

# ‘Ourselves Alone’? Encounters Between the Irish Literary Revival and Australian Settler-Modernisms, ca. 1913 – 1919

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IN his fragmentary travel narrative of Ireland in mid-1919, published in the Melbourne *Fellowship* and Sydney *Bulletin* as a series of short essays (‘Dublin Days’, ‘Dublin Nights’ and ‘Literary Dublin’), Vance Palmer projected a New World utopia of settler modernity onto Ireland. Ireland embodied, for Palmer, the realisation of White Australia’s ‘democratic character’, its vitality and its ‘extreme vivacity’.<sup>1</sup> Palmer, who arrived in Ireland after enlisting in the military only to arrive in Europe three days after the Armistice, was accompanied on this visit by his brother-in-law Esmonde Higgins, a student at Balliol College on his summer break.<sup>2</sup> A month later, Miles Franklin, who had earlier left the United States for London, visited Ireland on a separate tour as a political tourist and self-described ‘pilgrim’ in search of a departure from the quotidian in the political ferment of Ireland.<sup>3</sup> As canonical figures in Australian literary nationalism, Palmer and Franklin have received less attention in relation to Irish historiographical paradigms.<sup>4</sup> Invested with a utopian desire deferred into both the past and future, and ‘twice removed’ (Graham 7–9) from

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<sup>2</sup>For Esmonde Higgins, see Irving.

<sup>3</sup>Miles Franklin, ‘In the Shadow of the Church’, Papers of Miles Franklin, MLMSS 364/59.

<sup>4</sup>This article builds upon Roe, p. 274.; Heseltine, p. 15.; Smith, p. 11.; Walker, p. 119.; Jordan, *Nettie Palmer, Search for an Aesthetic*.

its promise of finality, Ireland during the Irish War of Independence provided Australian literary nationalists a literal and imagined space for the performance of settler selfhood. These encounters necessarily negotiated the differences between settler-colonial and Irish nationalist conceptions of self/other.

In articulations of Australian nationalist mythopoesis, Ireland conventionally figures as either immanent to the settler nation (Irishness-within-Australianess) or as originary to it (Australia-via-Ireland). If the old radical nationalism of Vance Palmer (*The Legend* 59) and Russel Ward, constructed Irishness as a metaphor for the masculinist egalitarianism of the 'Australian Legend', the more anxious New Australian Nationalism of the 1980s reconfigured Ireland into what Jennifer Rutherford (198) terms an imaginary outer 'boundary' of a culturalised White Australian national past. Australia-via-Ireland supplies the primary frame for Irish-Australian contribution historiography, a predominantly Australian nationalist historiographical genre constituted around the master concept-metaphor of 'national character'. Patrick O'Farrell (*The Irish* 19; 'What Is Australian History' 77), who Bob Reece termed an 'antipodean supernationalist', adhered to an organicist concept of national identity in which 'The Irish' (singular) constituted the 'fun factor' of – a sublating essence within – an Australian national 'core' (230). This suturing of Irish *ethnos* to Australian 'character' is sometimes represented in textile metaphors, whereby the oppositions Catholic/Protestant and Irish/English figure as 'tears' within a prior and presumptively unitary 'national fabric' (Kildea). Within this hierarchically-arranged identification of Irishness with a majoritarian Australian nation-ness, exceptionalist equivalences between Irishness and subalternity frequently operate as a displacement of settler-coloniality: O'Farrell simultaneously exculpated 'the Irish' from responsibility for Frontier violence (*The Irish* 72) while dismissing Indigenous history as 'fashionable' ('What Is Australian History' 75).<sup>5</sup> O'Farrell's identitarian taxonomy was steeped in essentialist assumptions that, applied to the literary, would proceed from a search for the authorial Irishness of writers, their primordial origins and their primarily *national* identity.

This article, while historical and limited to the early twentieth century in its scope, does not seek to excavate an Irish – or any – essence within an Australian nation but instead interrogates the relationship *between* Australian and Irish literary nationalisms through the lens of literary travel. If attention to transnational connections offers the possibility of questioning the self-sameness of nationalisms, this paper follows Deborah Jordan ('Elusive as the Fires') in situating the early literary career of the Palmers in the frame of transnational

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<sup>5</sup>O'Farrell's conclusions have been recently problematised in Elizabeth Malcolm and Dianne Hall, *A New History of the Irish in Australia*.

modernism. While the Great War and its aftermaths formed a fulcrum of O'Farrell's teleology of Irish-Australian assimilation – a triumph of emigrant success over sectarian adversity, allegorically displaced onto the conscription conflict – the intellectual history of Irish cultural exchange in the same historical period can complicate this linear construction of place and nation.<sup>6</sup> The article begins by examining the circulation and reception of Irish cultural revivalist texts within the Melbourne radical literary milieu before reading Australian literary travel narratives of Ireland in relation to settler-nativist constructions of self and other. It then traces specific connections between Australian and Irish literary networks, with a focus on Vance Palmer's connections to George William Russell (Æ), Darrell Figgis and the networks of the Abbey Theatre during the Irish revolutionary period. In situating these exchanges both in relation to Indigenous absence, and to Irish historical contexts beyond Australian nationalist history, it proposes that settler encounters with Irish nationalist utopias negotiated multiple, unstable displacements of meaning to construct settler selfhood as both *colonised* and *anti-imperial*.

