

Werner Huber, Michael Böss,
Catherine Mignant, Hedwig Schwall (eds.)

IRELAND

REPRESENTATION AND RESPONSIBILITY

Irish Studies in Europe

Edited by

Michael Böss, Werner Huber, Catherine Mignant, Hedwig Schwall

Volume

1

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Ireland: Representation and Responsibility

Werner Huber, Michael Böss,
Catherine Maignant, Hedwig Schwall (eds.)
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Contents

PREFACE	7
<i>Werner Huber (Vienna)</i> INTRODUCTION	9
<i>Ann Saddlemyer (Toronto)</i> JOHN SYNGE IN CONTEXT; OR, RE-POSITIONING SYNGE: THE POINT OF BALANCE	13
<i>Lucy Pereira (Oxford)</i> 'THE DEATH OF AN AUTHOR': COLLABORATIVE VOICES IN J.M. SYNGE'S <i>DEIRDRE OF THE SORROWS</i> (1910)	31
<i>Elke D'hoker (Louvain)</i> THE CONTEMPORARY FIRST-PERSON NOVEL IN IRELAND: RENEWAL OF AN OLD TRADITION?	41
<i>Teresa Casal (Lisbon)</i> 'FRIGHTENED WITH MY OWN HATRED': TELLING VIOLENCE IN JENNIFER JOHNSTON'S <i>FOOL'S SANCTUARY</i> AND <i>THE INVISIBLE WORM</i>	53
<i>Yvonne Igoe (Dundalk)</i> 'NORTHERN AND TROUBLED, SOUTHERN AND PEACEFUL': ABSENCE, PUNISHMENT, AND THE DISAPPEARED IN FILMS ON THE NORTH OF IRELAND	67
<i>John Erskine (Belfast)</i> ULSTER-SCOTS HISTORY AND CULTURE: A NORTH CHANNEL PERSPECTIVE	77
<i>Myrtle Hill (Belfast), Eilish Rooney (Coleraine)</i> REPRESENTATION AND RESPONSIBILITY: WOMEN IN NORTHERN IRELAND / THE NORTH OF IRELAND: A CONVERSATION IN DESCANT	87

<i>Anne-Catherine Lobo (Caen)</i> TO ACT OR NOT TO ACT: PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATIONS OF IRISH POVERTY IN THE 1830S	101
<i>Michael Böss (Aarhus)</i> DE VALERA REMEMBERING: A STUDY IN MEMORY AND SELF-REPRESENTATION	111
<i>Gráinne O’Keeffe-Vigneron (Le Havre)</i> THE IRISH IN POST-WAR BRITAIN: TOWARDS GREATER VISIBILITY?	121
<i>Michael J. Breen (Limerick)</i> DECONSTRUCTING MEDIA REPORTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE: AN ANALYSIS OF FRAMING IN IRISH PRINT MEDIA COVERAGE OF SEXUAL ABUSE, 1993-2002	133
<i>Jean Mercereau (Lisbon)</i> PUBLIC REPRESENTATIONS OF A PRIVATE CHOICE: IRISH DAILY NEWSPAPERS AND THE REFERENDA ON ABORTION OF 1992 AND 2002	151
<i>Catherine Mignant (Lille):</i> FAITH AND RESPONSIBILITY IN CONTEMPORARY IRELAND	161
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS	175

PREFACE

Irish Studies in Europe is the title of a new series of publications in Irish Studies. As the first two words of the title suggest, the projected thematic and methodological range of this series goes well beyond literary studies to include also aspects of social and cultural studies – in the most neutral sense, i.e. cultural studies as an advance over traditional academic disciplines such as, for example, *civilisation* or *Landeskunde*. The focus is, of course, on the island of Ireland (the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) as well as the Irish diaspora in all aspects of society, history, culture, literature, the arts, and the media.

The “European” dimension suggested by the title gives expression to a preferred, but by no means exclusive concentration on (mainland) European perspectives on Irish Studies. It is hoped that such, as it were, “etic” approaches in their detachment contribute a special dimension to the progress of Irish Studies at large and document the variety of European traditions of Irish Studies as inter- and multidisciplinary fields of research and teaching. Thus, the programme of this series is a reflection of the objectives of *The European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies (EFACIS)*, under whose aegis the series is published.

EFACIS was founded in 1998 with the express aim of supporting the expansion of Irish Studies (in the wider sense as emphasised above) throughout Europe. It is an affiliation of national and regional associations and centres but also of individual scholars of Irish Studies. Under the directorship of its founding father, Paul Brennan† (Paris), and successive presidents Catherine Mignant (Lille), Michael Böss (Aarhus), and Scott Brewster (Salford), the most visible result of *EFACIS* activities so far has been a series of conferences which explored the facets of the new and changing Ireland in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, as can be gathered from the list of programmatic conference themes: “Aspects of Ireland: Yesterday and Today” (Lille, 1998), “Ireland and Europe: Interchanges” (Paris, 1999), “Ireland and Europe in Times of Re-Orientation and Re-Imagining” (Aarhus, 2001), “Ireland: Representation and Responsibility” (Braga, 2003), “Place and Memory in the New Ireland” (Gothenburg, 2005).

EFACIS has also brought together graduate students and lecturers from all over Europe to participate in so-called Intensive Programmes in Irish Studies and discuss “Politics and Patronage: National and Regional Identities and their Representation in Irish Culture” at the Catholic University of Leuven/Louvain in September 2000 and at the Université Charles de Gaulle Lille 3 in September 2001. Many participants in these programmes have since made good academic progress. It is hoped that this new series will also prove a useful platform for the advancement of Irish Studies.

