian framework. While the narrative framework and rituals of kingship carried on a pagan tradition, it was blended with Christian ideals.[23] Kingship literature 'directly engaged with a continuing Western Catholic dialogue on the constitution of Christian kingship. The insular clerics […] used the] genre [of *tecosca ríg* and its other insular analogues] to create a theoretical, constitutional model of authoritative kingship based on scriptural precedent.'[24] In medieval tales, 'creative authors…hybridized their native inheritance with a vast body of classical and Christian learning, thereby engaging with the issues and demands of their own times.'[25] The holistic understanding of kingship was shaped by Christian notions of virtue and justice. The acquisition of kingship imagined in the tales studied here were produced in a Christian context and appear to retain a partly pre-Christian shape.

Tales of the Sovereignty contain elements of the following essential framework: a man encounters the Sovereignty (she approaches him, rather than vice versa) in the form of a young woman or a *puella senilis*; a drink is offered to the man in a royal cup; the man and the Sovereignty have an erotic interaction; if the Sovereignty is a *puella senilis* she may or

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[22] F. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (Dublin, 2001), 255.
[23] K. McCone cites texts such as *Audacht Morainn* and *Tecosca Cormaic* in *Pagan Past and Christian Present* (Maynooth, 1990).
[24] J. Grigg, 'The Just King and De Duodecim Abusiuis Saeculi', *Parergon* 27 (2010), 27-52. 50. Notably however, she never took on the characteristics of New Jerusalem, an allegorical bride passively adorned for a human husband: 'And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' (Rev. 21:2). This is iconically problematised by Kim McCone in *Pagan Past Christian Present*. It is critiqued in 2010 by Julianna Grigg, and both sides of this issue and explored by Andrew McQuaid in his dissertation: 'Advice for Kings: an Investigation into a Subdivision of Early Irish Wisdom Literature' (University of Glasgow, 2017).
[25] Williams, *Immortals*, 45.

may not transform into a young woman; the Sovereignty promises or bestows sovereignty upon the man.[26] Elements of this framework appear in various tales including *Baile in Scáil* (the oldest extant example), *Echtrae Chonnlai, Eachtra Airt mheic Cuinn, Echtra Mac nEchach Muigmedóin,* and possibly the character of Queen Medb in the *Táin Bo Cuáilnge.*[27] In some tales, the existence of the motif is more tenuous, such as Étain in *Tochmarc Étain* and Deirdre in *Longes mac nUislenn*.[28]

Perhaps the most iconic version of the motif is *Echtra Mac nEchach Muigmedóin*, 'The Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Mugmedon', which survives in the fourteenth century *Yellow Book of Lecan* and several other sources.[29] The work is a 'loathly lady' story

[26] Outline adapted from R. Breatneach, 'The Lady and the King', 334. An element of this motif also appears in *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig*, an early eighth century chronicle (surviving in a sixteenth century manuscript), which begins the list of kings in Tara by stating that they all drank the drink of sovereignty. B. Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* (Dublin, 2000), 67. Another potential aspect of this motif found in chronicles (eg, the *Annals of Connacht*), is the *banais rí*, or 'wedding feast of a king' in which the king marries the land. For example, the *Annals of Connacht* and the *Annals of Loch Cé* preserve a coronation story in which a king is described as marrying the province of Connacht in 1310. The coronation was a 'wedding feast'. Breatneach, 'The Lady and the King', 328. This is thought to be an aspect of the same *hieros gamos* motif present in the *tales ,* but it is convincingly challenged by B. Jaski in *Early Irish Kingship and Succession*. The meaning of the 'wedding feast' may thus be less straightforward than it appears.

[27] In *Eachtra Airt Mheic Cuinn,* a malevolent enchantress functions as an anti-Sovereignty figure when she marries the king and the land withers. Sessle makes an unusual argument for Medb as a negative manifestation of this figure, an externally beautiful but internally untransformed version of the *puella senilis*. E. Sessle, 'Misogyny and Medb: approaching Medb with Feminist Criticism', *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales* ed. P. Mallory and G. Stockman (Belfast, 1994), 135–138. Medb is also discussed by Bessai and Byrne (Bessai, 'Who was Cathleen Ni Houlihan?', 12; Byrne, *Kings and High-Kings,* 51).

[28] Williams notes that in *Tochmarc* Étan the title character is 'persistently half identified with the sovereignty goddess'. Williams, *Immortals*, 88. In a 2018 lecture, Gregory Toner wisely cautioned against using too broad and diluted an understanding of the sovereignty. G. Toner, *Manifestations of Sovereignty in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge, 2018), 4.

[29] *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* 'The adventures of the sons of Eochaid Muigmedóin' also Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 512 dates from the fifteenth or sixteenth century and is the only complete extant copy of the tale. A. G. van Hamel Foundation for Celtic Studies. 'Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 512' CODECS (2022).

from the Historical Cycle and concerns Níall Noígíallach (Níall of the Nine Hostages), a historical king who died in the mid-fifth century.[30] In this tale, he and his three brothers are cooking game and go in search of water. The brothers find a well but it is guarded by a hag who demands a kiss in exchange for water. While the brothers refuse, Níall offers the hag not only a kiss but sex. She reveals herself as the Sovereignty and offers Níall the kingship.[31]

A second tale with an overt sovereignty motif is *Baile in Scáil* ('The Phantom's Frenzy').[32] This work, preserved in a fifteenth or sixteenth century manuscript, predates *Echtra Mac nEchach Muigmedóin*. It tells the story of Conn Cétchathach (Conn of the Hundred Battles) becoming king. After a druid interprets supernatural portents of his kingship, the two men are transported to an Otherworldly house, where they are greeted by the god Lug (here a phantom-like man). A young woman sits in the throne wearing a golden crown.[33]

In these two texts, the Sovereignty is a supernatural woman confirming or bestowing power upon a man. When comparing these conceptions of the Sovereignty to their twentieth century analogues, three characteristics stand out: the selection of the king, the king's agency, and the political nature of the kingship. Eligibility for kingship (theoretically) required one be male and *rígdamna*, 'material of a king', meaning one had a kinship connection to kings.[34] A figure explicitly identified as the Sovereignty does not interact with

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[30] Byrne, *Kings and High-Kings*, 81.
[31] This narrative has been analysed in the work of R. Breatnach, 'The Lady and the King', and F. Byrne, *Kings and High-Kings*. Sex is essential in most tales. L. Craig, '"A Type of Her Race and His Own": The Celtic Sovereignty Goddess Tradition in Portrait of a Young Man' in *James Joyce Quarterly* 45:1 (Fall 2007), 69-83. 72.
[32] K. Meyer, *Baile in Scáil* (Cork, 2013). Also K. Murray, *Baile in Scail: The Phantom's Frenzy* 58 (Dublin, 2004).
[33] '*Ocus ba sí an ingen bói isin tig for a ciond Flaithi Érenn co práth*'. Meyer, *Baile in Scáil*, 460.
[34] Jaski, *Kingship and Succession,* 27.

women or with mortal men who are not *rígdamna*. In literature and in practice, it was desirable for a king to not only be *rígdamna*, but also to have *febas,* excellence, and qualities such as wealth and high social standing.[35] In a Sovereignty-figure tale, the figure discerns 'the men most likely to be successful rulers of Ireland—men who have proved themselves adept at battle, exhibited bravery, kindness, or wisdom, or treated the goddesses [i.e. the women of Sovereignty] themselves with particular respect or devotion.'[36] From the middle ages to the seventeenth century, the ruler was the personification of the body politic; so it follows that a figure concerned with rule would be interested only in rulers, and only rulers would be interested in her.[37] As the understanding of political society shifted in later centuries, a more republican and egalitarian understanding of the figure developed. She moved from a literature intended almost solely for aristocrats to the more socially broad national imaginary of republican Ireland becoming a figure who might act as a sweetheart, mother or patron for any person who honoured her—regardless of their social class.[38]

In both *tales ,* the future king is ignorant of the purpose of the interaction he has with the Sovereignty. In *Echtra Mac nEchach Muigmedóin*, the brothers do not appear to know the hag's identity and Níall's motives for offering her sex are opaque: whether they stem from a desire for water, or for sex, or are prompted by his destined kingship is unclear. The brothers may be *rígdamna,* but they are not actively seeking kingship, or any form of

[35] Jaski, *Kingship and Succession,* 29. For more information on the qualities of an Irish king, see T. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kingship* (Oxford, 2001).
[36] *Baile in Scáil*, 72.
[37] F. Hinsley, *Sovereignty* (Cambridge, 1986), 130.
[38] How far down in society the content medieval *tales* penetrated is a matter of conjecture, but the works were certainly not intended for a popular audience. T. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kingship,* 137.

service to their land or people. In *Baile in Scáil,* Conn Cétchathach's role is completely passive. In contrast, twentieth century iterations of a woman of Sovereignty are imagined as embodiments of a national community whom one may choose to serve and sacrifice for. This reflects the notion of political empowerment and participation, retaining the sacral dimension of interactions with the figure but reframing them as deliberate, voluntary, and open to all social classes and genders. The shift from the receipt of kingship from its custodian to a relationship of active service is part of changing ideas of the relationship between the individual and the political community, and political enfranchisement as an ongoing process rather than something granted at a fixed point in time.

Lastly, the medieval figure is not the Sovereignty of the island of Ireland. At any date from the fifth through twelfth centuries, there were likely no fewer than 100 kings ruling a population of fewer than a half million people.[39] The social structure was tribal and rural.[40] By the late seventh century there was some concept of a king's rule over the island, but it was unrealised.[41] Kingship was personal, direct, and the population may have had intense local patriotism; but even a sense of provincial patriotism was slow to develop.[42] A *rí tuaith* (the most local level of king) would have had more power local than any form of over-king, but no power outside his own *tuath* (roughly translated as 'petty kingdom'). Concepts of high king (an *ard rí*, a king at a higher level than *a rí cóiced* or provincial king) appeared by

[39] Jaski gives the figure of 100, while Byrne gives 150. Jaski, *Kingship and Succession,* 37; Byrne, *Kings and High-Kings,* 7. Thomas Charles-Edwards note that this number reduces significantly between the seventh and twelfth centuries. Charles-Edwards, 'When is a *Túath* Not a *Túath* and a Church Not a Church' Celtic Seminar (Oxford, 30 Jan 2020).
[40] Byrne, *Kings and High-Kings*, 28
[41] Bóruma was an over-king in the south in the late tenth century and tried to establish rule over the island but died in the Battle of Clontarf. English, *Irish Freedom,* 34-5.
[42] Byrne, *Kings and High-Kings,* 27, 43. Ireland is divided into five provinces, and *rí cóiced* means 'king of a fifth'.

the sixth century, but functioned more as a cultural idea than a cultural practice. Although the kingship of Tara does appear to historically have been the 'summit of regality', the idea of an island-wide monarchy, or even a monarchy divided between the seats of Tara and Cashel, is an invented tradition, which appears particularly strongly in the seventeenth century and Gaelic Revival.[43] In the revolutionary period, the woman of Sovereignty functions as an embodiment of the entire island, or as a sort of patron saint to the nationalist or republican community throughout the island (and abroad).

The Sovereignty may give the appearance of being an ossified tradition; but she is ever-changing. The medieval texts engage with an older tradition that had unready undergone metamorphosis by the time they were recorded. The figure persists in the national imaginary of the twentieth century, but she develops to encapsulate the changing nature of society, shedding her role as an ordainer or selector of kings and becoming a more widely accessible figure.

The *Aisling* Tradition of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century

The high kingship of Ireland ended with Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair at the close of the twelfth century.[44] After him, in poetry and other forms of cultural expression, Ireland was often characterised as either 'a widowed queen who had survived the deaths of a long line of royal husbands' or 'a sorrowful unwedded woman, like the lovelorn Maiden of the *aislingí*,

[43] Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kingship*, 482. Byrne, *Kings and High-Kings,* 41.
[44] As well as the disputed claim of Brian mac Néill Ruaidh Ó Néill in 1250, the disputed Scottish claim of Edward the Bruce in 1315, and the disputed claim of Henry VIII in 1542: Dalton, 'Blood Sacrifice', 345. As discussed in the previous section, the high kingship did not encompass the entire island until Henry VIII's claim.

awaiting a worthy mate'.[45] Around 1580, the poet Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn urged Conn O'Donnell of Donegal to take the kingship. In his poem, Ó Huiginn characterises Ireland as a 'luckless widow' and 'uncared-for' woman. He exhorts O'Donnell to 'Raise the veil' on the land and to '[e]mbrace her, go to her couch' despite her being 'dragon-like'.[46] A few years later, another poet, Eochaid Ó hEoghusa, wrote an ode to Hugh Maguire, the Lord of Fermanagh, describing Maguire as courting Ireland: She is an ugly woman, wrote Ó hEoghusa, but 'a transformation is at hand.'[47] In the same century, the poet Eoghan Rua Ó Néill opens a poem lamenting, 'Do chaill Éire a chéile fíre', Ireland has lost her true husband.[48]

The *aisling,* or 'vision', poets of the early modern period imagined a new relationship between kingship and the Sovereignty. In her medieval permutations the figure is powerful, bestowing some of her power on men who are worthy. Her role is custodial; a king requires her approval. In the medieval loathly lady narrative of *Echtra Mac nEchach Muigmedóin,* she comes to the men and demands the kiss required for her transformation. In the sixteenth century praise poems above, the figure retains the capacity to be frighteningly powerful ('dragon-like') but she is more human; she must be courted, and she is described with passive language: A man must go to her; a man must raise her veil; a man must court her. She must be rescued, restored or transformed.

The *aisling* tradition is prominent in seventeenth and eighteenth century Irish poetry. In the poetic narrative, a sleeping poet sees a abeautiful young woman, who is the

[45] Breatneach, 'The Lady and the King', 325.
[46] T. Ó Huiginn quoted in Dalton, 'Blood Sacrifice', 345.
[47] E. Ó hEoghusa quoted in Dalton, 'Blood Sacrifice', 346. It was not to be, as Maguire departed in the Flight of the Earls.
[48] J. Leerssen, 'Antiquarian Research: Patriotism to Nationalism', *Talam an Eisc: Canadian and Irish Essays*, ed. C. Byrne and M. Harry (Halifax, Nova Scotia: 1986), 71-83. 174.

true bride of the Irish kings. The *aisling* figure appears as a maiden or a *spéir-bhean* (sky woman), or occasionally a *puella senilis*. She grieves that her rightful husband is in exile.[49] As Declan Kiberd describes it: 'The authors of the eighteenth century *aisling* poems evoked in luscious detail the image of a passive, blonde *spéirbhean* (sky-woman), filled with vague longing and half-articulated desire, awaiting her deliverer'.[50] This reflex of the Sovereignty is hamstrung in the absence of her male counterpart. The narrative format is a product of the Williamite War in Ireland (1688-1691) in which James II and William of Orange struggled for supremacy. After the latter's victory, James II and the House of Stuart retained significant Irish Catholic support and the poems often express longing for a Stuart ruler.

The *aislingí* expanded to include a ballad tradition in the eighteenth century and the *aisling* woman was identified with a widening array of sovereignty characters. Risteard Breathneach credits the invention of new personas for the Sovereignty as an attempt to expand poetically within the restrictive *aisling* narrative: she became Caitilin ni Uallachan, Moirin ni Chullionain, Sheila ni Connolan, Sighile ni Gara, Grana Uaile, Maggy Laidir and Roisin Dub.[51] It is through the *aisling* tradition that the woman of Sovereignty took on the

[49] In 1707 Jonathan Swift published a parodic inversion of the *aisling* tradition. 'The Story of an Injured Lady', imagines Ireland as England's discarded lover. She has been abandoned for Scotland, a hag. The work is a commentary on the 1707 Act of Union of England and Scotland: *The Story of the Injured Lady* (London, 1746). Kiberd calls in an 'anti-aisling' in his chapter 'Jonathan Swift: A Colonial Outsider?', *Irish Classics* (Cambridge, 2001), 74.
[50] D. Kiberd, 'Irish literature and Irish History', *Oxford History of Ireland* (Oxford, 2001) ed. R. Foster, 230-281. 238-9.
[51] Bessai, 'Who was Cathleen Ni Houlihan?', 115. In the patriotic tradition from the seventeenth century onward, Síle became a name that stood for Ireland, and all variations of her are sovereignty figures who 'waste away without a royal suitor'. Freitag, *Sheela-na-gigs,* 56. The first poetic 'Caitilin ni Uallachan' was probably from 1739, during the War of Jenkins' ear, in a poem by Liak Ó hIfearnáin. 'Liak Ó hIfearnáin', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2022), www.oxforddnb.com [3 Apr. 2022].

multiplicity of personas that she possesses in the revolutionary period.[52] The woman of the *aisling* poems typically mourns the vacant high-kingship and/or pines for a Stuart king. [53]

Aogán Ó Rathaille (c. 1675 - 1729), credited as the originator of aisling poetry, imagined the figure in a particularly vulnerable context.[54] He describes a dream encounter with a figure possessing 'bruinn bhuacaigh' ('buoyant breasts') and eyes glittering like crystal ('Criostal an chriostail').[55] The narrator is put in fetters and watches the sobbing Woman of Sovereignty be sexually assaulted.

> *'S mo bhruinneal ar bruinnibh ag bruinnire bruin-rtuacach*
> And my fair maiden – on [your] breasts a quarrelsome churl [is] at-caressing[56]

[52] e.g. Caitlin Ní Houlihan and Grainne Mhaol.

[53] Aisling poetry was not the only manifestation of the sovereignty figure in the Early Modern period. In the second half of the eighteenth century, secret societies of Na Buachaillí Bána (Whiteboys), also known as Levellers, developed in response to multiple economic injustices. Their actions were a response to evictions, excessive priests' dues, tithe collection and rack rents. Members of these society engaged in threats, violence and property destruction against landlords, and acquired the name because they wore white undershirts as outerwear and adorned their hats with the Jacobite symbol of a white cockades.[53] The Buachaillí Bána called themselves the Children of Queen Sadhbh Amhaltach. They claimed to follow Sheila Meskill, also known as Joan Meskill or Johanna Meskill. Meskill is a real surname but connected to *meisce* (intoxication), which fits into the framework of a sovereignty figure offering a drink. The name Grainne is invoked as well, seemingly a conflation of Áine the goddess with Grainne Mhaol. The group called themselves the Children of Queen Sadhbh Amhaltach and sometimes said they acted under 'sanction of being faeries.' In 1762 an oath found on an apprehended member refers to the group as 'Sive Oulthos's children.' J. Donnelly Jr. 'The Whiteboy Movement, 1761-5', *Irish Historical Studies* 21:81 (Mar. 1978), 20-54. See also Kelly, E. 'Sadhbh [Sive]: Ancestral Goddess of *Munster' Irish Lives Remembered*, 51 (Winter 2020), 30-42.

[54] Aogán Ó Rathaille 'probably was the last of our poets to enjoy in any appreciable measure the old poetic privileges'. S. O'Tauam, *Repossessions: Selected Essays on the Irish Poetic Heritage* (Cork, 1995), 118.

[55] A. Ó Rathaille. *Dánta Aodhagáin Uí Rathaille; the Poems of Egan O'Rahilly* v.3 ed. P. Dineen and T. O'Donoghue, ed. J. MacErlean (London, 1911). 18.

[56] Ó Rathaille, *Dánta Aodhagáin*, 20.

In imaginings such as this, the Sovereignty is a custodian of rule only in the most passive sense. Her supernatural beauty works against her. All she can do is await rescue. This limiting poetic format soon turned stale. The theme became intellectually exhausted through an 'obsessive' poetic focus on the vacant High-Kingship, which was furthermore being proffered to James II, who was neither Irish nor likely to take up the role.[57]

The *aisling* figure underwent a metamorphosis in the nineteenth century. Some of the same limited tropes did continue (Young she is and fair she is and would be crowned a queen/Were the kings son at home here with Kathaleen-Ny-Houlahan) but alongside a new imagining.[58] Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847), the Catholic political activist, replaced the Stuarts as the focus of some *aislingí*. For example, in the ballad 'Erin's Green Shore', the dream-maiden is O'Connell's daughter:

> She resembled the goddess of freedom,
> And green was the mantle she wore,
> Bound round with the shamrock and roses
> That grew along Erin's green shore[59]

Here the *aisling* woman is goddess-like, but also the daughter of a political activist and an activist herself. 'I've come to awaken my brethren/That slumber on Erin's green shore', she

[57] Poets addressed a similar marriage narrative to local chieftans, urging them to wed the widowed nation. Breatnach, 'The Lady and the King', 325-6. The *aisling* girl did make occasional appearances later in history, as in Brendan Behan's ballad commemorating Michael Collins, who had died in 1922. Ah, curse the times and sad the loss my heart to crucify[…]/My princely love, can ageless love do more than tell to you/Go raibh mile maith agat for all you tried to do/For all you did, and would have done, my enemies to destroy/I'll mourn your name and praise your fame/forever, my Laughing Boy.'

[58] James Mangan in 1845: 'Think her not a ghastly hag, too hideous to be seen/Call her not unseemly names, our matchless Kathaleen/Young she is and fair she is and would be crowned a queen/Were the kings son at home here with Kathaleen-Ny-Houlahan.' J. Mangan, 'Kathaleen-Ny-Houlahan', *The Irish Penny Journal* 1:29 (16 January, 1841), 228-9.

[59] D. Wilgus, 'The Aisling and the Cowboy: Some Unnoticed Influences of Irish Vision Poetry on Anglo-American Balladry', *Western Folklore* 44:4 (1985), 255–300. 273.

tells the dreamer. This new iteration harbingered a new conception of the Sovereignty, in which the figure's aim is not bestowing or legitimising kingship but achieving freedom and reform.

The *aisling* framework did persist through the revolution, in part thanks to the success of Daniel Corkery's book *Hidden Ireland,* which devotes a great deal of space to *aisling* tradition.[60] Corkery was an IRA commandant during War of Independence, and Geraldine Neesson recalled in her memoir 'a considerable influence on formidable young minds.'[61]

Desexualisation and Political Ambiguity in the Revival

Fine de siècle writers and artists, and Yeats in particular, revived a visionary, supernatural motif that had not been at the cultural forefront since the *aisling* tradition.[62] The most striking characteristics in the Revival period are the desexualisation and age of the woman of Sovereignty, and the political ambiguity of her desires.[63]

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[60] D. Corkery, *Hidden Ireland* (Dublin, 1956).
[61] G. Neeson, *In My Minds Eye…The Cork I Knew and Loved* (Dublin, 2001), 77.
[62] Bessai, 'Who was Cathleen Ni Houlihan?', 114. *The Secret Rose*, *Red Hanrahans Song*, *Player Queen* and *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* all engage with the theme of transformation. Dalton, 'Blood Sacrifice', 351. *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* was the first production by the Irish Literary Theatre, starring Maud Gonne, and 'nationalist fervor ran high throughout the audience'. Bessai, 'Who was Cathleen Ni Houlihan?', 114.
[63] In the intervening years, one of the interesting trends is the medicalisation of the personified Ireland. In the early nineteenth century, some political pamphlets referred to an ailing personified nation as 'Sheelagh (i.e. Ireland)'. In one, she complained: 'For six hundred years I have tasted nor peace nor happiness from the solicitations, the treachery and the violence of Mr Bull', with her 'doctor' describing her as emaciated and dejected. Freitag, *Sheela-na-gig,* 56. Another development that space constraints prevents this chapter from investigating is how, as the nineteenth century progressed, Ireland was 'increasingly imagined in wifely terms' in a colonial context: Valente, 'The Myth of Sovereignty', 189.

Alongside the alluring *aisling* figure, the motif of a 'Harlot Queen' had become popular in verse in the seventeenth century and persisted through the eighteenth century. She was depicted as the mistress of the ruler who oppressed her, unfaithful to her true spouse (or the memory of him).[64] In some depictions she is 'old and ugly and fickle and lewd'.[65] In the late seventeenth century, Dáibhi O'Bruadair wrote of the personified Ireland:

> *Don méirorig mná níor granda an malairt*
> *caomtac cáirdis cáic do glacad*
> *ba séadac sám ba sátac seascair*
> *gan éagnac smail do ba 'na n-aice.*
>
> Nor to the shameless harlot hath the change been hateful,
> Who now with all in common shares her love's embraces;
> Once in wealth and peace, in affluence and comfort,
> Amid her own she lived, without disgrace or insult…[66]

Eugene O'Curry translated this same piece, more accurately rendering the description of the figure as 'decayed' rather than 'shameless'.[67] The characterisation calls to mind representations of Jerusalem. In the Book of Lamentations Jerusalem is addressed:

> And thy renowme went foorth among the heathen for thy beautie: for it was perfect through my comelinesse which I had put vpon thee, sayth the Lord God.
>
> But thou diddest trust in thine owne beauty, and playedst the harlot, because of thy renowne, and powredst out thy fornications on euery one that passed by; his it was.[68]

[64] Breatnach, 'The Lady and the King', 323-4.
[65] Breatnach, 'The Lady and the King', 323.
[66] D. Ó Bruadair, *Duanaire Ḋáiḃiḋ Uí Ḃruadair: The poems of David Ó Bruadair* (Boston, 1910), 30-31.
[67] Quoted in R. Clark, *The Great Queens: Irish Goddesses from the Morrígan to Cathleen Ní Houlihan* (Gerrard's Cross, Buckinghamshire, 1991), 170.
[68] Ezekiel (16: 14) King James Bible Online. *King James Bible* (2022). https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/1611_Ezekiel-Chapter-16/

In *Pagan past and Christian Present*, Kim McCone argues persuasively that the woman of sovereignty 'may well be the end-product of the ecclesiastical enrichment of potent native symbols with biblical concepts and exegetical insights'.[69] It is plausible that the invectives against the Sovereignty are influenced by biblical texts that would have been familiar to the poets. Ireland is at once raised to the status of Jerusalem and chastised for her liaisons with foreign rulers.

In the later nineteenth century it was no longer acceptable to criticise the Sovereignty's promiscuity: she had become 'an ideal' and '[could] not be a harlot, even under duress'.[70] Revivalist interpretations often invoked an older woman, such as the Shan Van Vocht or Cathleen Ni Houlihan as the Sovereignty. These figures were devoid of any erotic temptation, in some cases even lacking the possibility of an erotic past.[71] In *Cathleen Ní Houlihan*, Yeats' 1902 play set in 1798, Cathleen exclaims that although many men have come to her—'[she] never set out the bed for any!'.[72]

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[69] McCone, *Pagan Past,* 158. McCone writes that 'her literary role of sexually symbolic mediation in tandem with the king between this world and the other, man and god, matched and foreshadowed that of Christ's bride the Church in medieval Christian ideology and allegory', citing Ephesians (5:22-24), which exhorts wives to submit to their husbands as the Church does to Jesus: '*Sed sicut Ecclesia subiecta est Christo, ita et mulieres viris suis in omnibus*'.

[70] Clark, *Great Queens,* 171.

[71] An exception is a 1918 letter from Maud Gonne to Yeats, in which she describes a dream in which she was the Sovereignty, marrying Yeats who took the form of the god Lug. M. Gonne. A. MacBride White and A.N. Jeffares, eds. *The Gonne-Yeats Letters, 1893-1938* (Syracuse, NY, 1994), 99. However, this interaction was part of a discourse that was more mystical than national.

[72] Medb is still sometimes a promiscuous character, but in a context that downplays her association with sovereignty and instead plays up her independence and strong will, eg, Thomas Rolleston writing that she 'took what husbands she wished and dismissed them at pleasure; for she was as fierce and strong as a goddess of war, and knew no law but her own wild will': T. Rolleston, *Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race* (London, 1922), 202. Medb's treatment is considered in more depth in Chapter 4b.

Within Revival culture, the Sovereignty lost connection with the idea of a rightful king. She became elusive and mystical, coloured by the late Victorian and Edwardian interest occult nationalism. Gonne and Yeats exchanged letters about visions of the god Lug, druids, and 'the ceremonies of the cauldron, the stone'.[73] The Cathleen Ní Houlihan In Yeats and Augusta Gregory's eponymous play, first performed in 1902, is interested in sacrifice, not prosperity.[74] With no hope of victory, she expects tragedy: 'Many a man has died for love of me…If anyone would give me help he must give me himself, he must give me all…They that have red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake, and for all that, they will think they are well paid…'[75] She is characterized by fatalism and nostalgia, and the sacrifice she requires is romantic self-destruction rather than an articulated political goal.

Yeats wrote 'you cannot keep the idea of a nation alive where there are no national institutions to reverence, no national success to admire, without a model of it in the mind of the people. You can call it 'Kathleen-ni-Houlihan or the 'Shan Van Vocht…'[76] But Yeats was not a political separatist. In a 1914 lecture, Yeats spoke of the importance of art for art's sake and not forcing every Irish book or poem to 'shoulder some political idea.'[77] He saw the world war, and perhaps any war, as 'a brutal interruption of the cultural project.'[78] And the cultural project was not for everyone. In a letter to Maud Gonne in early 1903, he told her:

> You possess your influence in Ireland very largely because you come to the people from above. You present a superior class, a class whose people are more independent, have a more beautiful life…Maud Gonne is surrounded with romance…It was our work to teach a few strong aristocratic spirits that to

[73] M. Gonne, *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne: A Servant of the Queen*, ed. A. Jeffares and A.M. White (Chicago, 1994), 99.
[74] Clark, *Great Queens,* 185.
[75] W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Works in Verse and Prose of William Butler Yeats* 4 (Stratford-Upon-Avon, 1908), 47.
[76] Quoted in Dwan, *Great Community,* 15.
[77] W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats* X, ed. C. Johnson (New York, 2000).
[78] D. Kiberd, *After Ireland* (Cambridge, 2017), 4.

> believe the soul was immortal & that one prospered *if one laid upon oneself* an heroic discipline in living & send them to uplift the nation.[79]

Yeats complained in his autobiography that a movement 'first of poetry' eventually became a movement of 'abstraction and hatred.'[80] Yeats and most other Anglo-Irish elites involved in the cultural output of the Revival did not want the Sovereignty to bestow power on a new ruler. Their engagement with tropes of heroism and national mythology, was largely romantic and conservative and Yeats' political perspective was increasingly undemocratic.[81] His Cathleen Ní Houlihan was a peasant, a noble savage.[82] She called for sacrifice, but the sacrifice was romantic and doomed, and her vision of the future was murky.

Yeats, not himself a republican, eventually realised the falcon could no longer hear the falconer. A friend recalled:

> Immediately after Easter Week, by way of a joke, I said to him that I would tell the British authorities that he, with his Kathleen Ní Houlihan, was responsible for the rising. Later on, this idea troubled him so much, that he referred to it, in one of his last poems. One might under-estimate that influence of the play, which had an enormous effect, previous to the Rising.[83]

That poem was 'The Man and the Echo', written 1938, in which the poet asked, 'Did that play of mine send out/Certain men the English shot'?[84]

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[79] Yeats to Gonne, objecting to her marriage to MacBride circa Jan 1903 in MacBride White and Jeffares, *Gonne-Yeats Letters,* 165.
[80] Quoted in Dwan, *Great Community,* 15.
[81] Yeats' politics have been examined by many scholars, including Declan Kiberd, Roy Foster Mary Helen Thuente, Joe Cleary and John Hutchinson.
[82] Clark, *Great Queens,* 174-6.
[83] P. Little, WS #169, Bureau of Military History, 61.
[84] W.B. Yeats, *Collected Poems* (London, 1950), 393.

The revolutionary figure: Demanding sacrifice, exhorting to victory

'The effect of [Yeats and Gregory's] play on the young men and women of the Gaelic League and [later] Sinn Fein was profound.'[85] After the 1902 performance of *Cathleen Ní Houlihan*, the Woman of Sovereignty gained new cultural prominence and transitioned from a motif of Anglo-Irish Revivalists toward increasingly republican ownership. This section will consider the republican use of this figure, focusing on the examples of Cathleen Ní Houlihan and the Sean Bhean Bhocht.

Maud Gonne gifted Pearse's school St. Enda's with Beatrice Elvery's 1907 painting 'Eire', depicting the nation as an imposing Madonna figure:



Figure 15. F. McNally, 'Fanning the Flames of Revolution: an Irishman's Diary about Beatrice Elvery' Irish Times (20 May 2015).

[85] R. Brennan, WS #779, Bureau of Military History, 13.

Unlike most paintings of this archetype, the Madonna figure does not dandle, or even touch, the child on her lap. The Jesus figure (identified by the artist as 'presumably Young Ireland'), reaches out to the viewer in a demanding pose. The naked figures beneath the green cloak are ignored and appear sheltered but uncomforted. The assemblage in the background, described by Elvery as a 'ghostly crowd of martyrs, patriots, saints and scholars', are praying, presumably, but posed submissively; they stand at a remove, with their bodies and faces turned away. The Madonna's halo is a grave marker and the glow behind her could be dawn or an inferno. In her memoir, the artist prefaces her description of the work by saying, 'I had been very impressed by Yeats's Cathleen ni Houlihan'.[86] Elvery's envisionment of the figure elides devotional Catholic imagery with a dark, demanding Cathleen ni Houlihan.[87] And the artist recalled: 'I met one of the boys from the school and he told me this picture has inspired him "to die for Ireland"!'[88]

As the revolutionary era began, the figure retained her function as a requirer and receiver of sacrifice, but as the violence of the revolutionary era began the clarity of her requirements sharpened. Roger Casement's last words were reportedly 'for God and Kathleen ni Houlihane'.[89] That same year, Seumas O'Sullivan's poem 'Rosaleen' was published in *Aftermath of Easter Week* to raise money for the Irish National Aid and Volunteers' Dependents Fund.[90] It commemorated the dead with a blend of Sovereignty and crucifixion imagery: 'Little Dark Rose, the rain is in their faces/[…]/Red wine of joy stains

[86] B. Elvery, *Today We will Only Gossip* (London, 1964), 90.
[87] R. Kennedy, 'Visual Culture in the Irish Revolution', *Atlas*, 900-916. 914.
[88] Elvery claims, ingenuously, to be 'shocked'. Elvery, *Today We will Only Gossip*, 90-1. Kennedy, 'Visual Culture', *Atlas*, ed. Crowley et al., 914.
[89] English, *Irish Freedom*, 274.
[90] a.k.a. James Sullivan Starkey.

every pierced side.'[91] When raids began on Limerick Volunteers' homes in May 1916, a widow described a couple of her acquaintance bearing 'the troubles as well as they could regarding it as their share of the suffering to be borne for Caitlin ni Ullacain'.[92] Similarly, in her 1947 memoir *Life and the Dream*, Mary Column recalled being at a wedding in which the bride's mother commented that the groom had 'suffered for Grania Uaile'.[93] For Kevin O'Shiel, an Irish Volunteer who was reluctant to engage in violence for religious reasons, the drive toward physical force nationalism was 'the mad goddess' and her adherents were 'sacrificial priests, offering victims of blood on her altars, in many cases our own blood.'[94] Constance Markievicz's sister Eva Gore-Booth (personally a pacifist but enmeshed in republican culture) responded to the executions of the Easter Rising's leaders by describing how Ireland's 'ideal gesture remain[ed] through the ages "the laughing gesture of a young man going into battle or climbing a gibbet." The cry of Kathleen ni Hoolihan is ever in her people's ears: "He died for love of me; many a man has died for love of me."' [95] Rather than bestowing kingship she functioned as a sacred witness to male sacrifice.

As the revolutionary era progressed she did not demand sacrifice so much as *service*. Sacrifice was a potential byproduct, but less often the focus. IRA commandant Patrick Casey saw the choice in World War I as 'those who were to accept the domination of

[91] S. O'Sullivan, Seamus, quoted in WS #807, Bureau of Military History, 4. This poem was published in the pamphlet *The Aftermath of Easter Week* in 1917.
[92] M. Clancy, #WS 806, Bureau of Military History, 10. Widow of George Clancy Limerick, who was killed by British Forces, March 1921.
[93] M. Colum, *Life and the Dream* (Garden City NY, 1947), 56.
[94] K. O'Shiel, #WS 1770, Bureau of Military History, 155. 'With the Truce, 'Cathleen ni Houiihan released from bondage became visible, and the horrible creature she became destroyed all romance.' Flanagan quoting a 1922 letter to Louise Gates, May 1922, 148
[95] S. Tiernan, *The Political Writings of Eva Gore-Booth* (Manchester, 2015), 215. The double quotes are where Gore-Booth is quoting Pearse.

Britain' against 'those few who preferred to serve Cáitlin Ní Houlihan'.[96] Cumann na mBan member Aoife de Burca wrote of the sacrifices of Tom Clarke and how he was 'as fresh and untiring as ever in the cause of Roisin Dubh. It goes to prove what sacrifices a man who has genuine patriotism is willing to make, and what a noble cause it is that can produce such men.'[97] In 1917, after Thomas Ashe's memorial, the attendees pledged their 'undying allegiance' to 'Dark Rosaleen.'[98] In 1938, Maud Gonne titled her memoir of the Revival era *A Servant of the Queen* in reference to Cathleen Ní Houlihan.

In her guise as the Sean Bhean Bhocht, the figure required loyalty and urged her followers to victory. The Sean Bhean Bhocht ('poor old woman') is not quite a *puella senilis* but seems to be a permanently old figure, a hag or *cailleach*. Only poor weather had prevented a landing at Bantry Bay in 1776, and the quintessential song of the Shan Van Vocht is from that conflict, anticipating French intervention on Ireland's behalf:

> O! the French are in the bay,
> They'll be here without delay,
> And the Orange will decay,
> Says the Sean-Bhean Bhocht.[99]

The figure came to prominence again around the centenary. Alice Milligan (pen name Iris Olkyrn), and Anna Johnson (pen name Ethna Carberry) founded the *Shan Van Vocht newspaper* in Belfast in January 1896.[100] The paper became a respected source of nationalist

[96] P. Casey, #WS 1148, Bureau of Military History, 2.
[97] A. de Burca, WS #359, Bureau of Military History, 36. Clarke was executed for his role in the Rising.
[98] F. Phillips, WS #585, Bureau of Military History, 4.
[99] D.K. Wilgus. 'The Aisling and the Cowboy: Some Unnoticed Influences of Irish Vision Poetry on Anglo-American Balladry', *Western Folklore* 44:4 (1985) 255–300. 276.
[100] Alice Milligan was the daughter of a Protestant clergyman and Anna Johnson was a Catholic.

media and helped to foster interest in the separatist cause.[101] In 1918 The eighteenth century song was adapted in 1918 to bolster De Valera's bid for election:

> We recall the time last year
> Says the Shan Van Vocht,
> When the members raised their cheer
> Says the Shan Van Vocht.
> Pearse and Plunkett both are dead,
> East Clare to their cause is wed,
> Loyal she'll be, let it be said
> Says the Shan Van Vocht.[102]

Unlike the Celtic Twilight visions of the figure, the Sean Bhean Bhocht required political action and expected victory.

Gráinne Mhaol could function similarly. A sixteenth century land-owner, sea captain and activist, Grainne Mhaol later became elided with embodiments of the nation. Ernie O'Malley, who was an IRA officer in the War of Independence, recalled: 'In the minds of the people her name, Gráinne Uaile, had become bound up with the symbolism of the nation.'[103] He describes the selection of this as the marching song of the Volunteers.

> *'Sé do bheatha, a bhean ba léanmhar*
> *do bé ár gcreach tú bheith i ngéibhinn*
> *do dhúiche bhreá i seilbh meirleach*
> *'s tú díolta leis na Gallaibh.*
>
> **[Chorus]** *Óró, sé do bheatha bhaile*
> *óró, sé do bheatha bhaile*
> *óró, sé do bheatha bhaile*
> *anois ar theacht an tsamhraidh.*
>
> *Tá Gráinne Mhaol ag teacht thar sáile*
> *óglaigh armtha léi mar gharda,*
> *Gaeil iad féin is ní Francaigh ná Spáinnigh*
> *'s cuirfidh siad ruaig ar Ghallaibh.*

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[101] The paper was later transferred to the control of Arthur Griffith and became the *United Irishman*.

[102] Dublin, National Library of Ireland LO P 116 (46) 'Eyewitness: The Shan Van Vocht!' (1917). This is not the first time the song was adapted in support of a political candidate. For example, in 1868 the lyrics were adapted in a Cork Election: J. O'Callaghan, 'A new song in praise of Maguire and Murphy. The people's candidate!' (Cork, 1868). Also in 'The Coming Elections' *Kerry News* (31 Dec. 1913), 3, concerning the Tralee election.

[103] E. O'Malley, *On Another Man's Wound* (Cork, 2013), 25. O'Malley was later the assistant chief of staff in the anti-Treaty IRA in the Civil War.

Chorus

A bhuí le Rí na bhFeart go bhfeiceam
muna mbeam beo ina dhiaidh ach seachtain
Gráinne Mhaol agus míle gaiscíoch
ag fógairt fáin ar Ghallaibh.
Chorus

Hail, oh woman, who was so afflicted,
It was our ruin that you were in chains,
Your fine land in the possession of thieves...
While you were sold to the foreigners!

[Chorus] Oh-ro, welcome home
Oh-ro, welcome home
Oh-ro, welcome home
Now that summer's coming!

Grace O'Malley is coming over the sea,
Armed warriors as her guard,
Only Gaels are they, not French nor Spanish...
and they will rout the foreigners!
Chorus

May it please the King of Wonders that we might see,
Although we may live but one week after,
Grace O'Malley and a thousand warriors...
Sending the foreigners packing!
Chorus[104]

Here she is figured, like the earlier figure and the historical Gráinne Mhaol, as someone who leads her people to victory. Thus the use of the figure by republicans after 1916 demonstrates a subtle but distinct pivot from mournful self-sacrifice toward service and expected victory.

[104] O'Malley, *Wound,* 183-4.

Personalised: an object of love

As the Woman of Sovereignty was incorporated into the republican national imaginary, she became enmeshed in the movement's values. Sovereignty in the abstract is the basic rule of coexistence within both a domestic and international system. It is the basis of a political entity's actions, and is used to justify the use of force.[105] Before the revolutionary era, conceptions of sovereignty embodied in the Woman of Sovereignty had been neither democratic nor republican. As a republican figure, the Sovereignty's function was no longer to bestow sovereignty upon a king. Instead she formed a bond with the members of a nascent republic.[106]

In this poem from 1923, it is the internee who wants to crown the Sovereignty, not the other way around. The prisoner writes, 'we will place the Freedoms Crown/Once more on Rosey's head':

[105] T. Biersteker, and C. Weber, eds. *State Sovereignty as a Social Construc*t (Cambridge, 1996), 1.

[106] Sjöblom, 'On the Threshold', *Ulidia*, ed. J.P. Mallory and G. Stockman, 160. A curious variation of this is the memoir of Sean O'Faolain, who breathlessly describes his bond with his fellow Irish Volunteers as 'almost like coupling lovers' as they became 'one with the emotion of Ireland.' S. O'Faolain, S. *Vive Moi!* (London, 1965), 137.

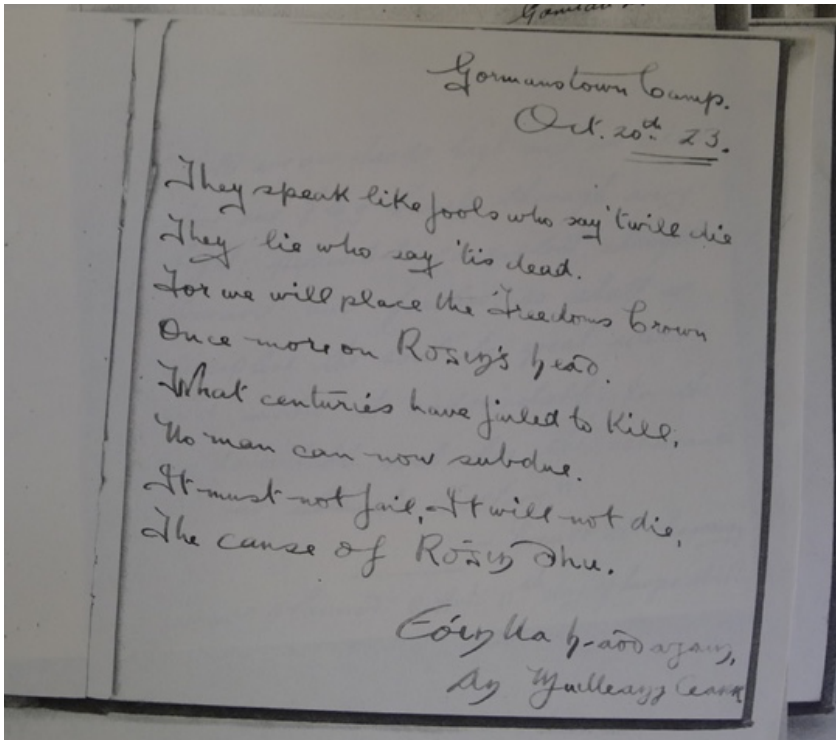


Figure 16. Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS 33,717. Autograph Book by Inmates of Gormanston Prison Camp (1923).