### **The *Fellowship*, Ireland and Radical Literary Subcultures**

Radical literary imaginings of Ireland in Melbourne at the time of Vance Palmer's visit to Dublin in 1919 were overdetermined by early interwar historical contexts and cultural identifications beyond ethnic community. A detour into the circulation of 'Ireland' in Melbourne literary radical networks can illuminate the multiplicity of ethical and political meanings attached to Ireland in the intellectual constellation of Vance and Nettie Palmer. This was an urban intellectual subculture that loosely intersected with the networks of the Victorian Socialist Party – of which Louis Esson and Bernard O'Dowd were founding members – and the Free Religious Fellowship, a nonconforming pacifist church led by Fred Sinclair (Walker 3). The cultural symbols of this network during the war centred less on Irish diaspora nationalism than on pacifism, feminism, theosophy, rationalism and ethical socialism. If this milieu included Irish-identifying members, it remained distinct from Irish cultural nationalist associational networks including the constitutional Irish nationalist United Irish League (UIL) and the radical nationalist Gaelic League, Irish National Association and Young Ireland Society.<sup>7</sup> A figure with connections to both subcultures was Henry Bournes Higgins, Nettie Palmer's uncle and a member of the UIL.<sup>8</sup>

Insofar as literary modernist and Irish cultural nationalist subcultures in

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<sup>6</sup>This valourisation of 'assimilation' is arguably inseparable from the biopolitical connotations of this term in an Australian context. See Griffiths, 'Biopolitical Correspondences.'

<sup>7</sup>For a study of these specific networks, see Noone.

<sup>8</sup>Henry Bournes Higgins, Letter to Nettie Palmer, 13 July 1917, Henry Bournes Higgins Papers, MS 1057/1/273.

Melbourne overlapped, this relationship was *non-necessary* rather than a prior alignment of interests.<sup>9</sup> In their location outside the Catholic/Protestant divide, the circulation of Irish Questions in the Free Religious Fellowship complicates allegorical conflations of the Irish question in the period of 1916 to 1921 with the history of Australian sectarianism. The non-Catholicism of Vance and Nettie Palmer was no barrier to Vance contributing freelance writing to the Catholic *Advocate*, or to Nettie subscribing to the paper.<sup>10</sup> For a younger generation of radical intellectuals politicised around wartime anti-militarism, including Esmonde Higgins and Guido Barracchi, the *Melbourne University Magazine* became a site of contact between the Irish question, anti-conscriptionism and Catholic pacifism. As early as August 1917, the magazine claimed in non-pejorative terms that ‘a section of the Dublin University Students is said to have kept the Sinn Féin spirit alive in the days when constitutional methods were adopted by the Irish Party’ (‘Postera Crescam Laude’ 61–62).

In its broader transnational ties, the literary milieu of the Free Religious Fellowship loosely identified with an assemblage of cultural coordinates spanning the Irish Literary Revival, British guild socialism, and the political nationalism of the Irish Dominion League (IDL), a London-based movement founded by Horace Plunkett and George Russell that radicalised a constitutional Irish nationalist stance without endorsing Sinn Féin (Pašeta 25). Nettie Palmer was, as Jordan writes, familiar with the writings of Æ including *The National Being*, an essay published after the Easter Rising that combined an esoteric conception of Irish nationality with the economic case for Irish agrarian co-operation (‘Elusive as the Fires’ 59–78; Allen 71). Henry Bournes Higgins distributed *The National Being* within the UIL on the grounds of its general usefulness ‘to Australians’ as a nationalist treatise beyond the ‘study of poetry’.<sup>11</sup> Higgins’s settler-nativist reception of Irish cultural nationalism is not intelligible outside a relation to its constitutive exclusions. As a key figure in the implementation of the White Australia Policy, Higgins’s settler-nationalist reading of Irish cultural nationalism ran through a claim for New World citizenship constituted as much within a pan-Pacific as an imperial imaginary (Lake and Reynolds 58). In this specific alignment of networks, Higgins became a long-distance subscriber of the IDL from Australia in 1920 following the collapse of the Irish Home Rule movement.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup>For the concept of non-necessary relations and articulation, see Stuart Hall.

<sup>10</sup>Nettie Palmer, Diary, 1921, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, MS 1174/16/4.

<sup>11</sup>Henry Bournes Higgins, Letter to Nettie Palmer, 13 July 1917, Papers of Henry Bournes Higgins, MS 1057/1/273.

<sup>12</sup>Henry Harrison, Letter to Henry Bournes Higgins, 22 Nov. 1920, Papers of Henry Bournes Higgins, MS 1057/1/419.

Political identification with the question of Irish independence did not necessarily give form to an Irish-Australian identity when Ireland was often positioned beyond the imagined bounds of the settler nation in radical Australian nationalist writings. The *Bulletin* responded favourably to news of Sinn Féin's electoral victory on Australian racial nationalist grounds, characterising Ireland as a 'white nation' whose 'identity' could be distinguished from the 'undefined or disappearing sort' ('The Irish Republic' 27 Mar. 1919, 6). Yet instead of identifying the Irish question with a redress of Irish minoritisation in Australia, it also published a racialised cartoon depicting a simianised shillelagh-wielding Fenian alongside bomb-throwing Indian and Egyptian nationalists the same year (18 Sept. 1919, 10). In a different divergence between the subject of political identification with Ireland and the Irish subject, Ireland formed a site of condensation for other ethical and political imaginaries without a discernible nationalist referent. In his 1918 'Easter', a poem first published in the *Bulletin* and later in *The Camp* (1920), Vance Palmer combined allusions to the executions of the Rising's leaders in a martyrological imagery of immortality with what Jordan identifies as an unease towards an emerging narrative of Australian wartime blood sacrifice. Nettie Palmer claimed this poem contained a 'Sinn Féin verse':<sup>13</sup>

Those, too, who in a reckless hour  
 The paths of dark rebellion trod,  
 No deep foreboding made them cower  
 That dawn before the firing-squad.  
 The quicklime eats their valiant dust,  
 But what shall stone or steel avail  
 Against their hearts' immortal trust  
 In the white hosts of Innisfail. (*The Camp* 14)

De-centered from standardised historical narratives of ethnocultural identity, the reception of Irish cultural nationalism in the Free Religious Fellowship

