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**Citizens of Nowhere: Longing, Belonging and Exile among Irish Protestant Writers in  
Britain, c.1830-1970**

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As he entered the final years of his life, Bernard Shaw received a gushing letter from Jawaharlal Nehru, independent India's first Prime Minister. During his undergraduate days in Cambridge, Nehru had been inspired by a lecture Shaw delivered, and promptly immersed himself in his writings. Nehru wrote to Shaw in 1948 with the hope of meeting his ageing hero when next in England. In his reply, Shaw could not resist stressing kinship with the leader of the newly postcolonial state. "I have lived through the long struggle for liberation from English rule, and the partition of the country in Eire and Northern Ireland, the Western equivalent of Hindustan and Pakistan. I am as much a foreigner in England as you were in Cambridge".<sup>1</sup> Just one month later, Shaw, with characteristic aplomb, contributed an arresting article to the *New Statesman* on the fluidity of national identities and political citizenship during his lifetime:

I am by birth a British subject. I have always so described myself when applying for passports, though I never stood up nor took my hat off while the English national anthem was being played until Ireland became a so-called Irish Free State. I am also a registered citizen of my native Ireland. When Mr Costello [the Irish Taoiseach] shot

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<sup>1</sup> 18 September 1948, in Laurence, ed., Bernard Shaw, 828.

out of the blue his intention to abolish external relations, a wild hope arose in me that as a citizen of Nowhere I might be able to escape taxation Anywhere.<sup>2</sup>

Shaw was, of course, one of the best known public intellectuals of his age, scaling the heights of the London socialist and avant-garde literary worlds over a fifty-year period. This was achieved while he – publicly, at least – cultivated the status of an outsider in England. That he made common cause with the “foreignness” of Jawaharlal Nehru within a British context, despite substantial differences in race and language, spoke volumes for Shaw’s conception of a distinctive Irishness that refused to be assimilated by an over-arching Britishness.

Shaw’s notion of “a citizen of Nowhere” and affirmations of his “foreigner” status in Britain chime with broader articulations of a migrant mentality of otherness, difference, and exclusion from the host country. Such traits historically distinguished the Irish experience – or, at least, perceptions of it – in Britain. The United Kingdom was, and remains, a multi-national political unit; population movement within it thus carries elements of both internal and external migration. While nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Irish migrants to Britain moved, technically speaking, from one part of the British state to another, they also travelled from one clearly distinct nation to another. After the creation of Northern Ireland in 1921, this process continued for migrants to Britain from the six counties. Given this dual internal-external migratory framework and – it can hardly be forgotten – the problematic constitutional relationship between Britain and Ireland, the experience of relocation from the smaller to the larger island produced a wealth of ideas concerning identity, homeland, and belonging.

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<sup>2</sup> Shaw, “Ireland Eternal and External,” *New Statesman*, 30 October 1948; reprinted in *The Matter with Ireland*, 296.

Migration to Britain was, in this regard, particularly acute for Irish Protestants. Shaw, in his own way, was representative of a certain intellectual dispensation within Irish Protestantism, one which rejected the excesses of native ideas of unionism and nationalism. In recent years historians have become increasingly sensitive to the experiences of Ireland's minority population. The "Protestant turn" in Irish historiography has resulted in a number of illuminating studies, which go some way to explain mentalities inherent within Protestant Ireland, before and after the end of Union in 1922.<sup>3</sup> Apart from an on-going debate concerning the displacement of southern Protestants during Ireland's revolutionary period of 1919-23,<sup>4</sup> this renewed interest in Irish Protestantism has not, by and large, filtered through to work on the diaspora. Protestants who left Ireland to settle in Britain, in particular, remain an underdeveloped aspect of historiography.<sup>5</sup> Too often, the term "Irish" is used to solely depict the Catholic Irish; it is unclear whether Protestant migrants by and large followed or deviated from patterns of diasporic life established by their Catholic kin.<sup>6</sup> Sectarianism and zero-sum outlooks may be the historic stain on Irish political culture, but invariably the landscapes of identity are complex and often surprising, particularly when the Irish, and in the case of this article, the Protestant Irish, are taken out of Ireland. The article has a number of aims. First, to provide a critique of the historiography of the Irish in Britain as it emerged from the nineteenth century; second, to consider attitudes towards migration among several key Protestant organs, particularly the Dublin University Magazine; third, to provide an overview of the impact of "exile" on the cultural psyches of a sample of Irish Protestant literary figures;

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<sup>3</sup> For an overview of this recent literature, see Biagini's review article, "The Protestant Minority". Among the most significant recent appraisals of Protestant Ireland are Fitzpatrick, *Descendancy* and Crawford, *Outside the Glow*.

<sup>4</sup> Bielenberg, "Exodus"; Hart, *The IRA at War*, 223-240.

<sup>5</sup> There are several notable exceptions, including MacRaild's *Faith, Fraternity and Fighting and Culture, Conflict and Migration*.

<sup>6</sup> A trait repeated recently in Sorohan, *Irish London*, 2-3.

and fourth, to offer some thoughts on the need for further research into the experiences of Irish Protestants as a section of the diaspora. As a whole, this article makes an initial contribution towards excavating the complex cultural terrain of longing and belonging amongst Irish Protestants in Britain.

### **An Identity Crisis?**

The cultural and national mentalités of Ireland’s Protestants are far from monolithic. For example, Ulster Protestantism contains a plethora of worldly perspectives; and these can be radically different from southern Irish Protestantism, especially the Anglo-Irish. The Anglo-Irish historically came from the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland, a small group wedded to the Episcopalian Church, which wielded much political and economic power through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Displacement marks the experiences of their descendants in the following centuries. With their aristocratic power eroded and interests threatened by the rise of a Catholic democracy in Ireland by the 1880s, the twilight of the Anglo-Irish coincided with that of the Union itself. While the scars of social decline in an age of democratisation are apparent, the wider disruptions in the Anglo-Irish sense of “place” caused first by the Union of 1800 and then its violent breakdown in 1922, are often less considered. To be Anglo-Irish was to belong to two nations but also none. The classic example is the writer Elizabeth Bowen, who straddled both islands during her lifetime; the Irish critic – and Bowen’s former lover – Sean O’Faolain, described her as a “resident alien” in both Ireland and Britain.<sup>7</sup> The idea that the Anglo-Irish were not truly Irish became a cause

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<sup>7</sup> O’Faolain, *The Vanishing Hero*, 116.

célèbre adopted by champions of a more exclusive nationalism, particularly in the decades after independence. In 1931, the nationalist critic, Daniel Corkery, published a controversial but influential study that fused two very different and separate definitions of the term “Anglo-Irish”, namely an Irish literature in the English tongue and the Ascendancy class. “Anglo-Irish” literature, argued Corkery, should not be considered a distinctive national literature as its creative impulse was alien from Irish mentalities. Corkery was blunt in his assessment: “It is all written for their motherland, England, by spiritual exiles”.<sup>8</sup>

The idea of “spiritual exiles” is an alluring one, but it is rarely examined from the perspective of the “exiles” themselves. This article centres on a number of Irish and Ulster Protestant literary figures who experienced life in Britain, either permanently or more transiently. From one perspective, they appear “exiles” in the sense that they are separated from the land of their birth; from Corkery’s perspective, they have returned “home”. The Irish Protestant mind-set was malleable enough to accommodate multiple national outlooks, but given the nature of political division between Ireland and Britain, it was hardly surprising that expressions of identity were permeated with tension. In his own characteristic manner, Shaw outlined the dilemma: “The more Protestant an Irishman is – the more English he is, if it flatters you to put it that way, the more intolerable he finds it to be ruled by English instead of Irish folly”.<sup>9</sup> As Shaw’s example shows, notions of Irish Protestant national identity can be supple. Perhaps the finest example of this is the afterlife of Edmund Burke. The Dublin-born Irish Protestant critic of the French Revolution was appropriated by many nineteenth-century

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<sup>8</sup> Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, 9-10.

