Spirit and Surplus

Excess in Modern Irish Writing

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INTRODUCTION: THE IDEA OF EXCESS

> The first warp-spasm seized Cúchulainn, and made him into a monstrous thing, hideous and shapeless, unheard of. His shanks and his joints, every knuckle and angle and organ from head to foot, shook like a tree in the flood or a reed in the stream. His body made a furious twist inside his skin, so that his feet and shins and knees switched to the rear and his heels and calves switched to the front. The balled sinews of his calves switched to the front of his shins, each big knot the size of a warrior's bunched fist. On his head the temple-sinews stretched to the nape of his neck, each mighty, immense, measureless knob as big as the head of a month-old child. His face and features became a red bowl: he sucked one eye so deep into his head that a wild crane couldn't probe it onto his cheek out of the depths of his skull: the other eye fell out along his cheek. His mouth was weirdly distorted: his cheek peeled back from his jaws until the gullet appeared, his lungs and liver flapped in his mouth and throat, his lower jaw struck the upper a lion-killing blow, and fiery flakes large as a ram's fleece reached his mouth from his throat. His heart boomed loud in his breast like the baying of a watch-dog at its feed or the sound of a lion among bears. Malignant mists and spurts of fire – the torches of the Badb – flickered red in the vaporous clouds that rose boiling above his head, so fierce was his fury.[1]

This passage appears in the most important story of Irish mythology, the *Táin Bó Cuailgne* (War of the Bull of Cooley), just as the Ulster hero Cuculain is about to enter battle against the warrior Fergus and his army from the province of Connacht in the west of Ireland. We are given an image of unbridled excess, in which all bodily proportion is confounded. What are its features? First, there is its unspeakable aspect. Kinsella translates Cuculain's warp-spasm as that which is 'unheard of'. The Irish-language term for this phenomenon, *ríastrad*, has no

straight English-language equivalent. *Ríastrad* denotes what is effectively indescribable. Second, there is its subversion of the opposition between the inside and the outside. Inner organs like lungs and liver become externally visible; one of Cuculain's eyes is sucked deep into his head, while the other falls out along his cheek. In an almost literal fashion, we encounter Derrida's destruction of the ordered difference between the outside and the inside in his famous pronouncement in *Of Grammatology*: 'The Outside Is the Inside'.[2] Third, there is the cultural status of this passage. The *Táin Bó Cuailgne* can legitimately be regarded as a foundation-myth for Ireland, perhaps *the* foundation myth, akin to Homer's *The Iliad* for the classical Greek world. To acknowledge it in this form is also to grant the narrative an essentialist status, however; one upon which the modern Irish claims to nationhood could draw. Yet this same essentialist foundation is undone in the passage cited, one that epitomizes a persistent propensity to excess throughout the *Táin*. A foundational myth, the *Táin* is also a narrative of confounding excess.

The excessive nature of Cuculain's warp spasm lends credence to Matthew Arnold's view of the Celtic spirit as excessive in nature, particularly when the centrality of the *ríastrad* to the narrative of the *Táin* is considered, and when the *Táin* is viewed as a foundational narrative in Irish mythology. While *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867) is a work heavily weighted with the racial ideas that informed philology studies in the nineteenth century, still it is difficult not to regard Cuculain's warp spasm and the general exorbitance of description in the *Táin* as typifying the assertions that Arnold makes about the Celtic temperament. He regards the Celt as the 'colossal, impetuous, adventurous wanderer, the Titan of the early world' and the comments on the Celt 'straining human nature further than it will stand'.[3] Arnold's work has received widespread attention in the field of Irish Studies over the past 40 years. This is particularly so with regard to what is seen as his colonial attitude to Ireland,

underwritten by a racial idea of civilization through which he supports his case for political union between Ireland and Britain (Irish critics have little to say on Arnold's extensive discussion of Welsh literature as Celtic in *On the Study of Celtic Literature*).[4] Arnold's well-known argument is that whereas the civilization of ancient Greece (his ideal model) exhibits measure and balance, that of the Celts is marked by passionate excess, incapable of coming to terms with 'the despotism of fact'. This is a phrase that Arnold borrows from his friend, the French priest Henri Martin. Martin includes a chapter on the Celts in his 1830s multi-volume work, *Histoire de France*.[5]

