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Dear Eva Votavová,

Thank you for the opportunity to evaluate Martina Vacková Reiterová's dissertation 'Revivalist Movements in Brittany, Ireland, Scotland and Wales around 1900: Discursive Strategies of Self-representation and Relationship to Celtic Identity'. I have read the dissertation carefully, and, with some qualifications that I detail in the comments that follow, deem that it is a **pass**.

Reiterová has produced an analysis that is very much in a social scientific framework—the strengths and weaknesses of the study proceed in part from the relatively rigid elements of research design associated with that approach, which tends to subordinate detail to the elaboration of an explanatory model. That model, however, is highly original. In short, Reiterová supplies a novel analysis that advances knowledge. There are points in the dissertation that would repay closer attention were it to be submitted for publication.

The study takes 'revivalist' organisations in four 'countries/nations' (Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Brittany) and interrogates, using a qualitative methodology, discourses in their leading publications (along with a few other titles from Wales) to explore them comparatively along a number of axes: language, education, popular culture, history, an 'apolitical and loyalist stance', and the associations' agendas and claims to the status of a 'movement'. It finally seeks to assess the extent to which 'Celts' and 'Celticism' were discursively mobilised in their projects.

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IMPROVE LIFE.

The central premise of the dissertation, drawing on Leerssen (13) is that the trajectories of national-identity development, at least as articulated through specific institutions, should not only be charted discretely, but also in comparative terms (as well as through any dialogues amongst the representative organisations chosen in this study).

The analysis is undertaken within a methodological framework that identifies and explores strategies and forms of self-representation and discourse-formulation and dissemination (13-15). It is a sound approach—one that signals the project’s embeddedness within social scientific practice and a form of research design and model-development that at points constrains analytic elaboration—especially, as noted above, in terms of engagement with the nuances and details of historical context.

Reiterová’s conclusions underscore similarities and differences in what the study characterises as collective representation in these countries, at least as it is constituted through the source base. Amongst the conclusions: that language was presented as the main focus of cultural cohesion by the groups under examination (what might be regarded as ‘propounders’), except in Wales, where the ‘revival’ (the term that Reiterová employs) prioritised history, culture, and literature (indeed these were entwined). Reiterová attributes this divergence to the comparatively earlier development of the Welsh revival, which is periodised and discussed in the study, as well as to the relative robustness of Welsh language speaking by the late nineteenth century. In contrast, Scottish, Irish, and Breton language supporters advocated for bilingualism (in many cases inspired by Wales, which was seen as an exemplar to revivalist movements). All propounders, in advocating for language advancement, faced similar problems—highly regional concentrations of speakers, including in Wales, and the relative absence of speakers in industrial, urban areas (though C.J. Withers’ *Urban Highlanders* [1998] would be instructive reading for the author). Other factors related to the profoundly different organisation of the French and United Kingdom states—which had implications for language acquisition through the education system, for instance (notably absent from this analysis, though, is a discussion of the unevenness of UK multi-national governance in the period under study – Scotland had a Scottish Office from 1885, Wales gained one eighty years later, and of course Ireland was an outlier in myriad respects).

An important element of this research, and an original contribution to knowledge, is that a ‘Celtic’ identity was not privileged (or, in the Irish case, even favoured) by the propounders under study. Reiterová underscores this point, and the ambivalences, hostilities and (in the case of Brittany, openness) to the discourse during the period under study.

Some of the categories of analysis are clearly defined—language, education, and history. Popular culture, as I note below, is narrowly treated in institutional terms, which can be problematic, not least because it can suggest a top-down model of cultural development. The criterion of ‘apolitical and loyalist rhetoric’ is awkwardly phrased, and in some respects under-conceptualised, as I note below. I wonder if Reiterová would have found Graeme Morton’s *Unionist Nationalism* (1999) helpful in understanding the Scottish context in particular.

