





## The Journey West

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### At the edge

Josef Koudelka called this photograph (Fig. 1), *Irlande 1972*. It is part of a collection of his work entitled *Exiles*. The three men kneel at the summit of Croagh Patrick, a site of Christian pilgrimage for over a millennium and a half, and before then, for perhaps twice that time, it has been a sacred place. Below the summit, and in the background, is Clew Bay, the Atlantic Ocean speckled with Clew's many islands, drowned drumlins marooned by geological time. In the photographs that make up *Exiles*, Koudelka photographed the margins of Europe, margins which are partly geographical, for Croagh Patrick is at the outermost western limits of Europe, and partly social. He repeatedly returns to images of gypsies, one of Europe's two great symbols of what it is to be at the margins of an acceptable social life from which they are exiled. Indeed, Koudelka was himself an exile, having fled from Prague after the Russian invasion of 1968, following which he took up a relentlessly peripatetic professional life as a photographer, much of it as a stateless person.

To be at a margin, or on a border, is to be both inside and outside, or it is to be neither

Fig. 1: Ireland. Croagh Patrick Pilgrimage, 1972. Photo: Josef Koudelka, Magnum Photos.



Fig. 2: Croagh Patrick, County Mayo, July 1994. Photo: Georges Dussaud/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images.

one nor the other. A man *sans* state is without a home, always in-between. Koudelka's photographs probe time as well as space in this pursuit of the in-between. Just as the people in the photograph are caught in a precise moment of time they are also outside time. Or at least they exist in several times—the time of Clew Bay, the time of pilgrimage and its pre-Christian history, the time of 1972. All photographs negotiate time in similar fashion and have the effect of being outside and within it: they are at once absolutely of and in the moment that they capture and timeless too, for in their taking the moment is frozen for ever and comes to exist outside time. Reality itself seems in exile, outside space and time. Koudelka's photographs powerfully accentuate this double effect.

He works in stark blacks and whites, as in this image, and his effects are elsewhere achieved by the dramatic use of shadow. Here, the three men are each highly distinctive, their distinctiveness caught in their faces and the attitudes of their kneeling, and in the way they hold their pilgrim's sticks. However, if the men are decidedly in

time, and of a place, they are also outside time. Koudelka's subjects, just as with these three men, often seem exposed and isolated, expelled from their surrounding time. The men are separated from the others around them not only by distance but by the gravity of their demeanour; the other figures seem to be admiring the view, the three men however look inward, into themselves (they are reflective, perhaps troubled), and it would seem into the gravity of this holy place, where St Patrick is held to have appeared. They are kneeling, the others stand. They may indeed have completed the final stage of the ascent on their knees, which was, and sometimes still is, the custom, just as it is to walk up barefoot.

The tableau of Christ's crucifixion which they evoke also gives them the epic, monumental quality found in many of Koudelka's human figures, and this further exiles them, sets them apart, from those around them. These surrounding figures dress casually as well as looking at the view, and the short skirt of the young woman reminds us it is 1972. The men, on the other

- 1 This essay will form part of a book called *The Children of Freedom: Britain and Ireland since 1945*. The book will follow my two published books on power and freedom in British history. In the preparation of this essay my warm thanks are due to Breandán Mac Suibhne for his generous encouragement and expert advice, not least on the Irish language. He is one of nature's editors. Louis de Paor and Niall Ó Ciosáin of Galway University set me on the way and Enda Delaney at Edinburgh University kept me on it, while Alvin Jackson advised me about Irish history. Patrick Curry and Rosaleen Joyce read and commented on the manuscript, as did my expert *Field Day* editor Ciarán Deane. I benefited from audience comments at two readings of parts of this essay, in Galway and Edinburgh universities. Buíochas libh go léir.

- 2 Robert Delpire, et al., *Koudelka* (London, 2006), 153.

hand, are dressed in what must be for them the appropriate attire for pilgrimage, but is to us now surprising—dark suits and white shirts, the dramatic blacks and whites enhancing their sense of separateness from the others, something also caught by the striking blackness of their hair. This black expresses being inside too, for it is a genetic mark often enhanced in this far west of Ireland. I carry this mark.

Their hands are big. These men work with their hands. The blackthorn sticks on which they lean were fashioned by these hands. They know hardship. They are kin to many of the other human figures in *Exiles*. One sees them in and through their hardship. This is how one of Josef Koudelka's curators put it,

Koudelka's work petrifies and transforms. It converts tears into stone and stone into wounds; it sees the soul through its hardships. The moment that he captures contains centuries. The space that the image closes opens the field of the universe, both inside and out. It is the theatre of opaque skies, where humanity is so minuscule, and yet such a vast mystery.<sup>2</sup>

The soul is seen through its hardships: if the three men form a crucifixion scene, then it is their own hardship that also makes up the tableau's meaning.

Two of these men are my kin. The younger man on the right is my first cousin, Seán Joyce (*Seán Seoighe*), the man on the left, Paddy Kenny, the husband of Sean's sister Sally, the third man, in the middle, a neighbour, Máirtín Mangan. For them Croagh Patrick is always known as 'the Reek'. Carrying their mark—the tallness and black hair of my kin—I share these bodies, and so another time, the time of genes, deep history. I first saw this photograph in 1984, on public display in an art gallery in Manchester. It had very quickly become an object of art. Seán and Paddy had been 'hung' in a gallery, an aesthetic execution that pleased and puzzled me then, in that very public place, just as it still does, as I write this. Pleased because my kin had become 'high art', puzzled as to

what this translation meant. A copy had been given to the family sometime shortly after its taking but put aside and forgotten, or at least regarded as of insufficient importance to be mentioned to visitors.

The three men come from Joyce Country, *Dúiche Sheoighe* in Irish, twenty miles south of the place of the photograph and to the immediate north of Connemara, with which it partly overlaps. The area spans the territory between the mountain of Maamtrasna in the north to the isolated settlement of Maam Cross in the south, and runs east-west from the village of Clonbur to Leenane on the Atlantic coast. All three have since died. My father was born in 1905 in the townland of Kilbride, on the northern shore of lower Lough Mask, where the lake forms almost a small lake of its own, known as 'Maskeen' on maps. Kilbride is in County Mayo, the border with Galway running its underwater course in Maskeen. Another in-between place, looking south to Connemara and north and west outside the *Gaeltacht*, or Irish-speaking district, of which it is part. In between townlands too, for the Joyce house was on the border between Kilbride and Kilmore townlands. Kilbride is near to the tiny settlement of Finny, which leads on into the mountains to the gaunt majesty of a separate lake, Nafooey, an unfortunate Anglicization of the Irish *Loch na Fuaiche*. *Dúiche Sheoighe* is a place of immense rain, and immense beauty, though as *Seán Seoighe* was quick to say, 'You can't eat a view'.

I first made the journey west to Joyce Country in 1948, brought as a child of three on what was in those days an extremely arduous journey from west London, one so arduous that my mother did not repeat it until many years afterwards. There were the seemingly endless train journeys with two small children and the sea crossing on something not much better than a cattle boat. Wexford was easier. My mother Catherine Bowe, always known as Kitty, was born three years later than my father in the settlement of Loughstown, in the townland of Great Island, five miles from the village of Campile, County Wexford, in the parish of Kilmokea, on 4

November 1910. The nearest town is New Ross, on the same river Barrow as her birthplace. Loughstown is near the confluence of the Barrow and the river Suir, another place of rare beauty.

Townland and parish make up different layers of the deep preoccupation of the Irish with land and locality, as do the county and the ‘village’, the latter now having an amalgam of the English and Irish meanings of the term, the Irish one drawn from simply a cluster of houses, often very numerous, the origin of which lay in the old, pre-Famine clachans (*clochán*) of a collective, pre-capitalist agriculture. Within a few miles of Kilbride, the 1841 Ordnance Survey shows four such clachans, two of them less than a mile away across ‘Maskeen’, where Paddy Kenny was from and where he and Sally Joyce lived when they married. They are called Lower and Upper Cloughbrack in the 1841 Ordnance Survey anglicizations of the Irish. The other two clachans were two miles to the west of Kilbride, by *Loch na Fúáiche*, a big and very remote one, where my Burke grandmother came from, ‘Shaunafarahaun More’, its little cousin Shaunafarahaun ‘Beg’ just a bit further west. In Kilbride they still talk of ‘Kilbride Village’ within the greater townland even though it is only just such a cluster, a sort of micro-clachan. In the 1901, census twelve separate Joyce households are listed in what was in fact a relatively small townland.<sup>3</sup> Loughstown was somewhat similar to Kilbride ‘village’, though the clachan form when evident in Wexford had a different historical trajectory than in the west. Time therefore clusters in these places as well as houses.

*Dúiche Sheoighe* is different again, and the same. *Dúchas* is an Irish noun that combines the sense of the innate quality of a person or a way of life with the idea of this being located in a native land or place which comes down to one as an inheritance.<sup>4</sup> It conveys more than ‘country’ in its English translation, more also than the sense of ‘home’, which it nonetheless embraces. Places, Croagh Patrick for instance, embrace multiple times but they also stabilize time, as with our conceptions of the places we

call ‘home’. Our sense of place is quiet until we are ‘out’ of place, so that for the emigrant who is by definition always out of place and denied home this sense is always keen. It is passed on to the second-generation, if to differing degrees—to people who are Irish at home and something else outside in the streets. Irish in England, English in Ireland too, so that in all locations ‘home’ is elusive despite the luck of being both. Lucky, too, to be white in London for the colour of our skin enabled us to have choices our fellow immigrants from the Caribbean did not have. This flexibility still left us in between, sometimes happy to be in one cultural skin, sometimes not. Glad to have both, but not quite fitting in either. The supposed invisibility of sounding English and feeling Irish liberated us just as it sundered us from who we were.

This in-between condition was informed by the deep sense of place that was located in the physical setting of different ‘homes’, in my case the one in Paddington, west London, which I shall describe later, and the Kilbride and Loughstown homes. Anthropologists tell us that place is sensed and in the process the senses are placed. This means that place is experienced as a meeting of space and time so that lives and events are joined together as embodied memories. We are not only in places, but of them. This is especially so for childhood, where all memory is shaped, and when the senses are open. Studies of second-generation British-Irish immigrants who settled in Ireland—those who went ‘home’ to the home they found the most true for them—reveal in a heightened way the persistence of Ireland in the psychic imaginary of my generation.<sup>5</sup> Here is one voice of these returnees:

I was always much more drawn to the sense of place there, people are part of it and the culture but to me the sense of the country was always sort of an eternal country to me, you know and I thought that this place contained some sort of energy that in some way if I threw myself at its mercy it would sort itself out and that’s effectively what I did.<sup>6</sup>

- 3 The Joyces descend from *Dúiche Sheoighe*, the name deriving from the thirteenth-century Norman-Welsh Galway colonizers, who were rapidly Gaelicized. The family of my literary namesake James left *Dúiche Sheoighe* for east Cork in the late seventeenth century, the Cork tribe of Joyces being the lesser branch—there were 641 households on the Galway/Mayo borders in the mid-nineteenth century, only 83 in east Cork. James carried the Joyce coat of arms, ‘with care’, from home to home across Europe. See John Wyse Jackson and Peter Costello, *John Stanislaus Joyce: The Voluminous Life and Genius of James Joyce’s Father* (London, 1998), Chapter 1, on the family.
- 4 Peter McQuillan, *Native and Natural: Aspects of the Concepts of ‘Right’ and ‘Freedom’ in Irish* (Cork, 2004).
- 5 Sarah Hannifin, ‘The significance of place to second-generation Irish return migrants’, paper presented at the Conference of Irish Geographers, May 2013. I am indebted to Sarah, a PhD student at the National University of Ireland Galway, for this paper, including its discussion of anthropology, and for much help generally on the subject of the second generation Irish.
- 6 The quotation is taken from Hannafin’s unpublished paper.

