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In September 1935, the League of Nations Assembly was convened to discuss the Abyssinia crisis, with Italy's belligerence making war seem increasingly likely. On September 3, the Irish delegation to the League departed from Dun Laoghaire en route to Geneva, the city where, as Susan Pedersen writes, "internationalism was enacted, institutionalised, and performed," with "a genuinely transnational officialdom" functioning as "its beating heart."[1] The delegation was headed by Éamon de Valera, President of the Executive Council and Minister for the Department for External Affairs. The delegation had Cabinet backing for de Valera's support for a League-mediated solution.[2] The secretary to the delegation was the poet and diplomatic cadet, Denis Devlin (fig. 1). Devlin was among the "youngest generation" of Irish poets, modernists such as Thomas MacGreevy and Brian Coffey, in whom a year earlier Samuel Beckett located "the nucleus of a living poetic in Ireland" in his August 1934 essay in *The Bookman* "Recent Irish Poetry," a blistering attack on the "antiquarians" in the line of the Irish Revival.[3]

On October 4, two days after Italy invaded Ethiopia, de Valera addressed the nation a day later than scheduled on Radio Athlone (known as 2RN prior to 1933), in which he conceded that all hopes for a League-sponsored resolution to the crisis were now gone. Several hours earlier on the same station, Devlin, de Valera's most junior diplomat in the delegation, delivered a talk on Irish poetry, "A Reply to F. R. Higgins," in which he waded into debates surrounding modernism and revivalism in response to an earlier series of radio talks by Higgins, an associate of

Karl O'Hanlon is a lecturer in the Department of English at Maynooth University. His forthcoming book is *Official Voices: Poets and the Irish State*.

Fig. 1. Denis Devlin (center) and other Irish diplomats seated with Èamon de Valera, Geneva, mid-1930s. Dorothy Macardle, de Valera papers, UCDA P150/2818, c. 1935.

W. B. Yeats and one of the leading proponents of an anti-modernist, postrevivalist "racial consciousness" in anglophone Irish poetry. De Valera's Abyssinia crisis address and Devlin's defense of modernist poetry airing in the same evening program on Radio Athlone emphasizes the cross-fade complexity of Irish modernism's radiophonic mediation, as well as modernism's inextricable situation within national and transnational political contexts.

As this article explores, Devlin's involvement in international broadcasting against the backdrop of the September 1935 session of the League has a curious, significant place in the history of Irish modernism.[4] While the centrality to modernism of what Timothy Campbell calls "the radio imaginary" has been firmly established thanks to pioneering scholarship, Irish modernism's broadcasting context, with notable exceptions, has not been extensively investigated, studies tending in the main to focus on major figures such as Yeats, and the BBC rather than Irish radio.[5] This article recovers Radio Athlone's role in the 1930s international mediascape as a fertile site for debates about Irish revivalism versus modernism, debates which also had echoes in the intrigue surrounding the legitimacy of the station's state-mandated role as a transmitter of a specifically "Irish-Ireland" collective consciousness.[6] By the mid-1930s, Radio Athlone played a crucial role in relaying Irish national identity to international listeners, an identity which was the discursive subject of many of its broadcasts. This article reconstructs the "radio imaginary" of these debates in the absence of surviving recordings, weaving the conflicted dynamics of Irish modernism as they emerge in all their density. By reconstructing Irish modernism's archival traces, this article resituates competing statements on Irish poetry by modernists and their opponents within the full context of their delivery.

The case for Irish modernism as made by one of its most intriguing voices, the poet Denis Devlin, clarifies the case for the categorical and critical value of Irish modernism (and modernism *tout court*) in contemporary scholarship, which has recently been questioned. The most striking intervention in this regard is made by Edna Longley in *Yeats and Modern Poetry* (2013), in which the rap sheet against modernism includes the assertion that its post-hoc "hegemony" only gained currency in the 1960s Anglophone academy, while the emphasis in new modernist studies on a plurality of modernisms instead of a tidy, overarching definition provokes Longley to suggest that modernism is a term of almost meaningless incoherence that critics would be better to jettison.[7] Leaving aside the fact that problems of historical, and by definition "post-hoc," categorization bedevil any major cultural-aesthetic complex (Longley's preferred substitution, "modern," is an obvious example, with Symbolism and Romanticism also relatively unproblematic terms in her book), the archival traces of 1930s radio wars between latter-day revivalists and modernists challenge Longley's assertions. These reconstructed debates bring into focus a generation of Irish poets discernibly modernist in position and often identified as such by contemporaries. Nevertheless, the broadcasts were disseminated in contexts that do not privilege a simple narrative of literary debate, or recapitulate an overly-crude binary contest between revivalism and modernism. Rather, the transnational cultural and political subtexts of broadcasts on Irish poetry are brought into striking relief, presenting Irish modernism's radiophonic mediation in all its finely-grained complexity.

A "single partisan review"? The "younger generation" and Irish Modernism

The background to Devlin's broadcast defending Irish modernism situates it as one intervention within a noisy, variegated cultural conversation which has only belatedly received sustained scholarly attention, a fact that obscures the actual state of play of modernism in 1930s Ireland.[8] Longley's skepticism regarding the historical validity of Irish modernism is not an isolated viewpoint. The charge is made with elegant concision in Seamus Heaney's remark in an interview with Denis O'Driscoll: "it was a single partisan review [from Beckett . . .] that foisted this fantasy of a 'tradition' of Irish 'modernist' poetry on us."[9] Heaney goes on—somewhat incoherently in light of this—to assert that the work of these fantastical modernists is of period interest only. Beckett's obstreperous 1934 essay "Recent Irish Poetry" was certainly a significant apparition in Irish cultural politics. On August 31, 1934 in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy, a year before his own radio defense of modernism aired, Devlin mentions the "storm" raised by Beckett's essay: "it appears Yeats was furious; it appears that Austin Clarke is vindictive by nature and will pursue Sam to his grave."[10] Appearing under the pseudonym André Belis, the essay divided Irish poets into the "antiquarians" and "others": those content in "delivering with the altitudinous complacency of the Victorian Gael the Ossianic goods," and those aware of "the new thing that has happened . . . namely the breakdown of the object, whether current, historical, mythical or spook" (Beckett,

"Recent Irish Poetry," 70). Clarke was seen as antiquarian-in-chief, the primary target of Beckett's animus, excoriated for hawking the "fully licensed stock-in-trade from Aisling to Red Branch Bundling" (73). By contrast, the younger Irish poets that have eschewed the "antiquarian" path include Beckett's friends Coffey, MacGreevy, and Devlin (Beckett himself is conspicuously absent from the roll-call).

By the kind of irony often encountered in literary criticism, recent nuanced accounts of Irish modernism have been used as evidence that the critical paradigm is dispensable, if not downright detrimental. In a piercing article on Beckett's "Recent Irish Poetry," Sinéad Mooney challenges the "shorthand" tendency to read the essay in terms of a "straightforward binarism" between "a cloying and conventional revivalism opposed by a reactive poetic modernism predicated upon modernist rupture."[11] Instead, Mooney argues for a recontextualization of the essay within its original appearance in a special "Irish number" of *The Bookman*. One of the main thrusts of Mooney's reappraisal is to challenge the extent to which Beckett's piece can be seen as a "coherent critical stance"; her article resists its commonplace status as a modernist manifesto or shot across the bows of the complacent walking corpse of the Celtic Revival and its progeny (Mooney, "Kicking Against the Thermolaters," 36). Mooney points out the irascible exaggerations to which Beckett subjects the contemporary literary field, suggesting that the essay is a "precipitate in prose"—a mimesis of modernist rupture rather than a definitive statement (36). Anthony McGrath makes a comparable claim for Beckett's resistance to essentialism, emphasizing the "tenuous . . . terminology" of the essay, and arguing that Beckett is uninterested in aesthetic argument as "socio-cultural discourse."[12] In "Against Irish Modernism: Towards an Analysis of Experimental Irish Poetry," Francis Hutton-Williams seems to concur with Longley in describing the concept of Irish modernism as "industry-driven," a tool blunted through too-capacious application, and in any case belied by what he sees as the failure of modernism to thrive in the conservative clerisy of the Free State.[13] While these, and other recent contributions to Irish modernist studies have usefully problematized the binary of modernism versus revivalism/Celticism, Beckett's "Recent Irish Poetry" is isolated as an iconic, lonely declaration of modernist tenets—however complex that declaration is ultimately found to be, or "shorthand" scholarly abuses of it lamented.[14] More to the point, critical expansions of modernism share with Longley's arresting dismissal an implicit acknowledgment of modernism's original premise: its meaning, as Jennifer Wicke argued, is "inseparable from its uses and its overdeterminations."[15]

