Image’nation : The Search for a Folk Image of Ireland in Art and Popular Culture, 1849 to 1949.

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image’ nation
The search for a folk image of Ireland in art and popular culture, 1849 to 1949

Ciarán Walsh

Master of Arts
2008
image'nation

The search for a folk image of Ireland in art and popular culture, 1849 to 1949.

This work is dedicated to
Nuala,
Aisling, Euglam and Conor.

Ciarán Walsh, [redacted]

Master of Arts

Submitted to the Institute of Technology Tralee, April, 2008.
This work is dedicated to
Nuala,
Aisling, Eoghan and Conor.
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Brian O’Connor, Oliver Murphy,
Lucy Fitzell, Sharon Phelan and Ashley Gaskin
and
Billy Finn, my Muse.
image’nation

image’nation (imagi’nation) v.t., & n. 1. v.t the search for an image of Ireland, 1849 to 1949. 2. f. art, folk culture and the rise of nationalism from the end of the Great Famine to the Ireland Act of 1949. [ME f. OF, f. L imago –inis + ME f. OF f. L natio –ionis]
CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS vii
ABBREVIATIONS xii
ABSTRACT xiii
INTRODUCTION 2

CHAPTER 1 IMAGE’NATION
   I Image’nation, a photo essay 18
   II Image’nation 29

CHAPTER 2 IN A GAOL
   Art | Tradition | Nationalism | Identity 46

CHAPTER 3 ART
   I Art and Irish Ireland 56
   II Art and Ireland in the nineteenth century 60
   III Revival 81
   IV The Politics of Art 86
   V Art and Politics 97
   VI The Trouble with Henry 111

CHAPTER 4 TRADITION 127

CHAPTER 5 FOLK
   I Folk 134
   II Folk Strategies 152

CHAPTER 6 INTO THE WEST
   I From Ethnography to Folk: Image and Nation. 170
   II Conclusion | The Real Thing 200

CHAPTER 7 IN SEARCH OF ‘THE REAL THING’
   a.k.a ‘the Galway Man’ and ‘An Gioblach.’ 205

BIBLIOGRAPHY 223
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Frontispiece

James O’Mahony (1810-1879),
*The Irish Gleaner*, from an original sketch,
illustration for *The Irish Gleaner, The Dawn of A Brighter Day* by Francis Bennoch.
Illustrated London News, November 27, 1852.

Introduction.

1. *Painting the Free State*, draft poster for an exhibition in the Gallery, Siamsa Tire, 2004. 1
2. *Erin Go Brath*, postcard. 14
3. *Cutting Turf*, photographic postcard, c. 1906, (Maggie Blanck Collection, 10504r.jpeg). 16
4. *Cutting Turf*, postcard, c. 1906, (Maggie Blanck Collection, OPC8.jpeg). 16

Chapter 1, Section I: Image*nation*, a photo Essay.

1.1 *Women carrying baskets of turf*, Major Ruttledge Fair.
*Two elderly women on a village street*, John J. Clarke. 18

1.2 *Family gathered outside stone cottage*, c. 1892, Major Ruttledge Fair. 19

1.3 *Nurse visiting a family, Arranmore*, Co. Donegal, c. 1906. 19

1.4 *Women washing clothes*, c. 1892, Major Ruttledge Fair. 20

1.5 *A young woman carrying dung, young boy in foreground*, c. 1892, Major Ruttledge Fair. 20

1.6 *A woman collecting fish*, c. 1892, Major Ruttledge Fair. 21

1.7 *A young woman holding her child, man in foreground*, c. 1892, Major Ruttledge Fair. 21

1.8 *People gathered at stone wall*, c. 1892, Major Ruttledge Fair. 22

1.9 *Man, woman and children outside a thatched cottage*. 22

1.10 *Members of the Congested Districts Board surrounded by locals*, 1906. 23

1.11 *Three gentlemen eating breakfast*, John J. Clarke. 23

1.12 *Man with driver riding jaunting car*, John J. Clarke. 23

1.13 *Members of the Congested Districts Board receiving directions from a local woman*, 1906. 24
1.14 Members of the Congested Districts Board, 1906. 24
1.15 A group of people at the Great Exhibition, Herbert Park, 1907, John J. Clarke. 25
1.16 Group of children standing on Bray promenade with two women and one man, John J. Clarke. 25
1.17 Woman with bicycle, John J. Clarke. 26
1.18 Man and woman beside Silbey’s Stationery Shop, Grafton St., John J. Clarke. 26
1.19 Woman and girl looking at rock pool, possibly Laytown strand, John J. Clarke. 27
1.20 Two women walking with a perambulator, John J. Clarke. 27
1.21 Man with umbrella at junction of Nassau St, Grafton St., and Suffolk St., John J. Clarke. 28
1.22 Woman with birdcage at junction of Grafton St. and South King St., John J. Clarke. 28

Section II: Image‘nation, Thesis and Themes

1.24 O’Meara’s Irish House, Dublin. 33
1.25 (a) Jack B. Yeats, Near Castelloe, 1905 and (b) Jack B. Yeats, Relief Works, 1905. 37
1.26 Gustave Courbet, Bonjour Monsieur Courbet! (1854). 43

Chapter 2: In A Gaol.

2.1 East Wing, Kilmainham Gaol. 45
2.3 Jack B. Yeats, LAMENT FOR EOGHAN RUA UA NÉILL, (1910). 52
2.4 Peter Griffin, The Stonebreaker’s Yard, Kilmainham Gaol, 2008. 54

Chapter 3: Art.

3.1 Henry O’Neill, West Side of the North Cross, Kilkilspenn, (1857). 55
3.2 George Petrie, Last Circuit of the Pilgrims at Clonmacnoise. (c. 1828). 64
3.3 Daniel Maclise, RHA, RA, The Marriage of Aoife and Strongbow, (c 1854). 64
3.4 Frederic William Burton, The Aran Fisherman’s Drowned Child, (1843). 68
3.5 Erskine Nicol, The Ejected Family (1853). 68
3.6 Elizabeth Thompson (Lady Butler), Eviction, (1877). 68
3.7 Erskine Nicol, A Shebeen at Donnybrook, (1851). 69
3.8 Octave Tassaert, Studio Interior, (1845). 71
3.9 Octave Tassaert, Une famille Malheureuse, (1849). 71


3.12 Sir David Wilkie, *The Peep-o'-Day Boys' Cabin, in the West of Ireland*, (1835-6).


3.15 Frank O'Meara, *Towards Night and Winter*, (1885).

3.16 Roderic O’Conor, *Portrait de Bretonne*, (1887).


3.21 Tara Brooches from the *Illustrated Catalogue of the Great Exhibition*, 1851.


3.23 Great seal of Saorstát Eireann designed by Archibald McGoogan.

3.24 *Art and Ireland* by Count Plunkett T.D. as published in ‘C-Weed,’ May 1923.


3.29 Paul Henry, *Cottages by the Lough*, (c.1919).

3.30 Achill Ferry, (c. 1890).

3.31 Railway Station Achill Sound, (c. 1890-1900).

3.32 Slievemore Hotel, Dugort, Achill, (c. 1890-1900).


Chapter 4: Tradition.

4.1 Brian Boru’s Harp from *Collectanea de rebus hibernicis ...*, (1786).

Chapter 5: Folk.

5.1 Postcard, *Barney’s Blarney, The Ulidia Series*, c. 1904,

5.2 Seán Keating, *An Aran Family*, Limerick City Gallery of Art.

5.3 John Millington Synge, *A Spinning Wheel*, c. 1893.
5.4 Inis Méain 1917, photographer unknown, from publicity leaflet, Inis Méain Kintwear, 2007. 138
5.5 L'ancien costume du Claddagh et trois attitudes habituelles, Marguerites Mespoulet, 1913, from Carnet D'Irlande, Musée Albert Kahn, Paris. Also contemporaneous notes by Marguerites Mespoulet. 138
5.6 Tending Cattle, Achill, (c. 1910). 141
5.7 James Dixon, An Baile Thiar | West Village, (c. 1957). 141
5.4 Patsy Dan MacRuaidhri, James Dixon Gallery, Oilean Thorai, (2006). 144
5.6 Web advertisement for exhibition by Bernadette Cotter in San Francisco, (April/May 2008). 150
5.7 1881 issue of Young Ireland. 151
5.8 Postcard, The meeting Of the Waters, (c. 1904). 159
5.9 Montage of early postcards featuring scenes of rural Ireland. 161
5.10 Montage of second generation postcards of rural Ireland. 162
5.11 John Tenniel, Two Forces, Punch, (29 October 1881). 165

Chapter 6: Into The West.

6.1 The Real Thing, The Lawrence Collection, (c.1888). 169
6.2 Robert J. Welch, Turf Slide Car, Sperrin Mountains, (c. 1901). 170
6.3 Postcard of a slide cart based on an original photograph taken by Robert J. Welch, (c.1902). 171
6.4 Robert J Welch, Janet. (c.1895). 174
6.5 Robert J. Welch, Snail Catchers, Murlough Bay, (May 1897). 176
6.6 Robert J Welch, Old Woman Spinning by Roadside and 2 postcard versions. 177
6.7 Tuke, Girl Running, (1906). 179
6.8 Reminiscences of Hedge-Firing, Punch, 1875. 179
6.9 Robert J. Welch, A Bog Cabin, Ben Lettery, The Balfour Album, (1893-5) 181
6.10 A Sick Family, Carraroe, Mansion House Enquiry, (1898). 181
6.11 Stoddard, The crop that failed, (1917). 183
6.12 Louis Anthony, Rail Fine Old Type, postcards. 188
6.13 Clifton Johnson, A Knitter on the Highway, (1901), frontispiece, The Isle of the Shamrock. 191
6.15 Clifton Johnston, A Bog Cabin, from The Isle of the Shamrock, (1901). 193
6.16 Robert J. Welch, Mick McQuaids Castle, Balfour Album, (1893-5). 193
6.18 Jack B. Yeats, *A Treason Song*, (1911) from Lynd’s *Rambles in Ireland* (1912). 197
6.21 *Irish Jaunting Car and Cottage*, postcard, from an original in the Lawrence Collection. 201

Chapter 7: In Search of ‘The Real Thing’

ABBREVIATIONS

A.A.A.   Allied Artists Association.
A.R.A.   Associate of the Royal Academy.
C.D.B.   Congested Districts Board.
G.A.A.   Gaelic Athletic Association.
I.E.L.A.  Irish Exhibition of Living Art.
R.A.    Royal Academy.
R.D.S.   Royal Dublin Society.
R.H.A.   Royal Hibernian Academy.
R.I.A.   Royal Irish Academy.
N.G.I.   National Gallery of Ireland.
N.C.A.D. National College of Art and Design.
N.L.I.   National Library of Ireland.
N.P.A.   National Photographic Archive.
N.U.I.G. National University of Ireland, Galway.
T.C.D.   Trinity College Dublin.
U.C.D.   University College Dublin.
This study considers how visual images became central to the folk imagination of Irishness between 1849 and 1949. It begins with contrasting representations in photography of the Irish in the 1890s. The political/cultural contexts of images of Irishness is established and developed with reference to the juxtaposition of contemporary visual arts, folk song and nationalism in Kilmainham Gaol in 1991. It considers whether distinct cultural systems have historically competed for legitimacy and whether, specifically, art and tradition are incompatible in terms of a nationalist construction of Irishness. The Irishness of Irish art in the nineteenth century, the role of the visual arts in the revivals of the 1890s, the institutional record of Saorstat Éireann and the career of Paul Henry are each examined with reference to a disconnection between art and tradition as defined by Irish Ireland. The nature of tradition is scrutinised in this context. The music of Sean O’Riada is considered as a case study in the degree of alienation between tradition and art in modern Ireland. A distinction is drawn between tradition, folk and popular culture as a pretext for an exploration of the capacity for art in Irish Ireland. The evidence of Synge, Henry, and the Tory Island painters is considered. Evidence of visuality in folk strategies devised by the Young Irelanders and George Petrie in particular is also considered. The focus shifts from restrictive notions of art to a more inclusive concept of visual culture and the emphasis shifts to popular culture in the age of mechanical reproduction. The work of photographer Robert J. Welch illustrates how the transfer of images of ‘the real Ireland’ from ethnography to popular culture facilitated the construction of folk images of Irishness at the end of empire. The study concludes with a photographic essay on the emergence of a folk ‘image’nation.’
Figure 1. *Painting the Free State*, draft poster for an exhibition in the Gallery, Siamsa Tire, 2004.
INTRODUCTION

Perplexed by time - since the present has no duration and the past and future do not exist - he concludes that the measure of time must be memory; hence a long past is a long remembrance of the past.

Ciarán Carson¹

Saint Patrick banished snakes from Ireland and Mary Swanzy introduced modern art into Ireland. Or so they say. This study is not a history; if anything it is a confrontation with history and the faction fighting that characterises recent historiography in Ireland. More particularly it is concerned with the idea of history as a form of mythography. Its focus is on the visual record of nation building, with the emphasis on the axis of popular and official sites of cultural production in the imagination of the Irish Nation over a period of a hundred years or so ‘after the famine.’ It is necessarily located in the confrontation between cultural theory and historiography, between the post-colonial concerns of Irish cultural studies and revisionist historiography. It is an awkward position to be in. Historiography has never been kind to images. Historians are distrustful of pictures because of their subjectivity. Their role is to illustrate, to suggest something of the appearance of a past recreated in text and authenticated by scholarship. At best, pictures corroborate other forms of enquiry but their admissibility, as evidence is always conditional. According to Ciara Breathnach:

To date scholars of Ireland have been reluctant to use photographs as historical evidence. As Peter Burke notes, ‘Relatively few historians work in photographic archives, compared to the numbers who work in repositories of written and typewritten documents’, and the resulting scholarship reflects that.² Books that focus on photographs tend to do so exclusively and they rarely provide full context to the images, whereas the Irish historiography relies mainly on documentary sources in which photographic images are used sparingly or as an adjunct.³

Art. Well ... art is another story. Art is about style and art history is principally a form of connoisseurship. Or so they say. Art historiography is no less divided when the issue of The Nation arises. Nationalists suspect that connoisseurship excludes republican perspectives and

achievements. The Unionists\(^4\) suspect that a post-colonial attitude to art historiography excludes, nay, denies the existence of a parallel nation with a specific and distinct entitlement to claim a culture of its own. This is the effect of the extension of colonial discourse analysis into the visual arts and the concomitant challenge to conventional histories of Irish art and art in Ireland. Art historiography has become concerned less with aesthetics and more with the social and political attitudes inherent in images. Images become texts to be interpreted in an ideological context. Elite and popular culture - polarised in formal visual arts narratives - are incorporated into an analysis of the visual record of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised and the transformative potential of culture in colonial and post-colonial contexts.

I began looking at pictures from this perspective but soon gave up on art. Why? Art historians are very selective (that is their job) and there remains a critical gap in their understanding of the link between art, visual culture and the broader vision that is revealed in popular forms of imagining the Nation during the “culture wars” that prefigured a real rupture in the colonial condition. The catalyst was an encounter with the past in the form of a photograph that seemed to condense all of the arguments about nation and colony into a single image of the confrontation between mutually incomprehensible versions of Irishness - the Gael, the Anglo-Saxon in Ireland, the Anglo-Irish and the Irish-Irish (Fig. 1.13). The scope of the enquiry narrowed in time and focussed on a series of encounters with Irish Ireland that were recorded on film at a critical time in the imagination of an Irish Nation. I have characterised this as a visual turn in the representation of the Irish and it covers a period of about thirty years, from the 1890s to 1920s. The impetus was political and cultural: the need for an alternative construction of Irishness to counter Anglo-Saxon hegemony as an integral part of the campaign for a sovereign nation. The effect was a schema of popular images that defined the Irish Nation in the last years of empire and in the transition from commonwealth to republic. This, it will be argued, constitutes a visual component of popular or folk culture.

The approach has been to accept the current ‘stand-off’ in historiography\(^5\) as a potent contextualising force without engaging in the row over the authenticity of nationalist, republican, post-colonialist, revisionist, Unionist, two-nation theorists or any of the other factions. If anything, the attitude is one of studied post-modernist irony and, even, an attempt at something that is as ill-defined as post-postmodernism. The one thing that I can say for certain is that it is a post-nationalist

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\(^5\) In the opening lines of his introduction to ‘The Revision of Irish Nationalism’ Desmond Fennell refers to ‘a view of the Irish National question ... which has tended to be pushed aside and smothered by the warring camps of traditional nationalism and so-called ‘revisionism’. ’ Fennell, Desmond, 1989, The Revision of Irish Nationalism,’ Dublin, Open Air, p. 9.
piece of work with all the permissions of a post-ceasefire context. In terms of the dissertation itself, the principle influences are two key texts that were important in my own aesthetic education: John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* \(^6\) and Robert Hughes’s *The Shock of the New* \(^7\). Both writers share a passion for pictures, the people who make them and the way images shape the way we imagine the world around us. Both books are a little dated now. Berger’s left wing manifesto was written long before The Wall came down. Hughes’s radical take on modernism-being-overtaken-by-post-modernism has become a standard text of late twentieth century aesthetics. *Ways of Seeing* and *The Shock of the New* originated as television series that attempted to confront the limits of art history and political discourse related to the arts. That is why they remain relevant. On a formal level John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* provided the basic model for this text - pictorial essays accompanied and contextualised by essays. In addition an attempt has been made at something of an engaged, discursive tone influenced by journalism which Berger and Hughes share and which had such an effect on art historiography in the 1980’s. More recent exemplars include Diarmuid Ó Giolláin’s *Locating Irish Folklore: Tradition, Modernity, Identity* \(^8\) which attempted to map the territory occupied by folk culture in historic and contemporary discourses on nation building. Similarly Brian P. Kennedy’s *Dreams and Responsibilities, The State and The Arts in Independent Ireland* \(^9\) was invaluable as a guide to the development of institutionalised culture in modern Ireland. To some extent this study has served as a model in terms of incorporating art historiography, Irish studies, the study of folk culture, and popular culture into a unified discourse on the role of the visual in the representation of Irishness between 1849 and 1949. To this end particular attention has been paid to various surveys of the arts in Ireland: periodic assessments of the state of the arts in Ireland as an element of a wider social, economic and political reviews. Key surveys include the *Official Handbook of Saorstat Éireann, Irish Free State*; \(^10\) the influential survey of *Ireland and the Arts* edited by Tim Pat Coogan \(^11\) and published as part of the *Sense of Ireland Festival* in London in 1984, a major and hugely significant review of the contemporary arts in Ireland; Adele Dalsimer’s *Visualizing Ireland: National Identity and the Pictorial Tradition*, London & Boston, Faber and Faber \(^12\) marks the cultural turn in Irish art historiography and the beginning of what might be

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termed the peace dividend in Irish studies. These are supplemented with exhibition catalogues, monographs and reviews. There are other accounts that are referred to in the text. Some are esoteric; the likes of Geoffrey Taylor’s wonderful memoir entitled *The Emerald Isle*.13 Taylor’s account is one of a number of first hand accounts (including John Millington Synge, Paul Henry, and Robert Lynd) which have been favoured over histories in an effort to assemble what amounts to personal testimony of the changes taking place in Ireland during the period under review; evidence of the conflicted sense of Irishness that contextualises everything that was said and done in the cultural and political century that followed the 1845-9 famine and well into the modern era.

There remains one last thing to be said. John Wilson Foster calls on Nietzsche to pose the question ‘Who speaks?’14 I was born in another state, one that started on the far side of the crossroads where my parents lived. As a child I remember my father, a Customs and Excise Officer, drawing up my brother and sisters, six of us in all, in a line across the road and saying “You are now the border”. His father was in the RIC. My mother’s father was active in the IRA until his death in 1947. My father was a member of the Blueshirts as a young man, yet his library contained many underground publications issued by republican groups during the “Troubles.” I never knew how he voted. He was an old fashioned public servant and the secrecy of the ballot was sacrosanct. My mother was a Fine Gaeler, a border Catholic who was utterly opposed to the republican movement. Somehow their allegiances seemed to have passed in the night. I can only assume that my father was radicalised by his experience of working on the border in the Fifties and Sixties. In my mother’s case I can only guess; maybe it was the deep burn of poverty left by a father who was always on the run in the merciless Thirties and Forties. Either way, the past was past and not spoken of even if it was still visible in the shadows - old photographs, an antique police baton in the wardrobe and campaign medals in a drawer. Shush!

Being borderline has been my heritage. We were always on the move between frontiers - borders, ports and airports. We were always from somewhere else. We grew up in the new suburbs - on the line between town and country - with children whose parents were always from somewhere else. I was schooled by the Brothers before the state took over and changed the status of education. I wanted to go to art college but ended up in the civil service. I left the civil service and enrolled in art college as a married man. I trained as a teacher in an art college and my professional career was largely concerned with that line between an indifferent public and an elite arts community. I now manage a contemporary art gallery in a folk theatre oriented mainly towards costume theatre for

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international tourists. It is located in a provincial centre on the western periphery of Europe. My sense of place has always been conditional and culture has always been an unstable element in terms of locating oneself.

So who speaks?
Well, that depends. What is the question?
Who are the Irish? And what has folk got to do with the visual arts anyway?

**Thesis and Themes**

It is proposed that visual imagery was central to the construction of an image of the Irish nation in the political century that began with the end of the 1845-49 Famine and ended with the formal recognition of partition in 1948/1949.\(^\text{15}\) This period is roughly co-terminus with the cultural century that began with Davis’s call for a National Art in 1843\(^\text{16}\) and ended with the establishment of the *Irish Exhibition of Living Art (I.E.L.A.)* in 1943\(^\text{17}\). It could also be called the folk century as interest in folklore \( \text{béaloideas} \) became established and institutionalised in roughly the same period. Indeed, the Folklore Commission of Ireland’s collection concentrates on the period between 1850 and 1950. This is a very broad timeframe with multiple and overlapping contexts and issues that are worthy of independent treatment in their own right. A more specific focus was required and, to some extent, the longer timescale functions as a backdrop to a period of three decades or so, from the 1890s to the 1920s, which are critical to the imagination of Irishness as an element of political nationalism. 1907 emerges as a pivotal date in terms of the visualisation of multiple and competing images of Ireland. The study narrows into a particular focus on developments in visual culture around this time, though their origins in the preceding half-century are examined as well as their role in the representation of Irish Irelandism (Saorstat Éireann). In the process the emphasis shifts from the visual arts to popular culture and specifically, the popular images of Ireland that constitute a visual component of folk culture in the early twentieth century.

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\(^{15}\) The Ireland Act (1949) was introduced by the British Government in response to the Republic of Ireland Act (1948). It acknowledged the fact that the Irish parliament had passed the Republic of Ireland Act (1948), had repealed the External Relations Act (1936) and had ceased to be a part of the Commonwealth. Furthermore it confirmed the role of the Parliament of Northern Ireland in maintaining Northern Ireland’s status within the United Kingdom.

\(^{16}\) Davis, Thomas, 1843, *National Art and Hints for Irish Historical Paintings*, *The Nation*, July 29 and December 2.

\(^{17}\) The *Irish Exhibition of Living Art* was established in 1943 by young artists whose work was rejected by the R.H.A. It was intended to act as a counter to the conservatism of the R. H. A. It is generally regarded as the point where the ‘Free State Artists’ were overtaken by the modernists, even if it was a diluted and conditional (provincial) variant of European trends. As an event it signals the beginning of the end of Irish Ireland.
Image'nation

The study begins with a photographic essay that represents strongly contrasting views of the Irish as a nation, the ‘West’ as photographed by Major Rutledge Fair in the 1890s and the ‘Pale’ as photographed by John J. Clarke almost a decade later. They are linked by a series of photographs of an encounter between these two Irelands – Gaelic (peasant) Ireland and Anglophone (Victorian) Ireland – taken on the Old Head in County Mayo in 1910. The accompanying text develops on the centrality of visual imagery to the construction of an image of the Irish nation as nationalism deserted the middleground and moved inexorably towards separatism and the consolidation, in cultural and political terms, of Irish Ireland. This section argues that not only is it impossible to separate the images from their social, cultural and political contexts, the images themselves are ideological in the way they represent Irishness. As such, the photographs function within a much wider set of symbols that had developed within nationalism since the Young Irelanders. In the era of mechanical reproduction however, photography had captured the real Ireland west of the Shannon and added an additional weapon to the visual armoury of cultural and political nationalism. The first folk images of life in the west of Ireland, the nation in waiting, began to emerge as the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth and Home Rule hung in the balance.

In a Gaol

Central to this thesis is a conflict between folk culture and art, a conflict that functions almost as a cypher for opposed concepts of Irishness that are expressed in specific cultural and political contexts. This aspect of the study has its origins in an exhibition that was shown in Kilmainham Gaol in 1991. In A State was an exhibition of contemporary visual art dealing with the theme of national identity in the context of contemporary political events that challenged accepted notions of nation states in Irish and European contexts. The choice of Kilmainham was provocative and deliberately set up an opposition between tradition / imprisonment (bad) and culture / liberty (good) where heritage was a function of an exclusive and oppressive nationalism. The gaol was used as a metaphor for nationalism as the antithesis of culture. This led me to wonder at the relationship between popular culture and art in Ireland and whether there exist mutually exclusive forms of cultural expression rooted in very different experiences of being Irish. The national question could not be ignored. Yet this is not about the ‘North.’ This was about fundamental aspects of cultural life in Ireland that have become problematic in post-colonial contexts in which the North is just one other factor. The key issue here was whether distinct cultural systems have historically competed for legitimacy and whether, specifically, art and tradition are incompatible in terms of a nationalist construction of Irishness: whether any engagement with traditional Ireland would, inevitably,
exclude the visual arts. This raised a whole series of interconnected issues relating to the arts in Ireland between 1849 and 1949.

**Art and the Irishness of Irish Art**

Art gets caught between Anglophone-Ireland and Irish-Ireland, raising the question as to whether one can even speak of an Irish art. This section considers the proposition that an engagement with traditional Ireland excludes the visual arts or pictorial record as anything other than a residue of colonialism, the product of an elite culture in conflict with popular culture in the rural heartlands of Ireland. This requires further consideration of the cultural and political circumstance of art production in Ireland in the nineteenth century.

**Art in Ireland in the Nineteenth Century**

Art historiography in Ireland is tends to with the search for an Irish art and an artist who is entitled to claim the title of 'First Irish Painter.' The standard trajectory is the transition from colonial systems into the Anglo-Irish period and on to a nationalistic art in Ireland as a prelude to the re-emergence of an Irish modernism - with the relative value of each phase measured against the standard of international modernism. From 1850s on the agenda was set by Davis’s call for the development of an Irish Schools of painting, a call which went unanswered as Irish art remained as British as any of the art produced in provincial centres like Manchester, Liverpool or Edinburgh. Its political, stylistic and commercial centre was London. A key text here is Cyril Barret's seminal study of the Irishness of Irish Victorian Art. The treatment of Irish subjects tended to reflect Anglo-Saxon attitudes to the native Irish, reinforcing the Anglo-Saxon hegemony and ignoring social and political realities in favour of the picturesque treatment of the peasantry. This began to change as London yielded to Paris as the main attraction for Irish born artists and the revivals of the 1890s began to influence the visual arts. Conventional genre subject matter modified stylistically by the influence of school of Paris connected with the romanticism of Synge in the work of Paul Henry and furnished the nationalists with a Realism that could be claimed as distinctly Irish.

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Revival

The Gaelic Cultural Revival and the Irish Literary Revival failed to capitalise on the emergence, however tentative, of a visual arts practice that was recognisably Irish. The Gaelic League was more concerned with the restoration of Gaelic civilisation through the recovery of medieval precedents. The literary revival was based on the recovery and translation by an Anglo-Irish elite of an ancient tradition of storytelling and folklore in a native language. The Gaelic Revival was institutionalised in an Irish state that was hostile to any artistic activity that did not conform to an exclusive and disabling orthodoxy based on a prescribed and proscribed understanding of the place of culture in the lives of its citizens. The result was the assumption was that the major cultural achievement of this period was a literary revival that was not matched in the visual arts. The legacy is an belief that the Irish, as a nation, have a highly developed literary sense but are visually illiterate and incompetent in terms of the fine arts - Art with a capital A. That may be the reason that the development of the visual arts in Ireland stalled at the point that political nationalism triumphed over Anglo-Irish accommodation. Or it may not be. This is disputed territory and it is necessary to consider different attitudes to the relationship between the state of the arts in Ireland after 1921 and the cultural policies of Saorstáit Éireann | the Irish Free State.

The Politics of Art

Conventional narratives of the arts in Ireland - the transition from regional British, through engagement with the School of Paris, to Irish Realism - needs to be tested. Art historiography has become as problematic as conventional historiography in the wake of revisionism and post-colonial discourses. The pictorial record has become an ideological battleground for art historians of different political hues. Brian McAvera dislikes linear histories which favour state sponsored narratives at the expense of radical analysis. Niamh O'Sullivan is suspicious of oversimplified narratives that support official chronologies and exclude other perspectives, particularly radical republican perspectives. Fintan Cullen believes that art historiography in Ireland is ideologically slanted in favour of nationalist narratives - at the expense of any real engagement with the

contribution to Irish culture of the English in Ireland or the Northern Unionists. The emergence of a
national art, an Irish school of realism lead by Paul Henry, is inextricably linked to the process of
state formation and the consolidation of Irish Ireland in the 1920s. The Irishness of Irish art remains
contested and with that, the validity of the pictorial record as a representation of Irishness. As An
Muircheartach put it: ‘nil scoil pheinteireachta Gaelacha againn fós | we still haven’t a Gaelic
school of painting.’

Art and Politics

The spotlight falls on the newly created Saorsát Éireann | The Irish Free State as the defining
achievement of historic nationalism in Ireland and the perception that it was hostile to art and
culture: that there was a failure to support the arts which translates into a perception that the ethnic
Irish lack a capacity for anything other than literary expression as an extension of traditional forms
or folk culture. In short, Irish Ireland was a Culture-free zone for all the wrong reasons. The study
considers anecdotal evidence from John Millington Synge and Paul Henry that tends to support this
view. Likewise, the failure of a radical arts agenda proposed by Republicans and the institutional
record of the Cumann na nGaedheal government underlines an attitude to the Irish and their
capacity for visual arts that had become well established by the middle of the twentieth century. Art
was out in the cold, irrelevant to the nationalist project of rehabilitating culture after independence.
A school of painters did emerge and they did enjoy official recognition. Paul Henry emerges as the
first national painter, although Sean Keating was more in line with nationalistic thinking. Paul
Henry’s images of the west of Ireland became synonymous with the aspirations Saorsát Éireann |
Irish Free State but there are very serious questions that needed to be asked about the realism of
Paul Henry RHA.

The Trouble with Henry

There is no avoiding some consideration of the early career and subsequent influence of Paul Henry
RHA in any discussion of the Irishness of Irish Art. During the period of this study Paul Henry
RHA has been completely rehabilitated as the poster boy of a resurgent market in modern Irish art.
His association with the grim orthodoxy of the Saorsát Éireann | Irish Free State and the
conservatism of the art associated with it has been completely erased by an major retrospective in
the National Gallery of Ireland and the declaration by his biographer S. B. Kennedy that ‘PAUL

xiii.
HENRY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT Irish landscape painter of the twentieth century. This section considers Paul Henry’s arrival in Achill and contrasts the work he produced with the social and political reality of the place between 1910 and 1920. The argument centres on Henry’s decision to remove real and angry peasants from his painting and his failure to acknowledge the extent of land agitation in Achill in his memoir of the time he spent there. The depopulated western landscapes that came to represented a rural, self contained and contented Ireland in the 1930s were a fiction which epitomised the disconnection between the art of the Irish Free State and the social and political realities of life in the west of Ireland. Paul Henry’s paintings of the west of Ireland do not represent the people of the west. Instead his paintings mark the difference between the artist and the peasant, between the RHA and the common people of the west of Ireland. It was their language, their stories, their music, song and dance that would dominate the cultural policies of the new state and the antagonism towards art as the preserve of the old elite would ensure that Paul Henry RHA could only conclude that the Irish, as a nation, had some sort of allergy to the arts. The failure of the ‘new’ Ireland to embrace modern art in the early 1920s signals the eclipse (in terms of cultural institutions and the political support that animates them) of Anglo Ireland by Irish Ireland. The era of the peasant was at hand. Paul Henry’s idea of an artistic revival driven by Anglo-French modernism was no match for the Irish language, culture, music and sport of Douglas Hyde and the Gaelic League. The difference in emphases between Ireland imagined by the proponent of the Literary Revival and the Gaelic Cultural Revival would remain one of the key dynamics in the cultural life of the new state. It would echo all the down to Kilmainham Gaol in 1991 and the stark contrast between the capacity for folk song and art to resonate with a site so inscribed with the birth pangs of the Nation.

Tradition

The struggle between Anglo Ireland and Irish Ireland set up a conflict between Anglophone and Gaelic culture that would have repercussion for the arts and culture in Ireland throughout the twentieth century. The victory of Irish Ireland after independence was reversed in the 1960s but the fault-line between Art and Gaelic culture remained. Indeed, ‘Art’ and ‘Tradition’ became opposed as ‘modern’ Ireland set about distinguishing itself from ‘traditional’ Ireland in the wake of T. K.

26 At the launch of Radio 2RN on 1 January 1926 Douglas Hyde summed up the prevailing attitude when he declared that ‘Éire is standing on her own two feet; the Irish language being one and her culture music and sport being the other’ See Kennedy, Brian P., 1990, Dreams and Responsibilities, The State and The Arts in Independent Ireland, Dublin, The Arts Council, p. 16-17. See the discussion on Governing the Free State, Government Policies on Art, pp 110 - 113.
Whitaker’s *Programme for Economic Expansion.*\(^{27}\) Clearly, there needed to be clarity around key words like ‘tradition’, ‘folk’ and ‘art’ and there needed to be some consideration of the complex intersections of tradition with folk culture on the one hand and art on the other. What emerges is the need for a radical rethink of the nature of tradition, folk and art as articulated with ‘Irish’ and ‘National.’ This section deals with the split in the 1960s between the Arts Council and Conradh na Gaeilge, the Gaelic League Mark III, over the place of folk culture in modern Ireland. This provides the pretext for an exploration of the meaning of ‘tradition’ and its relationship to ‘art.’

‘Tradition’ in contemporary Ireland was the end result of historical, social and economic forces reshaping the Irish people’s sense of Irishness as expressed in the dance, music and song of rural Gaelic Ireland. There is a political dimension that cannot be ignored. Authenticity and legitimacy are two sides of the one coin. The issue of legitimacy is inextricably linked to this is the role of the state in area of culture. *Saorstat Éireann* | The Irish Free State withheld its support from the arts in favour of Ireland’s unique tradition in the Irish language, culture, music and sport. The rejection of O’Riada by the Arts Council, a statutory organisation operating with the full authority of the state, is as significant in cultural terms as the publication of the *Programme for Economic Expansion* was in economic terms. It was ended of the hegemony enjoyed by Irish Ireland but this did not alter the fact that art and tradition remained locked in a struggle for legitimacy or that they were seen as mutually exclusive and historically inscribed expressions of Irishness. The opposition of art and tradition (the Irish language, culture, music and sport) does beg the question posed by Paul Henry in 1951: are ‘The Irish’ allergic to art? Was there no art at all associated with Traditional Ireland? In order to test this it was necessary to consider whether there was ever a visual component in the lives of the ethnic Irish or if there was any evidence of a capacity for the visual arts in folk culture as it developed in Ireland after ‘The Famine.’

**Folk**

Folk studies, comprising the collection of folklore and evidence of the material conditions of ordinary people in Ireland in the nineteenth century, was of interest in that it offered the possibility of evidence of an expressive visual culture that existed outside of the ruling elite (the royal societies based in Dublin). This turned out to be something of a dead end: what has been collected is biased in favour of orally transmitted native knowledge: folklore, beliefs and customs related to work in the home and on the land - the Danish model as it were. Nineteenth century painting is a resource

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\(^{27}\) *Programme for Economic Expansion* was a white paper published by the Government on 11 November, 1958. It was based previous papers presented to government by Whitaker as Secretary of the Department of Finance.
that is increasingly being used to fill the gaps in our understanding of what is now referred to as material culture in rural Ireland. It is of limited use in determining the existence of a visual equivalent to the music of the ethnic Irish. It is difficult to get around the assumption that recorded folk culture is devoid of an expressive visual component or folk art. However, very little work has been done in this area and it was not possible to test this within the scope of this study. Nevertheless the potential for folk art is considered in the light of John Millington Synge’s observations of life on Inis meáin in the 1890s; Paul Henry’s experiences in Achill during the second decade of the twentieth century; the development of a school of painters on Tory Island in the 1970s and a number of contemporary artists whose work reflects a distinctly folk attitude.

This section concludes that there is evidence of visuality in Irish folk culture, that the primary markers of life in the west of Ireland were visual, that economic factors impeded the development of this innate visuality into a pictorial tradition or folk art, and that the idea that the ethnic Irish lacked a capacity for fine art was a discredited discourse. This visuality provided the foundation for the representation of the Irish Nation in schematic imagery nationalists. This was not folklore in the strict sense of the word but these were folk images nonetheless. Current definitions of folklore and life in Ireland were inadequate in this context. What was needed was a radical approach to the idea of ‘folk,’ one that addressed the concept of a folk consciousness in elite culture and its role political nationalism from the 1840s.

Folk Strategies

The development of a folk consciousness emerged as an important factor in defining a sense of Irishness in the nineteenth-century. This had an important influence on visual culture and the representation of nationalist ideologies well into the twentieth-century. The Young Irelanders used folk culture to foster the concept of an Irish Nation and counter Anglo-Saxon hegemony. George Petrie was a key figure. He was part of the Young Irelander movement that provided nationalists with a range of symbolic devices that would represent ‘The Irish Nation’ in popular culture - the Round Tower, the Harp, the Wolfhound, the Shamrock and the figure of Hibernia. The iconography of the Young Irelanders was regarded by historians like Jeanne Sheehy as having vulgarised Celtic and mediaeval art. It definitely was not part of the pictorial record as assembled by connoisseurs of the Fine Arts. Yet the legacy of the Young Irelanders was a tradition of nationalist iconography within popular culture. In the 1890s this connected with the industrialisation of photography to radically alter the way the Irish Nation would be represented. Photographs of ‘West’ had begun to

circulate widely and in 1902 changes in Post Office regulations combined improved reprographic technology to produce a craze for postcards that lasted until the outbreak of the First World War. A postcard of a young woman photographing the lakes of Killarney decorated with a border of Young Irelander origin (Fig. 5.6) exemplified this development but millions of postcards of scenes of Irish life in the west of Ireland were produced between 1902 and 1914. A new type of folk imagery had been invented. This was not art as we know it and although it represented a revolution in the representation of Irishness, the postcard has remained invisible in terms of a pictorial record defined by art historians and folklorists.

Figure 2. *Erin Go Brath*. postcard, c. 1907.

A broader understanding of visual imagery and the way it functions in social, cultural and political contexts was needed. The study had to move beyond conventional art historiography as well as conventional approaches to folklore and life. The shift from the connoisseurial basis of traditional art historiography to the discursive complexity of cultural theory brings with it an understanding that the pictorial record that is constituted by the fine arts in only one form of representation. There are many others. Likewise, the developing interest in folklore and folklife as a counter-hegemonic needs to be considered. Some definition is needed here. O’Giollain offers

a rough distinction (that) can be established between folklore and folklife, the former tended to encompass the more intangible aspects of agrarian popular culture – beliefs, narratives, music, customs – and the latter the more tangible aspects – material culture specifically even
if this went against the usage in Sweden where the term was invented. Romantic nationalism tended to identify the former with earlier, often mediaeval, elite traditions, thus allowing the establishment of a great historical depth or continuity to the nation. Folklife, then, almost by default, dealt with the more obviously prosaic aspects of rural life and was usually less ideologically productive and not as likely (as folklore) to be carried on flights of Romantic fancy.²⁹

The images of Ireland that emerged from the 1890s onwards had to be seen in terms of their embeddedness in cultural nationalism, as part of the folk strategies of political nationalism. In this context it was possible to argue that these mass-produced images of the ways of the Irish peasant constituted a visual component of folk culture. Central to this argument is the appropriation and translation of aspects of the cultural lives of the common people by cultural and political elites in pursuit of political objectives - such as the achievement of a cultural nation in the absence of the achievement of Home Rule. The first photographs of life in the west were taken and translated into images of Gaelic Ireland, the nation in waiting (Fig. 5.9). These images illustrated Douglas Hyde’s clarion call for the de-anglicisation of Ireland. The development of the popular press in the nineteenth century and the advent of the postcard allowed these images to enter popular culture as folk images of Ireland in tune with Thomas Davis’s ‘A Nation Once Again.’

Into the West

Photography transformed the representation of Ireland and Irishness in the first decade of the twentieth century - in the last years of empire, half way between the Great Famine and the declaration of the Republic and in the giddy beginnings of the age of mechanical reproduction and mass communication. This section considered this topic in two parts. The first treated the work of Robert J. Welch as a case study in the translation of colonial/ethnographic images of the Irish peasant into a new type of folk imagery. Welch was a collector, amateur field scientist and pioneering photographer. His practice was complex, embracing field science, commercial work for the industrialists of Belfast, the tourist industry and documentation of the work of the Congested Districts Board. Welch was of interest because of his documentation of residual peasant communities in the west of Ireland and the way these images achieved a second life in representing the ‘real’ Ireland in the early twentieth century and have remained central to the folklore of the ‘real’ Ireland to this day.

Figure 3. Cutting Turf, postcard, (Maggie Blanck Collection, 10504r.jpeg)

Figure 4. Cutting Turf, postcard c. 1906. (Maggie Blanck Collection, OPC8.jpeg)
The second part places Welch’s work in the context of travel guides produced by travel writers who went ‘West’ in search of the ‘real thing.’ Topographical/travel guides to Ireland underwent significant change in the early 1900s when publishers began to incorporate photography as a form of illustration. The American ‘tourist’ Samuel G. Bayne used a photograph of an Irish man in ‘Real Ould Style’30 - a top hat, long coat, waistcoat, knee breeches and brogues - as a frontispiece for his account of his travels through Donegal and Connamara on a jaunting car.31 He titled it ‘The Real Thing’ (see Chapter 7) in reference to ‘the Irish’ who lived along the western seaboard, a primitive society located beyond the ordered towns and tidy farms of Victorian Ireland. This was the hidden Ireland and the object of fascination to people like Bayne and his readers. As the tide of opinion turned in Irish Ireland, this became the source of inspiration for a new image of the nation. A young writer who had travelled from Paris to the Aran Islands and took some photographs with a second hand camera changed everything. John Millington Synge’s photographs of Aran were the first from a nationalist perspective. They mark the end of ethnography and provide the source for one of the great folk images of the early twentieth century - Jack B. Yeats’s iconic drawing of An Island Man.32

Conclusion: The Real Thing

Visual imagery was central to the imagination of the nation from 1850 to 1950, not as art, folk art or embedded in the material culture of the west of Ireland peasant. This folk imagination was expressed in the ephemera of cultural nationalism and was to be found in the popular pictorial tradition that developed beyond the Pale and institutions like the Royal Hibernian Academy. The photographic postcard was the ultimate example of this tradition. Its emergence from the ethnographic representation of ‘The Irish’ in the nineteenth century is treated as a search for the ‘real thing’ in the rerepresentation of the ‘Hidden Ireland.’ It is presented as a photographic essay that mimics the construction of meaning by the juxtaposition of images and the translation of ethnographic images of the ethnic Irish into folk images of the Nation.

30 Produced by Lawrence and Company, the photograph is captioned ‘Real Ould Style’ and ‘Himself.’
32 An Island Man was one of the illustrations produced by Jack B. Yeats for Synge’s The Aran Islands which was published in 1907. The original is in the collection of the Model Niland Gallery, Sligo.
CHAPTER 1

IMAGE’NATION

Section I: Image’nation, a photo essay.

18
Figure 1.2  Family gathered outside stone cottage, c. 1892 (Major Rutledge Fair, Tuke 5, NPA/NLI).

Figure 1.3  Nurse visiting a family, Arranmore, Co. Donegal, c. 1906 (CDB55 NPA/NLI).
Figure 1.4 Women washing clothes, c. 1892 (Major Ruttledge Fair, Tuke 3, NPA/NLI).

Figure 1.5 A young woman Carrying dung, young boy in foreground, c. 1892 (Major Ruttledge Fair, Tuke 13, NPA/NLI).
Figure 1.6  A woman collecting fish, c. 1892 (Major Ruttledge Fair, Tuke 4, NPA/NLI).

Figure 1.7  A young woman holding her child, man in foreground, c. 1892 (Major Ruttledge Fair, Tuke 12, NPA/NLI).
Figure 1.8  People gathered at stone wall c. 1892 (Major Rutledge Fair, Tuke 7, NPA/NLI).