Fig. 3: Croagh Patrick, County Mayo, July 1994. Photo: Georges Dussaud/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images.



'Returnees' were, however, thin on the ground in the 1950s, and the energy of the 'eternal country' was by no means felt by all of us, so that this business of 'being Irish' in London meant nothing or next to nothing for many, who merged without fuss into being English. It all depended on what shade of green you were, and what made you that shade.

My journey west was to Wexford. From the age of six onwards every long summer for over ten years, my childhood, as for so many of my generation, was indelibly marked by these paradisaical summers. The journey west to *Dúiche Sheoighe* was as an adolescent and all the later years, begun again after 1948 following my father's early death in 1963 at the age of 55, the early death of our fathers being common to so many of my generation of immigrants' children. These were the men that truly 'died for Ireland', men forgotten in the stead of 1916, worn down by hardship and neglect, not least the neglect of the young state they had left and which was usually only too glad to see the back of them. So I

went west to his home, following my father's ghost. Emigration was the lot of both areas, if in unequal measure, and if my father first made the journey east to England in 1929, my mother, one of fourteen children, was not far behind in 1932. They both came from and went to a world of hardship. In the words of Eavan Boland's 'The Emigrant Irish', 'They would have thrived on our necessities/ What they survived we could not even live.'

It is their story I want to tell, and so mine too as a child of emigrant/immigrant parents. I lived what they survived, at least a part of it. I also tell the story of others like them such as the parents of my wife Rosaleen, who, herself born in Newry, emigrated to England with them in 1956 at the age of nine. I consider too the people in the Koudelka picture, and others like them, the people who stayed. This story is in no way unusual or remarkable, but that is in fact the point. I aim to write an amalgam of history and memoir in such a way as to allow memory to serve history by leading me back to these ordinary (yet remarkable) lives,

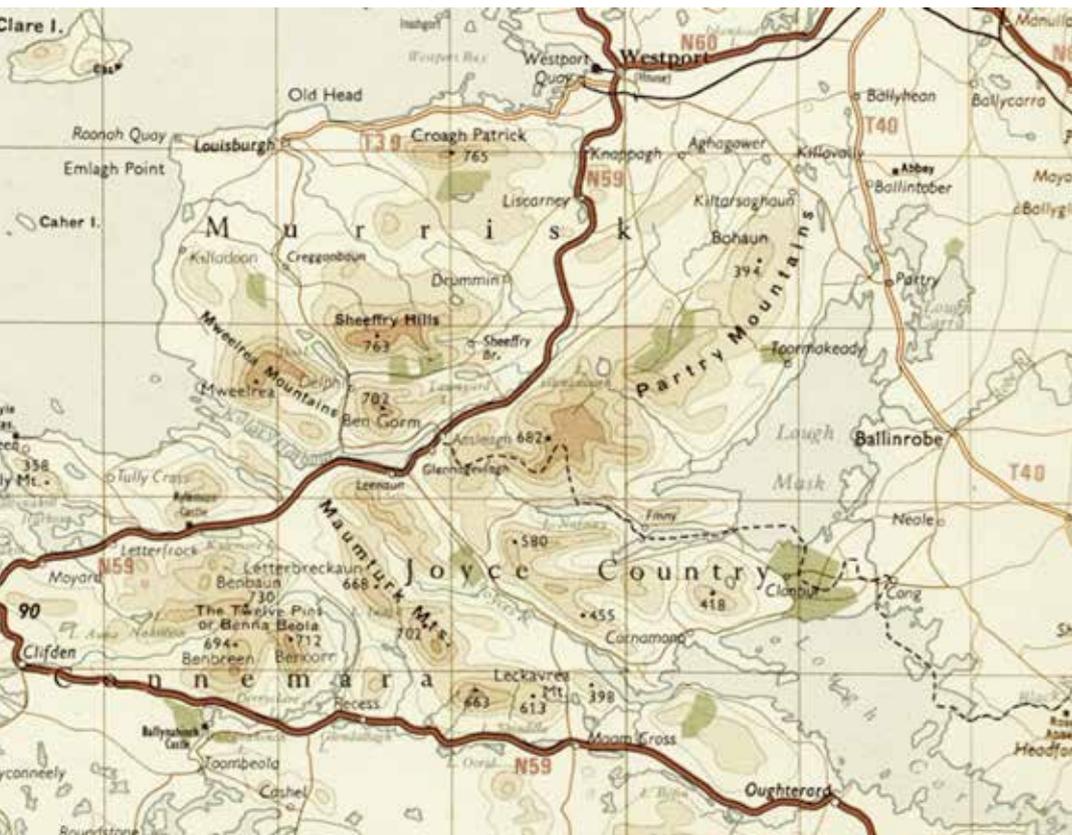


Fig. 4: Map detail, showing part of Galway and Mayo, including Joyce Country. Royal Irish Academy, 1979.

for these lives give weight and force to the abstractions we term 'Britain' and 'Ireland'. So it is a 'history' of Britain and Ireland that I claim to write. Not surprising I suppose, as I have spent most of my working life as an academic historian, someone who gets paid for being in and between times. An essential feature of this history is that Britain has finally become fully a post-imperial country since my own times began in 1945, and with this in important measure it has become an immigrant one. The relationship between Britain and Ireland, and especially England and Ireland, is at the heart of the making of the British state and the British Empire, even though historians do not always tell it this way. And, the Irish numerically and historically have for most of British history been by far the most important immigrant group. That is why I think it important to write the history I propose, one that includes both Britain and Ireland, and one that does

not take time and place for granted, so that a history such as I propose, one 'since 1945', should indeed be in and between many times.

'The soul is seen through its hardships', as Koudelka's curator puts it. 'Hardship' can be defined as that which exacts physical or mental endurance, so that this is a story of endurance also, and of the adaptation hardship necessitates if it is to be borne. The endurance of unimaginable catastrophe in the form of the Great Famine of the 1840s, or as that period was called in the Irish-speaking West of Ireland, in places like Joyce Country/Dúiche Sheoighe where its effects were most severe, *am an droch-shaoil*, the time of the bad life, or *am an ghorta*, the time of the hunger. There, in less than a decade more than a quarter of the population died and another quarter emigrated. *An Gorta Mór* was the greatest human catastrophe in nineteenth-century European history. It was in the West that the old Gaelic culture was

- 7 Breandán Mac Suibhne, 'A Jig in the Poorhouse: Space and Story, the G-word and the Issueless Tribute', *Dublin Review of Books*, April 2013; available at [www.drbr.ie/essays/a-jig-in-the-poorhouse](http://www.drbr.ie/essays/a-jig-in-the-poorhouse)
- 8 Enda Delaney, *The Curse of Reason: The Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, 2012)
- 9 Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge, 2013).
- 10 F. H. A. Aalen, Kevin Whelan and Matthew Stout (eds.), *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape* (Cork, 2011), 99–100.
- 11 For tourist guide versions of the Joyces, see John Barrow, *A Tour Round Ireland* (London, 1835) and Charles Richard Weld, *Vacations in Ireland* (London, 1857), 360–61, on the 'fine, stalwart fellows giving their name to this part of Connemara'.
- 12 *Black's Picturesque Tourist of Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1872), 285.

as a consequence almost eradicated. Modern Ireland has been written of as being 'spat out of the horror and squalor' of the Famine,<sup>7</sup> for not only was the old culture gravely wounded but a new Ireland was born in a form that brought to pass the capitalist vision of its British governors: free-market farming replaced the old subsistence and collective agriculture of the rundale system and the *clachan*. Paradoxically, though the highest excess mortality was experienced in the west of Ireland, it was there that the old culture managed to hang on.<sup>8</sup>

If the modern Irish state was spat out of horror, so too was the British one, for it was in the decades surrounding the 1840s that the modern bureaucratic state took the elaborate shape we recognize today. This form involved the routinization of suffering and deprivation in such a way that these could be amenable to the operations of paperwork and so to the persons who did this paperwork, whether they were the bureaucrats of poor relief in the new workhouses, built on 'rational' principles (in Westport just below Croagh Patrick for instance), or the inventors of bureaucracy at the centre of the action in London. At the centre of this centre was Charles Trevelyan, not only the administrator of the Famine but the very inventor of state 'administration'.<sup>9</sup> Thus we may call both the Irish and the English, also the other peoples of Britain, the children of freedom (the title of my 'history'), for the mass liberal state that is ours was given one of its first truly memorable and representative forms by the Famine. However, Irish if not English readers will need no reminding that *An Gorta Mór*, if the blackest, is only one chapter in a very long history of Irish endurance that goes back to the state-building of Elizabethan times, and with it the progressive westward expansion of English rule. This rule pushed the 'native Irish' to the fringes of the Atlantic, to places like Connemara and Joyce Country.

In the wake of the Famine there emerged a touristic vision of 'the West' among the English, and indeed among many of the Irish themselves. From the 1850s this new tourist gaze was as callous as it was quick to

find expression: these are the words of the historical geographer Kevin Whelan in his fine account of the making of the modern Irish rural landscape:

In Pre-Famine Ireland one of the commonplaces of historical writing was that poverty spoiled the tourist's view, the contamination of the aesthetic by the visible, noisy, dirty poor... The post-Famine emptying of the west and the absence of poor people allowed the Irish landscape to be presented in appealing terms, just as its accessibility increased. The advent of reliable steamship passenger services between Britain and Ireland, allied to the spread of the railway system, ferried tourists into hither inaccessible areas. Trains carrying tourists into the west met those carrying emigrants out of it.<sup>10</sup>

Trains with Joyces on them in the 1850s were not tourist trains.

In 1852, William Wakeman published in Dublin (not in London) a *Week in the West of Ireland*. The cover of the book shows a well-proportioned young man, dressed in tight white trousers, a blue jacket, and a straw hat, the costume of the leisure classes at play. Fishing rod in hand, he scales a hill, his left foot planted on 'Joyce Country', his right, as he ascends a hill on his way to Galway on 'Connemara'. The Joyces have played their assigned role in this depiction of the 'Western peasant', being both stood upon and eulogized, for *Dúiche Sheoighe* was on the tourist route long before the Famine.<sup>11</sup> After that catastrophe, which gets no mention in the tourist guides, *Black's Picturesque Tourist of Ireland*, published in Edinburgh in 1872, tells us that 'Much has been written about the Joyces, and the many marvels of their stateliness and strength are on record ... Mr Inglis describes them as a magnificent race of men, the biggest, tallest and stoutest he has ever seen in Ireland, eclipsing even the peasantry of the Tyrol.'<sup>12</sup> This version of the noble Irish savage (the undoubted magnificence and stateliness of the Joyces notwithstanding) stands out against the usual

depiction of the ignoble savage, immured in ignorance, the Hibernian *Untermensch*. The Joyces were at different times both. In Alexander Shand's *Letters from the West of Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1885) people in Joyce's Country are brutally ignorant: it is 'the most blood-stained of the districts of Ireland'.<sup>13</sup>

Long before even the emergence of tourism, in the 1750s the Joyces had represented to those in authority a world that was felt to be strikingly different. The Lord Chief Baron Edward Williams wrote to the Earl of Warwick sometime around 1760 that the part of Connemara on the west side of the lakes, where the Joyces lived, is but little known 'to the gentleman even of Mayo ... for the inhabitants are not reduced so as to be amenable to the laws, and have very little communication with what they call the continent of Ireland ... [They keep to the manners of the old Irish], and are almost to a man bigoted papists'.<sup>14</sup>

To continue with Whelan's words:

Tourists were attracted to the West as an antidote to full-blooded industrial capitalism. The metropolitan centre redefined its rural periphery as unspoiled, and inhabited by uncorrupted and therefore noble peasants, living in harmony with their environment. In Ireland, this conception of the West was also taken up by cultural nationalists, who presented its distinctive landscape as evidence of a unique, ancient and unchanging cultural identity. The West was constructed as the bearer of the authentic Irish identity in the rural, archaic and unspoiled landscape an instructive contrast to modern, industrial and urbanized Britain. Escaping modernity and its brutalising mass values, the Western peasant became the timeless emblem of a pristine world, a precious ancient remnant on the remote rim of modern Europe.<sup>15</sup>

'The remote rim of modern Europe': does not Koudelka share this 'enchantment of the West' in his depiction of the timeless, the

epic, and the monumental? I think not, for in 'seeing the soul through its hardships' he recognizes that the West is no Eden; so that he is the opposite of a romantic. His figures, though frozen in time, are not the bearers of a changeless vision of authenticity; his images probe multiple times, and they encompass the 'in-between' of time, the interstices of different times, and the sense of being both in time and outside it. Nonetheless, he does depict a world that is on the edge, the rim of the secular, developed, Western economies and societies, a place separate even from the 'continent of Ireland'. In the 1880s James Joyce also recognized this separation, one from his own Ireland of the day.<sup>16</sup> If *Dúiche Sheoighe* is geographically and temporally another place, this is so historically too, for Koudelka's photograph is simply one of countless possible representations of another and much wider history than that of Britain and Ireland alone, one I also wish to recount, the history of the long decline of peasant Europe. This decline continues to near-extinction in the present, as Eastern Europe comes within the orbit of Western Europe. It is a decline that has since 1950 been worldwide, as the majority of the world's population has come to live an urban life.

