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When reflecting on the seemingly relentless decline of the Irish language in the nineteenth century, the Donegal Gaeltacht writer Séamus Ó Grianna, was wont to recall John Mitchel's indictment of that century itself: "the 'nineteenth century' would not know itself, could not express itself in Irish."[1] For Mitchel, and for generations of his nationalist devotees like Ó Grianna, the Irish language found itself not just out of favor but outside of time itself. Of course, Mitchel regarded "the nineteenth century" as less a specific period of time than as an insidious amalgam of evils—chief among which were industrialization, rampant pauperization, and the rise of the British trade empire and the accompanying Victorian socioeconomic value system. For Mitchel, this was truly "the darkest of all dark ages" in which language—rather like the Irish monks in the dark ages—existed without and in spite of the nineteenth century. As such, the language was a reminder the Irish of an age of pristine virtue, the mark of which was that "there is no name for modern enlightenment in Irish, no word corresponding with the 'masses' or with 'reproductive labour'; in short, the 'nineteenth century' would not know itself, could not express itself in Irish."[2]

When Mitchel penned these damning remarks during the apocalyptic summer of 1847, he could scarcely have been aware that Aodh Mac Domhnaill (1802–67), a poet and scribe from County Meath, had set himself precisely the task of expressing the experience of the nineteenth century in the Irish language. In so doing, he gave some testament to the lives of an entire class of Irish people whose encounter of the shock of industrialization and the continuous displacement of rural communities was generally expressed by others for them, often retrospectively, and scarcely ever expressed in the only language that many of them could speak.

1. Séamus Ó Grianna, *Rann na Feirste* (Dublin: An Press Náisiúnta, 1942), p. 108; *Le Clap-sholus* (Dublin: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1967), p. 96.
2. John Mitchel, "The Famine Year," in *Jail Journal* (London: Sphere Books, 1983), p. 415.

The famine years have been characterized as a time of profound silence when there was "no singing, nor the desire to make song" (níl ceol in aon áit ná suim ina dhéanamh), as one of the few contemporary Irish songs has it.[3] It is with this in mind that one should judge the significance of Aodh Mac Domhnaill's poem "Ceol na mBacach" ("The Song of the Beggars"), in which he strives to give voice to a people who were being occluded from the record of history at a time before even the official recording of deaths had been initiated.

The proposition that the famine years left a legacy of unexpressed trauma of the famine years has, in our own time, inspired many critical engagements with that period.[4] It seems, however, that an awareness of the power of unresolved trauma is much less recent. As though anticipating the psychiatric tropes of postcolonialist writing, as early as 1963 Máirtín Ó Cadhain described in now-familiar terms the phenomenon of unexpressed trauma: "That sodden pulp of Famine fields, those nights of reeking coffin ships are bone of our bone, we carry them about with us still as rancorous complexes in our breasts."[5]

Although describing himself an "Ulster poet," Aodh Mac Domhnaill was probably born just over the modern provincial border in Drumgill, in northeast Meath in the year 1802. This places him within the southeast Ulster and northeast Leinster region known as Oiriall (Oriel), the seat of a rich literary tradition that flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries under the Ulster poets: Séamus Dall Mac Cuarta (1647?–1733), Pádraig Mac Giolla Fhiondáin (1666–33), Cathal Buí Mac Giolla Ghunna (1680–1756), Peadar Ó Doirnín

3. Cormac Ó Gráda, *An Drochshaol: Béaloideas agus Amhráin* (Dublin: Coiscéim, 1994), p. 73. The proposition that there was a retrospective silence about the events of the Famine is challenged by Niall Ó Ciosáin in "Was There 'Silence' About the Famine?," *Irish Studies Review*, 13 (Winter, 1995–96), 7–10.

4. See, for example: Cormac Ó Grada, "Famine, Trauma and Memory," *Béaloideas*, 69 (2001), 121–43. David Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008), pp. 22–38; Kevin Whelan, "Between Filiation and Affiliation: The Politics of Postcolonial Memory," in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*, ed. Clare Carroll and Patricia King (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003), pp. 92–108.

5. Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *An Ghaeilge Bheo—Destined to Pass* (Dublin: Coiscéim, 2002), p. 4. According to Joe Cleary "the emergence of colonial and postcolonial studies within the Irish academy as a distinct mode of critical analysis can probably be dated to roughly the start of the 1980s." Joe Cleary, "'Misplaced Ideas?': Colonialism, Location, and Dislocation in Irish Studies," in Carroll and King. p. 16. Although the influence of such writers as Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi on Irish postcolonial writing was generally facilitated by English translations, it is quite possible that Ó Cadhain had read some of the work published by these authors in the original French in the 1950s and 1960s, before English translations became available.

(1700–69), and Art Mac Cumhaigh (1738–1773).[6] The work of these poets, and the body of folklore it generated, became the focus for the Ulster scribes and antiquarians of the nineteenth century. It was to this project that Mac Domhnaill would make a key contribution.

In the personal genealogy he provides in his *Fealsúnacht* (Philosophy), Mac Domhnaill traces his oldest forbears back seven generations to at least the mid-seventeenth century to the area of Counties Louth and Meath. However as he includes the names Alasdrann and "Raghnall na gCapall," there is reason to believe that Mac Domhnaill was descended from the McDonnells of County Antrim, among whom both these names were favored and to a branch of which the soubriquet "na gcapall" (of the horses) applied.[7] If so, it is quite likely that Mac Domhnaill's ancestors arrived in Oriel as part of the great upheaval of population that followed the plantation of Ulster in 1609, during which the native Irish from various parts of Ulster were displaced to the southeast of the province. This inheritance of displacement and migration is of great significance in light of Mac Domhnaill's own prolific migrations throughout Ulster and North Leinster, from County Meath to County Antrim to Donegal until his eventual death in the poorhouse of Cootehill, County Cavan, in 1867. It also lends greater weight to the affinity expressed in Mac Domhnaill's "Ceol na mBacach" with the displaced vagrants of the Great Famine.

While nothing is known of his childhood, the scant information one can gather concerning Aodh Mac Domhnaill's early adulthood indicates that he worked as a teacher, possibly in County Antrim as early as 1824. By 1827, we have the firm evidence of Mac Domhnaill's subsequently well-documented activities as a teacher in the employ of the "Irish Society for Promoting the Education of the native Irish through the Medium of their Own Language." The Irish Society, founded in 1818 under the aegis of the established church, described its "exclusive objects" as being

> to instruct the native Irish, who still use their vernacular language, how to employ it as a means for obtaining an accurate knowledge of English; and for this end, as also for their moral amelioration, to distribute among them the Irish version of the Scriptures by Archbishop Daniell and Bishop Bedell, the Irish Prayer Book, where acceptable, and such other works as may be necessary for school

6. Although reputedly born in area of County Cavan outside of the Oriel region, Mac Giolla Ghunna is particularly associated with Oriel, especially in its oral tradition. Breandán Ó Buachalla, *Cathal Buí: Amhráin* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1975), p. 34.

7. Beckett, *Aodh Mac Domhnaill: Poet and Philosopher* (Dundalk: Dundealgan Press [W. Tempest] Ltd., 1987), p. 4.

> books, disclaiming at the same time, all intention of making the Irish language a vehicle for the communication of general knowledge.[8]

The activities of the Irish Society, initially unopposed by the Catholic church, soon drew the charge of proselytism. It was in this context that Mac Domhnaill's name occurs on a list of 135 teachers of the Irish Society in 1827. These 135 signatories pledged their support for the Kingscourt Resolutions drawn up by the Irish Society to refute, among other claims, the accusation that teachers had been pressured to change their faith. The Kingscourt Resolutions do not seem to have assuaged the growing hostility of the Catholic faithful toward the activities of the bible teachers, as indicated in the killing of one of the teachers, Owen McDaniel (possibly a relative of Mac Domhnaill's) during a disturbance in Carrickleck, County Meath, in 1830.[9]

