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# “Young Men of Erin, Our Dead Are Calling”<sup>1</sup>: Death, Immortality and the Otherworld in Modern Irish Republican Ballads

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## *Abstract:*

Irish physical-force Republicanism has long been noted for its tendency to promote the tropes of martyrdom and immortality as core tenets of its ideological belief system. This essay sets out to examine the *genre* of Republican death ballads so as to identify how such essentialist concepts are represented and promoted within the attendant song tradition. Particular attention will be paid to works that deploy overtly supernatural tropes in order to articulate the key Republican concept of heroic immortality. The present research will demonstrate the consistency with which such narrative devices have been retained within the Republican song tradition into the late twentieth century and beyond, a time when their utilisation had become largely redundant within the broader folksong tradition.

*Keywords:* Ballad, Immortality, Ireland, Irish Republicanism, Revenant

While Irish Republicanism has received growing levels of academic focus in recent years, its attendant ballad tradition continues to avoid scholarly attention. Despite the enduring longevity of Republican ballads within Irish folksong, the *genre* is notable for a marked absence of published material, with the last major scholarly work being Zimmerman’s *Songs of Irish Rebellion: Irish Political Ballads and Street Songs 1780-1900*, a 1967 publication which largely ignores twentieth century output. Considerable volumes of Repub-

<sup>1</sup> Quotation taken from the ballad ‘Seán Mac Neela and Tony D’Arcy’ (*The Harp: Songs and Recitations of Ireland*, 1960, 37).

lican songbooks continue to be published up to the present but contain little, if any, by way of literary analysis or commentary. As ancillary literature, the popular ballad provides an invaluable insight into the shifting ideological sands of Irish Republicanism – as well as the communities from which it continues to draw popular support – and its absence from any scholarly evaluation creates a considerable academic lacuna.

In its more dogmatic, physical-force manifestations, Irish Republicanism displays an essentialism that promotes the tropes of martyrdom and immortality as core tenets of its ideological belief system. The following essay will demonstrate how such concepts have been popularly represented within Republican song culture through the utilisation of supernatural and/or revenant tropes in ballads narrating the deaths of militants. The present work focuses exclusively on works from the twentieth century, a time when the composition of such narratives had become largely redundant within the broader folksong tradition, their more extreme manifestations from previous eras being largely rationalised by performers and composers alike (Ellis 1979, 170, 178). Despite their almost universal abandonment elsewhere, such culturally defunct narratives have been retained within modern Irish Republican ballads with a remarkable consistency. In the works under review, a sense of thematic ‘other’ is pervasive and all show considerable diversity in terms of afterlife locations, spiritual transitions, resurrections, ghosts and revenants, among others. Thus, the current work does not focus exclusively on any one particular aspect of the supernatural: instead, it is intended as a broad academic overview of the varying ways in which Republican death and immortality are represented via the medium of the popular political ballad in Ireland. In doing so, a suitable literary paradigm is provided through which these key ideological concepts can be satisfactorily analysed and developed within the broader scholarly framework of modern Irish Republicanism.

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The origins of modern Irish Republicanism can be traced to political events of the late eighteenth century, when the varying forces of Irish separatism embraced the principles of modern European Republicanism, having been significantly influenced by the successes of both the American and the French Revolutions (Adams 1986, 133; Bishop and Mallie 1987, 18; English 2006, 95-96; Sanders 2011, 22; *et al.*). In tandem with the core objective of establishing an independent 32-county state, Irish Republicanism has consistently displayed a quasi-theological adherence to the tropes of protracted endurance and heroic self-sacrifice, at times elevating them to essential prerequisites of national liberation (Coogan 1980, 14; Kearney 1980-1981, 62; Sweeney 2004, 338-339). One of the most totemic and enduring articula-

tions of same was by Patrick Pearse<sup>2</sup> who famously declared that: "Life springs from death; and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations" (1916, 133-137). Bishop and Mallie have argued that this concept of "turn[ing] disaster into an emotional triumph" has created "[t]he perverse psyche of Republicanism" (1987, 455) in which failure through ideological adherence will invariably supersede advances made through expedient political pragmatism (Ó Broin 2009, 13; Frampton 2011, 83-85, 281; Sanders 2011, 9). With the binary of sacrificial martyrdom and national liberation occupying such an elementary position within physical-force Republicanism, a resultant immortality has become embedded within its ideological belief structure, with death regularly obfuscated as a transient event in which the self-sacrificing Republican volunteer has willingly participated. Consequently, militants who have lost their lives quickly transcend their status as earthly patriots and come to be revered by the Republican community as mythological "hero-martyrs" (McCann 2003, 928). As shown throughout the following selection of ballads, such immortality is accentuated by the utilisation of the tropes of suffering, death and resurrection, such metaphorical representations of the eternal Republican deliberately mirroring the unrealised vision of the arisen, liberated Ireland.

While all Republican ballads ultimately fulfil the basic propaganda requirements of political song by serving as platforms for the interwoven tropes of heroic bravery, patriotism, national liberation, etc., those containing death narratives perform a separate and very specific function. Such works are essentially commemorative in nature and are quite often hagiographic; however, they also display a clear narrative duality, by being thematically inspirational in parallel with their primary commemorative focus. In such instances, they seek to serve as inspirational constructs by providing exemplars that future generations are expected to emulate. Thus, within Republican ballad narrative, the twin tropes of self-sacrifice and immortality primarily serve as dramatic devices used to reinforce this commemorative/inspirational dichotomy and essentially act as the fulcrum for this propagandistic binary. By deliberately focussing the narrative on the Republican's martyrdom, the audience is explicitly warned to never allow the sacrifice made to have been in vain. Thus, the ballads serve an instructive role as a motivation-cum-warning to the living. In such instances, the (specifically Republican) audience is not simply inspired to complete the project of national liberation, but is also urged to emulate the sacrificial path taken by the now deceased volunteer, should

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Pearse (1879-1916) was a Dublin-born barrister, poet, playwright, educationist, Irish-language revivalist and Republican militant. On May 3, 1916, he was executed by firing squad in Kilmainham Jail, Dublin, for his role in the Easter Rising. The quotation cited is from his graveside oration for Fenian leader Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa (1831-1915), delivered on August 1, 1915.

this ultimately prove necessary<sup>3</sup>. Republican death ballads, therefore, function as unifying narratives between past and future events, but perhaps more importantly, they also act as facilitators in the intrinsically cyclical culture of militant Irish Republicanism. This is achieved by both commemorating past, and seeking to inspire, future armed activity in equal measure<sup>4</sup>. This dramatic utilisation of the dead as motivation for the living, combined with the promotion of a glorious immortality, has led to a deliberate ambiguity between matters corporeal and otherworldly within Republican cultural narrative. As the following analysis will show, such ambiguity is reflected in the retention of paranormal tropes throughout the canon of modern Republican ballads, despite such dramatic devices having been either significantly rationalised or wholly discarded elsewhere within traditional folksong during the modern era.

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Given that the metaphorical resurrection and rebirth of Ireland is well attested as far back as the *aisling*<sup>5</sup> poetic *genre* of the XVII and XVIII centuries, it is unsurprising that ethereal depictions of Ireland have been retained throughout the modern canon of Republican song. Thematic representations of death as a transitional gateway to a heroic afterlife in Ireland are evident in “Shall My Soul Pass Through Old Ireland?” (*Songs of Resistance* 2001, 80), “Take Me Home To Mayo” (*ibidem*, 75) and “Brave Frank Stagg”<sup>6</sup>, works which document the final hours of three IRA hunger strikers who died in English prisons<sup>7</sup>. All three are narrated by the dying republicans themselves,

<sup>3</sup> The hunger strike ballad “Mac Swiney Thought Us How To Die” provides an explicit example of such sentiment (*Songs of Resistance* 2001, 99).

<sup>4</sup> These dialectic representations are manifest at Republican commemorations which form an indispensable component of the tradition. Such events are deeply ritualistic and traditionally involve marches (led by IRA colour parties) to Republican graves and are comparable to religious pilgrimages in protocol. In such activities, physical-force republicans essentially seek to contemporise their history and thus, legitimise their actions (Currie and Taylor, eds, 2011, 81-84).

<sup>5</sup> “Vision”. In such output, Ireland will appear in (generally very beautiful) female form, lamenting the condition of the Irish people under British rule. She will then invoke a young man to arise from his degeneracy and strive on her behalf. Shields notes the clearly erotic subtexts in such representations (1992-1993, 171).