<sup>9</sup> Shaw, *The Matter with Ireland*, 33.

commentators, such as Matthew Arnold, as “the greatest of English statesmen”.<sup>10</sup> During the mid-1920s, William O’Brien, the former Irish Party politician, conceded that some nationalists agreed with the Arnoldian reading of Burke, viewing him as “a more or less suspect Englishman”; this triggered O’Brien’s campaign to reclaim Burke as an Irishman.<sup>11</sup> Even Shaw bemoaned English efforts to “steal” Irish Protestants such as Wellington and Swift.<sup>12</sup> Did such manoeuvring signify a fundamental incoherence regarding the national identities of Ireland’s Protestants? For the Belfast playwright, Stewart Parker, the Northern Ireland Troubles crystallised an unseen but longstanding Ulster Protestant dilemma. Rejected by both the English and the southern Irish as “different”, Protestants in the North inhabited a “no-man’s land”; “We didn’t have a country’ Parker lamented in 1976, “we just had a Province”. This national detachment riddled Ulster Protestants’ sense of identity with a potentially corrosive ambiguity, while also providing Northern Irish writers with a powerful subject matter. As Parker admitted, “You’ve got a hell of a lot to explore”.<sup>13</sup>

The “no-man’s land” metaphor is an arresting one to apply to Irish Protestants in Britain, as many literary figures from this milieu embraced the languages of exile and national disruption. The language of “exile”, of course, permeates the broad Irish migratory experience. This was more than mere rhetorical gloss; the embrace of the “exile” trope represented a deep psychological justification among the Irish seeking a better life, especially in the United States.<sup>14</sup> While Patrick Ward has argued that an exile mind-set was not as prevalent amongst the British-based Irish diaspora because of the relative ease of a possible

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<sup>10</sup> Arnold, *Irish Essays*, 14. My emphasis.

<sup>11</sup> O’Brien, *Edmund Burke*, xiv.

<sup>12</sup> Shaw, *The Matter with Ireland*, 37.

<sup>13</sup> Richtarik, *Stewart Parker*, 10, 86.

<sup>14</sup> Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 556.

return to their homeland, this was certainly not the case for a number of émigrés.<sup>15</sup> As Sean O’Casey put it in memoir, “a short visit [to England] so often extended to take the emigrant’s rest of life”.<sup>16</sup> The peculiar language used to make sense of an exodus to the oppressor country remains to be decoded. But this does not only apply to Irish Catholics versed in nationalism; Protestants were also conflicted about leaving Ireland for Britain, and channelled the spirit of exile to articulate their sense of rupture. Autobiography and literature provides the means to map the “Ireland of the mind” at individual levels, to decode the language associated with migration; these rich source bases have yet to be fully exploited in the pursuit of understanding the mentalities of Irish Protestants in Britain.

### **“A Peculiar People”**

The history of modern Ireland is, of course, the history of emigration. Yet it is important to note that the vivid reality depicted by David Fitzpatrick in his study of Irish emigration – that to be born in nineteenth and twentieth-century Ireland was to prepare to leave it – did not solely apply to Catholics.<sup>17</sup> The rate of population decline amongst Irish Protestants over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was acute. On an all-Ireland basis, there were 693,336 Anglicans in 1861; by 1936, this figure drops to 490,504. In 1861, there were 523,291 Presbyterians across the thirty-two counties of Ireland; by 1936, the figure was 418,997. By the 1930s, nearly three-quarters of the Church of Ireland population and nine-tenths of

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<sup>15</sup> Ward, *Exile, Emigration and Irish Writing*, 170.

<sup>16</sup> O’Casey, *Rose and Crown*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration*, 1.



Presbyterians lived in Northern Ireland; the decline was startling in the south.<sup>18</sup> Between 1911 and 1926, there was a 32.5% decline in non-Catholics in the territory that became the Irish Free State.<sup>19</sup> Migration played a huge role in the numerical decline of Protestants; coupled with the high numbers of overall Irish population exodus across the nineteenth and twentieth century, it is clear that the history of modern Ireland cannot be told without emigration.<sup>20</sup> In recent decades, research into the Irish diaspora has become sizable, with numerous innovative and sophisticated studies emerging that have aided the historical recovery of the Irish throughout the world.<sup>21</sup> Yet the experiences of the Irish in Ireland's closest geographical neighbour – Britain – remain elusive. In a seminal article on the Irish in nineteenth-century Britain from 1981, Gearoid Ó Tuathaigh commented that scholarship into this section of the diaspora was relatively new.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, there are structural reasons why the historiography of the Irish 'near diaspora' is not as advanced as, say, the Irish in North America or Australia. The perennial problem rests with the sources: statistics of emigration patterns by religion simply do not exist, which goes some way in explaining the dearth of work on Protestant patterns of movement from Ireland to Britain.<sup>23</sup> That said, as Enda Delaney has highlighted, most scholarly analyses of the Irish in Britain after 1921 remain insensitive to the relationship between religious denomination and migration.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> McDermott and Webb, *Irish Protestantism*, 1, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Delaney, *Democracy, State and Society*, 71.

<sup>20</sup> Akenson, *Small Differences*, 42. There were, of course, additional factors, such as the *Ne Temere* decree of 1907, but it remains difficult to account for these in numerical terms.

<sup>21</sup> Among the classics of Irish diaspora history are Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration and his majestic Oceans of Consolation*; Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*.

<sup>22</sup> Ó Tuathaigh, "The Irish in Nineteenth-Century Britain", 149.

<sup>23</sup> Kennedy, Jr., *The Irish*, 110.

<sup>24</sup> Delaney, *Democracy, State and Society*, 69.