Overall, the under-development of historical context generally—even of the formation of the organisations that Reiterová studies—means that project reads less as an humanities-grounded analysis than a broader synthetic exercise aimed at producing an explanatory model wherein nuance can occasionally be lost (the introduction and chapter one on ‘The Celtic Literary Society’ by Brian Ó Conchubhair in Joseph Valente & Marjorie Elizabeth Howes, eds., *The Irish Revival: A Complex Vision* [Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2023] might have helped in the Irish case, for instance). Murray Pittcock’s 1999 *Celtic Identity and the British Image* is critical to interpreting the various UK nation’s differential revival trajectories, especially chapter three, ‘Nationality, Identity and Language’, pp. 94-128, and its absence from the literature review is somewhat glaring.

There are a few areas that would repay attention, though not as a condition of a pass:

1. The implicit framework of analysis relates to nationalism and national identities, but this is highly underdeveloped and does not engage relevant literature beyond gesturing to the scholarship of the modernist school (without mentioning Ernest Gellner) It does not explore its relationship to, and tensions with, other approaches—most notably ethno-symbolists such as Anthony Smith or John Hutchinson (11-12). It does not engage extensively with the early modern period and questions of nationalism and national identity, and therefore elides work such as the influential

scholarship of Liah Greenfield. Nor does it engage systematically in a critical sense with key debates in the field: it is challenging to credit concepts to Anderson, Hobsbawm, Hroch, and Smith without acknowledging and exploring debates amongst them. Hobsbawm and Ranger's work remains influential, but much of it is revised or challenged in subsequent scholarship—notably by scholars taking issue with the essentialist paradigm of pre-modern traditions which have been succeeded by those of an 'invented' variety. This is a critical lacuna in the study, because it sets up the analysis of the *Union régionaliste bretonne* (1898), Ireland's *Conradh na Gaeilge* (1893) *An Comunn Gàidhealach* (1891) in Scotland, and, in Wales, *Cymdeithas Yr Iaith Gymraeg* (1885) as pre-eminently modern 'producers'/propounders of a discourse of national identity and revival through their publications. The absence of John Hutchinson's 1987 masterpiece *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* is difficult to understand: it provides both an historical context and a model of cultural nationalism that is highly relevant to Reiterová's approach.

2. Related to the point above, it would help to explore the roles that antiquarians played in the process of language 'recovery' or 'construction' in the early modern period, especially prior to 1746 (46). Black (cited above, 2018) underscores that the mid eighteenth century was a fertile period for the construction of specific (often essentialist) ideas of the Celtic races; this point is made by Rosemary Sweet (2004) in her very thorough excavation of the topic (see especially pp. 119-53). There was a very substantial reception accorded Macpherson's Ossianic 'discovery' detailed in H. Gaskill, ed., *The Reception of Ossian in Europe* (see in particular the chapter 'Ossian in Wales and Brittany', by Mary-Ann Constantine) I am curious about the relatively brief mention of Edward Lhwyd (p. 42), who in most accounts of Welsh 'revivalism' is given more in-depth treatment. I wonder if the lens adopted here, which is squarely modernist in approach and modern in focus, tends to occlude these figures and these time periods. I note tangentially that Lhwyd was also interested in Cornish, and I am curious about it and Manx, and where propounders of their much more modest 'revivals' might fit into this analysis. Certainly the status of these two languages during the period under study makes them different cases altogether, but it would be helpful to know where they fit into the wider picture.

3. To what extent might Pan-Celticism and the discourse of the Celt have faced resistance in Ireland (pp. 106) on account of its association with two men who did not inhabit the institutions explored here: Lord Castletown and Edmund Edward Fournier d'Albe, both of whom may not have been regarded as part of a community most deeply engaged in the organisations which are foundational to this analysis. Castletown's politics may have proven especially anathema to many in the Irish movement. The alternative argument presented here—that this resistance was animated by an animosity towards Yeats at the Celtic Twilight in many respects—is persuasive.

4. What role did Church of Wales/Calvinist Methodist denominations play in the Welsh case, and the Church of Scotland/Free Church of Scotland/United Free Church in Scotland, as well as the various denominations in Ireland (where there is more discussion here, and where the predominant participation is Roman Catholic, although there is significant Church of Ireland leadership)? The focus is squarely on the institutions that produced these publications, which are in turn the basis of the discourse analysis which is privileged methodologically by Reiterová. But there are points in which the wider context (political, economic, cultural) is less foregrounded (can Reiterová engage more with the profoundly different national and regional economic structures—for instance regionalised industrialisation and agrarian unrest?). While national costume is identified as part of the repertoire of national symbols in Brittany, was this true in the other places under study, as well? Institutionally, while there is a discussion of the National University of Wales in places (pp. 75, 78, 81), its apparent importance is not underlined.

