

4 Style/Theosophies

Character and Descent in the Celtic Revival

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Well, says the citizen, what's the latest from the scene of action? What did those tinkers in the city hall at their caucus meeting decide about the Irish language?

It's on the march, says the citizen. To hell with the bloody brutal Sassenachs and their patois.

James Joyce, *Ulysses*

The observations in this essay do not stem from expertise. The arguments below present a response to Kathleen James-Chakraborty's invitation, whose charge, at its outset, appeared simple: to make what I would of an incongruous, inexplicable insertion in a well-known work of a well-known Irish artist: the oracular, seemingly Indian, figurines in Harry Clarke's painted-glass "window" of John Keats' poem *The Eve of St. Agnes* (Figure 4.1). The image was commissioned by the biscuit manufacturer Harold Jacobs and displayed at the Royal Dublin Society before being installed in Jacobs' house (now St. Michael's College). The window now belongs to Dublin's Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery. Clarke's work is widely regarded as exemplary of Ireland's "Celtic Revival," an aesthetic movement whose cultural politics is generally invoked, through members such as W.B. Yeats, in tandem with the political conflicts between republicanism and unionism, in the prelude to the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922. For all that, Clarke's work generally eschewed explicit political agenda, given that throughout his career he actively sought British clients. But clearly republicanism is never far offstage. Yeats' *September 1913* was, after all, written as a response to the Catholic reaction to the Hugh Lane bequest to the Dublin Municipal Corporation.

The actual circumstance by which these Indian figures came to be so tantalizingly lodged is not a project that I pursue here. The events and contexts by which a commercial artist in Ireland may have come by a genre of imagery construed as "Indian," and considerations which may have led him to place these in the Keats window are important avenues of inquiry,¹ but accounting for biographic circumstance as the basis for artistic intention is not my forte, not least because I remain skeptical of the humanism implicit in such rationalization. Beckett said it best: "The analysis of the relation between the artist and his occasion . . . anything and everything is doomed to become occasion, including the pursuit of occasion and the every man his own wife experiments of the



Figure 4.1 Harry Clarke, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, 157.5 × 105.0 cm, stained glass, 1924, Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery, Dublin

spiritual Kandinsky.”² Rather than investigate who Clarke met at what Dublin séance or dinner that introduced him to such and such thinker and his/her ideas about Indian religion and the occult, my interest here is to interrogate the construction of “culture” as such. My argument is simply this, that both “Celtic” and “Indian” motifs can be seen, in the context of turn-of-twentieth-century modernity and nationalism, as evolving in a process of *simultaneous* canonization, or co-canonization, if you will. The critical historiographic task here is not to trace the lines of influence, but rather to examine the modes by which themes of influence and tradition become operative in the cultural politics of anti-colonial thought. How do certain kinds of formal gestures and conundrums come to be understood as imprinted by a history and sensibility that can be identified as “Irish”? By what institutionalized method and anthropological apparatus do we chance, in the midst of the so-called “Celtic Revival,” upon this seamless identification with motifs identified as “Indian”?

These questions become particularly interesting in Harry Clarke’s case since his identification with either the “Celtic” or nationalist element is questionable. To be sure, there is the irrepressible nationalist air around Clarke’s “suppressed” Geneva window for the International Labor Organization’s new building at the League of Nations. Praised by Yeats as national emblem, it comprised illustrations from the work of 15 Irish writers such as Shaw, Synge, Lady Gregory, and Emmet.³ And yet, to append Clarke’s oeuvre to something like a national aesthetic, presents some key difficulties. For one, this corpus of commercial design was in conflict with the republican opprobrium towards the capitalist market, perceived as it was as the *raison d’être* for the depredations of British colonialism. Both Irish and Indian variants of anti-colonialism shared an explicit distrust of commerce, a distrust that expressed itself strongly within nationalist thought as an anti-materialist sensibility. This anti-materialism was voiced as much in a political program of economic resistance as – per Yeats – in the cultivation of an aesthetic imagination freed of indenture to a materialist polity, where commercial compulsions were seen as inimical to national autonomy. Yeats’ *September 1913* offers us a fine instance: “What need you, being come to sense, / But fumble in a greasy till / And add the half-pence to the pence / And prayer to shivering prayer, until / You have dried the marrow from the bone?”

Clarke’s business-mindedness, inveterate perhaps for designers, sits badly within this anti-colonial, anti-commercial rubric. As a commercial designer, the subject matter of his work generally drew from the wishes of his clientele. To wit the *Eve of St. Agnes*; Keats’ poetry is hardly the stuff of Irish identity. Within two years of the creation of the Irish Free State, Clarke would petition Yeats, now a Senator, to increase tariffs on stained glass imports to Ireland, an archetypal protectionist move even as he sought to use his Ashdown House commission in London to court more clients there. Indeed, as Nicola Gordon Bowe’s biography of Clarke unwittingly demonstrates, all his life Clarke continuously contrived, somewhat unsuccessfully, to establish a commercial foothold in London.⁴ If a certain “Celtic” air suffuses Clarke’s work, it only does so to the extent that it begs the question of the frame and content of this Celtic moment, introduces a mercenary miscegenation at the very place where the name “Celtic” attempts to recapture an uncorrupted essence, a primordial culture shorn of its subsequent economic subjugation.

The corraling of Clarke's markedly apolitical work within something like the "Celtic Revival" thus begs a different kind of question: if for Yeats and his compatriots, "Irishness" was something indeterminate, a philosophical or aesthetic disposition rather than an anthropological characteristic, how was it that this subjective element came to be construed as a category, or categories, of objects, into things or artifacts identified with an anthropology of the Irish? This chapter therefore examines the place where a hybrid, even foreign, element comes to stand in as bearing the crux of a so-named cultural authenticity.

" . . . the Irish Are Only Irish"

The "Indian" motifs in the *St. Agnes* window present a similar problem. The threads of what Edward Said anointed as "Orientalism" are more diverse than he or his followers have acknowledged. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said argued that Yeats' poetry derived precisely from a tension with his intimacy with a foreign element, in that it "expressed the predicament of sharing a language with the colonial overlord."⁵ This predicament places the Yeatsian corpus in the company of Caribbean and African writers. Said sees Yeats' turn towards the occult and later towards fascism, however, as responding to that predicament by reverting to a "nativism," as with *négritude*, where cultural resistance is seen to regress into a naïve, despotic identitarianism rather than embrace the liberal cosmopolitanism through which questions of freedom can be forged anew. In contrast to that nativist theology, Said forwards the conception of the "secular critic," who, while in sympathy with the anti-colonial struggles of the world, must arrogate to herself the burden of leading literary and artistic production away from obscurantism and parochialism, in the interests of imagining "the possibility of a universalism that is not coercive . . . [rather than one in which] all the Irish are only Irish, Indians Indians, Africans Africans, and so on *ad nauseam*."⁶

I will argue here that the turn towards nativism in the anti-colonial imagination is significantly more complex than the reactionary stance to which Said's lofty liberalism so unquestioningly consigns it. At the very least, the production of a "native" or atavistic imaginary is in fact a crucial pathway *through which* modernity and modernism is worked in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan cultures. One need only remember here the tremendous fascination that "primitive" totems held for Cubism, Dada, and Surrealism alike. I will point to crucial parallels between such "avant-gardist" and "revivalist" strains later in the chapter. In terms of political thought, Daniel Finn has described Irish republicanism as the "world's oldest anti-colonial tradition."⁷ Conversely, Stephen Howe has pointed out that if Irish history was "colonial," this amounts to a meaningless truism where all of Europe's history should be seen, in a manner of speaking, as colonial.⁸ If Irish nationalism has been beset by this perennial ambivalence between a sense of historical uniqueness and the more routine *agon* of liberal state-formation *per se*, the headings of "style" and "theosophies" in the title of this chapter refer to the manner in which the nationalist imaginary nonetheless sought to transcend this ambivalence by invoking a subliminal, autochthonous culture whose transition to the modern would be couched as definitive. Cosmopolitan "modernity" and nativist "tradition," in that sense,

must be seen as two facets of the same coin, where tradition or “Irishness,” I will argue, appears precisely where the “modern” concept of the nation attempts to tether this transitional ambivalence in an ancestral predestination whose essence remains inaccessible to it. “Tradition” must thus be seen expressly as the name *for a departure from tradition*, and to the extent that this is posed in the terms of a civilizational unconscious or subconscious, this “magical” production presents key similarities with other, transnational cultural strands such as Surrealism, as we shall see.

For Yeats, imagining Irishness presented nothing less than an epistemological and a cosmopolitan imperative: to move away from the utilitarian and profane legacy of the Enlightenment embodied in “the philosophy of Newton and Locke,” and to think rather in the shadow of (the Anglo-Irish) Burke and Berkeley, who “in three sentences, wrote after each that Irish thought otherwise, and the next page that he must publish to find if men elsewhere agreed with Irishmen.”⁹ Contra the “secular critic’s” disdain, the address here is to a tacit concord with “men elsewhere,” a gesture towards a primordial communion already extant amongst the world’s many civilizations, upon which a more profound global ecumenism can be founded, and creating an antithesis to the global market founded by the corrupting influence of the Cartesian, mathematizing Enlightenment. The indeterminacy of this address points to Yeats’ atavism – and that of his presumably equally “parochial” African, Caribbean and Indian cohort – as equally accommodative of hybridity as the metropolitan “universalism” espoused by the secular critic. (It is, however, a different question whether that “elsewhere,” so defined precisely as a response to Descartes and Newton, truly belongs elsewhere, a place other than the metropole, or whether it presents here only a counter-strain or an underbelly of Enlightenment thought itself, and this too will be a charge that this chapter will attempt to answer.) If Said’s conception of tradition is taken at its word, where only Indians understand Indians, and Irish the Irish, then one is hard put to explain the significant bridges built between various primitivist imaginaries, say between that of Yeats and the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore – he speaks in solidarity with Yeats as waging a war against “modernism . . . threadbare, played out” – another figure whose cosmopolitanism and revisionism cannot be so easily untangled from each other.

The argument here will be, consequently, that the atavistic element was a key means by which non-metropolitan – and metropolitan – imaginaries sought to write their modernity. It is important, I would argue, to make a more nuanced estimation of the widespread Orientalism *within anti-colonial and decolonizing movements* than the simplistic tones in which Said’s work renders it. Such an estimation would substantially complicate a crude understanding of Orientalism as purely an anthropological alibi of colonial power, construing it rather as a crucial element in the development of aesthetic sensibilities in *both* metropole and colony, one whose features would not exclude a certain “cross-Orientalism”: that is, the Orientalism through which Irish aesthetes continued to exoticize the cultures of the East, for instance, or Indians that of Africa, quite in tune with their metropolitan masters. The lateral exoticism with which Yeats perceived India – his description of Tagore as “Flowers and rivers, the blowing of conch-shells, the heavy rain of Indian July, or the parching heat”¹⁰ – cannot be merely reduced to Said’s

“predicament” of sharing the master’s tongue. Atavism here becomes the basis for empathy with the “other colony.”¹¹

The Cake of Custom

The case of Ireland is similar in its requirements to India . . . the improvement that has been looked for, has been through making their tenure more secure to them, and the sole difference of opinion is between those who contend for perpetuity, and those who think that long leases will suffice.

John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*

Let us recount, then, in the manner of the fox rather than the hedgehog, the series of events during the mid-nineteenth century from which we can discern, within intellectual, administrative circles, a turn towards “culture” as a compensatory anthropological apparatus posed against the dogmas of utilitarianism, given the latter’s foundering fortunes as the reigning political ideology of empire. John Stuart Mill’s abrupt decampment to the Lake District in the throes of his nervous breakdown of 1827, and his newfound appreciation of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Goethe, and Marmontel offers us an early instance of this mobilization of aesthetic or “soft” power for the future course of empire. The pitched battles in Europe in 1848, in addition to the Irish Famine, signalled a crisis in British political conceptions, even as a series of trade crises and general agrarian stagnation during the same period wore down the hold of “free trade” dogma over economic theory. The economic debates following the Fenian uprising of the 1860s, and during the passage of Gladstone’s Irish and Scottish Land Acts (1870–1886), further elaborated of anti-utilitarian skepticism, as did the emphasis on “native” or customary authority in the “Non-Regulatory” States so-designated in India after the conclusion of the Sikh Wars in 1849. The arguments made for delicensing Mill’s own bailiwick in India, the East India Company, by Parliament in the wake of the great uprising of 1857, offers yet another instance of this tendency.

On the cultural front, the Great Exhibition, that flagship of free trade and utilitarian ideology orchestrated by Mill’s *protégé* Henry Cole, produced its own critiques of industrial production, voiced in the form of strong rebukes by a gamut of aesthetes, from Gustave Flaubert to Gottfried Semper to Owen Jones, who deemed the products of the “non-industrialized” Orient and the Celtic periphery far superior to those displayed by British manufactories. Transformations in the contours of liberalism itself, such as in the influential writing of Henry Sumner Maine or the new Irish school of economists led by Cliffe Leslie and J.K. Ingram, testify to a similar shift on the academic and theoretical front. At the same time, the tremendous influence of Ruskin’s condemnation of British political economy brought the anti-utilitarian critique into the heart of the metropolitan bourgeois establishment.

Given these appearances of an overwhelming ideological turn, Clive Dewey, some decades ago, nonetheless argued for caution, characterizing this shift within the broad liberal-utilitarian corpus in more qualified terms, as less a repudiation than a heightened, “historicist,” sensitivity towards questions of context and epoch.¹² Broadly speaking, liberal legislation drew on a *quantitative* emphasis. Utilitarianism held that large holdings

of land, unencumbered by the informal, kinship-driven, entangled, customary modes that defined Irish cottier and Indian peasant, would be more conducive to economic growth, and that accelerated growth would in the long run benefit the displaced cottiers and peasants as well. In Ireland, this accumulative tendency was expressly intermingled with the ancient asymmetries of Anglo-Irish and Irish, and with the religious factions produced by the Reformation, to create, from the 1680s onwards, what is known as the Protestant Ascendancy. In real terms, therefore, this abstract “political arithmetic” would only deepen the neo-feudalist arrangements with which the Ascendancy came to be identified, including the use of remote titles as an instrument of political patronage and rife absenteeism in the landlord class.¹³ Rather than attending to these inherent inequalities, Malthusianism instead attributed both economic stagnancy and price crises in the Scottish highlands and the west of Ireland to excessive procreation and sloth.¹⁴ The younger Mill’s prejudice is nothing if not eloquent: the Irish were, he held, “equally passive in the absence of every comfort, equally reckless in multiplication.”¹⁵

The historicist riposte to utilitarianism is best encapsulated in the following passage by the patron saint of the movement, Henry Sumner Maine, who entangled his arguments with a Darwinian, even vitalist, ardor:

. . . juridical thinkers [such] as Bentham and Austin . . . sometimes write as if they thought that, although obscured by false theory, false logic, and false statement, there is somewhere behind all the delusions which they expose a framework of permanent legal conceptions which is discoverable by a trained eye, looking through a dry light, and to which a rational Code may always be fitted . . . The legal notions which I described as decaying and dwindling have always been regarded as belong to what may be called the osseous structure of jurisprudence; the fact that they are nevertheless perishable suggests very forcibly that even jurisprudence itself cannot escape from the great law of Evolution.¹⁶

At the same time, if the anti-utilitarian arguments of the “historicist” faction were posed against a quantitative bias, these were seen as having no more force than that of a proviso. For one, the uses of historicism were described entirely in terms of anthropological evolution and appropriateness. What was problematic was not the truth of the “deductive” axioms and atomisms of classical political economy, but their administrative *suitability* for societies that had had no historical exposure to them.

Thus, if the rationalist/Benthamite point of view effectively undid its objectives, in Maine’s view, by its unwillingness to engage traditions that appeared capricious and the root of decay, for the historicists tradition was a fundamentally malleable structure, accommodating and commuting itself in the face of vicissitude. The utilitarian impetus, Maine argued, would do better to take this impetus towards resilience within its active purview, attending to the contingencies of local cultural practice rather than risk losing the battleground altogether owing to doctrinal rigidity. In incidences like the Irish Famine and the ensuing revolts, it was not so much the inherent fallacies of economic doctrine that were at fault. The problem lay rather in the explosive combination of administrative inflexibility and popular obduracy. If English political economy was to

bear better fruit, it would be necessary to devise administrative mechanisms that were amenable to variation and “adaptability.” Critical within the new juridical study of precedence therefore is the manner in which this historicist insistence has a studied reciprocity, an echo, with the methodological assertions of liberal political economy itself. Take for instance Arnold Toynbee:

The Historical Method is also of value because it makes us see where economic laws and precepts are *relative*. The old economists were wont to speak as if these laws and precepts were universal. Free trade, for instance, is a sound policy, no doubt, for England, and for all nations at a certain stage of development: but it is open to any one to say that free trade is only good under certain conditions . . . But it is an unjustifiable prejudgment of the question to lay down that this policy must be wise at all times and places. I do not mean to assert, however, that there are not some laws which are universally true, such as the law of diminishing returns.¹⁷

The new history’s symbiotic relation to Benthamite dogma is palpable: historicity and historiography become useful only when the liberal doctrine *fails* in its pertinence to a particular situation. Dogmatic economism hounds historicism at its core even as the latter is set about to highlight its failures *vis-à-vis* cultural vicissitude and to corral these defects. Economic “truths” inhabit history from within; they dictate the terms of its efficacy as much as its proper domain, its reach, and its limits.