The Editors

Michael Böss

Werner Huber

Catherine Mignant

Hedwig Schwall

INTRODUCTION

Werner Huber

No matter whether the soubriquets are ‘postmodern,’ ‘secularised,’ ‘globalised,’ or ‘post-national,’ Ireland in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (also known as Celtic Tiger Ireland) does not only evince all the symptoms of radical political, social, and cultural change, but has become a byword for modernity and modernisation. After some of the enthusiasm that naturally goes with such progress has evaporated and been replaced by sobriety, the signs of an “ethical turn” begin to appear. Questions are being asked – not only relating to the ‘underbelly’ of the Celtic Tiger itself, i.e. the negative sides of this much vaunted economic and social boom, but also concerning ‘responsibilities’ and the problem of being in accordance with moral/ethical standards of any kind. In a social and cultural studies context such as circumscribed in the present area of concern, i.e. this projected series of publications on *Irish Studies in Europe*, ‘responsibility’ is a vital parameter for the reflection of reality and for any mode of representation, whether artistic, literary, historical, or scientific.

The essays collected in this volume concern themselves not only with aspects of contemporary Ireland and problems of representation, but wherever they venture into the past, they are bound to explore crucial episodes and periods in the social and cultural history of Ireland. The hidden structure of this collection is that of a widening of circles, or gyres even. Starting out from a disquisition on Synge and Irish drama today, the volume in its first half proceeds to take in contemporary literature and film. The second half is more orientated towards themes that call for approaches endemic to historical, biographical, political, and religious studies, as well as communication and media studies. Naturally, as one would expect, there are minor thematic clusters that are focused on Northern Ireland/the North of Ireland and the Irish diaspora.

In her essay “John Synge in Context; or, Re-Positioning Synge: The Point of Balance,” Ann Saddlemyer takes up the case of John Millington Synge to enquire into theatre’s responsibilities. She reconsiders Synge’s importance to the history of the Abbey Theatre and contemporary verdicts in the light of Synge’s biographical links with the leading figures of the national theatre movement during the first decade of the twentieth century. Starting from Synge’s use of the word “extravaganza” (as a mixture of the Rabelaisian and the Romantic), Saddlemyer re-values the mimetic responsibilities in Synge’s aesthetic – with *The Playboy of the Western World* as her prime example and as a lodestar for later directors and playwrights. In the second part of her essay, Saddlemyer considers Synge and the Abbey ‘one hundred years on’ and concludes with a discussion of Martin McDonagh and Marina Carr, the latter being made out as the more legitimate descendant in the Syngean tradition.

In “‘The Death of an Author’: Collaborative Voices in J.M. Synge’s *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1910),” Lucie Pereira looks at the concept of authorial intention in relation to textual representation and responsibility. She identifies the forces that seem to militate against the idea of complete authorial control, be they traditional (the Deirdre legend), autobiography (Synge’s sickness unto death), social contexts (nationalist ideology), posthumous editing (Yeats as Synge’s literary executor), or publication history (the Cuala Press).

Elke D’hoker speculates on the success of the “Contemporary First-Person Novel in Ireland” by surveying the Irish novel tradition. Although parallels with wider international trends cannot be discounted entirely, the Irish oral tradition with its peculiar features of eccentricity and a ‘strong narrator’ is shown to prove an influential factor. The problem of responsibility and representation here is firmly located in the tradition of (un)reliable first-person narrators from *Tristram Shandy* and *Thady Quirk* onwards.

In “‘Frightened with my own hatred’: Telling Violence in Jennifer Johnston’s *Fool’s Sanctuary* and *The Invisible Worm*,” Teresa Casal presents an allegorical reading of these two novels as stories of the “two cultures in Ireland,” Catholic vs. Protestant, Irish vs. Anglo-Irish, and as reflections of pre- and post-independence Ireland, respectively. Her basic metaphor is that of the family (romance), and the idea of narration/dialogue as relational space (within the self and between the self and the other) is seen as a responsible way of overcoming past violence and pain. The suggestion is that this may also be valid and of relevance outside the fictional realm created by Johnston.

Yvonne Igoe (“‘Northern and troubled, southern and peaceful’: Absence, Punishment, and the Disappeared in Films on the North of Ireland”) studies concepts and representations of the border between the North and the South of Ireland and how they feature in recent films thematising the Troubles, such as Joe Comerford’s *High Boot Benny*, Vinny Murphy’s *Accelerator*, Johnny Gogan’s *The Mapmaker*, and Anne Crilly’s *Limbo*. Her particular focus is on the motifs of punishment, abduction, and absence, as well as on the cinematographic reflections of the Irish landscape.

John Erskine in “Ulster-Scots History and Culture: A North Channel Perspective” surveys the history and culture of the Ulster-Scots community and the links between Ulster and Scotland by taking in the exemplary categories of religion (Presbyterianism/Dissenters), education (The Ulster-Scots contribution to the Scottish Enlightenment), literature (The Weaver Poets), industry (the Lagan-Clyde industrial corridor), and politics (liberalism and political sovereignty).

