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Modalities of Revival

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The Revival and the City in James Stephens's Dublin Fiction

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The Irish literary revival's pastoral vision of a people untainted by urban modernity, though largely inspired by German Romanticism and the proliferation of scholarly investigations of the folklore of various European "national literatures," has frequently been linked with the experience of the Famine[1] and the revolution in land ownership brought about by the Land Acts of the late nineteenth century.[2] The latter, in particular, threatened the position of the Protestant Ascendancy within Irish society, who faced the possibility of total marginalization in the face of a growing, and increasingly vocal Catholic middle class. Viewed as a garrison population, Protestant writers began to hark back to a largely imaginary, pre-lapsarian Irish idyll defined by rurality and pre-modern social harmony.[3]

As Raymond Williams has noted, such pastoral writing depends for its effect on "the suppression of work in the countryside…and of the property relations through which this work is organized" (46).[4] One of the more profound effects of this suppression is that the city becomes synonymous with a state of lost innocence, detrimental to personal health as well as to social cohesion. In an Irish context the city also becomes the locus of English attitudes and ways of life, as well as a symbol of imperial domination.[5] Indeed, as idealized visions of a rural nation proliferated, it became increasingly difficult to conceive of an Irish nation coming into being in the city at all. These attitudes were by no means the preserve of Ascendancy writers; the Catholic Church was deeply suspicious of urban life as tending to foster secularism and socialism, and so the pastoral conception of the countryside became bound up with social-conservative efforts to protect an emerging Irish state from the myriad threats posed by a secular modernity.[6] In this cultural climate representations of the

city would appear to be subject to severe limitations. Dublin, in particular, lay outside the cultural definition of an emergent Irish state.[7] The revival, predicated on the idea that through literature the nation could be brought imaginatively into being, might represent Dublin, but never as the object of imaginative appropriation.[8]

What Mervyn Horgan calls the "conflation of rurality and anti-urbanism with nationalism" was thus a key anti-colonial strategy in the process of nation-building in early twentieth-century Ireland (38-9). While this was undoubtedly true, it is problematic to further conflate such anti-urban sentiment with the overall trajectory of the "revival," both as a broad-based cultural upheaval and as a literary movement. Treatments of the literary revival that take Yeats and Synge as synechdochic of the revival as a whole cannot account for the multiplicity of countervailing forces at work within the revival as a broad, multi-faceted cultural movement. Even within the pastoral/idyllic tradition of the revival, competing visions of the peasant and of the meaning of the Irish landscape proliferated and came into tension with one another.[9] More importantly, analyses of the literary revival that have emphasized its anti-urban tendency have overshadowed the presence of real and active countervailing forces in revivalist writing that sought to accommodate the city within its rhetoric, while also tending to narrowly focus on the revival as a primarily literary movement to the exclusion of much broader social and cultural elements whose rhetorical thrust is not intrinsically anti-modern or socially conservative.

Thus while it is understandable that a movement whose primary motivation was to establish clearly the contours of an Irish identity might appear exclusionary and essentialist in the criteria by which that identity comes to be defined, it should come as no surprise that within that same movement there are a host of contradictory, and often conflicting views about how that identity should be formed. And if certain

elements of the revival were often caustically dismissive of the city in their rhetorical formulation of the meaning of "Irishness," it should be equally unsurprising to find that there existed also contrasting forces that sought to reconcile the reality of modern urban life with an emerging Irish identity at a moment when an Irish state, and all of its attendant practical concerns, was increasingly becoming a possibility. In particular, this talk will address how the town-planning movement, and the Dublin fiction of James Stephens, addressed these issues.

In 1911 the Housing and Town Planning Association of Ireland published *Housing and Town Improvement*, a short booklet designed to introduce readers to the principles of town planning, largely derived from Ebenezer Howard's *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, and to advocate for their implementation in Ireland. The foreword, written by Lady Aberdeen, plays on the patriotism of its readers to make the case for the planning movement.[10] She calls upon "Irishmen and Irishwomen" everywhere to join the Housing and Town Planning Association of Ireland, in order "to prepare for the future of a people determined to make the most of themselves and of their country" (HTPAI [n.p.]). Aberdeen alludes obliquely to the importance of history, but remains firmly focused on the role planning will have in the future of the nation, although she carefully avoids deploying any language that might alienate non-nationalist readers. Among the "press references" quoted at the beginning of the booklet are words of praise from the *Freeman's Journal* and *The Northern Whig* (the latter comments in passing of the Town-planning Act 1909: "It is not the least, though it is one of the latest, Irish grievances that Ireland is excluded from the benefits of that Act"), while the *Tuam Herald* remarks: "There is no one with a spark of patriotism but must wish to see our ill-planned, ill-kept towns arranged on a better plan, divested of their repulsive suburbs and unhealthy quarters, and made generally more civilised

and comfortable". The *Irish Industrial Journal* makes a similar appeal to national pride in the defense of planning: "Here in Ireland, where nature strews her charms with lavish hand, there is no excuse for the monstrosity of modern town building". In a chapter entitled "Town Planning in Ireland" the link with the revival is made more explicit:

> To be in line with the revival of language, industries, commerce and arts in modern Ireland there is need to urge constantly the necessity of a comprehensive, orderly and healthy system of development in its cities, towns and villages…. There is an increasing spirit of national pride among all classes, and great hope of future prosperity. Is it not well then that this spirit should be aided in expressing itself in the dignity and comfort of our homes and in the grace, convenience and architectural beauty of our cities, towns and villages? (13)

This passage draws heavily on the vocabulary of the revival, but its rhetoric is unambiguously progressivist: "Art we must have—in poverty or riches—else we must surely fail as a nation….There exists now in Ireland just that incipient state of affairs into which all the multitudinous benefits of town planning can be introduced judiciously" (13). The HTPAI's model for the future of town and city planning was the "Garden Village" in Kilkenny (now known as Talbot's Inch), whose appearance they describe with that most quintessentially revivalist term, "racy of the soil" (21).

The town-planning movement was widely regarded as out of touch with the realities of the housing problem in Ireland, its appeal limited to a small coteries of well-heeled amateurs with little practical experience of the extent of the Dublin housing problem. The fact was, though, that during the 1800s and the start of the twentieth century few of those in positions of greater power had done much to address the issue substantially. Nationalism and Catholicism, as the main forces for social change in Ireland, had the majority of their support-base in the countryside, and the urban population was too small for the urban housing problem to become a major political issue (McManus 38).

What is remarkable, nevertheless, is how easily the housing question shades off into debates around nationhood. Ruth McManus writes:

> In Dublin, middle-class suburbanization led to increasing religious and political segregation, as the largely Protestant and Unionist middle-classes moved away, leaving the Catholic and Nationalist-dominated Dublin Corporation to cater to the urban poor. This enabled Unionists to criticize the Corporation's failure to cope with housing conditions and use it as evidence that Irish nationalists were incapable of self-government. In turn, nationalists argued that a lack of political will at government level was hindering their attempts to solve the housing problem, but that in an independent Ireland this would no longer be the case. (McManus 38-9)

Increasingly, this debate became bound up with the question of urban social inequality as well. In 1905 the first working-class suburb in Dublin was built in Clontarf, and while the *Irish Builder and Engineer* welcomed the development as "the best method of combating our high death rate and arresting the ravages of consumption and other diseases", worker resistance to rehousing meant that a 1908 proposal to expand the suburb was cancelled. But during the 1913 Lockout, the housing question became a key issue in the debate over the conditions of the working class in Dublin, and after the collapse of a Church Street tenement in September killed seven people, James Larkin became an advocate of working-class suburbanization. The September 4 1913 edition of the *Irish Times* declared that "if every unskilled labourer in Dublin were the tenant of a decent cottage of three or even two rooms, the city would not be divided into two hostile camps." The Roman Catholic clergy, too, were attracted to the development of single-family suburban housing. But while Monsignor Michael Cronin believed they would alleviate "sickness and misery" whether "physical or moral," in contrast to Larkin, he saw the suburbs as a means to protect the state from the advance of communist sedition:

> If a Communist organizer wished to lay plans for the development of Communist cells throughout Dublin for the building of 'red forts' for revolutionary purposes, could he do better than dot the city over with large barracks of propertyless men? (McGrath 544)

A 1914 Local Government Board for Ireland report into the housing crisis, which had taken evidence from leading figures in planning such as Patrick Geddes and the Dublin City Architect, came out heavily in favor of large-scale suburbanization. And while Dublin Corporation remained resistant to this solution, the broad support for such ideas from across the nationalist ideological spectrum indicates a willingness to engage with both urban life and the texture of the city's topography imaginatively. Efforts to reimagine how Dublin might be planned were inseparable from debates about what role the city might play, both in a future independent Ireland, and more broadly within the national imaginary. And while the rhetoric of many groups, in particular the Housing and Town Planning Association of Ireland and the Catholic Church, was often reliant on an idealization of the benefits of country living to one's moral, physical, and spiritual health, nevertheless they opened up the possibility of thinking about ways to appropriate the city as a site of meaning in an emerging Ireland. It is in this context that we can re-examine the way that such engagements with the city were registered in the literature of the revival. Without rejecting the notion that certain elements of revivalist discourse were fundamentally anti-urban, we can nevertheless begin to comprehend the much more complex role of the city, and in particular Dublin, in the formation of a revivalist aesthetic.