As Eric Hobsbawm recognized, this change is perhaps the most fundamental one the contemporary modern world has seen, the world since 1945 that is, all the other vast changes notwithstanding:

[T]he most dramatic and far-reaching social change of the second half of this [the 20<sup>th</sup>] century, and one which cuts us off forever from the world of the past is the death of the peasantry. For since the neolithic era most human beings had lived off the land and its livestock or harvested the sea as fishers. With the exception of Britain, peasants and farmers remained a massive part of the occupied population even in industrialised countries until well into the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup>

To Hobsbawm's 'peasants and farmers', one should add the even more dependent landless

- 13 Alexander Shand, *Letters from the West of Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1885), 133.
- 14 Fifth letter in the collection, 1757–62, as cited in Sean Spellis, *The History of Galway, City and County* (Dublin 1999),
- 15 Whelan, 'The Modern Landscape: From Plantation to Present' in F. H. A. Aalen, Kevin Whelan and Matthew Stout (eds.), *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape* (Cork, 2011), 100.
- 16 Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom*, 306
- 17 E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London, 1994), 289.

18 Peter Laslett, *The World We have Lost* (London, 1965).

19 See 'Introduction', in Hugh Dorian, *The Outer Edge of Ulster: A Memoir of Social Life in Nineteenth-Century Donegal*, ed. Breandán Mac Suibhne and David Dickson (Dublin, 2001), 10.

labourers who often felt the icy contempt of the landed peasant proper. The Joyces and the Bowes were both in the ranks of the latter, though the Joyces held land many further east would not have considered worth holding, so that before and after the Famine the extremes of the landless labourer and large occupier were largely absent there.

The Spanish peasantry, for example, was halved in the twenty years after 1950, the Portuguese in the two decades after 1960. In Spain agricultural workers formed just under half the population in 1950 and this was reduced to 14.5 per cent in 1980. Italy was transformed in the 1960s by the vast movement of people from the rural south, the *Mezzogiorno*, to the rapidly industrializing north. The story is similar outside Europe: in Japan, for example, where farmers were reduced from over 50 per cent of the population in 1947 to 9 per cent in 1985; in fact this process took place all over the world except sub-Saharan Africa, India and Southeast Asia, and China. There too, things are now rapidly changing. If we push the time frame for Europe only a little further back, Germany, France, the USA and other early industrial nations only saw the extinction of the millennium-old peasant world in the twentieth century. Even for the United Kingdom, excluding Ireland, the extinction of the small farmer and rural labourer was later than supposed.

In Ireland, by 2010, almost two thirds of Irish people were urbanized and rural Ireland receded from people's daily awareness. Change in the nature of capitalist agriculture was complemented by immigration. In the 1950s, some 500,000 out of a total population of less than 3 million in the Republic of Ireland emigrated to Britain, the big majority of them leaving agricultural work (or rather, the lack or inadequacy of it). However, this surge was only part of a long history that went back well into the eighteenth century. The encounter of the peasant with urban and industrial ways was, in the Irish case, particularly sharp, for Britain was not only industrialized earlier than elsewhere but it had been urbanized earlier and more completely than anywhere else too.

Hobsbawm was right to declare that this is a 'world we have lost',<sup>18</sup> from which we are forever cut off. But he was right only in a certain way. There was always change in this world, things that were lost and things that were gained. What academics call 'tradition' and 'modernity' often sat side-by-side, sometimes in antagonism, sometimes in agreement. This was especially so in Ireland, which because of its closeness to Britain, and the geographical relationship of Ireland to the Atlantic world from the eighteenth century, has for long been linked into the circuits of world economic activity. This was the case even on the 'remote rim' of Connemara, which experienced the very early arrival of the 'fiscal-military' state in the eighteenth century. When the 'revenue men', or 'gaugers' as they were then called locally, came into the backhills of the West to curb an economy bolstered by illicit distillation and smuggling. 'Gauger' is in some places today the word for the social welfare officer.<sup>19</sup> The state augmented its power by measuring things, including landscapes in the form of mapping. This, in the great pioneering venture of the Irish Ordnance Survey in the 1830s and 40s, was carried forward by cartographers who were known as 'sappers', a term still used locally in Connemara for any kind of land surveyor or engineer. The modern state was planted early in the West, and there is a very long memory of this.

The same admixtures of tradition and modernity hold for the economy of the 'remote' West as for the state. The Connemara production of sea kelp for export as fertilizer to the British market was well advanced in the nineteenth century, and Connemara and Joyce Country helped provide the building workers, some seasonal, who constructed industrial Britain in the twentieth (including my father). Long before that, the seasonal migration of agricultural labourers to Britain was common, and so, paradoxically, the most tenacious 'peasants'—the people of Mayo, Connemara and west Donegal—were precociously proletarianized. One of the ironies of the tragic history of the West was that it was the remittances from abroad of

those forced to migrate—permanently or seasonally—which enabled aspects of the old culture to perpetuate themselves, not least in places like Joyce Country and Gaoth Dobhair in north-west Donegal. Sophisticated agricultural production for the capitalist market of Britain was by 1900 long established outside the beleaguered west of the country, especially in dairy and cattle production, and even there, in more fortunate parts, cattle-fattening for despatch east was apparent.

By 1900 too, Ireland had a sophisticated political structure, and a long tradition of agrarian political activism, including agrarian violence, not least in Mayo and Galway, where the Land League had been prominent in the 1880s. Also by the turn of the twentieth century, an equally sophisticated set of infrastructures existed—road and rail travel and postal communications especially, also a quite highly developed educational system. Even if these were for the most part not aimed, as in Britain, at the production of a liberal civil society but at the production of a disciplined and ordered one. Unlike the USA, or Australia and New Zealand, Ireland was near to hand. My parents were fairly typical, through the 1930s and 1940s going backwards and forwards between England and Ireland before making a life together in London, where children anchored them, even though my mother would exit London for Ireland at every opportunity that presented itself. Indeed, like many others, emotionally and spiritually she, like my father, never left it.

For all the coming and going, and for all the interpenetration of the modern and the traditional, their world was radically unlike that of most of London's and of the English that surrounded us. They made sure we were aware of this other world, inducting us children into it with energy and enthusiasm. From childhood onwards their difference to what was around us alerted me to what was being lost, for as they lived their lives and met their deaths they played out before my eyes a world that was indeed being lost forever. Living in London had not sealed them off completely from the momentous changes that were going on in Ireland, but it did preserve in

them the Ireland of their childhood and youth as their continuous present, a present they made known to me and my younger brother John. The end of the peasant world, the end of peasant Europe, the end of peasant Ireland: if the losses have been going on a very long time in my lifetime they have become of such a weight as to mean we have reached an ending.

My still Irish-speaking kin in Joyce Country, the sons of Paddy Kenny in Koudelka's photograph, now sardonically refer to themselves as 'hobby farmers', their regret being mixed with realism. In the 'Celtic Tiger' years between 1993 and 2008 the number of Irish farms declined by over one third. By 2015, only one third of Irish farms will be economically viable, while another third will be sustainable only through the means of off-farm income ('hobby farming'). The remaining third are vulnerable, cut off from such income.<sup>20</sup> Of the viable, it is estimated that by the same year over three quarters will be part-time in operation. The urban bleeds inexorably into the rural: the 2006 Irish census showed that 27 per cent of all housing had been built in the previous decade, in equal urban and rural proportions. This rate of development and the corresponding increase in house prices over the same period had few precedents globally. The housing boom of the 1970s, fuelled as later by easy money, had already laid the foundations for the later disintegration of rural Ireland. The countryside was no longer mainly concerned with agricultural production but with the consumption of lifestyle, leisure and the aesthetic.

Change has been evident in terms of language as well as land, the great markers of identity in Ireland. Parallel to a two thirds urbanized Ireland in 2010, by some estimates the numbers of those in the *Gaeltacht* who used the Irish language as their primary means of carrying on their daily life could be measured in the low tens of thousands. Even if outside the *Gaeltacht* the better-off sort of Irish are now educating their children in all-Irish schools, and there has been a language revival of sorts, the immemorial tie between the land and the language is almost broken.

20 *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape*, 120 and 156–57.

- 21 For a recent study, see Sean Williams and Lillis Ó Laoire, *Bright Star of the West: Joe Heaney, Irish Songman* (Oxford and New York, 2011).
- 22 Declan Kiberd, 'Underdevelopment', in *Inventing Ireland: the Literature of the Modern Nation* (New York, 1996), 471–97.
- 23 Samuel Beckett, *First Love* (London 1999), 30–31.
- 24 See the translations of Louis De Paor, Mike McCormack and Lochlainn Ó Tuairsg, in *Dhá Scéal: Two Stories* (Galway, 2007). The extraordinary Ó Cadhain, literary prose modernist in Irish, was a Marxist, an interred IRA man, a professor of Irish in TCD, and a banned schoolteacher.

In my lifetime, Irish in the Joyce Country has gone from being the first to the second language, and if the pattern of its use is still complex, held together as it is by communal ties, inter- and intra- family loyalties, and very uneven educational provision, then this is a pattern of what looks like inevitable decline and probable extinction of the unbroken inheritance of generations who have worked the land and the seas for their livelihoods.

The music of the West however fights back, especially in south Connemara, and especially in the form of the highly ornamented, unaccompanied Irish-language singing known as *sean-nós*, the old way or the old style. The tradition is nowhere stronger than in the village of Carna, on the coast to the west of Galway city and to the south of Joyce Country. The most noted of the *sean-nós* singers was Joe Heaney, *Seosamh Ó hÉanaí*, a native of Carna.<sup>21</sup> As a gauche, half-cut teenager I heard him at the Singers Club of the English folk revival in early 1960s London. There, and later in the USA, he received some of the acclaim not given to him and his like in the Ireland of their time (even though, to most of his British and American audiences, when he sang in his austere way the gaunt songs of his people he was incomprehensible in a way that went beyond language alone, for the songs touched a vein of living that his audiences did not nor could ever know). I then, just as now, knowing only superficially the language of my father, understood in my blood. However, *sean-nós* is still a minority interest in Irish traditional music, and even if Heaney is alive in Carna, it is a small place; and if Heaney is on You Tube or on a musicology course in an American university, then that betokens an ending as well as something new.