5. Methodologically, the approach to 'popular culture' (81-93) is a highly institution-based one, centred on a calendar of festivals, competitions, and celebrations: the focus is squarely on the *Eisteddfod*, *Gorsedd*, *Oireachtas*, *Feis*, and *Mòd*. This is in line with an analysis that is highly institutional in its focus, but I wonder if Reiterová can spend some space justifying the institutional lens, and perhaps acknowledging what is occluded in that approach. It seems to be an area where the model of 'invented traditions' would be appropriately reiterated and employed as a frame of analysis. It is also worth underscoring that the *Eisteddfod* and *Mòd* eventually received the 'Royal' *imprimatur*—which is not symbolically insignificant.

6. There is little engagement with the sources in terms of composition and authorship—indeed there are places in which there is a kind of personality imputed to the sources themselves, and I am curious about that choice. How were the voices of these sources constituted? Who wrote editorials, etc.? Too often the newsletters are attributed a ‘voice’ without engagement with the constitution of that voice (eg. p. 84—where the magazine is almost anthropomorphised).

7. Was there evidence that leaders or members of these groups interacted with each other, studied each other, etc., and how might that be represented in their publications? To what extent were these institutions led by a socio-economic elite, perhaps with close personal ties to each other? The social composition of *An Comunn Gàidhealach* (30) seems to resemble that of *Conradh na Gaeilge*; more details on the leadership and composition of the Welsh and Breton bodies, or even a systematic exploration of whether socio-economic hierarchies inhered in their constitutional structures (an elite dominating the executive, and perhaps the periodical, for instance) would be very helpful. Reiterová refers to entanglements of ideas across these nations in the period under study (8): to what extent does this signal closer personal links?

8. Were any of these institutions, publications, or rhetorical strategies inflected by gender? Was ‘the home’ elevated in any of this discourse as a site of cultural and linguistic reproduction, and, if so, were particular roles assigned by gender and family roles (father and/or mother, for instance)? I think of Aidan Beatty’s 2016 study *Masculinity and Power in Irish Nationalism, 1884-1938* and how various dimensions of linguistic nationalism may be conceptualised as gendered.

9. I remain unconvinced by one dimension of analysis: the one that assesses the ‘apolitical’ nature of certain bodies and agendas, which strikes me as a contemporary rhetorical construction that may have disguised/advanced specific political agenda. In particular, in Scotland (p. 119), I wonder where this body was positioned in relation to land agitation at the time (the so-called ‘Crofters’ War’)? And surely loyalism, as attributed to the Breton organisation, has to be seen as inherently very political? Might a conceptualisation of ‘patriotism’ be helpful in understanding the observed phenomena here? As for Ireland’s *Conradh na Gaeilge* identifying its agenda as a ‘movement’, the ambivalence towards

the diaspora is noted (104): how did diasporas figure into the strategies and publications of the other bodies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?

10. Is the 'racial discourse' to which Reiterová refers on p. 63 a discourse of science? How did scientific race theory figure into these discussions, either in the relatively narrow terms discussed here, when they were marshalled in favour of language recovery, or in broader terms? How was linguistic decline linked to broader anxieties over racial 'decay'?

11. In relation to the revivals, I think that more might have been made of those that took specific spaces of linguistic and cultural 'preservation' (the Gàidhealtachd and Gaeltacht) as a focus, and those that were less concerned with defining such spaces as part of the national revival project (such as Brittany). For the complex ways that the Scottish case was handled, see, for instance, Kate Louise Mathis & Eleanor Thomson, "Our Poetry Never Lacks Clearness If Read in Gaelic": Demystifying Gaelic and Anglo-Highland Women's Writing in the Celtic Revival', *Scottish Literary Review* 14, no. 1 (2022): 1–41.