Staying in the North, Myrtle Hill and Eilish Rooney (“Representation and Responsibility: Women in Northern Ireland/the North of Ireland: A Conversation in Descant”) engage in dialectics and a dialogue concerning the recording and the role of “personal stories” as “accounts of remembering” (especially from women victimised by the Troubles). They point out the challenges offered to dominant historical discourse by

personal memories as well as the tendentiousness of official histories prioritising what are deemed more 'authoritative' or 'objective' sources.

Anne-Catherine Lobo ("To Act or Not to Act: Parliamentary Representations of Irish Poverty in the 1830s") looks at political responsibility in an historical dimension by concentrating on the question of the Irish Poor Law and by an analysis of contemporary parliamentary discourses. Responsibility and representation intersect when remedial approaches to the problem of Irish pauperism are made to appear as criminalisation (the punitive approach) or as sanitation (the hygienic approach, which relies on metaphors of bleeding and of containing the epidemic).

The historical theme is continued by Michael Böss ("De Valera Remembering: A Study in Memory and Self-Representation"). Drawing on recent theories of memory, Böss demonstrates how representation functions as self-fashioning in the field of biography. The example Böss uses is the biography of Eamon De Valera by Lord Longford and Thomas P. O'Neill – as authorised by the subject himself. In the childhood chapter of this life-story various strategies of (auto)biographical narrative are employed to construct De Valera as a true-born Irishman.

Representation with regard to sociological research and policymaking is the agenda of Gráinne O'Keeffe-Vigneron's essay on "The Irish in Post-War Britain: Towards Greater Visibility?." O'Keeffe-Vigneron discusses the problem of the (in)visibility of the Irish immigrant generation in Britain after 1945 on local government levels. She studies the effects of the recognition of the Irish as an "Ethnic Minority" in the British Census of 2001 by analysing the Commission for Racial Equality report and a number of interviews conducted with local government officials in a selection of London boroughs. The key question in all this is the visible presence of the Irish in demographic monitoring procedures (and its secondary effects on discrimination, race relations, and lobbying).

Sexual abuse and the gradual revelation of the extent of such criminal practices has been one of the major issues and talking points in contemporary Irish life and society. Michael J. Breen in "Deconstructing Media Reports of Sexual Abuse: An Analysis of Framing in Irish Print Media Coverage of Sexual Abuse, 1993-2002" sets out to perform a content analysis of a corpus of 494 stories of abuse found in *The Irish Times* between 1993 and 2002. These data are subjected to statistical framing analysis. A comparison with the Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland report (as commissioned and carried out by the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre and The Royal College of Surgeons, respectively) reveals the discrepancies between hard clinical data on the one hand and media representation and the shaping of public opinion on the other (especially with regard to degrees of misinformation and stereotyping).

The issue of abortion is the starting-point for Jean Mercereau's analysis of "Public Representations of a Private Choice: Irish Daily Newspapers and the Referenda on Abortion of 1992 and 2002." Mercereau studies the extent to which five Irish morning

newspapers – *The Irish Independent*, *The Irish Times*, *The Irish Press* (until 1995), *The Star*, and *The Cork Examiner* – reported on this high-profile issue and reflected the polemics surrounding the referenda in their coverage around the actual polling days in 1992 and 2002. Due to the particular ethics involved this contrastive analysis of one important sector of the media landscape foregrounds the question of social responsibility in the media quite markedly.

Finally, Catherine Mignant (“Faith and Responsibility in Contemporary Ireland”) looks at the ways in which traditional religion (esp. the Catholic Church) has been challenged by alternative creeds which set great store by individual responsibility and personal representation of truth. Starting from the Derridean equation of ‘religion equals responsibility,’ Mignant reveals some of the motivation behind new religious tendencies which may be read as expressions of postmodern ultra-individualism and as reactions against, or rejections of, dogma and the legitimacy of authoritarian and patriarchal structures. Mignant discusses both the spectrum of neo-religious groups (e.g., Neo-Paganism, Wicca, Celtic Christianity, and feminist theology) as well as the various responses proffered by the Catholic Church.

Most of the essays collected here represent the extended and revised versions of papers first delivered at the 4th *EFACIS* Conference on the theme of “Ireland: Representation and Responsibility” (organised by Filomena Louro at the University of Minho, Braga, Portugal, in December 2003). The editors would like to acknowledge the generous sponsorship given to this project by the University of Vienna (The Rector’s Office). Special thanks must go to Filomena Louro for setting up the occasion and to Julia McIntosh-Schneider, M.A. (Paderborn/Regensburg); Elisabeth Siegel, M.A. (Vienna), and Ulrike Zillinger (Vienna) for their help in the editing process.

July 2007

Werner Huber

JOHN SYNGE IN CONTEXT; OR, RE-POSITIONING SYNGE: THE POINT OF BALANCE

Ann Saddlemyer

Let me begin with a story from my own country, the story of the inukshuk or inuksuit. Piles of stones, some seven to twelve feet high and so common across the Arctic that they have become a distinctive feature of the region, the inuksuit are traditional landmarks created in a land much like the barren surface of the moon, where there are no trees and few distinguishing features to use for reference when travelling. Other parts of the world also have their powerful structures; what appears to be unique about the inuksuit of the Arctic north is their meaning: for inukshuk were and still are used by the Inuit as indicators showing where others have been and where it is safe to go. The word means, as described by an ancient Inuit elder, “that which acts in the capacity of a human,” because they are guides (Hallendy 22). As such, they were a tool for survival and remain a tangible symbol of communication. They were also the product of co-operation, for the efforts of an entire group were required to build the more massive stone sculptures. Like fingerprints upon the land, no two inuksuit are the same. Some are man-shaped, but others range from cairns made from boulders or flat stones to single rocks standing on end or carefully displaced. They are a form of language between the land and the people, serving as a compass for a safe journey. Some have been there for as long as community memory recalls; others are recent offerings of thanksgiving or acknowledgement of who has come before.