In her consideration of the influence on Oscar Wilde of Ireland's pre-eminent melodramatist of the nineteenth century, Dion Boucicault, Sos Eltis turns to Wilde's essay 'The Critic as Artist' in the light of Arnold's ideas on dreamy but impractical Celticism. Wilde directly refutes the assertion that Arnold makes in 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1865). This is Arnold's belief that the duty of criticism across all branches of learning is 'to see the object as in itself it really is'.[6] This statement bears a direct relation to 'the despotism of fact' against which the Celt is constantly rebelling as Arnold sees it. In his dialogue with Gilbert, the character Ernest in Wilde's 'The Critic as Artist' pronounces 'that the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is not'.[7] That which Arnold denigrates in *On the Study of Celtic Literature* Wilde regards as a virtue; that which Arnold considers as confined to past times (the Celt as interesting for his/her past rather than his/her present condition), is now considered modern.[8] If the Celt is one who rebels against 'the despotism of fact', then s/he epitomizes the spirit of modern criticism for Wilde. Eltis considers Wilde's turning Arnold's thought on its head as a gesture of immense significance. It is one in which Celticism becomes the embodiment rather than the antithesis of the modern spirit: 'Celticism

is no longer a decorative sprinkling of fairy dust on the vital project of imperial expansion, industry and scientific progress; it is the driving intellectual force of civilization'.[9]

The argument of Eltis is compelling, particularly when considered in relation to Jarlath Killeen's exploration of Wilde's writings in relation to nineteenth-century Irish Catholicism and Catholic-Protestant doctrinal issues in England and Ireland.[10] If Wilde radicalizes Celticism as epitomising the spirit of modern civilization, however, then this must involve a concomitant revision of Arnold's understanding of modern culture: liberal, rational and progressive. The spirit of the modern age moves from Arnoldian reason to Wildean excess. Wilde's idea of the modern spirit as one of perpetual creative invention stands squarely at odds with Arnold's insistence on balance and measure in *On the Study of Celtic Literature*. It is in this aspect that Wilde's affirmative revaluation of Arnold's idea of the Celtic temperament can be re-conceived as emphatically modern – Wilde's contemporary times (and personal lifestyle) as one of excess. In doing so, however, those Arnoldian notions of imperial expansion, industry and scientific progress to which Eltis refers are thrown into crisis.

Wilde is aware of this when he speaks of 'the object in itself as it really is not'. In this phrase, he is doing something more than refuting Arnold. He is drawing a direct relation between excess and negation, identifying a void in being itself, the consciousness of which is a distinctive feature of a modern temperament. On two occasions in *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, Arnold writes of the Celt's 'nervous exaltation' as expressing its 'feminine' character and its gift of rendering 'the magical charm of nature'.[11] With Wilde's reformulation of Arnold, we come to see this nervous sensibility in modern terms as a

condition of anxiety in the face of the inexpressible (one that predisposed the Celt of antiquity to magical beliefs and practices). As with the inexpressible dimension of Cuculain's *ríastrad*, the Celtic predisposition to imaginative excess registers a dimension of nullity in existence itself. In the form of modernized Celticism, Wilde's object 'as it really is not' signifies the presence of a void within the object as it is encountered, a void that generates a sense of crisis. Just as Arnold associates the nervous sentimentality that he attributes to the Celtic temperament with a long history of inevitable failure, likewise there is an extensive list of modernist authors who came to literature from personal traumas that left them susceptible to nervous disorder.[12] Indeed the imprisonment and death of Wilde himself conjoins this history of defeated Celts with the collapses of the modernist and proto-modernist *décadents*.