The “Celtic” element that emerges in the 1850s within the Protestant Ascendancy must be seen as of a piece with this strain. Indeed, the art, literature, and decorative arts would come later; the “Celtic” persona was first cast as a problem of jurisprudence and administrative amenability. The legal impetus here can be found in the appointment of the Brehon Law Commission in 1852, and its publication, in 1865, of the first translated compendium of *Ancient Laws of Ireland*.¹⁸ Just as Maine, Bagehot and Toynbee deployed the prevalent idiom of “evolution,” historians such as Alexander Richey and W. Neilson Hancock at the Ascendancy’s ideological nerve center, Trinity College Dublin, set about formulating the Celtic periphery as an environment distinct from England. If in the Anglo-Saxon context, economic wealth and power presumably owed everything to the prevalence of the laws of contract, in the Celtic lands – Scotland, Ireland, and Wales – the study of medieval codes such as the Brehon Laws would be critical if they were not to be an impediment: “. . . great as are the evils which arise from the unreasonable retention of an antiquated system, they are not greater than those caused by the introduction, into a comparatively backward community, of laws constructed for a wealthy and progressive society.”¹⁹ For Matthew Arnold, Anglo-Saxon disdain for the Celt was the key reason that the latter were unable to shed their intransigence towards the political economy of their rulers: paradoxically, it was their rulers’ insensitivity towards Celtic custom that was the key obstruction to its permanent dissolution. Acknowledging difference was therefore crucial for assimilation.²⁰

The basis of the cottiers’ and crofters’ resistance to the doctrine was a turgid, congealed element, whose archaic tendrils had wafted through the centuries to recrudescence into, as Bagehot put it, “the cake of custom.” “[Customs] are not laws in the technical sense of

the term; but simply statements of the manner in which individuals standing in a certain legal relation to each other have hitherto acted.”²¹ If custom was indefinable, this was because the contingencies of administration themselves were unpredictable: everything within a system of relations depended on the changes proposed for them. “Invented tradition” this certainly is, but what is critical here is the collation of tradition as an elusive, informal counter-practice upon which, in spite of which, and through which, government and conventional political economy must act. The formalization of tradition was therefore a priority if Anglo-Saxon political economy was to have a future in non-Anglo-Saxon societies. In the case of the Scottish Land Acts, therefore, where no “authentic” documents such as the Brehon tracts were available, the “Celtic” legalisms devised for the Irish Land Acts were simply *extrapolated* to the new administrative protocols. Where no tradition was forthcoming, it was simply necessary to invent one.

A Horizon of Eternal Moaning

One thinks of Freud: where it was, [there] shall I be. The colonial construction of place is fundamentally a form of displacement: the Scot must be made to “speak” like a Scot, the Celt like a Celt, speak in the name of the disappeared, in the absent voice of their putative ancestors. This ventriloquism necessarily invokes a call to the imagination, and consequently, to poesis. In the writing of Matthew Arnold and Ernest Renan, two stalwart fomenters of this critical use of “culture,” this vicarious invocation of Celtic imagination is markedly tied to a somber mood that anticipates a kind of eventual decline, redolent of more mythic stories of lapse and the Fall. Here is Renan:

A cold wind arises full of a vague sadness, and carries the soul to other thoughts; the tree-tops are bare and twisted; the heath with its monotony of tint stretches away into the distance; at every step the granite protrudes from a soil too scanty to cover it; a sea that is almost always somber girdles the horizon with eternal moaning. A . . . change is apparent, I am told, in passing from England into Wales, from the Lowlands of Scotland, English by language and manners, into the Gaelic Highlands; and too, though with a perceptible difference, when one buries oneself in the districts of Ireland where the race has remained pure from all admixture of alien blood. It seems like entering on the subterranean strata of another world, and one experiences in some measure the impression given us by Dante, when he leads us from one circle of his *Inferno* to another. . . .²²

Renan’s footnotes make it clear that his observations drew significantly on new archaeological and philological research emanating in the 1850s and 1860s from within the Protestant Ascendancy. Archaeological recovery was thus continually entangled within an aesthetic and emotional experience, marked by subliminal loss, emotional despondency, and a primeval bleakness, each sentiment providing a bridge between an inoperative juridical frame and a transmogrified, active ethic.

For Arnold, the mournfulness that strikes one on crossing into Celtic lands belongs not to the past but to the future. The sentiment of dolor stems from anticipation, a premonition of the inevitable demise of the stubborn hostility, the “vain pretensions,” and “the

defense of desperate causes” of the so-called Celtic races.²³ For Renan, the eclipse of the Celt – with his insular spirit and his lament for his rapidly disappearing past – was an event to be mourned by the *metropole*, since it also signaled the relentless rise of a disenchanting, homogenizing modernity, devoid of the “divine tones thus expiring on the horizon.” With this demise would come the death of imaginative power – “nearly always proportionate to concentration of feeling, and lack of the external development of life” – of which the Celts were the last, dying manifestation within Europe. “The Celtic imagination is indeed the infinite contrasted with the finite”; these words echo Yeats’ recuperation, later, of Blake. There is a palpable similarity between Renan’s Dante and Yeats’ Blake in their description of the imagination as a menacing, ungoverned demi-world lurking underneath the homogenous vapidity of modern society.

The Celtic cultural nationalism that consequently emerged out of this schematic can be seen as turning this metropolitan conceit upside down. If Renan and Arnold characterized Celtic culture as inhering in its stubborn, “vain” or “desperate” essence, Irish nationalism would, in a manner of speaking, appropriate this alleged cultural obduracy to very different uses, posing it as the fount of political resistance. Whether with Fenianism or with *Æ*, whose intellectual interests covered agricultural reform and art alike, or with Yeats, the Irish tenacity or obtuseness towards English political economy would provide the wellspring from which a national imaginary could be forged. Aesthetic imagination would draw precisely from the will to reclaim an unwritten history, or rather in investing in historicity the provenances from which one could recoup the as-yet undetermined *telos* of the Irish people. Here is the Irish revolutionary martyr Roger Casement, in an essay titled *The Romance of Irish History*:

The history of Ireland remains to be written, for the purpose of Irishmen remains yet to be achieved . . . The resources Ireland opposed to her invaders have been unequal to the founding of a great state, but have preserved a great tradition. The weakness of Ireland lay in the absence of a central organization, a state machine that could mobilize the national resources to defend the national life.²⁴

The historical undertaking is here irrevocably identified with the capture of the state apparatus. We cannot see this merely as a simple reversal of the pragmatic historicism and the appendage to administrative doxa that Maine et al. had surmised. Within nationalist thought, the invocation to history is construed not so much as an empirical undertaking (for which the sources may well be irrecoverable) but rather as defined by a kind of perpetual forfeiture or irrevocable loss. A *poetics* of the past is expressly privileged over and against that of empirical research in the disciplinary sense, against the recollection of mere historical facts *per se*.²⁵ Synge’s *The Well of the Saints*, for example, is historically set in a deliberate ambiguity between Celtic Ireland and Celticist Ireland, bleeding between history and historicity, its timeframe loosely set “one or two hundred years ago,” suspended between “our” time and “theirs.”²⁶ Yeats puts this eloquently:

I . . . believe that poetry and romance cannot be made by the most conscientious study of famous moments and of the thoughts and feelings of others, but only by

looking into that little, infinite, faltering, eternal flame that one calls one's self . . .²⁷
 [and elsewhere] We cannot discover our subject matter by deliberate intellect, for
 when a subject matter ceases to move us we must go elsewhere . . . We must not ask
 is the world interested in this or that, for nothing is in question but our own
 interest.²⁸

Consider, then, the image of genealogy set out in the following lines:

I declare this tower is my symbol; I declare
 This winding, gyring, spiring treadmill of a stair is my ancestral stair;
 That Goldsmith and the Dean, Berkeley and Burke have traveled there . . .
 And haughtier-headed Burke that proved the State a tree
 That this unconquerable labyrinth of the birds, century after century,
 Cast but dead leaves to mathematical equality . . .²⁹

Celtic States

The state as a tree. History as a winding tower. What are we to make of these metaphors, these architectonic figures? The silhouette of the state is seen as bearing a certain form, organization appears to have a physical contour. There is here of course the Romantic and the organicist antipathy towards a purely physical universe conceived *more geometrico*, and a moribund form of reason that fails to grasp life itself. In Yeats' cosmology, "tradition" thus comes to be defined by an entire countervailing architecture or counter-canon: the organic logic of spires, gyres, and trees posed against the presumably mechanistic bent of Anglocentric polity. At the same time, it is as if this juxtaposition of shape and politics produces something of a diagram, or to be more specific, ideograms that capture the flight of imagination, stylizing the ethnic element and body politic as imbued with a certain morphology. The "tree" is not, as we will see, merely an "image." If for Casement the frailness of Irish destiny was to be attributed to "the absence of a central organization, a state machine," Yeats reads this absence as foregrounding the problem of poetic form, of literally deducing the contours of an ethnic imaginary that would bridge not only the abyss between nature and culture, but also the dissonance between Celtic folk tradition and the high classicism that he so admired.

Let us then turn to two textbooks, containing, after a style, copious examples of trees, two works that can be provisionally offered as the bookends to this morphological revisionism. The first is Owen Jones' *Grammar of Ornament* of 1856. The second is the Irish artist George Bain's book of 1951, titled *Celtic Art: The Methods of Construction*. Laying out between them the arc of Victorian and post-Victorian art pedagogy, these two volumes offer a parenthesis for early twentieth-century careers such as that of Harry Clarke. As is well known, the Celtic motifs in Jones' *Grammar* are presented as interchangeable with an ecumenical raft of similarly constructed patterns from across the globe: patterns with ersatz titles such as "Arabian," "Persian," "Turkish," "Indian," "Hindoo," "Chinese," and so on. A mongrel commerce between cultures intersperses the pedagogy of design, producing a trade between global cosmologies, with geometry serving as universal tender,

rendering these innumerable motifs functionally interchangeable and immediately reproducible for industrial production. The section on Celtic ornament in Jones' *Grammar* is accompanied by a note written by the Oxford entomologist J.O. Westwood. The note betrays little of political pressures in contemporary Ireland. All those events we have noted above – the recent famine, the Brehon Law Commission, the new historicism of the School of Celtic Studies at Trinity College Dublin, where the Book of Kells was first displayed, and from which Jones' *Grammar* usurped its motifs – receive no mention in this practitioner's toolkit. The fraught question of origins is passed over in a single sentence, a perfunctory note stating that provenance is of little consequence for a pedagogy of design:

We purposely, indeed, avoid entering into the question, whether the Irish in the first instance received their letters and styles of ornament from the early British Christians, or whether it was in Ireland that the latter were originated, and thence dispersed over England.³⁰

The elision is consciously political in its avoidance of politics. Bain's *Celtic Art*, by contrast, is a book recognizably written after its moment. Published in 1951 – the year of the Festival of Britain – when Ireland's former colonial overlords were themselves tenuously embracing modernism, this textbook appears markedly anachronistic, not only because it devotes itself to a pedagogy of the decorative arts a half-century after its heyday, but also because it rededicates itself to recovering the "essences" of Celtic ornament a whole century after the archaeological impetus of the 1850s posed that revanchism as its primary problem. Indeed, despite that strongly lapsarian air, the book's intent lies elsewhere, in what can be read as an attempt at closure. The closure in question is not of a historical period, or of announcing the end of a sensibility or style, but one that announces a tacit boundary or limit, a kind of interdiction. This interdiction reconciles Bain's endeavor to his contemporary moment, in that, like the moderns, his pedagogy also directs itself towards a critique of copying, of mimesis:

The author's real interest in Celtic Art began after he had been many years in Art colleges, including a few in the Royal College of Art, [South Kensington,] London . . . During the whole of his Art student period the study of Celtic art was distasteful to most Art students, for no instruction could be given. The only way was to attempt to copy an example, so that by comparison no 'mistakes' could be found by the teacher . . . Original designs were considered impossible and were rarely attempted. Adaptations [*sic*] by copying was the only use.³¹

Westwood is extensively cited in Bain's book. But unlike Westwood and Jones, the pedagogical challenge of the day for Bain explicitly involves a return to genealogy, to origins. The rejection of South Kensington-styled pedagogy is therefore double, both against mechanical copying in the classroom, *and* the alienation of the motif from the culture from which it emerges. This recuperative atavism, however, is no longer "historical" in the above, administrative sense. Rather, the motif is referred to quite another structure

of origins, that of “true psychology,” which goes beyond the merely empirical recovery of antiquarian artifacts to a more primeval source as the generator of the aesthetic.

The patterns provided in *Celtic Art*, in other words, invoke a subliminal, aboriginal, demiurgic element that inheres in all cultures, culture as such, but finds specific expression amongst the Celts, in fact defines the Celtic as such. If Owen Jones relied on Westwood’s voice as an academic authority allowing for the blotting out of the vexed Irish question, Bain seeks his intellectual legitimacy from a voice that is manifestly drawn from Yeats’ continent of the “elsewhere.” The preface for Bain’s book was written by the British-Ceylonese aesthete then widely regarded in the West as the translator of an equally authentic “Indian” tradition, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. Thus, rather than avoid the question of cultural provenance as a scene riven by sectarian conflict, Coomaraswamy’s preface dutifully settles this vexed conundrum by taking origin to the other direction, which is to say he describes these Celtic patterns as expressing a universal and ever-recurring dualism present in all cultures, and as proof “that *duo sunt in homine* is universal doctrine, Hindu, Islamic, and Christian.”³² It is through a kind of split but universal subject that the true Celtic roots of these patterns are authenticated: “The resolution of internal conflict, or self-integration is the purpose of all true psychology.” The parochial is validated as a kind of subliminal rupture within the universal, and it is through this dyadic transport that in the throes of global decolonization, in 1951, the interchangeability between “Celtic” and “Indian” has worked itself into a kind of global or post-colonial traffic between myriad, mongrel symbolisms. Immured within an eternal present, no longer rooted in a particular autochthon but drawn from a subliminal, subconscious apparatus, Coomaraswamy’s note inserts Bain’s undertaking explicitly in the court of framing a modern, *national* art, a hybrid modernism that is nonetheless averse to the Apollonian marketplace of the metropole.

For Bain, like the moderns, the recuperation of the Celtic motif comprises a replication that must, on the other hand, resist mechanistic repetition: “The mere copying of the ancient work is as valueless as it is impossible.”³³ And yet, the disavowal of copying does not lead to the disavowal of archetypes. One cannot totally reject mimesis, since on the other hand such a failure to imitate also risks the total dissolution of the Celtic element into a nondescript universal homogeneity. One must not copy, but one cannot forsake recognizability, descent. That, for Bain, is the kind of aimless wandering of the intellect evincible in the *informality* of Picasso and his “European” contemporaries, who also, for that matter, represent votaries of anti-mimesis, and whose “atavistic groping” and “anti-realisms” appear to be equally driven by subconscious motors. Bain’s dual rejection of the formulaic and the informal can be thus likened to a Yeats who likewise inveighs against the aimless divagations of “free verse,” redolent of the infinite and homogeneous expanses of Cartesian space-time.

Nonetheless, Bain says, despite their strong predilections the moderns are hardly able to entirely escape a certain heritage, a certain archaeology of motifs. The modernists’ “gropings, usually done in a state of acute consciousness, lead subconsciously to abstractions that may be inherited racial memories of the great Celtic cultures and of the still earlier race of palaeolithic Aurignacian hunter-artists who were probably the first of modern European man.”³⁴ However unwittingly, the Picasso-type artist finds himself

reverting back to an ever-present psyche, thus even more reaffirming the present-day validity of these Celtic patterns that on the other hand consciously invoke that autochthon. Continental, Cartesian “abstraction” thus validates the atavistic thrust of its Hibernian counterpart as also rooted in the modern.

Away from Mimesis

The censure of copying leads to an aporia. The rejection of mimesis cannot become an absolute interdiction against copying, since this repudiation must generate an alternative reference, a substrate – psychic, primordial, ethnic, universal – through which aesthetic conception can ground itself within a system. Bain saw the South Kensington system as denying that substrate, reverting, in the captive idiom of the industrialism that it purported to serve, to mindless repetition of patterns. In actuality, if one looks at the inception of the South Kensington system, one finds there an equally palpable censure of repetition and mimesis, albeit for somewhat different reasons. Take for instance the following note of concern voiced by Richard Redgrave, in the opening session of the Department of Science and Art in 1853: “It cannot be desirable to repeat even Turner’s pictures, however beautifully rendered, over cottage-walls, fitting them into corners, and round chimney-pieces and windows, and cutting them to lengths and widths. . . .”³⁵ To unthinkingly replicate images of nature in the objects of the interior produces a kind of aesthetic bedlam, with tea services, tablecloths, wallpaper, tiles all jostling with each other to produce a smorgasbord of jolting, truncated, uncurated images, each expressing a different whim of both consumers and manufacturers.