The Irish in Britain were a diverse group, but their written histories have tended to overwhelmingly focus on the Catholic poor, who formed the most visible section of the diaspora.<sup>25</sup> The wave of Irish migration to Britain in the wake of the Great Famine perpetuated negative stereotypes already in place. The upsurge in “No Irish Need Apply” notices in regional newspapers was an obvious marker for an increased awareness of the diaspora in Britain after the 1840s.<sup>26</sup> The extent to which these prejudices extended to Irish Protestants in Britain, however, is unclear. Advertisements for vacancies carried by English newspapers generally did not make a distinction between the two Irish religious communities, but on occasion notices were run announcing “Irish Protestant preferred”, or “Irish Protestant not objected to” for service jobs to families.<sup>27</sup> While the stereotypes of the drunk and feckless Irish by authors as diverse as Henry Mayhew, Friedrich Engels and Thomas Carlyle became ingrained into the British mind-set,<sup>28</sup> it is difficult, again, to assess the extent with which the Protestant Irish were also tarnished with this image. Don MacRaild has shown that during the nineteenth century, “Irishness became a synonym for decaying moral values”, a cancer in the heart of Britain’s major cities.<sup>29</sup> Given the perceived social issues caused by, and stigma attached to, the Irish Catholic poor in Britain – or the “vagrant, destitute, half-barbarian Irish who are the drudges and the enemies of the inhabitants of most of the larger towns in England”, as the *Saturday Review* put it in 1863<sup>30</sup> – it is understandable that their existence dominated contemporary and later representations of migration from Ireland, thereby masking the diasporic experience of Irish Protestants from all classes. Most Victorian studies

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<sup>25</sup> Swift, “The Historiography of the Irish in Nineteenth-Century Britain”, 52.

<sup>26</sup> MacRaild, “No Irish Need Apply”, 269-99.

<sup>27</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 18 September 1857, 7 March 1866; *Bristol Mercury*, 22 February 1868.

<sup>28</sup> Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*; Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*; Carlyle, *Chartism*.

<sup>29</sup> MacRaild, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain*, 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Saturday Review* 15, no. 387 (28 March 1863), 393.

of the Irish in Britain approached their subject through the prism of poverty and, at times, use the term “Irish” as a euphemism for Catholic Irish.<sup>31</sup> This set the tenor for later twentieth-century approaches to the diaspora: it is uncertain, for example, where Irish Protestant or professional classes or aristocratic migrants fit into in these historiographical landscapes.<sup>32</sup> Scholars are becoming increasingly attuned to Irish middle-class population movement, with the commercial interests and professional opportunities that linked Ireland and Britain underpinning vivid and complex narratives of diaspora before and after the Act of Union.<sup>33</sup> The peculiarities of Irish Protestants in Britain, especially their languages of longing, belonging and exile, however, remain elusive.

To be an Irish Protestant in Britain means one of two things in the historiography of the diaspora: either to don a sash and join an Orange lodge in England, Scotland or Wales (and thus allow the historian to observe this most Irish Protestant of traits), or integrate seamlessly into the new surroundings, becoming “invisible” through a lack of association with any overtly Irish characteristics.<sup>34</sup> There is also nothing like a British equivalent of the literature on Irish Presbyterian migration to north America and their contribution to civic, political and religious life in the United States and Canada from the eighteenth century.<sup>35</sup> Yet Irish Protestant migrants were confronted with a broader range of options than the binary embrace of Orangeism or “ethnic fade”. “The Irish Protestants are a peculiar people”, proclaimed the *Irish Review* in 1913. “How Irish they are they sometimes never discover

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<sup>31</sup> Such as Heinrich, *A Survey of the Irish in England*, xxi.

<sup>32</sup> For instance, there is no discussion of these categories in Lees, *Exiles of Erin* or O’Connor, *The Irish in Britain*.

<sup>33</sup> Bailey, *Irish London*. Also see the pioneering essay by Foster, “Marginal Men and Micks on the Make”.

<sup>34</sup> For Irish involvement in the Orange Order in Britain, see MacRaild, *Faith, Fraternity and Fighting*; Walker, “The Orange Order in Scotland”, 177-206; and Macpherson, “Migration and the Female Orange Order”, 619-42. For Irish Protestants integrating into their British surroundings, see MacRaild, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain*, 100-101.

<sup>35</sup> For recent thoughts on Irish Protestants in the new world, see Ireland, “Irish Protestant Migration”, 263-81.

until they go to live in England”.<sup>36</sup> The experiences of Irish Protestants in Britain were multifaceted; yet much work remains to excavate the more complex narratives of migrant identities, national belongings, and emotional responses of Ireland’s “peculiar people”.

### **The Politics of Protestant Emigration**

Capturing the mentalities and experiences of Irish Protestants in Britain begins in Ireland itself, and attitudes towards emigration amongst the minority population. That most familiar Irish Protestant migrant in London, Bernard Shaw, fused autobiography with advice in a characteristically bombastic way in 1921 when he declared that “Every Irishman who felt that his business in life was on the higher planes of the cultural professions felt that he must have a metropolitan domicile and an international culture: that is, he felt that his first business was to get out of Ireland”.<sup>37</sup> But this was far from universally accepted throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During its early years, *Dublin University Magazine*, the literary journal founded in 1833 to provide Irish Protestants with an intellectual outlet, frequently ran major articles reporting on the emigration of Ireland’s religious minority. The language adopted was often that of enforced exodus to escape persecution. “We are indeed fallen upon evil days”, ran an article from 1833, because of “the threatened emigration of the protestant population”. The DUM claimed that emigration of Irish Protestants had accelerated dramatically following the grant of Catholic Emancipation in 1829, and connected the two as cause and consequence, invoking the spectre of the 1641 rising, in which thousands of Protestants were either massacred by Catholics or migrated to England. The Protestant

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<sup>36</sup> *Irish Review* 3. no. 25 (March 1913), 4.

<sup>37</sup> Shaw, *The Matter with Ireland*, 10.

collective memory, as conjured by the DUM, thus blurred the lines between emigration and persecution.<sup>38</sup>

The DUM was a Tory periodical which attempted to push descendants of the Protestant Ascendancy to make sense of their Irishness within the framework of the Union.<sup>39</sup> But the (belated) concession of Catholic Emancipation in 1829, at the behest of a concerted campaign spearheaded by Daniel O’Connell, profoundly altered Irish Protestant attitudes to the British state. While the newly enfranchised Catholics were a minority group within the United Kingdom, they formed an overwhelming majority in Ireland, ensuring that the political position of Irish Protestants was gravely weakened. Samuel Ferguson angrily verbalised the precariousness of the Irish Protestant position in the aftermath of Catholic Emancipation and wider franchise reform in 1833:

I am tormented and enraged by the condition to which our loyalty has brought us. Deserted by the Tories, insulted by the Whigs, threatened by the Radicals, hated by the Papists, and envied by the Dissenters, plundered in our country-seats, robbed in our town houses, driven abroad by violence, called back by humanity, and, after all, told that we are neither English nor Irish, fish nor flesh, but a peddling colony.<sup>40</sup>

This was a complex mental and physical territory for Irish Protestants to chart, not least in thinking about Ireland’s larger partner within the Union. The DUM sought to fuse Irishness with an outward looking imperial identity; but this did not imply that its founding fathers regarded British spaces as their own. A number of editors of the DUM struggled to settle into

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<sup>38</sup> “On the Emigration of Protestants,” *Dublin University Magazine* 1, no. 5 (May 1833), 471-83.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Spence remains the best guide to this territory: “The Philosophy of Irish Toryism”.