My discussion of twentieth-century Irish literature in this book develops in terms of an intersection between the idea of excess as a characteristic of the Celtic temperament and excess as a constitutive feature of modern thought. I consider excess in the work of a broad range of influential thinkers from the nineteenth to the late twentieth century when discussing drama, fiction and poetry by Irish-born authors across the twentieth century. These include contemporary thinkers who present excess under different aspects. Foremost among these is Alain Badiou, particularly with regard to his mathematical set-theory account of being for which the notions of excess and the void are fundamental. Badiou's ideas on excess are particularly intriguing in challenging the view that modern Irish literature – with the major exceptions of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett – is generally recalcitrant to mathematical logic interpretation. My study draws upon Badiou's notions on set-theory as they relate to his ideas of the void and the point of excess when examining excess in works by W. B. Yeats, Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, Louis MacNeice, Samuel Beckett, Elizabeth Bowen, Michael Longley and Paul Muldoon. Along with Slavoj Žižek, another important thinker of recent

times for whom the role of excess is central is Peter Sloterdijk. Of particular significance to this study in Sloterdijk's theory of the spherical are his ideas of the body exceeding itself through absorption of (or penetration) by external elements and the importance that he attributes to artificial objects forming part of the human body, thereby extending the 'natural' body into the 'artificial'. This is particularly relevant to the presence of excess in the form of artificial body-parts in works by Sean O'Casey, Beckett and Roddy Doyle.

Within the field of Irish Studies, a recurrent suspicion of general theoretical readings of modern Irish writing is that such readings fail to demonstrate the specifically Irish aspects of the issues that are explored. It may well be argued that there is little to distinguish excess as it appears in twentieth-century Irish writing from that of excess in modern American, English, French, German or Spanish writing, for example. This objection has much to commend it when general theoretical analyses of works by Irish authors take little or no account of specifically Irish historical, cultural and political contexts and influences. For example, in his essays on Beckett, Badiou mentions Ireland only once. Commenting on Beckett's short story 'Enough', Badiou writes of the old couple wandering around 'in the beautiful Scottish or Irish mounds, covered with flowers'.[13] Suspicious of this kind of general theorizing of works by Irish-born writers, however, Irish Studies risks defending a ludicrous position, i.e. that Irish writing is somehow exempt from general philosophical and theoretical conceptualization. The success of the prison performances of Beckett's plays, for example, is just one instance of the profound impact of Beckett's work without any specifically Irish dimension: *Waiting for Godot* at Lüttringhausen prison near Wuppertal in Germany in 1953–54; *Waiting for Godot* at San Quentin prison in the USA in 1957, followed by prisoner-productions of this and other Beckett plays at the prison in the early 1960s.[14]

Examining works by W. B. Yeats in Part One, my study observes how the influence of Nietzsche on Yeats's thought (mediated by Yeats's dedicated study of William Blake) accounts in significant measure for Yeats's image of the Irish temperament as excessive in nature. What Arnold had identified as a specifically Celtic phenomenon is, in Yeats's work, a universal condition such as Nietzsche identifies it in his writing on Dionysian excess: a condition that may appear in Irish culture in a pronounced fashion. In his essay, 'On the Study of Celtic Literature', Yeats revises Arnold's belief that 'natural magic' was a distinctively Celtic belief and practice. Instead, Yeats regards the pagan nature-worship of the Celts as 'the ancient religion of the world, the ancient worship of Nature and that troubled ecstasy before her'.[15] However much Yeats's argument can be contested, still it shows that even in one as pre-occupied with Ireland as he, there is an understanding of Irish experience as part of world experience.