Certainly Dublin remained a cause of anxiety among the revivalists. In W.P. Ryan's contemporary account of the literary revival, he describes the movement as (of course) "racy of the soil," "inspired and moulded by the Land League" and founded out of a devotion to a peasantry at one with "Irish fields and Irish firesides" (4-5). Ryan nevertheless betrays a concern for the cultural development of Dublin, and its role in Ireland's future:

> We may see in our day in Dublin genuine Irish plays, of truth and talent, written for the people, prized by the people, moving and moulding the people. Otherwise I fear that the city will not half deserve to be the capital of a nation. (181)

Cultural nationalists, for all of the anti-urban rhetoric, recognized the role of the capital city in shaping the national consciousness. Dublin, as a result, would remain a highly contested space, even between the different strands of nationalist sentiment.

James Stephens's *The Charwoman's Daughter*, published in 1912, illustrates how revivalist texts *could* in fact engage imaginatively with the city and seek to formulate ways of responding aesthetically to both the nature of urban life and the particular political circumstances of an Irish city under British ideological control and surveillance, and try to appropriate Dublin as a site of meaning. The novel deploys some of the conventions of fairytale, just as it adopts some of the conventions of Dickensian urban realism, however its depiction of Dublin is a complex admixture, characterized as much by consumerist phantasmagoria and seemingly comprehensive systems of official surveillance as by images of extreme poverty, and combining ruralist fantasies of escape with positive impressions of the nature of urban life that problematize received understandings of the relationship between revivalism and the city.

The book's opening imagery, of "a big, dingy house in a Dublin back street" where "the grime of many years" blocks the view from the window of the tenement in which Mary Makebelieve lives with her mother, is a typically Dickensian vision of urban squalor (1). Such details are dotted throughout the novel, such as the image of Mary "carrying upstairs a large water-bucket, the portage of which two or three times a day is so heavy a strain on the dweller in tenements" (168). Frequently, this imagery is combined with gentle reminders of the sense of communalism in adversity fostered

by tenement life, such as when the new tenant staying with their neighbor, Mrs. Cafferty, offers to help Mary to lift the aforementioned water-bucket. Stephens repeatedly associates the poverty of the tenement-dwellers with their sense of powerlessness, and more specifically with their incomprehension of the systems of power at work upon their lives. Mrs. Cafferty, unable to understand why her husband cannot find a job, declares that "there was something wrong somewhere, but whether the blame was to be allocated to the weather, the employer, the Government, or the Deity, she did not know" (155).

Mary's response to her surroundings is to indulge in escapist fantasy, which frequently contains overtones of nostalgic, anti-urban idealism. She daydreams that they "were to move the first thing in the morning to a big house with a garden behind it full of fruit-trees and flowers and birds….There would be a wide lawn in front of the house to play lawn-tennis….There were to be twelve servants" (5). Mary's fantasy is rooted in an idealised vision of the past, and the sense of pessimism about the future is reinforced by her mother's impression of inevitable, widespread social decline: "Nowadays! her mother looked on these paltry times with an eye whose scorn was complicated by fury. Mean, ugly days! mean, ugly lives! and mean, ugly people!" (16). Even at the outset the only hope advanced for any kind of improvement in the social fortunes of mother and daughter is the vague possibility that Mary's uncle Patrick might return from America with money, or that "some one going along the street may take a fancy to you and marry you" (32). There is no dynamic force within the immediate social structure through which a similar change might be effected. The novel therefore seems to look to an idealised anti-urban past, or to some point outside the social structures determining the protagonists' daily lives, for an alternative way of being than that provided by the tenement system.