Nevertheless, Mooney's insistence on the need to contextualize Beckett's essay within "contemporary cultural debates" is crucial ("Kicking Against the Thermolaters," 30). It is significant that while Beckett's "Recent Irish Poetry" is central to most of our scholarly arguments about Irish poetic modernism, there seldom follows a discussion of Clarke's response, "Irish Poetry To-Day," published in *The Dublin Magazine*'s 1935 spring issue, in which he implies that the poetic innovations of "the so-called modernists" are an Anglocentric dead-end, best redirected into native scholasticism and experiments in assonance.[16] Despite the sneering qualifier ("so-called"), and the suggestion that yesterday's radicals are today's conservatives, Clarke accepts Beckett's

distinctions, and entrenches the rift between his own poetics and those espoused by the younger poets. In his literary journalism, Clarke was an implacable opponent of modernism, praising Yeats for "[avoiding] the perplexities of the modernist school" (1939), denouncing Louis MacNeice for judging Yeats by "the standards of modernism" (1941), and lamenting the oppositional energies of Ezra Pound's "modernist practice" (1929).[17] Far from being, as Longley suggests, "a critical paradigm imposed *after the event*" or a sporadic and variable term with little more import than "contemporary," from as early as 1929, Clarke's critical definition of modernism is coherent, legible, and consistent (Longley, *Yeats and Modern Poetry*, 37). It is simply not true to say that a concept of Irish modernism is ahistorical.

Even critics sympathetic to the aesthetic departure of Irish poetic modernism such as David Wheatley have questioned the extent to which the modernists constituted an "abiding *esprit de corps*" in the 1930s.[18] By contrast, Susan Schreibman has emphasized the manner in which Irish modernists Beckett, Devlin, George Reavey, MacGreevy, and Coffey "sought each other out, read, published, promoted, and reviewed each other's work."[19] One of the tuning words in Beckett's review is "generation": within "the youngest generation" of poets, his peers, there is "the nucleus of a living poetic in Ireland" ("Recent Irish Poetry," 75–76). Roy Foster's account of the "way a generation is 'made'" in his examination of the Easter 1916 revolutionists is useful, here; by the mid-1930s, the conservative aftermath of the revolutionary period and "the national project of restabilization (and clericalization)" cast these revolutionaries as the forces of political and cultural reaction against which Beckett was railing.[20] At any rate, the generational aspect of Irish modernist poetry as it emerged in the 1930s has perhaps not received the attention it merits.

In a December 1930 lecture to the Economic and Literary Society in Cork entitled "Modern Irish Poetry," Lennox Robinson gave an account of the literary field that is alert not only to generations, but units within generations; of the "youngest generation," he delineates three units: the first "following orthodox English models" (R. N. D. Wilson and Monk Gibbon), the second deriving its inspiration "from Gaelic" (Clarke and Higgins), and the third which was inspired by "the most modern English, French and American forms" (Geoffrey Phibbs and MacGreevy).[21] The "most modern" group (which Devlin was associated with) was routinely castigated by the second group; Higgins, in a 1939 Dublin Literary Society talk, described unspecified "younger poets" as has having "forgotten their heritage . . . led away by the fashion of cosmopolitanism."[22]

Yeats, in his BBC broadcast lecture "Modern Poetry" on October 11, 1936, mentions the "young revolutionist" poets of England influenced by T. S. Eliot, "the most revolutionary" poet that Yeats recalls in his lifetime. Curiously, he detects no such vitiating modernist influence on Irish poetry, which has been able to resist the satiric realism and impersonal philosophy of Eliot due to its "still living folk tradition."[23] Yeats's advertised lack of awareness of the existence of young Irish modernists operating outside "folk tradition" contradicts Devlin's correspondence with MacGreevy, which report, for instance, Yeats telling Constantine Curran, he "could not understand these young men" when Curran showed him some of Devlin's poems (Yeats, "Modern Poetry,"

100).[24] From the mid-1930s, press notices and reviews consistently refer to the "modernistic" note of Devlin's poetry. J. M. Hone's description in his March 1935 "Letter from Ireland" in *Poetry* praises Devlin for having "aroused an interest that has not been confined to the extreme partisans of the modernistic school and the anti-celticists," a transatlantic notice which usefully anticipates the nuance of recent scholarship on Irish modernism, while nevertheless implying a commonly-understood dichotomy between "celticists" and "the modernistic school."[25] Similarly, an essay by Listowel writer Bryan MacMahon in *The Kerry Champion*, December 28, 1935, lauds Devlin as among those who has given to "native ideals and native traditions that injection of modernism which marks our progress before nations" (a criterion that needs to be read in the context of Ireland's foreign policy under de Valera).[26] In a striking emblem of Irish modernism's recognizable cultural cachet and departure from the *status quo ante*, in February 1935 Devlin attended The Nine Arts fancy dress ball thrown annually in the Gresham Hotel, Dublin; among the usual pirates, sailors, Mickey and Minnie Mouse, and—in a sign of the political times—a substantial swathe of "coloured shirts," Devlin, sending up his own reputation, appeared in the guise of "Modern Poetry" (what his costume looked like is a tantalizing bait to the imagination).[27]

Set against this vibrant, often fractious conversation, Beckett's "Recent Irish Poetry" emerges as something quite remote from the "single partisan review" that Heaney alleges, which foisted a fictional tradition of modernism on unsullied Irish folk traditions; rather, the essay encroaches on cultural and political debates already in motion, complex rather than settled, inflected by intergenerational differences. Charting specific voices within that controversy uncovers an inchoate but discernible Irish modernist position, one that was being articulated, disputed, and refined in the very heat of debates staged across newspapers, little magazines, in lecture halls, university clubs and societies, pubs, and on the airwaves. Beckett's essay is an eminent, but far from isolated, example, and needs to be treated as existing within a *sorites* of polemical agitation.

"An attack on Yeats and all his followers": Debating Irish Modernism on the Airwaves

Radio Athlone was a significant arena for these debates. In 1935, Dr T. J. Kiernan was appointed by de Valera as Director of the station, on secondment from the Department of External Affairs. Kiernan's public lecture "The Developing Power of Broadcasting" at a meeting of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society in December of that year makes clear his modernist sympathies: "Radio programmes should not cater for 'musical drunkards'. . . . After what this generation had passed through, it was not easy to put the past in its proper perspective and a slight reaction against tradition. . . might be no bad thing. Merely to be traditional was not to be national, certainly not constructively national."[28] The ex-diplomat put special emphasis stressed on the importance of international broadcasting.

Devlin was a contributor to Athlone's programs, broadcasting talks on the poetry of his contemporaries at least four times between 1933–36. On October 4, 1935, the *Irish*

Independent's radio program listing, subtitled "Address by the President" in reference to de Valera's speech on Abyssinia, carried the following notice: "at 7.40 p.m. Mr. Denis Devlin will defend the young poets against the recent criticisms of Mr. F. R. Higgins. Mr. Devlin, who is an M.A. of the National University, has just returned from Geneva, having accompanied President de Valera to the League session."[29] A week earlier, the regular column "The Microphone" in *The Sunday Independent* gave an account of "the gradual evolution of the Irish Broadcasting Service from a static institution to a living entity," providing suggestions regarding unexplored possibilities for the radio short story, and advice about good "microphone manner." "The Microphone" recommends listeners tune in to Devlin's talk, "one of the younger Irish poets . . . . he is showing much promise, and much more is likely to be heard of him in the future."[30] Devlin's talk entitled "A Reply to F. R. Higgins," in which he defends Irish modernist poetry, gives an insight into just one skein of the debates between (and within) Irish literary generations of the midcentury.