Mac Domhnaill was married in 1827 to Brigid Roe of Ballybailie, County Louth. Brigid died in December 1836, nine years after her wedding, leaving one child, Anna. In the year of his wife's death, Mac Domhnaill had been working as a bible teacher in the Glens of Antrim, initially under the direction of the London Hibernian Society. He continued to work in the Glens as a teacher and inspector with the Presbyterian Home Mission, a missionary group that had come to an agreement with the Irish Society concerning areas of operation. It was during the last of his six years in the Glens of Antrim that Mac Domhnaill became embroiled in a controversy in which he would incur the public censure of the Catholic clergy. Having been instructed by their clergy to have no truck with the bible schools, the Catholics of the Glens of Antrim deserted the Home Mission's schools. Mac Domhnaill, dependent on the schools for his inspector's salary, began to concoct false registers of pupils to safeguard his position. The sham was soon exposed when Fr. Luke Walsh, parish priest of Culfeightrin in North Antrim, entered into a public correspondence with the Rev. Allen, superintendent of the Home Mission. The superintendent claimed that there were twenty-five Bible schools in the Glens of Antrim; Fr. Walsh maintained that there were none. In the ensuing argument—which took place on the pages of the Catholic *Vindicator* and the Presbyterian *Banner of Ulster*—Walsh was quick to produce evidence from a letter to him written by Mac Domhnaill in which the latter admitted that he had deliberately deceived the Home Mission: "I was obliged to make false reports of their schools to the Directors as it was altogether falsehood from

8. Pádraig de Brún, *Scriptural Instruction in the Vernacular: The Irish Society and its Teachers, 1818–1827* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2009), p. 1.

9. The surname Mac Domhnaill is generally Anglicized as McDonnell, McDonald, and McDaniel.

beginning to end as I thought the more we could take off them the better as St. Paul said he robbed other sects to establish his own."[10]

As he explained in one of his letters to Allen, Walsh compelled Mac Domhnaill and his colleagues to give their fraudulent earnings to the poor:

> When I had satisfied myself that proselytism was the object of your mission and not teaching the vernacular, from a love of the Irish language, I first suspended them—that is I suppressed your schools, and when I found out that those teachers were humbugging you, and taking your money for doing nothing, and practising a fraud, I then suspended them—that is to say I denied them Christian rites until they would desist and promise to give to the poor of God the wages of their sin.[11]

Having at once lost his livelihood and been held as an object of public scorn—Fr Walsh had declared the Irish teachers to be "the very dregs and lees of the Catholic people"—Mac Domhnaill's fortunes dramatically altered when, in the same year, 1842, he found employment with the Presbyterian foundry owner, Robert Shipboy MacAdam (1808–95).

A respected antiquarian and language revivalist who had founded the Ulster Gaelic Society in 1830, MacAdam recruited Mac Domhnaill as his chief assistant in the collection and compilation of Irish manuscripts, songs, and stories. MacAdam pursued this project, financed by the profitable foundry he ran with his brother James, with characteristic vigor. From 1842 to roughly 1856, Mac Domhnaill resided in Belfast but undertook frequent journeys at MacAdam's behest to a network of native scholars throughout Ulster who contributed manuscripts and other Irish-language material.

While Mac Domhnaill enjoyed warm relations with his network of collaborators, this was not immediately the case. For instance, Aindrias Ó hÉigeartaigh from Glenties in County Donegal initially thought Mac Domhnaill to be a spy sent by Dublin Castle.[12] Art Mac Bionaid, from the townland of Ballykeel in County Armagh—perhaps through jealousy. rather than suspicion—likened Mac Domhnaill to "the dung-beetle that came up from the piss and dung of the cow" after Mac Domhnaill had the temerity to encourage Mac Bionaid to write poetry.[13] While Mac Domhnaill eventually won the Ballykeel man's respect,

10. Breandán Ó Buachalla, *I mBéal Feirste Cois Cuain* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomar, 1968), p. 106.

11. Breandán Ó Buachalla, *I mBéal Feirste Cois Cuain*, p. 108.

12. Colm Beckett, *Aodh Mac Domhnaill: Dánta* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1987), p. 131; hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (*AMD* 131).

13. Ó Buachalla, *I mBéal Feirste Cois Cuain*, p. 146. This was a metaphor used by Geoffrey Keating to characterize such English historians as Stanihurst, Spenser, and others who, in Keating's opinion, tended toward the dung rather than the beauteous flowers of Irish culture. Seathrún Céitinn, *Foras*

there is a stubborn truth to Mac Bionaid's assessment of the nature of the patronage enjoyed by Mac Domhnaill under MacAdam, when he remarks that "the one-eyed man is a king among the blind."[14] More revivalists than antiquarians, and as such, actively committed to furthering the use of the Irish language, MacAdam and the members of his Ulster Gaelic Society nevertheless came from a different social class and cultural background than Mac Domhnaill and other native scholars. It is with this cultural distinction in mind that Art Mac Bionaid confidently told MacAdam that "there is more Irish history slumbering in the rocks of Ballykeel than ever Belfast was possessed [of]. It was cradled and nursed there and most likely never will awaken."[15] This declaration must be seen in its proper context—Mac Bionaid was in fact petitioning MacAdam to commission his history of Ireland—one can yet discern in the exchange the juncture at which native tradition and revivalism meet. The native scholars needed the patronage of revivalists and antiquarians to continue their endeavors.

This dependency signaled a redefinition of the role of the scribe during the nineteenth century where a rural, locally based tradition became increasingly dependent on urban-based patrons.[16] The change was felt most acutely by those like Mac Bionaid. who saw themselves as the last bearers of an ancient tradition. But revivalists like MacAdam were equally aware of the challenge the Irish language faced. In 1853, he would conclude his editorial address in the first edition of the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* by writing,

> We are on the eve of great changes. Society in Ulster seems breaking up. . . . We stand as it were at the threshold of a new social edifice in process of erection and not yet completed; while all around us lie scattered the ruins of the ancient structure fast hurrying to decay. Before these are altogether swept away let us gather a few fragments.

Feasa ar Éirinn: The History of Ireland, vol 1, ed. D. Comyn and P.S. Dineen (London: Irish Texts Society), pp. 1–5.

14. "Is righ fear leith-shuil a measg dall etc." Séamus P. Ó Mórdha, "Arthur Bennett's Correspondence with Robert S. Mac Adam," in *Seanchas Ard Mhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society,* 2, 2 (1957), 374.

15. Ó Mórdha, p. 388. It could not be said, however, that MacAdam was a stranger to the Irish language. Although not a native speaker of Irish like Mac Domhnaill and Mac Bionaid, he had clearly learned the language in his youth, and had already begun collecting manuscripts and songs as a young man while travelling on his father's business through the northern half of Ireland. He may also be said have to have inherited an affinity for the language, if not a working knowledge, from his father. Robert MacAdam, Senior, was one of a significant number among the Protestant mercantile class to have acquired the language and indeed Irish was taught in young MacAdam's alma mater, the Belfast Academical Institution as well as in the Belfast Academy. See Ó Buachalla, *I mBéal Feirste Cois Cuain*, pp. 59–60.

16. See Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail, *The Scribe in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Motivations and Milieu* (Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 2000), pp. 77, 208–09.

MacAdam likened the rapidity of change to one of the "dissolving views" of a magic lantern show, with steam and education transforming areas that "conquest and colonisation failed to effect in centuries."[17]

Ironically, the Soho Foundry that MacAdam ran, along with his brother James, was essential to the progress of steam-powered industrialization in Ulster. Various turbines of note originated there, especially those employed in linen production. The Soho Foundry provided the scene for a rare description in Irish of the shock of industrialization, an experience so frequently attested by nineteenth-century writers. On this occasion, Mac Domhnaill records in "Fáilte Pheadair Uí Ghealacáin" ("Peter Galligan's Welcome"), a humorous narrative poem reminiscent of eighteenth-century burlesque tales or *eachtraí*, his friend and fellow scribe's first experience of the foundry:

> I was brought into a fairy fort that left me frightened and overwhelmed;
> There were great numbers of the fairy host there worshipping demons,
> Their skin was like coal and their faces black as sloes;
> A priest of their druids was making a sacrifice to Baal there,
> With cauldrons roasting just as in Babylon;
> It was as though the wheel of every spinning wheel in the province
> Was racing there at brake-neck speed.
> When I saw that awful and monstrous vision,
> I was left with no power in my limbs nor interest in women.
> I was at a loss to know what prison I was in,
> But I feel that a dream was the cause of much of it.[18]