Sinéad Garrigan Mattar has persuasively argued for the influence of general anthropological notions of animism in Yeats's writings on Irish folklore during the 1880s-1890s, writings that perceived in accounts of Irish supernatural experience the same animistic features that Yeats detected in the Ainu tribes of Siberia as described by B. Douglas Howard, for example.[16] Garrigan Mattar's regards animism in so-called primitive societies through contemporary anthropological thought as a radical form of 'being-in-the-world' rather than a long-gone set of primitive beliefs. Likewise, when we recognize the consonance between this 'troubled ecstasy' before nature that Yeats identifies in the Celt and Nietzsche's idea of Dionysian excess in *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, we can see how this ancient religion anticipates in various ways the place of excess in modern thought. This is important when

observing the connection between excess as it appears in nineteenth-century thinking on the Celtic temperament and the role of excess in modern thought under the widespread influence of Nietzsche's writings. Significant in this regard is Nietzsche acquaintance in the 1860s with the German scholar Ernst Windisch at the University of Leipzig. Celticist, philologist and Professer of Sanskrit and Comparative Linguistics, Windisch worked with Whiteley Stokes on old Irish manuscripts and taught Kuno Meyer at Leipzig. Meyer would become one of the most important philological scholars for the study of the Irish language and of old Irish manuscripts during the Irish Revival of the late-nineteenth century.[17]

Part One of this book discusses excess in some works by Irish authors that carry no direct relation to Ireland. These include Oscar Wilde's plays *Salomé* and *The Importance of Being Ernest*, Yeats's 'The Gift of Harun Al-Raschid', Louis MacNeice's Indian poems 'Didymus' and 'Letter from India'. Considering the role of excess in Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, my discussion of these works identifies an important Irish dimension in relation to the view of Celtic excess as Oriental in nature or origin. This Orientalist form of excess is examined through the idea and the function of excess in the modern philosophical work of Martin Heidegger, Georges Bataille and Jacques Derrida. Part Three of this book includes discussion of Elizabeth Bowen's novel on London during the Blitz, *The Heat of the Day*, a novel with an important Irish connection but one dominated by its English setting. While drawing attention to the Anglo-Irish aspect of Bowen's novel, my consideration of this work is more concerned with its treatment of excess in terms of the ontology of Heidegger and of Badiou. Particularly when regarding Bowen's novel in the light of Beckett's prose works of the 1950s, it is possible to see how excess in Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* [Being-there] may also apply as much to Irish people's innermost experience of being in the world as to, say, that of Slovenians, Germans, English, Zambians, French, Peruvians or Canadians.

Recognizing that the presence of excess is no more unique to modern Irish writing than to the writing of any other modern culture, it is still important to acknowledge the distinctive ways in which excess sometimes appears in works by authors from Ireland. Indeed, when considering excess in its material aspect, the case of modern Irish writing might be regarded as exemplary to some degree. Part Two of this book addresses this material aspect in two senses: 1) the relation between the kind of emotional excess that Arnold attributed to the Celtic personality and such economic forms of excess as debt and inflation; 2) excess in the form of the waste product that is generated in the process of material production. An obvious point of reference here is the impact of the Great Famine in the 1840s that rendered a large section of the Irish population as surplus to economic requirements. Excess in the form of human beings as waste product was made strikingly apparent on one occasion in this context when the British Liberal prime minister John Russell described the Irish destitute who were emigrating to North America during the years of the Famine as 'the rubbish of the home population'.[18] My approach to these issues draws in the first instance upon the role of excess in the forms of surplus value and waste product that appear in Marx's economic writings. In addressing the relation between emotional and economic inflation, I consider the ways in which Marx's idea of profit as a measure of the time that a worker spends working for nothing is internalized existentially in Kierkegaard's reflections on the desire for self-annihilation.