Of course, as Irish readers will know, the story of endings is for Connemara and the West in general a familiar one. In Irish politics and culture the West has always been particularly emblematic of change, seemingly forever on the brink of extinction, so that it has sometimes been too easy to talk of endings. Writing on this West has moved

between romance and counter-romance as it has confronted imagined endings.<sup>22</sup> Counter-romance includes Samuel Beckett, and his scathing description of Ireland as the 'Elysium of the roofless',<sup>23</sup> Flann O'Brien's *The Poor Mouth*, and more recently the plays of Martin McDonagh, who, like me is a second-generation Irish Londoner and whose *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* is situated in Joyce Country. Counter-romantic too, was Máirtín Ó Cadhain, and most tellingly so of all, perhaps, because he wrote from the inside but knew the outside as well. The rare quality of his Irish-language prose is slowly being revealed to new audiences in recent translations.<sup>24</sup> He wrote from the inside, but his realism did not prevent him exalting the peasant life he was born into in *Cois Fharraigh* ('by the sea', out along Galway Bay and close to Heaney's Carna). He transcended the antinomies of the romance of the West. In the 1930s Ó Cadhain had already understood the inexorable direction of change as he saw the decay around him.

### Between times, in places

Endings and losses; beginnings and gain. There is no metric by means of which we can compute an account that is unambiguous and exact. The life of the land has been eclipsed and the culture that went with it eroded. A threshold seems to have been passed, an ending reached. In his essay 'Campo Santo', W. G. Sebald contemplates the Corsican dead and peasant death. In the graveyard of Piana he reflects:

They are still around us, the dead, but there are times when I think that perhaps they will soon be gone. Now that we have reached a point where the number of those alive on earth has doubled within just three decades, and will treble within the next generation, we need no longer fear the once overwhelming numbers of the dead. Their significance is visibly decreasing. We can no longer speak of an everlasting memory and the veneration of

our forebears. ... To remember, to retain and preserve, Pierre Bertaux wrote of the mutation of mankind even thirty years ago, was vitally important only when population density was low. ... You could not do without anyone then, even after death. In the urban societies of the late twentieth century, on the other hand, where everyone is instantly replaceable and is really superfluous from birth, we have to keep throwing ballast overboard, forgetting everything that we might otherwise remember: youth, childhood, our origins, our forebears and ancestors. ... The whole past will flow into a formless, indistinct, silent mass. And leaving a present without memory, in the face of a future that no individual mind can now envisage, in the end we shall ourselves relinquish life without feeling any need to linger at least for a while, nor shall we be impelled to pay return visits from time to time.<sup>25</sup>

An ending is reached, the living soon outnumber the dead and overwhelm them. Now, with this tide against us, how might we remember, retain and preserve, linger for a while and then return? With the tide against us should we even try? Or can we now do without the dead, as Sebald says we shall? This in part depends upon the view of time we have. It is not forever gone though it is past, and Sebald despairs too quickly perhaps. We commonly think of time as linear. This is public time, the time of science, but also of common sense, in which the present succeeds the past and is followed by the future, and in which only the 'now' of the present is real. This view of time is in fact spatialized, suspended in an abstract notion of space as uniform and homogenous. Things happen 'in time', and space is the container of this time in which things happen. In this view, time is also uniform and homogenous. However, we know that this understanding of time has a history, a political history in fact: it emerged in the seventeenth century in order to make science and modern politics possible, and dominated the organization of modern life,

which would have been impossible without it, from around the mid-nineteenth century. Before then, there were many times, and times were tied to places. Worlds outside our Western one did not and do not have this view of time. I have written about this history of time, and how it was central to the emergence of modern state power.<sup>26</sup>

On reflection this 'now' of abstract time turns out to be elusive, for there is no end to how we might divide and hence fix this 'now'. The place at which we might find 'now' seems more ideal than real. Time is exterior to the things that happen in it. However, what has been called psychological or phenomenological time understands time as lived first and linearized second. Time exists within the unfolding of human life. This seems to be an advance, but for its emphasis on the human, and the things that happen in time being only things that happen to humans. It is as if time is only in our service, whereas it is in the service of everything and the things that happen in time are mostly not human things at all. Nonetheless, the second view of time seems truer: for the present would be empty if it were not for the pull of the future and the weight of the past, so that the present does not define the future and the past but is defined by them. If the linear view of time privileges the present as real, this contrary view of time sees the past as real too, real in a different sense from the actuality of the present but still having a reality the future does not have.

Past and present seem then to be in coexistence, in mutual dependence, so that we might think of the past as always coiled within us and within the world outside human life too. It is ever ready to uncoil, so that the past in this sense has not passed but is ever-ready to do so, and is constantly happening in all our presents. One answer to why we should retain and linger with the dead is that they linger in and retain us. Koudelka's photographs show this coexistence of times at work, being in different times, being between times as well, and seeming to be outside time altogether. So does the visual and written work of Tim Robinson, who like Koudelka knows how the times of the West

25 W. G. Sebald, *Campo Santo* (London, 2006), 34–35.

26 Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, Chapter 3, and *The State of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London, 2003), Chapters 1 and 4.

27 Cited in Fintan O'Toole, *The Lie of the Land*, 11. Tim Robinson is another author who has written about the Joyces, see 'The Joyces and the O'Malleys' in *Connemara: A Little Gaelic Kingdom* (London, 2007).

28 See Hannah Arendt's introduction to Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London, 1973).

29 Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations*, 259.

30 Benjamin, 255–56. The final line of this thesis states that 'historical materialists' are aware of this. Benjamin was, however, a very peculiar historical materialist, of the rabbinical style rather than the scientific.

31 David Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin, 2008).

32 Breandán Mac Suibhne, 'Making a History of the Homeplace: The Famine and Memory in West Donegal' and Niall Ó Ciosáin 'Trauma and Inequality'. papers given 7 March 2014, at Magdalene College, Cambridge at 'The unequal dead: catastrophe and the historical reproduction of inequality', one workshop of a series organized by Patrick Joyce and Pedro Ramos Pinto who run the AHRC Research Network on Inequality, Social Science & History, Centre for History and Economics at Magdalene College, Cambridge. [www.histecon.magd.cam.ac.uk/inequality/index.html](http://www.histecon.magd.cam.ac.uk/inequality/index.html)

intersect and diverge, and do so there with a degree of intensity which is sometimes overwhelming. Robinson wrote of compiling his map of Aran:

[A]lone again, I have gone hunting for those rare places and times, the nodes at which the layers of experience touch and may be fused together. But I find that in a map such points and the energy that accomplishes such fusions ... can, at most, be invisible guides, benevolent ghosts, through the tangles of the explicit; they cannot themselves be shown or named.<sup>27</sup>

Maps, photographs, Heaney's songs, and these words of mine, poor relations to Robinson's but coming from a different place to that of the intrepid upper middle-class Englishman, Robinson of the rocks; these words also seek those places where layers of experience touch and may be fused.

Walter Benjamin suggests that historians, who think of themselves as professional 'custodians' of the past, have a special responsibility. His belief that the authority of the European cultural tradition had broken down was corroborated by the terrible events of his time. We might do well now, at another time of danger, to listen to this strange, messianic German Jew, the 'little hunchback'.<sup>28</sup> His 'Angel of history' is often quoted: the Angel's face is turned towards the past but a storm is 'blowing from Paradise' which irresistibly propels him into the future. The storm is called 'progress' and its results are not what we perceive, namely the chain of events of which progress is made up, but rather 'one single catastrophe which piles wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.'<sup>29</sup> 'The pile of debris before him grows skyward'. Against the weight of dead tradition and authority, 'the past spoke directly only through things that had not been handed down', by which he meant the untold stories of the numberless dead—the weight of tradition and authority had silenced these stories and blocked these paths, all in the name of the great story of progress. Less

cited is the second of Benjamin's eighteen theses on history, in which he wrote

our image of happiness is decidedly bound up with the image of redemption. The same applies to our view of the past which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations in the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply.<sup>30</sup>

The literary critic David Lloyd examines the settling of that claim in the Irish context. He is concerned with how in Irish culture, a ruined past, the ghosts of those who never achieved their proper potential, still haunt the present, so that memory continually becomes displaced into present times. This means that forgetting becomes difficult.<sup>31</sup> At least for some; and there are in Ireland, as everywhere else, different kinds of forgetting. Some are constructive, such as that at work in Irish communities after the Great Famine, which could not have functioned as communities without it (though pride and shame would still have underscored this necessary amnesia). Forgetting in the wake of the Famine has however meant the forgetting of class, the underbelly of public and official remembrance, in that it was the huge classes of beggars and landless rural labourers that did most of the dying and fleeing, so that the latter have been as obliterated from public memory as they were physically obliterated from post-Famine Ireland. A 'ruined past' still does haunt the Irish present, but the combinations of remembering and forgetting that have gone on in Ireland's remembrance of itself are, as historians are now showing, far more complicated than the dominant therapeutic model of trauma that still probably dominates, publicly and academically, as in Lloyd's work.<sup>32</sup>

Forgetting is nonetheless easier in English culture, being all too agreeable for those who have historically been on the dispensing not on the receiving end of power, and who do not have a 'ruined past'. The past here is power not wreckage, and Irish history hurts in a way English/British history does not. Nonetheless, as British society changes the old Whig interpretation of political and social progress changes too, though it is still dominant at a popular level on the left and on the right.

Narratives of British (but especially English) historical identity have always been state-centred, institutional rather than cultural. State-centrism was, and still is, mandated by a set of political institutions, primarily English, and a history turning upon the inexorable expansion of a state whose heart was forever England. As these institutions come into disrepute in England, as Britain itself shows signs of coming apart, and as the empire strikes back in the form of increasingly uncomfortable questions about the colonial past, the concept of 'Englishness' comes more and more in question. However, all this is slow to take effect and the pop-Whig story still dominates.<sup>33</sup> Ireland has a very subordinate role in this process, postcolonial history and theory notwithstanding. It remains on the margins of British history.

There is nothing in British culture like the civil war between the so-called 'revisionist' historians of Irish history and their critics, a war that has also involved literary scholars. In historical writing itself, this has led, until recently, to a certain degree of intellectual insularity, on both sides, for the fixation with the nationalist narrative and a narrow understanding of the relationship of Britain and Ireland fed a more widespread reluctance to engage with intellectual life outside History, and even with History outside its predominantly empirical Anglo-Irish framework. The revisionist claim to be beyond ideology is, however, absurd. As Terry Eagleton put it, for revisionists ideology is like halitosis, something other people have.<sup>34</sup> And, if Ireland was a strange sort of colony—to adopt a depiction of my namesake's work, more a matter of the semi-colon than the

colon—then the force of the postcolonial critique overwhelms the qualifications and apologies of the revisionists.<sup>35</sup> Post-colonial theoretical positions themselves however are sometimes as intellectually parochial as their opponents, a sensitivity to literature not being matched by their response to social theory, at least outside a Marxist domain itself often formulaic in actual use. Uncritical adoption of the concept of 'modernity' is one example of this. Historical writing has now begun to move on, opening geographically outwards to the wider world and intellectually so to other disciplines, and so to an engagement with the 'theory' so dreaded by the 'revisionists' (even though the poverty of Irish social thought still remains striking).<sup>36</sup> At the same time it has moved inwards, to the 'Gaelic past', to the past of my parents and the great majority that were like them (those who fought and died in the greatest number in Wexford's 1798 were Irish-speaking).<sup>37</sup>

Limits to both directions of change remain however. Movement inwards, if it is to mean anything, means engaging with the Irish language. To an outsider to the traditions of Irish historical writing like myself it beggars belief how it is that so few Irish historians have engaged with the language, especially its catastrophic historical decline, as key to Ireland's culture, history and identity. Indeed, it is apparent that many of them, inside and outside Ireland, do not know the language, or if they do appear to think it of insufficient worth to be a subject for enquiry. It is ironic that the linguistic turn so-called should have had such limited purchase in Ireland, the country where language turned more completely and dramatically than almost anywhere else in world history. When the language is considered the question of what language itself is often receives little analysis. Niall Ó Ciosáin, one of the few to seriously engage with the subject, asks a familiar question too long unasked in Ireland, namely, whether language is a neutral medium of communication or 'is fundamental to our construction and understanding of the world', so that its loss 'might constitute a radical reordering of perception'.<sup>38</sup> Too few

33 Jeremy Paxman's best-selling *The English* of 1998 might be construed as a thinking person's take on the pop-Whig view: despite everything the English are still liberty-loving, tolerant, and genial. There is the usual invocation of Orwell to testify to their inherent 'decency', so that the right and the left are both pacified.