<sup>6</sup> Accessed at: <<http://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=32684>> (05/2017).

<sup>7</sup> The three in question are Terence MacSwiney (1879-1920), Michael Gaughan (1949-1974) and Frank Stagg (1942-1976). The former was Lord Mayor of Cork at the time of his arrest for “possession of seditious materials” in August 1920 (Flynn 2011, 43). MacSwiney died on October 25, 1920 after 74 days on hunger strike, the longest recorded fast to death by a Republican political prisoner. Michael Gaughan was convicted and sentenced to seven

with each articulating predictive accounts of posthumous, spiritual journeys back to Ireland. Despite the obviously corporeal aspect of narratives related by still living subjects, all three works convey an unavoidable sense of the ethereal. As is the norm in Republican ballad culture, the offences for which the three were originally convicted are essentially irrelevant and are deliberately eschewed (Ó Cadhla 2017, 96), resulting in narratives concentrating exclusively on the spiritual transition of the dying hunger strikers. In each of the three works, the concept of a posthumous journey is not restricted to the religious context of a celestial otherworld as all three primarily focus on the men's dying wishes to be brought home to Ireland, a feature explicit in two of the titles. The trope of pilgrimage, coupled with the ritualistic descriptions of the journey home, is solidified by the utilisation of imagery conveying a pervasive sense of place and belonging in Ireland, juxtaposed against total alienation within Britain. Such unavoidable references to home and location have a binary force from a Republican perspective: firstly, they reflect the role – however self-appointed – of the Republican guerrilla as a defender of his/her community, but also serve to portray Britain as an invader, representative of an alien, unwelcome presence<sup>8</sup>. Thus, each narrative depicts Britain as being at best, a torturous purgatory or at worst, a hell which must be endured before the return to Ireland. The latter is in turn described in deliberately affectionate language as the heavenly destination that awaits the Republican hero-martyr. Descriptions of the remains returning to Ireland are infused with ritualistic imagery and contain spiritual subtexts that evoke a form of sacred journey that the dying republican must undertake to complete his sacrifice. The hunger strikers are each portrayed as being indifferent to their impending death, displaying a stoicism commonly found in Republican execution ballads (Zimmerman 1967, 70; O'Brien 2003, 159-161). In parallel with such fatalism, their only concern appears to be the aforementioned wish to be brought 'home', which is portrayed as a heavenly deliverance from their Hellish suffering in English prisons. This journey is, of course, not simply their wish to be returned to Ireland for burial, but is representative of both their physical and spiritual liberation and, by extension, an analogy for the newly resurrected and, thus, liberated Ireland.

years imprisonment in 1971 for his role in a bank raid. He embarked on a hunger strike for recognition as a political prisoner and for repatriation to an Irish prison and died on June 3, 1974. Along with six others, Frank Stagg was convicted of arson in 1973 and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. During his time in several English jails, Stagg undertook four separate hunger strikes, the last of which was to lead to his death on February 12, 1976. For further reading on the centrality of hunger striking within Irish Republicanism, see Coogan 1980, Beresford 1987, O'Malley 1990, Hennessy 2013.

<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of the local defensive dynamic of physical-force Republicanism, see Alonso 2002, 38-66 and Moloney 2002, 80-87, 229.

The motif of the sacred journey is evident in “Take Me Home To Mayo”, in which both “home” and “Mayo” are cited in each of the four lines of the chorus. The ballad has just two verses – placed between the three refrains of the ‘homeward-bound’ chorus – which contrast the idyllic life enjoyed by Gaughan in Ireland with his grim existence as a political prisoner on hunger strike in England. In Verse 1, the audience is presented with Gaughan as a young man in Mayo who has been compelled to leave home and take action against external aggression. The notion of a ‘reluctant revolutionary’ predominates, a popular feature of the Republican ballad tradition. He is dying in Verse 2, thoroughly alienated in Britain and wishing simply to be brought home. The clear sense of pilgrimage alluded to in the ballad was also evident throughout Gaughan’s funeral proceedings in which his remains were escorted by IRA colour parties through Irish emigrant areas of North London and similarly, from Dublin to Ballina via every town along the route<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, MacSwiney’s questioning of the priest in the second narrative as to whether his soul shall “pass through old Ireland” is followed by a chorus which explicitly references his city of birth, along with places of close personal and familial connections. The deliberate use of descriptors such as “old”, “little”, “loving”, “dear”, “pure”, “sanctified” in relation to Ireland convey a pervasive sense of homeliness and belonging, all of which are absent in Britain (“foreign”, “dreary”), and which MacSwiney will only reconnect with following his journey home. While ballads from the late twentieth century generally convey a less overtly religious dynamic than earlier works (McCann 2003, 928), “Brave Frank Stagg” retains strong spiritual and quasi-religious subtexts. Unlike MacSwiney who sought consolation from a priest, Stagg’s family appeal directly to God on his behalf. The presence of two women – his wife and mother – at Stagg’s side deliberately evokes the Biblical crucifixion scene, as do his final words of consolation to his family as he nears death: “‘Ah, my loves,’ the young man murmurs, ‘do not cry your tears for me, / For my time is nearly over, and today I will be free’ ”<sup>10</sup>. Again, the sense of place

<sup>9</sup> In keeping with the ritualism associated with the Irish physical-force tradition, the tricolour draped on Gaughan’s coffin was the same one used to cover MacSwiney’s remains in 1920. Five months after Gaughan’s death, the same tricolour was to be used again, this time on the coffin of IRA volunteer James McDade who was killed in a premature bomb explosion in Coventry, England. For a detailed account of Gaughan’s death and funeral, see O’Donnell 2011, 201-207.

<sup>10</sup> This quotation is readily comparable with lyrics found in the traditional Irish-language crucifixion lament “Caoineadh na dTrí Muire” (“The Lament of Three Marys”). The relevant lines read: “Éist, a mháithrín, is ná bí cráite / Óchón is óchón-ó! / Tá mná mo chainte le breith fós, a mháithrín / Óchón is óchón-ó!” (“Listen, dear mother, and do not be tormented / Alas! Woe is me! / The women who will mourn for me have yet to be born / Alas! Woe is me!”). The Three Marys in question are Mary the Mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother of James and Joseph.

and home is pervasive throughout ("Ireland/Erin" being mentioned three times, and "Mayo" twice, in just three verses), with Ireland again posited as the heavenly terminus that awaits the Republican at the end of his sacrificial journey. Before he dies, Stagg has a heavenly apparition and comforts his mother and wife with the words, "I can see a bright sun shining on my own green Mayo fields, / And I see dear Michael Gaughan, waiting there beneath the trees", again articulating an awaiting paradise which ensures – and indeed, celebrates – Republican immortality. In Stagg's case there was to be a further exposition of the Republican resurrection trope in the aftermath of his death, following a dispute regarding the hunger striker's legal instruction that he be afforded an IRA funeral and burial beside Gaughan. Unwilling to witness a similar display as had happened with the latter's funeral in 1974, the Irish government took the unprecedented decision to divert the aeroplane carrying Stagg's remains in order to frustrate a Republican funeral. He was interred three days later with 3 feet of concrete placed over his grave by police to prevent his reburial by the IRA. An armed police guard was removed from his grave in November 1976, at which point republicans – accompanied by a priest – tunneled through the adjoining grave and reinterred Stagg beside Gaughan with full IRA honours<sup>11</sup>. The discovery of the empty grave following his re-interment clearly evoke the opening of the tomb on Easter Monday and further accentuate the overtly Christian aspect of his self-immolation. In the popular Republican mindset, Stagg has finally completed his mortal suffering and is now not just spiritually, but also physically 'arisen' from the dead. Thus, he has become immortalised within Republican consciousness, as evidenced in the attendant ballad narrative: "But he lives in Erin's heart yet and wherever flies her flag, / Ireland's sons and Ireland's daughters will remember brave Frank Stagg".

Similar thematic portrayals of Ireland as an idyllic otherworld are liberally employed; however, numerous works also articulate a specific Republican Elysium beyond Ireland that all volunteers will ultimately reside in, similar to that alluded to in "Brave Frank Stagg"<sup>12</sup>. Ellis notes the widespread propensity for vagueness regarding descriptions of such locations, with a heaven of "definite theological connotations [and] Biblical descriptions" (1979, 176) by no means being the norm within traditional folksong<sup>13</sup>. Such output is ubiquitous throughout the *genre* of Republican ballads with narratives displaying constructs similar to that found in "Kevin Coen" (*Songs of Resist-*

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed account of the considerable controversy surrounding Stagg's funeral, see O'Donnell 2011, 350-373.

