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To cite this article: Hilary Joyce Bishop (2018) Memory and Legend: Recollections of Penal Times in Irish Folklore, *Folklore*, 129:1, 18-38, DOI: [10.1080/0015587X.2017.1388006](https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.2017.1388006)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.2017.1388006>



Published online: 15 Feb 2018.



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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Memory and Legend: Recollections of Penal Times in Irish Folklore

Hilary Joyce Bishop 

Abstract

Stories of priests being hunted down and murdered at Mass Rocks by priest-catchers and soldiers during the Penal era in Ireland persist to the present day. Using a tripartite taxonomy of memory, this article explores the reasons why these images continue to dominate and reflect the persecuted nature of Catholicism.

Introduction and Context

When they fled to the hills—priests and people—they carried God with them. No tabernacle now has he save His own blue canopy—no altar but the Carrig an Affrin—the Mass Rock. What a history of love and sorrow is evoked by that word! What a wealth of hallowed memories clings round that loved title! What a tragic tale it tells of ruined altars, and ruined homes. God homeless and His people homeless, yet God at home and His people at home as they gathered in the dark and the cold round the Rock of the Mass. (Lockington 1921, 51–52)

In Ireland, the period 1530–1750 witnessed major changes in the organization of Irish society that reflected significant ‘discontinuities, dislocations and traumata’ (Smyth 2006, 346). Familiar tranquil landscapes are cultural images that can often mask the social, political, economic, and spiritual processes from which they were formed (Robertson and Richards 2003, 4). Rather than being simply an inert backdrop to the momentous events that accompanied the advent of Protestantism in Ireland and the energetic attempts of the Roman Catholic faith to resist annihilation, the landscape provided a powerful arena for future devotion that shaped the profound theological, liturgical, and cultural transformations that mark this crucial period (Walsham 2011, 3).

Gaelic territories and peoples were governed and organized ‘mainly by the words and the living images associated with manuscripts, memory, local lore and myth’ (Smyth 2006, 58). The detailed naming of landscape features in Ireland and the stories associated with them were passed down from generation to generation. The human creation of Ireland’s mountains, rivers, lakes, and plains is described in the stories of both the *Lebor Gabála* and the *Dindshenchas* which have become embedded in Irish memory (Smyth 2006, 3). This mythical landscape has continued to provide ‘an ideal medium for the symbolism, manipulation and transformation of the past’ (Cooney 2008, 39).

The Williamite revolution of 1690–91 ensured the dominance of the Protestant minority in Ireland and both Williamite and Jacobite forces had seen themselves engaged in a war

of religion fighting for constitutional principles (Hill 1988, 99). It was the climax of the Reformation and of the long struggle between Protestant and Catholic political, social, and economic rivalry for supremacy in Ireland (Hayton 2004, 10). The Treaty of Limerick marked the end of the revolution, but Protestants believed its terms to be much too favourable towards the Catholics (Bartlett 1990, 1). They were deeply suspicious of the articles and believed that as long as the Stuart Pretender continued to be recognized by the Vatican and Versailles, their position in Ireland would remain threatened (Bartlett 1992, 17).

The Penal Laws were passed between 1695 and 1756, although it is reasonable to argue that Ireland's Roman Catholics had been in a state of suppression from as early as Tudor times. The degrading and dividing influence of the Penal Laws, which were enacted in defiance of a Treaty intended to guarantee Catholics freedom from oppression on account of their religion, and without the provocation of rebellion, extended to every field of Catholic political, professional, social, intellectual, and domestic life (Lecky 1892, 170).

The introduction of the Banishment Act of 1697 required all regular clergy, bishops, and those exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction to leave Ireland. Their expulsion was carried out in a highly efficient manner and those regulars, such as the Jesuits and Franciscans, who remained, or filtered back into the country, found refuge amongst wealthy Catholic families or remained under the pretext of being secular clergy, eventually registering under the Registration Act (English Statute, 1703, 2 Anne, c. 7, sec. 1). All registered priests were required to take an oath of abjuration, denying the right of James III to the throne and accepting Queen Anne as the rightful and lawful queen (English Statute, 1703, 2 Anne, c. 6, sec. 15). Few priests took the oath and those who refused forfeited any legal status which the Registration Act had offered them, resulting in a disruption to religious services. Priests were forced into hiding and the doors of the Catholic Mass Houses were closed (Connolly 1992, 276).

While the Penal Laws managed to limit the public expression of Catholicism, they did not ensure its elimination nor result in the mass conversion of Catholics (Bartlett 1990, 2). Despite chapels being appropriated by Protestant authorities and Mass Houses being closed, Mass continued to be celebrated in secret at a number of locations including barns, out-buildings, and private homes. It was frequently celebrated in ditches or under trees and bushes as well as at open-air altars known as Mass Rocks. The Mass Rocks were located in fields and glens or on mountainsides, and the majority are primarily known today at a local level, with information being passed down orally from generation to generation.

The Penal era remains an emotive and often misunderstood subject that continues to divide opinion and generate very different responses. Stories of the priest performing Mass at a Mass Rock and being hunted down by priest-catchers and militia alike, for execution or banishment, continue to the present day, but Marianne Elliott (2000, 2009) believes that this popular image remains largely unproven. She argues that there was in fact no systematic penal 'code' and that legislation was piecemeal, erratic, and rarely fully implemented. She further argues that the Catholic Church was not decimated, but instead flourished throughout the period and that, following an initial period when priests were persecuted, the practice of Catholicism continued without interference and Mass Houses were erected without protest (Elliott 2000, 164 and 166).

Elliott acknowledges that there were some parts of the country, such as Munster and Ulster, where the Penal Laws were utilized by ‘a particularly bigoted element in Protestant society’ (Elliott 2009, 166). She argues that the execution of priests has been subsumed into the story of the Penal era from previous centuries (Elliott 2009, 160) and that the prevalence of Mass Rocks throughout Ireland has ‘sustained the folklore of the priest and people preserving the faith against persecution’ (2009, 166). She points to the detailed investigation of the clergy of Clogher, carried out by the Reverend P. Ó Gallachair, which found such stories substantiated in only two cases, both in the seventeenth century, with one in the aftermath of 1641 (Elliott 2000, 174).

Folklore

Irish history has been plagued by a scarcity of archival materials, especially with respect to the early modern period (Meigs 1997, 4), due to the loss of much of the ‘grass roots’ material from across the country in the destruction of the Irish Public Records Office during the Irish Civil war in 1922 (Corish 1993, 90). Historians have therefore tended to focus upon providing an ‘authoritatively-documented narrative for Irish history’ using the calendars of Irish State Papers and other material held in the Public Record Office in London, the Vatican, and other established archives. But, as Mary Daly highlights, these resources tended to provide material for ‘writing Irish history from the standpoint of an administrative and religious elite, rather than from the perspective of common people’ (Daly 2010, 64).