MacAdam's antiquarian and revivalist endeavors were facilitated by the success of the Soho Foundry. So, too, was his patronage of Aodh Mac Domhnaill who supplemented his scribal work with a small body of original poems (forty-four compositions in Colm Beckett's edited poems of Mac Domhnaill) and a philosophical treatise on nature. *Fealsúnacht Aodha Mhic Dhomhnaill* (Aodh Mac Domhnaill's Philosophy), is, Beckett explains, "a study of Nature, based on the teachings of Ancient Greece and of the Bible, on folk tradition and on his own observation." The following extract, translated by Beckett, gives a flavor of the work:

17. Robert MacAdam, "The Archaeology of Ulster," *Ulster Journal of Archaeology,* First Series, 1 (1853), 7–8.

18. The full title of this poem is "Fáilte Pheadair Uí Ghealacáin lena Eachtra agus a Ráfladh," or "Peadar Ó Gealacáin's Welcome with [an account of] his Adventure[s] and Nonsense." Beckett gives "'nonsense" for "ráfladh" based on a note given in MacAdam's manuscript glossary (*AMD* 208). English translations of Mac Domhnaill's poetry as they occur in this article are my own, except where otherwise stated, and are based on the edited text provided by Beckett in *Aodh Mac Domhnaill: Dánta*.

> You must understand, reader, that God, in the beginning, made all creation male and female, and that everything that is female is fertilized by the male, and that it is the richness of the female body which rears and strengthens the bodies of all natural beings till they grow to maturity.
>
> When a sower sows a crop in the ground, the earth is fertilized by it and this royal mother produces the same variety; but supposing no-one cultivates nor sows seed in the earth, it is clear that she herself produces fruit, but the sort that comes from nature is not like the kind sown by the human sower. Instead, a wild seed comes, without good flavour, after the nature of the sower by whom it was sown, that is, the sky. For every kind of weather that comes from the sky has various seeds mixed with it. This is especially true of rain and dew, so that if the seeds fall on bare red earth, on a stony road or on hard ground, within forty-eight hours they will appear as a green sward like a field . . . So that from this we understand that the soil is the female and natural mother of all things, and accordingly the air is her lover and dear spouse as God in his wisdom has ordained. [19]

Mac Domhnaill spent roughly thirteen years in MacAdam's employ. He had forsaken Belfast for Donegal by at least 1856, where he found work again as a bible teacher with the Irish Society. The reasons for his departure from Belfast are unknown; it is possible that he wished to be closer to his daughter, who lived in Carrickfin and was married to Cathal Ó Cearbhalláin, a teacher of the "Island and Coast Society." Mac Domhnaill spent the years between 1856 and 1859 as a bible society teacher and inspector. Nothing is known of his life after 1859, save that he wrote a manuscript in 1863 which is now held in Maynooth.[20] The migratory existence that had accounted for much of his life was reflected in his death at Cootehill workhouse in County Cavan on March 31, 1867, at the age of sixty-five. In a letter thanking Robert MacAdam for his contribution to the funeral expenses, Mac Domhnaill's son-in-law relates how his grieving wife was ready at every moment to follow her deceased father to Moyra cemetery in Donegal. The letter also contains a fitting epilogue in the form of a lament for Mac Domhnaill in Irish by his son-in-law.[21]

19. Beckett, *Aodh Mac Domhnaill: Poet and Philosopher*, p. 13. See also Canon F. W. O'Connell, "The Philosophy of Aodh Mac Domhnaill,"*Journal of the County Louth Archaeological Society*, 3, 4 (November, 1915), 311–17. O'Connell summarizes Mac Domhnaill's philosophy as a treatment of "the necessity and value of philosophy, the nature of the Deity, the mystery of the Blessed Trinity and its analogies in nature; generation, heredity and variation; the nature of man, the human senses, psychology; the nature of herbs and plants, and their healing properties ; Materia Medica and Therapeutics, the names, peculiarities and habits of the various animals, birds, reptiles, and insects, the life of the bee, the trees and cereals of Ireland." p. 315.

20. *AMD* 24.

21. Ó Buachalla *I mBéal Feirste Cois Cuain*, pp. 257–58.

Aodh Mac Domhnaill's poetry is not distinguished by any sustained aesthetic accomplishment, but rather, by a sense of formal and public duty. These qualities show forth in his elegies, praises, and addresses. These include elegies for Thomas Davis and Daniel O'Connell, a "valedictory" address to O'Connell's son John on the occasion of his journey to France, and a welcoming address to William Smith O'Brien in anticipation of the Young Irelanders' ill-fated 1847 meeting in Belfast.[22] There is some irony, as Beckett notes, in Mac Domhnaill's self-appointed role as spokesman for a public that was not even aware of his existence (*AMD* 17).

Nevertheless, Mac Domhnaill clearly conceived of his role in terms of the functions of the professional bardic classes of medieval Ireland. In this way, after paying tribute to the kingly lineage of O'Brien, Mac Domhnaill welcomes the Young Irelander to Belfast on behalf of the poetic class of the North. In a similar vein, the ancient tradition of marriage between king and land is invoked in the elegy for Daniel O'Connell, where the Liberator's death is the death of Ireland's spouse.

Besides imitating the formal functions of a medieval Irish poet, Mac Domhnaill draws on that most favored tradition of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Irish poetry, the *aisling* or vision poem. In these poems, the poet acts as a mediator between the Irish people and its destiny as revealed through an otherworldy messenger, often a beautiful maiden personifying Ireland itself. The defining characteristic of the political *aisling* poem is its revelation of prophecy for which the guarantors are generally the native Irish saints.[23] The prophecy was normally interpreted to predict the imminent deliverance of the Gael by a messianic hero, the Stuart Pretender, Bonaparte, or in Mac Domhnaill's compositions, by O'Connell and O'Brien.

The continual reiteration of promised delivery from the present in *aisling* poetry points to a certain temporal disjunction in the consciousness of Gaelic Ireland from the seventeenth century onward. If the native Irish had become, in Pádraig de Brún's phrase, "cine gan tuairisc" or "a race without record" in the

22. O'Brien, accompanied by John Mitchel and Thomas Meagher, organized a series of Belfast meetings in November 1847 with the intention of attracting support for Repeal among Northern Protestants, including Orangemen. They met with great hostility from supporters of O'Connell who blamed the Young Irelanders for his death. According to Charles Gavan Duffy, the first meeting was "turned into a bear-garden by a gang of old-Irelanders—butchers from Hercules Street, for the most part—who clamoured to be let loose at the murderers of the Liberator." Quoted in Christine Kinealy and Gerard Mac Atasney, *The Hidden Famine: Hunger, Poverty and Sectarianism in Belfast 1840–50* (London: Pluto Press), p. 152.

23. See Breandán Ó Buachalla, *Aisling Ghéar: na Stiobhartaigh agus an tAos Leinn, 1603–1788* (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1996).

eighteenth century, then in the nineteenth century they began to resemble the anachronistic undead of Gothic novels in which, as W. J. McCormack remarks, "wrongful disinheritance is an explicit formula."[24] John O'Donovan encountered numerous instances of dispossessed, if not disinherited, aristocratic families who clung to the memory of their former prestige in spite of the circumstances of the present. In one such case, having observed a family of "tinkers" on Sheep Haven strand, County Donegal, O'Donovan is told by local fishermen that the group is led by "MacSwyne Na Doe and his family, the heir of Doe Castle and Sinsear of the Clann tSuivne, who though he retains all the high notions of his forbearers, has been obliged to exchange the sword and battle-axe for the budget and soldering (saudering) iron, and the spirited, richly caparisoned steed for the tame and rudely hampered Ass. . . ."[25] Robert MacAdam notes this sense of alienation from the present when he remarks that "the lineal descendants of the former lords of the soil and their retainers vegetate, as it were, in ignorance of the wondrous changes going on in the world around them."[26]

This temporal disjunction finds expression in one of Mac Domhnaill's aisling poems, "Aisling ar Éirinn" ("A Vision Concerning Ireland"), in which the Irish language appears to belong to the world of dreams and visions and English to be the medium of the here and now (*AMD* 38–40). Written at the time of O'Connell's imprisonment in 1844, the poet begins by expressing his regret that the nobles of Ireland are generally in slumber; even the poets are enfeebled since O'Connell's incarceration. As the wrongs suffered by Ireland are recalled, the abandonment of the Irish language is mentioned first along with the decline of poetry. Yet, just at the moment the poet fears that the Gael will remain in bondage until the day of judgment itself, he is greeted by a beautiful maiden bearing a letter with news of O'Connell's release. The maiden, of course, is Ireland herself. She goes on to relate how the Milesians will not be liberated through force of arms with the return of such sleeping heroes as Gearóid Iarla, but through the political guile of the country's contemporary leaders, O'Connell and O'Brien.