This reverses the dynamic of the medieval kingship narratives. The individual works to restore the status of the polity rather than seeking individual status.

As the nineteenth century progressed, Ireland had 'increasingly [been] imagined in wifely terms' in a British context.[107] Perhaps in response to this, republicans then fashioned her as their own wife, sweetheart, or object of quasi-chivalric erotic devotion.[108] She could occasionally be the desired wife of a political leader, as shown in this pro-Treaty political cartoon in which she rejects her suitor De Valera in favour of Michael Collins:

[107] Valente, 'The Myth of Sovereignty', 189.
[108] A. Gregory, *Kincora: A Drama in Three Acts* (New York, 1905), no pagination. Lady Gregory has Brian Bóruma say, 'I will never break faith with my sweetheart'.



Figure 17. Dublin, National Library of Ireland, EPH C480. The Rejected Suitor (1922).

Republican writing more often imagines the figure as a sweetheart or powerful, demanding mistress. 1918 Seamus Robinson was arrested for drilling the IRA. In jail, he sang Mangan's romantic and erotic nineteenth century 'My Dark Rosaleen'. Later his comrades teased him for deserving jail time 'for singing that sacred song in such a desecrated place'.[109] And in mourning for Sean MacDermott, Aoife de Burca wrote: 'The pity of it, that he should be gone from amongst us, never again to do or dare for his dear "Dark Rosaleen."'[110] Louis

[109] M. Davern, WS #909, Bureau of Military History, 11.
[110] A. de Burca WS #359, Bureau of Military History, 16. Róisín was the daughter of Aodh Mór Ó Néill, the Earl of Tyrone. She married (or was betrothed to) Aodh Ruadh Ó Domhnaill in 1587. He later divorced her and she married a subordinate chief, who then left her, and through this narrative she became a symbol of a wronged nation. Dalton, 'Blood Sacrifice', 348-9. She became a figure in the pre-aisling ballad tradition developed into one of the most popular representations in the land in 1849 when the poet and translator James Mangan refashioned an early modern ballad thought to be addressed to her. Mangan making the

Walsh describes republican prisoners seized by 'helpless loneliness'. 'But they knew that they were serving the "Dark Rosaleen" of their dreams, and their love for her made all things easy.' [111] The phrase appropriates Matthew (19:26): 'But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.'

Some twentieth century poems revised the *aisling* tradition. Many writers left poems in autograph books, often seeming to riff on the work of John Clarence Mangan. A prisoner in Mountjoy Prison's hospital in 1923 wrote of Roisin sending his pulse thrilling:

ballad into an ode to the nation. The lyrics '*Dá mbeadh seisreach agam threabhfainn in aghaidh na gcnoc/is dhéanfainn oisceal i lar an aifrinn do mo Róisín Dubh*' ('If I had six horses I would plough against the hill/I'd make Roisin Dubh my Gospel in the middle of Mass') change to 'I could plough the high hills/Oh, I could kneel all night in prayer'. Thomas Kinsella's 1981 translation quoted in S. Moran, *Patrick Pearse and the Politics of Redemption: The Mind of the Easter Rising, 1916* (Washington DC, 1994), 87. For additional discussion of the ballad, see Christin Mulligan's chapter 'En-"vision"-ing a Goddess of Sovereignty in a "State" of Conflict' in her book *Geofeminism in Irish and Diasporic Culture: Intimate Cartographies* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2019), 13-33. Mangan's poem is used often in the revolutionary period. For example, it's set to music in an Easter Week Commemoration Concert organised by Cumann na mBan in 1922. Cumann na mBan, *Seachtmhain na Casga 1916-1922* (Dublin, c.1922).

[111] L. Walsh, *'On My Keeping' and in Theirs: A Record of Experiences 'On the Run' in Derry Gaol and in Ballykinlar Internment Camp* (Dublin, 1921), 30.

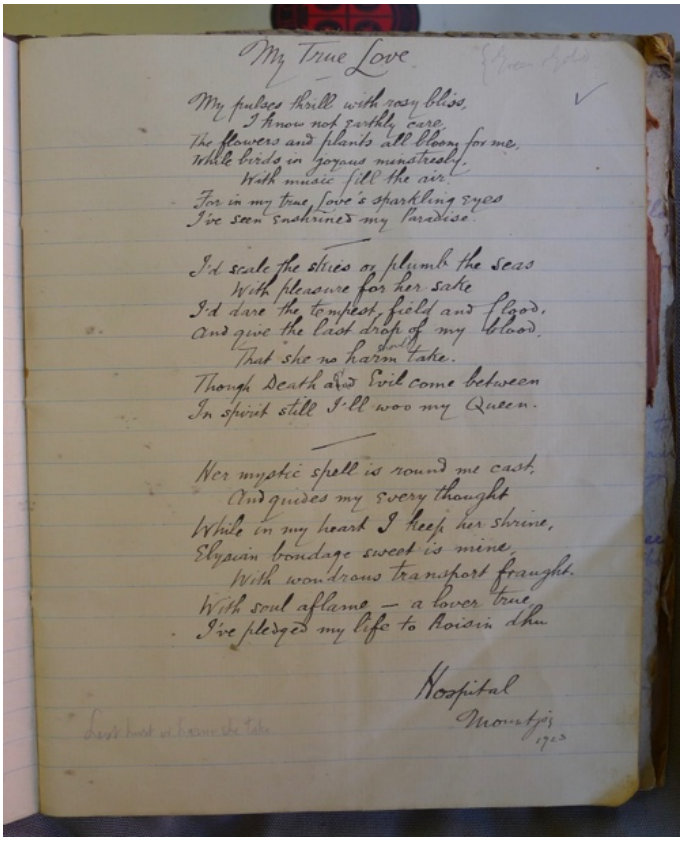


Figure 18. Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS 34,956 Poems of Prison Camp and Cell (Ballykinlar, Hare Park and Mountjoy) (1921-3).

In the example above, the writer would complete any feat not to enhance his own power but to keep 'Roisin' from harm. The fervent, erotic tone and the eagerness for obedient service are not unusual for the revolutionary era. A prisoner in 1921 wrote:

> Scorning all danger, disowning all fearing
> Ireland your captive forever I'll be.
> My body in chains is brought to you Eire,
> You heed not the gyres that bind my weak hands…'[112]

[112] Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS 42,139 Republican Autograph Album Compiled at Ballykinlar Internment Camp by Brian O'Kennedy (c.1919-21).

It seems likely that the author, not familiar with falconry, mistook 'gyre' to mean 'jesses' after reading Yeats' recently published 'The Second Coming'.[113] Thus he imagines simultaneously as a human prisoner and as a falcon, wearing gyres and ready listen to his falconer. Weak in comparison with her, but brave, the writer offers to remain a captive in any political outcome.

Similarly, a Catholic priest looked back on the men of 1916 'who felt a strange stirring of the blood, the periodic eruption of the national consciousness…' He recalled how those men heard the call of past heroes and did '"a hard, sweet thing". Almost with naked hands they "went out against the Gall" to do knightly service even unto death for "The passionate Dark Rose whose strange surprise/Of beauty nerved them to their enterprise".'[114] In this framework, the figures of both the Sovereignty and the men who serve her are erotically charged. This motif of struggle and release, alongside images of submissive service, surface often, particularly in autograph books from prison camps.

In some recollections, the Sovereignty was approachable and humanised and functioned as a tongue-in-cheek code for those whose conversation or correspondence was not private. One man recalled, 'I had made many friends and connections through my political activities, and found myself being drawn more and more to their sympathetic company to discuss the multitudinous and all-absorbing affairs of that exacting lady, Cathleen Ni Houlihan.'[115] In 1917 in Lewes Jail, IRA member Seamus Doyle writes that 'In

[113] 'Turning and turning in the widening gyre/The falcon cannot hear the falconer/Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold/Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world/The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere/The ceremony of innocence is drowned/The best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity.' From W.B. Yeats, 'The Second Coming', *Collected Poems* (London, 1950), 235.
[114] P. Doyle, WS #807, Bureau of Military History, 3.
[115] K. O'Shiel, WS #1770, Bureau of Military History, 697.

Lewes we were able to get a good deal of news from home by means of the poetic names of Ireland'.[116] Letters got past the censors by referring to a 'friend' Caitlín Ní hUallachain and that 'she had made a good recovery', In one case the governor calls in one of the men to inquiry how his 'dear lady friend' is of interest to so many other men as well—'She must be very clever indeed to keep you all on her hands at the same time!', he exclaimed.[117] Another prisoner recounted the same incident in the form of a transcript:

> Governor: 'Who is Miss Houlihan to whom you so frequently refer in your letters?'
> Murray: 'She is a girl I met in the Gaelic League.'
> Governor: 'Has she ever been in jail?'
> Murray: (By a supreme effort keeping a straight face) 'No'
> Governor: 'Is she a bad character?'
> Murray: 'No.'
> Governor: 'Well, there must be something wrong. The Home Office has directed me to expunge all referenced to her in letters in our prison.'[118]

Although the discussion of Miss Houlihan was a code, she is nonetheless a reflex of the Sovereignty. The accessibility of the figure to those who are not kings and *aisling* poets is the outcome of changes in socio-political values.

Real women and the allegorical Sovereignty

In the revolutionary era the woman of Sovereignty moved away from the model of an otherworldly apparition squinted at through a Celtic Twilight: one of the forms she occasionally took was that of a woman with socially liberal twentieth-century values.

[116] S. Doyle, WS #1343, Bureau of Military History, 8.
[117] G. Doyle, WS #1511, Bureau of Military History, 72.
[118] S. Doyle, WS #1343, Bureau of Military History, 8.

Despite this, the figure's role as a female symbol of sovereignty was not entirely beneficial to women in republican culture.

In Cork Jail in June 1919, Constance Markievicz wrote to her sister Eva of 'Kitty' getting divorced. 'Kitty seems to be having a great look-in just now. Everyone seems to want her: I think she'll get her divorce all right in the end. No one can say she is not entitled to it.'[119] The topic of divorce was still scandalous, and it would be impossible to read of Kitty's divorce without thinking of the 1890 divorce of Charles Stewart Parnell's partner Katharine (Kitty) O'Shea and the ensuing scandal. By writing about the nation as a woman who is divorcing an unsuitable husband, Markievicz fashions a female idea of the nation itself as a modern progressive woman. As in the exchange about the girl from the Gaelic League in the previous section, Markievicz may have been writing to avoid censorship. Regardless, her vision of the nation seeking a divorce is a subversive one: if the nation herself could do it, surely the nation's women could?

And yet human women were not participants in the sovereignty narrative. The narrative described paternalistic rule: the figure conferred sovereignty on a king, never a queen. The poet Eavan Boland considers this problem in her book *Object Lessons*:

> What female figure was there to identify with? None. The heroine, as such, was utterly passive. She was Ireland or Hibernia. She was stamped, as a rubbed-away mark, on silver or gold; a compromised regal figure on a throne…Her flesh was wood or ink or marble. And she had no speaking part. Her identity was an image.'[120]

[119] Naughton, *Markievicz,* 109.
[120] She refers here to a later era, but the critique may be applied to the earlier part of the century. E. Boland, *Object Lessons* (Manchester, 1995), 66.

This is part of a broader framework of nationalism and war that 'exploit[s] the female body for symbolic, abstract purposes.[121] As the poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill describes it: the image of a woman 'comes to stand for abstract concepts like justice, liberty or national sovereignty.'[122] At the same time, men are held up as the source of meaningful and exemplary human behaviour. The nation-as-a-woman reinforces a restrictive idea of a passive woman. Ireland as female 'exonerates it from aggressive and oppressive intent' and taps into ideas about protecting women and making sacrifices for them.[123] In some cases the woman of Sovereignty is like a real woman (e.g. seeking a divorce); but in some ways in this era it is the real women who are like territory. As the literary scholar Tina O'Toole argues, women could be 'guarantors of male status, bearers of male honour, and scapegoats for male errors.'[124]

Real women making political gestures could be read as personifications of the Sovereignty. In a recollection echoing Níall Noígaíllach kissing the 'hag' of the medieval tale, Ernie O'Malley described encounters with older women during the War of Independence. Sometimes a woman who gave shelter would bid him farewell 'and press a strong firm kiss on my mouth…for the moment I was her son…it was as if Ireland herself, An Shan Van Vocht, the Poor Old Woman, had saluted the one who was fighting for her.' [125] Whilst his

[121] E. Longley, *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland* (Newcastle Upon Tyne, 1994), 173.
[122] Ní Dhomhnaill 'An T-Anam Mothala/The Feeling Soul : The Woman Poet in the Irish Tradition', *Études Irlandaises* (1994), 27-52. 48.
[123] Longley, *Living Stream*, 189 .
[124] T. O'Toole, *The Irish New Woman* (New York, 2013), 9.
[125] E. O'Malley, *Army without Banners* (London, 1937), 165.

interpretation elevates the women's actions to mythic ritual significance, it does so at the expense of their human agency.[126]

'[G]uerilla war blurs the boundaries between home front and battlefront and, in so doing, challenges the duality of masculinity and femininity.'[127] In some instances the sovereignty figure pushes back against this. The use of both young and old archetypes of the nation allowed men to 'enact a range of masculine roles' being both a lover and a devoted son.[128] This dynamic 'helped to construct appropriate roles for women: caring mothers and selfless assistants'.[129]

Conclusion

The Woman of Sovereignty spans so much time and culture that this has been just a fragment of her history. The figure was initially interested only in granting power to Irish elites, particularly kings. In the early modern *aisling* tradition, the figure becomes an embodiment of the nation rather than the nation's custodian. The Gaelic Revival made her political aims misty and ambiguous. In the revolutionary period, the Sovereignty had many

[126] One way around this was to frame one's activism as genderless. Marie Perolz described her work as a courier in which she travelled to Dubgarvin with an urgent message of the Rising and walked into the male recipient's bedroom: 'That time we did not think about sex or anything else. We were all soldiers and I was only bothered about what I could do for Kate Houlihan.' M. Perolz [nee Flanagan] WS #246, Bureau of Military History, 4. And indeed, despite the feverish poetry written to the sovereignty, Ernie O'Malley insisted of his time as an insurgent: 'There were no affairs.' O'Malley, *Wound*, 159.

[127] L. Ryan, 'Reforming and Reframing: Newspaper Representations of Mary Bowles and the War of Independence, 1919-21', *Irish Women at War: The Twentieth Century* ed. McIntosh, G. and D. Urquhart (Dublin, 2010), 35-50. 47.

[128] Ryan, 'Reforming and Reframing', *Women at War* ed. McIntosh and Urquhart, 36. This quote refers to the ideas of C.L. Innes in *Woman and Nation*.

[129] Ryan, 'Reforming and Reframing', *Women at War* ed. McIntosh and Urquhart, 36

of the same names and features as she had in previous centuries; but the nuances of her imagining were specific to her political context. The sovereignty continued to articulate the ties between the sovereign and land. The function in this period is less about embodying the land or ordaining a king and more about defining and focusing a (frequently masculinist) political community.

4b. Queen Medb Reimagined: 'All myths have many meanings'

In 1916, the poet and dramatist Eva Gore-Booth published an extract from one of her plays in honour of the dead of the Easter Rising. *The Death of Fionavar, from the Triumph of Maeve* forefronted female subjectivity and imagined a future for Queen Medb in which she turned from worldly to spiritual concerns.[1] Anticipating criticism for departing from familiar versions of the tale, Gore-Booth began her introduction to the work with the following defence: '[A]ll myths have many meanings, perhaps as many as the minds who know them'.[2] This observation is particularly true with regard to female figures from Irish epic literature.

Nationalist self-fashioning often pointed to *men*–from the legendary Cú Chulainn to the medieval king Brian Bóruma to the eighteenth-century rebel Wolfe Tone–as embodiments of culture, pride, bravery and independence. Men dominated the 'canon of national valour'.[3] National self-fashioning often pointed to legendary and historical men–from Cú Chulainn to Brian Bóruma to Wolfe Tone–as embodiments of culture, pride, masculinity, bravery and independence. When women participated in revolutionary politics or violence, they were stereotyped by some (both inside and outside revolutionary movements) as either unsexed, hateful furies or frivolous, ignorant girls.[4]

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[1] Gore-Booth's play was reviewed in the *Irish Citizen* (1 Oct. 1918), 3.
[2] E. Gore-Booth, *The Death of Fionavar from the Triumph of Maeve* (London, 1916), 11.
[3] Horne, 'Masculinity in Politics and War, *Masculinities in Politics and War* ed. Dudink, Hagemannt and Tosh, 28.
[4] Eg. P. O'Hegarty, *Victory of Sinn Féin*, 57, 102-3. See also: Elizabeth Yeats referred to arrested Cumann na mBan activists as 'silly girls'. A. Ryan-Christensen, 'Meet Máire "Mollie" Gill, War of Independence Revolutionary, Cuala Press Cultural Activist and All Ireland Winning Camogie Captain'. RTÉ. (25 Jul. 2022) http://dx.doi.org/10.1021/ac0354342.

In the 1910s and 1920s, women's rights and social roles were contested subjects in militant nationalist circles. In December 1914, for example, an article in *The Irish Citizen* described how the republican activist Thomas MacDonaugh had 'exerted himself within the Volunteers to secure the recognition of the women's movement' but had failed to sway the organisation to 'embody liberty for women in their constitution.'[5] Activists questioned whether national emancipation or women's enfranchisement was the more urgent priority and debated what a woman's role should be in violent conflict and in government.[6] In 1918, women over the age of thirty gained the vote, provided they met the property and education requirements.[7] The women of Cumann na mBan and other nationalist organisations were crucial to the 1918 election and, in that year, feminists provided a list of potential women candidates to all major political parties.[8] Activities such as standing for office and electioneering were not only political accomplishments for women but included a high risk of violence, particularly in rural areas.[9]

As nationalists grappled with the meaning and boundaries of womanhood, this struggle incorporated stories from medieval literature. The compelling women and extreme situations of saga provided an opportunity for defining and representing Irish

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[5] Quoted in Pašeta, *Nationalist Women*, 144-5.
[6] Senia Pašeta corrects the historical record regarding tensions between feminist and nationalism, arguing: 'There is very little evidence that lasting and fatal divisions between suffragists and separatist nationalist women developed as a result of some public disagreement between both camps.' This tension has often been overstated. 'Sinn Fein *was* broadly supportive of feminist demands' and most advanced nationalist women maintained support for both nationalist and feminist agendas. Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 105-9.
[7] C. McGing, 'Women's Political Representation in Dáil Éireann in Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary Ireland', *Revolution* ed. Connolly, 85-100. 85. This chapter outlines the history of women voting and holding office in this era and the debates surrounding this activities.
[8] Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 260.
[9] Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 256-9.

womanhood.[10] Women of Irish-language sagas such as Medb, Deirdre and Emer could be packaged as an authoritative tradition of Irish femininity. With varied and malleable narrative traditions that treated topics such as a woman's power within a marriage, political leadership, personal agency, and violence, these stories became bound up with republican identity.

In the revolutionary period, the legendary Queen Medb of Connaught was the subject of art and literature and the namesake of children (such as the daughter of the revolutionary leader Constance Markievicz') and of branches of organisational such as the radical women's group Inghinidhe na Éireann (1900-1914).[11] The legendary Queen Medb is one of the central figures of the medieval Irish-language Ulster Cycle, written in Middle Irish: Her defining feature is her determination to have personal and political sovereignty at any cost. She is a driving force of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, the epic centrepiece of the cycle. It is her tallying of her personal property against that of her husband, in a bid to determine who holds the balance of power in their marriage, that sets off a chain of events that leads to a war between the Irish provinces. As a medieval figure, her character leaves scholars with questions about how medieval audiences interpreted her character. She was likely intended to be appealing but dysfunctional, with her extreme behaviour an inversion of gender norms serving as an entertaining, parodic caution against giving women too much power.

As the literary critic Paul Zumthor wrote, engaging with a medieval text, 'we cannot avoid projecting history and culture onto it, in order, as it were, to make it our own.'[12] This

[10] Sagas included powerful women, inactive heroes, casual sex, rape, and other subjects that could serve as vectors for exploring how twentieth century society might deal with these subjects.
[11] The medieval pronunciation would have been /mɛðv/ and may acceptably be pronounced as its modern cognate 'Maeve' /meɪv/.
[12] Zumthor, *Poetics*, 4.

chapter considers how the range of interpretations of Queen Medb, in particular, formed part of a discourse on the roles of women in nationalist life. Through a series of case studies, this chapter considers how the republican imagining of this 'remarkable amazon' was part of the project of identity-making.[13] It will conclude with a brief discussion of the multitude of interpretations of a contemporary women's actions in the revolutionary period, considering how narrative manipulations and mythmaking were at work in telling the stories of early twentieth century female revolutionaries.

'Let's see to it that we be worthy successors'

In the translations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, 'the sexually aggressive and independent women of Irish myth [were in many cases] transformed into dignified, stainless, but also vulnerable matrons.'[14] Through the literary and dramatic work of more than a century, many female figures of epic were reshaped into something more tame. Yeats, for example, weakened the title character of *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, 'depicting her as a comforting carer, not the fierce, independent woman we see in *Serglige Con Culainn* who, when informed of her husband's illness, recites a powerful satire; nor do we see any reflection of the woman prepared to murder any threat that stood between her and her husband.'[15] Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1909), along with many other plays about

[13] Scottish Celticist Magnus Maclean called her a 'remarkable amazon' in M. Maclean, *The Literature of the Celts: Its History and Romance* (Dublin, 1902), 160.
[14] N. Curtin 'A Nation of Abortive Men: Gendered Citizenship in Early Irish Republicanism', *Reclaiming Gender: Transgressive identities in Modern Ireland*, ed. M. Cohen and N. Curtin (London, 1999), 49.
[15] *The Only Jealousy of Emer* was published in 1919 or possibly earlier and performed 1922 in Amsterdam.

Deirdre popularized the image of her as 'ever-lamenting'.[16] In the earliest attested Irish version, *Longes Mac nUislenn*, from the twelfth century Book of Leinster, Deirdre begins as a shrieking foetus and grows up to not so much woo her love interest as grab him literally by the ears and force him to run away with her.[17] In James Stephens 1923 retelling, the young Deirdre is 'a round thing, all surprise and fluff' and as she grows up she becomes 'all spring and peep and run, like a young fawn'.[18] The many rewritings these saga characters underwent changed who they were in the popular imagination—and in the cases of Emer and Deirdre, flattened their characters. As the Revival author Eleanor Hull explains:

> The Deirdre of the ancient tale, forceful of purpose, fiercely determined at all hazards to gain her ends, and, spite of the steadfastness and strength of her devotion, showing in her conduct the savagery of an untamed nature, becomes softened ... into the tearful, sentimental maiden ... It is curious to find the wild woman of the 12th century Book of Leinster version transformed into the Lydia Languish of a later age.'[19]

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[16] Gregory quoted in Doyle, *History of the Irish Language,* 38.

[17] Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1339, Book of Leinster. This manuscript is from the later twelfth century.

[18] J. Stephens, *Deirdre* (London, 1923), 21. Most retellings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are influenced by the related tale *Oidhe Chloinne Uisnigh*. In this version, used by George Russell, Yeats and Synge, and later James Stephens, Deirdre dies less messily and more narrowly in reaction to her lover's death. In English she is made sweeter and her struggle for free will (the fulcrum around which the whole narrative turns) dampened. *Oidhe Chloinne Uisnigh* is an early modern tale, first attested in a partial fifteenth century manuscript. The popularity of the tale seems to come via a 1740 manuscript by Andrew Mac Curtin in County Clare. The popularity of this version in the Revival is quite likely a matter of manuscript availability rather than a conscious decision to privilege one redaction over another. But the result is that the strongest and most self-determined version of the figure, the one who turns the tale from a love story to a broader struggle about free will, is not the version popularly known in the twentieth century. Had the history of this text in translation been different, Deirdre may have served a different function for revolutionary women. Notably, Stephens was at the Rising and A. Robitaillié writes convincingly that his rendition of the tale can function as an allegory of the Rising, designed to glorify the Volunteers. A. Robitaillié 'How Deirdre and the sons of Uisneac Took the GPO: Parody in James Stephens's Deirdre (1923)', *Studi Irlandesi* 8 (2018), 377-92.

[19] E. Hull, 'The Story of Deirdre, in Its Bearing on the Social Development of the Folk-Tale', *Folklore* 15 (1904), 224–39. 225.

Medb, however, is so extremely the antithesis of values such as chastity, patience, domesticity and modesty that it was impossible to truly rewrite her character.[20] Thus, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Medb was held up as both an impressive barbarian and as a powerful queen exemplifying a historical tradition of women operating within a broader cultural sphere. Sophie Bryant, a nationalist who published *Celtic Ireland* in 1889, wrote Ireland had a long tradition of women participating in combat, citing 'powerful queens like the celebrated Meave' and a seventh-century law that she interpreted as barring women from military service (thus, she believed, proving a history of such service).[21] She insisted that 'in all times Irish women have been treated with chivalry, not merely of tenderness but of genuine respect; and Irish women may, too, be proud that they have always been ready to take part in their brothers' work, and be real comrades to their husbands'.[22] Such instances prove, wrote Bryant, a clear tradition of 'allowing women to come out of their "sphere"'.[23] In 1898, the writer Eleanor Hull characterised Medb as 'a splendid type of barbarian chieftainess, ruling her people with the craft of an Elizabeth, and leading them to war with the courage of a Boadicea.'[24] Not a republican herself, Hull portrayed pride in cultural inheritance.[25]

[20] Picturesque readings of Medb did appear, but only occasionally. 'Carnival Week,', *Westmeath Independent* (10 Jul. 1920), 8, described Medb reveling 'Amidst a merry throng/While fairy music…sped the dance along.'
[21] Bryant, *Celtic Ireland*, 86. For a further discussion of the Lex Adomnáin, see Chapter 3: Modalities of Time.
[22] Bryant, *Celtic Ireland*, 85.
[23] Bryant, *Celtic Ireland*, 87.
[24] Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, liv.
[25] 'Barbarian' is a particularly Anglo-Irish word choice, pointing to a difference in use of these sources by different political and social groups.

In the revolutionary era, women continued to look back to saga literature, and Medb in particular, for evidence of a native tradition of female leadership and participation in combat. Áine Ceannt (Áine Kent), a Cumann na mBan member who participated the Easter Rising, wrote of Irish women as inheritors of a powerful legacy. In the introduction to *Women in Ancient and Modern Ireland* (1917), she instructed, 'Let's see to it that we be worthy successors of Brighid, Maebh and Grainne Mhaol', putting the warrior queen alongside Saint Brighid as an antecedent and exemplar (alongside the sixteenth-century Gráinne Mhaol, who incidentally named her own daughter Méadhbh).[26] 'Ancient Ireland bred warrior women' Constance Markievicz wrote in 1915, '[but] today we are in danger of being civilized by men out of existence.'[27] The comment reversed the trope of women as a civilizing influence, and suggested that men were a deracinating force. Markievicz's perspective, and that of Ceannt, framed female power, violence and political engagement as something inherently Irish and traditional.[28] The women used the framework of 'tradition' to normalise contemporary progressive ideas.[29]

Medb's appeal is as a worldly woman of action; her entire narrative in the *Táin*, the most well-known text in which she appears, is based on securing power, asserting agency,

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[26] Beatty, *Masculinity and Power*, 126.
[27] Quoted in Beatty, *Masculinity and Power*, 81.
[28] Irish tradition was invoked selectively. Ceannt, for example, 'fiercely disapproved' of Maud Gonne for divorcing John McBride, although Ireland has a well-attested pre-Conquest tradition of woman-initiated divorce. R. Foster, *Vivid Faces,* 127.
[29] This vein of interpretation was not exclusive to republicanism. In 1921 the *Anglo-Celt* ran an article describing how 'In early times women drove chariots, led armies, hunted and owned property on equal terms with men.' 'Ireland's Heroines', *Anglo-Celt* (23 Jul. 1921), 1. In the same newspaper, an antiquarian article narrates Medb's role in the opening of the *Táin*, commenting: 'There was no modern Married Woman's Property Act in force but Irish women seem to have been at all times more sympathetically treated by the Celtic tribes than by the harder and more stern races of the Teutonic and northern blood…'. 'A Monaghan Legend', *Anglo-Celt* (6 Aug. 1921), 3.

and affirming her equality to her husband.[30] The famous 'pillow talk' *remscél* (foretale) that sets the *Táin*'s plot in motion has Medb and her husband Aillil comparing possessions.[31] In early Irish law, Irish marriages were categorized differently based on the formality of the arrangement and the status of the participants, with the most prestigious pairing being the *lánamnas for comthinchur*, or union of joint property, 'concluded by two people of free birth and some wealth.' [32] The relative status of each member of a couple carried legal significance as well as being a matter of pride, although the second recension *Táin* takes this concern to a parodic extreme. In the episode, Aillil muses that Medb is materially much better off than when they first met, thanks to his wealth: '*is maith ben ben dagfir*' ('it is good for a woman to be the woman of a rich man').[33] When she responds that she was rich when she met him, he says '*acht do bith-siu ar banticur mnáa*' ('but your wealth is women's wealth'.)[34] He tries to define her as a possession or accessory (a woman of a rich man) and she insists she is an independently rich person. Even the one disparity in their tally of possessions, is rightfully hers: Finnbenach, her husband's bull. Finnbenach had left Medb's

[30] Medb's interest in equality is taken to unreasonable and socially destabilising extremes. While we cannot know precisely how medieval audiences viewed her, she was likely understood as an appealing antihero and would not have been held up as an exemplar of women's behaviour.

[31] This episode is not in every manuscript witness but it drives the plot and is consistently included in translations and retellings. For further information about the *remscéla* of the *Táin*, see C. Cleary, 'An Investigation of the Remscéla Tána Bó Cúailnge & An Edition and Translation of *Aislinge Óenguso* with Textual Notes' (PhD Thesis, University College Dublin, 2018)

[32] Early Irish law, also called Brehon Law, was a series of legal customs first recorded in the seventh century. It governed the Irish legal system until the twelfth century, when English law began to suppress it, and it was fully replaced by English law in the seventeenth century. For more on early Irish law, see F. Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin, 1988).

[33] C. O'Rahilly, ed. *Táin Bó Cúalnge: from the Book of Leinster* (Dublin, 1967), 1. Translation my own.

[34] O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge: from the Book of Leinster,* 1. [Translation my own].

herd and joined her husband's because he refused to be led by a woman.[35] The pillow-talk episode encapsulates how Medb does not let others define her or speak untruthfully to her, and she is focused on action rather than reflection or lamentation.[36]

Medb's narrative could serve as a challenge to less confrontational conceptions of Irish femininity. In 1932, President Éamon de Valera gave a speech at the unveiling of a memorial bust of Constance Markievicz. In response, the republican suffragette and labour activist Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington produced a polemic, claiming the speech 'conventionalised' Markievicz beyond recognition: de Valera's depiction, she said, 'resembles those portraits by "studio artists" that improve away the real features of the sitter, smoothing out the wrinkles and furrows for a touched-up image of their own'. De Valera had described Markievicz within the framework of female self-sacrifice, saying 'she was truly a woman': she was motivated by 'love' and she 'put aside wealth and position that might have been hers'. In reaction to this characterization, Sheehy-Skeffington retorted that Markievicz's radical anti-capitalist politics was a form of rebellion, not noblesse-oblige philanthropy or feminine self-effacement, and that Markievicz had been, 'above all, a bonny fighter: her militant spirit was that of Queen Maeve or Granuaile, her countrywomen.'[37] Sheehy-Skeffington invoked two famously brave and determined figures from Irish culture. She said '[Markievicz] had no early Victorian repressions and inhibitions, none of the sheltered femininity of the drawing-room type. Where there was work that appealed to her

[35] The bull's ownership varies in different recensions. The Book of Leinster gives conflicting ownership in the tale of the pig-keepers (he is Medb and Aillil's jointly owned bull) versus the pillow-talk episode (he is Medb's bull).
[36] This episode is not in every manuscript witness but it is so important for the plot that it is consistently included in translations and retellings.
[37] H. Sheehy-Skeffington, 'Constance Markievicz – What She Stood For' *An Phoblacht* (16 Jul. 1932), 8.

to do she did it, whether it was carrying up bags of coal to a tenement back-room […] or shouldering a gun and sniping at the enemy from the rooftops […] in 1922.[38] Here Medb became a replacement for a domesticated, self-sacrificing woman. The comparison captured Markievicz's conviction and willingness to get her hands dirty. The warrior queen, with all her earthiness and agency, became, for Ceannt, Sheehy-Skeffington and Markievicz, a symbol of realness to be held up in contrast to the outmoded fiction De Valera had invoked. Markievicz herself had clearly felt that affinity when she named her own daughter 'Maeve' in 1901.

For these women, Medb is a larger than life character of extreme power and violence, ready to slice through any Gordian knot. She is also a mature figure—a ruler as well as a fighter. Whereas the young hero Cú Chulainn is under a *geis* (roughly translatable as 'taboo') to not see naked women, one cannot imagine Medb batting an eye at anyone's nudity. Whereas Cú Chulainn is overcome by *ríastrad* ('battle fury' or 'warp spasm'), Medb employs ice cold assessment. The queen's sharply analytical mind problem-solves through a combination of charm, ruthlessness and negotiation. She'll barter her daughter; she'll kill her own soldiers; and somehow that is more terrifying and impressive than a man turning himself inside-out through forces beyond his control.[39] Medb is always fully in control of herself, and usually in control of the others around her. In an early twentieth century society where stereotypes of women include immaturity, emotionality and delicacy, and

[38] Skeffington, quoted in S. Crozier-De Rosa and V. Mackie, *Remembering Women's Activism* (New York, 2019), 333.
[39] Cú Chulainn's *ríastrad* (battle frenzy) grotesquely distorts his body and will be discussed in the following chapter.

where political passion was sometimes labelled mere hysteria, one can understand why a mature, fierce, calculating queen held appeal.[40]

When masculinity becomes tied to participation in war, civilian domestic life is feminised. Despite women doing the work of men who are gone to fight and many also the work of war itself , men retain a version of the feminine as a reward to return to and a category to be protected.[41] Women also are seen to function as witnesses to male bravery and sacrifice, and are the bearers of memory. [42] For this framework to function, women cannot participate, or be acknowledged to participate, in conflict alongside men. The result is a split between those who desire the ossification of the gender status quo in its most conservative form versus those who push to rework the framework to link freedom and future peacetime to restructured gender categories, yoking gendered freedom to national freedom.[43] In the revolutionary era, those in the first category often reached for stories of the woman of Sovereignty, whilst, for women in particular, Queen Medb persisted as a symbol of power in the revolutionary period because it was impossible to fully de-claw her character. The translated versions of her are bowlderised, but her character is clear and consistent. Medb is never a victim, and no adaptation could succeed in turning her into a stainless maiden or 'mild mannered housewife'.[44] Her character is so consistently dominant

[40] P.S. O'Hegarty provides the perfect example of stereotyping, from 1924: 'it is woman…with her implacability, her bitterness, her hysteria, that makes a devil of him. The Suffragettes used to tell us that with women in political power there would be no more war. We know better now. We know that with women in political power there would be no more peace.' P.S. O'Hegarty quoted in Beatty, *Masculinity and Power*, 190.
[41] J. Goldstein, *War and Gender* (Cambridge, 2001), 301-3.
[42] Goldstein, 88-9.
[43] This categorisation is by no means neat. Every woman had a unique set of views regarding policies and social norms. A person such as Áine Ceannt, for example, could work towards women's political enfranchisement without desiring reform in domestic issues such as divorce. Foster (2014), 127.
[44] W.B. Yeats, 'Introduction' in A. Gregory *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1904), i-xv. xv.

and strong-willed, and she is so clearly a leader, that a *Táin*, or any other tale, with a tame and mild Medb would be inconceivable.

The Death of Fionavar, from the Triumph of Maeve

In 1916, in response to the Easter Rising, Eva Gore-Booth revised an extract from a play of hers, and her sister Constance Markievicz illustrated it whilst in jail—ostensibly with quills made from feathers she found in the prison yard. Her work, *The Death of Fionavar, from the Triumph of Maeve*, exemplifies the idea of *mouvance*, or textual mobility: a text is not a single static work, but is a network of intertextuality and inter-orality, with no authoritative 'original' or 'correct' version.[45] In her work, Gore-Booth reworks familiar figures from the medieval Ulster Cycle to develop new dimensions of Queen Medb's character and to centre the female perspective.

Originally from Sligo, Gore-Booth had by this point settled in London. Although known primarily as a suffragette and trade union activist, Gore-Booth was a nationalist and the Easter Rising impacted on her politics and writing.[46] When her sister, Constance Markievicz, and her friend, James Connolly, were sentenced to death in 1916 (later to be rescinded in Markievicz's case), Gore-Booth travelled to Dublin. Upon her return, her speech 'Holograph Account of a Visit to Dublin in the Aftermath of the Easter Rising' was published by Esther Roper and 'Sinn Féin Rebellion' was published in the *Socialist Review*.[47] She remained involved in revolutionary politics, with a strong bent toward pacifism. For

[45] This is Paul Zumthor's concept, created for medieval French poetry. Zumthor, *Poetics*.
[46] Tiernan, *Political Writings,* 181.
[47] Tiernan, *Political Writings,* 183.

example, when the number of executions of Irish men rose abruptly in response to martial law, Gore-Booth and her partner Esther Roper became secretaries of the Committee for the Abolition of the Death Penalty.[48] Although Gore-Both wrote that she was not herself in the 'Sinn Féin movement', she was a nationalist who was sympathetic to the cause fo independence.[49]

The Death of Fionavar is sometimes described as a pacifist play. Whilst the work ultimately rejects violence and its author was a pacifist, Gore-Booth clearly appreciated the aesthetics of 'savage heroism'.[50] Although Medb re-evaluates her life and casts away her worldly power, eventually finding 'the way to her own soul', she does so via gloriously martial imagery: '[Medb] stands victorious in her battle-car and when she turns homeward the car crushes the grass 'where many a new-made grave/Shall soon be heaped.'[51] Later, 'Men tell of her glorious deeds and her victories everywhere'.[52] Even Cú Chulainn flees before 'Maeve of the Battles'. In contrast to the *Táin*, her mission here is not merely to be on equal footing with her husband: she has clearly surpassed him and all men around her. Through the story, Medb's desires move from worldly to spiritual matters, but not in a way that disparages her worldly life. The tale, composed by a pacifist and illustrated by someone who was anything but, becomes a meditation on the glories and costs of warfare, and the wisdom that can be gained as a consequence of those costs.

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[48] This was a branch of the League of Peace and Freedom. Martial law was declared in Counties Kerry, Limerick, Cork and Tipperary in December 1920. The following month, this was extended to cover Waterford and Clare. Martial law required all weapons and ammunition be handed over to the authorities, and those found in possession of them faced a possible death sentence. Tiernan, *Political Writings*, 207 and 190.
[49] Tiernan, *Political Writings,* 207.
[50] Gore-Booth, *Death of Fionavar,* 11-12.
[51] Gore-Booth, *Death of Fionavar,* 35, 40-1.
[52] Gore-Booth, *Death of Fionavar,* 59.

In *The Death of Fionavar, from the Triumph of Maeve,* Gore-Booth uses the title to situate women as the subject of the tale.[53] The subjects of most medieval *tales* are men: one reads about the pig of Mac Datho, the feast of Bricriu, the wasting sickness of Cú Chulainn, the voyage of Bran; and even the exile of the sons of Usliu despite the subject of that tale clearly being a woman (Deirdre). In medieval tale lists, which organise saga narratives intoseventeen genres, women's names are restricted to the titles of the *aitheda* (elopement) and *tochmarca* (wooing) tales—and in the *tochmarca*, the woman is not truly a subject, but the object of a man's actions. *The Death of Fionavar* subverts genre conventions by categorising the tale within one of the categories seen in medieval tale lists– an *aided*, a death-tale–but with Medb's daughter Findbair explicitly as the subject.[54] This inversion of convention repeats in the overall title of the work, *The Triumph of Maeve*, which follows the same syntactical format.[55]

Gore-Booth not only makes women the subject of her play, she centres women's relationships. In the medieval texts *Táin Bó Cuáilnge* and *Táin Bó Fróech*, Medb's attitude to her daughter is unsympathetic and exploitative.[56] But Gore-Booth's Medb adores her daughter. In addition, Medb's ire toward the Ulstermen, with whom she is at war, is caused

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[53] As in *The Buried Life of Deir*dre, written in 1908, in which she reimagines many aspects of the tale and uses it to communicate her own philosophy of gender fluidity.

[54] The tale categories translate as destructions, cattle-raids, wooings, battles, voyages, deaths, feasts sieges, adventure-journeys, elopements, slaughters, eruptions, expeditions, immigrations, visions, love-tales. E. Knott and G. Murphy, *Early Irish Literature*, (London, 1966), 103-4. There are only three *aideda* (death-tales) with named women: Medb, Derbforgaill and Lócha. Yeats' *Deirdre of the Sorrows* does not follow a medieval title convention, which may be an attempt to mirror the format of classical tragedies such as *Antigone* and *Medea*.

[55] Although 'triumphs' are not a traditional tale category, this follows the convention of the tale list.

[56] In the former, Medb uses her daughter as a military bargaining chip to bribe fighters to take on Cú Chulainn in single combat. In the latter, Medb plots to kill her daughter's lover because he will not pay an exorbitant dowry.

not by personal grievance but by the death of Deirdre, who died in consequence of the king of Ulster's actions. A woman seeking vengeance on behalf of another woman is an unusual situation in Irish epic, and particularly notable for a character traditionally depicted as out for her own interests.

The story refuses to create any conflict between Medb's motherhood, her sexual enthusiasm, and her political and military power. Medb is a 'Warrior Queen' engaged in 'everlasting raids and campaigns', with an endless supply of lovers. When she begins to take fewer lovers, it is a sign she is unwell: 'Strange such a woman should tire of delight', comments one warrior.[57] When Medb holds court and a man comes to her with the complaint his woman has fled with another, she tells him he can't own or demand love and that he's attempting to clip a swallow's wings: 'Let those who dream of summer freely forth/Lest in their bonds they poison the deep wells of Life.'[58] Medb's legendary sexual appetite is paired with a portrayal of her as a devoted mother. Nationalism's 'view of female sexuality [often] prevented it from adequately mining the ore of what it claimed to be cultural heritage.'[59] Remarkably, this work engaged with that heritage and expanded it to explore a maternal dimension not present in the medieval work.[60]

In creating this tale, Gore-Booth remoulded the medieval stories of Medb to imagine her as a hero rather than an anti-hero. Medb's personal relationships present a world where women can be leaders and fighters without isolating themselves from other women or becoming unfeminine, perhaps obliquely addressing contemporary critiques of nationalist

[57] Gore-Booth, *Death of Fionavar,* 57-8.
[58] Gore-Booth, *Death of Fionavar,* 65.
[59] Ap Hywel quoted in Doyle, *History of the Irish Language,* 24.
[60] In medieval Irish texts, motherhood is not emphasised as an important social category. Parental bonds are generally weaker than the bonds between siblings or foster-siblings, with a few exceptions such as Finn mac Cumhaill and his son Oisín.

women. Medb seeks vengeance on the Ulstermen not through her own pride (as in most retellings of this era) but in retribution for the death of Deirdre at the hands of Ulster's king.[61]

Gore-Booth's work also explores the idea that loss can be a path to wisdom, and through the young Findbair she comments on the trauma and confusion of idealists confronting the realities of war. Simply witnessing the horror of the battlefield kills the title character. This is a trope of medieval texts—death through emotion—but one wonders if it's used here to consider the psychological impact of horror on noncombatants.

