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Decolonizing the Mind: Language and Literature in Ireland

The story of Ireland in the nineteenth century may be read as a classic colonial endgame. After the political subjugation of the country by an alien power, and, indeed, after the earlier plantation of a significant population from that power, the nineteenth century saw the cultural and linguistic assimilation of much of the native population into a provincial version of the culture of the colonizer. This process of assimilation was most pronounced in the Catholic middle and upper-middle classes, the so-called leaders of their society, which became prominent after the dismantling of the Penal Laws through the various acts of Catholic relief from the 1770s onwards down to Catholic Emancipation in 1829. This influential group of lawyers, doctors, merchants, and senior clergy—"men of the pale" as they were described by the first official historian of Maynooth College which educated them—were pragmatically intent on reaping the harvest of emancipation.[1] Either consciously or subconsciously, they accepted the psychocultural and, indeed, political superiority of the outsider. They took upon themselves the mannerisms, the patriarchal attitude, the worldview, and above all the language, and, religion excepted, much of the cultural value system of the invader. Many of this class would have had no problem in agreeing fully with Sir George Baden-Powell who said, in 1898, that "Ireland does not contain the necessary elements of a separate nationality—for among the inhabitants there is no unity or individuality of blood, religion, laws, occupations, sentiments, history or even tradition."[2]

Moreover, they would have had no difficulty in proclaiming along with one George Story, who wrote some two hundred years earlier in *A true and impartial history of the most material occurrences in the kingdom of Ireland* (1691), that the mere Irish were "perfect barbarians . . . till at length they were partly civilised

1. John A. Murphy, "Religion and Irish Identity," in *Irishness in a Changing Society* (Totawa, NJ, 1988), p. 133.

2. George Baden-Powell, *The Saving of Ireland: Industrial, Financial Political* (Edinburgh, 1898), p. 221. Quoted in Luke Gibbon, "Identity without a Centre: Allegory, History and Irish Nationalism," *Cultural Studies*, 6, 3 (October, 1992), 361.

by the English conquest of that country."[3] This same conquest, in the earlier words of Barnaby Rich in his *New description of Ireland* (1610), sought of necessity to "draw after it the Lawe, Language and Habit"[4] of the conqueror.

The language shift from Irish to English in the nineteenth century was by any standards swift and dramatic. In the period from 1800 to 1891, a mere three generations, the number of Irish speakers declined from some three million, the great majority of whom would have almost certainly been monoglot, to the 38,121 monoglot speakers recorded in the census of 1891. Many reasons have been advanced for this shift: the Great Famine, the education system and the consequent growth of literacy in English; the urbanization and commercialization of the country; the role of English in political, legal, and administrative life; the desire of Irish speakers to abandon the language. Thus Irish became, during the nineteenth century, the language of the outsider, the marginalized, the dispossessed, the rural backward poor; and English during this same period became the language of political and cultural hegemony, spoken by the insider, the privileged, the ruler and the urban middle and upper classes. The native speaker of Irish no longer perceived himself as being at the center should he adhere to the native language, and the mental eye was thus focused on another linguistic reality.

This process of language change was not so passive or voluntary as is sometimes claimed, and it is not just the inevitable result of the modernizing process during imperialist times. Language change and cultural shift is, I would claim, the second phase of the colonial process, the subjugation of the mind and the spirit after the subjugation of the body, and it is often brought about with the full cooperation, indeed connivance, of certain elements of the colonized group. This concept lies at the heart of much postcolonial analysis, and it gives rise to some hard questions, and, indeed, in the Irish situation, to some uncomfortable answers.

In his penetrating and challenging book *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1981), Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o places the question of language at the center of the colonial problem. In the final analysis he claims that the most effective weapon of imperialism is what he calls "the cultural bomb":

> The affect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. . . . It makes them want to iden-

3. Quoted in Joseph Leersen, *Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael: Studies in the Idea of Irish Nationality, Its Development and Literary Expression Prior to the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam, 1986), p. 66.

4. *Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael*, p. 59.

> tify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own.[5]

Ngũgĩ argues that a people's language is a fundamental part of their own self-image and self-definition in relation to their natural and social environment—indeed, to their whole concept of their universe. Colonial subjugation thus subverts this self: it switches the centerpoint, the focus of reality, the center that holds all things together, by placing the language of the conqueror at the center of the "new world."

> In my view the language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation.[6]

Ngũgĩ goes on to illustrate from his own experience. As a child he spoke Gikuyu, and was introduced to his own native tradition in that language. English, the language of the colonizer, was the language of the formal education system, and thus:

> English became the measure of intelligence and ability in the arts, the sciences, and all the other branches of learning. English became *the* main determinant of a child's progress up the ladder of formal education. . . . English was the official vehicle and the magic formula to colonial élitedom.[7]

Thus, he came to read about Joe Hawkins, Oliver Twist, Tom Brown, all of whom displaced Hare, Leopard, and Lion in the world of his imagination an experience not unknown to many generations of children in Ireland whose introduction to the printed word was often The Famous Five, The Secret Seven, Drina, or Biggles. Albert Memmi describes almost exactly the same process in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965) when he talks of the colonized borrowing the language of the colonizer:

> Likewise, the colonized no longer knew his language except in the form of a lowly dialect. In order to emerge from the most elementary monotony and emotions, he had to borrow the colonizer's language. In recovering his autonomous and separate destiny, he immediately goes back to his own tongue. It is pointed out to him that its vocabulary is limited, its syntax bastardized. It would be comical to hear a course in higher mathematics or philosophy in it. Even the left-wing colonizer is surprised by this un-necessary challenge which is more costly

5. Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1981; London, 1994), p. 3.
6. *Decolonising the Mind*, p. 9.
7. Ibid., p. 11.

> in the long run to the colonized than to the colonizer. Why not go on using Western languages to describe motors or teach abstract subjects.[8]

Both Memmi and Ngũgĩ claim that the fundamental *sine qua non* of the decolonization process is the restoration of the native language. Language is the collective memory, the carrier of the native worldview or symbolic universe. It verifies that set of values tried and trusted over developing and ongoing generations, which indicates what is right or wrong, good or evil, natural or unnatural, worthwhile or useless, growthful or destructive, pleasing or distasteful. It embodies the intellectual wealth of the people who use it and carries within it a moral, ethical and indeed aesthetical value system, and is, as Ngũgĩ calls it, "a set of spiritual eyeglasses through which they come to view themselves and their place in the universe."[9] Thus, the aim of the colonial process is to devalue the culture and language of the supposedly savage and barbaric colonized and at the same time to elevate that of the civilizing colonizer.

This ideology of contempt for the subjugated appears nowhere more strongly to the fore than in the colonial education system, a point echoed in much postcolonial writing. Edward Said, for example, in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) points out that

> The great colonial schools . . . taught generations of the native bourgeoisie important truths about history, science, culture. Out of that learning process millions grasped the fundamentals of modern life, yet remained subordinate dependants of an authority based elsewhere than in their lives. Since one of the purposes of colonial education was to promote the history of France or Britain, that same education also demoted the native history. Thus for the native, there was always the Englands, Frances, Germanys, Hollands as distant repositories of the Word. . . .[10]

Said's analysis applies also to the Irish education system in the nineteenth century. Although the beginning of the intense language shift predates the founding of the National Schools in 1831 by some thirty to fifty years, and although the hedge schools so beloved of the nationalist version of Irish history also functioned mainly through English, the state-established national school system was a strong active agent in the colonization process and was a major factor in cultivating cultural assimilation and political loyalty. Still the first language of millions, Irish was from the outset proscribed in the schools either as a subject for study, or more importantly as a medium of instruction. By the year 1878, Irish was allowed to be taught as a special subject after official school

8. Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (New York, 1965), p. 134.
9. *Decolonising the Mind*, pp. 14–15.
10. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1993), p. 270.

hours but was not taught during school hours until 1900. Not until 1904 was Irish recognized as a medium of instruction with the introduction of the Bilingual Programme in Education following a strong campaign by Conradh na Gaeilge.