Yet, Mac Domhnaill's poem does not finish with the conventional promise of deliverance received from Ireland herself. Rather the poet is seemingly returned to the present with a jolt when, looking round, he sees no one but "a little English-speaking woman" who is given the last prosaic lines of the poem: "If you see the papers you'll see 'tis true / That all our heroes have left the jail/

24. Pádraig de Brún, "'Gan Teannta Buird Ná Binse': Scríobhnaithe na Gaeilge, c. 1650–1850," in *Comhar*, 31, 11 (Samhain, 1972), 19; W.J. McCormack, "Irish Gothic and After: 1820–1945," *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, volume 2, ed. Seamus Deane, p. 834.

25. *Ordnance Survey Letters Donegal*, ed. Michael Herity (Dublin: Four Masters Press, 2000), p. 26.

26. MacAdam, "The Archaeology of Ulster," p. 2.

And we'll have Repeal for all they can do" (*AMD* 40). The eloquent promises of the dream maiden give way to the elliptical message of the street woman. The dream maiden's letter seems in reality a newspaper read by an ordinary woman in the street; it is as though the traditional Irish-language political message, with its now dubious temporality, has to be corroborated at the end by that most contemporary of documents, the English-language newspaper.

An indignant urgency is added to the sense of temporal displacement in Mac Domhnaill's poetry when he records the disastrous consequences of famine. Thousands of displaced people sought out Belfast in 1847 as a possible haven from hunger and disease. While the oral tradition preserved many contemporary accounts that were later collected by the Folklore Commission, very few poems or songs about the Famine have come to light.[27] In Cormac Ó Gráda's *An Drochshaol: Béaloideas agus Amhráin* (1994), there are only twelve songs or poems, two authored by Mac Domhnaill.[28] The silence induced by the Famine is also attested in such oral accounts as one from Rannafast, County Donegal, which recounts how "Sporting and fun disappeared. Poetry, music and dancing all stopped."[29] The compositions of Aodh Mac Domhnaill on the famine years have tended to be overlooked along with the corpus of evidence preserved in the later Gaelic manuscripts. Neil Buttimer's fascinating survey of these sources demonstrates that the scribes recorded many observations and reflections on the catastrophe, which include a verse composition of one hundred and twenty-five quatrains by Nicolás Ó Cearnaigh, titled "Éire án gan cháim ba lachtmhar" ("Illustrious unblemished Ireland was bountiful").[30] Mac Domhnaill wrote three poems about the Famine, "Milleadh na bPrátaí" ("The Spoiling of the Potatoes"); "Agallamh idir Aindrias Ó hÉigeartaigh agus an Bard um Mheath na bPrátaí" ("Discussion between Andrew Hegarty and the Bard on the decline of the Potatoes"), and "Ceol na mBacach" ('The Song of the Beggars').[31] Of these three, "The Song of the Beggars" is by far the most insightful.

27. A selection of these sources has been collated and edited by Cathal Póirtéir in two publications: *Famine Echoes* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1995) and *Glórtha ón Ghorta* (Dublin: Coiscéim, 1996).

28. Besides the twelve songs in this collection, two fragments of songs are included. The poems included in Chris Morash's *The Hungry Voice: The Poetry of the Irish Famine* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1989) essentially reflect, as Ó Gráda notes, the feelings of the middle classes about the tragedy; Ó Gráda, p. 35. See also Antain Mac Lochlainn, "The Famine in Gaelic Tradition," *Irish Review*, 17–18 (Winter, 1995), 90–107.

29. Ó Gráda, p. 3.

30. Neil Buttimer, "A Stone on the Cairn: The Great Famine in Later Gaelic Manuscripts" in Chris Morash and Richard Hayes, ed., *Fearful Realities: New Perspectives on the Famine* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press), pp. 93–109.

31. "Discussion between Andrew Hegarty and the Bard on the decline of the Potatoes" is followed by another "Discussion" that is essentially an extension of the same poem but which contains almost

Antain Mac Lochlainn has commented on the disparity between "The Song of the Beggars" and Mac Domhnaill's other two famine poems, remarking that it is hard to credit that the same person who produced as indignant a poem as "The Song of the Beggars" could write a piece as "seemingly flippant" as "Discussion."[32] The reason for the differing tone may lie in the time of the writing itself. "The Song of the Beggars" was composed in July 1847 at the height of the crisis; it seems most likely that "Discussion between Andrew Hegarty and the Bard . . ." was written at a period in 1846 when the sense of impending doom had not yet been registered. "The Spoiling of the Potatoes"appears to have been written, February 1846, when the population could not yet have understood the extent of the devastation that lay ahead.[33] Although one verse in "The Spoiling of the Potatoes" describes a populace debilitated by famine, the rest of the poem, like "Discussion" comprises a consideration of the causes of the potato blight itself. "Discussion" is undated, but appears in an earlier manuscript to that of "The Song of the Beggars."[34]

Furthermore, the second part of the 'Discussion' seems almost blasé, when the poet concludes by bidding good riddance to the potato "now that the seed potato has withered and potatoes are not expected." Rather than despair at this news, Mac Domhnaill maintains that the potatoes came from a bad root to begin with; several times earlier in the poem he refers to the insidious introduction to Ireland of the potato by Queen Elizabeth and Walter Raleigh. The poet ends by promising that children will have soda bread by the fire. This may have seemed a reasonable prospect in 1846, after one potato harvest had partially failed and the next had been confirmed as blighted. By 1847 the true import of this second crop failure would be properly understood.[35]

exclusively the poet's own thoughts on the matter. Andrew Hegarty, from Glenties in County Donegal, was approached by Mac Domhnaill to provide songs for MacAdam (*AMD* 60–62, 132–33).

32. Mac Lochlainn, p. 104.

33. Beckett notes that on the same manuscript page as this poem was written, Mac Domhnaill finished another piece to which he added the date 25th of February 1846 (*AMD* 127).

34 (*AMD* 131, 193).

35. Assuming that all of these indications of dating have been correctly interpreted, the sequence of Mac Domhnaill's three famine poems can be summarized as follows: "The Spoiling of the Potatoes" was composed in February 1846 several months after the first partial potato blight of 1845; "Discussion between Andrew Hegarty and the Bard . . ." was composed between spring and summer of 1846, with the *amhrán ceangail* or "concluding stressed verse," referring to the news of the failure of the 1846 crop. This news was widely reported in the Belfast press from the end of July 1846 onward and by August 13th the *Northern Whig* reported that "not one field has escaped the ravages of the blight," with stalks appearing to have been "blasted with lightning." Kinealy and Mac Atasney, p. 58. "The Song of the Beggars" deals with specific events in July 1847 and was likely to have been composed contemporaneously with these.

Mac Domhnaill's three poems on the Famine reflect the gradual recognition of the most severe famine in modern European history. "The Spoiling of the Potatoes" (February 1846) begins with the poet bemoaning the subjection of the Irish people to "lucht Béarla" or "English speakers." It expresses the stock regret for such absent heroes as Finn Mac Cumhaill, Mac Dáire and Conchúr Mac Neasa. The traditional notion that a just ruler brought abundance to the land is then enlisted to explain the material consequences of conquest. Mac Domhnaill asks his putative audience to consider if all that has been said regarding the blight is true: that it has been caused by "the friars who have broken the commandments of the saints" or "the queen who counted the people of the land," a reference to the 1841 census, or whether the disease has "arrived as others on the wind?" The poet concludes that the real cause of the blight is "the curse of the Pope on Martin [Luther] for his breaking of the law / which has brought destruction on all of the potato crop in the night / and you'll yet see Seán Buí [England] breached and laid to waste." In 1846, Mac Domhnaill evidently felt that because the potato had come to Ireland by means of the English court, the author of Ireland's plight might return again to its source. The rather limp wish expressed in the final line is that the old Spanish ally will come soon with potatoes.