With *The Death or Fionavar,* Eva Gore-Booth created a tale in which Medb achieves her military goals and displays love and concern for fellow women. She seeks vengeance for Deirdre and develops an intensely close bond with her daughter, whom she exploited as merely a useful tool in the *Táin*. [62] The work uses a story of Medb to participate in national conversations about war, loss and leadership, and particularly about these subjects as they pertained to women.

'What had she to do with tenderness'

In contrast to the previously discussed interpretations, Medb could still be imagined as an antihero during the revolutionary period. Helena Concannon was a historian, writer and anti-Treaty nationalist, and unlike Ceannt, Markievicz, and Gore-Booth, she read Medb as a negative figure. 'What had she to do with tenderness,' asked Concannon, 'this tall, proud,

[61] More precisely, the character is driven to suicide by the king's actions.
[62] For a contemporary interpretation of Findbair, see E. Young, *The Weird of Fionavar* (London, 1922).

angry, passionate woman'; 'the whole Táin is motivated by her pride.'[63] In her book *Daughters of Banba* (1922), she characterised the *Táin* as antifeminist and appeared to be a warning about the perils of female emancipation. Under Medb's rule, 'The land must run red with blood; old friendships and loyalties must be violated; the honour of women, the faith of men must be sacrificed that her whim may be appeased.'[64]

Concannon's own work praised 'the devotion of Irish nationalist women whilst emphasising the centrality of women's spiritual and domestic role in the home to the well-being of the nation'.[65] In matters of nationalism, she believed in a gendered division of labour. Although she did not condemn women who took a direct role in conflict, she understood women's political activism as mediated by men and stressed the importance of women 'inciting their men to patriotic action'.[66] With this understanding of nationalist femininity, she read Medb as a figure potentially misrepresented by hostile medieval tale-tellers from Ulster: 'Perhaps if the Sagas of her own race (i.e. the people of Connacht) had been preserved, we might have gathered a different impression of her', she wrote.[67]

Nationalists who shared Concannon's understandings of gender roles were drawn to figures other than Medb, women whose skills were more clearly domestic. In medieval saga, women are valued not only for their status and beauty, but also for traits and skills such as wisdom and needlework. A 1922 article in the *Nenagh Guardian* leveraged myth and history to explain women's domestic role:[68]

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[63] H. Concannon, *Daughters of Banba* (Dublin, 1922), 4-5.
[64] Concannon, *Banba*, 5-6.
[65] 'Helena Concannon', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.*
[66] Quoted in Kennedy, C. 'What Can Women Give but Tears': Gender, Politics and Irish National Identity in the 1790s' (PhD thesis, University of York, 2004), 15.
[67] Concannon, *Banba*, 5.
[68] This newspaper is initially unionist but becomes nationalist from 1916.

> It appears to be an acknowledged fact that whatever virtues, our women are credited with, good housekeeping is not one of them. The reasons for this are many…I think this lack is the direct outcome of the' times of great national unsettlement from which' this country was never quite free, for housekeeping is an art which can only flourish when life is ordered and secure. […] In the Gaelic sagas we find the Gift of Needlework included in the six urns of womanhood. When Cuchulainn came to woo Emer he found her on her lawn instructing the daughters of the neighbouring land-owners in needlework and fine handiwork.' The frequent descriptions of elaborate embroideries show that the art must have reached a high state of perfection at that early age. In these sagas we are also told how, when the heroes were away on warlike expeditions, their womenfolk administered their immense households with efficiency—and this surely was housekeeping on the grand scale. The history of Ireland abounds with instances of the skill of women in the administration of household and community life…We aim at recovering this tradition of great and good housekeeping and in making my plea for adequate means for this recovery. I do so… as an Irishwoman who desires the welfare of her country, and who wishes that our women, gentle and simple, may be enabled to contribute to that welfare by receiving an education which will fit them for the oldest and best function of womanhood—the art of home-making. [69]

Thus, not all nationalist women used saga material to further the cause of women's involvement in public life and political struggle. The example above uses saga literature to shore up a tradition of women as homemakers. Even a figure known for her wisdom and gift of speech, such as Cú Chulainn's wife Emer, could be repackaged as a silent exemplar of domestic crafting. The unnamed female author appeals to medieval literature as an authority on Irish femininity. But she does so with the shallowest engagement with this literature: women of saga are not, in fact, particularly domestic. Although women are shown to pour drinks at social gatherings and carry out needlework, female domesticity in the sense of managing a home is does not receive narration or celebration: Concannon is inventing a tradition.[70]

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[69] Anon. 'State of the Country: Domestic Science', *Nenagh Guardian* (22 Jul. 1922), 4.
[70] A famous scene from *Fled Bricrenn* shows three wives of heroes engage in a boasting competition and cite their lineage, beauty, and the accomplishments of their husband—but not skills an early twentieth-century person would equate with 'homemaking'. In an aristocratic household, some homemaking tasks would have been the provenance of slaves,

Both the newspaper article and Concannon's interpretation draw our attention to the variety of republican feminisms in the revolutionary period. For some nationalist women, such as Helena Concannon, Medb was neither an exalted ancestor nor an exemplar. And as the above extract from the *Nenagh Guardian* shows, saga material could provide other women, and other traits to satisfy different values.

Medb through the eyes of men

Some texts from the revolutionary era evoke Medb primarily as a bearer of native power and grandeur and often an inspiration for men. These texts, usually written by men, held up the queen as a source of national pride, connection to the land, and an inspiration for men, without considering her as an example for women or in any way typical of Irish womanhood.

A 1919 poem in the newspaper *An Saogal Gaedealac* presents a fantasy of loyalty to the powerful queen in which she inspires men to greatness:

> (ANY BOY, TO HIMSELF.)
> If I were alive in the golden days,
> I'd have set both heather and town ablaze, I
> 'd have fought for Meadhbh against Conchobhar,
> For Meadhbh was a queen, every inch of her;
> And Conchobhar a black-hearted villain, he,
> For all his conceit of chivalry.
> Och, I'd follow Meadhbh through a furnace blaze
> If I were alive in the golden days.
> I approve the grit of Fergus MacRoy, [Medb's lover]
> It's he was the staunch-hearted brave ould boy
> For to leave black Conchobhar and go to Meadhbh
> When the High King to death Usnach's brave sons gave
> Och Deirdre's face set the men astir,

not of wives. In the *Acallam*, Finn's wife Berrach is commemorated as a hostess known for her generosity, although this is more queenly than housewifely.

But Meadhbh was *a man*, every inch of her.[71]
I would follow Meadhbh to death's chilly door,
Or the gates of Hell—aye, I would, and more.
When Fergus and Meadhbh drew out Connacht's sword
And great Cuchulann stood in the ford
And to Connacht's heroes the battle gave,
I'd have broken his face for the sake of Meadhbh.
I'd have fought him there with the strength of ten,
There goes the Master—he's at me. again.
Yes, sir, I hear even- word that you say,
Hong-Kong is the capital of—Knocknarea.[72]

The narrative begins 'I' not 'She' and the 'I' is repeated throughout. Medb's function in this piece is to inspire the author's fantasy of his own potential greatness. In this framework, her power does not communicate or legitimise the capability of Irish women; instead it highlights her own extraordinariness. This is typical of men's interest in Medb in this era: she is viewed in a positive light, but not used to draw conclusions about Irish women's capabilities or rights.[73]

In 'Historical Roscommon', the republican Reverend Michael O'Flanagan claimed: '…the figure, and character, and personality of Queen Maeve are better known, not merely in Ireland, but throughout the world, than the personality of even Queen Victoria of England (applause). And while Queen Victoria is going down into darkness as the years go by, the glory and majesty of Queen Maeve is only now really coming into its own (hear, hear).[74] O'Flanagan lauded her as 'part of the grand old legends of the country' and suggested

[71] perhaps a typo for '*a woman*'?
[72] R. MacD., *An Saogal Gaedealac* (8 Mar. 1919), 5.
[73]Another example can be found in a poem from that same year in the nationalist paper *The Irishman*, presumably from a male author, imagines Ailill's plea to Medb. Medb famously refused to take a husband who would control her sexuality, and a condition of her marriage is that her husband not behave jealously when she takes other lovers. In the poem he pleads: 'Most wondrous of Eire's daughters/Why turnest though ever from me?/That thou art a queen, I know it—/And leadest wild hosts with pride/But if though hast love, bestow it/In queenship by the king's side.' 'Aillil to Maeve', *The Irishman* (12 Jul. 1919), 4.
[74] M. O'Flanagan, 'Historical Roscommon', *Westmeath Independent* (31 Jan. 1920), 6.

literature such as the Táín should one day replace poets such as Longfellow in school curricula.[75] The queen of saga was—he claimed—a suitable rival for Queen Victoria and the *Táin* was a rival for Longfellow's poems. Medb's larger than life character allowed her to fill the vacuum imagined in considering who would take the cultural place of English royalty and English writers. The sixteenth-century heroine Grainne Mhaol, the other clearest contender for an outstanding and appealing female ruler, could not be a suitable choice because she was twice a supplicant to Queen Elizabeth: the power dynamic between them was clear, and not in Grainne Mhaol's favour. Medb, from a mythologised pre-Norman past, had no such taint. O'Flanagan's hyperbolic claim that Medb's fame was on the rise, shows a perception that her Revival hasn't ended, that he perceives her as an increasingly important part of republican identity.

Similarly, at an *aeridheacht* (fête) in 1919, a speaker exhorted:

> Everyone, especially the young, should strive to know more of their glorious past, more of the history of Tir Eoghain, the land of the princely O'Neills, whose memory should be a dear heritage to them. Should not they all know more of Cuchullin and Queen Maeve, of Brian Boru and Owen Roe, and less of the rubbish that was dumped on them from across the water? The prouder they were of Arboe and Tir Eoghain the better Ulstermen they would be, and they could not be good Ulstermen without being good Irishmen.[76]

Here Medb is cited as an important part of Irish history alongside historical figures. Her function in this quote and the previous one is to convey both cultural history and national pride. In examples such as these, she is a bearer of cultural inheritance, not an exemplar for women.

In 1918, IRA officer Ernie O'Malley wrote in his memoir:

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[75] O'Flanagan, 'Historical Roscommon', 6.
[76] 'Gaelic Gatherings in Tyrone, Aeridheachtanna at Arboe and Omagh: Address by Mr. Biggar', *Ulster Herald*, (5 Jul. 1919), 5.

> I cycled towards Reilig na Rí, the royal burying place of Connacht seated on Rath Cruachan. I thought of Nannie and her stories of the Táin…I had read many versions of the Táin, but I remembered her stories well. I had searched for place names and fords mentioned and had followed the route of the invading army that had left Cruachan as far as the Leitrim border where police raids often made me sleep across the Shannon for the night. From the top of Cruachan Queen Maeve had reviewed her warriors and allies before they left to invade Ulster.[77]

Medb enhanced the significance of the landscape and elevated O'Malley's mission. The landscape of Cruachan harkened back to pre-invasion history. Rathcruachan ('Cruachan fort') is complex of prehistoric archaeological sites, as well as being the name of Medb's fort in medieval literature. Reilig na Rí ('burying place of the kings') is a necropolis and in O'Malley's time it was thought to be a burial site for rulers (Medb, Findabair, King Dathi, and others). Yet his focus is not on the burials but on the image of Medb leading her men. O'Malley's experience can be considered part of the *dinnsenchas* tradition of place-lore, which layers stories on the landscape and which continued after the middle ages in folk tradition. Whether a certain king was buried in a certain place does not matter in this context; what matters is that a story connected O'Malley to the place.[78] The practice of telling stories about the place-history should not be understood as whimsy, but as part of a tradition evidenced since the Middle Ages.

O'Malley was an insurgent on the run, but harmonised his experience with that of a powerful epic counterpart. Tasked with training rural IRA brigades outside his own

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[77] O'Malley, *Army without Banners* (1937), 74.

[78] The *Táin* incorporates *dinnsenchas* material through a mix of identifiable real-world places and non-identifiable places. If O'Malley formed a mental map, it would have come from secondary literature, most likely Eleanor Hull's *The Cuchullin Saga* (London, 1898) which explored the topographic aspects of the epic, 301-5. Hull's map is based on O'Grady's and is discussed in Paul Gosling's 'The Route of Táin Bó Cúailnge Revisited', *Emania* 22 (2014), 145–167.

community, O'Malley lived in conditions that were often unglamorous and unsanitary. Although he was on the move, and the army controlled even where he slept. O'Malley yoked his narrative to that of a legendary queen who exudes confidence, determination, status, leadership and control.

O'Malley's writing creates a parallel between his own experience and that of Medb, and how he conceives of her: a warrior queen reviewing her troops. Her significance for him is Irish control of the land. Her story of troops and invasion draw an implicit parallel to O'Malley's work for the IRA, elevating his work to epic significance, recalling a time when the people of Cruachan were the invaders. For O'Malley and O'Flanagan, the queen embodies Irish republican military, political and cultural power. And for the poet daydreaming of the queen, she is both an erotic object and an inspiration for male militancy. In these views, the legendary queen serves the nationalist cause in a fashion that is divorced from the experience and valuation of real-world women.

'Unmanageable revolutionaries': four visions of women and violence

The women of saga were not the only women whose stories were told in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes. Revolutionary-era writing about republican women's capacity for violence tends to categorise women four ways: monstrous; feminine and auxiliary; equal to men (though not necessarily interchangeable with them); or feminine and extraordinary.

For those taking the first viewpoint, revolutionary women's actions caused them to become monstrous. A May 1915 protestor at a Sinn Féin parade in Limerick described a 'powerfully built amazon…her hair flying and her apron full of missiles, [she] frenziedly

rallied the mob to renewed excesses…'[79] P.S. O'Hegarty complained about the women of Cumann na mBan and wrote a derisive chapter on them entitled 'The Furies', arguing that they were emotionally driven and irresponsible: 'They wanted war…and the irresponsibility and destruction and freedom of war.'[80] This hostile categorisation was sometimes used even in more republican circles. Eamon de Valera famously referred to women as 'at once the boldest and most unmanageable revolutionaries'.[81] IRA member Sean O'Faolain characterised republican women he met in 1923 as 'disturbing', 'theatrical, self-dramatising, power-hungry, temperamental but with few warm emotions, ruthless, abstract in discussion, and full of a terrifying sentimentality.'[82] These quotes describe monstrous hyper-femininity (eg. 'terrifying sentimentality') bound up with 'masculine' traits (boldness, power-hunger).

In the War of Independence, approximately fifty women were incarcerated; in the Civil War the number rose to more than 560.[83] In the Civil War, women were more likely than previously to be arrested (perhaps as many as 2000 were arrested in total) and women were more widely reported by the press as active participants in republican activity than in

[79] James Gubbins, IRA officer, Limerick, 1921 WS 76, 5. As for Sinn Féin itself, the party 'liked to proclaim its feminist credentials when it suited the organisation, and it was sometimes prepared to put its money where its mouth was when pushed'; but it remained male dominated, particularly in rural areas. Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 220.
[80] P. O'Hegarty, *The Victory of Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 1924), 57, 102-3.
[81] Quoted in S. Banerjee, *Muscular Nationalism: Gender, Violence and Empire in India and Ireland 1914-2004* (New York, 2012), 84-5. Banerjee's work must be read cautiously as it does contain one glaring error: 'Most members of the C.B. saw themselves as soldiers in their own right. They sported militaristic uniforms, and their logo was a silhouette of a woman carrying a gun.' Banerjee, *Muscular Nationalism,* 82. That is not the logo, and that is also an odd abbreviation, which is more normally shortened to CnmB to include the articles and the eclipsis.
[82] O'Faolain, *Vive Moi!* 169.
[83] 560 refers to women incarcerated by the Free State. Ward, 'Gendered Memories', *Revolution,* ed. Connolly, 81.

the preceding conflict. Reports of armed women threatening violence were frequent.[84] In January 1923, the *Irish Independent* published a Free State government report about 'neurotic girls' involved in political violence.[85] In 1925, a bishop opined in the *Cork Examiner*: 'Women who go around taking despatches and arms from one place to another are furies. Who would respect them or who would marry them?'[86] The critiques presented an image of disordered gender roles, weaponised for the destruction of social order.

A second narrative of women's activism is that of 'helpers'. The label 'auxiliary' encompasses a spectrum of attitudes, from women performing the work where they felt they could make the most impact (e.g. leveraging structural sexism to be couriers and gather intelligence), to men who simply saw women as helpers in service of men. The question of Cumann na mBan's relationship to the Volunteers (and later the IRA) was present from the organisation's inception.[87] In 1918, when public perception persistently conflated the organisation with Sinn Féin, the Cumann na mBan leadership advised its branches to put themselves under the orders of their local Volunteer corps.[88] The following year, the organisation's constitution emphasised: 'although working in cooperation with other associations having the same objects, it is independent of them.[89] Ina Heron, a Cumann na mBan member, wrote that women formed 'an auxiliary' to 'back the men'; and

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[84] L. Ryan, '"Furies' and 'Die-Hards": Women and Irish Republicanism in the Early Twentieth Century', *Gender History* 2:2 (July, 1999), 256-75. 257, 268-9.
[85] Ryan, 'Furies', 267.
[86] Quoted in Ryan, 'Furies', 272. A pertinent question since many women imprisoned in the Civil War never married. Many were excommunicated by the church, and were socially stigmatised. S. McCoole, *Guns and Chiffon: Women Revolutionaries and Kilmainham Gaol 1916-1923* (Dublin, 1997), 60.
[87] Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 6.
[88] Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 222. The number of members in Sinn Féin clubs remained low, even after the organization urged members to join in 1919.
[89] Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 222.

Ernie O'Malley referred to Cumann na mBan as 'organized as an auxiliary to the Volunteers.'[90] The historian Charles Townshend writes that women 'accepted an auxiliary military function.'[91]

Describing Cumann na mBan in the Anglo-Irish war, IRA officer (in both the War of Independence and on the anti-Treaty side in the Civil War) Tom Barry described Cumann na mBan as the 'women's auxiliary organization'.[92] He writes that members

> …were not in any sense women politicians, holding debating classes or propounding political theories. They were a group of women and girls from town and countryside, sisters, relatives or friends of the volunteers, enrolled in their own organization, for the sole purpose of helping the Irish Republican Army…Their work, particularly in government concerns, as intelligence agents, was vital to the well-being of the IRA.'[93]

Barry's standard for being in some sense a 'politician' would, of course, have not been met by many activist men. This rationalising of women as auxiliaries recalls Sarah Benton's assertion in 'Women Disarmed: The Militarization of Politics in Ireland 1913-23': 'The myth of brotherhood is a myth of male independence of women.'[94] Whilst it is entirely reasonable to frame Cumann na mBan as an auxiliary organisation, and many members did so, for some people, such as Barry, this became a means to downplay their participation in service of this myth.

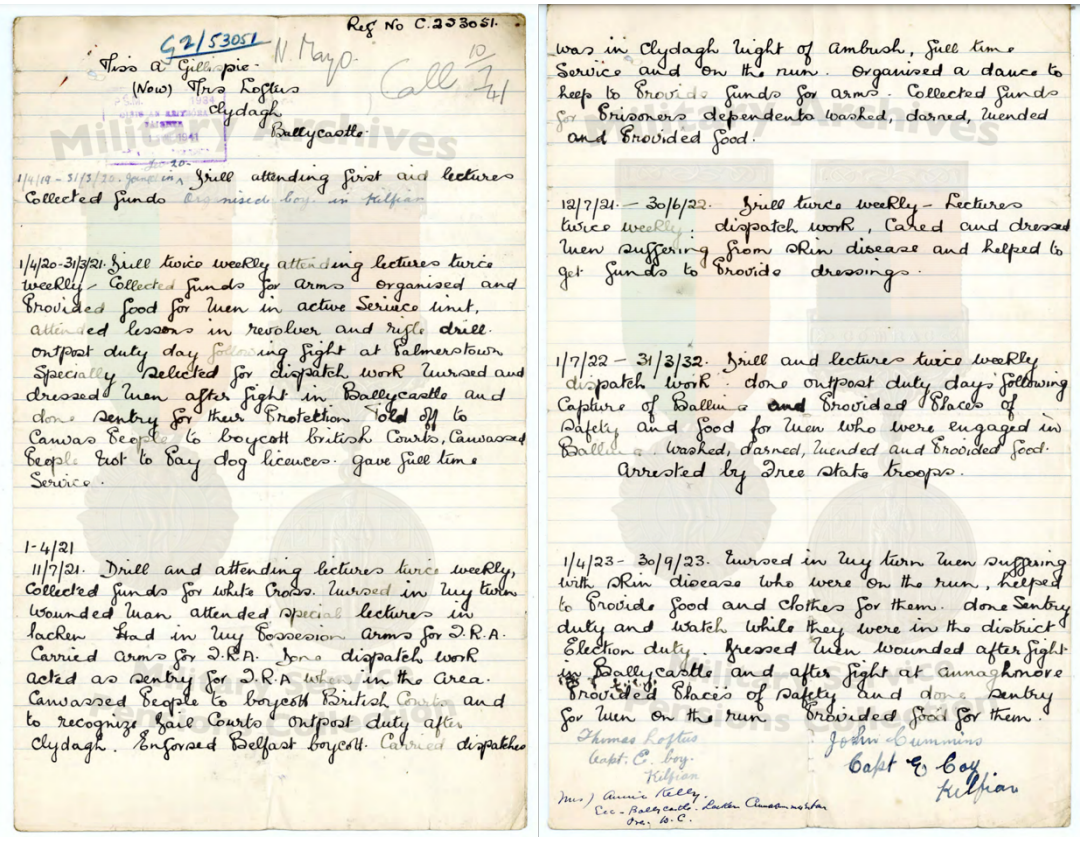
Struggles for women's pensions reveal the disagreements over the value and meaning of 'auxiliary' work. Some women served as IRA officers without a Cumann na

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[90] I. Heron, WS #919, Bureau of Military History, 89. O'Malley, *Army without Banners,* 54.
[91] C. Townshend, 'Historiography: Telling the Irish Revolution' in *The Irish Revolution 1913-1923* ed. J. Augusteijn (Hampshire, 2002), 1-16. 5.
[92] T. Barry, *Guerrilla Days in Ireland* (Tralee, 1955), 175.
[93] Barry, *Guerrilla Days,* 175.
[94] S. Benton, 'Women Disarmed: The Militarization of Politics in Ireland 1913-23'. *Feminist Review*, 50, (Summer 1995), 148-72. 162.

mBan affiliation; but as this was not recognised at a national level, they would not receive pensions or any other formal recognition.[95] Women's applications for military pensions recount a wide array of activities that the applicants believed counted as active service. To give one example of many, Annie Loftus's application for a military service pension under the Military Service Pensions Act in 1934 was unsuccessful, stamped '[The Act] does not appear to apply'. But in the application Loftus describes service that becomes a full-time job during the War of Independence: first aid training; fund collection; fundraiser organising; food provision; arms training; dispatch work; sentry duty; canvassing; lecture attendance; arms storage; boycott enforcement; care for ill and injured IRA men; care of paramilitary clothing; provision of a safehouse.

[95] Ward, 'Gendered Memories', *Revolution* ed. Connolly, 82-3. For the women whose contributions were recognized, the 1934 Military Service Pensions Act categorised their contributions as the two lowest ranks for pensions, categories D and E. Coleman, 'Compensation Claims and Women's Experience of Violence and Loss in Revolutionary Ireland 1921-23', *Revolution,* ed. Connolly, 130.



Reg No C.223051.

G2/53051

Miss A Gillespie.
(Now) Mrs Loftus
Clydagh
Ballycastle

1/4/19 - 31/3/20. Joined in, Drill attending first aid lectures Collected funds [illegible]

1/4/20-31/3/21. Drill twice weekly attending lectures twice weekly - Collected funds for arms organised and Provided food for men in active Service unit, attended lessons in revolver and rifle drill. Outpost duty day following fight at Palmerstown Specially selected for dispatch work Nursed and dressed men after fight in Ballycastle and done sentry for their protection Toked off to Canvas people to boycott British Courts, Canvassed people not to pay dog licences. Gave full time Service.

1-4-21
11/7/21. Drill and attending lectures twice weekly, Collected funds for White Cross. Nursed in my town wounded man attended special lectures in Lahen Had in my possession Arms for D.R.A. Carried arms for D.R.A. Done dispatch work acted as sentry for D.R.A when in the area. Canvassed people to boycott British Courts and to recognize Sail Courts outpost duty after Clydagh. Enforced Belfast boycott. Carried dispatches

was in Clydagh night of Ambush, full time Service and on the run. Organised a dance to keep to Provide funds for arms. Collected funds for Prisoners dependents washed, darned, mended and Provided food.

12/7/21 - 30/6/22. Drill twice weekly - Lectures twice weekly, dispatch work, Cared and dressed men suffering from Rin disease and helped to get funds to Provide dressings.

1/7/22 - 31/3/32. Drill and lectures twice weekly dispatch work done outpost duty days following Capture of Ballina and Provided Places of Safety and food for men who were engaged in Ballina washed, darned, mended and Provided food. Arrested by Free State troops.

1/4/23 - 30/9/23. Nursed in my town men suffering with Rin disease who were on the run, helped to Provide food and clothes for them. done Sentry duty and watch while they were in the district Election duty. Dressed men wounded after fight in Ballycastle and after fight at Cunaghmore Provided Places of safety and done sentry for men on the run Provided food for them.

Thomas Loftus
Capt: C. Coy:
Kilfinan

John Cummins
Capt C Coy
Kilfinan

(Mrs) Annie Kelly.
Sec - Ballycastle Ladies Cumann na mBan
Co. Co.

Figure 19. A. Loftus, MSP34REF53051, Military Pensions and Awards Database, 10-11.

Women such as Loftus performed republican activities that stayed relatively within the bounds of gender norms. Their pension requests show them questioning the problematic logic of highly privileging violent service or reducing recognised service to *only* violence and devaluing the wide range of (often difficult and dangerous) activities that support it.

In cases when women did serve through violence, they faced difficulty receiving institutional recognition. The most dramatic example of this is Margaret Skinnider, the only woman recorded as wounded in action during the Easter Rising. A member of both the Irish Citizen Army and Cumann na mBan, she did not receive her pension until more than ten

years after her application, despite undeniable evidence she was severely wounded in combat.[96] In her autobiography, she recalled:

> [The commandant] gave me four men to help fire one building, while another party went out to fire the other. It meant a great deal to me that he should trust me with this piece of work….., and I felt elated…I rush past [Councilor Patridge] into the doorway of the shop, calling to the others to come on. Behind me came the sound of a volley, and I fell. Mr. Partridge carried her outside where a figure lies in a pool of blood. 'It was Fred Ryan, a mere lad of seventeen…it was no use; he was dead.'

Skinnider had been shot in three places. After she was brought to relative safety by her comrades, Constance Markievicz disappeared briefly, then quietly informed her: 'you are avenged', having shot the two men likely to be responsible.[97] Despite the public and unequivocable nature of her action, Skinnider faced an unusual level of difficulty receiving her pension, likely, in part, on account of her gender (as well as her radical politics).[98] She encountered less dramatic institutional prejudice again in the Civil War, when she 'effectively ran the IRA's Quartermaster General's department for several weeks' but as a woman was not recognised as a quartermaster.[99]

The issue of Cumann na mBan's 'auxiliary' nature is complex because this was an era of 'difference feminism'. Many feminists did not see equality as equivalence: 'feminist and other progressive ideas about equal citizenship often distinguished between male and female characteristics and roles'.[100] 'It appears that most women did not take part in armed

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[96] Coleman, 'Compensation Claims', *Revolution,* ed. Connolly, 132.
[97] Skinnider, *Doing My Bit*, 149. The ICA member Rose Hackett recalled: 'Margaret Skinnider was in charge of a section, and led an attack. She was wounded, and a boy named Ryan, was killed at the same time…Margaret was brought back wounded.' R. Hackett, W.S. #546, Bureau of Military History, 7.
[98] Coleman, 'Compensation Claims', *Revolution,* ed. Connolly, 132.
[99] Borgonovo, 'Martial Women', *Revolution,* ed. Connolly, 79.
[100] Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 10.

combat because they evidently neither wanted nor expected to, and not necessarily because they were prevented from doing so.'[101] However, when Senia Pašeta discusses women's enthusiasm for weaponry and soldierly culture, she concludes that there 'can be no question that men's reluctance played a part' in the lack of women in combat roles.[102] And narratives such as Tom Barry's reveal an understanding of 'auxiliary' that discounts women's political thought. The experiences of Skinnider and Loftus suggest when women stepped away from a clearly auxiliary function, or when they try to challenge the hierarchy of violent service versus auxiliary service, they met with resistance in the service of *status quo* gender roles.

The third viewpoint held that women's participation was not gendered. Helena Molony of the Irish Citizen Army said she was often asked about women's participation in 1916. 'I feel they might as well ask me what did the tall fair haired men do in the wars and what did the small dark men do. My answer in both cases is the same: they did what came to their heads to do.'[103] Madeline ffrench-Mullen proudly expressed a similar view, telling Rosamond Jacob: 'there was absolutely no difference between men and women in the citizen army'.[104] And the Cumann na mBan constitution stated the organisation would work 'side by side' with men.[105] The author and critic Mary Colum wrote, 'we do any national

[101] Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 185.
[102] Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 184.
[103] Quoted in McCoole (1997), 15
[104] Quoted in Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 168. Pašeta notes ICA women were more likely to have access to their own weapons than Cumann na mBan.
[105] Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS 41,494/1/9, Constitution of Cumann na mBan (undated). Women also suffered some of the fallout of revolutionary support side by side with the men. For example, women who lost jobs for singing rebel songs or objecting to an employer's abuse of Volunteers in the wake of the Rising. Pašeta, 211. For more gender-specific consequences of revolutionary activity, see L. Connolly, 'Toward a Further Understanding of the Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Women Experienced in the Irish Revolution', *Revolution,* ed. Connolly, 103-28.

work—nothing too high or low…'[106] 'We are not the auxiliaries or the handmaidens or the camp followers of the Volunteers,' she said, 'we are their allies…If some unhappy fate were now to destroy the Volunteers, Cumann na mBan is not only capable of still growing and flourishing it is capable of bringing the whole movement to life again.'[107]

As Cumann na mBan was a large, national organisation, there were local variations. In some branches, women trained with male Volunteers.[108] Min Ryan described women being 'trained for war, even to take up arms if necessary' but this was a last resort and women were more often involved in the maintenance, transport and storage of weapons.[109] In the Rising, some women were armed: Helena Molony had a Sam Browne belt, revolver and ammunition, and Maeve Cavanagh of the ICA had a .22 revolver and ammunition.[110] Arming women could never be a priority, however, due to the scarcity of weapons throughout the revolutionary era. By 1916, for example, the Irish Volunteers had a membership of around 15,000 men but fewer than 2000 rifles.[111] In the Civil War, the evidence suggests women frequently held arms and joined IRA attacks, but rarely participated in gun battles. There were exceptions: Nora O'Sullivan assisted her brother in manning a machine gun when Free State forces attacked their home in County Cork.[112] Women participated in armed raids, such as Eithne Coyle, who carried out train raids in Donegal in 1922, seizing material being transported against the Belfast Boycott.[113] Kathleen

[106] Quoted in Banerjee, *Muscular Nationalism,* 82.
[107] Quoted in Banerjee, *Muscular Nationalism,* 82.
[108] Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 155.
[109] Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 161.
[110] Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 160.
[111] Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 160.
[112] Borgonovo, 'Martial Women', *Revolution,* ed. Connolly, 80.
[113] Borgonovo, 'Martial Women', *Revolution* ed. Connolly, 80. In 1920 the Dáil imposed a boycott in response to the expulsion of Catholic workers from Belfast shipyards.

Kennedy Cleary helped burn down the Athenry military barracks, Margaret McSharry was involved in blowing up bridges in Wicklow, and in the same county Siobhán Lankford and Roseanne Boland cut telegraph wires to impede Free State communications.[114] In 1923 Julia Ryan-O'Leary reported holding the local church canon at gunpoint until he agreed to toll the bells for Liam Lynch, the late Chief of Staff of the IRA. [115]

Through both desire and necessity, women did sometimes participate in revolutionary violence in ungendered contexts. However, this was not the dominant means of participation in the revolution, and it was a minority of women (particularly women in James Connolly's ambit in the Irish Citizen Army) who did this.

Finally, a fourth viewpoint held up women's participation as gendered but solitary. Even when republican women were not characterised as aberrant furies, their activities tended to be framed as non-normative. Women engaged in activities categorised as 'masculine' were sensationalised. When the teenager Mary Bowles was arrested and tried in 1921 in Clogheen, Cork, she was found wearing a bulletproof vest and trying to conceal weapons. Bowles was presented in the media as not only sensational but solitary.[116] Although arrested with nine men, 'the image of the solitary female figure isolates her from republicanism and, in particular, from the large numbers of women who were also involved

[114] Borgonovo, 'Martial Women', *Revolution* ed. Connolly, 80.
[115] Borgonovo, 'Martial Women', *Revolution* ed. Connolly, 80.
[116] E.g. in 'Girl of 15 Defies Court Martial', *Nottingham Evening Post* (26 Jan. 1921), 1.

in the militant movement.'[117] Similarly, her sentencing to spend five years in a Catholic reformatory 'denied Bowles any legitimacy as a republican political prisoner.'[118]

A graffito from Bridie O'Mullane in Kilmainham Jail, 1923, quotes the late Mayor Terence MacSwiney:

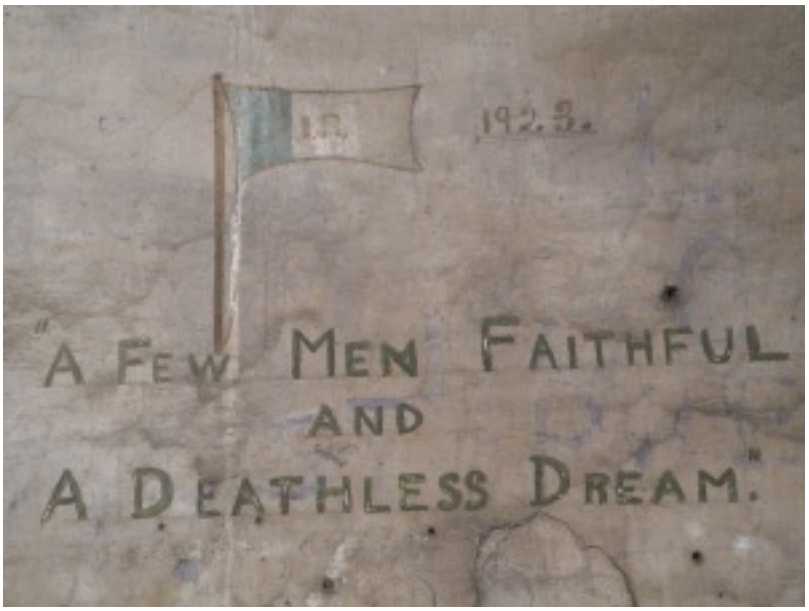


Figure 20. L. McAtackney, 'Graffiti: Commemoration and Memorialisation', Kilmainham Gaol Graffiti.

O'Mullane was an imprisoned Cumann na mBan activist, Director of Publicity and Propaganda. She nonetheless chose to inscribe the wall with a man's quote about *men* being faithful to a national dream, framing the project as a masculine endeavour. Approaching women's activism as extraordinary, unintegrated with the larger project, led to self-erasure.[119]

[117] Ryan, 'Reforming and Reframing', *Women at War* ed. McIntosh and Urquhart, 43. For contemporary reporting on her arrest, see: 'Ireland's Biggest Battle', *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* (26 Feb. 1921), 1. 'Girl in Steel Armour', *Hull Daily Mail* (26 Feb. 1921), 4, uses the title to present the young woman as extraordinary and describes her as though she is working alone.
[118] Ryan, 'Reforming and Reframing', *Women at War* ed. McIntosh and Urquhart, 45.
[119] Another possible reading is that O'Mullaine viewed her work as auxiliary.

Narratives of women's actions, whether from medieval literature or recent history, were used by all genders to shape republican understandings of womanhood. Thus the retelling and reworking of medieval narratives of women is one component in a larger framework.

Conclusion

Whether republicans thought Queen Medb was good, bad or misrepresented became a way for them to articulate their views about socially and politically active women. A community receiving a text 'seeks in it the reflection of the perception it has of itself' *and* uses it as a tool to create the present.[120] Medb could serve as a legitimation of women in public life and a springboard from which to explore topics such as leadership and sexual agency. In the context of the revolutionary period, her story was part of a network of retold medieval tales, within a larger network of narratives of both historical-literary and contemporary women's activity. Medb also served as an exemplar of Irish self-rule untainted by Englishness, and a counterpoint to icons of English rule and English-language literature such as Queen Elizabeth and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Medb is a compelling anti-hero and an investigation of her function in the revolutionary era adds nuance to our understanding of republican identity in this period. More broadly, considering Medb's multiplicity of meanings is part of a broader consideration of narrating women's revolutionary activism. And still more broadly, it points to the importance of considering the nuances of narration, translation and retelling. The tales of a single mythical figure can

[120] Zumthor, *Poetics*, 11-2.

be leveraged in a contradictory variety of ways: the actions of a single woman, or a single concept (such as ‘auxiliary’) are not fixed, definable points but contain fields of possible meanings.

4c. Cú Chulainn Reimagined: 'If only my name and deeds live after me.'

Cú Chulainn's battle frenzy seems more primal and less human than even the *mênis* of Achilles. In the first recension of the *Táin*, '*Ní aithg-néad cóemu ná cairdiu. Cumma no slaided ríam 7 íarma'* ('He would recognise neither comrades nor friends. He would attack alike before him and behind him').[1] He is uncontainable. And yet centuries later, in 1871, *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper of London* had an article describing Cuchulainn and the hero Diarmuid as 'knightly jugglers'.[2] The characterisation of this hero is elastic, in part because he contains two selves: the beautiful young man and the berserk fighter with his grotesquely transformed body. Revival writing often viewed him through a lens of chivalry, and Pádraig Pearse through a lens of idealised youth and Christlike self-sacrifice. In the revolutionary period, the lens refocused once more: he was a paragon of *adult* self-sacrifice, a defender of territory and community, and an example of ideal combat.

Cú Chulainn receded from the republican imagination after the Easter Rising but did not disappear. 'Imaginative refractions' of the hero, to use Maria Tymoczko's phrase, continued in advertising, witness statements, newspaper articles and art, and his tales remained a staple of youth literature and Irish-language publications for learners.[3] Scholars such as Jooep Leerssen (*Remembrance and Imagination*) and Zsuzsanna Balázs ('An Uncanny Myth of Ireland: The Spectralisation of Cuchulain's Body in W. B. Yeats's Plays') have

[1] O'Rahilly, C., ed. *Táin Bó Cúalnge: Recension I* (Dublin, 1976), ll. 1655-6, 171. [O'Rahilly's translation] In a medieval context, a tale might survive in several manuscripts, in multiple versions. The *Táin* has four recensions and the majority of translations draw on recension II.
[2] 'The Scrap-Book Column' *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper of London* (27 Aug. 1871), 5.
[3] M. Tymoczko, *The Irish Ulysses* (Oxford, 1997), 226. In addition to other resources, this chapter utilised digitised archives, using the searches 'conch*' 'cuch*', 'cu*', 'cúch*' 'cucu*' and 'cú*' to accommodate variations in spelling.

assessed his role in the Revival.[4] Seán Farrell Moran's *Patrick Pearse and the Politics of Redemption* examines Pádraig Pearse's messianic reading of the character. And Ciara Ní Bhroin's 'Championing Irish Literature: A Postcolonial Critique of Lady Augusta Gregory's *Cuchulainn of Muirthemne'* considers Cú Chulainn's role as a tragic hero not only in the context of Pearsian ideology but in the context of Parnell's fall from public favour.[5] This chapter extends analysis of this hero into the period 1916 to 1923. In this era, Cú Chulainn maintained some of the shape given by both Anglo-Irish writers and Pádraig Pearse's idealisation of the young warrior. But as he was remoulded to a new context his characterization shifted, expressing changes in the values and goals of those who invoked him.

The chapter will begin with an outline of Cú Chulainn literature before 1916, focusing on representations of the hero's character and the social and political import of the translations. This chapter will then examine four aspects of the post-Rising Cú Chulainn. The hero's role in republican identity in the post-Rising years has not received substantial scholarly consideration. First, the chapter will discuss his age: He was less emphatically youthful than in preceding years, and in one document he even took on the identity of a national father. Aengus Óg, another unlikely national father, underwent a similar transformation. Second, the chapter will look at the use of the Fer Diad episode of the *Táin* as a metaphor for conflict in the revolutionary era. Third, this chapter will consider Cú Chulainn's ongoing role as a superhuman warrior and defender of his territory, and how both his volatility and his self-sacrifice faded from the foreground of his character.

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[4] Leerssen, *Remembrance,* 198-207; Z. Balázs 'An Uncanny Myth of Ireland: The Spectralisation of Cuchulain's Body in W. B. Yeats's Plays', *Études Irlandaises* (2017), 61-75.
[5] C. Ní Bhroin, 'Championing Irish Literature: A Postcolonial Critique of Lady Augusta Gregory's Cuchulainn of Muirthemne', *Bookbird* 43:2 (2005), 12-21. 13.

The Hero in translation

Political communities are created symbolically and imaginatively. Community symbols such as Cú Chulainn accumulate power through proliferation, 'through constant repetition in the media, in politics, and throughout everyday life as social actors continually reinforce the connection between symbols and the ideas and concrete relationships they are intended to represent'.[6] A symbolic hero is not merely a means to mobilise a community; it also fashions a commitment to a specific conception of the community embodied by the hero's stories. Heroes and their stories orient people toward certain values and shape the group's evolution.[7] As the political landscape shifts, heroic narratives shift as well to better support the self-fashioning of a community. Thus the changing narratives of Cú Chulainn can be read to a political end as well as a literary one.

In order to understand the significance of this hero after the Rising, it is necessary to understand his earlier iterations. Cú Chulainn's origins are long contested and predate written sources.[8] Despite his parallels to Achilles, 'there is no possibility that any Irishmen were acquainted with Homer' at the time tales about him were composed', although knowledge of Achilles could have come via Latin sources.[9] Medieval sources portrayed Cú

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[6] Goalwin, 'Curious Case', 309

[7] For more on this idea, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

[8] Mary Leenane gives an overview of the early textual history of this figure in her dissertation. His character is a relatively late addition to the Táín narrative.
Leenane, M. 'The Role of Cú Chulainn in Old and Middle Irish Narrative Literature with Particular Reference to Tales Belonging to the Ulster Cycle' (PhD thesis, NUI Maynooth, 2014).

[9] 'There may have been some knowledge of Virgil and some late Roman epic, notably Lucan and Statius; but it seems that this was largely or entirely a matter of atomized grammatical and scholiastic facts rather than literary engagement'. M. Clarke 'Achilles, B. Byrhtnoth, and

Chulainn as both the son of the god Lug and as his mortal incarnation.[10] Cú Chulainn figures in many vernacular tales, including *Compert Con Culainn*, *Tochmarc Emire*, *Fled Bricrenn,* and *Aided Chon Roí*. As a character, his fighting is berserk and solitary, not the product of group tactics or leadership. His family connections are fraught: he is a rapist, he considers abandoning his wife for a woman of the Aos Sí, and he kills both his foster brother and his only son.[11] He is outstandingly beautiful yet his beauty is bizarre (seven pupils in each eye and tricoloured hair) and in his *ríastrad* he is grotesque (joints that turn backwards, hair stiff enough to impale apples). In the *Táin*, he is taunted for his small size and lack of a beard.[12]

The manuscript tradition ground to a halt in the early modern period and the tales never made their way into an oral tradition. By the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Ulster Cycle was not present in any living oral tradition and was communicated through English-language print. Despite this, in the early twentieth century, his tales were linked to a hazily imagined rural oral tradition, often transmitted (supposedly) through an Irish-speaking servant or grandmother. Cú Chulainn's narratives were important to literary culture and nationalist identity and appear to have re-entered oral culture via nineteenth

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Cú Chulainn' in Epic Interactions: Perspectives on Homer, Virgil, and the Epic Tradition Presented to Jasper Griffin by Former Pupils ed. M. Clarke, B. Currie, and R. Lyn. (2010), 243-72. 264.