34 Terry Eagleton, 'The Lack of the Liberal', *Field Day Review*, 4, 2008, 305–13.

35 Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes (eds), *Semicolonial Joyce* (Cambridge, 2000).

36 Attridge and Howes, 667–68.

37 See the judicious account of recent Irish historical writing by Alvin Jackson, 'Irish History in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries', Introduction to the *Oxford Companion to Irish History*, forthcoming Oxford University Press.

38 Niall Ó Ciosáin, 'Gaelic Culture and Language Shift' in Lawrence M. Geary and Margaret Kelleher (eds.), *Nineteenth-Century Ireland: A Guide to Recent Research* (Dublin, 2005), 149. Joe Lee's general survey of the decline still appears to be the best, although the term 'decline' obscures the reality of a society that was for the best part of a century and a half profoundly bilingual and diglossic. J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 1989), 662–70.

39 Robert James Scally, *The End of Hidden Ireland: Rebellion, Famine and Emigration* (Oxford, 1995).

40 If we were to try to map the traditional upon the Irish language, we come up against the fact that 'sexual discipline could and did exist in Irish, along with organised and orthodox religion, literacy, print culture, social welfare categories and other aspects of modernity.' Niall Ó Ciosáin, 'Gaelic Culture and Language Shift', 150.

41 Henry Glassie, *Passing the Time: Folklore and History of an Ulster Community* (Philadelphia, 1982), 608.

historians have asked the question, to answer which they have to become their own social scientists.. Of course, movements inwards and outwards are metaphors of change only and it is the peculiar convergence of the two that marks out the Irish historical experience as so important, and which promises to make Irish historical writing in prospect so exciting.

This 'Gaelic past' is still largely a 'hidden Ireland', the past of those hidden by their poverty and by their self-imposed distance from the governing classes, and not only by their language.<sup>39</sup> This Ireland is said to be 'traditional' as opposed to the 'modernity' that is held to have ultimately undermined it. These grand terms have a certain clumsy utility, but I do not think they take us as far as analytical concepts should in understanding 'hidden Ireland', or 'unhidden' Britain for that matter (the traditional pervaded the modern as well as the other way around, so much pervading that the conceptual edifice becomes distinctly unsteady).<sup>40</sup>

Above all, however, the terms are unhelpful because they carry the charge that the modern is rational and the traditional irrational. As always it is a question of power, of who gets to say what is modern and what is not, and so accrues to their side the required discursive and material resources. But who is to say that, for instance, the highly complex and socially purposeful and creative management of land systems by the 'hidden Irish' partly but so well revealed in Robert James Scally's work was any less 'rational' than 'modern' forms of capitalist land management based on instrumental reason? Rational to a fault in fact because it had to be created in the face of extreme poverty, a poverty it was in fact designed to order and regulate. The ferocity of this poverty in Scally's account is frightening, and the future of this form of land organization was, even before the Great Famine, bleak. This ordering of the supposedly 'traditional' carried its own hierarchies and inequalities, and it does these people of hidden Ireland a disservice to sentimentalise them as 'communitarians'.

Nonetheless, the social skill and imagination evident in this other form

of reason offers us cultural and political resources in the present, in managing our own 'modernity'. The past is indeed coiled within us, and it is a *useful* one, its versions of reason *and* the practical forms in which these were realized offering us examples for doing things in the present. In restoring rationality to the Irish past the folklorists and anthropologists have been exemplary, none more than Henry Glassie. Without romanticizing 'traditional' Ireland, and Glassie, the self-confessed 'romantic American folklorist' sometimes does this, as E. P. Thompson and his school did for the English working class, his question in his magisterial *Passing the Time*, is as pressing now as Benjamin's theses were in their immediate present:

Knowing modern people are mobile, knowing history undergirds law and order, can the historian compensate for the deracination necessary to modern life by giving people a portable new past of paper as rich as their stationary old one of dirt, a past that is not mere prelude to present power, but a stimulus to the imagination, that builds within people an understanding of their situation, and need for direct involvement in the creation of their own destinies?<sup>41</sup>

The romance comes in when the local and global webs of power in which the powerless are caught are ignored or subordinated (as an historian of power working in an institutional embodiment of power, yet coming out of the ranks of the powerless, I have always leaned to the side of counter-romance). 'Caught' because the logics that guide the rationality of ordinary life are shaped by interactions between unequal forces. Glassie is essentially a functionalist, so that in the world he portrays the trend is ultimately toward social equilibrium, an equilibrium shaped from the bottom up. There is too much symmetry and order in his world, too much self-direction and not enough necessity—and, as in Scally's work on 'hidden Ireland', there is next to no

attention given to the Irish language. Even so, those who are caught are not helpless, and make their own history, their own order, if often to a script written by others. Glassie is a fine prose poet of order and the people whose lives he recounts made a sort of order that is of enduring value.<sup>42</sup> And they continue to do so, as he also recognizes, for in the townland of Ballymenone the stories of lives and communities that people tell of the past in the present still produce a ‘History [that] frees them, proves them capable of change... real change, intended, directed change: history, the record of logical shift, of culture in time.’<sup>43</sup>

‘A portable new past of paper’, as he says: I have written previously about the influence of class and Irishness on my being a historian and so producing these paper pasts.<sup>44</sup> Part of this writing involved how the credibility of academic historians, their right to speak with some kind of authority, incurs a debt to the past and a responsibility to it, something expressed in terms both of the academic protocols of writing history and in moral terms akin to Benjamin’s understanding of the redemptive. I related the redemptive to my sense of Irish identity growing up in the working-class Irish and Catholic London of the 1950s and 60s, an identity which has since been elevated to the status of the ‘diasporic’. To cite Benjamin’s words again, ‘Our coming was expected on earth’, so that ‘There is a secret agreement between past generations in the present one’. Everyone is a historian in this sense, and is endowed with responsibility, with that ‘weak Messianic power’ he writes of.

The redemptive I think of as closely linked to the idea of return, the experience of my parents and to a degree myself being about separation and the possibility of return—on both our parts, return to and separation from Ireland, from ‘home’, from parents and beginnings, in Ireland and London. It is also linked to the very act of historical writing itself as for me the tidal swell of separation and return has always seemed to mimic the action of the historian in the archive, forever returning to and separated from the past. This

redemptionism was shaped by Catholicism as well as Irishness, for my experience of Catholicism gave me a sense of what it was like to live in a structure of meaning which embraced almost everything, and then, moving beyond this embrace, I could see quite clearly the interconnectedness of faith and life, and how it all worked to make a single thing. Similarly, moving within the British social system, together with the displacements of being English-born Irish, enhanced this interest in how social life worked and what ‘society’ is<sup>45</sup>—how it all worked to make a single thing.

In this sense I am a Catholic-Irish historian just as Terry Eagleton is a Catholic-Irish literary theorist, although he stayed embraced in the faith and I let go—an historian with the non-liberal caste of mind Eagleton so hilariously and perceptively anatomizes in his ‘memoir’.<sup>46</sup> There, he writes of how Catholicism as ritual, as doing the proper things, building from the outside inwards, creates a mental constitution ‘at odds with a social order that made a fetish out of interiority’, so that one ‘lacked all instinctive feel for a liberal sensibility’.<sup>47</sup> Rather than contingency and self-creation, Catholicism, and an Irish devotion to the tribe rather than the individual, gave him, as it gave me, an appreciation of how the habitual, the inherited, ‘the sheer inertia of history’ govern our lives. The public, collective and symbolic dimensions of selfhood were what mattered, so that as he writes, Catholicism, just like Judaism, is at bottom distinctly un-English.<sup>48</sup>

I became a social historian of Britain, and so wrote the history of a people who were not my own—something not unusual in the historical profession but rare in the Irish case. I was and am a social historian of the left at odds with much of leftist British social history, and all its devotion to the self-creation of classes, so that E. P. Thompson’s *Making of the English Working Class*, the touchstone of so much 1960s Anglo-American liberal leftism, did not set my imagination on fire as it did others’. I had felt the weight of history in that Irish-Catholic way, just as, unlike most leftist historians, I knew the

42 Glassie is also a humanist so that his romanticization of the people of the townland of Ballymenone involves a familiar version of the material world in which it exists only to bring meaning to humans. While humans are permitted their agency, non-human things are refused it. The deep political and cultural limitations of the localist perspective Glassie avers also give pause (as far as I can judge debate of Glassie’s work, work of the first importance, seems to be non-existent in the historical literature). There is only an attenuated grasp of the political in his work, especially when it comes to the state. He is not alone, for postcolonial positions, like Marxism in general, also share an impoverished view of what the state and its possibilities are. Growing up ‘green’ in Britain makes one acutely aware of the historical disjuncture between the two political cultures, the much-attenuated sense of civil society in Ireland and the negative and unimaginative understanding of the state which parallels it. Glassie, ‘Passing the Time’, 375–76.

43 Glassie, 376

44 Patrick Joyce, ‘More secondary modern than post modern’, *Rethinking History*, vol. 5 no. 3, 2001, republished in Alun Munslow, *Authoring the Past: Writing and Rethinking History* (London, 2013). See also my ‘The gift of the past; towards a critical history’, in Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan and Alun Munslow (eds.), *Manifestos for History* (London, 2007).

45 See Liam Harte, “‘Somewhere beyond England and Ireland’”: Narratives of “Home” in Second-generation Irish Autobiography’, *Irish Studies Review*, 11: 3, 2003, for a very interesting discussion.

46 Terry Eagleton, *The Gatekeeper: A Memoir* (London, 2001).

47 Eagleton, 31

48 Eagleton, 33, 35–36

- 49 The joke is Eagleton's own ('prolier than thou').
- 50 The Square comprised, as well as my school, the Cardinal Manning Girl's School, a Catholic primary school, the Crusade of Rescue hostel for fallen girls and their offspring, the parish church, Pius X, and a very large convent. This convent has since been the subject of a fine BBC TV documentary. G. K. Chesterton's family had donated the square and adjacent properties to the Church earlier. Chestertons is now one of the biggest estate agents in south Kensington, now perhaps the most opulent part of any world city.
- 51 As cited in Kevin O'Connor, *The Irish in Britain* (London, 1972), 168–69

English working class at first hand, and it was not always a pretty sight.