Moreover, the entire school curriculum was, at both primary and at secondary levels, totally Anglocentric, having as its aim the production of a "happy English child" and taking as its norm the fact that London and England were the focus and font of all power and privilege. This can be seen, for example, from the following extract from the first page of a geography text in common use at the turn of the century and mentioned by Peadar Ó hAnnracháin in his 1944 account of his times as an organizer for Conradh na Gaeilge:

> Our own group of islands forms a very small part of the British empire. In lands in every part of the world the Union Jack floats to the breeze and tells of the authority of Queen Victoria.[11]

Entitled "The British Empire," lesson 11 from *The Fourth Book of Lessons*—first published in 1834 and continuously in print until 1862—begins as follows: "As much dreaded in the Persian Gulf and the Erythrean Sea, as in the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Archipelago, the British Empire, the possessor of the finest countries of the earth, beholds its factors reign over eighty millions of subjects."[12] Furthermore, the "top" Irish secondary schools, established to educate the rising Catholic middle class in a manner similar to the English public schools of the time, prepared their pupils for public examinations which led to positions in the civil service of the British Empire. This held true even in schools of a distinctly nationalist leaning, such as those in the control of the Christian Brothers, who ceaselessly "ground" their pupils to succeed in these same examinations—thus adding further to the cultural, linguistic, and political assimilation process.[13]

One cannot deny that the national education system was effective and very well organized: schools were constructed even in the most remote of areas; the "three R's" were well taught; teachers were trained and kept on their toes by an eagle-eyed inspectorate; and text books were supplied. Indeed, some of the texts developed in Ireland proved so successful that they were put to use in other

11. Peadar Ó hAnnracháin, *Fé Bhrat an Chonnartha* (Dublin, 1944), p. xvii.

12. Commissioners for Education, *The Fourth Book of Lessons* (Dublin, 1834), Lesson 11, p. 91. I am indebted to Seosamh Mag Raoghallaigh, M.A., for this reference.

13. See John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London, 1987), pp. 255–65.

parts of the Empire.[14] Despite claims by some commentators[15] that the schools were language neutral and that they functioned in the preferred language of the parents, the stated and deliberate aim of the school system was to aid the shift from English to Irish. The historian Séamus Ó Buachalla, for example, has written of specific instances where requests made to the commissioners for permission to teach through Irish were instantly refused "because it forms no part of the objects they have been appointed to accomplish."[16] Patrick Keenan, senior inspector to the Commissioners of National Education, and a sympathetic commentator who actually advocated teaching native Irish speakers through Irish, stated in his report for 1855 that

> We are quietly but certainly destroying the national legend, the national music and the national language of the country. . . . The children of parents who at present speak Irish only, will, through the course of education pursued in the National Schools, and the experience in the home, speak English and Irish when they grow up, but their children in nine out of ten cases, will speak English only.[17]

In 1884, the National Commissioners reported to George Trevelyan, chief secretary for Ireland, that "the anxiety of the promoters of the National System was to encourage the cultivation of the English language, and to make the English language the language of the schools."[18] By 1902, J. M. Starkie, the resident commissioner of national education (1899–1920), could state during a lecture in Belfast "that his board since its foundation seventy years ago, had waged open war on the Irish Language and national feeling."[19]

The undoubted aim, therefore, of the Irish education system at all levels—national, secondary, and, indeed, in the Queen's colleges at Galway, Dublin, Cork, and Belfast—was the civilization of the uncouth, barbaric, and illiterate

14. *The Fourteenth Report of the Commissioners for National Education in Ireland for the Year 1847* (Dublin, 1848), p. 7, stated: "We have the gratification to state that the demand for our school-books in England and Scotland, is progressively increasing. Many of our colonies, too, have been supplied during the year with large quantitites; and in some of them a system of public instruction for the poor, similar in its general character to that of the National System of Ireland, as being equally adapted to a population of a mixed character as to their religious persuasions, is likely to be established. We have sent books and requisites to Australia, British Guiana, Canada, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Gibraltar and Malta."

15. A case in point is Donald Harman Akenson's *The Irish Educational Experiment: The National System of Education in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1970).

16. Séamus Ó Buachalla, "Education Policy and the Role the Irish Language from 1831–1981," *European Journal of Education*, 19, 1 (1984), 82.

17. *Report of the Commissioners for National Education* (Dublin, 1855), p. 75.

18. *British Parlimentary Papers*, Vol. 61 (1884): National Schools (Ireland) (Teaching of Irish), p. 9.

19. Quoted in Pádraig Ó Fearaíl, *The Story of Conradh na Gaeilge* (Dublin, 1975), p. 21.

native through a process of colonial assimilation, and the Irish language was considered a fundamental impediment to this process. The message of cultural and social assimilation and of political loyalty to the Empire permeated the whole system: "In such diverse fields of thought as poetry and political economy, definite doctrines were pressed home, even on the minds of pupils so young as hardly to be able to understand what they read aloud."[20] Professor of ancient history and later provost of Trinity College, Dublin, and also a commissioner for National Education early in the century, J. P. Mahaffy strenuously opposed the introduction of the language into the school and university curricula. In Mahaffy's words, Irish was "a most difficult and useless tongue—not only useless but a mischievous obstacle to civilisation," and its revival would be "a retrograde step, a return to the dark ages . . . to the famous Tower of Babel."[21]

Another important factor in the language shift was the oft-commented upon passion of the Irish for education as a means of personal self-advancement, which without doubt added to the alacrity with which speakers of Irish adopted English as their preferred language. As early as 1830 this fact was remarked upon in the annual report of the London Hibernian Society, which noted ". . . an idea held among the lower classes in Ireland, that the temporal interests of their children will more certainly be promoted by a familiarity with the English rather than the Irish language, hence many parents who themselves usually speak Irish discourage their children from learning to read that tongue."[22]

In such circumstances of planned linguistic and cultural assimilation, it comes as no surprise, therefore, that Conradh na Gaeilge, the Gaelic League, from its foundation in 1893 had kept near the top of its cultural and political agenda the complete reform of the Irish education system. Indeed, many of the Gaelic League's successes came in this area. The Gaelic League succeeded in making the language an important part of the national and secondary curricula around the turn of the century, and, after much controversy, it succeeded in 1908 in making Irish an obligatory subject for entry to the newly established National University of Ireland. The Gaelic League's "Programme for Education" or "Oideachas Gaelach,"[23] a major policy document published in 1917, became the blueprint for education in the fledgling state. As a direct result of the Gaelic League's activities, the Department of Education was perhaps the only depart-

20. Rev. Timothy Corcoran, "Examinations and Official Textbooks," *The Irish Monthly,* LVI (August–October, 1928), 514.

21. J. P. Mahaffy, "The Recent Fuss about the Irish Language," *Nineteenth Century,* XLVI (August, 1899), 221; "The Modern Babel," Nineteenth Century, XL (July, 1896), 783.

22. *Twenty-fourth Report of the London Hibernia Society* (London, 1830), p. 9.

23. "Oideachas Gaelach," *An Saoghal Gaedhealach,* 8 March 1919; "Programme for Education," *Fáinne an Lae,* 5 April 1919, and *The Irishman* 5 April, 1919.

ment of the Irish civil service to have a major Gaelic influence added to it immediately after the foundation of the new state.