<sup>12</sup> A comparable heroic otherworld – *An Mag Mell* (The Plain of Happiness) – is well-attested in pre-Christian Irish warrior mythology. See MacKillop 2005, 24, 149, 213.

<sup>13</sup> See also, Van Effelterre 2007, 69.

ance 2001, 52)<sup>14</sup> (“He has gone to join the company of Sligo’s gallant dead, / The six men on Benbulbin’s slopes who fought and nobly bled, / Sheeran, Breheny, Gorman, Savage<sup>15</sup>, who bravely faced the foe, / Are there to greet the dauntless soul of Rusheen’s Kevin Coen”), “Seán Sabhat<sup>16</sup> from Garryowen” (*ibidem*, 39) (“They have gone to join that gallant band of Plunkett<sup>17</sup>, Pearse and Tone<sup>18</sup>”), “The Ballad of John Greene” (*ibidem*, 51)<sup>19</sup>, (“Tonight amongst the martyrs of Erin, / God rest you, brave Johnnie Greene”) and “Seán Mac Neela and Tony D’Arcy” (*The Harp: Songs and Recitations of Ireland* 1960, 37)<sup>20</sup>, whom we are told reside in “Halls Eternal” with “Ashe<sup>21</sup> ... and brave MacSwiney”. This dramatic ploy of reciting lists of martyred republicans from previous generations is a consistent feature of Republican song, described by Zimmerman as “strings of names ... repeated in a litany like names of saints” (1967, 66). As well as accentuating Republican immortality, the practice also enables the ballad writer to convey a strong sense of historical continuity to the audience which in turn, is used to instil the con-

<sup>14</sup> Kevin Coen (1947-1975) was killed during a gun battle with the British Army on the Cavan-Fermanagh border on January 20, 1975.

<sup>15</sup> The six republicans in question here are Sligo anti-Treaty IRA members Seamus Devins, Brian MacNeill, Harry Benson, Paddy Carroll, Tommy Langan and Joseph Banks, all of whom were executed on Benbulbin Mountain, Sligo, by Irish Free State soldiers on September 20, 1922. Thomas Sheerin, Harry Breheny and Patrick Gorman – again, all from Sligo – were also killed by government forces during the Civil War period. Martin Savage was a native of Sligo, but was a member of the IRA’s Dublin Brigade when he was killed in action on December 19, 1919.

<sup>16</sup> Seán Sabhat (1928-1957) was killed with Feargal O’Hanlon (1936-1957) during an IRA attack on Brookborough RUC station, County Fermanagh on New Year’s Eve, 1956.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Plunkett (1887-1916) was executed by firing squad in Kilmainham Jail, Dublin on May 4, 1916, for his role in the Easter Rising.

<sup>18</sup> Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-1798) was a Dublin-born Protestant radical who was arrested and charged with treason for his role in the 1798 Rising. He died on November 19 of the same year from an alleged self-inflicted injury while in custody following a refusal of execution by firing-squad.

<sup>19</sup> John Greene (1946-1975) was shot dead in disputed circumstances outside Castleblaney, County Monaghan on January 10, 1975.

<sup>20</sup> Tony D’Arcy (b. 1906) and Seán McNeela (b. 1914) both died on hunger strike in Dublin in 1940 (March 16 and 19, respectively) following their conviction for relatively minor political offences. The former was sentenced to three months for refusing to account for his movements and for not giving his name and address when arrested, with the latter receiving two years for “conspiracy to usurp a function of Government” by operating a pirate radio station (Flynn 2011, 95).

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Ashe (1885-1917) was sentenced to death for his role in the 1916 Rising, the sentence being later commuted to penal servitude for life. Following a general amnesty in June 1917, he was rearrested and charged with sedition and sentenced to two years hard labour. He embarked on a hunger strike for political status in Mountjoy Prison, Dublin, where he died from the effects of force-feeding by prison staff on September 25, 1917.



temporary struggle with a greater political legitimacy, an essential feature of the physical-force tradition in Ireland<sup>22</sup>.

The trope of a heroic Republican Otherworld is developed significantly in several other works in which not only is the volunteer shown to be immortal within this realm – and consequently in the collective folkloric recall of the Republican community – but he/she is also portrayed as having physically transcended the grave. In such instances, the dead volunteer is no longer solely functioning as an ideologically inspirational figure from the relative distance of an abstract Republican paradise. Instead, he/she is also depicted as returning to Ireland – *post mortem* – to reinvigorate and lead the next generation of militants. This represents an interesting thematic shift from the three ‘pilgrimage’ ballads previously discussed. Here, Ireland is now no longer representative of an ethereal paradise that the volunteer will journey to after death; instead, it is a clearly physical setting to which the resurrected Republican will return in order to maintain the struggle and to encourage and ensure that others do likewise. Thus, the act of self-sacrifice is but one dimension of the Republican martyrdom trope, pointing further to the ballad narratives containing parallel commemorative and inspirational force, as previously argued.

An examination of such output reveals narratives that focus primarily on events before, and subsequent to, the actual death which the ballads were originally conceived to narrate. This deliberate obfuscation of death provides a seamless continuity between matters corporeal and ethereal and infuses the subjects with a pervasive sense of the eternal. Such immortality is manifest in “Hughes<sup>23</sup> Lives on Forever”, a work which focuses on the military prowess of its subject in the years preceding his imprisonment, to the almost complete exclusion of his eventual self-immolation on hunger strike<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, Hughes’ death is notably absent from the narrative, a feature re-enforced by the repetition of the ballad’s title at the end of each verse and chorus, respectively. Thus, in spite of Hughes’ death, his deeds are shown to be very much of the present as, “[t]he flame he carried now burns on”, he is “[u]nconquered

<sup>22</sup> “For [dissident republicans], history offers the ultimate validation – and the guarantee of future success. The culture of the dissidents is steeped in commemoration and reverence for republican ancestry ... devotees see themselves as following in the footsteps of those who have gone before” (Frampton 2011, 281). See also Sinn Féin policy document, “Where Sinn Féin Stands”: “... we take our inspiration and experience from the past” (1970).

<sup>23</sup> On May 12, 1981, Francis Hughes (1957-1981) became the second of the H-Block hunger strikers to die.

<sup>24</sup> This work appeared on the album *The Roll of Honour* (1983), an independently-released recording by Irish ballad group, The Irish Brigade. Lyrics are unavailable in printed source and are reproduced here with the kind permission of their author, Gerry O’Glacain.

still”, his “spirit is free” to complete the task pursued while alive<sup>25</sup>. The narrator indicates that Hughes is among the living by addressing him directly, claiming his death will be avenged and finally, cites Hughes as an omnipresent force within the Republican struggle: “They feared you then, they fear you yet’ / For Hughes lives on forever”<sup>26</sup>. Hughes’ immortality resurfaces in the “The Volunteer”<sup>27</sup>, an explicitly paranormal ballad narrated by a fictional IRA man who has been wounded in a gun battle with the SAS. Before being summarily executed, the narrator is rescued by an unidentified militant who single-handedly overcomes an entire company of British soldiers, before carrying him to a safe house. The wounded man then “turned to thank my comrade brave, but I found I was alone”. He tells the household of his “comrade strange, but it seemed they already knew”. The popular folkloric motif whereby the living only fully realise that they have encountered a revenant after its disappearance is shown at the ballad’s conclusion when the narrator ultimately recognises his rescuer in a framed picture which reads: “In memory of Francis Hughes” (Van Effelterre 2007, 69). In “The Volunteer”, the deceased Hughes speaks twice: firstly to the SAS men (“Just drop those guns down gently”) and secondly, to the narrator (“You’ll be safe here, ... / They’re friends of mine, though we haven’t met for many a lonely year”). This represents a significant development of the dramatic device previously cited in which the deceased is addressed by the narrator. The attribution of direct speech to Hughes further emphasises both his physical, and of course, politico-ideological, immortality and thus, his active participation within the broader Republican struggle. Again, what the audience is presented with is not a militant who is simply immortal within the abstract confines of a heroic Republican afterlife. Hughes’ faculty of speech, coupled with his physical ability to carry a wounded comrade to safety while carrying a rifle, all combine to show his narrative presence as being very much of this world.