The Irish Folklore Commission archive is the largest single resource available for the study of popular culture in Ireland’s recent past (Ó Giolláin 2005, 11) and has contributed significantly to defining the country’s intellectual and cultural heritage (Daly 2010, 63). The tales, music, songs, and traditions from Irish folklore have been described by Séamus Ó Duilearga as ‘the State Papers of a forgotten and neglected people’ (Ó Duilearga 1936, 399), and the main aim of the National Folklore Collection was to retrieve and rescue these cultural traditions before they disappeared (Daly 2010, 67). Despite this, scholarship in folklore and teaching and research relating to the history of modern Ireland have rarely aligned themselves, since historians and folklore scholars have mostly been interested in different topics as well as different source material (Daly 2010, 64).

One of the Commission’s first country-wide projects used the primary school system, with teachers coordinating material collected by the pupils at home (Ó Ciosáin 2004, 222). The Schools’ Folklore Scheme (1937–38) which resulted in more than half a million manuscript pages of valuable material, now known as the National Folklore Collection Schools’ Manuscript Collection (NFCS). Pupil attendance in the national school system was overwhelmingly Catholic and the children who participated collected folklore principally from family members, resulting in a pronounced partiality towards Catholic traditions (Beiner 2007, 55).

Seán Ó Súilleabháin, in his *Handbook of Irish Folklore*, stated that enquiries were to be made concerning the Penal days and were to include traditions found in particular districts (Ó Súilleabháin 1942). He called for the locations of Mass paths, Mass stones or altars, mountain hollows, caves, bushes, or other landmarks popularly associated with the saying of Mass or some other religious exercise during Penal times, specifically

suggesting that names and traditions connected with such places should be recorded. Ó Súilleabháin recommended that accounts of how Mass was heard and any name that may have been applied locally to temporary churches or buildings (e.g. *scálán*, 'hut') used for the celebration of Mass should be recorded. He encouraged the collection of information concerning where the clergy lived during Penal times and how the people could get in touch with their priest.

Sufferings and ordeals endured by priests and people in Penal times were to be recorded, including incidents of priest-hunting, betrayal, capture, punishment, or murder of priests, together with stories of unusual powers displayed by priests and any known escapes of priests from pursuers. Ó Súilleabháin called for information concerning help and shelter given to priests by persons of a different religious persuasion to be recorded, as well as stories of individual priests who won popularity and fame. Damage or destruction done to church property was also important, as were the experiences of the laity during the Penal times (Ó Súilleabháin 1942, 530).

In an article in *Folklore*, using material from the Irish Folklore Commission, Ó Ciosáin proposed a tripartite taxonomy for the study of memory in respect to the Great Famine and questioned the appropriateness of its application to other events (Ó Ciosáin 2004). This article takes Ó Ciosáin's framework and applies it in the context of the Penal Laws. As well as testing the relevance of the framework to an alternative event, this article echoes Ó Ciosáin's aims of helping to increase our perception of how ordinary people form an image of others, as well as of events in their collective. This is done through the use of their own local memories and through the mobilization of a body of both standardized and stylized folk narratives, and by adopting some elements of a learned and abstract historiography.

There are 125 volumes of the Schools' Collection for County Cork which form part of the National Folklore Collection; these volumes have been systematically studied by the author for entries relating to Penal times. Guy Beiner describes the communal activity of folk history-telling as an expression of historical discourse which recalls the experience of 'common' people narrated through their descendants (Beiner 2004, 203). These 'experiences' and the stories that accompany them cannot be fully understood in isolation and require placing within a broader context. I have, therefore, also analysed a range of historical and cultural sources in order to explore the legend of the priest murdered while saying Mass at the Mass Rock, which has become associated with the period.

The difficulties in using Folklore Commission archives are outlined by Beiner in *Remembering the Year of the French*, wherein he researches local memories of the events of 1798. He notes that the academic study of Irish folklore has always been strongly associated with the study of the Irish language and has therefore favoured material in Irish (Beiner 2007, 42). Field collection has also tended to focus upon rural areas and elderly informants (Beiner 2007, 44–45). He argues that because by the early twentieth century eyewitnesses to the events of 1798 were no longer alive, recollections had been transmitted as family traditions over two or three generations (Beiner 2007, 46). This poses even greater difficulties for the study of folklore concerning the Penal era, given its earlier position along the timeline of Irish history. Many of the stories in the Schools' Collection come from older generations and have been passed down orally

from parents to children and grandchildren. Taylor suggests that such folk versions are very informative since they are an indication of the way in which local people have ‘appropriated events to form an ideology that to some extent both defined and framed their perception of local reality’ (Taylor 1992, 151) and are, thus, highly relevant for our understanding of the period (1992, 145).

There is no standardized way of approaching the material contained within the folklore archive. Further, as Ó Ciosáin points out, some classic folkloristic categorization schemes, including those of Aarne-Thompson and Ó Súilleabháin, are inadequate either because they are designed largely for folk narratives that are fictional and imaginative (rather than historical) or because they derive from Scandinavian folk-life studies (Ó Ciosáin 2004, 223). Neither is it appropriate to apply the methods of oral history to the memory of historical events because little is known about the actual circumstances of the collection of the material and interviews cannot be repeated (Joutard 1977, 1983; Thompson 1985 cited in Ó Ciosáin 2004, 223). While Ó Ciosáin’s tripartite taxonomy is similar in structure to other taxonomies developed in studies of narrative and memory such as those by Yves Lequin and Jaques Métral (1980) or discussed by Topolski (1987) with respect to historiography, it offers a more relevant ordering of principles and categories for the Irish material, while at the same time embracing its diversity (Ó Ciosáin 2004, 223).

Memory

Ó Ciosáin suggests that there are three types or levels of memory; ‘global’, ‘local’, and ‘popular’. Usually deriving from written sources, global memory, as Ó Ciosáin describes it, is a level of information and interpretation that is abstract and usually national in scope. He describes local memory as being at the opposite end of the spectrum in that it aligns closely with folklore and oral history and can be termed as ‘straightforward recollection’. Consisting of stories based solely upon local knowledge or interest, often featuring named individuals, these stories and descriptions are atomized and fragmentary. However, Ó Ciosáin acknowledges that there is often some form of mnemonic involved, attaching the story to a specific place or building or some other point in the landscape (Ó Ciosáin 2004, 224–25).

Of particular significance is the intermediate level of popular memory, consisting of ‘a stylised repertoire of images, motifs, short narratives and supernatural legends’. Many of these form part of a wider international narrative repertoire. This wider repertoire forms a system of representation as well as a guide to behaviour during crises (Ó Ciosáin 2004, 225).