[10] Williams, *Immortals*, 20-1

[11] He rapes Aoife in Tochmarc Emire (the Wooing of Emer) and unknowingly kills their young son in *Aided Óenfhir Aífe* (the Death of Aoife's Only Son). O'Curry's *Lectures* makes a passing mention of Cuchulainn also being one of Lughaid's 'reputed fathers', which would give him a second son as well. E. O'Curry, *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History: Delivered at the Catholic University of Ireland, During the Sessions of 1855 and 1856.* (Dublin, 1878), 525.

[12] M. Hutton, *The Táin* (Dublin, 1924), 167.

century printed texts.[13] In the revolutionary era the hero was best known from the Ulster Cycle epic *Táin Bó Cúailnge,* which recounts his deeds in battle.[14]

The character was shaped by layers of revision. 'Those who were able to read the Táin Bó Cúailnge were reluctant to place it before the public because its primitiveness was too primitive, its violence was too violent, and its sex was too sexy'.[15] In 1861 Eugene O'Curry published *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History*. His *Lectures of the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish* was then published posthumously in 1873. His work was ground-breaking in making the contents of Irish texts available to English-speaking readers.[16] In his retelling, O'Curry glosses over Cú Chulain's grotesque battle frenzy and violent excesses and emphasises his conventionally beautiful aspects. O'Curry describes Cú Chulainn's 'beauty', 'noble carriage' and 'manly perfections', presenting him as a hero subject to 'the laws of chivalry of the time'.[17] Cú Chulainn 'confronts the invaders of his province', making his challenges 'by the laws of chivalry' in contrast to Queen Medb, who breaks her agreement with him and 'burned and ravaged the province'.[18] Compared to the Irish-language sources, this Cú Chulainn is notably restrained. The invocation of chivalry massages the mythical Celtic heroic age into medieval Anglo-Norman culture. O'Curry's framing uses the vocabulary and values of the Anglo-Norman medieval inheritance to repackage Cú Chulainn as a more intelligible and palatable hero. The antinarratable

[13] Yeats in Gregory, *Gods and Fighting Men,* x-xi.
[14] The *Lebor na hUidre* is the oldest extant recension of the *Táin* text, and dates from around 1100. It is a compilation joining (and expanding on) two texts, mainly written in Old Irish, which seem to date from the early ninth century. Knott and Murphy, 118.
[15] Wong, 'Oral Tradition', 639. The full *Táin* was not published until 1976. 'Overt' might be a more suitable word than 'sexy'.
[16] Williams, *Immortals*, 294.
[17] O'Curry, *Manuscript Materials*, 278, 280.
[18] O'Curry ,*Manuscript Materials,* 37.

passages are removed.[19] It is this sort of retelling that substantiates Declan Kiberd's arch remark that nineteenth century Cú Chulainn is 'little more than a British public schoolboy in drag.'[20]

The next major work in English was Standish James O'Grady's two-part *History of Ireland* in 1878 and 1880.[21] Standish O'Grady had a great influence on the Revival's use of Cú Chulainn, particularly through his influence on W.B. Yeats and George Russell.[22] His work was 'imaginative historiography as he assumed most legends based more or less on real events.[23] To O'Grady, a unionist, pre-Christian heroes and divinities were not culturally bound to people who were Catholic or rural, Irish speaking or nationalist. He presented Cú Chulainn as romantic and heroic, but primitive, and emerging from an obscure literary tradition for which only elites could provide access and guidance. 'The "bardic" side of O'Grady's history came to develop a distinctly mystical air'; but this mystic inheritance was not intended for everyone.[24] In 1894 O'Grady published *The Coming of Cuculain*, describing the source texts as a literature so vast and archaic as to repel all but students.'[25]

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[19] 'Antinarratable' refers to what cannot be written because of convention. R. Warhol, 'Neonarrative', or, How to Render the Unnarratable in Realist fiction and Contemporary Film', *Narratologies* (2005), 220-31, 221.
[20] Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland,* 31.
[21] Mattar, *Primitivism,* 4. Also notably, in France, Marie-Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville published De.*Cycle Mythologique Irlandais et la Mythologie Celtique* in 1884 and it became '*the* scholarly handbook of the meaning of Irish myth and its divinities for the Literary Revival.' Williams, *Immortals*, 296.
[22] P. Maume, 'Standish James O'Grady: Between Imperial Romance and Irish Revival', *Éire-Ireland*, Volume 39:1 and 2 (Spring-Summer 2004), 11-35. 15. For a further consideration of this figure, see J. Valente, 'Lost (and Found) in Translation', *Standish O'Grady's Cuculain: a Critical Edition* ed. G. Castle and P. Bixby (Syracuse, NY: 2016).
[23] Castle, 'Nobler Forms', *Irish Histories,* ed. McBride, 174; C. Boettcher, 'The Shattered Worlds of Standish O'Grady' (PhD. thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 2002), 14.
[24] Williams, *Immortals*, 305-9.
[25] S. O'Grady, *The Coming of Cuculain* (Dublin, 1894), vi.

O'Grady approached the heroic tradition as part of a wider cultural reservoir of pre-Christian knowledge and aesthetics, and styled it as a noble analogue or precursor for Anglo-Irish rule. His heroes were not evidence of unique Irish culture, but analogues of 'the divinities of other places and peoples,'.[26] Thus the mythic inheritance was loosed from its Irish-language roots. O'Grady notoriously could not pronounce Cú Chulainn, and his engagement with pronunciation was as imaginative as his engagement with source material.[27] Yeats described O'Grady as 'mind full of Homer', and the accuracy of this characterisation is borne out by the illustrations in *The Coming of Cuculain*.[28]

In O'Grady's *The Coming of Cuculain,* the opening image by illustrator D. Murray Smith shows the young hero in a scene from *Macgnímrada con Culann* and telegraphs a classical aesthetic:

[26] Williams, *Immortals*, 309. Maume, 'Standish James O'Grady', 33.
[27] O'Grady was not an Irish-speaker and his spelling of Irish names in the text was idiosyncratic, as was common for his time. Upon meeting Pearse, O'Grady is recorded as pronouncing the hero's name 'Cutch-ul-ane' and being corrected—to his surprise—by Pearse. Castle and Bixby, *O'Grady's Cuculain,* xi.
[28] Yeats, quoted in M. Ayres, '"But Where Can We Draw Water?" Ideology, Myth, and Legend in Twentieth-Century Irish Literature' (PhD. thesis, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2015), 87.

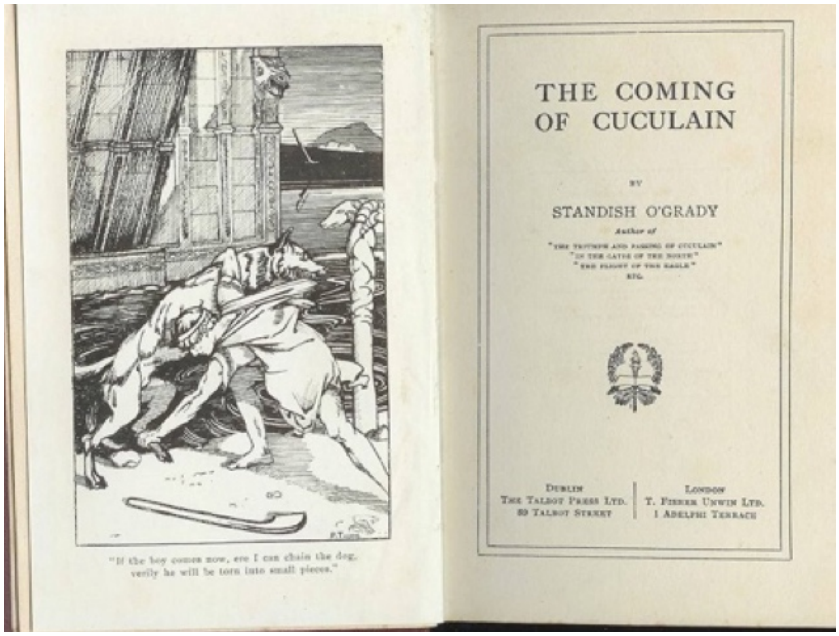


Figure 21. S. O'Grady, Coming of Cuculain*, title page.*

In front of a landscape more evocative of the walls of Troy than of a ring fort, the hero grapples with a hound with emotionless calm. The artist has aged him to muscular maturity.[29] The illustration recalls depictions of Herakles' first labour, fighting the Nemean lion:

[29] Contrast this with Stephen Reid's illustration of the *macgnímrada* from Eleanor Hull's 1909 *Cuchulainn the Hound of Ulster*, shown later on in this chapter.



Figure 22. Rome, Villa Giulia, Museo Nazionale Etrusco. 'Attic Black-Figure Amphora B' attrib. to the Boulogne Painter, 550–500 BCE. Photo: E. Sani.

This illustration mirrors the young hero's actions in manuscript sources—picking up the dog to dash it against a rock—but the aesthetic situates it in a neo-classical European tradition. O'Grady's epigraphs at the start of his chapters continue this work. He quotes Byron ('There were his young barbarians all at play'), as well as Longfellow, Milton, Coleridge, Keats and Shelley, interspersed with translated quotes from Irish literature.[30] His writing values Irish literature not so much for being unique and locally grounded but for being a component in a wider tradition of myth and literature.[31]

[30] The most intriguing quote is from Chapter 3: 'Very small and beautiful like a star', a quote attributed to Homer. O'Grady, *Coming of Cuculain*. Achilles is described as a star (in Book 22 of the Iliad) but not in combination with his size or beauty. Achilles is radiant in his armour like the star Orion, described as the λαμπρότατος ('brightest') star. The 'small and beautiful' may have been a fabrication to link the Irish hero to the Greek one.

[31] This association with the classical was made even with Irish tales that had more in common with other genres such as chivalric romance. The Revival included attempts to create a counter-claim to high culture and history by situating Irish literature as a parallel to Greek and Latin classics and the Celtic pantheon comparable to the Greek one.

Thus the elevation of the past did not always serve claims of uniqueness or a politics of separatism. To the extent that these nineteenth- and early twentieth-century translated works were used for identity construction, they enabled both writers and their audiences to avoid history except to establish continuity with an aristocratic Gaelic world obliterated in the early seventeenth century. Anglo-Irish writers such as O'Grady were interested in manuscript materials as an artistic and cultural resource and viewed the imagined past with a 'collector's melancholy'.[32] Writers such as Lady Gregory, Standish O'Grady, Douglas Hyde, J. M. Synge, who came from high status backgrounds in the Ascendancy and sub-Ascendancy classes 'exhibited a revulsion at British penetration of Ireland.' They blamed it for 'the bureaucratization of native society, the development of a complex division of labour and the rise of a vulgarising mass culture.'[33] And yet O'Grady feared the establishment of what he suspected would be 'a shabby an sordid Irish republic'.[34] Heroic literature offered a connection with a more 'authentic' and 'noble' past, a model for elite virtue, without necessarily making demands on one's social or political behaviour in the present.[35] This approach has parallels in Welsh Catalonian, Basque and Breton culture, all of which had movements concerned with national pride and rural culture in the face of modernisation and industrialisation.[36]

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[32] Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, 62, writing about Synge. For more on the Anglo-Irish relationship to the Irish past, see J. Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London, 1987), 215-6.
[33] Hutchinson, *Dynamics,* 220.
[34] Maume, 'Standish James O'Grady', 20-1.
[35] 'Books for Boys and Girls', the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (23 Nov. 1906) asked 'why go abroad for mythic heroes when we have excellent examples of our own?', expressing, from northern England, a confident ownership of Irish-language literature. 9.
[36] J. Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse: The Making of a Revolutionary* (Basingstoke, 2010), 3.

Yeats wrote five works in which Cú Chulainn features.[37] Amongst the Revivalists, Yeats had 'aesthetic hegemony'.[38] 'His influence was stamped on every area of Irish cultural life' and he was one of the 'main drivers' of the Revival.[39] Yeats was interested in the idea of heroism but rejected political nationalism as crude and schoolboyish.[40] He was remembered with resentment by some Gaelic Leaguers as someone who would 'make himself prominent' at their social functions 'although most of the boys disliked him.'[41] His political positions were often in flux an cannot be tidily summed up, but are traced by Roy Foster in his magisterial *Yeats: A Life*.[42] Although not disconnected from nationalist politics, Yeats was ultimately concerned with creating art (more enduring than politics) and with exploring the reaches of human potential and his own psyche. Yeats wanted to rechannel Anglophobia into rejection of the specific modernity Britain represented to him. Magic and politics were not competing concerns for Yeats; they reinforced each other. Magic was envisioned as a collective endeavour striving towards a 'Unity of Being' that would 'so deepen the political passion of the nation that all, artist and poet, craftsman and day-labourer would accept a

[37] 'The Death of Cuchulain' (1892 poem, rewritten in 1925 as 'Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea'); 'On Baile's Strand', a play in verse published 1903 in *In the Seven Woods* and revised in 1906 in *Poems 1899*; 'The Golden Helmet' a prose drama (1908, rewritten 1910 as 'The Green Helmet'); 'At the Hawk's Well,' a Noh play (1916, previously called 'The Well of Immortality' and 'The Waters of Immortality'); 'The Only Jealousy of Emer,' a Noh play (1919, rewritten in a 1928 prose version 'Fighting the Waves'); 'The Death of Cuchulain', a verse play (1939); 'Cuchulain Comforted' a poem published (1939, previously called 'The Death of Cuchulain'). W. Wedin, 'Chronology of Yeats's Use of the Cuchulainn Legend'. Department of English, California state University (2004). http://www.csun.edu/ [20 May 2022].
[38] S. Sheehan, and A. Dooley, 'Introduction', *Constructing Gender in Medieval Ireland* ed. S. Sheehan, and A. Dooley, eds. (New York, 2013), 3.
[39] Williams, *Celtic Myths*, 173.
[40] Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, 96.
[41] J. Kavanagh, W.S. #889 , Bureau of Military History, 15.
[42] R. Foster, *Yeats: a Life* (Oxford, 2005).

common design[43] Like O'Curry and O'Grady, his work did not rely on the uniqueness of Ireland: Yeats understood his mystical nationalism to be an indigenization of practices he learned in the Golden Dawn.[44] Despite his own discomfort with the separatist movement, the works of Yeats, and his contemporaries, had unintended consequences.[45] Cumann na mBan member and anti-Treaty republican Dorothy Macardle, for example, wrote that she was 'awakened to an awareness of my nationality' through the works of Yeats, O'Grady and Gregory.[46]

In 1902 Lady Augusta Gregory published *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, working with a London publisher because Irish publishers were not interested. However, her book became popular in Ireland and she subsequently published an Irish edition. Her work was a 'deliberate challenge to the Trinity College professors who wished to denigrate Irish culture.' In *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* she presents herself as a conservator of stories, acknowledging that the Cú Chulainn material had passed from living memory. Addressing the Irish rural audience to whom her work was dedicated, she writes that scholarly editions 'are not easy for you to get, or to understand, and the stories themselves are confused'.[47] Therefore it fell to her, 'a woman of the house', to pass on the stories because there was a dearth of 'respect for Irish things' amongst Dublin academics.[48] Through the dialect, dedication and preface, her work sought to reconnect the tales with their native Irish origins. In her work, Cú Chulainn fights individually. Gregory emphasizes this, showing the

[43] Yeats quoted in J. Dean. 'The "Supernatural Artist" and the Tarot Fool: Transnational Esotericism in W.B. Yeats', *Modern Drama* 63:1 (2020), 1-20. 3.
[44] J. Dean, 'Supernatural Artist', 1.
[45] Yeats' relationship with nationalism was complex and changed throughout his life.
[46] D. Macardle, WS #457, Bureau of Military History, 1 .
[47] Gregory, *Gods and Fighting Men*, v.
[48] Gregory, *Gods and Fighting Men*, vi.

object of combat is not to annex territory but 'to uphold social order and bonding among one's own people.'[49]

As Ernest Renan said in an 1882 lecture: 'Forgetting, I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation.'[50] This is true of the creation of a national literature as well. It is necessary to consider what was omitted in retelling medieval tales. Gregory's retelling is selective and mild, and she informs her readers she 'left out a good deal I thought you would not care about for one reason or another'.[51] When Cú Chulainn undergoes his *ríastrad* (battle frenzy), rather than an extreme physical transformation described in Irish-language sources, 'the hero light shone around his head, and it was not the appearance of a man that was on him, but the appearance of a god.'[52] Compare:

> *Ar bá bés dó-som in tan no linged a lón láith ind, imréditis a t[h]raigthi iarma 7 a escata remi 7 muil a orcan fora lur-gnib, 7 indala súil ina chend 7 araili fria chend anechtair. Docoised ferchend fora beólu. Nach findae bíd fair ba háthithir delc sciach 7 banna fola for cach finnu. Ní aithg-néad cóemu ná cairdiu. Cumma no slaided ríam 7 íarma.* (TBC I, ll . 1651-1655)
>
> For it was usual with him that when his hero's flame sprang forth his feet would turn to the back and his hams turn to the front and the round muscles of his calves would come on to his shins, while one eye sank into his head and the other protruded. A man's head would go into his mouth. Every hair on him would be as sharp as a spike of hawthorn and there would be a drop of blood on every hair. (TBC I, ll .1651-1655)[53]

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[49] D. Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (Cambridge, 2001), 408.
[50] E. Renan, '"What is a Nation?" Text of a Conference Delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11th, 1882', *Qu'est-ce Qu'une Nation?* trans. E. Rundell (Paris, 1992). For an examination of this idea, see G. Beiner, 'Introduction', *Forgetful Remembrance: Social Forgetting and Vernacular History of a Rebellion in Ulster* (Oxford, 2018). 1-45.
[51] Gregory, *Gods and Fighting Men,* vi.
[52] Gregory, *Gods and Fighting Men,* 35.
[53] O'Rahilly, *Táin,* 1651-5, 171.

Cuchulainn of Muirthemne's intended use in schools certainly affected Gregory's editorial choices.[54] It was common practice for elements of a tale considered undesirable to be altered or omitted, with or without comment.[55] Gregory was, however, criticized for her bowdlerisation by John Synge, Douglas Hyde and Standish O'Grady, suggesting her expurgation was heavy-handed even for her time.[56] She avoided barbarity, ambiguity, liminality and what is essentially Cú Chulainn's too-muchnes. But the elements Gregory found antinarratable were essential to the hero's character. Her work displayed a patronising smoothing-over, a desire to avoid the extreme. Whilst this is to some extent a product of her cultural context, it may also reflect her conception of the work as a national literature, an offering—albeit a more indirect one than her preface presents it—to the native Irish and a representation of the Irish nation.

In retelling Cú Chulainn's stories, some writers steer toward tales in which the hero is most fully human and integrated into society. George Sigerson's 1907 *Bards of the Gael and Gall* focuses on narratives of romance and pathos, such as Cú Chulainn's wooing of his wife Emer and his affair with the Sí woman Fand.[57] Suseen Varian's 1909 *Cuchulainn: a*

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[54] Ní Bhroin, 'Championing', 17.

[55] Tymoczko, *Postcolonial*, 126. In 1891 Whitley Stokes explained a lacuna in a particularly earthy episode of *Cath Dédenach Maige Tuired (The Second Battle of Moytura,* lit*. The Last Battle of Moytura)*: 'Much of it is obscure to me, and much of the rest is too indecent to be published in this Revue.' Tymoczko, *Postcolonial,* 126. In Hutton's *Táin*, a scene in which Queen Medb stops a battle because of her period turned into the queen saying 'I shall not live unless I rest a little' with no mention of the trenches created by her menstrual blood in the Irish text. Hutton, *Táin,* 433. In Maclean, *Literature of the Celts*, 159, Cú Chulainn's rape of Aoife is 'his chance encounter with the lady who bore him his famous son'. A. Gregory is more direct, saying he left Aoife with child after overcoming her in battle: *Gods and Fighting Men*, 313. Maclean also skips the scene in which Cú Chulainn cuts off the hair of Medb's daughter and uses a stone to pin her down beside a corpse.

[56] M. Cronin, *Translating Ireland: Translation, Languages, Culture* (Cork, 1996), 139.

[57] G. Sigerson, *Bards of the Gael and Gall* (New York, 1974). [Originally published in Dublin and Belfast]

Cycle of Irish Plays chose two out of the four plays to focus on his marriage.[58] Yeats' work also considers the hero in his more human experiences, such as his grief in the poem 'The Death of Cuchulain' (1896). Other writers told the stories selectively: In Magnus Maclean's version of *macgnímrada* (boyhood deeds) in his 1902 *The Literature of the Celts,* the young hero encounters the youths of Emain Macha and transforms with *ríastrad* so the youths flee—but he doesn't strike down fifty of them as he does in the Irish.[59] In Hutton's 1902 *Táin,* Cú Chulainn is made twee in his boyhood deeds and his violence against the youths of Emain Macha is removed.[60] Hutton's retelling emphasizes the hero's acceptance into Ulster society without his perilous instability (his quickness to violence and his inability to understand social norms or form connections with others). Revivalist retellings vary from writer to writer but tend to integrate Cú Chulainn into society with a tone somewhere between nostalgia and patronisation.

Pádraig Pearse's stamp on the hero was to revere his youth and to link his martial prowess to Christian mythology. In the years leading up to the Rising, Pearse's sacrificial boy-hero was a particularly influential symbol amongst young republicans. Pearse set up St. Enda's School in 1908 and many participants in the coming conflicts were his students.[61] St. Enda's boys became 'a regular fixture in Dublin's social and cultural life in the early years of the twentieth century and were considered…emblematic of the potential of Irish

[58] S. Varian and J. Varian, *Cuchulain: A Cycle of Plays* (Dublin, 1909).
[59] Maclean, *Literature of the Celts,* 156.
[60] Hutton, *Táin*, 140-60
[61] Hutchinson, *Dynamics,* 245

manhood.'[62] 'The tone of the time was set by men like Pearse, Plunkett and Macdonagh.'[63] The front hall of the school displayed a fresco of Cú Chulainn by the Morrow brothers.[64] It showed the boy hero taking arms, and around the mural was an inscription of his choice of fame over life, echoing that of Achilles: 'I care not though I live but one day and one night if only my name and deeds live after me.'[65] Cumann na mBan member and Irish Citizen Army volunteer Margaret Skinnider recalled how the words 'became a motto for the boys in that school.'[66]

Pearse's vision of the hero centred on youthfulness and sacrifice, intertwining with his religious philosophy. Accompanying the inscription in the front hall was Beatrice Elvery's 'Íosagán' (Little Jesus), embodying the ideal of youthful sacrifice. Pearse had commissioned this work specifically for the school:[67]

[62] E. Sisson, 'The Boy as National Hero: The Legacy of CúChulainn,' UCD Scholarcast (undated), 6. http://www.ucd.ie/scholarcast/scholarcast2.html [29 Nov, 2017), 6. Joost Augusteijn describes the whole cast of 'the Boy-deeds of Cúchulainn' marching in costume through Dublin. Augusteijn *Patrick Pearse,* 174 .
[63] Dalton, 'Blood Sacrifice', 352
[64] Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, 171.
[65] Sisson, 'Boy as National Hero', 6.
[66] '…and also a prophecy of their teacher's death.' M. Skinnider, *Doing My Bit for Ireland* (New York, 1917), 17.
[67] F. McNally, 'Fanning the Flames of Revolution: an Irishman's Diary about Beatrice Elvery', *Irish Times* (20 May 2015). Pearse published a book by the same name. P. Pearse, *Íosagán agus Sgéalta Eile* (Dublin, 1907).



Figure 23. Rathfarnam, Pearse Museum, Ísagán

This theme was entrenched further still when Maude Gonne gifted Pearse's school with Elvery's 1907 painting 'Eire', depicting the nation as an imposing Madonna figure, discussed in the earlier section of Chapter 4: the Woman of Sovereignty. These works of art allude to Pearse's vision of bloodshed as 'a cleansing and a sanctifying thing,' his conviction that 'the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood.'[68]

Cú Chulainn was everywhere at St. Enda's: the exercise book, the primer, the art, the pageants, the plays, the daily stories.[69] The hero was for Pearse 'a true type of Gaelic nationality, full as it is of a youthful life and vigour and hope.'[70] This idea was itself an

[68] P. Pearse, *Collected Works of Pádraic H. Pearse: Plays, Stories, Poems* (Dublin, 1966), 99.
[69] Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse,* 172-3.
[70] Pearse, quoted in Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, 170.

reimagining: doom and inevitability dominate the stories of the Ulster Cycle more than hope.[71] Thematically, the Ulster Cycle presents a tragic breakdown of the relationships that underpin society: 'The relationship between host and guest, between kindred, between foster brother, between men and women, between lords and clients and the gods.'[72] Against the textual tradition, Pearse brought his version of the hero closer to his own social mores. In his daily retellings of Cú Chulainn tales he excised 'the womanising, arrogance, violence, tricky and non-national elements.'[73]

In this context, Cú Chulainn was the centrepiece of a wider Pearsian body of imagery centred on sacrifice and death. Whilst this was part of a European trend to which Pearse was attuned, and which was amplified by World War One, he tribalised it.[74] Pearse rerouted a deeply held Catholic piety into service of the nation via a rather crude and transparent allegory. The wainscoting in his school's main classroom displayed the names of both heroes and saints to inspire students, blending the two traditions.[75] He tied his republican project to Catholic ideas of martyrdom, advocating victory through death.[76] He reimagined his

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[71] This is evident in the nature of *geisa* (loosely translatable as 'taboos'). As soon as a *geis* is mentioned it is narratively destined to cause difficulty or worse. Some tales such as *Longes mac nUislenn* (the source of Yeats' *Deirdre of the Sorrows*) do sympathetically explore the human need for hope and striving toward free will but conclude that between social and supernatural constraints such things are fruitless.

[72] J. Radner, quoted in T. Clancy, 'Court, King and Justice in the Ulster Cycle' in *Medieval Celtic Literature and Society* (Dublin, 2005), 163-82. 178. And as Tom Sjöblom clarifies, it also shows the recreation of the 'social and cosmic order'. Sjöblom, 'On the Threshold', *Ulidia*, ed. J.P. Mallory and G. Stockman, 169.

[73] Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, 170. 'Womanising' isn't quite the right word here; 'lust and sexual violence' would be more accurate.

[74] For more on this European trend, see Mosse's *Fallen Soldiers*. For more on Pearse's embeddedness in European thought, see Augusteijn's *Patrick Pearse: The Making of a Revolutionary*.

[75] Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, 171.

[76]Oscar Traynor quotes a speech from Pearse: 'Be assured that you will find victory, even though that victory may be found in death.' O. Traynor W.S. #340, Bureau of Military History, 11.`

religion as a nationalist tribal creed. For Pearse, 'the rebel-martyr without death was no hero at all'.[77] One student recalled 'we understood that it was Pearse's goal to make every student a Cúchulainn for Cúchulainn was his exemplar'.[78] The Irish-language school prospectus (and not the English language one) said the school would attempt to inculcate pupils to devote their lives to their country, and to die for it if necessary.[79] He presented Cú Chulainn's death as a redemptive blood-sacrifice.[80] Pearse had conflated Catholicism and nationalism to an arguably blasphemous extent, believing in: 'A love and a service so excessive as to annihilate all thought of self, a recognition that one must give all, must be willing always to make the ultimate sacrifice this is the inspiration alike of the story of Cuculainn and of the story of Columcille, the inspiration that made one a hero and the other a saint'.[81] Pearse invented a Cú Chulainn driven by love and selflessness, a wholly new revision of this character.

His position was controversial and sharply rebuked: Francis Shaw accused Pearse of 'national heresy' because 'his equation of the patriot with Christ is in conflict with the whole Christian tradition.'[82] A visitor remarked skeptically that 'the kids in there are being taught according to the commandments of Cú Chulainn rather than the ten commandments of God.'[83]

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[77] Thompson, *Imagination*, 122.
[78] Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, 171.
[79] Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, 279.
[80] Thompson, *Imagination*, 121.
[81] Pearse, *Collected Works*, 25.
[82] Quoted in M. Ruczaj '"Daringly, Yet with Reverence": Pearse, Mickiewicz and the Theology of National Messianism' *Études Irlandaises* 39:1 (2013), 57-71. 58.
[83] Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse*, 171. He was severely critiqued by theologians after his death, as well as politicians: Conor Cruise O'Brien called his idea of the Rising 'a passion play with real blood'. Ruczaj 'Daringly', 419.

Pearse's ideas nonetheless percolated through republican circles. In a Frongach Camp autograph book from the Civil War, a prisoner Patrick Nolan wrote: 'I was sentenced to be shot. I was shot. But still I live for Ireland.' Beneath it, another prisoner writes 'Teach every Irish lad you meet that once more noble blood was shed in Holy Ireland's cause in 1916 Teach him to prepare that the next shedding brings his native Land – Freedom!'[84] And a 1920 article commented: 'We have all thrilled at the hero-greatness of the epic. That passage that Pearse loved, which tells how the dying champion laughed his last laugh as he saw the raven slipping in his blood, has moved us all, yet has moved us all, yet only know it from some cheap redaction.[85] The writer senses the palimpsest of translations and retellings mean people connect with the story through layers of mediation. And yet Pearse's particular mediated version was influential.

Cú Chulainn 1916 to 1923

By 1916 to 1923, the expurgations of sections of medieval narratives had already happened: since most republicans were not antiquarians they did not simply censor or alter a medieval text themselves: they were picking and choosing from preselected translated materials of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, work that blurs the distinction between translation, retelling and invention. The republican imagining of the hero had been shaped by cultural gatekeepers such as Gregory, Yeats and Pearse; but the cultural function of Cú Chulainn, and the emphases in his story, shifted as he became part of new projects of self-

[84] December 19, 1922. Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS 44,025 – 44,310, Sean O'Mahony Papers (1880-2005).
[85] 'Is Cuchulain Neglected?', *Donegal News* (23 Oct. 1920), 4.

fashioning. In the post-rising years, Cú Chulainn was not at the forefront of the cultural imagination but was well known.[86] A 1918 article in the *Evening Herald* claimed: 'Cuchullain and Finn MacCool and other heroes of our bardic annals, are household names' in South Armagh.[87] And as that article implies, engagement with the stories continued to be a shorthand for nationalism and authenticity. And a 1920 the Donegal News article asked: 'Why is it that the Cuchulan saga is so much neglected? Why is it not made the theme of new and ever newer literature?' I don't agree that it is neglected. In fact, wo have had so much of it that unless an author should arise to treat it with supreme genius many of us would be glad to hear no more of it for a while.' [88] In 1923 the nationalist *Freemans Journal* published an article archly critiquing President William Cosgrave's Free State government for its suppression of republicanism. It sarcastically described General Richard Mulcahy's confidence in the Free State Army: 'As far as he is concerned Southern Ireland is bubbling with young-eyed Cuchulains, Finns, and Diarmids. Fifty thousand of them are dressed in glorious khaki, dyed green, and present arms—purchased from the benevolent British Government—when "General" Richard gives the proper…command in Gaelic.'[89] The piece sarcastically critiques the anti-Treaty forces, suggesting they have no right to feel a connection to those figures, or to give Irish commands.[90] This chapter will now consider how

[86] The story is present in the general cultural imagination. The skin care company Gibsol claimed, 'So many requests have been received from clergymen and school teachers for the Gibsol Heroic Series of pictures to be used for educational purposes that we have had them printed on separate sheets which will be sent post free on application.' Their ads appeared in publications across political divides. Eg. *Irish Examiner* (12 Jun. 1920), 1. In addition to nationalist papers they advertised in the unionist *Belfast Telegraph*.
[87] 'Cuchullain and Finn', *Evening Herald* (22 Jan. 1918), 2.
[88] 'Is Cuchulain Neglected?', *Donegal News* (23 Oct. 1920), 4.
[89] 'A Special Correspondent', 'The Gunmen and Ulster', *Freemans Journal* (22 Sept. 1923), 5.
[90] As Ann Dolan summarised: 'To die in 1916, 1919, 1920 or 1921 was to die a martyr for old Ireland. To die in a Free State unit was to die a mere soldier.' A. Dolan, quoted in J. Wolffe, *Sacred and Secular Martyrdom in Britain and Ireland Since 1914* (London, 2020), 64.

the Cú Chulainn of those years was a tool for communicating cultural values, and how the emphases of his character and story shifted to accomplish this.

Boy hero to father figure

After the Rising, the boy hero aged. His later years gained more attention relative to his boyhood deeds, and in one political poem he was invoked as a father of the nation.[91] This stands in contrast to the pre-1916 idolisation of the youthful warrior, as led by Pearse. The Cú Chulainn who found cultural resonance after the Rising was less young, less liminal, less plagued by 'anxious masculinity'.[92] This suited his political function.

Cú Chulainn was initially claimed for republicanism by Pearse. The dominant portrayal of the hero was a youth. Stephen Reid's 1909 illustration of the *Macgnímrada (boyhood deeds)* from Eleanor Hull's *Cuchulainn: The Hound of Ulster* shows a young, fresh hero.

[91] Cú Chulain's age of death varies from twenty-seven to thirty-three. Hull places him at seventeen during the *Táin*, in which his small stature and beardlessness are a frequent source of comment. Hull and O'Curry, put his age at death at twenty-seven. E. Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, 39. O'Curry, *Manuscript Materials,* 555. A 1917 article does as well: Lex, 'Lessons in Irish History, Literature, etc', *Anglo-Celt* (17 Mar. 1917), 22. Williams, puts it at thirty-three. Williams, *Immortals*, 22. This variation is presumably due to some redactor matching his age to that of Jesus.

[92] S. Sheehan. 'Fer Diad De-flowered', 61.

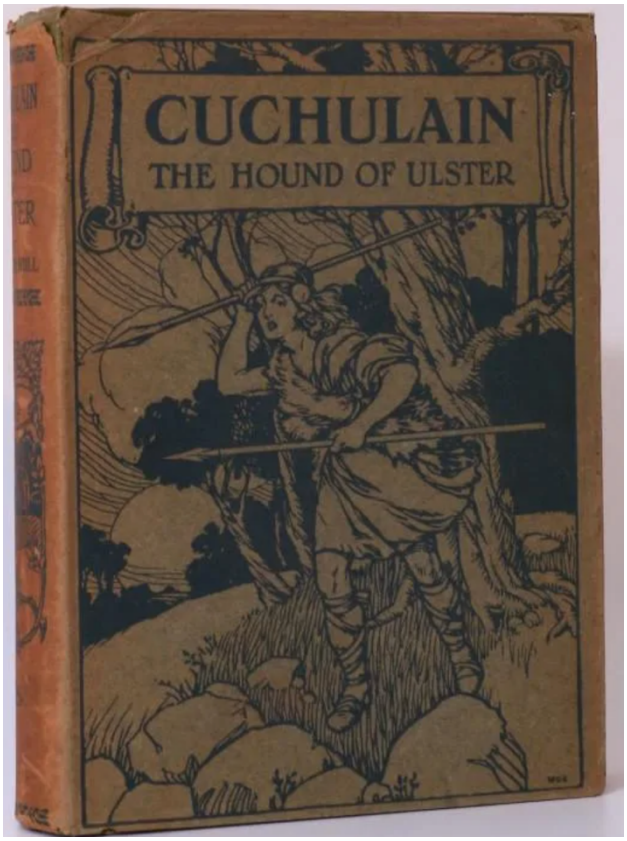


Figure 24. E. Hull The Hound of Ulster *(London, 1909).*

In republican circles after 1916, this representation tended to give way to older and more martial imaginings.

Some part of this may have been due to both the authors and audience for Cú Chulainn narratives aging. After the Rising, children became a less visible force in republicanism. Pearse was no longer alive to run St. Enda's School, and the Rising initially had a negative effect on Fianna outside Dublin, with several *sluaighte* (troops) becoming defunct.[93] Popular attention turned those imprisoned and executed. All sixteen executed for their role in the Rising were adults, and the face of national self-sacrifice was now often a

[93] M. Hay, *Na Fianna Éireann and the Irish Revolution, 1909-23: Scouting for Rebels*, (Manchester, 2019), 70.

middle aged one. Tom Clarke, for example, was executed age fifty-eight, alongside thirty-eight-year-old Thomas Macdonagh and thirty-six-year old Pádraig Pearse.[94]

Peter Hart's research compares the ages of volunteers through the post-Rising years and concludes the median age is fairly stable.

Table 4. *Ages of volunteers in Ireland* (%)

	Officers			Men		
	1917–19	1920–1	1922–3	1917–19	1920–1	1922–3
Sample...	675	561	335	2,052	2,722	1,409
Under 20	14	11	3	23	20	17
20–9	65	68	73	59	68	75
30–9	20	19	20	14	9	7
40–9	2	2	3	3	2	1
50–9	1	1	—	1	0·1	0·1
Median age	25	25	26	23	24	24

Sources besides those used in Tables 1 and 2: Defence of the Realm Act (DORA), GPB records, prisoner records, cartons 3–6 (NA); prisoner files in the Art O'Brien papers (NLI, MS 8443–5). Ages were calculated as of 1918, 1920, and 1922.

Figure 25: P. Hart, 'The Structure of the Irish Republican Army, 1916-1923' The Historical Journal 42:2 (Mar. 1999), 207-31. 217.

The combatants remained young, but not children by the standards of the day. IRA members were on average four to five years younger than Sinn Féin members (and membership to both was of course possible), with other demographics of membership roughly the same.[95] In any given year of the conflict from 1916 to 1923, at least 75% of

[94] From 1917 to 1919, the average Sinn Féin activist was 4 to 5 years older than his counterpart in the Volunteers. Hart, *IRA at War*, see Figure 25.
127. In 1922, a Free State soldier had a median age of twenty-four and many were under twenty. Hart, *IRA at War,* 130. The Volunteers in this era were a less clear 'type' and tended to be under thirty. Hart, *IRA at War,* 131.
[95] Hart, 'Social Structure', 219.

paramilitary men were late teens and twenties, less than 5% above 40.[96] From 1917 through 1923 the average age of the IRA increased by one year only.[97]

Na Fianna Éireann were still involved in the independence struggle, particularly after they reorganised in 1917. In April that year they paraded on the streets of Dublin in open defiance of orders against marching and drilling: their youth 'enabled them to challenge government authority more openly than their adult counterparts at this relatively early stage after the rebellion.'[98] Fianna adjutant Barney Mellows complained that the Volunteers had 'not made the slightest attempt to avail themselves of the advantages of boys over men and that the general opinion is that the Fianna are only youngsters who should be treated like children.'[99] After the outbreak of the Civil War the organisation fell apart, lacking funds and divided by the civil conflict.[100] Thus the cult of youthful sacrifice dissipated. Although the group was widespread and useful for morale, community cohesion, and support operations, youths—real or mythical–never became dominant face of the independence struggle, with the exception of Kevin Barry.[101] Eighteen-year-old IRA member Kevin Barry,

[96] Hart, 'Social Structure', 216 .
[97] Hart, 'Social Structure', 216 The turnover of membership kept the age low.
[98] Hay, *Na Fianna,* 76.
[99] Hay, *Na Fianna,* 85.
[100] Hay, *Na Fianna,* 90.
[101] One exception is the IRA member Kevin Barry, who was executed in 1922 at age eighteen. He became an icon of sacrifice and his youthfulness was leveraged to gain sympathy. By 1919 there were *sluaighte* (troops) of Fianna in 'every important sized town and village'. In March 1920, a report from Dublin said the organisation has been hindered by arrests and lack of funds, and Adjutant Barney Mellows complained it was difficult to convince older boys to remain in the youth organisation as they wanted to join the Volunteers. Over time, tensions developed with the IRA and the Fianna eventually put themselves at the disposal of the IRA as an auxiliary. Hay, *Na Fianna,* 78-82. For more on Kevin Barry, see the witness statement of his sister Katherine Barry Moloney, #WS 731, Bureau of Military History.

on the border of youth and adulthood, was executed in Dublin in 1920 and his youthfulness was emphasised at the time, as in this song:

> In Mountjoy Jail one Monday morning
> High upon the gallows tree
> Kevin Barry gave his young life
> For the cause of liberty:
> Just a lad of 18 summers…[102]

As the political aims moved on from a doomed and sacrificial rebellion to a plausibly winnable war for independence represented by older combatants, the national hero became an adult. In the context of the War of Independence, the iconic hero developed from being a self-sacrificing youth to someone who survived to adulthood, became part of a community, and perhaps had a family. A War of Independence entry from a Kilmainham Gaol autograph book reads:

> God bless the IRA
> Dauntless and bold in fray
> Brave worthy sons of Cuchulian and Conn
> Careless of steel or lead.[103]

Cú Chulainn, with Conn Cétcathach (Conn of the Hundred Battles), is here a forefather, not an exemplar of youthful sacrifice.

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[102] 'Ballad of Kevin Barry' quoted in E. O'Halpin, 'Kevin Barry: An Irish Rebel Life and Death' in *Études Irlandaises* (2022), 144-50. 146.

[103] 'A Rallying Song' in Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS 34,954/1A Republican Autograph Book Compiled at Ballykinlar Internment Camp (1920-1921). Conn of the Hundred Battles appears in annals and the *Lebor Gebála Érenn* as a High King of Ireland. A notable, but not unusual, feature of this inscription is the misspelling of Cú Chulainn. While the name has multiple modernized spellings, the reversal of the final two vowels suggests he was being squinted at from a distance and the details were never quite in focus. The description of Cú Chulainn bears this out: although a major hero, he is usually thought of as a youth, not a progenitor and ancestor.

A rare earlier example of an older Cú Chulainn was Yeats' poem 'Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea'. This 1893 reimagining *Aided Áenfir Aífe* (*The Death of Aífe's Only Son*) was radically different from the medieval text, largely Yeats' own invention.[104] In this work, the hero is 'Aged, worn out with wars/On foot on horseback or in battle-cars'.[105] Yet in this poem, Cú Chulainn has not gained maturity, leadership or wisdom, only age. Enchanted by Conchobor's druids, the poem ends with him futilely battling 'the invulnerable tide'.[106]

Later imaginings associated his age with wisdom. In a 1919 story in the *Connaught Telegraph* (a reformist though not republican paper), he has a pupil, and speaks to him in a way that suggests both age and authority:

> To his pupil Lugaid a prince destined to rule over Erin, Cuchulinn's instructions were—Speak not haughtily. Discourse not noisly. Mock not, insult not, deride not the old. Think not ill of any. Make no demands that cannot be met. Receive submissively the instructions of the wise. Be mindful of the admonitions of the old. Follow the decrees of your fathers. Be not cold-hearted to friends; but against your foes be vigorous. Avoid dishonourable disputes in your many contests. Be not a tattler and abuser. Waste not, hoard not, alienate not. Submit to reproof for unbecoming deeds. Do not sacrifice justice to the passions of men. Be not lazy lest you become weakened, be not importune lest you become contemptible.[107]

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[104] W.B. Yeats*, '*Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea'*, The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* ed. R. Finneran (London, 1991), 33–36.

[105] Yeats*, '*Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea', 34.

[106] Yeats, '*Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea', 36. Yeats retold a second story of an adult Cú Chulainn, the 1918 verse play *The Only Jealousy of Emer.* This tale is not about nation or leadership, but is a retelling of *Serglige con Culainn,* a medieval text that survives in the twelfth century Lebor na hUidre. The medieval text about the hero conflicting his love for his wife and another woman. This is perhaps prompted by Yeats' 1917 marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lees after decades of obsession with Maud Gonne.

[107] 'Shaveings' in *Connaught Telegraph* (8 Mar. 1919), 4. This is uncredited but quoting Hull, 'Instructions of Cuchulainn to a Prince' in *The Cuchullin Saga*. Another translation appears in Gregory's *Cuchulainn of Muirthemne*. This translation is reasonably faithful to the medieval text, although in the Irish the hero ends the address 'a meic', 'o young man', which further entrenches the age disparity: '*Ardotchuibdig fri sechem na m-bríathar sin, a meic*!' D. Myles, ed. *Serglige Con Culainn*, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 14 (Dublin, 1956), 9.