If I am less holy than Eagleton, then I can claim to be more 'proley', in the sense that I attended a (Catholic) secondary modern school, he a Catholic grammar one.<sup>49</sup> One's fate in the 1950s was pretty much decided at the age of eleven when the 'eleven-plus' examination sorted the educationally worthy from the unworthy, the latter headed for a life of manual work or, if lucky, and in the top stream of the 'sec. mod.', which I was, perhaps the lower ranks of the professions and business. I passed this examination, but because there were not enough Catholic grammar schools to go around, went with my friends, and so with the utmost gladness, to the Cardinal Manning Secondary Modern School for Boys, in St. Charles Square in London's Notting Hill, where it borders less salubrious Notting Dale, 'Rotting Hill' as Wydham Lewis called it. The school was itself a positive Kremlin of London institutional Catholicism.<sup>50</sup> There is a Byzantine world of subtle differences to being 'prolier than thou', to being London working class as opposed to (say) the northern working class of Eagleton's Salford, to being second-generation Irish to Eagleton's third, and so to being 'Paddier than thou', although in the 1970s and 1980s we were all 'Plastic Paddies' to many of our pre-enlightened, diaspora-unaware brothers and sisters across the water.

### The journey east

Growing up 'green' at the Cardinal Manning did not endow us with much of Benjamin's messianic power, for of Irish history we knew nothing, even though we were almost to a boy Irish-born or first-generation children and taught by those of a similar shade of green. If our dead kin had expected us they were kept waiting, for the 'secret agreement between past generations in the present one' was slow to materialize. Hidden Ireland, London W10. But history poked its nose in anyway. This is how the writer John O'Callaghan describes being brought up Irish Catholic in England:

To be brought up as an Irish Catholic in England is to be nurtured as a schizophrenic. ... History is the most obvious place to see the affect of being introduced to a background of which I was not the true inheritor ... the Irish—the native Irish—presence of my parents at home—brought reminders that the fair play, the self-control, the impartiality of the British is as skin deep as in any other race ... things in England are not always what they seem. You are born outside furrows of thought that some pure natives never see over. It is worth risking the schizophrenia to be reared without blinkers.<sup>51</sup>

Schizophrenia? Not quite perhaps, Louis MacNeice's words catching it better, if out of a very different experience, 'I wish one could either *live* in Ireland or *feel oneself* in England' (the emphasis is MacNeice's). In London's Paddington at a time before 'identity' had been invented things were more straightforward than they later became. We were described by our parents as 'Irish descent', not English or British, not postcolonial 'hybrids', not Irish, but of the Irish. It was good enough.

Manning Boys knew much about Roman Catholicism, if not about Irish history, and the Catholic Church in England was its familiar self-interested self in seeing to it that we turned out dutiful sons of the temporal power, unburdened by inconvenient histories. Which hue of green one was depended on the generation born into of course, but it was also measured by the presence or absence of the Irish childhood summer, by family involvement in Irish and Catholic associational life, by family size, and by the number of Irish relations over here and over there, among many other factors. On all these cards the Joyces marked high. Hidden Ireland existed in 1950s England in another sense too, for on the other side of the Irish Sea there was what has been called a 'conspiracy of denial' on the part of the Irish government, about emigration in general, and in particular about the mass waves of emigration to England in

the 1950s. It was the Catholic Church for all its self-interest that came to our aid, especially to the aid of women like my mother. Her social life was built around the church and the parish, the Church in England being a paler version of the para-state Church in Ireland.

The most telling state for us was however the British welfare state, the salvation of the immigrant Irish ('England fed me and gave me money ... a home').<sup>52</sup> So that the British state for my generation and my parents became indeed a sort of 'home', or at least a source of refuge. So too for my wife's parents from the North-people effectively without a state at all if Catholic, as they were. Irish Londoners remained ignored by the Irish state until very recently when we went from being the 'diaspora' to the disbelieving targets of something called 'The Gathering'. The Irish Embassy in London had little impact on our communities, just as the middle-class Irish Club in fashionable Eaton Square could have been on Mars as far as we were concerned. As Boland's poem confesses (Boland was the daughter of the Irish Ambassador to the United Kingdom):

Like oil lamps, we put them out the back,  
  
of our houses, of our minds. We had lights  
better than, newer than and then  
a time came, this time and now  
we need them.

Hidden Ireland: hidden father. Hidden by his early death, and by the long illnesses that preceded it. Hidden also by the daily rhythm of his work: up at 5.30 a.m. and out to his job as a 'general labourer' for one of the local municipal authorities, home at four o'clock in the afternoon, then out again at his evening job in the kitchens of the Cumberland Hotel on the corner of Edgware Road and Oxford Street, then home at ten. In the 1950s the Irish had almost completely colonized the staff of the giant Cumberland. The wage of the 'Council labourer' so-called was among the lowest in the country at that time, and it was economic necessity that enforced a work regime that was however completely interrupted on the

weekends, so that we felt the full strength of the love of this 'fine, quiet, decent' man then.

He first went to England in 1929, then back and forwards between 1929 and 1944 when he married my mother. Like most of his peers, he left to work in the building trade, and in the 1930s and through the Depression he led the usual life of the itinerant Irish labourer, 'sleeping on the job, and eating off the shovel', as the saying went.<sup>53</sup> 'I slept with your father in Harrow Weald in 1936', this and similar reports from his fellow itinerants greeted us when we returned to the West just after his death. 'Home' as well as England was populated by men who listed off the locations of their English labour and their shared berths as if they were battle honours, 'Stratford-upon-Avon', 'Rugby', 'Potters Bar'. As was usual, in 1929 he travelled at first to a known community of local people who had preceded him, as was the case in emigration the other way, to the USA, where three of his four siblings spent their adult lives.

Two went to Pittsburgh. His brother Pat was crushed to death on the railtracks of Carnegie's Pittsburgh steelyards, where he worked. Pittsburgh was full of Joyces (my aunt Mary Joyce married one on arrival in the city), and my grandfather had spent some time there in his earlier life too. Back in Joyce Country, across the lake in front of the house in Kilbride, the area has borne the name *Baile Mheiriceá* ('America' on OS maps) since the nineteenth century. My grandmother raised her five children in the knowledge she would have to lose all but the one who inherited the small farm, set below the mountain and sweeping down to the edge of Maskeen. Most other parents shared this knowledge. As David Fitzpatrick has observed, 'growing up in Ireland meant preparing oneself to leave it'. 'The buildings' took my father to Portsmouth in 1940. There he was buried alive in a German bombing raid. He was the only one of seven in the house to survive. The physical damage done to his hands left him unable to do the hard but well-paid labour that would have kept him out of the Council and the Cumberland. Of the mental scars we knew nothing, though I can read the signs a little better now.

52 Mary Broughton interview, History Talk, North Kensington Irish History Project, Lancaster Road, London W10. This project comprises 36 interviews taken in 2002 with people from the Irish community living in north Kensington. I use these interviews in writing the essay that follows this one.

53 Timothy O'Grady and Stephen Pyke's novel *I Could Read the Sky* (London, 1997) is the most penetrating of all the several accounts of the itinerant Irish labourer in Britain.

Fig. 5: My father, Sean Joyce and myself, Kilbride, 1948.



He, like she, before their marriage lived in north-west London, where they were part of the intense social life of young Irish immigrants of their day, centred upon the pubs and dancehalls of Willesden, Harlesden, Kilburn and Cricklewood, another ‘north-west passage’ alongside that of Jewish London, this one from the Euston and Paddington railway termini, instead of the East End. This was the world of exotic pub names to us children, ‘The big Crown’, ‘The little Crown’, ‘The Case is Altered’, ‘The Skiddaw’.

[Fig. 5] is a photograph of my father in 1948, not quite in his early days, but when he was still a robust and healthy man. He holds me, smiling down as I hide my defective eye from the light, my protective visor on, his arms enfolding me, his left hand showing the signs of Portsmouth as well as the signs of love. It is his hands I remember him by, for as children we examined them closely as my mother, not he, told us what had happened. His hands, the means of his livelihood and the embodiment of his identity as a ‘working man’, the term he used. I am a big child, he a big man, beside us is tall Sean my cousin, the man on the right in Koudelka’s photograph of 1972—all of us big (if not magnificent) Joyces. Sean is barefoot. Behind is the wall up the

long bohereen to the house, behind which Kilbride mountain stretches, the lake below. Johnny was the first to be born in the new house of 1905; the four others were born in the old house even further up the hill. There, his grandfather was born around 1850. *Liam na hAille*, Liam of the Cliff as Sean translated his name, for where the house was sited a deep cleft cuts into the mountainside and marks the townland border. My father’s holiday dungarees are on and he is ready for work around the farm, which is needed, judging by the condition of the wall.

[Fig. 6] is a photograph of my mother in the 1930s. She stands in the haggard, the two storey family house behind. My grandmother stands in the middle, my aunt Stasia’s young suitor Mick O’Shea on one side, my mother in her best flapper wear on the other. This photograph was taken on one of her periodic visits back as she see-sawed between the two countries, between domestic service and home, before marriage moored her in London. My grandmother was a striking woman; she ‘holds herself’ well as it used to be said and is well turned out in her farmwife’s garb, her hair carefully parted, her glasses adding to her dignified bearing.



Fig. 6: My mother and grandmother, the Great Island, 1930s.

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- 54 The Ryan Report of the Commission on Child Abuse revealed only those horrors that had taken place after 1936, when St. Joseph's had already been in existence fifty years.
- 55 I have written about the murders and the wrongful execution of Myles Joyce in *The State of Freedom*, 303–07. In the argument, I consider the house as a sociomaterial nexus of power and identity, linking the domestic house to the public school house and the prison house of Galway Gaol where an almost certainly innocent Myles Joyce was executed in brutal and bungled fashion in September 1882. A few years ago, there was a move to get Joyce posthumously pardoned, but it appears to have got nowhere with Her Majesty's Government.

Her hands are eloquent too. Her composure seems to be only temporary; it is as if she is ready to get back to work with these hands as soon as possible. This woman had by then had given birth to fourteen children, suffering the grief of four of them dying early. Being from the eastern side of Ireland none of the children went to the USA, although three lived their lives in London and the others were scattered around Ireland. My grandmother was a Kent, a family that had prospered on 'the Island' (Great Island), where the land was good and money was to be made from wheat and barley, and from fishing in the Barrow, which many of the local men did, often illegally and so at night in their black-tarred 'prongs'.

Great Island has a very strong sense of its own identity, just as Joyce Country has. My grandmother had chosen Patrick Bowe from the village of Ramsgrange close by. Bowe is a west Wexford and east Kilkenny name, Anglo-Norman in origin like so many in this corner of Ireland so near the Welsh coast, and the Old English enclave of Pembrokeshire—Englishes, Butlers, Suttons, Wheelers and Whittys abound.

My grandparent's photograph stands above me as I write. She is a beauty, he not her equal in looks. He was an only child—his mother died giving birth to him. Again it is the hands that speak, for the hands of both are big and powerful, and though the Kents had land they worked hard for it. Patrick was a farmer too, but, as it turned out after his marriage, an intermittent one, as he seems to have reduced the large farm to a small one by his drinking ('Sure he drank three farms', reports his grandson). I knew them as a child, Patrick in death as well as life, taken to Ireland by my mother for his wake and funeral when I was eleven, in 1956. He and his wife died within three months of each other. His body was laid out in the back bedroom of his eldest son's new house. Dressed in splendor, in death he was got up in what seemed to me then the vestments of a priest, singularly inappropriate wear given the accounts of his life. The corpse and the decaying lillies in that back room overwhelmed the senses of the child.