The work of design, therefore, is to coordinate these discordant effects by devising and coordinating patterns whose totality produces a unified, cohesive aesthetic effect. If, for Bain, that cohesion must be drawn from some primordial, psychic substrate, for the Department, the idea of formal cohesion drew its inspiration from a concomitant, ineluctable symmetry of forms within nature and its species.³⁶ Philip Ritterbush has offered us a succinct genealogy of such “organicism” in the interlinked domains of art and science of the nineteenth century.³⁷ In founding the South Kensington curriculum, Redgrave expressly brought that organicistic logic into the industrial realm. The formal design of the commodity must reflect a morphological unity similar to that found amongst the diversity of natural species.³⁸ It is in the indifference to a ruling motive that the marketplace appears as bedlam, subject to the caprices of mass-“fashion,” where “a pattern or design is known to be good, bad or indifferent, only after those who are supposed to be the best judges of such things, namely, the purchasers, have approved or condemned it . . . There are no legitimate standards of taste or design except the demands of the day.”³⁹ What design must do therefore is to rehearse the “contrivances” by which nature’s generative forces appear as form, turning them into schemas for adaptation “in some new material and for some new purpose.” Anti-mimesis inevitably ends up miming a kind of transcendent logic, following an inner imperative towards a regulative grammar that would vouchsafe the aesthetic against democratic kitsch. The uses of such an implantation are not hard to see. Linnaeus’ dictum, “nature does not make a leap,” has here worked itself by way of the natural philosophy of German idealism into a

description of the industrial commodity. It simultaneously confers cohesion on the disparate and disjointed production systems of the Industrial Revolution, while continuing to rest the metaphysical bridgehead of this cohesion upon an archaic natural-theological tradition. Jacques Derrida has discerned this kind of “economimesis” as already inherent in the Kantian aesthetic from which modern organicism will draw its inspiration.⁴⁰

The knots, trees, animals, plants of Bain’s *Celtic Art* of a century later retains the South Kensington argument for “ruling motive.”⁴¹ However, here the unifying imperative rests not so much on a principle of formal consonance as its wellsprings in the eternal recurrences of verities, verities that only imperfectly express themselves in the form of *symbols*. Indeed, the half-hidden characteristic of symbolism is the driving force that secures Bain’s undertaking – and the undertaking of the Celtic Revival in general – against the mere, and economically expedient, imitation of historical motifs. Symbolism lifts the pattern above the realm of mechanical replication, conferring on it a sublime sanctity, a genealogy of belonging in the profane marketplace of purloined motifs. This, above all, is the kernel of Revival: a two-way traffic is set up between symbolic and industrial realms just as nationalism is established as a site of exchange between transcendental and commercial imaginaries.⁴²

It could be argued that Clarke’s *Eve of St. Agnes* implicitly plays out this doubled dichotomy of pattern and symbol, of material order and transcendent meaning. The Indian figurines in Clarke’s window express the following lines from Keats’ poem: “The carved angels, ever eager-eyed, Star’d, where upon their heads the cornice rests, With hair blown back, and wings” (Figure 4.2). The abacuses with the seated figurines “sit” on columns that are part elephant, their multiple heads reminiscent of all-seeing Hindu gods. That is, they *appear* to sit on the columns, but in fact they don’t. They hover, rather, over a pitch-black emptiness, indeed literally over pitch in a manner of speaking: the black, soldered lumps of lead or joints that connect the different glass portions of the



Figure 4.2 Clarke, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, detail, Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery

window, the actual frame that holds up the image. This structural frame is distinct from what is *drawn* as frame or frames in the image – the faux architecture of ornamental flutes and acanthuses, florets and spandrels – that subdivide the various stanzas or episodes of the poem into so many visual panels.

In the *St. Agnes* window, as in all of Clarke's works, the material jointures, these tenebrous, soldered lumps produce a second system of boundaries – the "real" architecture of the window – strongly demarcating the "ornamental"/design patterns from the "pictorial"/painterly portions. A kind of mechanical or constructional effect interposes itself into the composition, splitting the window into two kinds of depths and two genres of frames, one emphasizing the material and finite economy of the surface, the other the limitless and self-eliding space of mimesis. In the former, an economy of industrial production of the nineteenth century – the play of symmetry, seriality, modularity, subdivision – pervades the work; "design" viscerally cuts into the painterly space of the window, suspending the image between figure and motif, between mimesis and anti-mimesis. The very technology that produces the luminescence of stained glass must necessarily operate like a blank interstice within the aura it is meant to invoke.

This "double" move is critical to Clarke's technique in other media as well. Take, for instance, his endpaper design for Swinburne's *Selected Poems* of 1928 (Figure 4.3). The

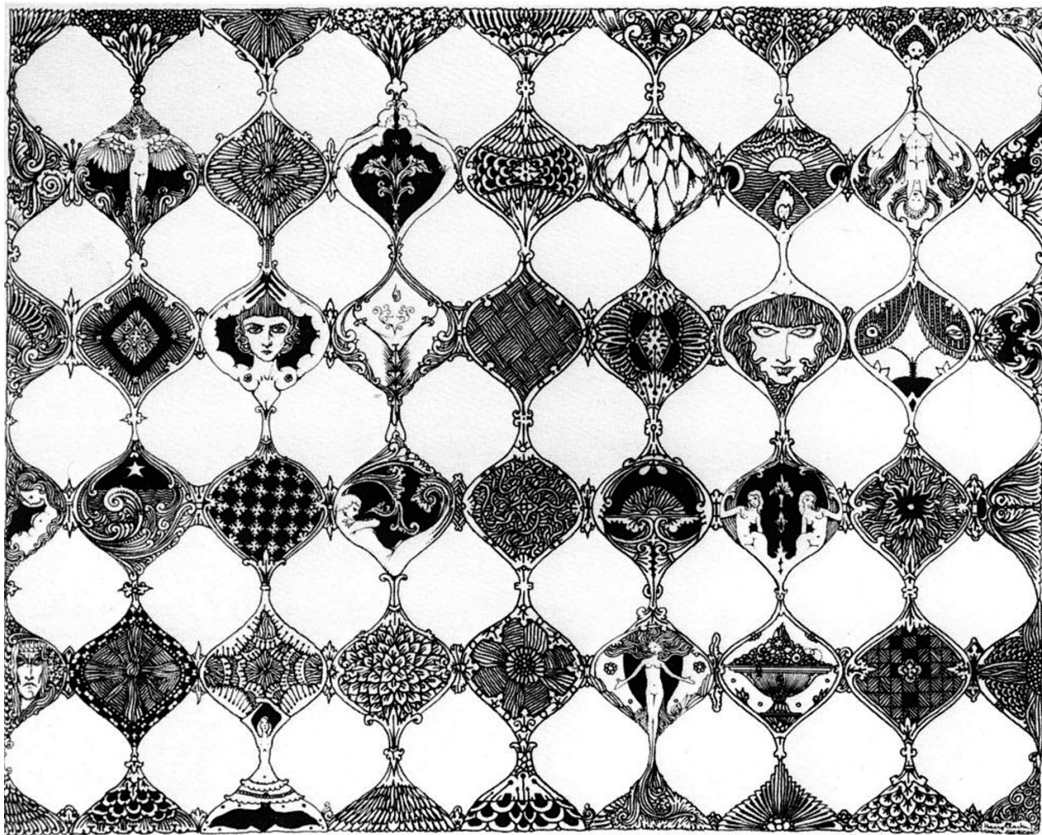


Figure 4.3 Harry Clarke, Endpaper, Swinburne's *Selected Poems*, 1928, courtesy of the Board of Trinity College, Dublin

painterly space is here almost completely evacuated, a feature that invites comparison with the Cubism of his time.⁴³ There is no more “scene”: ornament and symbol intermingle within a field that has no depth, into a representation that makes it into so much wallpaper, without finite limits and extensible in all directions beyond the boundary of the page itself. The faces and figurines are circumscribed within the ornamental pattern, following the play of symmetry and repetition that geometrically over-determines the figures. The field of representation has been reduced – traduced even – into a kind of equivalence or interchangeability with pattern. Here the mimetic is dominant, there the motif gains play. Likewise, Clarke’s plates for Goethe’s *Faust* (1925) or Poe’s *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (1919) demonstrate a similar regression from naturalistic or realist depiction into the field of caricature and of geometry. Clarke’s characters appear contorted by the plasticizing, organic pressure of some deep psychical, demiurgic force that overwhelms any possibility of naturalism or realism.

Economimesis

“Culture” is invoked in the Celtic periphery as a kind of economimesis: a supplemental or external schema that interposes itself as if according to an inner economy or functional anthropology that otherwise appears to elude the rationales of political economy. In other words, culture operates as something like a primed canvas for the stylization of the economic universe. Tradition appears here both as foil and as spur for the economic, conjuring up an anthropology by which the abstractions of political economy both reveal their infelicity on the one hand, and are provided with a more tractable image of social behavior on the other.

It is critical to observe that Yeats’ invocation of tradition explicitly presents a *doubled* response to this *doubled* character of the Ascendancy. In contrast to the administrative idiom of culture, Yeats’ refers the imagination on the one hand, to the republican principles of Augustan high classicism (a trait that he shares with the Ascendancy) and on the other, to an obscure, pan-civilizational mythos of folkloric symbols. Together, they reflect an impulse to restore a kind of civilizational parity, even a superior subliminal power, of the Celtic against the mercantilist, and ultimately vulgarizing, fervor of the metropole. Imagination, in Yeats’ words, must be “freed . . . from practical politics, from agrarian grievance, and political enmity,”⁴⁴ a freedom that nonetheless brings on the burden, as one scholar has put it, of a “desired fusion between Ascendancy values and a nationalist culture based on the folk,” a fusion ordained from on high that would vouchsafe Ireland from the rampages of the democratic mob.⁴⁵ Thus for Yeats it is not enough simply to hark back to the original culture of the Celts *as found* by scholarly researchers or administrative mavens, the “practical, political, social life” of the Celts as defined by Arnold. Rather, the material facts thrown up by archaeology requires, in the aesthetic realm, supplantation by an image of “unity” by which the national imaginary can find its destiny, or to quote Casement again, its “purpose.”

The Celtic periphery must be remade, not merely disinterred; it has to be reworked into a site of invention. Which is to say, it is not Celtic tradition *per se* that must be remade, but *tradition as such*, the very modality by which the future can be seen as recouping a

national destiny. Tradition can no more afford a hidebound mimesis, a mechanical repetition of historicist motifs, than an industrial designer attempting to infuse taste in the new artifacts of modern industry. For Yeats, if the “imagination” is a commonplace faculty availing amongst the folk, this cultivation also demands a classicizing rigor. In order to reconcile the “classical” past with the “primitive” element, one cannot simply go back to the mundane, decayed elements of the old culture. It is in this sentiment of decay that Yeats’ most profound and elitist complicity with the Ascendancy has been noted, and it is here that we should also observe the considerable affinity of this conception with South Kensington’s mid-Victorian, Arnoldian conception of cultivating design as a new faculty as a riposte to “fashion” and the capricious, crass “demands of the day.” This affinity may not be coincidental, if one considers that Yeats studied at the South Kensington-controlled Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin, during the course of which he published his first poems. (Two decades later, Harry Clarke would do the same, receiving three consecutive gold medals from South Kensington for his earliest works in stained glass.)

For Jones and Bain, mimesis is protected against by infusing the motifs obtained from nature with a kind of geometrical structure or rigor. Here, we can offer a parallelism with Yeats. For Yeats, the archaeology of the below must be subjected to a further, regulative code whose determinants cannot be availed of from indigenous sources but must be carefully selected from *the adversarial traditions of the metropole itself*. It is here that Yeats’ invocations to Shelley, Blake, Nietzsche, and Freud (or, for that matter, Gandhi’s to Ruskin, and Tagore’s to Byron etc.) acquire primacy in the revisionist proscenium. The recuperation of the “Heroic Age” is a markedly knotted one that fuses a “strong misreading”⁴⁶ of the perceived anti-nomianism of Berkeley and Burke with the *völkisch* mannerisms produced in *Celtic Twilight*.⁴⁷ Tradition can only be remade as a continuance of a project that exposes the contradictions of the modern as such, which is to say “tradition” can only be realized by dint of a counter-tradition. Yeats’ critical treatments of both Blake and Wordsworth – republican figures poised on the penumbra of the French Revolution (unlike Burke) and for both of whom the modern represents a miraculous nature that has been travestied into a utilitarian field, harvested only for profit – thus represent express attempts to limn the outlines of metropolitan disenchantment.

Both Wordsworth and Blake have been described as “millenarian.”⁴⁸ Yeats’ recuperation of Blake, characterized as a Dionysian reaction to a liberal, imperialist Britain, is within this strain:

[The worldly] kingdom [of soldiers, of men of the world, of priests busy with government] was bound to grow weaker so soon as life began to lose a little in crude passion and naïve tumult, but Blake was the first to announce its successor, and he did this, as must needs be with revolutionists who have ‘the law’ for ‘mother,’ with a firm conviction that the things his opponents held white were indeed black, and the things that they held black were white; with a strong persuasion that all busy with government are men of darkness and ‘something other than human life.’ One is reminded of Shelley, who was the next to take up the cry, though with a less abundant philosophic faculty, but still more of Nietzsche, whose

thought flows always, though with an even more violent current, in the bed Blake's thought has worn.⁴⁹

Blake's portraits of a febrile demi-world, as destructive as it is life-forming, awash with leakages, the overflow of fluids, humors, passions, and chafing against the regulative apparatuses of the Enlightenment, recast secular politics within an exorbitant eschatology, rendering historical events as expressions of apocalyptic prophecy. His description of the French and American Revolutions as convulsions of energy, breaking out of a Newtonian, rule-bound prison, can be said to mirror the extra-rational faculty that the Romantics termed "imagination," as a universal instinct struggling to find expression from beneath the formal confines of positive freedom. Yeats extends this reading of Blakean sensibility to an appraisal of colonial political economy as equally impeding the primeval wellsprings of native culture and historical destiny. In *The Statues* (1938), for instance, Pythagorean proportion is put on the side of abstract, profane, calculation, unable to produce the soft flesh, "live lips upon a plummet-measured face," realized by the sculptors of antiquity on bronze and marble, a form-giving "dark" power which the Irish must recover, quite in the way that a martyred Pearse could infuse the Easter Uprising with the heroes of Gaelic legend:

When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,
 What stalked through the Post Office? What intellect,
 What calculation, number, measurement, replied?
 We Irish, born into that ancient sect
 But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
 And by its formless, spawning, fury wrecked,
 Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
 The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.

Paradoxically, it is in this characterization of a political economy whose excess fecundity renders all distinction formless that we find Yeats' signature emphasis on *formal* economy. Yeats – like Ruskin and Morris before him – describes the "toil" or labor of crafting a poem as a form of labor whose output resisted vendibility: a counter-commodity. Contemplation cannot be bartered. One thinks of Keats' "Negative Capability . . . the ability to function in uncertainty and doubt."⁵⁰ Here is Yeats:

Blake, who deified imaginative freedom, held 'corporeal reason' for the most accursed of things, because it makes the imagination revolt from the sovereignty of beauty and pass under the sovereignty of corporal law, and this is 'the captivity in Egypt.' True Art is expressive and symbolic, and makes every form, every sound, every colour, every gesture, a signature of some unanalysable imaginative essence. False art is not expressive, but mimetic, not from experience but from observation. . . .⁵¹

Imagination operates here as the carrier of an ineffable, recessive, "unanalysable," essence, an ineffability that defines the myths and folklore gathered in *Celtic Twilight*. For

Yeats, however, this Dionysian recuperation necessitates a reconciliation with the Apollonian heights of formal classicism, wherein the “imaginative essence” of Blake finds expression through an emphasis on the line – “the hard and wiry line of rectitude” – the power of delineation and definition from which figure is seized back from mathematical uniformity and its resultant chaos. Through the power of line, conflict between the unboundedness of godly essence and the bounds set by it for man transfigures itself into beauty and art, a conflict epitomized in the exemplary drawings of Raphael, Michelangelo, Correggio, and Dürer. Blake’s conceptual antagonist, in this frame, would be Joshua Reynolds, in whose work the absence of line and the washes of shades and color represent, for Yeats, both the godless infinity of the Newtonian universe and the loss of distinctions produced by the rampant marketplace, or in what amounts to the same thing, the democratization of art.⁵² Indeed, Blake literally reads into the use of acid in copper etchings a kind of violent, satanic investment that reclaims an elemental, primordial power of the aesthetic from the maw of the commodity: “this I shall do by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which were hid. . . .”⁵³

We return to Yeats’ arboreal political morphology in *Blood and the Moon*: “And haughtier-headed Burke that proved the State a tree / That this unconquerable labyrinth of the birds, century after century, / Cast but dead leaves to mathematical equality. . . .” These morphological ideograms are pointedly conjured to place a *check* upon our unmediated access to primordial culture, or for that matter, art as well. A labyrinthine “murkiness” interposes itself between the ethnos and its readability; essence here is marked as a kind of impenetrability. A tree’s logic is imperceptible; it grows from inscrutable purposes while retaining fidelity to its own nature. The Irish state to come must be defined not by the homogeneity of rights, where each subject is but interchangeable with the next, but also by its accord with that primal, subliminal, elusive, singularity by which the Irish have retained their distinctiveness even after centuries of colonial assimilation. What is critical here is the manner in which the invocation of tradition also invokes the Celtic “Penetralium of mystery” as *obscuring*, even consciously obfuscating, the path to its easy restoration.