Cú Chulainn is here a dispenser of wisdom. Cú Chulainn explains how to be an ideal member of society, exhorting a self-control alien to his usual persona.[108] This hero has the wisdom of age, suggesting an interest in a hero who is not passionately self-sacrificing, but strategic, experienced and integrated into society.

This text is part of the medieval tale *Serglige Con Culainn* and the newspaper retelling makes this extract the centrepiece of the tale.[109] *Serglige Con Culainn* was often read in the nineteenth and twentieth century as a romance text and this section is not forefronted. In the same year, 1919, Yeats used the tale as the basis for his a verse play *The Only Jealousy of Emer.* Yeats' tale is not about virtue or leadership, but focuses the narrative on the hero's conflicting his love for his wife and another woman.[110] So while Yeats retold this tale to explore its love triangle narrative, the *Connaught Telegraph* extracted the *specula principium* section.[111] The newspaper article uses Eleanor Hull's translation. Removed from the broader context of Hull's *The Cuchullin Saga*, the article draws our attention to an older and wiser iteration of the hero, selecting that as the important story to communicate in 1919.

In his memoir, Ernie O'Malley recounts travel in 1919 to the Aran Islands. There is an exchange of storytelling, mixing saga and history, medieval and early modern. His friends tell him tales from the Finn Cycle and one story he responds with is the medieval Ulster

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[108] Jeremey Lowe analyses his liminality in '*Kicking over the traces*: the instability of Cú Chulainn', *Studia Celtica* 34 (2000), 119–129.
[109] The text survives in the twelfth century Lebor na hUidre.
[110] The choice of subject matter was perhaps prompted by Yeats' 1917 marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lees after decades of obsession with Maud Gonne. Yeats simplifies the characters and the conflict, turning a sophisticated narrative into something flatter.
[111] 'Mirrors for princes' or 'advice to princes' most famously exemplified by Machiavelli's *The Prince*, is a literary genre offering advice to a ruler or potential ruler. In Irish this genre is known as *tecosca*, ('instructions').

Cycle tale *Fed Bricrenn*, Bricriu's Feast. Bricriu's Feast shows Cú Chulainn in a heroic light that runs parallel to chivalry: it is likely a source for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.[112] The tale focuses on Cú Chulainn's honour in an analogue to the beheading 'game' more widely known through *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. A will-read twentieth century reader of this tale could not help but infer Cú Chulainn is more honourable than Sir Gawain because Cú Chulainn does not share Gawain's fear of death or his inability to live up to the impossible standards of his society. This is a tale in which Cú Chulainn is a married man, and one in which his extreme prowess is not alienating or grotesque.

In 1920, Cú Chulainn become a narrative anchor for the deeds of Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork who died age at age forty-one whilst hunger-striking in Brixton Prison. Several obituaries compared MacSwiney to Cú Culainn. PS O'Hegarty saw MacSwiney's body displayed and commented he had 'a warrior face…this man was fundamentally a warrior, a warrior of the highest caste known to mankind.'[113] In an article called '*Mairtír is déidheanaighe',* the *Freemans Journal* announced him a compared him to Cú Chulainn: '*Tá Cúchulainn na linne seo imthighthe uain, curtha chum báis ag náimhdibh ar dtire*.' ('[The] Cu of this [current] time is gone, killed by the enemies in [of] [the] country.').[114] A few days later, the *Ulster Herald* made a similar comparison:

> The great soul of Terence MacSwiney lies passed into eternity. For in life he typified all that is exalted and incorruptible in humanity, like Cuchulliain, he was 'steeped in the civilisation and culture of his own people; like Hugh O'Neill, he struggled as a statesman and a soldier to sever the chains which held his country in slavery…To the Irish people he is not merely a national hero, but a national saint…[115]

[112] O'Malley, *Army without Banners,* 95.
[113] Beatty, *Masculinity and Power*, 30.
[114] 'Mairtír is déidheanaighe 'in *Freemans Journal* (26 Oct. 1920), 6.
[115] 'Notes', *Ulster Herald* (30 Oct. 1920), 4. Also appears in *Donegal News* (30 Oct., 1920), 2.

This Cú Chulainn was probably influenced by the narrative that had been promoted at St. Enda's in its elevation of self sacrifice and its conversion of loss into emotional triumph.[116] But MacSwiney was forty-one when he died, hardly a boy hero. Thus Cú Chulainn still inspired but was less tightly tied to youth.

The figure Aengus Óg ('Young Aengus'), also known as Óengus Óg, aged as well. In medieval saga he is the son of the god the Dagda and the goddess Bóand and he appears in works such as *Tochmarc Étaíne* (The Wooing of Etain) and *Aislinge Óenguso* (the Dream of Óengus). In Old Irish, he is sometimes called Mac Óc or Maccan Óc ('Young Boy'), emphasising his youth. Curious then, to see him appear as a father figure in the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, the god had evolved into a sensual, androgynous young man, always depicted in some sort of dishabillé.[117]

[116] In the Civil War 'Martyrdom by hunger strike or on the gallows had value in creating public outrage. But with the new revolutionaries it was a tactic not a creed.' F. Keane, *Wounds: A Memoir of War and Love* (London, 2017), 121.

[117] See Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland, NG 2023. Angus Og, God of Love and Courtesy, Putting a Spell of Summer Calm on the Sea (1908). See also English painter N. Bush, 'Angus Og, the ever young: A wonderful dream came to me, a beautiful maid then stood beside me', first published in F.C. Brunton, *The Enchanted Lochran: Stories of Celtic Mythology* (London, 1917), 28.



Figure 26. B. Elvery, 'Aengus' in V. Russell's Heroes of the Dawn (London, 1914).

He became associated with Cupid, depicted with birds that were sometimes said to represent his kisses. [118] O'Curry quotes the book of Ballymote, saying that no one was an equal beauty to the king Cormac Cas 'excepting Conairé Mór…or Aengus, son of the Daghda.'[119] He was a god in a state of interpretive flux and cultural forces appropriated him in a particularly startling way.

In Standish O'Grady's *History of Ireland*, Óengus is identified as 'Angus Og, the god of youth and love and beauty' and later called 'Mild Angus'.[120] Eleanor Hull calls him 'the Adonis of the Irish Pantheon'.[121] He appears in the writing of Yeats, Russell and Stephens as

[118] Williams, *Immortals*, 282.
[119] O'Curry, *Manuscript Materials,* 45.
[120] S. O'Grady, *History of Ireland* v I (Dublin, 1878), 60, 177.
[121] E. Hull, *Text Book of Irish Literature v.I* (Dublin, 1906), 18.

an embodiment of imagination, a less earthy counterpoint to Pan, and at times the embodiment of a reborn Irish nation.[122] In *Ireland's Immortals*, Mark Williams suggests he functions in the early years of the twentieth century as 'a symbol for the inner fusion that a certain kind of Protestant intellectual hoped could be accomplished deep within the national psyche'.[123] In much of his tradition, the figure is youthful, lovesick, and 'decidedly effeminate'.[124] Angus' beauty 'caused every woman who saw him to fall in love with him.'[125] George Russell identified the god with 'every form of desire' and Yeats identifies him with 'the Spirit of Life' and ecstatic poetry: his power transcended the national.[126]

Unsurprising then, that Aengus rarely appears in republican writing 1916 to 1923. It was a period in which activists were sometimes at pains to point out their lack of sensual enjoyment and the sacrifice of romantic desires for national ones. As Ernie O'Malley insisted in his memoir: 'There were no affairs.'[127] Implausible as such a blanket statement is, sacrifice and asceticism became a hallmark of insurgent self-perception, particularly for men 'on the run'.[128] And in a society where people were disillusioned with romantic ideas of cultural wholeness, the figure had little to offer. In 'The Coming of the Babóg', a story in the radical *Red Hand* magazine in 1920, Angus is an avuncular but powerful figure 'whom men

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[122] Quoted in Williams, *Immortals*, 454.
[123] Williams, *Immortals*, 454-6.
[124] In *Folklore* magazine in 1936, a writer commented: 'Aengus mac Oc himself has little in his character to identify him with a member of the ancient Irish Olympus…His whole nature is decidedly effeminate; his general helplessness and lovesickness as brought out in certain texts are the last features one would expect to find in a barbarian.' A. Krapple, 'Diarmuid and Grainne' *Folklore* 47:4 (Dec. 1936), 347-61. 348.
[125] Hull, *Text Book* v.I, 19.
[126] Williams, *Immortals*, 353.
[127] O'Malley, *Wound,* 159.
[128] Peter Hart's 'The Social Structure of the Irish Republican Army' records that out of a sample of 572 prisoners in 1923 whose marital status was known, fewer than 5% were married. Hart, *IRA at War,* 217.

hated and women feared but loved.'[129] In 'To Ireland, 1916' Kathleen Goodfellow identifies the executed rebels as 'Sons of young Angus': 'Red wine of joy stains every pierced side/Sons of young Angus, princes of the morrow/Sunlight and wind acclaim the crucified!'[130] This is a curious invocation as Angus had not, at the turn of the century, been identified as a warrior or a national progenitor. [131] The transformation of Angus from a sensual figure to the father of rebels was part of a cultural claiming and repurposing of mythology by republicans. In a similar vein, the *Victoria Daily Times* also describes him as Diarmaid's foster-father, talking about him in a fatherly role assisting Diarmaid to woo Grainne.[132]

As the country moved from doomed insurrection toward insurgency and possible independence, the republican fashioning of heroes moved away from youthful and sensual narratives and the heroes themselves sometimes aged.

The combat at the ford: Fer Diad and civil strife

'Behind the immense vitality, humour and imagination of the Ulster stories is a picture of a society moving to dysfunction and self destruction.'[133] The cycle depicts a society in conflict,

[129] Coming of the Babóg in *Red Hand* (1 Sep. 1920), 42.
[130] Browne, *Aftermath,* 'To Ireland, 1916', 15. A handwritten authors list in the UCD copy identifies this author on both the page and the table of contents as Miss Goodfellow. Kathleen Goodfellow was a member of Cumann na mBan and sometimes published as 'Michael Scot'.
[131] Doyle, P. W.S. #807, Bureau of Military History, 3.
[132] *The Victoria Daily Times*, (19 Oct. 1920) 12. However, this is a Canadian source.
[133] J. Radner, 'Fury Destroys the World: Historical Strategy in Ireland's Ulster Epic', *Mankind Quarterly* 23:1 (1982) 41-60. 47. And as Tom Sjöblom clarifies, it also shows the recreation of the 'social and cosmic order'. Sjöblom, 'On the Threshold', *Ulidia*, ed. J.P. Mallory and G. Stockman, 169.

and one episode in particular emerges in the post-1916 period as a new reference point: the 'combat at the ford', a scene in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in which Cú Chulainn must fight his own foster brother in single combat. In O'Curry's 1878 work, the episode was lauded as 'remarkable' but was 'too long' to include in the book.[134] O'Grady's *The Coming of Cuculain* in 1894 also omits the episode.[135] The scene then appears in a variety of popular *fin de siècle* retellings, including Sigerson's *Bards of the Gael and Gall*, the second volume of Leahy's *Heroic Romances*, Hutton's *Táin*, Maclean's *The Literature of the Celts* and Gregory's *Cuchulain*. The episode found new political relevance in the revolutionary era, in which violence was often personal.[136]

In Louth in 1920, the soon-to-be-anti-Treaty republican writer and future Sinn Féin president J.J. Kelly gave a speech beginning with an acknowledgement that they were near where Cú Chulainn 'defended the ford'.[137] There is no acknowledgement of the cost. The point of the story is that the hero defended the land (not the usual take-away for this narrative), not that he fought his foster brother. This example speaks both to an earlier period of conflict (the War of Independence, before the Civil War) so the model of conflict and to a hard-line, black-and-white interpretation of tale.[138]

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[134] O'Curry, *Manuscript Materials,* 39.
[135] O'Grady, *Coming of Cuculain.*
[136] This statement excludes the Rising. The violence of the Rising tended to be at a distance and anonymous; the ensuing two wars were more personal. D. Fitzpatrick, *Terror*, 45.
[137] Féis Miurtheimhne' in *Drogheda Independent* (10 Jul. 1920), 3.
[138] In 1918, *The Butte Independent*, a Montana USA newspaper that took a strong interest in Irish affairs: 'In the Tain Bo Cuailgne [sic], the great Irish Epic of pagan days, when Cuchulainn had given the death-wound to his enemy, Ferdia in a fair fight, he tenderly carried his opponent's body across the ford, and with tears in his eyes mourned over the loss of such a noble "torch of valour of the Gael.' Father Dollard, 'Morality and Chivalry of the Gaels' in *Butte Independent* (20 Apr. 1918), 4.

After the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed on 6 December 1921, the episode's meaning changed. The Treaty received popular support, particularly in the east, fuelled by the conflict-fatigue of the population. But as General Macready reported to the British Cabinet, there was little 'outright enthusiasm'.[139] The Treaty divided political loyalties, and sometimes split families. Whilst the combat at the ford never became central to the discourse of the Civil War, the analysis of its use does enhance historical understanding of this conflict.

In a 1922 speech, Archibishop O'Donnell in Dundalk proclaimed:

> It would be a desecration of everything that was right if the fine spirit of rational feeling that impelled our young men to put Ireland before every human interest were diverted into fanning flames of fratricidal strife. After all, it would have been better that Cuchulian and Ferdid should have lived and worked for Ireland than that one should slay the other and then be slain himself.[140]

For the archbishop, the conflict forms the perfect metaphor for the Civil War. In this episode of the *Táin*, the men are at first keen to fight, Fer Diad telling his charioteer 'Let us meet Cúchulainn/I'll pierce his slight body…'[141] King Aillil, standing aloof from the action and ostensibly supporting Fer Diad, tells Queen Medb: 'It is all the same to us if they both die'.[142] It is not difficult to extract the metaphor.

In this episode, the warriors exchange insults and threats, but as the moment to fight draws near, Cú Chulainn becomes concerned. In a speech stemming more from worry than threat he asks: 'How can it be that you alone/could escape my fatal rage?/…Don't

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[139] Quoted in Hopkinson, *Green against Green*, 35.
[140] 'Cardinal Logue and Archbishop O'Donnell Welcomed in Dundalk' in *Fermanagh Herald* (13 May 1922), 3.
[141] T. Kinsella, *The Táin* (Oxford, 1970), 176. Although a later translation, Kinsella's work is used here as it is the most effective translation of this episode. In the *fin de siècle* period, a multitude of similar translations of this episode existed. C. Carson, *The Táin* (New York, 2007).
[142] Kinsella, *Táin,* 177.

break our friendship and our bond,/…Noble warrior, do not come.[143] The combat between them is gruelling, lasting days, and Cú Chulainn tells his foster brother again that he doesn't wish to harm him.[144] When at last Fer Diad falls, Cú Chulainn stands devastated over the body, lamenting the 'everlasting loss' and calling the struggle 'shameful'.[145] His weapon cut free from his foster brother's corpse, he asks—'who thought of such pale lips/or a weapon of struggle between us?'[146] He looks back on battles they fought together in earlier years, recalling their fight side by side.

This section of the *Táin*, perhaps the most moving section of the work, resonated with those who found themselves torn from friends and family by politics and facing the possibility of violence against those they knew and loved.[147] It also was used dissuasively against the anti-Treatyites, acknowledging the honour of both sides of the conflict but implying that inflexibility would lead to waste and tragedy. This is an interesting use of the scene, because those who were pro-Treaty typically cast anti-Treatyites as interested only in chaos.[148] Treaty supporters cast republican resistance as boyhood delinquency, or even a moral threat. But in this narrative the enemy is neither unscrupulous and unheroic.

In May 1922, on the brink of the Civil War, the pro-Treaty *Irish Independent* published a poem cautioning against civil strife:

> When England barred your gate long ages past,
> Within you battled fate, confined and pent;
> and slavery's brand you spurned and, still unbent,

[143] Kinsella, *Táin,* 185.
[144] Kinsella, *Táin,* 191. Fer Diad literally means 'man of the pair.' Sheehan (2009), 57.
[145] Kinsella, *Táin,* 199, 202.
[146] Kinsella, *Táin,* 202.
[147] This combat may be a later addition to the *Táin*, originating no earlier than the eleventh century. M. Ó Flaithearta, 'The Etymologies of (Fer) Diad', *Ulidia* ed. R. Ó hUiginn and B. Ó Catháin, 218-225.
[148] For example, G. Foster, *Civil War and Society,* 130.

Arose! Can now that iron sear at last?

For see! you wander fierce within your wall
and tear each other's hearts as slaves are wot
And those you love, and those who love you most
You strike in lieu of foe—beyond recall.

Cuchulain knew—but wisdom came too late
as grieved he stood above the mangled corpse
Beside the ford; he know of Maedhbh's deep guile
Beware! the ghosts keep watch beside the gate.[149]

In the *Táin*, Queen Medb's entraps the warriors in a combat through manipulation and lies. Analogising her to Britain, the guileful third party pulling the strings to create conflict, couches a political message in epic terms.

Most newspapers were pro-Treaty, creating an imbalance of newspaper material for this period. At the time of the Treaty split in 1921, only one major newspaper, the *Connachtman*, declared itself anti-Treaty.[150] However, the Fer Diad episode does not appear as a cautionary tale in the more hawkish anti-Treaty publications, suggesting it may be a particularly pro-Treaty use of the *Táin*, casting the anti-Treaty minority as the overconfident and doomed hero Fer Diad.

The conflict between Fer Diad and his Cú Chulainn is a powerful episode of the Táin, long appreciated on its literary merits. Understanding the tale and the parts that are emphasised or de-emphasised gives historical insight into the understanding of the revolutionary period. The War of Independence and Civil War often targeted specific

[149] A. O'Farrelly, 'To Cuchulain's Countrymen' in *Irish Independent* (23 May 1922), 4. *Irish Independent* (23 May 1922), 4. The paper's political alignment is discussed in Ó Drisceoil, D. 'Irish Newspapers, the Treaty and the Civil War', *Atlas*, ed. Crowley et al. 661-5.
[150] Hopkinson, *Green against Green*, eds. n.282. Christopher Doughan's work on newspapers has been invaluable in understanding newspaper sources. C. Doughan, *The Voice of the Provinces: The Regional Press in Revolutionary Ireland, 1914-1921* (Liverpool, 2019).

individuals, and particularly in the latter case, sometimes former comrades. J.J. Kelly's speech during the War of Independence focuses on Cú Chulainn's success but not its cost. The Civil War iterations of the story, largely pro-Treaty, show civil conflict through a tragic lens without the oft-seen characterisations of anti-Treaty republicans as foolhardy, anarchic or bloodthirsty.

The characteristics of the hero

In the medieval texts, Cú Chulainn struggles to function within society, even as his extraordinary nature is what makes him valuable to society. The Ulster Cycle expresses ambivalence about both warriors and rulers, whose power can harm those they should protect. 'The very nature of the warrior's role, its intense competitiveness, its excess, is at the best of times dangerously close to being out of control.'[151]

In the *Táín,* Cú Chulainn dons 'twenty-seven shirts, waxed and hard as boards, which used to be bound to his skin with ropes and cords so that his sense might not be deranged whenever his fit of fury came upon him', seeking to restrict and normalise his extraordinary body.[152] In another scene in that work, an Ulster watchman warns: 'He will shed the blood of every man in the fort unless heed be taken.'[153] Cú Chulainn is unstable, irrational,

[151] E. Gray 'The Warrior, the Poet and the King: "The Three Sins of the Warrior" and the Death of Cú Roí', J.F. Nagy, L. Jones and P. Ford, *Heroic Poets and Poetic Heroes in Celtic Tradition: a Festschrift for Patrick K. Ford* (Dublin, 2005), 74-90. 76.
[152] O'Rahilly, *Táin,* 179 [O'Rahilly's translation]. *Ocus focheird Cú Chulaind de na sec[h]t cneslénti fichet cíardai clárda bítis fo thétaib 7 rifetaib fria chnes arnacha ndechrad a chond céille tráth doficfad a lúth láthar*. O'Rahilly, *Táin,* ll.1481-4, 40.
[153] Táin Bó Cúailnge l.804 quoted in S. Erni, 'Inside Out... and Upside Down: Cú Chulainn and his Ríastrad,' *Helden E-Journal zu Kulturen des Heroischen = Heroes = Héros*, 1:1 (2013), 53-63. 55.

sometimes himself a site of conflict. But in the popular understanding of the hero from mid-1916 to 1923, his power is largely stripped of its berserk nature, his instability converted to 'the warrior's overpowering zeal to excel'.[154] This is in part the result of selective translations and retellings by writers such as Gregory, Hull and Hutton in the preceding years ('How delightfully human is Cuchullin in spite of his prodigious strength and valour!' insisted Hull).[155] It also speaks to the political function of the figure in the revolutionary era. To be insensible or controlled by emotion evoked the stereotypes of 'race science' and stage Irishness.[156]

Cú Chulainn served as the paragon of revolutionary fighting ability. In his memoir, IRA commandant Seán Moylan described another man as having the 'fighting capacity of a Cú Chulainn'.[157] An article in the *Irish Examiner* described how Cork Volunteer Patrick Fleming began 'a series of heroic exploits which read like a page out of the life story of Cuchullin or Hercules.[158] In a fictional story in the *Nationalist and Leinster Times* in 1923, a character claimed, 'The lads in my Division regard me as another Cuchulain.'[159] Arthur

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[154] Gray, 'The Warrior, the Poet and the King', *Celtic Heroes* ed. Nagy, Jones and Ford, 78.
[155] Hull, *Cuchullin Saga*, xlvi.
[156] The witness statement of Augustine Ingoldsby describes attending a small party in the Inghinidhe na hÉireann rooms on Great Brunswick Street. 'There was a showy Irish-American present, wearing diamond rings and other jewellery.' After Yeats 'sublimely' read a poem, the American 'stood up and sang a real stage-Irishman song called "The Irish Jubilee". It was about pigs' check and porter for the poor, just the very sort of thing that Willie Rooney, Griffith and the rest of us were trying to kill…I can still see the expression on Yeats' face. At that time respectable people were afraid to go to Irish concerts lest they would hear that sort of thing and also they were likely to end in a fight. Our little society organized concerts with the express purpose of ending this and making the people familiar with decent traditional songs and music.' A. Ingoldsby, W.S. #582. Bureau of Military History, 12. No date given, but this is around the turn of the twentieth century.
[157] S. Moylan, *Seán Moylan's Memoir of the Irish War of Independence* (Belfast, 2002), 33
[158] Padraig, 'A Brave Soldier's Recompense' in *Irish Examiner* (3 Aug. 1922), 4. *Irish Examiner* is a conservatively nationalist paper
[159] K. Fitzgerald. 'The Coward' in *Nationalist and Leinster Times* (29 Dec. 1923), 7.

Griffith wrote of a childhood friend as 'a great man with more than one part of resemblance to the familiar pagan hero, Cuchulainn.'[160] In these examples the hero is a byword for prowess, decoupled from instability and menace. Building on an earlier tradition, the understanding of Cú Chulainn in this period uncomplicates his strength.[161]

As Cú Chulainn's power became less grotesque it took on new features as well. When identified with specific twentieth century leaders, Cú Chulainn was protean. In MacSwiney's case, a hero known for violence is identified with the self-sacrifice of a hunger striker. In the pamphlet 'Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins', Alice Stopford Green likens Michael Collins to an 'apparition of a Cuchulain in the glory of his courage and generosity…There was no slave-mind in the making of that ancient Ireland and the new Cuchulain brought with him all the richness of its freedom of soul.'[162] Here the hero's courage is emphasised, but with the curious addition of glorious generosity. It could be argued Stopford Green is awkwardly shoehorning a hero into a role he doesn't fit; but one may also understand heroes as malleable and their stories as living texts. In that light, Stopford Green is not misunderstanding the hero but deciding the Cú Chulainn the 1920s needed to grow up and develop his character. Cú Chulainn shaped the commemoration of Michael Collins; but at the same time Cú Chulainn maintained his relevance by becoming more like Collins. Another curious comparison is found in a *Sunday Independent* review of John Mitchel's biography of Wolfe Tone in 1920: 'So [Mitchel] makes Cuchulain was not a

[160] W. Rooney, 'Men of the West' in *Meath Chronicle* (14 Aug. 1920), 3.
[161] Fergal Keane, who was born in 1961, recalled his father's stories: 'My father read to me the legend of Cú Chulainn, our greatest hero, who loomed out of the mythic Past dripping in the gore of his enemies. Pitiless and self-distorting violence runs through the narratives. Keane, 11.
[162] Stopford Green in Ghall, *Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins*, 46. The pamphlet is undated but was released after Michael Collins' death in August 1922.

more splendid figure than this laughing, daring, suffering wanderer. Fortitude kindliness, loving loyalty were never better exemplified in a national hero.'[163] Cú Chulainn lent stature and legitimacy to whatever he touched, but he was adapted to take on whatever new traits are being lauded—in this case it is the addition of laughter that is out of character.[164] These examples show the hero as continually evolving, maintaining his relevance with new characteristics such as generosity and humour.

Conclusion

For republicans, the hero was a shorthand not only for prowess, but national defense, legitimacy and self-rule. In describing his objection to the Treaty of 1921, Tod Andrews later wrote ' of his own uncompromising, and perhaps naïve, idealism, 'I was in thrall…to the standards of Cuchulainn and Fionn.'[165] It is a far cry from Yeats saying that in Irish tales he found 'the work of men who were not troubled about any probabilities or necessities but those of emotion itself…One knows one will be long forgetting Cuchulain, whose life is vehement and full of pleasure.'[166] Yeats' Cú Chulainn enjoyed a self-focused and impulsive

[163] De B. A [this is likely either Aodh de Blácam or Aoife de Búrca]. 'A Neglected Classic', *Sunday Independent* (17 Oct. 1920), 4.
[164] The hero does not seem to possess much humour. Instead he is someone who is himself a source of humour (e.g. when the women of Emain Macha bare their breasts to him and he needs to be put in successive vats of water, which he causes to boil, before he can calm down).
[165] Compare this to the British magazine *The Athenaeum* recommending Alfred Nutt's *Cuchulain, the Irish Achilles*, alongside several other works on mythology and folklore, with the argument that one cannot rule over a people whose customs and 'inner life' one is not acquainted with. *The Athenaeum* framed the medieval literary inheritance as a tool for sympathetic external control. T. Andrews quoted in Hopkinson, *Green against Green*, 38.
[166] Yeats in Gregory, *Gods and Fighting Men,* xv. He also writes 'the men who imagined the Fianna had the imagination of children' and claims there was 'no darkness' in their world. xiv-vi.

existence, glorying in his own talent. The story of Cú Chulainn in a republican context took on the weight of political responsibility: a Cú Chulainn, or his inheritor, was someone not only powerful but devoted to the cause of his community.[167]

As a medieval character, Cú Chulainn is not a leader, but an outsider who through his youth, appearance, prowess, and rage, never fits into his society.[168] In years preceding 1916 the hero was at the forefront of nationalist imagination but after the Rising he lost cultural prominence. In the revolutionary era, his extremeness and outsider status and were ended. Cú Chulainn's role as a national protector was reined in to exclude his dangerousness and grotesque excess, building on the restrained Revival idea of the hero. The figure was not merely an after-image of a Revival narrative or Pearsian ideal, but a dynamic figure who evolved to embody contemporary political and social values, even when they were at odds with his earlier character and story.[169] Cú Chulainn's status as a cultural artefact that was universally recognised made him the perfect instrument for fashioning successive ideals of heroism.

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[167] Eimar O'Duffy's 1923 *King Goshawk and the Birds* satirises the hero-cult of Cú Chulainn.
[168] E.g. He is the only man not affected by the debilitation of the Ulstermen, a curse that the Ulstermen will suffer birth pangs in their hour of need.
[169] In 1935 a statue Cú Chulainn was placed at the General Post Office in Dublin. There were some objections that he was irrelevant. The statue predated the Rising: it had been made in 1911 by Oliver Sheppard. It was chosen by De Valera, who described it at the unveiling as 'symbolising the dauntless courage and abiding constancy of our people'. In death, Cú Chulainn was stripped of his menace an *ríastrad* (battle frenzy or 'warp spasm'), bound to his beautiful human form. The government later used this image on the 1916 veterans' medal and on the 1966 commemorative 10-shilling piece. It also appeared on a postage stamp and on savings certificates. J. Turpin, 'Modern Ireland in 100 Artworks: 1935 – The Death of Cúchulainn by Oliver Sheppard', *Irish Times* (28 Mar. 2015).

4d. Brian Bóruma: 'The great opponent of all Danish innovation'

Vikings first raided Ireland in the mid 790s, harrying the coastline.[1] A few decades later their raids moved inland, and in the 840s the first Viking-Irish alliances were forged.[2] In that same century, Dublin, Cork, Wexford and Waterford were all established as Norse centres.[3] No single dynamic characterised the relationship between the Irish and Norse: whilst intermarriage existed, so did a profitable trade in Irish slaves.[4] At this time, Ireland was governed by disparate kingdoms and Irish kings often united with Norse leaders against one another.[5] At the start of the eleventh century, one such conflict became legendary. Brian Bóruma mac Cennétig was the leader of the Dál Cais, a minor kingdom in Munster; he had been rising in power for decades thanks to his abilities in both warfare and diplomacy.[6] He became an *ard rí*, winning first the allyship then the submission of the other most powerful king, Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill of the Northern Uí Néills. In 1014, at the Battle of

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[1] K. Holman, *The Northern Conquest: Vikings in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2012), 41. Although 'Norse' and 'Viking' are used interchangeably in some histories, the terms have distinct meanings. 'Viking' refers to someone engaged in raiding; Norse refers to the ethnic group.

[2] English, *Irish Freedom,* 34-5.

[3] English, *Irish Freedom,* 3. In 902, the Dublin Norse were expelled by an Irish alliance but a subsequent wave of settlement soon replaced them.

[4] Holman, *Northern Conquest,* 40. Slaves were sold to European and especially Scandinavian markets.

[5] Kingship was multi-layered and included the categories of *rí tuaith* (petty king)*, rí cóiced* (provincial king) and *ard rí*, high king. The *ard rí* was king at a higher than provincial level but not necessarily a king of the whole island. The title at times was used to assert a claim of island-wide control without this being a political reality. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kingship*, 482.

[6] The territory of the Dál Cais was in what is now County Clare. The title *bóruma,* meaning 'cattle tribute' may be from his assertion of dominance over Leinster, which then paid him a *bóruma.* But the epithet may come from his association with a ring fort in near Killaloe, Bél Bóraime, associated with the practice of cattle tribute. S. Duffy, *Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf* (Dublin, 2014), 43, 66-70.

Clontarf, Bóruma led Munster, South Connacht and Scottish allies against the revolt of Leinster and Dublin, which had allied with the Norse leader Sigurd of Orkney.[7] Although Bóruma was killed, it was a victory for his forces.[8]

Since the Middle Ages, Brian Bóruma has been an enduring symbol of Irish identity and his story has served various iterations of Irishness. The mythologising began one or two generations after his death as a way to boost the prestige of his dynasty.[9] It was not long before '"how it really was' [was] translated into "how it shall be remembered"'[10] Although neither his reign nor his final battle had significant long-term structural impact on the Irish political landscape, he was an outstanding leader and, in many estimations, the last high king.[11] He remained an enduring cultural symbol, his tale retold in plays, novels and histories.[12] The nature of Bóruma's rule shifted to accommodate different cultural and

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[7] F. Byrne, 'Ireland and her Neighbours' in D. Ó Cróinín, *New History,* 862-98. 862.

[8] Being too old to fight, he was in his tent when he was killed by Vikings. The balance of power in these alliances differs in different chronicles. In the *Annála Inis Faithlinn* (*Annals of Innisfallen)*, for example, the Vikings were the dominant partners against Bóruma. Duffy, *Brian Boru,* 170.

[9] C. O'Halloran, 'Brian Boru and his Afterlife' in *History Ireland*, 22:22 (Mar.-Apr. 2014), 38-41. 38. Also Holman, *Northern Conquest,* 114. *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaib* (*A War of Irish against Foreigners*) is probably the most enduring Irish-language source for his story. There is no tale-cycle devoted to Bóruma, and he enters the literary and historiographic tradition through an assortment of sources. He is mentioned in the Historical Cycle kingship tale *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin*. His deeds are described in the *Leabhar Oiris,* a later medieval chronicle of the period 976-1028. He is the subject of one stanza of the medieval poem 'Dá mac déc Cennéitig cháid' and of the early modern poem 'A Chinn Choradh, Caidhi Brian'. In the revolutionary period, these sources would not have been familiar outside antiquarian circles; but by this time the medieval and early modern Irish narratives had a longstanding tradition of retellings in English. In addition, some English-language sources show familiarity with the Norse *Njals Saga*.

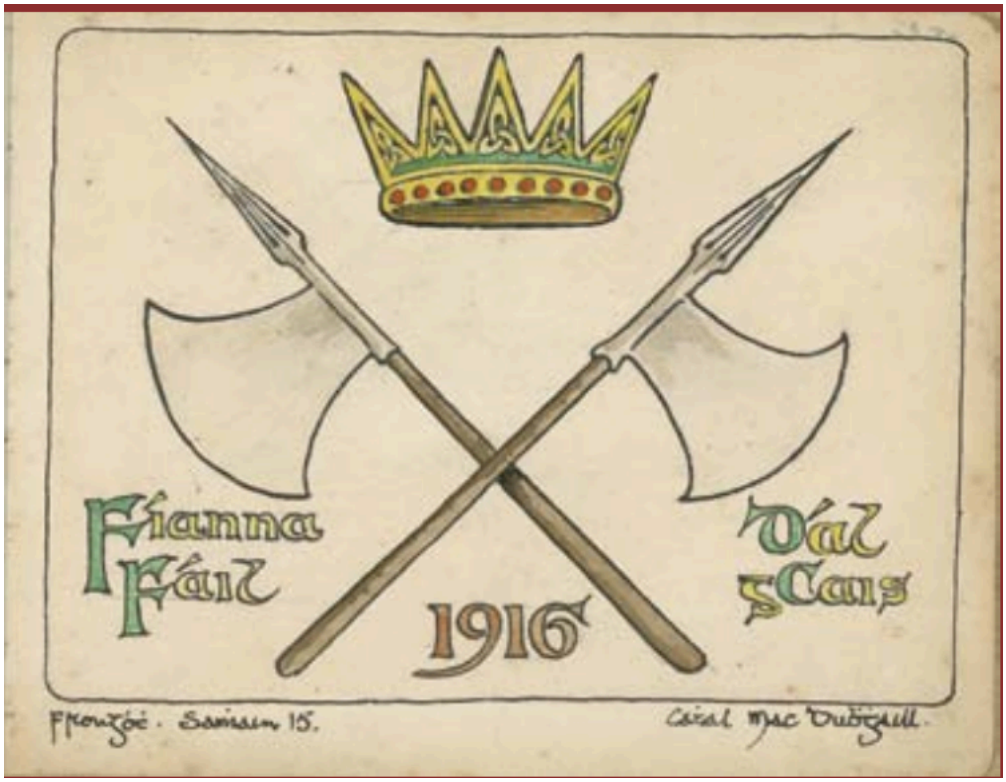
[10] R. Sethi, *Myths*, 36.

[11] After Bóruma's death, the title of *ard rí* was again taken up by his predecessor Máel Seachnaill. The title was continuously in use until the end of the twelfth century, after which it continued to be sporadically resurrected.

[12] The eighteenth century antiquarian and civil rights activist Charles O'Connor was perhaps the first to link antiquarianism to political aims. He identified with Catholic and Gaelic Ireland and published a collection of Irish material designed to show the Irish as 'refined,

political aims. Any community receiving a narrative refashions it to suit the self-perceptions and desires of their present. And thus, as a ruler, Bóruma was sometimes envisioned as a reflex of Ascendancy rule; yet to patriots and later nationalists, it was the Vikings who were the Ascendancy. In the fine de siècle period, Bóruma served several conflicting political agendas.

In an autograph book entry created by Cathal Mac Dubghaill of Carlow (a musician who arranged the national anthem) he created this commemorative entry on Frongach Prison. His emblem combined the Fíanna Fail with Bóruma's tribe the Dál gCais, and a medieval crown in a roughly eleventh century style.



polished and learned' (though his work was never as influential as Brookes' 1789 *Reliques of Irish Poetry*. This patriotic (rather than nationalistic) agenda centred on social progress, without demanding changes to the political status quo *vis a vis* national status. J. Leerssen, 'Antiquarian Research', 72-9.

Figure 27. Mac Conmara, Patrick Brennan*, 80.*

During the Anglo-Irish War and Civil War, Bóruma's story and significance continued to develop as part of the scaffolding of republican identity. This chapter outlines his history as a cherished—yet permutating—symbol of identity and investigates his reimagining in the republican imagination during the revolutionary era. The chapter will begin by outlining his eighteenth and nineteenth century functions as an antecedent of the Ascendency class and as an embodiment of Christian struggle against enemies of the Church. It will then consider a peculiarly English trend of critiquing and devaluing him, an indication that the cultural ownership of the figure was shifting toward nationalists. Within the period 1916-23, the memory and imagination of Bóruma served four primary functions. First, the republican appropriation of his narrative was a means of establishing ownership over both the Irish past and its historiography. Second, his narrative was as a cathartic and inspiring story of triumph over foreign efforts to assert political control. Third, overstatement of the king's power and accomplishments served a political end by presenting Irish independence and unity as achievable, and even as a natural or default pre-Norman state. Finally, his death in battle elevated narratives of republicans who died as a result of their political commitments.

Ascendancy, Status and Christianity

In the art and writing of the early modern period, Bóruma's primary characterisation was as a Christian king who ruled with paternalistic *noblesse oblige* and protected his people from pagans. His leadership was only occasionally used to express a desire for independence or political reform.

Bóruma's identity as a Christian protecting the land from paganism first appears in the foundational text *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaib* (*A War of Irish against Foreigners*), dating from the early twelfth century.[13] It was further dramatized by Sylvester O'Halloran in his 1778 *General History of Ireland*, in which the author invented a speech for the rallying of the troops: Bóruma rides the ranks of his 'imperial army', exhorting people to do their duty for both their religion and country and emphasizing the Vikings were enemies of God.'[14] The Viking arrival in Ireland was seen as marking an end of the golden age of the early Irish Church, and A. M. Sullivan's 1867 *The Story of Ireland* called Clontarf a defense of 'Faith and Fatherland.'[15] Later republican material often downplayed the religious dimension, focusing instead on the territorial narrative. Without a religious focus, historical memory could accommodate a sense of pride in Ireland's own pagan history. The first issue of the *Irish Volunteer* came out in February 1914, containing the lines: 'The ships of King Dathi with victories decked/The sea that is eastward remembers King Brian/The hopes of the Vikings are vanquished and wrecked…'[16] Dathi was the last pagan king of Ireland (404-27) and a movement away from a Christian versus pagan narrative allowed him to be honoured in the same breath as Bóruma.

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[13] Most sources, e.g. Mac Shamráin, 5, and O'Halloran (2014), 38, date this as twelfth century but Duffy makes an argument that the text is eleventh century and developed from eyewitness sources. Duffy, *Brian Boru,* 198.

[14] O'Halloran, 'Brian Boru and His Afterlife', 40. This scene inspired many later writers and artists.

[15] O'Halloran, 'Brian Boru and His Afterlife', 153, 41. Notably, in James Sheridan Knowles' *Brian Boroihme: or, the maid of Erin*, Bóruma displays a Kantian toleration to Viking religion: He had not taken measures to restrain pagan practices, 'holding it wrong in the sight of heaven to stipulate the law of conscience'. In this tale, Bóruma also has Viking allies. J.S. Knowles, *Brian Boroihme: or, The Maid of Erin: a Historical Hibernian Melo-drama, in Three Acts* (New York, undated, refers to 1848 and 1853 theatre runs).

[16] Colum, *Life and the Dream,* 1.

Literature professor Maureen Hawkins wrote of Bóruma that it was the Ascendancy class who 'first historiographically and dramatically claimed him'.[17] By the time Charlotte Brookes published *Reliques of Irish Poetry* in 1789, 'the ancient Gaels were already being claimed as the Anglo-Irish blood ancestry.'[18] Only occasionally did contempt for Irishness of any era win out, such as the 1784 assertion in the *Universal History: from the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time* that Vikings provided a civilizing influence![19] In 1801, Sidney Owenson's poem 'An Adieu, on leaving the country, December 1799' imagines inspired minstrels singing lays, and how they would 'with rapture dwell on Boru's name/And weep his fate, exalt his fame!'[20] The dominant interpretations were not advancing separatist goals and Sylvester O'Halloran describes the antiquarian investigations following the 1801 Act of Union as becoming 'suddenly studiously apolitical'.[21] However, support of a political status quo, or nonresponse to a political development, cannot avoid being a political act. James Sheridan Knowles' mid-nineteenth-century play *Brian Boroihme* described the Irish fighters as 'knights' and the Norse as 'terrible monsters' and 'savages', projecting the language and dynamics of English social structure onto an Irish narrative.[22] For example, in Knowles' play, Bóruma knights a 'gallant youth' to make him a 'patriot soldier'; but knighthood was, historically, a later English import.[23] Here the tale is an adventure tale in which the Anglo-

[17] M. Hawkins, 'Heroic Kings and Romantic Rebels: the Dramatic Treatment of Brian Boru and Robert Emmet as Irish National Heroes' (PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1992), 97.
[18] J. Leerssen, 'Antiquarian Research: Patriotism to Nationalism', *Talam an Eisc: Canadian and Irish Essays*, ed. C. Byrne and M. Harry (Halifax, Nova Scotia: 1986), 71-83, 80.
[19] O'Halloran, 'Brian Boru and Hist Afterlife', 155
[20] S. Owenson, *Poems* (Dublin, 1801), 132.
[21] Leerssen, 'Antiquarian Research', *Talam an Eisc* ed. Byrne and Harry, 81.
[22] Knowles, *Brian Boroihme,* 6,14. *Brian Boroihme: or, The maid of Erin : a historical Hibernian melo-drama, in three acts.* New York: S. [refers to 1848 and 1853 theatre runs], 6-9.The English-language history and literature of the middle ages in the *fin de siècle* period frequently refers to warriors as knights as a way to elevate them and confer intelligibility.
[23] Knowles, *Brian Boroihme,* 8.

Irish identify with the gallant Christian ruler and his people. Later in the century, Standish James O'Grady, 'a life-long upholder of aristocracy in general and of the British monarchy and Ascendancy landlordism in particular' compared Bóruma the English King Alfred.[24] In 1889 Rebecca Hime wrote *Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf*. She wrote that ten years prior she had read in a major paper that Ireland had no real heroes to speak of since the mythological ones and she wanted to tell this story to Ireland's 'boys and girls'. In her version, Bóruma unites with Leinster and cries: 'Union's strength, disunion's weakness/Brothers bound are brothers free.'[25] Thus when Bóruma was represented on a vase presented to Gladstone in 1888 it was not as strident a symbol as it might first appear.[26] Bóruma has a diverse history of cultural affiliations and could convey a flexible, even Anglo-Irish, narrative.

Devaluing what could not be claimed

A particularly English reading of Bóruma questioned his value, presenting a variety of reasons he was overrated. They often appear in English (and occasionally Anglo-Irish) newspaper and journal articles, shaping the historical perception of a wide readership by denigrating the celebrated leader.