Figure 1.9  Man, woman and children outside a thatched cottage, (CDB99, NPA/NLI).
Figure 1.10 Members of the Congested Districts Board surrounded by locals, c. 1906 (CDB94, NPA/NLI).

Figure 1.11 Three gentlemen eating breakfast, (John J. Clarke, Clar 45, NPA/NLI).

Figure 1.12 Man with driver riding jaunting car, (John J. Clarke, Clar 81, NPA/NLI).
Figure 1.13 Members of the Congested Districts Board receiving directions from a local woman, 1906 (CDB95, NPA/NLI).

Figure 1.14 Members of the Congested Districts Board, 1906 (CDB93, NPA/NLI).
Figure 1.15  A group of people at the Great Exhibition, Herbert Park, 1907 (John J. Clarke, Clar 66, NPA/NLI)
Figure 1.16  Group of children standing on Bray promenade with two women and one man, (John J. Clarke, Clar 28, NPA/NLI).
Figure 1.17 Woman with bicycle, (John J. Clarke, Clar 75, NPA/NLI).

Figure 1.18 Man and woman beside Silbey’s Stationery Shop, Grafton St., (John J. Clarke, Clar 104, NPA/NLI).
Figure 1.19  Woman and girl looking at rock pool, possibly Laytown strand, (John J. Clarke, Clar 115, NPA/NLI).

Figure 1.20  Two women walking with a perambulator, (John J. Clarke, Clar 76, NPA/NLI).
Figure 1.21  Man with umbrella at junction of Nassau St, Grafton St and Suffolk St., (John J. Clarke, Clar 726, NPA/NLI).

Figure 1.22  Woman with birdcage at junction of Grafton St. and South King St. (John J. Clarke, Clar 58, NPA/NLI).
SECTION II: IMAGE’NATION.

image’nation (imagi’nation) v.t., & n. v.t the search for an image of Ireland, 1849 to 1949. 2. f. art, folk culture and the rise of nationalism from the end of the Great Famine to the Ireland Act of 1949. [ME f. OF, f. L imago –inis + ME f. OF f. L natio –ionis]

Visual imagery was central to the construction of an image of the Irish nation in the cultural and political century that emerged in the aftermath of the famine of 1845-49. Each aspect of the century has its own particular dynamic: the political progression from moderate and constitutional nationalism to separatism and a military struggle for independence; the cultural decline of the Ascendancy and the attempted compromise between Anglophone and Gaelic-Ireland followed by Saotstát Éireann | Irish Free State and the rise of Irish-Ireland with its exclusive brand of cultural nationalism derived from folk traditions and defined by the Irish language and Catholicism. What emerges is an unstable and contested idea of Irishness that is expressed in a range of cultural and political contexts - a series of hegemonic and anti-hegemonic strategies that had the effect of opposing the folk traditions of the Gael and the art and language of Anglophone-Ireland in the struggle for cultural and political legitimacy. As a result the role of art in the construction of a nationalist idea of Irishness has been downgraded. This has led to the role of the visual image in Irish nationalism being significantly overlooked. It is my contention that visual imagery was central to the representation of Irish nationalism, that the opposition between folk traditions and the visual arts is not as total or as definite as the conflict between Anglo-Ireland and Irish Ireland would suggest and that this is the result on an inherent instability in the meaning of Irishness.

1 The Irish

‘Who are the Irish’ was the question posed by John Wilson Foster in Colonial Consequences. He meant it in the sense of an ethnic identity rather than residence in a state or a territory defined by geography. Foster charts different phases in which ethnicity impacts upon the definition of Irishness as an expression of identity: from the Irish Mark I as represented by from Berkeley to the Irish Mark V as characterised by Corkery. Foster concludes that the “winning” definition of the term is the version in which Irish is understood as being ‘synonymous with the Gaelic language (even if forgotten), aboriginal ethnicity, and the Roman Catholic religion,’ the version associated with Corkery and Irish-Ireland. It is a negative definition from the perspective of an excluded Northern

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Protestant whose entitlement to Irishness is foregrounded in the rejection by Irish nationalists of an Anglo-Irish understanding of shared Irishness. During the Literary Revival the Romantic Nationalists had extolled the virtue of the peasant, fabricating the image of the mystical, rooted peasant while choosing to ignore the less attractive nature of the lowly workaday Catholic, preferring instead to gingerly sidestep the Catholic church in an effort to establish a role and identity for the southern Protestant in a dangerously changing Ireland from 1880 onwards. If anything it was naïve and it was certainly ill-equipped to withstand the force of nationalism in the form of the Irish Mark V - Corkery's 'Hidden Ireland' with its narrow definition of Irishness and automatic disqualification of 'most of the northern Irish as well as the Anglo-Irish.'

S. Ó Buachalla located this version of Irishness in a sense of national identity that began to inspire political life from the late eighteenth-century onwards. In the nineteenth-century this was to become the very cornerstone of cultural and political nationalism. According to this narrative, Irish-Ireland emerged in the late nineteenth-century as a term to represent a multi-dimensional concept that began to manifest itself across a wide range of political, cultural, artistic and economic movements. These included The Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language (1876), the Gaelic Union (1880), the Gaelic Athletic Association (1884), the Gaelic League (1893), Horace Plunkett’s co-operative movement and the Land League (1879). Douglas Hyde was involved in founding a number of these movements:

Philosophically, the concept of ‘Irish Ireland’ owed much to Thomas Davis and the Young Irelanders of the 1840s and the influence of their paper ‘The Nation’. The immediate historical source may best be traced to the address of Douglas Hyde in 1892 on ‘The necessity of de-Anglicising Ireland’; this was the clarion call which convinced many of that generation of the need to promote a sense of separateness from England.

Douglas Hyde and John O’Leary had laid the foundations for a culturally defined Irish-Ireland in the aftermath of Parnell’s death in 1891. In the political vacuum that followed the aspirations to a national consciousness moved from the political arena and into the sphere of culture. The Irish nation would be defined culturally rather than politically. The emphasis was firmly upon the revival of the Irish language and the creation of a distinctively Irish culture. This was particularly evident in Davis’s call for a national art. This had preceded Hyde’s call for the de-Anglicisation of Ireland

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34 Ibid. p. 254.
and was rooted in an earlier variant of cultural nationalism strongly influenced and shaped by Celticism. Celticism is defined by L. P. Curtis Jr. in *Anglo-Saxons and Celts* as an ‘ethnocentric nationalism with a strong measure of race consciousness which many Irishmen used to arm themselves against Anglo-Saxon claims of cultural and racial superiority’... According to Curtis, ‘Celticism’ developed in reaction to ‘Anglo-Saxonism’, a system of texts about and images of the Celt which repressed by representation’...  

Douglas Hyde challenged this in his 1892 lecture which he delivered as a manifesto to the National Literary Society in November 1892. ‘The Necessity of De-Anglicising Ireland’ countered Anglo-Saxonism with a celebration of native language and culture. The “down side” of Celticism was provided by Matthew Arnold whose analysis of Celtic culture, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, concluded that the sentimental Celts were politically incompetent and therefore in need of governance by the less imaginative but capable Anglo-Saxons. Douglas Hyde moved beyond such paradoxes and stated the case for Irish-Ireland in much more unequivocal terms. But his arguments were, as J. W. Foster concludes, ill equipped to withstand the force of nationalism as it moved inexorably toward separatism and insurrection. Douglas Hyde served as President of the Gaelic League until 1915, when he resigned after its constitution was altered to include political independence as a primary aim. This was the tipping point between cultural nationalism and republican separatism. The controversy over Canon James Hannay had eroded Protestant support for the League but the virtual takeover of the organisation by the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and the outspoken Irish Ireland attitude of the new president Sean Ua O’Ceallaigh mark the point where nationalism contracted and turned to confront Anglophone Ireland. Joep Leersen’s analysis of the growth of Irish identity in literary expression over five centuries provides a useful summary of both attitudes:  

When Irish nationalism took shape as a separatist ideology in the nineteenth century, it came to rely increasingly on the principle that Ireland, as a country, had a separate cultural individuality, un-English and un-British, and that as such Ireland could not be merged into a United Kingdom. The cultural self-definition that played such an important role in national self-definition was a collective self-imagery of relatively recent vintage; it invoked the Gaelic roots of the country, the Catholicism and the folkways of the peasantry, the Protestantism and benevolent sense of affiliation of the upper classes. Crucially, Ireland was seen as a country... 

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38 Matthew, Arnold, 1886, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*.


where social divisions coincided with ethnic and religious differences, but where, ideally, both halves of the population could subscribe to a joint territoriality (the island of Ireland) and a joint sense that this territory was heir to a radically non-English cultural antiquity.

The differences were insurmountable. Whatever chance there was of an historic accord between these two Irelands, it was sundered as moderate cultural nationalism polarised and the middle ground evaporated. Irish Ireland defined itself in opposition to England and its colonial apparatus in Ireland. It was determined to seize political power on the strength of a nationalist cultural manifesto.

John Wilson Foster regards this is as the real issue in terms of defining Irishness. The question 'Who are the Irish?' is inseparable from the question of power and the exercise of power is expressed as ideology - competing ideologies masquerading as cultural differences expressed in the construction, or imagination, of a sense of self as the basis of nationhood. The consolidation of the Union in Ireland had revealed the extent of the Anglo-Saxon hegemony. The nationalists needed to counter the loss of power with the assertion of unifying symbols, images that spoke of a nation with a long history of civilisation rather than the recalcitrant rabble of Anglo-Saxon propaganda. George Petrie was instrumental in creating an iconography of Gaelic Ireland that was used to great effect by the Young Irelanders in the promotion of Romantic nationalism. Jeanne Sheehy identifies two trends in applied arts production that reveal the extent of the influence of a Celtic revival and growing nationalist sentiment on the arts and the popular imagination:

In all of this production, both in the fine and the applied arts, two kinds of motif are discernible, though sometimes they are combined. On the one hand there is the revival of ancient Celtic art, evident in the use of interlace designs and the revival of jewellery and architecture. On the other hand are the national emblems: the shamrock, harp, wolfhound, Hibernia, some of which date from the late 18th century. The round tower is common to both categories. In the course of the century antiquarian motifs became increasingly popular, so that eventually Celtic interlace, high crosses and the Tara Brooch joined the harp and the shamrock as popular devices.41

Petrie had given the nationalists a set of symbols that defined nationhood. The propagandists in The Nation adopted the symbols as evidence of a past and of a future. Daniel O'Connell was buried under a round tower designed by Petrie. Petrie's real achievement, however, was to underpin all of this with a legitimacy that was hard won in a bitter culture war with the Anglo-Saxons. His conflict with the 'romantic antiquarians led by Henry O'Brien and Charles Vallancey and others42 over the

Figure 1.24. O’Meara’s Irish House, Dublin.
function of Irish round towers marks the starting point of modern Irish archaeology and, in the process, establishes the entitlement of the Irish to claim civilisation. The only thing that mattered was a symbolic revival of the Irish nation. When the Irish were on their knees, pauperised and dying in the ditches, Petrie had revealed another ancient Ireland. ‘National’ became a prefix of distinction which connoted nationhood founded on a distinct Irish identity. Present degradation was mitigated by past glories and the evidence of a capacity for Civilisation on a grand scale was publicised in *The Nation*. The Young Irelanders may have been the propagandists for Romantic Ireland but it was Petrie who defined it in visual terms. This was insinuated into wider image systems that operated at the end of the nineteenth-century:

Nostalgia for Ireland’s medieval past was reinforced by a European tendency to look to the middle ages for style and subject matter, the basis for the Gothic and allied revivals. There was also interest in the exotic products of the empire fed by the international trade shows and greater ethnographic interest or, plainly put, curiosity in colonial subjects in Africa and the Middle East and, to a lesser extent, on the margins of Europe; in Brittany, Scotland and the West of Ireland. This makes it difficult to decide, in the case of Irish artists (principally Maclise, Burton, Foley, Moore, Hogan), to what extent we are dealing with patriotic fervour and to what extent fashionable archaeological or sociological interest, or even a taste for picturesque peasants and a distaste for urban industrial society.

Petrie was much closer to patriotic fervour than either nostalgia or the picturesque and, although he may be regarded as peripheral to the development of art in Ireland in the nineteenth-century, his influence on the visualisation of Irishness was profound. He had revealed another Ireland, situated far beyond the Pale and he had provided nationalists with a visual language to describe it. The extent to which this had penetrated popular consciousness by the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of Irish-Ireland can be seen in the masterpiece of popular nationalism, the building that was the Ireland House in Dublin (Figure 1.28)

2 Into the West

To a certain extent Petrie’s influence on visual imagery has remained unnoticed because of the populism of the Young Ireland project and the fact that its impact was felt in primarily popular culture and the applied arts. However his influence was to prove significant in literature. His description of the unspoiled native of Aran persuaded a new generation of Romantics to go West in search of an Ireland that offered an alternative to capitalist materialism and satisfied the Romantic Nationalists’ fascination with the image of the mystical, rooted peasant that was evident during

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Literary Revival. Among them was John Millington Synge. Petrie was a particular influence on Synge. Synge had read his account of the ‘Araners’ before he made his first trip to the Aran Islands in 1898. In 1907 Synge shocked the nation with his image of life in the West as presented on the stage of the Abbey Theatre. This was a turning point. It was the culmination of the romantic literary tradition and its love affair with the Irish peasant but the backlash against The Playboy of The Western World reflected a change in Irish nationalism and the way it would or could be expressed. Nationalist culture had begun to contract around a narrower understanding of what it meant to be Irish. Within a few years Synge’s treatment of the clergy would be reason enough to cancel a performance of The Tinker’s Wedding in Dublin for fear of another round of “The Playboy Riots”. The Literary Revival was in the process of being eclipsed by the Gaelic Cultural Revival. Terence Browne argues that the stated aim of national revival had, within it, the objective of a culturally exclusive Ireland and a programme of completing the revolution by removing all traces of the English and Anglo-Irish and their culture. The person who would manifest this version of Ireland and the Irish was Daniel Corkery:

Here hinted then, what the historians scanted; and scanting the soul and the spirit of the people, what of that people have they profitably to speak? But history has belied the historians, for that people, if they were but a mob had died, and their nationality had died with them: instead of which that nationality is vigorous today, not only at home, but in many lands abroad – “translated, passed from the grave.”

Corkery, like Petrie, looked to the remnants of Gaelic culture to re-construct an image of the Irish and legitimise a very particular perspective on the nation. His study of Irish poetry and culture in Munster in the eighteenth-century was the basis for his enduring definition of Irish Ireland as rural, Gaelic speaking and Catholic. John Wilson Foster has conceded that this is the winning definition of Irishness but his argument is a prelude to a case for Irish-Ireland as the denial of an Anglophone, Protestant Ireland that valued a political union with England in the context of a United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland but was no less entitled to call itself Irish for all that.

For the purpose of this study I have attempted to locate a definition of Irishness in a series of unstable ideological constructs that emerged after the 1845-9 famine and became consolidated in the political and cultural conflict that follows, thereby providing a context for a study of the role of

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the visual in the construction of identity in Ireland during this period. In the nineteenth-century the romantic Nationalists sought meaning in the remnants of Gaelic culture. The Young Irelanders translated this into a series of popular devices that continue to define the nationalism of manifest destiny. Irish-Ireland underpinned this with a Catholic ethos and enforced a rigorous and exclusive cultural orthodoxy based on language and traditional forms of literature and music. Along the way the Anglo-Irish Romantics had attempted to engage with the Nationalists and achieve a heterogeneous and inclusive sense of Irishness. They failed culturally and politically. Yet their legacy is one of the defining elements of this study. Art was inextricably linked to Protestant Ireland and the Anglicised culture associated with it. The separatist imperative was to create an entirely new art as Irish Ireland, a nation once again, sought to define itself in the reconstructed tradition of folklore, literature, music, song and dance. It is at the point that distinctive systems of imagination and representation emerge, one looking to the east and the other looking to the west.

Petrie and the nationalists of O'Connellite Ireland had developed a symbolic system based on archaeological and folkloric precedents. The emphasis had always been on the elite culture of ancient Ireland that contradicted the degraded reality of the Irish peasant as the rationale for Anglo-Saxon dominion. From the 1890's onwards this changed and the peasant became the central motif of nationalist iconography.\(^{48}\) The West of Ireland had become visible as the popular media's interest in distress and the land war had combined with developing field sciences and the growth in tourism along improved communications network. The new technology of photography facilitated objective documentation of the social and economic conditions in the West, located the west as a place apart and provided the material for the construction of an image of the west in the networks of production, distribution and consumption of visual images that were beginning to define the age of mechanical reproduction.

All eyes were on the west of Ireland and the people who lived there. These were the real Irish and they represented very different things to Nationalists and Unionists. Making sense of Ireland meant going West and confronting the peasants. In 1905 the artist Jack B Yeats and the writer John Millington Synge were asked to do just that by the editor of the Manchester Guardian. Their job was to report on conditions in Connemara, Mayo and Donegal. Their illustrated accounts of life in

Figure 1.25 (a). Jack B. Yeats, Near Castelloe, 1905.

Figure 1.25 (b). Jack B. Yeats, Relief Works, 1905.
the Congested Districts of Connemara and Mayo were published in the Manchester Guardian in 1905 (Figure 1.29). Around the same time members of the Congested Districts Board visited the Old Head near Louisburgh in County Mayo (Figure 1.14 and 1.18). Two very different images of Ireland emerge or, to put it another way, two very different approaches to constructing an image of the Irish emerge. One is a nationalist view supported by a radical journal opposed to the social and economic policies of the British Government in Ireland. The other is the British Government’s view of the Irish that is its own justification of its policies: the alleviation of endemic distress in the west of Ireland as a rationale for the social and economic policies of the British Government in Ireland. And it is here, in the west, in this geography of destitution, the last bastion of the Gael, that the study concentrates. Defining Irishness is necessarily a confrontation with peasant Ireland and one of the defining images of this period is a photograph taken of the members of the Congested Districts Board during a visit to the West (Figure 1.17).

3 A Photograph of Ireland

Figure 1.17: ‘Members of the Congested Districts Board receiving directions from a local woman c. 1906 (CDB 95, NPA/NLI)’ or ‘CDB 95’ for short depicts members of the Congested Districts Board (C.D.B.) on a tour of inspection in County Mayo around 1906 or 1907. The photographer is unknown. The members have alighted from their jaunting car and are talking to a woman by the side of the road. The woman is giving directions. She is a native, dressed in the clothes of the west of Ireland peasantry and, typically, she is carrying a large wicker basket full of turf on her back. The photograph is one of a series that document the visit by the C.D.B. to the Old Head near Louisburgh in the west of the county. Other photographs show the members with a gathering of local people including the local clergy. They are typical of the photographs taken of any outing by a photographer working for a client in that they are intended to demonstrate the members at work “in the field.”

The C.D.B was established by the Land Act of 1891 following the visit by Arthur J. Balfour, Chief Secretary For Ireland, to the west in the previous year. There were 84 districts along the western

50 It has been attributed to the photographer Robert J Welch (1859 -1936) who worked for the C.D.B. from 1891 to 1923 and is responsible for 40 of the 105 photographs in the C.D.B. archive in the National Photographic Archive. There is no record of it in the Welch Collection in the Ulster Museum in Belfast so the attribution cannot be confirmed.
coast identified as being congested.\textsuperscript{51} Francis S. Sheridan, writing in 1915, describes the appellation as ‘being rather a misnomer’ in terms of the districts identified as congested:

The term “congested districts” was not applied because the land is thickly populated and overcrowded. On the contrary, the density of the population is very low, being only 89 persons per square mile as compared with 134 for all Ireland. The districts were first called ‘congested’ by those mistaken philanthropists who recommended emigration of the inhabitants rather than the development of local resources and possibilities.\textsuperscript{52}

Chief among the mistaken were the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Arthur J. Balfour. In a wonderful piece of political inversion Balfour stated that ‘The general impression left upon the casual traveller is that you are dealing with a population that is not congested in the sense of being crowded, but being congested by not being able to draw from their holdings a safe and sufficient livelihood for them and their children.’\textsuperscript{53} Balfour’s verbal acrobatics should not be exaggerated or misinterpreted. Congestion was commonly used as shorthand for social conditions in overcrowded slums in the East End of London and other cities in England - it had the same currency that ‘disadvantaged’ had in the 1980s. In public administration systems, the term migrated from one residuum to another and Balfour’s reasoning is a clumsy attempt to justify the use of an inappropriate label. The strategy of alleviating distress in the west of Ireland was essentially no different from that adopted to deal with overcrowded slums in England. Charles Booth had surveyed the poverty of the East End in 1889\textsuperscript{54} and when Balfour was put under pressure to do something about the social and economic conditions in the west of Ireland\textsuperscript{55} the same procedures were adapted to deal with the peasant residuum living there. A survey of conditions was undertaken. The research was ‘minute,’ scientific baselines were established before the work of material and moral salvation could proceed. Reports from the districts are peppered with references to fecklessness, slovenly work and the profligate nature of the

\textsuperscript{51} On the basis that more than 20% of the population lived in Electoral Divisions where the total ratable value divided by the population was less than £1 10s per person.

\textsuperscript{52} Sheridan, Francis S., 1915, The “Congested Districts” and the work of the Congested Districts Board by Barrister At law, Chief Clerk to the Congested District Board, in Morrissey, James, 2001, On the Verge Of Want, Dublin, Crannóg Books, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. In a speech delivered by Balfour in Liverpool in November, 1890.

\textsuperscript{54} See Gillian, Rose, 2001, Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, SAGE Publications, p. 154: Booth ‘used 34 Board inspectors (the officials responsible for enforcing attendance at school) to survey the income of every house in the East End. He then calculated how many people were living in poverty and mapped their location. The survey was seen as scientific in a number of ways. First, its coverage was more or less complete (456,877 people were included according to Booth’s figures). Second, its coverage was seen as complete in terms of its understanding, and here the visual effect of the map was crucial: the map seemed to lay the East End bare to scientific gaze that penetrated what others described as its darkest recesses. Third, Booth’s survey and the map classified its subjects in ways that were central to contemporary scientific procedures.

peasant. The moral imperative is omnipresent. Mr. Doran, Inspector, in his Supplementary General Report in March 1893 for the counties of Mayo, Galway, Roscommon, and Sligo warned that the 'conditions of life for the migratory labourer are not conducive to the moral or social advancement of the individual or to the welfare of the country.'\textsuperscript{56} Poverty was seen as a function of individual weakness. Official action was focused on promoting industry as an antidote to fecklessness, improving material existence and preventing moral degeneracy and chaos that might upset the status quo. Gillian Rose regards such policies as being racially motivated. They are based on the sort of moral classification that was central to other Victorian sciences, particularly those that constructed racial differences. The natives of the East End of London were compared to the Natives of Darkest Africa.\textsuperscript{57} From the mid 1880's the East Ender had been constructed as being marked physically and visibly by moral degeneracy and was regarded as an affront to a Victorian sense of social order. It was a view that was articulated within the elites, given scientific veracity through research and mediated through journals and the burgeoning popular media of newspapers, novels, pamphlets, poems and photographs. The same applied to the peasants of the west of Ireland. The Congested Districts laid a framework over the division of Ireland between the Gaelic-Irish and the Anglicised-Ireland, a division that would be used by the to locate the remnants of Gaelic Ireland in the marginalized communities of the western seaboard, the 'geography of destitution' as the areas devastated by the 1845-9 famine have been aptly described by Donnelly.\textsuperscript{58} The Congested Districts Board’s inspectors, mapped, parsed and analysed these communities and in the process created a collective image of the Irish peasant. The people doing the documentation were Irish as well. But they were different. They were Victorian and the photograph on the Old Head in Mayo is a stark representation of the meeting of those two Irelands. It is more than a snapshot of the social divisions that existed in the country at that time; this is an image of the confrontation between Irish-Ireland and Anglicised-Ireland.

It is not an innocent image either. ‘CDB 95’ is typical of the field photography that had become an integral part of the emerging disciplines of ethnography, anthropology, archaeology and geology:

Increasing ease of photographic technology and the duplication of vast numbers of inexpensive prints promoted the extensive circulation of photographs from the 1860's. Official photographs taken for colonial aims, exoticised travel pictures and photographs taken by missionaries became valuable objects of exchange ... European field sciences had long depended on the movement of specimens, artefacts and visual images which could be stored and analysed. Photography offered a new method of transferring and replicating seemingly  

\textsuperscript{56} Morrissey, James, 2001, \emph{On the Verge Of Want}, Dublin, Crannóg Books, p129.  
reliable information. The circulation of these images strongly influence the development of the disciplines of anthropology archaeology.\textsuperscript{59}

The C.D.B. was well aware of the usefulness of photography. In 1901 an exhibition of photographs illustrating the work of the C.D.B. was held in The Vice Regal Lodge in Belfast, during a visit by Queen Victoria. It was compiled by the photographer Robert J. Welch of Belfast who had presented James Arthur Balfour with a similar album of photographs in 1895.\textsuperscript{60} These photographs, which replaced earlier drawings by graphic artists like Charles William Cole and James O Mahoney,\textsuperscript{61} transformed the representation of the west of Ireland between 1890 and 1920 and define, to a large extent, the difference between the visual record of western Irish peasantry in pre-famine and post-famine Ireland. The function of that representation was invariably political. The work of the Congested Districts Board was politicised by opposition to British Government policies in Ireland in the face of endemic food insecurity, land agitation, poor housing and unemployment. C. P. Scott's\textsuperscript{62} decision to send John Millington Synge and Jack B. Yeats to the Connemara and Mayo to report on conditions in the Congested Districts was part of a campaign by the liberal press to pressurise the British Government over its social and economic policies in Ireland. Criticism of the C.D.B. wasn't confined to the press. Sheridan's view of the C.D.B. is unashamedly nationalist. He regarded the work of the C.D.B. as a long overdue response to the disastrous consequences of the Cromwellian policy of 'to Hell or Connaught' and the consequences of the large scale population movements that followed the Williamite Wars. W. L. Micks, First Secretary of the C.D.B. (and permanent employee until its dissolution in 1923) seems to concur in giving Balfour credit for being the first British Minister who 'acknowledged in a practical way that the universal poverty of the West of Ireland was a disgrace to the British government.'\textsuperscript{63} But there is a difference and the difference is crucial to understanding the mindset that underpins the establishment and programme

\textsuperscript{59} http://homepage.ntlworld.com, November 25, 2003, University of Cambridge, Photographic Collection of the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Networks and Exchange. These are the field sciences that Gillian Rose identifies as being involved in the construction of race differences.

\textsuperscript{60} Robert J. Welch compiled The Balfour Album on behalf of the 'people' of Galway and Connnemara in recognition of Balfour's support for the Galway to Clifden railway line.

\textsuperscript{61} With the emergence of illustrated newspapers in the 1840's many artists were employed to provide black and white drawings of events in Ireland. These were then translated into wood engravings and incorporated into letterpress. O'Mahoney is best known for his images of famine in West Cork that were published in the Illustrated London News in 1846 and 1847. C.W. Cole contributed to The Graphic from April 1880, when he was appointed as special artist to report on events such as the Boycott Relief Expedition (12th - 26th November 1888) at Lough Mask. Some of the sketches in this album were published, in slightly altered form, as wood engravings in The Graphic (Source: National Library of Ireland). Cole's later work shows the increasing influence on photography on illustration and there is a transition phase of around 2 decades before wood engravings were eventually replaced by halftone photographic reproductions in newspapers.

\textsuperscript{62} Editor of \textit{The Manchester Guardian} in 1905.

of the C.D.B. and its representation in the documentary photographs of Welch, Major Ruttledge Fair and others. Sheridan is in no doubt as to who is to blame. Poverty is a direct result of the cross-generational impact of dispossession and institutionalised oppression. Micks is more circumspect. Poverty may be a disgrace but it is not necessarily the fault of the British government. In other words, the work of the C.D.B. was intensely and inherently political.

In this context ‘CDB 95’ is particularly interesting. On one level it documents three Victorian gentlemen accompanied by their guide meeting a native woman who is impossibly burdened by the primitive toil of the peasant class. The gap between civilised society and the peasant residuum is revealed in every detail. The woman carries her load on her shoulders, the men travel by coach. The woman stands in the field, they stand in the road. Clothing denotes social and economic status and establishes the balance of power in the exchange. The construction of the image belies the almost incidental quality of the encounter. This is a posed photograph designed to create the impression of immediacy that is associated with contemporary photojournalism. The impression of a conversation is implausible as there was undoubtedly a language barrier (the local guide standing at the back of the group was probably an interpreter). This is not “mere” documentation. The photograph functions as an illustration of the penetration of the West by the members of the C.D.B. and graphically underpins the ‘truth’ of the undertaking as expressed in the scientific terms of its research. There is a sense of the arrival of redemptive progress in the form of the colonial authorities and their representatives on earth. In this way the photograph shares much with ‘Bonjour Monsieur Courbet!’ of 1854 by the eponymous French painter Gustave Courbet (1819-77) (Figure 1.30). Compositonally, the image is constructed along the same lines as ‘CDB 95.’ Two men are shown meeting the artist on the road into Montpellier. One of the men is Alfred Bruyas who in 1854 invited the artist to stay in Montpellier and included work by Courbet and other contemporaries in the collection of the Musée Fabre in the city. Ostensibly the picture shows artist being welcomed to Montpellier by his patron. The intended meaning is quite different. Courbet regarded political agitation and art as inseparable. His painting of the Funeral at Ornans may portray the funeral of a peasant but it declares that the rural masses had metastasised as a revolutionary political force bent on confrontation with the bourgeoisie. Bonjour Monsieur Courbet! is an equally politicised image that operates on two levels. On an art historical basis it ‘teases the often fraught relationship of painter and private patron ... Courbet was acutely aware of this relationship. Note the way in which only Courbet stands on the earth; neither the deferential Bruyas nor Calas cast a

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64 Something which would not be possible until the introduction of Barnack’s Leica in 1925.
shadow, as if only the painter, as labourer, is of this earth.” The painting is also about contemporary politics in France. Courbet identified very strongly with the peasant class. His ‘earthedness’ declares his political allegiances. His arrival in Montpellier is the arrival of agrarian unrest and revolutionary politics in the guise of revolutionary ‘modern’ art. The ‘Meeting’ is the moment of enlightenment, with the artist cast as Messiah in political and artistic terms. To emphasise the point, ‘Bonjour Monsieur Courbet!’ is modelled on standard treatments of the meeting between Christ and the Apostles on the road to Damascus, a visual trope for enlightenment. It would be fanciful to think ‘CDB 95’ is modelled on Courbet’s painting or that the photographer was even aware of its existence. Nevertheless, the point is made. The Messianic/Enlightenment element is common to both images even though the political allegiances underpinning the implied sense of redemptive modernisation are radically different.

‘CDB 95’ may be a piece of propaganda but it does, even if it is accidental, graphically represent the contested nature of Irishness during this period. This will be considered in more detail in later sections of this study but it is worth noting at this stage that the policies of the Congested Districts...
Board were not universally welcome. As far as John M. Synge was concerned economic
development of the west was destroying the last bastion of the Gael:

Kilronan ... has been so much changed by the fishing industry, developed there by the
Congested Districts Board, that it now has very little to distinguish it from any fishing village
on the west coast of Ireland. The other islands are more primitive, but even on them many
changes are being made...67

The Romantics of the Literary Revival and their conditional allies in the Irish Ireland movement
would regard ‘CDB 95’ as proof of the urgent necessity to de-anglicise Ireland, to invert the power
relations inscribed in the photograph and confront the attitudes behind them on a cultural and
political front. It would not take long. The era of the peasant was at hand and another phase in the
ideological construction of Irishness was about to begin.

67 John M. Synge quoted in Robinson, Tim, Place/Person/Book: Synge’s ‘The Aran Islands’, in Synge,
Figure 2.1. East Wing, Kilmainham Gaol.
CHAPTER 2

IN A GAOL: ART | TRADITION | NATIONALISM | IDENTITY

“And that old triangle, went jingle jangle
Along the banks of the Royal Canal.”

Brendan Behan

The idea that Irishness is a conditional and ideological construct strikes at the heart of identity. It also raises issues of cultural and political legitimacy if we accept that identity is ultimately about the exercise of power and that the nation is the institutionalised expression of identity. These issues have always been at the heart of culture in Ireland. The very concept of an Irish-Ireland (as opposed to Anglo-Ireland) makes the point and Irishness has to be regarded as a set of mobile and unstable hegemonic strategies or discourse - especially if one is to pay any attention to Douglas Hyde, Daniel Corkery, Terence Brown or John Wilson Foster (to name but a few likely candidates). These issues were brought to the fore in 1991 in an art exhibition that set out to provoke debate about Irishness, nationalism and art. It chose one of the most evocative sites to do this, Kilmainham Gaol during the 75th Anniversary of the Easter Rising. The work of the best artists from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland was assembled in Kilmainham Gaol, a sacred place where blood had been spilt and lives sacrificed for the sake of the nation. And the people were invited there to see what the artists had done, to be challenged by their vision of national identity, art and history, and to be shown an imagined possibility of being wrest from the grasp of the past. The like of it had never been done before. Everything about Kilmainham had changed. Control had pass from the old volunteers to the state heritage service. A different language was spoken and works of art had replaced the old relics that bound it to the time of dying. Personal experience had become history and the place of commemoration had become a heritage site. The time of the past in the present had passed and a new attitude to the memory of the place was needed. Some found it hard to let go of the old ways. They muttered about the damage done by those who picked away at the meaning of all they held to be true. How could they put modern art into the cells of men who had died for Ireland? “Modern” art made no sense in a place dedication to republican martyrology. It was a struggle for meaning in which art, history and politics had been deliberately set against one another.

68 ‘The Auld Triangle’ also known the ‘The Banks of the Royal Canal’ opens the action in ‘The Quare Fellow,’ Behan’ 1954 play set in Mountjoy Prison.
We had to choose to cherish the past or face the future, to remain enthralled by the sacrifice of another time or embrace the politics of a New Ireland. The very notion of Irish identity and nationality was being challenged.

As previously stated the ‘In A State’ exhibition was planned for the 75th Anniversary of the Easter Rising in Dublin, which coincided with the Irish Presidency of the European Union and the referendum in Ireland on the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. It was organised by Jobst Graeve in response to a series of political events in 1989 and 1991. In 1989 the Berlin Wall had come down and a friend sent Graeve a fragment of the wall. In the same week he travelled to Belfast to see an exhibition by Rita Duffy that dealt with divisions between the Protestant and Catholic communities in the “North.” Shortly afterward the security fences known as peace lines were extended in Belfast. In 1990 Ireland had assumed the Presidency of the European Union as the project of re-organising Europe in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War gathered pace, with far reaching implications for the sovereignty of individual states. By July 1990 he had come up with the idea of an exhibition of art dealing with the theme of national identity that would take place in Kilmainham Gaol. Pat Cooke, Curator of Kilmainham Gaol, came on board and secured the support of the Office of Public Works. The Arts Council provided funding and the final selection of the artists took place. There was to be an even mix of artists from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The former were easy enough to select as there was an established body of artists whose work was essentially political in nature and routinely dealt with the theme of contested identity and conflict. This was not the case with the artists from the Republic Of Ireland. There were fewer artists whose work ‘reflects directly on Irish Society,’ and the greater commitment to radical agendas by women artists (in the way they contested nationalist discourses) was reflected in the selection.

The choice of Kilmainham was provocative not just in terms of location but also in timing. This building referenced past, present and future forms of nationhood in a very particular way. Kilmainham Gaol is a potent symbol of martyrlogy in Irish republicanism and central to a wider nationalist understanding of the realisation of nationhood. This was problematic. Whereas Maastricht promised the end of nationalism, Kilmainham Gaol represented the dogged persistence of militant nationalism in the post-colonial configuration of the territory of Ireland and, more particularly, the unfinished business of the “North.” What mattered most was symbolism. The art on show was intended to explore the way we imagine and express a sense of identity and how this achieves symbolic, ideological and political effect. The exhibition intended to challenge attitudes to national identity and provoke debate about the relationship between identity, nation and state in the

context of the enlargement of the European Union. The introductory essay by Fintan O'Toole, one of the most influential commentators on the role of culture in Irish society at the time, stated that it deliberately set up an opposition between tradition / imprisonment (bad) and culture / liberty (good) when heritage is a function of an exclusive and oppressive nationalism. The gaol was used as a metaphor for nationalism as the antithesis of culture. The exhibition opened in Kilmainham Gaol in April 1991 and ran on through the summer, mimicking the timeframe of the historic events most closely associated with the gaol itself.

Figure 2.2. Rita Duffy, *Emerging from the Shamrock*, (1991).

In preparation for this I was asked to organise a series of training workshops for guides employed in Kilmainham Gaol by the Office of Public Works. These guides were expected to act as 'interpreters' of the exhibition for members of the public, a role consistent with that of guides working on national monument sites. It soon became clear that there were difficulties with this. Kilmainham Gaol had closed in 1924 with the release of the last republican prisoner. The gaol had become a ruin and was rescued by republican volunteers in time for the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966. It was taken over by the Office of Public Works in 1986 and, under the
direction of Pat Cooke, began to bring the administration of the gaol as a heritage site in line with best practice in contemporary museology. This required a significant shift in attitude. Since 1966 Kilmainham Gaol had operated as a shrine to militant nationalism, radical republicanism and blood sacrifice. It was run by people who were committed to a nationalist reading of history and deeply suspicious of the growing influence of the revisionists who sought to challenge nationalist certainties and discredit the history of manifest destiny. Also, nationalist history was coming under the influence of the historicising tendency in contemporary historiography. The result was a change in the way institutions like Kilmainham are managed as sites of historical significance. This was summarised by Fintan O’Toole in his introductory essay as the tension between heritage and culture.

Heritage is what we are given, culture is what we make of it day-to-day and year-to-year. Kilmainham Gaol is a heritage institution trying to become a cultural space, a place we have inherited from 200 years of history, but have to make sense of here and now.

This statement sets out the rationale behind the exhibition. The role of the guide was to mediate this to members of the public who participated in tours of the exhibition. The volunteer guides of the old regime regarded themselves as custodians of the republican heritage of the site. The introduction of guides who were university students was seen as a further weakening of Republican control of the site. Putting art works in cells occupied by men who were executed in the course of the War of Independence and the Civil War was regarded as tantamount to sacrilege. This came to a head in the training workshops for the guides. What became apparent was that contemporary art had nothing to say to a generation who regarded themselves as children of the nationalist revolution and guardians of nationhood. They had difficulty in dealing with art in the context of Kilmainham Gaol and the intended transformation of the space into some sort of politically neutered heritage site. The university students were deeply suspicious of the physical force tradition of Irish nationalism. The frameworks of third level aesthetic education were as restrictive as the perceived atavism of Irish nationalism. Each side was speaking the language of an Ireland that was unrecognisable and

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70 Pat Cooke was Curator of The Pearse Museum and was responsible for the development of Kilmainham as a heritage site under the aegis of the Office of Public Works, the state’s heritage management service at that time. Cooke went on to develop an award winning museum for Kilmainham Gaol in the grounds of the prison but ‘In A State’ was the first act of heritage management on the site after control had passed from the volunteers. Cooke has written extensively on the difficulty of mediating heritage which impacts upon historical and ideological constructions of identity in contemporary political contexts. See also Kathleen O’Brien in Kreilkamp, Vera et al. (Eds.), 1999, Eire-Ireland, Morristown N. J., The Irish American Cultural Institute.
72 Ibid.
73 Rita Duffy’s work was shown in Sean Heuston’s cell much to the disapproval of his relatives. During the exhibition Duffy painting was slashed on two separate occasions.
incomprehensible to the other. Art and nationalism had become opposed and not in the discursive or abstract way Fintan O'Toole had in mind. It was much deeper than that.

In the “wee” hours of the morning, long after the opening of the exhibition, small groups lingered in thrall to the gaol and all that happened there. Two artists began to exchange songs of the nationalist and unionist tradition. They were somewhere off in the middle of the prison but their voices carried along the old ‘98 wing, along the corridor that led to the stonebreakers yard into the East Wing, the newer part of the gaol where the men of 1916, the War of Independence and the Civil War had been imprisoned. I was sitting with two colleagues in the East Wing. It was in darkness except for a single light illuminating the spiral staircase at one end of the cellblock. The songs echoed around the space, a little muted, as if they were being sung by the men and women imprisoned behind the tiers of black door that punctuated the gloom of the landings. It was not difficult to imagine a similar scenario on the wings 75 years earlier, in the aftermath of the Easter Rising.74 I cannot remember which songs were sung - ‘A Nation Once Again’ and ‘The Sash’ perhaps. What matters is that they were instantly recognisable for what they were – the popular anthems of two nations located in the one country. They represented opposed and antagonistic traditions of song that, in turn, represented and defined opposed and antagonistic political communities. The exchange was as symbolic as the songs themselves. It acknowledged difference with a degree of ironic political awareness. Territory was marked symbolically. There was no need to fight over it. These songs were statements of identity with a long tradition of balladry enforcing their legitimacy as such. The bloody handprint of the past in the present was acknowledged (tacitly) as was the ambivalence of that location. They were sung with a melancholic awareness of the pointlessness of gestures of allegiances in a place marked by extremes of revolution and reaction.

The art in the East Wing seemed redundant even irrelevant by comparison. It had little to say that made sense at that moment. The exhibition was a deliberate and carefully crafted act of curation that lacked the spontaneity of the songs. The selected artists had been asked to make images inspired by the gaol, artworks that were intended to make us think about ‘symbolism’ as ‘history’ in the configuration of ‘identity’ in a ‘national’ context as defined by contemporary political states. The whole enterprise was informed, tacitly or otherwise, by the hard facts of the building and the memorabilia (fragments of lives) contained in display cases that were open to inspection and interpretation in a politically conditioned historical context. Contemporary visual art was used as a device to move beyond the limits of a divided historiography and explore alternative modes of representation. Art and nationalism seemed utterly opposed and the art seemed powerless,

74 When I discussed this with Pat Cooke, he made the point that the only people in Kilmainham Gaol who might have sung The Sash were the prison guards.
ineffectual and out of place in the face of the symbolic power and heritage of Kilmainham Gaol. I believe Fintan O’Toole misjudged the issue in his essay. In anticipation of resistance he makes the case for culture over heritage in a post-nation-state European context. He overstates the degree of ‘the drowning man’s grip on old certainties’ that locks people into a violent, intolerant and atavistic nationalism at the expense of the liberating uncertainties that hover around historic moments. O’Toole placed the giddy excitement of art as a state of flux in opposition to the oppressive force of fossilised nationalism. He insinuates the exhibition as the moment of liberation for Kilmainham Gaol, the transformation of heritage into culture. The songlines of Kilmainham Gaol suggest a different narrative. From the first awareness of the music of the ancient Irish (Petrie), the Irish music of the revival in the 1890 and early 1900s (Feis na nGleann in Antrim), the “National” music of the Irish Free State (Clan Dillon) and on to the revivals in the sixties and seventies, folk music speaks of a continuity that defines nationhood with reference to a very particular sense of identity, the ethnicity of the Irish Mark V – Gaelic Catholic Ireland - that J. W. Foster refers to in Colonial Consequences.75

The point about these songs (and the whole back catalogue of nationalist and unionist anthems) is that one doesn’t even have to think about them to understand their effect. It is automatic. They have a familiar feel. They reference something that is outside of history. They have come down through the generations as songlines that carry the essential identity and aspirations of a people. Contemporary visual art does not. It is more individualistic, more opaque in terms of identity and nationality. It is obviously ‘modern’ and has little in common with the traditional iconography of nationalism or unionism. There was a direct connection between the song and the gaol that was not shared by the art. More significantly the artworks lacked the immediacy and popularity of ballads. Their appeal is prescribed by their modernity (even post-modernity) and the internalised logic of the contemporary arts sector and its players. It is also constrained by the limited distribution and difficulty of access to artworks. These artworks operate within carefully constructed and managed frameworks that are temporary and have very little by way of a public life and memory. Ballads, on the other hand, are almost one-dimensional in terms of structure, meaning and purpose. They are imprisoned in a heavily romanticised past, indelibly marked by political intolerance and violence that continues into the present like a plague. They do not sit comfortably with an Ireland inching towards an historic accommodation with England within a Europe configured on an increasingly federal basis: with the end of nationalism in sight, it might be said.

Figure 2.3. Jack B. Yeats, *Lament for Eoghan Rua Ua Néill, commonly called Owen Roe O’Neill*, A Broadside, No 9, February 1910, Cuala Press.
In contrast to the songs and their well-worn sense of legitimacy, the exhibition had a feeling of imposition, an intrusion from another dimension - a cultured graft onto the wild root of tradition.