It is one of the ironies of the Irish historical experience over the last two hundred years or more that the language shift and the process of cultural assimilation should take place at the same time as the development of Irish political and cultural nationalism. One aspect of these interlinked processes which is not often commented upon, particularly in the field of Irish Studies, is what I would like to call the palimpsestization, and also the peasantization, of the Irish language as a living vernacular and particularly as a language of intellectual or creative enquiry during this time. A palimpsest is a manuscript which has been written on twice, the original obliterated. It appears to me that this is the fate of the language during the intellectual discourse of the nineteenth century and, indeed, in much of the discourse of cultural critique, even among sympathetic commentators, of Irish Studies to this day. Thus, the Irish language is reduced to something in the background, either cultural or psychical, in order to render the Irish slightly different from the normalizing and powerful center, but not too different so as to be totally incomprehensible to those at that center, and, therefore, dangerous or outside the "civilized" Pale. In the end, this attitude constitutes nothing less than an out-and-out provincialism that regards the powerful colonial center as the originating norm.

The late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries witnessed a major flourishing of Irish Studies, both among scholars trained in the native tradition and among English-speaking intellectuals and scholars of a philanthropical bent, and also among others whose aim was the creation of a distinctive Anglo-Irish identity through the production of a literature in English based on the older Gaelic tradition. Few of the above would have claimed a restorative or revivalist language agenda, and most would have identified with the anonymous writer who claimed in a pamphlet published in 1822 that, "The common Irish are naturally shrewd, but very ignorant and deficient in mental culture, from the barbarous tongue in which they converse which operates as an effectual bar to any literary attainment," and that the Irish language "spoils the English accent and creates a prejudice against one in fashionable society."[24] This intellectual and cultural climate without doubt influenced the conscious decision of scholars of the calibre of John O'Donovan and Eugene O'Curry, both giants of Irish scholarship in the nineteenth century and native speakers of Irish to boot, to leave their own children without a single word of Irish. This scholarly and literary movement reached its creative literary apotheosis in the great flower-

24. Quoted by Tomás Ó hAilín, "Irish Revival Movements," *A View of the Irish Language*, ed. Brian Ó Cuív (Dublin, 1969), p. 92.

ing of the Anglo-Irish Revival with the creation of that idealistic quasi-Gaelic construct, Anglo-Irish literature, whose aim was to restore Ireland to its former glory—as understood and interpreted by the seer-poet-artist—by drawing on the ancient atavistic repository of knowledge that was the Irish tradition. Thomas Kinsella says of Yeats in *The Dual Tradition* that

> It is part of Yeats's legacy to twentieth century Irish poetry, largely from his early work, to have established the character of a modern Anglo-Irish poetry: a poetry in English, set in an Irish milieu presented distinctly, against a geographical and historical background presented indistinctly; employing recognizable Irish references and occasional devices; directed with an explanatory air toward a primarily English audience, but attaching otherwise as closely as possible to 'mainstream' English writing; and published in England.[25]

We are here at the kernel of the problem of colonization in its final form of cultural or psychocultural and, of course, linguistic assimilation. With the foregoing as the intellectual given, it is possible to discuss Irish literature in terms of literature in English only. Seamus Deane, for example, claims on the one hand that the "radical dispossession"[26] of the colonial process has been linguistically successful; in an effort at some measure of repossession, he renders homage to the palimpsest with a short chapter on "the Gaelic Background" on the other hand. Deane admits from the outset that "Gaelic literature . . . is treated in a summary fashion, partly because of my own deficiencies in that area, partly because the emphasis *had* to be on literature in the English language."[27] This amounts to nothing less than a declaration that Irish as a living language is dead. Indeed, Deane himself states that "the various forms of artificial respiration on Gaelic culture had no hope of ever reviving it as such. It was well and truly dead by the end of the *eighteenth* century."[28] Despite its insights about Anglo-Irish poetry or Irish poetry in English in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Deane's *A Short History of Irish Literature* (1995) is not a history, short or otherwise, of Irish literature, because it is narrated solely from a linguistically Anglocentric point of view.

A similar flawed analysis lies at the heart of Thomas Kinsella's *The Dual Tradition.* Kinsella's basic aim is to argue for the recognition of Irish literature as a "dual identity," as a tradition of the two native languages of the island. However, Kinsella too speaks of Irish as a dead language.[29] Moreover, following

25. Thomas Kinsella, *The Dual Tradition: An Essay on Poetry and Politics in Ireland* (Manchester, 1995), p. 92.

26. Seamus Deane, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis, 1990), p. 100.

27. Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature* (London, 1986), pp. 7–8. My emphasis.

28. *A Short History,* p. 28. My emphasis.

29. Earlier, in 1966, Kinsella also spoke of the "silence" of the nineteenth century and of his own sense of discontinuity and uprootedness arising from his own use of English following from what

Séamus Ó Grianna, a man certainly not known as the most objective commentator writing in Irish this century, Kinsella speaks of it as a language whose "capacity for all the requirements of a modern poet might be open to question."[30] Kinsella then goes on to discuss twentieth-century Irish poetry, presumably within his concept of the dual tradition, without mentioning one single poet writing in Irish save Patrick Pearse. His analysis of the nineteenth century proves equally reductionist. The blunt assertion that "the nineteenth century in Ireland is dominated by poetry in English"[31] starts off Kinsella's comprehensive account of the verse of Mangan, Ferguson, Davis, Allingham, and Moore. Following the identical thesis and reductionist ideology presented by Deane in his *Short History*, Kinsella also claims that Irish poetry effectively perished or descended among the peasants in the eighteenth century—referred to Anglocentrically, it should be noted, as "Goldsmith's time":

> The last generation of Irish poets, making poetry for an appreciative and adequate audience, lived in Goldsmith's time. The poetry was mainly folk poetry, but there were a few notable individual talents.[32]

Raftery, the major Gaelic voice of his day, whose poetry was so appreciated by multitudes of Irish speakers in the nineteenth century that it not only was written down again and again in a variety of manuscript versions, but has also survived in oral form even to this day in the Gaeltacht, is here presented as an "interesting folk presence in the Yeats country."[33] Moreover, the only poem by Raftery alluded to, "Mise Raifteirí an File," is one he did not even compose, a fact mentioned in Kinsella's own anthology *Poems of the Dispossessed* (1981), published with Seán Ó Tuama. In the end, Kinsella claims that "Raftery's poetry is local: there is no concern for national or wider politics, and no suggestion of a world any further than the next parish. It is a world of the defeated, and there are only the defeated there."[34] This argument is not only simply wrong,[35] but seems also to derive from the underlying ideology of *The Dual Tradition*, and, indeed, from what Kinsella himself calls, in speaking of the poets

he calls the "great rift" of the shift from Irish to English. Thomas Kinsella, "The Irish Writer," in *Davis, Mangan Ferguson: Tradition and the Irish Writer* (Dublin, 1970), pp. 57, 59. See also "The Divided Mind," in *Irish Poets in English*, ed. Seán Lucy (Cork, 1973), p. 209.

30. *The Dual Tradition*, p. 2.