One tactic was to point out that Bóruma's struggle was not national. An early example is the 1845 *Spectator* article 'Brien Boroimhe'. The author counsels Catholic emancipation activist Daniel O'Connell and his followers 'to deal a little more sparingly with

[24] O'Grady, *Coming of Cuculain*, 87. Williams, *Immortals*, 299.
[25] R. Hime, *Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf* (Dublin, 1889), 17, 15.
[26] P. Mason, 'Frederick Rhead's Gladstone Vase' Rhead Pottery (13 Mar. 2014). www.rheadpottery.com. [3 Feb. 2018].

the myth of Brien' because it is 'hackneyed'.[27] The author goes on to belittle the significance of Clontarf as 'not national, but a family brawl of the head of a sept.'[28] It is true the 1014 Battle of Clontarf was not a national struggle between the native Irish and Viking invaders and it is true the conflict was often misportrayed as such. It was essentially the revolt of the Leinstermen against Bóruma's overkingship and Vikings played a supporting role.'[29] However, the events were not a family brawl and to call it such has an emasculating implication that Bóruma wasn't an effective head of his own family. A 1918 *Anglo-Celt* writer questioned the leader's credentials:

> Right down through Irish history wo find the Irish 'nation' composed of a number of tribes whose chief occupation seemed to consist in fighting among each other; and if we except Donegal we have the spectacle of a united Ulster. Only once in the history of Ireland was there complete unity. That was under Brian, for the short period of ten years; and the curious thing is that Brian in becoming King of Ireland defied all precedent of heredity, and thereby laid the way open 'for even more violent internecine strife after his death than had preceded his seizure of the "throne" from Malachi II. The claim of Henry II of England to be King of Ireland was sounder than the claim of Brian.

The writer draws attention to the fact Bóruma was from the Dál Cais, not from the Uí Néill family that held the high kingship. He uses this to delegitimise the one king he believes to have unified the island and goes on to blame him for political instability after his death. *The Anglo-Celt* went on to critique national identity as 'a comparatively new thing'.[30]

Another approach was to question the king's character: In her 1904 article in the English periodical *Womanhood*, in a line one must hope was tongue-in-cheek, Florence Armstrong characterised Bóruma as 'the great opponent of all Danish innovation'.[31] In 1903, the *Anglo-*

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[27] 'Brien Boroimhe', *Spectator* (12 Apr. 1845), 350.
[28] 'Brien Boroimhe', *Spectator* (12 Apr. 1845), 350.
[29] Quoted in Hawkins, 'Heroic Kings', 75.
[30] 'Mr. Herbert Pim and the Irish Nation', *Anglo-Celt* (3 Aug., 1918), 7.
[31] Armstrong, F. 'Celtic Heroines in Song and Story' in Womanhood 12:71 (Oct 1904) [no

Celt described his fame as fraudulent: 'It is only when the value of that Law to Ireland has been realized that Brian Borumha as a historical personage shall be reduced to his true place, viz., that, of a treacherous, if successful, rebel in whose seeming triumph over foreign rule he broke power of native sovereignity [sic], and sowed the seeds of centuries of degradation.'[32] This perspective may suggest resistance to any foreign rule in Ireland risks being shortsighted and ultimately disastrous.

Critiques of the ruler became more frequent in these first years of the twentieth century. Critical retellings went back at least as early as the 1784 assertion in the *Universal History* that Vikings asserted a civilizing influence on the Irish.[33] But in the early twentieth century the small flurry of critique was likely a conduit for anxieties about the ownership of Irish history and a desire—not necessarily conscious—to devalue what could not be claimed. In the English press, and sometimes the Anglo-Irish press as well, critiques of Bóruma's historical importance was stretched to become a snide accusation of 'brawling' and he was accused of being treacherous, an outlaw, and someone who harmed his people.[34] These narratives likely expressed a reluctance to extoll the virtues of native Irish kingship. The use of Bóruma as a republican symbol and inspiration may be considered in part a reappropriation of him from these narratives.

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pagination]

[32] 'Múrcail do Mirneach a Bhanba', *Anglo-Celt* (26 Sep. 1903), 7.

[33] O'Halloran, 'Brian Boru and his Afterlife', 155. In 1910 This line of argument was still common enough to exasperate a writer of the *Connacht Tribune*: 'The comment of the Norsemen on the Irish learning and culture which they found in Ireland was to throw the books into the lakes. The gold ornaments and works of art they pilfered whenever they could. How it can be maintained, as is done by some, that Ireland was really considerably benefited by the Norsemen, I fail to see.' 'The Danes in Ireland', *Connacht Tribune* (19 Feb. 1910), 9.

[34] Eg. 'Brien Boroimhe', *Spectator* (12 Apr. 1845), 350.

Claiming Irish history and historiography

In late 1920, the *Spectator* expressed hope that Lord Ernest Hamilton's *The Irish Rebellion of 1641* would arouse a greater Irish interest in history, claiming: 'though the Nationalists are fond of adducing pseudo-historical arguments for their case against England, it is notorious that Irish people know little and care less about genuine historical research. The fables which pass as history in Ireland…could not have survived so long among an educated community.'[35] This encapsulated a long-running historiographical practice in which the past was either worthless or could be mapped onto Anglo-Ireland. The quote built on a perspective already present in the previous century: in 1845 the *Spectator* dismissed stories of Brian Bóruma as 'rude legends of a barbarous age' and argued they were not a source of pride for 'rational Irishmen who instead look to men such as Swift who gathered their laurels within the pale of the British constitution.'[36] The nineteenth and twentieth century *Spectator* quotes attempted to dictate not only who should be a source of pride, but also who could 'own' history. A 1904 article grumbled that, twenty or thirty years previously, Irish historical and antiquarian research was 'savouring unduly of Nationalism or whatever "ism" was in worst odour at the time…' [37] Using the medieval period as a source of knowledge, pride and republican identity became a way to reclaim ownership of Irish history. Valuing figures who are pre-Invasion against the pressure to embrace someone such

[35] 'Books' in *Spectator* (4 Sep. 1920), 30.
[36] 'Brien Boroimhe', *Spectator* (12 Apr. 1845), 14.
[37] 'A Social History of Ancient Ireland' in *Spectator* (27 Feb. 1904), 22. The same publication lauded Patrick Joyce's 1906 *A Social History of Ancient Ireland*.

as Swift, a writer from an elite background who wrote of an island 'absolutely undone' could be a subversive act.[38]

In 1903, the *Donegal News* ran a story by an author writing with the pen name An Seabhac ('the Hawk'). This was Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha, who would later become an influential organiser in the Irish Volunteers.[39]

> 'What is your name?' John [i.e. John Bull] asks. 'O Muchadha,' the man answers. 'I come of the race of Murchadh, the son of Brian Borumha.' Sean buide [Yellow John?] turns up the whites of his pious eyes in horrified disgust at such an ugly patronymic. 'Holy Brurmagem,' he exclaims, 'what a savage race! Look here,' he says to the son of Murchadh, 'that ancestor of yours is a myth…'[40]

John Bull's dismissal of O Muchadha's pride at his lineage comments of the English dismissal of Irish historical memory. In contrast, nationalist and republican culture elevated these narratives. A witness statement describes a tableaux in the procession in the early 1910s:

> I arranged one of these representing the battle of Clontarf. We had several horses which were lent to use by sympathisers. My brother, dressed as a soldier in the battle, rode a hearse horse…The procession traversed the principal streets and aroused the enthusiasm of the population…It was that class of thing that opened people's eyes and made them realise that they were living in Ireland.[41]

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[38] I. McBride, 'The Politics of *A Modest Proposal:* Swift and the Irish Crisis of the Late 1720s' *Past & Present* 44:1 (2019), 89-122. 89. In this period, an 1843 Membership form for the Loyal National Repeal Association of Ireland shows a triptych of civil saints including Brian Boru. Dublin, National Library of Ireland, EPH C636. [Card] Volunteers of 1782 revived (1843).

[39] He published books under this name, e.g. An Seabhac, ed. *Tóraidheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne*, Comhlucht Oideachais na hÉireann (Dublin, 1939).

[40] 'An Seabhac' [a.k.a. Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha], 'Sean Buidhe and Our Irish Names' in *Connacht Tribune* (19 Feb. 1910), 9. 'Brummagem' is a term for both Birmingham and the Birmingham dialect.

[41] A. Ingoldsby, W.S. #582. Bureau of Military History, 13-14.

In this account, Clontarf is what causes the writer's identification of the past as belonging to him, and the newness of this realization, that is significant. The figure of Bóruma comtinued to be incorporated into republican culture: J.J. O'Kelly writes of how in Dublin in 1913, shortly after the formation of the Volunteers, he was 'asked to deliver the oration on the ninth centenary of the Battle of Clontarf'; Bóruma later became the namesake of the Fianna *sluagh* (branch, literally 'host') Brian Boru in 1916.[42] In 1920, Sinn Féin clubs planned a series of lectures in rural areas, although because of the war they could not go ahead since public meetings were impossible.[43] These lectures were designed to restore knowledge and ownership of Irish history and cultural inheritance to their audiences. Eoin MacNeill was scheduled to deliver lectures on the Gaelic and Norman periods and Alice Stopford Green planned to lecture on Brian Bóruma.[44] Because of the war, the lectures were distributed in published form instead, and accomplished a similar goal to the tableaux described above.

In the revolutionary era, Incorporating history into one's own narrative and quotidian activities could be a political act. IRA Captain Sean O'Neill wrote of 'telling stories of Caithlean Ni Houlihan, Brian Boru and the glories of the past', a practice that appears with some frequency in Bureau of Military History witness statements.[45] Michael Collins' personal secretary Eamon Broy recalled reading Sullivan's *Story of Ireland* by the river Figile, 'where Brian Boru is said to have obtained shafts for his spears for the Battle of Clontarf.'[46] And Joseph Lawless wrote of passing the place 'where rested the body of King Brian for a

[42] J.J. O'Kelly, W.S. #384, 23. S. Pounch, W.S. #267. Bureau of Military History, 1.
[43] Sinn Féin reoriented its plans to publish the lectures between in 1921-2. They distributed lectures, in the categories Economics, Industrial Development, Social Problems, History, Biography and Art.
[44] A. Ceannt, W.S. #264, Bureau of Military History, 66-70.
[45] S. O'Neill, W.S. #1219, Bureau of Military History, 32.
[46] E. Broy, W.S. #1280, Bureau of Military History, 9.

night, on its way to its burial place at Armagh'.[47] These reclamations of history, both scholarly and casual, mark medieval history as valuable and yoke it to republican identity.

The coalescing of a republican version of Bóruma's story and significance was an act of laying claim to Irish history and historiography. Reclaimed history was used to build contemporary identities and to provide inspiration for the future.

Driving out the invader

In the early twentieth century, the narrative of Clontarf shifted further toward nationalist ownership. The battle functioned as a metaphor for throwing off British control. In the revolutionary period, Bóruma was celebrated less as a Christian king than as a king who challenged an invading people.[48] This interpretation intensified around the 900th centenary of the battle (1914) and continued afterward.

Even in early texts, the conflict at Clontarf is at times distilled to 'Irish versus foreigner'. *The Annals of Innisfallen,* a medieval chronicle from Munster likely compiled in the eleventh century (and continued through the fifteenth), details the complex alliances in the struggle. But it opens the account of the events of 1014 with a simple description of strife between '*Gullu & Goedelu'*, the foreigner and the Gael.[49]

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[47] J. Lawless W.S. #1043, Bureau of Military History 4.

[48] There are exception, such as a 1914 article in the nationalist-leaning *Donegal News*, in which Bóruma's donations to church are mentioned and he is described as encouraging 'the spirit of religious fervor'. Benmore, 'Brian Boru's Memory' *Donegal News* (16 May 1914), 7.

[49] *Forcoemnactar cocaid móra isin bliadain sin eter Gullu & Goedelu. (Is do) suidiu ro marbad (Donnchad) mc. Donnchada Fin(n) h-Uí Maíl Sechnaill & in t-Albanach mc. Mail Se(ch)naill[gt] m. Domnaill, & ro la(d) ár fer Mide i Fine Gall im Fland mc. Maíl Sechnaill; & i s-suidiu luid loi(ng)es o Gallaib sech h-Erind, fades siar coro loiscset Corcaich Móir Muman coro la rí h-Ua Líatháin ár forru. Lotar iar se(in) lais (d)es siar co Clére ( ){folio 21a} coro marbait i suidiu, .i. Mathgamain mc. Dubgaill mc. Amlaíb mc. Sittriucc & meicc Gillai Maire. Ba firt mór do Dia & do Barre ani sein. Is and sein ro bui Brian i n-Osrugu & i l-*

Comparisons between the Vikings and British had been drawn before but were not the dominant interpretation. In the 1722 play *Hibernia Freed*, for example, the dying Viking leader Turgesius foretells 'Another nation shall revenge my death', alluding to future Anglo-Norman and English rule.[50] Later that century, Sylvester O'Halloran compared Viking domination to the penal laws in his 1784 *General History of Ireland*.[51] Through the Revival and revolutionary era, Bóruma's story was used as a stand-in for all invasion and to demonstrate both the tradition and necessity of self-governance. In Paul McSwiney's 1888 play *Brian*, Bóruma's idea of peaceful co-sovereignty is shown to be a delusion, with parallels easily drawn to contemporary politics.[52] Alice Stopford Green's 1912 *The Old Irish World* framed Bóruma's life as an anti-imperial struggle, and one whose memory was 'expunged'.[53] In 1914 Roger Casement wrote of how Bóruma achieved peace only through fighting. He contrasted Bóruma with 'Ruarí' (presumably Ruaidri Ua Conchobair, twelfth century king of Connacht and contender for the title of the last high king) who 'trafficked for peace and… brought slavery and extinction.'[54]

1914 was the 900th anniversary of Clontarf, which brought the battle more into the cultural imagination of that decade. In the first issue of the *Irish Volunteer*, Roger Casement

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Laignib o Féil Ciarain co Notlaic oc gabail fri Gullu & ni tuc síd. Bas Briain rig h-Erinn co righraigh Muman. S. Mac Airt , *Annals of Innisfallen* (Dublin, 1951), ll. 1012-3, 182.]

[50] J. Bowyer, *Hibernia Freed* (London, 1722), 57.

[51] O'Halloran, 'Brian Boru and his Afterlife', 56

[52] Hawkins, 'Heroic Kings', 84. Hawkins gives the date as 1890. McSwiney was Irish but at this time was living in America.

[53] A. Stopford Green *The Old Irish World* (Dublin, 1912), 46-7 and 91-5. For more about her career as a historian and public intellectual, see S. Holton, 'Gender Difference, National Identity and Professing History: the Case of Alice Stopford Green' in *History Workshop Journal* 53:1 (March 2002), 118-27.

[54] R. Casement, 'Clontarf to Berlin' in *Irish Volunteer*, (7 Feb. 1914), 2. Some early twentieth century sources are unfortunately lost. Bulmer Hobson's play *Brian of Banba* (1904), and Padraic Colum's unproduced play *Brian Boru* (1910) would doubtless add interesting detail to this analysis but no copies survive.

described Clontarf as 'one of the really great events in our history of depression.'[55] In April 1914 thousands travelled to Kincora, one of Bóruma's main strongholds. One speaker declared Bóruma 'would go out for the Irish language and would take part in the Volunteers'—pointedly adding, 'not the Carson Volunteers.'[56] Though a local paper called the event 'a celebration of people of *all* religions and political persuasions' the dominant tone was nationalist.[57] In *The Irish Volunteer*, Brian Butler wrote that the Volunteer display commemorating Clontarf 'would show our successors of 2014 that through the vicissitude of centuries we have preserved our nationality and the history of our country, and that we remembered Brian the Conqueror and his armies.'[58] At the centenary, Bóruma was a touchpoint of national identity, and an inspiration for advancing a national cause.

The parallel drawn between the British and Norse continued after the centenary. Irish Volunteer Seamus Daly later recalled a memorable speech that occurred during volunteer drills in 1916: Thomas MacDonagh 'reminded us we were standing on historic ground in Clontarf where Brian Boru had defeated the Danes in 1014. Easter was the time of the battle of Clontarf. The battle was on Good Friday. Good Friday and Easter were coming near, and that was the time of resurgence in Ireland...'[59] Writing of his experience in the Rising, Irish Volunteer captain Oscar Traynor recalled 'we were convinced that there was

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[55] R. Casement, 'Clontarf to Berlin', *Irish Volunteer*, (7 Feb. 1914), 2.
[56] D. Fanlon, '"900 Years Later" How Nationalists Adopted Brian Boru in 1914' *Irish Times* (10 Apr. 2014), no pagination.
[57] Fanlon, '900 Years Later', *Irish Times* (10 Apr. 2014), no pagination. However, in 1915 the *Irish Times* reported a Royal Fusiliers recruiting sergeant from Clontarf saying he though Bóruma would have made a splendid recruiting officer.
[58] Butler, 'Our Generation' *The Irish Volunteer* (7 Feb. 1914), 4.
[59] S. Daly W.S. #360, Bureau of Military History, 23. Some were jaded: only a week after the Irish Volunteer was published, Canon Maol (aka P.J. O'Shea aka Ó Séaghdha, Pádraig) dismissed it with the expectation that it would be 'mainly a splash of mud oratory by speakers whom Brian would not understand and who knew little of him and his times, nor of the events which led up to the great battle.

going to be another Battle of Clontarf. We were not too hopeful, however, owing to the number of men who lacked experience in the use of their weapons...'[60] In Traynor's conception, Clontarf was a decisive battle and stand against an invader—not necessarily a military victory. Yoking the Volunteers to Bóruma's army elevated their military activities to mythic proportions and located them in a tradition of national struggle.

After the Rising, similar comparisons abounded. *Battle-Cries* is a collection of poems by Terrence MacSwiney, published between the Rising and c.1920. In the title piece he writes: 'Old Brian, smiter of the Danes, and you shall hear as we/Shout your great name, and smite the for and sweep them to the sea.'[61] An internment camp autograph book includes a poem called 'Eire': 'from out the sainted Shore/Brian drove the Norse Invader.'[62] Clontarf was remembered as a watershed moment in memoir as well. Dan Breen, the commander of an IRA brigade in Cork recalled in his memoir: 'Brian Boru and his brother Mahon fought their first great battle with the Danes in 968, when Brian with his gallant army of Tipperary men and Clare men routed the invaders.'[63] Breen resists lauding a single great man, focusing instead on the cooperation between Bóruma and his brother, and the gallantry of Bóruma's men: their success is built on cooperation. In 1920, the nationalist *Evening Herald* recalled Clontarf as a turning point in security and independence:

'Brian Boru marched the valiant army which routed the Danes at Ballybough, and put an end

[60] O. Traynor W.S. #340, Bureau of Military History, 11.`
[61] T. MacSwiney, *Battle-Cries* (CA: c.1920), 9.
[62] Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS 34,956 Poems of Prison Camp and Cell (Ballykinlar, Hare Park and Mountjoy) (1921-3).
[63] D. Breen, *My Fight for Freedom* (Dublin, 1964), 35.

to their depredations and baneful influence for ever'.[64] This account also emphasised the communal nature of the struggle.[65]

In 1917, a Limerick election agent published an electoral handbill for De Valera, demanding: 'Dalcassians! Do you want a hero to represent you?'[66] 'Dalcassians' is an Anglicisation to describe the people of the Dál Cais, Bóruma's tribe.[67] This imagining fits neatly with the contemporaneous ballad: 'when we meet the English, well show them how to fight/And well crown De Valera King of Ireland'.[68]

Another handbill offered a narrative of Dalcassian history:

[64] 'By Calka's Banks' in *Evening Herald* (20 Sep. 1920), 2.
[65] Heroic narratives may have been a way to blur ugly realities. In *Terror in Ireland*, Fearghal McGarry notes that republicans in the revolutionary period recalled conventional battles with celebration but tended to be circumspect in the recollection and commemoration of less conventional violence. This might include tactics such as livestock mutilation, arson, concealed explosive mines, hit and run ambushes, and executions. Perhaps the use of mythic imagery was an attempt to drape brutal actions in romance to make them more agreeable. McGarry in Fitzpatrick, *Terror*, 47.
[66] Dublin, National Library of Ireland LO P 116 (56) 'A Bit of Dalcassian History (c.1917).
[67] 'Dál' means 'portion', with a meaning here similar to 'apportioned territory'
[68] 'De Valera Cottage' Visit Ballyhoura. (2022) https://visitballyhoura.com/explore/de-valeras-cottage [20 Sep. 2022]. Irish kingship was repurposed in its signification, advancing self -rule rather than being connected to Anglo-Irish rule. First Parnell was nicknamed 'the uncrowned king of Ireland' And then, less famously, Paddy Ryan (Lacken), the 'fighting man' of the War of Independence and anti-Treaty IRA member, was eulogised by a local poet as the 'King of Ireland'. L. Hoolan, W.S. #1553, Bureau of Military History, 15-6. And finally de Valera then received the title. After the above song from 1917, in late 1918, a new ditty appeared: 'When we were little children, Johnny Redmond was a fool/He bade us to be satisfied with something called Home Rule/But we have learned a thing or two since we went to school/And we'll crown de Valera King of Ireland.'

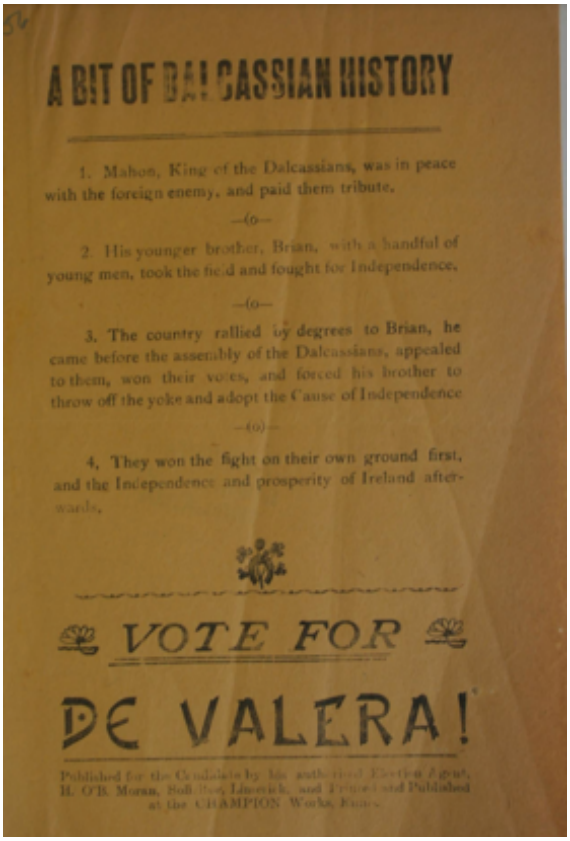


Figure 28. Dublin, National Library of Ireland LO P 116 (56) 'A Bit of Dalcassian History (c.1917).

The handbill lays out a clear analogy: The Dál Cais paid tribute to the Vikings. Bóruma, the king's younger brother 'with a handful of young men, took the field and fought for Independence.' The future king then won his people to him with votes and steered his own brother toward the cause of Independence. The narrative recasts this medieval power struggle to communicate the scale and urgency of the War of Independence. It offers hope for those split by political differences: The king and his younger brother disagree on how best to deal with Vikings and Bóruma's commitment allows him to gain political power and force his brother to 'throw off the yoke' as well. The local victory spreads until the Island is said to be free from Viking control, and furthermore prosperous. The leaflet seeks to inspire people by showing an independence struggle that was started by a political minority, successful, ultimately unifying, and led to prosperity.

Some of this Revolutionary-era sources focus on the barbarity of the Vikings, their lack of appreciation for learning, Christianity and art. In 1921, the republican writer and politician Sean Ua Ceallaugh (aka John O'Kelly) published *Ireland: Elements of her Early Story, from the Coming of Ceasair to the Anglo-Norman Invasion*.[69] He presented 'Brian Boirmhe' as a cultural guardian who grew up hearing 'of the barbarities of the Norsemen' and of cloisters sacked and 'the art treasures' stolen.[70] In Ua Ceallaugh's history, Boirmhe bridles at the oppressive tributes demanded of Munster and is convinced 'the only hope of national emancipation lay in the complete overthrow of the foreigners.'[71] Both implicitly and explicitly, the battle of Clontarf was compared to the events of the revolutionary period.

As republicans shaped their narrative of history, Bóruma became an inspiration and an aspiration, defined primarily as a unifier and a defender against foreign domination. History was nudged to make the defensive army larger (i.e. impressive) or smaller (i.e. underdogs) and writers drew out details most salient to their anti-British grievances.

Unity

[69] S. Ua Ceallaugh, *Ireland: Elements of her Early Story, from the Coming of Ceasair to the Anglo-Norman Invasion* (Dublin, 1921).
[70] Ua Ceallaugh, *Elements,* 297-8. Helena Concannon wrote that famous schools were ruined by Vikings and the 'precious books, which the old scribes had copied with such loving care, were destroyed.' She added that the Normans of England 'were descendants of the fierce sea-robbers of whom we are speaking'. H. Concannon, 'Makers of Irish History', *The Southern Bulletin* (17 Feb. 1923), 4. This was a periodical of the Free State Army in Waterford.
[71] Ua Ceallaugh, *Elements,* 298.

There is little to suggest that at the outset of his career Bóruma had a grand plan for kingship of the whole island.[72] And yet, his story was framed by *fin de siècle* nationalists (and some of their predecessors) to present political unity as the natural, historical state of the island. Seumas MacManus, in his 1921 *Story of the Irish Race*, claimed Celtic people in Ireland had 'a high degree of political unity with a single king.'[73] This unity implied a cohesive bloc of power and culture, although in the medieval period as in modern times, there was no one version of Irishness.

By the late seventh century there existed a concept of kingship over the whole island. But in practice such vast territorial control was too ambitious and remained unrealised.[74] Even as late as the eighth century, 'the Irish law tracts do not recognize a high king of Ireland, a king exercising authority over all the Irish island.'[75] Bóruma was the king of Munster, which has acquired great power in southern Ireland by the tenth century. Whilst there was no permanency or continuity to the power he established (his son did not inherit his power), he aimed to present himself 'as a kind of emperor of the Irish': His notary inscribed him in the Book of Armagh at 'imperator Scottorum'.[76] Bóruma had 'an exceptional ability to grasp political realities and to seize opportunities'. He 'realized the potential of the high-kingship more effectively than his predecessors and, having gained a

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[72] A. Mac Shamráin, 'Brian Bórume, Armagh and High Kingship' in *Seanchas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society* 20:2 (2005), 1-21. 5-6.
[73] MacManus, 7. Bill Kissane comments on the memory of a pre-Norman political community in B. Kissane, *The Politics of the Irish Civil War* (Oxford, 2005), 48.
[74] English, *Irish Freedom,* 34
[75] English, *Irish Freedom,* 34
[76] English, *Irish Freedom,* 36; Byrne, 'Ireland and her Neighbours', Ó Cróinín, *New History,* 862. This event is discussed by Duffy, *Brian Boru,* 138-144. *Scotorum* may refer only to Ireland, but the word *Hibernici* would have been a more obvious way to do that. As the Latin equivalent of *Goídil*, *Scotorum* more precisely refers to all Gaelic-speaking regions. Duffy, *Brian Boru,* 144.

position of ascendency, was more committed to and more proficient at exploiting it to the full.'[77] Shortly before Clontarf, in 1011, 'there was not a king or a lord of any standing in Ireland who had not formally submitted to Brian Bóraime mac Cennétig of Dál Cais.[78] When Bóruma died at Clontarf he had amassed great power and seemed on the brink of achieving still more.

Rather than identifying him as an over-king ruling an assortment of tribes, his rule is invoked by later generations as a period of political unity. In 1633, Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn,* which aimed to convey the sophistication of the Irish people, portrayed Bóruma as an emperor.[79]



[77] Mac Shamráin, 'Brian Bórume', 5-6; Duffy, *Brian Boru,* 156.
[78] Duffy, *Brian Boru,* 164.
[79] O'Halloran, 'Brian Boru and his Afterlife', 38. His self-title 'imperator' is a more flexible term but roughly cognate with 'emperor' and the origin of the latter word. For a ruler from Clare to sign the Book of Armagh as 'imperator' of the Scotti, i.e. the Irish, is certainly the gesture of an over-king, or an emperor at a stretch.

Figure 29. Dublin, National Library of Ireland LO P 116 (56) 'A Bit of Dalcassian History (c.1917).

In the *fin de siècle* period, he was remembered as a unifier without much use of the term 'emperor'.[80] In 1921, the nationalist *Ulster Herald* published an article called 'Ireland's Ancient Unity'. The article described 'the burial place of Brian Boru, the monarch who welded Ireland into a solid entity against the "Northmen," and who remains to our time a symbol of Ireland's ancient unity.' From Bóruma to the Volunteers, the article continued, Armagh 'has been associated with every protest against foreign aggression.'[81] In 1920, *Red Hand* explained that political unity only emerged in the Viking era: Ireland, and even then only slowly and imperfectly, that they came to understand the necessity of political unity as a safeguard against external dangers.[82]

Terrence MacSwiney's poem 'To Clontarf' proclaims: 'In the blaze of his glory his country is one…/We'll welcome the invaders with the naked sword,/By the shore we will give them a rest!'[83] MacSwiney urges his readers to confrontation, bringing the country to unity through violence. Implicitly, also, through sacrifice—Bóruma died at this battle, but it's the blaze of glory, not his continued life, that's valued. In the 1922 *Tuam Herald*, Michael Collins is quoted as saying the Irish Government 'is as completely and wholly Irish in blood, in outlook and in policy as the Government that ruled Ireland under the great Ard ri [high

[80] Writing in Irish allowed less room for interpretation because the term is 'high king' rather than a loan word such as 'emperor', allowing Irish sources such as some of Pearse' writing to avoid the word altogether. Pádraic Pearse wrote: '*sa bliadain 980 sead gabh maoilseachlainn árd-righe éireann… níor mair samhail mhaoil-sheachlainn in eirinn ariam acht brian boroimhe fein*'. P. Pearse, *Ós Cionn na Fairrge agus Aistí Eile* (Dublin: 1908), 67.
[81] 'Ireland's Ancient Unity', *Ulster Herald* (24 Sep. 1921), 3.
[82] 'Despotism Tends to Centralise, Freedom of the People to Decentralise', *Red Hand Magazine* (1 Sep. 1920), 40.
[83] MacSwiney, *Battle-Cries*, 16.

king] Brian Borumha—the last entirely Irish Government ruling over the whole country.'[84] This characterization of his rule as constituting an 'entirely Irish government' with island-wide jurisdiction developed precent and pride, inventing-remembering a tradition and providing a measuring stick of legitimacy.

There was a counterpoint in which the tribal nature of eleventh century Ireland was leveraged to promote individual liberty and decentralised rule. Constance Markievicz put her own particular spin on the leader's significance. In late 1919 she wrote to her sister from Cork Jail. She asserted that 'we [the Irish] never produced a tyrant' because of some innate drive that 'prevented any man or woman from ever desiring to conquer all Ireland – a sort of feeling for "decentralisation"', which she compared to contemporary soviets.[85] Brian's virtue was not in holding absolute power, but in never interfering with the business of petty kings beneath him. A similar idea was expressed at the 1956 unveiling of the memorial for Liam Hoare, who was killed in 1921:

> The Irish state was organised on a basis of wide individual liberty. The chief o[f] the clan being independent of any other neighbour, and, unless when a very strong man rose, as for example Brian who broke the Danes, at Clontarf and destroyed them and welded the whole of the clans together for the purposes of defence, the country was easy of attack, the neighbours did not always help the chief attacked. The country was in fact organised for peace not for war.[86]

In all these examples except the last two, the reach of Bóruma's political authority is overstated as a means of identifying Ireland as a nation with proven capability of self-government.

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[84] 'The Prevailing Insecurity' in *Tuam Herald* (13 May, 1922), 2. This is a nationalist paper, tending toward constitutional nationalism.
[85] Naughton, *Markievicz,* 151-2.
[86] S. O'Hegarty. 'Liam Hoare Memorial – Unveiling', Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS 31,444/4. Obituaries, Newspaper Cuttings, Typescript Speeches and Commemorations Relating to Deceased Members of the IRA (1946-65).

Self-sacrifice

It was challenging to use an over-king to build identity in movements that sought independence from monarchic rule. Some emphasise the urgent and protective military efforts of the ruler whilst exempting him from the decadence and self-indulgent grandeur one might associate with kingship and emperorship. Alice Milligan described him away from home 'till his cheeks were hunger-hollow/His voice grown hoarse in a thousand fights where he called on his men to follow'. She narrates a scene before his kingship of him looking shabby.'[87] He tells the kings 'I have wooed no love, I have joined to game, save the kingly game of battle' against the Danes.[88] Offered treasure, he wants only more men of the Dál Cais to follow him to fight.[89] While the idea of a shabby, outlaw leader tends to belong to a critical English narrative, Milligan activates elements of this tale for republican ends, describing the nobility of privation and self-sacrifice.

Being killed in the battle that was his greatest victory, his narrative lent itself to twentieth century sacrifices. In 1917, at Roger Casement's funeral anniversary, Thomas Ashe said: 'We look away in the distant ages of the past to the figure of the king who died in the Battle of Clontarf, and we think of the Ireland which he ruled…'[90] In 1918 the *Irish Independent* listed famous deaths from Bóruma in 1014 up to IRA Captain Richard Coleman who died of Spanish flu in Usk Prison in 1918: 'They died to secure the liberation of the oldest political prisoner in the world—Ireland!' Coleman's death in prison in the flu

[87] Milligan, *Hero Lays*, 16-7.
[88] Milligan, *Hero Lays,* 18.
[89] Milligan, *Hero Lays,* 19.
[90] T. Ashe quoted in M. McAuliffe, 'Carrying a Cross for Ireland: Thomas Ashe in Profile' RTE Century Ireland (2022) https://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/carrying-a-cross-for-ireland-thomas-ashe-in-profile [Jul. 2022].

pandemic was elevated through this tie to a larger historical narrative of national sacrifice, beginning with Bóruma.[91] And in 1922 a Sinn Féin memorial card read: 'Cathal Brugha: lies dead, dead for Ireland…He is a link with…Brian who drove the Danes from Ireland.' In these commemorative comparisons, Bóruma is distinct from the Anglo-Irish and English narratives that emphasized piety or were critical of the king. Instead, he emerges as a self-sacrificing and unifying protector of a homeland. With these characteristics he became an icon of republican struggle.

Conclusion

In the revolutionary period Bóruma was remembered less as a Christian king than as a king who challenged invaders. He is also held up as an example of native rule and Irish unification. Bóruma did not create or hold high-kingship of the entire island.[92] And yet his memory served as a narrative of native self-rule. His name is regularly part of the pantheon of heroes invoked in lectures, pamphlets and commemoration. While not a central figure in the republican self-fashioning of the era, the shifts in his use as a symbol illuminate the nuances of nationalist visions of government, past and community.

[91] At the same time, Bóruma's history was itself adapted to show him working to free an imprisoned nation.

[92] Byrne, 'Ireland and her Neighbours', Ó Cróinín, *New History,* 862. He did, however, separate the concept of high kingship from the kingship of Tara. Duffy, *Brian Boru,* 251.

5. Landscape: 'Vague, eclectic slogans'

The independence movement required articulation of what made Ireland distinct from England. This process was fraught, as Ireland had undergone a 'violet and disruptive historical development' and had been subject to foreign control for much of its recorded history.[1] In a society so shaped by assimilation, republicans searched for a permanent principle which defined Irishness.[2] Land was an obvious site of national identity, but a complex one. Republican politics were confronted by issues of land ownership, land use and the rural economy, and Sinn Féin particular had internally irreconcilable views regarding land use. Redirecting incendiary conflicts over land ownership and use into a narrative of *cultural* ownership of the land was a means of identity-building that included rural Ireland whilst accommodating (or avoiding) the irreconcilable desires of landless people, small farmers, graziers and landlords.[3]

In rural areas, land agitation was sometimes successfully yoked to the independence movement at a local level; but the urban leadership of Sinn Féin ultimately chose to withdraw their overt support.[4] By 1918, the majority of the nationalist population were Sinn

[1] Leerssen, *Remembrance,* 224. Leerssen states the process was 'much more fraught and complex than elsewhere' which seems an overstatement.
[2] This had been a goal in the Revival and earlier as well. In 1917 the poet Geroge Russell envisioned 'One river born from many streams/Roll in one blaze of blinding light.' Flanagan, *Remembering the Revolution*, 127.
[3] 'Graziers' will here be used interchangeably with 'ranchers' and 'grazing land' with 'ranches'. This paper will focus on anti-Treaty Sinn Féin, but some similar dynamics were at work within the pro-Treaty party.
[4] Beatty, 'An Irish Revolution', 70. In the 1920s half the Irish workforce was agricultural In general, Sinn Féin pre-Treaty was largely capitalist: republicans with socialist views were an unbalancing minority element. Beatty 'An Irish Revolution', 63.

Féin supporters.[5] As with other issues involving social class, Sinn Féin's leaders were wary of taking a stand that would divide their supporters. Sinn Féin thus could not hold a unified, consistent position on issues of pressing concern to the rural polity. A similar tension existed with the Irish Volunteers and IRA. This chapter argues that as a result, rural Ireland (and the rural west in particular) functioned most effectively in republican discourse as a mythic and historical anchor. This chapter begins with an overview of *fin de siècle* land politics, and argues that the effectiveness of medieval narratives in building connection to the land was likely amplified by the lack of consensus regarding real-world land policy: cultural narratives were sometimes all that policymakers and other stakeholders had in common. The second part of the chapter will examine the role of medieval narratives in republican identity. It will consider two questions: First, what was the nature of the 'authenticity' provided by the land or rural culture, and did this differ from earlier eras of romanticisation of an 'authentic' west or countryside? Second, apart from providing a stamp of authenticity, how were these narratives used in self-fashioning?

Due to the diversity of its membership Sinn Féin was unable to cohesively and sustainedly address the concerns of rural populations. Like its predecessor, the Irish Parliamentary Party, Sinn Féin 'thrived on imprecision', pushing its factionalised members to focus on the national project.[6] Even the question of a 'republic' was a highly divisive issue. Kevin O'Higgins, a Sinn Féin leader, once commented that most Sinn Féin supporters would like independence without the destruction of the British Empire, if only the British Empire 'behaved itself.'[7] With existential questions such as the republic left fuzzy, it is no wonder

[5] Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 221.
[6] M. Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1999), 4, referring to the IPP.
[7] Beatty, 'An Irish Revolution', 68.

the party avoided specificity. In early 1918 De Valera insisted 'We ought not attempt to regularise the land campaign' because doing so would be all-consuming.[8] This weakness at the policy level may have encouraged Sinn Féín leaders, particularly those from urban areas, to engage with rural Ireland through history and myth. The republican prototype in 1916 was urban, 'skilled' and often white-collar; but in 1917-8 farmers' sons were drawn to republican politics because of the conscription crisis.[9] Conscription electrified political activism amongst people who had not otherwise been active. Whilst not necessarily a conscious choice, history and legend were the only avenue to a universally appealing narrative of land ownership.

Land ownership and grazing land remained flashpoints of conflict. Large scale grazing expanded in the nineteenth century, particularly after the Famine.[10] Grazing had a high land requirement but low labour requirement, leading to large swathes of untenanted land.[11] Graziers did not often become patronal figures, 'taking care of the community, especially the less fortunate': many 'conspicuously failed to do this.'[12] They were 'essentially

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[8] Laffan, *Resurrection,* 258.
[9] Hart, 'Social Structure', 217.
[10] Graziers are middlemen who buy local cattle to prepare for export.
[11] Graziers held a minimum of 200 acres. Bew, *Revolution in Ireland 1879-1923* ed. G. Boyce, (Basingstoke, 1988), 220. The grazing system was most prevalent in Meath, Westmeath, Kildare, Connaught, Roscommon, Galway, Mayo, Clare and Tipperary. D. Jones, *Graziers, Land Reform, and Political Conflict in Ireland* (Washington DC, 1995), x.
The meaning of property is not static, and the nineteenth century saw two conflicting ways of conceiving of property. One framework was capitalistic: property ownership was individual, zero-sum and absolute. Contrastingly, property ownership was embedded in community relationships and traditions. This latter idea emerged from early modern conceptions of landowners as leaders of society: making a living off one's estate allowed one the leisure to develop free will and thoughtful engagement with political affairs. This model of landowning entailed obligations to the local community; however, Irish landowners were clearly not, for the most part, patrons and keepers of communal heritage, which compounded resentment.
[12] Jones, *Graziers,* 251-2. Their farms were sometimes non-residential. Jones, *Graziers*, 158.

capitalistic farmers, driven by commercial ambition and the desire for wealth and social rank.'[13] Land was 'simply a commodity to be acquired and forfeited.'[14] Landlord sometimes evicted tenants and removed common grazing areas to create more land for the grazier market, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century.[15] Graziers were often viewed as barring access to land and as taking over land previously owned by smallholders.[16] The graziers as a class had often supported land reforms and included many proud nationalists but were collectively seen as the 'degenerate offspring' of landlordism.[17] Kevin O'Shiel, the judicial commissioner of Free State's Dáil Land Courts, described them as 'not, in any sense, farmer… a very opulent class of "cattle lords."'[18]

Alongside this, tenant farmers had struggled to purchase land or sustain themselves on what they rented. The vast majority of renters leased land that was uneconomical: too small and/or low quality to support them.[19] At times the land was farmed in impractically small and noncontiguous parcels. [20] Although the 1879-82 Land War broke the power of the landlord class, different classes of farmers were left with conflicting economic interests and

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[13] Jones, *Graziers,* 155.
[14] Jones, *Graziers,* 155. The graziers leased land, sometimes on long (even multi-decade) contracts but often on eleven-month leases. Such leases were advantageous to landlords as the rents were much more likely to be collected and collected on time.
[15] Jones, *Graziers,* 94, 108-9.
[16] Jones, *Graziers,* 229.
[17] P. Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation in Ireland 1890-1910: Parnellites and Radical Agrarians* (Oxford, 1987), 7; D. Jones, 'The Issue of Land Distribution: Revisiting Graziers, Land Reform and Political Conflict in Ireland', *Land Questions,* ed. Campbell and Varley, 117-48. 119.
[18] K. O'Shiel, W.S. #1770, Bureau of Military History, 930.
[19] Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, 1-2. In the 1881 Land Act set up the Congested Districts Board. It also , replaced the absolute right of the landlord was replaced with a tenant's legal right to tenancy and fair rent. But the eleven-month lease was not subject to these guidelines as they only applied to leases longer than twelve months. Campbell, *Land and Revolution,* 16, 20.
[20] K. O'Shiel, W.S. #1770, Bureau of Military History, 924-5. The commissioner witnessed cases of twenty separate plots for one person, amounting to 'well under two acres'.

goals. After the Land War, tenancy reform received a broad spectrum of support from farmers but land redistribution remained controversial.[21] Later, the passage of the 1903 Wyndham Act incentivised the transfer of land to its tenant farmers; but many tenants could still not afford to purchase land.

Sinn Féin's emergence as a political force was coterminous with the 1906-9 Ranch War, which attempted to redistribute ranch holdings amongst small farmers and landless men.[22] The conflict aimed to get landlords to sell their estates at prices deemed fair by the tenant-buyers, and it sought to end the grazing system.[23] During the Ranch War, Sinn Féin rapidly expanded outside Dublin and its rural meetings addressed the issue of graziers.[24] In the west, local Sinn Féin leaders wanted redistribution. Rural IRA members also wanted land redistribution as the only viable alternative to emigration. [25]

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[21] Varley, *Land Questions,* ed. Campbell and Varley, 238.

[22] Campbell gives the date as 1904-1910 and there seems to be no agreement about the exact dates. 49. Agrarianism was part of the political culture in the first decade of the century, not only in Ireland but in other parts of Europe. This movement as tied to Revivalism and valued preserving rural traditions whilst promoting the rights of rural poor. It was conservative and antipathetic to urban culture, and antithetical to communism. Jones, 'Land Distribution', *Land Questions,* ed. Campbell and Varley, 141-2.

[23] Campbell, *Land and Revolution,* 85. The Ranch war was less violent than the Land War, and a smaller territory was contested: it was largely confined to north Leinster, north Munster and Connaught. Jones, *Graziers*, 208.

[24] Campbell, *Land and Revolution,* 115.

[25] D. Fitzpatrick, 'The Geography of the War of Independence', *Atlas,* ed. Crowley et al., 534-43. 542. By 1900 there was widespread agreement that land redistribution was the only solution to western poverty. Campbell, *Land and Revolution,* 1. The original source of this poverty was Cromwell's relocation of large numbers of people to the west and the reassignment of confiscated Irish land to new English owners was followed by two centuries years of penal laws limiting Irish Catholics of property ownership. For more on land ownership, see S. Maurer, *The Dispossessed State: Narratives of Ownership in Nineteenth century Britain and Ireland* (Baltimore, MD, 2012).