Kitty was as outgoing as Johnny was quiet, and as tiny as he was tall, which did not prevent her absolute rule over the three men who loomed over her. She loved to talk, she liked company, and told endless stories about 'the Island'. Like my father she was educated at the local school, walking the seven miles there and back every day, without shoes in the summer and taking the younger ones with her. There she was met by the impudence of petty authority so characteristic of the time. The authority of the British state in Ireland had been succeeded by the petty authority of the local middle class, the priest and the doctor as well as that of the auctioneer and the teacher. In Kilbride I have heard of the same impudence thirty years on, in the 1940s. Vulnerable parents suffered the overwhelming threat of their children being taken away from them and 'put into care', sent to institutions like Letterfrack Industrial School. There the Christian Brothers ruled with a barbarity unusual even for them.<sup>54</sup> Hidden Ireland; the hidden bodies in the churchyard for decades. Hidden and therefore silent Ireland. Not just the silence of clerical abuse but the millennial silence of peasant communities. The 'Maamtrasna Murders' had occurred over the other side of Kilbride Mountain in the August of 1882, when five Joyce family members had been murdered, by amongst others, further Joyces, in what seems to have been a mixture of bitter feud and politically motivated revenge (for informing). The case became an international *cause célèbre*.<sup>55</sup> These were the years of the Land War and political assassination, the latter evident on the shores of Maskeen below the home in Kilbride. Inquisitive visitors are still shunned today, the media included. Ranks are closed, 'informers' are disliked, and the memory is still there among the old.

My mother experienced a new form of authority when she came to work in domestic service in London, before the Second World War ushered in the end of domestic service as a mass employer of labour. She met kindness too, and a sort of liberation in well-paid wartime weapons manufacturing, where she worked for the major aircraft production

companies in north-west London. My father had been a victim of aerial warfare; she made the weapons which brought utter devastation to the German cities. Remote Ireland carries the burden of the twentieth century too, and the immigrant Irish who stayed in wartime Britain, however ambivalent their feelings, could not be 'neutral', unlike the southern Irish state

My parents were proletarians to the letter. All the property they had was their children. They left enough to bury themselves, a prized tea-set, a few letters, sprinkled with 'Thank Gods' and 'Please Gods', a ritualized form of writing that had little or nothing to do with personal expression (it was the rituals that mattered). Letter writing was designed to give news rather than to convey states of mind and feeling, as among the educated middle class, whose epistolary legacies I envy. As their children were their only property so we are their legacy—as are our children. I am then their 'document' of the life they made in London, the 'home' they made together there. Glassie writes of rural Fermanagh: 'Action is history. Every gesture has precedent and consequence. As the hand grips the spade, slaps brick, or grates spuds, historical time flows through the fingers and writes its narrative into the land. ... Yet beyond us, around us, spreads the vast and democratic history book of the landscape.'<sup>56</sup> If Fermanagh, why not London? Time flew through the fingers, the actions of my parents in London, and history wrote its narratives in the world they made there. How to compare the two worlds, that of the Ireland left and the London found? Like Glassie, we should start with the house.

The 'house' for us was our flat at 11 Ashmore Road in west London's Paddington. My mother and father lived there for nineteen years, almost all of the brief span of their twenty years of marriage. It was there I spent the first eighteen years of my life, my brother sixteen of his. This place is ineradicably within me, organically, just as I was once within its physical forms. As the years pass, I inhabit no. 11 and its neighbourhood with more intensity, not less. The place inhabits

me just as I then inhabited it. Memory and the organic body are intertwined, including the times of the body, as the body goes through life and ages. The words of Pierre Bourdieu, come to mind, 'What is learned by the body is not something that one has, but something that one is.'

Gaston Bachelard, in his *Poetics of Space*, writes,

The house ... is a group of organic habits. After twenty years, in spite of all the other anonymous stairways, we would recapture the reflexes of the 'first stairway', we would not stumble on that rather high step... The feel of the tiniest latch has remained in our hand ... in its countless aveoli space contains time. That is what space is for.

Memories are housed, quite literally, stored up and preserved, within the physicality of the rooms of the habitation. The house/habitation according to him is 'one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind ... Its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it man would be a dispersed being ... It maintains him through the storm of heavens and through those of life ... It is body and soul'.<sup>57</sup> It is the human being's 'first world'. In this understanding we make our homes as we go through life, but the house goes with us always as it is through this form that we most fully know what home is. The first house above all, but also the other subsequent ones as we go through life. These successive houses reverberate one with another, the new shaping the old and the old the new.<sup>58</sup> In the sense we never really leave our houses, especially the first one. How does this 'reverberation' work, between the old and the new 'house'?

Glassie's Fermanagh house has the essentials of the houses in Kilbride, and on 'the Island', houses I have known all my life. The central kitchen, the two rooms off to left and right, the hearth the focal point of the centre that is the kitchen. At the middle of the hearth the fire; directions are 'set in motion around the fire', and 'the hearth burns

56 Henry Glassie, *Passing the Time*, 603.

57 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, 1994), 4–8.

58 Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom*, chapter 7.

Fig. 7: Kilbride, Clonbur, Co. Mayo, c. 1865-1914. Photo: Robert French, National Library of Ireland.



- 59 Glassie, 327.  
60 Glassie, 351.  
61 Glassie, 354.

still in the centre of the mind, and its space, at the kitchen, occupies the middle of the home'.<sup>59</sup> There should be nothing to impede the space between the fire and the door, the door being always ajar to welcome people for it is bad manners to knock or to stop the visitor in the doorway. People should stay in the kitchen and not go up into 'the room', stay in the kitchen where they can be watched and helped, stopped from brooding. The rooms are for sleeping, where a limited privacy could be had if necessary. In the kitchen one was in 'company'.

The kitchen is intermediate between the rooms and outside. The outside is formed by what are in effect concentric circles radiating from the house, taking first the 'street' outside (the walkway in front of the house), then the outhouses, including the farmyard or haggard (into which once the hay and turf are brought they are said to be 'home'), then the fields of the holding, then the moss and the bog, then the world outside made up of the local, only then the great world beyond. This

is a culture of centres, according to Glassie, not margins.<sup>60</sup> 'Community' and 'society', just like the household, involve this creation of centres, the original of which is the house. No name marks limits, for the priority of the creation of centres means that these define social entities. As he says, 'The one becomes the all at the centre. This way to create order is not restricted to space. It is applied in the still more arbitrary realm of time.'<sup>61</sup>

The year is organized around centres more than beginnings and ends. Order is created not by demarcating a whole, then cutting into parts, so that this culture is a matter of key occurrences, epiphanies, 'letting the whole take care of itself'. 'History is a cluster of powerful events, space a collection of landmarks', so that 'order is ceded to an endless reality that cannot be completely known', to 'the nature of things'. People's responsibility is not the shape of the whole but 'the force of wholeness: continuity'. Therefore, the hearth is a point in the continuous whole, the 'crucible of

continuity; here, at the centre of space, people work to unify time, keeping a fire alight that consumes the intervals between generations, between the great days and every day and night'. The house is said to be 'lonesome' without a fire. Travel from the hearth betokens potential danger, holy water is at hand, and one's view on leaving the house is of the cross, and the Sacred Heart picture, always burning below it the candle and later the tiny electric cross. The fire protects the seams of space and time, stitching them safely together. Fire therefore burns away 'categorical distinction', by unifying women and men, inside and outside, setting the scene 'for the formation of society'.<sup>62</sup> Thus the community builds itself at the hearth, which is where 'fireside law', 'fireside lore', 'fireside stories', are made. Like the fire, if talk and stories flag they must be revived, continuity must be maintained.<sup>63</sup> What he calls 'organic order' involves the growth of reason through 'an incompleteness, through the complexity and interpenetration of categories.' 'Nothing stops or starts exactly, things go on'. Continuity is established through the stories, including the histories, that are told, and the homes that are made.

This is not completely so, all of this. For Irish culture, especially in the West, has been characterized by the force of margins themselves, in-between states that even if they are held by the centre constantly tear at it, upsetting the creation of the equilibrium Glassie, the functionalist, so much seeks out. Order is created by demarcating wholes, then cutting them into parts, the order of private property. But more than this, a more elemental ordering and disordering is apparent. What has been called 'Galway space'—literary space but it holds good for real space too—has been characterized as defined by the road, the house, and the grave; movement, stability, and separation, that of death.<sup>64</sup> But death is only another margin, for in Irish rural culture the living and the dead mingle. In the past especially so, when a 'fairy' reality ran alongside and interpenetrated the everyday sort. My parents and my wife's parents, in London and Southampton,

continued to believe in the power of the lone bush in a field, the cry of the *bean sí* (Banshee) foretelling a death. It was and still is regarded as wrong to mock and belittle these versions of another supernatural; in the 1930s, long after my mother was a child, the *bean sí* was simply taken for granted in rural Ireland.<sup>65</sup>

Irish culture has for good reason been called funerary and Irish Catholicism itself still has strong residues of this older reality. Those born before baptism entered the marginal state of Limbo, formal doctrine being reproduced at another level by believing Catholics as, under cover of darkness, infant bodies were buried at margins, by walls, between cultivated and uncultivated land. Sometimes burial took place in *cillíni*, children's graveyards located in the corners or on the edges of official graveyards, or further away, as in the one on the brow of the mountain between Kilbride and Maamtrasna, where good and bad land meet. Not only children were buried in such places, but also sometimes suicides, shipwrecked sailors, strangers, unrepentant murderers and their victims, all who were at a margin and of an ambiguous condition. The Irish *idir-eatarthu*, meaning in-between, half and half, spans at once uses in this world and being between and simultaneously in different worlds.

Two of Máirtín Ó Cadhain's finest early stories concern these margins, one about a lone woman's struggle against the relentlessly encroaching Connemara bog and the land she has hard-won for cultivation. The other is the story of a woman who has had multiple miscarriages and seeks the graves of her stillborn and aborted, buried on the edge of the home place the exact location of which her husband will not tell her. The ending of this story explains something of my mother's faith in the Virgin Mary as the supreme expression of God's mercy, a kind of faith apparent long before nineteenth-century official Marianism. It was through the mother that the deepest spring of hope and solace ran: Nóra digs for the bodies of her dead children in the hope she has at last found them; she despairs but then her despair is transfigured as the mother of God gives her

62 Glassie, 360.

63 Glassie, 372, 375.

64 Patrick Sheehan, 'The Road, the House, and the Grave: a Poetics of Galway space, 1900–1970' in Gerard Moran and Raymond Gillespie (eds.), *Galway: History and Society* (Dublin, 1996).

65 Patricia Lysaght, *The Banshee: The Irish Supernatural Death Messenger* (Dublin, 1986).

66 Ó Cadháin, *Dhá Scéal: Two Stories*, 180.

the hope that the dead children may not be in the 'dark place without pain' where those 'who have not tasted the wine of baptism' must go. The sacred picture she keeps on the wall comes alive with the burning image of Mary which changes then into the image of her own mother:

People crowded into the room. In spite of herself, Nóra stretched out her hand. There was her mother. There was no mistaking the slender fingers and the fair hair; and Micil's father with his slim neck, broad back and soft eyebrows ... 'They have not tasted the wine of baptism ... The mothers, the mothers! Look at them Son!' <sup>66</sup>

The living and the dead are part of one another, Sebald's Corsican peasants in their holy ground are at one with the ground Mary's intercession has made holy in Connemara. Ó Cadhain's modernist masterpiece *Cré Na Cille*, is entirely organized around the interactions of the already dead and buried with one another, and with the living world above their churchyard clay.

Centres, continuities and margins took, had to take, a different form in No. 11 Ashmore Road. The house in which we lived was inhabited at cross purposes to its design and intention, so that it was twice removed, once from the respectable classes for whom it was built around the 1870s, and once again from the house in Ireland. The neighbourhood was composed almost entirely of three-storey houses which by the 1940s, as with so many other districts in this part of London had for long been given over to individual tenancies, the social tone sinking accordingly. The area had one of the highest population densities in London. Invariably there was at least a single household to a level, so that the occupancy level had trebled from the original. This meant that as we had the middle level we lived in a flat not meant for single habitation. The internal structure was simple, to the point of crudity, similar however to all around, Irish or English (the Caribbean population moved in only later). The kitchen was at the back, a large bedroom

to the front, a smaller one in the middle, a passage, 'the hall', to the side, running between the front door and the kitchen at the back.