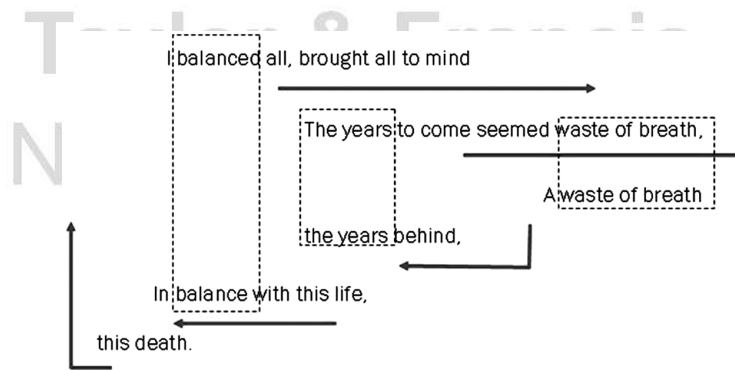
Chiasmus

This assertion of impenetrability is represented in Yeats’ poetry through two devices: his overt reliance on covert symbols, and a kind of “visual” projection of aural organization worked through in the very meter of his words. Helen Vendler has written of the intense laboriousness with which Yeats approached his poems, first laying out in prose the content to be communicated, then working through draft after draft until the poem can be seen to catch, or hold in its grasp, a certain rhythm or pattern. The three-step of the stanza from *Blood and the Moon* quoted above – declare/stair/there; tree/century/equality – speaks to this formal “research” into the architectonics of memory. Many of the leitmotifs that Vendler identifies in Yeats’ poetry – rhythm, repetition, return, inversion – are also leitmotifs of nineteenth-century ornamental pattern. “Design” and “pattern” are leitmotifs of Yeatsian analysis.⁵⁴ Vendler’s account of Yeats’ work on the final version of his 1919

poem *An Irish Airman Foresees His Death* palpably invites visual diagram. She refers to Yeats' labor as attempting "to make the poem seem not merely a statement but also a shape – and a suitable *shape* – for the airman's statement, evolving through passion to intellectual reflection. . . ." ⁵⁵ And yet this shape is noteworthy as much for its intricately crafted character as its painstaking production of a structure which both palpably suggests its presence and at the same time evades detection, a "tree-like" logic as it were.

For Yeats, the conventional appearances of symmetry and repetition in the play of rhyme and meter – the "lyric" form – are reworked according to a system whose origins lie in both classical canon and folk cosmogony. "History" – in the "historical" sense described above – is definitely in play here. Poetic structure in Yeats operates like the geometric apparition of descent, a kind of archaic effect by which the poem's metric structure acquires something like the dimensionality of a visual field. ⁵⁶ The aesthetic is thus intuitively saddled by a kind of mensurational work: it gives definition and dimension against a dangerous polysemy to which culture is always susceptible.

The figure that Yeats uses here, and elsewhere, is the chiasmus, a regular feature of English poetry where words are arranged in a "crossed" (1,2,2,1) rather than linear (1,2,3,4) fashion. In the last quatrain of *Irish Airman*, in the crossed symmetry between [balance ↔ balance], [years to come ↔ years behind], [waste of breath ↔ waste of breath], we can see what Vendler describes as a triple chiasmus. We could diagram this in the following way:



Poetic figure here has the visual profile of an ideogram. There is the definite air of loose strings being tied together, of the untethered, secret threads of language being knotted into place. Compare then these intertwined chiasmuses to the pages on knots in Bain's textbook on Celtic Art, or the three plates in Jones' *Grammar of Ornament*, where knots appear as the defining feature of Celtic ornament. In the *Grammar*, Westwood notes, "In the Roman remains the ribbons are simply alternately laid over each other, whilst in the Celtic designs they are *knotted*." ⁵⁷ Indeed I would argue the knot here is just not one other motif amongst others – it proliferates through much of the art of the Revival – but the master-metaphor for the modernity that is being woven into place. A good knot is nothing but a structure that hides itself, whose complexity resists easy unraveling; its elegance is defined by the adroitness by which it is untied by *those in the know*. Thus, in addition to serving as the motif for the essence of tradition, in formal terms the Celtic "knot" performs two functions: of introducing an archaeological motif into the

encumbrance of geometry, therefore introducing a diachronic element into a synchronic form of knowledge; and like a knot it functions also in a countervailing direction, using geometry as the analytical frame for *disentangling* the historical motif from its origins. A knot is something of a holding operation: the action of a knot, its purpose, is precisely to hold in place, to “balance all,” to bring its totality to mind. The chiasmus operates in much the same way in which in the knot’s materiality forces figure/form onto the transcendent idea. The chiasmatic ideograms, the “opposing vortexes” of Yeats’ *The Vision*, are not merely one instance of poetic figure, but a figure for modernity itself, while simultaneously modernizing figuration – its protocols of transmission and communication – at the same stroke.⁵⁸

Another name for this chiasmus could be *style*. There is not space here to lay out a genealogy of the term, but suffice it to say that style at the turn of twentieth century is the name for an *agon*: of the snaring up of the natural within the affected, of the formless trapped within form, and of the archaic recognizability of the modern. Take for instance Nietzsche, an author about whom Yeats wrote extensively, in the following passage from *The Gay Science*:

One thing is needed. – To ‘give style’ to one’s character – a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses that their nature has to offer and then fit them into an artistic plan until each appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye . . . In the end, when the work is complete, it becomes clear how it was the force of a single taste that ruled and shaped everything great and small – whether the taste was good or bad means less than one may think; it’s enough that it was one taste! It will be the strong and domineering natures who experience their most exquisite pleasure under such coercion, in being bound by but also perfected under their own law; the passion of their tremendous and serving nature; even when they have palaces to build and gardens to design, they resist giving nature free rein. Conversely, it is the weak characters with no power over themselves who *hate* the constraint of style; they felt that if this bitterly evil compulsion were to be imposed on them, they would have to become *commonplace* under it – they become slaves as soon as they serve; they hate to serve.⁵⁹

Pleasure under coercion; perfection in being bound by the law: Nietzsche’s conception of style here is inherently antinomic, with force as the active element driving personal character. Style is the process by which nature’s “free rein” is curtailed, by dint of violence, by an “artistic plan” or “design,” and pertains to the gamut of subjective expressions, extending the realm of aesthetic discernment into “power.” Identity in this field is produced, indeed empowered, not by the organic, “weak” expression of the native, or by naïve sentiment, but rather through the imposition of a coercive, exogenous frame.

Seen as this carapace, tradition is expressed by the contortion of foreign, “superior” forms into the terms of a self-censorship, and thus into the outcome of a *work*. Through this stylized frame – the object of a labor that is not labor but play – we see the “trees” and “chiasmuses,” figures as much of English tradition as of others, being maneuvered by the Celtic Revival into the iconology of a Celtic past. Quite against Said’s charge of

parochialism, the impulsion towards style brings under the aegis of tradition a heterogeneous gamut of motifs, a chain of exotic influences. In Yeats' case this comprised, by one account, a promiscuous smorgasbord of references, from "Noh theatre, Egyptology, Neoplatonism, the Upanishads, medieval alchemy, [to] contemporary heterodox religious circles."⁶⁰ And the force of style for Yeats in anti-colonialism becomes clear if we read his admiring comments on Gandhi:

I have been watching with delighted amusement the controversies with Gandhi . . . Gandhi writes to the Viceroy as one well-bred man writes to another he has met in friendly intercourse, the Viceroy adopting the time-honoured method of politics replies like a journalist, then Gandhi the well-bred man answers him, & the Viceroy has probably a sleepless night, then correspondents to the Times saying that something must be done to restore British prestige, without understanding that it is a question of style.⁶¹

The enigmatic game of style is best played *when the rules are borrowed, imposed*. Style here is distinctly tied, as Nietzsche suggests, to the exigencies of a historical moment rather than to carrying the burdens of history. Gandhi captures the moment because his dead-pan etiquette plays back the language of his rulers, a case of undermining by mimesis.

Bazaar

At its core, tradition describes a structured intimacy with the alien. It is here that we can begin to formulate an explanation for how the markedly *un-Celtic* bulk of the Harry Clarke oeuvre could become an emblem of Celticism. Illustrating as it does a non-Celtic poem with non-Celtic motifs, this is exactly the point about exogeneity that we are making here: what brings a work such as the *Eve of St. Agnes* into a kind of Celtic aura is precisely its air of a generic, murky "Penetralium of mystery." This foreign determination defines not only the Celtic Revival but all those anti-metropolitan turns to tradition in the name of non-Eurocentric modernities, whether they be the "Buddhist," pan-Asian affectations of Tagore's Santiniketan, or the "Indian" affectations of Yeats' *A Vision*, or the tacit Orientalism within various regional European aesthetic movements, not to rule out the work of the Japanese scholar-aesthete Okakura Kakuzo.⁶² A paradoxical, universalist contamination pervades each of these explicit rejections of modernist defilement.

This heterodox borrowing produces a remarkable convergence in the stylizing explorations that comprise the many national aestheticisms of the early twentieth century. One such front for this nationalist stylization can be found in the genre that came to be named the "fantastic." The commonalities between the work of a Kay Nielsen in Denmark, an Aubrey Beardsley in England, an Edmund Dulac in France, a Harry Clarke in Ireland, or a Sukumar Ray in Bengal (Ray studied Beardsley in London), in which all adopt and adapt from each other a stylized, exogenic ethno-symbolism hardly precluded the work of each from being viewed as the stuff of national idiom. And at least some of these "deep" nationalist roots of the fantastic owe their "archaic" air to two major intellectual currents of the early twentieth century: the new currency of "dreams" as the subliminal fount of cultural life, and the redefinition of childhood, now envisioned as a

civilizational front where the prerogatives of the race would be instilled and protected.⁶³ It is precisely through such a redesign of dreams, then, that the very structure of primordiality is remade within the national imaginary. Nothing more French than Dulac, the French would say; nothing so quintessentially Bengali as Ray's *Abol Tabol*; so Slavic as Ivan Bilibin's Baba Yaga, quite so Irish as Clarke or the Yeats sisters. Walter Benjamin called this a "Platonic anamnesis."⁶⁴

A clandestine trade with the exotic occupies the subliminal place where culture is purportedly returning to its roots. This is not just limited to symbols alone, to the proliferating iconic merchandise made available in the undercurrents of the imperial semiotic marketplace. In Yeats' poems, symbolism goes beyond obscure iconology to encompass form itself, such that form – shape – becomes the "material" device through which the exotic imperative of design is clandestinely impressed upon syntax.

The revisionist undertaking thus rests on two critical pillars that in a way also echo the doubled response of Yeats' aesthetics that we have earlier talked about. First, the question of essence resists geographical demarcation. Thus, every motif must refer to a hybrid field where meaning can only be glimpsed through a process of cultural cross-referencing. Second, and conversely, this cross-referencing across cultures only confirms the priority of some common, prior, pre-cultural origin – the future can only be construed as future to the extent that it can be construed as a re-enchantment of the world. Revivalism inevitably stitches together a tattered canvas, a canvas that is given unity through the simultaneous construction, and an ensuing "resolution" of two paradoxical attributes, hybridity and essence. At the same time, this synthesis of heterogeneous elements and primordial unity cannot be resolved within the work itself. More than any other genre, the revisionist canvas is most harried by excess. It invariably needs recourse to a beyond, a "somewhere else" in which the enchanted precinct of the ethnics can be grounded, sanctioned, sanctified. It goes without saying that this other place would not be a place, but would rather describe a gesture, a beckoning to the beyond, or in other words, simply the desideratum of a procedure, a antinomian method posed against methodology.

Theosophies

One would be remiss, therefore, if one did not notice, within this play of revisionism and revivalism, an apparatus of control. In the Irish context, as is well-known, the production of a Celtic imaginary was a directed attempt to delink sectarian affinities from the language of both governance and resistance. In that context, it would be important to point out that the Indian figures *are the only religious motifs* in a rendering of what is otherwise a poem about chivalrous romance. Let us pay closer attention to the third Indian figurine in Clarke's *St. Agnes* window. Once again, this figure is sectioned off by a window within a window, a circular cut that removes this beatific persona to a different time-sequence than the poem's closing scene (Figure 4.4). Seated cross-legged like the Buddha, she smiles beatifically, like the other Indian figures, straight out of the canvas into our eyes. A lamb rests in her lap, while she holds a palm leaf in her hand. These symbols, along with the halo around her head, identify her. She is St. Agnes, martyred during the reign of Diocletian and canonized by the Roman Catholic Church, author of miracles, protector



Figure 4.4 Clarke, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, detail, Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery

of virgins, chastity, and victims of sexual violation, and on the night of whose Feast the events of Keats' poem take place, after the moon "Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet/Against the window-panes; . . . hath set."

All the three Christian figures in the window are explicitly rendered in a *non-Christian* style. In other words, it is precisely in rendering the religious – and more importantly, Roman Catholic – element that an "Orientalist" impetus asserts itself, defanging the sectarian element and sublimating it in the direction of the symbolic and the aesthetic. (To be sure, Romanticism already epitomizes such a sublimation: in Keats' poem, the piety of the old Beadsman is poised explicitly in contrast to the nocturnal revelries indulged in by the other characters.) Why this exotic contortion of religion? At the very least, this can be described as a double exoticism, since the "Indian" attributes so discerned can be ascribed to another colonial "invention": that of the Buddhist/"Gandhara" style. Clarke appears to have adapted Gandhara features in some of his other work as

well, for instance his rendering of the Mater Dolorosa shrine to which Gretchen addresses her prayer in the 1925 English translation of *Faust*.⁶⁵ I have written elsewhere about the comparisons drawn by colonial writers between Wahhabism and Fenianism as nameless, atavistic threats to empire.⁶⁶ For our purposes here I would simply mention that Buddhism might be described as a nineteenth-century Asian counterpart to the Brehon Laws, the product of a comparable quest to identify a requisite spiritual doctrine that would counteract a similarly fraught sectarian conflict, the asserted incompatibility between Hinduism and Islam.⁶⁷

William J. McCormack has argued that one example of what Edward Said called Orientalism in the context of Ireland was Christianity itself. "With the undermining of religion as a philosophical position, the sense of comprehensibility which religion had provided was in part replaced by an increased valorization of *race* as the living guarantee of the reality of the past and the cohesion of a secular society."⁶⁸ The Ascendancy's conjuring of a Celtic identity over and above a Catholic identity was nothing if not self-preserving. Albeit towards different purposes, both Yeats' transcendental symbolism and Clarke's stylistic symbolism might be described as equally erasing the Catholic element and setting, in its place, a mythos of re-enchantment and alternative canonization. (This displacement may well have been the basis of many a *bildungsroman*. In his autobiography, Yeats recounted how his own turn to the "daemonic" was a reaction to his Protestant father's avowed atheism.)⁶⁹

We could describe this displacement as one from theology to theosophy. This name could be confused with that of the international movement that was active in Ireland and India at the same time,⁷⁰ but here I use it in its literal sense, in order to indicate the deactivation and reactivation of the religious element into a transcendental drive *within the field of secular criticism*. McCormack describes Celticist literature as availing of a topography of consciously chosen Gaelic, rather than Roman or Christian, place names in Ireland. For instance, Synge's writing exhibits a strong geographical focus on the Irish west, with the Achille and the Aran islands painted as the privileged locale for a lapsarian, unadulterated Celtic past. One particular building type dominates this textual topography. Synge's work is full of references to ruined churches and church doors, a not-incidental subtext given both the church-building boom and the long shadow of the debates on Disestablishment in the 1860s–1870s. What is important here is that these references are as much gestures towards religion as a separation from it, in the sense that they indicate a deliberate suspension of theological content in the direction of a museological field. Thus, even as the emphasis by Celticist archaeology on Romanesque churches spoke of a religious identity distinct from the Anglo-Gothic, the shift from lapsed theology to positive anthropology is visible in the spate of round towers built next to the new churches of this period as characteristic markers of Irish identity.