31. Ibid., p. 47.

32. Ibid., p. 38.

33. Ibid., p. 46.

34. Ibid., p. 46.

35. Even a perusal of Ciarán Ó Coigligh's edition of the poetry of Raftery, *Raiftearaí: Amhráin agus Dánta* (Dublin, 1987) will confirm this. Notably, Ó Coigligh's edition antedates Kinsella's *The Dual Tradition* by some eight years.

of the nineteenth century writing in English, the "colonial impulse to present the home literature to a 'senior' outside audience for its amusement or instruction."[36] It is as if the narrative would best be expressed in the first place in English owing to the intrinsic superiority of that language (shades of O'Connell-like utilitarianism!) and it is worth noting that Kinsella quotes from Yeats's introduction to Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*: "I think this book is the best that has come out of Ireland in my time . . . for the stories which it tells are a chief part of Ireland's gift to the world—*and it tells them perfectly for the first time.*"[37]

Yeats's claim that Lady Gregory's translation actually supersedes the original Irish version is, effectively, the Anglocentric mere-Irishing of the *fíor-Ghael*. This emanates from a postcolonial analysis which claims for itself both political and intellectual power and the legitimization of its own claims to rule or speak authentically. It is the "otherizing" of the other part of oneself. It is the ideology of, if not contempt, at least of patriarchal condescension, and it contains at its foundation that attitude of confident superiority over the other, in this instance the Irish-speaking "peasant," the attitude that lies at the heart of the colonial worldview. It is essentially an ascendancy of the spirit and of the mind. Since Irish is now merely the language of the peasant on the western seaboard, and although one can come into contact with ancient verities through his folklore—and it is worth noting that the term "folklore," coined by William Thomms in 1846, is itself a naming construct or conceit from without and above—the language must remain in the realm of the palimpsest.

In discussing the intellectual and cultural history of Ireland in the nineteenth century there is, however, another world and worldview apart from the "world of the spirit of a gentleman" referred to by Edmund Burke in his famous speech on the French Revolution. Entry to this world does not require the Anglocentric ransacking in enemy papers described in his own inimitable way by Daniel Corkery. This is the world of the Gaelic element of the tradition of the island of Ireland—an element not always accorded the importance and centrality it deserves in the field of Irish Studies and, most surprisingly, in the realm of postcolonial analysis. There is also an alternative *entrée* to that world which will render more to us than the accounts of visiting travellers, would-be reformers, school administrators, and other government officials, not to mention the poetry of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy or of those who would pretend to that status. It behooves us to move beyond the simplistic, and even the linguistically challenging, beyond what David Greene has called, "the ersatz culture of harps

36. *The Dual Tradition*, pp. 61–62.

37. Ibid., p. 67. My emphasis.

and shamrocks, round towers and wolfhounds," in order to arrive at a realistic understanding of the Gaelic worldview of the day—Ireland from below in many ways.

The recent imaginative and scholarly work of Ó Buachalla,[38] Leerssen, Mac Craith,[39] on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and Hutchinson, and Philip O'Leary,[40] on the Irish Revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to mention just a few major works, have shown the realistic and serious response of the Gaelic world to the question of "The Conquest of Ireland" or "Gabháil na hÉireann." This response was not merely a closing of the mind to reality by yearning for a return to some glorious ancient mythical past, but a serious effort at coming to terms with new realities. The greater part of the nineteenth century has, in this context, been something of a closed or unwritten book—the known mostly perceived through the linguistic lens or mental sieve of English. Thus, even such a commentator conversant with the Gaelic side of the equation as Alf Mac Lochlainn can state that "most contemporary documentation on the vernacular culture [comes] from the comments of visiting travellers or would be reformers," while he himself peasantizes the Irish-speaking masses as remote from "intellectual movements" such as the *Nation* group "in their hundreds of thousands of cabins, a self-contained community of pre-industrial proletarians in a vast rural congested slum."[41] Neil Buttimer of University College Cork, in a recent unpublished survey of the Gaelic tradition of the nineteenth century, indicates the wide range of sources available to those who would go beyond the external Anglocentric view in order to arrive at the Gaelic worldview of the nineteenth century from within, in reference to and validated by itself. Among the resources that Buttimer delineates are: the

38. See the following articles by Breandán Ó Buachalla: "Annála Rioghachta Éireann is Foras Feasa ar Éirinn: an comthéacs comhaimseartha," *Studia Hibernica*, 22–3 (1982–83), 59–105; "Na Stíobhartaigh agus an t-aos léinn: Cing Séamus," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, LXXXIII, Sec. C (1983), 81–134; "Cúlra is tábhacht an dáin *A Leabhráin ainmnighthear d'Aodh*," *Celtica*, 21 (1990), 402–16; "Poetry and Politics in Early Modern Ireland," *Eighteenth Century Ireland*, 7 (1992), 149–75; "James Our True King: The Ideology of Irish Royalism in the Seventeenth Century," in *Political Thought in Ireland Since the Seventeenth Century*, ed. D. G. Boyce (London, 1993), pp. 1–30.

39. See the following work by Micheál Mac Craith: *Lorg na hiasachta ar na Dánta Grádha* (Dublin, 1989); "Gaelic Ireland and the Renaissance," in *The Celts and the Renaissance: Tradition and Innovation*, ed. G. Williams and R. O. Jones (Cardiff, 1990), pp. 57–89; "The Gaelic Reaction to the Reformation," in *Conquest and Union: Fashioning a British State 1485–1725*, ed. S. G. Ellis and S. Barber (London, 1995), pp. 139–61; "Litríocht an 17ú haois: tonnbhriseadh an tseanghnáthaimh nó tonnchrutú and nuaghnáthaimh?," *Léachtaí Cholm Cille*, XXVI (1996), 50–82.

40. See Philip O'Leary, *The Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival, 1881–1921: Ideology and Innovation* (Philadelpha, 1994).

41. Alf Mac Lochlainn, "Gael and Peasant," in *Views of the Irish Peasantry*, ed. Daniel Casey and Robert E. Rhodes (Storrs, CN, 1977), pp. 31–32.

manuscript tradition, which continued much longer than is widely known, and its vast traditional lore; religious and political treatises, which show an astute awareness far beyond the merely local; religious sermons; personal letters written in Irish, many of which survive; and of course the mainstay as ever of the Gaelic tradition—*an fhilíocht*, the poetic tradition of song and poem.[42] Even scholars well versed in the Gaelic tradition are wont to peasantize this literature and the community that produced it, to regard it as "the end of a tradition"[43] instead of accepting it as the *contemporary* response to the situation in which those still within the Gaelic tradition found themselves. In a famous lecture to the folklore society An Cumann le Béaloideas Éireann in 1950, Máirtín Ó Cadhain stated with no little ire that it was *not* peasants who preserved the oral literature. Studiously avoiding the pejorative term "folk literature" or "folklore," Ó Cadhain reminds us of the fact that the *file* and *seanchaí* were heirs to a conscious and serious intellectual tradition very different from the English tradition, but not inferior because of that fact.[44] The *seanchaí*, for example, was the repository of a particular society's knowledge of itself over a wide range of the human experience as lived over generations by that community. Subject to critical analysis and appreciation by his peers, he was entitled to give voice to that knowledge in his stories, riddles, proverbs, sayings, and songs. The *file*, or poet, was heir to the same tradition and also gave voice, though in a more creative, innovative and challenging way than the *seanchaí*, to his own vision of his world through his poems and songs.

The poetry of Antaine Raiftearaí (1779–1835) speaks from and for the Gaelic world of his time. Firmly rooted in his own place—the region, as he says himself, between the Shannon and the sea—the consciousness of his work is an introduction to the native *weltanschauung* not visible in state papers and visitors' accounts—sources invariably either blind to or hostile to that world. Like the poets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Raiftearaí believed that Ireland was lost through *clisiam Gall*, "the trickery of the Gall." In poem after poem, Raiftearaí gives the "nationalist" or "nativist" version of history which he inherited from the seventeenth-century poet/historian Seathrún Céitinn (Geoffrey Keating), one of his oft-mentioned heroes, and others of that same tradition. The Ireland of Raiftearaí was that of the dispossessed Irish-speaking Catholic, and his poetry is often venomously sectarian—a trait not uncommon in verse and in life in general on both sides of the religious divide at the time.

42. Buttimer's essay will be published in 1997 in a collection of essays edited by the present author and titled *Oidhreacht na Gaeilge.*

43. For an example of this attitude, see R. A. Breatnach, "The End of Tradition: A Survey of Eighteenth-Century Irish Literature," *Studia Hibernica*, I (1961), 128–50.