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<sup>13</sup>Nettie Palmer, Diary, Apr. 1917, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, MS 1174/16/3; Jordan, 'Shaped on the Anvil' 387.

was often aesthetic rather than nationalist. In January 1919, Nettie Palmer – a woman of Methodist Irish upbringing and agnostic religiosity who, in multiple ways, represented the limits of the Catholic Irish working class as a paradigmatic frame for Irishness in Australian history – situated the opening of the First Dáil within her interwar present. In one of the few direct references to Irish political questions in her correspondence with Vance Palmer, she wrote of being ‘thirsty for news’ from Ireland but recalled with disappointment of having ‘raced to the sale for papers’, only to discover that ‘neither morning paper mentioned it!’<sup>14</sup> This association of Ireland with the post-war international settlement, rather than a distant past, was accompanied by a modernist concern for abstract form and the sacred influenced by Symbolism. Nettie Palmer was less drawn to Australian cultural nationalism in this period than Vance and embraced a ‘mystical’ Irish cultural nationalist aesthetics (Jordan, ‘Elusive as the Fires’ 135).<sup>15</sup> If unorthodox religions offer what Frank Bongiorno terms a ‘history from below’ (‘In This World’ 190) of political modernity extending into ‘the personal’, Irish cultural nationalist aesthetics formed part of this same aesthetic modernism in the Free Religious Fellowship. Despite disassociating himself from his Catholic upbringing, Bernard O’Dowd retained a residual identification with Irish nationalism as a theosophist and vitalist in adulthood (Bongiorno, ‘Bernard O’Dowd’ 112). Nettie Palmer’s interest in Irish mythology partly ran through an ethnicisation of Bernard O’Dowd as insufficiently Irish, often against O’Dowd’s objections. She recalled meeting a ‘young Sinn Féiner’ named ‘McGee’ through contact with Henry Minogue, who she arranged to meet O’Dowd in order to ‘hear them discuss Fairies and Furbolgs and Fenians and Sinn Féin’.<sup>16</sup>

The hunger strike, death and public mourning of Cork Republican Lord Mayor Terence MacSwiney in October 1920, one of the most widely transmitted images of the transnational Irish War of Independence, carried an ethical and affective charge within Australian literary milieus broader than Irish nationalism. Miles Franklin was one of numerous sympathetic bystanders from beyond the Irish nationalist movement to have attended MacSwiney’s funeral procession in London – one of three – and situated the event in the same post-war conjuncture as the English miners’ strike, the arrest of Sylvia Pankhurst (who she had met in the United States) and Scottish temperance campaigning.<sup>17</sup> As Paige Reynolds writes, the image of MacSwiney’s death reconciled a

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<sup>14</sup>Nettie Palmer, Letter to Vance Palmer, 21 Jan. 1919, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, MS1174/1/2039-1.

<sup>15</sup>Nettie Palmer, Letter to Vance Palmer, 7 Jan. 1919, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, MS 1174/1/2176-1.

<sup>16</sup>Nettie Palmer, Letter to Vance Palmer, 7 Jan. 1919, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, MS 1174/1/2176-1.

<sup>17</sup>Miles Franklin, Article on Terence MacSwiney’s funeral, 30 Oct. 1920, Miles Franklin Papers, MLMSS/59.

‘mode of heroism located in the distant mythic time’ (540) with a modern conception of the autonomous self. The feminist poet Mary Fullerton, a member of the Free Religious Fellowship of Ulster Presbyterian and Irish identification, and who later visited Ireland at the end of the Civil War in 1923, incorporated an allusion to Clarence Mangan’s *Dark Rosaleen* in a poetic response to MacSwiney’s hunger strike ‘dedicated to the British Government’. If, as Maud Ellmann holds, the political performance of hunger striking constitutes an ‘anti-epistle’ (70) that converts the starving body into words, Fullerton represented the textualised body of MacSwiney in the feminine as a ‘Banshee’s note’. MacSwiney’s disembodiment as text stands in here for the fullness of ‘freedom’:

FREEDOM, where tyrant wrong

So long has been,

And LIFE for him who died

For Rosaleen. (‘The Late Mayor of Cork’ 17)

The transnational networks in which Irish cultural texts circulated were not necessarily constituted on diasporic lines. The transnational friendships of Louis Esson and the Palmers with various writers in the Abbey Theatre between 1904 and 1921 formed a distinctly non-diasporic intellectual circuit through which the Irish Literary Revival travelled to Australian literary networks (Walker 17). Esson, a writer without either Irish or Irish nationalist identifications, had first established contact with J. M. Synge and W. B. Yeats on a visit to London in 1904 and maintained a friendship with Padraic Colum in New York during 1921 (Peter Fitzpatrick 26, 135). The intellectual circle of the Fellowship was also well-acquainted with Padraic Colum’s children’s novel *The King of Ireland’s Son* (1916) through Esson’s literary networks. Nettie Palmer deemed it ‘funny & rich & absorbing and beautiful’ on aesthetic grounds without identifying herself with Irish cultural nationalism.<sup>18</sup>

More overtly Australian nationalist receptions of Irish literary nationalisms, including Higgins’s, might also be considered from another perspective as non-diasporic insofar as they laid claim to full settler belonging rather than a condition of cultural in-betweenness. As has been established by Peter Fitzpatrick (185), Esson and the Palmers formed the short-lived Pioneer Players on the

<sup>18</sup>Nettie Palmer, Diary, 3 May 1921, Papers of Nettie and Vance Palmer, MS 1174/16/4; Nettie Palmer, Letter to Esmonde Higgins, 5 Sept. 1921, Papers and Letters of Esmonde Macdonald Higgins, MLMSS/3/9.