As Radio Éireann and its forerunners did not acquire recording capabilities until 1936, these live transmissions were essentially ephemeral.[31] Nevertheless, archival enquiry sheds light on Devlin's talk and its immediate contexts. Devlin alludes to the broadcast in a letter to MacGreevy, October 5, 1935:

> I don't know whether you may have listened to 2RN [*sic*] last night (i.e. the 4th instant) and heard my marvellous recitation of your Nocturne of the Self-Evident Presence. It ran: ". . . Mr. Thomas McGreevy [sic], an Irishman, who has been most incomprehensibly neglected." I was delivering an attack in answer to F. R. Higgins, on Yeats and all his followers. Are you pleased? I am glad to have got the chance . . . [continued on October 22]: my broadcasting you has really been of benefit, many people have enquired about you.[32]

While no recording exists, a hitherto unidentified, untitled holograph script is among Devlin's papers.[33] His letter to MacGreevy, quoting the exact form of his introduction to a reading of "Nocturne of the Self-Evident Presence" as it appears in the untitled script and the letter's description of the broadcast as a response to Higgins, firmly supports the identification. Devlin's broadcast is a direct response to an earlier series of radio talks by Higgins entitled "Irish Poetry of the Past Thirty Years." Virtually unknown today, Higgins was a friend of Clarke and a disciple of Yeats, appointed managing director of the Abbey Theatre in 1935. An energetic commentator on the contemporary literary scene, newspaper notices and reviews show that he delivered lectures and penned articles on such topics as "Business Men and Poets" (the Dublin Rotary Club, May 30, 1934), the philistinism of the Free State government (opening remarks made at an exhibition of work by Harry Kernoff, Daniel Egan Galleries, Dublin, November 30, 1934), and "The Poet and Modern Life" (*The Irish Times*, November 30, 1936).[34] His lecture to the Blackrock Literary and Debating Society, November 3, 1934, "Poetic Hysterics in Ireland," is among the earliest of his attacks on "internationalists of no racial abode" and ephemeral French fashions co-opted by Ireland's young poetic "charlatans."[35]

When Higgins is remembered, it is usually for his BBC radio debate with MacNeice, July 11, 1939, in which he asserts that Irish poetry is superior to English poetry be-

cause it is attuned to a "racial rhythm."[36] Like his mentor and collaborator Yeats, Higgins grasped the potential of the medium in terms of staging in real time a venerable Irish mode—an argument.[37] On October 22, 1935, nearly four years earlier than the MacNeice debate, Higgins had appeared on Radio Athlone in a "microphone debate" with Maurice MacGonigal of the Royal Hibernian Academy, with Higgins critiquing the state of Irish visual art, and MacGonigal defending; MacGonigal later contributed illustrations to Yeats and Higgins's revived Broadsides series, published by the Cuala Press (showing how fluid some of these coteries could be).[38] Higgins understood his radio work as of a piece with his role as an influential critic and gatekeeper in his work at the Abbey, the Broadsides, his lectures, public talks, interviews, and indeed, the volatile conversation of Dublin pubs.[39] Examining his September 1935 broadcast series "Irish Poetry of the Past Thirty Years" reveals the immediate catalyst to Devlin's defense of modernism.

The Irish Times's "On the Wireless" listings describe these broadcasts as "a series of talks on Anglo-Irish Literature."[40] Higgins's first talk aired on Radio Athlone on September 6, with the second and third parts broadcast on September 13 and 20 respectively. As with Devlin's reply, it appears Higgins's talk was broadcast live and not recorded; however, several of Higgins's broadcast scripts have been preserved and are held with his papers at the National Library of Ireland. As Emilie Morin has shown with regards to Yeats, the "contours" of Higgins's radiophonic work may be pieced together using program listings and reviews in the Irish press.[41] A review of Higgins's first talk appeared the following day in *The Irish Times*:

> Speaking of "Irish poets during the past thirty years," [Higgins] mentioned only five—"A. E.," Padraic Colum, Seumas O'Sullivan, Miss Alice Milligan, and the Ulsterman, Mr. Joseph Campbell, on whose worth he laid a special stress. . . . "This Irish poetry," Mr. Higgins concluded, "is vital and pungent with earth. Irish poetry is always close to the earth and to those who are of the earth. In that intimacy our poetry is richly alive, and so different from English verse of to-day, which is a poetry long depressed from long residence in the lawn and in concrete areas of towns, where human beings appear as the inmates of their own zoological gardens."[42]

The Irish poetry that Higgins prizes is of the countryside rather than the city; in fact, in he pointedly seems to embrace Beckett's backhanded compliment in "Recent Irish Poetry" that his verse has "a good smell of dung" (73). These qualities are politically-inflected; as well as championing poets from the north among his quintet, the agricultural features of the Irish poetry Higgins praises are pitched as constitutionally opposed to the features of "long depressed" English poetry. Higgins is concerned with Irish writing in English, minimizing the significance of the Irish language (as opposed to Irish "racial" identity, which is crucial). In these respects, his talk occupies a fine balance within the cultural and political landscape of 1930s Ireland: his rejection of urban modernity as inherently English is reminiscent of de Valera's famous 1943 St. Patrick's Day broadcast, a bucolic fantasy of the nation comprising "cosy homesteads . . . fields and villages . . . joyous with the sounds of industry."[43] At the same time, Higgins's negligible regard

for poetry in Irish is at odds with the linguistic cultural consciousness that de Valera made mild efforts to inculcate, and his belief that although Irish literature in English contained "much that is of lasting worth," it was "far less characteristic of the nation" than work produced in the Irish language.[44]

While Higgins' prescriptions in the talk are shaped by Yeats and the Revival, he also heaps scorn on the "Irish 'songsters'" of the turn of the century, in stridently macho language: "their verse threw a feminine glamour over cottage cults" ("Some Modern Poets," 10). Higgins's disavowal of late-Revival "songsters," like Clarke's vexed negotiations of Yeats's influence, suggests that not only modernists had to negotiate the problematic legacies of Yeats and the Revival. Higgins nevertheless mounts a veiled attack on modernists, Devlin in particular: "the poetic rushlights died out, and with the cries of battle the poetic blackbirds took wing. Today some of those blackbirds are. . . roosting in Government departments"; he goes on to suggest that the purer strain of his earthy quintet were rising above those blackbird "warblings" (10). This vituperative personification perhaps blurs a *locus communis* of Irish poetry, the blackbird, with its ostentatious cubist cousin in Wallace Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" (first published in 1917), a modernist symbol *par excellence*. The clerical blackbird "roosting" within the Free State's bureaucracy is almost certainly Devlin, who had left a junior demonstratorship lecturing post in the English department at UCD to enter de Valera's Department of External Affairs early in 1935.

While the personal attack doubtless stung Devlin into a reply, his letters to MacGreevy reveal that Higgins was a longstanding *bête noire*. In the August 31, 1934 letter to MacGreevy from within the eye of "storm" raised by Beckett's essay, Devlin complains: "Consider Higgins. An estimable man soft-breathing gentle cow. Quite content to look on his poetry as a job . . . He experiments in decking out a carcass."[45] The correspondence of modernist poets set alongside the coded attacks in broadcasts by Higgins and Devlin have been, until very recently, neglected historical traces that flesh out the cultural debates of 1930s Ireland, and the divisive lines of battle between urban modernists and rural "antiquarians" (who tended to congregate in Dublin, in Higgins's case periodically retreating to a cottage in Mayo to "gather local 'atmosphere,'" according to a 1930 interview in *Western People*).[46]

At the same time, an over-crude dichotomy fails to emerge, as glimpsed in Clarke's references in his essay "Irish Poetry To-Day" to Thomas MacDonagh's prosodic experimentation two decades before Beckett, and Higgins's aspersions on "cottage-cult" Twilight "songsters" (Clarke, "Irish Poetry To-day," 60). Consequently, recovery of just some strands of the arguments surrounding Irish poetic modernism (beyond the shibboleth of Beckett's "Recent Irish Poetry") proves it to be no feverish fiction of 1960s academic minds, but a distinct, if varied and inchoate cultural allegiance, tied to a specific group within a specific generation.

Higgins's attack on Irish modernism and the "blackbird" slander did not go unnoticed by Devlin in Geneva, in spite of the busy and demanding session of the League of Nations. Morin notes the European reach of Irish broadcasting in the mid-1930s:

> from 1934, Radio Athlone began to broadcast at a new wavelength, used by other European stations working on low power, and the signal, weather conditions permitting, could reach mainland Europe, providing access to its news and broadcasts; how regularly James Joyce and Samuel Beckett might have availed of this opportunity in Paris is anyone's guess. ("W. B. Yeats and Broadcasting," 149)

It is beyond doubt that Devlin tuned in from Geneva. The delegation left Ireland on September 3, three days before Higgins's first talk was broadcast, not returning until October 1 by which time the series had ended, meaning that Devlin must have listened to it while working alongside de Valera (and perhaps began to draft his response). It is quite possible that Devlin arranged his own talk and de Valera's broadcast to the nation in the same passage of communication with Radio Athlone's Director, Dr. Kiernan, and the station programmers.[47] As his letter to MacGreevy announcing the broadcast shows, Devlin clearly saw his "attack on Yeats and all his followers" as an act of solidarity with modernist poets of his generation, a fact corroborated by Beckett's mention of the broadcast (and Devlin's role in de Valera's civil service) in a letter also to MacGreevy, October 8, 1935: "I trust Devlin was kind to us. I fear he has hooked onto Dev a little late in the day."[48]

The script of Devlin's broadcast, presented as an annotated "Appendix" to this article, is a compelling archival trace that provides suggestive points of departure for further study into Irish poetic modernism in the 1930s. Its key topics (which overlap substantially) may be summarized under the following headings: modernist form and subject matter, language, anti-romanticism, and internationalism (including transnational politics and the international mediascape).