44. Máirtín Ó Cadhain, "Béaloideas," *Feasta* (Márta, 1950), 9–12, 19–25.

This fact caused great problems for his first editor, Douglas Hyde, the son of a Church of Ireland minister and founder of the Gaelic League. That said, accepting the poetry of Raiftearaí on its own literary, intellectual, cultural and social terms opens pathways of understanding into the real Irish-speaking Ireland of the day.

The same may be said for the poetry of the Connemara poet Colm de Bhailís, born in 1796, who died at the great age of 109 years and ten months in the poorhouse at Uachtar Ard, County Galway. De Bhailís once saw Raiftearaí on a street in Galway city, and thought him rough and uncouth. Likewise, to the Anglophone outsider De Bhailís no doubt seemed an unlettered, bedraggled peasant—a man who could not sign his own son's death certificate on the latter's death of consumption at the age of twenty years in 1877, and therefore had to merely make his mark on the document. As heir to Raiftearaí and the other poets before him, de Bhailís speaks with the authority of the traditional Gaelic poet in his songs and constantly reminds his listeners that his voice must be listened to when he talks of matters that merit a poem. He recounts in his songs the everyday happenings of the local community and interprets that life through the critical eye of the hereditary poet. He praises or chastises the people of the area as appropriate; reminds them of their social, cultural and religious duties; and entertains them in some amusing songs, all recounted in the well-wrought verses that his community had a right to expect from him. While de Bhailís's poetry lacks the national consciousness—and, indeed, the technical and linguistic verve of Raiftearaí—the best of his songs, like "Amhrán an Tae" and "Cúirt an tSrutháin Bhuí," are worthwhile artistic statements which articulate the inner world, the perceived reality of his community, to such an extent that, as with some of the songs of Raiftearaí, they are still sung in the Connemara Gaeltacht today.[45]

The real significance of such voices as those of Raiftearaí, de Bhailís, and many others—one could name dozens of so-called "minor" or community poets from the period in Connemara alone—is that they were listened to and that their work survived in a society which, though unlettered in the modern Western sense, was highly sophisticated and had a highly complex aesthetic, intellectual, and cultural sense. I am not arguing that Raiftearaí, de Bhailís, and their fellow poets are major literary figures, though one might bring to mind Patrick Kavanagh's lines about Homer making the *Iliad* out of "local" events. The real importance of these poets and of their successors today in the Connemara Gaeltacht, about whom I have written elsewhere,[46] is that they rendered

45. See *Amhráin Choilm de Bhailís,* eag. Gearóid Denvir (Indreabhán, 1996).

46. See the following articles by Gearóid Denvir: "A Survey of Eighteenth-Century Irish Literature," *Léachtaí Cholm Cille,* XIX (1989), 192–222; "The Living Tradition: Oral Irish Language Poetry in

witness, through the practice of their hereditary poetic trade, to the human condition as they themselves lived it, and they did so in terms emanating from their own worldview. They were and are conscious literary artists within that world, and it is worth repeating in this context Ó Cadhain's assertion that is was not peasants who preserved and composed the oral literature. If their tradition is not that of a reflective introverted modernist western worldview, then this fact is simply a reminder that their tradition must be approached and appreciated in its own terms, following its own aesthetic—for we are dealing here, I believe, with the Gaelic Ireland of the noncolonized mind.

It is not easy to move like this from one mode of discourse to another completely different one, barriers of language notwithstanding. Thus, even a sympathetic and ideologically committed writer such as Patrick Pearse, in speaking of a poet like de Bhailís, can bring with him the intellectual baggage of the peasantization of the Irish speaker, or to speak in terms of a postcolonial analysis, the "otherizing" of the other. This opening passage from an essay on de Bhailís by Pearse illustrates the point. Pearse draws here, as is his wont, from the well of Romantic Arnoldian criticism, which describes literature as an "explanation of life and nature," as a "philosophy of life," rather than on the well of "Cúirt an tSrutháin Bhuí" or "Tobar Dheireadh an Domhain," of the Gaelic story tradition and worldview.

> One must beware of approaching a singer like Colm Wallace in a severely critical spirit, primed with all the stock epithets of the newspaper reviewer. This is no professional poet; indeed, scarcely a formal poet at all. Here is a naive, sprightly, good-humouredly satirical personality, a peasant living amongst peasants, who sings, like the lark, from very joyousness and tunefulness of soul; sings because to sing is a necessity of his gladsome nature. He has no 'philosophy of life'—not he; he warbles to while away a summer's day, to 'shorten the road' on a tramp across the bogland, to repay the hospitality of a *bean tighe* who has given him a night's cheer. The ordinary, prosaic events of his daily life, the sights and experiences he encounters on his way to a fair, such are the inspirations of his verse: he makes a *bráicín* to shelter under during a shower; he overhears a conversation as he passes along the road; he meets with a churlish reception in a house where he had expected hospitality; and, as he goes faring on his way, more as *caitheamh aimsire* than anything else, he weaves the experience into verse, and embellishes it with a hundred odd fancies, which, in the case of a more formal poet, one would rightly set down as grotesque extravagance.
>
> In poetry thus, so to speak, incidentally produced, it would be absurd to expect deep thoughts on life and death and destiny; passion, fire, majesty; great

Connemara Today," *Éire-Ireland*, XXIV (Spring, 1989), 92–108; "Tradition et innovation dans la poésie orale due Conamara aujourd'hui," *Études Celtiques*, 29 (1993), 147–60, as well as *Amhráin Choilm de Bhailís*, pp. 7–40.

> technical skill, or even uniform melody of verse. Much of Colum's poetry lacks real inspiration, much of it, from the technical standpoint, limps hopelessly. Yet good qualities it does possess—indeed, must possess to have achieved its undoubted popularity throughout a whole county—a certain energy and vivacity, a tuneful swing, a whimsical playfulness of fancy.[47]

Pearse was, of course, one of the most original thinkers and activists on that other side of the Irish Revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—the language movement of Conradh na Gaeilge, the Gaelic League. In the words of Douglas Hyde, the Gaelic League's aim was "the de-Anglicising of Ireland," the key to which was the restoration of the Irish language. Along with the likes of Eoin Mac Néill, Pádraig Ó Duinnín, Peadar Ó Laoghaire and all the various wings of the language movement of the time, though very different in their own "attitude and philosophy of life," Hyde, Pearse, and Ó Conaire were all in agreement about the fact of their being the true heirs of the Gaelic tradition, whose renewal they felt would lead to the reconstruction of the new Ireland, Gaelic and free, of the twentieth century. While many traditionalist Gaelic Leaguers would have regarded the Anglo-Irish literary movement of the same period, which "aimed at the creation of a distinctively Anglo-Irish nation by a literature in English infused with the legends and idioms of . . . western peasants,"[48] as being mere literary elitism or an invented foreign-influenced construct, it is worth noting that in many respects the *weltanschauung* of both groups was but a mirror image of one another.

This can be most vividly seen in that literary, cultural and even political construct of the movement as a whole, well-documented in the work of Aisling Ní Dhonnchadha, Máirín Nic Eoin and Philip O'Leary: the Fíor-Ghael,[49] the Irish-speaking peasant of the western seaboard, the repository of ancient primal knowledge, uncontaminated by "the filthy tide" modern life and commercialism, who lived in timeless communion with his own natural, cultural, and linguistic environment and tradition in a fundamentally dignified ancient way of life. Indeed, this idealized Irishman—the true Irish-Irelander—in all his pristine innocence and goodness was one of the reasons why the Catholic church, itself a bastion of conservative nineteenth-century Victorian morality and respectability, particularly in the person of many parish priests, was so supportive of Conradh na Gaeilge and the language movement in general.