The intimate connection between economic and emotional excess appears most strikingly under the aspect of marriage. In chapter five I consider seminal dramatic works by Dion Boucicault, Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw in terms of the affective and financial

issues relating to marriage. In so doing, I identify how presence of a void in these plays marks a critical point of intersection between emotional excess, the threat of bankruptcy and the recycling of left-over culture. This analysis is extended in chapter six to consider how, as leftover objects, human agents live off left-over equipment in such a way as to survive in the realm of excess produce. Looking at works by Sean O'Casey, Samuel Beckett and Roddy Doyle, my interest is in the transformation of human agents in this process, particularly when left-over equipment (such as a wooden leg) becomes effectively integrated into the body. I discuss the representation of human body parts in the work of these Dublin-born writers in terms of Peter Sloterdijk's consideration of a contemporary relationship between the human body and technology.[19] Assessing this in relation to characters like O'Casey's Captain Boyle, Beckett's Molloy and Doyle's Henry Smart, I contextualize Sloterdijk's perspective in terms of Heidegger's post-war concept of human agents reduced to the condition of a 'standing reserve': a surplus maintained and ready to be put into motion at any time for the generation of energy.[20]

The excessive nature of violence in modern Irish writing is discernible in two dominant aspects: sacrificial violence and revolutionary violence. Although separate, both aspects are often linked within a history of Irish war and rebellion dating back over a thousand years to the Gaelic tribal defeat of the Vikings at the Battle of Clontarf near Dublin in 1014. In modern philosophy, the significance of sacrificial violence can be traced back to Søren Kierkegaard's famous reflection on the call of Yahweh to Abraham to kill his son Isaac. In his 1843 work, *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard conceptualizes one of the most important ideas for modern philosophy in terms of this biblical narrative. Taking Abraham's circumstance as his model, Kierkegaard argues for the need to take decisive action as the basis of authentic self-realization, without any prior ethical calculation regarding the value of

the action or its consequences. Kierkegaard's argument is an important precedent for Georges Bataille's radical ideas on sacrificial violence in works written in the 1920s and the 1930s, though Bataille is more directly associated with Nietzsche's ideas of Dionysian excess. In chapter three I address sacrifice as presented in plays by Patrick Pearse, Yeats and Marina Carr in terms of the excessive nature of Kierkegaard's notion of sacrifice in *Fear and Trembling*, demonstrating a new way of considering the politics of Pearse's personal sacrifice as leader of the 1916 Irish rebellion. In the process, I draw attention to the relation between sacrifice as excess in the thought of Kierkegaard and Bataille. Furthermore, I consider the aspect of guilt that is involved in these Irish theatrical representations of sacrifice in terms of the modern interpretation of guilt that Heidegger proposes as a constitutive dimension of *Dasein* in its primordial orientation towards death.

Part Two concludes with a discussion of violence and material excess in fiction and drama from Northern Ireland. I examine the extent to which Northern Irish writing reflects a situation of excess in the political sense: a state-formation that has existed beyond the relative civic order of the Great Britain since the 1920s, and one that has perpetually remained threateningly beyond the administrative authority of the Republic of Ireland. Over the course of the twentieth century, Northern Ireland has elicited contradictory impulses from British and Irish Governments to assimilate or to repel, testament to its political condition as exceeding the sovereign integrity of the neighbouring nation-states. Drawing on Derrida's idea of excess in the form of the parasite when discussing Glenn Patterson's 1988 novel *Burning Your Own* and Belfast plays from 1986 and 1996 by Christina Reid, I consider how George Sorel's anarcho-syndicalist notion of revolutionary violence – with its concepts of myth and infinity exceeding all norms of statehood – presents a new form of understanding sectarian, paramilitary and state violence in Northern Ireland.

Part Three addresses excess in modern Irish literature in terms of myth, focusing on the question of language in the process. Beginning with a discussion of the mythic and linguistic aspects of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, I consider how it inflates Irish mythology to an infinite degree through its exploration of associations with eastern civilizations: linguistic, historical and geographical. Drawing on Badiou's set-theory account of the relation between excess and the void, I consider how *Finnegans Wake* presents origination itself – both in the sense of the earliest and of the new – as an act of violence through writing. In the process, I situate Badiou's concept of the event in relation to Sorel's idea of the mythic stature of a revolutionary situation. In the process, excess in *Finnegans Wake* is contextualized in terms of the violence that followed the 1916 rebellion in Ireland as it in turn related to the wider circumstances of political violence in Europe in the early-twentieth century.