"Poetry . . . come down into the streets": Modernist Form, Questions of Language, and Anti-romanticism in Devlin's Broadcast

Devlin's broadcast refers to "technical innovations in modern poetry," the two key elements being its expanded, urban vocabulary, "having come down into the streets long ago" and dealt with the psychic shocks of World War I (a significant statement on that conflict's impact on Irish consciousness), and most importantly, its embrace of *vers libre*: "Poetry is not to be strangled and noosed in rhymes." Devlin had studied at University College Dublin (UCD) under Roger Chauviré, an expert in post-Symbolist French poetry who impressed upon his students its freedom from "antiquated restrictions" and its "hygienic" anarchy.[49] Although Longley makes the discrepancy between Yeats's impermeable form and the flux of free verse central to her argument, disparaging Devlin and others as "minor *vers libre* poets," her preferred designation "modern poetry" obscures this important characteristic; for instance, in *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (an important text for Yeats), Matthew Arnold asserts that rhyme is the *sine qua non* of "modern poetry" in distinction to classical poetry (Longley, *Yeats and Modern Poetry*, 42).[50] Devlin's script cues three readings of modernist poetry by an American, Irishman, and Anglo-American respectively: Hart Crane, MacGreevy, and

Eliot. The logic of metaphor favored by each of these poets, their emergence out of post-Symbolism in contact with Surrealism, as well as the internationalism they represent (in comparison to Higgins featuring exclusively Irish poets) further inflect the formal characteristics of Devlin's modernist poetry.

The second feature of Devlin's broadcast is its political aspect. Whereas Beckett's "Recent Irish Poetry" is perhaps only latently political, the politics of Devlin's broadcast is explicit, remarkable given his junior role in de Valera's diplomatic corps. Against Higgins's idea of "racial consciousness"—nebulous and viciously nativist in one sense, yet capable of recognizing what Roy Foster has called "the special contributions by the Anglo-Irish to Irish culture" in another—Devlin asserts that language is what defines a national literature.[51] In a provocative statement designed to enrage Higgins and other Anglophobic poets who nevertheless wrote exclusively in English, Devlin asserts in the broadcast script that Irish poetry as Higgins portrays it "could be called in fact a regional movement," a comment that requires careful interpretation.

In his August 1934 letter to MacGreevy, Devlin asserted, "I have no sympathy with the attempt to build up an Irish literature in English. Lucan is a Latin poet."[52] His broadcast a year later rejects not only Higgins's implicit argument for the superiority of Irish literature in English to literature in Irish, but also the slippage in attributing to poetry written by Irish poets national or even racial identity; in that respect, Devlin's "Irish modernism" seems to ward off Longley's binary of critical approaches that "distance what they call 'modernism' from Ireland" and those which "collapse it into Ireland" (Longley, *Yeats and Modern Poetry*, 44). Devlin's critique of Higgins's spiritual smugness regarding English poetry was informed not only by his exposure to French and German at UCD, the Sorbonne, and a brief studentship in Munich during the early 1930s, but a collaboration with fellow UCD graduate Niall Montgomery to translate modern French poetry into Irish, hailed as a "notable experiment" by *The Irish Press* when the poems first began to appear in the journal *Ireland To-Day* in 1937.[53]

In an allusion to Daniel Corkery's 1931 study *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* that would have been clear to listeners, Devlin concurs with "students of the Irish language" in critiquing the presumption of Irish poets writing in English to speak on behalf of some hypostatized image of the national character. At the same time, he also rejects the philistine, sectarian subtext that usually accompanies this line of attack, admonishing the typical "Irish-Ireland" position: "I do not think it possible to distinguish one nationality from another by drawing up categories of emotions or ideas which should be nature to one and foreign to the other." Devlin was almost certainly aware of the short-lived Irish language periodical *Humanitas*, edited by the Catholic priest Pádraig de Brún, who urged an outward-looking engagement of modern Irish Gaelic with the achievements of European literature. Corkery, from within *Humanitas*'s own pages, savaged this Gaelic internationalism in rabidly xenophobic terms, which wounded de Brún and rang the death knell of the magazine.[54] De Brún was a key influence on Devlin's interest in both modern European literature and Gaelic; the priest's niece Máire Mhac an tSaoi, another poet-diplomat, asserts that Devlin asked for "Father Paddy" on his deathbed (adding that de Brún's rehabilitation has yet to follow that of Devlin, MacGreevy, and other modernist poets he influenced).[55]

His reservations about "Irish-Ireland" language activism notwithstanding, Devlin's conclusion is strikingly postcolonial: that anglophone Irish literature since Yeats has been a mimicry of the imperial Other it purports to hate, and that the "unhappy flame" of what there is of a "national quality" of Irish literature must be guarded against the anglophobia of Higgins and his confreres, instead finding its own language. Devlin's attack on "Yeats and all his followers" is therefore conducted upon politicized lines regarding language (not least when the broadcast alludes to the trade war, the negotiated resolution of which he took part in, saying that Ireland has retaliated to tariffs by "enriching" England's literature). In what is presumably a much shorter draft of the broadcast script found elsewhere among Devlin's papers titled "An Answer to F. R. Higgins," he is even more forthright in defining the factional contours of his antagonists, referring sarcastically to Higgins's "very charming discursive account of a literary movement" which is already in "the second part of its history, its uncertainties and then its renewed vigour," with Higgins "active in its inner politics."[56] In this draft version, Devlin refers to the "belief and habits that formed that generation," once again conducting the debate along generational lines.

It is easy to see how Devlin's subtle, conflicted argument regarding the status of Irish literature in English would have been, and perhaps still is, open to misinterpretation. The provocation that Irish poetry, if not written in Irish, might be "a regional movement," coming from a civil servant in de Valera's Ireland, seems reckless. It is worth mentioning that in his 1960 reminiscence "Of Denis Devlin: Vestiges, Sentences, Presages," Coffey felt the need to assert "[Devlin] was quite unwilling to accept the idea of an Irish poet related parasitically or in some symbiosis of province and capital city to the London scene. Certainly not."[57]

The third important theme that emerges in the broadcast script is that, as with Beckett's renunciation of the "Irish Romantic Arnim-Brentano combination" of Revival luminaries Standish O'Grady and Samuel Ferguson, Devlin excoriates the poetic line of Higgins and his associates as neoromanticism. Unlike Beckett, however, Devlin's anti-romanticism is explicitly theological. He describes the post-Revivalists' romanticism as a product of their "Rousseauistic belief in the sinlessness of man." David Dwan has explored Rousseau's bogey-man status for modernism, from T. E. Hulme onward, particularly within the pages of Eliot's *Criterion* where the overt political ramifications of Eliot's assault on romanticism were aligned with a horror of "Rousseau's familiar gospel: the denial of original sin."[58] Eliot's influence on Devlin, Coffey, and MacGreevy cannot be overstated; Devlin sent poems to *The Criterion* in January 1934, receiving a polite rejection in May, and among his papers there is an appreciation of Eliot's work written in French (probably a lecture delivered at UCD before he left to join the Department of External Affairs).[59] The pair later met during Eliot's visit to Dublin in January 1936, with Devlin and Constantine Curran showing the modernist master around a memorial exhibition for Æ.[60]