<sup>40</sup> “A Dialogue between the Head and Heart of an Irish Protestant,” *DUM* 2, no. 11 (November 1833), 591.

English – and more particularly, London – society. Charles Lever, author and editor of the DUM from 1842 to 1845 resolutely refused to maintain a base in London, preferring European life instead. As he confided to Alexander Spencer in 1848, England was “in reality as little my country as America”.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Sheridan Le Fanu, the renowned gothic writer and editor of the DUM during the 1860s, found metropolitan life unappealing. After qualifying as a barrister in 1838, Le Fanu travelled to the capital to begin a career in law; he lasted only a few weeks before returning to Dublin, never to apply his trade.<sup>42</sup> It took another Anglo-Irish writer, namely Elizabeth Bowen, to spot that Le Fanu’s masterpiece, *Uncle Silas*, was “an Irish story transposed to an English setting”, which permitted the author to explore the psychological impulses of “what would have been the norm of his own heredity”.<sup>43</sup> For Le Fanu, the Irish self was a much richer subject than the English other, even if England was the nominal backdrop.<sup>44</sup>

The DUM ethos represented a potent combination of distrust of the mainstream British political classes and the minority status of Protestants in Ireland contributed to a profoundly unsettled disposition. Articles on Protestants leaving Ireland in the DUM expressed concern that, as the minority community were by and large the key exponents of the Union, their depletion in numbers threatened the very constitution.<sup>45</sup> This gave Protestant emigration a different political edge than the discourse surrounding Irish Catholic migration. This was very apparent in the affairs of the Anglican Church. The Act of Union merged two

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<sup>41</sup> Downey, Charles Lever, 278.

<sup>42</sup> Moynahan, *Anglo-Irish*, 112.

<sup>43</sup> Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree*, 101. Indeed, an earlier version of the story appeared in the DUM under the title, “Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess”.

<sup>44</sup> McCormack, Sheridan Le Fanu, 140-1. McCormack cites a letter from Le Fanu’s London publisher asking him to write about “English” subjects.

<sup>45</sup> “Emigration of the Protestants of Ireland,” DUM 4, no. 19 (July 1834), 3; “The Protestant Deputation to England,” DUM 5, no. 26 (February 1835), 225.

states into one; it also unified, for political purposes, the Churches of Ireland and England into one Protestant Episcopal Church. This enabled the much smaller Church of Ireland to draw on wider English networks of support for Irish proselytising and education work. The London Hibernian Society, for example, which was composed of Irish expatriates and English grandees, aided the funding of schools founded on the principle of circulating the Scriptures across the thirty-two counties of Ireland during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>46</sup> Individual Irish clergymen flourished in England, such as Rev Abraham Hume in Vauxhall, becoming embedded within the fabric of British intellectual and educational life.<sup>47</sup> The interconnectedness of the English and Irish Churches left a profound mark on cultural life across the two islands, with the idealism of a common Anglo-Irish Church perhaps more pronounced on the Irish side. When Rev. William Edward Burroughs, a minister based in Kingstown (now Dun Laoghaire), left Ireland to take up a post at the London headquarters of the Church Missionary Society in 1895, his congregation presented him with an elegant book with the inscription, “We feel that your call to your new and honourable sphere of work will tend to knit closer the bonds of union between our Beloved Church and that of the Sister Island”.<sup>48</sup> An initiative by Irish Protestant clergymen based in England in 1886 to found an expatriate association, the Anglo-Irish Clerical Society, which later became the Anglo-Irish Church Society, was taken with the ideal of forming “a bond of union between the Irish

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<sup>46</sup> Reports of the London Hibernian Society, files of the Church Education Society, MS 154/9/2, Representative Church Body Library [RCBL], Dublin.

<sup>47</sup> Hume was the author of *The Learned Societies and Printing Clubs of the United Kingdom*. For an account of his work in Liverpool, see the undated newspaper cutting and letter to the Bishop of Liverpool, 26 April [?1884], Abraham Hume Papers, D2765/A/3/19 and D2765/A/2/47, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland [PRONI].

<sup>48</sup> Presentational book, inscribed to Rev William Edward Burroughs, MS 574, RCBL.

clergy and laity in England and those in Ireland”.<sup>49</sup> Not much came from the Society, though, bar a handful of meetings. Indeed, the “bonds of union” were not an unproblematic formula. The *Church of Ireland Gazette*, the official organ of the Church, gave a platform for Irish clergy and laity to complain about the asymmetry within the Anglican institution across the two islands. The “undue prominence” that “English Church topics” receive in Irish clerical publications defeated their purpose, asserted an early issue of the *Gazette* in 1900; a year later, the journal expressed surprise that no Irish Anglican was invited to speak at the English Congress on issues affecting the constitution of the Church.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, the institutional framework of the Anglican Church aided the development of a unionist language which fused religious and political discourse: Irish clergymen in England can be portrayed as the spiritual embodiment of the fusion signalled by political Union. As the *Church of Ireland Gazette*’s predecessor, the *Irish Ecclesiastical Gazette*, argued in 1884, an increasing number of Irish bishops were attached to English sees, thus “infusing the strong blood of St Patrick’s hierarchy into the delicate views of English Episcopacy”.<sup>51</sup> Fusion was, however, rather more difficult to achieve in other spheres.

### **Between Two Countries?**

How did life in Britain impact on the political and cultural psyches of Irish Protestants? For Monk Gibbon, the Irish man of letters who worked as a school teacher in Wales, the weekly pilgrimage to the newsagent to collect the *Irish Statesman* newspaper in a bid “to return to

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<sup>49</sup> *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 1 March 1901, 167. See *Irish Times*, 24 May 1886, for a report on the foundation of the Society.

<sup>50</sup> *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 29 January 1900, 65; 11 October 1901, 821.

<sup>51</sup> *Irish Ecclesiastical Gazette*, 15 March 1884, 230.



another and more congenial world” was a life-affirming ritual within his more dreary routine.<sup>52</sup> But a quip by F. S. L. Lyons, one of the most distinguished historians of Ireland during the 1960s and 1970s, about living in Britain is perhaps more revealing. In 1971, Lyons, an Irish Protestant born in Derry, published his majestic *Ireland since the Famine*, a book that was cautiously optimistic about the Irish experience, particularly when compared to his final work, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland* from 1979. Much of *Ireland since the Famine* was written before the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland became sustained and enduring, a key factor which shaped the pessimism of his later work; Lyons was also living outside of Ireland during the book’s gestation. Several years after the publication of *Ireland since the Famine*, a Trinity friend of Lyons ribbed him that, for all his careful analysis, the book was written with a strong tinge of “sentimental nationalism”. Lyons’s retort was illuminating. “Yes, but you must remember I was living in England then”.<sup>53</sup>

This might be interpreted as a throwaway comment, but Lyons’s rejoinder suggests that distance from Ireland impacted on ideas of individual and communal identity amongst the Irish, both Protestants and Catholics, in Britain. Certainly, many members of the Irish diaspora ruminated on this very subject. One of the most prominent of these was the Catholic Nationalist politician and journalist, T. P. O’Connor, who wrote in 1917 that

the Irishman in Great Britain occupies a curious middle place between nationality to which he belongs and the race among which he lives... He is more patient, more tolerant, more indulgent, if I may venture on the word, broader in his outlook than his

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<sup>52</sup> Gibbon, *Mount Ida*, 39; also see Gibbon’s *The Masterpiece*, 74.