This led me to wonder at the relationship between popular culture and art in Ireland and whether there exists mutually exclusive forms of cultural expression rooted in very different experiences of being Irish. It suggests the existence of two quite separate modes of imagining and representing identity in contemporary Ireland. It also suggested the existence of multiple traditions. That, in itself, undermines the very notion of and Irish’ identity. Clearly, there were a number of identities present in this context. There was, for instance, the historical fact of Kilmainham Gaol and the tradition of radical republicanism or ‘blood sacrifice’ symbolised by it. There was the opposed tradition of unionism and the mechanics of colonial rule. There was the interrogation of identity by contemporary visual artists and the commemoration of allegiance through the songs of opposed political traditions. If there was a pattern, it was the opposition of traditional and contemporary modes of expression - between commemoration and representation, between past events and the imagination of present realities. Kilmainham Gaol was both space and context. There was history and there was the unfinished business of political conflict. There was the experience of political states of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. There was Traditional Ireland and Contemporary Ireland, each represented by distinctive and, possibly, exclusive modes of expression. The issue here was the way in which the past is imagined and represented in the present. In the context of ‘In A State’ and its deconstructivist or revisionist strategies, there is the atavistic repetition that is tradition and the creative renewal that is contemporary art, There is also is a suggestion that the visual arts or the Fine Arts are somehow alien to traditional Ireland. They belong to another Ireland, a conditional state busily distancing itself from its own past. The songlines of traditional Ireland express a deep sense of community and continuity that has been transmitted orally. There is, apparently, no equivalent in terms of visual imagery. The pictorial record, such as it is, was external to the communities that constitute traditional Ireland geographically and culturally. It is historically associated with the colonists and the ruling class and it maintained its elite status after the colonists had been replaced by a native ruling-class. The pictorial tradition of the colonist was redundant and that of the modernists irrelevant to the project of representing the new state. This new ruling-class looked to traditional Ireland for its model of citizenship. The quest for a national art that Thomas Davis had launched in 1843 had been

frustrated and nationalism lacked a Fine Art component. The Free State was antagonistic to Culture, irredentist and determinedly Catholic. It had rejected the achievement of the mainly Protestant Anglo-Irish Revival. There was no room in Irish-Ireland for anything that was not demonstrably and verifiably Gaelic and Catholic. Irish-Ireland, in its political form, would be defined by cultural exclusivity. Its main achievement was the introduction of a suffocating and sectarian orthodoxy reinforced by rigorous censorship abetted by indifference at an institutional level. The effect was to establish the visual arts as alien to the Irish imagination. Traditional Ireland expressed itself in the music, song, dance and stories of the people of the parts of rural Ireland where Gaelic was still the vernacular. Therefore, any engagement with traditional Ireland would exclude the visual arts as anything other than the preserve of an elite class engaged in terminal conflict with popular and populist Ireland.

Figure 2.4. Peter Griffin, The Stonebreaker’s Yard, Kilmainham Gaol, 2008.
Figure 3.1. Henry O’Neill, *West Side of the North Cross, Kilkispenn*, from ‘Illustrations of the most interesting of the sculptured crosses of ancient Ireland, London 1857, University of Chicago Library
CHAPTER 3

ART

SECTION I: ART AND IRISH IRELAND

One of the central questions of this thesis is this: when confronted with Irish-Ireland, can one speak of an Irish art?

It’s a relatively straightforward question and An Muircheartach gives a typically straight answer: if the ancient tradition of native poetry is a benchmark, then ‘nìl scoil pheinteireachta Gaelacha againn fòs’ / we still haven’t a Gaelic school of painting.”⁷⁷ An Muircheartach should know, as he was the personification of Irish Ireland as it consolidated its position after independence. He joined the Gaelic League phase three, Connradh na Gaeilge in 1937, shortly after leaving school. He went on to chair the Exhibition Committee, the sub-committee on art and he was involved in the development of Irish language theatre and literature. He served as President from 1955-1959. He was a keen amateur photographer. His primary interest was the Irish language and he dedicated his life to the task of having it revived as the first language of Ireland. Granted, this is one man’s opinion but there is plenty of evidence to support his view. Immediately after independence An Muircheartach’s link between Irishness and art was stated much more bluntly by Joseph Hanly. There was no in Irish Ireland for ‘Anglo-Irish politics, rhetorical flourishes, minor pursuits and abstract sentiments … The only truly national literature of Ireland is that which is expressed in the Irish language.’⁷⁸ The remnants of the pre-Christian Gaelic civilisation purified and enhanced by the ‘Fire of Saint Patrick’ provided ‘ample material to build up a great national school of Irish Art, modernly amplificed, which would play a very great part in the re-establishment of our own distinctive civilization.’⁷⁹ The official position adopted by the Irish Free State wasn’t far off this. In 1932 the Cumann na nGaedheal Government published the ‘Saorstat Éireann, The Irish Free State: Official Handbook’ that was intended to stand as a record of achievement ‘in the first decade of native government.’⁸⁰ The section on ‘Modern Irish Art’ states that

⁷⁹ Ibid p. 141
Having allowed the problem of art to bide awhile ... we are now ready to deal with the situation; and it is not an idle dream to hope ... that this nation, once so distinguished in the practice of the arts, will recreate a national art of its own, not based on out-worn styles and lost endeavours, but reflecting the energetic aspirations of a new born nation.\textsuperscript{81}

The tone may be milder than Hanly but the basis for an Irish art is located just as firmly in revivalist strategies and Celtic / Christian precedents. This is all the more surprising given that it was written by Thomas Bodkin (1887-1961). He had served as a Director of the National Gallery from 1927 to 1935 and was a tireless advocate of the arts during this period. He published his seminal book on ‘Four Irish Landscape Painters’ in 1920\textsuperscript{82} in which he endeavoured to trace a distinctly Irish character in the work of the leading Irish painters of the time. In fact all he could discern of any Irishness in art was an attitude to a style of landscape painting associated with London and Paris. By 1932, however he would include reproductions of paintings by Sean Keating, Paul Henry, Harry Kernoff, Seán O’Sullivan, Maurice MacGonigal and Estella Solomons in the ‘Saorstat Éireann, Irish Free State: Official Handbook’. This amounts to an acknowledgement of sorts of the emergence of a national school of painters or, at least, a group of painters sympathetic to the nation building efforts of the Irish Free State. A year later Bodkin tried to revive the idea of A Ministry of Fine Arts\textsuperscript{83} with Eamon de Valera after he had taken over as President of the Executive Council in 1932 at the head of a Fianna Fáil government. It was rejected and Bodkin assumed that de Valera had no interest in the arts. ‘A new era had begun and Bodkin was out of sympathy with it.’\textsuperscript{84} That is not to say that the arts did well under the previous administration. Quite the opposite: behind the rhetoric of the Saorstat Éireann, Irish Free State: Official Handbook the newly formed Irish state was hostile to any artistic activity that did not conform to an exclusive and disabling orthodoxy based on a prescribed and proscribed understanding of the place culture in the lives of its citizens. Art was seen as having become disconnected from the remnants of Gaelic civilisation that had formed the basis of the Gaelic Cultural Revival. Art had been patronised by an Anglophone elite - the colonising Anglo-Saxon - and had nothing in common with the reconstructed traditions in folklore, native literature, theatre, dance and drama as expressed in a native tongue. Art had no place in Irish-Ireland. Paul Henry and the Dublin painters would struggle to match the Literary Revivals with a similar achievement in the visual arts. They would fail and Henry’s own failure as a painter\textsuperscript{85} would come to symbolize the failure of the Irish state to support the arts in any sort of


\textsuperscript{82} See Campbell, Julian, 2004, Walter Osborne in the West of Ireland, Dublin, Adam’s, p.16.

\textsuperscript{83} A Ministry of Fine Arts was established by the first Dáil. George Punkett was appointed Minister for Arts in 1921 and served 5 months in that position. It was dissolved at the start of the Civil War.

\textsuperscript{84} Kennedy, Brian P., Dreams and Responsibilities, p. 27.

meaningful way. There were other failures too. The embryonic Department of the Arts established by the first Dáil did not survive the Treaty. Irish cinema production was killed off with censorship legislation enacted with almost indecent haste. Badly needed reform of the art schools in Cork and Dublin was ignored and arts education at primary and post-primary level barely existed. There were exceptions. Ernest Blythe convinced the government to fund the Abbey but on the basis that it would be useful in the revival of Irish as the first language – surely the exception that proves the rule. If any single act represents the attitude of Irish-Ireland to the arts, it was the decision by the Cumann na nGaedheal Government to replace drawing with Irish on the primary school curriculum.\(^{86}\)

Embedded in the Irish-Ireland attitude to the arts is a reaction against any form of culture that is contaminated by the legacy of colonisation, that cannot be ignored in terms of defining Irish art as opposed to considering art in Ireland in an historical context. Fintan Cullen argues for a much more rigorous analysis of ‘what is represented and who represented it’ in the context of the cultural consequences ‘of colonialism in the former United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland’\(^{87}\) before any definition of Irishness in art can be trusted or formulated. But the battle had been lost a long time before. By 1922 the gulf separating unionists and nationalists had widened. Ewan Morris describes how the stock of common, politically neutral symbols of Irishness had dwindled and the symbolic universe seemed to have narrowed into a set of stark oppositions: Union Jack versus Tricolour, ‘God Save the King’ versus ‘The Soldier’s Song’, republic versus monarchy.\(^{88}\) Art was seen as a product of Anglo-Ireland and as, Terence Browne argues, Irish-Ireland was antagonistic to the Anglo-Irish and their ‘English’ culture. Brown cites the Catholic Bulletin\(^{89}\) as evidence of a campaign motivated less by ‘idealistic cultural imperatives than a desire to advance Catholic power and social policy in the country through the defeat of Protestant-Ireland and the Anglicised culture associated with it, in ideological warfare.\(^{90}\) The last word is given to Geoffrey Taylor who summarised the state of the arts in Ireland as being beyond hope: by the 1950s it was ‘…probably too late to develop a national tradition in any of the visual arts – painting, sculpture,  

\(^{86}\) Ibid. See Kennedy’s account of the development of arts policy at an institutional level in the first three decades of independence. 
\(^{89}\) As edited by Sean Ua Ceallaigh who had been President of the Gaelic League from 1919 – 1923. Sean Ua Ceallaigh’s election followed the resignation of its founder Douglas Hyde in protest at the politicisation of the movement, a moment that neatly captures the decline of Anglo-Ireland in the face of a hardening Nationalist outlook. 
architecture, ceramics, gardening ... the conditions in which might arise a regional school in any of the visual arts simply are not present.\textsuperscript{91}

In conclusion, the answer to the question posed at the outset is no: it is not possible to speak of art when confronted by Irish-Ireland. Yet as Cullen points out, Irish Ireland was only one version of Irishness and the very idea of Irishness is contested when it comes to any definition of an Irish art in a post-colonial context. Also Bodkin identified a group of artists who have become synonymous with the Irish Free State. They were products of the arts establishment that had existed in the country up until independence and some of the artists, Keating and MacGonigal in particular, maintained those systems after independence as a way of controlling the arts in Ireland. And whatever happened to the Anglo-Irish? Obviously art and Irish-Ireland went in very different directions but that does not mean that one cannot speak of an Irish art at all. This raises a number of issues: what constituted Irish art prior to independence; what influenced the emergence of the peasant as proxy for Irishness in art; what was the influence of the Literary and Gaelic Revivals; what role did the Irish Free State play in defining Irish art and, the biggest issue of all, who is entitled to be called the first Irish painter. Finally, as Cullen points out, all of this is underscored by a distrust of conventional art historiography in Ireland, a distrust that has its origins in the ideological construction of Irishness and Irish art. These issues are now considered.

SECTION II: ART AND IRELAND IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

1  A National Collection?

In terms of art historiography the mid nineteenth-century is defined by Thomas Davis’s call for a National Art. Homan Potterton’s history of the National Gallery Of Ireland provides a useful context to begin to examine this. He locates the concept of the gallery within the efforts to modernize Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century. William Dargan (1799-1867), an Irish born industrialist, had financed the Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853. The series of Universal Exhibitions started in London in 1851 with the Great Exhibition of Works of Industry of All Nations in Crystal Palace, London, inaugurating the concept of ‘a universal exposition focusing on innovation, industrial progress and the intellectual improvement of society’ as the calling-card of Victorian England. It was Dargan’s strategy to use the Fine Arts to demonstrate that Ireland had recovered from the calamity of the Great Famine and to demonstrate that social and economic progress was being achieved in this part of the Kingdom. He wanted, in effect, to represent Ireland as a civilised nation or, to put it another way, a nation that had been civilised, and was worthy of a parity of esteem within the United Kingdom. More pragmatically, Dargan was determined that the art on display would compensate for the lack of native industry. The London exhibition of 1851 did not have a Fine Arts section but it was included in a smaller exhibition in Cork in 1852. In Dublin in 1853, the Fine Arts were included as one of four sections, the others being Raw Materials, Machinery and Manufactures. The paintings of contemporary Irish and English artists hung on one wall with French, German and Belgian artists on the other. Sculpture was exhibited in between the two. However, of the works on exhibition, only a handful were by Irishmen. This was indicative of the state of the art market and private patronage in Ireland. Cyril Barrett paraphrases testimony given to a select Committee on Art Union Laws in 1866: ‘M. A. Hayes (testified that) the nobility do not buy pictures, at least not pictures by Irishmen. There were 328 Old Masters, attributed to the greatest names, from the Irish collections in the Dublin exhibition of 1853, where

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95 Ibid.
out of 1,023 pictures only a handful were by Irishmen. Despite this, the Dublin exhibition of 1853 created the impetus for a national collection and the National Gallery of Ireland was established by Act of parliament in 1854 and opened in 1864. Potterton deals with the collection in the gallery as divided in standard ‘schools’ of painting with outstanding works by acknowledged masters:

George Mulvany, the first Director, was a contemporary of fellow Irish artist Sir Federick Burton, then Director of the London National Gallery. He laid the foundation for the broad Dutch collection that now fills six rooms with ease. Rembrandt’s ... Flight into Egypt is a masterpiece... There is also a good selection of artists working in his studio or under his influence in Amsterdam. Landscapes dominate several walls with the golden tone of Cuyp, Both and Berchem recalling Italy; those of Salomon and Jacob Ruisdael are the more familiar Dutch climate. A selection of the innumerable genre and still-life painters lead to Hals’ Fisherboy holding a still dripping fish and Stomer’s The Betrayal of Christ by an artist steeped in the Italian tradition.

By contrast, his entry on Irish painting is cursory: ‘The Irish collection comprises about a third of the entire number of paintings. Suffice to say that while there are gaps, it offers the most comprehensive collection of artists working from the late seventeenth (and) it is only lack of exhibition space that prevents even more from being on show. Suffice to say that the attitude to the ‘innumerable’ anonymous genre paintings of the Dutch school may have something to do with Potterton’s failure to mention by name a single Irish artist. Genre, the sentimentalized treatment of everyday scenes from the lives of common folk, does not rate highly in the traditional hierarchies of western art. Mulvany was a genre painter and the Dutch emphasis in the collection reflects his taste. Genre is, in Potterton’s view, a byword for mediocrity, suggesting that there might be more to exhibition priorities than space alone. Either way the art produced in Ireland and represented in the National Collection did not merit attention as far as Potterton was concerned in 1984. What passed for Irish painting was seen as a regional expression of London’s interaction with Paris and Rome, two steps removed from the centre of the art world and very low on the order merit. Dominated by portraiture and ‘sentimental anecdote.’ Irish art or, art in Ireland, was a mere footnote to British art and, as such, the study of art produced in Ireland during that period didn’t really exist until 1969 when Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin published their seminal work on Irish Portraits.

97 'a rare night landscape whose dense forest (entirely painted in black and white) contrasts with the glowing light of the central fire.'
99 Ibid.
1660 – 1860 and, later in 1978, with their equally important volume on *Painters of Ireland, c.1660 -1920.*

2 A National Art?

There was never an Irish school of painting in the conventional art historical sense. This was to have important consequences in the second half of the nineteenth-century and the first half of the twentieth-century. Fintan Cullen considers the call by the *Dublin Evening Post* for the establishment of an Irish school of painting ‘that would soon equal the Flemish or Italian schools’ as ‘laudable but confused given the training and economic realities of late eighteenth-century Irish artists.’

It was certainly aspirational given the circumstances on the ground. Crookshank identifies one George Morphey (1680 -1716) who ‘emerges as the first known native Irish painter’. He was a sophisticated stylist whose portraits reveal an understanding of contemporary painting in England and on the continent, with particularly strong links to the Netherlands. He had a very large portrait practice based in Dublin that spanned the older Catholic families and recorded the emergence after 1690 of the ‘newer Protestant gentry’. Painting was not popular. Morphey’s successor Charles Jervas (c. 1675 - 1739) was less popular in Ireland than in England where he worked mainly and yet was unrivalled in Ireland. It was not until the 1720s and 1730s ‘that there was a real increase of interest in fine house and in the arts generally and no doubt up to then only a few people were interested in pictures.’ Even then Crookshank surmises that Thomas Frye (1710-62) went to live in England possibly because ‘there was still too little work to keep two painters fully occupied.’ Arts education was non-existent. Most artists trained in England or in the continental centres of Antwerp, Paris and Rome. The Dublin Society’s schools, founded in the 1740s, do not appear to have taught oil painting, concentrating instead on teaching design for applied arts to students who stayed for about two years before being apprenticed to a suitable

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102 ‘We want not talent – we want not genius, we want the grand incentive – Encouragement! Let, then, the men of rank and spirit ably step forward and put the Arts on a permanent foundation: that accomplished there cannot be a doubt, but that the Irish would soon equal the Flemish or Italian schools:’ Cullen, Fintan, *Exhibitions pre-1970* in Ed. McCormack, W. J., 1999, *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Irish Culture,* Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, p. 204-6.


104 Ibid. Jervas studied at Knellers Academy in London from 1694-95, travelled to Rome in 1699 and remained there for 10 years after which he settled in London. He made several trips to Ireland.

105 Ibid.
Nevertheless, intermittent exhibitions of art had been taking place in Dublin since 1765. The first recorded exhibition of art outside of Dublin took place in Cork in 1815. Loan exhibitions of old masters (mainly of Italian origin) were held in Dublin from 1814 onwards. There were a number of artists societies, mostly based in Dublin and all in competition for a limited market for portraits and landscape amongst their peers in the landed gentry, mercantile and political classes. The Royal Hibernian Academy was established by Royal charter in 1823 but remained conservative and provincial. Artists looked elsewhere for direction and ultimately employment and recognition. In effect, there was no foundation for the development of an Irish school of painting that could compare with European models. Painting was almost entirely limited to portraiture with secondary and equally dismal roles for landscape and genre painting. In 1843 Thomas Davis summed up the state of the arts in Ireland as follows:

Something has been done – more remains.  
There are schools in Dublin and Cork. But why are those so neglected and imperfect? And why are not similar or better institutions in Belfast, Derry, Galway, Waterford and Kilkenny? Why is there not a decent collection of casts anywhere but in Cork, and why are they in a garret there? And why have we no gallery of Irishmen’s, or any other men’s, pictures?

Davis was equally frustrated by the fact that ‘Ireland has some great Painters – Barry and Forde for example, and many of inferior but great excellence, and now she boasts high names, Maclise, Hogan and Mulready. But their works are seldom done for Ireland and are rarely known in it.’ Davis call for a national art of Irish born painters depicting inspirational scenes from Irish history on a grand scale would never be realised. Frederic William Burton (1816-1900), who inspired Davis to make this call to action, had left Ireland to work in London. The artist who is most closely associated with the Young Irelander project is George Petrie (1790-1866) and he is better known as a music collector, an archaeologist and illustrator.

Petrie was the son of a Scottish born portrait painter who had a practice in Dublin and is best known for his portraits of the United Irishmen. George Petrie pioneered new watercolour techniques in

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108 Canova made a set of plaster casts of classical sculptures for use in a drawing academy. The casts were a gift to the Prince Regent who did not want them and they were eventually secured for Crawford Gallery. They are still on display there.


110 Ibid.
Figure 3.2. George Petrie, Last Circuit of the Pilgrims at Clonmacnoise. (c. 1828).

Figure 3.3. Daniel Maclise RHA, RA, The Marriage of Aoife and Strongbow, (c. 1854).
‘field work’ in County Wicklow. From the age of 18 he made regular trips to Wicklow to sketch
classic romantic landscape subjects, like the waterfalls at Poulaphuca, Ballymore Eustace taking
full advantage of the freedom created by small portable Reeves watercolour boxes and high quality
Whatman paper. His first antiquarian drawings begin to appear in his sketchbooks at this time and
progressed through to his work for the Ordnance Survey and the Royal Irish Academy. His
preferred subject was landscape and his medium watercolour, both of which were rather low on the
traditional scale of artistic endeavour. Landscape had always been regarded as the equivalent of
ornamentation and watercolour was used primarily for preparatory sketches for oil paintings or for
pictures that could be easily reproduced by engravers. That was about to change. Petrie’s
combination of topographical attention to detail and delicate rendition, with an emotional
sensibility, was in keeping with of a new type of landscape that emerged in the 1790’s and enjoyed
a new status in the early nineteenth-century. The Drawing School promoted picturesque
landscape and the young Petrie was influenced by the work of pioneering ‘picturesque’ landscape
artists like Paul Sandby whose paintings of Glendalough were published as engravings. Petrie’s
most popular painting was ‘Gougane Barra’ which he painted around 1831. It was a masterpiece of
the sublime but his career is bookended by two versions of ‘The Last Circuit of the Pilgrims at
Clonmacnoise’ that were painted in 1828 and 1842. These paintings record his spiritual journey
west, into the heartland of the ethnic Irish and, more than any other painting of the period, espouse
the romantic nationalism of the Young Irelanders. As far as art historians are concerned Petrie is
less significant than James Barry RA (1741-1806) or Daniel Maclise RHA, RA (1806-70), artists
whose careers and reputations were based in London. Maclise’s painting of ‘The Marriage of Aoife
and Strongbow’ (ca. 1854) is one of the few major works of art that conforms to a specifically Irish
view of the development of painting in Ireland in the nineteenth century. It is set in a landscape
defined visually by the archaeological recovery of ancient Ireland pioneered by Petrie. But Maclise
was working within the conventions of “High Art” on a grand scale: the full-blown treatment in oils
of historical themes connected to contemporary politics and commissioned by the state. It is
probably the best example of what Davis had in mind as a “National Work of Art” but, as Fintan
Cullen emphasises, ‘The Marriage of Aoife and Strongbow’ was specifically commissioned to
record the political union of Britain and Ireland. Petrie, a landscapist and illustrator/antiquarian,
is a world removed from the state sponsored and “elite” art production of Maclise. Petrie’s
reputation as an artist has been displaced to some extent. He is regarded primarily as an antiquarian

See Murray, Peter, 2004, George Petrie ((1790-1866): The Rediscovery of Ireland’s Past, Cork and
Kinsale, Crawford Art Gallery and Gandon Editions, pp. 48-51.

Maclie’s Marriage of Aoife and Strongbow has become one of the classic texts of Irishness in the art
of nineteenth-century. Dalsimer and Cullen interpret this painting from opposite perspectives: Cullen
from a two nations/unionist perspective and Dalsimer from a post-colonial / nationalist perspective.

Press, Cork.
who founded ‘modern’ Irish archaeology. He helped to create an iconography of Gaelic Ireland that was used to great effect by the Young Irelanders in the propaganda of Romantic Nationalism. Jeanne Sheehy and Peter Murray consider Petrie responsible for the rediscovery in art of ‘Ancient Ireland’ and its dissemination through imagery in popular culture, as well as in the Fine and Applied Arts. Sheehy in particular provides a trace system for the manifestation of nationalism in a series of interconnected cultural contexts that have a visual dimension. The key factor here is the awareness that Ireland had a glorious past as evidenced by the high art of the pre-Christian and mediaeval era that, in the process of dissemination, becomes popularised and vulgarised by the tabloid strategies of the Young Irelanders.\textsuperscript{114} It may be distinctly Irish but it is beyond the Pale as far as “Art” is concerned.

Despite the best efforts of Davis and the Young Irelanders, there was no sense of an ‘Irish School’ of painting up to the 1890s. There was no representation of Irish art in the fledgling National Gallery or in the Crawford Gallery in Cork. Irish art was a mere footnote to British art, a provincial echo of London. Fintan Cullen goes a step further. What needs to be emphasised is not the empirical fact of the production of sophisticated visual records of carefully maintained estates (by George Barrett, Moore and Ashford), but the fact that by the second half of the eighteenth century parts of Ireland, and Scotland for that matter, were being transformed into ‘little replicas of England’.\textsuperscript{115} The art may have been produced in Ireland but it was as British as the landscape of the big house, and the grand homes of the Ascendancy. Ewan Morris’s treatment of popular devices is a significant advance on Jeanne Sheehy. He locates the traditional symbols of Irishness in the divided loyalties that followed insurrection, civil war and partition in Ireland. What is of interest here is the extent of Anglicisation of Irish society indicated by the difficulty encountered in adopting a new anthem and flag for the Irish Free State. For many years after independence, more people attending matches in Croke Park were more familiar with the words of God Save the King than the putative new anthem, the Soldier’s Song: ‘... unfamiliarity with the anthem’s lyrics may have been at least as widespread as ignorance of the flag’s colours. Fritz Brase of the Army School of Music noted in 1928 that during Horse Show Week a section of the audience would sing along to ‘God Save The King’ but that no one joined in when he played the ‘The Soldier’s Song’\textsuperscript{116}. In fact it wasn’t until the thirties that the ‘The Soldier’s Song’ was accepted as the new national anthem and this was


largely due to the efforts of the Gaelic Athletic Association.\footnote{Ibid. p.65.} Horse Show Week was (and is) one of the main public events organized by the Royal Dublin Society (R.D.S.). Ewan Morris has inadvertently identified the source of much of the art produced in Ireland as the thoroughly anglicised culture of Anglophone-Ireland and elites associated with the Royal institutions in Ireland. The Dublin Society for Improving Husbandry, Manufactures and Other Useful arts was founded in 1731 and became the Royal Dublin Society in 1820 when King George IV became its patron. It was responsible for the founding of Ireland’s most important cultural institutions including the National library, the National Gallery and the National Botanic Gardens; it also established the first substantial school of art, developing into the Metropolitan School of Art, now the National College of Art and Design.\footnote{Hickey, D. J. and Doherty, J. E., 2003/5, \textit{A New Dictionary of Irish History from 1800}, Dublin, Gill and MacMillan, p.420.} It was also responsible for the development of the Veterinary College, and the College of Sciences. The R.D.S. was very influential. It was the product of the growth in learned societies that took place under royal patronage and transformed cultural and scientific learning in Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century. The Royal Hibernian Academy of the Arts was incorporated by charter in 1823 followed by The Royal Zoological Society (1831), the Royal Academy of Music (1834) and the Royal Society of Antiquaries (1849). George Petrie, at the age of 15 or 16 followed his natural inclination to art and enrolled in the Drawing Schools of the Dublin Society.\footnote{He won a gold Medal for a group of figures in 1805 and a landscape of his was exhibited in 1807. In 1809 he joined the breakaway Society of Artists in Dublin. His interest in landscape quickly became apparent and he formed a friendship with James Arthur O’Connor and Francis Danby.} Petrie is the personification of the culture of learned societies that was embedded in a network of similar organizations throughout the United Kingdom of Ireland and Great Britain. Art and science prospered in an environment that was, as Cullen puts it, a little replica of England in Ireland.

Not surprisingly, overt political statements were rare in the art produced in Ireland of the nineteenth century. Sentimental anecdotes of life in rural Ireland abounded and, as the nineteenth century progressed, the Irish peasant became one of the primary motifs of paintings produced in Ireland. Yet, paintings that depicted the grim reality of peasant Ireland were few. Art remained largely insulated from the aftermath of the 1845-9 famine and the land wars that followed. Frederic William Burton’s \textit{The Aran Fisherman’s Drowned Child} (1843, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin) and similar works by Erskine Nicol (1825-1904) and Elizabeth Thompson (Lady Butler, 1846-1933) deal with the social conditions of the peasantry in a way that evokes an emotional rather than political response. These painting reveal a darker side to ‘Arcadia’ but they are still part
Figure 3.4. Frederic William Burton, *The Aran Fisherman's Drowned Child*, (1843).

Figure 3.5. Erskine Nicol, *The Ejected Family*, (1853), Department of Irish Folklore, UCD.

Figure 3.6. Elizabeth Thompson (Lady Butler), *Evicted*, (1877), Department of Irish Folklore, UCD.
of the romantic project even if it is a hard romanticism - a filtered realism which eschewed idyllic or pastoral references for more contemporary themes but lacked the uncompromising social and political attitude of radical French artists like Jean Francois Millet and Gustave Courbet, much less a nationalist or republican attitude in an Irish context. Burton and Erskine certainly cannot be accused of having a sympathetic view of the native and Catholic Irish. Erskine is particularly known for his slyly racialist caricatures of “Pat” (Figure 3.9). Thompson’s ‘Evicted’ was exceptional in the career of a woman artist (exceptional in its own right) and was based on first hand experience of an eviction. It was severely criticised when it was shown in London and never sold. Irish art in the second half of the nineteenth century was as British as any of the art produced in provincial centres like Manchester, Liverpool or Edinburgh. Its political centre was London, just as its stylistic and commercial centre was.

That was about to change. The changes came from two directions.

1. Stylistically British art was overtaken by developments in France and, although filtered through London, Irish art would be shaped more by artistic developments in Antwerp and Paris from the 1890s onwards.
Politically, art was reclaimed for the Irish by the cultural revivals of the 1890’s - the Gaelic Revival and the Literary Revival – as part of the culture wars with Anglo-Saxonism.

Each of these factors had its own particular effect on the construction of Irishness in art. The French connection would provide the pictorial framework for a Fine Art practice that would be endorsed by Irish-Ireland. The Gaelic and Literary revivals would end the provincialism and establish art in Ireland as separate from the English pictorial tradition and Fine Arts establishment by making reference to Gaelic precedents, on the one hand, and European modernism on the other. These influences would meet in the west of Ireland. For artists, the Irish peasant of the western seaboard represented an opportunity to exploit the stylistic advances made in France. For the nationalists the romanticized motif of the peasant cast as essential man was a readymade model for a nationalist construction of Irishness that looked to the West for legitimacy. The search was on for the first national painter. Paul Henry epitomises the interaction between Ireland as a province within the United Kingdom, Paris as the centre of the art world and London as the natural focus for ambitious Irish artists in the transition from provincialism with a colonial framework to independence. His so-called Realism¹²⁰ may have been a variant of post-impressionist French genre painting but it would redefine the way nationalist Ireland would see itself as represented in art.

3 The Peasant In Irish Painting – The French Connection

The pictures of the ethnic Irish by artists operating in Ireland in the second half of the nineteenth century fit the ‘sentimental and anecdotal taste of the period, this genteel poverty did not demand sweeping political reform.’ Genre painting in Ireland, which emerged from the Dutch inspired art of the first half of the nineteenth century, had come under the influence of French painting during the second half of the century. Beaufort refers specifically to mid-century French artists like Octave Tassaert (1800-1874) (Figure 3.8 and 3.9), Pierre Edouard Frère (1819-1886) (Figure 3.11) and Adolphe Leleux (1812-1891) (Figure 3.10) whose work, unlike that of Courbet and Millet, ‘skirted social issues’ in favour of sugarcoated sentimentalism and found widespread acceptance - by buyers and public alike. Their equivalents in Ireland include David Wilkie (1785-1841), Erskine Nicol (1825-1904) and William Mulready (1786-1863) (Figure 3.13) amongst others. Wilkie (Figure 3.12) and Nicol (Figure 3.5 and 3.7) were Scottish by birth but are associated with Ireland because of their treatment of Irish themes. Mulready was Irish by birth. However all three worked


Figure 3.8. Octave Tassaert, *Studio Interior*, (1845). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Figure 3.9. Octave Tassaert, *Une Famille Malheureuse*, (1849), Musée D’Orsay.

Figure 3.10. Adolphe Pierre Leleux, *Self portrait in a picture gallery*, (1888).

Figure 3.11. Pierre Edouard Frère, *The Morning Meal*, (1856).
Figure 3.12. Sir David Wilkie, *The Peep-o’-Day Boys’ Cabin, in the West of Ireland*, (1835-6). Tate Gallery, London.

Figure 3.13. William Mulready, *Butt Shooting A Cherry*, (1869).
Figure 3.14. Nathaniel Hone, *The Boundary Fence*, Forest of Fontainebleu, (c. 1868).

Figure 3.15. Frank O'Meara, *Towards Night and Winter*, (1885), Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin.
Figure 3.16. Roderic O’Conor, *Portait de Bretonne*, (1887).

Figure 3.1.7. Walter Osborne, *A November Morning*, (1888).
within the English system centred on the Royal Academy in London. Beaufort’s analysis focuses on three interlocking areas that contextualise the representation of the peasant in nineteenth century French painting – the Peasant, the artist and the market for paintings of peasants. The peasant had become the subject (in terms of content) and the object (in terms of appropriation and exploitation) of artists. Artists were, for the most part, middle class professionals whose work in exhibition was biased ‘by preconceived ideas derived from their social backgrounds, the training they received, critics views of their work and what the public was willing to buy.’ At the beginning of the nineteenth century genre subjects ranked low in the hierarchy of acceptable and approved artworks. But the emergence of an art market that would eventually usurp traditional forms of patronage would change that. ‘Nineteenth century periodicals, Salon catalogues, museum records and dealers accounts, provide ample evidence of that images of peasant rural life’ were of widespread interest, across all sorts of critical and stylistic lines (Romantics, Realists, Impressionists etc) and ‘had meaning for buyers from many levels of society’. In fact rustic scenes and genre painting in general had become the market leader, overturning the established position of classical, or history painting approved by the academies. This was not unique to France. The internationalism of the pan-European art world meant that styles transcended national boundaries and that artists in constituent countries participated in a common (or, at the very least, parallel) system of training, professional practice and trade. Radical developments in France in the aftermath of 1848 had quickly become mainstreamed and their influence had begun to spread throughout Europe. French ‘Realism’ would change the nature of art produced in the nineteenth century and French ‘Republicanism’ would change the nature of patronage, paving the way for an aggressive art market independent of the academies and supported by an emerging popular press. The artist – studio - critic – collector system had emerged and “The Arts” had gone “Bourgeois.”

Nineteenth century Ireland was not immune to artistic and political developments in France:

In the second half of the nineteenth century there was an increasing tendency amongst Irish art students to go to the Continent to study, especially to Antwerp and Paris. After a year or two at an art school, they went into the country, to the Flemish countryside, to the artists’ colonies at Barbizon and Grez-sur-Loing by the Forest of Fontainebleau, to Pont Aven or Concarneau in Brittany or to Etretat or Etaples in Normandy, following the then universal tendency among art students to paint from nature.

Nathaniel Hone was at Barbizon by the late 1850s (Figure 3.14.) where he met Millet and Jacques in the sixties. He is regarded as the first Irish painter of importance to engage with the Barbizon

122 ibid
123 Ibid.
painters and adopt the peasant as a subject. He was followed by other artists such as Roderic O’Conor, (Figure 3.16) Frank O’Meara (Figure 3.15), John Lavery, Helen Mabel Trevor, Walter Osborne, (Figure 3.17.) Joseph Kavanagh, Augustus Bourke, Nathaniel Hill, Stanhope Hill, Norman Garstin and many more who were active in France in the 1880s and 90s. They engaged with the various attitudes, styles and motifs then current in France. Hone is closely identified with the Barbizon school. O’Connor integrated fully with the French artists in developing a Post-Impressionist attitude to colour, whilst Lavery, at Grez-sur-Loing in the 1880s mixed mainly with English speaking painters. Campbell does not find a unified approach to the treatment in paint of the French peasantry, rather ‘attitude and style varied from painter to painter’. These fed back into the art scene in Ireland and in the late 1870s and 1880s as ‘an increasing number of domestic and rural scenes of Flanders and Brittany ... began to appear in the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin, evidence of the popularity of new realistic subject-matter amongst Irish artists.’ The focus had shifted from London to Antwerp and Paris but London remained the art capital of Ireland and British artists (including those ‘regional’ artists from Ireland) went through successive phases of engagement and disengagement with dominant French styles. 1878 - 92 was a period of intense engagement or internationalism that was followed by a period of retrenchment that lasted until 1905. This was followed by a second phase of French orientated internationalism that lasted until the outbreak of the First World War. The earlier phase is marked by the mass migration of young artists from all over the world who went to finish their education in the ateliers of Paris, attracted by the complete dominance of French art from the late 1870s onwards. The ‘Magazine of Art’ described Paris as the ‘the art centre of the world... the art school of the world... and the art market of the world.’ There the young artists mixed in an international milieu of which the more successful artists exhibited at the annual salon. The young Bastien-Lepage was the most influential of the artists working in Paris and Concarneau. He was an extraordinarily versatile artist whose style incorporated the most popular and attractive of contemporary painting techniques in plein-air pictures of high finish and meticulous technique. He treaded a cautious path between the radical Impressionists while achieving a contemporary feel to his painting. His style became the house style of the period and his influence was extended by exhibitions in Glasgow and London as he consolidated his position as the most up-to-date exponent of the genre tradition established by the Barbizon school of which Millet, Jules Breton and Lhermitte were the most exhibited and sold French artists in Britain in the 1880s. Bastien and his followers (see O’Meara Figure 3.15.) were never regarded as the most progressive exponents of the French ‘school’. This honour fell to the

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125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
painters who worked in London under the aegis of Whistler, a ‘small select and self contained group following whistler and attempting to expand their experience.’ These artists became the core of the avant-garde in Britain who went on to embrace the influence of the French Impressionists, in particular Monet and Degas. Degas was particularly influential and included among his admirers one George Moore who, as an art critic, tirelessly promoted him. The result was something of a power struggle within the British establishment - between the Bastien Lepage influenced conservatives and the progressive followers of Whistler and Degas - which was fought out in the exhibitions of the New English Art Club. It was founded in 1886 by the ‘progressives’ artists and was modelled on the salon and in direct opposition to the Royal academy which tended to overlook French trained British artists. The 1890s saw a revival of interest in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the British subject painting, in part a nationalist reaction to the extent of French encroachment and in part a reaction to the dubious quality of much of the ‘imitators’ of Monet and Degas. The Slade School of Art was instrumental in redirecting British attention through a combined revival of interest in Velasquez and Whistler (who in his later career was much influenced by Velasquez). Interest in France was reawakened in 1905 with an exhibition of 315 Impressionist paintings in the Grafton Gallery that was, even at this stage, a retrospective exhibition and developments in France had already outpaced the British artists. The resurgent internationalism was confirmed in 1910 when Roger Fry mounted the seminal and controversial exhibition Manet and The Post-Impressionists in the Grafton Galleries which featured work by Gaugin, Van Gogh and Cezanne created up to 25 years earlier. ‘The exhibition was put together in a hurry to fill a gap in the Grafton Galleries programme’ by the art critic Roger Fry and the inexperienced secretary of the exhibition Desmond McCarthy. The exhibition caused an ‘art quake’ which launched a wave of exhibitions which established Britain as a regional centre of modernist experiment which never challenged the dominance of the emerging French and German avant-gardes and eventually petered out during the First World War.


130 The work in the exhibition was assembled through contacts with a select group of dealers in Paris (including Vollard, Cezanne’s former agent), in Munich and a visit to Van Gogh’s family in Amsterdam. The exhibition took Manet as its starting point (9 pieces including A Bar at the Folies Bergère) with representation by ‘Gaugin (46 works), Van Gogh (25) and Cezanne (21). Seurat had only two pictures. Serusier and Denis had five works each, Vallotton four and Redon three. Twentieth-century art was represented by some Fauve paintings - Marquet (five), Manguin (four), Roualt (six) and a substantial group of the closest followers of Cezanne, Vlaminck (eight) and Derain (three). As painters Matisse and Picasso were modestly shown, with two and three oils respectively, though their drawings, and in Matisse’s case sculpture, were numerous’.

131 Ibid
Roger Fry’s attempts to promote modern art in Britain were matched in Ireland by the collector Hugh Lane. In 1904 he organized an exhibition of Irish art at the Guildhall in London to promote the need for an Irish school of modern art. McConkey paraphrases Lane’s ‘Prefatory Notice’ for the exhibition:

He declared himself publicly for creating a ‘standard of taste and a feeling for the relative importance of painters.’ A gallery of modern Art would imply a commitment. It would be necessary to the student ‘if we are to have a distinct school of painting in Ireland’. Lane believed that an artist ‘expressed the soul of his age’, and that there must be a common feature in the works of artists born in Ireland which signified the characteristics of the race. There were two issues here. One was that most Irish artists of note in the preceding century had been driven into exile and the other was the belief that the best modern art, which in 1904 was ‘Corot, Watts, Sargent’ would stimulate the new art, for ‘it is one’s contemporaries that teach one the most’.

Lane would, subsequently, abandon the English moderns and embrace the French Impressionists as the pioneers of modern art. But his efforts to promote an Irish equivalent would fail. When Lane was killed (he was a passenger on the ‘Lusitania’ when it was torpedoed of Cork in 1915) confusion over his will would consign his collection of paintings to a limbo between Dublin and London. Dublin showed no enthusiasm for his request that a gallery be built to house his collection (as a precondition to the bequest of his collection) despite a public campaign in support of the project. It was an unseemly episode and a defining moment in the arts in Ireland. The rejection of Lane was symbolic of the lack of support for the arts in Ireland, especially modern art with its foreign influences. Also, the central thesis of Lane’s selection for the 1904 exhibition – that a ‘race instinct’ was inscribed in the art produced in Ireland – was rejected by many critics - The Art Journal concluded that, on the basis of the evidence presented in the Guildhall, ‘there (was) no Irish school of pictorial art.’ The definitive survey of Post-Impressionist art in Europe mounted by the Royal Academy in London in 1979 featured work by Lavery, Leech, O’Conor, William Orpen, Walter Osborne and Jack B. Yeats as British artists – Irishmen working within a distinctly British context. All of them, were in part, based in London and had participated in key exhibitions in London at this time. One artist who was not featured was Paul Henry. Yet Henry would prove to be the main conduit into Irish art for these developments.


133 Ibid. p. 14 quoting The Art Journal, 1904, p.236
5 Paul Henry

Henry’s career is a textbook example of the artistic formation described above. From 1895-8 he attended the Belfast Government School of Art where he took an interest in the work of Jean Francois Millet. In the autumn of 1898 he went to Paris and joined several ateliers. He came into contact with the French avant-garde. Van Gogh made a lasting impression on him but it was the American painter James MacNeill Whistler who had the greatest long-term influence on the young artist. He exhibited in the Salon des Refusés in Paris in 1900 but did not do very well. He returned to London where he tried, unsuccessfully, to set up a French-style atelier. He got full-time work as an illustrator for the newspaper To-Day. In 1906, he exhibited charcoal drawings in the Goupil Gallery that was one of the main outlets for French and French-inclined art, in London. In 1907 he exhibited in the Ulster Arts Club and in 1908, was involved in the Allied Artists Association in the Royal Albert Hall in London where he met Hugh Lane. Exhibitions followed at

134 Henry, Paul, 1951, An Irish Portrait, The Autobiography of Paul Henry R.H.A., London, New York, Toronto, Sydney, B.T. Batsford Ltd., p. 25-27. The Salon Des Refusés was independent of the Academy and had emerged as an alternative for artists who were rejected by the Academy. The first Salon Des Refusés marked the beginning of Impressionism and was thereafter associated with radical and experimental art. The I.E.L.A. was modelled on the Salon Des Refusés and it is a little ironic that Paul Henry as regarded as epitomising the conservatism of the R.H.A.
the Royal Academy and The Royal Hibernian Academy (1910) and all the while he was showing work in the AAA, Belfast Art Society, Goupil and other galleries as he went on his ‘casual and uncalculating’ way. His style, at this stage, was a mix of illustration, Millet inspired charcoal drawing and Whistler inspired painting. And then, in 1910, he went ‘west’:

As a very young man I had met Yeats and Synge in Paris, but I had not read any of their work: I had only met them casually, as two young fellow-countrymen. I had read *Riders to the Sea* and had turned it over and over again. There was something in Synge that appealed to me very deeply. He touched some chord which resounded as no other music had ever done. And I was thinking of *Riders to the Sea* as the train steamed out of Euston, taking me, as I thought, on a couple of weeks holidays ... (to Achill Island, in County Mayo).  

Just as Synge had travelled to Aran with Petrie in his back pocket, Henry had come to the Island of Achill with Synge as a guide. Irish art would never be the same. Ireland had its first painter of peasants who would furnish Irish-Ireland with an idealised image of itself and help create the first Irish school of painting - Irish Realism, an Irish hybrid of Anglo-French Realism and post-impressionist variations of picturesque landscape.