Given the likelihood that Devlin began to draft his broadcast while the League was still in session, its references to Rousseau, the "self-proclaimed 'Citizen of Geneva,'" seem a significant comment on the anthropological assumptions of democratic process

fundamental to the League's operations (Dwan, "Modernism and Rousseau," 551). Devlin's emphasis on original sin in the broadcast, quoting from Eliot's unfinished sequence *Coriolan* (with its political chaos, metallic aurality, collage, and collapse of diction into a jumble of patrician chilliness and riotous slang), resonates with a modernist preoccupation that fixated French Catholic intellectuals such as Charles Maurras and Jacques Maritain; indeed, Devlin's Irish radio debut on January 17, 1933 was a talk on "The Christian Reaction in Modern French Literature."[61] That said, the exact tenor of his anti-romantic appraisal of moral behavior might also owe something to the secular skepticism of Montaigne, on whom he completed his M.A. thesis at the Sorbonne: one of the charges he brings against romanticism in the broadcast is that it is "disgusted with the world around it." At any rate, the intellectual European Catholic sensibility in the work of Devlin (and Coffey and MacGreevy) owes an enormous deal to Eliot.[62]

The "informational field": Irish Modernism, Transnational Politics, and the International Mediascape

The final point to be made about the broadcast is its context within what Christopher Morash calls "an informational field": transnational lines of communication constituted by journal and newspaper circulation, the telegraph, and perhaps especially, radio waves.[63] As Damien Keane has posited, this "international media economy" not only entangled questions of Irish self-determination within "institutional footings that no longer recognised [an] opposition" between national and paranational, but had consequences for cultural debates, not least the persistence of dichotomies between which agents could oscillate—literary autonomy versus literary nationalism, cosmopolitanism versus localism (*Ireland and the Problem of Information*, 5, 7). We might well add: revivalism and modernism. As Keane writes:

> In Ireland, with its especially close and mutually determinative relationship of literary and political activity, these relational contests were most intensely waged around the very classification of "literary" versus "political" communication, for this porous and shifting boundary was what was at stake in the emergent and evolving structure of the "informational field." (9)

Devlin's broadcast is one thread in a tangled skein of controversy and cultural politics which, in the last analysis, cannot be separated from the interpenetration of modernism, new media, and transnational communication. Nowhere is this clearer than in the program scheduling of Devlin's talk, the circumstantial delay of de Valera's address to the nation meaning that it aired later the same night on the same frequency as a defense of modernist poetry by the secretary to the Irish delegation.

Michael Kennedy has traced the origins of neutrality as a cornerstone of Irish foreign policy to de Valera's gradual disillusionment with the League of Nations, coming to a head in the crisis talks of September 1935. Kennedy argues that de Valera's broadcast on September 12 to the United States from Geneva over the Columbia Broadcast

System is a "mish-mash" of his persisting faith in the League's attempts to conduct international affairs "by reason and justice" with the reservations of his senior diplomats, Francis Cremins, Permanent Representative at Geneva, and F. H. Boland, head of the League of Nations section in the Department of External Affairs (*Ireland and the League of Nations*, 204–8). Effectively alone within the delegation in his belief in the League, a new tone began to creep in to de Valera's performances in Geneva. In the September 12 broadcast, he acknowledged that the League is a "precarious and imperfect instrument," closing with a threat that the only alternative to it is "a return to the law of the Jungle. What philosophy of life can make us believe that man is necessarily condemned to such a fate?"[64] The tone of his September 16 speech to the Assembly is markedly gloomier:

> To-day, however, the cynic is our teacher. He is whispering to each of us, telling us that man in the long run is only a beast, that his duty is determined and his destiny ruled by selfishness and passion, that force is his weapon, that victory rests with the most brutal and that it is only the fool who credits such dreams as were uttered here.[65]

What is striking about both the broadcast to the United States and the speech to the Assembly several days later is de Valera's repeated motif, a resistance to the notion of man as "a beast" abandoned to "the law of the Jungle," even as the rhetoric of both performances reveals an increasing lack of confidence that reason and justice will prevail over this dark "philosophy of life."

The political philosophy implicit in de Valera's evolving foreign policy has surprising correspondences in the anti-romantic modernism espoused by Devlin in his talk. As with other small states, Ireland had set great store by the League since joining in 1923, eventually seeing in it, and not the Commonwealth, the natural direction of its foreign policy, "an international podium" for its aspirations towards full independence, and no less importantly, the mechanism for achieving a peaceful world-order, what Desmond FitzGerald, Minister for External Affairs from 1922 to 1927 (and incidentally, a modernist poet associated with Imagism) called "the conscience of the world as a whole" (Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations*, 13, 15). De Valera considered the Covenant of the League to be a solemn pact, and his hopeful, if beleaguered, belief in international cooperation, and in the League itself, ultimately derive from the anthropological optimism of the Enlightenment, that human affairs could be ordered by reason and justice as glimpsed in Immanuel Kant's speculations on "a league of nations" in his 1795 essay, "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch."[66] This positive anthropology also fed into Romantic nationalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, shaping Fenianism and the politics of the Rising generation. De Valera, so often read exclusively as a conservative molded by Catholic social teaching, during the 1930s espoused a modern, open foreign policy consonant with Enlightenment values in its optimistic view of human nature and deontological emphasis on the League's Covenant as binding. These priorities resonate with Rousseau's emphasis on human goodness, as well as his frequently overlooked commendation of "the 'denaturing' of

humanity through the collective institution of rational laws" (Dwan, "Modernism and Rousseau," 541).

Resituated within the 1935 crisis session of the League and his role as secretary to de Valera, it becomes clear that Devlin's defense of modernist poetry was disseminated in contexts that do not privilege a narrative of binary debate between literary revivalism and modernism, but a discourse with subtexts profoundly embedded in questions of political philosophy and international relations. Devlin attacks the Revivalists' neo-romantic denial of the limits placed on human progress by "the many vilenesses" of the "soiled" heart as a Rousseauist "habit of mind." A range of influences beyond those of Eliot and French intellectual thought informed Devlin's philosophical pessimism: in marked contrast to de Valera, the seasoned realpolitik of senior colleagues in the diplomatic service, Cremins and Boland, who had experienced the League's inefficacy first hand during the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931; the inevitability of the slide to war that permeated the September session (Devlin's broadcast pointedly mentions the "destructive terror of masses of men"); and finally, perhaps also Devlin's animosity towards de Valera's idealism, colored by familial reminiscences of its consequences during the Irish Civil War.

Devlin's implicit critique of de Valera's political philosophy and the ways in which his diplomatic role shaped his anti-romantic modernism are further evidenced in two poems that allude to the League. "Anteroom: Geneva" was first published in *The New Republic*, October 28, 1940 in a version titled "Antecamera: Geneva 1938."[67] The poem captures the war clouds gathering at the 1938 Assembly, de Valera's "swan-song at the League" (Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations*, 234). It features a diplomatic "Cadet, poor but correct" unctuously bullied by the "General Secretary" (perhaps Seán Lester, Deputy Secretary General of the League) into keeping "private letters" about the economic distress of citizens from "the President," presumably de Valera, who had been newly-elected President of the Assembly. The poem's examination of "well-mannered Power" ends with a gnomic image of collusive prosperity, diplomatic impotence, and paralysis:

> Their mutual shirtfronts gleamed in a white smile
> The electorate at breakfast approved of the war for peace
> And the private detective idly deflowered a rose.[68]

Devlin's "jump cut" technique, with each line carrying a not-quite-consecutive image, blends French Surrealism with the Dada absurdity of the late 1930s news cycle. The Munich Agreement was signed on September 30, 1938, with Italy, France, and Britain capitulating to Germany's plans to annex the Sudetenland, and the League frozen out of power-brokering (Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations*, 324–37). Devlin's poem implies that the failures of the League were compounded by de Valera's neglect of domestic prosperity during the Anglo-Irish Trade War, content to play statesman on the world stage.