Nothing epitomizes this displacement more than the Hiberno-Romanesque architecture of the Honan Chapel, the Catholic chapel for Queen's College (now University College) in Cork, built between 1894 and 1925, and conceived explicitly as a set-piece for colonial-era secularization.⁷¹ Harry Clarke's windows play a substantial role here (Figure 4.5). Amongst the furnishings, altar plate, hangings, vestments, and utensils



Figure 4.5 Harry Clarke, *St. Gobnait*, stained glass, 1915–1918, Honan Chapel, courtesy of Michael Cullen

commissioned from different ateliers, all intended to commemorate the achievements of Arts and Crafts in Dublin, they were seen as part of a *gesamtkunstwerk*, quite in the same way that William Morris' Red House or Josef Hoffman's Palais Stoclet involved collaborations between multiple crafts.⁷² John O'Connell, executor of the Honan family's bequest, described the chapel's commission exclusively in terms of an aesthetic program:

No church can be regarded as a beautiful and worthy whole unless all those things which are needed for the service of the altar are designed and fashioned for it as parts of a thought-out scheme based on one guiding ideal – the same idea which appears in the building and the decoration also inspires and moulds all the furniture, the altar plate and the vestments and everything which is used in the service of the chapel.⁷³

In that sense, the Honan chapel quite echoes the myriad exposition pavilions unveiled in this very period, equally dedicated to a unifying ideal, not to rule out commercial showrooms such as Siegfried Bing's *Art Nouveau* gallery in Paris, from which the movement would gain its name.

Even a cursory look at the Honan Chapel's different parts, however, gives the lie to the unifying claim. The smorgasbord of individual stylistic signatures speak, if at all, very little to each other. The multiple incongruities were certainly evident to contemporary observers. Robert Elliott, author of the 1902 volume *Art and Ireland*, declaimed its "sham medievalism – an imitation chromo-lithograph of a medieval paneled saint, which has none of the reproductive utility of a lithograph."⁷⁴ If anything the absence of unity is rendered somewhat paradoxical if one considers that every participating artist in the Chapel defined their contribution as representing a certain fidelity or consonance with the Celtic element; and as such this dissonance speaks succinctly to the faultlines of mimesis. It may be more appropriate to describe this chapel as a *collage*, in that the latter far better encapsulates the evident disjunctions and juxtapositions that make up the Celtic "composition" of the building.

Disjuncture

Honan as collage? As Dada, even? This characterization may appear strange, but it speaks more acutely to our framing of revisionism as the flip-side of the modern, as a gathering-up of the hybrid whose unity lies elsewhere. The 11 windows Clarke eventually produced for the chapel almost singularly exemplify this heightened sense of disjunction, given their evident discrepancy with every other artifact in the building. If the rest of the building demonstrated strong tendencies of historicism, the Clarke windows are distinctive in that they render their Celtic content – nine Irish saints and Mary and Joseph – in a decidedly *non-Celtic* idiom. Compare the following detail – and this will do as well as any – from the St. Gobnait window on the south-facing nave wall, with the two facial studies from Clarke's book illustrations for Poe's *Tales of Mysteries*. In both, each feature – face, hair, aura, head-dress – has been broken up into independent,

strongly delineated areas – stained glass circumscribed by lead jointures – each receiving its own, distinct, pattern, resolved as flat “fills” of shape without any three-dimensional emphasis.

The nuances of expression are broached through exaggerated contortions of the face and physique, almost as if in caricature. On both glass and paper, whether in rendering religious or picaresque physiognomy, the prominent nose, the curved lip, the accentuation of chin are equally pronounced. In Clarke’s work one notices a kind of unruffled passage of style whether in his renderings of Poe’s melancholic moderns or the patron saint of Irish beekeepers, which is to say, between the representations of the sensational and the spiritual. There is the conspicuous impression that the beatific or the spiritual is being invaded, even corrupted, by a dissolute, perverse pleasure or turpitude, by the “fashionable Satanism” of the Symbolists. The religious realm has been subsumed under the secular, even profane, purview of art. Tradition has been turned on its head, injecting the “passions” into the secular, rationalized realm of the “subject,” with a kind of psychological expressionism imprinted onto the physiognomies of the various saints.⁷⁵

Even a glance at the other windows by Alfred Childs, and by Catherine O’Brien and Ethel Rhind of An Túr Gloine brings out their differences with Clarke’s work into distinctive relief, mired as the former are within a kind of medievalist fealty. It is not just that religion here has been reverted to the realm of secular symbol, but in its strong identification with the genre of “fantastic” the Celtic has been effectively profaned in its own temple, in the very moment of consecrating itself. The somber imagination of historical destiny has been rendered indistinguishable from fantasy. In Clarke’s unperturbed style, one that travels with equanimity between characters conceived by Goethe, Keats, and Synge alike, and between his London and Dublin clients, and in his closer affinity to the international illustrative cadre of Beardsley, Dulac, Nielsen et al., *it is effectively the Celtic icon that has become the borrowed motif* in what is otherwise a global market in the subliminal. In appearing to tether the components of the Celtic into the identitarian bind, the knot has been, in effect, tied in reverse – identity reveals itself as scripted only in the idiom of the exotic. Not only that, it is through Clarke’s commercial cosmopolitanism that the Celtic Revival truly acquires its modernizing edge. This implicit subtext, I suspect, explains the considerable popular affection accorded to Clarke’s work in Ireland even today.

So far, I have argued the following points. First: that the impetus of the Celtic Revival in Ireland substantially drew from an administrative prerogative to render a population into the managerial rubric of “culture.” To a great extent, the national imaginary that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century can be described as turning the alleged ethnic intransigence of the cottiers and crofters towards the nostrums of modern political economy on its head, by discerning in this intransigence the fount for resistance and a reimagining of historical destiny. Second: in the conception of figures such as Yeats, revisionism does not refer to the empirical recovery of the native culture as found so much as its subsequent reshaping by aligning it within the adversarial traditions of the metropole. Third: an inherent elitism ties together the presumptions of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and the aesthetic presumptions of revisionism such as Yeats’ in that both see in the democratic mob the organic outcome of a homogenizing, colonizing,

commerce. If the imperialist marketplace erases the powers of distinction and discernment upon which a proper human destiny can be founded, for Yeats the restoration of this imaginative ability requires a kind of reinvestment into a subliminal and symbolic firmament, a “penetralium,” of occult meaning, whose decipherment requires active reading, the *work* of art. Fourth: to the extent that this obscure terrain of symbols returns us to the question of essence, the recovery of the ethnos does not avail of a particular, geographically limited, ethnicity; its idioms emerge from primal, pan- or pre-civilizational, cosmological confrontations that open up to ontological and existential enigmas that remain obscure for humanism as such. In that sense, the recovery of the ethnos inevitably draws on a hybrid, transcultural web of semiotic references and motifs.

In what we have discerned so far, the broad body of Harry Clarke’s work – despite its popularity, in constituting what is presumed to be the swansong of the Revival – shares *none of these* politico-aesthetic programs. The only affinity for Republicanism that we find in Clarke is in the narrowest of interests: in trying to protect his business by petitioning to shore up the tariffs imposed by the new Republic in the 1920s. Where it does converge, and this shall have been our argumentative crux here, is their common delving into the substance of culture as a “murky” or enigmatic substrate. For Clarke, this tenebrism came less from a Dionysian unraveling of artistic self than from a cosmopolitan immersion – “fashionable” even – in the international, commercial culture of the “fantastic.” If the Yeatsian sensibility can be seen as poised against a market aesthetic of any kind, what produces a common ground between nationalist revisionism and Clarke’s mercenary trade in “cool” is their shared accentuation of a suspended semiosis. The power of revisionism relies on a good deal on this indeterminacy in traffic between religion, occult, and fantasy. This comprises both its principal point of cultural seduction and reveals it as strongly constituted by a kind of contaminative borrowing. Indeed, the *agon* consists here less in *what* is retained as the essence of a culture than in *how* things – a past, cosmic signs, nature, narratives – are read. We could follow Harold Bloom and call this misprision. A *suspended* semiosis, mind you, not a failed one: revisionist ardor derives its will by a desire to retie the frayed temporal skeins rent asunder by modernity. “Influence” – contamination – by the exotic or ancient is here not foreclosed, but guarded against as an uncurated, random procedure. The question of origins cannot be empirically located in a particular origin, rather what is sought to be curtailed or rendered into form is the modality of recovery *per se*, a hermeneutic whose image can only be a chiasmus, a kind of knot.

Things Fall Apart

We end, as perhaps we must, with Beckett, just as we began with him to refute provenance as adequate to understanding the story of influences. Seamus Deane writes, “Yeats began his career by inventing an Ireland amenable to his imagination. He ended up by finding an Ireland recalcitrant to it.”⁷⁶ The path by which Beckett sketched out his aesthetic program partly by rejecting Yeats’ (and the Celticists’) esoteric world of symbols and the hermeneutic rejuvenation of the linguistic is too well known to warrant extended mention here. The deferred symbolism on which revisionism grounded itself relied

tacitly on the displaced form of eschatological intuition, mapping therein a continuum between religious and national imaginary even as sectarian affinities were sought to be undone in this very same procedure. Beckett's sensibility would go a little further, pointing to the impossibility of that passage from a primordial unity. In Beckett's world, this impossibility thus explicitly and agonizingly strands the aesthetic imagination in a condition of perpetual limbo. Suspension "does not hold."

bon bon il est un pays
 où l'oubli où pèse l'oubli
 doucement sur les mondes innommés
 là la tête est muette
 et on sait non on ne sait rien
 le chant des bouches mortes meurt
 sur la grève il a fait le voyage
 il n'y a rien à pleurer . . .
 all right all right there's a land
 where forgetting where forgetting weighs
 gently upon worlds unnamed
 there the head shush it the head is mute
 and no one knows no but one knows nothing
 the song of dead mouths dies
 on the shore it has made its voyage
 there is nothing to mourn⁷⁷

A Passion for Paintings, the 2006 exhibition at the National Gallery of Ireland illuminated Beckett's intense immersion in painting and its techniques, presenting extensive documentation on a lifetime of continuous meditation on the relationship between visual apperception and technique. For Yeats, the visual field introduced the felicity of "a suitable shape" or pattern by which poetic labor could rebraid the loose threads of semantic dissolution. For Beckett, this impetus towards form-finding as the closure of intent is a circle that can never be closed, a desire that exhausts itself in the very process. Unable to bridge the gap between action and consequence, the passage of meaning is left only with the task of annotating its own failure. The threads that link motif to meaning appear to have nothing to do with each other.⁷⁸ If this characteristic of the Beckettian work has been well-documented, what has been less talked about is the manner in which this stalemate of meaning extends as well to his understanding of the relationship between word and image. Beckett's lifelong engagement with painters and paintings was defined by deliberations on this very impossibility.⁷⁹

Bon bon il est un pays was written sometime between 1947 and 1949 in response to an invitation by the artist Geer van Velde to provide a text that would accompany one of his paintings.⁸⁰ Van Velde could not use it, perhaps because the text provided by Beckett constitutes an explicit rejection of the invitation. The poem was later displayed by one of Beckett's other close artist companions, Avigdor Arikha. Beckett's note of 1967, *Pour Avigdor Arikha*, might be described as a piece of conceptual art in its own right: "The eye

without ceasing changed by the hand at the same instant as without ceasing the hand by the eye. The look releasing the invisible only to pounce on the unmakeable and back without pause."⁸¹ Style here has been pared down, rarefied to something like an asemantic gesture. The desuetude of meaning reduces form to a syntactical aphasia in which phonetic repetition is left to count out the impossible steps of retrieving its own import. In a manner of speaking, style confronts its own dissolution, and the approach to the visual field is inexorably conditioned by its own incompleteness.

vous voulez que j'aïlle d'A à B ne peux pas
 je ne peux pas sortir je suis dans un pays sans traces
 oui oui c'est une belle chose que vous avez là une bien belle chose
 qu'est-ce que c'est ne me posez plus de question
 spirale poussière d'instant qu'est-ce que c'est le même
 le calme l'amour la haine le calme le calme
 you want me to go from A to B I cannot
 I cannot come out I'm in a traceless land
 yes yes it's a fine thing you've got there a mighty fine thing
 what is that ask me no more questions
 spiral dust of instants what is this the same
 the calm the love the hate the calm the calm

Notes

- 1 Clarke's most exhaustive biographer, Nicola Gordon Bowe, does not give any explanation for this either – neither does she in fact seem to notice the peculiarity of these Indian insertions in her otherwise thoroughgoing survey of Clarke's life. See Nicola Gordon Bowe, *The Life and Work of Harry Clarke* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1989).
- 2 Samuel Beckett, in Samuel Beckett, Georges Duthuit Jacques Putman, *Bram van Velde*, trans. Olive Classe and Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 9.
- 3 Andrew Haggarty, "Stained Glass and Censorship: The Suppression of Harry Clarke's Geneva Window, 1931," *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua* 3, 4 (1999), 99–117.
- 4 See Bowe, *The Life and Work of Harry Clarke*. In this sense he exemplified the future Irish Free State's general conservatism in economic matters; this conservatism would ensure that the Irish economy would remain subservient to Britain, eschewing any strong moves against economic decolonization. "On the economic level, the logic of the British connection continued; 98 percent of Irish exports went to the UK in 1924 . . . What did not develop, despite the Sinn Féin pedigree of the government's theorists, was a coherent policy of protectionism. Some tariffs were imposed on imported goods, to encourage home production; no overall fiscal readjustments were made with a view to developing new industries . . . But public probity and, yet again, political stability were seen as indissolubly linked to conservative finance; economic nationalism was far too risky a horse to back." R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 522–3. This is signally different from the deficit-driven economic interventions undertaken by countries undergoing decolonization from Britain in the 1940s and 1950s.
- 5 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 274.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 229.
- 7 Daniel Finn, "Diary," *London Review of Books*, April 30, 2009.

- 8 Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 9 William Butler Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 402.
- 10 William Butler Yeats, Introduction to Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*, in *Essays and Introductions*, 391–2.
- 11 For that matter, the “Oriental” leanings of Clarke's *St. Agnes* window belong more to the metropolitan obsession with “fantastic” themes in the early twentieth century, to the trademark insertion of “Oriental” themes into the corpus of Victorian and Edwardian illustrated literature. This sensibility can hardly be attributed with the “Celtic Orientalism” and “Cross-Colonialism” that in Joseph Lennon's view so distinguished the work of Yeats et al. from Anglo-French Orientalism. See Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004).
- 12 Clive Dewey, “Celtic Agrarian Legislation and the Celtic Revival: Historicist Implications of Gladstone's Irish and Scottish Land Acts 1870–1886,” *Past and Present* 64 (August 1974), 30–70.
- 13 William Petty's career in Ireland could be offered as example. Ted McCormick, *William Petty and the Ambitions of Political Arithmetic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- 14 Michael A. MacDowell, “Malthus and George on the Irish Question: The Single Tax, Empiricism and Other Positions Shared by the Nineteenth Century Economists,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 36.4 (October 1977), 401–16.
- 15 John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), 323. Nor was this conceit of the landed interest in any contradiction with the so-called “industrial interest,” otherwise hyped as a counteracting mercantile force against the bulwarks of tradition. “The landed interest frustrated free-trade agrarian reform in England; but in Ireland landowners unnerved by agrarian agitation concluded a tacit alliance with ‘Manchester’ against their errant tenants.” Dewey, “Celtic Agrarian Legislation,” 33.
- 16 Henry Sumner Maine, *Dissertations on Early Law and Custom* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1886), 360–61. Or for that matter, one might heed Walter Bagehot, who declared, “Ideas which are paradoxes everywhere else in the world are accepted axioms here because of [Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*].” Walter Bagehot, *Economic Studies* (London: Longmans, Green, 1908).
- 17 Emphasis added, Arnold Toynbee, *Lectures on the Industrial Revolution of the Eighteenth Century in England* (London: Longmans, Green, 1980), 5–6.
- 18 *Ancient Laws of Ireland, Introduction to Sechus Mor*, vol. 1 (Dublin: HMSO/Alexander Thom, 1865). Dewey has drawn attention to the distinctly two-tiered arrangement of the first commission, the commissioners themselves drawn entirely from the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, and the editors composed of Gaelic-speaking, Irish Catholics who “served as intermediaries between the traditional Irish culture of their birth and the Anglo-Irish culture of their patrons.” The Fenian uprising in 1860 would significantly alter the terms of the *within* within this compact, but the Gladstone-led Irish Land Acts nonetheless significantly drew on the historical reconstructions of Celtic society triggered by the collation of the Brehon Laws. Dewey, “Celtic Agrarian Legislation,” 44.
- 19 Alexander Richey, *The Irish Land Laws* (London: Macmillan, 1880), 3.
- 20 Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1867), 12.
- 21 Richey, *The Irish Land Laws*, 4.
- 22 Ernest Renan, *Poetry of the Celtic Races*, trans. William G. Hutchinson (1896. Reprinted Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), ix.
- 23 Arnold, *On The Study*, 14; Renan, *Poetry of the Celtic Races*, 1–2.
- 24 Roger Casement, “The Romance of Irish History,” in Joseph Dunn and P.J. Lennox, eds, *The Glories of Ireland* (Washington, DC: Phoenix, 1914), 2.
- 25 “The past remains; but I cannot write academically of past events in the manner of a historian or scholar. I have not that knowledge or equipment or training; nor do I possess the