By 1918 agrarian radicalism was 'a very ambiguous force'.[26] Some branches of Sinn Féin were active in agitation, especially in Galway, where by 1918 Sinn Féin was the most influential political organisation in the county.[27] The Galway Sinn Féin executive resolved in March 1918 that 'there can be no peace until this economic hardship is removed by the just and equitable distribution of the ranches.'[28] Although there was some eastern demand for land redistribution, eastern branches were more conservative.[29] Many examples exist of struggles against landlords and the grazier system eliding with the struggle for national self-determination.[30] In March 1918, *Freeman's Journal* reported that 'In Sinn Fein circles counsels are divided as to the wisdom or otherwise of the new agrarian campaign.' Michael Brennan, the commanding IRA officer in county Clare, wrote he 'hadn't the slightest interest in [land agitation] but I had every interest in using it as a means to an end.'[31]

The issue of cattle drives exemplified how 'Republicans were discovering that unanimity was more easily maintained by Nationalist movements with vague, eclectic

[26] P. Bew, 'Sinn Fein, Agrarian Radicalism and the War of Independence, 1919–1921' *Revolution in Ireland* ed. G. Boyce, 217-34. 222. Agitation against landlords and graziers died down in 1914 but revived at the end of 1917, with renewed agitation lasting into 1920. This included cattle driving and smallholders/landless people occupying untenanted land occupied, especially in Westmeath and Clare. Jones, *Graziers*, 206.
[27] Campbell, *Land and Revolution,* 115, 166.
[28] Varley, 'Land, Revolution and Counter-Revolution in the West', *Atlas* ed. Crowley et al. 495-6. 495.
[29] T. Varley, 'Land, Revolution', *Atlas,* ed. Crowley et al., 495.
[30] In the food shortage of the 1917-8 winter, for example, sometimes groups of men seized land whilst carrying a tricolor (e.g. in Connaught in Spring 1918). In 1919 in Kilmaine, Mayo, graziers surrendered land under Sinn Féin pressure. Rent was then paid rent for the seized land. Campbell, *Land and Revolution,* 241-2.
[31] M. Mulholland, 'How Revolutionary was the Irish Revolution?' in *Éire-Ireland* 56:1-2 (Spring-Summer 2021), 143-79. 152. Bew, 'Sinn Fein' *Revolution in Ireland* ed. G. Boyce, 225. In contrast, in 1919 a constitutional nationalist wrote of Sinn Féin being 'in the main…a farmer's movement.'

slogans than my informal governments with social consciences.'[32] Thomas Tuohy of the Clare IRA describes cattle drives in which men affixed placards to horns of cattle that read 'The land for the people; the road for the bullocks'. But Tuohy's company received orders from GHQ in early 1918 'forbidding such activities.'[33] In South Mayo, Sinn Féín organised cattle drives and in North Roscommon they called for boycotts.[34] Then In February 1918, Sinn Féin pivoted to not to conduct cattle drives without agreement with divisional executives.[35] On 2 March 1918, Irish Volunteer headquarters in west Clare forbid participating men participating in cattle drives in their capacity as an Irish Volunteer and ruled that no prominent officer should attend. In East Clare, Sinn Féin headquarters said members required branch permission before participating.[36] Michael Brennan of the East Clare IRA wrote of how his unit decided to 'cash in' on the local discontent: 'Cattle drives became very popular and all over the county Volunteers took part in them as organised units.'[37] Some Sinn Fein elites decided 'most of the cattle drives were no doubt justified' but forbid Sinn Fein members 'to identify themselves with cattle drivers or raids on private houses or farms.'[38] In 1921 the Sinn Féin leadership backed off land agitation lest it divert energy from the independence struggle, and local committees worked to prevent land seizures and cattle drives.[39] [40] In May 1922 the Roscommon Brigade of the IRA announced

[32] D. Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life 1913-1921 Provincial Experience of War and* Revolution (Cork, 1998), 140-1. After sweeping the 1918 elections, the party consciously avoided commitment to 'long term political programmes.' Fitzpatrick, *Irish Life* 134.
[33] T. Tuohy, W.S. #983, Bureau of Military History, 7.
[34] Campbell, *Land and Revolution,* 242.
[35] Fitzpatrick, *Irish Life,* 132.
[36] Fitzpatrick, *Irish Life*, 132.
[37] M. Brennan W.S. #1068, Bureau of Military History, 30.
[38] 'Events in the West' in *Freeman's Journal*, (1 Mar. 1918), 3.
[39] Jones, *Graziers*, 207
[40] Quoted in Bew, 'Sinn Fein', *Revolution in Ireland* ed. Boyce, 230

that as the 'guardians of the liberties of the citizens of the electoral area of South Roscommon', the 'driving of stock and taking by force of farms and ranches' were thenceforth 'strictly prohibited'.[41] In Galway, Sinn Féin TD Art O'Connor in 1920 insisted the central authority in Dublin did not support 'anything in the nature of confiscation.' [42]

In 1919-23 there was a new wave of agitation against the grazier system and for many rural people this took precedence over the national struggle. During World War I, Sinn Féin had commanded strong support from farmers across all classes, propelled toward the party by the threat of conscription. After the war, Sinn Féin's power waned with the end of conscription. The party could not afford to alienate swathes of its supporters. British government policy had shifted the status quo on land in response to crises of the past few decades and Sinn Féin's leadership was unwilling to change it much further. The party ended up supporting redistribution but not violent seizure.[43] Provincial Sinn Féin had different priorities than central leadership, and the leadership was itself often fragmented. Although laborers and small farmers were important to the Revolution as they formed a significant part of Irish Volunteer forces, their grievances were considered too divisive.[44] Rural grievances included the unresolved congestion of the west, the surplus of noninheriting farmers (due to emigration restrictions during the World War) which led to a

[41] 'Agrarian Trouble: Cattle Driving and Seizures in Roscommon', *Evening Herald* (26 May, 1922), 2.
[42] Quoted in Bew, 'Sinn Fein', *Revolution in Ireland* ed. Boyce, 230
[43] Campbell, *Land and Revolution,* 256. T.D. Kevin O'Shiel was sent to investigate the situation in the west in 1920 and called it 'the last land war.' Quoted in Campbell, *Land and Revolution,* 247.
[44] Townshend argues that from 1916-21, land hunger was the only force generating large scale action. Bew, 'Sinn Fein', *Revolution in Ireland* ed. Boyce, 225-6.

dramatic increase in the numbers of rural poor. In response, land was acquired and redistributed through a mix of legal means and illegal seizure.[45]

Districts with the most violent agrarian unrest were therefore not the centres of the independence struggle.[46] Connaught, for example, had seen militancy in the Land War and Ranch War but was underrepresented in its participation in the War of independence.[47] By the summer of 1920 it was clear that republican leaders would not sanction the seizure of land, and 'the west responded by a relatively low key participation in the War of independence.'[48] The alternative would have been broadening the aims of the struggle, which would have challenged the conservativism of the leadership and led to factionalisation.

As Aodh de Blácam said in 1921, 'we have had for three years the curious situation of the government with conservative objects working in a revolutionary atmosphere by revolutionary methods.'[49] In general, Sinn Féin pre-Treaty was largely capitalist: republicans with socialist views were an unbalancing minority element.[50] O'Shiel called land seizure 'Bolshevism' whilst a registrar of the land courts complained '…the most vile hooligans…are marching, with the tricolour, to commandeer lands'…'there are a few good "Shinners" who have lost their heads over this land racket…'[51] IRA Captain Joseph O'Byrne called agitators a

[45] D. Jones 'The Issue of Land Distribution', *Land Questions,* ed. F. Campbell and T. Varley, 119-42. 121-2.
[46] Bew, 'Sinn Fein', *Revolution in Ireland* ed. Boyce, 233.
[47] Bew, 'Sinn Fein', *Revolution in Ireland* ed. Boyce, 233.
[48] Bew, 'Sinn Fein', *Revolution in Ireland* ed. Boyce, 234.
[49] Laffan, *Resurrection,* 258.
[50] Beatty, *'*An Irish Revolution'.
[51] K. O'Shiel, W.S. #1770, Bureau of Military History, 976. Pro-Treaty Sinn Féin was against illegal seizure, with TD (and later Minister for Economic Affairs) Kevin O'Higgins calling it 'organised robbery' and 'wanton and deliberate trespass'. Jones, 'Land Distribution', *Land Questions* ed. Campbell and Varley, 129.

'menacing disease'.[52] In 1920, IRA officer Sean Moylan wrote that the IRA was not involved in cattle drives and had even 'cleaned up' the cattle drivers.[53] The republican leadership had a 'deep suspicion' of yoking the agrarian struggle to the national one.[54] There was a risk it would not only divide the party but take attention and resources away from the struggle against the British. Arthur Griffith and the Sinn Féín leadership feared the agrarian unrest 'could well wreck the entire national movement.'[55] Peader O'Donnell lamented in *An Poblacht* in 1930, 'We lost out in 21, forced to defend ranches, enforce rents, be neutral in strikes.' Not only was there division between the central and rural leaderships of both Sinn Féin and the IRA, there was division even at the top of the command structure. The result was an incoherent and ever-changing policy that seemed to satisfy no one. Sinn Féin were entrapped by their belief and rhetoric of 'land for the people' but their political survival required retreat from this ideal.[56]

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[52] He mentions reports from part of the west in which 'allegedly landless men and small-holders were taking illegal action by entering upon and seizing land by violence with complete disregard of rights of property. Some of these bands sought to attach a patriotic significance to their lawless activities by flaunting the Republican banner (orange, white and green), while others committed their acts of trespass under the flag of the Irish Parliamentary party.' O'Byrne W.S. #1142, Bureau of Military History, 3.

[53] Quoted in Bew, 'Sinn Fein'*, Revolution in Ireland* ed. Boyce, 232.

[54] Bew, 'Sinn Fein', *Revolution in Ireland* ed. Boyce, 233. Even when the agrarian and national struggles were connected, there were urban and rural differences. Rural Sinn Féin was less liberal and it appears women rarely held top positions. Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 223.

[55] Griffith to O'Shiel, quoted in Campbell, *Land and Revolution,* 254.

[56] Cronin *Agrarian Protest in Ireland, 1750-1960*. (Dublin, 2012), 52. The agrarian parties ultimately couldn't transcend class differences. This was not only a Sinn Féin issue but something other parties (e.g. The Farmers Party) struggled with as well. T. Varley, 'On the Road to Extinction: Agrarian Parties in Twentieth Century Ireland' *Irish Political Studies* 25:4 (Dec. 2010), 581-601. 583. Some followers found an awkward compromise: a sceptical constitutional nationalist described in 1919 how Sinn Féin's 'most enthusiastic advocates' were those who are carefully making payments on farmers bought on British credit, then attending a Sinn Féin meeting as merely an 'exhilarating tonic' that 'satisfied patriotic sentiments'. Bew, 'Sinn Fein', *Revolution in Ireland* ed. Boyce, 223. In the Land Act of 1923

The policy of avoiding specific class interests is apparent in the leaflets of the day:



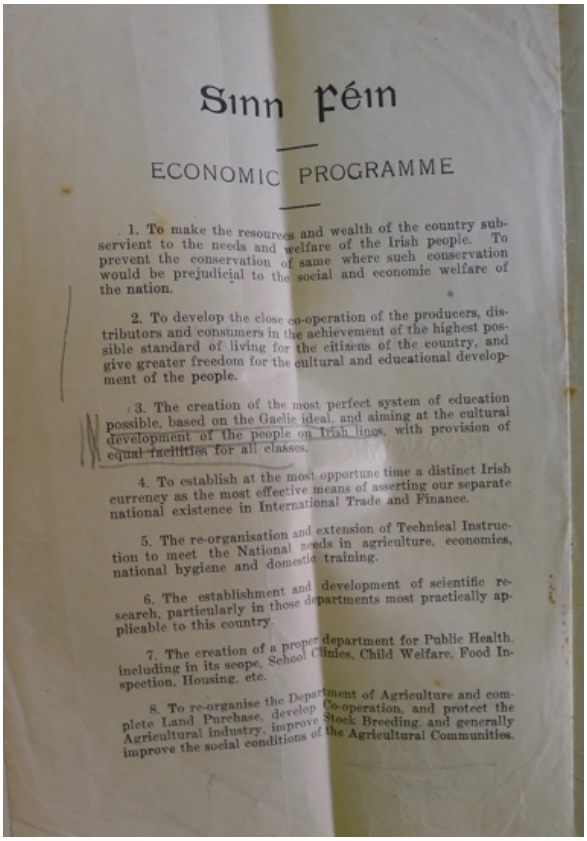
THE TWO POLICIES.

THE POLICY OF SINN FEIN GIVES YOU	THE OTHER POLICY GIVES YOU
All Ireland for the Irish.	An Ireland with a lost Province.
A Self-reliant Nation.	A "Free State" founded on the Pale.
Ireland not merely free, but Gaelic as well.	A Freemason Senate.
Ireland for the historic Irish Nation.	Prisoners rotting.
Ireland free, and therefore strong, prosperous & peaceful.	A new Jobocracy.
A Fearless Nation.	Iron Rule, for six or (sixty-six) years.
	A Craven State.

Figure 30. Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS LO P 117 (51) 1916-1922…a Comparison (1922).

The above pamphlet from 1922 offers no tangible policies. The 'Economic Programme below, from the same year, promises to 'reorganise the Department of Agriculture and complete Land Purchase,' to develop cooperation and to 'generally improve the social conditions of the Agricultural Communities'.

the state acquired all land not dealt with under previous acts and redistributed it through a land commission. Cronin, *Agrarian Protest,* 53.



Sinn Féin

ECONOMIC PROGRAMME

1. To make the resources and wealth of the country subservient to the needs and welfare of the Irish people. To prevent the conservation of same where such conservation would be prejudicial to the social and economic welfare of the nation.

2. To develop the close co-operation of the producers, distributors and consumers in the achievement of the highest possible standard of living for the citizens of the country, and give greater freedom for the cultural and educational development of the people.

3. The creation of the most perfect system of education possible, based on the Gaelic ideal, and aiming at the cultural development of the people on Irish lines, with provision of equal facilities for all classes.

4. To establish at the most opportune time a distinct Irish currency as the most effective means of asserting our separate national existence in International Trade and Finance.

5. The re-organisation and extension of Technical Instruction to meet the National needs in agriculture, economics, national hygiene and domestic training.

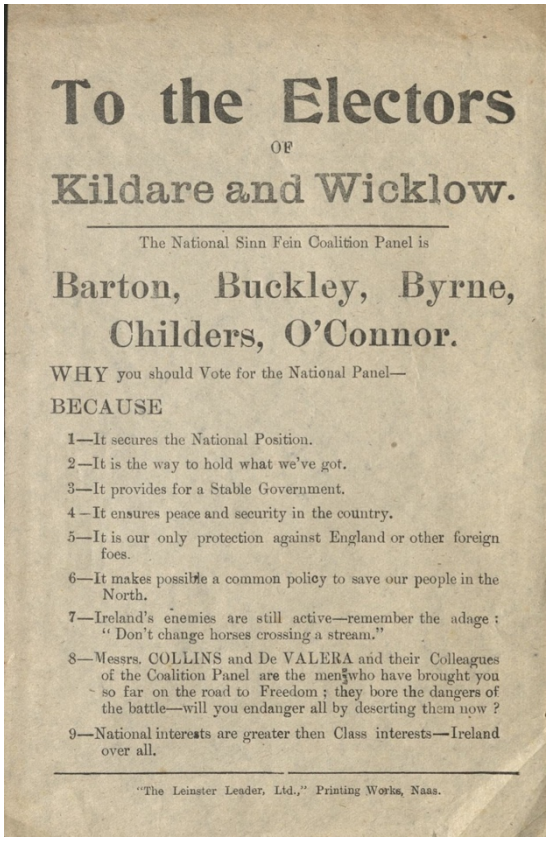
6. The establishment and development of scientific research, particularly in those departments most practically applicable to this country.

7. The creation of a proper department for Public Health, including in its scope, School Clinics, Child Welfare, Food Inspection, Housing, etc.

8. To re-organise the Department of Agriculture and complete Land Purchase, develop Co-operation, and protect the Agricultural industry, improve Stock Breeding, and generally improve the social conditions of the Agricultural Communities.

Figure 31. Dublin, National Library of Ireland, MS LO P 117 (51) 1916-1922…a Comparison (1922).

These goals avoid a divisive level of specificity.



To the Electors
OF
Kildare and Wicklow.

The National Sinn Fein Coalition Panel is

Barton, Buckley, Byrne,
Childers, O'Connor.

WHY you should Vote for the National Panel—

BECAUSE

1—It secures the National Position.
2—It is the way to hold what we've got.
3—It provides for a Stable Government.
4—It ensures peace and security in the country.
5—It is our only protection against England or other foreign foes.
6—It makes possible a common policy to save our people in the North.
7—Ireland's enemies are still active—remember the adage: "Don't change horses crossing a stream."
8—Messrs. COLLINS and De VALERA and their Colleagues of the Coalition Panel are the men who have brought you so far on the road to Freedom; they bore the dangers of the battle—will you endanger all by deserting them now?
9—National interests are greater then Class interests—Ireland over all.

"The Leinster Leader, Ltd.," Printing Works, Naas.

Figure 32: A 1922 Election Poster. J. Durney, Kildare Local History: June '22, Leinster Leader *(26 Jun. 2022).*

In Kildare and Wicklow, an election poster warned: 'National interests are greater than Class interests—Ireland over all.'[57]

Authenticity and identity

In a conflict where many of the fighters and leadership were urban, the land offered authenticity.[58] As Sinn Féin was strategically unable to hold a clear policy position on land, the only universally practicable option was to read the land as cultural inheritance. This

[57] J. Durney, Kildare Local History: June '22, *Leinster Leader* (26 Jun. 2022).
[58] Throughout the revolution, the fighters were disproportionately urban Hart, 'Social Structure', 212.

unfolded in two ways: engagement with the land as a marker of authenticity, and a deeper engagement with the land as a source of identity. It is not always possible to disentangle the two.

This departed only partially from an existing tradition of fetishisation, established by the English and adapted by Revivalists. Anthony Smith describes a 'cult of the picturesque' that began in the Renaissance and propelled the interest in land as an aesthetic subject into the eighteenth century.[59] In the eighteenth century, the English and European lens of the picturesque challenged some previously overtly negative attitudes toward rural Ireland.[60] However, it did so by exploiting the rural poor as a poetic spectacle.[61] Irish rural life was presented in terms of exoticness and appreciated as a performance of shocking (yet aesthetic) poverty. After the famine, the depopulated West appealed to tourists and the Victorian era saw a tourist boom to Ireland.[62]

Revivalist culture then further entrenched patronising stereotypes of rurality. Even as the Revival advanced nationalistic ideas, artists waxed lyrical about 'their discovery of the

[59] Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 36

[60] Leerssen, 'Antiquarian Research', *Talam an Eisc* ed. Byrne and Harry, 74. This continued into the following centuries, and even to the present day. For more on this, see Alison Lacivita's 'Wild Dublin: Nature versus culture in Irish Literature' in *Green Letters* 17:1 (2013), 27-41.

[61] F. Benozzo, *Landscape Perception in Early Celtic Literature* (Aberystwyth, 2004), ix. In her introduction to *Visualizing Ireland*, Adele Dalsimer describes Ireland's extant early modern visual art as largely a 'byproduct' of conquest, emphasising the extent to which the aesthetic of Ireland became externally controlled. A. Dalsimer, ed. *Visualizing Ireland,* 4. In the mid-eighteenth century, an interest in the picturesque emerged in British culture. One nineteenth century framework that competed with the picturesque was the English concern about *excessive* nature or naturalness. In the early nineteenth century, Irish 'nature' became inextricable from the need for 'improvement'. In rural areas, English ideas of improvement focused on making nature governable and profitable. O'Connell in Kelly, 16, 23. M. Kelly, ed. *Nature and the Environment in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Liverpool, 2019).

[62] Lacivita, 'Wild Dublin', 32.

sparsely populated west.'[63] One's 'discovery' of a Gaeltacht in the remote West was 'frequently presented in quasi-religious terms as the end of a quest.'[64] 'The most peripheral areas of Ireland were 'canonized', and the west was idealised in contrast to Dublin.[65] With its celebration of the supernatural and 'celebration…of rural poverty', the Revival can be interpreted as a reaction against the 'rationalising project of improvement' to Britishise language and culture.[66] This produced a sort of museumisation, a tendency to view rural Ireland as an anachronism and symbol rather than a collection of dynamic political and social communities.[67]

This also led to mystical readings of the landscape. One way for Revivalists to work against narratives of miserabilism was to 're-enchant the Irish natural world', to see the landscape not as a place but as a portal or vision.[68] Revivalists created an idealised peasant who was a symbol of 'an ancient, dignified Irish culture' set against the 'modern industrial and commercial British spirit.'[69] The anthropologist Walter Evans-Wentz wrote in 1911, 'Let us…forget that there are such things as libraries and universities, and betake ourselves to the Celtic peasant for instruction, living close to nature as he lives, and thinking the things

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[63] B. Kennedy, 'The Traditional Irish Thatched House: Imagination and Reality' in A. Dalsimer, ed. *Visualizing Ireland: National Identity and the Pictorial Tradition* (London, 1993), 165-79. 174.
[64] Hutchinson, *Dynamics,* 221.
[65] Leerssen, quoted in D. Ó'Giolláin, *Locating Irish Folklore: Tradition, Modernity, Identity* (Cork, 2007), 29; Steele, 24. This issue of 'canonisation' did not disappear with the end of the Revival. Brian Kennedy contrasts De Valera's 1928 advocacy of traditional cottages as ideal residences with rural cottage-dwellers' desire for homes with running water and better sanitation, Kennedy, 'Thatched House', *Visualizing Ireland* ed. Dalsimer, 176.
[66] H. O'Connell, *Ireland and the Fiction of Improvement* (Oxford, 2006).
[67] Speaking of India, Sethi writes that for a 'romantic conservative', a village community showed 'preserved culture…permanence in an otherwise disintegrated and chaotic world.' Sethi, *Myths*, 25.
[68] S. Hewitt 'Seamas O'Sullivan and Revivalist Nature Poetry' in M. Kelly, *Nature*, 203-222. 203. Ó'Giolláin, *Irish Folklore,* 72.
[69] Lacivita, 'Wild Dublin' 28-9.

which he thinks.'[70] The Revival's interest in the symbolism of nature relegated rural Ireland to a superstitious, unmodern realm. Some writers such as Yeats avoided the physicality of the natural world, although for other Revivalists the spiritual could be found through nature.[71] In later years, this Revivalist perspective has been remembered critically although its interpretations of the rural never entirely disappeared.

Republicans of the revolutionary era did romanticise the landscape, but their romanticism was different from what had come before. In the wake of the Revival, republicans took up the mantle of celebrating all that was plausibly (and sometimes implausibly) traditional and rural. The land was no longer a spectacle of miserabilism.[72] Nor was it primarily a doorway to a fairyland or a means of accessing an otherworldly realm. The land was a holder of both mythic and historical stories, and those narratives bound the land to its people and solidified their identity. Rural Ireland, particularly the west, had long been imbued with cultural meaning; and in the revolutionary period it remained a touchstone of national identity. In this context, the landscape could provide that essential Irishness needed for arguments of self-determination because it was the site of significant historical and mythological events as well as an idealized agrarian life that had itself acquired a near-

[70] Quoted in Williams, *Immortals*, 411.
[71] Hewitt, 'Seamas O'Sullivan', *Nature and the Environment* ed. Kelly, 217.
[72] Kevin O'Shiel, for example, described of how a 'congested village' 'seemed to be hiding itself for shame if its misery.' K. O'Shiel, W.S. #1770, Bureau of Military History, 919. And Sean Moylan's account is typical of this era: 'When I say that living conditions in the rural Ireland of 1920 were poor, I must not be regarded as one who makes complaint of the welcome given to the I.R.A. by the Irish people in their homes…We were truly grateful…But having said so much, it is in no spirit of ungrateful criticism that I repeat that the standard of living in rural Ireland was unbelievably low. Food was coarse and in general not well cooked…Furnishings in general were inadequate, or poor design and craftsmanship. Houses were damp, airless, inconvenient; outhouses entirely unsuitable to their purpose...' W.S. #838 , Witness: Sean Moylan, OC 3 Southern Division IRA, 1921; Member Dail Cabinet 1951 – 1954, 245.

mythical status. The land became a vehicle for authenticity, established though referencing and retelling stories.

In the early modern period, Irish speakers were settled more densely beyond the Pale and the Irish language was increasingly tied to western and rural land. The Famine of 1845-52 impacted the West hardest, and Irish speakers experienced disproportionate levels of emigration and death.[73] From the middle to end of the nineteenth century, monolingual Irish speakers declined from 5% of the population in 1851 to 0.8% in 1891 and 0.5% in 1901.[74] Rural land maintained a legitimate association with Irish-speaking and native narrative traditions. In contrast, the literary experience of Dublin at the turn of the century was almost exclusively focused on the Anglo-Irish tradition.[75] A pastoral ideal of stories told about the land's history provided a reconnection not only to the land itself but to linguistic and storytelling traditions.[76]

At times, however, this recapitulated the fetishization of earlier years. The land was less likely to be a spectacle of deprivation, locus of 'primitive' magic, or portal to another world, but a resource for republicans to dip into and draw out legitimacy. Many republicans did not have a physical connection to the land or rural life. But authenticity could be found in the land, through encounters with its inhabitants and through history, myth and the Irish language. As Rumina Sethi writes, 'the glorification of the peasantry is an appropriation by the nationalist intelligentsia of that site of subalternity which is [perceived as] untouched by the culture of imperialism…the peasantry…[are]…alloyed with unadulterated and pristine

[73] Bennett-Kastor, *Multi-Literate,* 19.
[74] For the same series of dates, the bilingual population declined from 23.3% to 14.5% to 14.4%. Bennett-Kastor, *Multi-Literate,* 66.
[75] Lacivita, 'Wild Dublin', 28
[76] Of course even people steeped in Irish narrative were sometimes interested in English literature. Ernie O'Malley's letters from jail almost exclusively request English books.

reality.'[77] Florence O'Donoghue reflected the strong consensus of the IRA when he said men of the countryside are better nationalists because they have 'deeper roots in old traditions'.[78] Some republicans waxed lyrical about the sparsely populated West as the locus of authentic tradition. And a grandmother or nanny (real or imagined) who was a native Irish-speaker or well-versed in epic or folklore perhaps became a box to tick for republicans.[79] The rural land and community are seen as the holders of cultural value: something 'pure, simple, original...'[80] When Ernie O'Malley describes his boyhood move to Dublin, he wrote: 'We told our school chums stories of Fionn and Cuchulain, but they laughed at us. They had read the latest Buffalo Bill, could talk of the red varmints of Indians…of splitting-up-the-back Eton suits and the rags of that other public school life of the *Magnet* and *Gem*. Only to ourselves now did we talk about the older stories.'[81] In this source, Dublin is a place disconnected from Irish culture; it went hand in hand with a diluted identity.[82]

In republican culture after the Rising, the landscape was more than a potentially superficial marker of authenticity; it was a holder of narratives. Landscape is not only land, but 'the meeting place of [humans] and nature, the site of co-belonging.'[83] The anthropologist Martin Ball defines 'place-making' as the construction of identity as it is

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[77] Sethi, *Myths*, 7.
[78] Quoted in Hart, 'Social Structure', 213.
[79] For an example of this box-ticking, see the opening of E. O'Malley's *Army Without Banners* (London: 1937). In 1928, most rural people were eager for more comfortable homes with running water and sanitary facilities, yet De Valera rhapsodized about the cottage as a desirable alternative to servitude in a large mansion. Dalsimer, A., ed. *Visualizing Ireland: National Identity and the Pictorial Tradition* (London, 1993), 174-6.
[80] Smith (2003), describing the quality of national authenticity. 58.
[81] O'Malley, *Army without Banners,* 16.
[82] Some modernist writers such as Joyce reacted against the Anglo-Irish articulation of Irish pastorality by focusing their artistic attentions on inner city life.
[83] Benozzo, *Landscape Perception,* ix.

connected to the land.[84] It is an 'intertwining of shapes, duration and dynamics', a 'system of relationships and connections.'[85] Some of these connections were medieval or older, but some were modern. Fearghal Keane wrote: 'It is impossible to understand the War of Independence and the Civil War that followed unless you know the story of the land. It is where the hardest of all memories lay, where the grievance and losses accumulated and became ready to flower into violence.'[86] The stories of the land provide the 'volume' of a place, creating a foundation to assert ownership and inheritance.[87] In addition to stories, the land's inhabitants were essential to the land. Without its inhabitants, the people who tell the stories, the land was a wasteland. In the early twentieth century, tenantless land used for ranching was described as 'prairie', 'desert', 'wilderness', 'wasteland' and even compared to the Sahara.[88] In 1907 a rural district councillor called County Meath 'a howling wilderness…worse than any described in the bible…'[89]

For a space to become a place, it must have a story. Sites tied to Brian Bóruma were a common touchstone. Through tales of Brian Bóruma, the land was not an objectified surface but an anchor for national experience. Dan Breen, hardly a romantic, wrote of being in Solohedbeg in 1919: 'In this plain dominated by the Galtemore mountain, Brian Boru and his brother Mahon fought the first great battle with the Danes in 968, their gallant army, composed of men from Tipperary and Clare, routed the invaders.'[90] In this framing, the land

[84] M. Ball, 'People Speaking Silently to Themselves: "Sense of Place" in Apache Cultures' *American Indian Quarterly* (Summer 2002), 460-79. 462-3.
[85] Benozzo, *Landscape Perception,* ix-x.
[86] Keane, *Wounds*, 49.
[87] Benozzo, *Landscape Perception,* 76.
[88] Jones, *Graziers*, 248. See 'nothing but grassy desert' in K. O'Shiel, W.S. #1770, Bureau of Military History, 931
[89] Jones, *Graziers*, 248
[90] Breen, *Fight for Freedom,* 40.

was a national inheritance, circumventing the local land struggles that the southwest faced in 1919 and to which Breen, himself from Tipperary, would have been privy. IRA intelligence agent Eamon Broy names the river Figile as 'where Brian Boru is said to have obtained shafts for his spears for the Battle of Clontarf.'[91] Irish Volunteer Seamus Daly recalled how in 1916 'we were standing on historic ground in Clontarf where Brian Boru had defeated the Danes in 1014.'[92] The nationalist *Ulster Herald* in 1921 published an article called 'Ireland's Ancient Unity' describing Cuchulain, Shane An-Diomais ('Shane the Proud') and Brian Bóruma: 'Thus is will be seen that from the very dawn of Irish history Armagh has occupied a pre-eminence in its national life…it has been associated with every protest against foreign aggression…'[93] In these connections to Bóruma, from the Galtee Mountains in the west to Clontarf in the east, republican men related to the landscape as a site of struggle, victory, and national identity. In answering the question of what makes Ireland different and worthy of self-determination, land fashions the understanding of a unique national self.

The idea of hearing stories from rural people, particularly Irish speakers, and connected to the Irish landscape, was clearly important to republicans such as Ernie O'Malley. O'Malley describes his childhood nurse, a rural woman, telling him stories from the *Táin*.[94] To some extent these publicly shared memories are performative, but that does not empty them of significance in identity-construction. O'Malley recounted: 'Around the fires I heard versions of St Columcille's prophesies…Legends were remembered by older people, great happenings were looked forward to.' James Maloney recalled his childhood a march to Lough Gur, 'the enchanted lake', recalling it as 'rich with antiquarian history. There

[91] E. Broy, W.S. #1280, Bureau of Military History, 9.
[92] S. Daly W.S. #360, Bureau of Military History, 23.
[93] 'Ireland's Ancient Unity', *Ulster Herald* (24 Sep. 1921) 3.
[94] He does note that this story was not in the oral tradition of 'her people'. 107.

were dolmans, cranógs, druidic circles and graves of the Fianna.'[95] 'We loved every hill and flat and our minds ran riot at the deeds of heroes of old whose tales we had heard at the winter fireside."[96] Remembering the story became a ritual of ownership of (or by) the land. Stories perceived as part of a living tradition, the incidents of the Ulster Cycle are 'known in one form or another to every Gaelic-speaking countryman in Ireland or in the Highlands of Scotland.'[97]

Stories of the land formed—consciously or not—part of the tradition of place-name literature, *dindsenchas,* a portmanteau of *dind* (raised ground) and *senchas* (ancient or traditional lore). Celticist Marie-Loise Sjoestedt calls it 'the mythical geography of the country.'[98] Whilst sometimes described as a way of cataloguing, *dindsenchas* literature is not a merely a list but an exploration through time and space, the real and the mythic. Francisco Benozzo argues persuasively that 'the tradition *is* the places, the places *are* the tradition.'[99] There is a ninth century text, the *Do Foillsigud na Tána Bó Cúailnge, The Revealing of the Táin*, which tells how the text of the Táin was traded to an Italian scholar in return for another book. [100] At a later date, Ireland's chief poet summoned all the great poets and discovered they did not know how to tell the story of the *Táin*: they only know fragments of this great epic. The chief poet sent the other foremost poets toward Europe to retrieve the text, telling them not to linger even two nights in one place until they find it. The poets hastened east across Ireland to find the Italian with their book and recover their

[95] James Maloney, W.S. #678, 8
[96] James Maloney, W.S. #678, 8
[97] Yeats in Gregory, *Gods and Fighting Men,* x-xi
[98] Quoted in Benozzo, *Landscape Perception,* 59.
[99] Benozzo, *Landscape Perception,* 61.
[100] Attested in the twelfth century Book of Leinster. J.F. Nagy, 'Nagy, J.F. 'Orality in Medieval Irish Narrative: An Overview' Nagy, J.F. 'Orality in Medieval Irish Narrative: An Overview', *Oral Tradition* 1:2 (1986), 272-301.

native literature. They passed through the land where one of the *Táin*'s heroes, Fergus Mac Róich, was buried. One of the poets paused to address the burial site as though addressing Fergus Mac Róich himself. Fergus then appeared and recited the entire *Táin* so the poets could learn it and pass it on. The story explains how the *Táin,* and Irish cultural inheritance more generally, is embedded in the landscape; even when some aspect of the tradition is lost, it can be recovered.

Douglas Hyde spoke about this in *The Necessity of De-Anglicising Ireland*. Placenames elicit 'an enormous range of mental and emotional associations—associations of time and space, of history and events, of persons and social activities, of oneself and one's stages in one's life.'[101] 'Placenames provide materials…for speaking and writing in potent shorthand.'[102] In the autumn of 1923 a columnist of the unionist *Belfast Newsletter* disdainfully complained of the Free State altering place-names:

> Another epidemic which is ravaging the Free State is a mania for changing the names of every squalid hamlet and jerkwater township in the 26 counties to some other name that the place was known by two thousand years ago when it was the seat of the kings of Leinster, or the authentic place where Diarmid of the ginger hair got off to have a drink and was carried off by a woman of Tushi, or where Cuchulain, the Irish Sir Galahad, beat in the heads of the Ulster team...[103]

Thew newspaper article seethes in frustration because 'Place-names strengthen political control over land for a group while linking a group of people with the associated mythology

[101] K. Basso, 'Speaking with Names': Language and Landscape among the Western Apache', *Cultural Anthropology* 3:2 (May 1988), 99-130. 103.
[102] Basso, 'Speaking with Names', 103.
[103] 'Ancient Flint-Axe Man' in *Belfast Newsletter* (11 Oct. 1923), 5. 'Tushi' may be a misunderstanding of the Sí'.

and appropriate characters…while also binding the people together through their common place and mythology.'[104]

Ernie O'Malley expressed a regional pride, recounting a childhood tale ostensibly from his nurse, 'of Ferdia of Connacht whose loss was our loss, for was he not from Erris in our county Mayo. That was the best of all her stories.'[105] Fer Diad of Connaught was Cúchulainn's foster brother, killed by Cúcuhlainn in single combat in one of the most tragic scenes of the Táin Bó Cuailnge, the centrepiece of the Ulster Cycle. He is not a hero with his own tales, so a particular attachment to his loss would have been a regional quirk. As an adult, O'Malley took a detour to look at his burial mound.[106] J.J. Kelly, who would later become Sinn Féin's president, began a speech by saying he was happy to be amongst his friends, '*i dir magh muirthemne mar a mbiodh cuchulain ag imirt 'na oige agus bánta fine gall'* ('in the plain of Muirthemne [in Co. Louth] where Cuchulain used to be at play in his youth and the grassy fields of Fingal'). These stories and speeches are localised create local pride and connection. These narratives are used to inscribe the landscape and tie it to republican identity at a micro level, and an emphasis is sometimes placed on receiving the story orally from a native of the place.

Sean O'Faolain, who served as the IRA's publicity director during the Civil War. described creating a new tradition built from the old. He recalled in 1916 or 1917 looking at a photo in a cherished book of poetry by Kerry man Tomás O'Suileabháin: 'a smudgy photograph showing a rock promontory on the Atlantic, a ruined chapel, an old graveyard, a few small fields. Time out of mind I used to open the book at this photograph and gaze and

[104] T. McMahon, *Grand Opportunity: the Gaelic Revival and Irish Society, 1893-1910* (Syracuse, New York, 2008), 44.
[105] O'Malley, *Wound,* 15.
[106] O'Malley, *Wound,* 148.

gaze at it. Sea, chapel, graveyard, lonely rock, poor fields—they became my new symbols,' a symbol of a hard, traditional life.[107] 'Gazing at that picture,' he wrote, 'I was creating a new legend, a new myth.'[108] Similarly Colm O'Lochlainn inscribed himself into a new myth:

> Then we slept, or I think we did, huddled together in the back of the car, and the gods of the mountain awoke and the wild horsemen of the hill came riding and the weavers of the mist hung their curtains round about. All blue and silver with gleams of purple and rose they were, these magic curtains and I saw the forms of heroes astride upon the hills with horses and with hounds. Curog MacDaire, maybe, or Oisin himself or Finn in his eternal following of Grainne and of Diarmuid, who knows…For this story has an ending of its own, the stark and terrible ending of a saga or a folk tale.[109]

Mac Neill in *Duanaire Finn* says the stories of Finn are special and unusual because 'it is the hero lore of a subject, not a ruling race' and 'the property of the whole nation without any burden of learned prestige.[110]

The land's past could be a predictor of its future. A 1922 article in *Young Ireland* claims:

> When we are dealing with the *Dinnseanchus or* kindred documents we ought to dread lest our attitude become supercilious...Based upon their study of ancient manuscripts the profound Irish scholars mentioned had maps prepared according to scale of what might tend to identify the remaining vestiges of Tara with its glorious past….Because of the inherent qualities of, her children, Dublin, though often prostrated, is fated to rise fairer and grander and endowed with surer strength than she ever has known.[111]

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[107] O' Faolain, *Vive Moi!* 106.
[108] O' Faolain, *Vive Moi!* 106.
[109] C. O'Lochlainn, W.S. #751, Bureau of Military History, 5. His mission on Good Friday 1916 was to seize radio equipment that could be used to communicate with a German ship bringing arms for the Volunteers. 'Curog' is an odd spelling that may suggest a lack of familiarity with the figure, who is presumably Cú Roí . Cú Rói Mac Dáire, king of Munster, the 'hound of the battlefield' kept his soul in a salmon for safekeeping.
[110] S. Ó Coileáin, 'Place and Placename in Fianaigheacht' in *In Dialogue with the Agallamh*, ed. Aidean Dyle and Kevin Murray (Dublin, 2014), 6-20. 10.
[111] T. Cuffe in *Young Ireland* (18 Feb. 1922), 6.

He invokes a literature of wide-ranging and flexible topography.

Conclusion

Transforming incendiary questions of land ownership into a discussion of national belonging and identity was a discourse that included rural Ireland whilst evading the political concerns on the ground. Sinn Féin publicly repudiated agrarian struggle as it threatened the interests of some of the party's supporters and potential supporters. The IRA gradually disengaged—unevenly and often reluctantly—from its involvement in extra-legal provincial land campaigns. A vacuum in political engagement with land policy left room for an engagement with the land that focused on authenticity, language, and the volume that history and myth provide to the land. Republicans and rural agitators maintained their 'dogged and enduring popular belief in the universal right to land' and stories were a means of land enfranchisement in a period when addressing urgent rural grievances proved problematic and disunifying.[112]

Stories reincorporate land into the national community and strengthen the self-understanding of that community. Achille Mbembe writes of how in a culture under foreign control 'the self becomes unrecognizable to itself'.[113] The land is a means of self-recognition. Identifying the land as a source of authenticity, and as a site of shared history and myth from Brian Bóruma to Diarmuid and Grainne, allowed republicans of all affiliations and localities to find 'Irishness' in land and landscape. Whilst there may not have been an

[112] Cronin, *Agrarian Protest,* 57.
[113] Mbembe, 'Conversation', 78.

explicit link between land policy and this way of constructing Irish identity, this chapter suggests the incoherence of former is likely to have strengthened the latter.

6. Self-Fashioning through Clothing: 'My most treasured possession'

'Material objects can be read as repositories and producers of cultural memory…They are a place where meanings can be contested, resisted, or repressed.' [1] And thus 'fashion' is a process of fashioning. It is a relationship between individuals and clothing; but just as importantly, it is a creative process in which networks of people create meaning through clothing.[2] The pageantry of 'Celtic' historical dress began in earnest in the Gaelic Revival.[3] While the interest in a supposedly Celtic national costume then waned during the revolutionary period, Joep Leerssen somewhat overstates this shift when he claims: 'The Revival of national dress…amounted to no more than an abortive attempt to introduce kits and ladies' cloaks, failing to survive 1916.'[4] Instead, I argue, in the years leading up to the Rising, distinctly 'Celtic' elements this form of national dress crystalised into a clear set of garments and significations; and after the Rising it continued to play an important role the republican project of self-creation. Its failure to reach more widespread and continued use was due in part to the proliferation of paramilitary uniforms, which also functioned as powerful tools for self-fashioning.

This chapter will examine the practice of self-creation through clothing. It will begin with a discussion of Lady Aberdeen's 'Celtic' dresses as an example of conservative Revivalist self-creation. It will then consider how national costume came under the

[1] V. Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual* (Philadelphia, 2007), 92.
[2] This is discussed further in S. Woodward and T. Fisher. 'Fashioning Through Materials: Material Culture, Materiality and the Process of Materialization', *Critical Studies in Fashion and Beauty*, 5:1 (2014), 2-33.
[3] For a history and problematization of the term 'Celtic', see Chapter 1.
[4] J. Leerssen, 'Cúchulain in the General Post Office: Gaelic Revival, Irish Rising' in *Journal of the British Academy* 4, (15 Sep. 2016), 137-68. 160.

ownership of more radical nationalists, becoming a manifestation of national status, history and nationalist identity. Finally, the chapter will consider uniforms, the most important identity-forming garment of the revolutionary era.

Lady Aberdeen's dresses

Some of the most dramatic and publicly visible Revival-era examples of 'Celtic dress' are the dresses made for Lady Isabel Aberdeen, whose Scottish husband served twice as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. The fashionable cut and sheer cost of her dresses 'loudly proclaimed a social structure and philosophy introduced to Ireland by a colonising England', while other elements, such as knotwork design motifs, proclaimed their Irish affinities at equal volume.[5] Aberdeen was an aristocrat with an interest in politics. She supported limited Irish independence, and her political views were rejected and lampooned by militant nationalists.[6] She was an enthusiastic patron and consumer of Irish artisanal skills. She founded the Irish Industries Association and she likely saw her engagement with Irish cottage industry—and Ireland in general–as charitable. [7] Her clothing commissions featured Irish material and motifs, and, per her specification, were crafted by Irish people. She

[5] H. O'Kelly, 'Reconstructing Irishness: Dress in the Celtic Revival, 1880-1920' in *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader* ed. J. Ash and E. Wilson (London, 1992), 75-83.
[6] Skinnider's memoir includes an appendix of songs, including one satirising Irish loyalty to England and naming Lady Aberdeen, 232. Writer and literary critic Mary Colum also wore a Book of Kells dress, accompanied by an Irish *brat* (fabric drape). Colum, *Life and the Dream,* 107.
[7] An important organisation in developing cottage-industry crafts. Arts and crafts patronage was a role taken on by other aristocratic women as well. For example, Baroness Pauline Prochazka supervised women at the Irish School of Art Needlework, where they created 'elaborate embroidery that intentionally evoked motifs from the Book of Kells.' C. Cullen, ed. *The World Upturning: Elsie Henry's Irish Wartime Diaries, 1913-1919.* (Dublin, 2013), 163.

hosted events to which guests were requested to come in Irish-made clothing, and even in 'ancient' Irish costume.[8] The dresses she wore mapped a luxurious, powerful, over-the-top Irishness onto her body.