The poem "Old Jacobin" is another coded censure, evoking "bitter watercress" in the Shannon of de Valera's Limerick in its early drafts. First published in 1942 as "Fugitive Statesman" in *Calendar, An Anthology* by James A. Decker's Prairie press, and with a draft title "Robespierre at Charenton" among Devlin's papers, the poem is a dissection of the Romantic revolutionary, a child of the Enlightenment, with its haunted speaker trying to pacify his tortured soul "as though I had never sinned"; in the Jacobin's self-exculpation, Devlin yet again associates a denial of human sinfulness with Romanticism. The poem blurs de Valera's culpability for the Civil War with the politics of The Terror, depicting its "Old Jacobin"/de Valera as a narcissistic revolutionary drunk on abstractions:

> The ghosts of children without bread and milk
> Thronged my threshold; their fathers
> Wept without tears.
> I shouted in the Assembly; the deputies
> Blushed in the drama. They knew and I
> The Goddess Reason's treasonable trance.[69]

Devlin's anti-romantic dismissal of the "treasonable trance" of the First French Republic's "Cult of Reason" can be read as an oblique swipe at de Valera's legendary role in the Civil War, as well as his persistent belief throughout his participation in League sessions, "shouted in the Assembly," that human affairs might be ordered in accordance with "reason and justice," while his more cynical "deputies / Blushed," Devlin included. There is a taint of demagoguery in "shouted" and "drama"—a familiar line of attack by de Valera's enemies, domestic and British.[70]

Devlin worked closely with de Valera at Geneva, helping to prepare his international radio addresses, and writing on de Valera's instruction to his secretary Kathleen O'Connell in Government Buildings, Dublin to enclose a typed copy of the September 12 speech to the United States. It seems likely that Devlin's role included acting as amanuensis for de Valera's speechwriting, as several drafts of the September 1935 speeches among de Valera's papers appear to be in Devlin's hand.[71] As Kennedy writes, the "perspiration and expertise" of the Department of External Affairs ensured that de Valera's performance was an "ensemble piece" (Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations*, 223). Devlin was an industrious member of the delegation, writing to MacGreevy that he sometimes worked from 7:30 am to midnight.[72] In his limited leisure time, however, he must have relaxed by tuning in to Radio Athlone, perhaps surprised by Higgins's coded personal attack, then arranging his response with the station and presumably beginning to draft it with the League in session.

Back in Ireland, de Valera's speech to the nation aired some hours after Devlin's talk, conceding in the aftermath of Italy's invasion that the "slight hope . . . hostilities in Ethiopia" would be thwarted by League intervention were "now gone." While his speech concludes by reiterating his theme throughout the session that the League, albeit in need of reform, offered the best hope that "human society can be ordered according to reason, and is not doomed to remain forever subject to brute force," the

broadcast poses the question "whether, *human nature being what it is*, there can ever be a League of Nations."[73] Whereas his speeches in session merely raised the bestial "law of the Jungle" rhetorically as an unthinkable alternative to a world order based on human reason, political realities had brought home to de Valera the limitations placed on collective security by "human nature being what it is," a philosophical anthropology by no means distant from Devlin's anti-romantic modernist insistence several hours earlier in reply to Higgins that "the heart of man is soiled."

In the letter to MacGreevy the day after his broadcast, Devlin describes feeling "a fool broadcasting rimery during a war," adding "I am very pro-Italian. I do not much care for being the ally of savages," a racist reference to the impending sanctions against Italy which de Valera had announced and which Devlin's Department would implement.[74] Such views not only chime with reactionary Catholic opposition within the country at large, but also evidence the interaction of Devlin's experience of the League's terminal decline, the cross-fade radiophonic field in which Irish modernism and Irish foreign policy were disseminated and overlapped, and the political subtexts of Devlin's Irish modernist anti-romanticism.[75] Alex Davis notes that Devlin's posting to Mussolini's Rome as secretary to the Irish legation from 1938 to 1939 abruptly curbed his "pro-Italian" sentiments; he witnessed Mussolini raving on the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia at the invasion of Albania, later translating French Resistance poets and dedicating his elegy for de Valera's antagonist Michael Collins to the antifascist writer Ignazio Silone.[76]

There is, as Beckett knew, a danger in the neatness of identifications. Literary criticism is not bookkeeping. However, making the case for Irish modernism is to insist on the historical record, and the heuristic validity of categories. In an undated letter to Yeats, Lady Gregory diagnoses the problem with the critic's blessed rage for order: "I think it would be very hard to find anyone to write about the 'celtic Revival' (the name must be changed) who would not take some pigeon-hold [*sic*] view of it and be an annoyance. My own pigeon-hole of course I should not object to."[77] One's own critical "pigeon-holes" are seldom objectionable, if, indeed, one is in the rare enough position to possess an objective awareness of their existence. Why should they be? For all that they misrepresent, they also master and portion out, arrange, deepen, and enchant. More crucially, paradigms structure not only the debates that tissue and texture the historical record, but the processes by which those debates come to recede in the same: the charge that "Irish modernism" emerges in the 1960s academy seems plausible because of the canon-formation and gatekeeping of an earlier prevailing narrative, but the fact is that an Irish modernist critical language was emerging in the very ferment of its artistic expression. Perhaps the firmest definition we can offer for Irish modernism, then as now, is that it is made out of the quarrel with others and ourselves. It can no more be dismissed than the Irish Revival, or as Yeats defensively and tentatively called it (in an earlier quarrel with Edward Dowden), "our 'movement.'"[78] Instead of a binary collapsing into an attenuated plurality that is easy to dismiss, the reality might instead constitute something more like fugitive arguments on abandoned frequencies—richly dissonant, barely audible. "The signal is still on."[79]

Appendix

This "Appendix" presents Devlin's broadcast script. I have made minor amendments to punctuation, and retained elisions and substitutions. Devlin read three poems (or extracts from poems) during his broadcast; I have given his cues as they appear in the script.

"A Reply to F. R. Higgins," the script of a broadcast by Denis Devlin on Radio Athlone, October 4, 1935

Poetry must state the obvious clearly: it must now describe the horrible circle that is closing round the mind. Particular grief [and] joy are of no interest when set against the destructive terror of masses of men.[80] Poetry must live in that terror and manoeuvre mankind into a path of escape, but escape with honour.

Quote "Hart Crane"[81]

Our poetry is ~~moral~~ candid and indifferent and our prophet is Isaiah, dating from the time when, 50 years ago, W. B. Yeats, impatient of the literary salons of London, returned to this country for good and decided to give it a literature. This literature, written nevertheless in English, was to create the imagination of the Irish people, and express for it its character & sentiment in the same important way in which English poets have done it for their own country. It was to be Irish literature.

Gradually, objections began to make themselves heard. Students of the Irish language itself protested there was no resemblance between Gaelic poetry and the poetry of the Celtic Twilight. Gaelic poetry, they said, was concrete and hard, humorous and always close to reality and the vague aspiration, the indecisive colouring, the cultivation of a distinguished private melancholy, the unusual botany and foreign tapestry, which made up the subjects of the poetry of Yeats and his followers, could by no means be said to reflect the mind of the Irishman. This poetry was the expression of a small group living in Ireland but separated from the mass of the people by religion & by love of a foreign culture. Their literature should, it was said, be called Anglo-Irish. In fact the bitterness, the aloofness and the self-torture which were in Swift and in Anglo-Irish writers of the day, must have been due to their feeling of exile from both England & Ireland and to the equal attraction with which these countries tore them apart.

But the Anglo-Irish have defended their claim to the expression of Ireland. They point out that the Celtic Twilight is long since past, that it was killed in fact from within by the poets themselves, that Yeats abandoned it and that later writers, Colum and Higgins & Stevens [sic], are as clear spoken and close to the earth as could be ~~imagined~~ desired.[82] They might add, if they wished, that the charges of dreaminess and cloudy language could be brought against Gaelic poetry itself. I mean the aisling of the 18th century. The particular language used does not matter, they say: an Irishman writing in English is making Irish literature.

It is here that I agree with those who object to the Anglo-Irish school though I find both their reasons and their conclusion incorrect. Their reasons because I do not think

it possible to distinguish one nationality from another by drawing up categories of emotions or ideas which should be nature to one and foreign to the other. In French and German poetry there is evidence, for instance, of the feeling of the divinity of nature just as in English; and the same thoughts and judgements occur to all men in endless repetition. What makes the difference between one poet and another is language; for language is nothing else than the means adopted by the will to prove that a new personality wishes to distinguish itself from the inchoate mass of men who accept gregariousness. So what divides one literature from another is language. If we were to take some particular sentiment as for instance Honour and to inquire how it was celebrated by the poets of two different countries, we should see how obviously the complexion of the sentiment was found to be different simply because the language is different.

So it seems to me that this Irish or Anglo-Irish poetry of the last 30 years is properly to be called English poetry. With some differences of course: Yeats is not Swinburne, nor Stevens Blake; but those differences are no deeper than what might be expected to come from 2 provinces of the English language. The movement could be called in fact a regional movement. How could it be otherwise, when so much of the accidentals of our life are English; think of our clothes, our speech, our way of walking, our trams, our schools, our absurd and imitative adoration of Shakespeare, our reaction to foreigners, ~~our pitiful adoption of American~~ our emotional life arranged by the cinema. Certainly we have a national quality; but it is as yet an unhappy flame, it is the naked will which has found no clothes to fit it. And unless it finds its language, it will burn on simply relative to that which it hates—"consumed by that which it is nourished by."[83]

It is a melancholy reflection and one which should have the attention of Englishmen that, in return for their depriving us of our goods, we have not turned the other cheek, all that is asked of a saint, but have loaded England with a present of the kind to please her most, we have enriched her literature.