Local Memory

Religion involves the collective identity of a people and has strong affinities with the traditions and knowledge handed down from generation to generation (Cusack 2011, 2). Such traditions and knowledge are often handed down orally, and Gavin Andrews and his colleagues advocate the potential of these oral histories, as ‘they clearly demonstrate unique insights into the history of places’ by providing narratives about the recollection

of self, relationships with others, and place; insights rarely provided in such depth by other methods (Andrews et al. 2006, 170).

An intimate knowledge of ‘place’ is clearly evident within a number of entries of the Schools’ Collection for Cork. One child reports that *Cúm liath* (Coomleigh, ‘grey valley’) is so named ‘because of the fionnán or grey coloured grass growing there’ (NFCS 281: 334). The importance of Drimoleague Rock is highlighted in several entries. One child records that ‘in the centre of this district is Drimoleague Rock from which the land slopes north towards the river Ilen and south towards the village. Up to about 50 yrs ago the local fairs used to be held at the rock because it was a very convenient centre’ (NFCS 303: 7).

Personal memory can be selective and subject to mental deterioration and nostalgia, particularly in old age (Hobsbawm 1999; O’Farrell 1982–83). Thus, traditions that are passed down orally can die out. However, such fragmentation, bias, and selectivity can be one of oral history’s greatest strengths. Such subjectivity can often provide clues about the meanings of historical experience; the relationships between past and present, between memory and personal identity, and between individual and collective identity (Perks and Thompson 2006, 3).

Charles McGarvey (1956) reflects on local memory concerning Mass during the Penal days in Armagh. The text provides more than the simple identification of Mass sites; it demonstrates how historical experience can be transferred orally from one generation to another. The author writes that ‘none of the older generation, when I was a boy, ever remembered Mass said anywhere else in the Cross districts of the present Donaghmore parish. However, the late Rev. Hugh Quinn, a native of Gortindarragh, told me that Mass was said in olden days in Mickey Quinn’s Glen between Gortindarragh and Glenburrisk’ (McGarvey 1956, 183). This later fact is subsequently corroborated by Miss Maggie Quinn of Glenbeg, who remembers that ‘as a child her mother brought her with the other children to pray at the spot’ (McGarvey 1956, 183). The author remembers that sixty years earlier, in 1896, he heard from a very old man about a Father McCourt having ‘his “Trusted Ones” who always knew which Altar Green the Mass was to be said at the following Sunday. Sometimes he said Mass in gardens and other places’ (McGarvey 1956, 184).

In County Cork, many children interviewed reported Mass Rock locations and gave information about the surrounding area and topography including the names of relevant fields and their owners. For example, Mass was said at ‘Clash an Aifrinn [hollow/furrow of the Mass] in the land of Thomas Powell Lissarda and Cnoc Aileann [beautiful hill] in the land of Mr Daniel Wall Lissarda’ (NFCS 340: 161). One entry advises that ‘near Drimoleague Rock there is a rock called Carraig an Aifrinn [Mass Rock] where Holy Sacrifice used to be offered up in the Penal Days. It is in O’Brien’s farm’ (NFCS 303: 8), and another, in Irish, records ‘do bhí ortha dul I measg na gcnoc chun an Aifrinn do leigheam dos na daoine’ (they had to go amongst the hills for the Mass to be read to the people) (NFCS 281: 205).

Ó Ciosáin suggests that as the memory of the Famine was transmitted, it was probably those elements of local memory that corresponded most closely to popular memory and that were the most ‘tellable’ which survived in the narrative repertoire of the informants of the 1930s and 1940s (Ó Ciosáin 2004). In this way, popular memory structures local memory (Ó Ciosáin 2004, 226). This is also evident within the entries of the Schools’ Collection for County Cork with respect to the Penal era.

A number of the stories relate the help and support given to priests during the Penal period. One child writes that there was a place called ‘cúm an tSágairt (valley of the priest) about 4 m north of Drimoleague’ where one of the Mahonies used to have a horse ready for the priest when he used to go to Goulanes to say Mass. He/she writes that ‘if the day was foggy he would have to guide him on his way’ (NFCS 303: 197). Another entry advises that the ford in the river between a Mass Rock and a particular *cúm* (valley) was ‘known as ath an solais [ford of the light] because the neighbours used to light a fire there on dark nights so that the priest might find it more easily when returning from ministering to the old and the sick of the district’ (NFCS 281: 482). In Bantry, a priest hid from the soldiers for a short time in a cave called ‘Poll an tSagairt’ (hole of the priest) before making his escape. During his stay in the cave ‘a native of the district’ brought him food (NFCS 286: 27).

The perceived threat to clerics during the Penal era is made abundantly clear from numerous reports of ‘Red Coats’, ‘soldiers’, and ‘priest-hunters’. There are multiple stories, often reflecting differences in the details, describing how Priest’s Leap in Bantry got its name when a priest, pursued by soldiers, leaped across the sky on horseback and landed on a rock just outside Bantry (NFCS 278: 170, 278: 173, 284: 37–38, 286: 99, 289: 182, 303: 197 and 303: 298) and there are similar stories about a Priest’s Leap in bogland on Goggin’s Hill in Ballinhassig (NFCS 322: 206, 322: 207, 383: 33 and 386: 10). A priest was also pursued near Kilnadur while saying Mass in an old chapel about a mile away from the present-day school. The chapel was watched by the ‘Red Coats’ in order to arrest the priest, but he was informed accordingly and Mass was celebrated on a flag under a rock instead. It was celebrated at the same spot many times and was called ‘Carraig an Aifrinn’ (NFCS 305: 109 and 305: 112). Additionally, in ‘a field on Mr Sweetnam’s farm in the townland of Knocknamoholagh about a mile distant from Carraig an Aifrinn in a secluded glen’ there is a field known as Paírc an Easpaig (field of the bishops) where a priest was pursued by the Red Coats in the Penal days but ‘escaped as far as “Drom Caol”, a hill near Ballydehob’ (NFCS 296: 43).

The O’Keeffe family are identified as active priest-hunters in Penal times. The story is told that ‘somewhere not too far from the village of Cullen now stands, a priest came to celebrate Holy Mass. The usual lookout was kept for the enemy but he was captured at last. He was killed and it is told he left a curse on the family of the O’Keeffe that at the death of each male member of the family the dogs would be heard barking in the air’ (NFCS 323: 152). In Dunmanway, Cork, the Coxes are identified as a family of active priest-hunters (NFCS 303: 299). Their task was not always an easy one and several of the orders and directions from the Justices of the Peace of Cork, carried out by Samuel Porter of Inishannon, reveal that hunting priests in Cork was often dangerous work. He reported that the ‘popish persons have spirited and trained up their mobs in a most violent manner’ (Burke 1914, 213).