I develop this evaluation of mythic and linguistic aspects of excess in Irish writing by turning to Elizabeth Bowen's London war-time novel, *The Heat of the Day*, as it relates to Beckett's trilogy of the 1950s. At issue here is language itself as a form of excess. A relation between infinity and the absolute minimum appears in these works, pointing to that feature of the event as Badiou defines it, by which something emerges from nothing. I consider the multitudinous references that the narrative voice of *The Unnameable* makes to 'nothing' in describing the figure of Worm.[21] The sheer magnitude of nothingness that Louie Lewis feels in *The Heat of the Day* is also brought into consideration, as is the sense that Robert Kelway feels in Bowen's novel of he and Stella Rodney existing in a complete void.[22] Addressing these features in terms of nothingness as it appears in the thought of Heidegger and Sartre, I

also evaluate Beckett and Bowen's novels in the light of Badiou's contention that the void can only be identified in excess of the situation to which it is connected.[23]

The final chapter of the book examines poetry from Northern Ireland since the outbreak of political violence at the end of the 1960s. The forms of excess already discussed in relation to Joyce, Bowen and Beckett are traced here in reading poems by Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Paul Muldoon and Medbh McGuckian. I consider Heaney's poem from the early 1970s, 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing', in terms of Badiou's ideas on belonging and inclusion, excess and the void. I discuss Michael Longley's poem on political violence in 1980s Belfast, 'The Ice-Cream Man', in connection with Bataille's association of delicacy and death in his theory of nature as endless expenditure. Furthermore, I consider the formal reticence that marks both poems in responding to violence. Heidegger argues that reticence is the most appropriate form of response to the shock of the event, triggered by the manner in which the event suddenly exceeds meaning. It is through this idea of Heidegger's that I assess the poetic formality of 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing' and 'The Ice-Cream Man'.

One of the most interesting poems on the political situation in Northern Ireland during the Troubles is Paul Muldoon's 'The More A Man Has, The More A Man Wants' from his 1983 collection, *Quoof*. I discuss excess in this poem in terms of Badiou's description of the limit ordinal number: a number that guarantees the succession of a sequence but that always occupies the place of the Other to the entire sequence itself.[24] Reading the central figure of Gallogly in this poem as an instance of the limit ordinal number in operation, I illustrate the poem's congruence with the associative technique of *Finnegans Wake*. It thereby becomes evident that Muldoon's use of myth generates the excess of the poem over the various

contexts to which it alludes. A similar pattern is evident in myth as it appears in the poetry of Medbh McGuckian. Instead of bringing disparate circumstances under the umbrella of a central mythic order, McGuckian employs mythic allusion to exceed such order. By way of examples, I consider the manner through which she interweaves the Irish legend of the absconding lovers Diarmuid and Gráinne in her 1988 poem, 'Gráinne's Sleep Song', with the love affair of Olga Ivinskaya and Boris Pasternak in Stalinist-era Russia. I also discuss the various associated layers of 'The Dream-language of Fergus' from the same collection, *On Ballycastle Beach*. I draw attention to the excess that is created through a specific process of doubling in both poems, a process evident in Muldoon's poem also and one that can be traced back to the notion 'Dyoublong', from *Finnegans Wake*. Doubling in these poems exemplifies the excess that is generated in the procedure of 'the counting of the count', a notion that Badiou draws from mathematical set-theory.[25] This procedure is in turn analogous with the original doubling that Peter Sloterdijk identifies in ancient cults of the magic vulva, a notion of special significance to the topic of birth in McGuckian's 'The Dream-language of Fergus'. In this way, the centrality of excess to the poetic responses of Muldoon and McGuckian to circumstances in Ulster during the 1970s and 1980s is brought to light.

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[1] Thomas Kinsella, trans., *The Táin: From the Irish epic Táin Bó Cuailgne*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 150–53.

[2] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1976; repr,. Baltimore MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 44.

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[3] Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1867), 106, 108.