- mood for that kind of work. But [history] is not life, unless we can find the vital links between it and the present with all its conflicts and problems. [The discipline of history] is a kind of art for art's sake, without the passion and the urge to action which are the very stuff of life," wrote Jawaharlal Nehru in prison in his seminal book *The Discovery of India*. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (1946. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2010), 7.
- 26 I am borrowing from William McCormack's argument. William J. McCormack, *From Burke to Beckett: Ascendancy, Tradition and Betrayal in Literary History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994).
- 27 Quoted in Edward Engelberg, *The Vast Design: Patterns in W.B. Yeats's Aesthetic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 39.
- 28 Yeats, "Discoveries," in *Essays and Introductions*, 358.
- 29 W.B. Yeats, "Blood and the Moon" (1933), in *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (New York: Scribner Paperback Poetry, 1996), 237–8.
- 30 Jones, *Grammar of Ornament* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1868), 94.
- 31 George Bain, *Celtic Art* (1951. New York: Dover, 1973), 15.
- 32 Both the Coomaraswamy letters published in full as the imprimatur to Bain's book are revealing in Coomaraswamy's self-referentiality. "I would suggest that you look up certain of my references . . . Regarding your Alesund design, the two birds are correctly thought of as a symbol of friendship in the highest sense, that is to say of friendship between the inner and outer man . . . in the Rgveda and Mundaka Upanishad, they represent the universal and individualized selves (true self and Ego)—The resolution of internal conflict, or self-integration is the purpose of all true psychology." Bain, *Celtic Art*, 20.
- 33 Bain, *Celtic Art*, 21. Encompassed in this antagonism between copying and aboriginality is the significant history of institutional subsidence and subservience of Irish art and design pedagogy to the Department of Science and Art (DSA), formed in South Kensington immediately after the Great Exhibition. The history of the DSA's vast institutional network has been addressed elsewhere. See, amongst others, my own: Arindam Dutta, *The Bureaucracy of Beauty: Design in the Age of Its Global Reproducibility* (New York: Routledge, 2007). In the Irish context, that history would have to be qualified by way of the story of the School of Design in Dublin and its subjugation under the economically oriented diktats of the South Kensington cabal. See John Turpin, "The School of Design in Victorian Dublin," *Journal of Design History* 2 (1989), 243–56. For our particular context, it would be important to note that both Harry Clarke's training at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art, the gold medal awarded him by South Kensington and his subsequent remove to London as a young artist on the make implicitly retraces the intricate but strong institutional lines of influence within the multi-national South Kensington system. Likewise, Bain's disaffection with "copying" must be seen as a contention against the long history of that pedagogical subjugation, more abiding, as always, in the colony than in the metropole.
- 34 Bain, *Celtic Art*, 16.
- 35 Richard Redgrave, *On the Necessity of Principles in Teaching Design, Being an Address at the Opening of the Session of the Department of Science and Art, October 1853* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1853), 23.
- 36 Compare Coomaraswamy's invocation of *duo sunt in homine* to the following prescription by Christopher Dresser, acolyte of Owen Jones, and Professor of Artistic Botany at South Kensington, to his design students as the fundamental logic undergirding all patterns, whether in nature or artifice: "There are certain ornamental and geometric forms which may be found amidst all creation; thus, we may take an hexagon, with radii proceeding from the centre of its angles: we have it in the top view of the flower buds of most Endogens, we have it in many crystals, and we have it in animals . . . there is a unity in the artistic effects of plants, for monotony is inimical to all, and variety makes all more beautiful . . . These facts not only establish the existence of a unity between all the parts

- of a plant, but also the existence of a concord between the members of all plants, and between plants themselves." Christopher Dresser, *Unity in Variety as Deduced from the Vegetable Kingdom, being an attempt at developing the oneness which is discoverable in the habits, mode of growth, and principle of construction of all plants* (London: James S. Virtue, 1859), 158, 159, 162.
- 37 Philip C. Ritterbush, "Organic Form: Aesthetics and Objectivity in the Study of Form in the Life Sciences," in G.S. Rousseau, *Organic Form: The Life of an Idea* (London: Routledge, 1972), 32–3.
- 38 For more detail on this argument, see Dutta, "Architecture Upside Down: The Morphotropy of Value," in *The Bureaucracy of Beauty*.
- 39 Redgrave, *On the Necessity of Principles in Teaching Design*.
- 40 Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis," *Diacritics* 11.2 (Summer 1981), 3–25.
- 41 It is "valueless" to "merely copy," Bain says, the Pictish pictogram, this "great national art" can only be recuperated through an "understanding of the ingenious and simple mathematical basis of the art of their ancestors," by following a set of "important rules" wherein "each stage must be completed throughout the design before the next one is commenced." Bain, *Celtic Art*, 21.
- 42 Today we are better placed than ever to recoup this occult underpinning of the modern. For now, it may be important to point out that an extensive list of citations can be set up here referring to events off Irish coasts but pertaining to the same issues within the same period, a history beginning with Jung's (and later Freud's) embrace of the symbol within psychoanalytic theory, and the subsequent dyad posed by Lacan between the "imaginary" and the "symbolic." For the temper of Bain's book discerned above, ramifications of the symbol's modernizing element can be found, for instance, in the arguments about the implications of post-Kantian thought in Erwin Panofsky's *Perspective as Symbolic Form* of 1924–1925 and Ernst Cassirer's three-volume *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923–1929), where the "universal" imports of mathematics and geometry are investigated in terms of a "universal" cultural potency, realized through the attributes of the symbol. David Simpson has characterized Cassirer's interest in symbolism as thus defining him as a "'whole world/one world' theorist, believing in an original, formative power that energizes both natural and mathematical science and art, language and myth." See David Simpson, "A Positive Future," *London Review of Books* 31.6 (March 26, 2009). Also see Rosemary Haag Bletter, "The Interpretation of the Glass Dream: Expressionist Architecture and the History of the Glass Dream," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 40 (1981), 20–43; J.K. Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).
- 43 Think of the Picasso of 1907 and his *Les Femmes d'Alger*, which has similarly been described as a work where one perceives "little sense of represented three-dimensional space." See Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanations of Pictures* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 37.
- 44 Yeats, *Explorations*, quoted in Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals* (Winston-Salem, NC: Wake Forest University Press, 1984), 45.
- 45 Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, 45.
- 46 I borrow these terms from Harold Bloom. See *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); in general, also see the sections on Blake, Shelley, and *The Wanderings of Oisín* in Bloom, *Yeats* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).
- 47 W.B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight* (London: A.H. Bullen, 1893).
- 48 The definitions of subjecthood and freedom that emerged in the aftermath of the French and American revolution were not the only concepts of liberation that were released by their profuse social energies. Both of these authors belong to those liberational factions who, despite their unstinting allegiance to the French and American revolutions, repudiated the "liberal-radical" conceptions of the Enlightenment – the "rights-based" tradition of John Locke and Thomas Paine – perceiving the secular egalitarianism propounded by

- these proponents of freedom as itself a restriction of freedom. Their radicalism drew from a “mélange of blasphemy, millenarianism and sedition,” forming themselves into cults and semi-cults for whom the legalistic or constitutional articulation of the free “subject” censored or threatened to extinguish the passions, the subliminal or demiurgic inception of zeal, the ardor within the soul that was the mark of divinity or nature. Saree Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 21.
- 49 Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 130.
- 50 See Kurt Heinzelman, *The Economics of the Imagination* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980). Also Timothy Materer, *Modernist Alchemy: Poetry and the Occult* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 4.
- 51 Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 139–40.
- 52 In this sense, Blake and Yeats both misread the Cartesian universe as the Newtonian universe, quite missing out the strong and contradictory epistemological boundedness that Newton and his followers sought to impose on Enlightenment inquiry. See Keith Michael Baker’s essential *Condorcet: From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1975). And Yeats, for good measure, can be seen as inimical to the Blake who eulogized the mob and the French and American rebellions in the light of a “bubbling variety of radicalisms, often popular, unrespectable, semiliterate, or downright ‘dangerous,’ that drew on religious or at any rate mystical fate . . . ‘submerged millenarianism, built up through biblical allusions’ alongside Paine’s ‘sturdy rationalism.’” See Makdisi, *William Blake*, 21.
- 53 William Blake, Plate 14, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 120; also see Makdisi, *William Blake*, 43.
- 54 See Engelberg, *The Vast Design*; Helen Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline: Yeats and Lyric Form* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap / Harvard University Press, 2007).
- 55 Italics added. Vendler, *Our Secret Discipline*, 8–9.
- 56 The relationship of both Yeats and Beckett with various modernists in the visual arts has been extensively researched and recorded, and the analogies drawn by either between image and word in their respective formal domains remain a fertile area of study. See Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux, *Yeats and the Visual Arts* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), and Gordon S. Armstrong, *Samuel Beckett, W.B. Yeats, and Jack Yeats: Images and Words* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1990); for Beckett, see *Samuel Beckett: A Passion for Paintings* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 2006); Beckett, Duthuit, Putman, *Bram van Velde*; Anne Atik, *How It Was: A Memoir of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Shoemaker Hoard, 2005).
- 57 Jones, *Grammar of Ornament*, 148.
- 58 In this sense, the chiasmus can be seen as behaving in quite the role that the “S” curve had in Art Nouveau or the crystalline shapes occupied for the German Expressionism of the Gläserne Kette. See Bletter, “The Interpretation of the Glass Dream.”
- 59 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 163–4.
- 60 Armstrong, *Samuel Beckett*, 89.
- 61 Quoted in R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats*, vol. 2: *The Arch-Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 536.
- 62 Kumamoto Kenjiro, “Japan and Nandalal Bose in the Context of Modern Indian Art,” trans. Louise Allison Cort, in Sonya Rhie Quintanilla, ed., *Rhythms of India: The Art of Nandalal Bose* (San Diego, CA: San Diego Museum of Art).
- 63 See Athena S. Leoussi and Steven Grossby, eds, *Nationalism and Ethnosymbolism: History, Culture and Ethnicity in the Formation of Nations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

- 64 Benjamin spoke eloquently to this power of children's books: ". . . if anything remotely similar to the Platonic anamnesis actually exists, it would take place in the lives of children, for whom picture books are paradise. By remembering, they learn; what you put into their hands should have, insofar as human hands should have, insofar as human hand can impart it to paper, the color of paradise, just as a butterfly's wings have their patina . . . this tension with the messianic is the exclusive effect of genuine art, whose recipient learns not from memory alone but from the yearning that it satisfies too soon and therefore too slowly . . . For adults, the yearning for paradise is the yearning of yearnings. Not the yearning for fulfillment, but the yearning to be without yearning. . . ." Walter Benjamin, "Notes for a Study of the Beauty of Colored Illustrations in Children's Books (Reflections on Lyser), in *Selected Writings, 1913–1926* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1996), 264.
- 65 "Incline, O Maiden/ Thou Sorrow-laden/ Thy gracious countenance upon my pain," Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Bayard Taylor, illustrations by Harry Clarke (New York: Arden Book Company, 1925), 194.
- 66 See Dutta, "Infinite Justice: An Architectural Coda," in *The Bureaucracy of Beauty*.
- 67 See Charles Allen, *The Search for the Buddha: The Men Who Discovered India's Lost Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). See Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-Colonial India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
- 68 McCormack, *From Burke to Beckett*, 226.
- 69 Materer, *Modernist Alchemy*, 25.
- 70 Yeats and Tagore – both of them were born and die within four years of each other – are thus contemporaries in more senses than one; their respective investments into symbolism patently play out the apprehensions about revealed religion and its relationship to the modern. In the wake of the Symbolists, the Theosophists would churn this imperial traffic in subliminal communion and negative theology into a devotional froth: a haphazard mix of confused physics, loosely referenced psychological and physiological motives drawing from a smorgasbord of sacred texts, and most importantly, with the universal, pacificatory impulses of Buddhism at its center. Take for instance C.W. Leadbeater's collaboration with Annie Besant – the Irish Theosophist who became crucial to the Indian nationalist movement at the turn of the century – in their 1901 book *Thought Forms*, where certain colors and patterns are depicted as indicating discrete imprints of the intellect and the imagination. The canonizing ardor of Ananda Coomaraswamy – George Bain's interlocutor – could be offered as a scholastic counterpart moving in the opposite direction. For that matter, there is the entire school of Irish Orientalists, Sydney Owenson, Thomas Moore, in addition to other figures around Trinity College, that round out the scene here between Ireland and India, that comprise an intense traffic in conceptions of form, color psychologies, theosophies, style, and figure, recounting the history of which would be belaboring the point. More important is the manner in which, in so many ways, Celtic and Indian come to operate interchangeably as forms of structured reference to the unstructured terrain of the imagination. In this sense, the *Eve of St. Agnes* window offers us less a lesson in "influence" between different cultures as the interchangeability of symbol.
- 71 Gabriel Cooney and Peter C. Woodman have written at length of the undeclared politics in the archaeological establishment at the time of the Chapel's commission. See Gabriel Cooney, "Theory and Practice in Irish Archaeology"; and Peter C. Woodman, "Who Possesses Tara?: Politics in Archeology in Ireland," in Peter J. Ucko, *Theory in Archaeology: A World Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
- 72 For a broad history of the influence of the *gesamtkunstwerk* concept see Juliet Koss, *Modernism after Wagner* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
- 73 Quoted in Virginia Teehan and Elizabeth Wincott Heckett, ed., *The Honan Chapel: A Golden Vision* (Cork: University College Cork, 2004), 7.
- 74 *The Honan Chapel*, 166–7.

- 75 In placing Clarke in the camp of the late-nineteenth-century Symbolists, Nicola Gordon Bowe has described him as a hyper-aesthetic persona quite like Joyce's Stephen Daedalus, inclined to the "pallid, ghastly-good-taste-ecclesiastical design" of an era immersed in Synaesthetic decadence and morbid dandyism, thus bringing the Celtic revival close to its avant-garde counterparts on the continent. And yet, Clarke was hardly a man possessed of the kind of self-destructive aestheticism that animated the output of thinkers such as Baudelaire and Nietzsche. Munch's *Scream the Eve of St. Agnes* is manifestly not.
- 76 Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, 38.
- 77 Samuel Beckett, "bon bon il est un pays," from *Six Poems, 1947–1949*, in *Collected Poems in English and French* (New York: Grove Press, 1977); trans. Philip Nikolayev, "all right all right there's a land," in *Poetry* 141.5 (February 2008), 383.
- 78 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Second Course, "The Concept of Nature: 1957–1958—Animality, the Human Body, and the Passage to Culture," in *Nature, Course Notes from the Collège de France*, notes by Dominique Séglaard, trans. Robert Vallier (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 150.
- 79 See the entire third section, "Words about Painters," in Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1984).
- 80 About the two van de Velde brothers, Beckett wrote: "For what remains to be represented if the essence of the object is to escape representation? There remains [*sic*] the conditions of this avoidance. These conditions will take one of two forms, according to the subject. One will way: I cannot see the object in order to represent it, because it is what it is. The other: I cannot see the object in order to represent it, because I am what I am. There have always been these two kinds of artists, these two kinds of impediment, the object-impediment, the eye-impediment. Geer van Velde is an artist of the first kind (in my stumbling opinion), Bram van Velde of the second. Their painting is an analysis of a state of privation." Beckett, *Disjecta*, 136.
- 81 Atik, *How It Was*, 29.

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5 Afterword

Kathleen James-Chakraborty

On November 14, 2012 a photograph of a radiantly smiling raven-haired woman appeared on the front page of the *Irish Times*, Dublin's newspaper of record.¹ Gold earrings, two intricate necklaces, the edges of a brocade sari, and a matching blouse set off her beautifully made up brown face (Figure 5.1). The small diamond that sparkled in one of her front teeth was echoed by the crystal set into her-black framed *bindi*, the dot she wore on her forehead just above her nose, and another at her hairline. Her obvious youth and happiness matched what was for most Irish readers her equally obvious exoticism. Although most readers had probably never encountered Savita Halappanavar, a dentist who had immigrated to Ireland from India, within days almost everyone in the country knew her name (although they found "Savita" much easier to remember or pronounce than "Halappanavar"), and that she had died of sepsis following the refusal of the medical staff at Galway University Hospital to abort the fetus she was miscarrying as long as it had a heartbeat. On July 30, 2013, nearly nine months later, the Republic of Ireland's constitutional prohibition on abortion had been slightly but significantly eroded, with "terminations" to use the term preferred on the island, allowed when the life of the mother is at risk, including when that risk is of suicide, never an issue in this case.²

The subject of this chapter, concluding a book on the role of India in art in Ireland, is not Irish abortion policy but the impact of a single photograph. Halappanavar's death on October 28, 2012 has hardly been the only significant news story in Ireland in recent years; only two years earlier for instance, the country had had to be bailed out by the European Central Bank, the European Commission, and the International Monetary Fund. No other important event of the last several years, including even the visit of Queen Elizabeth II in 2011, was as closely tied, however, to a particular image, and probably no other image published in this period is as familiar to so large an Irish audience. Halappanavar's death also had an enormous impact upon Indian awareness of Ireland, although the photograph, because not obviously foreign there, played a lesser role there.