The ballad “Mairéad Farrell”<sup>28</sup> contains a resurrection narrative related not by an anonymous figure, but by the deceased Republican herself. The

<sup>25</sup> A similar representation is evident in “The Ballad of Francis Hughes” which again, after presenting his various military feats, depicts Hughes as an active IRA volunteer who has transcended death: “And high ‘round the hills of Bellaghy / Francie Hughes watches over his men” (*Songs of Resistance* 2001, 6).

<sup>26</sup> Comparable expressions are also evident in “The Ballad of Billy Reid”: “But they still fear him yet and they’ll never forget / How brave Billy Reid stood his ground” (*Songs of Resistance* 2001, 69). Reid (1939-1971) was part of an IRA unit which ambushed a British Army patrol in Belfast city centre on May 15, 1971, resulting in the wounding of two British soldiers and in Reid’s own death.

<sup>27</sup> See footnote 24.

<sup>28</sup> Accessed at: <<http://www.bobbysandstrust.com/multimedia/songs#18>> (05/2017). Along with two other Belfast IRA members, Mairéad Farrell (1957-1988) was assassinated by the SAS in Gibraltar, on March 6, 1988.

ballad opens with the line, "Do not stand at my grave and weep. / I am not there I do not sleep", thereby imposing her immortality on the narrative from the outset. The established motif of symbolically equating the resurrected Republican with the newly-reborn Ireland is also evident throughout, "When Ireland lives I do not die", as is the familiar trope of suffering necessarily preceding liberation: "In Armagh jail I served my time, / Strip searches were a British crime. / Degraded me but they could not see, / I suffered this to see Ireland free". Similarly, "Martin Hurson"<sup>29</sup> also employs the device of posthumous speech with three of the four verses narrated directly by the hunger striker himself. The first verse states (three times) that Hurson is dead, but in the remaining three, he is clearly alive and recounts his childhood, his years on IRA active service, his imprisonment and finally, his time on hunger strike. Hurson engages in the familiar inspiration-cum-warning widely deployed throughout the canon: "And though I'm gone you must fight on 'til Ireland is free again"<sup>30</sup>. Any potential for doubt that he has not, in fact, transcended the grave is dealt with in the final verse when – similar to Hughes – he is omnipresent and leads his fellow republicans: "My ... companions brave I'm watching over you yet". Hurson's immortality is again emphasised in the final (repeated) line, in which he says, "*a chairde, slán go fóill*"<sup>31</sup>, his *au revoir* again indicating that death does not conclude the activity of the deceased Republican hero-martyr.

Despite the tangible sense of "other" in the above depictions of Hughes, Farrell and Hurson – and while they have clearly risen from the dead – it is still somewhat unclear whether their *post mortem* status is, in fact, corporeal, ethereal or revenant, a common ambiguity of ballads that are thematically supernatural (Munnely 1992-1993, 177). Indeed, Atkinson's deployment of the non-specific "unmortal character" in such instances is perhaps appropriate in this regard (1991, 233). In the case of "The Volunteer", the arisen Hughes still possesses wholly physical attributes and faculties, despite the unmistakably paranormal narrative related. Similarly ambiguous representations are also clearly evident in "Hughes Lives On Forever", as well as the previously discussed portrayals of Farrell and Hurson. While the corporeality – or otherwise – of these particular visitations may be equivocal, elsewhere in the canon, ballad writers show no reluctance in fully embracing the supernatural through the promotion of exclusively revenant apparitions. In one such work – "Feargal Óg O'Hanlon" (*The Easter Lily: Songs and Recitations of Ireland* 3, 1964, 23)<sup>32</sup> – the subject re-

<sup>29</sup> On July 13, 1981, Martin Hurson (1956-1981) became the sixth of the H-Block hunger strikers to die.

<sup>30</sup> See footnote 24.

<sup>31</sup> "Friends, goodbye for now".

<sup>32</sup> See footnote 16.

turns from the dead and appears in apparition near the border town of Clones. He speaks lucidly throughout the ballad, narrating the circumstances of his death at Brookborough with Seán Sabhat. The established trope of Republican paradise is duly referenced, as they both now reside among “the hosts of Count O’Hanlon”<sup>33</sup>. The encounter is related anonymously and describes the arisen O’Hanlon as: “a freedom fighter of great renown, who fought and laid his young life down. / ... His eyes were bright with freedom’s glow as when on earth he walked below”. The paranormal theme is reinforced in the final verse in which O’Hanlon “vanished in an Ulster dell ... / But forever in our hearts shall dwell” thus, remaining (as ever) immortal. Before his disappearance, the narrator – clearly unperturbed by the apparition – asks the dead Republican if he has “a message to convey”. O’Hanlon replies (albeit somewhat predictably), “‘I have,’ said he – ‘Fight on’”, the posthumous rallying call clearly being the sole reason for his visitation.

Ballads in a similar thematic vein are pervasive. In such works, the dead reappear to instruct former comrades to complete the task of national liberation for which their own lives have been sacrificed. More importantly, perhaps, they also seek to ensure that the living do not stray from the path of self-sacrificial militancy. Such tropes are reinforced by the appropriation of the ballads’ closing lines as inspirational constructs for the following generation. It should be noted that these posthumous statements are wholly unambiguous and bear no similarity to the popular revenant ballad motif of “a confrontation ... and an ensuing wit combat, the outcome of which determines whether the unmortal can lay claim to the mortal” (Atkinson 1991, 232). Such riddling episodes are not a feature of Republican ballads as revenants have a specific message to relate and are never of malign intent. (In any event, such activity is wholly unnecessary, as Republican revenants are very much preaching to the already converted). This device is ubiquitous and is not restricted to explicitly resurrection-focussed narratives. Similar expressions are to be found in execution ballads such as “Kevin Barry”<sup>34</sup> and “Brave Tom Williams”<sup>35</sup>, but are also evident in works that narrate physical confrontations, such as “The Ballad of Billy

<sup>33</sup> Count Redmond O’Hanlon (c. 1640-1681), seventeenth century Irish outlaw.

<sup>34</sup> “Lads like Barry are no cowards, from the foe they will not fly; / Lads like Barry will free Ireland, for her sake they’ll live and die” (Cronin 1965, 51). Kevin Barry (1902-1920) was captured following an attempt to relieve arms from a British Army patrol in Dublin in which three soldiers were killed. He was subsequently convicted of murder and was hanged in Mountjoy Prison, Dublin, on November 1, 1920.

<sup>35</sup> “So, I say to Irish soldiers: ‘If from Tom’s path you chance to stray. / Keep in memory of that morn when Ireland’s cross was proudly born / By a lad who lies within the prison clay’” (*Songs of Resistance* 2001, 13). Tom Williams (1923-1942) was convicted of murder for his role in a diversionary IRA operation to facilitate the passage of a banned Easter 1916 commemorative march in West Belfast, during which a member of the RUC was shot and fatally injured. He was hanged in Crumlin Road Gaol on September 2, 1942.

Reid"<sup>36</sup>. While such political exhortations are clearly unambiguous, their impact is considerably lessened – certainly from the perspective of a Republican audience – by virtue of their anonymous narration. In “Feargal Óg O’Hanlon”, however, a tangible gravitas is added to the invocations due to their utterance by a volunteer who has transcended the grave, rather than simply by an anonymous narrator. In “The Ballad of John Greene” the dead volunteer now resides in Republican paradise “amongst the martyrs of Erin”; however, this is but a temporary destination before his inevitable return to the conflict in Ireland. The theme of Republican immortality is revisited throughout the narrative, with references such as “the deathless Irish Republic” accompanying descriptions of Greene’s return from the dead. His resurrection is symbolic of the reborn Ireland, which will be delivered with his own personal participation in the struggle: “And we march to the dawn light of freedom, / You will lead us, brave Johnnie Greene”. An almost identical narrative is evident in “Seán Mac Neela and Tony D’Arcy”. Again, their immortality is heavily emphasised. The pair are “deathless heroes”, whose deeds “we’ll hold . . . in our hearts forever . . . / We’ll tell their tales through generations”. Similar to previous narratives, the two deceased republicans return to physically participate in what will be the final, victorious battle: “Brave Tony D’Arcy and brave Seán MacNeela and all our heroes from sea to sea. / We’ll march beside you ‘till in joy and triumph, we’ll sing your praises in Ireland free”. The opening line of Verse 3 contains an interesting literary device: “Young men of Erin, our dead are calling to their comrades in field and town, / To join the standard of *Poblacht na hÉireann*<sup>37</sup> and fight the forces of the British Crown”. In such narratives, the inspirational trope found in the final lines of “Kevin Barry” *et al.*, is accentuated to the point where living republicans are infused with a pre-emptive guilt should they even consider abandoning the path of sacrificial militancy and thus, are effectively haunted by the dead to complete the task of national liberation. Similarly, in “The Roll Of Honour”<sup>38</sup>, the writer insists on utilising the paranormal so as the dead may instruct the living, despite the ballad being an ostensibly corporeal-focussed work which commemorates the 1981 hunger strike. The first three verses provide a generic account of the collective grief of the Republican community in the wake of the hunger strikes, but the narrator appropriates the final lines to address the final (now dead) hunger striker directly: “Michael Devine from Derry you were the last to die. / With your nine brave companions with the martyred dead you lie”. All ten dead hunger strikers then reply in unison: “Remember! Our deaths were not in vain! / Fight on and make our homeland a nation once again!”.