47. *Amhráin Cholm de Bhailís*, p. 126.

48. *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*, p. 119.

49. Aside from Leerson and O'Leary, consult also: Aisling Ní Dhonnchadha, *An Gearrscéal sa Ghaeilge* (Dublin, 1981); Mairín Nic Eoin, *An Litríocht Réigiúnach* (Dublin, 1982).

Though the Gaelic League preached a return to this Gaelic-speaking Ireland, which was in its living form represented by a Gaeltacht population of some 500,000 Irish speakers at that time, many of its activists were at more than one remove, and not just in the linguistic sense, from the living Gaeltacht culture of the time. Many Leaguers, and particularly those from the larger urban areas, were middle-class intellectuals with cultural and philanthropical interests, and the time, leisure, and the economic resources, to pursue them. Their only encounter with the Gaeltacht would have been day-trips or summer holidays—hardly a realistic anthropological introduction. Indeed it was not unknown for some to stay in "good hotels" outside the Gaeltacht for their holidays while making day-trips into the "reservation" to meet the Irish-speaking natives.

Even Patrick Pearse, despite his deep understanding of and sympathy with the people of the Connemara Gaeltacht, not to mention his command of the language itself, is a case in point here. A university graduate in law, and a man of some means, Pearse had a holiday home in the Gaeltacht at Ros Muc, and he himself recounts the story of the riposte thrown at him after exhorting the people of the area to keep their language: "What use is Irish to you after you go beyond Maam Cross?" Moreover, while his short stories and poems in Irish can at times be fairly realistic, Pearse's representation of the West in his poetry in English, particularly in poems like "The Wayfarer," comes straight from the worldview of the urban intellectual Romantic with its lyrical reference to "children with bare feet upon the sands of some ebbed sea"—omitting the fact that their unshod feet were probably sore and their bellies empty.

Many Gaelic Leaguers lacked understanding of the realities of life in the Gaeltacht, and moreover, would not have been themselves content to live out that Romantic vision of Gaelic Ireland in their own day-to-day lives. Tom O'Higgins, minister of home affairs in the first Free State government, later called his generation "the most conservative revolutionaries in the world," and this description of the ideals, mores, and worldview of the founding generation of Catholic Gaelic middle-class nationalist revolutionaries is rather apt. However, to follow Tom Garvin and claim that theirs was merely a "revolution of frustrated upwardly aspiring *petit bourgeois*"[50] is to merely peasantize the peasant and to follow a particular ideological agenda of today rather than of yesterday.

As Terry Eagleton judiciously observes in *Heathcliffe and The Great Hunger*: "Ironically . . . Ireland made its strike for independence at just the point where it was coming most to resemble the society which held it down."[51] Eagleton, however, goes on himself to otherize the other, to peasantize the peasant, and

50. See Tom Garvin, *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland* (Oxford, 1987), especially Chapter 5, "The Politics of Language and Literature," pp. 78–106.

to complete the process of colonial assimilation by arguing that it is only in a negative sense—that is, in relation to the colonizer or to the fact of having been conquered—that the colonized can define himself. It is as if there can be no indigenous, nativist worldview, and it would seem that the capacity for thought was brought to the conquered only through the conquest: ". . . striving of small nations to be free is bound to appear quaintly archaic, at least in a multinational world . . . [and] what gives [colonized people] their unity is not some racial essence, but the negative fact of being held down as a whole."[52] As Memmi, Said, Ngugi and other postcolonial critics have pointed out, this apparently fundamentalistic rhetoric, which views the universe in simplistic binary oppositions—right *vs* wrong, good *vs* evil, the colonizer *vs* the colonized, Gall *vs* Gael—is a basic part of the discourse of separatism and eventual decolonization. Laced with the rhetoric of propaganda, this discourse arises from the strong desire of the colonized to reestablish a positive, self-assured image of self—one based on the traditional nativist worldview. The native or oppressed language is always seen as the repository of that worldview, thus leading to language revivalism. Memmi observes:

> And the most urgent claim of a group about to revive is certainly the liberation and restoration of its language. Indeed, if I express wonder, it is that anyone wonders.
>
> Only that language would allow the colonised to resume contact with his interrupted flow of time and to find again his lost continuity and that of his history. . . . The colonised writer, having succeeded after much effort in being able to use European languages—those of the colonisers, let us not forget—can use them only to clamor for his own. That is not a question of incoherence or blind resentment, but a necessity.[53]

This is exactly the process of decolonizing the mind which led Ngũgĩ, as mentioned earlier, to abandon English and write in Gikuyu, his own mother tongue, and it is an idea central to the language revival movement at the turn of the century in Ireland. This same process is also the key to explaining the ultimate success of the Gaelic League at that time. As a movement of cultural and linguistic nationalism, the Gaelic League created a feeling of self-respect and self-confidence in being Irish and not only set the agenda for the emergence of the new Ireland but also provided the yardstick against which that new Ireland was to be measured, for better or worse.

Following Wole Soyinka and Frantz Fanon, Said asserts in *Culture and Im-*

51. Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliffe and The Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London, 1995), p. 282.
52. Ibid., pp. 282–3.
53. *The Colonizer and the Colonized,* p. 110.

perialism that the first generation of the liberationist or postcolonial movement will invariably be strongly nativist in tone and ideology,[54] and this is undoubtedly true of the official Ireland which emerged in the years before and after the founding of the Irish Free State in 1922. The good citizen of the Gaeltacht, as portrayed by the nativist wing of the language movement, was now the new official Irishman. This narrow Gaelic, Catholic construct was to lead to the establishment of the Committee of Enquiry on Evil Literature in 1926, and to the establishment of the Censorship Board in 1929. These actions of the newly founded state, together with the establishment in 1926 of An Gúm, the government's Irish-language publishing house, ensured that the best of modernist Irish writing in both languages was censored and that nothing was published that contradicted the official ideology of the state. Thus, most literature in Irish came to be synonymous with the depiction of a sanitized version of Gaeltacht life as seen in the likes of the literature of the Blaskets, which grew over time into a veritable industry glorying in the heady days of the neolithic, premodern, preindustrial, rural past. It hardly needs emphasizing that this also, by another quirky historical irony, amounts in many ways to the peasantization of the Irish speaker and of the Gaeltacht in an eternally frozen, idealized construct of the official Fíor-Ghael. The same neotraditionalist attitude was to the fore in the political and education systems under native government, and in the majority of newspapers and periodicals, both in Irish and in English, of the period.

A word of caution is necessary here. Some commentators on Irish literary, cultural, and historical affairs, particularly those with a certain preconceived ideology or cultural agenda, tend to frame their analyses solely in terms of the traditionalist or nativist aspect.[55] There was, however, another fundamental element to the whole revivalist movement from the outset. As Philip O'Leary has shown in *Ideology and Innovation: The Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival* (1994), there was always a significant, if sometimes conveniently forgotten, modernist or modernizing wing to the Gaelic movement of the early part of the century, as can be seen in the creative and discursive work of Pearse, Ó Conaire, Piaras Béaslaí and W.P. Ryan. One of the founding voices of modern Irish literature—and in the words of his contemporary Stephen Mac Enna, one of the few Gaelic writers of his time one could imagine a literate European reading—Pádraic Ó Conaire left a significant body of essays in which he analyzes the literary, social, political, and cultural climate of his time in strikingly modernist

54. *Culture and Imperialism*, pp. 276–7.