Abbey Theatre's model of a national theatre, partly on the advice of Yeats. Critics of the category of diaspora including Ien Ang (142) have questioned whether this concept transcends the putative bounds of ethnonational identity. Yet if, following David Lloyd, diaspora is understood as a condition of non-belonging constituted in tension with nation-ness rather than a claim for citizenship, settler nationalist translations of Irish cultural nationalism represented not a form of diasporic syncretism but its reverse: an assertion of homogeneity. This is not to diminish the existence of Irish diasporic literary networks – only to suggest that *nationalist* literary transnationalism was not necessarily diasporic, so as to avoid conflating the two. How might the ambivalence of settler nationalism as a specific articulation of difference be situated in the same frame as the transnational history of Irish literary exchange?

### Performing Settler Indigenisation in Dublin

The concept of an Australian diaspora, as distinct from the Irish diaspora, provides a reversal of terms through which to access the settler possessive within Australian literary travel narratives of Ireland.<sup>19</sup> If the definite article 'the' in 'the Irish in Australia' denotes *ethnos* as origin, its absence in 'Australians in Ireland' points towards a specifically settler-colonial structure of desire and recognition constituted not around Australian *ethnos*, but a double enunciation of settler difference and 'settler indigenisation' – a desire for, and *to be*, the autochthonous Other (Johnston and Lawson 363). Ireland – as both a metropole and an imperial periphery – provided an unequal space of contact between differently situated colonial histories in the practice of travel.<sup>20</sup> If narrations of the settler self in exilic terms are not exceptional to an Irish diasporic condition but a feature of Australian nationalist discourse at large, settler literary tourists in Ireland partly enacted an imagined return to a lost origin. (Curthoys; Veracini 21). These travels were, as a practice of settler indigenisation, also performances of settler difference from the metropole. In this perpetual role reversal with Indigeneity that settler identification phantasmatically enacts, the paradox of Australian radical nationalist identification with an Ireland-to-come lies in its staging of the settler subject as a counter-imperial – or colonised – subject.

The figure of 'the Irish' appeared, in the travel narratives of Vance Palmer and Miles Franklin to Ireland, as a displaced object of Australian nationalist desire that signified both autochthony and modernity. A utopian vision of Ireland as the absent fullness of Australian settler modernity provided Vance Palmer a mirror-image for an imagined Australian self. Utopias are, as Duncan Bell holds, a 'a nowhere that signals the possible future instatiation of a somewhere',

<sup>19</sup>For the concept of the 'white possessive', see Moreton-Robinson.

<sup>20</sup>On contact zones, see Pratt.

constituted within lack (18). The Irish ideal type was, for Palmer, essentially ‘democratic’ in character but more so than Australians: while there certainly were, for Palmer, ‘snobs’ in Dublin, they ‘do not set the standards or create the character of the place’ (‘Dublin Days’). Miles Franklin cited the same tropes of settler-egalitarian sociality in her narration of Ireland, describing ‘the Irish’ as fearing ‘no snub . . . and assum[ing] no airs of self-superiority’. This designation of Ireland as ‘civilised’ – as capable of self-government – rendered Ireland proximate, for Franklin, with the white settler colonies of Australia and the United States.<sup>21</sup>

An excess of meanings emerges within this association of Ireland with settler modernity. Franklin, whose intellectual outlook Marilyn Lake (*Progressive* 9) identifies as New World Progressivist, had lived in the United States between 1911 and 1918 as the secretary of National Women’s Trade Union League leader Alice Henry. In translating the literary-scenic tourist trope of moral indignation at ‘Irish poverty’ into a trans-Pacific Progressivist frame, Franklin’s touristic gaze installed American social reform as a beacon of ‘progress’ that accentuated the gap between the settler self and Ireland.<sup>22</sup> The demand for Irish independence figured, for Franklin, as the latest chapter in an Enlightenment humanist teleology of ‘progress’ triumphing over ‘reaction’ throughout ‘centuries’.<sup>23</sup> In this Progressivist chain of equivalences, Franklin identified ‘a close analogy’ between the Irish question, Edwardian feminism and pre-war syndicalism, holding the former to be the ‘militant suffragette of the nations’, whose ‘lack of compromise’ was analogous to that of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union during the 1913 Dublin Lockout.<sup>24</sup> Conversely, these equivalences were articulated within differences from constitutional Irish nationalism and Unionism. Invoking her American labour movement background, Franklin likened the former to ‘reactionary’ trade union officials and non-militant Suffragists.<sup>25</sup> Irish Unionists appeared, within this narrative, as the antithesis of ‘progressive’ and the embodiment of the ‘paleolithic reactionary’ in all societies.<sup>26</sup>

This construction of Australian settler authenticity by way of Irish modernity summoned an imaginative geography of the world at large. Anglicising the term ‘Sinn Féin’ (Ourselves Alone) within an implicit analogy between island nations, Vance Palmer urged that ‘our eyes have to be withdrawn for awhile

<sup>21</sup>Miles Franklin, ‘At the Horse Show’, Miles Franklin Papers, MLMSS 364/59.

<sup>22</sup>Miles Franklin, ‘In the Shadow of the Church’, Miles Franklin Papers, MLMSS 364/59.

<sup>23</sup>Miles Franklin, ‘The Three Mutineers’, Miles Franklin Papers, MLMSS 364/59.

<sup>24</sup>Miles Franklin, ‘The Three Mutineers’, Miles Franklin Papers, MLMSS 364/59.

<sup>25</sup>Miles Franklin, ‘Republics and Republics’, Miles Franklin Papers, MLMSS 364/59.