However, the novel does provide a set of coordinates through which we might understand the structural underpinnings of the Makebelieves' poverty, even if the connections between them remain obscure. Mary frequently alleviates her hunger pangs by indulging in the phantasmagoric escapism provided by the Grafton Street shop windows:

> she…was able to tell her mother at night time that the black dress with Spanish lace was taken out of Manning's window, and a red gown with tucks at the shoulders and Irish lace at the wrists put in its place; or that the diamond ring in Johnson's marked One Hundred Pounds was gone from the case, and that a slide of brooches of beaten silver and blue enamel was there instead. In the night time her mother and herself went round to each of the theatres in turn and watched the people going in, and looked at the big posters. When they went home afterwards they had supper, and used to try to make out the plots of the various plays from the pictures they had seen… (12-13)

Though Mary's walks between meals, and her long discussions over supper with her mother, mark her exclusion from the fantastical world of conspicuous consumption that the windows and theatres represent, she is still able to engage with the commercial city as a spectacle, participating imaginatively in the process of self-creation that these objects enable by continually walking the city (a freedom upon which the novel repeatedly remarks).

The Charwoman's Daughter thus defines the city both in terms of a carefully constructed set of social divisions (whose territories are represented by the windows that separate Mary from the objects of her continually frustrated desire) and a concomitant offering of the possibility of personal development and change through the acquisition of consumer goods. It therefore encapsulates one of the central contradictions of modern urban life in its representation of Dublin. But Stephens also seeks out strategies for representing the culture of surveillance and social enforcement through which these contradictory experiences of the city are maintained.

Throughout the text Mary Makebelieve's movements through the city are increasingly observed and regulated through her encounters with a policeman whose romantic advances shade off quickly into an oppressive compulsion to control the girl. The policeman's acts of observation operate as an extension of the power of the state apparatus as an integrative force serving to unify and control its otherwise multitudinous operations. The narrative repeatedly references the intensity and inescapability of his gaze, in contrast with her own sheepish glances: she notices in an early encounter "his calm, proud eye—a governing, compelling, and determined eye….She did not think he noticed her; but there was nothing he did not notice" (23). Later "her shy, creeping glance was caught by his; it held her mesmerised for a few seconds; it looked down into her—for a moment the whole world seemed to have become one immense eye—she could scarcely get away from it" (24).

The policeman's gaze, in fact, seems to bring all of the city's elements into its orbit, bestowing order and control upon all of its aspects. When Mary first sees him, Stephens's description begins with the policeman's position at the intersection of Nassau Street and Grafton Street, but expands outward into a broad panorama of the city as a whole, its political and cultural contradictions and social complexities on display, but all carefully overseen by the policeman's all-encompassing gaze:

> Perhaps this is the most interesting place in Dublin. Upon one vista Grafton Street with its glittering shops stretches, or rather winds, to the St. Stephen's Green Park, terminating at the gate known as the Fusiliers' Arch, but which local patriotism has rechristened the Traitors' Gate. On the left Nassau Street, broad and clean, and a trifle vulgar and bourgeois in its openness, runs away to Merrion Square, and on with a broad ease to Blackrock and Kingstown and the sea. On the right hand Suffolk Street, reserved and shy, twists up to St. Andrew's Church, touches gingerly the South City Markets, droops to George's Street, and is lost in mean and dingy intersections. At the back of the crossing Grafton Street continues again for a little distance down to Trinity College (at the gates whereof intelligent young men flaunt very tattered gowns and smoke massive pipes with great skill for their years), skirting the Bank of Ireland, and on to the river Liffey and the street which local patriotism defiantly speaks of as O'Connell Street, and alien patriotism, with equal

defiance and pertinacity, knows as Sackville Street. To the point where these places meet, and where the policeman stands, all the traffic of Dublin converges in a constant stream. The trams hurrying to Terenure, or Donnybrook, or Dalkey flash around this corner; the doctors, who, in these degenerate days, concentrate in Merrion Square, fly up here in carriages and motor-cars; the vans of the great firms in Grafton and O'Connell Streets, or those outlying, never cease their exuberant progress. The ladies and gentlemen of leisure stroll here daily at four o'clock, and from all sides the vehicles and pedestrians, the bicycles and motor bicycles, the trams and the outside cars rush to the solitary policeman, who directs them all with his severe but tolerant eye. He knows all the tram-drivers who go by, and his nicely graduated wink rewards the glances of the rubicund, jolly drivers of the hackneys and the decayed jehus….nor are the ladies and gentlemen who saunter past foreign to his encyclopedic eye. Constantly his great head swings a slow recognition, constantly his serene finger motions onwards a well-known undesirable… (20-2)