![Figure 3.18. Paul Henry, The Watcher, (1911).](image)

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135 Ibid. p.48
SECTION III: REVIVAL

Paul Henry was lucky in the sense that he was in the right place at the right time. Henry describes his arrival in Achill as a sort of personal epiphany and an act of fate inextricably bound up with the manifest destiny of Ireland. Critics like McConkey echo this self-heroicising tendency. He correlates Hugh Lane’s call for the establishment of an Irish school of painting with an earlier call by William Butler Yeats to writers to return to Ireland and:

... dig in Ireland the garden of the future, and understand that here in Ireland the spirit of man may be about to wed the soil of the world.’ This was the essence of the enjoinder to Synge in Paris in 1896. It was the reason why Paul Henry in 1910 stationed himself upon the bleak Achill hillsides to portray the potato diggers.  

This is wilfully mythographic. Paul Henry is central to the attempts of nationalists of every shade to reclaim art in Ireland for the Irish as a reaction to Anglo-Saxon hegemony the that was expressed in two linked but distinct strategies, the Gaelic Cultural Revival and the Literary Revival.

1 The Gaelic Cultural Revival

The Gaelic revival had little time for the modern. It was fixated on the past, on the golden age before conquest. In the absence of contemporary role models, reference was made to ‘Ancient Ireland’ and its recovery through the arts and crafts movement, ecclesiastical architecture and popular culture. The resurgent Holy Roman Catholic Church reasserted its dominance of the social and cultural landscape with a building programme that sometimes relieved the bland institutionalism of transmontane architecture with references to the land of saints and scholars, using architectural motifs from a previous era of church building and institutional power that seems more than a mere exercise in aesthetics: the purifying flame of St. Patrick burned brightly once again. The burgeoning Catholic middleclass merchandised this newfound sense of nationhood and converted the popular devices that Petrie and the Young Irelanders had developed into a profitable market in the effects of popular culture. Who’s for the last Tara Brooch? ‘Celtic’ and ‘Hiberno-Romanesque’ motifs colonised every aspect of material culture. Davis’ legacy was a Tara brooch on every lapel. The fact that the interest in Celtic artefacts was part of a European wide fascination


with Mediaevalism and exotica or, that Queen Victoria had played a part in the dissemination of
such motifs and their transformation into tokens of identity is neither here nor there.\footnote{The ‘Tara’ brooch became popular after Queen Victoria purchased a replica during the 1853 Great
Chicago, The David and Alfred Smart Museum of the University of Chicago, p. 8-9.}
What mattered was a symbolic revival of the Irish nation. The front cover of the \textit{Saorstat Éireann, Irish
Free State Official Handbook of The Free State} synthesises many of these elements in an intricate
‘Celtic’ design by Art Murnaghan. Between the covers the reproductions of work by the school of
Irish realism were used to create an image of the state. The arts and craft movement maintained the
rigour and aesthetics of the Royal Dublin Society. But the view was firmly backward and the
outdated values of the School of Paris and a nineteenth century revivalist aesthetic remained
dominant long after the European scene had been altered by the aftershock of the First World War and the build up to the Second World War. The ‘official art of the Free State’ was ‘... from the same school of thinking which produced the early Irish postage stamps, Tailtean Games, some rather grim and four-square pieces of architecture, the typical Abbey rural play etc.’ Art never came close to realising an image of Irish Ireland and Irish-Ireland never came close to embracing Irish art. If anything, the Gaelic revival obstructed the development of the visual arts in Ireland for almost half a century.


The Literary Revival

The artists aligned with the Literary Revival fared little better. The revivalists, mainly Anglo-Irish Literary Romantics, had a double problem. On the one hand they had to establish a distinctly ‘Irish’ art, independent of the big house and amenable to a nationalist construction of culture, whilst on the other, the need for artists who could deliver art that functioned in the same way as the literature of the Revival and to the same standard. Most of all they had to deal with what Paul Henry regarded as the main obstacles to progress - the conservatism of the RHA and the ‘complacent self satisfaction of this country’ in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In 1906:

A royal commission had been held in Ireland ... which professed to look into the work done by the Royal Hibernian Academy and the Metropolitan School of Art. I have a much-valued copy of the Report beside me and it makes very sorry reading. Amongst those who gave evidence A.E., William Butler Yeats, Sir William Orpen and George Moore, whose evidence, in spite of its apparent flippancy, proves that indifference to art was no new thing.143

Barrett assigns the neglect of Irish artists during the nineteenth century to the failure to develop a system of patronage as successive political crises led to a dearth of potential patrons amongst the ruling elite. He quotes Strickland on the lack of interest in the arts following the 1798 rebellion and adds to this the exodus of potential patrons after the Act of Union and during the “Famine.” By the end of the nineteenth-century patronage was hard come by. ‘It took time for the rising middle class to acquire the taste for art which the aristocracy had inherited with their estates.’ The church tended to prefer French, German and Italian artists rather than the native Irish. Weak institutions, an indifferent elite, a poor foundation of arts practitioners and an underdeveloped market, compounded by the contested nature of Irish art in a highly politicised atmosphere, all hindered its development in the transition from the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth century. Paul Henry and his friend Arthur Power ‘deplored the fact that the literary revival had not thrown up any such revival in painting.’145 Bruce Arnold had detected a broad revival of interest in the arts which was taking place in Dublin, Glasgow and London, absorbing influences from Paris, Antwerp,

143 Ibid. Further Reminiscences was dictated in 1953, 2 years after he had completed his autobiography. As Ted Hickey stated in the introduction: ‘Paul Henry’s sense of chronology was rather weak, as he rarely dated his paintings and his writings are deficient in dates. While it is difficult to pin down when events took place, Henry’s account is retrospective.’
Fontainbleau, Brittany but there is no evidence to suggest that Irish artists ‘travelling widely in Europe, were influenced by political and social upheavals here’ or had any involvement in the pro-independence movements in other areas of the arts and culture which generated the Irish Literature Revival in the subtle and complicated transition from British provincialism to an independent albeit truncated state. The lack of a visual equivalent to the literary tradition coupled with the lack of coherent leadership\textsuperscript{147} exacerbated a complex social, cultural and political situation in which competing traditions hindered the development of art in Ireland. The Anglo-Irish had attempted to stimulate a cultural revival drawn from the well of ‘ancient Irish culture’ aligned to a broader European tradition that had been the inheritance of the ascendancy. The colonists wished to maintain the union and their social, religious and political supremacy whilst acknowledging a distinctive (though subordinate) native culture of ‘twee thatched cottages and young women in shawls’.\textsuperscript{148} The residue of Gaelic Ireland located itself in the economically impoverished cultural heartland beyond the Shannon - the line drawn by Cromwell between English Protestant Ireland and Gaelic Catholic Ireland in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. The separatists wanted to recreate an independent Ireland in an image of a glorious past and rid it of Anglo-Saxon influence. Yet they all shared a desire for cultural legitimacy that would underwrite ideological and political supremacy in Ireland. Even the modernists like Joyce, who were either indifferent or in exile, were recruited to invest the drive for statehood with cultural credibility. Ultimately the main dynamic was that of a culture trying to renew itself as it became the vehicle for avant-garde and nationalist ideas opposed to a colonial power and its oppressive image of the native. During the 1890s this is essentially what happened to the Irish literary movement, with the visual arts playing catch-up. However, as the Literary Revival progressed through the 1890s and into the first decade of the twentieth century, there was no evidence of a consensus developing around a national Irish art and, in the end, the Literary Revival was eclipsed by the Gaelic Cultural Revival and any hope of a revitalised art, let alone a brave new beginning for the Irish art sector was lost.

\textsuperscript{147} The visual arts lacked someone of the stature of W. B. Yeats and no-one in the visual arts had had the impact of Synge and \textit{The Playboy of the Western World}. Paul Henry was no W. B. Yeats and Hugh Lane never achieved the influence of Lady Gregory. Most importantly, the visual arts lacked the coherent vision of the principals involved in the literary revival.

SECTION IV: THE POLITICS OF ART

Conventional art historiography in Ireland is obsessed with the search for a National art and the artist who is entitled to claim the title of ‘First Irish Painter’ of an independent Irish-Ireland:

Now if the literary folk could produce a distinct Irish literature, why, it was asked, should not the artists produce a distinct Irish art? This was the simple reasoning behind what, by the 1880s was the central issue for Irish painting.

The standard trajectory in Irish art historiography is the transition from provincial status in a colonial context into the might-have-beens of the Anglo Irish period and on to the achievement of a nationalistic art in an independent Ireland, with the relative value of each phase measured against the standard of international modernism. The Anglo-Irish artists score well on this scale as they were actively engaged with emerging modernist trends in the visual arts emanating from Paris. The Nationalists score badly because they were looking the other way, into the past in terms of an idea of Ireland that was introverted and anti-modern. The progression is seen as exclusive, leading to a situation where a nationalistic art alone, an art in line with the cultural parameters laid down by Irish-Ireland, qualified as Irish art. But the linear progression of traditional (nationalist) art historiography has been disrupted by some awkward questions: whatever happened to the visual traditions of Anglophone and Unionist Ireland after independence? Also, some art historians have begun to question some fundamental narratives of art in Ireland. For instance, leaving nationalist agendas aside, can one really speak of an Irish modernism? Art historiography has become every bit as problematic as historiography in general given that revisionism and post-colonial studies have tended to politicise what had heretofore been the preserve of the connoisseurs sequestered in the art world. Irish art historiography has begun to develop the same stress fractures that are to be found in other areas of historiography. These run from north to south, east to west, republican to loyalist, left to right and conservative to radical. This section deals with the issue of art historiography as a problematic, using the issue of the search for the ‘first national painter’ as the starting point to position art histories as an alliance between the arts and political establishments which create state-sponsored mythologies that are at odds with artistic and political realities and are particularly divorced from social fact; a discourse, best represented by the career and reputation of the man most art historians regard as the first Irish artist, Mr. Paul Henry RHA.

The Trouble with Art Histories

The first impulse that needs to be considered in relation to the role assigned to Paul Henry, as ‘First Artist of the Nation’ is the need to identify the point at which a distinctive Irish school of modern painters begins to replace the London centred, ascendancy system of patronage and production. This need derives in part from nationalist agenda of defining a nation by culture rather than by politics, and, in part, by the need to weave the story of Irish art into the progressive narrative of mainstream European modernism. To do so is to confer status on both the artist as representative of the cultural nation. This is dangerous. There is the risk of a distorted and distorting art historiography. Peter Lord uses the example of John Lewis, a Welsh/Irish painter, to highlight the risks inherent in art historians who are prepared to indulge aspirations to bolster the national canon at the expense of evidence. Facts are adapted to fit national traditions and histories are constructed to a particular agenda. ’... Such wishful thinking runs the risk of undermining rather than reinforcing both Irish visual tradition and the principles which guide the development of national traditions in general.’

Brian McAvera goes further in his criticism of art historiography. He identifies a tendency for historians and art critics ‘to like linear versions of histories, with one event leading to the next, one movement generating another.’ He links this to state sponsored culture and argues that art histories are the result of an alliance between the arts and political establishments. This is the effect of partial independence in a post-colonial context. It is not suited to the ‘contradictory complexity’ generated by the fraught relationship with the ‘mainland’ of Great Britain, with the mainland of Europe and with both sides of a partitioned territory. The official art of the Irish Free State visually represents Eamon de Valera’s version of nationalism: the artist is complicit in the creation of state sponsored mythologies which distort or override social and politic fact. Although a broad chronology is a prerequisite of any history of art, it makes more sense to McAvera ‘to situate a movement, or an artist, within the overlapping frames of reference that constitute the social,

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1. Lord, Peter, 2005, The Two Lives of John Lewis in Irish Arts Review, Spring 2005, Dublin, Circa, p. 114. Peter Lord works in Wales as an art historian and has written extensively about visual culture in both Welsh and English contexts. The Two Lives of John Lewis concerns ‘the recent enthusiasm’ to claim the 18th Century landscape painter as an Irish artist.


3. Ibid.

4. McValera makes an appearance here as the bogeyman of liberal Ireland. This is out of sequence with the scenario being created by McAvera. Almost everything that McAvera has said conforms to the situation in Ireland under the Cumann na nGaedháil government, before de Valera came to power in 1932. McAvera has conflated the character of the Irish Free State with Ireland under Fianna Fail in the 1930s as a general portrayal of nationalistic culture in Ireland after independence.
cultural, political and historical milieu.' This has not happened. Instead art history has been
manipulated; the manipulation is institutionalised and therefore political. ‘Art in twentieth Ireland ... 
was not a glorious affair. When compared to developments in France, Germany and, even, England, 
art in Ireland was ‘characterised by a conservative and often romantic academicism (that bolstered) 
the official image of Ireland (as) promoted by politicians, patriots and the Irish Tourist Board’.
McAvera paraphrases DeValera’s (in)famous “crossroads speech” as a gauge of the quality of Irish 
art of the time. The references to Paul Henry are obvious but not exclusive. Art is tied into a 
political agenda that linked nationalism to rural values, presented the ‘Irish as classless and carefree 
in terms of cash and promoted a mythical West coast of Ireland as the key to Ireland’s identity. 
Charm, security and blue skies replaced the reality of despair and demoralisation in the same rural 
communities.” In his notes to the text, McAvera goes a little further in directing his polemic at 
particular artists, historians and institutions. He moves beyond the creation of a context for the work 
of the artist Eamon Coleman and creates a subtext that is critical of the social, cultural and political 
bankruptcy of the Irish state and Irish-Irelandism. He anticipates dissention from ‘revisionist’ 
historians but insists that it ‘is difficult to understand how the ‘optimistically named ‘Irish 
impresionists’ can be spoken of in the same breath as their French Counterparts. He describes the 
attempt by the ‘equally hopefully named Irish Museum of Modern Art to install Mainie Jellett as a 
key figure in Modernism as doomed to failure. The tepid nature of Irish art is elegantly 
demonstrated in the illustrated pages of S. B. Kennedy’s ‘Irish Art and Modernism 1880 – 1950’ 
though this is a judgement the author might dispute. McAvera concludes that art histories are, in 
effect, state sponsored mythologies that deny artistic or political realities and social fact as a 
political act. He supports his analysis by reference to Terence Browne’s critique of Gaelic Ireland 
and goes on to state that ‘one has only to look at the ‘Saorstat Éireann, Irish Free State: Official 
Handbook’ to see the official image.

Niamh O’Sullivan shares some of McAvera’s understandable distrust of a partisan and political art 
historiography, even if she approaches the issue from a very different direction. O’Sullivan shifts 
the focus from a preoccupation with issues derived from a left to right opposition to a more vertical 
axis of chronologies concerned with the past in the present and the dualism of what McAvera calls 
“our partitioned selves.” Revisionism may have undermined traditional (nationalist) historiography 
but the post-ceasefire situation has allowed greater freedom in the exploration of issues connected 
with the origins of the state in a way that touches upon the legacy of violence that was The

154 Ibid.
155 Kennedy, S. B. 1991, Irish Art and Modernism 1880 - 1950, Belfast, Institute of Irish Studies, 
in 1932 not 1922 as stated in the text.
Troubles. In a review of the Fintan Cullen’s ‘Sources in Irish Art’ O’Sullivan\(^{158}\) states her dislike of surveys that tend to simplify history and reinforce the assumptions and imbalances of official chronologies. There is a tendency to confuse facts with history and substitute assumption for evidence in chronologies that may be ideologically derived but are very real in their political effect. She suggests strongly that Davis’ call for a national art was frustrated because of ‘the selective prejudices of contemporary and subsequent critics’. Access to original sources reveals the extent of the manipulation of the historical ‘record’ in the chronologies that pass for art histories. ‘Anthologies such as this ... demonstrate the extent to which Davis’ plea for an art that addressed ‘great principals and conditions was bolstered or challenged by other treatises on the concepts of art and nation, in the formation of national identity.’ O’Sullivan ascribes a political role to both art historian and critics where ‘the nation’ is both subject and object in histories concerned with the fit between events and perception in an ideological context. Davis is accredited with the first call for a ‘national’ art!\(^{159}\) It remains relevant. Davis’ manifesto was published in essay form in ‘The Nation’ newspaper. His call for ‘a national art’ was contained in two essays in 1843 that deal with the definition of a national art and a range of possible subjects as exemplars for a distinctly Irish school of painting. In the first essay published in July Davis states bluntly that ‘We have Irish artists but no Irish, no national art.’\(^{160}\) A national art, as defined by Davis is, ‘conversant with national subjects’ which he extrapolates as the grand themes of Irish history. The lack of a national art, either inherited or created is a matter of disgrace and places Ireland at the ‘lowest stage of all’. In ‘National Art’ Davis painted a rather gloomy picture of the state of the arts in mid-century Ireland as a backdrop for a range of measures to promote a national art. These included improved arts education, commissions and opportunities for artists and the establishment of a network of public galleries containing ‘great works of art’. But, as O’Sullivan states, Davis’ call for a national art ‘passed into oblivion’ under pressure from other treatises or concepts of art and national identity. O’Sullivan does not elaborate in this context but her work on Aloysius O’Kelly would indicate that art history has ignored artists like O’Kelly because of his sympathy and support for the militant Irish Republican Brotherhood or The Fenians. This has placed him beyond the pale: a

\(^{158}\) O’Sullivan, Niamh, 2000, Sources in Irish Art, A Reader in Circa , Irish and International Contemporary Visual Culture, Summer, 2000, p. 64. O’Sullivan article is a review of Cullen, Fintan, (ed.), 2000, Sources in Irish Art, A Reader, Cork University Press. Cullen acknowledges O’Sullivan’s ‘help with enquiries and guidance when necessary’.


stone in the shoe of a more elegant and reassuring narrative of the blending of genre, Realism and elements of modernism in the Anglo-Irish foundation of art with a distinctly Irish identity.

Davis’ definition of a national art has been updated and re-defined by Cyril Barrett as a nationalistic Irish art. In an earlier essay Barrett outlined the requirements to be considered an Irish artist in the nineteenth-century as follows: Irish by birth, having resided in and produced art in Ireland or having produced art that related to Ireland in its subject matter. In ‘Irish nationalism and Art 1800-1921’ he makes a distinction between national and nationalistic art in the context of three main streams of political nationalism and a possible fourth. These are (1) the extreme nationalism of the militant republicans and separatists (2) the mitigated nationalism which sought an independent monarchy and (3) the moderate nationalism that favoured a constitutional accommodation with Britain. The fourth group, the patriotic nationalists, were a milder version of this last category as espoused by people who would consider themselves British in Ireland. Barrett does not find any evidence of art emanating from the first two categories – the Fenian O’Kelly brothers are not mentioned at all. With regard to the last two categories there is a pictorial tradition which could be regarded as national but, to be considered nationalistic it would have to go beyond the mere representation of nationalist themes: ‘some glimpse must be given of what these people are striving for, what values they wish to preserve, what kind of life they wish to bring into being...’ Jack B. Yeats comes close to being considered nationalistic but his treatment of republican themes are too subtle ‘to be effective in rousing national sentiments ... Besides Yeats there is no one who could be considered a candidate for the title of a nationalist painter.

In 1920, Thomas Bodkin published ‘Four Irish Landscape Painters’ in which he compared Osborne to Jack B. Yeats:

One need only compare his western types with those of Jack B. Yeats to realise Osborne’s lack of anxiety to depict anything more than the mere appearance of his models. His peasants, even in the picturesque costume – tall hat, tall hat, frieze coat and knee breeches – which then survive, are not nearly as Irish or as romantic as those painted by Yeats.

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162 Barret, Cyril, 1971, *Introduction in Irish art in the 19th century*, Cork, Cork, Cork ROSC ’71 Committee, p.8. This exhibition of Irish Victorian art at the Crawford Municipal School of Art was modelled on the exhibition of Irish art organised by Hugh Lane in the Guildhall, London in 1904.

Yeats's had been hailed as the most distinctive Irish painter in the exhibition of Irish art in the Guildhall in London in 1904\textsuperscript{164} and his work was described in a review of the exhibition as wonderful examples of 'pictorial Irishisms.'\textsuperscript{165} This was rejected in turn by Barrett and other, more nationalistic, writers some of whom would have taken issue with Yeats's religion and Anglo-Irish background.\textsuperscript{166} Joseph Hanly, for instance, would have regarded Yeats's Irishness as a 'sham-nationality.'\textsuperscript{167} The rejection of the Anglo-Irish and the British in Ireland - the people described as patriotic nationalists by Barrett - was a distinct feature of nationalist attitudes to the arts. James Christen, Stewart proposed the following as a definition of West Brit when he described the Irish Literary Movement as being regarded by certain elements of the Church as a "West British movement" - that is to say, one that adhered to unionist values.\textsuperscript{168} By the same token the West Britons regarded the mere Irish as incapable of maintaining the Anglo-Irish commitment to Culture.

The search for a national/nationalistic art after independence inevitably developed into a political process, political in the sense of reconciling the narratives of history and culture or, more accurately, the historiographies of politics and art. Art and politics in Ireland are inseparable. 'The impression has literally gone abroad that Ireland has traditionally been a culture in which art and politics, and especially the politics of trouble, (since there has been little else), has been a close and mutually enforcing one.' During 'the Revival', this attitude manifests itself as

the heroicising impulse which Irish art and Irish politics discovered as a principle of liberation and energy in the earlier part of the century (when) the demands made by a dramatically broken history on artists who were caught between identities, Irish and British, Irish and Anglo-Irish, Catholic and Protestant are well nigh irresistible. In the period of the Revival the response to history was heroic and astounding.\textsuperscript{169}

Seamus Deane's perspective on 'the Revival' is interesting: it was a time when 'programmes of national revival and rehabilitation gave form to political passion (and) it was almost inevitable that, for the artist, the only available resource was the construction of ideologies of art itself.' The artist had to deal with history and that involved adopting an attitude to history. The result was a parallel

\textsuperscript{164} This was the starting point for Cyril Barrett's exhibition in Cork Rosc in 1971. Barrett set out to test the nationality of the Irish art selected as a measure of Irishness in art in the nineteenth century.
\textsuperscript{167} Hanly, Joseph, 1931, The National Ideal, Dollard, Dublin, p10.
\textsuperscript{168} Stewart, James Christen, 1999, The Irishness of Irish Painting in When Time Began to Rant and Rage, Figurative Painting from Twentieth-Century Ireland, London, Merrel Holberton, pp.16-17
political and artistic programme of revolution and consolidation that created a New Ireland, or at least, a new idea of Ireland created by 'artists and politicians, military leaders and poets.' Bruce Arnold\(^{170}\) disagrees. He uses the pictorial record to make the case that Irish artists had not had any involvement in the pro-independence movements in other areas of the arts and culture that generated the Irish Literature Revival. More importantly Arnold adds another dimension to Deane's coupling of art and politics. The politics of art were just as important in shaping the outcome of the arts during the subtle and complicated transition from the British pictorial tradition to modern Irish painting. He cites Orpen as the most influential artist at that time and his influence was felt much more directly on the development of a 'nationalistic art' by 'notable followers of Orpen, like Sean Keating and Maurice MacGonigal (who) were later to employ the tradition of dramatic tension in art in order to deal with issues of character and history.' Orpen influenced matters more than the transmission of style from one generation of artists to the next. Orpen represents the continuing conservatism and persistence of the Academic tradition and the Academic approach to painting.\(^{171}\) His influence within the arts establishment would have hindered the impact of modernism. Because of his stature and political influence:

The power struggles habitual to art - about who controlled art education, the major exhibitions, the Royal Hibernian Academy - tended to be won by the British tradition. Money was in portraiture, genre painting and in the tense rural drama, which so attracted Jack Yeats, and in the provocative haunting canvases of William Orpen.

Was it this that stood in the way of a nationalist art? Paul Henry seems to think so. He lays the blame for the failure of modernism to take hold in Ireland at the very institutions most influenced by Orpen.

That leaves the issue of contested identities. This brings us back to John Wilson Foster and the final phase in this review of art histories. Foster has been quoted as stating that the very concept of an Irish identity is problematic because it is inseparable from the exercise of power expressed as ideology. Up until the 1980's the concept of ideology had had little impact on the histories of art in Ireland. Since then the search for a national art inevitably becomes a search for legitimacy in terms of the authentication of representation in an ideological context. This is the last phase of art historiography that will be considered. In the last decade a number of books have been published


\(^{171}\) Arnold on Orpen '... an emphasis on drawing and rigorous composition and the heroic/historical treatment of narrative and character. He was influenced by developments in Europe but only to the extent that he incorporated them into a style that was rooted in traditional (or academic) British painting and innovation in the incorporation of the influence of European modernism. Orpen's art (and, indeed, his artfulness) lay in accommodating conflicting ideas and positions.'
which signal a shift in the direction and methodology of mainstream art historiography. ‘Visualizing Ireland, National identity and the Pictorial Tradition’ attempts to place the pictorial tradition within a broader cultural narrative (and) indicate how visual materials can be incorporated into our construction of ‘Irishness’ as an ideological concept. The focus is on the application of new critical models to the study of the history of art, a parallel movement to that described by John Wilson Foster as the shift from literary criticism to cultural criticism:

the shift in interest in scope and method (which) reflects a reorientation in Anglo-American critical writing during the same period (1974 - 1990), when the interdisciplinary, cultural and even ideological have been increasingly prized over the more modest quarry of prior criticism (and, increasingly) ‘excited less by critical theory than by the political weather in Ireland. For several years now, a lively cultural debate has been conducted within Ireland, often within earshot of bomb-blast and variously responsive to political fall-out.

Field Day led the way and mainstream art historiography was a little slow in catching up. There is now a lively debate going on in that quarter. Dalsimer saw a gap in Irish Cultural Studies as it developed into a discreet discipline and responded with the collected essays of ‘Visualizing Ireland: National Identity and the Pictorial Record.’ This attempted to address the neglect in cultural studies of the pictorial tradition that emerged in Ireland since the medieval period. It focused on 'Irish art as a means of accessing the nation’s social and political past' with the clear understanding that the pictorial tradition was the product of colonisation:

As Maire de Paor reminds us; visual arts that survived from the early modern period was a by-product of English conquests. For subjects, artists emerging from or working for garrison forces turned to an elite class and its surrounding, or alternatively, to the native Irish world as seen from the perspective of the colonizers. While a significant body of native Irish music and literature survived after the sixteenth century, a comparatively rich tradition is absent in the visual arts - or, as Kevin O’Neill insists - on the visual productions acknowledged as art. Consequently, contemporary cultural historians, seeking the voice of a marginalized people, rather than that of its colonizers, have too often failed to turn to Irish paintings. Because of the imperial sources of post-conquest art, Irish cultural studies ignores material essential to an understanding of the intertwined national identities of the two Irelands in their colonial and post-colonial incarnations.

The American spelling reveals the importance of the Irish-American counter to Anglo-American perspectives in the debate.


Gibbons, Luke, 1996, Transformations in Irish Culture, Cork, Cork University Press in association with Field Day. This volume was influential in redirecting art historiography toward visual culture as a new framework for critical writing.


ibid
This represents an attempt to insert an ‘ideological component’ into ‘the art historian’s study of post famine genre painting.’ Brian Kennedy’s contribution examines the iconography of the thatched cottage in painting and architecture, from the eighteenth century to the present, in order to create a context for the exposure of the effect on representation of the ‘historically established fact’ of various ideologies or, more specifically, aesthetics rooted in or defined by ideology.

It is now clear that the pictorial record has become regarded as an ideological construct that must be read as a series of perspectives. That is the starting point for ‘Ireland: Art Into History,’ edited by Brian P. Kennedy and Raymond Gillespie. ‘Ireland: Art Into History’ adopts the same approach with essays by both Kennedy and Gillespie appearing in both publications. Stylistically there is a difference. ‘Visualizing Ireland: National Identity and the Pictorial Tradition’ is a collection of essays by Irish and American authors that was published in the United States as a complementary volume to accompany an exhibition in Boston College of watercolours and drawings from the collection of the National Gallery of Ireland. The volume was an initiative of the Irish Studies Programme and has the sober feel of an “intervarsity” publication. Nevertheless it attempted to break new ground in art historiography by inserting a visual discourse into the inadequate and restrictive (literary) demarcations of Irish Cultural studies. Dalsimer, in her introduction, adopts the language of discourse referring to painting by Jack B. Yeats as a visual text in the context of inherent narratives, the representation of social difference, visuality, sites of production, audiencing and inter-textuality. The effect is uneven: Margaret MacCurtain sets Thomas Alfred Jone’s sugary depiction of an Irish peasant girl cast as Molly Macree (circa 1860) against the harsh social and economic conditions experienced by women of her class in the aftermath of the famine as seen from the perspective of a radical social historian. It is only in the last paragraph of the essay that she engages fully with the ideological effect of the image of the Irish colleen and the broader discursive formation to which it belongs:

After the famine public discussion of Irish nationalism gradually assumed the proportions of a major ideological discourse, communicated at a popular level through broadsheets, ballads, new forms of journalism and artistic iconography. Ideology finds avenues to express itself in a variety of texts and the visual image is a powerful conveyer of the political text. It is only

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by the viewer’s ability to decode and interpret - as well as respond to - the artist’s composition that new modes of recognition surface. 181

‘Ireland: Art into History’ is a much more glamorous production, a hardback, large format volume that achieves the same level of presentation as that of a “coffee-table book” without sacrificing the quality of the collected essays inside. In ‘Ireland: Art into History’ Kennedy and Gillespie push the process beyond the Fine Arts in an attempt ‘to re-create the material world of the past; images as a reflection of political life in the past; and images as evidence of ideas and mentalities’ from a wider range of visual material than those traditionally recognised as art. For instance, they identify the Welch collection in the Ulster Museum as an attractive road into the past. Ironically, photography is ignored in the book and it’s value as anything other than illustration or, in some cases, collaborative evidence is completely overlooked. Nevertheless the idea of an expanded pictorial record has been adopted and 13 essays cover topics as diverse as ‘National Monuments in Ireland c 1870-1914: Symbolism and Ritual’ and ‘Child Rearing in Ireland 1700-1830: an Exploration.’ Both Dalsimer and Kennedy/Gillespie - as editors and contributors - share a neo-nationalist outlook in the sense of a post-colonial perspective on Irish art. This provoked a reaction from Fintan Cullen in the form of ‘Visual Politics.’ That was written from a two-nations-theory or neo-unionist perspective. Cullen is wary of the issue-led and post-colonial approach of Dalsimer, Kennedy and Gillespie. Cullen argues that revisionism in art historiography has not gone far enough in addressing the cultural context or the range of visual material used. His argument in ‘Visual Politics’ is that the cultural turn in arts historiography is exclusive of the unionist tradition:

Recent texts such as Ireland, Art into History edited by Raymond Gillespie and Brian P. Kennedy and Visualizing Ireland, National Identity and the Pictorial Tradition edited by Adele Dalsimer are welcome additions to the growing literature (of Irish art Historiography). These two texts are, on the whole, issue led. In this they are innovatory in an Irish context. Gillespie and Kennedy’s collection of essays as well as Dalsimer’s compilation are ambitious in scope, their contributors ask useful questions or reveal rich areas for research, but the overall results are disappointingly uneven in their achievement (and) a greater awareness of the cultural role of the visual needs to be addressed. 182

Although Davis’s manifesto for a National Art, and Bodkin’s tentative first steps in defining Irishness in art may have yielded to the consideration of intertextuality in visual discourses and, challenging their power as regimes of truth by analysing the social production and effect of images, one thing has remained constant: art historians still disagree on the nature of Irishness in art.

Figure 3.22 Alice Maher, Cell, Bramble, 1991
SECTION V: ART AND POLITICS

The spotlight falls on the newly created Saorstát Éireann or Irish Free State as the defining achievement of historic nationalism in Ireland and the perception that it was hostile to art and culture and that this translates into an acceptance that the ethnic Irish lack a capacity for anything other than the literary arts as an extension of traditional forms or folk culture. In short, there is a perception that the political and institutional expression of Irish Ireland, The Irish Free State | Saorstát Éireann, was a Culture free zone for all the wrong reasons, that independent Ireland was a failed state as far as Art and Culture was concerned.

Figure 3.23. Great seal of Saorstát Éireann designed by Archibald McGoogan.

As stated previously, one of the first acts of the Irish Free State was to replace drawing with Gaelic in the primary school curriculum, an act that symbolises the ascendancy of Gaelic Ireland and the retreat of Culture as patronised by an Anglo-Irish elite. On achieving independence Irish art would be reconfigured in the image of peasant Ireland, a necessary retreat into nineteenth century genre in defiance of European modernism and all other external influences. The significant achievement of writers and the tentative steps toward modern art that characterised the literary revival were allowed to wither or, as some would have it, were done to death by an oppressive regime. Independent Nationalist Ireland emerges as anti-art and the Irish as visually incompetent, a race whose main achievements would be literary, as befitting a peasant people whose traditions have been orally transmitted for centuries. There are two parts to this. The first concerns the people, the Irish as a race. There are racist undertones in the assertion that the Irish (as in the Irish nation, standing alone) are incapable of art. The second concerns the political apparatus established by the
nationalists after independence and the civil war – the Irish Free State | Saorstát Éireann. By and large the Irish Free State gets a bad press. It is seen as having failed to protect Gaelic culture, nourish the achievements of the Anglo-Irish or provide for the development of the arts in Ireland at a time of tremendous excitement on an international level. In short the Irish Free State is a failed state where art and culture are concerned and this is evidence of a lack of capacity for Art in the ethnic Irish. Is this true? Does the record of the Irish Free State support the view that the Irish on gaining independence wilfully or otherwise turned their back on Culture? And does this support the view that the Irish have some sort of allergy to the arts?

It is true that the arts would be denied any sort of institutional support by the state for almost half a century. In fact, established institutions like The National Gallery and the Metropolitan School of Art would decay as inevitably as the fabric of Georgian Dublin and the big houses all over the country. The orthodox view is one of the eclipse of art and culture by Gaelic Ireland as the Culture of the big house succumbs to the rude peasant in his utilitarian and bigoted state. The cultural failure of the Irish Free State is characterised by Terence Browne as a rejection of the Anglo-Irish Literary Revival and it links to mainstream European modernism as evidence that Irish Ireland was incapable of Culture. Conventional histories of art in Ireland assume that Art was an entirely Anglo-Irish affair and that the development of the arts stalled at the point where Irish-Ireland gained political supremacy over Anglo-Ireland. Art recovers as the influence of Irish-Ireland wanes in mid-century. The main achievement of the Irish Free State - in cultural terms - is an irredentist cultural orthodoxy enforced by a nasty and all encompassing censorship that reveals a nation that is institutionally incapable of supporting the arts. Fintan O’Toole regards the failure of Culture during the Irish Free State as the legacy of oppressive Irish Nationalism. The implication is that nationalism and art are irreconcilable forces pulling the nation in opposite directions. This overlooks the poets and artists in the revolution, which led to the creation of the Irish Free State. Like Thomas Davis and the new Irelanders, the revolutionaries of 1916 regarded the arts as central to the realisation of an Irish nation and an independent Irish state. The role of the arts in the nationalist imagination needs to be reconsidered.

1 Plunkett and the Republican manifesto for the Arts in Ireland

Count George Plunkett (1851 - 1948) wrote a manifesto for the promotion of the arts in an independent Irish state in May 1923. It was to all intents and purposes an updated version of

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185 The title was a Papal award (Pope Leo XIII).
Plunkett was an antiquarian and a politician. He was Director of the Science and Art Museum in Dublin from 1907 – 1916. He was provoked into political activism and membership of Sinn Féin by

Thomas Davis’ manifesto of 1843. It was published in ‘C-Weed,’ the magazine produced by prisoners in Kilmainham Gaol. Plunkett was imprisoned because of his involvement in a failed attempt to overthrow a government established as a result of the political settlement that was the Anglo Irish Treaty of 1921, a failed coup that precipitated a campaign of terrorism against the legitimate government of the Irish Free State. Irish-Ireland had split and Plunkett went with republican side.

the execution of his son, Joseph Mary Plunkett, because of his role in the Easter rising of 1916. He was elected a Member of Parliament in Roscommon in 1917 and he joined the first Dáil as Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1919. He was appointed Minister for Arts in 1921 and served 5 months in that position. He remained loyal to Sinn Féin after the formation of Fianna Fáil. His daughter-in-law was the artist Grace Gifford. She had studied art in the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art and the Slade School of Fine Art in London (1906-7). She was also politically active. She had become a member of Sinn Féin through contact with Constance Markievicz. She was also a member of Inghinidhe Na hÉireann | Daughters of Ireland and the Irish Women’s Franchise League. She was later active in the Women Prisoner’s Defence League. In May 1915 Gifford became engaged to marry Joseph Mary Plunkett and one year later, on the 4 May 1916, she married him in his cell in Kilmainham, just hours before his execution. Following the rising she became a member of the Executive of Sinn Féin and began to produce banners, posters and other material. She took the anti-treaty side in 1921 and was imprisoned in Kilmainham in 1923 alongside her father-in-law. Whilst in prison she painted the allegorical ‘Madonna of Kilmainham’ on the wall of her cell on the ground floor of the East Wing. It deteriorated badly as the gaol became derelict after its closure in 1924. In 1966 attempts were made to preserve it during restoration of Kilmainham Gaol undertaken by republican volunteers for the fiftieth anniversary of 1916. Water damage had made the plaster so unstable that preservation would have been practically impossible. Instead it was re-painted by the artist Thomas Ryan RHA. He traced the outline of the original. The cell was re-plastered and Ryan re-painted the ‘Madonna’, signing it ‘TR’.187

The combination of recalcitrant militant nationalism, religion and the Royal Hibernian Academy is enough to send shivers down the spine of the liberal left and commentators like Fintan O’Toole for whom Kilmainham Gaol is symbolic of an irredentist, intolerant and instinctively violent nationalism. In 1991 O’Toole188 characterised Kilmainham Gaol as a stubborn throwback to a redundant idea of the Irish nation. It functioned as a symbol of a dystopian state and a metaphor for the cultural and democratic limits of historic nationalism. Its transformation by means of an art exhibition was, in turn, employed as a metaphor for liberation. In effect, O’Toole opposes Nationalism and Culture. Plunkett’s manifesto appears to contradict this. I would go so far to say that it suggests that O’Toole’s characterisation of Kilmainham Gaol is deficient, if not altogether invalid. Perhaps O’Toole’s liberal certainties are getting in the way of a more complex reading of the gaol and its significance. Certainly, Plunkett and O’Toole share a belief in the transformative

187 In A State; In A State, an exhibition in Kilmainham Gaol on national identity, Dublin, Project Press, p. 86.
188 Ibid. O’Toole, Fintan, p. 12.
nature of art in both a personal and a national context. In ‘Art & Ireland’ Plunkett asserts that:

Before a work of Art takes shape to the eye, it has taken a thousand shapes in the mind of the artist. If it is a great work, it has a spiritual quality and healthy emotion that tell on the feeling of those who are sensitive, and stir even the most careless observer. Through the eye, the mind is made speculative by such work, and thus often begins the process of what we call ‘refinement’ by which men shed the husks of ignorance and rudeness.  

Plunkett goes on to deal with the multiple functions of art in society: from religious art, art in public buildings, product design and industry to arts education and heritage. The text restates Davis’s view that the arts in Ireland have been neglected and that native-born artists have pursued careers abroad at the expense of art in Ireland. He lays the blame on a perverse primary education that promotes English materialism at the expense of a spiritual education conducive to the appeal of art. But the text is informed primarily by his devout Catholicism. ‘Art & Ireland’ ends with the call ‘For The Glory of God & the Honour of the Nation.’ Plunkett sees the transformative power of art in spiritual and religious terms, albeit qualified by a pragmatic range of social and economic benefits. Within Kilmainham - within Irish nationalism - there was a clear commitment to the visual image and a policy for the development of the arts in an Irish Republic. This was the legacy of Thomas Davis and the Young Irishers. So what went wrong? The best evidence in this regard is provided by the artist, Paul Henry who is most associated with the artistic limits of the Irish Free State and yet provides a compelling analysis of the difficulties faced by artists from within Irish Ireland as it took shape in the second decade of the twentieth century.

2 Paul Henry gives up on the Irish Free State

Outside the walls of Kilmainham Gaol Paul Henry was coming to terms (unhappily) with the legacy of a disrupted and underdeveloped Civilisation as described by Plunkett. The artist had moved to Dublin from his base in Achill in 1919 and was trying to establish himself as an artist of some status in Dublin. He was deeply frustrated by the experience. Henry was convinced that there was a huge amount of talent that was going untapped and that ‘Art was clearly a living reality in the minds of those early (Irish) artists’ who had produced the ‘Book of Kells’ - ‘they live as landmarks in human history.’ Yet all the evidence led Henry to conclude that the Irish were allergic to the visual arts. Henry cites the lack of a visual equivalent to the Literary Revival and the lack of a painterly

189 Plunkett, George in Art & Ireland.
190 This is a constant theme in Celticism, Irish-Irelandism and Anglo-Saxonism in which the capable, materialistic and protestant Anglo-Saxon is contrasted with the imaginative, emotional (i.e. prone to violence) and spiritual Celt/Gael, each for their own ends and usually for opposite effect.
achievement to match the literary achievement of James Joyce. Henry and Arthur Power\(^\text{192}\) deplored ‘the fact that the literary revival had not thrown up any revival in painting ... Must her Genius blossom only in literature and drama, seldom in painting or music.’ Henry saw little hope of making a living in a country that was unaware that there was such a thing as art and that was completely indifferent to his effort to become the “modern” artist of the period.

There is little sense of a political dimension to Henry’s analysis and very little by way of a direct treatment of the political context for what is happening in Ireland in terms of painting. There is no reference to the Land War which was in an intense and final phase in Achill during his time there,\(^\text{193}\) 1916 or any of the political changes that followed. An Irish Portrait contains a number of humorous anecdotes about the good Captain Boycott and his blunderbuss. In Further Reminiscences Henry muses about split loyalties and there is an account of sectarian strife on the streets of Belfast in 1898, all of which is wound up in a typically charming account of his brief flirtation with Nationalism in the form of a young woman called Mary McCracken, an ardent nationalist who was involved in organising the centenary celebrations of 1798. The story ends with the artist feeling rather dazed by all the tumult and resolving that learning the craft of painting was far more important: ‘Paris it must be.’\(^\text{194}\) There is also a brief reference to the number of policemen and secret service men who accompanied the Lord Lieutenant to an opening of an exhibition organised by Henry in January 1922,\(^\text{195}\) ‘those dark and evil days during the time of the ‘troubles’ when everyone was suspect and Henry was aware of the growing tension on the street.’\(^\text{196}\) It is hardly surprising then that Sighle Breathnach agrees with S. B. Kennedy’s conclusion that Henry ‘was not politically motivated’.\(^\text{197}\) Henry’s critique of painting is referenced only to the spread of modernism and its failure to take root in the conservative mediocrity of Dublin. The Literary

\textsuperscript{192} Arthur Richard Power, painter, lived in France 1919-30. He was art correspondent of the New York Herald in Paris and met and formed a close friendship with James Joyce. He recommended Paul Henry as an artist when Joyce wanted to have a portrait of his father painted but the commission was given to Patrick Touhy. Source: From the Old Waterford House in The Joyce We Knew (ed. Ulick O’Connor) quoted in Henry, Paul, 1973, Further Reminisces, Belfast, Blackstaff Press, p. 79.

\textsuperscript{193} Captain Charles Cunningham Boycott (1832-97) obtained a lease on 2,000 acres in Achill in 1855. In 1879 he came in conflict with the Land League and was subjected to what Charles Stewart Parnell subsequently called ‘moral Coventry’ (1880) which became popularly known as a “Boycott.”


\textsuperscript{195} Some Modern Pictures which Henry organised with Arthur Power during Dublin Civic Week in 1922.

\textsuperscript{196} Henry, Paul, 1973, Further Reminisces, Belfast, Blackstaff Press, p. 73.

Revival is an apolitical model for the revival of painting in Ireland: ‘it was necessary to tell the indifferent world that there was such a thing as Art; that painting was one of the arts, and that we must try and lift it from the low state into which it had declined.’ The root and nature of this suffocating indifference is ambiguous. Henry grapples inconclusively with the capacity for art of the ‘Irish’, aligning the native ability of the young Anthony Mac Namara of Achill with the ancient achievement of the Books of Kells and pitting both against the low standards that could be seen daily ‘in the shops and in the little exhibitions in the galleries’. He refers to the ‘sorry reading’ that is the report of the Royal Commission of enquiry into the work of the Royal Hibernian Academy and the Metropolitan School of Art that was held in 1906. The results, he concludes, suggests ‘an allergy’ to painting in the Irish character. The situation is compounded by the failure of Count Plunkett to deliver on the opportunity for redress represented by the passing of the ‘Irish Treaty’.