And now what is the nature of the body of literature which Mr. Higgins proposes as a tradition to be worked upon & continued by future writers? Mr. Higgins nowhere disengages the general features which are common to the poets he discusses; but they can be noted from a study of his terms of appreciation. The movement, then, in a word seems a neo-romantic one; its themes are those of the romantics with a different mythology. It is disgusted with the world around it but it abandons the argument and creates the Land of Heart's Desire.[84] Finding that the human heart cannot live there it falls down to earth again and makes songs of deception—disillusion is the accepted word—disillusion in all its tempers from the wistful to the bitter. Even among the poets who write of the living world, the actual countryside which they know thoroughly, Higgins & P. Colum, the type of melancholy is the same. All this verse swings about in a sort of battledore & shuttlecock between a fairyland to which we have no right and a section of reality conceived by the romantic poet as drab. But reality is wider than the disappointment even of a noble mind; and the heart has other movements than the cultivation of private joys and sorrows. What gives most irritation in reading their poetry is the repeated mishandling of Beauty. They all have freedom of that city and they continually assert their claim with more or less arrogance. The habit of mind at

the back of this is, of course, the Rousseauistic belief in the sinlessness of man. There is a line of poets which has had eyes open enough and conscience enough to see that Beauty is not our possession by any natural right; that the heart has many vilenesses to account for, that the heart of man is soiled.

Poetry speaks with a different voice now having come down into the streets long ago. After the Great War, and that is an old story, everything was called in question; people doubted whether they felt or thought. The defenders of the old order were horrified; but instead of recognizing the attacks of a fundamental kind which were thrown at them, they attended only to the slight surface signs of change. This may explain the fury with which the technical innovations in modern poetry were attacked. Free verse was barbarous and unmusical, the use of words which the hand & brain had long made a comfortable part of our emotional life—words like train and lamppost [sic]—this use was said to break the rules. What rules? Poetry is not to be strangled and noosed in rhymes. All and any words are at the disposal of the poet, if he cannot use them so much the less poet he.

Here is a poem by Thomas McGreevy [sic], an Irishman who has been most incomprehensibly neglected. It will illustrate how words considered commonplace shine in all their strength when used in a new rhythm.

Quote "Self-Evident"[85]

But do you not agree that such quarrels about vocabulary & technique are futile in face [sic] of the anger & distress of our world? A poem is still pleasurable if it touches our contemporary life somewhere.

Quote "Triumphal March"[86]

Notes

I am grateful to Sarah Bennett, Alex Davis, Roger Little, and Jim Mays for their pioneering scholarship on Devlin, as well as their kind encouragement.

1. Susan Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (2007): 1091–117, 1112.

2. Michael Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations, 1919–1946: International Relations, Diplomacy, and Politics* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996), 205.

3. Samuel Beckett, "Recent Irish Poetry," in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1983), 70–76, 75–76.

4. Damien Keane's book *Ireland and the Problem of Information: Irish Writing, Radio, Late Modernist Communication* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2014) dedicates a chapter to the intertwining forces of technological advances in radio transmission and the 1935 crises of internationalism.

5. Timothy C. Campbell, *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xiii. Keane's chapter "Time Made Audible: Irish Stations and Radio Modernism" in *A History of Irish Modernism* considers Irish modernism's broadcasting context (*A History of Irish Modernism*, ed. Gregory Castle and Patrick Bielby [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019], 330–45).

6. See Richard Pine, *2RN and the Origins of Irish Radio* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 173.

7. Edna Longley, *Yeats and Modern Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 35–44.

8. See *The Cambridge Companion to Irish Modernism*. ed. Joe Cleary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) and *A History of Irish Modernism*, ed. Castle and Bielby for recent contributions to the field.

9. In *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney*, ed. Dennis O'Driscoll (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), 239.

10. Devlin to MacGreevy, August 31, 1934, in *The Letters of Denis Devlin*, ed. Sarah Bennett (Cork: Cork University Press, 2020), 56.

11. Sinéad Mooney, "Kicking Against the Thermolaters: Beckett's 'Recent Irish Poetry,'" *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* 15 (2005): 29–42, 29.

12. Anthony McGrath, "An Agon with the Twilighters: Samuel Beckett and the Primacy of the Aesthetic," in "Irish Poetry Cultures, 1930–1970," ed. Lucy Collins, special issue, *Irish University Review* 42, no. 1 (2012): 6–23, 19, 6.

13. Francis Hutton-Williams, "Against Irish Modernism: Towards an Analysis of Experimental Irish Poetry," *Irish University Review* 46, no. 1 (2016): 20–37, 20.

14. Hutton-Williams's monograph *Thomas MacGreevy and The Rise of the Irish Avant-Garde* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2019) appears to somewhat revisit his article "Against Irish Modernism," carefully charting alternatives to second-wave Revivalism.

15. Jennifer Wicke, "Appreciation, Depreciation: Modernism's Speculative Bubble," *Modernism/modernity* 8, no. 3 (2001): 389–403, 395.

16. Austin Clarke, "Irish Poetry To-day," in *Reviews and Essays of Austin Clarke*, ed. Gregory A. Schirmer (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1995), 56–62, 59.

17. Austin Clarke, "Poet and Artist," in *Reviews and Essays*, 14–16, 14; Austin Clarke, "Review: *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats* by Louis MacNeice," in *Reviews and Essays*, 17–18, 18; Austin Clarke, "Unconstitutional Poetry: Review of *Selected Poems*, by Ezra Pound, ed. T. S. Eliot," in *Reviews and Essays*, 181–82, 181.

18. David Wheatley, "Samuel Beckett: Exile and Experiment," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry*, ed. Fran Brearton and Alan Gillis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 145–60, 146.

19. Susan Schreibman, "Irish Poetic Modernism: Portrait of the Artist in Exile," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry*, 130–44, 132. Schreibman's essay draws attention to the exclusionary tactics of the post-Revival poetry establishment (attacks on *Finnegans Wake*, James Stephens' mooted anthology, the foundation of the Irish Academy of Letters).

20. Roy Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland 1890–1923* (London: Penguin, 2015), xxi, 116–17.

21. "Modern Irish Poetry: Lecture By Mr. Lennox Robinson," *Irish Examiner*, December 22, 1930, 9.

22. "Modern Apathy to Poetry," *Irish Independent*, February 25, 1939, 11. Higgins returned to this theme time and time again; for the anti-Semitic overtones and racialized metaphors of his discourse, see Emilie Morin, *Beckett's Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 77. I am grateful to Professor Morin for drawing my attention to this connection.

23. W. B. Yeats, "Modern Poetry: A Broadcast" (1936), in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, ed. William H. O'Donnell, vol. 5, *Late Essays* (New York: Scribner, 1994), 89–102, 95, 100.

24. Devlin to MacGreevy, April 26, 1934, *The Letters of Denis Devlin*, 50.

25. Joseph Hone, "A Letter from Ireland," *Poetry* 45, no. 6 (1935): 332–36, 334.

26. Bryan McMahon, "Poetry, Whence and Whither?," *Kerry Champion*, December 28, 1935, 3.

27. "600 Dancers at Nine Arts Ball," *Evening Herald*, February 23, 1935, 2.

28. "Dr T. J. Kiernan on Ideal Broadcasting Programme," *The Irish Press*, December 20, 1935, 9.

29. "To-Day's Radio Programmes," *Irish Independent*, October 4, 1935, 4.

30. "The Microphone," *Sunday Independent*, September 29, 1935, 5.

31. See Pine, *2RN and the Origins of Irish Radio*, 157.

32. Devlin to MacGreevy, October 5, 1935, *The Letters of Denis Devlin*, 65.

33. Denis Devlin, "Untitled essay on Irish poetry in English and Irish," MS 33,800, Devlin Papers, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

34. "Poets Now and Then," *Irish Press*, May 1, 1934, 7; "Exhibition of Paintings: Mr. F. R. Higgins's Plea for Art," *The Irish Times*, December 1, 1934, 7; "The Poet and Modern Life," *The Irish Times*, November 30, 1936, 4.

35. "Irish Poets of To-Day: Mr. F. R. Higgins on Hysterics," *The Connaught Telegraph*, December 8, 1934, 3.