55. For example, see: *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland*, pp. 78–106; *Heathcliffe and The Great Hunger*, pp. 226–72; David Fitzpatrick, "Ireland since 1870," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland*, ed. R. F. Foster (Oxford, 1989), pp. 213–74.

terms which draw as much, if not more, on the Ireland of Molly Bloom as that of Peig Sayers.[56] The same can be said of the literary essays of Pearse, particularly those published in *An Claidheamh Soluis* between 1903 and 1908, which became the foundation for modern literary criticism in Irish throughout the twentieth century.[57]

Nor did the modernist agenda disappear from Gaelic discourse after the founding of the state, despite the disparaging comments of Terence Brown in his account of Ireland of the period 1930–1965 in *The Field Day Anthology* (1991). Describing what he calls the counter-revival, Brown states that, "this was a period of self-imposed cultural confinement and provincialism" with a "dominant Irish Ireland consensus" and a "limited vision of Gaelic tradition which emphasised its rural roots." Brown claims that almost the only liberal voices of the time were *The Irish Statesman* (1923–1930) and *The Bell* (1940–1954), which published "a body of biting, pungent, commonsensical, clearly argued, analysis of current Irish society."[58] This assertion completely ignores, however, the equally biting, pungent, commonsensical, clearly argued analysis of current Irish society of the socialist Irish-language paper *An t-Éireannach*. An important element in the social, intellectual, and cultural history of the mid 1930s, this Gaeltacht paper was recently analyzed in depth by Éamon Ó Ciosáin.[59] Indeed, *An t-Éireannach*, with its Gaeltacht base and ideology and its European and strongly antiestablishment outlook, might rightly be described as the true nativist or, as I would prefer to call it, the noncolonized voice of its time.

Much writing of the first generation of modern Gaelic writers—from 1893 to 1939—however, does without doubt reflect the official consensus of the day. It must be remembered that a writer wishing to produce work in Irish at the time, whether a native speaker or not, was trying to write in a medium that had remained undeveloped in any modern literary sense, and therefore lacked the cumulative body of contemporary work which is the normal literary and intellectual environment for most writers. Thus Hyde, a man of no small literary taste, and a noted scholar of Irish to boot, could write rather simplistic poetry in the same Ireland which produced the major poetic work of his friend and

56. See *Aistí Phádraic Uí Chonaire*, eag. Gearóid Denvir (Indreabhán, 1978).

57. See: *The Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival;* Frank O'Brien, *Filíocht Ghaeilge na Linne Seo* (Dublin, 1968); Gearóid Denvir, "Ó Shíolteagasc go critic: litríocht dhioscúrsúil na Gaeilge san aois seo," *Léachtaí Cholm Cille*, XXVI (1996), 178–218.

58. Terence Brown, "The Counter Revival: Provincialism and Censorship, 1930–65," *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (Derry, 1991), III: 89.

59. Éamon Ó Ciosáin, *An t-Éireannach: Páipéar Sóisialach Gaeltachta*, 1934–1937 (Dublin, 1993).

colleague in many enterprises, W. B. Yeats. This generation of writers was, moreover, so self-consciously Irish that, with honorable exceptions like Ó Conaire, Pearse, Liam Ó Flaithearta, and Pádraig Ó Mileadha, their literary output often amounted to mere *pietas* or *apologia* for their chosen medium.

If the first generation of twentieth century writing in Irish proved that one could write in Irish despite manifold difficulties, the following postwar generation—the likes of Máirtín Ó Cadhain, Máirtín Ó Direáin, Máire Mhac an tSaoi and Seán Ó Ríordáin—inherited from them a medium for which there was no need to apologize. I do not intend to attempt to discuss the merits or indeed demerits of writing in Irish in the period after World War II. Moreover, I do not intend to analyze further the ideology and practice of the language question in Ireland, and particularly the often huge discrepancies between the rhetoric and the reality, despite the fact that there are fundamental political, cultural, and ideological aspects beyond the purely literary to the question of "Decolonizing the Mind." I have argued in various articles over the years that a fundamental aspect of writing in Irish in the twentieth century is the question of continuity, of the writer in Irish being consciously or unconsciously part of the continuum of the two thousand years of the Gaelic tradition.[60] Whether it be, as one critic has called, it the chimera of continuity or not, I wish to draw attention, in conclusion, to the element of the noncolonized mind in twentieth-century Gaelic writing which I see as a fundamental, unifying theme in much of this work.

On the death of Máirtín Ó Cadhain, Seán Ó Ríordáin, in his own inimitable style, wrote in 1971 that

> Ní aigne Béarlóra ag cur Gaeilge de réir Béarla ar shaol a bhí tomhaiste de réir Béarla í seo ach aigne na Gaeilge féin ag sealbhú réimsí nua agus ag seasamh a cirt féin inti. Athéiriú na hÉireann a bhí ar bun aige. Níor fhág sé mar a dúirt sé Baile Átha Cliath ina pháipéar bán. Stath sé saol béarlaithe na hÉireann as múnla an Bhéarla agus neadaigh i múnla na Gaeilge é.[61]

60. See Gearóid Denvir, "Litríocht agus pobal: nualitríocht na Gaeilge agus an traidisiún," *Scríobh*, 6 (1984), 11–47; *Littérature et Communauté: Aspects de la Tradition dans la Littérature Moderne en Gaélique* (Rennes: Association pour le Développement des Études Celtiques, 1983), 35 pp; "Continuing the Link: An Aspect of Contemporary Irish Poetry," *The Irish Review*, 3 (1986), 40–54; "D'aithle na bhfilí," *Innti*, 11 (1988), 103–19.

61. "This is not the mind of an English speaker putting Irish in accordance with English on a life that was measured in English, but the Irish mind taking possession of new regions and doing justice to itself through Irish. He was re-Irelanding Ireland. He did not leave Dublin a blank page either. He uprooted the Anglicized life of Ireland from the mold of English and settled it in the mold of Irish." Seán Ó Ríordáin, "Útamáil Uí Chadhain," *Irish Times*, 10 October 1971.

Ó Cadhain is one of the most powerful and important voices in twentieth-century literature in Ireland in either of the two native languages. One of the most fundamental aspects of his art is precisely that to which Ó Ríordáin refers. While being utterly modernist in scope and style, particularly from the late 1940s onwards, Ó Cadhain draws heavily upon the symbolic universe of his native Gaelic at the level of vocabulary, metaphor, and extended narrative in order to express his personal vision of his own world. Thus, a simple metaphor at the microlevel of text—like a reference to *bradán na beatha*, "the salmon of life"—will need a gloss in translation from Irish to explain the reference to what is essentially an exteriorisation, in the Gaelic tradition, of the life-force. Similarly, at the macrolevel of narrative, stories like "Gorta" or "Beirt Eile,"[62] are heavy with creative allusion to the Gaelic literary tradition, which adds extra layers of meaning to the modern stories, if properly understood and, when taken out of this context or who the symbolic universe of another language, these stories would need a crosscultural explanatory treatise.[63] Of course, one does come across the argument that this is what Joyce, Beckett and many so-called "Anglo-Irish" writers working in English, even down to Roddy Doyle, have done to the English language in order to fool the conqueror in his own language as a gesture of postcolonial revenge or sleight of mind—or the empire writing back.[64] Similarly, a fundamental aspect of the poetry of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill is rooted firmly and unapologetically in the Gaelic tradition. Much of her work is a rejection of Cartesian, intellectualized Western thought, a conscious and often unconscious effort to move into a different mode of feeling, seeing, and knowing culled from the Gaelic side of her heritage. In the same vein, the recent work of another new writer, Pádraig Ó Cíobháin, draws much in psychological and cultural terms from his native Corca Dhuibhne and its literary tradition. This element of his art while at times chauvinistic, though perhaps in the best sense of that word, is in no way negative, introverted, or neotraditionalist in the same way as the earlier Blasket literature.[65]

Ó Cadhain, Ní Dhomhnaill, and Ó Cíobháin, like a host of other writers, are in no way prone to Gaelic chauvinism, to pious apologist self-justification, or to the backward look—that glorification of times past which is the unfortunate and oftentimes only trademark of the nativist element in much of early

62. Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *An tSraith ar Lár* (Dublin, 1967), pp. 27–31, 97–109.