The photograph of Halappanavar was not only a prominent feature of news articles on her death but a crucial image in the debate it opened up about the country's abortion policy. It was reproduced in the at first hastily arranged and later more carefully choreographed public protests advocating changes in Ireland's abortion laws that would protect the life of the mother, as well in many news articles published at home and abroad about Ireland's changing abortion policies in the months that followed. It operated



Figure 5.1 Savita Halappanavar, courtesy of Irish Times

effectively, helping to prompt a sea change in the opinions of the Irish general public as well as of many politicians from across the political spectrum. Although some of this had to do with particulars of the case that could not be communicated visually, much of the transformation can be credited to the impact of the image itself. That Halappanavar was a happily married professional with a planned pregnancy, and delighted that she was expecting a daughter required words.³ What the photograph communicated was that she was not ethnically Irish, was quite possibly neither Catholic nor Protestant, was relatively prosperous, and, above all, had a magnetic smile that suggested that she was a very likable and thus much mourned young woman.

The photograph simultaneously emphasized Halappanavar's difference from the mainstream of Irish society and the degree to which she was likely to be a good fit in her

adopted country. The outcry that following the publication of the details of Halappanavar's death and the accompanying photograph was unusual in the broader European context for the degree to which the majority of Irish identified with the immigrant rather than with their own medical establishment. This was particularly notable because the hands of the staff treating her had been tied by an amendment to the Irish Constitution passed as recently as 1983 by a two-thirds majority.⁴ At a time when after years of economic crisis many Europeans viewed immigrants with increasing apprehension, the Irish ability to see in Halappanavar someone who despite differences in dress and skin color was fundamentally like themselves distinguished this debate from others across the continent, in which newcomers were more often criticized for the degree to which they remained distinct from their host society.⁵

Comparing the iconic photography of her with Thomas Hickey's eighteenth-century portrait of an Indian woman allows one to gauge the change between imperial and contemporary relationships between India and Ireland. Each shows a beautiful young woman cloaked in salmon-colored silk and bedecked with golden jewelry. Hickey's portrait, as Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby makes clear earlier in this volume, is unusually respectful for the time because of the degree to which it shows its subject as self-possessed rather than as the embodiment of exotic sensuality. Yet the sense of detachment that imbues this portrait with such dignity is very different from the confidence and joy with which Halappanavar beams out at the viewer. This is a woman meant to be active not passive. Nor was there anything unusual about Jemdanees's death in childbirth; it could as easily have happened in Galway as Calcutta. That an outgoing modern woman would face the same fate was by 2012, however, no longer acceptable in either. Significant and at times surprising cultural differences between Indian and Irish societies were flushed out into the open following Halappanavar's death, but they were not the same ones that had condemned Jemdanees to a subordinate social position within both halves of colonial Calcuttan society. It was now the European nation's turn to be labeled superstitious.⁶

Although not a work of art, the photograph of Halappanavar has had an impact upon Irish society that far exceeds that played by any Indian work of art present in Ireland or by any reference to India in Irish art or architecture. Its effectiveness reminds us of how much images matter, and what qualities they communicate independently of words. This is not necessarily because they can transcend cultural difference, although at times they do, but above all because we can connect with them at a level that is viscerally psychological as well as intellectual. The portrait of Halappanavar released to the public to announce what had been lost through her death successfully shamed her host society because it conveyed so much information about her so efficiently, and because she looked so little like the victim she eventually became.

Immigrants and Emigrants

Ireland has long been a nation of emigrants; particularly since the Famine in the 1840s millions have left the island, above all for Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Many more people of Irish descent currently live off the island than

on it. Since the bottom fell out of the economy in 2008, emigration, which had appeared to be staunch after a substantial exodus during the 1980s, resumed once again. At the same time, however, Ireland has become a nation of immigrants, with talent from around the world attracted to the Republic during the boom years of the Celtic Tiger of the 1990s and early 2000s. The Indian community is small, but – unlike its counterpart in the United Kingdom – disproportionately professional, with most employed in information technology, as was Halappanavar's husband Praveen, health care, as she herself was, or finance. Far less visible than the Poles and other Eastern Europeans who flooded into the country following the expansion of the European Union, Indians and other South Asians have nonetheless been part of the transformation of Ireland into something far less insular than it was throughout the often impoverished and at times also politically unstable twentieth century.

There is nothing new, however, about the presence of Indians in Ireland or of their integration into the Irish middle class. While most Indians in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland were undoubtedly household staff brought home by Irishmen and women whose families had served the empire in the military, clergy, civil service, or, less often, as business people or educators, there were occasional, often distinguished, exceptions. As Barry Finbarr Flood describes in the Foreword to this volume, as early as 1784 Dean Mahomet emigrated to Cork from Bengal under the patronage of Godfrey Evan Baker, the son of a former mayor of the city. Mahomet resided in Cork for a quarter century before moving to London, where he opened Britain's first Indian restaurant and helped introduce the word "shampoo" into the English language. The bathing establishment he established in 1814 in Brighton with his wife proved as fashionable and exotic as the Pavilion erected there by the Prince of Wales. As kings, George IV and his brother William IV were the most distinguished of Mahomet's large clientele. Although Mahomet only became famous once he moved to England, his years in Cork provided him with an understanding of European society necessary for his eventual success in Brighton.⁷

Nor was Mahomet unique in meeting with considerable social acceptance despite his foreign origins. Take the case, for instance, of Louisa Harriet Arnold, the half-Indian granddaughter of the notorious American general Benedict Arnold, who during the American Revolution defected to the British. After her father's death in 1828, she accompanied her uncle by marriage, Pownell Phipps, back to Oaklands, his house outside of Clonmel in County Tipperary. Seventeen years later she married Alan Bailey, a British architect. In order to obscure her complex origins, her family name was first changed to Adams.⁸

The last decades before independence saw visiting Indians have an important impact upon Dublin's cultural life, as well as absorbing key lessons from local nationalists. In 1885 Mohini Chatterjee arrived in the city to establish a local lodge of the Theosophical Society. He returned two years later to his native Calcutta to practice law after helping to introduce the young William Butler Yeats to Indian religious philosophy and mysticism.⁹ A generation later Varahagiri Venkata Giri, the fourth President of India, came to Ireland in 1913 to study law at University College Dublin. He was expelled following the Easter Rising, after having been in contact with at least some of its organizers.¹⁰

The independence of first Ireland and then India, along with Ireland's sluggish economic growth across much of the twentieth century, kept the size of the Indian

community on the island quite small, however. For decades, most Indians in Ireland were students or doctors on temporary visas; only a few, such as the father of the Fine Gael politician Leo Varadkar, settled permanently. Ireland finally became more attractive to Indians during the 1990s, when its economy became one of Europe's most dynamic. By 2012 the Ireland India Council, founded in 2002, estimated that there were 25,000 Indians living on the island, almost all in the Republic and roughly two-thirds of them in and around Dublin.¹¹

For most Irish people looking at the photograph of Halappanavar, none of this history mattered. Instead, what they saw was an attractive young woman who had lost her life far from home. And there were few countries in Europe in which there would be as much sympathy for a young woman who had died tragically after setting out to find better opportunities in a foreign land.

Almost each member of the Irish audience for the photograph had family abroad, and at a time when young people were leaving, especially for Australia and New Zealand in large numbers, the sense of identification with Halappanavar's parents, Akhmedevi and Andanappa Yalagi, while not always translating into shame, certainly prompted considerable regret.¹² Just over a month before Halappanavar's death Jill Meagher, an Irish-woman living in Australia who was only two years younger than Halappanavar, was raped and murdered in a case that garnered considerable attention in both countries, especially in the six days between her disappearance and the location of her corpse. Many of those who mourned Halappanavar without having known her could only too well imagine what it must have been like for the Yalagis, who had returned from Galway to India after she was hospitalized, to have agonized over a preventable death that took place while they were thousands of kilometers away. Regardless of one's position on abortion, most were uncomfortable that the Yalagis were enduring the worst nightmare of so many Irish families.¹³

The prosperity conveyed by Halappanavar's bejeweled visage and richly embroidered silk sari and matching blouse also mattered. This was not a young woman in some kind of furtive distress. Instead she appeared confident and poised. Although in fact it showed her excited about her wedding celebration, it could just as well have conveyed her joy about impending motherhood, and the particular pleasure she took, in contravention to stereotypes about Indians, that she was expecting a daughter, for whom she was clearly well able to provide both economically and emotionally. In Ireland, a culture which enjoys dressing up, but where displays of gold are typically more modest than in India, her social status may have been read as even higher than it was (her parents lived comfortably in a small villa in Belgaum; her father was a retired executive engineer with the Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited).¹⁴ The photograph also made clear that she was someone who in normal circumstances would have been able to make the journey to the United Kingdom, which along with the Netherlands is where most Irish women seeking an abortion for reasons that range from contraceptive failure to serious fetal abnormalities, routinely travel.

Indeed, some of the informal chatter about the case was in part about whether or not, as outsiders, the Halappanavars had known enough about what to do in such a situation.¹⁵ Moreover the regret that something so terrible had happened to someone else's

child in a land that was supposed to be a far safer one than her own in which to give birth was only exacerbated by the uniformly terrible international press Ireland received following the publication of Halappanavar's death.¹⁶ Details of this coverage were widely reported in Ireland itself; the presence of so many recent Irish emigrants abroad, where many undoubtedly had to answer questions about the case and the country's abortion laws, unquestionably deepened their domestic impact.¹⁷ Ireland had to confront both whether it was a country to which highly-skilled immigrants would chose to come and how their culture would be received when their own children worked abroad. Both concerns helped shape the debate that followed.

Exoticism

International news reports of Halappanavar's death focused on the fact that abortion remained illegal in Ireland, a situation that put the country at odds with most European and English-speaking countries, if not all of Latin America (in India abortion has been legal since 1971).¹⁸ In this context it was Irish law, rather than Halappanavar, that was exotic. For this reason the photograph of her that was so transformative in Ireland played a much smaller role in the international discussion of the case.¹⁹ Even before Halappanavar's status as a foreigner ensured that both the Irish public and the government had to contend with how their laws were perceived abroad, however, the photograph that had accompanied the initial news story served as a visual rallying cry. Within hours of its publication, it appeared on banners and placards calling for changes in the law (Figure 5.2). Here its



Figure 5.2 Protests, Dublin, November 2012, courtesy of *Irish Times*

effectiveness was tied in part to the fact that it hinted that Halappanavar was, as her husband and father repeatedly made clear, neither Catholic nor Protestant, and thus was located outside the religious and also political equation that had generated medical decisions so at odds not only with the wishes of the patient and her husband but also with international norms.

That Ireland was an international outlier was perhaps clearest to the embarrassed government officials charged in the weeks before Ireland assumed the presidency of the European Union with addressing the concern voiced publically by their Indian counterparts and probably privately by many Europe diplomats and civil servants. Indian news coverage and diplomatic actions, both widely reported in Ireland, caused particular concern at a time when India's rapid economic growth made it increasingly attractive to a variety of Irish enterprises.

Negative publicity about the case dominated an entire 24-hour news cycle on many of India's round-the-clock cable news channels (there are a relatively large number of these because they exist in all of the country's major languages).²⁰ The single worst headline blared, "Ireland Murders Pregnant Dentist."²¹ Indian reaction included summoning the Indian ambassador to the Republic of Ireland, Debashish Chakravarti, back to New Delhi for talks.²² Among the many reasons that the Irish government took Halappanavar's death so seriously and that Foreign Minister Eamon Gilmore, the leader of the Labour Party, almost immediately pledged to change its laws, were fears of a further breach in relations with India.²³

In particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government authorities were worried about efforts underway to increase the share of Indians studying abroad who came to Ireland. Just over a week after news of Halappanavar's death blanketed the front pages of newspapers in both countries, the Minister of State for Training and Skills, Ciarán Cannon, led a delegation comprised of 60 academics from a total of 16 Irish universities and institutes of technologies to New Delhi, Bangalore, and Mumbai. The goal was to increase Ireland's 0.5 percent market share (an estimated 1,000 students) of this valuable market.²⁴ Halappanavar's death threatened to wipe out entirely the dividend expected from the prominent role Trinity College had played in the blockbuster action film *Ek Tha Tiger*, which had been released the previous August 15, on the sixty-fifth anniversary of Indian independence. Starring Salman Khan as an Indian variant of James Bond, large parts of the spy thriller, larded in typical Bollywood style with exotic dance numbers, had been shot in Dublin.

The Irish government was particularly anxious to involve medics of South Asian origin in the public investigation into Halappanavar's death. Five days after the news story broke, the Irish Health Services Administration named Sir Sabaratnam Arulkumaran, a prominent British obstetrician and a native of Sri Lanka, as chair of the inquiry. Arulkumaran made clear that the refusal to hasten a miscarriage by giving her an abortion was not the only cause of Halappanavar's demise, although it almost certainly would have saved her life. Halappanavar had not been monitored properly as her condition deteriorated nor was she properly treated for the septicemia that eventually resulted in multiple organ failure.²⁵ These details, however, were published only on June 13, 2013, months after the initial publicity surrounding the case, which instead focused on her husband

Praveen's declaration that they had been told that she could not have a termination as long as a fetal heartbeat was present because Ireland was a Catholic country.²⁶

Details of Ireland's economic ties to India and of the way in which Halappanavar was or was not treated properly for septicemia meant very little to the thousands of people who gathered already almost spontaneously on the evening of November 14 in front of Leinster House in Dublin and in many more carefully organized demonstrations afterwards in cities across the country to protest both Halappanavar's death and Ireland's restrictive abortion laws.²⁷ The personalization of the abortion issue through the widely published photograph of Halappanavar proved to benefit only one side, however, in what remained an acrimonious and highly charged debate. It was a ubiquitous presence on the posters and placards carried for months to come by those advocating a change in policy. A stylized black outline proved particularly graphically powerful; it was often accompanied by the slogan "Never again."²⁸ Those opposing any change in the law struggled unsuccessfully to focus on abstract principles or placards showing a healthy white mother and baby emblazoned with the slogan "Love them both."²⁹ Even this cheerful image failed when placed in direct competition with Halappanavar's megawatt smile.³⁰

Above all the photograph placed Halappanavar outside the religions whose views had determined abortion policy in both jurisdictions on the island. The first abortion clinic on the island opened in Belfast only days before Halappanavar's death.³¹ Even before Halappanavar's personal piety became widely known, because of her photograph the discussion of abortion in Ireland ceased to be contained within the opposition of Catholic and Protestant or Catholic and unbeliever that had set the tone for more than three decades. Many northern Protestant religious leaders are as opposed to abortion as their Catholic counterparts, although other Christian denominations on the island, especially Anglicans, are more accepting, especially in cases where the mother's life is in danger. Nonetheless, a series of referenda held in the Republic in 1983, 1992, and 2002, all of which confirmed the state's opposition to abortion, were widely viewed as evidence of the key role that Catholicism continued to play in the country's politics and policies.³² The island's Catholic bishops, led by Cardinal Sean Brady, actively opposed the legislation passed in the wake of Halappanavar's death.³³

Although there is a significant Christian community in India, many of whom are Catholics, most Irish observers correctly discerned that Halappanavar was neither Protestant nor Catholic. Indeed she and her family were Lingayats, adherents of a monotheistic branch of Hinduism that emphasizes the worship of Shiva. Christians in Kerala trace their origins to the arrival of St. Thomas, one of the 12 apostles, in 52 C.E.; the written records confirm the presence of Christianity in Southern India as early as the sixth century. The Portuguese colonization of Goa in 1510 created an outpost of Catholicism. In 1542 St. Francis Xavier, an early disciple of Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, arrived in Goa, which served for the next decade as the base for his missionary voyages to present day Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, and China. The Irish have played a significant role in the development of Catholicism in India; Loreto schools for girls, for instance, are among the most prestigious in both countries, and Sister M. Cyril Mooney, an Irish nun, has been honored by the Indian government for her work

educating poor children in Kolkata.³⁴ Today Christianity is India's third most practiced religion, after Hinduism and Islam.