While Mac Domhnaill still aspires to Spanish aid in "Discussion" (Spring–Summer 1846), in this second poem the potato itself is condemned on the grounds of its dubious provenance. The historic culpability of "graceless Elizabeth" is allied to that of the present incumbent, whose 1841 census is accused as an instrument for levying further taxes. The poet charges the Victorian mania for carrying out detailed empirical surveys—nothing was left out of the census, claims Mac Domhnaill, "not even a rat"—to be a mere ruse to divest Ireland of its natural resources. Reminding us that King David was incited by the devil to conduct a census of Israel, for which defiance of the word of God David chose the punishment of plague, Mac Domhnaill adds that "This is how God watches the kings that there are / Who let not the people be, but rather expel them and lay them to waste."[36] Again, the final line of the poem, which cautions against despondency and holds out the prospect of soda bread by the fire, is best understood in the context of the time it was written.

Peadar Ó Gealacáin outlines the context for "The Song of the Beggars" in this manuscript note:

36. Interestingly, Robert MacAdam explains the numbers of individuals who returned themselves as ignorant of the Irish language in the 1851 census as in part due to "a secret dread that that the Government in making this inquiry (for the first time) had some concealed motive." Ironically, MacAdam was instrumental in securing the inclusion of the question on Irish language in the census. Ó Buachalla, *I mBéal Feirste Cois Cuain*, 1968, pp. 216–17.

At a meeting held in Belfast in [date missing] against travelling beggars or Paupers, it was ordered that Bang beggars should be appointed in order to arrest, or take up the destitute poor. The R. Catholick Bishop Dr Denvir Presided there and a great No. of Protestants and Priests, together with Roman Catholics, it was considered by them that travelling Beggars through Belfast might cause some distempers from the scent of their old clothes. The following Irish song was composed by the same Poet who composed the aforesaid songs.

The Song of the Beggars[37]

Friends have you heard from poets or bards,
Apostles or prophets while reading the scriptures,
That the commandments have been broken by poverty and woe,[38]
Famine and plague that were suffered with patience?
Or would it cause the death of any Protestant,[39]
To meet with [the beggar's] set of bags, little blanket or drinking horn
Or a beggar that they should meet on the street,
And he crippled and wan, friendless and penniless?

But that's not how it has been; since the potatoes disappeared
It seems that the moon and the sun have changed,
And it seems there's not a rye grain of love
That didn't leave for the fear of the Indian meal.
It pains me to say that the day has come
When the saying of the saints has been fulfilled,
That priests made of coarse wood would be numerous and strong
And that piety would leave the clergy entirely.

I heard tell, and I'll not conceal
From any of the seed of Adam,
Of a pitiless session that was held in this place,
As everyone knows against the poor of the Son of God.
There was a bishop on the platform of the church of the Pope,
And of Protestant ministers more than a hundred,[40]
To serve a strong warrant
On the hosts that once fed them.

Against the word of John and the letter of St Paul,
The Gospel, the Order, and letter of St James,
They gave the reverend and righteous order
The likes of which was never given from the faith began:
Everyone that was sick, weak and aimless,
Without cover for head or shoulders, without shoes, blanket or braid,
Should be taken from the road and cast in together
Without food or drink until they should die.

37. My approach to translation here has been to favor the transparency of narrative over imitation of the original poem's formal or stylistic qualities.

38. Mac Lochlainn here has "That poverty and suffering are against the Commandments."

39. Mac Lochlainn here has "the English" for "duine ar bith gallta." This translation does not, however, appear to correspond with the use of the adjective 'gallta' elsewhere in the poem. Line 22: "'S de mhinistéirí gallta corradh agus céad" describing the meeting's attendance, is reflected in Ó Gealacáin's introduction where he has the attendance including "a great No. of Protestants and Priests."

40. Mac Lochlainn has here "And a hundred parsons of the English kind."

But Bishop you are the best I've ever heard tell of
From the time of my birth till I saw you,
'Tis a great pity that you weren't to be had
At the time when St Patrick taught the creed.
You wouldn't let friars or monks that were pious,
Go off into the desert to feed the flock;
Truth be told you'd soon leave the flock behind—
And let their plague and disease consume them.

Should you meet John the Baptist without a hair or stitch on him,
Except for a cloak of camel hair,
Without socks or shoes and he teaching the commandments
And penance as indeed the clergy should do—
You'd say he was a ghost of a hapless beggar,
A poor decrepit person or a ragged fool,
And you wouldn't walk the road with a spectre of that sort
If he wasn't portly or had not cloak and accessories.

But I'll never believe from priest or friar
That it's a sin to be wretched, destitute and poor;
For I have heard from poets in my day
That from the poor that were weak came the Son of God.
Colmcille told it to men and to women,
From the time of the prophets it has been told to the world:
For all those who are vain and place their faith in riches,
It shall forever be hard to reach God's kingdom.
(*AMD* 63–64)

The "pitiless session" that so angered Mac Domhnaill was a meeting of the Belfast Board of Health and the Belfast Charitable Society, held in July 1847, in response to the spread of fever in the town thought to be occasioned by the large numbers of vagrants that had recently gathered there. The concerned citizens decided that men should be employed to clear the town of vagrants and hold them in the old "House of Correction" in Howard Street, above the door of which was inscribed "within amend, without beware." Mac Domhnaill describes the decision of the Board of Health in the fourth verse:

> Everyone that was sick, weak and aimless,
> Without cover for head or shoulders, without shoes, blanket or braid,
> Should be taken from the road and cast in together
> Without food or drink until they should die.

The minutes of the Belfast Charitable Society record that the "prisoners' would receive a supply of rations from the relief committee, so it would appear that the last line is an exaggeration, although probably explained by the fact that, well into the nineteenth century, it was not usual for prisoners to be fed by the prison authorities.[41] The "bang beggars" referred to in Ó Gealacáin's note were "the sturdy rascals and beggars themselves who were sent out with staves and cloaks to apprehend the poor unfortunates who went about the streets begging."[42] The

41. R. W. M. Strain, *Belfast and its Charitable Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 267.
42. Cathal O'Byrne, *As I Roved Out* (Dublin: At The Sign of the Three Candles, 1946), p. 218.

practice of employing bang beggars to round up undesirable vagrants was initiated by an act of 1772, which allowed town corporations to distribute badges, in the manner of permits to their own population of beggars while at the same time taking measures to build poorhouses to which "strolling beggars" would be committed.[43]

However harsh and unchristian these measures may have seemed to Mac Domhnaill, contemporary evidence shows that they succeeded in reducing the spread of fever; the total number of fever patients in Belfast declined from 2,200 in July 1847 to 1,400 in the following month. It is also worth noting that similar measures were taken in other Irish towns. Barricades were placed on roads outside Dublin, and the mayor of Cork, having issued a proclamation banning disease-ridden paupers access to the city, employed men to patrol the city gates.[44]

In April 1847, faced with a steady increase in the number of fever patients, Dr. Anderson, the house surgeon of Belfast's General Hospital, warned that unless preventative measures were taken the town would become a "charnel-house with infection in every corner and death in every street."[44] Anderson's calls for action were matched by his own practical engagement with the fever crisis, an engagement that resulted in his own death by typhus fever in October 1847. The fear of what was known as "Irish fever" was witnessed also in such British ports as Liverpool, Glasgow, Newport, and Bristol where a large number of mostly Irish people fell victim to the disease.[46] In addition to this, approximately 6,000 people died in Grosse-Ile, Québec, in the summer of 1847, including the mayor of Montréal.[47] Many had traveled on ships from the port of Belfast, one thousand people having left the town in one day in April 1847.[48]

The general feeling in Belfast was that the measures taken to clear the streets of vagrants had been both successful and justified. Reports carried in the Catholic *Vindicator* mirrored those, such as the following, from the Presbyterian *Banner of Ulster*:

> It is scarcely necessary to inform our readers in Belfast of the very happy change in the matter of street-begging which has been effected during the past few

43. Peter Gray, *The Making of the Irish Poor Law 1815–43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 22.

44. Strain, p. 266; Kinealy and Mac Atasney, p. 82.

45. Kinealy and Mac Atasney, p. 90.

46. Kinealy and Mac Atasney, pp. 90–101.

47. See: Marianna O'Gallagher, *Grosse Ile: Gateway to Canada 1832–1937* (Québec: Livres Carraig Books, 1984); Colin McMahon, "Montreal's Ship Fever Monument: An Irish Famine Memorial in the Making," *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 33, 1 (Spring, 2007), 48–57.