<sup>26</sup>Miles Franklin, ‘Irishmen-All!’, Miles Franklin Papers, MLMSS 364/59.

from Moscow, Fiji or London' and towards national problems that can only be solved by 'ourselves alone' ('Ireland and Australia' 56). Palmer's displacement of the putative egalitarianism of Australian radical nationalism onto Ireland – his representation of 'the Irish' as more 'Australian' than 'Australians' – iterated a narrative of New World self-government that defined selfhood within racial and gendered ideals of masculine autonomy and self-sufficiency (Lake and Reynolds 7). This claim for settler sovereignty partly ran through the consolidation of a white/not-white racial binary in the exclusion of non-Indigenous exogenous Others from the body-politic (Veracini 21). If a handful of other intellectuals in the Melbourne radical literary milieu, most notably Bernard O'Dowd, were more ambivalent in their relationship to racial exclusion, Palmer continued to identify with the White Australia Policy within an aestheticisation of 'geographical boundaries' and 'the firm outline of an object' even during an emerging fissure within the Fellowship over racial exclusion (*The Legend of the Nineties* 15–20, 'White Australia', 'On Boundaries'). Read within the co-constitution of race and nation in Palmer's thought, these metonymic displacements of Australian settler self-government onto Ireland implicitly raced the latter as white.<sup>27</sup> What Heseltine terms Palmer's 'fundamental attitudes towards civilized life' (15) can hence be read as an effect of racial discourse, offering no self-identical ground for its own interpretation.

'Ourselves' referred, in Palmer's (mis)translation of advanced Irish nationalist claims for autochthony, not to a plural Irishness-within-Australianess, but to the we/they distinctions of a binaristically interpellated White Australian subject secured by its constitutive outsides. Palmer's mapping of the chain of differences within Irish nationalism onto 'Australia' defined the national self against the metropole around a claim for geographical insularity but was invariably aporetic in light of the specifically possessive relationship of the latter nationalism to Indigenous land. Palmer's association of Ireland with settler modernity was thus accompanied by a settler-nativist aesthetics of ecological vitality that figured 'the Irish' as products of 'climate' and the 'soil' ('Dublin Nights'). Within this projection of settler ecology upon the physical environment of Ireland, Palmer named a leaf that he collected from a tree outside Patrick Pearse's study window at St. Enda's, the boys' school that Pearse founded, a 'gum leaf' and posted it to Nettie Palmer.<sup>28</sup> In measuring authenticity according to proximity to land, Palmer's allusions to ecology in Ireland formed part of a poetics of settler space-making that, in its projection of the self, elided specifically Irish ecologies including its post-famine geography.

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<sup>27</sup>See Docker, p. 97.

<sup>28</sup>Vance Palmer, Letter to Nettie Palmer, ca. July 1919, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, MS 1174/1/2228-1.

The figure of ‘the Irish’ in settler literary travelogues was sufficiently recognisable within the terms of the latter’s unmarked universality to be ethically apprehended but remained different from the self. The invocation of the universal ethical subject – the ‘brotherhood of man’ bearing an ‘unstemmable internationalism’ – by settler literary travelers in Ireland operated, in the case of Miles Franklin, to introduce an ironic distance from Irish cultural nationalist particularity. Franklin held that ‘little languages’ such as Irish ‘tend to perpetuate the curse of the Tower of Babel’, adding that ‘I should hate to face the world with nothing but Gaelic on my lips’.<sup>29</sup> If such remarks could have easily been associated with sections of the Irish Literary Revival including George Russell (Kiberd 143), Franklin’s tourist gaze also ran through a caricature of Hibernian accents, including that of a woman at a hotel who ‘declaimed her country’s wrongs’ at her with ‘Celtic fervour’.<sup>30</sup> Vance Palmer apprehended ‘the Irish’ as a recognisable – not wholly – other, rather than part of his self. Although raised by an Irish mother, Vance Palmer encountered literary Dublin from the outside in. If Paul Eggert situates the radical nationalist mythology of Palmer’s *The Legend of the Nineties* in a specifically post-Second World War intellectual context, Palmer’s travel correspondence from Ireland in this early part of his early literary career was marked by an absence of references to an immanent Irishness-within-Australianness (qtd. in Dixon 145). Far from experiencing a shared nationalist bond with Ireland, Palmer recalled feeling distinctly like having ‘crossed a national border’ upon arriving in Dublin from Holyhead (‘Dublin Days’). This encounter placed an absent hyphen between Irish and Australian articulations of nationalist selfhood that accentuated both the dividedness and the contingency of the latter.

### Untranslatable Routes?

A consideration of specific intellectual encounters between Vance Palmer and Irish literary revivalists can problematise the apparent tension between the closure of difference required by settler-nationalist discourses and the cosmopolitanism of literary travel. In place of seamless translatability, encounters across transnational difference can be understood as what Anna Tsing terms a generative condition of ‘friction’ between ‘heterogenous and unequal’ histories (5). Vance Palmer had in the pre-war period met various European literary figures including modernists such as Ezra Pound but also G. K. Chesterton (himself a literary traveler to Ireland during the Irish War of Independence), and it was from within these networks that he re-established contact with Irish literary networks in 1919 (Heseltine 11; Walsh 157). A major intellectual influ-

<sup>29</sup>Miles Franklin, ‘To the Abbey Theatre’, Miles Franklin Papers, MLMSS 364/59.

<sup>30</sup>Miles Franklin, ‘In a Proclaimed Area’, Miles Franklin Papers, MLMSS 364/59.

ence on Palmer in this period was the English Guild Socialist Alfred Richard Orage, the editor of the London *New Age*, whose concept of nationalist difference incorporated an organicist spiritualism (Walker 47). Palmer's relationship to the Irish question in this milieu was shaped less by diasporic Irish Nationalism than by a heterodox politicisation around Ireland that permeated British radical intellectual networks. During the Dublin Lockout of 1913, he wrote a poem for the London labour newspaper the *Daily Herald* that satirised Home Rule leader John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party's claims to represent 'the Irish race' within a defence of the syndicalist transport union leader Jim Larkin:

'The leader of the Irish race'

A workgirl's throat gives forth the cry,

'Up, Larkin!' and from every place

'Up Larkin!' thunders to the sky . . .