[4] See, for example, Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature* (London: Faber, 1985), 25–27; David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 44–51; W. J. McCormack, *From Burke to Beckett: Ascendancy, Tradition and Betrayal in Literary History*, 2nd ed. (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994), 228–31; Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: the Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), 30–32; Aaron Kelly, *Twentieth-Century Irish Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 7–10.

[5] Arnold, *On the Study*, 102.

[6] Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism as the Present Time', in *Essays in Criticism*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1875), 1–47 (5–6).

[7] Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', in *Intentions* (New York: Brentano's, 1905), 93–218 (144).

[8] 'It is not in the outward and visible world of material life that the Celtic genius of Wales or Ireland can at this day hope to count for much; it is in the inward world of thought and science. What it *has* been, what it *has* done, let it ask us to attend to that, as a matter of science and history; not to what it will be or will do, as a matter of modern politics' (Arnold, *On the Study*, 15).

[9] Sos Eltis, 'Oscar Wilde, Dion Boucicault and the Pragmatics of Being Irish: Fashioning a New Brand of the Modern Irish Celt', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 60, no. 3 (2017): 267–293 (284).

[10] Jarlath Killeen, *The Faiths of Oscar Wilde: Catholicism, Folklore and Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

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[11] Arnold, *On the Study*, 90, 132.

[12] Arnold opens *On the Study of Celtic Literature* with the following line from *Ossian*: 'They went forth to the war, but they always fell' (Arnold, *On the Study*, xix). The quotation points to a circular form of reasoning in the book: the Celts as sentimentally extravagant from a long history of perpetual defeat arising in large measure from the sentimental character of the Celts. With regarding to modernist anxiety by way of comparison: Chris Baldick names an extensive list of British modernist writers who suffered personal trauma. This includes Dorothy Richardson, whose mother committed suicide; John Masefield, whose father became clinically insane; Virginia Woolf, who was sexually abused in childhood; Graham Greene, who tried to kill himself when a teenager. Chris Baldick, *The Oxford English Literary History*, vol. 10: *1910-1940: The Modern Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 40.

[13] Alain Badiou, *On Beckett*, ed. Alberto Toscano and Nina Power (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003), 6.

[14] James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), 409–10, 612–13.

[15] W. B. Yeats, 'The Celtic Element in Literature', in *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1955), 173–88 (176).

[16] Sinéad Garrigan Mattar, 'Yeats, Fairies, and the New Animism', *New Literary History* 43, no. 1 (Winter) 2012: 137–157 (141–42).

[17] Wayne Borody observes that Nietzsche himself returned to a Celtic past when he took up residence at Sils-Maria in the Swiss Alps after he become a Professor at the University of Basel. This area was an important Celtic settlement in ancient times, an area where stone dolmens are common, once sacred sites of worship and burial for the Celtic druids several

thousand years before Christianity. 'Nietzsche on the Cross: The Defence of Personal Freedom in *The Birth of Tragedy*', *Humanitas* 16, no. 2 (2003): 76–93 (91–92).

[18] 'Colonisation for Ireland', *The Examiner*, June 6 (1847): 361–362 (362). In the previous sitting of the Westminster parliament, Russell urged the need to subject England to expense in order to prevent Ireland 'from sinking into a state which he could not contemplate without horror' 'Destitute Poor (Ireland) Bill', *The Examiner*, June 6 (1847): 360–61 (361).

[19] Peter Sloterdijk, *Neither Sun nor Death*, with Hans-Jürgen Heinrichs, trans. Steve Corcoran (Los Angeles CA: Semiotext(e), 2011), 135

[20] Martin Heidegger, 'Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics', *What Is a Thing?*, trans. W.B. Barton Jr. and Vera Deutsch (1967), in *Basic Writings*, new ed., ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993): 267–306.

[21] Samuel Beckett, *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London: Calder Publications, 1959), 349.

[22] Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* (1948; repr., New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 227, 207.

[23] Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (1988) trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), 109.

[24] Ibid., 155.

[25] Ibid., 94.