While entries from pupils near Enniskeane reveal that those of the ‘Established faith’ were not always as tolerant of Catholics as some historians have suggested (Elliott 2000, 2009; McBride 2009), with one child reporting that the Protestants near Enniskeane ‘were not friends with the priest’ (NFCS 306: 255), there is clear evidence of some accommodation and assimilation within the county. Protestants in the area were clearly tolerant of the erection of alternative Catholic places of worship as, at Carraig na Marbh

(rock of the dead), about half a mile north of Drimoleague, the Catholics were allowed to build a Mass House because the Protestants had taken possession of their church (NFCS 303: 198). In Ballydehob, the Swanton family were reported as being 'well disposed towards priests and Catholics' (NFCS 293: 91).

Despite this, the Schools' Manuscript Collection contains an abundance of stories concerning the murder of priests during Penal times. A number of stories focus on the spilt blood of the priest. The blessed 'Tobar na gcloc ndearg' (well of the red stone) south of Meelin derived its name from the blood of the murdered priest, said to have spilled on the rock (NFCS 380: 168), and we are told that there is a red stain on the Mass Rock in Rockchapel where a priest was killed by soldiers while saying Mass (NFCS 351: 222). In the townland of Curraghoe in the parish of Glanworth, Cork, there is a field called 'The Stone Field'. There are two stones in this field, one resting against the other. It is said that, at one time long ago, a priest was saying Mass in this field using the stones as an altar when suddenly soldiers arrived and captured the priest and killed him on the spot. There are red marks on the stones to the present day and local people say that these marks represent his blood (NFCS 373: 72).

On occasion, the death of a priest caused a transformation of the rock and at a place known as 'Comhla Bhreac' (speckled door) the rock bent into the form of a church door when a priest was murdered by a soldier on horseback while saying Mass there one morning (NFCS 276: 1). In Inniscarra, a priest was beheaded by soldiers while saying Mass at the Mass Rock:

the soldiers left the priest's head and body on the rock but when they were gone a woman came and wrapped the priest's head in a towel with the intention of burying it. As she was coming off the rock, the towel and its contents slipped from her hand and fell on to a ledge on the rock where it remained for some time. A few days afterwards a man was working by the rock. He was looking at the place where the priest had been killed when he saw the towel high up in the rock. He wanted to know what was in it so he climbed up the rock to the place where the towel was. He took it off but to his surprise he saw the image of a human head on it. The priest's head was taken and buried and from that day to this the human head can be seen on this rock, and that is why it is called 'carraig an aifrinn' which means the rock of the Mass. (NFCS 348: 71-72)

Because of his religious functions and role as God's minister on earth, a belief in the supernatural powers of the priest has always been strong in Ireland from the earliest days and it is understandable, therefore, that the priest is often portrayed throughout folklore 'as reacting to the temporal power of his tormentors by his own miraculous abilities' (Ó hÓgáin 1985, 205). In the absence of alternative social leaders during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century in Ireland, the local priest played a central role in the lives of his congregation that 'extended far beyond religious matters' (Connolly 1982, 56).

Stories are also recorded that tell of whole congregations being murdered. In the parish of Lisgoold, a congregation celebrating Mass at a Mass Rock was killed by soldiers (NFCS 387: 100) and, in the townland of Ardrahan in Kanturk, five people were killed during Mass although the priest, on this occasion, escaped (NFCS 353: 628-29). Near the village of Kealkil, the priest and his congregation were murdered by Cromwell's soldiers while they were saying Mass in a church (NFCS 284: 150), and we are also told that Cromwell's soldiers murdered a bishop and his congregation during the sacrament of confirmation about a mile from Ballydehob (NFCS 291: 96).

Global Memory

'Global' memory is relevant to the study of the sacred space of Mass Rocks for two reasons. First, the literary movement of the nineteenth century was rooted in earlier antiquarian study, popular nationalist literature, and folklore (Ó Giolláin 2000, 104). Leading figures such as Yeats and Lady Gregory were important students of folklore, interpreting the mythological and heroic Gaelic literature and drawing their inspiration from the supernatural world of fairy forts, holy wells, dolmens, and standing stones (Ó Giolláin 2000, 110 and 113). It is important to acknowledge that through a Byzantine system of folk belief, certain places within the Irish landscape became assimilated and understood in ways that had continuing meaning for subsequent communities (Cooney 2008, 39). The second consideration requires further expansion and relates to the fact that folk history concerning the Penal era tended to create stories which reflected the persecuted nature of Catholicism. These were subsequently commemorated in nationalist historiographies (Moran 1899; Burke 1914; Lockington 1921) and popular newsprint of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Most definitions of nation include a common historical memory within their criteria (Ó Giolláin 2000, 71). Early folklore scholarship thrived in countries where a new hegemony was being created and where histories had been 'characterised by rupture rather than continuity' (Ó Giolláin 2000, 76). Tradition, culture, and identity have usually been central concepts in the study of folklore (Ó Giolláin 2000, 70) and these elements form a system of symbols that allow ordinary people to participate in the building of a nation. The use of folklore as a historical source has an early pedigree in Ireland and can be traced as far back as *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (History of Ireland), the monumental work of seventeenth-century Gaelic historiography written by Geoffrey Keating, who referred to the oral instructions of the ancients as a primary source (Beiner 2007, 34). Douglas Hyde's seminal address to the National Literary Society in 1892 gave new importance to folklore in understanding Gaelic Ireland and called for the parallel creation of a movement reviving the Irish language and placing it centrally in Irish life (Ó Giolláin 2000, 114).

Folklore has also been used to advance the nationalist claims of ethnic communities and, in a newly independent Ireland, was 'recognised as a cultural resource for national identity' (Beiner 2007, 37). Nineteenth-century nationalism 'rested on the knowledge of Ireland's cultural distinctiveness, and increasingly on its Gaelic inheritance' (Ó Giolláin 2000, 94). The creation of institutions for the preservation of folklore were therefore representative of the 'Gaelicization' policy of the new state and the Gaelic League of 1893 was pivotal in attracting official support for the task of recording Ireland's folklore (Ó Giolláin 2000, 128–29). The Folklore of Ireland Society, founded in 1927, was followed by the Irish Folklore Commission in 1935 (Ó Giolláin 2000, 132).

Folk History Concerning the Penal Era

While Beiner acknowledges that popular print did not supersede oral culture, he argues that it clearly influenced it (Beiner 2007, 276) and my research presents clear parallels with his findings. He notes that despite the reading public being exposed to an abundance of texts, 'the formidable expectations of historical literature to reshape perceptions of

the past were conditioned by the persistence (often through mutations) of traditions embedded in social memory' (Beiner 2007, 277). He asserts that popular interest in certain historical events can spawn a wealth of primary and secondary historical material, while historical fiction can significantly influence people's perceptions of an event. He argues further that, while the information in printed material nourished oral tradition, it also filtered through to written folk history (2007, 277). Marianne Elliott believes that the writings of William Carleton provide an excellent example of how such fiction can interact with popular folklore (Elliott 2009, 160).

