

Úna Ní Bhroiméil



The Creation of an Irish Culture in the United States: The Gaelic Movement, 1870–1915

The Irish language was the hook on which Irish cultural nationalism was hung in Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century. The foundation of the Gaelic League in 1893 focused on the revival of Irish as a spoken language. By 1916, Irish nationalism had become unthinkable without the Irish language at its core. While the Irish language may have provided a basis for cultural nationalism at home, it can hardly be said to be politically relevant in the context of the United States. One of the reasons for the decline of the Irish language in the second half of the nineteenth century was emigration, and in general studies of language in America, Irish receives little mention. Irish is not listed by Fishman as an immigrant language,¹ and Heinze Kloss remarks that the Irish do not belong to the foreign language minorities in the United States.² Jeffrey Kallen clearly documents the use of Irish as an immigrant language in the United States, but asserts correctly that the language has taken on a “covert role” in ethnic life.³

When historians discuss the Irish language in the United States, they usually refer to scattered pockets of Irish speakers, to the missions of the Gaelic League seeking moral and financial support in America, and sometimes to the Gaelic societies and to Gaelic League branches founded abroad and reports on their progress to date.⁴ Rarely is the language movement regarded as a cultural movement in itself. Rather, it is perceived as a means to an end—to the cultivation of respectability lacking in nineteenth-century Ireland because of its

1. J. A. Fishman, *Language Loyalty in the United States* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966).

2. H. Kloss, *The American Bilingual Tradition* (Rowley: Delta Systems, 1977), p. 17.

3. Jeffrey L. Kallen, “Irish as an American Ethnic Language,” in *The Irish Language in America—A Historical, Sociolinguistic and Applied Linguistic Study*, ed. Thomas W. Ihde (Wesport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1994).

4. K. E. Nilsen, “Thinking of Monday: The Irish Speakers of Portland, Maine,” *Éire-Ireland*, 25, 1 (Spring 1990); Dennis Clark, “Muted Heritage: Gaelic in an American City,” *Éire-Ireland*, 6, 2 (Spring 1971); Proinsias Mac Aonghusa, “An Ghaeilge i Meiriceá,” in *Go Meiriceá Siar*, ed. Stiofán Ó hAnnracháin (Dublin 1979); Lynn McGowan, “The Irish Language in America,” in Ihde, *The Irish Language in America*.

status as a colonized country; as a common plank in Irish nationalist organizations; or as proof of a glorious and civilized past that should be taught as part of the history curriculum in American schools.

While it would have seemed unlikely that the Irish language would prove to be a unifying force among the American Irish given its progressive decline in postfamine Ireland, allied to other aspects of nationality within the American context, it acquired a significant import in Irish-American organizations. And in the Irish quest for assimilation to the host country, a badge of ethnicity that indicated an ancient and glorious past rather than a demeaned and debased one could prove invaluable. An accurate analysis of the Irish community in the New World needs to recognize that there was also a flowering of cultural consciousness and debate among the Irish in the United States in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. This led to the creation of a unique Irish cultural identity in the United States.

Long before the foundation of the Gaelic League in Ireland in 1893, Gaelic societies had appeared in America. In 1872, Michael J. Logan, a teacher and real estate agent who had been born in Milltown, County Galway, had started an Irish class in Brooklyn. In 1874, he founded the Brooklyn Philo-Celtic Society for the purpose of teaching the Irish language. (The first such society in the United States, the Philo-Celtic Society of Boston, was founded on April 28, 1873.) The aim of the society was the cultivation of the Celtic or Irish language, and its object to give free instruction. The constitution of the society stated that "no political or religious discussion affecting this country will be allowed at the meetings under any circumstances."⁵ And although its early documents assert that the lack of knowledge of the Irish language among the Irish people was due to the "vandal invader who made war on everything Irish," the formation of the society was not overtly political. It was better understood as a confirmation of an identity that was threatened with extinction, and an effort to prove Ireland an old and civilized race through its language and literature:

There are many of our countrymen here who . . . are ashamed of everything Irish . . . let us make those have the proud satisfaction of feeling that their own country is second to none in literary renown, which will make them turn that shame into glory and convert them to genuine Irishmen.⁶

It is from Michael J. Logan's journal, *An Gaodhal*, the first edition of which was published in 1881, that we get a sense of what the language movement meant to those involved. In an article in December, 1881, Logan argued that the preservation and cultivation of the Irish language were "indispensable to the

5. Constitution and By-Laws of the Philo-Celtic Society of Boston, *Irish World*, 19 September 1874.

6. *Irish World*, 15 April 1876. Letter from P. J. O'Daly, Secretary, Philo-Celtic Society of Boston.

social status of the Irish people and their descendants, and therefore, of vital importance to Americans of Irish descent.”⁷ This notion that knowledge of the language would somehow raise the status of the Irish in their own eyes and by so doing, would raise them in the eyes of others, was reiterated again and again in the pages of *An Gaodhal*. While Logan admitted that the first objective of *An Gaodhal* was to cultivate and preserve the language, he acknowledged that the elevation of the social standing of the Irish in America ran a close second:

Secondly, to remove the slur which the non-existence of a journal in the national language seemed to cast on the Irish element in this country, seeing that of all the nations the Irish was the only one that had not its national journal. Even the few scattered natives of the insignificant Kingdom of Bohemia have their national journal. The existence of the *Gael* removed that slur, and it is destined to do more to elevate the social standing of the people in this country than anything before attempted.⁸

In a column titled “the sentiments of our subscribers,” we see a mixture of people who spoke the language and had no occasion to use it, and of those who had no knowledge of the tongue but who desired to preserve it as a mark nationality. Correspondents remarked on a range of situations:

Counsellor Gough, Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin: I am able to read Irish fairly, but your publication will enable me, I hope, to read it fully.

James Powers, Fall River, Massachusetts: Though not able to speak or read Irish myself, I admire every effort of those who are interesting themselves to rescue our mother-tongue from that almost oblivion into which it has fallen.

Timothy Danahoe, Ottawa, Minnesota: I was raised in Westmeath and understand no Irish, I am fifty years old but can learn it.

Jeremiah Hanley, Kingsville, Indiana: Wants to try his hand at the language which by rights he ought to know.

Maurice Downey, Montague, Michigan: Your advertisement . . . induced me to have your paper as I speak the language.

C. Murphy, Maniton, Colorado: Wishes it distinctly understood that no man is an Irishman who does not know the language.

Miss Mary Clifford, New Hampshire: Wishes to promote the cultivation of the tongue of her sires.

Mary Considine, Ulysses, Nebraska: Does not believe that Irish ladies should be ignorant of the language which was so often lisped in their praise.⁹

7. *An Gaodhal*, December, 1881.

8. *An Gaodhal*, August, 1882.

9. *An Gaodhal*, May, 1882.

Joining a Gaelic society would provide an opportunity both to learn the language and to use it in the company of like-minded others. Thus, instead of sinking into oblivion, organizers envisioned that the language would at once become an integral part of a pleasant and social activity, while its preservation as a mark and badge of identity was assured. By 1884, it was claimed by the *Irish World* that there were over fifty schools devoted to the study of the Irish tongue in the United States.¹⁰ It is difficult to estimate the membership of these societies, as they tended to record the numbers of new members in their monthly reports but rarely gave total membership numbers. Between sixty to one hundred dues-paying members appears to have been the average membership of each society. Also, not all persons attending classes were necessarily members of a given society. Society dues were usually 25 cents a month, but tuition was free to anyone who cared to avail of it, adding to the difficulty of estimating membership. One week the hall might be crowded and another, especially during the hot summer months, a few diehards might be the only ones in attendance.