All are reference points. Some were built so they could be seen from far away, standing tall like welcoming figures. Some are grouped in a straight line: by looking through a hole in the base to the next inukshuk, the best route might be seen for the next part of the journey, or as an astronomical sight-line, lining up the viewer to the North Star or the mid-winter moon. Thus there might be large numbers of intercepting lines of inuksuit, similar to ‘ley lines’ of energy and power found in other parts of the world. Sometimes they are warnings, indicating where the frozen sea ends and the frozen land begins. Some – and these may be frightening both to humans and animals – are mixed media ‘sound-makers’ that include fractured stone and bone. Some may even have been made to pass the time, while waiting, and these are often the most beautiful. No matter their specific purpose, for travellers in Canada’s North, one of the world’s harshest environments, an inukshuk is a welcome sight. It says, “I’ve been here before; you’re on the right path.”

When I set out to reconsider the meaning of Synge to the Abbey Theatre, especially in the chiselled quality of Yeats’s later pronouncements about him, the image and role of the inukshuk kept coming to mind. Indeed, this ‘haunting man’ even in life

seemed to be a foreigner in his own country, his place “outside the circle, gravely watching, gravely summing up [...] the fools and wise ones inside” (Masefield 181-82). Neither of his fellow directors was ever certain of what he thought of them or their work; this doubt and Synge’s self-containment tantalised Yeats throughout his life. Lady Gregory appreciated his craftsmanship but distrusted his behaviour – although a gentleman, he tolerated those who were not. Extreme nationalists thought him “an evil Spirit” (*An Claidheamh Soluis*) with “a morbid unhealthy mind” (Holloway 81); his own actors frequently misunderstood his instructions and motives; even his mother confessed astonishment and bewilderment at her youngest son. While he was alive Yeats had readily folded Synge’s work into his own ideals and political agenda. There were fierce objections to *The Shadow of the Glen*, its first production confirming the worst fears about the self-styled Irish National Theatre and its new playwright. Arthur Griffith informed readers of *The United Irishman* that the play was no more Irish than the *Decamerone*, “a staging of a corrupt version of that old world libel on womankind – the ‘Widow of Ephesus’,” further drawing up the battle-lines by adding, “It is not by staging a Lie we can serve Ireland or exalt Art” (Griffith 1). No matter that Synge had sent him the original story as he had heard it on Aran; Griffith was fully aware that the ending (where the disillusioned housewife goes off with a sweet-talking Tramp) was an invention of the playwright. Then Griffith and his friend Maud Gonne, accompanied by one of the outraged players, ostentatiously walked out of the first performance.

Yeats could not have been more delighted at the fuss over his new discovery, now denounced as “an evil compound of Ibsen and Boucicault” (*Leader*) – doubtless a yoking startling to Synge, who admired Boucicault’s humour as much as he disparaged Ibsen’s “joyless and pallid words” (Synge, *Prose* 398; *Plays* II 53). “One cannot fight a battle in whispers,” Yeats informed the editor of *The United Irishman*, who obligingly replied by once more angrily declaiming, “we all of us know – that Irishwomen are the most virtuous women in the world” (*Letters* III 446). Later, eagerly pouncing on the example of the English reaction to Ibsen’s *Ghosts* a decade earlier, Yeats wrote to an American friend,

We will have a hard fight in Ireland before we get the right for every man to see the world in his own way admitted. Synge is invaluable to us because he has that kind of intense narrow personality which necessarily raises the whole issue [...] It will be a fight like that over the first realistic plays of Ibsen. (*Letters* 447-48)

Although London audiences enthusiastically endorsed Yeats’s valuation of Synge, those in Ireland remained hostile, and distrust of Synge continued, and indeed never disappeared in his lifetime and beyond. Synge insisted that his plays demanded an intellectual effort to be understood, and cavalierly dismissed objections to *The Shadow of the Glen* by stressing his own originality: “On the French stage the sex-element of life is given without the other balancing elements; on the Irish stage the people you agree with want the other elements without sex. I restored the sex-element to its natural place, and the people were so surprised they saw the sex only”

(Synge, *Letters* I 81, 74). However, the theatre barely covered its costs on his next play, *The Well of the Saints* (producer Willie Fay fretted that all the characters were bad-tempered), and we all know of the riots over *The Playboy of the Western World*; only the dramatist's early death and sympathy for his bereaved fiancée Molly Allgood stilled complaints over the posthumously produced *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, which Yeats feared "would seem mere disjointed monotony" (*The Death of Synge* 31). Yet he continued to assert that Synge was the movement's true signifier, believing that it was "the very elements" which made him "a man of genius" that repelled the enemy. "They shrink from Synge's harsh, independent, heroic, clean, wind-swept view of things" (Yeats, *Letters* 495).

As early as 1904, Yeats and Lady Gregory's memorandum in support of the Abbey's theatre patent had claimed that "we have done a great deal for the intellect of this country in discovering and training into articulateness J.M. Synge, whom I believe to be a great writer, the beginning it may be of a European figure" (Yeats, *Letters* III 625-26). This on the strength of but two short plays! However, his was the first work to be translated and produced in Europe, and within three months of his death in 1909, four of his plays were in repertory in London. Two years later Yeats and Gregory's first public request for funding highlighted their desire to keep Synge's plays in constant performance. By 1915 Yeats would confidently declare to Joseph Holloway, that officious recorder of theatre gossip, that he had worked to make the Abbey a Synge theatre, and a Synge theatre it would remain (Holloway 172).