The reference to the Fusilier's Arch, and its alternative moniker Traitors' Gate, just like the reference to O'Connell/Sackville Street, points to the text's recognition that Dublin is a deeply contested space. But the policeman's eye (described as both "encyclopedic" and "severe but tolerant") bespeaks a sense of overarching official control over these competing forces. Just as notable is the proliferation of images of intense bustle and commerce, which remain similarly subject to the control of the policeman's gaze, and his complacent ordering of the city's activities with little more than a wag of his "serene finger". The passage exaggerates the extent of the policeman's view, so that what he can see in a literal sense is only vaguely distinguished from the much broader panorama of the city as a whole. The only limitation on his figuratively all-consuming sight is when the view is "lost in mean and dingy intersections", a reference that carefully contrasts the nameable, civilised main streets from the anonymous maze of slum lanes, while remaining conscious also of an on-going anxiety about the proximity of extreme poverty. The passage, in other words, evokes a sense of the city's complexity and multiplicity, as well as the overbearing surveillance to which it was subject as an untrustworthy, seditious place.

Importantly, however, such images of the modern city are counter-balanced by other, more positive impressions of city life. Mary, for example, often walks along the quays and out to the Phoenix Park, and the narrative recounts her changing sensory impressions, first of the city's commerce: "watching the swift boats of Guinness puffing down the river" and then of the park itself. There she can stop and watch the bustle of people playing various sports, or walk down "quiet alleys sheltered by trees and groves of hawthorn" where "one can walk for a long time without meeting a person…. There is a deep silence to be found there, very strange and beautiful to one fresh from the city, and it is strange also to look about in the broad sunshine and see no person near at all" (36-7). By contrast, her mother "would pine for the dances of the little children, the gallant hurrying of the motor-cars, and the movement to and fro of the people with gay dresses and coloured parasols and all the circumstance of holiday" (36). The city, crowded and active, can be a joyous place as well, and Mary's enjoyment of the trams, jarveys, and outside cars that "whizzed by" and the young men and women "darting forth" from their offices for lunch, provides a vision of the city in which its attraction lies precisely in its speed, its crowds, and its combination of functionalism and apparent chaos (48-9). Indeed, the crowds are, for Mary, a defining feature of her identification with the city; on her way to work for the first time, encountering the streets at an unfamiliar hour during which they are empty, "she seemed almost in a strange country" (106). The novel, indeed, is on occasion capable of flights of lyricism about the city. On a dry, grey day in Dublin, Stephens writes:

> A street is no longer a congeries of houses huddling shamefully together and terrified lest anyone should look at them and laugh. Each house then recaptures its individuality. The very roadways are aware of themselves, and bear their horses and cars and trams in a competent spirit, adorned with modesty as with a garland….The impress of a thousand memories, the historic visage, becomes apparent; the quiet face which experience has ripened into

> knowledge and mellowed into the wisdom of charity is seen then; the great social beauty shines from the streets under this sky that broods like a thoughtful forehead. (135)

This passage projects an urban topography and community that is cohesive and beautiful; its invocation of the value of history and collective memory is consistent with revivalist social and aesthetic values while remaining dependent for its force on the urbanity of the scene.

It is, perhaps, this vision of the city of which Mary's new suitor is so protective when he bemoans the sight of a British soldier walking the streets: "for he saw a conqueror, trampling vaingloriously through the capital of his country, and the inability of his land to eject the braggart astonished and mortified him" (186). Just as nothing really fundamentally undermines the policeman's power in the novel (notwithstanding his sense of impotence when Mary loses interest in his attentions, which is marked by a sudden, but temporary, lapse in his surveillance and control of Mary's whereabouts in the city),[11] neither does their escape from poverty signify or emerge out of any broader impetus towards fundamental social change.

More striking still, however, is the sudden turn towards vagueness and topographical incoherence that the narrative takes at this point. Discussing what to do with the money, and in particular where they are to move, we are told: "Hats were mentioned, and dresses, and the new house somewhere—a space-embracing somewhere, beyond surmise, beyond geography" (223). The novel's vision for the future breaks down into insubstantiality, its spatial definition melting into ethereal indeterminacy. The novel falters at the moment of imaginative necessity, and cannot envision any real life beyond the confines of the social world it has thus far depicted, even if the story's trajectory has always been towards a different horizon.