<sup>36</sup> “If you think he was right, come and join in the fight and help to free Belfast. / For the blood Billy shed and although he lies dead, in our hearts his memory will last” (*Songs of Resistance* 2001, 69). See footnote 26.

<sup>37</sup> “The Irish Republic”.

<sup>38</sup> See footnote 24.

Comparable hauntings appear throughout the canon with considerable frequency. “A Call From The Prison Graves”<sup>39</sup> relates a striking narrative in which living republicans are not simply extolled to rededicate themselves due to the sacrifice already made, but are explicitly haunted into doing so, as seen in “The Roll of Honour”. Direct speech is utilised throughout, and all four verses are spoken by the dead. Unlike in previous works, the republicans here are anonymous, an iconic figure clearly unnecessary to develop the narrative, such is the force of sentiment contained therein. Again, immortality is centre stage, as shown in the opening line in which the dead are deemed to merely “sleep in death”. The familiar invocation appears early in the ballad (Verse 1), when the living are instructed, thus: “Before the flame we kindled wanes, we charge you do your part”. Verse 2 conveys a greater sense of urgency (“The creed our blood re-baptised – then will you not serve it too? / We cannot man the breach again, ‘tis you must dare and do”) with the living scorned, and effectively ordered to embrace death in the cause of Irish freedom (“Oh, what is life, that you should pause or fear to cast behind?”), a cause without which their lives are deemed meaningless: “Life consecrate to some high cause alone doth purpose find”. Verse 3 returns to the familiar theme of Republican continuity and the living are instructed to complete the task of national liberation for which the dead have sacrificed their lives: “From our cold hands then take the sword, complete what we began ... the sacred fire still fan”. Should the living renege on this task, Verse 4 contains stark and explicit warnings as to the consequences of failure: the dead will return to their “blood-dyed grave [and] your shame will curse and know’. This fate will not be borne solely by the living, as a considerably worse humiliation will be brought to bear on the Republican dead who “will feel a fiercer pain than sting of England’s lead, / If you betray, for ease or gain, the trust of martyred dead”. As already noted, living republicans are to draw inspiration from the fact that they will be accompanied in militant action by the risen dead, a coalition which will assure victory: “Beside you in your columns proud, we martyred ones will walk. / You strong with life, we in our shroud – the tyrant still will baulk”. In this instance, the thematic utilisation of the martyred dead as an inspirational trope is taken to dramatic extremity with the representation of shroud-clad, revenant IRA volunteers march-

<sup>39</sup> Accessed at: <[http://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS\\_ID=Samuels-Box5\\_0620](http://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS_ID=Samuels-Box5_0620)> (05/2017). The lyrics for this ballad are reproduced with the kind permission of the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. As noted previously in the instance of Pearse’s 1915 funeral oration, the grave is an ever-popular trope within Irish Republican culture. Similar sentiments were expressed the year previously by fellow 1916 Rising leader James Connolly: “If you strike at, imprison, or kill us, out of our prisons graves we will evoke a spirit that will thwart you and, mayhap, raise a force that will destroy you. We defy you! Do your worst!” (Quoted in Adams 1986, 70).

ing in military columns alongside the living<sup>40</sup>. By depicting republicans in their death shrouds – yet still able to fight – the narrative succeeds in articulating a form of purgatory that the deceased cannot escape until the struggle for Irish independence has been completed, which perhaps may explain their eagerness to return to the corporeal world. The revenants in this work, being of a more obviously ghostly nature than previous examples, would be the exception rather than the rule in Republican song. In terms of general appearance and activity, the revenant Republican largely tallies with Buchan's definition of a "corporeal creature, a substantial person acting like a human being because he or she is to all appearances a human being, though one returned from the Otherworld" and certainly bear no resemblance to "ghosts of the diaphanous variety with jangling chains and heads tucked under arms" (1986, 145-146). As noted, the revenant republican not only verbally encourages former comrades to continue the struggle, but will also popularly participate in same and thus, is very much a "walking, talking dead person in a significant part of the action" (*ibidem*, 151).

Given the established consistency of supernatural tropes within the Republican death ballad *genre*, it is appropriate at this point to examine comparable representations of same throughout the broader folk song tradition. Folklorist and musicologist Hugh Shields has researched extensively in the field and has set out a series of criteria that are pervasive in ballads containing revenant narratives, namely:

- (i) The popular use of decayed, decomposed bodies rising from the grave (Shields 1972, 101);
- (ii) The occurrence of supernatural events within dream sequences (*ibidem*, 103; Shields 1992-1993, 164);
- (iii) Subject matters are generally of a "latter day banality" with "sketchy apparitions" (1972, 108);
- (iv) The use of revenant characters solely as a "narrative device to bring about a suitable conclusion to the story", such occurrences being "quite perfunctory and no more remarkable than any natural event" (*ibidem*, 109);
- (v) The propensity for apparitions to be "feebly motivated ... express[ing] in their relations with the living ... nothing more than a vague benignity" (*ibidem*, 109);

<sup>40</sup> A similar narrative can be found in the ballad "The Dead March Past" (*The Flag: Songs and Recitations of Ireland*, no. 1, n.d., 22).

- (vi) Shields also notes the gradual disappearance of revenant tropes from popular ballad tradition over time, explaining the loss as being “possibly as a result of simple degeneration, but often rather through the tendency to rationalise by effacing supernatural features wherever they occur” (*ibidem*, 99), citing the “general decline in the strong, collective conviction that things against nature can happen” (*ibidem*, 99). Munnely further observes that “[b]allads dealing specifically with supernatural occurrences, individuals and other beings do not make up a very large corpus of traditional song in English in Ireland” (Shields 1992-1993, 173). Essentially, with the arrival of more sophisticated, literate audiences, such folkloric motifs have been rendered somewhat *passé* in the modern era (Ó Cadhla 2012, 69-70).

If we are to employ the above criteria as a comparative paradigm between thematically paranormal ballads from both the Republican and the broader folksong traditions, immediate anomalies become apparent. The current research has shown that within Republican ballad narrative, revenant hero-martyr figures:

- (i) are physically strong and battle-ready, and regularly display corporeal faculties, most notably speech. They also participate in armed action;
- (ii) appear to the living in specifically non-dream settings;
- (iii) are clearly identifiable and have heroic, epic roles;
- (iv) represent the climactic moment of the narrative and thus, are in no way perfunctory;
- (v) have very clear and definitive roles and are motivated to return so as to inspire and physically assist future generations, conveying explicit instructions and warnings;
- (vi) enjoy a ubiquitous position within the ballad *genre* and show no signs of the deconstruction evident within folksong tradition in general.

It is clear from the above comparison that all six of Shields’ criteria are at some considerable variance with the established format of the revenant Republican ballad, something which puts the *genre* in a rather unique position when compared with the broader folksong tradition. Similarly, Republican ballads show no evidence of “a central relationship [that] has been severed” (Buchan 1986, 146), nor of the emotional upheaval and excessive grieving commonly found throughout folksong (*ibidem*, 147-148; Moreira 2008, 109), nor indeed, of the traditional role of ballad revenants as providers of solace and consolation to the living (Ellis 1979, 178; 1986, 147-150; 2008, 109). Therefore, revenants in Republican song display no comparable cathartic function for the wider Republican community. In essence, such a role is effectively redundant given the clear obfuscation of death within the song tradition, a direct consequence



of the fundamental importance of self-sacrifice, resurrection and immortality as inspirational tropes within physical-force Republicanism. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the attendant song tradition has not undergone the transition evident elsewhere. With the concept of heroic immortality being so deeply embedded within the ideology, revenant representations are consequently not viewed as nostalgic, quaint narrative motifs, but rather have a genuinely contemporary resonance within popular Republican consciousness. All of the above is not to suggest, of course, that republicans retain an archaic belief in superstition and ghosts. Put simply, the trope of heroic immortality, as represented by the revenant Republican hero-martyr, has proven far too powerful and totemic a propaganda device to allow its disappearance. Thus, the often explicitly essentialist nature of Irish Republicanism has acted as an effective barrier to the rationalisation and discarding of such revenant tropes, which as demonstrated, have been retained within the ballad tradition with remarkable consistency.