48. Kinealy and Mac Atasney, p. 97.

> weeks. The drab-coated servants of the Charitable Society have done more to produce a healthy reaction in our social condition than could be well credited. Hundreds of wretched beings who have left their still wretched dwellings to spread contagion during the day throughout town have been picked up and carefully tended by the Board of Health, while the sturdy vagrant and the insolent juvenile imposter have been shipped or sent by railroad or coach to the various places to which they allegedly belong.[49]

Mac Domhnaill's indignation—while directed at a specific action initiated by Belfast's clerical and lay authorities—was grounded in a wider sense of alienation from the prevailing ideological currents that dictated the town's response to the Famine. This response was marked by a stubborn resistance to calls for relief of the poor, as well as by a tendency to deny that industrial Belfast was affected by the national crisis at all. Until the publication of Kinealy and Mac Atasney's groundbreaking *The Hidden Famine: Hunger, Poverty and Sectarianism in Belfast 1840–50* (2000), the consensus among historians was that Belfast had been largely unaffected by the Famine. Statistical evidence on the impact of the Famine on Belfast is difficult to obtain; the recording of deaths was not made compulsory until 1864, the population of Belfast actually increased during the Famine years, in line with the town's rapid industrialization and exponential population growth throughout the nineteenth century.

Kinealy and Mac Atasney's examination of local records and contemporary reports from the Belfast area gives an account of a town that—far from being insulated by industrial affluence—encountered virulent outbreaks of fever and witnessed overflowing hospitals and cemeteries. The diary of Robert MacAdam's brother James shows how the order book of the Soho Foundry was dominated by the extraordinary circumstances of the time: "Extremely busy at the foundry in a measure owing to the demand for machinery to grind Indian corn…relief to about 8,000 persons daily . . . the town is swarming with beggars from all parts of the country."[50]

The mood of foreboding was so pronounced that the deputy grand chaplain of the Orange Order appealed to his brethren to cancel the annual July marches:

> The present condition of this country in general, and of Belfast and Lisburn in particular, imperatively calls upon you to refrain from your usual public rejoicings. Famine pestilence and death are fast coming from Almighty God in judg-

49. Kinealy and Mac Atasney, p. 8.
50. Ó Buachalla, *I mBéal Feirste Cois Cuain*, p. 178.

> ment upon our land. Almost a million of our fellow countrymen have within a few short months been swept away into eternity by hunger and disease. . . .[51]

As early as April 1846, the desire of the town's civic leaders to keep up the appearance of immunity to the national crisis was lambasted by the Catholic *Vindicator,* which inveighed against "the fine philosophy that would starve the poor for the honour of the rich," which prevailed among those who regarded signs of poverty as "a disgrace to the province, and [yet] wonder that persons will not be content to linger, sigh, and die in silence, sooner than sully the credit of Ulster."[52]

Ironically, much as Mac Domhnaill sought the causes of the Famine in native prophecy and biblical retribution, much of British public opinion understood the crisis affecting Ireland in terms of providentialism, "the doctrine that human affairs are regulated by a divine agency for human good."[53] As Peter Gray explains, "Providentialism blended with Manchester school economics to produce a moralistic reading of the Irish crisis that put the blame for the state of Irish society squarely on the moral failings of Irishmen of all classes."[54] The idea that the provision of state or municipal relief could unnecessarily disrupt the progress of benign providence and natural economics had powerful advocates among Belfast's civic leaders. When the Whig-Liberal government finally moved to provide soup kitchens in the summer of 1847, Belfast's Poor Law Union was among only three in Ireland that refused the government loan to provide these.[55]

Beatrice Webb's autobiography *My Apprenticeship* (1926), generally regarded to be a classic of Victorian social history, offers an insight into the pervasive ideological currents that informed Belfast's response to the Famine. Significantly, when Webb outlines the formation of her mother in the tradition of British Utilitarian thought, she cites Belfast rather than any city in her native England as still epitomizing these attitudes:

> An ardent student of Adam Smith, Malthus, and particularly of Nassau Senior, she had been brought up in the strictest sect of Utilitarian economists. . . . My mother practised what she preached. . . . Her intellect told her that to pay more than the market rate, to exact fewer than the customary hours or insist on less than the usual strain—even if it could be proved that these conditions were injurious to the health and happiness of the persons concerned—was an act of self-indulgence, a defiance of nature's laws which would bring disaster on the

51. Kinealy and Mac Atasney, p. 103.

52. Kinealy and Mac Atasney, p. 3.

53. Peter Gray, "Ideology and the Famine," in *The Great Irish Famine*, ed. Cathal Póirtéir (Cork: Mercier Press, 1995), p. 91. See Buttimer, pp. 103–06, on speculation among Gaelic scribes, particularly Peadar Ó Gealacáin, concerning divine retribution and the Great Famine.

54. Gray, p. 92.

55. Kinealy and Mac Atasney, p. 5.

> individual and the community. Similarly, it was the bounden duty of every citizen to better his social status; to ignore those beneath him, and to aim steadily at the top rung of the social ladder. Only by this persistent pursuit by each individual of his own and his family's interest would the highest general level of civilisation be attained. No one of the present generation realises with what sincerity and fervour these doctrines were held by the representative men and women of the mid-Victorian middle class. The man who sells his cow too cheap goes to Hell" still epitomises, according to John Butler Yeats, "the greater part of the religion of Belfast"—that last backwater of the sanctimonious commercialism of the nineteenth century.[56]

The excesses of Utilitarianism and official opposition to relief are undoubtedly at the heart of Mac Domhnaill's invective in "Song of the Beggars"; yet, the direct target for his most withering barbs is Dr. Cornelius Denvir, the Catholic bishop of Down and Connor. While he addresses later verses of the poem directly to the bishop, the question posed in the very first verse—"Or would it cause the death of any Protestant / To meet with [the beggar's] set of bags, little blanket or drinking horn / Or a beggar that they should meet on the street [?]"—appears to be asked, at least obliquely, of Denvir. During his tenure, the bishop frequently attracted the criticism of both Catholic clergy and laity for his approach toward cooperation with Belfast's Protestant establishment. The bishop sat on various committees, including those of the Belfast Charitable Society and the General Hospital, but it was his acceptance of certain government commissions that was the focus of controversy. In particular his acceptance of the charitable bequests commission in 1844 drew the disapproval of all of his clergy and "practically all the laity."[57] The private remarks of the archbishop of Armagh, Dr. Dixon, bespeak some measure of this dissatisfaction with the bishop: "Dr Denvir is a man of very good intentions, but the 'spiritus timoris' as regards the Orangemen among whom he lives so predominates in him that he is utterly unfit to be left in the administration of the Church in Belfast. Indeed it may be said that to a great extent Dr Denvir's administration has ruined Belfast."[58] John Silke has demonstrated how Denvir, an outstanding mathematician and physicist, has been unfairly dismissed by historians who have accepted on face value the criticisms of the bishop which culminated in his resignation in 1865.[59] Clearly, Mac Domhnaill was no less unquestioning of the bishop's perceived faults.

56. Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship* (London: Longmans, Green, 1926), pp. 14–16.

57. John J. Silke, "Cornelius Denvir and the 'Spirit of Fear'," *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 53, 2 (January,1987), 137.