And the situation was about to get worse. As the Irish Free State became established in the twenties it strangled whatever existed by way of cultural life in Ireland according to Brian Fallon. He has already been quoted as characterising the Free State style as grimly nationalist and bereft of originality and excitement. In his opinion the Free State was a grocers’ republic, economically, socially and politically conservative with little time for culture. He equates it with the rise of populism in the form of the common man and the tyranny of the majority. It is the effect of the transformation of the peasants as an urbanised class of:

small shopkeepers, minor civil servants, bank clerks, publicans and chemists. They brought with them their philistinism and populism, the levelling mass-mind mentality, communal simplistic, sentimental lacking in taste, knowledge and self-criticism, though often earthily shrewd and with an eye to its own profit. It resents privilege, sophistication, complexity, elitism and virtually all that it does not understand. (It also dislikes) eloquence in the traditional sense and any too obvious display of intellect or culture since, in its eyes these are mostly displays of elitist snobbery designed to elevate a few people and make the majority feel small.

A similar sentiment was expressed by John Millington Synge to Stephen McKenna and W. B. Yeats. Clearly, both Synge and Fallon were appalled by the nature of the emerging catholic middle-classes in town and country but, whereas John Synge saw ‘rampant double chinned vulgarity’ at the expense of the simple lives of the ordinary people, Brian Fallon saw philistinism

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199 Ibid. p. 68.
200 Count George Plunkett (1851 – 1948) was appointed Minister for Arts in 1921 and served 5 months in the position.
and the grubby tyranny of the ordinary people. What was missing was a counterbalance to the grubby little republic of grocers-stroke-farmers in the form of the cultured society that is the inevitable outcome of ‘moderate wealth, educational privilege, inherited culture and an inbred self-belief and capability’. The Anglo-Irish had been shuffled (unceremoniously) off the stage and a huge gap had been left in the social and cultural landscape of the Irish Free State. Nothing had emerged from Irish Ireland that could replace them or their role in the arts and cultural life of country. Patrick Shaffrey made the same point in relation to architecture in a post-Free state context. He regarded the disparity in quality between the colonial heritage in the built environment and contemporary ‘development’ as a critique of the grocer’s republic and the ravages of “Mohair man,” the politically protected property developers who literally paved the way for urbanisation on an unprecedented scale in the modern era and transformed the rural environment through bungalow bliss and ribbon development. Like the Anglo-Irish, good architecture and sensitive planning had no place in the Republic of Ireland. E Estyn Evans made a similar point and both may be used to illustrate the emergence of a West Briton attitude to issues like art and architecture (as legacies of Anglicised society) in independent Ireland. Shaffrey’s conclusion was that “the Irish” may be articulate in a literary sense (even if they are a lot less literate than they like to believe) but are ‘visually blind’ (blind to art) reflects the emergence of an attitude that the Irish-Irish lack a capacity for art and the finer things that an inherent sense of Culture endows upon a nation.

3 Bring on the Catholics and out with the Protestants

Fallon and Shaffrey bring class into play as an issue in the narrow cultural base of Irish Free State nationalism. The failure of any form of social reform let alone a socialist agenda to emerge in an independent Ireland is a feature of Terence Brown’s analysis of the revolution. This, he suggests, differentiates the Nationalists and the Republicans and characterises independence as the victory of a rural, socially conservative Catholic middle class of small farmers, professionals and business people; a philistine class which was antagonistic to the cultural achievements of the Anglo-Irish. Browne stresses the religious dimension: the Catholicism of the Priest’s half-sister married to the general-shop-man was the key to economic and political power in independent Ireland. Browne was


204 E. Estyn Evans makes a similar observation on the neglect of the ‘big house’ in the Republic when commenting on Robert J. Welch’s photograph of Castle Coole: Evans, E Estyn and Turner, Brian S., 1977, Ireland’s Eye The Photographs of Robert John Welch, Ulster Museum Series 201, Belfast, Ulster Museum, p. 128.

very clear that the removal of all traces of the English and Anglo-Irish and their culture was sectarian in motivation.\textsuperscript{206} For the Catholic right there was no ambiguity about this. Joseph Hanly proclaimed that Catholicism derives from a higher authority of which nationalism is a manifestation.\textsuperscript{207} The nation state is secondary to the church. Every citizen is a Catholic first and nationalist second. Nationalism is a vehicle for the realisation of a Catholic state for a Catholic race of Gaelic/Celtic origin. Every social, economic, political and cultural aspect of life in the state is conditioned by ‘nationality in accordance with the Law of God.'\textsuperscript{16} There was, according to Hanly, no room for the sham nationality of the Anglo-Irish and their English sponsors. Nor was there any tolerance of their religion either! Hanly’s general tone and attitude is in line with those of conservative Catholic lobby groups like the Irish Vigilance Societies\textsuperscript{208} and the Catholic Truth Society\textsuperscript{209} both of which played a major role in the cultural revolution in which efforts to promote a Gaelic or Irish-Ireland were accompanied by equally forceful cultural protection as expressed in the political campaign for the enactment of comprehensive legislation for censorship of the press and print publications. Terence Browne summarises the view of the Catholic right as follows:

The prevailing note sounded in the writings and speeches of those calling for a censorship bill was the notion that all evil in literature and journalistic matters derived from abroad, particularly from England. It was, therefore, the business of an Irish legislature to protect Irish life from impure external influences and to help build up a clean-minded Catholic Irish civilisation. It must protect that supposedly distinctive Irish religious life and practice that, sometimes associated with the Irish language and the Gaelic way of life, comprised national identity.\textsuperscript{210}

Fr R. S. Devane S.J., an influential Dublin priest active in the campaign for censorship\textsuperscript{211} wrote the

\textsuperscript{206} Ibid. p.71.
\textsuperscript{207} Mr Joseph Hanly, F.R.C.Sc.I., M.R.I.A. was, according to the biographical note in the book, the General Organising Inspector of Agricultural Science for the Department of Education. He was the author of \textit{Mixed Farming, A Practical Text Book of Irish Agriculture} and \textit{Farm Surveying}. He was employed for ten years as Agricultural Instructor for County Cavan. He served as a Member of Educational Deputations to Great Britain and the Continent and he was a member of the Gaeltacht Commission. His reference to sham nationality would suggest a common platform with Stephen Quin who regarded the Literary Movement as sham Irish literature.
\textsuperscript{208} The Irish Vigilance Association was founded by the Dominican Order in 1911.
\textsuperscript{209} Founded in 1899, The Catholic Truth Society’s lay members were very involved in the censorship of books, checking the books for offensive passages, underlining any that caused offence and submitting these books to the Censorship of Publications Board which frequently banned the books on that basis.
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid. Fr. Devane met Kevin O’Higgins, Minister for Justice for the Irish Free State in 1925 as representative of the Priest’s Social Guild. In 1926 he was the only private individual to present evidence before the Committee of Enquiry on Evil Literature established by O’Higgins in 1926 to prepare the way for an eventual Censorship Bill. Brown, p70.
following in a 1927 edition of the Jesuit periodical ‘Studies:’

We are at present engaged in a heroic effort to revive our national language, national customs, national values, national culture. These objects cannot be achieved without a cheap, healthy and independent native press. In the face of English competition such a press is impossibility... Against such propaganda of the English language and English ideas the present effort at national revival looks very much like the effort to beat back an avalanche with a sweeping brush.²¹²

Devane is also cited by Roy Foster because of his efforts to diminish the status of William Butler Yeats,²¹³ purely because of his Anglo-Irish heritage and his religion. The Censorship Bill of 1929 was not as draconian as the Catholic right had demanded. Nevertheless, censorship created a legislative framework and bureaucracy for determining the extent and nature of cultural production in the Irish Free State. The idea of acceptable expression was clearly established and the result was described by Mervyn Wall as²¹⁴ a general intolerant attitude to writing, painting and sculpture. These were thought dangerous, likely to corrupt faith and morals... one encountered frequently among ordinary people a bitter hostility to writers ... Obscurantism had settled on the country like a fog.²¹⁵

4 Governing The Irish Free State, Government Policies on Art

It wasn’t just the ordinary people who were hostile to writers and artists. The attitude of the Cumann na nGaedheal Government wasn’t much better even if it was expressed as indifference rather than open hostility. The government had conceded to demands from religious pressure groups for censorship. Just as significant was the fact that the government was also utterly opposed to the need for state intervention in support of the arts. The country was recovering from a destructive civil war and was faced with straitened public finances. Even aside from this, the arts were low on the list of priorities. Cultural institutions were left in a state of inertia. Committees of enquiry into the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art and the National Museum were shelved (the latter after some controversy) on the basis that the Government could not meet the increase in expenditure required to develop these institutions. Such decisions reflect the entrenched conservatism that characterised the social and economic policies of the new state. The Cumann na nGaedheal government policy was a product of ‘Political inexperience, Catholic social philosophy,²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Wall, Mervyn, ‘Some Questions about the Thirties’, in conversation with Smith, Michael (ed.), The Lace Curtain 4, Summer, 1971, pp 77-86.
economic exigencies and a nationalist tradition all (of which) argued for a state whose role would be less substantial than other European nations. It adopted a minimalist approach to state activity with low taxation and state expenditure kept within the limits of current revenue. Economic exigencies and the memory of civil war anarchy reinforced the Government’s innate conservatism. The central element of Free State economic policy was the promotion of agricultural exports, anticipating that in time the resulting profits would stimulate more general economic growth. The State’s role in the process was to do as little as possible. This view was formed amidst a crisis of declining world agricultural prices which lasted until 1925: ‘in the interests of low agricultural costs, taxes and state expenditure were kept down, budgets were balanced, and little was spent on social welfare or on improving bad housing’ or, for that matter, the arts.

As a result the state had very little to do with the arts in Ireland in the first three decades of independence. In *Dreams and Responsibilities* Brian P. Kennedy defines the state as the government and all organisations and institutions wholly subsidised from public funds. The arts are a more difficult item to define. At its most open ended the arts include ‘all those skilful activities requiring creativity and intelligence which seek to represent and respond to human experience.’ Legislation enacted in the fifties and seventies had a narrower focus, referring principally to the fine arts, painting, sculpture, literature, music and architecture. This was an exclusive definition. The emphasis was on creative arts. A distinction was made between heritage - the conservation of past creativity - and the living arts. There was also a distinction made between creative and interpretive arts. Drama, musical theatre and dance were excluded from most definitions (including the Arts Act of 1951) as they were regarded as tending towards entertainments. The applied arts were regarded as a function of industry and the craft industries in particular. Graphic design was regarded as commercial art. Photography was a combination of science and technology and was not considered an art form at all. Film was, although censorship had destroyed an embryonic film culture early on in the life of the Irish Free State.

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219 Rockett, Kevin, 1980, *Film & Ireland, A Chronicle*, London, A Sense Of Ireland Festival, p. 4. Rockett has since published extensively on cinema and censorship in Ireland but this Chronicle is a masterpiece of economy and originated in an important festival that set out to define Irish art in the mid 1980s.
In terms of institutions, The Department of Fine Arts, which had been established by the Second Dáil Éireann operated for 19 weeks before the treaty after which it was abolished and its functions nominally subsumed into those of the Department of Education, the transfer being confirmed when the bulk of the states responsibilities in the area of the arts were assigned in the Ministers and Secretaries Act of 1924. During its short lifetime, ‘the Ministry’ invited Thomas Bodkin to submit proposals for the ‘Functions of a Ministry of Fine Arts.’ Bodkin was an energetic and effective administrator. He took the spirit of Plunkett’s manifesto and translated it into a language that made sense in a modern public administration context. Davis’s call for a national art had found an echo in the modern period. In October 1921 his views on art in general education were canvassed by Fr. Timothy Corcoran, Professor of Education at University College Dublin. In January 1922, shortly after the abolition of the first Dáil, he submitted a lengthy memorandum to the Minister for Education arguing for the re-instatement of the Ministry of Fine Arts. Bodkin argued for the re-establishment of ‘a small and inexpensive’ Ministry of Fine Arts whose role would be mainly advisory and consultative. In a structure that pre-empted the non-statutory Arts Council structure that was adopted in 1951, Bodkin proposed that independent advisors appointed on a temporary and advisory basis could advise the Ministry. He set out a comprehensive role for the Department that would liaise with other government departments to ensure the effective management of everything from the design of post boxes to the management of museums and galleries and an award system for artists. O’Kelly’s reply was short and perfunctory - a nice idea that is just not practical at this stage - don’t call us, we’ll call you! In 1949 Bodkin recalled that his proposals had been severely received by senior officials of the Department of Education and had run foul of the Department of Finance. Bodkin continued to lobby for the establishment of a Department of Fine Arts. In 1924 when the legislative framework for government ministries was being put in place, Horace Plunkett recommended Bodkin to President WT Cosgrave as a man suited to the job of heading up a department of Fine Arts. However, by this time, Bodkin’s influence was on the wane and he was about to be eclipsed by Ernest Blythe.

220 Known officially as Aireacht na n-Ard Ealaion.
221 26 August, 1921 - 9 January, 1922.
222 See Kennedy, Brian P., 1990, Dreams and Responsibilities, The State and The Arts in Independent Ireland, Dublin, The Arts Council, pp. 5-9. The Department, under Secretary Labhrás Breathnach, had its offices at 37 North Great Georges St., Dublin. Breathnach had no staff apart from a messenger boy. The Department did little in the nineteen weeks of its existence. It organized one public event, a commemoration of the 600th anniversary of the death of Dante which was held in the Mansion House. Kennedy quotes the Dáil Debates, Vol. 125, 24 Apr. 1951, col. 1337. He relates that, in the Dáil on 24 April 1951, de Valera related how he had been told during the performance that the Treaty had been signed in London during Dante’s fictional journey from hell, through purgatory and on into paradise.
Blythe is not as well remembered as Bodkin. As Minister for Finance Ernest Blythe had supported the Department of Finance’s secretariat in its efforts to block government backing for practically all arts projects seeking state support. Those that were favoured were geared towards the promotion of the Irish language and included funding for the Abbey (1925), An Gúm (1926) and An Taibhdhearc (1928). At the launch of Radio 2RN on 1 January 1926 Douglas Hyde summed up the prevailing attitude when he declared that ‘Éire is standing on her own two feet; the Irish language being one and her culture music and sport being the other … It is a sign that times have changed when we can take our place among the nations and use the wireless in our own language.’ Art, at least modern painting, was not seen as part of Irish culture. The Abbey was the exception that proved the rule. In 1925 Blythe, in a singular departure from government policy, had decided to support the National Theatre Society with a grant of £800 (making it the first state funded theatre in Europe) on condition that a Catholic be appointed to the Board of Directors and on the pretext that it would be a useful vehicle for promoting the Irish language. It was a mixed blessing. Blythe was himself the living symbol of the relationship between the theatre and politics in Ireland. Blythe was one of the founders of the state. As Minister for Finance in the first governments of that state, he had done everything possible to defend and preserve it, supporting the the execution without trial of his opponents during the Civil War, and taking a shilling of the Old Age Pension. He was deeply committed to Gaelic Ireland and to the integration of the cultural nationalism movement with state policy, obtaining for the Abbey Theatre the first state subsidy for any theatre in the western world. When, on his retirement from party politics, he was made managing Director of the Abbey, it was a startling symbol of the theatre’s retrenchment in line with the gathering gloom of social conservatism and intolerance of the new state.

The effect was a depressed social and cultural life in the first decade of the new state, a decade which witnessed the political consolidation of catholic nationalist conservatism and a social order ‘dominated by farmers and their offspring in the professions and in trade, (believing) that they had come at last into their rightful heritage - possession of the land and political independence.227

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224 Ibid
225 Blythe forced through a 10% cut in the old age pension.
227 Ibid.
Conclusion

The Irish Free State would forever be perceived as antagonistic to Culture, irredentist and determinedly Catholic. There was no room in Irish-Ireland for anything that was not demonstrably and verifiably Gaelic. Irish-Ireland in its political form would be defined by cultural exclusivity reinforced by rigorous censorship, its main achievement being the introduction of a suffocating and sectarian orthodoxy. It was decided at an institutional level to do nothing to encourage any form of arts activity, preferring instead to pursue an ineffective and quixotic policy of reviving the Irish language as the primary marker of culture in an independent Ireland. It is a little bit strange that Thomas Bodkin chose to describe this state of affairs as having left the business of the arts 'bide awhile.' Is it any wonder that Paul Henry was gloomy when he reflected on his attempts to convince the Irish that modern painting mattered. It is a little ironic that Henry himself 'became synonymous with the ideological programme of the new state' and that his decline as a painter is seen as symptomatic of the Irish Free State and its failure as a cultural enterprise.

There remains one issue that needs to be considered. Was Paul Henry part of a deliberate effort by the art and political establishments to construct art histories that are, as Brian McAvera has charged, state sponsored mythologies: deliberately fabricated narratives that deny artistic reality and deliberately contradict the social fact of a grimly conservative, poverty stricken and demoralised nation? Paul Henry's arrival in Achill is presented as an epiphany, a moment of artistic enlightenment and a wonderfully romantic one at that. He was an observer of a life that was passing into oblivion and his work has the same elegiac tone as the literature of the Blasket Islands. You will never see the like of Achill again. His stance is that of the detached outsider, the observer and, as Sighle Breathnach and S. B. Kennedy have been at pains to point out, he was apolitical and his art is not an ideological expression of Irish-Irelandism. It was art, a form of realism that, for the first time ever, represented the spirit of the Irish. His art is Irish but it is not nationalistic. If anything it transcends politics, the conservatism of Irish Irelandism and the grubby reality of Irish Free State. For the first time ever in the history of art in Ireland, there was realised in art a vision of an essential Ireland. Or was it? Is this the mythologising that McAvera is concerned about? It is worth taking a closer look at Mr. Paul Henry RHA.

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SECTION VI: THE TROUBLE WITH HENRY

This section deals with the early career of Paul Henry as a case study in mythography and the construction of an image of the "Irish Nation." Paul Henry is one of the most resilient characters in the history of Irish art. A talented painter, he found himself at a crossroads in Irish history and seized the opportunity to become the official painter of a state he distrusted. He is still regarded as the primary exponent of the Irish Free State school of painting and his decline as a painter is symbolic of the failure of the Irish Free State as a cultural enterprise. Fifty years after his death he remains synonymous with the West, his work is one of the main attractions for visitors to the National Gallery of Ireland and he has never been more marketable.

The most succinct description of the life and work of Paul Henry RHA (1876 - 1958), painter and "poster boy" of the Irish Free State, is to be found in 'A Buyer’s Guide to Irish Art: the most comprehensive sales index of Irish paintings sold at auction.'

Henry benefited from the benevolence of a bachelor cousin who offered to pay for his training abroad as an artist. In Paris he studied under Jean Paul Laurens (1838 - 1921) and was influenced by the work of Whistler RA. The turning point in his career came in 1912 when Paul and his first wife Grace, settled on Achill Island. His paintings there of the local people of Achill were to secure Henry’s place in the history of Irish art. Henry was one of the first Irish artists to bring Parisian influences to Ireland and he did so with much success. Paul Henry’s images of rural life are popular to this day. A retrospective exhibition of Paul Henry’s work was held in the National Gallery of Ireland in Spring 2003.

The biographical entry is illustrated by a black and white reproduction of a painting with the caption ‘Thatched Cottages with Lake and Mountains Beyond, (19.5X24in) (50x61.5cm), Oil on canvas. Sold 16 Apr 2002, Dublin. €70,000.’

The exhibition in the National Gallery of Ireland in 2003 completed the remarkable rehabilitation of this artist. S. B. Kennedy’s introduction to the catalogue is a conventional tribute rather than a critical assessment of his work. Kennedy is unambiguous in his treatment of Henry:

PAUL HENRY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT Irish landscape painter of the twentieth century. Almost single-handedly he defined the view of the Irish landscape, in particular that of the West, that remains as convincing to modern eyes as it was in his own time. Like Constable’s Suffolk and Cezanne’s Provence, once experienced it is difficult to see the landscape of the West other than through Henry’s eyes (emphasis by Kennedy).

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Figure 3.25. Paul Henry, *Fishing Boat Achill*, (c.1910-1919).

Figure 3.26. Paul Henry, *Roadside Cottages*, (c.1930).
Kennedy goes on to extol the virtues of an artist who is ‘at the centre of Irish Art.’ The biography that follows is a paraphrase of Henry’s autobiography combined with additional autobiographical information that was published in ‘Further Reminiscences’ and continues on from where the artist finished in both texts. Sighle Breathnach has written an essay on ‘The Formation of an Irish School of Painting: Issues of National Identity’ which is a standard account of the emergence of the Dublin Painters as a national school of painters and its eventual eclipse by the young modernisers of the ‘Irish Exhibition of Living Art’ in 1943. This catalogue falls far short of the sort of reassessment of the artist’s career and his impact on the development of art in Ireland that one would have expected from a major retrospective exhibition. S. B. Kennedy covers much of the same ground in ‘An Irish School of Art, Depictions of the Landscape in a Critical Period in Famine, Land and Culture in Ireland’ but does so more effectively. Indeed, in terms of art historiography and the historiographical treatment of visual culture in Ireland, this catalogue is about ten years out of date. One can only speculate why the NGI passed on the opportunity to re-evaluate, even revise, the life and work of the most popular artist in its collection. It is badly needed. In 1922 the Luxembourg Gallery in Paris bought ‘A west Of Ireland Village’ by Paul Henry from an exhibition of Irish art that was held in the Galeries Barbazanges in Paris during the World Congress of the Irish Race.

By 1951 he was regarded as a spent force and, worse, an impediment to the establishment of a modern attitude to painting in Ireland. The writer Sean O’Faolain In the Foreword to ‘An Irish Portrait’ deals with the perceived the decline of Henry as a creative force in Irish painting and especially, the repetitive (one might say formulaic) nature of much of his later output:

I have been looking at his work for thirty years. What always delights me in it is the man’s knowledge and sure observation of nature. Sometimes people say that he is always painting the same thing – clouds, blue mountains and black bogs. He is always, indeed, painting the same thing; always the one thing – light caught in a flux, a moment’s dazzling miracle. His pictures are amazingly mobile with this miracle of light. He is the least static painter I know. He never repeats himself.


Fallon is less sympathetic describing how ‘during the Thirties, which was probably his period of highest popularity, his paintings grew increasingly stereotyped and ended by being barely distinguishable from less gifted contemporaries such as James Humbert Craig.’

In 2002 when I first started to consider the work of Henry, he was still regarded in this light with the added disadvantage of being the lightning rod for critics of the Irish Free State and the artists (the term was used with some equivocation) associated with it. He was, as has been stated often in this study, a byword for a culturally and ideologically bankrupt idea of Ireland and a state that had treated art and culture with absolute disdain. However, in December 2007, his ‘Turf Gatherers’ sold for €300,000 in an auction that attracted huge crowds and fetched record prices for ‘work by artists whose long-term value is well established, such as Jack B. Yeats and Louis Le Brocquy. Last week Adams auctioneers set new records for works by Gerard Dill and Paul Henry. Paul Henry’s reputation has recovered in the market at least. His work is reproduced on most of the advertisements for major sales of Irish art by the auction houses. It would appear that Paul Henry is being used to “brand” Modern Irish Art in the market. It is a remarkable turnaround and it deserves some analysis. ‘Paul Henry’ at the National Gallery of Ireland in 2003 was disappointing from this point of view. The catalogue merely restates the story of Henry’s arrival in Achill and the subsequent development of his career in the context of the development of a national school of painters. It is tempting to dismiss this as a market driven reversal of fortune but there are more serious issues at stake. No review of art in Ireland and during this period - or any consideration of Irishness in art - is possible without confronting the legacy of Paul Henry RHA. This section is an attempt to revisit the record of this artist and deal with some of the contradictions that suggest narratives other than the first painter of the Irish peasant as the visual marker of the real Ireland.

237 Ibid. Adams auctioneers projected an annual turnover of €19m from the sale of Irish paintings in 2007, almost double the value of the market in 2005.
238 Was this evidence of a strong market for art affecting the way art exhibitions are mounted in premier national cultural institution? It would not be the first time that there have been suggestions that the National Gallery of Ireland has been playing the market. Another issue here is the publication by auction houses of monographs of artists or surveys of Irish art such as Campbell, Julian, 2004, *Walter Osborne in the West of Ireland*, Dublin, Adams and McConkey, Kenneth, *A Free Spirit, Irish Art 1860 – 1960*, Antique Collectors Club in association with Pym’s Gallery, London, 1990. Has the marketing of art had an influence on art history?
There is a striking portrait of Paul Henry by his first wife Grace Henry. It is used as a frontispiece in ‘Further Reminiscences,’ a posthumous addendum to Paul Henry’s autobiography. Emily Grace Mitchell was a talented painter and according to Dorothy Walker, a better painter than the man. Yet Grace Henry is never mentioned in ‘An Irish Portrait.’ It is dedicated to Mabel Florence Young whom Henry met in 1924 and married in 1953, after the death of Grace Henry. This is not gossip. If Paul Henry can excise Grace Henry from his narrative of his time in Achill then how can the integrity of his account be trusted? Granted ‘An Irish Portrait’ was published in 1951 and the idea of a lifelong affair would have been awkward. But there are other instances where Paul Henry has been selective in the content of his autobiography. This is not to say that ‘An Irish Portrait’ does not have either meaning or merit. It does. One cannot help being charmed by this book and Paul Henry comes across as a likeable man, who had great empathy for the people of Achill. His story of the young Anthony McNamara is a stunning snapshot of a young man’s desire to paint. It is also a remarkable statement of the economic barriers to creative expression in a marginalised community that has profound implications for the state of the arts in Ireland in the second half of the twentieth century. But Paul Henry is selective and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that ‘An Irish Portrait’ was written to a formula determined by his position as official artist of the nation. Indeed ‘Further Reminiscences’ would appear to be an attempt to set the record straight on issues like his childhood in Belfast which is dealt with rather cursorily but severely in ‘An Irish Portrait.’

Figure 3.27. Grace Henry, Portrait of Paul Henry, (c. 1915).

239 Henry portrays himself as a modern, an artist of cosmopolitan Paris, self consciously styling himself as a bohemian and shocking his conventional companions with his appearance: I had a mass of brown curly hair which I wore very long, a black velvet jacket of unusual cut, a green velvet waistcoat also of unusual cut, very baggy peg-top trousers and an enormous black bow tie. (An Irish Portrait, p. 17). He had to tone down his appearance during his stay in Achill and recalls his joy at being once again being able to wear his black sombrero, as he had in Paris, on his return to Dublin.
The first half of ‘An Irish Portrait’ covers his escape from his grim family life in an even grimmer Belfast, his arrival in Paris and his experiences as an aspiring artist attending ateliers, meeting famous people and being “bewitched” by the modern masters. Reality bites on his return to London. The search for work and the challenge of turning art into income is a constant theme, nowhere more acute than at this point. By 1903 he was married and working part time as an illustrator, thanks to a network of people he had known since childhood. By 1904 he was working fulltime as an illustrator for ‘To-Day’ producing a series of illustrations including ‘Types’ and ‘In The Public Eye.’ He was not happy. He felt he was in a rut and going nowhere fast. He became friends with the influential English painter Walter Sickert and had a pleasant time painting some portraits and associating with other artists in The Strand and other trendy spots in London. Then he met the critic Frank Rutter and agreed to join The Allied Artists Association. He began to exhibit in London, Belfast and Dublin: ‘And so life went, casual and uncalculating, until the August of 1912. In that month my fate was, without my knowing it, at last decided.’

Robert Lynd returned from his honeymoon in Achill full of enthusiasm for the place and Paul Henry decided to go and see the place for himself. Paul Henry was 36 and life would never be the same again.

Paul Henry represents his arrival in Achill as a sort of epiphany. In fact, Paul Henry was an opportunist. Achill was already a well-established tourist destination with a reputation for rugged scenery and exotic peasants. Robert Lynd was more than just a honeymooner. Lynd and Henry had shared a studio in 1900 during which time Lynd was active in the Gaelic League, learning and teaching Irish. Lynd was also a prolific essayist and addressed political nationalism in The

241 Walter Riddal and Robert Lynd. Lynd was a nationalist a very active essayist and publisher. Although he is hardly spoken of nowadays he was connected to both Henry, J. B. Yeats and was a good friend of Roger Casement. He wrote the section on literature in the Saorstat Éireann, Irish Free State: Official Handbook. Lynd does not get a single reference in The Blackwell Companion to Modern Irish Culture but merits one of the highest number of entries (10) in the Oxford Book of Ireland – 2 more than Synge!

242 Set up by Rutter and Jan Holewinski with Paul Henry’s friend Walter Riddal acting as secretary.


244 See Chapter 6 of Lynd, Robert, 1912, Rambles in Ireland, London, Mills and Boon.

245 Lynd taught Roger Casement Irish between 1902 and 1903, just before Casement got involved the Feisceanna in the Antrim Glens in 1904. The Feisceanna signalled the start of the Gaelic Cultural Revival in the North. ‘It is a generally accepted fact that the Irish revival of the late 19th century was a west of Ireland affair, synonymous with Yeat’s Sligo, Gregory’s Kiltartan, Pearse’s Rosmuc and Synge’s Aran. This view, however, may owe more to the dominance of Yeats’s account and to a certain partitionist strain within Irish historiography than to actual realities.’ Alternative Cradle of The Revival by PJ Matthews writing in the Irish Studies column of the Irish Times Weekend Review

116
‘Orangemen and the Nation’ in 1907, published an Irish grammar (‘Irish and English’) ‘Home Life in Ireland’ in 1908. In 1912, he published *Rambles in Ireland*[^246] which he would have been working on around the time of his visit to Achill. Henry, for his part, was an admirer of Jean Francois Millet and Vincent Van Gogh and the parallels between Brittany and Achill would not have been lost on him. Also, there was still a thriving market for artists’ illustrations of tourist destinations like Achill in popular illustrated journals like ‘Graphic’ and ‘Black and White.’ Paul Henry may have gone to Achill for a holiday and he may have stayed in an attempt to recreate the conditions of Brittany in the 1880s. Or he may have seen it as an opportunity to develop his career as a graphic artist. This is speculative but it appears to me that Paul Henry’s visit to Achill was rather more like a ‘canny’ career move (an illustrator moving to a popular tourism destination in search to produce work for illustrated periodicals) than the simple twist of fate that he describes in his autobiography.

![Figure 3.28. Paul Henry, Self Portrait, (1938).](image)

There is another portrait of Paul Henry. It was taken in 1938 and it shows a rather smart looking gentleman standing with paintbrush and palette in hand beside a large painting on an easel. This is a conventional society portrait of his brother Robert Mitchell Henry. This reveals another side to Henry and raises a number of issues about his reputation as an artist whose work and career were formed by having been sequestered amongst the peasants for almost a decade. First, Paul Henry was only based in Achill according to S. B. Kennedy. Secondly there is the sense he was sequestered amongst the peasants, removed from the world and unaffected by the political developments of the time. With regard to the first issue, Paul Henry was active in London, Belfast and Dublin. In 1911 he was elected a member of the Ulster Arts Club and presented the first of nine annual exhibitions with Grace Henry in various venues in Belfast. He was also active in Dublin (nine exhibitions) and London (five exhibitions) and the focus of his career moves from London to Dublin and Belfast during this time. Alongside these exhibitions Henry ran a lucrative portrait practice based in Belfast. A number of portraits in the style of that of his brother are held in the Ulster museum but are rarely seen. He also worked as a paymaster for the Congested Districts Board and, although this forms part of the narrative of ‘An Irish Portrait,’ it is overlooked by S. B. Kennedy. This is revealing for it points to the second issue in relation to Henry’s time on Achill: while he was supposedly sequestered amongst the primitives there had been total war in Europe and a rebellion followed by a guerrilla war of independence in Ireland. There is no sense of the impact of these events in ‘An Irish Portrait’ or S. B. Kennedy’s account of Henry’s time in Achill. Achill is merely a pretext for the development of Henry’s trademark style of painting, influenced by Whistler’s ‘language of pure tonal relationships’ as applied to the landscape of Mayo and Connemara in and around 1914 or 1915. This is important. According to S. B. Kennedy it represents a shift from the influence of Millet and the Realists in Barbizon (see Figure 3.25. Paul Henry, Fishing Boat Achill) to James MacNeill Whistler, the American modernist whose influence dominated Paul Henry’s later period as a student in Paris and his early days in London. Why this shift? According to S. B. Kennedy Paul Henry lost interest in the peasants around this time. Henry was merely an observer who never commented on matters ‘socio-economic or of other import.’ This may suit the image of the disengaged artist but it raises the possibility that S.B. Kennedy is


249 As mentioned previously, Henry kept a postal address in London.

250 I tried to get access to these but they had been placed in long term storage while the Ulster Museum was closed for refurbishment (2005-8). However I spoke with Sean McCrum who had worked as a keeper in the Ulster Museum and he was able to confirm the collection and the existence of the portrait studio as being both significant and profitable. A number of the Portraits are reproduced in the catalogue of the NGI exhibition of 2003.

Figure 3.29. Paul Henry, *Cottages by the Lough*, (c.1919)

Figure 3.30. Achill Ferry, (c. 1890), (N.P.A., EB289).
Figure 3.31. Railway Station Achill Sound (NPA, LROY 206, c. 1890-1900)

Figure 3.32. Slievevemore Hotel, Dugort, Achill (c. 1890-1900, N.P.A. lroy6798)
guilty of the sort of manipulation that McAvera and O’Sullivan suspect has distorted art historiography in relation to issues of national identity. Is S.B. Kennedy wilfully reinforcing the myth of ‘the peasant painter’ sequestered in the wild West with nothing but art on his mind?

It would seem so. For a start Paul Henry had to face the reality that Achill in 1912 was not Brittany in 1880. Unlike John Synge, Henry did not have to land in Achill in a ‘canoe.’ He arrived by train into a well-developed town bustling with tourists (much to his horror). The west had been opened up to tourism for some time. Julian Campbell identifies the rail network as a key factor in the developing interest in the West. The ease of access created by the railways attracted many artists to the West of Ireland. For instance, in 1892 the painter Walter Osborne made his first trip to Galway. He left Dublin on Thursday 5th May, travelled to Limerick and took a trip as far as Killaloe. The following day he arrived in Galway at 4pm. He spent the rest of the day and most of Sunday walking around the city and went as far as Salthill. On Monday he left Galway at 10.30am, travelling with the Midland Great Western Railway, and arrived in Dublin at 4pm. The 5-hour journey was easy and he made a second trip a month later, staying for two weeks this time. Julian Campbell describes how:

artists came to the West with a variety of interests and motives; some with antiquarian and archaeological interests, some as landscapists, lured by the magical beauty of Connemara, or some simply as travellers, out of curiosity, some to find a simple unspoiled life in Connaught, as in other ‘primitive’ unspoiled parts of Europe. Others were stimulated by the colour of the clothing worn by the Galway women, or with an interest in regional costume or habitation. Other artists still were more deeply interested in the lives of West of Ireland people, in local customs and traditions, some to record social conditions, or, amongst illustrators especially, to draw attention to the poverty and destitution during periods of Famine (sic) and eviction. Others came to find an intimate family life amongst country people and fishing communities, indeed to find a kind of idyllic life in the West.

Other ‘visitors’ are divided into three groups: ‘those who observed social life and political events, and whose drawings were adapted for publications in journals such as the Illustrated London News...”

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252 Julian Campbell, 2004, Walter Osborne In The West Of Ireland, James Adam Salesrooms, Dublin, 2004, p. 18. This study deals with a number of painting forays into Galway city and county made by the ‘Irish impressionist’ Walter Osborne in the 1890s. In a somewhat reflective essay, Campbell prefaces his study of Osborne’s trip to ‘the West’ with his own experiences of travelling in Galway with his father Joseph Campbell, author of My Lagan Love (see footnote 212). Campbell is the acknowledged authority on ‘Irish Impressionism.’

253 Ireland’s first railway was a six-mile line between Dublin and Kingstown which was opened in 1834. Dublin was linked to Cork in 1849, Galway in 1851 and Belfast in 1853. The network peaked in 1922 by which time there were 3,454 miles of track, 2,896 of which were Irish standard gauge (1.6m) and the remainder a narrower gauge. The most celebrated line was the 53 mile long West and South Clare Line featured in Percy French’s 1902 popular hit ‘Are ye Right Michael?’

and Punch ... those who illustrated topographical or travel books ... and a few other artist-travellers and amateurs.\textsuperscript{255} The peasants of Connemara, Kerry, Achill and the Aran Islands had not yet developed the significance that they were to assume in the twentieth-century and, with the exception of artists like William Frederic Burton and Erskine Nichol, art historians had paid little attention to painters operating in the West of Ireland before Henry other than commenting on the mediocrity of Dutch inspired genre painting that dominated the Royal Hibernian Academy exhibitions in the nineteenth century and favoured sentimentality over social comment (see pages 63-66). However Brian P. Kennedy argues that the ‘representation of the peasant was sensitive to formal and aesthetic change as well as changes in the body politic.’\textsuperscript{256} During the nineteenth-century there was a significant shift in the style of ‘Irish rustic painting to the extent that it exists as a genre’ and this reveals the extent to which ideologies and contemporary political events influenced artists’ treatment of representations of rural Ireland and its inhabitants. Anne Bermingham characterises this as a decline in the number of Romantic landscapes produced in ‘inverse proportion to the growing resentment, agitation and alienation of the peasantry ... throughout the Kingdom.’\textsuperscript{257} Kennedy speculates that the increased awareness of famine and emigration in Ireland may have fostered a degree of sympathy, much less sensitivity, to the plight of the peasants and affected their representation in paint. He does not present us with any evidence in support of this. On the contrary. As the century progressed and as estates became encumbered and cleared – ‘as the peasantry was deprived of its land’ - more artists began painting landscapes without people. The starving, dispossessed and agitated peasant became invisible. The depopulated landscape was invented.

Is this what happened with Paul Henry in Achill between 1914 and 15. It is worth repeating S. B. Kennedy’s observation that:

Henry’s absorption with life on Achill lasted until around 1914 – 1915. That changed, however, as the landscape itself increasingly preoccupied him. He had of course painted some ‘pure’ landscapes since his earliest days on the island – \textit{Clare Island from Achill}, 1911 (cat no. 33), is a good example – but from about 1914 or 1915, some notable exceptions - \textit{The Potato Diggers} 1915-16 (cat. no. 45), \textit{The Spoil of the Sea}, 1916 (cat. no. 48), \textit{The Potato Harvest}, 1918-19 (cat. no. 60), \textit{An Irish Bog} 1919-20 (cat. no. 63) – he became a landscapist first and foremost.

\textsuperscript{255} Ibid, p. xiii.
It seems that Henry decided to remove the peasant from his painting for reasons not unlike those identified by Brian P. Kennedy and Anne Bermingham. Henry had noticed the changes taking place in Achill and, although 'the change, it is true, was very slight it was there and I was to watch with growing uneasiness this change for the worse.'

I felt that I was watching the end of an epoch, the slow fading out of an era. I had seen the first furrow being cut by a plough that ever turned over the soil of Keel. I was witnessing with sorrow the gradual discarding of the scarlet petticoat by the women folk.

The simple lives of the peasantry that had remained virtually unchanged for over one hundred years had been corrupted by the vulgarity of large towns. This is pure mythology. According to Ó Danahair, Paul Henry was witnessing the social effect of an economically depressed Gaeltacht interacting with an outside world that was perceived as being materially affluent. Ó Danahair describes the psychological reaction as an:

essential conflict between the traditional and the modern way of life (that) became part of changing perceptions where 'traditional' became seen as backward, old-fashioned and unworthy, whilst ‘modern’ life, perceived by Gaeltacht dwellers from impressions gained from summer visitors and brief contact with government or company officials, became seen as an easier, affluent and more desirable existence.

Rapid encroachment of modernising influences coincided with the shift from a preliterate community with a 'strong oral tradition in Gaelic to a high level of oracy and literacy in the span of a generation with a concomitant decline in the oral transmission of significant aspects of Gaelic culture, storey telling etc: a process accelerated by waves of post famine emigration and the pragmatic realisation of an instrumental need for English. Leyland documents the decline of Gaelic languages as a measure of the Anglicisation of remote Irish and Scottish communities which had survived into the first half of the twentieth century by dint of a combination of environment,

258 Leyland Janet, 1995, Outpost of the Gael: The Decline of Gaelic in the Great Blaskets and St. Kilda, in Knockel, U., 1995, (ed.), Heritage and Identity, Case Studies in Irish Ethnography, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press in association with The Institute of Irish Studies, p. 64. The context is the decline of Gaelic in a comparative study of the Great Blasket Island and St. Kilda in the Western Isles of Scotland. These islands had ‘undeniably romantic appeal as outposts of the Gael but are, in a socio-economic context … indicative of damage caused to Gaelic culture in areas of geographic isolation with limited economic activity and political marginalisation. The sense of inferiority and an “association of Irish/Gaelic with poverty and ignorance” transferred into common speech in saying like “Irish will butter no bread.”

260 Ibid. p. 75.
cultural heritage and language but were now in terminal decline - as acknowledged in the wistful and elegiac tone of the Blasket writers who were aware that their way of life had passed and that their task was that of leaving a minute for future generations. In Leyland’s view Paul Henry was part of the problem. He was an agent of the changes he deplored, both as a visitor and, much more importantly, as an employee of the Congested Districts Board.

When Henry arrived in Achill in or around 1910, the place was in the throes of violent disorder as a result of a campaign of protest by the people against their landlord, the Trustees of the Achill Mission Estate. The trouble was caused by The Trustees’ refusal to transfer ownership of the estate to the Congested Districts Board in order to facilitate the redistribution of the land amongst the tenants and allow the ‘improvement’ of holdings to proceed. The agitation continued into 1913 and was fought out in the courts and in the villages of Keel, Dugort, Pollac and Duagh with several violent confrontations between local women and representatives of the estate backed up by the local constabulary. The issue was not resolved until further agitation (led by the local Sinn Féin representative) resulted in the estate being sold to the Congested Districts Board in 1914, one of the last acts of the Land Wars that had begun in Mayo in the 1870s. Henry makes no reference to any of this in ‘An Irish Portrait.’ Worse still, his friend, the old poet and musician Michael Mangan was heavily involved in the work of the Land League in County Mayo. Henry never acknowledged this. The fact that Henry chose to turn a blind eye to these events, suggests a ‘desire to secure his Irish identity premised upon a representation of an ideal image of Ireland and himself. Cosgrove takes issue with Henry over the lack of representation of ‘real (angry) peasants’ in his lonely, idealised landscapes but sees in this a possible sublimation of a disrupted relationship with his mother or, a projection his own absorption in the notion of the artists as an outsider who is removed from the material world and engaged in a deep rooted spiritual quest for some sort of fundamental statement about man and nature. Henry had regarded the ‘peasant’ as ‘a paragon of basic humanity ... a kind of natural man ... living a simple life of moral virtue at a time when conventional morality was

262 In 1881 there were 600 tenants on an estate of 2,200 acres of reclaimed land with an average holding of 4 acres per family. The estate was capable of supporting one third of the population according to evidence submitted to the Bessborough Commission by the Agent of the Mission. In 1912 the island was still overpopulated and rents were excessive. Improvement - the rationalisation of holdings under the direction of the Congested Districts Board - would mean better holding for some and emigration for others.

263 The Trustees were reluctant to avail of the relatively favourable conditions set out under the terms of the Wyndham Act of 1903 and the Congested Districts Board had been given the power to compulsorily purchase the estate by an amendment to Wyndham in 1909.

under attack and simplicity had begun to disappear from the world.' This was the legacy of French Romanticism and it was expressed in different visual codes: from the escapism of idyllic landscapes and the Orientalism of the exotic peasant, to the peasant as a cypher for social revolution. By the time Henry had arrived in Achill all that was left of this tradition was a shadow: ‘easel paintings done for display and sale ... acts not just of abstraction but of appropriation from the peasant by and for the middle class.'\textsuperscript{265} This just about sums up the situation on Achill.

Paul Henry RHA was always at the Romantic end of the peasant painters but his decision to remove the angry peasants from his representation of Achill in paint and print was a political act that is consistent with the disconnection between the school of Irish Realism and the social, economic and political reality of life in the West of Ireland. To characterise it as the act of a disinterested observer is to reveal the ideological impulse in this version of the history of art in Ireland. It is a little ironic that the work of Paul Henry, the modernist, was appropriated by the Irish Free State and that half a century later, the official artist of Irish Irelandism would be rehabilitated by mainstream art historians in an alliance between that arts establishment and the auction houses. How Irish is that?