Stephens's ability to imagine the erasure of Dublin more easily than its subsequent fate is illustrated in his contemporaneous journal account of the 1916 Rising, *The Insurrection in Dublin*. The journal recalls a sense of anticipation before the Rising, and also the overwhelming uncertainty of life in the city during it. On the first day of the Rising, going by Stephen's Green where crowds of onlookers have gathered, he "received an impression of silence and expectation and excitement" (7). The Rising, he says, "had been promised for so long, and had been threatened for so long. Now it was here" (18). Stephens's account of the early onset of fighting emphasises the difficulty of understanding the city as a warzone, in which the mechanised weaponry and mass slaughter of the Great War seems to be impinging on the quotidian and the everyday (48). That quotidian life, he expects, will eventually reassert itself. Once the Volunteers run out of ammunition, he avers, "life here will recommence exactly where it left off, and except for some newly-filled graves, all will be as it had been until they become a tradition and enter the imagination of their race" (59). The statement is a prescient one in its long-term prognosis of the Rising's significance, but in the short-term Stephens's fatalistic assessment of the strategic and political value of the Rising is that such destructive convulsions are incidental to the operation of quotidian urban experience. However, even at this point the extent of the destruction in the city centre has made this interpretation more tenuous. Stephens describes a shop on the corner of Sackville Street and the quays that has undergone heavy shelling:

> One's heart melted at the idea that human beings were crouching inside that volcano of death, and I said to myself, 'Not even a fly can be alive in that house'….It was then, and quite suddenly, that the possibilities of street fighting flashed on me….and I knew at this moment that Sackville Street was doomed. I continued to watch the bombardment, but no longer with the anguish which had before torn me (54-5).

Aside from a sense of resignation in the face of catastrophic destruction, Stephens's journal also registers a burgeoning sense of the imprint that the Rising will make on the cityscape as a site of meaning. Describing a Georgian building that has been at the centre of heavy fighting, he writes:

> To inexperienced eyes they did not seem to have done very much damage, but afterwards one found that although the walls were standing and apparently solid there was no inside to the house. From roof to basement the building was bare as a dog kennel. There were no floors inside, there was nothing there but blank space…. (57)

The "apparently solid" facade of the Georgian house gives way, under the carnage of urban warfare, to a "blank space". The symbolic significance of the house (as a minor relic of Dublin's "golden age" in the eighteenth century) has been left bereft of substance. The edifice stands as a symbol of the "hollowing out" of the city's meaning that the Rising effected. Months before the Rising, Padraig Pearse declared: "rather than go on living as we are, I would prefer to see Dublin in ruins" (Caulfield 26). His declaration reflects the growing sense of alienation from the cityscape experienced by the Catholic middle class during the previous century. In a city like Dublin, whose monuments and great buildings told a story that occluded the history and identity of those who inhabited and, increasingly, controlled it, the city in ruins was also a city freed from the constraints imposed by its existing topography.

But just like Mary Makebelieve, for the inhabitants of Stephens's Dublin that moment represents a precipice beyond which a different Dublin can be neither imagined nor articulated:

> No person in Dublin is excited, but there exists a state of tension and expectancy which is mentally more exasperating than any excitement could be….We do not know what has happened, what is happening, or what is going to happen, and the reversion to barbarism (for barbarism is largely a lack of news) disturbs us. (80-1)

The narrative's emphasis remains on the extent and the thoroughness of the destruction: "The finest part of our city has been blown to smithereens, and burned into ashes. Soldiers amongst us who have served abroad say that the ruin of this quarter is more complete than anything they have seen at Ypres, than anything they have seen anywhere in France or Flanders" (96). The Rising, he argues, must have been "only the primary plan, and unless they were entirely mad, there must have been a sequel to it which did not materialise" (106). For Stephens, the Rising serves to render Dublin as an imaginatively blank space, divested of the sedimented meanings imparted by history, without providing some framework through which it might be reconstituted or rendered amenable to a new narrative.

But this imaginative lapse is all the more surprising in the context of broader cultural reactions to the Rising. In its immediate aftermath many people, from diverse political backgrounds, saw the destruction as an opportunity just as surely as it represented a tragedy. R.M. Butler, writing in the moderate Catholic journal, *Studies*, stated that the 1916 Rising presented an "opportunity" to "reconstruct" the city so that Ireland "might well be proud" (Butler 570). Elsewhere, the same publication commented that "Dublin has need for many public buildings – an Art Gallery, a school for progressive Irish Art, a National Theatre...new offices for the Bank of Ireland, a new Parliament House" (Kincaid 44)**.** In the *Irish Builder*, one writer commented that "our city now offers a wide field, a mine of wealth to the architect and engineer and the contractor."[12] In no field was this sense of opportunity more clearly revealed than in urban planning. So, for example, Raymond Unwin, a leading British planner and the man responsible for the parliamentary bill for reconstructing Sackville Street, gained the support of unionists by advocating classical architecture and a Haussmannesque commitment to wide and straight streets. Less popular was

Edwin Bradbury of the Architectural Association of Ireland, who advocated an avowedly modernist architecture that would overcome social division by creating a "free space from the heavy weight of history" (45). While the general embrace of urban planning in Ireland was, to some degree, predicated on the belief that it could serve to erase particular historical narratives from urban space, it is a peculiarity of the Irish adaptation of planning ideas that those narratives were not replaced with a call for ahistorical, functionalist space, but rather that each vested interest saw planning as a means of implementing their own vision of Irish history and identity.