Reports on the activities of the Gaelic societies can most easily be obtained from the contemporary newspapers. The *Irish World* carried a weekly page on what was happening in the United States and here, among such headlines as "Mangled on the Elevated," "Renouncing the World," "Taking the Veil," and "Clerical Changes," we find reports on the day-to-day functioning of the Gaelic societies. While scattered as far apart as Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Kansas City, the basic activities of these societies appear very similar. Logan recommended certain rules and regulations for the conduct of such Gaelic classes in *An Gaodhal*: "The class exercises of each session should be confined to one hour, and the presiding officer should see that perfect quiet was maintained during that hour. The second hour of the session should be given to speaking, singing etc."¹¹

This pattern appears to be the one most commonly followed by the Gaelic societies. The societies tended to meet at least twice a week, usually between the hours of seven and ten o'clock in the evening. Instruction in the language would occupy the early part of the evening, consisting of reading, translation, and vocabulary and grammar exercises. Occasionally, there would be a lecture on such a topic as "the antiquity of the Irish language" given by a visitor or by a member of the society. Then the "pleasant hour" would ensue. This usually meant songs, recitations, and, later on, Irish dancing. A mixture of Irish and English would be used during the pleasant hour and *Moore's Melodies* were particular favorites. A monthly meeting was held to transact the business of the society, to hear reports from committees, and to discuss future events and

10. *Irish World*, 12 April 1884; 17 May 1884.

11. *An Gaodhal*, August, 1896.

finance. The election of officers was an annual event and would again be followed by songs and recitations. Typical news accounts would read like these:

Philo-Celtic Society (Boston) held a meeting . . . at its rooms on Tremont St. when some fifty new members were admitted. An interesting lecture was delivered in the Irish vernacular by Mr. Carr, and Mr. O'Sullivan amused the audience by singing the "Meeting of the Waters" in Irish.¹²

San Francisco: The Gaelic Club had a splendid meeting in Red Branch Hall recently at which a splendid address on the present state of Ireland was delivered by John O'Quigley . . . [others] contributed to the enjoyment with songs and recitations.¹³

The Phila. Philo-Celtic Society: After the routine business had been transacted the members entertained one another very pleasantly with songs, recitations etc.¹⁴

St. Brendan Branch Gaelic League (N.Y.): At the close of school hours a short time is devoted to Irish dances presided over by a regular teacher of the art, Irish music and history, the traditional singing of the old airs.¹⁵

The entertainment session was, therefore, an intrinsic part of both the regular meetings and of special events. The anniversary of Archbishop McHale's birthday was annually celebrated by the Brooklyn Philo-Celts in music and song, and regular concerts were given by all societies to demonstrate their progress. During the summer months, picnics were regular occurrences, and balls were the highlight of the winter months. Most entertainments of the societies seem to have been popular and financially successful. The societies often suspended their weekly classes for the summer months and the annual picnic served to draw the scattered members together in preparation for the autumn session. The picnics were not confined to members of the societies, but open to "all who desire to promote Gaelic sentiment" and the "respectable" nature of the occasions was emphasized by the promoters: "The attendance was fair and select; there was none of that rough element which generally patronises such assemblages present."¹⁶

Large numbers appear to have attended: "The first annual picnic of the Philo-Celtic school took place at Fresh Pond Grove and was attended by 1000 persons."¹⁷ The language of the day was Irish. In fact, Logan paints an interest-

12. *Irish World*, 5 July 1873.

13. *Irish World*, 24 April 1886.

14. *An Gaodhal*, January 1891.

15. *Gaelic American*, 10 October, 1903. This and the preceding quotations are a random, illustrative sample chosen from many reports over the period 1870-1905.

16. *An Gaodhal*, September, 1882.