During the Penal Laws the mainstay of Catholic education had been the 'hedge schools'. Forbidden to teach, Catholic schoolmasters were compelled to do so secretly in remote places, usually by a hedge or bank in order to hide himself and his pupils from sight (Dowling 1968, 35). Hedge schools remained a feature of Catholic life until the nineteenth century when the National School system was introduced. Carleton, a former hedge school pupil and teacher, claimed that schoolmasters had utilized history lessons 'to promote dissident Catholic politics' (Beiner 2007, 292). He was scathing of the reading books used by schoolchildren, believing the content to be 'of a most inflammatory and pernicious nature, as regarded politics'. He further argued that 'as far as religion and morality were concerned, nothing could be more gross and superstitious than the books which circulated amongst them' (Dowling 1968, 65). Carleton drew attention to the fact that political pamphlets often found their way into the schools and were used as reading books (Dowling 1968, 67). In a survey of Tullaroan, County Kilkenny, published in 1819, the Rev. Robert Shaw notes the use of a book containing 'The Articles of Limerick' of which several thousand copies were 'sold every year throughout every part of the nation'. He comments that 'it is impossible for children to read without imbibing a spirit of disloyalty to the government' (Dowling 1968, 68).

Under the direction of Archbishop Hugh Boulter, a House of Lords committee was established in 1731 to ascertain the 'present state of popery' in Ireland. In response, the Mayor of Cork was unable to determine the exact number of Catholic hedge schools or 'popish' schoolmasters due to their abundance (McManus 2004, 20). By 1807, when Dr Coppinger, Bishop of Cloyne and Ross, drew up a list, there were 316 hedge schools in his diocese, catering for 21,892 children and equating to an average of six schools per parish (McManus 2004, 21). It would appear that in County Cork the hedge schools were predominantly Catholic led and Catholic taught. The *Survey of Tracton Abbey* revealed that in each Cork parish there was at least one school 'kept by a Roman Catholic master' and in the town of Middleton, according to *Mason's Parochial Survey of Ireland*, the books generally read were Catholic ones (Dowling 1968, 67).

By the turn of the century schools were often set up in or beside Catholic chapels and run under the supervision of the local clergy in order to maintain a reasonable standard of religious education. In 1792 a school was opened in Ennis, County Clare, by the Bishop of Killaloe supported by public subscriptions and replacing the smaller establishment that he had set up and personally financed twenty-five years earlier (Connolly 1982, 80). This period also saw the rise to prominence of teaching orders such as the Presentation Sisters (founded in Cork in 1777) and the Christian Brothers (1802) (Connolly 1982, 81).

When the National School system was introduced in the nineteenth century, Irish history was deliberately removed from the curriculum (Beiner 2007, 295). However,

Commissioners had no control over independent schools such as those run by the Christian Brothers. In 1825 the Commission of the Board of Education reported that a copy of *A Sketch of Irish History by Way of Questions and Answers for the Use of Schools* was located in one of the schools established by the Christian Brothers (Dowling 1968, 68). Christian Brothers' schools placed a particular emphasis on Irish history and by the end of the nineteenth century 'lessons increasingly inculcated militant nationalism' (Beiner 2007, 296). Following independence, education in Ireland was mainly controlled by religious organizations, meaning that the vast majority of children who actually received an education were educated under the auspices of the Catholic Church (Garvin 2006, 158). The Irish Free State recognized that history lessons were a valuable way to instil the ideal of a national Gaelic ethos and heritage. Christian Brothers' schools became integrated into the National School system, thus increasing their influence even further (Beiner 2007, 298). As Tom Garvin argues, 'schoolchildren were conscripts in a compulsory system driven by spiritual threats backed up by a politically powerful church, as were their parents' (Garvin 2006, 255).

Often labelled 'the Bible of popular nationalism', one of the key texts employed by the Christian Brothers was A. M. Sullivan's *The Story of Ireland*. Originally published in 1867, the text was reissued in more than thirty editions and became a popular source of reference in homes across Ireland (Beiner 2007, 300). The second half of the eighteenth century saw the beginning of widespread lay reading, in both English and Irish, as a result of the expansion of the rural economy, which meant that more people were able to read and had more money to buy books (Ó Ciosáin 2004–2006, 82). The most salient feature of this literature was that it was overwhelmingly religious (Ó Ciosáin, 2004–2006, 83). Sullivan was from Cork and an author, journalist, and politician. His work was 'hugely influential' and introduced another language in which 'nation' became 'religion' (Foster 2001, 6 and 8). The introduction of reading rooms in the late nineteenth century widened the audience further. Reading rooms of the National League in rural parishes and the Catholic Young Men's Societies in towns ensured that the reports and speeches of journalists such as Sullivan reached 'ordinary Irish people' (Whelan 2004, 313).

The Christian Brothers' *Irish History Reader* describes the Penal era as 'a night of deepest horror' (Christian Brothers 1905, 238). Concerning the celebration of Mass, it advises that 'in assisting at Holy Mass the utmost care was necessary to prevent detection, and when the congregation had assembled, sentries were posted on all sides. Despite all precautions, however, the worshippers were often taken by surprise, and the priest's blood was shed upon the altar stone' (Christian Brothers 1905, 240). The value of the Penal Laws, as perceived by those historians who were functioning pastors within the Catholic Church, was as an evangelizing tool and James Kelly points out that 'they were forthright from the mid-nineteenth century in fore-fronting the religious repression that their forebears experienced by reason of these laws in order to inspire Catholics to greater loyalty to the institutional church and to greater exertion in their devotional life' (Kelly 2011, 28). Kelly goes on to argue that nineteenth-century historians were so content to echo clerical claims that the Penal Laws sought to destroy the Catholic Church that such interpretations have remained difficult to dislodge (Kelly 2011, 28–29). By the mid nineteenth century a significant number of Catholics considered the Penal

Laws to be a ‘conscious and carefully contrived attempt to effect the destruction of their religion’ (Kelly 2011, 38).

In *A Child’s History of Ireland*, the author writes that ‘these laws were mainly intended to suppress the Catholic religion’ and further advises that ‘Catholic bishops remained all through the country in spite of every effort to discover them, living in huts in remote places under various disguises, and meeting their congregations by night’ (Joyce 1903, 389 and 392). In the following year, Mary Gwynn produced *Stories from Irish History*. She explains that her chapter on the Penal days is a short one due to the sadness that accompanied the wrongdoing and cruelty of the period (Gwynn 1904, 142).

There are other authors who give a vivid account of clerical persecution (Moran 1899; Burke 1914; Lockington 1921). Priests carried out their duty in the face of death, labouring in ‘the gloom of the mountain cave, and under the shadow of the hedge, willingly facing martyrdom that Ireland might keep true’ (Lockington 1921, 131). In *The Soul of Ireland*, Lockington’s dramatic account begins ‘gaze at the dark stain on the gray stone’ and goes on to describe ‘the flash of the musket, the priest lying across the stone, dyeing it with his life-blood—still clasping the chalice to his breast—dead’ (Lockington 1921, 53).