<sup>53</sup> Foster, “Francis Stewart Leland Lyons”, 472.

countryman who has never left the shores of Ireland and never dwelt among the English people.<sup>54</sup>

O'Connor meant this to apply to Catholic nationalist migrants living amongst the Saxon "enemy", as it were, but the idea of a "curious middle place" is an arresting one to apply to Irish Protestants. In the autobiographies of many Anglo-Irish Protestants, there was nothing unusual about spending a large period of time in Britain. That said, many autobiographical reflections from the Anglo-Irish restlessly ruminate on their "hyphenated" cultural identity, giving the Bowen-esque impression of "being at home in the middle of the Irish Sea".<sup>55</sup>

Rarely is life in Britain presented as a traumatic rupture; indeed, a number of Protestants from Ireland regarded the larger island as a sanctuary from their Irish difficulties. The Protestant nationalist literary figure Stephen Gwynn wrote at great length about how much he despised student life during the 1880s at Oxford, which embodied "the extreme characteristic expression of English life";<sup>56</sup> yet following the collapse of his moderate political programme during the Irish war of independence in Ireland, Gwynn moved restlessly between England and Ireland.<sup>57</sup> The iconic leader of the Irish Party during the 1880s, Charles Stewart Parnell, who came from an established Anglo-Irish Protestant family, frequently bemoaned English habits; yet a house in Brighton which contained his mistress, Katherine O'Shea, sustained the reclusive Parnell, who barely set foot in Ireland after 1886.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> O'Connor, "The Irish in Great Britain", 32.

<sup>55</sup> Corcoran, Elizabeth Bowen, 12; Grubgeld, *Anglo-Irish Autobiography*, xi. For an arresting take on the major themes in Anglo-Irish memoir, see Séan Kennedy, "'The Beckett Country' Revisited", 135-44.

<sup>56</sup> Gwynn, *Experiences of a Literary Man*, 47.

<sup>57</sup> Reid, *The Lost Ireland of Stephen Gwynn*, 20-1, 206.

<sup>58</sup> O'Shea, Charles Stewart Parnell, 135-46

Gwynn and Parnell are historical examples of the plight that Roy Foster believed F. S. L. Lyons endured: namely, “the Anglo-Irish dilemma about living in England or in Ireland”.<sup>59</sup> There is a certain aristocratic set of values in this assumption, centring on a paternalistic affection for Ireland and cosmopolitan attachment to Britain. The impulses of Irish politics from the late nineteenth century onwards made such a position exceedingly difficult to sustain. As so often, Elizabeth Bowen most elegantly highlighted the tension that this created within the Anglo-Irish mind-set. In a new preface that Bowen wrote for her most revered novel, *The Last September*, in 1956, she pinpointed the “heart-breaking” position of Anglo-Irish landowning families in a time of polarising conflict. During the War of Independence of 1919 to 1921, Bowen believed that “inherited loyalty (or at least, adherence) to Britain... pulled them one way; their own temperamental Irishness the other”.<sup>60</sup> Most northern Protestants, however, exemplified a rather different set of mentalities. With partition in 1921, Protestants in the North shifted from minority to majority status overnight. The transformation of the six northern counties into a distinct political entity, permeated with Ulster unionist cultures of loyalism and distrust of Catholic Ireland, impacted hugely on the Protestant psyche, creating its own dilemmas for migrants to Britain. “The cultured Protestant Ulsterman with a literary bent”, claimed Denis Ireland in 1930, “either goes to London and submerges himself in the stream of English literary life, losing all real contact with his native soil – or he stays in Ireland and becomes a Nationalist”. As Ireland added despondently, “There seems to be no halfway house”.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Foster, “Francis Stewart Leland Lyons”, 468.

<sup>60</sup> Bowen, *The Mulberry Tree*, 125.

<sup>61</sup> Ireland, *An Ulster Protestant Looks at his World*, 38.

Denis Ireland is himself an interesting case in point. A Belfast-born Ulster Protestant who refused to conform to type by rejecting unionism, Ireland fought in the First World War before entering his family's linen business. This work took him to London and north America for lengthy stretches. Ireland's memoir from 1939, *Statues Round the City Hall*, depicts his time as a temporary resident of London with humour and a searing restlessness that stands in stark contrast to Bowen-esque cosmopolitanism. In a chapter entitled "The Emigrant", Ireland's life as a London business man is presented as an "alter ego" to the real self, as he despised "London with its fogs and its dark confusion". This antagonism was furthered after rowing with family members based in England, particularly over politics.<sup>62</sup> But more intriguing is another account Ireland penned in the early 1960s entitled "The importance of being Irish". This recalled a childhood trip to anglicised relatives in a London suburb, where Ireland was embarrassed by the fact that he had a different accent and demeanour of speaking to his English cousins. After spotting a photograph of someone whom he recognised but could not name, Ireland blurted out, in a "thoroughly Ulster form of English", "who's this that is?", a question that was greeted with "roars of hearty Anglo-Saxon laughter". Reflecting on this memory later in life, Ireland noted the dichotomy between Ulster assumptions about pan-British identity and the actual reality. "The whole trend of my education in Ulster", he mused, "had been to persuade me that I was a 'happy English child' whose forbearers had, for their sins, been banished to a rude island in the Atlantic". His experience of England as a child shattered this notion. As he put it, "It was only years later I discovered that all that was wrong with me was that I was Irish".<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ireland, *Statues Round the City Hall*, 16-19, 23-26.

<sup>63</sup> *Focus: A Monthly Review* 6, no. 1 (January 1963), 17-18.

This revelation was more acute for northern Irish Protestants in England, given what Ireland called the Ulster accent's "positively oriental scale of intervals", which clearly marked them as different.<sup>64</sup> A number of southern Protestants, particularly those from Anglo-Irish stock and who had been educated in England, did not have overtly Irish accents. Oscar Wilde infamously boasted of losing his Irish accent at Oxford, while Brian Inglis, the Irish journalist who became editor of the *Spectator* in 1959, reflected that "some of us would have passed for English".<sup>65</sup> The same could not be said for most Ulster Protestants. The mockery of his accent contributed to Denis Ireland's later assertion that the political and cultural mind of his northern Protestant kinsmen was certainly not English, but "works in an inverted Irish fashion of its own".<sup>66</sup> While accents were obvious markers of difference between Ulster-raised people in England and the English, however, this dynamic went both ways. The Belfast-born but English-educated author, C. S. Lewis, recalled the "strange English accents" he encountered as a child, which "seemed like the voices of demons".<sup>67</sup> Indeed, Lewis took to his diary to record an "ashamed" glee in recording the "vulgar accent" of an English student of his at Oxford.<sup>68</sup> For Lewis, and, indeed, Denis Ireland, the Ulster accent was certainly not a badge of inferiority when among the English.