Even if we allow for Yeats's penchant for biographical revisionism, there is no doubt that he was shattered by Synge's early death; the description of his wandering disconsolately among the tombstones after his friend's funeral rings true. He had lost, if not a close confidant (which he still had in Lady Gregory), certainly a comrade-in-arms; the term is suggestive of both collusion and distancing, indicating the friendly alienation that marked their relationship. For unlike George Russell (AE), who always feared the magnetism of Yeats's personality and who could all too easily be soothed by his charm, Synge stood sufficiently apart. Yeats defended Synge's disinterested passivity to Gregory, disagreeing with her interpretation of their co-director as "selfish" and "egotistical"; soon, however, there would be nothing left but Synge's *work*, and with that Yeats could feel more comfortable. He never ceased to believe that Synge's path had been the right one for the new Irish drama, and when the theatre took a different direction, he too said farewell. It is not only the exigencies of rhythm but also the realisation of Synge's importance that put his long-dead comrade first in the famous sonorous lines from "The Municipal Gallery Revisited":

John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought
 All that we did, all that we said or sang
 Must come from contact with the soil, from that
 Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong. (Yeats, *Poems* 369)

Which leads us back to the inukshuk. In these silent persistent northern guardians, each stone is a separate entity, each supports, and is supported by the one above and the one below it, held in place only by the force of gravity. The strength lies in its unity, secured through balance. No rock is more important than another, and all were found in the immediate area, reflecting the characteristics of the surrounding land forms; all were chosen for how well they fit together. Their meaning however lies in the whole; remove one and the entire figure would weaken and collapse.

This could not better describe the method Synge employed in writing his plays (and Yeats himself in his persistent stitching and re-stitching of his work). When pressed by his colleagues to say when *The Playboy of the Western World* would be ready for rehearsal, Synge fretted,

My play, though in its last agony, is not finished and I cannot promise it for any definite day. It is more than likely that when I read it to you and Fay ... there will be little things to alter that have escaped me. And with my stuff it takes time to get even half a page of new dialogue fully into key with what goes before it.

Then somewhat ominously he added, "The play, I think, will be one of the longest we have done, and in places extremely difficult" (*Letters* I 211).

As I have described elsewhere, it is clear from his notebooks and worksheets that Synge's original concepts and the incessant revising and meticulous polishing of each passage took place in the study, not during rehearsal (Saddlemyer, "Introduction" x). He rewrote each scene over and over again, polishing the phrasing, balancing the dialogue, clarifying the action, until he had achieved the strong stage play he required. His worksheets (more than a thousand pages over two years for *The Playboy* alone) carefully plot the 'currents' and 'crescendos' for each individual scene, expanding here, cutting back there, always with an eye to character and mood. Some entire scenes are jettisoned in order to maintain the careful balancing of opposing effects, including a favourite of mine: the raunchy action between the Widow Quin and Old Mahon. The final complexity of plot and character can be seen in the various titles he contemplated, beginning with "The Murderer (a Farce)," "Murder Will Out," "The Fool of the Family," until he achieved the ironic implications of his final title. Although he did most of his work at the typewriter, lettering the various drafts as he went along, he frequently jotted down phrases and related ideas, sometimes even entire scenes, in one of the small notebooks he always carried with him; these fragments would then be reworked into the fabric of the play. As he had warned, when he finally read the finished work to his colleagues, no revision beyond minor verbal alterations was possible; even the suggested alteration of a single passage would have upset the delicate balance of the whole. Even then he was rarely satisfied: Act III of *The Playboy* went as far as draft 'L' and he still thought it needed "pulling together."

This careful control extended to performance: whenever possible he directed his own plays. He insisted also on rehearsing whenever a new actor took over a role. (His courtship of Molly Allgood began when she took over the role of Nora Burke in *The*

Shadow of the Glen, giving rise to his signature in his letters to her, “Your old Tramp”). Despite later disagreements, actor and stage manager Willie Fay recalls with admiration Synges directorial sense, claiming that “His power of visualisation was perfect [...] above all he knew what he wanted, and when he got it said so” (Fay & Carswell 138-39). Similarly, *Riders to the Sea* was produced with as much authenticity as possible, Synges going so far as to order thick flannel and pampooties, the traditional Aran footgear, from the west. What became known as “the Abbey method” (or “P.Q.”: “Peasant Quality”) owed much to the fidelity and simplicity of design developed for the most part in Synges two shorter plays and leading to the familiar style of acting insisted upon by the company for many years to come, often to the despair of later directors and designers.