This is best exemplified in Patrick Abercrombie's new city plan for Dublin, *Dublin of the Future* published in 1922. Although Abercrombie's foreword implies that rational planning will provide an antidote to the chaos of rebellion and war, it also says that the destruction wrought by the 1916 Rising "naturally gives opportunities which in the ordinary sense could not have been even considered" (vi). For example, he provides a map of O'Connell Street and the surrounding neighbourhood in which his new plan is superimposed across the areas worst affected by the fighting. In the caption Abercrombie notes: "The destruction of St. Thomas' Church and the frontage in O'Connell Street will allow Gloucester Street to be carried through" (Abercrombie Plate III). Thus, like Haussmann and Le Corbusier, Abercrombie requires the partial destruction of the existing city as a prerequisite for the new one. The foreword recommends that public buildings, for example Municipal offices, "might now be found a more convenient position on one of the demolished sites" (xi). Demolition, therefore, renders these sites as blank canvases on which "the future" can be imposed without regard for the history those spaces might once have reflected, or for the social, cultural, and economic forces which hastened their destruction, and which did not necessarily reflect the interests of the state whose ideological tendencies the plan

attempts to accommodate. What differentiates Abercrombie's work from that of a writer like Stephens is the ability to crystallise a vision for the city's future after it has been rendered imaginatively "blank".

Stephens notes toward the end of *Insurrection* that, as the chances of success for the Rising begin to diminish, the Volunteers "appear to have mapped out the roofs with all the thoroughness that had hitherto been expended on the roads, and upon these roofs they are so mobile and crafty and so much at home that the work of the soldiers will be exceedingly difficult as well as dangerous" (75). These actions, emerging in moments of contingency and desperation, serve to challenge official architectonic control of the cityscape, altering fundamentally the relationship between the city and its inhabitants in ways that lie deliberately outside the purview of the state apparatus. Though not, in its conception, a Revivalist text, Stephens here explores how Dublin might be appropriated in ways consonant with the demands of an Irish identity-politics traditionally hostile to the very notion of city space. For the literary revival, however, the form that such an imaginative appropriation might take, remain under-articulated and indeterminate.

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[1] See, for example, Michael Rubenstein, *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism, and the Postcolonial*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 2010. Rubenstein traces the development of what he regards as an Irish cultural antipathy to public works and other material modes of modernization to an "overriding sense…that Ireland was a brutal experimental testing ground for the most unpopular kinds of public works" (23). This sense was most forcefully articulated by John Mitchel, who popularized the idea of the Famine as a genocide designed "to get rid of a recalcitrant population that was in the way—physically and culturally—of a massive push toward agricultural modernization" (26). This traumatic experience of modernization, he argues, helped to configure the anti-modern thrust of much revival writing.

[2] Adrian Frazier, "Irish Modernisms, 1880-1930" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*, ed. John Wilson Foster. Cambridge: CUP, 2006, pp113-132 argues

that the Land Acts largely shaped the romanticism of much revivalist writing: "if there is something Irish about Irish modernists, one of the most distinctively national traits is that they were living through a period when the material basis for their own social class was melting away." (121)

[3] This argument is most fully articulated by Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of a Modern Nation*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1995. See also Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*. Cambridge, CUP, 2001, pp3-8. For a discussion of the effect of the rise of the Catholic middle class, and the consequent sense of isolation and marginalization among the Protestant Ascendancy, on the literary revival, see R.F. Foster, "Protestant Magic: W.B. Yeats and the Spell of Irish History" *Proceedings of the British Academy* 75 (1989) 243-66. Terence Brown, "Dublin in Twentieth-Century Writing: Metaphor and Subject" in *Irish University Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1, (Spring, 1978), pp7-21, similarly links Protestant involvement in Irish cultural nationalism with the erosion of their social position throughout the nineteenth century beginning with Catholic Emancipation.