Similar feelings can be detected in the work of Nesca A. Robb, which illuminates the dilemmas of the Ulster Protestant experience in England. Robb grew up in Belfast before leaving for an Oxford education; she lived for some twenty years before returning to her home city after the Second World War. In 1942, she published *An Ulsterwomen in England*,

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>65</sup> Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 195; Inglis, *West Briton*, 23.

<sup>66</sup> Denis Ireland to General Sir Hubert Gough, 31 May 1944, Denis Ireland Papers, D3137/6, PRONI.

<sup>67</sup> Clare, "C. S. Lewis: An Irish Writer", 19.

<sup>68</sup> Lewis, *All My Roads Before Me*, 185

which was (in her words) “a tribute of deep, if not wholly uncritical affection for the country in which I have now spent many years of my life”.<sup>69</sup> In a Lewisian manner, Robb inverted the shock of differing accents in the account of her first meeting with English people as a young girl. “Their voices, high, shrill and supercilious beside our forthright tones”, she complained, “struck my unaccustomed ear with a ring of insincerity”.<sup>70</sup> Robb was drawn to reflect on the complexities of Ulster Protestant longing in England. In an unpublished memoir describing her Ulster childhood, she reflected on “the sense of difference and isolation, pressed in on us from so many quarters, had its effect. It made us, for one thing, militantly defensive of our homeland”. Robb conceded that much of this was born from a profound insecurity, which she took to England early in her life.<sup>71</sup> Despite suffering from homesickness (Robb was writing exile poetry before she moved to England),<sup>72</sup> she gained a sentimental affinity with the English during the 1920s and 1930s, based on observing widespread shared virtues of goodwill and tolerance in the face of class-based unrest and the darkness that hung over Europe. This contrasted with the temperamental harshness of Robb’s instinctive Ulster unionism. Robb rationalised that the “British side of [her] inheritance” did not imply that the peoples of Britain were as one; she, in fact, championed the idea that multiple feelings of longing and belonging were natural for Ulster Protestants taken away from Northern Ireland. Staunch unionist as she was, much though she felt a connection with English landscapes and the countryside, absence prompted Robb to feel “the devastating nostalgia of the Irish”.<sup>73</sup> This centred on the idea that she, as an Ulster unionist, could meet a fellow traveller from Ireland

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<sup>69</sup> Robb, *An Ulsterwoman in England*, vii.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>71</sup> “The Lark in Clean Air,” Nesca A. Robb Papers, D3847/9, PRONI.

<sup>72</sup> See her poem “Ulster,” which was written in 1920. Nesca A. Robb Papers, D3847/3, PRONI.

<sup>73</sup> Robb, *An Ulsterwoman in England*, 4.

in a foreign place and feel a natural kinship which, because of volatility of Irish political, cultural and religious life, would be impossible at home. The moral of Robb's account, then, was that distance prompted a more pluralistic mode of Irishness that did not compromise an ingrained unionism.

Indeed, distance from Ireland and occupying new spaces prompted some Irish and Ulster Protestants to reconsider their sense of national being. Many of the founding members of the Irish Literary Society in London in the 1890s, such as W. B. Yeats, Bram Stoker and Alfred Perceval Graves were middle-class Irish Protestant expatriates, who found themselves excluded from an increasingly Catholic- and agrarian-defined nationalism after the 1870s. Their dedication to Irish literature, while not a substitute for politics, served as a vehicle for a – formally speaking, at least – non-political embrace of Irishness. This idea was not new; earlier generations of Irish Protestants, such as Samuel Ferguson in the 1830s, had advocated identification with the Celtic past, local history and literary aesthetics as a mode to create a common Irish cultural badge.<sup>74</sup> While literary and cultural bodies in Ireland were plagued with politicisation, those outside of the country remained more ambiguous. Alfred Perceval Graves, father of the First World War poet, Robert Graves, left Ireland after completing his degree at Trinity College Dublin to take a position in the English civil service. He eventually became a school inspector in Manchester, before moving first to Huddersfield, then Taunton, before retiring to Harlech in Wales. Throughout his professional life, he maintained a position as an Irish man of letters, becoming one of the most important folk-song collectors of the British Isles and President of the Irish Literary Society of London. Graves was an admirer of Ferguson, describing him in 1916 as a “patriot in the highest sense of the word”,

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<sup>74</sup> For Ferguson, see Patten, Samuel Ferguson.

which, as Graves made clear, meant “he felt that the highest duty he owed his country was that of a poet and prose writer above party”.<sup>75</sup> These words were loaded with autobiography: one reason why Graves appreciated Ferguson so much was that he styled himself as a fellow traveller of literary patriotism. Graves’s physical distance from Ireland enabled him to evade many of the politicising challenges that confronted the late-Victorian and Edwardian Irish revival. His reminiscences of Irish cultural activities in London appear almost tranquil next to Stephen Gwynn’s traumatic reflections on the creeping politicisation of Irish cultural activities in Ireland.<sup>76</sup>

Graves balanced integration into his British surroundings with an ongoing fascination with the Irish literary past and present. Some Irish Protestants, however, actively shunned the country of their birth while pursuing new lives in Britain. The Dublin-born painter William Orpen found his artistic voice in London as a contributor to the Celtic revival, but turned his back on Ireland with the descent to violence after the First World War.<sup>77</sup> One of the most prominent figures in nineteenth-century English anti-vivisection and suffrage circles was Frances Power Cobbe, who belonged to an ancient Anglo-Irish Protestant family. She spent all her adult life in various English cities before moving to Wales in old age. While in London she moved in elite political and literary social circles; she proudly proclaimed in her memoir that her English friends did not know she was Irish.<sup>78</sup> This may have been more to do with class than national background, though; Cobbe’s professional ambition distanced herself from her landed family, as she desired to make a name for herself based on merit.

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<sup>75</sup> Graves, ed., *Poems of Sir Samuel Ferguson*, xvii.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Graves, *To Return to All That and Gwynn*, *Irish Books and Irish People*. Also see Reid, *Lost Ireland of Stephen Gwynn*, 176.

<sup>77</sup> Arnold, Orpen, 129.

<sup>78</sup> Cobbe, *Life of Frances Power Cobbe*, 445.



Nevertheless, she attempted to purge all things Irish from her psyche. Cobbe's most recent biographer perpetuates this impression, barely considering the Anglo-Irish context, formative influences or Irish intellectual formation of her subject.<sup>79</sup> Despite Cobbe's embrace of English radicalism, though, Irish affairs had a habit of creeping back into her life. In the aftermath of the Fenian rebellion in 1867, she addressed a staunch defence of the Protestant interest in Ireland to English readers, arguing that "England must recognise at last that it is the men of her own blood who are the 'People of Ireland' for her".<sup>80</sup> Cobbe's Irishness was submerged into her wider conception of Britishness; it was unsentimental, other than a salient sympathy for the Anglo-Irish. She feared outsidership in England, and subverted her Irishness accordingly. For Cobbe, England was a space not to explore more pluralistic notions of Irish identity, but an escape from Ireland.