One final ballad that is worthy of discussion is "Dark Rosaleen's"<sup>41</sup> Last Chaplet". The early twentieth century work contains an explicitly paranormal narrative in which the executed leaders<sup>42</sup> of the 1916 Rising are portrayed as spirits flying over Dublin city. Verse 1 revisits the theme of Republican immortality by describing the interment of Pádraig Pearse, thus: "Forty feet deep they dug his grave ... / But none could bury his soul". The absurd grave depth is repeated in the following line ("Forty feet of Irish earth / The true heart of Pearse they covered") as a dramatic device – albeit a clumsy one – to again pointedly articulate the concept that death is not the final role for the Republican hero-martyr. As per the political resurrection motif famously extolled by Pearse himself, the grave is no obstacle for the deceased Republican as "over the city that gave him birth the wind of his spirit hovered". The following two verses continue in a similar vein, citing several of the executed 1916 leaders<sup>43</sup> who, like Pearse, are all portrayed as ethereal figures in the Dublin skies. The sense of paranormal eeriness is further accentuated with archaic descriptions of inclement nocturnal weather: "Toll the bells of Ireland, toll"; "The wind of his spirit hovered"; "His soul sailing under the morning star"; "The red wind

<sup>41</sup> Variation on "Róisín Dubh" ("Dark Róisín"). Archaic poetic personification of Ireland, Trinity College Dublin, <[http://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS\\_ID=SamuelsBox5\\_0620](http://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS_ID=SamuelsBox5_0620)> (05/2017). The lyrics for this ballad are reproduced with the kind permission of the Library of Trinity College, Dublin.

<sup>42</sup> The ballad lists the 15 leaders executed from May 3 to May 12, so it may be assumed that the work was penned before the execution by hanging of Sir Roger Casement in London on August 3, 1916.

<sup>43</sup> The executed republicans cited are: Michael O'Hanrahan, Thomas Clarke, Thomas McDonough, Edward Daly, Seán McBride, Michael Mallin, Thomas Kent and Eamon Ceannt, along with Pearse's younger brother Willie.

of death rushed by”; “The winds of Ireland ... / At dawn ... and at dark”; “In the mist”; “On His wind”; “The twelve winds of Erin”; “the grey-green winds”; “The purple winds ...”. Verse 4 is spoken by no less a narrator than God himself, who personally grieves for Joseph Plunkett and while addressing him directly, returns to the theme of equating the suffering of Ireland with that of the Biblical crucifixion: “I have a care for thee, / Since many a crown was for Ireland weaved, / Like one that was wove for me”. The Christian imagery is repeated in the following verse in which God proceeds to extol a martyrdom willingly embraced so as to alleviate the suffering of others: “I saw [Con] Colbert chose a felon’s path that a comrade might go free”. Verses 6 and 7 personify Ireland, portraying her in the familiar role of a lamenting mother in a perpetual state of suffering, the only escape for her ‘children’ being Republican martyrdom and immortality: “And the voice of Ireland chanted slow / ‘Only my dead are free’ ”. A conversation heavily-infused with religious imagery follows in which ‘Mother Ireland’ addresses God, claiming that the wreath of mourning she carries for her ‘sons’ is “of a thorn-bush ... made”, clearly implying that the 1916 leaders have not so much been executed, as crucified. Along with the wreath, she also offers God her chaplet containing 15 rosary beads, each symbolising one of her executed ‘sons’. The ballad writer’s representation of the executed 1916 leaders as a set of rosary beads in the hands of a mourning mother implies unity of political purpose and communal endurance. Coupled with the veneration of a maternal deity figure associated with rosary recitation within Catholicism, the image completes a picture of *pietà* – like suffering regularly promoted within the Irish physical-force tradition (Zimmerman 1967, 67; Sisson 2004, 162-163). Heavenly angels – *dramatis personae* notably absent from Republican death narratives – escort the 1916 martyrs to “the highest place”, where they are addressed by a God infuriated by “the black story of England’s way”, proclaiming that for “[t]oo long hath Ireland the thorn-path trod”. Ellis remarks that angels’ primary role in folksong was “to mediate between this world and the next so as to minimise the importance of death” (1979, 173), but here they appear to assist solely in the transition of the 1916 leaders into angels themselves, further evidence of revenant Republican song narratives eschewing a cathartic function for the wider Republican community. The ballad concludes with apocalyptic utterances from God as he descends to earth and vows to “ ‘show the dawning of Ireland’s day’ ”, by inflicting similar suffering on Britain: “ ‘Vengeance is Mine!’ said the mighty God, / ‘Is mine! I will repay!’ ”. The adaptation of God as a *de facto* IRA man is an interesting narrative development. While obviously infusing the Republican struggle with a further degree of hallowed sacredness, it is also an obvious acknowledgement of the vastly superior strength of Britain and consequently, the unlikelihood of an outright Republican victory in the classic military sense. The appropriation of a heavenly deity to the Republican struggle points to a

rather extreme development of the dramatic device whereby such ballads are used in an attempt at inverting the prevailing colonial power dynamic, and points clearly to the "perverse psyche of Republicanism" already discussed. Thus, if national liberation and control of political destiny are not possible via military victory over Britain in this life, then perhaps they may only be achieved symbolically by the embracing of suffering and endurance leading to an inevitable death – and importantly, resurrection and immortality – a consistent feature of the Republican song tradition that would benefit from further scholarly attention.

### *Concluding remarks*

Since the late nineteenth century, Irish physical-force Republicanism has displayed a propensity to elevate the tropes of endurance and heroic self-sacrifice as prerequisites of Irish national liberation. This essentialist ideal of "turn[ing] disaster into an emotional triumph" has created what Bishop and Mallie have termed "[t]he perverse psyche of Republicanism" (1987, 455). This is evidenced in the widespread promotion of heroic immortality throughout the ideological belief structure of Irish Republicanism. Within such discourse, death is popularly represented as having no finality, with deceased militants lionised as "hero-martyrs" (McCann 2003, 928) who have transcended death. In Republican popular culture, such figures are regularly portrayed as earthly patriots and mythological figures in equal measure. This paper has examined a diverse cross-section of Republican death ballads so as to identify how the tropes of sacrifice and immortality are represented and promoted within the *genre*. It has been established that such works display a narrative duality, by being thematically inspirational in parallel with their primary commemorative focus, with the twin tropes of self-sacrifice and immortality serving to reinforce this dichotomy. This is achieved by deliberately focussing the narrative on the Republican's martyrdom and in doing so, explicitly warning the audience not to allow this sacrifice to have been in vain. It has been demonstrated that by utilising the immortal dead as motivation for the living, a deliberate ambiguity has been contrived between matters corporeal and ethereal. Such ambiguity can be observed in the widespread utilisation of paranormal tropes within the popular musical tradition of Irish Republicanism. Several distinct categories of Republican death ballads have been identified, all of which are thematically supernatural to varying degrees. Several works represent Ireland as an idyllic, ethereal otherworld that awaits the deceased Republican, while others articulate a specific Republican Elysium that all volunteers will ultimately reside in. Works popularly portray the Republican hero-martyr as physically transcending the grave and subsequently returning to Ireland. Here, Ireland is no longer representative of a heavenly otherworld but is a clearly physical setting to which the revenant Republican returns.