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure3.33.png}
\caption{Paul Henry, \textit{Loch Altan, Donegal}, (c. 1918-21). AIB Collection.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{265} Ibid.
Figure 4.1 Brian Boru’s Harp from Collectanea de rebus hibernicis ..., published by Luke White, Dublin in 1786. Source: Villanova University.
CHAPTER 4

TRADITION

This Chapter interrogates the link between music and identity in the context of cultural differences between Anglo-Ireland and Irish-Ireland and the way that these have been expressed ideologically and institutionally since 1850. It is clear from the foregoing that Thomas Davis’ ‘The West’s Awake’ (1843) and Paul Henry’s ‘A West Of Ireland Village’ (c. 1920) may both derive from a common idea of Irishness and a desire to represent the essential spirit of the Irish nation and yet, represent mutually exclusive and even antagonistic cultural systems that developed in Ireland between 1850 and 1950. The search for some form of equivalence between folk song and contemporary arts practice has required testing the meaning of Irishness in relation to art and, specifically, testing the variations of Irishness that emerge from any study of art in Ireland from the 1840s to the 1940s. However, it would appear that any consideration of the Irishness of Irish art moves inexorably toward an opposition between the cultural traditions of Irish-Ireland and the Fine Arts. This remains one of the core themes in this study but the focus now switches from the fine arts to a consideration of folk song and the cultural traditions associated with Irish Ireland.

Lillis Ó Laoire summarised ‘the different ways Irish music was imagined since 1792’ as follows:

Music in Ireland in the modern period reflected the changing socioeconomic strata of the society in which it was produced and consumed. Professional performances were put on in theatres for well off audiences. A burgeoning print culture produced broadsides and ballads disseminating radical republican ideas, co-existing with an older, Irish language tradition, where anonymous love songs, drinking songs, laments and other songs by literate poets abounded. Professional traditional musicians, harpers, fiddlers and pipers plied their trade and tailored their repertoires to suit their patrons …

Ó Laoire emphasises the role of political change is the emergence ‘of canon of Irish music.’ The link between musical traditions and politics is established and Irish music becomes as ideologically inscribed as the type of Irishness it represents. Thom Moore is regarded as little more than the plaything of the Anglophone elite who peddled his Irishness in the homes of the constitutional nationalists who were doing very nicely under English rule. The Gaelic League went back to the source through collections assembled in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the Gaelic Athletic Association used these to enforce an orthodoxy that spawned the Clandillon style, the


orthodox ceili music which dominated the airwaves of the state radio broadcasting service. In 1935 The Dance Hall Act brought an end to parlour dancing in Ireland\(^{268}\) and one of the chief vehicles for performance and transmission of a musical tradition that was both rugged and regionally diverse was lost. Traditional music was more vibrant in the Irish communities in the United States and the working class pubs of London than it was in rural Ireland.\(^{269}\) In the Fifties and Sixties Ó Riada came to the rescue with his combination of orchestration, scholarship and, most importantly, a respect for tradition. O’Riada’s mix of eighteenth century marches, songs, aislings, planxties, ballads and tunes collected by Bunting alongside slip-jigs and reels from all parts of Ireland established a new attitude to the range and quality of Irish music as well as the possibilities of performance and transmission. Ó Riada re-possessed traditional Irish music, thrashing the old orthodoxies and presenting music that made sense in a rapidly modernising and urbanising Ireland. Brian Fallon regards Ó Riada as a key figure who triggered off at least one aspect of a mini Celtic renaissance that began in the Fifties and went far beyond the revival in folk music that:

‘raged through the Sixties ... It would not be an exaggeration to say that Ó Riada largely transformed public perception of what Irish music was, since he killed off the old Clandillon-style céili band which had been omnipresent since the 1920s (and) heralded a new mass following for folk and traditional music.’\(^{270}\)

Seamus Clandillon was the first Director of 2RN, the state radio station founded in 1926 when Douglas Hyde, at its inauguration, dedicated it to ‘what we have derived from our Gaelic ancestors, from one of the oldest civilisations in Europe, the heritage of the Os and the Macs’. Under the direction of Clandillon Irish ballads, Gaelic songs, Irish pipe music and the singing of Mr and Mrs Seamus Clandillon\(^{271}\) featured prominently in a programme that reflected the defensive Gaelicism, hostility to foreign influences and puritan Catholic morality of official culture.\(^{272}\) Clandillon emerges as the bogeyman of Irish music. He is credited with the invention of the ceilí band but that is seen as a by word for orthodoxy and is of interest in the context of the transformation brought about by Ó Riada. Ó Riada adapted the format, changed the arrangements and instrumentation. He


\(^{269}\) Topic Records (originally set up as the recording label of the Communist part of England) was assiduous in collecting the music of the people. See the sleeves notes of Hall, Reg (ed.), *Past Masters of Irish Dance Music*, London, Topic Records, 2000, TSCD602


\(^{271}\) Seamus Clandillon was married to Máiréad ni hAnnagain. She was a singer who featured regularly on 2RN.

re-introduced the harp sound by way of the harpsichord and orchestrated individual instruments in the classical style as opposed to the wall-of-sound approach of Clandillon. Also Ó Riada spanned both folk and traditional genre – from planxties to ballads with thrilling popular touches like the onomatopoeia of the pipe playing on *Scapadh na gCleiti* / Scattering the Feathers, musical hooks that were guaranteed to snag the curious.

However Ó Riada inadvertently set the limits of traditional music in terms of art and an alternative tradition of Western Art Music. Harry White portrays Ó Riada as a failure. He was the great might have been of Irish art music. White summarises Ó Riada’s career from the late 1950’s a ‘mental journey from the resources of European modernism through the noontide of renascent Irish nationalism in the 1960s, to a decisive rejection of European composition in favour of the ethnic repertory.” Ó Riada took refuge in fertile, culturally apposite representations of a very small stock of traditional melody.” He established Ceolteoirí Chualann as ‘an ensemble of traditional instrumentalists whose deportment, and arrangement of the native repertory, was novel, and whose commitment to traditional Irish melody was absolute ... It was as if Bartok had abandoned composition and instead toured Europe with a group of Magyar musicians.’ Nationalism stood in the way of music as an art form independent of politics and spoiled the development of distinctive art music in Ireland in the 20th century. This is the more or less the same attitude adopted by O’Toole in his essay on the exhibition in Kilmainham Gaol. He makes the case for culture over heritage in a post-nation-state European context. He overstates the degree that ‘the drowning man’s grip on old certainties’ locks people into a violent, intolerant and atavistic nationalism at the expense of the liberating uncertainties that hover around historic moments. O’Toole opposes the giddy excitement of art as a state of flux with the oppressive force of fossilised nationalism. As with O’Toole, White regards art and tradition as irreconcilable forces.

This was nothing new. White’s rejection of ethnicity in the music Ó Riada was in line with the social, economic and cultural factors which Lillis Ó Laoire has identified as shaping Irish music since 1792. Ethnicity and social status are linked, as John Millington Synge notes when reflecting on emerging class differences on the Aran island: ‘The families here are gradually forming into

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ranks, made up of the well to do, the struggling and the quite poor and thriftless.’ He describes with obvious distaste the

ragged, humorous type (who) was once thought to represent the real peasant of Ireland... These strange men with receding foreheads, high cheekbones, and ungentlemanly eyes seem to represent some old type found on these few acres at the extreme border of Europe, where it is only in wild jests and laughter that they can express their loneliness and desolation.275

The same man/menace makes an appearance as ‘a vital and demanding ghost’ in ‘The Dead’ by James Joyce, a ghost raised by the singing in the ‘old Irish tonality’ of the ‘Lass of Aughrim,’ a grim tale of seduction, betrayal and loss which is in strong contrast to the sweet sentimentality of the Moore’s melodies which play a crucial part in the story. This story, according to Terence Browne276 ‘sets in opposition the music with which an Irish Catholic middle class at the turn of the century could feel comfortable and a musical tradition which speaks from a more vital, dangerous territory of the national consciousness (and) a more primal, elemental, passionate Ireland.’ Browne draws a line between the east and the west, placing traditional airs with their subversive undertones and ragged emotions well beyond the pale. It was an attitude that was to become institutionalised in modern Ireland.

Seán Ó Riada died in 1971, at the age of 40 years. During his career An Chomhairle Ealaion [The Arts Council was established by an Act of the Oireachtas (Arts Act 1951) and reformed by further legislation shortly after his death (Arts Act 1973). The Arts Act of 1951 states that the expression ‘the arts’ means painting, sculpture, architecture, music, the drama, literature, design in industry and the fine arts and applied arts generally.’ In 1973 the principal act was amended by the insertion of ‘the cinema’ after ‘drama.’ The 1973 Act also contained provision for the Council to establish committees to advise on (1) sculpture and architecture, (2) music, (3) drama, literature and cinema. No reference was made to traditional music song or dance or any of the cultural elements of folklore as defined by Delargy | Ó Duillearga as ‘Oral literature, and Sports and Pastimes.’277 Given that Irish dance was governed by the Gaelic Athletic Association one can presume that folk dance is included under sport and pastimes. In 1960 the Arts Council put standards before participation and, under the direction of Mervyn Wall, decided to refuse all future applications for the funding of most local activities: from brass bands to amateur drama, the construction of community halls and, significantly, ‘fesieanna, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann functions, or general festivals in which

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traditional music, dancing or storytelling are extensively featured.' Mervyn Wall rationalised the exclusion of folk dancing on the basis of a judgement by the British Court of Appeal that ‘such dancing is for the enjoyment of those practising it as opposed to a form of aesthetic expression giving aesthetic satisfaction to those perceiving it.’ Mervyn Wall had, at last, and in the cause of Culture, gotten the better of the forces of obscurantism that he believed had fostered a general intolerant attitude to writing, painting and sculpture in the formative years of the State. However An Chomhairle Ealaion would subsequently be criticised for failing to support Ó Riada who was widely seen as the creative force behind the growth in popularity of traditional and folk music. Coincidentally An Chomhairle Ealaion would also be criticised with failing to support artistic activity outside of Dublin in any serious way. Culture had become an East Coast and metropolitan affair. In 1976 traditional music and jazz were supported for the first time but, despite research published in 1983 that showed that traditional music concerts were the most popular type of arts events, they only accounted for 2% of overall Arts Council expenditure. In 1985 the Arts council developed a policy for traditional music that maintained the strict separation between traditional and art music. It would take a further 20 years for An Chomhairle Ealaion to reverse its 1960 policy and, under pressure from Comhaltas Ceótaír Éireann and a sympathetic Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, John O’Donoghue TD, published a policy supporting what it called traditional arts. This is strictly outside of the scope of this study but it is relevant in so far as it reveals the extent of the gap between art and tradition in Ireland, it demonstrates that this gap has persisted since the foundation of the state and reveals the extent to which it has been expressed in political and institutional contexts.

Eighty years after Ernest Blythe had closed the door firmly on state support for the arts and institutionalised antagonism towards the arts establishment, the arts establishment has reluctantly engaged with the traditional sector on a limited basis, and was prepared to financially support what its has termed traditional arts – traditional music, song, dance, storytelling and other Irish language based cultural activities that could be described as artistic in a traditional context. This had all the hallmarks of an unsteady compromise between two versions of Irish culture. Comhaltas bears the imprint of Blythe’s fingerprints and is perceived as the voice of an Ireland hostile to everything the Arts Council represents. An Chomhairle Ealaion would cut Comhaltas out of the picture in 1960, horrified by the exclusive version of Irish culture maintained by Comhaltas and their allies in the GAA, Conradh and in Government departments like Education and Finance. Since then the

280 Ibid., p. 211.
Arts Council, as a statutory agency, has reversed the power relationship and, would be regarded as having more influence on government. Comhaltas attempted a coup, hoping to re-assert its dominance of cultural policy, secure statutory status for itself and get its hands on some of the increased funding secured by the Arts Council since the mid 1990s. Ideally Comhaltas would have preferred a statutory agency dedicated to the Irish language, traditional music and dance and under its control. It failed. The power that the backroom boys of Irish-Ireland held over cultural policy had been broken for the first time since the 1920s. Art and tradition are no closer in Ireland than they ever were. They remain separated by history, class, politics and ideology. The compromise that is the traditional arts policy of the Arts Council is an attempt to reconcile opposed versions of Irish culture in terms of the state's role in art and culture - to accommodate Irish ethnicity within a Fine Art framework at an institutional level for the first time ever.

Conclusion

Traditional (Gaelic) Ireland was defined by the ethnicity and rugged localism of its music, song and dance. These were promoted by the newly formed Irish state at the expense of other art forms and the visual arts in particular. Does this imply that the Irish lack a capacity for visual expression, that the ethnic Irish are, indeed, blind when it comes to the visual arts? This is to some extent a rhetorical question as the political conditions that affected the development of the arts in Ireland after independence have been dealt with. But there remains one issue that needs to be addressed and that is whether there exists any evidence of a visually expressive component that would suggest a capacity for art in Gaelic Ireland, in the townlands beyond the Anglo Irish elite. Was there ever a visual equivalent to folk song. The need for a distinction to be made between art and folk art is inevitable in this context. The latter is an art of the people and for the people. Art historiography in Ireland has been consumed by the former: operating on the twin assumptions that (a) all art production emanated from the Anglo-Irish elite and their successors after independence and (b) that native traditions were exclusive of a distinctive visual dimension or folk art. This leaves the question as to whether there was a visual component to folk culture in Ireland as it emerged after the famine.
Figure 5.1. Barney's Blarney. Postcard.
SECTION I: FOLK

The collection of folklore and physical evidence of the material conditions of ordinary people in rural Ireland in the nineteenth century was of interest in that it offered the possibility of evidence of an expressive visual culture that could be used to refute the assertion that the ethnic Irish lack a capacity for art. This turned out to be something of a dead end. The study of folk culture in Ireland has concentrated on the retrieval and preservation of oral traditions supported by artefactual evidence in a context defined by the social and economic changes in rural Ireland between 1850 and 1950. Although much of the artefactual evidence has a distinctly ethnic look with strong regional variations that could be construed as styles, there is no evidence of a tradition of folk art in the collections of the Folklore Commission, the Museum of Country Life or otherwise of a folk art or the existence of a visually expressive component in the lives of the cottier class and smallholders of the West of Ireland. Furthermore first hand accounts by John Millington Synge and Paul Henry confirm the absence of a tradition of art in these communities. But the same accounts reveal the narrowness of the discourse on art and folk life to date and it is necessary reconsider the issue from a fresh perspective. For a start we have to be clear about what we mean by “folk” as in folk art and folk culture.

Folklore was first conceptualised as word in 1846 to describe the orally transmitted native knowledge (lore) of the ordinary people (volk) who shared the same territory but lived beyond civilised society as defined by ruling elites. Folk music is used as a term for the first time in the 1760s to describe the ‘ancient music of Ireland.’ The Young Irelanders perfected the political ballad as a deliberate strategy to use folk song as a political weapon. Irish music took over from 1890s and reflected Irish Ireland’s concern for authenticity, cultural integrity and revival as Irish-Ireland began to reconstruct the cultural traditions of the ethnic Irish. In the 1970’s traditional became commonplace as a term used to distinguish between aboriginal Irish music and its popular expression in folk music as well as other forms of Irish music that were becoming established in

281 O’Giollan, Diarmuid, 2000, Locating Irish Folklore: Tradition, Modernity, Identity, Cork, Cork University Press, p. 46. In a letter to the English intellectual magazine ‘The Athenaeum’ on 22 August 1846, the antiquary William John Thoms, writing under the pseudonym Amrose Merton, suggested his own coinage ‘folk-lore’ (‘a good Anglo-Saxon compound’) in place of popular antiquities or Popular Literature.
282 Ibid.
popular culture. In the process the meaning of the word folk has fragmented. It has become detached from lore and the emphasis has not only changed from the spoken word to music, it has migrated from the rural periphery to urbanised centres. In the process it's meaning has changed. Folk, as in folksy, now denotes familiarity and cutesiness. Folk theatre is the idealised presentation of traditional ways of life in rural communities through costume theatre for tourists. Folk music is the contemporary expression music defined by forms associated with a particular place: also known as “roots,” it is distinguished by its origins in the music of the ordinary people in distinctly regional contexts. Folk music also describes balladry that tends to the populist and sentimental end of the scale but has some connection with traditional musical form. Folk is sometimes used to denote popular and the words are seen as interchangeable to some extent. Folk culture could be described as the popular culture of the ordinary people in rural communities. But popular in this sense should not be confused with the popular culture that is defined by print, broadcast and web based media. The difference is that folk culture tends to be defined by the particularity of place whereas popular culture is a globalised consumer culture disconnected from any specific cultural origin. The folk revival in Ireland in the nineteen-sixties was driven by emigrant communities who wished to maintain something of their native song, music and dance. It had many sites in the Irish Diaspora and was distinctly popular in tone and distribution. The folk revival of the nineteen-seventies marked a distinct return to a robust but distinctive local flavour and an upsurge in interest in traditional musical form in rural Ireland, albeit in the context of an unprecedented consumer culture. However both revivals reflect the effect of the Irish Diaspora and urbanisation in a shift from the country to the town that had a marked effect of the music, its transmission and reception. Folk song in Ireland has always been associated with particular ideologies and politically inscribed identities. It is this version that I use to describe the songs I heard exchanged in Kilmainham Gaol. In fact folk culture is just as much of an ideological construct as any other form of cultural expression discussed so far in this study. Folk songs are just one element of various anti-hegemonic strategies devised by nationalists and unionists – ‘A Nation Once Again’ or ‘The Sash My Father Wore,’ depending on whether one felt oppressed by Unionism or Nationalism. It is this tradition that I put in opposition to contemporary visual arts practice when I started this study. But this is only one aspect of folk culture in Ireland, the term ‘culture’ recognising that the disparate elements of folk described heretofore - folk lore, folk music, folk song and folk dance - all originate in a common cultural context, that of rural, Gaelic and Catholic Ireland. This required a wider reading of “folk,” its intersection with “art” and the search for some form visually expressive component in folk culture as it developed in the “folk century” that followed the 1845-9 famine.

Folk Art

In Chapter 3 the argument was made that the fine arts in Ireland in this period were patronised by ruling elites, whether that is the Protestant Ascendancy, the Anglo Irish, or, in so far as it goes, the Irish Free State. The Dublin Painters may have been nationalistic and they may have represented peasant Ireland in their paintings, but there is no way that their work could be considered folk art. They represent an elite tradition and the common elements of the “Free State Style” derive from Anglo-French models of genre and realism. The difference is summarised by Kevin O’Neill as the difference between replication and creation: interaction between elite and popular cultures has created:

> a paradigm (that) defined folk art as “replication” and an elite art as “creation” ... that the “fine” artists functioned as individuals, bringing creativity and control to their product, while the “folk” artists merely repeated a static and simplistic cultural refrain.

The study of visual forms of communication (and expression) in popular culture is still at a very elementary and there is a ‘very great difficulty in locating popular visual material’ in an Irish context. O’Neill concedes that there is very little evidence of the existence of folk art in Ireland. On the contrary, all the evidence tends to supports the view that folk culture in Ireland lacks any sort of visual dimension that could be regarded as an art of the common people or, as John Millington Synge put it, all Art is unknown in the lives of the Irish peasant. I attempted to corroborate this with evidence from travelogues and the pictorial record of the time. There was very little here that was of any use and the most effective evidence that I have found is the first hand accounts of John Millington Synge and Paul Henry (see)

In 1898 John Millington Synge had just settled in to his lodgings on Inismaan on his first visit to the island when he set about describing the beauty and distinction of the people, the cottage and its contents. He was particularly struck by the red petticoats of the women, who were gathered about the fire. He began to muse about the character of the islanders. It is worth quoting him at length:

> Every article on these islands has an almost personal character, which gives this simple life, _where all art is unknown_, something of the artistic beauty of mediaeval life. The curraghs and spinning-wheels, the tiny wooden barrels that are still used in the place of earthenware, the home-made cradles, churns and baskets are all full of an individuality, and being made from

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136
Figure 5.2. Seán Keating, *An Aran Family*, Limerick City Gallery of Art.

Figure 5.3. John Millington Synge, *A Spinning Wheel*, (c. 1893), Trinity College Dublin.
Included in the photo are (from left to right) Nóra Máirtín Óg (Nóra ni Chonghaile), Seán O Meachair (Seán Sheain Phaidí), Seán Ó Chonghaile (Seán Óg), Dara O Meachair (Dara Sheáin Phaidí), Micheál O Chonghaile (Micil Mairtin Óg), Tom O Maolchiaráin (Tom Ciárán) and Mairin O Maolchiaráin (Mairin Tom Ciárán).

Figure 5.5.6 & 7 & 8 L’ancien costume du Claddagh et trois attitudes habituelles, Marguerites Mespolet, 1913, from ‘Carnet D’Irlande, Musée Albert Kahn, Paris. Also contemporaneous notes by Marguerites Mespolet.
materials that are common here, yet to some extent peculiar to the island, they seem to exist as a natural link between the people and the world that is about them.

The simplicity and the unity of the dress, increases in another way the local air of beauty. The women wear red petticoats and jackets of the island wool stained with madder, to which they add a plaid shawl twisted around their chests and tied at their backs. When it rains they throw another petticoat over their heads with the waistband round their faces, or if they are young, they use a heavy shawl like those worn in Galway. Occasionally other wraps are worn, and during the thunderstorm I arrived in I saw several girls with men’s waistcoats buttoned around their bodies. Their skirts do not come much below the knee, and show their powerful legs in the heavy indigo stockings with which they are all provided.

The men wear three colours; the natural wool, indigo, and a grey flannel that is woven of alternate threads of indigo and the natural thread ...

... As Flannel is cheap - the women spin the yarn from the wool of their own sheep, and it is then woven by a woman in Kilronan for fourpence a yard – the men seem to wear an indefinite number waistcoats and woollen drawers one over the other.\footnote{Synge, John Millington, The Aran Islands, Mineola New York, Dover Publications inc 1998, p. 9-10.}

Synge has described what would become the primary visual markers of life in the west of Ireland and remain powerful signifiers of the ‘West’ into the modern era. In the 1930’s Adolf Mahr, Director of the National Museum of Ireland commissioned four sets of clothing (man, woman, boy, girl) as part of exhibition of folk life in Ireland. The same costumes now form part of the Museum’s folk life collection and are on display in the Museum of Country Living in Castlebar, County Mayo.

In 1898, however, Synge was in search of a way of life that was intact and offered an alternative to the materialism of the developed world beyond these islands. He took some photographs of the women of the island but these are black and white. In 1913 Marguerite Mespoulet took what may have been the first colour photographs of life in the west in Galway city. She was fortunate enough to get a photograph of one of the last of the Galway shawls mentioned by Synge, which had by then been replaced by the paisley patterned and fringed shawl (Figure 5.5). The visual impact of the cloak is remarkable. As both Synge and Mespoulet knew, the life they were recording was changing rapidly. When Synge was in Inis Meáin weaving had already begun to move to the mainland and the traditional shawls would gradually be abandoned for mass produced versions. By 1913 that is precisely what Mespoulet was recording. Yet in 1898 the clothing John Millington Synge describes constituted a thriving craft industry with a definite aesthetic and distinctive design features. That aesthetic is still used to market the knitwear that is still produced by Inis Meáin Knitwear and sold as a high fashion item (Figure 5.4).\footnote{Inismeain Knitwear originated in a co-operative set up by Comharcumann Inis Meáin and was bought out by its first manager Tarlach de Blacam. It produces high quality fashion knitwear.} And it wasn’t just the clothing that generated visual markers of a distinctive island culture. There was the indigenous architecture of the islanders and other aspects of applied design that characterise furniture and other utensils made by crafts people within
the community using locally sourced materials. It is a truly wonderful picture that Synge describes in prose. It is easy to be distracted by the romanticism of Synge’s preoccupation with the primitive and lose sight of the fact that there are major components of art, craft and design present in Synge’s description of the material aspects of island culture – indigenous architecture, furniture and textiles and even, to push the argument to its extreme, fashion. In other words there were strong visual elements with a distinctive aesthetic in the material culture of the Aran Islanders. What was missing was painting, a visually expressive component to the culture of the islands. The craft basis of the visual components in the lives of the islanders conform to O’Neill’s definition folk-art as the replication of a static and simplistic cultural refrain. In addition, there was no evidence of a pictorial tradition in the culture of the Aran Islanders. To emphasise the point, Synge describes the arrival of a pedlar in Kilronan who produced ‘some cheap religious pictures – abominable oleographs – but I did not see many buyers.’ It seems there was no market for pictures, not even holy pictures. Nevertheless Synge’s assertion that all art is unknown in the lives of the islanders is not entirely accurate and the visual markers of life on Árainn do not support the view that folk culture lacks a visual component. However it does support the view that painting, (as we know it) was absent. This leaves the question of the existence of a visually expressive component of folk culture open. The potential for such a component was considered in detail by the man who went to Achill Island also in search of primitivism in a residual peasant community in the West of Ireland. Paul Henry’s account of the attempts by a young man’s attempt to paint fills in the gap left by Synge in his account of the visual imagination of the native Irish.

2 Anthony MacNamara (Anthony Johnny Tom) of Achill, An instinctive artist.

Paul Henry had an experience on Achill that caused him to reflect on this aspect of life in the West. One day Paul Henry met an old man who had heard that he was an artist and was looking to buy some oil paints. The man was Johnny MacNamara whose son had expressed an interest in

288 Brian P Kennedy defines the arts, in an open ended way, as ‘those skilful activities requiring creativity and intelligence which seek to represent and respond to human experience (and) there has been a tendency to confine the legal definition to the so-called fine arts – painting, sculpture, literature, music and architecture’ in a legislative context. Kennedy, Brian P., 1990, Dreams and Responsibilities, The State and The Arts in Independent Ireland, Dublin, The Arts Council, p. 2. Plunkett gives a much more nationalist definition of the arts in his manifesto Art in Ireland, Plunkett, George, T.D. and Count, 1923, Art & Ireland reproduced in In A State, an exhibition in Kilmainham Gaol on national identity, Dublin, Project Press, pp. 99-100. However, a more apposite example is the current Art, Craft and Design syllabus at Junior Level in Irish schools which includes all of the activities described above under the generic term ‘Art’.


painting. Paul Henry hummed and hawed, going on about the expense of painting. But he got to talking with the old man and resolved to talk to the boy. Anthony MacNamara was tending his father’s cattle on the hillside above Corrymore. Paul Henry joined him and they got to talking about the landscape. Once again it is worth quoting at length:

> When I mentioned the landscape his face lighted up ... and he began to tell me how he felt about the landscape surrounding him on all sides. He said how wonderful it must be to be an artist and transfer these things to canvas.

I am afraid I rather stressed the difficulties of the artistic life but he did not seem to understand what that meant. He told me that he had one or two things that he had tried to do and that he would show them to me. I was prepared for crudity and an utter lack of knowledge, but as he unfolded his work I saw that the lack of knowledge was there but not the crudity, and it was clear to me that the things were markedly mature with the maturity that comes from long brooding. I realised the many hours he must have spent with his father’s cattle on that lonely spot absorbed and absorbing. He had borrowed his father’s paints and great thick brushes. The only colours he had were a vile Prussian blue, an orange red, and black, but with these unpromising materials he had produced something that amazed me. He had not spent long hours tending his cattle for nothing. His landscape were savage and in their intensity and made me think of Van Gogh. I imagine Anthony must have been about fourteen, and I realised I was in the presence of an instinctive artist.

In my time I have seen many different kinds of painting and many different kinds of artists, but Anthony was unique in my experience. He didn’t even know the names of the colours he was using, but in those lonely hillside hours he had been storing up a love of the landscape that was better than all the lore of the studios.

![Figure 5.6. Tending Cattle, Achill, (c. 1910), (eas4057 N.P.A.)](image)

MacNamara was the son of John MacNamara, who was the son of Tom MacNamara, the son of Owen MacNamara, ‘Johnny Tom Owen MacNamara’ known to the countryside as ‘Johnny Tom Owen’. He was a carpenter by trade who had worked as a cooper in the stockyards of Chicago but preferred to live in Achill near the mountains and the sea. Henry got to know him very well and is generous in his praise of the man.

Captain Boycott’s old residence on Achill, which Henry had been offered at a very attractive price. He could not afford but seems to have been quite taken with the idea of living in Captain Boycott’s House.

Ibid.
Paul Henry goes on to relate how this encounter had greatly unsettled him. He was worried about the boy’s future and that he might be responsible for encouraging him into a way of life in which ‘many were called but few were chosen.’ Paul Henry got to thinking about his own youth and the difficulties that he had to contend with in contemplating a life as a painter. He thought of all the young artists he had known - the thousands of young hopefuls in Paris - and how few of them had done anything worth talking about:

I could not help thinking of Van Gogh with his tortured soul, who crucified himself to express what was in his mind, and this youthful untrained mind who saw no difficulties in painting; he was too untrained for that, but he could convey what he wanted to express with unerring certainty because he felt so deeply and emotionally, and the fact that he did not know how to paint caused him no uneasiness. He painted as the bird sang and with as pure an emotion.

There are times when Paul Henry is a little sly in his memoir, but this passage is remarkable in terms of the depth of Henry’s response to the young boy’s eagerness to paint. It contrasts sharply John Millington Synge account of the Aran Islanders. Synge, with all his romantic primitivism, has locked his the Aran Islanders into a life without art whereas Henry, with Van Gogh as his mentor, sees very clearly that the impulse to paint exists everywhere and will find expression. The failure of art and artists is located in the difficulty of surviving in harsh and unforgiving social and economic circumstances rather than race. In ‘Further Reminiscences’ Henry would consider the paradoxical combination of these two forces in Dublin in the nineteen twenties and conclude that, as a society, the Irish were allergic to art. For the moment however, Henry’s account of the will to art had for me, the same impact as Petrie’s work on the real significance of the Irish round tower. Just as Petrie had debunked the racialist speculation of the antiquarians, Henry exposes the racialist undertones in the assertion that the ethnic Irish lack a capacity for visual expression.

Was the young Anthony Mac Namara unique? I don’t think so. I remember a conversation with the composer John Bukley who explained that he was turned on to music by an encounter with a composer in the classroom when he was a young boy. This was a phenomenon that preoccupied a lot of arts educators in the eighties and nineties and informed the Arts Council policy of intervention based arts education in schools and communities: providing funding for artists to

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293 Ibid. p. 24. Van Gogh had made a strong impression on Henry when he was studying in Paris. ‘I can well remember the shock with which I looked at my first Van Gogh ... but in a few months I would have walked half way across Paris to look at a new thing by him.’

294 John Buckley (1951 - ), composer and teacher and a member of Aosdana. He was a member of the Arts Council when I worked there as Education Officer between 1992 and 1995.

295 Access and Participation was a policy of the Arts Council which supported the creation of opportunities for interaction between the public and the arts community. The educational philosophy
work in communities on the understanding that access to and empathy with artists encourages participation in the arts by people who otherwise have no experience of art. Nowadays Paul Henry would have been funded by the Arts Council to be an artist in residence in Achill. But that sort of thinking would not be possible for well over half a century. The point is made though. Contact with art stimulates art or, at least, the expression of latent artistry. A better example is Tory Island in that the circumstances described by Paul Henry are replicated almost in their entirety. The outcome was quite different however.

3 The Tory Island Painters

Tory is a remote island off the coast of North West Donegal. Since the nineteen-seventies painting has become established as a routine part of the cultural and economic life of the island. The painter Derek Hill (1916-2000) is credited with starting a school of “primitive” painters on the island. The story is not all that different from the encounter between Paul Henry and Anthony MacNamara. Hill first visited Tory in around 1952 and returned often to paint, using as a painting studio a shed that had been built to store the lens of the new lighthouse on the western end of the island. Some time around 1956 Hill was approached by James ‘Jimi’ Dixon, a fisherman and a farmer on Tory. Dixon had experience of building model boats and, in 1950, he had constructed a cabinet and model of ‘The Wild Goose,’ a yacht owned by Wallace Clark, a frequent visitor to the island who had befriended Dixon. Dixon subsequently painted ‘Mr Clark Passing Tromore’ in his Yacht and presented the painting to Clark on his return to Tory. When Dixon met Hill around 1956 or 7 he was working on a painting of the West End Village, an Baile Thiar. Jim Hunter of the University of Ulster describes what happened next:

Derek asked him what he thought of the painting. I could do better myself was the response. Derek challenged him to do just that and offered him art materials, but he refused saying he could easily make his own from a donkey’s tail. Using a primitive brush he produced his first

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297 Hunter, Jim, 2003, *Tory Island and its artists*, Belfast, University of Ulster. This account is incorporated into Hunter, Jim, 2006, *The Waves of Tory*, Tonnta Thorai, Buckinghamshire, Colin-Smythe Ltd. in conjunction with the University of Ulster, 2006 and an abbreviated version is included in Mac Lachloinn, Coillín, 2003, *Toraigh, Tory Island: a visitors guide*, Oileán Thorai, Comharchumann Thorai Teoranta.
Figure 5.3 James Dixon, *An Baile Thiar | West Village*, (c. 1957), The Anthony Petullo Collection of Self-Taught and Outsider Art

Figure 5.4 Patsy Dan MacRuaidhri, James Dixon Gallery, Oilean Thorai. The Gallery is located in John Dixon’s house on the edge of the West Village.
works of primitive art which impressed Hill. With Hill’s encouragement and generosity, Dixon’s output was prolific and his reputation spread far beyond the shores of Tory. Hill purchased Dixon’s version of ‘West End Village’ and Dixon continued to paint. He had his first one-person exhibition of 21 paintings at the New Gallery in Belfast in 1966 followed by exhibitions in Dublin (1967), London and Vienna (1968). Dixon was feted as a primitive and his work was exhibited widely in this context. Press coverage was extensive. Dixon was joined by other painters from the island community – his brother Johnny Dixon, Jimmy ‘the Yank’ Rodgers, Ruaidhri Sarah MacRuaidhri and the young Patsy Dan Mac Ruaidhri. The phenomenon gathered pace and the Tory island painters were insinuated into major survey exhibitions of contemporary landscape painting: *Irish Primitive Painters*, Queens University, Belfast and *Elements of Landscape* in the Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin (1971), Cork Rose (1980), an Arts Council supported touring exhibition (1983) and the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the Tate St. Ives (1999-2000). A younger generation of painters has maintained a level of painting on the island. One of those is Antain Ó Mianán (Anton Meenan) who runs the Dixon Gallery with Patsy Dan Mac Ruaidhri. I met Anton in August 2005 and asked him of his first memories of Derek Hill. Hill, he recalls, was fond of Mackerel and the young Anton used to bring the fish to his studio in Ard Lárthain. He was profoundly struck by the fact that the landscape could be set down so precisely in paint on a piece of board. He began to experiment with painting at home and was always drawing at school. Hill recognised that Anton had talent painter and used to check up on his progress. Anton has mixed feelings about Hill. He recalls Hill belittling him if he made any mistakes in his English but he persisted and with Hill’s encouragement went on to study art in the Regional Technical College in Letterkenny, out in Ireland. That was an unhappy experience and he returned to the island. He still paints and photographs of Anton painting in the cab of his tractor or on Tor Mor are included in most books on Tory. This led me to question some aspects of the Hunter’s version of the origin of the Tory Island painters. I believe Hunter exaggerates Hill’s role. Dixon’s decision to opt for his own brushes was the act of a skilled craftsman and model maker and displays the resourcefulness of islanders so well described by Synge. Sara Glennie and Michael Tooby write:

> It can be read that Dixon’s comment on meeting Derek Hill, “I could do that”, was the catalyst for his painting, but he was in fact painting before this meeting between 1956 and 1958, giving paintings to Wallace Clark, a regular visitor to Tory Island, during the 1950s.

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298 Hunter, Jim, 2006, *The Waves of Tory, Tornta Thoraill*, Buckinghamshire, Colin-Smythe Ltd., in conjunction with the University of Ulster, p. 112-131. Although this version appear in each of the publications listed above, and would appear to have originated with Hunter, he references this piece to *Two Painters, Works by Alfred Wallis and James Dixon*, catalogue of Irish Museum of Modern Art and Tate Gallery St Ives, London, 2000.
This knowledge turns his claim into a confident challenge rather than a flippant remark on stumbling across a painter. Also, his decision to use donkey-hair brushes can be seen to derive from experience, not eccentricity.299

Hunter’s version is a good story in the telling of it but it does emphasise the primitivism of the islanders. Also, Antain’s account suggests that Hill may have been a catalyst but it was the islanders themselves that created the ‘school of painters.’ Hunter’s depiction of Hill as ‘the father of the School of Art’ is as displaced as it is paternalistic. Henry had identified poverty as the barrier to art in Achill. Tory in the 1970s had much in common with the Mayo that Henry experienced but the economic and social changes that had taken place since the twenties had made art possible. But there was another factor. The emergence of a school of ‘primitive’ artists was an important element in a prolonged campaign to prevent resettlement on the mainland, a campaign that pitted culture against economics and where the conventional view of the island as a residue of pure Irish culture meant that the politics of preservation prevailed. The emergence of a school of painters who have assumed the mantle of folk artists caused great excitement, the idea of a distinctly Irish school physically and aesthetically separated from the mainstream, insular in every sense of the word. It touched upon one of the major discourses in art in the seventies and eighties - the tension between peripheries and centres of cultural power. In this context the term ‘primitive’ borders on the offensive. Patsy Dan Mac Ruaidhri conforms to Kevin O’Neill description of folk art in its highly schematic and repetitive style but Antain Ó Mianáin has internalised the influence of Hill and his work is typical of a lot of contemporary landscape painting in Ireland in its lyrical romanticism and handling of light and texture - the essential element of Irish landscape painting in the twentieth century as first articulated by Thomas Bodkin in 1920. But painting on Tory survives because it generates income. The artists who gave up on painting did so because they could not sell their work. The native artfulness, that Synge and Henry both describe, is applied by resourceful islanders to exploit a new set of economic parameters, the phenomenon that is cultural tourism and the romantic lure of the primitive beyond the pale, far out in the wild Atlantic.

4 Folk Themes in Contemporary Irish Art

Tory is not unique, merely exceptional because of its location and context. At the same time that Tory was establishing itself as an outpost of native art, a generation of young artists whose work is informed by their experience of growing up in rural Ireland was beginning to emerge from the

reformed arts education system at third level. One of the artists in the ‘In A State’ exhibition Kilmainham Gaol was Alice Maher. Maher installed an artwork in one of the cells. It consisted of briars collected from the prison grounds and rolled into a ball inside the cell (figure 3.22). After a while the ball of briars filled the cell and was literally imprisoned in the space. The piece had tremendous appeal, even to people who were hostile to the very idea of an exhibition of ‘modern’ art in one of the most sacred sites of republican sacrifice. It had a simple, unforced quality that I eventually recognised as the visual equivalent of a nationalist ballad. It was thoroughly contemporary in terms of art but it was utterly folk in sentiment. Maher’s experience of growing up in rural Ireland informed a lot of her earlier work, an attitude that John Moriarty has described as a folk psychology. Since 1996 a number of studies have been undertaken as research for this study of that have concentrated on this aspect of contemporary visual arts practice. These involved of a number of artists who grew up in rural communities that would be regarded as traditional, some even classified as Gaeltachtta: artists like, Bernadette Cotter, Kathleen O’Donnell and Tadhg Mac Suibhne. These artists represent a generation of children of rural families who had permission to study art, not in the narrow sense of parental acquiescence but in the much wider sense of educational, social and economic opportunity. It also includes a number of artists who have been attracted to these communities because they are perceived as being traditional: artists like Andrew Duggan, Caoimhghin O Fraithile and Deirdre O’Mahony. This was not a search for a nativist school or a nativist trend within contemporary Irish art. It was a challenge to the presumption that culture in Ireland is inherently non-visual and that folk culture and contemporary visual culture in Ireland are mutually exclusive. The research began with an exhibition by the artist Bernadette Cotter in August 1996. Cotter’s work is rooted in the experience of growing up on a small farm in Beal Atha an Gaorthaigh. It deals with the tradition and the rituals of folk life in a very contemporary way. Cotter is one of a number of artists who have explored the persistence of tradition in the present with particular reference to the second life of traditional forms in contemporary arts practice – sometimes in dance, art or music and sometimes in a combination of many art forms. Other projects included Fásach by Caoimhghin O Fraithile (2002) which dealt with the persistence of folk memory and customs. Contrapunti by Ron van der Noll dealt with the musical heritage of Michael Coleman; rEVOLUTION, in 2005 was a complex visual arts and dance collaboration which explored the creative expression of ethnicity in contemporary Irish contexts. The Fifth Province in 2006 by Tadhg Devlin documents the persistence of a folk mentality in aspects of contemporary Irish society.

300 It featured a performance by Pat Ahern, Mike Shea, Jonathan Kelliher and members of the community performance company in An Fal Carrach during the Fleadh Ceoil na hÉireann in Letterkenny in 2004.
Figure 5.5 Caoimhghin O Fraithile, *Coumalochaigh*, Brandon, Co. Kerry, (2006).
All of the projects were carried out as part of the Visual Arts Programme of the National Folk Theatre of Ireland. This very far removed from the origins of Siamsa Tire in the folk customs of rural North Kerry *san am fado* or, long ago. In December 2006 Pat Ahern recalled the early days Siamsa Tire and its origins in the lives of ordinary people in the rural heartland of North Kerry. He talked about the importance of the cottage as a symbol and the importance of the hearth in the social, cultural and spiritual lives of the people and, the responsibility for keeping the flames of tradition burning bright. He might as well have been describing a visual arts project which had just taken place in Comalochaigh, back West by Dingle, Daingean Uí Chuis. For most of September Caoimhghin O Fraithile and a group of local farmers rebuilt a long abandoned cottage at the back of a deep valley on the western side of the Brandon Range. Long hard days were spent digging stone out of the ground and rebuilding the walls. Casual conversation revealed the traditional methods of building a house. Long conversations over cups of tea speculated about the people who lived in the house. Was it Donal Rua who is said to have reared 16 children in this three-roomed cottage? Was it the Moriarties (the people of John Moriarty, philosopher, folklorist and friend of Siamsa Tire) who are still remembered for their fondness for books? Recovering the folk memory of the place went hand in hand with the digging out of the earth that had filled the cottage over the 100 years or so since it had been abandoned. Eventually we found what we were looking for, a large stone flag set into the earthen floor, blackened and cracked by the fire that had burned there. Careful digging turned up a dudeen and bits of crockery that had been swept too the back of the hearth by the bean *a' tí*. Some weeks later, on the night of a full moon in October, the fire was relit. Breandán O Beaglai played some tunes, Monsignor Padraig O'Fiannachta recalled the names of the people who had lived in the valley and, all night long, a steady stream of lights could be seen coming up the valley as people returned to a cottage to sit by the fire and listen to a tune or two. This was the whole point of the artwork. Caoimhghin O Fraithile had constructed a shrine that invoked the spirit of the people who lived in a particular place. The remoteness of the location meant a long trek across rough ground. This recalled the tradition of pilgrimage associated with Brandon and symbolised a spiritual journey in search of an identity defined by place and communal memory: the folkways and lore associated with land use in rural Ireland *san am fado* or long ago - a time defined by race memory rather than the clock. The project in Coumalochaigh was the culmination of a decade of work in the gallery in Siamsa Tire; work which attempted to forge a link between contemporary visual arts practice of the highest standard and folk as a vital and creative process with an inherently visual dimension.
5 Conclusion

There is clearly a capacity for visual expression in folk culture in Ireland and all the evidence suggests that social, cultural, economic and politic factors may have suppressed this for as long as we can remember, but that is not the same as dismissing the capacity for visual art amongst the native Irish altogether. That is a discredited discourse. Clearly there is a need to rethink our approach to the study of folk culture in Ireland. To date the emphasis has been on the retrieval of evidence of a range of actions related to life in rural Ireland – the Danish Model as it is known. This is inadequate. What the above reveals is the need to start thinking in terms of a folk consciousness, what John Moriarty has termed a folk-psychology. This has always been presence in elite culture and has always been linked to nationalist politics. It is time to consider this in detail.

Figure 5.6. Web advertisement for exhibition by Bernadette Cotter in the DCP Project Space, San Francisco, in April/May, 2008.
Figure 5.4. 1881 issue of Young Ireland.
SECTION II: FOLK STRATEGIES

In this section I propose to examine, in outline only, the development of a folk consciousness and the part it played in the culture wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This was expressed in political strategies that drew on folklore and folk life in the expression of ideologies linked to identity as defined by ethnicity. This is what I have termed folk strategies. Folk strategies emerged as an important factor in defining a sense of Irishness in the nineteenth century. These formed the basis for the consolidation of Gaelicised culture in the Irish Free State as well as Unionist culture in Northern Ireland after partition and all that led up to it) had disrupted the various forms of Irishness which had co-existed heretofore: a rupture either side of which two cultural and political communities sealed their frayed edges in mutually antagonistic oppositions defined by tradition and expressed symbolically. Folk strategies have their origins in the 1850's when The Young Irelanders employed the idea of folklore in order to foster the concept of an Irish nation and counter Anglo-Saxon hegemony. These persisted into the twentieth century and remained central to the strategies of nationalists, separatists, republicans and, indeed, unionists and loyalists. What emerges is a series of concentric themes at the centre of which is the elite’s preoccupation with the peasant. This necessitates a radical review of the idea of a folk dimension in elite cultures and it is proposed that, in this context, (a) visual images were central to the realisation of a folk image of Ireland and (b) that this was fundamental to counter hegemonic strategies that comprise distinct phases in the development of folk consciousness in Ireland from the mid eighteenth-century onwards.