The same cannot be said about a number of Irish and Ulster Protestants who articulated the language of exile during their time in Britain. "Exile" is not the same as migration: it invokes metaphor, biblical or otherwise, journeys and enforced separation. "Exile" has emotional baggage; "migration" sounds overly clinical. Given its association with heroic sacrifice and righteous suffering, exile, as Peter Costello has affirmed, "has always been an honourable fate in Ireland".<sup>81</sup> There are repeated invocations of exile from the Irish in Britain. In some instances, the idea of exile is complicated by the competing pulls of multiple identities: Irish Protestant migrants could instinctively 'belong' to the British nation-state while 'longing' for their homeland in Ireland or Ulster. But just how genuine were these appeals? Edward Said affirmed that 'Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their

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<sup>79</sup> Mitchell, Frances Power Cobbe.

<sup>80</sup> Frances Power Cobbe, "Ireland for the Irish," *Tinsley's Magazine* (February 1868), 49.

<sup>81</sup> Costello, *The Heart Grown Brutal*, 246.

past'.<sup>82</sup> Is it accurate to interpret the use of the vocabulary of exodus among Irish Protestants in Britain as a true representation of the 'double conscience', as one cultural studies scholar has described it, of an exile?<sup>83</sup>

It is clear that a yearning for Ireland shaped a number of the key poetic works of Irish Protestant émigrés in Britain. Like many nineteenth- and twentieth-century Anglo-Irish writers, W. B. Yeats straddled the islands of Ireland and Britain throughout his life. The Yeats family moved to London when William Butler was just two years old; family holidays were taken throughout his childhood in their ancestral home of Sligo. The idea of 'home' was created by Yeats while living away from it. His *Autobiographies* records the sense of displacement he felt during his childhood, and how English places continued to remind him of the Ireland he left behind:

A poignant memory came upon me the other day while I was passing the drinking-fountain near Holland Park, for there I and my sister had spoken together of our longing for Sligo and our hatred of London... I know we were both very close to tears and... I longed for a sod of earth from some field I knew, something of Sligo to hold in my hand.<sup>84</sup>

Such a mood sets the tone for the London backdrop of *Autobiographies* and, of course, one of Yeats's best known early poems, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree". A return to Sligo was, by the late 1880s, impossible for the youthful poet chasing literary glory, which served to deepen its

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<sup>82</sup> Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 177.

<sup>83</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 256.

<sup>84</sup> Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 58.

demonstrative pull.<sup>85</sup> While “Innisfree” remains one of Yeats’s most revered poems and has become the lonely Irish émigré’s verse of choice, perhaps more illuminating insights can be drawn from his novel, *John Sherman*. Published in 1891 under a pseudonym, it lacks the flair of Yeats’s verse, but contains much in the way of biographical insight. The novel has two geographical settings, a small Irish town which is clearly modelled on Sligo, and London. At one point, the leading character, John Sherman, wanders the streets of London while pining for the comforting routine of his hometown on the western seaboard of Ireland. Every sound and sight reminds of home; eventually, this mental world obscures the material one. “These pictures became so vivid to him that the world about him... began to seem far off”.<sup>86</sup> For Yeats, homesickness was a powerful framework to explore the dual emotional pulls of provincial Ireland and metropolitan England. His self-fashioned exile motif was an alluring one. Yeats never lived in Sligo; and his dislike for bourgeois Dublin, particularly after *The Playboy of the Western World* “riots” at the Abbey Theatre in 1907, and literary London, where, as he put it, “all the intellectual traditions gather to die”, were well known.<sup>87</sup> “Home” thus remained rooted in an idea rather than a reality, which vests Sligo with an idyllic magnetism that permeates sections of his canon.

One of Yeats’s great admirers was John Hewitt, the Ulster-born poet and socialist. Born thirteen years before Ireland was partitioned, Hewitt helped to define Northern Irish artistic culture while perpetually rebelling against the insular political and intellectual life that marked his native province. A man of the arts since his twenties, Hewitt was by the 1950s the deputy director and keeper of art at the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery; but when he was

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<sup>85</sup> Ellmann, *Yeats*, 84.

<sup>86</sup> “Ganconagh” [Yeats], *John Sherman and Dhoya*, 123.

<sup>87</sup> Finneran and Bornstein, eds., *Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Early Essays*, 126, 227.

rejected for the post of director in 1953, he reasoned that the conservative unionist establishment had blackballed him because he was, as he put it, “communist and pro-Catholic”. His posthumously published memoir records the “turmoil of rage” that this injustice prompted, which ultimately drove him to leave Belfast to become the art director of the Herbert Art Gallery in Coventry.<sup>88</sup> While Coventry provided an escape from the provincialism of the Ulster political and cultural worlds, Hewitt was delighted to find that his family line descended from the city, which gave him “an odd friendly feeling, as if, in some way, part of me had come home”.<sup>89</sup> Family, even a distant unknown one, connected Hewitt to his new home, but it also prompted serious self-reflection. Hewitt’s spatial distance from Northern Ireland triggered his interest in pursuing autobiography as a form of re-engaging with Irish life, and energised his poetic and literary focus.<sup>90</sup> Some of Hewitt’s best Irish work comes, somewhat ironically, from his Coventry period. Indeed, this would not have come as a surprise to him. Several years before leaving Belfast, Hewitt explored the state of Ulster arts in an essay that contained a lengthy discussion of “the lure of emigration”, in which Irish talent, north and south, continued to go to England for increased opportunities.<sup>91</sup> Hewitt noted that with Picasso in Paris and Epstein in London, there was nothing unique about Irish creative thinkers leaving their “home ground”. As he put it, “this condition of exile seems, dare I say, a symptom of the world’s plight”.<sup>92</sup>

Hewitt, too, would embrace the “world’s plight”. Despite his perception that Coventry was an oasis of progressivism, in stark contrast to the “ingrown parochialism” of both

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<sup>88</sup> Hewitt, *A North Light*, 208.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>90</sup> Before the Belfast Museum debacle, Hewitt had penned some thoughts on artistic emigration from Ireland: Hewitt, “Painting and Sculpture in Ulster”, 81-3.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

Irelands,<sup>93</sup> Hewitt's English life was punctuated by frequent invocations of the iconography of exile. His poem, "An Irishman in Coventry", refers to banishment to the waters", while "our hearts still listen for the landward bells". While Hewitt was a champion of multiple identities and pluralistic ideas of Irishness and Britishness, the poetry from his time in Coventry is that of the outsider. His exile mentality found an overt expression in "The Search":

It is a hard responsibility to be a stranger;

to hear your speech sounding at odds with your neighbours';

holding your tongue from quick comparisons;

remembering that you are a guest in the house.<sup>94</sup>

No doubt Denis Ireland, whose Ulster accent provided entertainment within his English family's home, could relate. Hewitt created a narrative of exile to explain his rejection in Northern Ireland; once in place, it became all dominant and self-perpetuating. It is also apparent that he played the part of the stranger, and at times forgot he was "a guest in the house".