The public distress in India over Halappanavar's death was triggered in part over the staunchly secular nature of government in a country with many religious minorities and by the more circumspect position Indian Catholic authorities thus take on matters like abortion. Halappanavar, her husband and her parents were clearly stunned that Catholic dogma regulated the treatment of adherents of other faiths and the citizens of other countries.³⁵ In a statement perhaps designed as much to spare Indian Catholicism from criticism as to condemn what had happened to Halappanavar, Rev Fr Dominique Imanuel, the spokesperson for the Catholic Archdiocese of Delhi, declared, "In a case when the mother's life is in danger, save her life and while saving the mother if something happens to the baby in the womb then no doctor or mother should be held responsible as the intention was to save a life and not to end a life."³⁶

Back in Ireland it was clear from the beginning that the news of Halappanavar's death had radically changed the terms of the discussion on abortion. Although no one talked about it, the sartorial modesty conveyed by this photograph, and indeed by all the informal snapshots of Halappanavar released to the press in the months that followed, played a role in achieving this. Much of the Irish discomfort with abortion stems from the lingering impact of the fusion of strict middle-class morality and Catholic nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century. Halappanavar had often been photographed comfortably arm in arm with her husband, which was a quiet indication that she was a modern woman, far from the strictures on public displays of affection that had governed many Indian women of her mother's generation. At the same time, the fact that there were also no photographs of her in the public realm that would not have satisfied the social mores of even the most conservative corner of the island at least a half a century earlier helped to ensure that the public discussion of the case, unlike earlier ones that had involved rape, remained firmly focused on maternity rather than sex.³⁷

In consequence, there was nothing hushed or embarrassed about this discussion of abortion, as the woman at the center of it, rather than being anonymous, now had a face, and a very lovely one at that. Many politicians had trouble keeping abreast of the dramatic shift in public opinion (a number described their views as "evolving"). The majority of the electorate favored a new law and the government quickly committed to passing it, even though the task of doing so proved to take longer than originally anticipated. Although opponents of spelling out that abortion was to be allowed to save the life of the mother, including when the threat came from suicide, were distressed at the lapse in the country's stellar record of maternal health care that resulted in Halappanavar's demise, they criticized associating the two. They rightly pointed out that when Halappanavar began to miscarry, her doctors did not realize that her life was in danger. In the end, however, their struggle to convince the majority that the issue was an abstract matter of ethical principal, rather than the lives of individual women carrying wanted children, failed.³⁸

Halappanavar's death offered those Irish women and men already committed to changing the country's abortion policies the perfect storm. The photograph of the radiant young Indian bride played a major role in convincing their neighbors that the life of the

mother mattered most. Exoticism cut two ways. It transformed Halappanavar into a victim of policies that were not conceived with her in mind at the same time that it made a rather stunned Irish public all too aware of how anomalous their laws were in relation to international best practice. Her death highlighted the geographical, cultural, and religious distance between Ireland and India, even as it helped collapse it through shared identification with a promising young woman.

Images

There is a widespread sense among contemporary intellectuals that images matter in our media-saturated society more than they have at any point since the rise of mass literacy.³⁹ Certainly the photograph of Halappanavar circulated widely through the web in addition to being disseminated through printed newspapers and printed and stenciled placards and banners, not to mention televised coverage of her death and the discussion of abortion that it triggered across Ireland. And yet little about its ubiquity or effectiveness appeared to derive from the use of the latest technology. Indeed the portrait of her smiling visage was as different from most widely distributed photographs that have come to stand for particular events, and for that matter from the standard celebrity shots that are another staple of our highly mediated world, as it was from the works of art that continue to work their magic largely within a museum setting. Moreover, it remained unusual within Irish cultural history in which words and songs rather than images have typically captured the essence of important events, although this began already to change during the Troubles.

The relationship between what the photograph of Halappanavar showed and why it mattered was very different from that in most iconic news photographs, such as that of John F. Kennedy's son saluting at his father's funeral, of a woman crying over the body of a student shot by the National Guard at Kent State, or of a naked girl and her fellow Vietnamese villagers fleeing an American napalm attack.⁴⁰ All four resonate so effectively in part because of the nearly universal comprehensibility of what was being shown, but only Halappanavar's does not depict what is actually newsworthy. The widely published photograph did not invade her privacy. Moreover it encouraged a far greater degree of emotional identification.

Similarly, although Halappanavar's image became the ubiquitous face of an important political debate, it remained detached from the cult of celebrity. She never courted fame, although by all accounts she was an outgoing person and talented performer. Nor was the scandal attached to her name related in any way to her behavior, which remained completely beyond reproach. People who identified with her feared that they or their wives, sisters, daughters, or friends might share her fate; they did not otherwise crave to be her or take vicarious pleasure in either her achievements or an all-too-human fall from grace, the key narratives that drive much reporting about the owners of other widely recognized faces.

Like many news photographs, the portrait of Halappanavar, although taken with obvious care, is clearly not a work of art. It is thus a very different kind of artifact from the Mughal and Rajput miniatures in the Chester Beatty, Hickey's portrait in the National

Gallery of Ireland, or Harry Clarke's *Eve of St. Agnes* window on display at the Hugh Lane. Carefully composed for possible display within a circle of family and friends, it was nonetheless not aesthetically ambitious nor was it originally made for international distribution. Its eventually considerable impact derived largely (but not entirely) from the back story attached to it, from what happened to its subject as much as what it showed.

Precisely because it was not a work of art, however, the photograph of the smiling Indian dentist acquired a cultural resonance, even power, that none of the other works addressed in this collection have had. Whether distributed through the print media, through television, or through the internet, it entered most Irish households at least temporarily and imprinted itself on more Irish memories than most of the art displayed in the impressive collections of the country's museums. And images based upon it were repeatedly, over a period of months, also a forceful presence in the streets of Irish cities, especially Dublin and Galway, in a way that even the most famous objects housed in the national cultural institutions typically are not. Eventually, because it is so key to the story of Ireland in the 2010s, versions of it, and perhaps some of the original placards and banners, are likely to be displayed in Irish museums, but to illustrate the country's history rather than as works of art in their own right.

W.J.T. Mitchell tells us that "Images are not just passive entities that coexist with their human hosts . . . They change the way we think and see and dream. They refunction our memories and imaginations, brining new criteria and new desires into the world."⁴¹ The same is true of works of art, but as the development of the field of visual studies over the course of the last decades of the twentieth century has shown, the central role that images play in the modern media tells us as at least as much about a society as its art, not least because it is often, as here, far more broadly accessed. *The Eve of St. Agnes* may be one of Ireland's most popular works of art, but its details, even when reproduced on websites, posters, and note cards, remain outside the daily experience of even most of those who know it well.⁴² That photographs and moving film, television, and video footage remain representational when for a century much art has been abstract has also heightened their impact. The reductive images of Halappanavar, a stenciled graphic based on her photograph used on so many posters and placards, was meaningful only to those who recognized it as shorthand for the original photograph.

The photograph of Halappanavar did indeed change many Irish minds, but it remained anomalous in that regard. With the crucial exception of the Troubles, relatively few of the key events of the last century of Irish history are remembered above all through photographs, not least because so many of them, such as the execution of the leaders of the 1916 uprising, occurred, often purposefully, out of public view. Even the greatest cataclysm in modern Irish history, the Great Famine, was chronicled in only a handful of images by the then new illustrated press.⁴³ Only perhaps the lockout of 1913 is strongly associated with a particular photograph, and that in part because the classic silhouette of James Larkin addressing his supporters eventually served as the basis of Oisín Kelly's sculpture of him, erected in O'Connell Street in 1977.⁴⁴

Highly mediated images of historical events are a commonplace today in societies around the world, but the photograph of Halappanavar stands out in both the Irish and

the international context for the way in which putting the face on an issue that had been secretive and anonymous transformed how people thought about it. No work of art connecting India to Ireland has had the same impact upon contemporary Irish society, but neither has any other kind of art. And nothing has done more in recent years to make people in Ireland think about India and the Indians who live amidst them.

Conclusion

The story of Savita Halappanavar's smile illustrates the ways in which two countries, one large and one small, located nearly half way around the world from one another, continue to have an impact upon one another's culture in ways that are expressed though as well as mediated by images and objects. These include but are by no means limited to works of art. Ireland's attitudes towards abortion changed because of a cultural confrontation that stemmed only partly from the fact that globalization has fostered ever greater economic ties between disparate corners of the globe. The law changed, however, not to make Ireland more attractive to Indian students and highly-skilled immigrants such as the Halappanavars, but because a majority of the Irish citizenry saw in a photograph of the face of Halappanavar a woman whose death they regretted. They did not want more women to suffer as she had, and more families, regardless of where they were from, to experience a preventable loss.

Complex bonds created out of the shared experience of empire tie contemporary Ireland and India together, but these no longer define the entire postcolonial relationship. Instead it was a nuanced sense of a common humanity, even more than of appearing provincial or worse to a major Asian power, that accounted for the transformative effect of Halappanavar's death. Until Halappanavar's death, Indian motifs spiced up the offerings on view in both Dublin museums and the countryside around Dromana; much of their power resided in the powerful contrast they created from the mainstream of Irish art and architecture as well as the art in Irish collections. Halappanavar's death linked the visual culture of the two places, whose 24-hour news channels and the internet news outlets overlapped, more forcefully than art ever had. The cause for that overlap was a tragic case of cultural difference, but for those working to overcome such differences, the hope remains that far more cheery chapters in the relationship between the two places remain to be written.

Notes

- 1 Kitty Holland, "Woman 'Denied a Termination' Dies in Hospital," *Irish Times*, November 14, 2012. The most complete account of Halappanavar's life and death and its consequences is Kitty Holland, *Savita: The Tragedy That Shook a Nation* (Dublin: Transworld Ireland, 2013). The photograph on the front page was a slightly cropped version of the one that would become ubiquitous in press coverage of Halappanavar's death.
- 2 Henry McDonald, "Abortion Becomes Legal in Ireland in Certain Circumstances," *The Guardian*, July 30, 2013.
- 3 "'I Will Fight until Ireland Changes Its Abortion Law,'" *The Hindu*, November 16, 2012.
- 4 <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1983/en/act/cam/0008/print.html>, consulted January 20, 2014.

- 5 For a historical study of a counter-example see Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling and Anton Kaes, eds, *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955–2005* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).
- 6 “Religious Restrictions Killed My Daughter: Savita’s Dad,” *Times of India*, October 29, 2013.
- 7 Michael H. Fisher, ed., *The Travels of Dean Mahomet: An Eighteenth-Century Journal* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).
- 8 Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2011) 339. See also Pownell Phipps, *The Life of Colonel Pownell Phipps* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1894). Phipps himself descended from English settlers in St. Kitts in the West Indies; his maternal grandmother was reputedly a Circassian princess, whom his grandfather, an Irish wine merchant, had met in Spain. On his father’s side Phipps’s great-great-great-uncle Constantine served as Lord Chancellor of Ireland from 1710 to 1714.
- 9 R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life*, vol. 1: *The Apprentice Mage, 1865–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 47–8, 85, 102, 469–70.
- 10 Surjit Mansingh, *A Historical Dictionary of India* (New Delhi: Vision Books, 2005), 240.
- 11 <http://www.irelandindiacouncil.ie/community.php>, consulted December 30, 2013.
- 12 Fintan O’Toole, “We’re Brilliant at Plan B—What We Need to Do Some Work on Is Plan A,” *Irish Times*, December 31, 2013, reports that 200,000 people had left the country since 2008.
- 13 Like her husband, Halappanavar’s father was outspoken and articulate about her case, stating in one interview, “God is merciful. He does not want women to die. Religion should have nothing to do with medicine.” “Savita Halappanavar’s Parents Still Wait for Justice,” *Mid-Day*, June 25, 2013.
- 14 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2233341/Savita-Halappanavar-Husband-watched-pregnant-wife-died-Irish-doctors-refused-perform-abortion.html>, consulted 16 September 2014.
- 15 I heard this opinion voiced multiple times in the immediate aftermath of the publication of the story.
- 16 Irish supporters of abortion restrictions often trumpeted that Ireland had the world’s lowest maternal death rate (see, for instance http://prolifecampaign.ie/?page_id=788, consulted December 30, 2013), but already in 2010 the CIA listed it as being tied with Spain, the Netherlands, and Slovakia for the twelfth lowest out of 184 countries surveyed. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2223rank.html>, consulted December 30, 2013.
- 17 Una Mullally, “Savita Halappanavar,” *Irish Times* blog, November 14, 2012, <http://www.irishtimes.com/blogs/poplife/2012/11/14/savitalhalappanavar/>, consulted December 30, 2013.
- 18 <http://worldabortionlaws.com/map/>, consulted December 31, 2013.
- 19 Prominent early coverage of the case unaccompanied by the photograph of Halappanavar included Ben Quinn, “Scandal in Ireland as Woman Dies in Galway after ‘Being Denied Abortion,’” *The Guardian*, November 14, 2012, and Dara Doyle and Colm Heatley, “Death of Indian Woman Forces Ireland to Face Abortion Taboo,” *Bloomberg Business Week*, November 16, 2012.
- 20 The headline of Vandita Agrawal, “Ireland Murders Pregnant Indian Dentist,” *India Times*, November 14, 2012, captures the tone of much of the Indian reaction. “Parents Slam Irish Laws after Woman Dies,” *The Hindu*, November 15, 2012, includes quotes from the Indian television coverage. See also Emily Alpert, “Outrage in India over Death of Woman in Ireland,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 15, 2012.
- 21 Agrawal, “Ireland Murders Pregnant Dentist.”
- 22 “Salman Khurshid Closely Follows Developments in Savita Halappanavar Death Case,” *Times of India*, November 18, 2012.

- 23 "Eamon Gilmore Calls for 'Legal Clarity' on Abortion," RTÉ, November 15, 2012, <http://www.rte.ie/news/2012/1115/345726-savita-halappanavar-university-hospital-galway-hse-x-case/>, consulted December 31, 2013.
- 24 <http://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/news/pressreleases/2012-press-releases/minister-cannon-leads-largest-ever-irish-education-delegation-to-india.html>, consulted December 31, 2013.
- 25 Sabaratnam Arulkumaran, Cora McCaughan, Cathriona Molloy, Brian Marsh, Geraldine Keohane, James Walker, Mary Horgan, "Investigation of Incident 50278 from Time of Patient's Self Referral to Hospital on the 21st of October 2012 to the Patient's Death on the 28th of October, 2012," Health Service Executive, June 13, 2013, <http://hse.ie/eng/services/news/nimtreport50278.pdf>, consulted December 31, 2013.
- 26 Holland, "Woman 'Denied a Termination' Dies in Hospital." See also Paul Cullen and Kitty Holland, "Midwife Manager 'Regrets' Using 'Catholic Country' Remark to Savita Halappanavar," *Irish Times*, April 10, 2013.
- 27 Holland, *Savita*, 94–109.
- 28 "Organisers 'Delighted' with Turnout for Action on X Rally," *thejournal.ie*, March 4, 2013, consulted January 4, 2014.
- 29 As shown in photographs of the rally held on January 19, 2013. <http://pledgeprolife.com/vigil-for-life/>, consulted January 4, 2014.
- 30 As shown in photographs of the rally held on January 19, 2013. <http://pledgeprolife.com/vigil-for-life/>, consulted January 4, 2014.
- 31 Shawn Pogatchnik, "Ireland's First Abortion Clinic Opens, Uniting Catholic and Protestant Protesters," October 18, 2012, *thestar.com*, consulted January 4, 2014.
- 32 Jennifer Schweppe, ed., *The Unborn Child, Article 40.3.3 and Abortion in Ireland: Twenty-five Years of Protection?* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2008), and Lisa Smyth, *Abortion and Nation: The Politics of Reproduction in Contemporary Ireland* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
- 33 Douglas Daly, "Irish Catholic Church Condemns Abortion Legislation," *New York Times*, May 3, 2013.
- 34 Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India 1707–1858* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Tim O'Brien, "Winners of Presidential Awards for Irish Abroad Named," *Irish Times*, October 13, 2013.
- 35 "Praveen Halappanavar: 'I Still Can't Believe That She's Not with Us,'" November 21, 2013, <http://www.thejournal.ie/praveen-halappanavar-i-still-cant-believe-that-shes-not-with-us-684364-Nov2012/>, consulted January 4, 2014.
- 36 "Dentist's Death Sparks Outrage, Parents Demand International Probe," *India Today*, November 16, 2012.
- 37 This was in strong contrast to the notorious X case, which in 1992 involved a 14-year-old rape victim. James Clarity, "Irish Court Says Girl Can Leave to Obtain Abortion in Britain," *New York Times*, February 27, 1992.
- 38 "The Tragic Loss of Savita Halappanavar Not Caused by Ireland's Abortion Ban," November 14, 2012, <http://www.youthdefence.ie/latest-news/the-tragic-loss-of-savita-halappanavars-life-was-not-caused-by-irelands-ban-on-abortion/>; "Inquest Confirms Lack of Abortion Didn't Kill Savita Halappanavar," April 4, 2013, <http://www.lifenews.com/2013/04/19/inquest-confirms-lack-of-abortion-didnt-kill-savita-halappanavar/>; and <http://savitatruth.com/>, all consulted January 4, 2014.
- 39 W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- 40 For more on iconic photographs see Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

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- 41 W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 92.
- 42 A 2012 television show rated it one of Ireland's 10 favorite paintings. <http://www.rte.ie/tv/masterpiece/index.html>, consulted January 21, 2014.
- 43 Emily Mark-FitzGerald, *Commemorating the Irish Famine: Memory and the Monument* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2013), 11–51.
- 44 More recently, it served as the cover photograph of Richard Aldous, ed., *Great Irish Speeches* (Dublin: Quercus, 2009).

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