Go and play gold with George, you clown,

They've crowned a man in Dublin town ('A Labour Poet' 118)

Palmer's identification with Larkinism differed from the prevailing constitutional Irish nationalism of the Irish Literary Revival but concurred with the stance of Æ, a mutual friend of A. R. Orage (Allen 21), who became his most important literary contact and intellectual influence in Dublin on his second visit to Ireland in 1919. Like Louis Esson eleven years earlier (Peter Fitzpatrick, 32), Palmer visited gatherings of the Dublin literary milieu in Horace Plunkett House, Æ's office in Merrion Square and a fixture of the Dublin literary subculture on Sunday evenings. At these gatherings, Palmer – along with Esmonde Higgins – encountered numerous members of the Dublin literary set, recalling a sociality in which intellectual 'talk' was 'at its highest level' ('Literary Dublin' 2) Among the members of this circle during Palmer's visit were the Dublin lawyer and writer Constantine Curran, a close friend of James Joyce, and a 'Mrs MacBride', possibly Maud Gonne MacBride or her mother-in-law Honoria Gill MacBride.<sup>31</sup> Palmer's travelogue also closely mirrored the memoir of English Suffragette and journalist Evelyn Sharp who frequented Æ's gatherings in

<sup>31</sup>Esmonde Higgins, Letter to Nettie Palmer, 9 Aug. 1919, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, MS 1174/1/2212-1; Vance Palmer, Letter to Nettie Palmer, ca. 1919, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, MS 1174/1/2230-1. For the connections of MacBride to Æ, see Nic Dháibhéid.

the same months and recalled meeting Maud Gonne MacBride within the same circle.

These cross-cultural encounters between Palmer and the networks of George Russell were marked by a precarious presentation of the Australian masculine self abroad. There is scarce evidence to suggest that Palmer's borrowings from the Irish Literary Revival were reciprocated in an equivalent Irish engagement in Australian literature: Æ ignored Palmer's gift of O'Dowd's *The Bush* (Jordan, *Nettie Palmer* 77–99). Yet in an implicit vicarious identification of Irishness with an Australian settler-nativist appropriation of the bush, Palmer claimed that Æ apprehended Esmonde Higgins as 'Australian' in raciological terms on the basis of his 'very Irish face', asking whether he was 'bush by blood'.<sup>32</sup> In a comic aside, Higgins recalled that upon hearing 'there were 3 Australians in the company', 'Mrs MacBride' 'smirked across the room' and invited them to her home.<sup>33</sup> Higgins rebuffed MacBride's offer, resenting her request that they 'perform' their Australian-ness 'as quaint barbarians' and with the expectation that 'we had to shock her'.<sup>34</sup>

In allusions to George Russell's aesthetics, of which spiritualism was a distinguishing feature, Palmer mapped a concept of the sacred onto a settler-nativist imagining of the land that bore the trace of Indigenous absence in Australia. Michael R. Griffiths, drawing on Pheng Cheah's conception of cosmopolitics as the co-constitution of universality and nationalism, identifies a 'cosmopolitical disjuncture' in the literary nationalism of Bernard O'Dowd that manifested a possessive appropriation of Indigeneity through a claim for spiritual transcendence (197–98). A similar settler-nativist cosmopolitics can be identified in Palmer's association of *Ireland* with land, and land with spiritual vitality – as 'fresh, vigorous and alive' – in his reading of Æ ('Ireland and Australia'). This representation of the land as an organic life force ran through a masculinist aestheticism that, as Michael McAteer (187) holds, assigned spiritual transcendence to the feminine in patriarchal terms. In transcending material and historical existence, the figure of 'the Irish' as spiritual unity reinstated the Cartesian dualisms of nature/culture and passive/active in Palmer's gendering of land: as reverent for the 'great Earth-mother' instead of 'Finn and Cúchulainn'. Palmer defined this ecological atavism against the anthropomorphic mythologies of 'gods and brooding heroes', privileging the 'Mayo Bogs and Donegal Cliffs' as more authentic, tangible and immediate markers of spiritual

<sup>32</sup>Vance Palmer, Letter to Nettie Palmer, ca. 1919, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, MS 1174/1/2230-1.

<sup>33</sup>Esmonde Higgins, Letter to Nettie Palmer, 9 Aug. 1919, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, MS 1174/1/2212-1; Vance Palmer, Letter to Nettie Palmer, ca. 1919, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, MS 1174/1/2230-1.

<sup>34</sup>Esmonde Higgins, Letter to Nettie Palmer, 9 Aug. 1919, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, MS 1174/1/2212-1.

presence ('Dublin Nights').

As Palmer's settler-nativist translation of 'Sinn Féin' suggests, these overlapping intellectual worlds were produced within and against the political ferment of the Irish revolution, a contested historical category usually understood as spanning the Easter Rising, the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War.<sup>35</sup> In its location outside Australian nationalist time, the Irish revolution can be read as a discontinuous irruption into self-referential settler-nationalist constructions of Ireland as a metaphor for Australian-ness. Louis Esson, who visited New York in 1921 where he met W. B. Yeats and Padraic Colum, maintained an ephemeral and politically hybrid relationship to the Irish Question despite his non-identification with Irish nationalism, attending a lecture by the Irish feminist and nationalist Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington on the same visit.<sup>36</sup> As a founding member of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society and key figure in the Irish Dominion League, George Russell can be broadly situated in the same political generation as Irish revolutionary nationalists despite defying easy nationalist/colonial binarisms (Allen 55). Palmer recalled Æ 'humming out week by week an agricultural policy for Ireland' and conversing with him not only about Standish O'Grady and the Irish language revival, but also about the politics of Sinn Féin, [James] Connolly and 'the Cooperative Movement in Italy'.<sup>37</sup>