17. *Irish World and Industrial Liberator*, 2 September 1882.

ing progression of the Brooklyn Philo-Celtic Society's attitude to the use of the Irish language at the annual picnic in *An Gaodhal*. While it was noted that at the third annual picnic in September, 1882, that, "The Irish language only as far as practicable will be used by members" and that there were some "whose efforts to do so caused considerable amusement," by September, 1883, his line had hardened: "It [Irish] will be the language of the day, and any member who uses English to those who understand him or her in Irish will be fined."¹⁸

While this might appear at first to be a draconian measure to take at a social entertainment, it does underline the fact that these societies considered themselves to be, first and foremost, language preservation movements and not mere social outlets for Irish Americans. No doubt, members and their friends needed to be reminded of this from time to time—or at least Michael J. Logan believed that they did. Lest they become confused as to the aims of the societies, he was on hand to keep members on the right track: "Picnics or balls should not be the object of Philo-Celts, but the cultivation of their language."¹⁹ The balls and concerts of the societies were also well patronized and much was made of the fact that they proved to be financial successes:

A large concert and Ball was given at Uris' Academy under the auspices of the Philo-Celtic Association [Brooklyn] . . . the large attendance should be gratifying to the officers . . . a financial success.

The Philo-Celtic Society [Boston] will give a good entertainment on May 29 . . . over 700 tickets have already been distributed.²⁰

The programs for these entertainments, however, were not confined to Irish-language songs or recitations, although some events made greater use of the Irish language than others. Most entertainments opened with an address by the president of the society, generally given in both Irish and English, followed by a mixture of bilingual songs and recitations by members of the society. The Brooklyn Philo-Celts gave two entertainments in 1883 in April and October, one of which was decidedly more Irish-language oriented than the other, as the programs testify. In the second program in October nine out of twenty items, both songs and recitations, were performed in the Irish language, whereas only one out of eleven items was in Irish in April.²¹ The same was true of other societies. The Philo-Celtic Society of Philadelphia celebrated its third anniversary in June, 1884, with a concert and presentation of prizes. Presided over by "a distinguished lawyer of this city, P. E. Carroll . . . and filled

18. *An Gaodhal*, July and September, 1882; August, 1883.

19. *An Gaodhal*, September, 1887.

20. *Irish World*, 3 May 1884; 20 December 1884; 2 May 1885.

21. *An Gaodhal*, April, 1883; November, 1883.

to utmost capacity with . . . hundreds who came unable to gain admission,” the address and eight of its twenty-two items were in the Irish language. One recitation, “The Flight of the Earls” was performed twice—the first time in Irish, with a translation immediately afterward in English.²²

The entertainments appealed to a wider audience than Irish-language enthusiasts alone and this was reflected in the large numbers attending. If any proceeds were to be realized, an appeal to a wide audience was necessary, whether through a bilingual program or through a program of sentimental and patriotic songs and recitations. Where neither of these conditions were met, as in the case of *An Bard agus An Fó*—an operetta in Irish performed in New York under the auspices of the New York Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language in November, 1884—the project was doomed to failure. Michael J. Logan blamed the flop on the fact that the musical was an “opera,” albeit “one of the best of its kind ever produced on any stage, or before any audience: pure, chaste, and patriotic; and being in the language of Erin.”²³ The editorial in the *Irish World* in January, 1885, attributed the failure to the fact that the opera was performed solely in the Irish language and was therefore unintelligible to the majority of interested citizens. It was therefore proposed to hold a

concert of charming old Irish ballad music . . . in Steinway Hall . . . the proceeds of which it is expected will liquidate the expenses incurred by the members of the Irish Language Society by producing the first Irish musical work composed in the U.S. . . . on the present occasion it [*An Bard agus An Fó*] will be rendered in English to make it more generally intelligible.²⁴

On this occasion the evening turned out to be “a magnificent success . . . the hall was well-filled by a large respectable and highly appreciative audience,” although whether the success was attributable to the English language or to the charming Irish ballad music is unclear.²⁵ In all probability, it was a mixture of the two, as the formula was a tried and tested one in the entertainments of the Irish societies.

The success of various picnics, balls, and entertainments cannot be taken as proof that the Irish societies were thriving and had a high profile among the Irish-American population. These were exactly what they said they were—entertainment—and the large numbers attending them were at variance with the numbers attending the “real” business of the societies: learning the language. The numbers attending class constantly fluctuated and were the subject of many appeals to members to be more consistent about their attendance. Logan

22. *An Gaodhal*, July, 1884.