58. Patrick Rogers, *St Peter's Pro-Cathedral Belfast—1866–1966* (Belfast: Howard Publications, 1967), p. 10.

59. Silke, 130–41.

So far as Mac Domhnaill was concerned, the already well-established public case against Denvir's administration was fortified by a sense of personal grievance over the bible society controversy, as it was Denvir who had prescribed the bible societies to his flock in 1840. Additionally, the charge that the clergy were sinning against charity would have had resonance for Mac Domhnaill, for whose sins Fr. Walsh had compelled him to pay his ill-gotten teaching fees to the poor in 1842. Indeed, throughout Mac Domhnaill's oeuvre he repeatedly characterizes of the clergy as materially greedy, as instanced in the title of one short piece, 'The Greedy Priest', as well as a riddle based on "poverty" that remarks that "the church, though it praises me, would flee me like heavenly clouds" (*AMD* 112, 110) Interestingly, Mac Domhnaill at times seeks to justify his strictures on the clergy through the prophecies of Colm Cille. Thus, in "On the prophecy of Colm Cille son of Féilim," Mac Domhnaill notes that the saint warned that "there would be an error in the path taken by the clergy" (*AMD* 115–17). Beckett points to similar references in Nioclás Ó Cearnaigh's *The Prophecies of SS ColumKille, Maeltamlacht, Ultan* (1856), which, although published after Mac Domhnaill's compositions, nevertheless appears to draw on the same sources. The concluding message of "The Song of the Beggars"—that those who put their faith in riches will face great difficulty in gaining God's kingdom—is attributed by Mac Domhnaill to Colm Cille. Similarly, the second verse of the poem invokes the prophecy of the saints:

> It pains me to say that the day has come
> When the saying of the saints has been fulfilled,
> That priests made of coarse wood would be numerous and strong
> And that piety would leave the clergy entirely.

Mac Lochlainn points out that the latter refers to the adage that "In Patrick's time there were wooden chalices and priests of gold. Now there are golden chalices and priests of wood."[60]

In the political poetry of the Irish language, the native saints, particularly Colm Cille, were the authoritative source of prophecy. Bishop Denvir spoke Irish and was known to have given sermons in Irish.[61] Aodh Mac Domhnaill addresses his satire to him in a way that foregrounds the seemingly interiorized discourse of the Irish language (*AMD* 134). Besides the references to Colm Cille and to native prophecy, Mac Domhnaill's ire is grounded in a reaction against the betrayal of native traditions of charity. The new Victorian "religion of

60. Mac Lochlainn, p. 102.

61. Besides being considered foremost among the Irish Catholic bishops in the movement to encourage bible reading, Denvir was responsible for the publication of an altar missal that included an Irish language supplement. Silke, 130–31.

Belfast" was marked by its eschewal of the medieval system of charity, to which the Gaelic church in Ireland had a particularly strong adherence. Canice Mooney's study of the Gaelic church or *Ecclessia Inter Hibernos*, highlights the duty of charity among its distinguishing features, an observation also made in the Calendar of Papal Letters.[62]

The *spitél* or hospital where the poor were received was an institution essential to the dispensation of the church's charity. In nineteenth-century Ireland, the tradition of providing hospitality to the vagrant poor was maintained by that section of the population that had most retained the Irish language, which was also the least materially wealthy. Archbishop McHale of Tuam made this clear in his evidence to the Commission of Inquiry into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland, headed by Richard Whately, a Church of Ireland archbishop:

> The relief of beggars falls especially on the humbler classes. The poorer give in larger proportions than the wealthier portions of the community: so that "*dearka d'on dearka*," (i.e. alms from alms) has passed into a proverb, the practical meaning of which is every day attested by the fact, that it is by the poor the poor are supported.[63]

Throughout the submissions to Whately, evidence reiterates that the attitude of the "humbler classes" to alms-giving closely approximated the original meaning of the Irish word déirc—spelled phonetically as *dearka* above—which can be given as "love of God," being a compound of the Old Irish words *dia* and *sercc* or "god" and "love." The Whately commission heard numerous reports of alms said to be given by small farmers "for God's sake."

Although Mac Domhnaill's difficulties with the Catholic clergy centered around the "bible war" in the early 1840s, his attitude is typical of an older antipathy between Irish-language poets and the clergy, which Breandán Ó Buachalla traces to the 1760s onward, after which the image of the tyrannical and arrogant priest becomes clearly established.[64] This image was especially associated with two of the Southeast Ulster poets who most influenced Mac Domhnaill's work, name-

62. Canice Mooney, *The Church in Gaelic Ireland: Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1969), pp. 18–20. The reaction to Utilitarianism in Britain prompted a nostalgia for some of the values and institutions of medieval society, a view typified in the work of one of the champions of the Gothic Revival movement, A. N. W. Pugin. In his *Contrasts; or a Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, and Similar Buildings of the Present Day; Shewing the Present Decay of Taste* (1841), Pugin includes a contrasting portrayal of the Victorian workhouse and the medieval abbey.

63. *First Report of his Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring Into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland,* Appendix A (1835), p. 490.

64. Breandán Ó Buachalla, *Aisling Ghéar*, p. 646.

ly Peadar Ó Doirnín (1700–69) and Art Mac Cumhaigh (1738–73). Of course, the Gaelic poet from the seventeenth century onward acquired his own stock image, that of the disillusioned soul consumed by the fall from grace of his poetic caste. In these circumstances, it was quite natural that the poets should have a predilection to castigate every perceived departure from native values as more evidence of the wrongs visited upon themselves.

Nonetheless, there is a clear sense in Mac Domhnaill's poetry, particularly in "The Song of the Beggars," of the duty of alms and a tolerance for vagrancy being part of an inherited value system. Indeed, the prophecies on which Mac Domhnaill draws were typically carried by mendicants depicted by Carleton as "prophecy-men."[65] Strolling beggars and the wandering poor were undoubtedly welcomed for the news, stories and songs that they carried with them from other places, a trait that contributed to the romanticized image of the Traveller that became synonymous with the Celtic Twilight. Synge identifies the artist with the tramp in his essay on the vagrants of Wicklow: "in the middle classes the gifted son of a family is always the poorest, he becomes a writer or an artist. In the family of peasants the gifted son sinks also and is soon a tramp on the roadside."[66]

The vagrants of nineteenth-century Ireland were, of course, a heterogeneous mix. Among them were those who were unable to make a living from their holdings and resorted at various times to begging in areas where they were not known. This is the pauperization that Carleton decries; he insists that if people were prohibited from begging anywhere but in their own locale they would soon find an alternative.[67] Another group comprised the established beggars or "boccoughs," often associated with feigned disability and an assortment of ruses by which they exploited the peoples' munificence. Niall Ó Ciosáin demonstrates how in the 1830s, many of the plain people of the West of Ireland distinguished between "boccoughs" and the deserving poor or "bochtáin," preferring to give charity to the latter.[68] Added to these classes of vagrants were the spalpeens, or migratory workers, and the pahvees and cadgers who travelled from place to place peddling cloth, fruit, and fish. In Oriel, this latter occupa-

65. William Carleton, *The Black Prophet: A Tale of Irish Famine* (London: Simms and McIntyre, 1847).

66. John M. Synge, "The Vagrants of Wicklow," in *The Complete Works of J.M. Synge* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Poetry Library, 2008), p. 236. See also Mary Burke, *Tinkers: Synge and the Cultural History of the Irish Traveller* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

67. William Carleton, *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: E. L. Carey, 1834), p. 169.

68. Niall Ó Ciosáin, "Boccoughs and God's Poor: Deserving and Undeserving Poor in Irish Popular Culture," in *Ideology and Ireland in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Tadhg Foley and Seán Ryder (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), pp. 93–99.

tion had a long tradition as one can gather from the poet Cathal Buí Mac Giolla Ghunna's (1680–1756) description of his "going with goods to Loughgall." In Belfast, fish and fruit selling was associated with the Irish-speaking people of Omeath, County Louth, who were known there as "Fadgies."[69]

Aodh Mac Domhnaill spent much of his life travelling the roads of Ulster where he would have encountered all of these diverse migratory classes. It is not surprising that he should express a genuine affinity with the plight of those who were compelled to seek out the poorhouse in the famine years. It is in this context that we may understand his outrage at their forced incarceration in Belfast's House of Correction in July 1847—whatever the practical motivation the Board of Health had in mind. For Mac Domhnaill, the urban authorities had forsworn the venerable tradition of obligation toward the poor, and in doing so, set themselves apart. This departure had been observed by Amhlaoibh Ó Súilleabháin in his diary of 1830, where he remarked that there was much less charity dispensed in the big towns of Kilkenny and Clonmel than in the small town of Callan in which he lived, adding that the small farmers fed the poor almost on their own.[70]