Even though he wrote with specific performers in mind, something in Synges distrusted actors. Perhaps even more than Yeats he tended to treat them as puppets, and as he grew more confident in his staging and choreography his stage directions increased, matching action to word, requiring facial response and tone of voice to immediately reflect the characters’ thoughts and reactions. Thus, Pegeen Mike is told when to lick a stamp and empty the slop pail, on which phrase to raise the broom, when to alter the inflection in her voice; Christy Mahon counts all the cups and glasses in the shebeen and examines himself in the mirror which will later serve as tray for the choric overlaying of gifts from the village girls; all the characters are instructed to respond immediately, without any time for reflection. No Stanislavski or method acting here. The cumulative effect of Christy’s – and later his father’s – delighted “Is it me?” owes much to Synges careful placing of movement as well as word. Given this relationship between action, reaction, and speech, it is no wonder that Christy Mahon is “transformed by overhearing himself” (Bloom 1). In later productions, when a series of handsome actors replaced diminutive Willie Fay – already familiar to audiences as the sly manipulative Tramp in the Yeats-Gregory early farce *The Pot of Broth* – as the cringing dirty Christy Mahon, much of this bold (almost flaunting) shock quality disappeared from the play as Synges had visualised it.

It is hardly surprising that, under judicial cross-examination over that first production, Yeats took refuge in asserting that his colleague’s play was “an example of the exaggeration of art” (Hogan & Kilroy 133). For Synges play was as artificial as *The Well of the Saints*, which had preceded it. Yet *The Freeman’s Journal*, doubtless quoting the theatre’s own press release, had announced before opening night,

No one is better qualified than Mr Synges to portray truthfully the Irish peasant living away in Western Ireland. He has lived with them for months at a stretch, in the Arran Islands and Mayo. He has noted their speech their humours, their vices, and virtues. He is one of the best Irish speakers in the country, and is thus brought into the closest contact with people. ‘The Playboy’ is founded on an incident that actually occurred. (26 Jan 1907)

Synges himself then compounded confusion by insisting in his programme notes that

[n]early always when some friendly or angry critic tells me that such or such a phrase could not have been spoken by a peasant, he singles out some expression that I have heard, word for word, from some old woman or child, and the same is true also, to some extent, of the actions and incidents I work with. The central incident of the *Playboy* was suggested by an actual occurrence in the west. (Programme Notes)

In fact the twin stories or “actual events” were fairly recent and well known throughout Ireland (Robinson xxxiv-v). It was only when cornered by a persistent reporter after the first audience’s angry outburst that Synge himself disputed the claim to realism, “It is a comedy, an extravaganza, made to amuse” (*Evening Mail*).

Much depends upon that word ‘extravaganza’ – traditionally defined by Webster as “a literary fantasy that is freely imaginative in subject, structure, and development and that often includes elements of burlesque or parody” (Webster I 807). If *The Playboy* was a burlesque in the tradition of the Queen’s Theatre (Dublin’s home of melodrama), then what of the Irish Literary Theatre’s promise to rescue Irish drama from the stage Irishman, to mirror instead “the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland” (Yeats, *Letters* II 124)? If a fantasy, why the emphasis on detail and naturalistic stage decor and setting? If a parody, what and who were being travestied? By the end of the play the audiences (both onstage and in the auditorium) would claim they themselves were the target and by extension Ireland; the public forum convened by Yeats elicited comments ranging from enraged dismissal to consideration of the local marriage market. Under pressure Synge himself admitted that although his work was “not a play with ‘a purpose’ in the modern sense of the word, [...] and] although parts of it are, or are meant to be extravagant comedy, still a great deal that is in it, and a great deal more that is behind it, is perfectly serious, when looked at in a certain light.” He ended by citing Shylock and Alceste as examples and inviting even further controversy with the suggestion that “[t]here are, it may be hinted, several sides to ‘The Playboy’” (*Letters* I 286).

In claiming the term ‘extravaganza’ and, in the heat of the moment insisting that “I never bother whether my plots are typical Irish or not; [...] my methods are typical” (*Evening Mail*), Synge was also drawing on his own experience as a trained musician with European experience and a keen sense of methodology, for the musical extravaganza depends on familiarity with the forms it caricatures – burlesque, melodrama, opera bouffe – which Synge would have known in Paris. Jack Yeats recalls accompanying him to a melodrama at Dublin’s Queen’s Theatre where “he delighted to see how members of the company could by the vehemence of their movements and the resources of their voices hold your attention where everything was commonplace” (Jack Yeats 41-42). A revealing self-direction in a late draft of *The Playboy* aims for the “prodigiously fantastic” (Synge, *Collected Works* IV 304).

No wonder the first players were confused; misinterpreting Synge’s careful directions as instructions to emphasise the reality of what they played out, and with Lady Gregory (Yeats was out of town) pleading to have the language softened. Gentle George Russell (AE) was shocked by the first appearance of Old Mahon “with his head ban-

daged and he looked so realistic and so like a poor battered old man that the audience got a chill and felt that they were really making a jest of parricide and father-beating." Even George Moore, no stranger to the creation of shocking effects himself (his collaboration with Yeats over *Diarmuid and Grania* had raised a storm of protest), condemned the brutality of Pegeen Mike's callous burning of Christy's leg as intolerable and unacceptable. No wonder that an overworked Willie Fay fluffed his lines on that first performance, providing – as is well known – even more realism with the alteration of "a drift of Mayo girls" (instead of "chosen females") parading in their shifts. Nor is it surprising that in Philadelphia four years later, when the actors were hauled into court, the objections were to what must have taken place *between* the acts and "not while the curtain was up." Indeed, the place of reality (including both of Christy's 'murders') is offstage while we watch the growth of the playboy onstage miming his deeds first with a loy and then with a chicken bone. Even as practised an actor as Cyril Cusack (noted also for his playing of Boucicault), who played Christy over a span of twenty years, spoke of the exigencies of an acting style compounding "two apparently conflicting elements," "the purely theatrical with a form of naturalism perilously near to being simply representation" (Hirsch 115-16).