23. *An Gaodhal*, December, 1884.

24. *Irish World*, 17 January 1885.

25. *Irish World*, 31 January 1885.

published a column in which he praised regular attendees and castigated those whose commitment he regarded as being below par:

Morrissey: Vice-president Morrissey is a little earlier in attendance since our last issue.

Heany: Fin. secretary Heany is always on time: he never misses a meeting.

Cassidy: P.M. Cassidy is being marked absent quite frequently lately.

Dowling: It is very pleasing to see Mr Wm. L. Dowling, though an American born, leading his three daughters, ranging from seven to twelve years of age, into the hall every meeting evening. His example should be followed by Irish Americans.

Peyton: Miss Peyton is also marked absent.

Rielly [sic]: Miss Kate Rielly, the Misses Gallagher, Miss Dwyer and Miss Brennan, though new members, are making progress.²⁶

This form of public chastisement was extreme, especially as it was offered in the context of trying to win support for the preservation of the language that was in danger of extinction not only in the United States but also in its homeland. Logan possibly felt that patriotic appeals were not having the desired effect and so resorted to more direct methods. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, he made continual appeals for regular attendance at classes:

Philo-Celtic Society [Brooklyn] . . . the members have worked energetically but so far have not met with the success which their endeavors merit. They therefore again earnestly appeal to their fellow countrymen to come forward, apply themselves earnestly to the study of the language, and otherwise co-operate in the good work.

Brooklyn: David O'Keefe, Principal of the Irish Language School in St. Patrick's Academy complains that the attendance had been very poor lately and urges those interested in the grand old tongue to be present at the meeting.²⁷

Thus, while attendance at picnics and entertainments may have been large and the proceeds welcome, the main business of the societies was the preservation of the Irish language itself and it was this message that needed to be reiterated again and again to the members.

But learning the language to any degree of fluency was difficult—especially in a society that acclaimed proficiency in English, which had come to be regarded as the language of progress even in Ireland. For the majority of members it

26. *An Gaodhal*, February, 1883.

27. *Irish World*, 30 August 1879; 15 November 1884.

was sufficient to acquire enough Irish to converse in simple phrases with one another, and to sing songs and perform recitations composed in or translated into Irish. They could enjoy the pleasant hour and entertainments in a congenial setting, while at the same time feel a sense of pride and patriotism that an aspect of their nationality was not being allowed to die out. This would appear to be the case if we compare the attendance at picnics and entertainments with the actual numbers in each individual society. Logan outlined the difficulties societies faced in July, 1887:

What is the matter with our Brooklyn Philo-Celts. The hall is nearly empty every Sunday. Ah, Philo-Celts, spasmodic ebullitions of patriotism will never attain the end in view. You have undertaken the task of educating your countrymen in the science of Nationality, the undertaking is no milk and sugar affair, but downright hard labor. It is no picnic affair, but an affair which puts to the crucial test the Irishman's mettle. Remember he who would win the prize must climb to the top of the pole.²⁸

Even after the founding of the Gaelic League in Ireland in 1893 and the subsequent support and affiliation of many of the Gaelic societies with that organization, the American societies followed their own familiar path. Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, most societies had at least two nights a week devoted to such different activities as language classes combined with history classes and dancing classes. The pleasant hour continued to be part of a lecture meeting, when a lecture on a particular topic was followed by exhibitions of dancing, singing, and recitation.

These varied activities again posed difficulties for Gaelic societies. Which was more important, the language or the history, the learning or the entertainment? Should societies allow members to attend only the singing classes or the history classes and spare themselves the work of actually learning Irish itself? Were they language societies or not?