Daily newspapers tell the nation its own collective story through daily instalments (Garvin 1990, 23). First published in 1905, the *Irish Independent* was the first halfpenny popular paper in Ireland (Steele 2014, 63) and became one of Ireland’s most influential newspapers (Steele and de Nie 2014, 10), bringing mass readership to the Irish and reaching a daily circulation of 100,000 by the outbreak of war in 1914 (Steele 2014, 64). Scenes of remarkable devotion and piety appear in a number of issues and are particularly evident in the 1930s when much of the folkloric material was being collected. ‘A Catholic Centenary’ commemorates Mass at the Burren Rock in Bryansford where ‘Mass was offered secretly in the dark penal days, under the shadow of the Mourne Mountains’. Readers are told that after Mass the Blessed Sacrament was carried in procession to an altar in an adjoining field where Benediction was given to a congregation of over two thousand people (*Irish Independent*, 28 October 1930). In ‘Benediction at Mass Rock’, events of a similar nature are reported at the Mass Rock at Crana River, outside Bunrana, County Donegal, where the parish priest addressed an open air congregation of over three thousand people (*Irish Independent*, 19 June 1933).

One of the biggest gatherings took place at the Mass Rock in the Glens of Antrim near Cushendun in 1934 where ten thousand people are reported to have joined in an annual procession of the Blessed Sacrament from St Patrick’s Church. In ‘Mass Rocks in the Glens’, we are told that the parish priest from St Malachy’s Belfast, the Very Reverend J. P. Clenaghan, delivered a sermon which could not have failed to have left an impression upon the congregation. He reviewed the ‘long night of persecution’ through which the Irish people had passed and alluded to the sacrifices they made for the Mass in Penal Days: ‘The Mass Rocks and lonely altars on the mountain sides of Ireland are an abiding testimony of relentless persecution on the one hand, and on the other the fidelity of the Irish people to the religion of their ancestors’ (*Irish Independent*, 5 June 1934). At another annual pilgrimage to the Mass Rock at Ballyholland, the Very Reverend J. Canon Magee is reported to have delivered an ‘eloquent sermon dealing with the historic associations of the rock, when their forefathers were prepared to sacrifice everything to hear Mass’ (‘The Mass Rock at Ballyholland’, *Irish Independent*, 10 August 1936). Such priests kept

the Penal stories alive by continuing to pay their respects at these Mass sites. We are told that in Cork, about three miles from Blarney, there was a church by a fort in Healy's farm where a priest was killed after saying Mass. The altar stone was still in existence in 1937–38 and it was said that the priest from Whitechurch never passed without going in and saying a prayer there, even bringing palm leaves to the site on Palm Sunday (NFCS 349: 24–25).

Visits to Mass Rocks were encouraged amongst schoolchildren. In the Parish of Rathcormack, one child writes:

Last Tuesday week, being a holiday from school, our School Master and the school boys decided to go to Carraig an Aifrinn. We met at the top of the green and then we started our excursion. We had a donkey and car and a pony and car to carry us in. It was a fine warm sunny day. When we were walking on the mountain a nice healthy breeze was blowing. When we arrived at Carraig an Aifrinn all the boys went to see the historical rock and said a few prayers. (NFCS 381: 399d)

Kelly believes that it was the religious dimensions of the Penal Laws, to the virtual exclusion of all other aspects, that became the focus of Catholic clerical historians who amplified the severity of both their provisions and the rigidity with which they were implemented (Kelly 2011, 41). As a result, in the first half of the twentieth century in national as well as in diocesan, county, and regional histories, it became commonplace to highlight the religious dimension of the Penal Laws and to focus on the often disturbing experiences of individual bishops and priests at the hands of 'priest hunters' and 'bigoted Protestants' to the detriment of all other aspects (Kelly 2011, 42). Indeed, this religious element became 'the official orthodoxy, and the dominant viewpoint' within textbooks issued between 1920 and 1950 to major schools and universities, not just in Ireland but in Irish America too (Kelly 2011, 42–43).

But what of the books that were used in schools across Ireland during the 1930s? In remarks to the National School Commissioners in 1922, Pádraig Ó Broilcháin, the new chief executive officer for education, made clear the intention of the new regime to Gaelicize all aspects of the curriculum in order to create a truly Irish outlook that would highlight the struggle against oppression down through the centuries. Emphasis on this aspect of the policy intensified throughout the 1930s when the newly appointed Minister for Education, Thomas Derig, confirmed his commitment to school programmes in which Irish language and history would unite to nurture a patriotic and Gaelic Ireland (Coolahan 1981, 42). Sean Farren notes that this was embodied in the statement aims for the teaching of history in the 'Notes for history teachers' which were circulated in 1933 by the Department of Education. These stated that one of the specific objectives for that subject was 'the study of the Gaelic race and Gaelic civilisation and of the resistance of that race and civilisation for a thousand years to foreign domination, whether Norse, Norman or English' (Farren 1995, 147). 'The Literary Reader Series', together with a small number of approved history books, were used in the National School classrooms from 1924 onwards. They continued to be used for at least a further six decades (Frehan 2012, 37) and also found their way into classrooms in schools across Australia for much of the nineteenth century (Jamison 2016a). The Sixth Reading Book (1898) contained a dedicated section on Edmund Burke, one of the key political figures in Irish history and a prominent critic of the Penal Laws (Jamison 2016b).

In Cork, older publications continued to act as a source of reference for more contemporary authors. A tribute to the memory of Jeremiah O'Mahony was published in 1975. O'Mahony's *West Cork and Its Story* appeared in serial form in the newspaper *Realt a'Deiscairt* (Southern Star) between 1949 and 1950. This later publication paid deference to the hunted priest and the holy sacrifice offered to the congregation on the lonely hillside while sentries kept watch for 'the possible arrival of the bloodhounds of the law'. O'Mahony explains that 'the murders of individual priests were too numerous to excite wonder and the torture was a favourite method of punishment for those clergy who dared continue performing their sacerdotal duties despite decrees and laws', citing two such examples in his native Cork area. The text pays testament to such events through local place names such as Carraig an Aifrinn and Pairc an Aifrinn (Mass field) throughout West Cork as 'silent proof of what our people suffered for the faith' (O'Mahony 1975, 236). Similarly, in his *History of Newmarket County Cork*, D. H. Allen reflects upon older traditions concerning the deaths of two priests in a glen in the area (Allen 1973, 50).