In 1886, Aberdeen hosted a viceregal garden party wearing a dress designed by the curator of the Royal Irish Academy and embroidered with motifs from the Book of Kells.[9] The dress combined the motifs of ninth century illumination with elements such as a medieval-style girdle and brooch. The ensemble was thought to be based on a painting of *Aoife Ní Diarmait* (Aoife MacMurrough), a twelfth-century noble.[10] Lady Aberdeen's clothing displayed her 'wealth, power and status, as well as her aristocratic liberalism.'[11] Although Lady Aberdeen had only newly and temporarily come to Ireland, her clothing refashioned her non-Irish body as quintessentially Irish, connecting it to historical Irish power and status (Aoife MacMurrough) as well as to learning and arts (the Book of Kells). In addition, her use of Irish fabrics and needlework highlighted her status as a modern patron with influence on local industries. Her dress was featured in Queen Magazine, an women's periodical reporting on the British establishment.[12]

[8] Williams, *Icons,* 59.
[9] Williams, *Icons*, 59.
[10] MacMurrough married a key figure in the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland
[11] J. Helland, 'Ishbel Aberdeen's "Irish" Dresses: Embroidery, Display and Meaning' *Journal of Design History* 26/2 (Oct 2012), 152-167.
[12] The periodical later became the UK *Harpers Bazaar.*



Figure 33. 'Court Dresses Worn by the Countess of Aberdeen at Her Majesty's Drawing Room, Feb. 24, 1 888', Queen *(3 Mar. 1888), 258. Toronto Reference Library. Reprinted in Helland, 'Exhibiting Ireland, 158.*

Her dress also featured in *Ladies' Pictorial*, a fashion magazine, framed in a giant shamrock.



Figure 34. 'Sketches at the Viceregal Garden Party', Lady's Pictorial*, (29 May 1886), 487. Reprinted in Helland, 'Exhibiting Ireland', 157.*

The *Irish Times* described the dress, mantle, cap and jewellery as 'all typical' of the thirteenth century' when it was, in fact, a creative amalgam.[13]

Lady Aberdeen's creation of a 'Celtic' or 'Irish' dress points to the multiplicity of meanings and forms this style of dress could take during the Revival. Even Lady Aberdeen found her own reception changed over time: she wore some of the same dresses again between 1906 and 1915, during her second residence in Ireland, and this time her views were less well received and her style of dress considered less fashionable.[14] At the end of the nineteenth century, Celtic-inspired dress was not necessarily overtly political, and could express a variety of stances from militant nationalism to British Liberal support for Home Rule. In the twentieth century, the costume itself acquired a more particular format, and began to be associated with separatist nationalism. It lost some of the sense of dressing-up that it carried for guests at Lady Aberdeen's parties, and became a uniform, perhaps even a ritual garment.

National costume in the revolutionary era

The body is the most basic medium for existence and, and so the body and what it wears are a locus of selfhood. For militant nationalists, to dress in a 'Celtic' style, whether with just a brooch or a full costume was to fashion the body as distinctly Irish and in continuity with a historic and mythic past; it established pride, power and cohesiveness. It was also a form of

[13] *Irish Times* (24 May 1886), 5, quoted in Cullen, 163.
[14] Helland, '"Irish" Dresses', 161.

public political communication in a time when many women had limited platforms for political action.

In the Gaelic Revival, national costume developed through the confluence of several factors. A desire for clothing of national manufacture included, for some, a desire to wear a distinctly national dress. [15] This was made possible through, and surely also inspired by, the flourishing Arts and Crafts movement in decorative arts.[16] A 'made in Ireland' national trademark was introduced in 1906, alongside a movement to buy locally manufactured fabrics.[17]

Whilst the national dress emerging in countries such as Finland was based in poor, rural traditions, Ireland's was not. A 'peasant' style of clothing would have been ill-fitting for a nation resisting stereotypes of being backward, uneducated and ape-like. Revivalists instead looked back to a heroic and aristocratic past. As revolutionary nationalism developed, a national costume coalesced alongside the emerging militarised national costumes of organisations such as the Irish Volunteers and Cumann na mBan. In her 1917 memoir *Doing My Bit for Ireland*, Margaret Skinnider describes donning a uniform before going out on a military mission. She changes into her uniform 'for the work of war can only be done by those who wear its dress.'[18] Something similar can be said of men and women

[15] This was a largely urban phenomenon: pageantry requires an audience, and an audience is most accessible in cities.

[16]These developments were part of wider trends. The Arts and Crafts movement began in England and flourished across Europe and North America, while the interest in codifying and manufacturing a national dress was emerging at the same time in countries such Norway and Finland. A. Ward, 'Dress and National Identity: Women's Clothing and the Celtic Revival', *Costume*, 48:2, (2014), 193-212. 198.

[17] Ward, 'Dress and National Identity', 194.

[18] Skinnider, 144. She is referring here not merely to aesthetics but to the idea promoted by Markievicz that to be treated as a combatant under international law one needed to be in uniform.

donning Celtic style clothing: some felt the work of national identity required one to wear its dress.

The costume that became iconic nationalist dress for women, if never a formally recognised national dress, was a solid-colour tunic (often white) and penannular brooch, a style strikingly unlike the contemporary fashions of Europe.[19] With a local style and local material, nationalist dress rejected the standard relationship of periphery fashion imitating the metropolis.[20] This form of dress challenged the body's relationship to the British and European fashion by situating it within a different social order entirely. It was at times at odds with the major metropolitan fashion trends such as the corseted Edwardian silhouette, bustles, hats, military-inspired clothing, narrow skirts and an ever-shifting ideal of where the waist should be belted.

This style of dress that emerged in the Revival had a loose, flowing shape and was often adorned with embroidery. Arts and Crafts styles moved away from boned foundation garments and toward a more natural silhouette that allowed for greater movement.[21]

[19] In the shape of an incomplete ring

[20] Metropolitan fashion appropriated from the periphery as well, most famously with the development of the Victorian bustle likely being influenced by the body of Saartjie Baartman, the 'Hottentot Venus'. A. Vlasopolos, 'Venus Live! Sarah Bartmann, the Hottentot Venus, Re-Membered' in *Mosaic, 33*:4 (2000). 126-49. 129.

[21] Victoria and Albert Museum. 'How Arts and Crafts Influenced Fashion' Victoria and Albert Museum (2022) https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/how-arts-and-crafts-influenced-fashion#:~:text=What%20did%20the%20Arts%20and,by%20developing%20a%20particular%20style. [1 Dec 2022].



Figure 35. Dun Emer Press, c.1903. 'Unseen Hands: Women Printers, Brinders & Book Designers: Elizabeth Yeats'. Princeton University Library. Graphic Arts Collection.

Although presented as distinctly Irish, the work of studios such as Dun Emer (established in 1902 by Evelyn Gleeson, Elizabeth Yeats and Susan 'Lily' Yeats and named for Cú Chulainn's wife) was part of the wider Arts and Crafts movement. In the late nineteenth century this movement produced historically- and locally-inspired styles: whilst the Irish and Scottish studios produced 'Celtic' work, English studios used their own locally-inspired motifs such as flowers from English hedgerows.[22]

[22] 'How Arts and Crafts Influenced Fashion' Victoria and Albert Museum (2022) https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/how-arts-and-crafts-influenced-fashion#:~:text=What%20did%20the%20Arts%20and,by%20developing%20a%20particular%20style. [1 Dec 2022].

Although never part of mainstream fashion, the clothing moved with the times. For example, in the 1920s, Dún Emer Industries adapted some garments to suit emerging fashions with raised hems, high square necklines, and defined dropped waists:



Figure 36. Kilmurry, Kilmurry Museum, 'Kate O'Callaghan's Celtic Revival Dress and Mantle' (1920).

The dress above, custom made for Katherine (Kitty) MacCormack, Dun Emer's principal designer, shows the influence of the French designer Jean Patou, inventer of the 'flapper' aesthetic, whose iconic 1914 collection reverberated through the fashion worlds of North America and Western Europe. As the previous two dresses show, and Ishbel Aberdeen's dresses as well, 'national' dress for women was an ever-shifting idea. And the work of studios such as Dun Emer was as much part of the international Arts and Crafts movement as it was a political project for Ireland.

For republican women, national costume coalesced around a few key elements. They are pictured with some frequency in embroidered dresses such as those depicted above. This was not necessarily daily dress but used for public appearances such as protests, lifecycle events, and being photographed. The 'Tara brooch' occasionally with a *brat* (sash) was more suitable for daily wear as well as special events.

The republican and feminist activist Hanna Sheehy Skeffington wore an interpretation of national dress to 'Women's Sunday', Hyde Park in 1908:



Figure 37. London, Museum of London. C. Broom. Suffragettes in Hyde Park (1908).

She stands beside the woman in the 'Banner Captain' sash, wearing a dress embroidered with knotwork. With her university mortarboard and embroidered dress, she signals her education, her nationality, and a high-status power and richness that is removed from British cultural hierarchies. In May 1922, *The Separatist* described the widowed activist 'Mrs. Terence McSwiney, in a black Celtic embroidered dress' at a political talk.[23]

A particularly striking example of national dress is the photo of Brigid Malone in her June 1921 wedding to IRA commander Dan Breen, in which she wears the white Celtic-style

[23] Tor Chonnaill [an alias] 'Within Four Walls' in *The Separatist* (27 May 1922)

dress instead of a traditional wedding dress, and holds a rifle in her lap.[24] Her sister Áine, the bridesmaid, wore a similar dress.



Figure 38. C. Kenny 'Historical Film of Dan Breen's Wedding Gaining Momentum' in The Premier *(24 Sep. 2021).*

As a movement seeking to establish national sovereignty, nationalism looked back to a pre-invasion aristocratic warrior class. A photo of Sinéad de Valera in 1920 shows her wearing an embroidered tunic, *brat* and 'Tara brooch'.

[24] The other man in the photo is Seán Hogan. Breen, *Fight for Freedom,* 40.



Figure 39. 'Sinéad De Valera, 1920' Irish Volunteers: Commemorative Organisation (22 May 1914).

Whilst 'Celtic' accessories appeared in everyday wear, the full costume was occasional, even ritual, worn for events such as a wedding or *oireachtas* (cultural gathering).

Perhaps the most emblematic item of neo-Celtic dress was the 'Tara brooch'. This was the unisex penannular brooch worn by the Malone sisters in the wedding photo above. It was a piece of functional jewelry originally worn in Ireland and Scotland from around 700 to 900 C.E., and elites wore ornate versions fashioned of precious metals. The 'Tara' brooch was a particularly fine specimen found in 1850. Made of gold, silver, glass, amber and enamel, it captured the imagination of Revivalists when it was exhibited. It was 'a virtuoso

performance of virtually every technique known to late seventh and early eighth century metalworkers.[25]



Figure 40. National Museum of Ireland. 'The History of Ireland in 100 Objects: The "Tara" Brooch"' (2022). National Museum of Ireland.

'Celtic' style jewelry was already in fashion, which helped the brooch's rise to fame. It became an iconic accessory for both genders, and continued to be a popular symbolic accessory after the Rising, as attested by the many photographic portraits in which it is worn, including portraits of Constance Markievicz, Sinéad De Valéra and Thomas Ashe. A similar This is shown on the masthead of the paper *Bean na hÉireann* (1908-11).[26]



[25] F. O'Toole, *History of Ireland in 100 Objects* (Dublin, 2013), 29.
[26] McCoole, 12

Figure 41. Bean na hÉireann *masthead (1916).*

The brooch used a shared notion of a heroic past to redefine notions of rank in a way that is transgressive and revolutionary.





Figure 42. Left: Private Collection, Thomas Ashe in memoriam card (1917).

Right: Constance Markievicz (c. 1918) in J. O'Malley, 'The Great Tragedy of a Revolution Steeped in Religious Conservatism' in Independent (3 Oct. 2014).

Dr. Kathleen Lynn was given one by James Connolly in thanks for her medical preparations for the Rising and she later wrote that 'it is still my most treasured possession.'[27]

For men, national attire was never quite as popular as for women, and there are three likely factors in this. One possibility is that men had more outlets for public expression of nationalist opinion. Women, with more limited options for public political expression and

[27] K. Lynn, W.S. #357, Bureau of Military History, 3

participation, more social conditioning to define themselves through clothing, and more involvement in the industries (embroidery, fabric manufacture, etc) that created clothing, were more drawn to the project of national costume. Another factor is that Irish men before the early modern period did not dress in a way considered, practical, attractive or decent by early twentieth century men. The tunics were frequently short, and the legs bare or covered with hose or trews rather than anything a twentieth century men would have recognised as trousers. And finally, the need to present a distinct national identity free from British military aesthetics was tempered at the other extreme by a need to offset stereotypes of barbarity shaped by white supremacist views.

Considering examples across the middle ages, such as the ninth- or tenth-century Cross of Muiredach and the sixteenth-century illustrations, there is little that could be easily copied:





Figure 43. Detail from Cross of Muiredach. M. Newsome, 'The Early History of the Kilt' The Scottish Tartans Museum (2003).

Bottom Left: Detail from A. Dürer, 'Irische Kriegsleute und Bauern' (c.1521) in K. Bond, 'Outfit of the Day: Hairstyles and Fashion in 16th Century Ireland' RTÉ. (30 Aug. 2021)

Bottom Right: *J. Derricke,* Image of Ireland *(1581) in M. Newsome, 'The Léine', The Albanach Archive.*

When Padraic Pearse saw sixteenth century Irish men's clothing at a museum, presumably in the style in Derrick's drawing above, he was dismayed to find it lacked trousers. He considered the ensemble wholly undignified.[28] In 1900 a member of the Gaelic League had asked him what he could wear as a national costume; but Pearse was unable to recommend what was, perhaps, the only historical costume he had seen. He thus suggested the Scottish kilt as the nearest dignified Celtic option.[29] This kilt would not be tartan but saffron. Saffron had a long history of being considered a distinctly Irish dye and medieval sumptuary laws had sought to suppress its use.[30] A man of Pearse's historical knowledge would likely have known that saffron clothing had been target for suppression in Anglo-Normam Irish law. From that time forward, the saffron-coloured kilt became Irish men's 'traditional' national dress, along with the *brat* (a sash of both Scottish and Irish origin). Yet it was easily confused with Scottish dress, as well as being from a later time period than other elements of national dress, and certainly after the Anglo-Norman invasion.

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[28] Beatty, *Masculinity*, 133.
[29] Beatty, *Masculinity and Power*, 133, still trouserless but more modest than the Irish alternatives
[30] S. Booker, 'Moustaches, Mantles, and Saffron Shirts: What Motivated Sumptuary Law in Medieval English Ireland?' in *Speculum* 96/3 (July 2021), 726. 745-9.

Sinn Féin promoted the kilt as the ideal attire for men.[31] The newspaper *Bean na hÉireann* reports that at the 1910 Oirechtas of the Gaelic League there were around fifty men and twenty women in national dress.[32] A report of the celebration Feis Muirtheimhne described how 'the gay Irish costumes seen scattered everywhere'.[33] Thus some men did wear traditional dress to cultural events. Thomas Ashe and Eamonn Ceannt wore kilts to play the uileann pipes, and in 1910 Thomas Ashe designed two kilts for the Black Raven Pipe band. One had a green kilt, the other a coloured saffron kilt. Around a year before being executed for his part in the Rising, Con Colbert wore a kilt for his photo with other members of the Fianna Éireann Council:



Figure 44. Dublin, National Library of Ireland, Ke 212, Con Colbert and members of the Fianna Éireann Council. Keogh Photographic Collection. Fianna Éireann Council, 1915 (c.1915).

[31] M. Staunton 'The Whereabouts of the Kingdom of God: Countervisualizing the Irish Citizen in Sinn Féin's editorial Cartoons' in *Études Irlandaises* 44:2 (127-40), 130.
[32] Beatty, *Masculinity and Power*, 133
[33] 'A Grand Rally', *Drogheda Independent* (10 Jul. 1920), 3.

Sean O'Neill recalled Liam Mellows, who would become IRA Commandant general, visiting his hometown in 1910. He remembered the you youth in youth productions: 'kilted lad, with his saffron-flowing shawl over his shoulders, Tara brooch, green kilts, long stockings and shoes, arrived, and brought with him a ray of sunshine into our somewhat dull and drab town of that period…to think that he is gone, that grim wee Cuchuilian who pedalled hill and dale…'[34] Yet the association with Scotland and piping and the lack of distinction of this garment as something associated with separatism worked against its taking hold.

For the men who wore national dress, it was a gesture toward a distinct national identity. In addition, it disrupted the hierarchies of civilian versus British soldier and of the periphery versus the metropolis. As Joseph Valiente argues in *The Myth of Manliness*, for those outside the 'metropolis' of an imperial society, achieving a specific brand and status of manhood was paradoxically both mandatory and impossible.[35] Successful British politicians and soldiers became 'veritable walking Christmas trees of stars and collars, medals and sashes, ermine robes and coronets', participating in a militarized display of status and manhood.[36] While an expectation of manliness was set out to those on the periphery, manhood was understood by the English as something specifically Protestant and Teutonic, and status was understood to originate from the metropole (whilst it could be achieved by outsiders, there was of course a glass ceiling). A person with an Irish identity successfully achieving British masculinity would emasculate the colonial men and challenge the assumptions of colonial hierarchies; so the game was rigged. Imprisoned for his part in the rising, James Maloney was jailed, and complained that books issued to prisoners, whether

[34] S. O'Neill, W.S. #1219, Bureau of Military History, 11
[35] Valente, J. *The Myth of Manliness in Irish National Culture* (Champaign, Illinois, 2010), 10-11.
[36] D. Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw their Empire* (London, 2001), 95.

for study or pleasure reading, 'had for the hero one of the blue blood English, Eton, Oxford and Cambridge, the beau ideal of "civilised manhood".[37] 'This', he wrote, 'has been our lot almost wholly from the time we could read'.[38] Not only is the model he perceived hypocritical (the British claim to epitomize civilize manhood but he finds them in reality to be 'brutal, savage and undisciplined'); it's also an attempted monopoly on ideal manhood, inaccessible to members of subject nations.[39] In *The Wasted Island,* 1919, Eimar O'Duffy affectionately lampoons this. He writes about his character being given Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*. He reads and rereads the book, adoring the costumes, imagining himself dressed like characters.[40] He is excited by fights between champions and the clash of armies, 'but the descriptions of the costumes appealed to him almost more keenly.'[41]

Ireland was subject to bestialising and feminising stereotypes, which set up a permanence and impossibility with regard to Irish subjugation (as to change the status quo would be akin to changing one's gender or species).[42] Irish people were represented in metropolitan culture (e.g. *Punch*) as possessing ape-like traits, and were described as a genetically more feminine and thus suited to obey the will of a masculine race.[43] For Irish nationalist men, wearing attire and ornaments associated with rulers and warriors entirely outside this system functioned as a rejection of the system and its hierarchies.[44] In an ironic

[37] J. Maloney, W.S. #1525, Bureau of Military History, 40.
[38] J. Maloney, W.S. #1525, Bureau of Military History, 40.
[39] J. Maloney, W.S. #1525, Bureau of Military History, 40.
[40] Flanagan, *Remembering the Revolution,* 24.
[41] Flanagan, *Remembering the Revolution,* 24.
[42] See Chapter 2, 'What is a Celt?', for a discussion of these stereotypes.
[43] Valente, *Myth of Manliness*, 11.
[44] The chieftan Seán Mac Cuinn Ó Néill, a committed adversary of the English in Ireland, was granted an audience at the court of Queen Elizabeth in 1562. His appearance created quite a stir. Unlike his father, who had submitted to Henry VIII in 1542 wearing English clothes and accompanied by English noblemen, Shane pointedly came dressed in his native attire, surrounded by a retinue of Scots mercenaries, all of them displaying 'bare heads, ash-

expression of this, a cartoon in the 21 May 1922 issue of *The Plain People/Na Daoine Macánta* uses clothing shows Arthur Griffith attends a 'Shoneen Fancy Dress Ball'.[45] In the cartoon, the ball is hosted by the Governor General of the Saorstat (Free State). Griffith is dressed as Finn Mac Cumhaill to underline the absurdity of that equivalence.

National dress articulates a self perceived to be (or presented as) authentic and connected to a present, past and imagined national community. Developing a Celtic style of national dress highlighted the existence of a meaningful pre-British past and a non-British form of masculinity, served as an avenue for women to articulate their political views in the public sphere while still following conservative gender norms, and at the same time subverted those by clothing women in a uniform associated with queens and warriors and resisting hierarchies of race and gender.

Paramilitary uniforms

In the early twentieth century, paramilitary uniforms emerged as an alternative form of national dress. Kevin O'Shiell recalls witnessing '…the improved discipline and carriage of the Volunteers…they were being, bit by bit, got into uniform – a kind of brown material cut like the British tunic with brown trousers and puttees. And, most effective of all, they were undoubtably getting armed, slowly.'[46] The proliferation of uniforms for the Irish Volunteers (and later the IRA), along with the uniforms of organisations such as the ICA, Cumann na mBan and na Fianna Éireann, subtended the revolutionary era. The uniforms of armed separatist groups offered not only cohesion and distinct identity, as 'Celtic' dress did, but

coloured hanging curls, golden saffron undershirts, . . . loose sleeves, short tunics, and shaggy lace.' Nelson, *Nationalists,* 18.

[45] 'Shoneen' is a pejorative Hiberno-English term, used to describe Anglophilic behaviour.

[46] K. O'Shiel, W.S. #1770, Bureau of Military History, 113

also practicality: 'a secretive elite of young male warriors on the run' benefited from sturdy, functional dress and the anonymity of uniform that allowed wanted men to more convincingly lie about their true identity.[47] The emerging 'masculine prestige of the paramilitary patriot' was not incompatible with more culturally oriented expressions of nationhood, and occasionally uniforms incorporated elements of cultural inheritance such as a 'Tara brooch'. [48]

These garments suited everyday use in both urban and rural environments. In addition, the attire (often) included weapons. Kevin O'Shiel, aware of the aware the constitutive power of clothing, mused**:** 'Had the War Office taken Redmond's request "on the hop" and absorbed the 180,000 Redmondite Volunteers into such a corps, given it a distinctive uniform, its own Irish colours and its own Irish officers, there is no question that the response in Ireland would have been overwhelming…'[49] Uniforms held appeal. A witness statement recalled: 'many thousands of innocent young country girls, up in Dublin, at domestic service mostly, were dazzled by these handsome and brilliant unforms…' of World War I soldiers.[50] Joseph Lawless described the RIC uniform as 'imposing, or perhaps I should say, intimidating, as no doubt it was intended to be.'[51] A 1914 report said the use of uniforms would help the ICA with recruiting.[52]

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[47] J. Horne, 'Masculinity in Politics and War in the Age of Nation-States and World Wars, 1850-1950', *Masculinities in Politics and War* ed. S. Dudink, K. Hagemannt and J. Tosh (Manchester, 2004), 22-40. 27.
[48] Banerjee, *Muscular Nationalism,* 81.
[49] K. O'Shiel, W.S. #1770, Bureau of Military History, 494
[50] H. Moloney, W.S. #391, 3
[51] J. Lawless, W.S. #1043, Bureau of Miitary History, 26
[52] J. Leddin, *'The Labour Hercules': The Irish Citizen Army and Irish Republicanism 1913-23* (Newbridge, 2019), 52.

Uniforms were also a tool of legitimacy, in presentation of combatants and in ceremonies such as funerals, which were modelled on British military affairs, incorporating not only uniforms but often a tricolour, Irish Volunteer or Cumann na mBan march, bands, rifle volleys, and the playing of the Last Post.[53] Joseph Lawless wrote of forming a guard of honour for the deceased Thomas Ashe in 1917: 'twelve other Fingallians who could still boast of the possession of a Volunteer uniform, counted guard that night over the body of our dead commander. This was dressed in the uniform he had so proudly worn…[54] During the War of Independence, Cumann na mBan prepared bodies for funerals, dressing the dead in their paramilitary uniforms.[55] Under international rules of war, a uniform was necessary for one to be a legitimate combatant.[56] In a practice Frantz Fanon termed 'hegemonic mirroring', national culture was expressed and elevated in a way that mirrored the dominant power.[57] This was different from the logic of 'Celtic' dress, but to a similar end.

Before the Rising, Markievicz had pushed for Irish Citizen Army uniforms. 'she argued the theory that these brassards [blue for men, red for officers] would classify the men as belligerents and would grant them, under international law, certain protections and rights as prisoners of war.'[58] In the Rising, it was a rule among the insurgents not to engage the enemy if not in uniform. This was not just a matter of courtesy; it was done to legitimise the military action and support the case for statehood.

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[53] Borgonovo, 'Army without Banners: the Irish Republican Army, 1920-21', *Atlas* ed. Crowley et al., 890-399. 397.
[54] J. Lawless, W.S. #1043, Bureau of Military History, 230.
[55] Borgonovo, 'Martial Women' *Revolution* ed. Connolly, 72.
[56] G. Foster, *Civil War and Society,* 94.
[57] F. Mac Ionnrachtaigh, *Language, Resistance and Revival* (New York, 2013), 31.
[58] Leddin, '*Labour Hercules',* 51-2.



Figure 45. Dublin, National Library of Ireland, NPA POLF203. Head and Shoulders, Facing Left Portrait of Countess Markievicz in Military Uniform (c.1916-1927).

C. H. Foulkes, a British Army veteran who became director of Irish propaganda in Dublin Castle in 1921, published a handbill appealing 'to members of the I.R.A.' Telling young I.R.A. men that they needed to behave like proper soldiers, he explained what a proper soldier was:

> They must wear a distinctive sign or uniform RECOGNISABLE AT A DISTANCE. They must carry arms OPENLY. They must conduct their operations in accordance with the Laws and customs of war.' To reinforce his already emphatic capitalised points, he reminded his readers that 'these Laws and customs of war were not drawn up by England for the purpose of fighting the I.R.A. They were drawn up by all the great nations including America, in order that war between white men should be carried out in a sportsmanlike manner, and not like fights between savage tribes.'[59]

[59] A. Dolan, 'Killing in "the Good Old Irish fashion"? Irish Revolutionary Violence in Context', *Irish Historical Studies*, 44:165 (2020), 11-24. 22.

The uniform was a distinguishing feature not only of lawful combat but encapsulated ideas of civilised, 'sportsmanlike' war between white combatants.

The uniform became an object of more than just practical importance and is frequently referred to as a treasured possession.' Men express delight at and love for their uniforms (e.g. 'beautiful uniform'[60] or 'beautiful new uniform'), which are often gained at some financial sacrifice, and which the wearers go to great lengths to preserve. 'It had been a matter of pride with us to display ourselves in uniform at all times', recalled Joseph Lawless.[61] Several witness statements refer to uniforms in terms such as 'beautiful'. Seán O'Kelly recalled 'making a call to Gleeson's in O'Connell Street where I had an appointment to try on for the last time the beautiful new uniform which I was going to wear for the first time on Easter Sunday...'[62] Seamus Pounch recalled: 'When things warmed up and public processions were prohibited, also wearing of uniform [sic], the Fianna laughed and carried on.'[63] Uniforms were often confiscated in prison. Irish Volunteer Sean O'Duffy wrote of being imprisoned at Frongach: 'I happened to be the only one now in possession of a uniform and wore it in the camp. It was my intention to wear it when going to London but an order was made that no uniform was to be worn. I immediately set out to secrete the uniform…I still have it in my possession, having escaped many raids and searches during the Black and Tan period.'[64] 'Our uniforms were destroyed sometime after our arrival in the prison.' June 1917.[65] Prisoners went to great lengths to preserve their uniforms in prison.

[60] J. Kenny, W.S. #1693, Bureau of Military History, 9
[61] J. Lawless, W.S. #1043, Bureau of Military History, 12
[62] S. O'Kelly, W.S. #1765, , Bureau of Military History, 230
[63] Pounch, W.S. #267. Bureau of Military History, 6
[64] S. O'Duffy W.S. #618, Bureau of Military History, 12
[65] S. Doyle, W.S. #1342, Bureau of Military History, 15

Peadar O'Mara of the Irish Volunteers (later the IRA) wrote of his experience as a prisoner after the Rising:

> 'One of the rumours circulated by James Mallin was the impending move of all prisoners to an internment camp When pressed for details James said he did not know where the camp was but he heard that all Volunteers in uniform were to be stripped of their uniform and issues with civilian suits as issues to discharged prisoners. As I was dressed in uniform I was at my wits end as to know how I could have it saved and sent home.[66]

A Cumann na mBan member recalls helping to stitch her brother's uniform into some other clothes in May 1916 so he could take it home.[67] Sean O'Duffy was arrested after the Rising and commented with relief when 'I got my own beloved uniform back again.'68

Terence MacSwiney wore an Irish Volunteer unform to his wedding in June 1917. To avoid detection he wore an overcoat and gaiters and removed the coat only when the bride arrived: 'He created a great sensation because he wore his raincoat going to the church'.[69] The uniform had been smuggled to the wedding location with the help of Geraldine Sullivan (later married name Neeson), a bridesmaid who was a Cumann na mBan activist.[70] Best man (and IRA commander-in-chief) Richard Mulcahy's uniform was smuggled over but one piece got lost and he had to wear his ordinary clothes.[71]

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[66] P. O'Mara, WS #377, Bureau of Military History, 23
[67] MacMahon, 23
[68] S. O'Duffy, WS #618, Bureau of Military History, 5
[69] G. Neeson, 'Geraldine Neeson Recalls her Friend the Former Lord Mayor of Cork Terence MacSwiney' We Are Cork (2021) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hee16Kacb1I [3 Mar. 2022]
[70] G. Neeson, *In My Minds Eye…The Cork I Knew and Loved* (Dublin, 2001). 87-8
[71] The wedding was in Irish and the registrar was flummoxed by this. It ended being bilingual. Neeson (2021).



Figure 46. Cork, University College Cork, Geraldine Neeson, MacSwiney Sisters (1917).

Like Brigid Malone's 'Celtic' dress in 1921, the uniform took on a ritual significance.

The hegemonic mirroring of uniforms was sometimes tempered by the desire to have a paramilitary aesthetic: some thought a certain ruggedness or rakishness was appropriate. Some IRA officers acquired walking sticks, adopting the familiar fusion of the gentleman British army officer, and met with consternation.[72] And when Tom Barry met Ned Duggan, who had been appointed to an IRA administrative position by Michael Collins, he looked sceptically at Duggan's hat, coat, waxed moustache, trousers and spats. Barry concluded: 'And he was supposed to be an IRA man. He was no more an IRA man than I was an atom bomber.' [73] Frank O'Conor, a member of the anti-Treaty IRA, remarked that he wanted to get 'a soft hat…pulled low over one eye so I could look the part'.[74]

The dynamics of uniforms shifted in the Civil War. In mid-August 1922 the conflict moved into its guerrilla phase. Large-scale IRA forces were dispersed and it was no longer

[72] Borgonovo, 'Army without Banners', *Atlas* ed. Crowley et al., 397
[73] Breen, quoted in G. Foster, *Civil War and Society,* 97.
[74] F. O'Connor quoted in G. Foster, *Civil War and Society,* 94.

tactically expedient for IRA units to wear uniforms, which is whY so much of the discourse about them is from the preceding era.[75]

Although the significance of pre-modern Irish men's clothing did not disappear, its impracticality and its failure to become a distinct iconic look meant it never captured the cultural imagination. The uniforms of paramilitary organisations fashioned a sense of group identity as well as communicating discipline, cohesion, and military legitimacy.

Women in uniform

As with men, women of different organisations wore a variety of uniforms. These could include a 'Celtic' component, such as the Tara brooch of the Clann na Gael uniform, but more often they did not.[76] The Cumann na mBan uniform, for example, 'was comprised of a tunic on something the same pattern as a Volunteer officer's tunic, loose skirt, leather belt and tweed slouch hat.'[77]

Women expressed love of their uniforms (Margaret Skinnider wrote of 'the coat of my fine, new uniform…') and uniforms brought a different respect than a medieval inspired

[75] Borgonovo, 'Martial Women', *Revolution* ed. Connolly 75.
[76] This is not the American Clann na Gael but a junior Cumann na mBan of the same name. The uniform, is described in 1917 in Cork as a green blouse and kilt and 'a brown brath with a Tara brooch attached'. P. Duggan, W.S. #1576, Bureau of Military History, 8
[77] S. Kavanagh, W.S. #1670, Bureau of Military History, 16. Female rebels in the Rising were largely un-uniformed, keeping them from suspicion and allowing them mobility to carry dispatches and supplies such as ammunition. Pašeta, *Nationalist Women,* 180. Susan Cahill describes how the Cumann na mBan member Catherine Byrne hid dispatches in her hair, which was ornamented with a pink ribbon and beret. S. Cahill, 'This Is No Country for Young Girls? Irish Girlhood in the Revolutionary Period' in *Constructions of the Irish Child in the Independence period, 1910-1940* ed. C. Boylan and C. Gallagher (Basingstoke, 2018), 165-86. 166.

outfit.[78] Women donning uniforms, especially when photographed, was an act of 'prememory', the self-conscious construction of future memories.[79] Like men, women constructed prememory through practices such as photography. They uses their clothing to develop not only the prememory of a legitimate, uniformed struggle, but the participation of women in militarised institutions within that struggle.

A uniform commanded respect. In the lead up to the Rising, there was emphasis on beauty being of secondary importance and even that cosmetics were unpatriotic.[80] As one woman recalled: 'I had an Irish tweed costume, with a Sam Browne. I had my revolver and ammunition.' 'As all my clothes were gone and I wore my Cumann na mBan uniform most of the time. One day in Tralee a Munster fusilier was on furlough, saw me in uniform, jumped out in the road & saluted.'[81] Helena Maloney recalled that Constance Markievicz 'went out to the rebellion in the uniform coat of Michael Mallin, who had got a new uniform. As he was so slim his coat fitted her perfectly. She bought a pair of breeches and a skirt to wear over them for the Rising…She always liked militarism. "I don't like girls", she said, "I am afraid of them".'[82] For some, the degendering of a uniform was gratifying.

Women were frequently infantilised. Mollie Gill (a.k.a. Máire Ní Ghiolla), for example, was an activist politicised through cultural nationalism, into suffrage activism, feminism, and then militant nationalism.'[83] Arrested in a raid when working at the Cuala Press, publisher Elizabeth Yeats described her and her colleague: 'We had another upset,

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[78] Skinnider, *Doing My Bit*, 143.
[79] G. Beiner explains this concept in G. 'Probing the Boundaries of Irish Memory: from Postmemory to Prememory and Back', *Irish Historical Studies* , 39:154 (Nov. 2014), 296-307. 305.
[80] McCoole, *Guns and Chiffon*, 8.
[81] A. Fahy, W.S. #202, Bureau of Military History, 5.
[82] H. Moloney, W.S. #391, Bureau of Military History, 54.
[83] Ryan-Christensen, 'Meet Máire "Mollie" Gill'

my two printing girls were arrested…the two silly girls belong to Cumann na mBan, the women's Republican Society.'[84] Gill had joined Inghinidhe na hÉireann (Ireland's only explicitly nationalist and feminist organisation at this time) in 1900 and later became one of Cumann na mBan's first members in 1914.[85] She marched in O'Donovan Rossa's funeral procession and was on the executive committee of the Irish Republican Prisoners' Dependents Fund, which distributed funds to prisoners' families.

Gill was photographed in uniform and with guns. Was this a means to avoid infantilisation as a 'silly girl'? Her grip on the handgun in the photo below (right) suggests a lack of shooting experience.[86] Like Markievicz one wonders about the prememory, about the cultivation of the image. 'Clothes literally *are* authority' and Gill was deliberate in being photographed armed and in uniform.[87]

[84] Ryan-Christensen, 'Meet Máire "Mollie" Gill'
[85] Ryan-Christensen, '"Mollie" Gill'. Regarding suffrage activism, it should be noted that this activism extended beyond voting rights. Suffragettes addressed a range of additional issues, including rape, child abuse and domestic violence. Ryan, 'Nationalism and Feminism', *Revolution* ed. Connolly, 27.
[86] Women who could shoot (e.g. Markievicz) would generally pose as though sighting. In addition, her trigger finger is in a preposterous position.
[87] B. Cohn quoted in J. Craik, J. *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression* (Oxford, 2005), 41-2.



Figure 47. Left: A. Ryan-Christensen, 'Meet Máire "Mollie" Gill, War of Independence Revolutionary, Cuala Press Cultural Activist and All Ireland Winning Camogie Captain'. RTÉ. (25 Jul. 2022).

Right: M. McAuliffe quoted in S. McCoole, 'Mollie Gill, 1891–1977: a Woman of Ireland' in History Ireland *(12 February 2013).*

Markievicz famously commissioned portraits of herself in uniform. Gail Baylis argues convincingly that she understood the power of spectacle and needed to set herself up to be visually disassociated from her highly feminine debutante photos, which continued to be circulated after her arrest.[88]

[88] G. Baylis, 'What to Wear for the Revolution? Countess Constance Markievicz in Military Dress', *Éire/Ireland* 54:3-4 (Fall-Winter, 2019), 94-122. 97.



Figure 48. Left: Dublin, National Library of Ireland, NPA POLF 206. Signed publicity photograph of Constance Markievicz in Military Styled Costume, Keogh Brothers. (1916).

Right: 1908 portrait published 1916. London, The National Portrait Gallery. Constance Georgine Markievicz (née Gore-Booth) 1916.

Nora Connolly, the daughter of ICA leader James Connolly, commissioned photos of herself in male uniform. Gail Baylis interprets this both as 'gender transgression' and 'the announcement of a more equalitarian society as an outcome of revolution.'[89]

[89] Baylis, 'What to Wear', 101-2.



Figure 49. Baylis, 103. 'Your Soldier Son,' Nora Connolly, future founder of the Irish workers Party, in full Volunteer uniform, Reid, Belfast, c. 1916 (17PC 1B52-06, Office of Public Works, Kilmainham Gaol Museum, Dublin).

Nora Connolly spent the morning of the Rising serving breakfast to the Rising's leaders at Liberty Hall. The prememory gesture of her photograph.[90]

For the Rising, the women of the Citizen Army discussed what they should wear. Constance Markievicz opted for riding breeches, which she combined with one of Michael Mallin's old uniform jackets. On marches before the Rising, however, she decided to wear a skirt over the breeches, as there seemed little point in provoking scandal over the question of dress. Margaret Skinnider, who could pass for a boy and who, as a courier, would spend much of her time on a bicycle, planned to wear breeches also. In the end, Skinnider wore a

[90] This interpretation departs from that of Baylis who takes the photo at face value as a joke.

civilian dress when engaged in courier work during the Rising, because a 'girl on a bicycle' was less likely to be challenged than a boy.

She did however don a uniform at other times. The other women chose to wear the less practical, but socially more acceptable and certainly less conspicuous long skirts of the day. These did create some problems once the insurrection began. One of the women tore her skirt while climbing over the gates during the occupation of the Dublin City Hall and other women found them awkward when it became necessary to climb over barricades or through windows and holes in walls.[91]

Conclusion

Clothing acts as both a signifier and catalyst that creates and maintains identity.[92]The reimagination of Celtic clothing served different functions in the *fin de siècle* period and eventually became the provenance of republicans, solidifying into a uniform that included medieval-inspired dresses, kilts, and the unisex accessories of a brooch and sometimes a *brat*. For women, dress inspired by pre-Invasion Ireland remained part of cultural and lifecycle events. For men, these fashions persisted, particularly for cultural events, but never became widely adopted. Male identity was largely expressed through uniforms, and women wore revolutionary uniforms as well. For some women such as Constance Markievicz, those uniforms perhaps articulated an indirect connection to medieval Ireland, bolstered by knowledge (correct or not) of pre-invasion warrior women.[93]

[91] Taillon, n.49-50.
[92] Drawing on Vanessa Ochs' analysis of Jewish ritual objects in Ochs, 102
[93] For more on this topic, see the discussion of Queen Medb in Chapter 4b.

7. Conclusion: 'Both—and, not either or'

As Joep Leerssen says, 'tradition' is not 'a discreet heirloom' but 'a vast and chaotic curiosity shop.'[1] *Fin de siècle* republicans in Ireland inherited a wealth of narratives that took multiple forms in the middle ages and were then passed through centuries of time and translations. Any narrative holds a field of possible meanings. Entering twentieth century culture, the tales were mediated not only through translation but through their modern audiences' values. New translations, retellings, and derivative works of art–and the context of each reader's own particular *Weltanschauung*–all create new frameworks for using old narratives in the service of identity. Thus the interpretation of the medieval narrative tradition are 'both – and, not either or.'[2]

This study has come to three conclusions: First, medieval narratives did not slip from republican culture after the Easter Rising. Although they lost their centrality, they remained a component of republican self-fashioning through the remainder of the revolutionary era. The presence of these narratives in letters, memoirs, advertisements, songs and art demonstrates their relevance. This also calls further into question the notion that the medievalism is apolitical, that is decorative rather than constitutive.

Second, the selection and interpretation of medieval narratives was not a simple continuation of Revivalist culture. Works are not merely received and recapitulated, but *used*. Narratives were selected and retold to suit the political ends of the revolution. The tales that were prominent in republican culture advanced values such as women's

[1] Leerssen, *Remembrance,* 205 ,
[2] Leerssen, quoted in C. Carroll and P. King, *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* (Cork, 2003), 3.

enfranchisement, adult heroism, and connection to the land. The tales are living texts, and a detailed analysis of their selection and permutation yields fruitful results. The prominence of the military struggle of the Ulster Cycle, for example, the elevation of Queen Medb, and the maturing to Cú Chulainn all shed light on republican self-fashioning. And from a literary perspective, the history explains some of the shifts in literary retellings.

Third, the nature of these narratives varies according to context. There is no simple description. Self-fashioning is an 'artful process' and at times the use of the medieval inheritance is self conscious.[3] Political pamphlets drew on pride and attachment to figures such as Brian Bóruma to tell people how to vote. Republican leaders such as Ernie O'Malley assured people of their authenticity through social connections to native Irish-speakers who told medieval tales. Prisoners created documents in the style of illuminated manuscripts as a continuation of a medieval tradition cut off by invasion. In literary representations even of historical events '"how it really was' can get translated into "how it shall be remembered"'[4]

Several topics merit further consideration. This has been a thematic overview and future work could be done disaggregating some of the categories that have been considered together here. Do Irish-language sources intended for *Gaeilgeorí* have a different relationship to medieval narratives? What regional differences are at play? Does partition make an impact? How do pro- and anti-Treaty republicans use narratives differently? How does the Free State use medieval narratives? How does narrative use change across the War of Independence into the Civil War? These are all good questions for future study.

Following the Rising, national symbols did shift away from references to mythic or past heroism. But if Cú Chulainn had been a metaphorical brigade commander in the Rising,

[3] S. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, 2005), 2.
[4] Sethi, *Myths*, 36.

he did not die there. The cultural inheritance continued to solidify identity and advance the political case for independence. Mythic narratives allowed people to understand, define and legitimise the present in terms of the past. In the struggle for independence, republicans sought some permanent principle that defined Irishness. But concepts of nationality with 'their pretended reference to empirical reality' are ultimately 'an imponderable.'[5] 'The past has to be reconstructed over and over again.'[6]

[5] Leerssen, 'Antiquarian Research', 25.
[6] Miller, 50.

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