In a controversy that was published in the pages of the *Gaelic American* in early summer, 1907, an ex-president of the Brooklyn Gaelic society, John J. O'Leary, debated this issue with "Redhand." O'Leary made a clear distinction between the Gaelic League in America and the Gaelic League in Ireland. In America, the work of the Gaelic League should necessarily concentrate on the education of Irish Americans in Irish history and on interesting them in Ireland, according to O'Leary. As most Gaelic League branches made it a condition of active membership that Irish be studied, O'Leary believed that these branches were not only confining themselves to a very limited grouping, but were in fact barring themselves from educating thousands of Irish Americans. "Redhand,"

28. *An Gaodhal*, July, 1887.

who regarded all activities except the teaching of the language as secondary, vehemently disagreed. He maintained that those who would not study the language would not be interested in Irish dancing, singing, or history either—or at least should not have the option to enjoy these elements if they were not going to make the effort for the language as well.

O'Leary countered this statement by pointing out that when he was president of the Brooklyn Gaelic Society, it was common to have a nightly attendance of 150–175 people at a dancing or singing class whereas the numbers attending a language class would be far smaller. It was through these classes, he maintained that the Gaelic Societies got most of their recruits.

This reflection would appear to be borne out in other societies also. To accommodate the aims of the Gaelic League and to ensure the continued support of its members, the New York Gaelic Society proposed a compromise in November, 1907. While the dancing and singing classes were reporting good attendances, the society admitted that very little had been done in the way of language classes. Therefore, a new class system was to begin:

While the best and only way to learn Irish is from the books, yet many have not the time or inclination to do so, but would like to have at least a few words in the good old mother tongue. For this class a new system will be inaugurated. Anyone desiring to learn the ordinary, everyday Irish salutation and simple household words will be accommodated with pleasure.²⁹

In May, 1908, *An Claidheamh Soluis* acknowledged the difficulties faced by American societies:

Many American Gaelic Societies have been confronted with a two-fold problem in connection with dancing—first the apparent necessity of providing plenty of dancing in order to hold the members and get new ones, and second, the absolute necessity of picking out the battered fragments of the language from under the heels of the dancers. Few of the societies have succeeded in accomplishing both feats.³⁰

In Anaconda, Montana, a fife and drum band as well as a football team were organized under the auspices of the League. Yet the house was also full on the regular meeting night suggesting that there was as much interest in the language classes as in the extra activities.³¹ In Butte, it was reported that scores of native speakers of the language were in attendance every meeting night.³²

29. *Gaelic American*, 16 November 1907.

30. *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 23 May 1908.

31. *Gaelic American*, 1 August 1908.

32. *Gaelic American*, 26 October 1907.

During the period 1906–1910, American Gaelic societies reported varied attendances at the language classes. It is clear that learning Irish in any real sense was not the perceived goal of the language movement in America. In spite of, or perhaps because of this, the Gaelic societies in the United States were financially successful ventures. Rarely do we see a complaint that the Gaelic societies were short of money to fund their activities during this period. The large concerts, balls, and entertainments of the societies helped to keep their coffers in the black and were invariably well attended. These entertainments were inexpensive and accessible. The admission tickets for a Gaelic League ball held in Grand Central Palace, Manhattan, in December, 1906, cost 50 cents each and \$1 for a box ticket. Tickets for a “Summer Nights Festival” in September, 1907, under the auspices of the Brooklyn Philo-Celts and Cumann na Gaedhilge of Bay Ridge, cost 25 cents each.³³ Two plays in the Irish language were produced in New York in March, 1908, and in May, 1909. Two thousand people attended the production of *Gleann na Sidheog* in March 1908 and the Lexington Opera House was “thronged” when the New York Philo-Celtic Society put on *Mac Carthaigh Mór* in May, 1909.³⁴

In both instances the play was preceded by a concert consisting of songs, recitations, and dancing exhibitions and, in the case of *Mac Carthaigh Mór*, the evening was followed by Irish dancing. The song and recitation program in both cases was almost exclusively in English whereas, prior to 1905, it had tended to be bilingual. Dancing appears to have taken over the slot previously occupied by Irish-language recitations and songs during this period. Nonetheless, both plays were exclusively in the Irish language, and according to the report in the *Gaelic American*, the frequent applause and shouts of laughter would seem to suggest that there were a large number of Gaelic speakers present. Was this wishful thinking?