"Living in England I can look back on the characteristic ill will and bitterness of the Irish, north & south, with something like objectivity", Hewitt boldly told the Irish poet, Austin Clarke.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, Hewitt pursued Irish affairs more feverously than ever before while in Coventry. He was actively involved in the establishment of the Irish literary periodical,

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<sup>93</sup> Matthews, *Irish Poetry*, 49.

<sup>94</sup> Hewitt, *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, 160

<sup>95</sup> John Hewitt to Austin Clarke, 4 November 1958, Austin Clarke Papers, MS 38,658/3, National Library of Ireland [NLI].

Threshold, and joined the Irish Literary Society in London. His attitude to contemporary political identities in Ireland, north and south, became more critical. “My attitude to my native land has been modified by the years of exile”, Hewitt confided to his friend, Patrick Maybin, in 1963. “I love it & hate it with a much deeper force”.<sup>96</sup> Hewitt arranged for copies of the Belfast Telegraph, Irish Times, the Kilkenny Review and the Dubliner to be sent to him to avoid national isolation in England.<sup>97</sup> In private correspondence, Hewitt expressed a dislike for the English, hinting of his cultural seclusion in Coventry. After experimenting with a tape recorder to assess his lecturing prowess, Hewitt “noticed how easily I slip into anti-English cracks”.<sup>98</sup> As Hewitt neared retirement in the late 1960s, violence in Northern Ireland was becoming more common place. During this time, Hewitt’s emotional engagement with Ulster affairs was merely amplified by the spacial distance from his province. He absorbed any information about Northern Ireland that he could find, with his political and cultural gaze only on the island across the Irish Sea. “I share the exile’s addiction to the newspaper cutting and the late news”, he admitted to Maybin. His longing for home was powerfully underpinned by a feeling of guilt that he did not have to endure the tragedies of everyday life in Northern Ireland after 1969. “We exist”, he wrote in 1971, “in a limbo of justification and near despair when we are not going through the regular rituals & routines”.<sup>99</sup> He did this the following year, when he retired back to Northern Ireland, becoming a prominent figure who preached toleration and non-sectarianism. The impact of life as a migrant arguably made a

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<sup>96</sup> John Hewitt to Patrick Maybin, 27 January 1963, John Hewitt Papers, D3838/3/13, PRONI.

<sup>97</sup> Hewitt to Maybin, 25 May 1963, John Hewitt Papers, D3838/3/13, PRONI.

<sup>98</sup> Hewitt to Maybin, 27 January 1963, John Hewitt Papers, D3838/3/13, PRONI.

<sup>99</sup> Hewitt to Maybin, 12 December 1971, John Hewitt Papers, D3838/3/13, PRONI.

huge impact on his sense of home, and heightened his determination to challenge the “rigid clichés of political life” in Northern Ireland.<sup>100</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In 1955, Hubert Butler attacked Irish Protestants who left the country but insisted in behaving as self-appointed spokespeople for Ireland. “[T]he Irish intellectual émigré often has his [sic.] own dream world”, Butler exclaimed, “and one of its hallucinations is that by escaping from the struggle he raises himself above it”.<sup>101</sup> Certainly, Sean O’Casey, for one, fell in into this trap. Part of the rationale of Sean O’Casey’s volume of autobiography that covered his life in England, *Rose and Crown*, was to attack Irish sentiment regarding his controversial play, *The Silver Tassie*, which was initially rejected by the Abbey Theatre:

The Irish critics have made all the use they could of the Abbey’s first rejection of the play, and have pursued it with curious and persistent hatred; but it still refuses to lie down. Peace, be still, heart of O’Casey: It is only Ireland that abuses the play now. Everywhere else, the play has been accepted as a fine and courageous experiment in modern drama.<sup>102</sup>

The rejection of *The Silver Tassie* prompted O’Casey’s move to England. His autobiographical reflection combined a depiction of maltreatment in Ireland with literary vindication outside of Ireland. That his adopted English home accepted *The Silver Tassie* merely confirmed to O’Casey that Ireland was simply “wrong”. Physical distance became

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<sup>100</sup> Hewitt, *Ancestral Voices*, 156.

<sup>101</sup> Quoted in Tobin, *The Minority Voice*, 141.

<sup>102</sup> O’Casey, *Rose and Crown*, 53-4.

fused with an emotional sense of resentment against Ireland that created an intense and negative feeling of exile. As he mischievously put it, “For reasons too short to explain, Sean preferred to embrace the opinion of the English Literary Supplement [which had given *The Silver Tassie* a positive review] rather than that of the Irish journal”. Indeed, a creeping anti-Catholicism (mostly directed against the Church) marked some of his plays written in England.<sup>103</sup>

Many Irish and Ulster Protestants migrants in Britain had rather different experiences and emotional responses to life in “exile”. The “dream world” of the Irish Protestant migrant conjured up by Butler was not merely a mirage; for many, life outside of Ireland forced a recalibration of national perspectives on a profound level. A number of the Irish Protestant diaspora in Britain used autobiography and literary platforms to articulate complex emotional responses to the fundamental question of where “home” was, with the language of displacement distinguishing a number of works. The mentalities of individual migrants offers a powerful contrast to the nineteenth-century “condition of England” books, which perpetuate negative stereotypes of the Irish in Britain.<sup>104</sup> Ultimately, the diversity of Irish Protestant diasporic voices needs to be recovered to fully comprehend wider trends in Ireland’s global history.

Irish Protestants in Britain remain a largely unseen component of the diaspora, but their cultural mentalities offer many insights into the intricacies of identity and nostalgia across nations and territory. Like other migrants the world over, Irish Protestants reacted in a multitude of ways to moving across boundaries, many of which complicated basic narratives

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<sup>103</sup> Cowasjee, *Sean O’Casey*, 147.

<sup>104</sup> Harte, *The Literature of the Irish in Britain*, xxix.



of unthinkingly belonging to a British nation-state.<sup>105</sup> Quite often, manifestations of “longing” were more intrinsically Irish in nature. Whether it is Louis MacNeice, who neatly summed up the existential identity crisis of the Irish Protestant in Britain – “I wish one could either live in Ireland or feel oneself in England” – or the correspondent in the *Focus* magazine in 1960 whose friend moved to England and wrote back to say, “I can’t say I find any marked difference in people here, compared to Ye Olde Folks at Home”, the range of experiences among Ireland’s minority in Britain was as diverse as the diaspora itself.<sup>106</sup> It remains to relate these experiences to the wider history of the Irish in Britain. Far from experiencing an almost-mechanical ethnic fade, a number of culturally-minded Irish Protestants actively engaged with their surroundings in Britain to articulate revised formations of Irishness. The idea of Britain as a space which enabled some Irish Protestants to reconsider ideas of individual and national identities is a compelling strand of the diaspora story.

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<sup>105</sup> Christiansen and Hedetoft, “Introduction,” in same, eds., *The Politics of Multiple Belonging*, 1.

<sup>106</sup> Stallworthy, Louis MacNeice, 342, original emphasis; Harum, “The Observer,” *Focus*, 3, no. 1 (January 1960), 24.

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