Situated in a broader culture of transnational literary travel to Ireland during the Irish revolution, the translation of Æ's thought into a settler-nationalist imaginary by Palmer and Higgins carried no fixed or essential referent beyond the floating signification of national difference as a discourse of modernity. Among the numerous other international visitors who entered into Æ's orbit during the Irish revolution was the Egyptian nationalist Ibrahim Rashad, who detailed his travels in a 1920 travelogue, *An Egyptian in Ireland* (Doyle 127).<sup>38</sup> If Egyptian nationalist and Australian settler-nativist adaptations of Irish modernist literary techniques were equally catachrestic in their re-iteration of Irish Co-operative movement and nationalist texts, they were discontinuous from each other in their relationships to empire and the global colour line. The absence of common ground, if not the antagonistic relation, between white settler and Egyptian nationalisms in 1919 delineates the outer bounds of settler-nativist claims for imperial marginality. Ireland was, however, sufficiently am-

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<sup>35</sup>Aidan Beatty, for instance, critiques the concept of an 'Irish revolution' for overstating the discontinuity of the period.

<sup>36</sup>Louis Esson, Letter to Vance Palmer, 16 Feb. 1917, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, MS 1174/1/1618-1.

<sup>37</sup>Vance Palmer, Letter to Nettie Palmer, ca. July 1919, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, MS 1174/1/2228-1.

<sup>38</sup>See also Omar; Maurice J. Casey is also researching the radical literary connections of Æ.

bivalent a national signifier to accommodate analogies with both nationalisms.

Other contacts of Palmer within Æ's milieu were, by the Irish revolutionary period, more discernibly entangled with the networks of Irish revolutionary nationalism. The Abbey Theatre inhabited, as Fearghal McGarry writes, a syncretic urban oppositional culture in which artists and intellectuals converged with the networks of Sinn Féin within an 'intense sociability' (89). The contact who first introduced Palmer to Æ was the playwright Darrell Figgis, who Palmer had earlier encountered through the networks of Orage's *New Age* in 1911, but recalled was 'altogether a different Figgis [sic] from the one I remember'.<sup>39</sup> Figgis, a close contact of Æ, was by the War of Independence, an active republican, a participant in the 1914 Howth gun-running, and the honorary secretary of Sinn Féin in Clare, in which capacity he edited the small left-Republican newspaper *An Phoblacht (The Republic)* (David Fitzpatrick 167). In its broader reception, *An Phoblacht* appealed to Australian literary modernists based on both its literary form and its content. Palmer described the journal as a 'very bright, vigorous weekly', without specific regard for its nationalism, while Miles Franklin purchased it on her visit to Dublin based on its headline 'Is England fit for Self Government?'<sup>40</sup>

In encountering the event of the Irish revolution, Australian literary travelers invested Ireland with a utopian futurity. Proximity to a real Ireland did not, however, bring travelers within closer reach of the desire invested in Ireland, but produced new sources of enjoyment in the departure from the quotidian provided by travel. Miles Franklin, whose travel narrative centered primarily on the political tumult in Ireland rather than Irish literary networks, visited Clare on the premise of it being Eamonn de Valera's electoral constituency, expressly to witness a 'proclaimed' county.<sup>41</sup> Franklin's relationship to Ireland was an ambivalent identification, both diasporic and influenced by an aesthetic anti-materialism.<sup>42</sup> She distinguished her own 'passionate desire of invincible youth' to see Ireland from her Irish-born grandfather's 'unconquerable nostalgia' for origins, contrasting the romance of 'Sinn Fein rebellions' and 'anti-fraternisation orders' to the 'dull materialism' of modernity.<sup>43</sup> Vance Palmer visited Dublin partly, as the radical publicist Robert Samuel Ross reported, to 'size up the situation' and observed that 'there are no politicians in this distressed country

<sup>39</sup>Vance Palmer, Letter to Nettie Palmer, ca. July 1919, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, MS 1174/1/2228-1.

<sup>40</sup>Vance Palmer, Letter to Nettie Palmer, ca. July 1919, Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer, MS 1174/1/2228-1; Miles Franklin, 'In a Proclaimed Area', Papers of Miles Franklin, MLMSS 364/59.

<sup>41</sup>Miles Franklin, 'In a Proclaimed Area', Papers of Miles Franklin, MLMSS 364/59.

<sup>42</sup>Miles Franklin, 'On the Irish Mail!', Papers of Miles Franklin, MLMSS 364/59.

<sup>43</sup>Miles Franklin, 'On the Irish Mail!', Papers of Miles Franklin, MLMSS 364/59.

nowadays' (Palmer, 'Literary Dublin' 2; Ross 1). To a greater extent, Esmonde Higgins encountered the culturally hybrid networks of literary Dublin through a utopian tourist gaze. During his tour of the Irish countryside, Esmonde Higgins firmly insisted on his difference as a 'non-Irishman' who would 'never fight for Ireland', despite having been immersed in the politics of Irish Home Rule in his upbringing.<sup>44</sup> Yet Higgins simultaneously maintained an ethical receptiveness towards his political surroundings, assuming the role of a sympathetic ally with 'tremendous admiration for', rather than a participant in, Irish republicanism.<sup>45</sup> If Esmonde Higgins initially identified with the Irish Dominion League from within the networks of Vance Palmer, claiming upon arrival that 'the only people with an obvious knowledge of what they really wanted were the Horace Plunkett people', he was by the third week of his tour overtly sympathetic to Republican calls to 'chuck away any vestige of faith in England'.<sup>46</sup>