Historical records for Cork indicate that priests were more likely to be simply imprisoned during the Penal period rather than murdered. John Sleyne and Donough McCarthy, two of the three bishops serving in the united diocese of Cork, Cloyne, and Ross between 1692 and 1746, were long-term prisoners in Cork city (Dickson 2004, 53). The story is similar in other counties. In County Clare, twenty-four priests were voluntarily imprisoned in Ennis jail (O'Brien 2006), and in Limerick the Grand Jury presentment book shows that there were proceedings against priests at every assizes from 1711 to 1726 when the record ends (Burke 1914, vi).

There is little doubt, however, that a priest's job was not an easy one. MacCarthy Rabach, an elderly bishop from Youghall, was forced to go into hiding for two years (Dickson 2004, 59) and James Gallagher, Bishop of Raphoe, sought refuge on one of the islands in Lough Erne between 1735 and 1737 (Mac Murchaidh 2011, 152). Sources suggest that it was difficult for Gallagher to function as a bishop and that life as a Catholic cleric in Raphoe was particularly hard (Mac Murchaidh 2011, 153). As well as going into hiding, priests also disguised themselves from their congregations and Ignatius Murphy notes that priests would have blended in with the laity and adopted their dress accordingly. He reports that priests tended to wear frieze (a coarse woollen cloth) similar to their parishioners in rural parishes while adapting their dress in towns and cities to mirror the more middle-class members of their congregations. The wearing of the Roman collar and, for the religious, the habit, was introduced much later (Murphy 1991, 144). Tomás Ó Fiaich advises that by 1710 priests had found another way of circumventing penalties, through the celebration of Mass with their face veiled or with a curtain between themselves and their congregation (Ó Fiaich 1971, 49).

Popular Memory

The intermediate level of 'popular' memory consists of 'a stylised repertoire of images, motifs, short narratives and supernatural legends' and is of particular significance because it forms part of a wider international narrative repertoire. Ó Ciosáin argues that this wider repertoire, in turn, produces a system of representation (Ó Ciosáin 2004, 225). He highlights the relationship that exists between the layers of popular memory and

global memory, and proposes that popular memory acts as a framework of reception for aspects of the abstract and long-term accounts of the Famine in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Ireland. Looking at the story beyond the story, he suggests that two meta-narratives would have created an undercurrent that may have informed the memory of this event. The first he describes as a nationalist political meta-narrative, the other religious and Catholic (Ó Ciosáin 2004, 226). Specifically, he cites the nationalist version of the Famine presented as an episode in a longer history of Anglo-Irish conflict and the Catholic narrative as an extreme and distasteful, although not entirely uncharacteristic, stage in a longer history of conflict between religions. The source of these stories is most probably the Catholic meta-narrative, whether directly in written or printed form or indirectly through sermons or speeches. Consequently, the stories represent global memory. He argues that, overwhelmingly, the global has been assimilated to the popular (Ó Ciosáin 2004, 228).

Cardinal Moran's *The Catholics of Ireland under the Penal Laws in the Eighteenth Century* was published in 1899. Moran was Archbishop of Sydney, Australia, and based the first chapter of his book on an article that had first appeared in the *Dublin Review* in 1822 and subsequently in a series of papers in the *Australian Catholic Record*, published in Sydney. The Cardinal writes that 'never has a whole nation suffered more for the Faith than Ireland; and nowhere has fidelity to God and loyalty to the Holy See, amid unparalleled sufferings and national humiliation, achieved more glorious victories or been crowned with happier results. Those victories of the Faith and those grand religious results are a priceless heritage, of which the Irish race at home and abroad is justly proud to the present day' (Moran 1899, unpaginated preface).

In Moran's account of Dr John McColgan, appointed to the see of Derry in 1752, we find an example of how global memory can be assimilated into popular memory. Initially living in a whitewashed cottage at Muff, County Donegal, the prelate was compelled to take refuge in his native mountains of Carndonagh, in Inishowen, as the storm of persecution became more threatening. Moran writes that McColgan remained concealed in the house of a Presbyterian farmer for a few days, but one evening, as the farmer was ploughing his field, a messenger came running towards him announcing that there was a party out searching for the bishop. The farmer unyoked his horses and provided one of them to the prelate so that he could escape down to the river at Lanankeel, where he found a boat that took him safely to Fannett. The Cardinal reports that 'they were only a short time gone when the pursuers arrived in Carndonagh. They reported that "they found the nest, indeed, but the bird was gone"' (Moran 1899, 27). This phrase appears to form the basis for accounts found in the Schools' Collection for Cork in 1937–38. In the records for Kanturk, one story relates how a priest is warned of soldiers plotting to kill him. When they arrive at his house the priest is gone and we are told that the commander of the soldiers says that 'the nest is warm but the bird has flown' (NFCS 353: 627). In the Glanworth records, an almost identical story involves the Grimes family of priest-hunters. Their plot to capture the priest is unsuccessful because he is able to escape and hide in a tree. They too reflect that 'the nest is hot but the bird it is gone' (NFCS 373: 148).

The potential for the assimilation of global memory and popular memory remains. On 29 September 1979, millions gathered in Phoenix Park, Dublin, to hear Pope John Paul

II. The ‘Mass-Rock-persecuted-religion’ aspect of the Penal Laws within the story of the Irish nation was the focus of his speech:

I am thinking of how many times, across how many centuries, the Eucharist has been celebrated. How many and varied the places where the Masses have been offered, in stately mediaeval and in splendid modern cathedrals, in early monastic and in modern Churches; at Mass Rocks in the glens and forests by hunted priests, in poor thatched-covered chapels, for a people poor in worldly goods but rich in the things of the Spirit, in ‘wake houses’ or ‘station houses’ or at great open-air hostings of the faithful. (Veritas 1979, 5)

Concluding Remarks

It has been argued by some that the murder of priests at the Mass Rock is a Penal ‘myth’ and that the dominance of the ‘Mass-Rock-persecuted-religion’ aspect of the Penal Laws within the story of the Irish nation has served merely to distract from their real significance (Elliott 2009, 167; Kelly 2011, 42). My research supports this argument in that I have not found any historical basis for the belief that priests were murdered at Mass Rocks, but the record is not so silent on those who allegedly hunted them. William Burke discusses the Grand Jury Presentment Book for the County of Limerick, which records full particulars of priest-hunting for both Clare and Galway (Burke 1914, vi). Patrick Corish, while acknowledging that there is some truth in the popular notion that the priest was a hunted man, believes that it happened frequently only in the north of Ireland where there was a considerable Protestant population, and that in other areas of the country such activity was exceptional (Corish 1970, 5).