Feiseanna (literary and musical festivals) were also popular, from the New York Feis Ceoil, which took place annually at Carnegie Hall, to the smaller society based affairs held in Worcester and Springfield. All such events were financially successful, due in large part to the mixture of language and entertainment on the programs. An outdoor *feis* such as the one held in Celtic Park, New York in May, 1912, had the advantage of being able to accommodate considerably more people than a hall. The *Gaelic American* opined that all 15,000 in attendance felt that here, indeed, was Ireland.

The *feiseanna* were a practical and concrete expression of Irish-Ireland in America. They gave public recognition to the work of the Gaelic societies. Prizes were awarded for the hours spent at language classes as well as at music, danc-

33. *Gaelic American*, 6 December 1906; 7 September 1907.

34. *Gaelic American*, 28 March 1908; 8 May 1909.

ing, and singing. They also allowed for a coming together of various strands of Irish nationalism that were not necessarily associated with language and culture. At the *feis* in Celtic Park, New York, a football match between Kerry and Kildare was held, as well as an exhibition drill by the Irish Volunteers. Sentimental and partisan as the report was in the *Gaelic American* it captured the essence of the *feis*:

Punctually at two o'clock the competitions commenced. They danced and they sang, they piped and as they did the crowd kept time with their feet to the "Humors of Bandon," "The Top of Cork Road," and the "Blackbird." They sang, and as the sad notes of "Táimse im'chodladh 's ná dúisigh mé" floated from the white throat of a youthful colleen the bosoms of many a matron heaved a sigh. Back over the years their memories went, to the cottage at the foot of the hill, to the turf fire and winter nights of long ago. And as the pipers made their warlike instruments shriek out their marching tunes, "O'Donnell Abú," "The Wearing of the Green," and "Brian Ború's March," many a fist was clenched and many a jaw was set and ever and anon the young men from the hills of Kerry or from the rich lands of Meath looked wistfully on the company of Irish Volunteers which was drilling on the green sward, and veterans sighed for such men to send such music to cheer towards the green hills of holy old Ireland.³⁵

The aims and objectives of the language movement had a broader and more encompassing focus than language alone. In 1903, the New York Gaelic League set forth the objects for which it was striving. The cultivation and spread of the Irish language as a spoken tongue was the first goal, but with the qualification that this would be achieved "particularly in Ireland." Other objectives equally as relevant to the League were the teaching of Irish history to Irish-American children, resistance to all perversions of Irish history and caricatures of the Irish character, particularly in the theater, the cultivation of native music, art, dance, pastimes, and customs, and to stop, as far as possible, any further emigration from Ireland.³⁶ The fact that the League was promoting Irish-Americanism did not, in its view, impinge in any way upon its Americanism. "The Star Spangled Banner" was usually sung at the close of large gatherings of the League, either in Irish as translated by Fr. O'Growney, or in the original English.³⁷

Thus, the thrust of the Gaelic League in America was toward a broad plank that would unite Irish Americans. In a speech to the Harlem Gaelic Society on June 8, 1904, the jurist Daniel F. Cohalan outlined clearly the work of the Gaelic League in America. He declared that while the study of Irish was of necessi-

35. *Gaelic American*, 25 May 1912.

36. *Gaelic American*, 7 November 1903.