Higgins was drawn further into the networks of Irish political nationalism via Vance Palmer's literary connections in Dublin, and on the same visit, attended a debate at the Abbey Theatre between Horace Plunkett and the republican intellectual Aodh de Blacam over the question of the 'Irish Republic', a debate that at least one other member of Æ's circle – Evelyn Sharp – also attended. If Palmer positioned Ireland as the fulfillment of Australian settler modernity, Higgins reversed the direction of this utopian desire, positioning Australia as the future of an Irish 'national consciousness' yet-to-come. Higgins observed that Sinn Féin's wider membership was absent from this debate and, despite his non-identification with Irishness, took it upon himself to criticise Sinn Féin in a letter to Figgis's *An Phoblacht* – within a nationalist discourse of the spiritual reminiscent of Orage, Æ and Palmer – for making insufficient efforts to re-awaken the 'national spirit'.<sup>47</sup> Darrell Figgis never published this letter, although this may have been due less to its contents *per se* than to Higgins accidentally posting it to his parents in Melbourne. Figgis did, in any case, publish a subsequent letter from Higgins lambasting 'English imperialism' under the pseudonym 'Australian' as a 'profound international immorality' (*An Phoblacht (The Republic)*, 18 Sept. 1919, 154). This mobilisation of 'anti-imperialism' from an Australian nationalist standpoint was constituted within the ambivalence of settler nationalism as a claim for equivalence with Irish republicanism.

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<sup>44</sup>Esmonde Higgins, Letter to parents, 15 July 1919, Esmonde Macdonald Higgins Papers, MLMSS 740/3/5.

<sup>45</sup>Esmonde Higgins, Letter to parents, 15 July 1919, Esmonde Macdonald Higgins Papers, MLMSS 740/3/5.

<sup>46</sup>Henry Bournes Higgins, Letter to Nettie Palmer, 13 July 1917, Papers of Henry Bournes Higgins, MS 1057/1/273.

<sup>47</sup>Esmonde Higgins, Letter to the editor of *An Phoblacht (The Republic)*, 29 July 1919, Esmonde Macdonald Higgins Papers, MLMSS 740/3/7.

It is therefore impossible to separate the encounters of Australian literary travelers with Irish cultural and political nationalisms from a surplus of meanings beyond Australian nationalist historical teleologies. As is apparent in the disjuncture between Esmonde Higgins's and Vance Palmer's travel narratives, Palmer's aesthetic borrowings from *Æ* – including an organicist conception of nationality – did not translate into a literal identification with Irish nationalism. The utopias of revolutionary Ireland largely remained a site of silence in the published writings of returned Australian literary travelers despite their direct proximity to it. Palmer's travelogue and travel letters to Nettie Palmer were notably devoid of direct references to the violence or spectacle of the Irish revolution beyond the most cursory. This elision was most apparent in Palmer's representation of Darrell Figgis as solely a writer, without reference to Figgis's Irish republican persona. If references to Irishness – along with settler-colonial alterity – later surfaced prominently in Miles Franklin's *All That Swagger* (1934), Ireland after 1916 figured, for both Vance and Nettie Palmer, less as a literal essence within an Australian nation-ness in the early interwar period than as part of a post-war international situation external to it. Upon his return to Australia, Vance Palmer contributed a series of freelance columns to the *Advocate* that situated the 'Irish Question' – in a realist, journalistic format – within surveys of 'World Affairs'. These literary encounters with Ireland were irreducible to an either/or between discrete nationalist identities. They inhabited not a coherent or prior nation-ness, but the unstable interstices in between.

## Conclusion

To what extent can these settler literary encounters with Ireland be incorporated into the category of Irish-Australian literature? This article has, in highlighting some absent hyphens between early twentieth-century Irish and (White) Australian cultural nationalisms, problematised the tensions between differently situated constructions of self and other. It has proposed that a historicisation of connections between Irish and Australian literary networks is, *contra* the methodological reflexes of identitarian-nationalist historiography, not *necessarily* a venture into the bounds of Irish-Australia, if this term is taken to denote a supplementary relation between a primarily ethnocultural prefix and a putatively unitary suffix. As a counterpoint to the nation-centrism of O'Farrell, literary connections with Ireland present the possibility of decoupling the construction of Ireland as an object of aesthetic and political desire in the early interwar period from the nationally bounded teleologies of Irishness-within-Australianess and Australia-via-Ireland. Neither the connections of Australian nationalist literary travelers with the Irish Literary Revival, nor the reception of Irish literary texts in the wider literary networks of these

travelers, were divorced from an encounter with the heterogeneity of transnational difference beyond the nation or the spectres of Indigenous alterity within it.

If Australian literary travel narratives in Ireland negotiated differently situated colonial pasts instead of a prior sameness, this difference was constituted around the ambivalence of New World settler identification. Performances of Australian settler diaspora in Ireland enacted multiple displacements of desire between Irish and New World settler nationalist utopias that contested the category of autochthony. These displacements ran through a set of narrative reversals – between the settler ‘self’, Indigenous alterity and Ireland – that phantasmatically constructed the settler subject as not only colonised and indigenised, but also as an anti-imperial agent. In settler literary encounters with George William Russell, Ireland became a double image of autochthony and modernity, divided between a distant past and a utopian futurity.

These connections point towards a multiplicity of Irelands in the early inter-war Australian settler radical intellectual imaginary, accessible at the margins of the nation. Insofar as the literary can be read from Irish historiographical locations as a source on the transnational Irish revolutionary period itself, it points towards a more unstable and contingent play of meanings around Ireland than reified narratives of diaspora nationalism permit.<sup>48</sup> The Irish revolution – a political utopia that settler literary travellers either vicariously experienced or dissimulated but had difficulty avoiding – remained a site of silence within radical Australian nationalist narrations of the settler nation. If nationalist analogies between Ireland and Australia were inchoate, Ireland also signified in excess of the nation within ethical imaginaries bearing no necessary relation to the grammars of race or nation, whether feminist or pacifist. There is no national ‘self’ outside its constitutive differences in a settler-colonial past and present. But nor does this ‘self’ need to provide a sufficient ground for a historicisation of its multiple encounters with Ireland.

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<sup>48</sup>For the most recent work in this area, see Aiken.

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