Mac Domhnaill's affinity with that section of the Irish population that survived on "alms from alms," the displaced and pauperized is unmistakeable. And yet, what material impact could poetic remonstrations have had on their plight? It is interesting to note Cormac Ó Gráda's classification of "The Song of the Beggars" and "The Destruction of the Potatoes" as "poems rather than songs, that did not arise from the folk tradition nor belong to it."[71] Mac Domhnaill was, as Colm Beckett notes, a self-appointed spokesman for a people who did not so much as know he existed. It is indeed ironic that the poet should accuse the spiritual leader of this same people of being incapable of recognizing John the Baptist should he appear; Mac Domhnaill was himself something of a voice in the wilderness. All the same, Mac Domhnaill was undoubtedly of the people, and he was a passionate advocate of their needs. If he was in some way estranged from his peers, it is only by virtue of the medium in which he chose to express this advocacy, the Irish language—for which the nineteenth century itself seemed to have become alien territory. In the twentieth century, Albert Memmi would memorably diagnose the dilemma of all those who write in the language of the colonized: "for whom shall he write, for what public? If he persists

69. "Beatha Chathail Bhuí," in Ó Buachalla, *Cathal Buí: Amhráin*, p. 72. For a discussion of the "Fadgies," see Fionntán de Brún, "'The Fadgies': An Irish-speaking colony" in Nineteenth-century Belfast," in *Belfast and the Irish Language*, ed. Fionntán de Brún (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), pp. 101–13.

70. *Cín Lae Amhlaoibh*, ed. Tomás de Bhaldraithe (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1970), p. 67.

71. Ó Gráda, *An Drochshaol*, p. 48.

in writing in his language, he forces himself to speak in front of an audience of deaf men."[72] Mac Domhnaill's predicament embodied this paradox.

Nevertheless, he persevered in expressing, in Irish, some of the defining experiences of the nineteenth century. In particular, Mac Domhnaill bore witness to the huge shift from a localized rural economy to the urban industrial centers, a shift that many felt led to further impoverishment, what John Mitchel caustically describes as "the nineteenth century with its enlightenment and paupers."[73] In spite of mass Irish emigration to British and North American industrial cities at the heart of the industrial revolution, other than Mac Domhnaill's poems there is little surviving contemporary record of this experience in Irish.[74] This silence on a major historic phenomenon appears even more striking when one considers that in 1851 the Irish made up 13.1 percent of the population of Manchester, 18.2 percent of the population of Glasgow and 22.3 percent of the population of Liverpool.[75] Despite having one of the oldest literary traditions in Europe, literacy in Irish suffered a marked decrease in the nineteenth century. The "manuscript men" who sought to preserve the language tended to apply themselves to traditional material, rather than record their own impressions of contemporary society.

Yet, Irish was the language spoken by many of those who labored in the "dark satanic mills" and factories. Friedrich Engels heard Irish spoken in the most thickly populated areas of Manchester in 1842 and A. M. Sullivan describes an 1856 visit to the industrial "Black Country" of the West Midlands where he found that "in very many of the houses not one of the women could speak English, and I doubt that in a single house the Irish was not the prevalent language."[76] *Wuthering Heights*'s Heathcliff may well have been inspired by one of the thousands of Irish children who arrived in Liverpool at the height of the Famine, as Bronte's fictional child was discovered starving in the streets and spoke a kind of "gib-

72. Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfield (1957; London: Earthscan, 2003), p. 52.

73. Mitchel, p. 415.

74. While a small body of poems and memoir in Irish contains a discussion of the conditions of industrialization in North America and Wales, these compositions belong to the latter stages of the Industrial Revolution, roughly from the 1880s to the 1920s. See Seán Ó hUrmoltaigh, "An Réabhlóid Tionscalach i bhFilíocht na Gaeilge," *Feasta* (Meán Fómhair, 1959), 7–8, 22; Kerby A. Miller, "Emigrants and Exiles: Irish Cultures and Irish Emigration to North America, 1790–1922," *Irish Historical Studies,* 22, 86 (September, 1980), pp. 97–125.

75. See Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, "The Irish in Nineteenth-century Britain: Problems of Integration," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 31 (1981), pp. 149–73.

76. Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845: Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987) p.124; quoted by Denis Gwynn, "The Irish Immigration," in *The English Catholics—1850–1950*, ed. G. Andrew Beck (London: Burns Oates, 1950), pp. 267–68.

berish."[77] This may, as Terry Eagleton suggests, explain the origins of the "disruptive element" in Brontë's novel: there can be no doubt about the association of Irish immigrants with disruption in British industrial cities, where the soubriquet "Little Ireland" became synonymous with vice and depredation even in areas where the Irish did not dominate.[78] The hostile reception of famine refugees in industrial Belfast was replicated in the xenophobic attitudes encountered by Irish immigrants in British industrial towns and cities, summarized in Thomas Carlyle's phrase, "crowds of miserable Irish darken all our towns."[79]

In assessing the significance of Aodh Mac Domhnaill's poems, one is inevitably drawn to his occasional expression of the great social and cultural metamorphoses of the nineteenth century that—while directly transforming the lives of millions of Irish people—were scarcely recorded in the language that many of them spoke.[80] The unexpressed trauma of the Famine is given at least some expression in his verse, particularly in "The Song of the Beggars." We can find a certain appropriateness in the historical fact that a poet who opposed the criminalization of poverty and made common cause with those whose who were corralled into Belfast's House of Correction would end his days in a workhouse.

The most abiding impression created by the poetry considered here is its sense of temporal disjunction. Mac Domhnaill appears to inhabit two worlds at the same time, the one characterized by anteriority and the other laying sole claim to contemporaneity. This sense of the colonized existing outside of time is again aptly summarized by Memmi: "The most serious blow dealt to the colonized is in his removal from history and from the community. . . . More unpardonable is its [colonialism's] historic crime toward the colonized, dropping him off by the side of the road—outside of our time."[81] The temporal disjunction, or liminality, that typifies Gothic fiction, where the past refuses to give way

77. Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (London: Verso, 1995). See also Tabish Khair, *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness: Ghosts from Elsewhere* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 23, for a reading of the novel based on Heathcliff's putative Indian origins.

78. Graham Davis, *The Irish in Britain, 1815–1914* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1991), p. 59.

79. Thomas Carlyle, *Chartism* (1840: London: Chapman and Hall, 1898), p. 18.

80. The lack of opportunity to express these profound social and cultural changes found its corollary in the spiritual domain where the inability to give one's confession in Irish was regarded by many as the ultimate crisis they would face. Thus Fr. Signini, an Italian priest based in Wales created his own Irish phrase book to allow him to hear confessions in Irish. Gwynn, pp. 267–68. As late as the early 1900s, the greatest fear of one of the Omeath Irish speakers living in Belfast was not being able to make a final confession in Irish, see de Brún 2006, p. 107. See also John Denvir, *The Irish in Britain: From the Earliest Times to the Fall and Death of Parnell* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., 1892), pp. 259–60.

81. Memmi, p. 135; p. 156.

to the present, is equally witnessed in Mac Domhnaill's "Song of the Beggars" where the homeless poor are likened to wandering "spectres" and "ghosts." Like the poet himself, these spectres were considered to be anachronisms, which would finally give way to enlightened progress.

And if we are indebted to Mac Domhnaill for expressing the unexpressed with a prophetic rage, then we are equally in the debt of Robert Shipboy MacAdam—whose appreciation of the need to "gather up the fragments" of the Gaelic tradition was matched by a commitment to a dynamic new revivalism. In MacAdam's view the cultural conquest that had begun with colonization had been completed, in many areas, by steam and education. His own position at the heart of both of these latter domains left him uniquely positioned to embark upon the project of what Mac Domhnaill called the "athghineadh" or "regeneration" of the Irish language.[82] In assessing the legacy of both men we find that the year of MacAdam's death in 1895 was not the end of these endeavors. It was, rather, the year of the founding of Belfast's first branch of the Gaelic League—an event that marked a new beginning.

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82. Ó Buachalla, *I mBéal Feirste Cois Cuain*, p. 186.