The playwright remained unrepentant throughout all the confusion of attacks, insisting that his play was a serious-sided comedy. Nor did the dramatist ever deny the truth of his play, claiming that "the story – in its ESSENCE – is probable, given the psychic state of the locality" (Synge, *Letters* I 333). That element of place was always important to Synge. Just a few years earlier he had walked the Congested Districts with Jack Yeats, reporting to *Manchester Guardian* readers in searing detail the degrading misery and poverty he saw in the west. When an actor objected to a speech in *The Well of the Saints*, he vehemently replied, "what I write of Irish country life I know to be true and I most emphatically will not change a syllable of it because A. B. or C. may think they know better than I do [...] I am *quite ready* to avoid hurting people's feelings needlessly, but I will *not* falsify what I believe to be true for anybody" (*Letters* I 91). Later, defending his style, he famously insisted that "the romantic note and a Rabelaisian note [in *The Playboy*] are working to a climax through a great part of the play, and [...] the Rabelaisian note, the 'gross' note, if you will, must have its climax no matter who may be shocked" (*Letters* II 47). He was still harping back to this duality a year later when preparing the even more famous preface to his *Poems and Translations*: "it is the timber of poetry that wears most surely, and there is no timber that has not strong roots among the clay and worms. [...] It may almost be said that before verse can be human again it must learn to be brutal" (*Poems* xxxvi).

The first objections to the *Playboy* had been to that Rabelaisian note, but the romantic note – so evident in his previous plays and later to overwhelm the mood of his unfinished *Deirdre of the Sorrows* – did not achieve the climax in production that he desired. In part, as I have indicated, this was his own fault for concentrating both in public pronouncements and direction on the details of place and character, by emphasising that "shock of new material," a phrase Yeats was fond of quoting, and leaving the

“poetry of exaltation” to fend for itself. But the published text reveals that while very much aware of place and character on stage, Synge was also celebrating the use of language and narrative in the natural world. Since boyhood he had travelled the roads of County Wicklow, relishing the idiosyncratic speech of the tramps and people of the glens and listening sympathetically to their stories; the language he invented for his plays (four of them set in one Wicklow valley) accurately echoes the rhythm and speech order of country speakers. Out of appreciation of their heightened sensitivity to the changing moods of nature and the harsh conditions they endured, Synge developed his own aesthetic, a blending of romantic pantheism and ironic realism. The mingling of what he described in his diary as “humanity and this mysterious external world” (*Prose* 351) accounts for much of the individuality of his writing. It accounts also for his insistence that all the notes must be played between tragedy and humour, for him the two poles of art and the mark of their sanity; another notebook comment reads simply, “Contrast gives wonder of life” (Saddlemyer, “A Share” 211). However, both must be delicately balanced; while a young student of musical composition he had won prizes in harmony *and* counterpoint.

In the first two acts of *The Playboy* Christy and Pegeen strike the romantic note: the young stranger’s songs to nature are reminiscent of the Tramp’s in *The Shadow of the Glen*, while Pegeen’s rough humour and wistful ambitions resemble Nora Burke’s. By the third act the desperate actions of both have been elevated to extremes far beyond the seductive pre-lapsarian innocence of their love speeches, with Christy ‘proving’ his worth as giant-killer, and Pegeen shocked into brutally attacking her poet-hero for leaping the gap between ‘gallous story’ and ‘dirty deed.’ Meanwhile the chorus of mocking Mayoites provides a Rabelaisian framework to the narrative, which begins with a grotesque Dionysian parody of a wake and ends with a resurrection and the Playboy’s celebratory death of the ‘fool of the family.’ Nothing remains for Pegeen but the wailing lament of loss, and even this is accompanied by a box on the ear.

It is left to the witty, worldly, thirty-year-old Widow Quin to serve as the point of balance in the play, much as the inukshuk is deliberately constructed. She too is carved of heroic violent stuff, but the deed itself, too close to home, won “small glory with the boys itself,” an early warning of Christy’s fate. Being a widow (and therefore suspect for her sexual knowledge and rumoured to observe unnatural practices) she like the whimpering young stranger is set apart, “looking on the schooners, hookers, trawlers is sailing the sea.” Like Christy yet unlike, isolation has created in her a breadth of sympathy and realistic appraisal not granted her fellow villagers. Like Shawn Keogh, she is summoned out of the dark by Father Reilly. Like Pegeen, she longs for a life beyond her little house on the hill. Serving as an arch in the balance of tension between the Rabelaisian and the romantic, she acts as foil to both Christy and Old Mahon in her lusty humour and materialism, as counterbalance to the village girls in her experience and longings. Through her sympathetic, affectionately scornful eye, we are invited to take note not only of the making of the playboy but of our own eager

contribution to the imaginative joy Synge celebrated as peculiar to the locality and the richness of the nature he observed in the west. Fittingly, it is she who tags Christy “the walking playboy of the western world,” with all the ironies that complex title – hoaxer, humbug, mystifier, role-player, strolling performer, storyteller – implies. Indeed, Synge was so enamoured of his creation that she threatened to destroy the delicate balance he was constructing between Christy and Pegeen, Christy and his father, the Mahons and the Mayoites, the Mayoites and the big world beyond. And so, by the last scene, the Widow (like the Fool in *Lear*), had disappeared from the stage.