Regular inconsistencies have been identified as to the *post mortem* status of characters within the ballads reviewed. It has been argued that the representation of death in Republican ballads is deliberately obfuscated so as to provide seamless continuity between the corporeal and ethereal realms, with such works progressed by focussing primarily on events before, and subsequent to, the Republican's death. Direct speech is regularly attributed to the arisen Republican so as to further accentuate the sense of immortality. Exclusively revenant apparitions are also widely employed throughout the canon. It has been demonstrated how the dead perform a very distinctive function within such works by pointedly instructing former comrades to continue the struggle for which they themselves have sacrificed their lives. Closing lines are regularly appropriated as inspirational constructs for the following generation in this regard, with the living effectively haunted by the dead into pursuing the task of national liberation to its completion. Such thematic utilisation of the dead is taken to extremity in several works through the graphic depiction of dead IRA volunteers marching beside the living to fight the British. Such ballads articulate a form of political purgatory that the hero-martyr cannot escape until the struggle for Irish liberation has been successfully concluded. A comparison with thematically revenant ballads from the broader canon of folksong has also been provided. A total of six distinctive features common to such works have been identified, while the almost complete disappearance of revenant narratives from traditional song in the modern era has also been noted. All six of these criteria have been demonstrated to be at significant odds with the established format of the revenant Republican ballad. This puts the *genre* under review in a somewhat unique position within the broader folksong tradition, demonstrating as it does, the complete absence of the modernising transition evident elsewhere. Further comparisons have revealed that revenant Republican ballads display no evidence of a severed close relationship, excessive grieving, or of revenants providing consolation to the living, all of which are universally found throughout folksong tradition. Thus, the revenants in Republican song provide no discernible catharsis for the wider Republican community, instead functioning primarily as motivating exemplars for future generations of militants. With the tropes of self-sacrifice, resurrection and heroic immortality being so deeply embedded within Irish Republicanism, revenant representations have been retained as inspirational tropes within the attendant ballad tradition with notable consistency. I argue that this is due to the ideal of heroic immortality – as represented by the revenant Republican hero-martyr – being too powerful and totemic a propaganda tool to permit its removal. Thus, the often explicitly essentialist nature of Irish Republicanism has acted as an effective barrier to the discarding of such revenant tropes from the Republican song canon, as has been demonstrated to be the case throughout the wider folksong tradition throughout the modern era.

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*Appendix*<sup>44</sup>

"Shall My Soul Pass Through Old Ireland?"

In a dreary Brixton prison where an Irish rebel lay.  
By his side a priest was standing, 'ere his soul should pass away.  
As he faintly murmured 'Father', as he clasped him by the hand.  
'Tell me this before I die: Shall my soul pass through Ireland?'

Chorus:

'Shall my soul pass through old Ireland, pass through Cork's old city grand?  
Shall I see that old Cathedral, where Saint Patrick took his stand?  
Shall I see that little chapel, where I pledged my heart and hand?  
Tell me this before I die: Shall my soul pass through Ireland?'

'Was for loving dear old Ireland in this prison cell I lie.  
Was for loving dear old Ireland in this foreign land I die.  
Will you meet my little daughter? Will you make her understand?  
Tell me this before I die: Shall my soul pass through Ireland?'

(Chorus)

With his heart pure as a lily and his body sanctified.  
In that dreary British prison our brave Irish rebel died.  
Prayed the priest that wish be granted as in blessing raised his hand.  
'Oh, Father grant this brave man's wish: may his soul pass through  
Ireland.'

(Chorus)

"Take Me Home To Mayo"

Chorus:

Take me home to Mayo, across the Irish Sea.  
Home to dear old Mayo, where once I roamed so free.  
Take me home to Mayo, there let my body lie.  
Home at last in Mayo, beneath an Irish sky.

<sup>44</sup> Copyright to reproduce the lyrics of "Brave Frank Stagg" and "Mairéad Farrell" has not been fully secured. Full texts are respectively available at: <<http://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=32684>> and <<http://www.bobbysandstrust.com/multimedia/songs#18>> (05/2017).

My name is Michael Gaughan, from Ballina I came;  
 I saw my people suffering and swore to break their chain.  
 I raised the flag in England, prepared to fight or die.  
 Far away from Mayo, beneath an Irish sky.

(Chorus)

My body cold and hungry, in Parkhurst Gaol I lie.  
 For loving of my country, on hunger strike I die.  
 I have just one last longing, I pray you'll not deny.  
 Bury me in Mayo, beneath an Irish sky.

(Chorus)

### “Kevin Coen”

No more he'll roam the laneways he wandered as a lad,  
 No more he'll welcome springtime as the green comes o'er the land,  
 For he stood in the gap of danger to redeem his country's loss  
 And he fell 'mid a hail of bullets on the road near Cassidy's Cross.

Chorus:

When Ireland is a nation from sea to roaming sea;  
 When we rid ourselves of Quislings and men are really free;  
 Remember him with honour, remember him with pride,  
 For he fought to free his country and for its cause he died.

He has gone to join the company of Sligo's gallant dead,  
 The six men on Benbulbin's slopes who fought and nobly bled,  
 Sheeran, Breheny, Gorman, Savage who bravely faced the foe,  
 Are there to greet the dauntless soul of Rusheen's Kevin Coen.

(Chorus)

Get out of our country England and take your thugs away,  
 For there are still men like Kevin in the Provo IRA,  
 Who will face your hired killers and die if that must be,  
 To establish peace with justice in a land that's truly free.

(Chorus)



"Seán Sabhat From Garryowen"

It was on a dreary New Year's Eve as the shades of night came down,  
 A lorry load of Volunteers approached the border town.  
 There were men from Dublin and from Cork, Fermanagh and Tyrone,  
 And the leader was a Limerick man, Seán Sabhat from Garryowen.

And as they moved along the street up to the barracks door,  
 They scorned the danger they might face, their fate that lay in store.  
 They were fighting for old Ireland to claim their very own,  
 And the foremost of that gallant band was Sabhat from Garryowen.

But the sergeant spied their daring plan, he spied them through the door.  
 The Sten guns and the rifles, a hail of death did pour.  
 And when that awful night was passed two men lay cold as stone.  
 There was one from near the border and one from Garryowen.

No more he will hear the seagull's cry o'er the murmuring Shannon tide.  
 For he fell beneath a Northern sky, brave Hanlon by his side.  
 They have gone to join that gallant band of Plunkett, Pearse and Tone,  
 A martyr for old Ireland, Seán Sabhat from Garryowen.

"The Ballad of John Greene"

All through the four kingdoms of Ireland  
 There rises a loud swelling peal –  
 A cry full of anger and sorrow,  
 They have murdered our brave Johnnie Greene.

A prayer rises up from the faithful,  
 The faithful in woe and in weal,  
 Tonight amongst the martyrs of Erin,  
 God rest you, brave Johnnie Greene.

You came to the red gap of danger,  
 And never bent knee to the foe,  
 You fought like a Gael and a soldier,  
 For a cause that lay trampled low.

When the deathless Irish Republic  
 Is rescued from slavery and shame,

We'll give you a place in her memory  
And a soldier's salute to her name.

And all Volunteers make answer  
When the foe in front of us yields,  
And we march to the dawnlight of freedom,  
You will lead us, brave Johnnie Greene.

“Seán MacNeela and Tony D’Arcy”

Brave Tony D’Arcy, brave Seán MacNeela  
From storied Galway and proud Mayo,  
They have walked the ways of deathless heroes  
And have won the glory that martyrs know.  
We’ll hold their deeds in our hearts forever,  
We’ll call their names over land and sea.  
We’ll tell their tales through generations  
By the glowing firesides of Ireland free.

Their lives they offered for *Poblacht na hÉireann*  
For truth and justice and stainless right.  
God give them rest in the Halls Eternal,  
For with hearts unbending they fought the fight.  
May Ashe be near them and brave MacSwiney  
And all who travelled the same hard road.  
Through the gloom and pain and the vale of shadows  
Where no bright hope star above them glowed.

They foe they fought was the foe of ages,  
The vile invader who laid us low,  
Whose empire strangles all peaceful nations,  
And robs the weak that itself may grow.  
While slaves in Ireland bow down to England  
And lower the flag that was floating high,  
Our best and bravest, and loved and dearest  
For *Poblacht na hÉireann* must fight and die.

Young men of Erin, our dead are calling  
To their living comrades in field and town,  
To join the standard of *Poblacht na hÉireann*  
And fight the forces of the British Crown.

Brave Tony D'Arcy, brave Seán MacNeela  
And all our heroes from sea to sea –  
We'll march beside you, 'til in joy and triumph  
We'll sing your praises in Ireland free.

"Hughes Lives On Forever"

In Derry's hills they mourn a son,  
A brave young Irish soldier's gone.  
The flame he carried still burns on,  
For Hughes lives on forever.

Chorus:  
Freedom's dawn has come at last,  
Judgement for injustice past.  
Your tyranny is dying fast,  
While Hughes lives on forever.

Guardian of the hill and dales,  
Tyrone and Derry loved him well.  
Though tortured in that H-Block cell,  
Hughes lives on forever.