Despite this, evidence of the difficulties endured by priests may be found in Irish-language sources in County Cork from the period. Vincent Morley examines the work of several poets from various social strata and localities. A native of Cork, and both a poet and a priest, Conchubhar Ó Briain (1650–1720) complains of a lack of prelates ‘to direct the flock in the face of the foreign hounds’ (Morley 2011, 176). Eoin Ó Callanáin, a physician from the Carbery district of west Cork, writes that ‘every year that comes is worse for us, and our clergy have no churches but the threat of death and bondage always with them’ (Morley 2011, 177). According to Morley, the image of the clergy heroically defying the pressures and brandishments of a heretical and oppressive state remained in later decades. A later poem, which he attributes to the 1740s, includes a reference to the clergy being driven onto the hillsides. A farmer and schoolteacher from north Cork, Seán Clárach Mac Dónaill (c. 1690–1754), writes: ‘O Son of God, are you tired of your clergy’s wandering, with them being cast out onto the hill tops and on every mountain peak?’ (Morley 2011, 186). As Morley states, it is evident that ‘the image of the harassed fugitive priest, an image formed in the opening years of the century, retained its place in popular culture during the decades that followed’ (Morley 2011, 187).

Many of the images associated with eighteenth-century religion, including the Mass Rock, the fugitive clergy, and the priest-hunter, were popularized by the generation that had fought for Catholic Emancipation in the 1820s (McBride 2009, 215) and these images are clearly identifiable within the Schools’ Manuscript Collection for Cork. There are reports of priests hunted a mile from Bantry at ‘Priest’s Leap’ (NFCS 303: 197) and murdered by English soldiers while fleeing for their lives in Kilcassan about two miles

west of Ballineen (NFCS 306: 228). Similar events occur in Coomleigh (NFCS 282: 482) and in James O'Mahoney's field in Cloundereen (NFCS 313: 150), while in Macloneigh a number of monks were reportedly slaughtered (NFCS 339: 55). In the Coomleigh Mountains, the body of a priest murdered by soldiers was buried and marked by standing stones (NFCS 282: 482), and about two miles east of Bantry it is reported that there is a height called 'Ard an t-Séipéil' (chapel hill) because there was a church there long ago. It appears that 'one day when the priest was saying Mass the soldiers came and they took him out and killed him' (NFCS 284: 38). One child reports that during Penal times a priest was saying Mass on a hill on John Connor's land of Droumcoora, protected by two men watching for soldiers. The soldiers managed to avoid detection and killed a young boy who was serving Mass. The priest tried to hide, but 'the soldiers found him and killed him' (NFCS 293: 406). Other priests are also reported as having been killed; two in Bealad, Clonakilty (NFCS 307: 88), two in the townland of Knox (NFCS 307: 89), and a further two in Scarteen. Here we are told that the priests were betrayed and when the priest-hunters came to arrest them they were shot dead trying to escape. The spot where they were killed is reported as being marked by two blackthorn bushes. The priests were able to hide the chalice before they fled and its hiding place is now marked by a beech tree shaped like a chalice (NFCS 353: 169).

Despite folk narratives describing the death of numerous priests, including that of Father Hegarty who had hidden in a sea cave on the banks of Lough Swilly, County Donegal during the 'times of persecution' (Maghtochair 1867, 69), McBride highlights the fact that no priest was in fact executed for a 'Penal' offence, with the possible exception of Timothy Ryan who was convicted at the Limerick assizes of 1726 for officiating at a 'mixed' marriage (McBride 2009, 233). It is clear that memory of the Penal era is underpinned by certain meta-narratives that are reflective of nationalist politics and religion, both of which have conspired to create a Penal legend which remains largely unproven. Such meta-narratives continue to influence both the perception and the memory of the period, while the image of the persecuted priest has remained a central part of Catholic culture in Ireland.

One of the earliest images to appear on modern murals in Northern Ireland, introduced after the ceasefires of the 1990s, can be found on the gable-end of a house on the Ardoyne Road in Belfast and is almost a carbon copy of a painting by John Dooley Reigh entitled *A Christmas Mass in the Penal Days—The Alarm!*, which appeared as a free Christmas supplement to the *United Ireland* newspaper of 20 December 1884. Reigh's painting was also possibly the inspiration for an article by M. McGuinness in *The Irish Monthly* which describes a moonlit scene with a priest and his congregation at a Mass Rock on a mountainside in the snow. Their secret location discovered, they are surrounded by soldiers and a shot rings out to the cry of 'shoot the papist dog' (McGuinness 1932).

Similar snow scenes appear in the Cork NFCS entries. At Carraig an Aifrinn near Berrings, a thirty-year-old priest, who had just arrived from Rome, was saying the Consecration one Christmas morning when a company of priest-hunters murdered him at the altar (NFCS 348: 220). In Kilmakilloge on the Beara Peninsula we are told that 'on Christmas night Father Downey arranged to have a Mass . . . Two days before Christmas a heavy shower of snow fell over all the surrounding country. On Christmas night the

people were stealing away to the house in which Father Downey was saying the Mass and a man who saw them told Puxley in Dunboy who followed the footprints in the snow to the house in which father Downey was saying Mass. They hid in the wood nearby until he was alone with the boy and then they rushed in and killed him' (NFCS 274: 411–12).

This article has taken Ó Ciosáin's tripartite taxonomy for the study of memory and applied it in the context of the Penal era. Ó Ciosáin questioned the appropriateness of its application to other events, arguing that there are relatively few large collections of narrative similar to the Famine material (Ó Ciosáin 2004, 229). The body of material explored in this study has shown the usefulness of his taxonomy for exploring and understanding memory of the Penal era and the legends that have become associated with the period. There is strong evidence that while local memory identified places and people, 'global' memory was structured by meta-narratives that derived from the Catholic Church and nationalist politics. The intermediate level of popular memory arose from both the local and the global, and included a folk narrative tradition. It formed a coherent system of representation that was replicated both geographically and temporally.

While Ó Ciosáin introduces three discrete levels of memory, evidence suggests that these levels are mutable and interactive. This is exemplified through the writings of Cardinal Moran in Australia. The first chapter of his 1899 publication was based on an article that had first appeared in the *Dublin Review* in 1822, and may be found repeated in local narratives within the Schools' Manuscript Collection for Cork in 1937–38.

Many of the traditional beliefs associated with the image of the Penal era of Irish folk memory have been challenged in recent decades (Whelan 1997, 214), yet Garvin argues that older traditions are 'still "knocking around" in our modern cultures and have certainly not been consigned to the national cultural attics of the modern nation states' (Garvin 1990, 19). He is of the opinion that memories of confiscation and a strong Catholic faith have been ineffectively disguised in 'the rags' of a 'dead Gaelic identity' and lie behind much of the notion of a 'secular modern national identity of English-speaking Ireland' (Garvin 1990, 21). With Pope Francis due to visit Ireland in August 2018 ('Pope's Visit to Ireland Will Not Draw the 1979 Crowds of 2.7 m', *Irish Times*, 29 November 2016), it will be interesting to see whether a focus upon the 'Mass-Rock-persecuted-religion' remains and how this is reflected in future memories of the Penal era.

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