As in so many Irish homes, one of these rooms was rented out for a period, the smaller one in the middle, to an Irish family, not for profit but through solidarity. No bathroom, no inside toilet, the outside one being reached by passage through the apartment below. A stinking clump of grass formed the tiny unattended front 'garden'; the larger back garden, part of downstairs' domain anyway, was a blasted wilderness. Like everybody else, we rented from anonymous landlords, 'slum' or otherwise (the notorious Rachman held much property in adjacent north Kensington, where I went to school). However, our manor was a cut or two above the real slums that surrounded us and through which I walked to school every day. Most notably, those in the area around Golborne Road and 'the Lane' (Portobello Road, the wrong end). This included Southam Street, thought by Brendan Behan to be the worst slum in Europe, and coming from Mountjoy Square, in Dublin's north inner city, he would have known. In no sense did we think of ourselves as 'poor'. The poor were in Southam Street.

A sad comedown from the house in Ireland it might be thought, or at least a radical change, and there is no hiding the enormous difficulties my parents faced in living in these conditions. But for me, never having seen anything else, except in Ireland, this was just the way it was, as with all children. The house in Fermanagh, Glassie's house, the house on 'the Island' and later in Kilbride, these houses I knew as a child alongside Ashmore Road, and I knew them as Glassie describes them, the open door, the invitation to the fire. The English 'house' was radically different, but the reverberations of the ones left behind were nonetheless strong and clear. As I say, we make our homes as we go through life, but it is the first house that most fully helps us know what home is and how it can be made. This was so with my parents, for they transplanted the old to the new, despite appalling obstacles.



We lived our life in the kitchen, and the relationship between the kitchen and the other two rooms was as in the Irish house. The welcoming path ran from the front door through the hall down to the kitchen, in which the fire was almost constantly lit. Directions were still 'set in motion around the fire'. Travel from the hearth betokened potential danger in England too, and as across the sea, holy water was at hand, and the perpetually lit Sacred Heart picture looked down on us, a picture on which was inscribed the dedication of the 'house' to this particular manifestation of the Faith. The fire was never lit in the bedrooms, which were for sleeping. People should indeed stay in the kitchen and not go up into 'the room', though illness forced my father there. In the kitchen of number 11 there was a constant stream of visitors from the West of Ireland

and Wexford, and all points in between. If family, these visitors would stay, crammed together, so that Ireland was reproduced in the talk that surrounded us, which included Irish when the Westerners visited. My mother only had 'school Irish', and my father did not think to teach us his language, whether because it was thought useless in England, or that it was a badge of the hardship left behind and so to be hidden, or simply because he did not have the time I do not know. The creation of order in these difficult conditions involved the constitution of continuity through the basic form of the habitation itself, the home that my parents made, reshaping it as best they could to the only pattern they knew. The fire as the centre thus set the scene for the formation of society, our community building itself at the hearth too, which is where the music and the stories issued from. Talk came

Fig. 8: Southam Street, London, 1957. Photo: Roger Mayne / Mary Evans Picture Library.

67 Seamus Deane, 'The End of the World', *Field Day Review*, 8, 2012, 225.

68 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, 1990), 73.

69 Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (Berkeley, 2009).

70 Tony Bennett and Patrick Joyce (eds.), *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn* (London, 2010).

71 See the exemplary, Terence Patrick Dolan, *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English: The Irish Use of English* (Dublin, 1998).

incessantly from the kitchen and my mother did most of it. I knew 'the Island' as well as if I had always lived there, childhood memories and London stories mingling together.

Stories had to be told in full and in the correct way every time so that experience and memory were passed on to us in forms that were designed to be remembered. Continuity was established through these stories as well as the homes that were made; as Glassie puts it 'nothing stops or starts exactly, things go on', Kilbride and the Island seeming to have gone on forever, almost as present over here as back there. My parents' accents remained completely unchanged despite the decades in England. These stories and memories were rich in sound, observation and humour, and like so much humour that came and comes out of rural Ireland wickedly accurate in its delineation of character and circumstance. The linguistic resources of Hiberno-English were rich and extensive, and how things were said mattered to us as much as what was said, for even more than the music it was the talk that most enabled one to enter the world my parents brought with them..

Seamus Deane has written of how Irish is intractably a spoken language, asking as regards translation into English, 'How can we "hear" in English a language which has been compelled, for its survival, to proclaim a kind of acoustic autarky'?<sup>67</sup> I nonetheless heard Irish, heard it ventriloquized through the deeply Irish language-inflected English of both parents, especially on my father's side and especially through Seán Seoighe in Koudelka's photograph, my beloved first cousin. Just like the photograph, language is absolutely of the moment yet carries within it multiple times. The past works its way silently through us in the present, shaping it and us in ways themselves not present, or even available, to its recipients. Language is the same, it is the past silently working its way through us. The past as the Irish in the English flowed through us, and vice-versa too, all tangled together, as my father's people had by 1950 been bilingual for at least two generations.

And this past as language, as with the house in Bachelard's words was and is a material thing, a 'group of organic habits', something in our bodies, or it is rather our bodies themselves, for to recall Bourdieu, what is 'learned by the body' is not something that one *has*, but something that one *is*.<sup>68</sup> Multiple times are at play here, the moment of listening and talking, the centuries in which language is made and remade, and the deep history of language made in material bodies over species time, the time of genes.<sup>69</sup> We change the past and language in the present, but my aliberal sensibility tells me that it is more a question of language and the past speaking us than we speaking them. The past is something that one *is*, and language is a material power.<sup>70</sup> Between times, in that place, the talk of my parents connected the multiple times of language together and presented them to us as their unknowing gift. Language formed its own sort of 'centre' in England, for if the land could no longer serve to locate a core to the life it was the language that stood in its stead. Language included the strange and wonderful English talk of Wexford, close to eighteenth-century pronunciation, full of words taken from an even older English and given a meaning now specific only to that Irish context.<sup>71</sup>

The outside of the house was formed not by the concentric circles of the Irish homestead but by the complex paths running through the local neighbourhood and connecting all things and places Irish and Catholic, and all things to do with work. Joyce Country in the city. *Dúiche Sheoighe i Londain*. All things Irish and Catholic had a long history in the area, so close as it was to Paddington Station and the boat train to Fishguard and Rosslare. The railway (to Ireland) and the Grand Junction Canal shaped the geography and political economy of the immediate area, and both were built by Irish labour long before our cohort arrived (the canal was completed in 1801), much of this labour settling in the area. Order, as in Ireland, was created not by demarcating a whole, then cutting it into parts, the parts of the city of London known by maps and



Fig. 9: London Wexfordmen's Association outing, late 1950s.

guides. Indeed, my parents did not know 'London' at all, as was the case with us children, at least until the early teens. This was a case of, as Glassie puts it, 'letting the whole take care of itself'.

The margins pressed in on all sides nonetheless, within the house in terms of those who lived above and below us, and in the no-man's land of the connecting 'passage' to the front door. The outside margins were marked by the 'Protestants' that surrounded us, 'heathens' sometimes being the term of description chosen by my mother. Our social life in the street was almost entirely confined to the Irish families. We had no English

callers, except that is for the stream of rent men, book sellers, milkmen, knife sharpeners, coal men, postmen and others, with whom relations were always cordial, some of them having been callers for years. We children departed England most summer holidays for Ireland. The doctor was Irish, the dentist was Irish, a Wexford woman always served my mother in our local grocery, 'Pearkes Dairies', and if she patronized the 'Home and Colonial' grocery she always sought out the Irish assistants. Again, the Cumberland Hotel my father worked in at night was an Irish colony. Men had their community in the Irish pubs of Paddington, Kilburn and all points



Fig. 10: London Wexfordmen's Association children's party, late 1950s. The author is the only bespectacled child; he wears a striped jacket sent by the Pittsburgh Joyces. These photographs were taken by Paddy Fahey, from the book *Irish Londoners; Photographs From the Paddy Fahey Collection* (Sutton Publishing, 1997). My mother bought these at the time of taking, from Fahey's business.

north west, although many Catholic parishes had men's clubs. There were also the various county associations, most prominent for us the London Wexfordmen's (sic) Association much patronized by my Wexford uncle Michael, which organized parties and outings with the direct purpose of making us Irish.

My mother's life revolved around the institutions of the overwhelmingly Irish parish, especially the Mothers' Union. We went to Catholic cubs and scouts. I went to Catholic Primary school, run by nuns, and then the Catholic secondary modern school. Religious-cum-social outings were organized by the Church. This piety we experienced at

home too, as we were regular 'reciters' of the rosary, which for the uninitiated is a devotion to the Virgin Mary marked by the ritualized repetition of certain prayers, the ritual for us involving kneeling on hard floors and cold linoleum preparatory to bed.

All my Cardinal Manning friends were Irish Catholic and together with them I joined a Catholic youth club, Stonyhurst and Barrett (named after the prominent Jesuit, Catholic public school, which gave us their patronage, although precious few Jesuits or public school boys were to be seen on the premises). This was the nearest we got to public school, at the receiving end of this peculiar expression



Fig. 11: The author in First Communion regalia outside 11 Ashmore Road. The horse-drawn milk cart is visible behind. The street contrasts with Southam Street (Fig. 8) in its order and cleanliness, even though the standard of the accommodation was poor.

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72 Alan Johnson, the Labour Cabinet minister, grew up on the street, his account of which is his totally unrevealing *This Boy: A Memoir of a Childhood* (London, 2013). Much more revealing is *The Street Photographs of Roger Mayne* (London [1986], 1993).

of upper class paternalism. Rugby School patronized the equivalent and eponymous 'Protestant' youth club of an adjacent locality, Notting Dale, of course much rougher than us, as were the local state, non-Catholic schools. These really were rough, the bizarrely named Isaac Newton School being sensationally publicized as a 'blackboard jungle' in the *News of the World* (then the largest circulation newspaper in the world). The desperate violence produced by poverty and the maleducation of the white English working class around us were all too real, as the 1958 Notting Hill 'race riots' testified. Our margins lay then with the 'rough' 'Protestants' around us, not least those of Southam Street.<sup>72</sup>

Not that Catholic Irish status distinctions were not often inward-directed and self-crippling. If anything, these were stronger than in Ireland, peasant self-sufficiency and Catholicism being heightened by the experience of emigration (paradoxically, only by emigrating could people feel themselves to be 'Irish', at home they belonged to less abstract entities). There was of course sound justification for this distance from the English, and from my parents I heard at first hand about the prejudice directed against the Irish during their time in England. After my father's death my mother wore black for a year in the fashion of her countrywomen. Ironically, after this we were rehoused, and as was the practice in those days people were scattered around London in various Council tower block dwellings, which, even if they showed a higher degree of comfort and hygiene than Ashmore Road, were far less socially congenial and culturally engaging. Twenty years stretched from my father's death to her own as my mother slowly made her way back if not quite completely to the Ashmore Road beginnings, then nearby, so that she could be nearer to the 'home' she had made and left, and to the pathways through the city that she and my father had made and known together. This twenty-year circular movement through West London, itself an emigration and a return, a diaspora within

the diaspora, ended with her burial beside my father in Saint Mary's Cemetery, Kensal Rise. The cemetery is wedged beside the canal and the railway line that runs towards the west and so to Ireland. They lie facing the rising sun so that at the Resurrection they may rise and meet their Saviour as He comes from the east, ready to follow Him to the west and the setting sun, to Paradise. Then they will make the journey west.