As stated already, Folklore was first conceptualised to describe the native knowledge of the common people, which was seen as being ignorant of the orthodox religious practices and social codes of the elite. Rural and potentially subversive, the common people and their superstitions were the object of suspicion and curiosity in equal measure. However, the study of their ways and lore gradually assumed some importance in asserting a sense of nation defined by the particularity of place in response to the political and cultural hegemony of imperial France in Germany and, England in Ireland. The dark romanticism of folklore with its long race memory was employed against the rationalism of the enlightenment as a way of emphasising the difference between the native and the occupier. Anti-French attitudes in Germany led to less interest in the Enlightenment there. This also significantly influenced British folklore, not least the largely

301 For a comprehensive study of Irish folk lore and folk life in historic and contemporary contexts, see Diarmuid Ó Giolláin Locating Irish Folklore: Tradition, Modernity, Identity ,Cork, Cork University Press, 2000.
invented notions of Scotland, Wales and Ireland having a shared 'Celtic' culture. It was the start of a movement that would see folklore deployed by the emerging nationalist movements as a counter to colonisers and the hegemony of the enlightenment and its sponsors in the imperial powers. Thomas Davis was largely responsible for these ideas taking hold in Ireland and in the process, transforming the look of moderate nationalism in second half of the nineteenth century. "The visit of Thomas Davis ... to Germany in 1839-40 and his exposure to German Romantic thought made a great impact on him." His writings give evidence of the Romantic idealisation of the spiritual Celt who is contrasted with the materialistic Anglo-Saxon.

Thomas Osborne Davis was born in 1814 and died in 1845. The funeral of this young man 'was witnessed by thousands, escorted by members of the Corporation, Young Ireland, the Eighty Two Club, the Committee of the Repeal Association and the antiquaries and scholars of the Royal Irish Academy.' Davis had graduated from Trinity College Dublin in 1838 (aged 24) and immediately began to have an impact on the political scene in Dublin. He delivered his manifesto on Irish nationality to the Dublin Historical Society in 1839 and subsequently published it in the 'Citizen' and 'Morning Register' newspapers. In October 1842 he founded a weekly newspaper called 'The Nation' with a group of young journalists and intellectuals that included John Blake Dillon and Charles Gavan Duffy. These were nicknamed the Young Irelanders. 'The Nation' set out to promote an inclusivist definition of Irish identity and demonstrate this through distinctly Irish literary, historical and political essays, popular poetry of the day, translations from French and German literatures and a wide range of other material. ‘The Nation’ was hugely influential and inspired other periodicals like John Mitchell’s ‘United Irishmen.’ The editors of ‘The Nation’ were initially supportive of Daniel O’Connell’s repeal movement but they lost patience with O’Connell’s commitment to constitutional methods and they eventually parted company with ‘Old Ireland’ in

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304 Ibid. German, Russian, Swedish, Serbian and Finnish songs and sagas were collected and arranged to form epics between 1806 and 1835. Interest in national epic poems and the subsequent interest in folklore developed first in Germany, Finland, the Baltic States and Ireland. At the time these countries were ruled over by other nations. Even in Spain, the fashion for popular culture during the late eighteenth century was a way of expressing opposition to the French-led Enlightenment.

305 One year after he had graduated from Trinity and a year before he joined the Repeal Association.


309 Ibid. A nickname based initially because of their resemblance to romantic nationalists on the continent, but later used to distinguish them from O’Connel and the ‘Old Irelanders.’

1846 over the issue of the use of violence in support of political objectives.\(^{311}\) New members and the impact of the 1845-9 famine radicalised the remnants of the Young Irelanders and led to a military gesture of rebellion in 1848 which was little more than a charade. ‘The Nation’ was suppressed but it was revived again in 1849 and, although it was published until 1892, it never achieved the readership or relevance that it had between 1842-9. Nevertheless, the influence achieved in this period was important in shaping cultural nationalism in Ireland.

Davis used ‘The Nation’ as a vehicle to bring the Young Irelanders’ sense of nationality to a mass audience. Davis himself published some fifty poems in ‘The Nation’, the first entitled ‘My Grave’ appeared in the third issue and was signed ‘A True Celt.’\(^{312}\) Davis also published ‘A Nation Once Again’ and ‘The West’s Awake,’ Irish airs with English lyrics and nationalist themes.\(^{313}\) The songs, poems and essays of the Young Irelanders became the staples of Irish anthologies including the ‘The Spirit of the Nation,’ the best selling book of Irish ballads published in 1845 with a cover by the artist William Frederic Burton. It was regarded ‘as a symbol of renascent nationalism in Ireland.’\(^{314}\) Some critics dismissed it, Yeats included, as nothing more than agitprop ballads\(^{315}\) but it quickly became the standard fare of moderate nationalists. Yeats’s disdain for the poetry and ballads of ‘The Nation’ marks the widening gap between elite and popular expressions of nationalism that was reflected in the emergence of a politicised Catholic middle class with access to popular journals like ‘The Nation’ and other material that was published in popular anthologies. Davis believed that cultural regeneration would lead to the realisation of an Irish nation and the best way to achieve this was to mobilise the people, to appeal ‘to the ‘lower classes’ who were the hope of the future, and the concept of the Irish peasant, who typified all that was best and noble in the Irish character, indeed all that was essentially Irish was born.’\(^{316}\) In this way ‘Young Ireland pointed the way to the turn of the century to the turn of the century and the cultural nationalism of the

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\(^{311}\) Ibid. Davis’ support for the Queen’s colleges led to a public clash with O’Connell at the Repeal Association in May 1845 in which Davis, always a poor speaker, was reduced to tears.


\(^{313}\) The West’s Awake commemorates the rebellion of 1798.

\(^{314}\) Cullen, Fintan, (ed.), 2000, *Sources in Irish Art, A Reader*, Cork, Cork University Press, p.244. The publication of The Spirit of the Nation and Burton’s cover prompted Davis’s call for a national art that was published in the Nation in 1843.


Gaelic League and the literary revival which arguably represents 'the apotheosis of Romanticism in Ireland ...'⁴¹⁷

The influence of the strategic use of folk material by Davis and the Young Irelanders was felt in every area of cultural and political life. In literature elite culture had absorbed the lessons of the Young Irelanders, moved on from its propaganda and agitprop approach and incorporated the folk elements into the Literary Revival. Davis's call for a national art had been ignored: portraiture, landscape and sentimentalised genre predominated but Davis's friendship with George Petrie would have a significant impact on popular visual material and the applied arts (design and craft) leading to the emergence of a distinctly Irish visual culture in the second half of the nineteenth century.³¹⁸ In song, 'St. Patrick's Day' which had been widely accepted as an Irish anthem in the first half of the nineteenth century³¹⁹ was replaced by 'A Nation Once Again' along with 'God Save Ireland,' which had a more explicitly militant message. Ewan Morris states that 'A Nation Once Again' became enormously popular and remains so today. It had a useful ambiguity about it in that it represented cultural regeneration as the best hope of realising a nation and yet could be read as a call to arms, an endorsement of the political and military struggle for independence.³²⁰ The latter was definitely Davis's legacy in the twentieth century. To mark the centenary of Davis's death in 1945 the Irish government commissioned an American Company called 'The March of Time' to make a documentary film on Davis. 'The film, 'A Nation Once Again' was propagandist in tone and (represented) the epitome of Irish Irelandism.'³²¹

In terms of folklore Davis would be followed by Seamus Ó Duillearga and the Gaelic League but in a way that was far removed from the Romantic ideas of the 1840s. With the development of field sciences in the second half of the nineteenth century the study of folklore began to incorporate aspects of ethnographic and anthropological enquiry in terms of field work, collection, categorisation, publication and dissemination through publication and networks of interest. Folkloristic research developed as the study of the body of expressive actions and communal practices including tales, music, dance, legends, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, and customs of ordinary people as defined by ethnicity and place. The artefacts and practices associated with the home, husbandry and land use were also collected. Folklore had divided into two distinct if interlinked areas of study: folklore and its subsidiary folk life. O'Gioilláin makes the distinction

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³¹⁸ See Chapter 3, Art in Ireland in the 19th century
³²⁰Ibid.
³²¹Ibid.
between folklore as the more intangible aspects of agrarian popular traditions (beliefs, narratives, music customs), while folk life refers to the material aspects of life in agrarian societies (utensils, furniture, house types, transport). The word culture is hard to avoid. O'Giolláin states that:

Folklore, folk life, folk culture, popular culture and subaltern culture can be more or less synonymous, though on a sliding scale which goes from the philological towards the sociological, and from the conservative towards the radical. The same applies to folk, peasantry, (common) people, masses, popular and subaltern strata or classes.

Culture, in this sense, is a modern term. The exclusivist definition of the humanities as the ‘best’ that the (western) world has thought, written or visualised and stored in the elitist treasure houses of national traditions has been overtaken by a much more inclusivist and democratising approach which challenges the traditional hegemony of the ‘arts’ as markers of culture. Culture and folklore had been opposed in the discourses of the nineteenth-century. All art is unknown to the Irish peasant as John Synge said and the peasant’s primitivism is defined by the absence of culture. In 1824 John T. O’Flaherty’s ‘A sketch of the of the History and Antiquities of the Southern Isles of Aran, lying off the West Coast of Ireland; with Observation of the Religion of the Celtic Nations, Monuments of the early Irish, Druidic Rites, &c’ was published in the ‘Transactions of the Royal Academy.’

According to O’Flaherty the Aranites were a primitive, simple and sequestered people who, in language, habits and customs retain more of the primitive Celtic character than any other contemporary tribe of that stock in the Kingdom: Sequestered and unmixed ... for a long succession of generations, history has always considered them as full of that ancient spirit, which has been elsewhere made to disappear by the force of revolutionary and colonial innovations.

George Petrie is more direct. The ‘Araners’ show no sign that ‘the blessings of civilisation had ever been extended to any portion of the inhabitants of this very wretched country.’ Culture was known only by its absence in this context. The long winter evenings of storey-telling that Petrie said...

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323 Ibid. p.5 (O Giollain)
326 O’Flaherty adds another element to support the conventional attitude to folklore - the well attended winter-evening tales of the Scealaidhe, or story-teller, are the ‘only historical entertainments of this primitive, simple and sequestered people’. Robinson also quotes George Petrie. Petrie had visited the Aran Islands in 1821 but his account of Aran – Character of the islanders was not published until 1868. He picks up where O’Flaherty left off and describes the inhabitants of the Aran Islands as hardy, intelligent and industrious but credulous and even superstitious, a simple and primitive people. Petrie is less speculative than O’Flaherty when it comes to close study of the Druidic remains on the island.
was all that existed by way of popular ‘entertainment’ remained is the primary definition of folklore that persisted up to the cultural turn of the sixties and seventies.

The detail of this definition was established when the study of folklore in Ireland was institutionalised with the establishment of The Cumann le Béaloideas Éireann, The Irish Folklore Commission in 1935. This was wound up in 1971 and its functions transferred to the Department of Irish Folklore at University College, Dublin. Between 1935 and 1971 Cumann le Béaloideas Éireann, under the direction of James Hamilton Delargy or Seamus Ó Duillearga, collected information in fourteen categories: Settlement and Dwelling; Livelihood and Household Support; Communications and Trade; The Community; Human Life; nature; Folk Medicine; Time; Principles and Rule of Popular Belief and Practice; Mythological Tradition, Historical Tradition, Religious Tradition; Popular ‘Oral literature’; and Sports and Pastimes. This is the legacy of Irish Ireland as it focussed on the popular traditions of life in agrarian communities, the cottiers who survived famine and emigration and remained sequestered in their clachans in the west of Ireland as the nineteenth century merged into the twentieth. As the rundale system was dismantled under the land reform of the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century a small-farmer-class emerged and brought with it traces of the folk traditions of the cottiers. The Irish Folklore Commission was dedicated to the recovery of these before they disappeared altogether. This was a nationalist strategy and it located the last traces of the historic Irish Nation in the west. This was Corkery’s hidden Ireland, the last resource of folk life left in Ireland. Folklore and the west of Ireland became synonymous and the following was proposed as a definition of folk in an earlier phase of this study:

Standard perspectives on folk life in Ireland concentrate on the traditions of rural communities between 1850 and 1950 with the emphasis on the preservation of orally transmitted native knowledge, customs and beliefs collected at source: the authentic voice of the people and the spirit of the nation. Folk usually refers to preliterate and pre-capitalist agrarian communities which, in an Irish context, constitute the cottiers and small holders of the western seaboard; the class that has become synonymous with the native Irish and are traditionally referred to as the Irish peasant.

There is no reference to a visual component in Irish folk life. As stated earlier (page 139), there is very little evidence of the existence of a visual component in the folk traditions of the west as defined by Ó Duilléarga. Yet folk life is central to nationalist strategies to construct an image of the

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329 Land redistribution which followed Wyndham’s Land Act of 1903 and the efforts of the Congested Districts Board to rationalise holdings.
west as a metaphor for the Irish nation: the West as represented functions imaginatively as a proxy for a liberated and culturally re-integrated Ireland. I have already considered the output of the elite (such as it was) and the presence of folk themes in paintings consistent with a nationalist outlook. Neither of these could be considered as the equivalent in any way to folk song with its native symbolism, narratives and rhythms. Irish art appears to be, at this point, a cultural orphan: the illegitimate offspring of Anglophone-Ireland. The Young Irelanders had embraced art as an ideal but realised that it was the property of an elite that was not sympathetic to their cause. Instead they took to the streets with popular ballads, literary essays and histories. In the process they translated the work of the antiquarians, the Gaelic scholars and folklorists into forms that were accessible to ordinary people, including a new iconography of nationalism. This may have vulgarised the art of ancient Ireland (Jeanne Sheehy) and it may have been propagandist (Yeats) but it was a way of visually marking the Irish nation with a series of popular devices. The Shamrock, the Harp (with or without the Crown), the Wolfhound, the Round Tower, Sunbursts, High crosses and Hibernia, the very personification of Ireland, became the accepted symbols of Ireland:

There is Glory in the round Towers of Ireland,  
The pretty little shamrock so green;  
The wolf-dog lying down,  
And the harp without the crown,  
with the sunburst of Ireland between.  

There was no organic link between this sort of popular sentiment and the art of the ruling elite. Art historiography has only ever considered folk life as a form of material corroboration for the representation of the peasants in the genre painting of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Art historians Brian P. Kennedy, Raymond Gillespie and Marie Bouke are now engaged in the retrieval of folklore and the material aspects of folk life in an effort to authenticate the pictorial record in material and ideological terms. Social historians like Gearoid Ó Tuathaigh, Ciara Breatnach and Kevin Whelan have become interested in the pictorial record as something more than illustration. They recognise that art may have a role as a source of information on the material and attitudinal aspects of life in the nineteenth century, a sort of meta-history which has traditionally been distrusted by historians because of the subjectivity of its viewpoints. However art historians and social historians are limited in the scope of their enquiry in that they operate within

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331 Morris, Ewan, 2005, *Our Own Devices*, Dublin and Oregon, Irish Academic Press, pp. 11-12. This was a verse which a correspondent quoted in a letter to the Cork Examiner protesting at the lack of traditional symbols on the coinage of the Irish Free State.

conventional (even traditional) art historiography frameworks. This makes it awkward to deal with
the influence people like George Petrie had on popular culture.

George Petrie was part antiquarian, part painter, part archaeologist and part cartographer. Because
of this, he is difficult to locate within conventional art historiographies. His influence is restricted to
the applied arts and it is not necessarily regarded as being benign: he may have done Trojan work
on the significance of round towers but he was also responsible for the vulgarisation of these
masterpieces of mediaeval Irish architecture as the populist symbols of a nationalism which
instinctively distrusted all art. Petrie was the architect of a symbolic system that provided the
Young Irelanders with an alternative to the compliant art of the elite and, with the rise of popular
nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century, the imagination and representation of the
Irish nation was diverted from elite culture into popular culture. Art historians have overlooked this
until very recently333 and, even now, efforts to engage with popular culture are constrained by the
evidentiary nature and connoisseurial bias of their enquiry.

Figure 5.6. The Meeting Of the Waters, postcard, (c. 1904).

333 Murray, Peter Murray, Peter, 2004, George Petrie ((1790-1866): The Rediscovery of Ireland’s Past,
Cork and Kinsale, Crawford Art Gallery and Gandon Editions, p. 7. Murray argues that ‘The genius
of George Petrie (1790-1866) is perhaps obscured by being dispersed over so many fields. In many
areas of cultural history, people come across his name; in each case they only come across a partial
aspect of his work.’ Even this survey of the many aspects of Petrie’s work does not deal with his
influence on popular culture.
This is not simply about an extended range of visual reference material, a more flexible attitude to what can be regarded as “art.” As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth century a new technology was being developed that would have profound consequences for the imagination and representation of Ireland. Photography was emerging as a hugely popular means of recording and representing life in Ireland. It was developing the capacity to incorporate this into rapidly developing reprographic technology in the print media at all levels, from popular illustrated newspapers like the ‘Illustrated London News,’ to illustrated guide books for gentleman travellers and postcards for tourists. This was the beginning of the age of mechanical reproduction. The west would become visible in a way that would have been unthinkable even a decade beforehand. One man, Robert French, would take over 40,000 photographs of Ireland over three decades, creating a visual record that remains the definitive image of Anglo-Ireland. The popular devices pioneered by Petrie and the Young Irelanders were ready made for the new media and they exploded in a new wave of folk inspired images of Ireland. In or around 1904 a young woman called Eileen wrote to her Mum to say she would be coming home the following Wednesday.334 The note was written on the back of a postcard of the Meeting of the Waters in Killarney. The snap shot of the scene is rendered in a hand-tinted reproduction in a cameo format. To the side is a young woman wearing a Galway Shawl, petticoat and apron - the traditional apparel of a young Irish countrywoman or ‘colleen.’ In her hands she is holding a box camera that she is pointing at the Meeting of the Waters. A border of four-leaf Clover, into which is set a Maid of Erin crest, frames the scene.335 Folk and nationalist themes are transformed by the new technology of mechanical reproduction in a new era of mass communication. The image of Ireland would never be the same. ‘Postcards bearing pictures first became acceptable within the Irish and British postal system in 1894336 and by 1900 over 100 million were sold. In 1902 post office restrictions were lifted and the picture postcard was introduced. The demand for postcards was huge. It constituted a ‘craze’ that continued until the outbreak of the First World War. In 1913-14 the total number of postcards sold in the United

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334 Dear mum, I am getting on alright and I am coming home next Wednesday with aunty ada. how is dad and jack and yourself getting on without me. tell Jackie i will send him a postcard soon this is all the time so goodbye love to dad | Jackie and your self | from Eileen xxxx | xxxx | xxxx |xxxx 

335 The Maid of Erin Crest consisted of the Brian Boru Harp with a winged Hibernia on the boss set against a blue background. Set against a green background, this was the unofficial flag of nationalist Ireland which only became discredited when it was used during recruitment campaigns for the British army during the first World War. It was replaced by Mitchell’s tricolour that had been revived by Sinn Fein.

Figure 5.9. Montage of early postcards featuring scenes of rural Ireland.
Figure 5.9. Montage of second generation postcards of Ireland. Included are scenes from Ballymaclinton, the "typical" Irish village created for the Franco-British Exhibition of 1908.
Kingdom since their introduction had reached 926.5 million.\textsuperscript{337} The postcard craze had followed on the popularity of small studio portraits called Cartes-de-Visite that had brought photography within the reach of the middleclass, and the demand was huge.\textsuperscript{338} Hand held box cameras had been introduced on a commercial basis in 1898 but were still expensive. Photojournalism was still two decades away and photographs in the print media were still a novelty. The popular demand for photography was diverted into postcards. Art historiography has not considered to this revolution in image making and consumption as significant in terms of the development of the pictorial record - a revolution that produced archetypal folk images of Ireland that would dominate visual culture for over half a century. These images were not the popular devices of the Young Irelanders although these remained popular as elements in of graphic design. Photographs of life in the west of Ireland had begun to replace them. These new images had some similarity with the genre painting of the nineteenth-century but that was something entirely different: that was art and art and photography were locked in a battle over the authority of the visual image that pitted mechanics against creation. More significantly, these images originate in the field studies of the ethnographers, anthropologists, colonial administrators, romantics, revivalists and tourists who went west and brought back evidence of conditions on the margins of empire using the latest technology available, photography. Between 1890 and 1920 the west of Ireland becomes visible and is schematically represented in photography. This objective documentation is translated into popular images of Irishness and a new form of folk consciousness is created, a visual form that is beyond folklore and folk music but just as well defined by reference to folk life in Ireland: to the living conditions of the cottiers of the west of Ireland and the visual markers of their way of life in what remained of the clachans and rundales on the margins of Victorian Ireland.

To establish a role for visual imagery in the popular construction of Irishness, the study has had to move beyond conventional attitudes to both the pictorial record and the study of folk culture. It is necessary to rethink the meaning of folk and the role of visual imagery in an altered folk context. It is necessary, at this point, to locate this development in a visual context other than art history: one that encompasses both Fine Art practice and the ephemera of popular culture in a way that is not hierarchal (as conventional art histories are) or opposed (in the sense that cultural theory opposes elite and popular cultures).


I propose to deal with the production of popular images of Ireland as one element of a visual culture that developed out of political nationalism between 1890 and 1920. The term visual culture and the emphasis within the term of the embeddedness of visual images in a specific cultural context were first used by Svetlana Alpers in 1983\textsuperscript{339} to refer to the importance of visual images in seventeenth century Dutch culture. Visual culture in this sense has implications for the way images work, how they are interacted with. The theory of visual culture promotes the idea of cultural production as a continuum on two levels.\textsuperscript{340} First it incorporates every form and site of production and manifests itself in all sorts of ways. It refers to art galleries and exhibitions, art in public spaces art and architecture, art in the environment and the whole world of craft and design, fashion, advertising, packaging, interior design and the media - in short the whole range of visual technologies that are used to ‘re-present’ the world in visual terms. Secondly, images are not produced in isolation. Images are the product of a culture that constructs social relations and offers very particular visions of social categories such as class, gender, race, sexuality, and so on. The continuum operates on a loop between the producer and the viewer and the relations that are constructed effect the way images are made and read. In short, images are not passive and are interacted with in a particular socio-cultural context that mediates their effect. Rose deals with art as an integral part of an expanded pictorial record made up of visual objects. ‘Visual culture can be roughly defined as those material artefacts, buildings and images, plus time-based media and performances, produced by human labour and imagination, which serve aesthetic, symbolic, ritualistic or ideological-political ends and which address the sense of sight to a significant extent.’\textsuperscript{341} But it is more than simply an expanded range of visual material. Visual material is inevitably ideological and being aware of the site of production is being aware of how meaning is constructed and thereby being sensitised to the power relations inherent in all visual imagery. For instance, the photographer who took the group portrait of members of the Congested Districts Board on the Old Head in Mayo (Figure 1.17) was constructing a visual representation of primitivism and poverty in the west of Ireland as a justification for the work of the Congested Districts Board. The probable audience was Arthur James Balfour,\textsuperscript{342} his associates in the British Government, its civil servants in Whitehall, and

\begin{thebibliography}{99}


\bibitem{340} Ibid.

\bibitem{341} Ibid., p.1.

\bibitem{342} Arthur James Balfour Chief Secretary for Ireland and leader of the Conservative Party in The House of Commons in 1891. Along with his brother Gerard and George Wyndham, Balfour was responsible for the legislation that enabled the transfer of the ownership of land from Landlord to tenant alongside a programme of economic and infrastructural development undertaken by the Congested Districts Board. In 1895 the photographer R. J. Welch presented Balfour with an album of photographs which represent the effect of his policies in Connemara: See Walsh et al. in Ciara Breathnach, Ciara (ed.), 2007, \textit{Framing The West: Images of Rural Ireland 1891 -1920}, Dublin and Oregon, Irish Academic Press.

\end{thebibliography}

164
beyond them, critics of the government and its policies in Ireland - people like C. P. Scott\textsuperscript{343} of the Manchester Guardian. The photograph is set up to be read an encounter between the forces for modernisation and a recalcitrant peasantry from a viewpoint that is sympathetic to the objectives of The Congested Districts Board. As such the photograph emerges from the same site of production, is inscribed with the same ideology and has the same political effect as the anti-Home Rule cartoons in Punch (Figure 5.9) or, at the opposite end of the continuum, Daniel Maclise's 'The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife' (Figure 3.3).

\textbf{Figure 5.11.} John Tenniel, \textit{Two Forces}, Punch, 29 October 1881.

\textsuperscript{343} C. P. Scott, Editor of the Manchester guardian who commissioned John Millington Synge and Jack B. Yeats to produce a series of illustrated article articles for he Manchester Guardian. The articles were published in June 1905.
A similar strategy is needed in relation to folk. It is necessary to move beyond the standard perspectives of folk culture in Ireland. Rather than dealing with the retrieval and dissemination of oral and artefactual elements of a folk life in the rural heartlands of Ireland, I propose to deal with that aspect of folk that can be read as an expression of nationalist ideology. Simply put, the study of folklore and folk life as it developed in Ireland between 1850 and 1950 was incorporated as a form of cultural resistance in an ideological struggle between the coloniser and the colonised before and after independence was achieved in 1922. In this context, I believe that it is more productive to think in terms of a folk consciousness that is strategic and has played a part in the development of a political sense of Irishness as expressed in the nationalist ideologies that emerged in the aftermath of the 1845-9 famine. There were distinct phases in the development of a folk consciousness in Ireland between 1850 and 1950. The Young Irelanders represented the first of many folk revivals the objective of which was to re-create a cultural nation as a political act. The Gaelic League moved the agenda on from cultural regeneration within a shared tenitory to political separation and the ranking of a Gaelicised and de-Anglicised idea of Ireland above all others. The Irish Free State gave institutional effect to an Irish-Ireland riddled with the contradictions of a truncated national territory but united in its vision of itself as the custodian of the heritage of the peasant aristocrats, the bards, the pipers and the storytellers of the hidden Ireland revealed by the Gaelic cultural revival and articulated as a cultural manifesto for independent Ireland by Daniel Corkery. What each phase has in common is that the idea of folk is deployed as a political weapon. This reveals much about the impetus behind folk revivals. In the 1890s Home Rule had not yet been achieved and there was a desire to realise an Irish Nation culturally in the absence of a political or military breakthrough. It was the only response possible given the consolidation of the Union and the growing hegemony of the Anglo-Saxon. These created the need to fight anti-identity measures with the assertion of unifying symbols of an Irish nation as a counter to the loss of power. Folk traditions were perceived as the embodiment of that unaltered, stable and desirable lost world that was being documented in order to record and preserve native knowledge systems and systems of self definition and representation. Added to this was the recovery of the artefacts and manuscripts of mediaeval Ireland and the basic visual syntax of an imagined Irish nation was assembled. This symbolic language of Irishness was both resilient and unifying (up to a point). Ewan Morris describes how an agreed set of symbols of Irishness had existed up to the First World War and the Easter Rising but had become differentiated and polarised after partition as nationalist and unionists set about defining their territoriality with partisan symbols – the Irish Harp with or without the Crown as it were. Folklore provided southern Catholic nationalists and northern Protestant unionists with origin myths that

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344 Using O’Giollain’s distinction between folklore as the oral tradition of native knowledge and folklife as the material aspects of an agrarian society. Folk culture is a synthesis of both.

345 In this context, one could regard the Arts Council’s decision in 1960 to exclude folk elements from its remit as the point where the dominance of an Béaloideas is confronted and begin to decline.
served to underpin partition. South of the border Corkery imagined a hidden Ireland that had maintained a cultural continuity with ancient Ireland in the fastnesses of the west of Ireland. North of the border E. Estyn Evans was in search of an origin myth that would refute the nationalist emphasis on conquest and settlement as the basis for Ulster protestant heritage. He scoured the fields and farmyards of Ulster to find traces of a distinct Ulster heritage which survived in folk traditions that existed outside of conventional Irish histories and established a cultural base for Northern Ireland as a political state. Folklore was embraced as a means to a political end. The lives of the people matter less than the translation of their lore and lives into a cultural weapon of resistance for nationalists of every hue.

Translation is the key to understanding a folk consciousness. Folk cultures were recreated by elites from the study of the lives of the marginalised, the cottiers of the underdeveloped margins of Victorian Irish society. Folk culture in Ireland only became visible when it is on the point of disappearing and it suited the elite (whether antiquarian, Young Ireland, Gaelic League or Romantic Nationalist for instance) to notice it. In Northern Europe the hegemony of the Enlightenment, rapid industrialisation and urbanisation generated an awareness of the loss of traditional ways of life in the countryside and this provided the elite with a metaphor for the effect of colonisation. Recovery was a form of resistance formulated by the Romantics. In Ireland the status of the Union of Great Britain and Ireland in the second half of the nineteenth century created the same effect. Douglas Hyde’s call for the de-Anglicisation of Ireland was a call for revival as a form of cultural resistance with political effect. It was a classic folk strategy:

By the closing decade of the nineteenth century, some form of devolved self-government or Home Rule for Ireland seemed imminent. At the same time, the census returns were clearly indicating that the death of the Irish language seemed now inevitable and hardly less imminent. It was at this juncture that that a deliberate project of ‘decolonisation’ was formulated and adopted by a group of intellectuals and artists with, in time, significant support from a larger group of political activists who were to form the nucleus of the political leadership of the new Irish state eventually established in 1922.

In each case the subject of revival, the common folk, were the object of economic and social policy which saw them leave the land and migrate to the cities or emigrate in search of work. It was left to the Romantics, the intellectuals, artists and priest patriots to record and preserve something of what was left behind in residual communities such as the Aran Islands. John Millington Synge’s ‘The


Aran Islands' is the perfect example of this. A more apposite is example is Bigger’s early experiments in folk theatre (page 177). These demonstrate that, despite being rooted in recorded fact, folk enthusiasts deal ultimately with idealised forms in selectively edited versions of the ‘facts’ of folk life. They project an imagined past in order to invoke the spirit of “the Nation.” As such, all folk action is to some extent an act of appropriation by translation perpetrated by elites in order to advance a particular attitude or ideology and achieve power. Projection implies a constituency that is activated in the pursuit of political power. The folk consciousness of the elite enters into the public domain where it is translated into popular devices. This is the ‘Petrie effect’ as described by Jeanne Sheehy (page 28) or, in the case of John Millington Synge, the process whereby his dramatic treatment of the essential man of Aran is transformed into ‘the typical Abbey rural play (featuring) strong men and fair colleens in rural or Western seaboard settings and wearing picturesque peasant clothes.’

This study is concerned with visual images and the objective now is to demonstrate how images of folk life collected by the elite have entered into the imagistic and ideological space that is visual culture and how, in the process, they have become translated into folk images of ‘the Irish.’ The next section will concentrate on photography and the mass reproduction of images of Irishness in the print media and tourism industry between 1890 and 1920. The work of one of the pioneering photographers in Ireland, Robert John Welch, will be used as a case study. It considers Welch’s role in the documentation of the West and the construction of an image of peasant Ireland that would, in turn, be translated into a folk image of Ireland.

Figure 6.1. ‘The Real Thing,’ The Lawrence Collection, C.1888.
CHAPTER 6

INTO THE WEST

SECTION I: FROM ETHNOGRAPHY TO FOLK: IMAGE AND NATION.

This chapter deals with the work of the photographer Robert J. Welch (1859 – 1936). Welch was of interest because of his documentation of residual peasant communities in the west of Ireland and the way these images achieved a second life in representing the ‘real’ Ireland in the early twentieth century and have remained central to the folklore of the ‘real’ Ireland to this day. His work provided a case study in the translation of colonial/ethnographic images of the Irish peasant into a new type of folk imagery. The objective was to demonstrate how folk images of Ireland which originated in the ethnographic documentation of the west of Ireland were translated into folk imagery and were insinuated into popular culture. The life and work of Robert J. Welch encapsulates many of the issues that have been discussed heretofore and there are a number of points that need to be restated at this stage.

Figure 6.2. Robert J. Welch, *Turf Slide Car*, Sperrin Mountains, (c. 1901).

The first is that, historically, very little emphasis has been placed on the visual components of folk culture and it has always been assumed that folk culture in Ireland between 1850 and 1950 was
exclusive of what we regard as art. It the absence of evidence to the contrary, most enquiries into the visual culture of the common people inevitably default into a study of the representation of the common people in the visual culture of the elite; whether that is in Art or, increasingly, a more inclusive range of visual sources. It follows that a study of the visual record of the common people has to be a second hand affair; the collection of evidence on the material conditions of rural populations from sources external to those communities: from the pictorial record of the elite; the anecdotal evidence of the traveller; the enlightened enquiry of the private scholar; the ethnographic gaze of the stranger; the folkloristic endeavours of the revivalists and the documentary record of campaigners and colonial administrators concerned with social conditions, the politics of distress and the land war. It constitutes an ethnographic retrospection of sorts with a firm focus on artefacts and living conditions as the visual markers of folk life in the ‘West.’ This has led to a renewed interest in the work of photographers who were active as ethnographers of a sort between 1890 and 1920. Robert J. Welch pioneered field photography in a range of disciplines. His documentation of folk life in the west combined with his work for the Congested Districts Board is of particular interest. Photography has largely been overlooked to date but at this stage it is much more relevant in an Irish context than the Fine Arts.

Figure 6.3. Postcard of a slide cart based on an original photograph taken by Robert J. Welch. Collection of Maggie Blanck.

This postcard was posted on the Website of Maggie Blanck, http://www.maggieblanck.com/Mayopages/People.html. The postcard is shown alongside another image taken from Stoddard. The
The second point concerns the status of the visual image. Since the 1990s art historians have begun to peep at the complexity of visual culture, grappling with critical models developed in other disciplines and although they were constrained by conventional art historiographical approaches to the pictorial record, there is a shift toward a much more inclusive and incisive understanding of the complexity of visual culture and the ideological components underpinning it. By the same token social historians are beginning to acknowledge that their instinctive distrust of the inherent subjectivity and potential for dislocation of images is problematic and that the analysis of the visual record is a valid form of historiography. Granted all of this is still very tentative. In July 2007 'Framing the West, Images of Rural Ireland 1891-20' was published. It was a breakthrough as it represented one of the first treatments of historic photography in Ireland by a combination of social historians, art historians and cultural theorists concerned with visual culture. In his introduction Cormac Ó Grada refers to the anxieties historians feel when confronted with images as evidence. Nevertheless the visual image, the picture, has migrated from the preserve of the connoisseur into others areas that impact upon social and cultural systems. Questions of politics and power cannot be ignored any longer when considering the role of the visual image in constructing identity in the context of ethnicity, territoriality and nationality.

The third concerns the concept of folk. The study of folklore has undergone a similar transformation; a cultural turn where the gap between folk constructions of Irishness and life as lived in the townships is measured in ideological terms. The standard perspective on folklore as collection and preservation has been replaced by a broader understanding of folk culture. But, ats this study argues, this needs to go further and begin to radically rethink the way a folk consciousness has conditioned images of the Irish and has shaped our perception of the nation as expressed historically in political and cultural nationalism. Like folklore, this folk consciousness derives from the interaction between elite and subaltern or popular culture and is invariably a strategic expression of ideology masquerading as culture.

The fourth and final issue concerns the transformation of the ethnographic image in the age of mechanical reproduction. This facilitated the translation of the documentary record of folk like in the west of Ireland into a schematic representation of a folk sense of identity which defined Irish Ireland and continues to shape the image of the Irish nation in popular culture.

site also features a hand-tinted postcard of the photograph Welch sent to Haddon in 1931. Blanck has gifted her postcard collection to Mayo County Library in Castlebar, Co. Mayo.

These issues are now considered in the context of the photography of Robert J. Welch who, like many of his contemporaries, was part ethnographer and part photographer. His vision was shaped by the Victorian fascination with fieldwork on the margins of empire but his practice was defined by the industrialisation of photography and the growth of tourism in the very margins of empire that was the object of his ethnographic interest. This section deals with the work of Robert J. Welch as a case study in the transformation of ethnography into folk images of Irish Ireland in the age of mechanical reproduction.

1 Robert J. Welch, Photographer.

The photography of Robert J. Welch offers the possibility of an authentic visual record of life in the townships of the west of Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century, a unparalleled glimpse of the 'Hidden Ireland' just as it was about to disappear forever. The objective documentary quality of his photography and his reputation as an ethnographer are firmly located in his involvement in the Belfast Field Club and his pioneering use of photography in the field. He was a photographer by trade, a natural scientist by inclination, and a collector by temperament. He wasn’t an effective businessman and he didn’t have an impact on the development of commercial photography in Ireland like his contemporaries Lawrence, Valentine and Ward. Chandler’s history of photography in Ireland in the nineteenth century\textsuperscript{351} dismisses Welsh (sic) as ‘one of a number of photographers who were interested in social issues’ cumbersome history of photography in 19\textsuperscript{th} Century. This is unfair and substantially incorrect. Welch was a pioneer of field photography recording a number of firsts in the documentation of natural history, geology and archaeology.\textsuperscript{352} Welch was part of the great Victorian love affair with science. His photographs resonate with his belief in the authority of scientific method assumed by Victorian enquirers and that the mechanical veracity of photography enhanced objective posture of the enquiry. His tools of choice were a cumbersome field camera mounted on a tripod, Ross Goertz lenses, dry glass plate negatives and his jaunting car. For example ‘Janet’ (Figure 6. 4) documents an old woman squatting beside a crude stone hut on a beach below a road. The hut is a primitive affair, a low, windowless construct of rough beach stone and mortar.


\textsuperscript{352} Maguire, W. A., 2000, \textit{A Century In Focus; Photography and Photographs in the North of Ireland 1839 – 1939}, The Blackstaff Press, Belfast, Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland (Ulster Museum), p. 99. He recorded a number of firsts: nesting sites on Rathlin Island (1889); a horned cairn (now known as a court grave) in Donegal in 1890 and his publication of ‘a catalogue of geological views, accompanied by a scholarly comment by professor Greenville Cole, was a first of his kind.’
The 'roof' is covered in seaweed drying in the sun. The sea seems perilously close. There is a dry stone wall of beach rocks in front of the hut that looks more like a wave breaker than a boundary. On the wall are a billycan and a cast iron three-legged pot. The woman looks old and weather-beaten. Her hair is white and tied back with a scarf. She is wearing a full-length dress that has seen better days. She is barefoot. Her clothes indicate destitution. Welch records that the woman is named as Janet. The hut is her home 'on the back of beach between Larne and Glenarm, Country Antrim. The seaweed is Dulse or *Rhodymenia* to give it its proper name that was 'by this time was becoming a curiosity sold at seaside resort and autumn fairs.' There is another similar photograph of 'The Fisherman’s Cave' that is basically a maritime still life with a fisherman as a contextualising element if not just a prop. The photograph is carefully arranged to give us information about the materiel and dress of the Rathlin Island fishermen. The careful arrangement of pots demonstrates a keen interest in artefacts as the material markers the cottier class and their primitive way of life. There is a strong sense of the past in the present, a sense that we will never see the like of this woman again.

Figure, 6.4. Robert J Welch, *Janet*. (c.1895).
Welch was deliberate in his attempt to record a way of life that was disappearing fast. But Welch was not a folklorist. He would have come in contact with the folk component of the Gaelic revival in County Antrim through his friendship with F. J. Bigger but there is no evidence of an active engagement with the revival or any sympathy with its aims. If anything Welch personifies the Anglo-Saxon attitude that provoked the development of folklore as a counter-hegemonic measure in the culture wars of the late nineteenth-century. His documentation of the peasantry is one component of a complex practice the bulk of which was focussed on commercial work in the industrial and tourism sectors. His scientific outlook and practice was Victorian. His work for the Congested Districts Board earned him a royal warrant and ultimately a royal pension. He was, in a very real sense, a member of the establishment and a loyal servant of the Crown. This is not the profile one would associate with the folklore movement. Yet his photographs have been incorporated into conventional folk narratives as authentic representations of folk life in Ireland in the nineteenth century. Welch embraced the age of mechanical reproduction and was instrumental in the production and dissemination of images of ‘old’ Ireland between 1890 and 1920 in a practice that often blurred the line between exoticism and fieldwork, tourism and ethnography. Others translated his photographs into the first generation of folksy images of ‘auld’ Ireland. Since then reproductions of his photographs have slipped sideways into visual culture and continue to function as authentic images of the real Ireland of long ago. Welch, the quintessential Victorian gent, a private scholar and member of the colonial establishment has been transformed into an accidental folklorist.

The abiding image of Welch is of an intense looking man in tweeds on the left of the a group of conchologists photographed by W.H.W. in May 1897 on a field trip to Mulrugh Bay, County Antrim. Welch and his friends stare at the camera, deeply conscious of the act of representing themselves ‘in photography’. It is this look, the objective posture of the gentleman enquirer active in the field in the cause of popular science that defines the Victorian gaze. Welch’s own photograph of an old woman squatting beside a crude stone cabin on a beach in Co. Antrim is a perfect example of that gaze. The Victorian fascination with primitive societies was channelled into the developing field sciences of ethnology, ethnography and anthropology. Photography became the effective way of collecting and disseminating specimens of otherness. Welch quickly developed a reputation as an

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See W. A. Maguire A Century In Focus; Photography and Photographs in the North of Ireland 1839 – 1939, The Blackstaff Press, Belfast, Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland (Ulster Museum), 2000. P. 54. F J Bigger, was a member of the Belfast Field Club and an enthusiast for all things Irish. He was a member of the Gaelic League and he revived the Glens Feis or Feis na nGleam in 1904. Having restored a tower in Ardglass in the style of a traditional Irish chieftain he organised traditional music and dance performances by people dressed in ‘fancy dress,’ Gaelic costumes which he personally designed. Welch must have witnessed these early versions of folk theatre. He was a regular visitor to Ardglass and photographed ‘Shane’s Castle’ for Bigger.
ethnographer and his photographs were much in demand by those involved in field sciences. He was closely associated with Dr. Alfred Cort Haddon, a zoologist turned ethnographer whose work had considerable influence on the development of anthropology as an academic discipline in Britain. In 1893 Haddon and Charles Radcliffe Browne presented ‘The ethnography of the Aran Islands, County Galway’ to the Royal Irish Academy. Browne conducted further ethnographic studies in the west of Ireland while Haddon went on to become a lecturer in ethnology at Cambridge University in 1900. The photographic collection of Cambridge University’s Museum of Anthropology contains a large collection of Welch’s photographs, one of which is used on the museum’s website to illustrate the use of photographic reproductions in the dissemination of images of otherness within colonial networks of exchange. It is a postcard of an old woman with a spinning wheel which Welch sent to Haddon in 1931 with the greeting ‘how’s this for ethnog’ written on the verso.

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354 Evans, E Estyn and Turner, Brian S., 1977, *Ireland’s Eye The Photographs of Robert John Welch*, Ulster Museum Series 201, Belfast, Ulster Museum, p 99. ‘He sent on request over a hundred Irish ethnological photographs to General Pitt-Rivers of Rushmore, Salisbury in 1897, and in the following year he contributed to the collection of anthropological photographs sponsored by a British Association committee of which Professor J. L. Myres was secretary. In addition nearly a thousand of his pictures went to the association’s Geological photographs committee’.

355 Postcard. R. Welch. Ireland. Haddon Collection. P.490683.ACH22,
Figure 6.6. Robert J Welch, *Old Woman Spinning by Roadside*, (Haddon Collection, P.490683.ACH2, Photographic Collection of the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) and subsequent postcard versions.
In 1895 Welch produced an album of photographs of Connemara as 'a gift to the former Chief Secretary of Ireland Arthur J Balfour in recognition of his support for the building of the Galway-Clifden Railway.\(^{356}\) The ‘Balfour Album’ is made up of 50 plates that show ‘the character of the congested districts of the western seaboard, and the peasant life, industries and unique antiquities, as far as photographs could show them.’\(^{357}\) It is a project that reveals much about his practice, his methodology as a photographer and his status as an ethnographer. The album is assembled from a back catalogue of around 200 photographs of Galway, Connemara and the Aran Islands. There is none of the close observation that characterise C. R. Browne’s anthropometric documentation of the people of the Aran Islands and the Mullet Peninsula in County Mayo.\(^{358}\) In fact, people are an unstable element in Welch’s photographs. They move and when they move they expose the limitations of his equipment and antagonise his dislike of imperfection in the printed image.