36. F. R. Higgins, quoted in Tom Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 47–48.

37. Several studies have investigated Yeats's mastery of the medium and its influence on his work: see Ronald Schuchard, *The Last Minstrels: Yeats and the Revival of the Bardic Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 335–403; Emilie Morin, "W. B. Yeats and Broadcasting, 1924–1965," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 35, no. 1 (2015): 145–75; and Emily C. Bloom, *The Wireless Past: Anglo-Irish Writers and the BBC, 1931–1968* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 27–63.

38. "On the Wireless: Daily Programme Review," *The Irish Times*, October 22, 1935, 4.

39. Later in 1939, Higgins's next broadcast with MacNeice, "A Literary Night Out," tried to capture something of "the salty, sensitive, exuberant talk of the Dublin literary pub" (Walker, *Louis MacNeice and the Irish Poetry of his Time*, 48–49).

40. "On the Wireless," *The Irish Times*, September 6, 1935, 4.

41. See Morin, "W. B. Yeats and Broadcasting, 1924–1965," 147, 156.

42. "Some Modern Poets: Characteristics of their Verse: Broadcast Talk by Mr. F. R. Higgins," *The Irish Times*, September 7, 1935, 10.

43. See de Valera's radio broadcast, March 17, 1943, in *Speeches and Statements by Eamon de Valera, 1917–73*, ed. Maurice Moynihan (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), 466–69, 466.

44. See de Valera's speech opening Athlone Broadcasting Station, February 6, 1933, in *Speeches and Statements*, 230–33, 232.

45. Devlin to MacGreevy, August 31, 1934, *The Letters of Denis Devlin*, 54.

46. "The Poet by the Lakeside," *Western People*, August 30, 1930, 7.

47. See Pine, *2RN and the Origins of Irish Radio*, 175.

48. Beckett to MacGreevy, October 8, 1935, in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, ed. Martha D. Fehsenfeld and Lois M. Overbeck, vol. 1, *1929–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 284. Beckett's comment intimates that the Devlin family may have been Treatyite republicans, accepting the Treaty out of personal loyalty to Collins (who kept headquarters at Liam Devlin's pub in Parnell St during the War of Independence), later becoming disillusioned with Cumann na nGaedheal and gravitating towards the former enemy, de Valera's Fianna Fáil. The Army Mutiny, a failed Treatyite republican coup led by Liam Tobin, took place in Devlin's pub in March 1924.

49. "Modern French Poetry," *Belfast Newsletter*, March 14, 1930, 13.

50. Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), in *The Development of Celtic Linguistics*, ed. Daniel R. Davis (London: Routledge, 2001), 6:159.

51. Roy Foster, quoted in Mo Moulton, *Ireland and the Irish in Interwar England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 235–36.

52. Devlin to MacGreevy, August 31, 1934, *The Letters of Denis Devlin*, 54.

53. "The Magazines," *The Irish Press*, August 3, 1937, 7. The planned edition of Devlin's poetry in Irish never saw the light of day, although they appeared in some form in J. C. C. Mays' edition of Devlin's *Collected Poems*. See *The Collected Poems of Denis Devlin*, ed. J. C. C. Mays (Dublin: Dedalus Press, 1989).

54. See Séamus Blake, "Seán Ó Tuama and Irish Gaelic in the Twentieth Century," *American Journal of Irish Studies* 8 (2011): 117–36, 150–51.

55. Máire Cruise O'Brien, *The Same Age as the State* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2003), 100–101.

56. Denis Devlin, "An Answer to F. R. Higgins," Devlin Papers, MS 33,803, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

57. Brian Coffey, "Of Denis Devlin: Vestiges, Sentences, Presages" (1960), *University Review*, rpt. in *The Poetry Ireland Review* 75 (2002/3): 82–100, 92.

58. Quoted in David Dwan, "Modernism and Rousseau," *Textual Practice* 27, no. 4 (2013): 537–63, 549.

59. See his letters to MacGreevy, January 26, 1934 and April 26, 1934, *The Letters of Denis Devlin*, 48, 50; and Denis Devlin, "Untitled appreciation in French of T. S. Eliot," MS 33,808, Denis Devlin Papers, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

60. Devlin is photographed with Eliot at the exhibition in the *Sunday Independent*, January 26, 1936, 11.

61. "To-Day's Programmes," *The Irish Times*, January 17, 1933, 4.

62. For the engagements of Coffey and MacGreevy with Eliot and/or "Catholic modernism," see James Matthew Wilson, "Brian Coffey, Jacques Maritain and *Missouri Sequence*," in *Other Edens: The Life and Work of Brian Coffey*, ed. Benjamin Keatinge and Aengus Woods (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 121–38; and Rhiannon Moss, "Thomas MacGreevy, T. S. Eliot, and Catholic Modernism in Ireland," in *Irish Modernism: Origins, Contexts, Publics*, ed. Edwina Keown and Carol Taafe (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 131–44.

63. Christopher Morash, *A History of the Media in Ireland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 96.

64. Typescript draft of de Valera's speech from Geneva to the US over Columbia Broadcast System, September 12, 1935, P150/2804, Éamon de Valera Papers, University College Dublin Archives, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland.

65. Typescript draft of de Valera's speech at plenary meeting of 16th Assembly of the League, P150/2803, de Valera papers, University College Dublin Archives, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland.

66. Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay* (1795, rpt., New York: Cosimo, 2010), 28. For de Valera's emphasis on the League's Covenant as the cornerstone of its effectiveness, see Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations*, 168.

67. See drafts for both poems discussed here in the folder titled "Old Jacobin: Anteroom Geneva," MS 33,763/1 (1–8), Devlin Papers, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

68. Denis Devlin, "Anteroom: Geneva," *The Collected Poems of Denis Devlin*, 169.

69. Denis Devlin, "Old Jacobin," in *The Collected Poems of Denis Devlin*, 167–68.

70. Drafts of the poem have "That the republic must be betrayed" in place of the last line quoted here ("Old Jacobin: Anteroom Geneva," MS 33,763/1, Devlin Papers, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland).

71. See P150/2804, de Valera papers, University College Dublin Archives, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland.

72. Devlin to MacGreevy, October 5, 1935, *The Letters of Denis Devlin*, 65.

73. Typescript of President's Broadcast, October 4, 1935, P150/2805, de Valera papers, University College Dublin Archives, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland, emphasis added.

74. Devlin to MacGreevy, October 5, 1935, *The Letters of Denis Devlin*, 65.

75. For a study of the domestic reaction to the crisis, see Cian McMahon, "Irish Free State Newspapers and the Abyssinian Crisis, 1935–6," *Irish Historical Studies* 36, no. 143 (2009): 368–88.

76. Alex Davis, *A Broken Line: Denis Devlin and Irish Poetic Modernism* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2000), 118.

77. Lady Gregory to W. B. Yeats, undated, Lady Gregory Papers, The Berg Collection, New York Public Library, New York.

78. W. B. Yeats to the editor of *The Daily Express*, January 26, 1895, in *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. John Kelly, vol. 1, *1865–1895* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 430–31.

79. A phrase of Yeats, from an idea for a staged fight with James Stephens during the broadcast of "My Own Poetry," cited in Emilie Morin, "'I beg your pardon?': W. B. Yeats, Audibility and Sound Transmission," in *Yeats's Mask: The Yeats Annual No. 19*, ed. Margaret Mills Harper and Warwick Gould (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2013), 191–219.

80. Devlin seems to add an interlineal insertion between "joy" and "are of no interest": "must be abandoned, poetry is general." Thanks to Matthew Sperling for help decoding.

81. Devlin reads three poems in the course of the broadcast. Which Crane poem Devlin chose to read is a matter of speculation, however, Crane's poem "Cutty Sark" first appeared in *transition* with an epigraph from Isaiah; both Devlin and Crane contributed to Eugene Jolas's magazine *transition*. See Francesca Bratton, "Hart Crane and the Little Magazine" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2017). For a comparison of Devlin and Crane, see Davis, *A Broken Line*, 59–67.

82. Padraic Colum (1881–1972), F. R. Higgins (1896–1941), and James Stephens (1880–1950), poets associated with the legacy of the Irish Literary Revival.

83. Shakespeare's Sonnet 73.

84. The title of an 1894 play by Yeats.

85. Thomas MacGreevy's "Nocturne of the Self-Evident Presence" was first published under the pseudonym L. St. Senan in *The Irish Statesman* 7, no. 8 (1926): 57–58.

86. T. S. Eliot's "Triumphal March," part of his unfinished *Coriolan* sequence, was first published in *Triumphal March*, Ariel Poem 35 (1931).