37. Printed in *An Gaodhal* in September, 1898.

ty one of the cardinal principles of the Gaelic League in Ireland, in America it was incidental. The real work of the League in America was

to banish such monstrosities as the stage Irishman, to educate our church and Catholic societies up to the standard of the Gaelic League, to correct such abuses as the falsifying of American history, to introduce Irish history into the parochial and public schools, to foster and promote in every way possible Irish industries, music, dances, and pastimes and in this manner to create a strong, healthy irresistible public opinion in favor of a free Ireland.³⁸

The “respectable” nature of all occasions was reiterated again and again by organizers. But even on the question of “respectable culture,” there were differences between Irish Americans. The main organizer of Douglas Hyde’s 1906 American tour, lawyer John Quinn, saw no place for vulgar or sentimental patriotism in his Irish-American heritage and he believed that other affluent Irish Americans felt the same. He therefore tried to ensure that the trip would be dignified as well as representative, and he related disparagingly the ideas of Diarmuid Lynch, the president of the Gaelic League of New York, in a letter to Hyde:

For example, Lynch wanted you received at the dock by the 69th regiment (the Irish regiment here), and by a band (probably a German band), and by a platoon of policemen. This idea of course had to be killed, and it was killed. O’Leary, another of Lynch’s friends, wanted a chorus of Irish singers at the public lecture in order, as he put it, that the meeting “might not be too dry” and this we also had to kill.³⁹

This issue of respectability also came to the fore with the Abbey production of Synge’s *Playboy of the Western World* which opened in America in November, 1911.⁴⁰ The *Gaelic American* carried lengthy protests from various Gaelic societies condemning the play and recorded resignations from the Gaelic society in Washington when Lady Gregory was invited to address the members.⁴¹ The total rejection of Yeats and Lady Gregory by the Gaelic League envoys fund-raising in America confirmed the reliance of the League on the Gaelic societies and on men like Devoy, who controlled the powerful Clan na Gael movement, for support and financial assistance. Panic ensued in the League’s Irish leadership when it appeared that these groups would abandon the Gaelic League. Main-

38. *Gaelic American*, 18 June 1904.

39. B. L. Reid, *The Man from New York: John Quinn and his Friends* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 41.

40. See Adele M. Dalsimer, “Players in the Western World: The Abbey Theatre’s American Tours,” *Éire-Ireland* 16, 4 (Winter, 1981).

41. *Gaelic American*, 14 October 1911; 25 October 1911; 25 November 1911.

taining the flow of money from America was a priority, and those who threatened to remove that source of income had to be appeased at all costs.

Broader in scope than the Irish language alone, the language movement in the United States provided a platform for the creation of an Irish cultural identity. This identity was of necessity a fusion of Irish revivalism and the American immigrant experience. It was not the same movement in the United States as the Gaelic League in Ireland, a fact amply demonstrated to the later missionaries of the Gaelic League who traversed the continent on fund-raising missions. It was a unique cultural movement, based loosely on the Irish language as the cornerstone of identity. Such aspects of this identity as history and dance gradually subsumed the language aspect, and eventually defined Irish culture in the United States.

Although the Gaelic and Philo-Celtic societies in the United States were small, local, and scattered, their aims became part of the canon of Irish-American nationalism. The language and its concomitant aims of teaching Irish-American children the history of their ancestral land became one of its central planks. So, too, did banishing the Stage Irishman of old and even the new staged Irishman—as the repugnance with which many Irish Americans and especially the Gaelic societies greeted Synge's *Playboy* in 1911 proved. The movement's influence on other groups was always more significant than its influence per se although the societies were supported and patronized by powerful figures within Irish America. Such high profile American supporters of the movement as Daniel Cohalan, John Devoy, and Bourke Cockran linked the movement with a resurgent Irish-American nationalism, while Gaelic League missions and the support of John Quinn affiliated the societies with a powerful cultural movement in Ireland.

Gaelic societies in America were focused primarily on the American Irish and on their need for asserting a distinctive and cultured identity in the New World. The Irish wanted to be assimilated into the multiethnic society of the United States, not on sufferance as a debased and derided national group, but as a civilized and cultured race. This did not require "ethnic fade"; rather, it necessitated an embracing of ethnicity in its best and most advantageous forms. Gaelicization was a deliberate attempt to reclaim the distinctive identity and civilization of the Irish people. The Irish language was at its core. But relinquification in favor of the Irish language was never the aim of Irish Americans. Rather, the language became a building block of ethnic pride and distinction.

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