There is also another dynamic at work. There is little evidence of any engagement with the people of the place even if that been possible for the gentleman photographer dressed in tweeds and speaking with a strange accent. In the photograph of members of the Congested Districts Board in conversation with a woman on Old Head, County Mayo (Figure 1.17)\(^{359}\) a local man can be seen acting as an intermediary. Paul Henry describes how local people would run away and hide from the ‘sketcher’ during his time on Achill Island.\(^{360}\) This fugitive quality is perfectly captured in the Tuke collection\(^{361}\) and, especially in \textit{CDB 96}\(^{362}\) (Figure 6.7). It is a photograph of a young woman running away from the stranger with a camera. The photograph was taken at the same time as Figure 1.17 and contrasts sharply with the posed look of that photograph. This type of situation was


\(^{357}\) Evans, E Óstyn and Turner, Brian S., 1977, \textit{Ireland’s Eye The Photographs of Robert John Welch, Ulster Museum Series 201}, Belfast, Ulster Museum, P.7. Excerpt from a report in Northern Whig of 11 June 1900 on \textit{The Queen’s Visit. Interesting exhibit of west of Ireland Photographs}. The exhibition was held in the Viceregal Lodge, Dublin as a showcase for the work of the Congested Districts Board. The report in the Northern Whig’s is focussed on Welch’s appointment as photographer to Queen Victoria, but contains a useful summary of his Connemara portfolio.


\(^{359}\) Ibid, p.19 for reference to the Congested Districts Board Collection.


\(^{361}\) Tuke’s activism in the West was central to the establishment of the Congested Districts Board. He commissioned Major Rutledge-Fair to document conditions in Connemara. People, especially, adults going about their daily lives (and avoiding the camera) feature much more so than in Welch’s photographs.

\(^{362}\) CDB 96, Congested Districts Board Collection, The National Photographic Archive, The National Library of Ireland, Dublin
Figure 6.7. Tuke, *Girl Running* (c. 1906., N.P.A. / CDB 96)

Figure 6.8. *Reminiscences of Hedge-Firing*. Punch, 1875. The caption reads:
'Itinerant photographer (from under the Cloth) "Will you keep quiet? How do you suppose —"
Subject (who is evading the focus) "Be jabers man, will I sit still to be shot at?!!"
made fun of in Punch in 1875 but a better example is provided by the testimony of Marguerite Madame Mespoulet. She traveled to Galway in 1913 to document the west of Ireland as part of the Archive of the Planet project set up and funded by the French banker and Philanthropist Albert Kahn (see Figure 5.5). She describes the difficulty involved in getting two fish sellers to pose for a photograph: ‘These women were amongst the shyest we met we had to use gentleness and ruses not to mention other means such as jokes to keep them still for eight to ten seconds in front of the lens.'

Much more damaging to Welch and his reputation as an ethnographer is the nakedly political nature of the Balfour project. Plate No. 23 of the Balfour Album is entitled ‘A Bog cabin, Ben Lettery’ but it is catalogued in the Ulster Museum as ‘W14/05/83 An Evicted tenant’s cabin’ (Figure 6.9). This is a more accurate description of the type of temporary accommodation constructed by cottiers after eviction. Another squatter’s home is described as ‘Mick McQuaid’s Castle,’ a humorous reference to a character from popular fiction. ‘Mick McQuaid’s Castle’ is a clever device in terms of the political sensitivity of the project in hand, but one that denies the evidence of dispossession, reinforces the narrative of the feckless Irish and their primitive cabins and underlines the benevolence of the architect of the policy of improvement. Also, Welch was selective with a noticeable preference for the picturesque. There was evidence of extreme poverty to be found on the island of Gorumna, not far from the sites he visited. Some of the most harrowing photographs of distress were taken here and published in the Report of the Mansion House Enquiry in 1898 (Figure 6.9). They reveal the dark interiors of the cabins and the wretched conditions of the impoverished populace. The difference between these photographs and the Balfour Album show the extent to which Welch as a spectator and one who was deeply complicit in the politics of improvement.

It would be wrong to dismiss Welch entirely. His documentation of the break-up of rundale systems in the west of Ireland is a remarkable record of the transformation of the rural Irish landscape. There is an ethnographic element to his work but is it should not be confused with an exaggerated pitch for sales to curious Victorians or his clients in the travel business and the colonial administration. Nevertheless it is this element that makes Welch interesting in a contemporary folk

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364 Boran, Marie, 2002, The Ireland That We Made, A Galway Tribute to Arthur J Balfour, Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society, p. 170. Mick McQuaid was ‘a well known Irish humorous character’ whose exploits were penned by William Francis Lynam in The Shamrock periodical from 1867 until its demise in 1920, long after Lynam’s death in 1894.

365 Tallon / Mansion House Committee Collection, National Photographic Archive, National Library of Ireland, Dublin. Tallon, Lord Mayor of Dublin, reported to the Mansion House Committee in 1898 on Distress in the West and Southwest of Ireland. There are 30 images in the collection, most notably photographs R27-399, R27-390 and R27-449.
Figure 6.9. Robert J. Welch, *A Bog cabin, Ben Lettery*, (c. 1893), The Balfour Album, Hardiman Library, NUIG. (catalogued in the Ulster Museum as ‘W14/05/83 *An Evicted tenant’s cabin*’).

Figure 6.10. *A Sick Family, Carraroe*, Mansion House Enquiry, photographer unknown, 1898, (R27 399, N.P.A.).
context - not as a conditional record of folk life so much as the way his collection is used and the second life achieved by his images at the hands of others.

E Estyn Evans, Professor of Geography and Director of the Institute of Irish Studies at Queen’s University, Belfast, describes how he met Welch very soon after he ‘came to Queen’s in 1928 to establish a department of geography. ‘He gave me old prints of a number of his photographs, many of them with his annotations scribbled on the back and I got from him a set of lantern slides which I used in lectures.’ Evans had begun to turn his back on the Anglo-centric orthodoxy of Queen’s University Belfast and with the support of the Belfast Field Club concentrated on the ethnology of the living ‘peasant culture still lingering in the hills,’ on folk life and folklore and ‘the unrecorded traces of cultural history’ that survived in the aftermath of the great famine of 1845-49. Welch provided Evan’s with a valuable documentary record of that lingering culture and Evans incorporated Welch’s photographs into an authoritative narrative of folk life in Ulster. Evans wrote the introduction to the principal catalogue of the Welch collection that was published in 1977.366 He annotated each of the photographs that were reproduced in 12 thematic photo essays. According to Evans ‘Plate No. 41 Setting Potatoes’ (Figure 6.11) is ‘probably the best known photograph in the collection’. It records the McAllister sisters ‘setting seed potatoes, breaking clods with spade, Glances, Co. Antrim’.367 Evans states that ‘there are very few illustrations of the way in which the spade ridges whose traces can be seen on many hillsides were made, but Welch saw the value of recording a very ancient method of cultivation’. In ‘Highland landscapes: habitat and heritage’368 Evans traces the system of ridge cultivation to the Neolithic and describes the sort of spade used by the women as the being derived from the long handled Atlantic shovel which can be traced to the late Mesolithic. Evans uses artefacts in the context of settlement patterns and land use to argue ‘that the inter-action of prehistoric societies with upland environments has long-lasting effects on both habitat and inhabitants’, effects that could still be gleaned in the contemporary folk life of Ulster at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.

Evan’s treatment of the Welch collection reveals the ideological impulse and political effect inherent in most folk strategies. He is in search of an origin myth that would refute the nationalist emphasis on conquest and settlement as the basis for Ulster protestant heritage. The McAllister sisters may seem like a world away from the destitute old woman on a beach in County Antrim but

366 Evans, E Estyn and Turner, Brian S., 1977, Ireland’s Eye The Photographs of Robert John Welch, Ulster Museum Series 201, Belfast, Ulster Museum
they are linked in Evans’ view by the charm of rural industry and the narrative of a lingering presence of an ancient culture. The nationalist view is quite different. Images of women and children beside their hovels had become something of shorthand for poverty in the representation of distress throughout the nineteenth century. In the 1830’s a Royal Commission of Enquiry into the Conditions of the Poorer Classes identified widows with children as particularly vulnerable and described how some were left to scavenge on the seashore in order to survive.\(^\text{369}\) As a visual trope, the image has a pedigree. The\textit{ Illustrated London News}, in its reports on distress in Ireland in 1849 embodied the effect of famine in the wretchedness of Bridget O’Donnell and her children,\(^\text{370}\) an image that represents the folk memory of the Great Famine more than any other.

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\(^{369}\) CLASP Press with introduction by Niall O’Ciosain, Department of History, N.U.I.G., Poverty Before the Famine, County Clare, 1835, Appendix (A) to the First Report from His majesty’s Commissioners for Enquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland, CLASP Press, Ennis, 1996, p.23.

These competing constructions of the lives of the cottier class in Ireland point to a problem with the study of folk culture in Ireland. Traditional folklorists have tended to deal in certainties fixed in time by survival and continuity in transmission within culturally defined communities, framed by an attitude that is invariably nationalist or counter-hegemonic in character. Evans upsets that presumption and suggests a mobility of subjectivity and context over time. Images become dislocated and assume new identities as they function in altered contexts. Language is critical. Images are contextualised in nuances of narrative. Words like cottier, peasant, folk, the common people, hovel, cabin, house, destitute, dispossessed, primitive and residuum locate subjectivity in a range of contexts. Even language is contentious. Peasant may be synonymous with folk but it is a terminological import from another discourse. It is widely used by nationalist and colonialist alike but is essentially inappropriate in an Irish context. It is the language of the ethnographer, the stranger and the official but not of na muintire, the people. All of this suggests an instability in folklore. It is not the fact of the past or its recreation in the present that matters but the process of translation over time that makes sense of the fact in traditional folk narratives. The conventional systems of retrieval, categorisation and re-presentation within a defined chronology and ethnological context need to be replaced by radical folk perspectives which deal with folklore as part of a broader cultural narrative. ‘Setting Seed Potatoes’ is a case in point. In 1915 the photograph was published in Stoddard’s in ‘Lectures on Ireland’ with the caption ‘the crop that failed’. It was used to illustrate a text on Daniel O’Connell in the context of the calamity that was the failure of the potato crop in 1846 and 1847. Published in America, ‘Lectures on Ireland’ is part guidebook (modelled on nineteenth century precedents) and part popular history. It is distinctly nationalist in tone. It is heavily illustrated with reproductions of photographs, many of which are taken from Welch’s catalogue. His ‘Irish Views’ had begun to slip sideways into visual culture where, even today, they function as signifiers of an idea of Ireland. Benner’s Hotel in Dingle has a photograph of a fireside and an enlarged half-tone print of the kitchen of the Loo Bridge Inn which was photographed by Welch in 1898. The former also appears in T. Walsh and Co.’s

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374 Benjamin Stone Collection, Birmingham Central Library, taken in 1895 on a combined Field Club excursion to County Kerry: See Evans, E Estyn and Turner, Brian S., 1977, *Ireland’s Eye The Photographs of Robert John Welch, Ulster Museum Series 201*, Belfast, Ulster Museum, plates 94 (Farm Inn) and 151 (Ice Sculpture).
The second life of Welch’s photographs as tokens of “the real” Ireland reveal a lot about folk strategies and the construction of identity. In the wake of the Revivals the Victorian gaze is turned on its head as photography enters the age of mechanical reproduction. Ethnography is commodified in a wave of popular consumption. In the 1890s developments in print technologies had advanced to the point where photographic images be reproduced alongside text on an industrial scale but it would take another twenty-five years before the process was perfected. The print media drove much of the development. The first illustration appeared in a newspaper in 1842 (the Illustrated London News) but it was produced from a wood block engraving and reproduced using letterpress. Photojournalism did not become established until the 1920s. In the interim attempts were made to industrialise the production of photographs and incorporate them into printed text. In the printed media photographs were used initially to support the production of wood engraving for use in illustrated newspapers like the Manchester Guardian, the Pictorial Times, The Illustrated London News, Frank Leslie and Harpers. In 1887 Lawrence’s chief photographer Robert French was despatched to the scene of evictions in Bodice, Co Clare and within days his photographs were translated into black and white illustrations in press reports of the Plan of Campaign. The visual style of press illustrations became moved inexorably from artists impressions to a close transcription of photographs using a variety of improved engraving techniques including printing photographic images on to woodblock which were then engraved by hand. The public demand for illustrated newspapers was huge. In 1891 over 1,000 artists were producing 10,000 drawing per week for the press in the USA alone. In 1877 the first mechanical reproduction of a photograph appeared in France in Le Monde Illustré and in 1897 the New York Tribune published the first halftone photograph on newsprint paper. From 1900 photographic reproductions became a feature of newspapers and periodicals and by 1914 most of the technical barriers to the printing of photographs had been overcome. The printed media quickly found applications for the new technologies in response to public demand. Welch reckons that his photograph of the launching in 1910 of the ‘Olympic’ (sister ship of the Titanic) ‘which appeared in newspapers and publications

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*San am fado*, long ago.

all over the world, must have been reproduced about 700 million times. The development of offset lithography which was perfected in 1904 and further developed over the next ten years greatly improved printing techniques. Nevertheless it would take another decade before the print industry would be capable of supporting mass production of photographically in illustrated print media in response to public demand. In the meantime the public demand for printed photographic images would be met by the production of postcards.

2 Postcards of Irish Life

The idea of the postcard was adopted in Hungary in 1869 and the first printed postcard appeared in 1870. The first commercial card was produced in 1872 in Great Britain. The first German card appeared in 1874 and 1889 the first coloured postcard was produced in Great Britain. By 1890 the postcard was well established and the postal authorities began to respond to demand during the 1890s. In 1898 the United States legislated to allow publishers to print and sell private mailing cards and in 1901, the use of ‘Post Card’ was permitted. In 1902 the Post Office in England was the first to permit the use of a divided back, freeing up the verso for the use of reproductions. The post card as we know had arrived and was taken up in France (1904), Germany (1905) and somewhat later in the United States (1907). Postcards quickly became a very lucrative business and Welch was very involved in supplying publishers with material. Marcus Ward Ltd. of Belfast commissioned a mass of detailed photographs of ‘Irish life’ for publication as postcards. Welch photographed a turf slide car, a primitive form of transport still in use in the Sperrin Mountains in the 1890’s (Figure 6.2). A similar car was featured in a display of transport organised by Welch for the British Association for the Advancement of Science in Queen’s University Belfast in 1902. Shortly afterwards this photograph was published as a hand tinted postcard Figure 6.3. It seems like a minor point but it is a milestone in many ways for it is at this point that the ethnographic image - the objective documentation of folk life in Ireland – begins to be transformed into a schematic representation of Irish Ireland and migrate into popular culture.

378 The ‘Balfour Album’ was illuminated and bound by Marcus Ward Ltd.
Welch's scenes of 'Irish Life' were 'manipulated' in the studios of printing firms in Germany where the bulk of the printing was done up to 1914. At a minimum they were hand tinted. Others were edited and some were transformed from photographic images with an ethnographic or topographic origin into illustrations of stereotypes of Paddy the Farmer, the Irish Colleen and the Old Woman on the Donkey-cart. Paddy Mac Monagle supplies a useful example in his catalogue of vintage postcards. He reproduces a series of three postcards published by Anthony of Killarney to demonstrate the 'ingenuity' of photographers and the level of manipulation involved in postcard production. In a scene from Irish life, a 'rail' fine old type complete with top hat is shown standing on a donkey-cart outside O'Donoghue's Pub in Killarney in the 'original genuine' photograph. The farmer and donkey-cart are then cut out and pasted into a photograph of a thatched cottage. The overall tone of the image is sharpened through increased contrast and some editing of fine detail. The third image is a hand-painted transcription in colour of the farmer, cart and donkey in front of Ross Castle, one of the main tourist attractions in Killarney. 'Auld' Ireland had just been invented and was going down a treat with tourists and returned emigrants. Welch provided the raw material for the production of popular devices that were used to depict an exaggerated image of peasant Ireland cast as Gaelic Catholic Ireland with a whole host of recognisable characters and situations: the old woman spinning; the hearth; the thatched cottage; the ass and cart, the poitin still, currachs being carried ashore and so on - imagery that has remained in currency for over a century.

Indeed John Hinde's iconic image of the red headed children with their donkey and creels of turf is but one variation on a theme established by Welch long ago.

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383 Ibid. p. ix. Originally from Alsace, Louis Anthony established a studio in Killarney that supplied Lawrence with scenic views. He also developed a photographic service for tourists, which he based in the Gap of Dunloe.

Figure 6.12. Lois Anthony, *Rail Fine Old Type*, Postcards, Collection of Don MacMonagle.
It seems a long way from the old woman and her cabin on the beach. Welch left us what is probably the only record of her existence and there is a sting in the tail of that story. He informs us that Janet Welch noted that the woman was taken by the tide the following year: that he cabin 'Washed out and old woman drowned in the Great Cyclone of 22-23/12/94.' Destitute and marginalised, the woman is caught between an unyielding land and an unforgiving sea, a cruel fate that is the perfect metaphor for a shattered community doomed to extinction. This is where folklore comes from.

Welch was many things but he would not have described himself as a folklorist. He described himself as an ethnographer and his interest in the primitivism of the Irish peasant has more to do with the development of field studies in a colonial context than the collection of folklore in a nationalist context. That is the difference between Welch and Bigger (see page the discussion of Bigger’s experiments in folk theatre on page 176). Nevertheless he has left us a with an authentic looking record of a way of life on the point of eclipse, his images have been translated into markers of identity and they remain relevant to contemporary folk narratives, to the origin myths of nationalists in Ireland and Ulster alike. He is, in some ways, an accidental folklorist.

Welch has until now been largely ignored outside of Ulster although his achievements rank alongside those of Petrie and Henry in terms of their roles in the visual construction of Irishness. These men had much in common and there are many parallels in their lives and careers. Petrie did the fieldwork that provided the Young Irelanders with a set of symbols that could be translated into popular images of ‘patriotic fervour’. In a similar way Welch anticipates Paul Henry. Welch was obviously enthralled by Connemara. His images of the Twelve Bens show an awareness of pictorialism and pre-empt the compositional devices of Henry. Both were Belfast men who went ‘West’ to document the peasants; Henry in search of work as a ‘black and whiter’. Welch in the service of tourism. Both worked for the Congested Districts Board and they each produced images of Ireland for rail companies and those images have entered popular culture as potent signifiers of the ‘West’. But there is a crucial difference between Henry and Welch. Henry was an avant gardiste with aspirations to be the painter of the Literary Revival but he has become a model of formal conservatism and nationalist orthodoxy. Welch was personally and professionally conservative, a Loyalist who was proud of his Protestant heritage. Yet he has produced a body of work that remains in the public domain as an authentic representation of Corkery’s hidden Ireland.

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387 A ‘Black and Whiter’ was the trade name for a graphic artist who worked for illustrated newspapers and periodicals.
It is ironic that it is Welch’s photography that now performs the function that Henrys’ posters once did, even if they are the anonymous images of an accidental folklorist.

3 In Search of the ‘Real Thing’

Whether one looks at Welch as the photographer of the shipyards that ground out the Titanic, the collector of seashells, a journeyman supplying postcard publishers with human and topographical subjects, propagandist for the CDB or the man who photographed the disappearance of the Irish peasant, he has left a remarkable visual record of life in Ireland. It is a record that continues to resonate. One of the main reasons for this is the position the west of Ireland has maintained in the imagination of Irishness. In this context the combined influence of tourism and photography cannot be underestimated in terms of the representation of Irish-Ireland as it took shape in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In fact it, represents something of a revolution in the way an image of the nation was constructed, disseminated and consumed. This has, by and large, been completely overlooked. In conventional histories of the period have failed to take into account the role of photography in the documentation of life in the west of Ireland between the 1890s and the 1920s: the heyday of field photography and the most intense period of transformation in the social, political and cultural landscape of rural Ireland since the end of the 1845-9 famine. Tanya Kiang argues that photography was overlooked as an art form until the late 1970s:

In the debates over Irish Cultural history during the first half of the twentieth century photography was of marginal interest in a climate where appeal was made to literature, drama and music for cultural definition and the development of a national self image.\textsuperscript{388}

If painting was undervalued, then photography was ignored. Photography had nothing to do with the arts and, in some quarters, it was even viewed as anathema to the arts. In 1900 it was something to do with studio portraiture for the chattering classes - souvenirs of public events (such as royal visits), postcards and guidebooks. Photojournalism was a long way off and the incorporation of photography and text in the popular print media was in its infancy. Despite the advances being made in reprographic technology, an artist’s illustration ‘was still the only way of reconstructing recent events’ in the press in the first decade of the twentieth century\textsuperscript{389} Photographs were being printed but it was confined to book publishing mainly. For instance, in 1901 The Macmillan Company of London and New York had published the collected articles of Clifton Johnston in a


Figure 6.14. *The Dawn of a Brighter Day*, After James O'Mahoney, 1852.
volume entitled ‘The Isle of the Shamrock’ This is an illustrated account of Johnson’s travels in Ireland from the perspective of the outsider, ‘a record of first impressions, and of the pleasure of things novel and unexpected which never comes but once’

That I was in Ireland was plain from the start, for the brogue and the peculiar piquancy of the faces were unmistakable. Then there were the women with shawls drawn over their heads, and the numerous beggars and the barefoot newsboys selling green tinted newspapers, and there was the omnipresent donkey cart, and, scarcely less conspicuous, that other distinctively Irish Vehicle, the jaunting-car, with the seats hung above the wheels.  

The tone is set early on. Clifton had just arrived in Cork and, after a few further comments about ‘walking scarecrows’ cheek by jowl with evidence of business prosperity and a rich farming region reminiscent of England, he made his way to Blarney Castle. His tour continues through Cork and Kerry (Killarney) and up the coast to Connemara, Mayo (Achill), Donegal and Antrim (the Giants Causeway). ‘The Isle of the Shamrock’ is of interest because it reveals a lot about the state of publishing in 1900, perceptions of Ireland and the representation of Ireland in the growing market for illustrated travelogues in Ireland and the across the Irish Diaspora, but mainly in the United States. The cover is a rather standard ‘turn-of-the-century’ graphic of a man, dressed typically in top hat, dress coat, waistcoat, breeches and gaiters leading a heavily laden donkey away from a thatched cottage on the brow of a hill. Johnson photographed the man and his donkey and the photograph is used as an illustration opposite page 67. The frontispiece is a striking image of ‘A Knitter on The Highway,’ a heavily retouched photograph in the style of lithographic reproduction of French genre. ‘A Knitter on The Highway’ reveals something of the influences on illustrators like Johnson – the influence of the ‘realism’ of nineteenth century French genre painting combined with stereotypical representations of the Irish peasant and a strong hint of the romanticised primitivism of Curtis’s groundbreaking photographs of American Indians. The ‘Knitter’ is little different from the print of ‘The Irish Gleaner’ published in the Illustrated London News in 1852 as an illustration to Francis Bennock’s verse ‘The Dawn of a Brighter Day’ - in terms of subject, the influence of genre and the treatment of images of women as representations of Ireland.

‘The Isle of the Shamrock’ may jar a little in terms of attitude and stereotyping. What matters here is the approach to the incorporation of text, illustration and photography that is quite unusual at this stage. The book is illustrated with a mixture of art-and-craft influenced design motifs, illustration, illustration derived from photography and photography. Much of the photography is comprised of standard shots of the ‘tourist sights’ but there are some rather striking and original photographs that show the influence of pictorialism. Illustration is clearly in a secondary position and obviously

derived from photographic originals. The transition from artist-produced graphic illustration to illustration by photography is very evident. The ‘bog cabin’ illustrated at the end of the chapter on Achill (‘An Island on the Wild West Coast’) is a half tone treatment of a type of photograph which appears in many collections including Lawrence and the ‘Balfour Album’ compiled by Welch in 1895. This is ‘Mick McQuaids Castle’ (see page 185). Praeger uses the same photograph in his classic volume ‘The Way that I Went.’ It features a squatter’s hut on a lakeshore in the Inagh Valley in Connemara, on the road to Clifden and not far from the Galway to Clifden railway line. In short, one of the primary tourist routes through Connemara and, obviously, a standard sight on any tour of the west of Ireland. It is also a visual trope for conditions in the west of Ireland and is fairly typical of the standard ‘Irish Views’ that were used to represent Ireland at this time.

Figure 6.15. Clifton Johnston, *A Bog Cabin*, from ‘The Isle of the Shamrock,’ (1901).

Figure 6.16. Robert J. Welch, *Mick McQuaids Castle*, (1893-5), Inagh Valley, Connemara, from the Balfour Album, Hardiman Library, NUIG.

Harper of New York and London published ‘On an Irish Jaunting-car through Donegal and Connemara’ by Samuel G. Bayne’s (1844-1924) a year later. The jaunting car was regarded as the quintessential Irish experience for travellers. It is featured in almost any account of travelling in Ireland and was to all intents and purposes a metaphor for the “rigours” of travelling in Ireland. ‘On an Irish Jaunting-car through Donegal and Connemara’ is illustrated with 31 photographs spread over 138 pages of text. There are no drawings in this book and the photographs comprise standard topographic or postcard style shots as well as views of ‘Irish Life,’ photographs of the peasantry. It was a fairly standard account of a journey taken by a couple of New Yorkers who travelled to Londonderry and on through the Northwest / Ulster, before heading down along the west coast and on to Limerick and Cork in search of ‘the real thing.’ ‘The Isle of Shamrock’ and ‘On an Irish Jaunting-car through Donegal and Connemara’ reveal a lot about the treatment of Ireland and, Irish-Ireland in particular, in the print media - at least that section of the print media that was concerned with visits to the ‘auld sod’ and the market in the United States for accounts of life in Ireland.

Ireland wasn’t unique. Clifton Johnston produced work on Scotland, rural England and France. This was not a recent phenomenon. Travelogues have been produced ever since Giraldus Cambrensis’s accounts of his visits to Ireland in 1183 and 1185 were published his ‘Topographia Hibernia’ and the ‘Expugnatio Hiberniae.’ Nevertheless, the travelogue gained momentum in the 1890s when the Victorian fascination with the primitive combined with the beginning of industrialised tourism and created a demand for illustrated literature on exotic places. This added a particular slant to the travelogue. Johnson and Baynes typify this approach. This is highlighted by a radically different approach adopted by Robert Lynd in ‘Rambles in Ireland,’ published over a decade after Bayne and Johnston. All three books are fairly standard productions of the time. The covers are similar in terms of design and the format of each book is roughly similar, a tour of Munster, the west coast and on to Dublin. Each account features a mix of anecdote, topography, archaeology, history and a checklist of themes such as industry (or the absence of it), agriculture, fishing, social conditions, the arts and, of course, ‘The West’. Illustration and photography are mixed but there is no doubt that photography is the preferred medium. Lynd uses a Jack B. Yeats drawing as a frontispiece and two out of the first three illustrations are also by Yeats. The third is an illustration and by his friend Paul Henry. Then photography takes over. The photographs are all from the firm of W. L. Lawrence and reflect that company’s dominance of the market. The Lawrence view of Ireland is one of urban centres, important archaeological sites and scenic views beyond which is the ‘Real thing,’ the ‘West’ and the ‘Irish Peasant.’ Lynd’s text and Yeats’s illustrations are perfectly matched in

393 Lynd, Robert, 1912, Rambles in Ireland, London, Mills and Boon, opposite p. 103. Paul Henry’s black and white reproduction of painting of an old age pensioner is very inferior to Jack B. Yeats’ coloured illustrations.
describing the characters on the edge of rural society in the west of Ireland. Paul Henry’s painting of an old age pensioner is quite inferior to Yeats’s drawings and yet, conspires with Yeats in locating the ‘West’ in another dimension - a fantastic world far beyond the respectability of the Ireland of important ruins, bustling market towns and rather grand cities as portrayed by Messrs W. Lawrence. ‘Rambles in Ireland’ is an Irish production and reflects a much sharper understanding than either Bayne or Johnson of a nation with one foot in the past and the other on the road to a showdown with the present. Lynd’s breathless description of the carry on at the Galway races reveals the brogue tinged Irishness of Baynes and Johnson for what it is. But ‘Rambles in Ireland’ is still a travelogue and the industry standard for illustration was the photographic work of companies like W. Lawrence, Valentine and Marcus Ward.

Figure 6.17. *The Cliffs of Moher*, W. H. Lawrence & Co. The photographer was Robert French.

‘Rambles in Ireland’ is important for another reason. Text and image combine perfectly to reveal the spirit of the west of Ireland in 1912. Yeats’s illustrations were, Bruce Arnold believes, a foreshadowing of things to come. In a field removed from the races a ‘group of peasants in their grey tailed-coats or white woollen jackets’ are gathered around a balladeer singing from a pamphlet. It is worth quoting Lynd’s description of the scene at length:

> Not far off in the space between two tents, an old countryman in a faded high hat was the centre of a group of boys who seemed to be getting ballads out of him. Unfortunately he was rather drunk, and they were beginning to be tipsy too, so that there was more handshaking than singing done. He sang – or rather alternately moaned and skirled – a

scarcely recognisable version of 'The Boys of Wexford,' and at the end of almost every line he had to stop and shake hands with the young fellows one after the other in an exaggeration of the country fashion. As soon as he had slobbered one song out of his scrappy and ulcerous face, a volley of demands for a dozen other songs showered down on him. One big square headed boy, with red hair and freckled face, remains in my mind with especial vividness, as he kept insisting with self-conscious awkwardness to the singer: "Give us 'The Men of the West.' Give us 'The Men of the West.'" \[395\]

The subversion of the routine and stereotypical representations of the madcap Irish is employed to devastating political effect. Behind the bonhomie and the madcap behaviour of the common people of rural Ireland is the deadly serious business of nation building. The irony of 'A Treason Song' as a caption for Jack B Yeats' illustration is not lost on us. The subversive spirit is exactly as James Joyce portrayed it in the singing of the 'Aughrim Lass' in 'The Dead.' \[396\] Robert Lynd and Jack B. Yeats were committed republicans and they were well aware that the men of the west were awake and eager for action. The political tone is as intentional as it is unambiguous. In the illustration a shawled woman bears witness to the call to arms in the tradition of the allegorical representation of Hibernia as woman, alone and waiting.

As a sketch of life in the west of Ireland, 'A Treason Song' has an interesting pedigree. Yeats portrays the men as a group portrait of the man whose image was used to illustrate the frontispiece of Synge's 'The Aran Islands.' \[397\] Yeats had gone with Synge 'to the Congested Districts of Connemara and Mayo in May 1905 'to record the human and agricultural devastation of Connemara and Mayo, which had been assaulted by famine for the fourth time in fifteen years.' \[398\] It was the start of a creative partnership that lasted until Synge's ill health and death in 1909. Yeats


\[397\] The man has been identified as Micil Sheán Learai, grandfather of Aine de Blacam, nee Chonghaile, married to Tarlach de Blacam, current manager of the knitwear factory on Inis Meáin. The boy in the photograph is her father.

And though they may sleep in Dungeons deep.
Or flee, outlawed and banned,
We lose them yet, we can’t forget,
The felons of our land.

Figure 6.18. Jack B. Yeats, *A Treason Song*, (1911) from Lynd’s ‘Rambles in Ireland’ (1912).
illustrated 'The Aran Islands' and these illustrations were based on photographs taken by Synge on the Aran Islands in 1898, in the ethnographic style developed and popularised by Robert J. Welch. The interaction between illustration and photography is important in terms of the construction of images of Ireland at the time. Jack B. Yeats worked as an illustrator and would have been very familiar with the impact photography had on the production of images in the print media. But his ambition was to be an artist and over the next decade he would abandon illustration for painting. It puts his sketches of life in the west of Ireland in a sort of art historical no-mans-land, between popular culture and the Fine Arts. His career as an Irish artist is only considered to have developed in 1915 when he began to produce paintings like 'Bachelors Walk: In Memory' (1915) and 'The Funeral of Harry Boland' (1922). In 1912, however, Yeats and his work were embedded in popular culture and the overt nationalism of 'A Treason Song' in 'Rambles in Ireland' represents the legacy of Thomas Davis, the Young Irelanders and the spirit of 'The Nation.' It was the perfect blending of a tradition of folk song and a tradition of imagining the Irish nation in popular culture as it coalesced around the idea of an independent Irish-Ireland. The idea of Ireland was located in the West and in a sense of Irish identity that was to be found beyond the walls of the larger cities, if we except Galway and beyond the walls of the towns, if we except Dingle, Youghal and a few others in Connaught and Donegal: a wild place, a place of rock, bog and windswept seashore, beyond the mountains that border the fat lands, the rich lands that were seized from the Gael a long time ago. This was the hidden Ireland as described by Corkery. This was the world of the Irish peasant and Robert J. Welch represented this in photography. Just as Yeats has translated Synge's photograph of an Aran islander into an iconic image of the Gael, Welch's ethnography would be translated into a visual form of folk consciousness expressed in folk images of the of the nation, the “real Ireland.”

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399 Barrett regards these paintings as oblique hints at events which, nonetheless, could be considered as 'the finest things that nationalistic art produced in Ireland .. but they were too subtle for that.' Barret, Cyril, 2000, Irish nationalism and Art 1800-1921, in Studies, Winter 1975, pp. 393-409. In Cullen, Fintan (ed.), 2000, Sources in Irish Art: A Reader, Cork, Cork University Press.

400 Corkery, Daniel, 1924, The Hidden Ireland, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan.
Figure 6.19. John Millington Synge, *An Island Family, Inismaan*. (1898), Library of TCD.

Figure 6.20. Jack B. Yeats, *An Island Man*, (1905-1907), Model Niland Collection, Sligo.
The discussion, in the context of Irish art and identity, of a group of men gathered around a ballad singer in the west of Ireland brings this study back to where it started. Lynd’s image of Irish identity expressed in a nationalist ballad as illustrated by Jack B. Yeats is, in many ways, the corollary of the juxtaposition of folk song and visual imagery that took place during the ‘In A State’ exhibition in Kilmainham Gaol in 1991. The parallels are as obvious but the differences are far more significant. Lynd and Yeats were united by a common imagination but the folk song and art in Kilmainham Gaol represents an imagination that has been pulled apart - from east to west, north to south and, more importantly, between popular and elite constructions of art, cultural traditions and nationality. Just as Yeats was in transition to a style that would earn him national recognition as one of the few European talents to emerge out the arts in Irish-Ireland, nationalism was moving from the popular devices pioneered by Young Ireland to the hybridised realism of the Dublin Painters as it developed in the 1920s. The prejudice against photography assumed by Kiang has meant that the contemporaneous representation of Irish-Ireland in photography has gone unrecognised as one of the defining moments in visual culture in Ireland. Rejected as art, photography has remained stranded between the field sciences and tourism, between the ethnographic instant and the fabricated Ireland of the postcard. The failure of art historians to countenance the vulgarity of populist sentiment or to embrace the intertextuality of visual culture has left the pictorial record of Irish-Ireland stranded in a hybrid culture manufactured by an arts establishment embedded in a political nationalism that had expropriated the folk life of the Irish peasant as cultural life in the Irish Free State contracted into a rigid and sectarian orthodoxy. The populism that defined the nationalist imagination for most of the political and cultural century that began after the famine of 1845-9 continues to find expression in the lives of the common man and the popular culture that developed out of the age of mechanical reproduction.

One of the key visual tropes of the representation of the west of Ireland was the jaunting car. Sometime early in the first decade of the twentieth-century a photograph from the Lawrence Collection was published as a hand tinted postcard. It was a picture of a jaunting car waiting alongside a thatched cottage, beside the sea with blue mountains in the background, the perfect image of a voyage beyond the Pale. It was on such a voyage that a New York gentleman called Samuel Gamble Bayne (1844-1924) encountered the real Ireland which he represented in the form of photograph on the frontispiece of his account of a journey ‘On An Irish Jaunting-Car, Through
Donegal and Connemara (Illustrated).\(^4\) The photograph is entitled the 'Real Thing' (Figure 6.1) and the man represented in it has entered the public domain as the personification of Irish-Ireland. The photograph has been published on the Internet alongside several postcard versions of itself.\(^5\) It has also featured in the remarkable survey of photographs of Ireland taken between 1875 and 1925 that was published by Appletree Press in Belfast between 1975 and 1980\(^6\) and the postcard version of the photograph is included in a recently published collection of vintage Irish postcards.\(^7\)


\(^5\) http://www.maggieblanck.com/Mayopages /People.html.


\(^7\) MacMonagle, Paddy, 2006, *Paddy Mac's Collection of Vintage Postcards*, Killarney, Mac Publications, p. 142: Entitled the 'Irish Farmer' and accompanied by the verse From Galway, came his Dad, His Mother hailed from Clare, He was the Shrewd Old Lad, when selling at the fair. It is one of a series of Irish types represented in the same faux genre style including A Killarney Spinster, Bridget 'Going to The Fair', Lovely Mary (with a quote from Allingham), The Lily of Killarney and Kate Kearney (of Gap of Dunloe fame).
It has taken three years almost to track down the original: Negative no. 4270 also known as *Himself, 4720 W. L.* or *Real Auld Style 6345. WL*, Cabinet 6138, photographer unknown, Irish Life Series,\(^{405}\) William Lawrence Collection, National Photographic Archive, Dublin. That search embodies everything that this study was about. It started with a confrontation between folk song and visual images and developed into a search for meaning in images of the west of Ireland as it was represented in a visual culture that developed in Ireland just over a century ago. The search involved many encounters with the ordinary people of the west of Ireland as they are represented in visual images. It started with an encounter between a group of men and a woman on the Old Head I County Mayo in 1906. It ended with another group of men in Galway with an altogether different woman in the picture. In between the complexity of visual culture and the convergence in representation of the nation in the popular imagination was revealed.

This study is concluded with a search for the origins of ‘The Real Thing’ and that search had been expressed in the form of the ephemera in which it is located, the overlooked legacy of the Young Irelanders, the folk images of Irish-Ireland circa 1902 – 1914. It is intended that the images will read as texts and that the juxtaposition these images constitute a pictorial essay on the Irish image‘nation.

**Note**

What follows is an attempt to recreate the effect of one of the most important aspects of visual culture: the construction of meaning by the juxtaposition of images. There is no text. An important part of this thesis has been an exploration of the way meaning is constructed *visually!* To annotate or “explain” each of the images included would not only undermine a central tenet of this work, it would disrupt the process it is intended to reflect. However some general comments on the photo essay are required in terms of approach and thematic development.

The search was real. It took three years to eventually locate the original negative of a photograph that has appeared in a whole range of visual discourses on the “Irish” between 1890 and 1920. That search ended on 28 November 2007 in the National Photographic Archive. The material included in this essay is a sample of the sort of material encountered in that quest.

\(^{405}\) The Irish Life Series includes other shots of ‘the Irish peasant’ with captions like *The Haughty One* and *The Height of Absurdity* as well more mundane titles like *Haymaking.*
That search started with the ‘Last Look,’ a drawing made by Charles William Cole in 1880 while he was reporting on the Plan of Campaign in County Mayo. This drawing has survived in a sketchbook belonging to Cole in the National Library’s Print Collection. Cole has written a note on the first page: ‘Some notes made in Limerick with Mr. Parnell - and at Boycott’s Ballinrobe – Saving the Crops.’ This is a drawing was made by a person who was sent into Mayo to record the one of the most spectacular confrontations in Irish History, the Boycott Relief Expedition. It doesn’t illustrate history, it is history. At some stage historians are going to have to trust images, and the people who make them. This was one of the interesting things to emerge from the project that was ‘Framing the West.’ Fifteen people from very different background compiled a book on the photographer Robert J. Welch. Welch, each reflecting on the man and his work from a range of perspectives - social, economic and cultural. It was clear from the ‘Welch Project’ that historians ‘read’ visual images very differently from people who are involved in visual culture and that they tend to regard photographs as low grade information, a sort of unreliable evidence.

One of the most striking outcomes of this project was, however, the discovery that Welch’s photographs are everywhere, just like those of Robert French, Lawrence’s main photographer. Like Cole, French was sent to the front in the land war to record another major event in the plan of campaign, the evictions of O’Halloran and McNamara in the village of Bodyke, County Clare. He took photographs of the O’Halloran sisters that are featured in one of the many press reports of the ‘battle,’ a composite drawing of ‘The Bodyke Eviction Scenes’ that appeared in a special supplement of the ‘United Irishman.’ Welch and French have remained anonymous yet, between them they represent one of the most signicant changes in the representation of Ireland and were at the heart of some of the most important events in the second half of the nineteenth century. They have provided some of the most striking images of the transformation of Ireland in that period.

This raises another the issue. These men were very talented photographers, better at photography than Cole was at drawing. There is a photograph by an unknown photographer of three men in an Album known as the Coolgreaney Eviction Album. It is one of 46 photographs in an album compiled by a local curate to record the evictions on the Brooke estate near Gorey, County Wexford. It is a stunning representation of the barely suppressed anger of a nation. Why is it that this image, a mere photograph, is considered less worthy than a sketch by a send rate graphic artist who came to depend on photography as the source for his illustrations in the popular press? Another of Cole’s ‘drawings’ is a reworking of he photograph of a sick family in Connemara (Figur 6.10). Yet there is something about photography’s ability to freeze time - that moment in the midst of an

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406 Clare County Library has a special section on its website dealing with documentary evidence of the Bodyke evictions.
eviction when three men faced the camera - that is unique. Photographs like this, and the encounter between a local woman and Members of the Congested District in County Mayo are startling images and work as historical documents because of this visuality.

There is one other point that is worth considering. Historians tend to think of photographs as dislocated fragments. They fail to realise that photographs circulate. The first half of this essay is about collecting evidence from a variety of sources – archives, second hand shops (old books, prints and post cards) and of, course, the internet. In the nineteenth century, before reprographic technology developed sufficiently to allow for mass distribution of photographs, these images were circulated in albums, much the same way that images are circulated on the Internet but with very obvious differences. The Coolgreaney album is a perfect example. Welch’s Balfour Album is another and the album entitled ‘Pictures of Irish Life’ is the source of many of the postcards of life in the west of Ireland. There is an unsubstantiated story of a trader in Listowel who was a member of the Land League. He was also a keen photographer. He recorded evictions on the Sandes estate in North Kerry (also targeted in the Plan of Campaign) and he displayed the photographs in albums in the window of his premises in town. The point is that photography was embedded in the socio-economic relations that defined the political and cultural struggles in Ireland in the 1880s.

The first half of this photo essay deals with these issues. Follow the hat. The starting point was the treatment of dress as a visual marker of otherness, the exotic Irish peasant, across a range of media. Photographers are featured (Welch, Wynne and French) as is the press coverage based on their work. Albums and their contents (‘Irish Life’ and ‘Balfour’) are also featured as is their modern day equivalent (in terms of image exchange networks) on the Internet. It is also concerned with the developing aesthetic of socially and politically engaged photography from Wynne to Welch.

The second half of the essay reflects on the beginning of the age of mechanical reproduction and the transformation of ‘The Real Thing’ of a folk image of Ireland. This theme is explored in depth in Chapter 6 and all that is left to do at this stage is to allow the images work as images.

Ladies and Gentleman, ‘The Real thing,’ also known as ‘The Galway Man’ and ‘An Gioblach.’
Chapter 7

In search of
'The Real Thing'

a.k.a. 'Galway Man' and 'An Gioblach.'
Pictures of Irish Life: Foradharc ar ar bheathaidh na nGaedheal i L.

Evicted Tenant and his Family.
THE BODYKE EVICTIONS

The emergency men scalped.

The eviction party made an early start on Friday morning and reached Bodyke at half past nine o'clock. They were met at the house of James Lynch, a relative of the tenant, by a crowd of approximately 200 men, women, and children. The landlord, Mr. Power, was present and attempted to negotiate with the tenants, but his attempts proved unsuccessful.

The tenants were determined to resist the eviction and had barricaded their home. The landlord's代表s attempted to force their way in, but were met with strong resistance. The police were called in to help evict the tenants, but the tenants continued to fight back.

The struggle lasted for several hours, with both sides sustaining injuries. Eventually, the landlord's representatives were able to force their way in and remove the tenants from their home. The tenants were forced to leave their home and were sent to a nearby workhouse.

The eviction caused widespread outrage among the local community, who saw it as an attack on their way of life. The tenants were supported by many local residents, who held protests and rallies in support of their cause.

The eviction of the Bodyke tenants was one of several similar incidents that took place during the Great Irish Hunger, and it helped to spark a wider movement for land reform and social justice.
On An Irish Jaunting-Car
Through Donegal and Connemara
By S. G. Bayne

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK AND LONDON
HARPER & BROTHERS
PUBLISHERS
“Jaunting Car Ireland”

Printed on back

“Jaunting Car, Ireland. The jaunting car used in Ireland somewhat resembles our “dog cart” with the exception that it is not as high and carried four passengers with a driver instead of two. The passengers are seated side-wise, as may be seen from the picture.”

No postmark

Postcard collection of Maggie Land Blank

Jaunting Car Photographs Ireland 1890 Lawrence Collection

Jaunting Cars/Donkey/Pony Back to Irish Life List

The jaunting car used in Ireland somewhat resembles our “dog cart” with the exception that it is not as high and carried four passengers with a driver instead of two. The passengers are seated side-wise, as may be seen from the picture.”

No postmark

Postcard collection of Maggie Land Blank
Wishing Chair, Giant's Causeway
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