(Chorus)

The scourge of Ireland's enemies,  
The SAS and RUC.  
Unconquered still, your spirit's free,  
For Hughes lives on forever.

(Chorus)

Brave Francis Hughes you're with us yet,  
Your murderers we'll not forget.  
They feared you then and they fear you yet,  
While Hughes lives on forever.

(Chorus)

“The Volunteer”

The gunfire split the still night air, from my side the blood flowed red,  
 Informer's work had been well done, an ambush had been laid.  
 My comrades turned back to my aid, I waved them on again,  
 Escape for me was hopeless: why should they die in vain?

The soldiers soon around me stood, their unit I could guess,  
 Their blackened faces could not disguise the hated SAS.  
 “Finish him off!” I heard one say as a gun moved towards my head,  
 “Tomorrow they'll all sing of another Fenian dead.”

“Just drop those guns down gently” a voice called from the dark.  
 They turned and fired a volley, but it seemed they missed their mark.  
 A stranger stood before them now, with eyes that seemed alight.  
 The cowards turned and quickly fled as he raised his Armalite.

His face, somewhere I'd seen before, though I couldn't tell just where,  
 But I knew from his green battledress that he was a volunteer.  
 He never said a word to me as we moved off through the night,  
 I was hoisted across his shoulders, a burden that seemed light.

“You'll be safe here”, at last he said, as a cottage door drew near.  
 “They're friends of mine, though we haven't met for many's a lonely year.”  
 He laid me gently down beside a wall of slate and stone.  
 I turned to thank my comrade brave, but I found I was alone.

When next I woke, I found myself with a family staunch and true,  
 I told them of my comrade strange, but it seemed they already knew.  
 I gazed upon that parlour wall, and things came clear at last,  
 And I thought of songs and of stories heard often in the past.

And I knew then that our struggle was a fight we could not lose,  
 For beneath his picture there I read “In memory of Francis Hughes.”

“Martin Hurson”

Among the hills of green Tyrone an Irish soldier lies.  
 The youthful Martin Hurson who for Ireland gave his life.  
 To uphold his country's dignity he followed Bobby Sands  
 On hunger strike for human rights, 'til death he took his stand.

Through dreary days in that H-Block cage, my thoughts returned to you.  
 Though beaten low by a savage foe, your memory saw me through.  
 In tortured nights you're prayers brought light and soothed fears and pain.  
 And though I'm gone you must fight on 'til Ireland is free again.

Now gaunt and pale in my H-Block cell, my heart still burns aflame.  
 In fondest dreams I drilled it seems among your hills again.  
 A guiding light to lead the fight to free my green Tyrone.  
 The voice of truth for Irish youth to crush the British throne.

Farewell my native green Tyrone and you sweet Bernadette.  
 My parents and companions brave, I'm watching over you yet.  
 Of Cappagh's braes, my childhood days, fond memories I recall.  
 And so adieu to the land I love true, *a chairde, slán go fóill*.

"Fergal Óg O'Hanlon"

I met a lad near Clones town,  
 A freedom fighter of renown,  
 Who fought and laid his young life down,  
 Brave Fergal Óg O'Hanlon.

His eyes were bright with freedom's glow,  
 As when on earth he walked below,  
 And with his comrades faced the foe,  
 Brave Fergal Óg O'Hanlon.

'God save you kindly', I did say,  
 'Have you a message to convey?'  
 'I have' said he – 'Fight on and pray  
 For Fergal Óg O'Hanlon.'

'At Brookeborough we fought and died,  
 Seán Sabhat and I fell side by side,  
 And now we've joined with joy and pride,  
 The hosts of Count O'Hanlon.'

Near Clones town he said farewell,  
 He vanished in an Ulster dell,  
 But forever in our hearts shall dwell,  
 Young Fergal Óg O'Hanlon.

“The Roll of Honour”

Chorus:

Read the roll of honour for Ireland’s bravest men.  
 We must be united in memory of the ten.  
 England you’re a monster, don’t think that you have won.  
 We will never be defeated while Ireland has such sons.

In those dreary H-Block cages, ten brave young Irishmen lay.  
 Hungering for justice as their young lives ebbed away.  
 For their rights as Irish soldiers and to free their native land,  
 They stood beside their leader - the gallant Bobby Sands.

(Chorus)

Now they mourn Hughes in Bellaghy, Ray McCreesh in Armagh’s hills.  
 In those narrow streets of Derry they miss O’Hara still.  
 They so proudly gave their young lives to break Britannia’s hold.  
 Their names will be remembered as history unfolds.

(Chorus)

Through the war torn streets of Ulster the black flags did sadly wave.  
 To salute ten Irish martyrs the bravest of the brave.  
 Joe McDonnell, Martin Hurson, Kevin Lynch, Kieran Doherty,  
 They gave their lives for freedom with Thomas McElwee.

(Chorus)

Michael Devine from Derry, you were the last to die.  
 With your nine brave companions with the martyred dead you lie.  
 Your souls cry out: ‘Remember! Our deaths were not in vain!  
 Fight on and make our homeland a nation once again!’

(Chorus)

“A Call From The Prison Graves”

In prison graves we sleep in death, we cannot battle more.  
 We fought the fight ’til our last breath, the stress and brunt we bore.  
 Now with life still in your veins, with manhood’s eager heart,  
 Before the flame we kindled wanes, we charge you, do your part.

The creed our blood rebaptised – then will you not serve it too?  
 We cannot man the breach again, 'tis you must dare and do.  
 Oh, what is life that you should pause or fear to cast behind?  
 Life consecrate to some high cause alone doth purpose find.

From our cold hands then take the sword, complete what we began.  
 By daring deed and fearless word, the sacred fire still fan.  
 Beside you in your columns proud we martyred ones will walk.  
 You, strong with life, we in our shroud, the tyrant still will baulk.

But should you fail – ah, God who gave us strength to strike the blow,  
 We each within our blood-soaked grave, your shame will curse and know;  
 And we will a fiercer pain than sting of England's lead,  
 If you betray, for ease or gain, the trust of martyred dead.

"Dark Rosaleen's Last Chaplet"

Forty feet deep they dug his grave, toll the bells of Ireland, toll.  
 They buried the man who Ireland would save but none could bury his soul.  
 Forty feet of Irish earth, the true heart of Pearse they covered,  
 But over the city that gave him birth, the wind of his spirit hovered.

His soul sailing under the morning star heard the desecrate city sigh,  
 And bearing his brother's soul afar, the red wind of death rushed by.  
 The winds of Ireland met up there, at dawn they met and at dark,  
 O'Hanrahan's soul on their wings they bore and the soul of Thomas Clarke.

The watchers down in the city heard MacDonough's soul go by,  
 But hardly his sleeping children stirred so gently he passed them nigh.  
 The souls of Daly and John McBride in the mist with Mallin's went,  
 And the Lord bade the soul of Thomas ride on His wind with Eamon Kent.

And the Lord was for Joseph Plunkett grieved and said 'I have a care for thee,  
 Since many a crown was for Ireland weaved like one that was wove for me.  
 Men knew that I broke not the bruised reed, yet they would not let me live.  
 My way was hard for My sons indeed and My mind is to forgive.'

'I saw Colbert chose a felon's path that a comrade might go free.  
 And much is pardoned to one that hath loved another as much as he.'  
 The twelve winds of Erin went to find the scattered souls of the rest,  
 And Heuston was found by the grey-green winds, the wind the wild birds love best.'

The purple winds swept up the Liffey tide for Connolly's soul unseen,  
And Seán MacDermott's, the last that died, God counted in all fifteen.  
The lights of Ireland gleamed below in the ring of her leaden sea,  
And the voice of Ireland chanted slow: 'Only my dead are free.'

'Dear Lord! Of a thorn bush my wreath is made', so mourned my Dark Rosaleen.  
'My chaplet tonight at Thy feet is laid, I give Thee my beads fifteen.'  
He heard who dwelt in the highest place and His angels silent led  
The waiting souls to His holy face and He spoke unto the dead:

'I have never yet dropped a feeble wing too small for mine eyes to see,  
Nor ever was sought by a hunted thing a refuge in vain with Me.  
I would the black story of England's way were blotted from my sight.  
I will show the dawning of Ireland's day he passing of her night.'

Then God from the steps of His high throne went down for many a mile,  
And He saw great England hard as stone and he bent in thought awhile.  
'Too long hath Ireland the thorn-path trod, I will turn my face away,  
Vengeance is Mine!' said the mighty God, 'Is mine! I will repay!'