[4] In an Irish context, this meant supplanting images of the landlord-tenant relationship with fictive portraits of the noble peasant living harmoniously with nature and under the protection of a benign aristocracy, or nostalgic recollections of an untroubled and organic relationship with the rural landscape. What is interesting is that this reversed the tendency of many key Irish writers from earlier in the nineteenth century, such as Maria Edgeworth, William Carleton, Emily Lawless, and, as we have seen, George Moore, all of whom were concerned with the material relations underpinning Irish rural life.

[5] See Mervyn Horgan, "Anti-Urbanism as a Way of Life: Disdain for Dublin in the Nationalist Imaginary" in *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, (Fall,

2004), pp. 38-47: "If the very substance of the nation is premised on a particular ideology that views rural life as the truth and ideal of Irish life, then general disdain for Dublin, as the place where what is not Irish occurs, was inevitable" (40). He continues: "Suspicion of the central city characterizes the provincial imaginary in general, though in Ireland this suspicion is given a peculiar remoulding in unveiling a paranoid sensibility around Dublin's erasure of the essence of Irishness" (41). Mary E. Daly, "An Alien Institution? Attitudes Towards the City in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Irish Society" in *Etudes Irlandaises* 10 (December 1985), pp. 181-194 argues in a similar vein that rural depopulation became synonymous with "loss of race or nationhood" (191) while rural imagery became "essentially romantic and devoid of realistic content" (192). For a discussion of how such attitudes became embedded not just in cultural production but in actual policy advocacy, see Eoin Devereux, "Saving Rural Ireland: Muintir na Tire and its Anti-Urbanism, 1931 -1958" in *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 17.2 (December 1991). 23-30.

[6] "The Catholic Church by and large disengaged from urban problems, not just because of the perceived concentration of vice and the secularizing tendency inherent in urbanization, but also because Dublin was to be feared as the place where socialists could and would triumph, a fear exacerbated by the 1913 Lock-Out" (Horgan 43).

[7] "[T]he cities were where colonialism had had the greatest impact on the landscape. Indeed, Dublin had inherited an unmistakably colonial imprint and the opportunity for levelling and reconstruction along the lines of Hausmannian Paris certainly did not arise in a newborn country that could ill afford to assign funds to such a massive undertaking" (Horgan 42).

[8] This contention is most eloquently articulated by Fintan O'Toole, "Going West: The Country Versus the City in Irish Writing" in *The Crane Bag* Vol. 9 No. 2 (1985),

pp.111-116: "What has been missing has been a Utopian tradition, drawing its poetry from the future, taking the city as the ground of transformation to set against the tradition of the Golden Age which draws its poetry from the past, taking the country as the ground of timeless, ahistorical innocence. For it is in the nature of the city that it cannot be merely represented without being transformed. The later O'Casey tried to show the city by transforming it, viewing its daily realities from the point of view of the future, of a radically altered Holy City. Joyce, having named the city and informed its daily realities with new dimensions of symbol and myth in *Ulysses*, went on to the Utopian geography of *Finnegans Wake* in which the city achieves a new unity by absorbing the country, history and the world. But these attempts to make Dublin a new Jerusalem, the stirrings of a genuinely urban literature do not amount to a tradition" (116).

[9] See Edward Hirsch, "The Imaginary Irish Peasant" in *PMLA* Vol. 106 No. 5 (October 1991) pp.1116-1133.

[10] As both a prominent aristocratic figure and the wife of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lady Aberdeen is an unlikely purveyor of Irish patriotic sentiment. As Janice Helland has shown, however, both she and her husband were popular figures among nationalists in Dublin, at least in the 1880s. When leaving the city in August 1886 at the end of the Earl of Aberdeen's first tenure as Lord Lieutenant, they were seen off by a huge crowd waving green flags as well as the flags of France and America. Helland's essay details Lady Aberdeen's keen interest in Irish handicrafts and materials, arguing that in wearing Irish garments she was able to perform a type of Irishness befitting her social standing that posed a challenge to inherited stereotypes about Irish identity. See Janice Helland, "Embroidered spectacle: Celtic Revival as

aristocratic display" in Betsy Taylor Fitzsimon and James H Murphy, *The Irish Revival Reappraised*. Dublin: Four Courts, 2004, pp.94-105.

[11] "But she was out of reach; his hand, high-flung as it might be, could not get to her. He went furiously to the Phoenix Park, to St. Stephen's Green, to outlying leafy spots and sheltered lanes, but was in none of these places. He even prowled about the neighbourhood of her home and could not meet her." (177-8)

[12] "The Results of Revolution." In *Irish Builder and Engineer*. 13 May 1916, 202.