Overall, the general weakness of the dissertation lies in the way it conceptualises national identity formation and propounding in relation to the rich body of scholarship on nations, nationalism, and national identity on one hand, and very limited engagement with national historiographies on the other hand. In part this is a product of the ambitious scope of the analysis: it would be too hard to develop a mastery of the relevant historiographies of the four nations under analysis. The result, though, is an occasionally thin and superficial engagement with subject matter that has produced, within the relevant national historiography, very rich scholarship. Ireland is perhaps the most obvious example (and much of the core literature cited on p. 21 is dated). Did the Irish revivalists examined here only not engage with history, popular culture, and literature as much as Wales because of the relative strength of the language in Wales (130)? Might there be a question of periodisation here: would a somewhat later focus on Ireland not reveal deeper interest in the subject when the focus is shifted? To what extent did the contested nature of Irish histories in particular, especially given the composition of the organisation, play a role in the observed phenomena, as well as the multi-denominational and politically multifarious complexion of *Conradh na Gaeilge* at its origins?

Although Reiterová signals the importance of ‘individual decisions and local conditions’ at the outset of the analysis (8), there is a notable lack of specific context—differential economic development between and within countries (sometimes, for instance, there is a tendency in the analysis to conflate all Highland districts into one Gaelic region), roles of diverse institutions that are not the foci of this analysis and, in the case of Ireland, a very specific of experience of colonialism that shaped its distinctive experience of cultural and linguistic ‘revival’. I think this emerges in part from the thinness of the secondary source base that Reiterová draws upon in her analysis of countries’ various historical contexts. Related scholarship dates back to Michael Hechter’s 1977 landmark *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*, with a 2nd edition published in 1999. On Ireland alone, she might consult *The Irish Revival: A Complex Vision*, edited by Joseph Valente & Marjorie Howes (2023) and for Scotland, *Gaelic in Scotland: Policies, Movements, Ideologies*, by Wilson McLeod (2020). While Ian B. Stewart’s *Past and Present* article is cited, Reiterová may also find his 2018 chapter ‘Celticism and the Four Nations in the Long Nineteenth Century’ in Naomi Lloyd-Jones & Margaret M. Scull, eds, *Four Nations Approaches to Modern 'British' History* instructive. It draws on Leerssen’s conceptualisation of Celts and Celticism in fruitful ways, expanding on the ways that Leerssen is used in the thesis (18, 39). Moreover, Stewart’s argument that a sense of Celtic ‘kinship’ supplanted rivalries over Celtic origins amongst various ‘nations’ only in the mid nineteenth century seems to be consonant with Reiterová’s findings. This argument, and the way that Stewart links the emergence of distinctive engagements with the Celtic past in the nineteenth century in relation to English Saxon chauvinism, would contribute nicely to a more robust contextual section in the thesis. There is also a useful discussion of earlier nineteenth-century exchanges amongst ‘Celticists’ on pp. 149-50.

The charts on pp. 56-57 summarise Martina Vacková Reiterová’s argument well and are critical tools in conceptualising the relationships amongst the organisations discussed in this study. I wonder if a similar graphic could be used to illustrate the spectrum of attitudes towards Celtic identity that is referenced on p. 142.

In the end, this is a valuable study because of its comparative, synthetic ambitions, however much in places they can smooth over complexities and

elide national peculiarities that would repay closer attention. A summary of the role of eighteenth-century antiquaries would, as Sweet has shown, reveal divergent approaches to the study of the subject of the 'Celt' in Scotland and Wales (and its comparatively higher levels of politicisation in Ireland), too (see her 2004 work, pp. 136-48).

This thesis offers a very well-written analysis, largely error-free in grammar, syntax, and spelling, and well-structured, though summaries at the ends of chapters would be helpful to the reader. If it is to be developed into publications, considerable effort should be spent on developing the literature review and embedding the study more deeply with relevant historiographies, with more elaboration of the discussion related to the source material and the constitution of voices within it.

I have no hesitation in recommending that the dissertation **pass** and encourage Reiterová, moving forward, to refine the analysis by deepening it. In my judgement it advances knowledge, notably in its comparative scope and synthetic analysis. Its ambitions lie at the heart of several of its most notable weaknesses, which can be redressed through engagement with a more expansive range of scholarship. This study has considerable potential, with further development, to increase its impact our understanding of developments in these countries at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.

Yours sincerely,



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