63. For a discussion of the writing of Máirtín Ó Cadhain, see Gearóid Denvir *Cadhain Aonair: Saothar Liteartha Mháirtín Uí Chadhain* (Dublin, 1987); Louis de Paor, *Faoin mBlaosc Bheag Sin* (Dublin, 1991).

64. For example, see John Cronin, "The English Language Belongs to Us: Irish Writing at a Tangent," *Éire-Ireland* (Summer, 1995), 27–41.

65. See Gearóid Denvir, "Ár leitheidí arís: léamh ar shaothar Phádraig Uí Chíobháin," *Oghma*, 7 (1995), 17–32.

twentieth-century Gaelic literature already mentioned. They have eaten the apple of modernity, a taste which, once acquired, cannot be eradicated. Consciousness, upon its awakening, cannot be unlearned. As Seán Ó Ríordáin says in his poem "Oilithreacht fám Anam":

> Ach thuirling eolas buile
> A scoilt an mhaidin álainn
> 'na fireann is 'na baineann,
> Is chuir ruaig ar chlúracána.[66]

Though Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill has no difficulty in understanding and indeed drawing inspiration from Peig, and though Ó Cíobháin similarly stands at the altar, as he himself says, of *na seanmháistrí teangan*, "the old language masters," those same inhabitants of an earlier Corca Dhuibhne would in no way comprehend the issues raised in the stories and poems of the new generation. As Tomás Mac Síomóin puts it in a poem celebrating Tomás Ó Criomhthain, the original islandman of the species, the thinking or late twentieth century reflective, self-conscious Tomás has a different literary agenda from that of the earlier descriptive Tomás who simply "wrote down the speech of his people."[67] Modern consciousness and modern sensibility have intervened in the meantime and impinged on the Gaelic tradition, a process which resulted in, to paraphrase Eliot and Mallarmé, a repurification of the dialect of the tribe. Such writers as Ó Cadhain, Ní Dhomhnaill, and Ó Cíobháin represent an aspect of the noncolonized, nonassimilated Irish mind—one consciously rooted in the native tradition, and at the same time thoroughly modern in sensibility.

One final question arises immediately from the foregoing—the vexed and controversial question of translation. It is difficult not to agree with David Lloyd in *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Cultural Nationalism* when he asserts that translation embodies the fatal double bind of cultural nationalism: disseminating the message through English destroys the very language you wish to preserve.[68] The aim of translation can, and often is, the decolonizing of the mind through introducing those who have no Irish to the Gaelic literary tradition. Lloyd's double bind unfortunately means that it can also contribute to the ongoing process of colonization. In a review of the bilingual anthologies as *The Bright Wave / An Tonn Gheal* (1986)

66. "Maddening knowledge descended / and ruptured the beautiful morning. / into masculine and feminine, / and chased away the gnomes (of innocence)." Seán Ó Ríordáin, *Eireaball Spideoige* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1952), p. 71.

67. "Ómós don Chriomhthanach," from *Codarsnaí* (Dublin, 1981), pp. 12–13, was rewritten as "Níl in aon fhear ach a fhocal," in *Cré agus Cláirsearch* (Dublin, 1983), pp. 7–8.

68. David Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Cultural Nationalism* (Berkeley, 1987), p. 94.

and *An Crann Faoi Bhláth / The Flowering Tree*, Pól Ó Muirí states without equivocation that "It occurs to me that translation in this instance has a lot more to do with colonisation—a desire to scavange rather than a desire to propagate. It is patronage and pity."[69]

Translation occurs normally from the "minority" language to the more powerful and widely used language, as in our case from Irish to English. Translation adapts to the modes and thought patterns of the more powerful language, and must of necessity simplify and lose many internal creative allusions and reverberations, for translation leaves behind those nonstated but yet understood things which exist below the external form of the word in any language and which are unique to the symbolic universe and discourse of that language as developed through history. It therefore goes without saying that it is not possible to fully understand or, indeed, do complete justice to the likes of Ó Cadhain, Ní Dhomhnaill, or Ó Cíobháin in English—or in any other language. Any such translation must lose much of its original otherness and uniqueness which is ultimately the very reason for learning another language or of course for preserving one's own. Why bother with Irish, if all is available anyway in English without the blood, sweat, and tears of preserving an endangered language or of learning Irish? This problem is further compounded by the fact that contexts of translation are rarely neutral—the power relationship between English and Irish being an obvious case in point—and also by what Michael Cronin calls "fluent strategies" of translation, which render the new or translated text eminently readable in its own right, and thus obliterate, undermine, or reduce the import of the original.[70] The translation syndrome also leads to doubts as to why one should write in any "minority" language in the first place, and such doubts lead eventually to arguing against multilingualism and multiculturalism and in favor of the global domination of the languages of the major political powers,. The direct result of that is, in this case, the eventual palimpsestization of the Gaelic.

The uniqueness of the symbolic universe of all languages is something to be treasured, encouraged, and celebrated, not in any insular, negative or chauvinistic way, but in a spirit of positive recognition of one's own identity and in such a world, as Said and Fanon hope for—one constructed not by warring essences, but by a universalism that does not limit, coerce, or force one into believing in or trying to acquire a single nonchanging identity. In a world of galloping linguistic, cultural, social, and increasingly political homogenization; in a world

69. Pól Ó Muirí, "A Desire to Scavange," *Fortnight* (April, 1993), 16.

70. See Michael Cronin, *Translating Ireland: Translations, Languages, Cultures* (Cork, 1996), pp. 167–91.

of corporate and market-driven colonization; in a world where power-language domination means that eleven languages are spoken by some seventy percent of the population of the earth and where multilingualism and linguistic diversity are seen as a threat to the integrity of nation states or as an obstacle to progress; in a world where some fifty percent of our six thousand languages are linguistically moribund, and where in the United States and Canada alone 149 of the 187 spoken languages are in immediate danger of extinction; in a world where greater and greater centralization is creating an ever-increasing dependency syndrome which stifles the local and the regional to the benefit of the mandarin bureaucrat—in such a world, speakers of minority languages must be given the right to live and work through their own language and, at the same time, not be excluded as a result from the center of things.

Such a positive assertion of self should not be taken as a denigration or negation of any other, nor in the Irish situation as an argument in any sense for insular Gaelicism, nor as a vision of a monoglot Irish-speaking Ireland, for such an attitude is but an inverted form of colonization. Either as a day to day vernacular or as one's preferred language of intellectual or creative enquiry, the use of Irish in Ireland today is not, despite the protestations of such as John Wilson Foster a "stumbling block to an island-wide Irishness, especially as the language is associated with a western rurality and the ethnic well-spring of the peasant."[71] For Foster and other commentators of his persuasion, Gaelic Ireland is but a revivalist construct, an invented Ireland with a social, political, and cultural agenda with which they disagree fundamentally. Yet their analysis forgets that an actual Irish-speaking Ireland still exists to this day, that Ireland is a bilingual country both *de facto* and *de jure*, and that it is the expressed will of a majority of the people on the island in survey after survey that this should remain the case. For those who are within that tradition, Gaelic Ireland is not an invented construct but a living reality. What must necessarily be established is a true parity of esteem between the various strands of the two linguistic traditions in an Ireland liberated in the manner that Fanon anticipated in his second moment of decolonization[72] which would seek to include rather than exclude, and to hold in esteem rather than peasantize, palimpsestize or otherize the other.

~ COLÁISTE NA hOLLSCOILE, GAILLIMH

71. John Wilson Foster, "Who Are the Irish?," *Studies*, 77, 308 (Winter, 1988), 441.
72. *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 278.