Was Synge indeed deliberately mocking his audience in a parody of ‘Cuchulainoid’ ambitions? Certainly the audience on stage, that circle of conspirators who first honour Christy then reject him. Those in the auditorium? I think not. Synge delighted in violence, the unexpected danger, the *life* of energy. But apart from a fastidiousness in manners and personal behaviour, Synge the man was remarkably non-judgmental, describing himself as an “imaginative sceptic” and insisting that there was a place in society for both “the law-maker” and the “law-breaker” (*Letters* I 76). I am not so sure therefore that Synge set out in *The Playboy* to upset his audience, despite Willie Fay’s claim and public suspicions. His private assessment of the opening night was, “I feel like old Maura today ‘its four fine plays I have though it was a hard birth I had to everyone of them and they coming to the world’.” But then he added, “It is better any day to have the row we had last night, than to have your play fizzling out in half-hearted applause. Now we’ll be talked about. We’re an event in the history of the Irish stage” (*Letters* I 285).

Instead, he reserved the anger at his opponents for his notebooks and private letters. It was about that time that the playwright wrote to his close friend Stephen MacKenna of his experiences in the Congested Districts:

Unluckily my commission was to write on the ‘Distress’ so I couldn’t do any thing like what I would have wished to do as an interpretation of the whole life [...] There are sides of all that western life the groggy-patriot-publican-general shop-man who is married to the priest’s half sister and is second cousin once-removed of the dispensary doctor, that are horrible and awful. [...] I sometimes wish to God I hadn’t a soul and then I could give myself up to putting those lads on the stage. God, wouldn’t they hop! (Synge, *Letters* I 116-17)

Obviously, despite Yeats’s characterisation, Synge was indeed a man of strong opinions.

But those very opinions were always countered by his insistence that in a work of art “all the notes” must be played. It has not usually been noticed that the various stories within the *The Playboy* often do not have closure, and are in fact full of contradictions. Christy ‘kills’ his father but also ‘accepts’ him; he is terrified of violence but perpetrates it; a ‘loser’ in Kerry, he wins all the races in Mayo. Michael James is the free-wheeling drunken anti-clerical, anti-polis admirer of Christy as potential son-in-law, but also the man (like Dan Burke in *The Shadow of the Glen*) who wants peace for

his drinks and a well-ordered home. Pegeen may – or may not – marry Shawn Keogh after all. Always we are given opposing possibilities, not ‘either/or’ but ‘on the one hand’ and ‘on the other hand,’ both ‘a gallous story’ and ‘a dirty deed.’ If we think back to the blind beggars of *The Well of the Saints*, their departure for the south may lead to death or to liberation. Deirdre’s keening recalls “the choice of lives” she and Naisi had “in the clear woods,” culminating in her own triumph over death. In all the plays Synge emphasises the possibility of choice between resignation and defiant revolt; the phrases “I’ve/you’ve a right” echo throughout the canon. With choice comes discovery – of self and others in relation to self. All the plays also end with at least one character seeing the world and her/himself without illusion.

Synge claimed that a work of art “must have been possible to only one man at one period and in one place” (*Prose* 349). How then, does one assess someone as unique as Synge a hundred years later? What is lost? What is gained? For a while his romantic note overwhelmed the Rabelaisian, with two musicals based on *The Playboy* enjoying predictable results. Yeats predicted that “in the long run, his grotesque plays with their lyric beauty, their violent laughter, *The Playboy of the Western World* most of all, will be loved for holding so much of the mind of Ireland,” the “mischievous extravagance” of the Irish genius (“Synge and the Ireland of his Time” 32).

The director who in most recent years has been most energetic in restoring Synge to the stage has been Garry Hynes, director of Druid Theatre in Galway. She has produced *The Playboy* regularly since 1975, taking it to the Aran Islands as well as several other continents, adding a number of his other plays to the repertoire in the intervening years. She and her company then embarked on a production of the complete plays in 2005, which toured from Galway to Dublin and finally the Edinburgh Festival. Accompanying the justly acclaimed cycle was a generous website (www.druidsynge.com) and a volume of essays celebrating the playwright (Tóibín). (Also, a DVD entitled *DruidSynge: The Plays of John Millington Synge* [Wildfire Films and RTÉ] is to be launched in October 2007.)

Hynes’s own discovery of Synge as a writer was, she admitted, “an epiphany, one of the shock things. It completely influenced everything I’ve done since, and continues to do so [...] Synge has been a constant companion.” Not surprisingly, her belief in theatre is very similar to his, “an intensification of what we believe living to be. Passion is very much a given [...] all theatre is artifice.” And, pointing out that although Synge, “a marvellous writer, a colossus of world theatre,” wrote only eight hours of drama, she believes “he’s still the dominant figure of twentieth century Irish dramatic literature, and a dominant figure in world dramatic literature [...] He influenced, effectively, everybody.” She sees “Boucicault as a grandfather of the modern Irish drama movement,” in a clear line to Synge and then Beckett. Synge would especially have appreciated her recognition of Boucicault. But again and again, she returns to Synge (Hynes 199-202).

Certainly in a manner similar to huge intercepting lines of the inuksuit stretching across the tundra, it is possible to see some of this influence radiate out from the playwright like the spokes of a wheel. First, there was George Fitzmaurice, who had the misfortune to follow Synge too closely in time. His grotesque characters and fantastic plots were overshadowed for many years, but were reclaimed by Druid (1993) and the Abbey Theatre during its centennial year celebrations (2004). Sean O'Casey, who insisted that he was "not Synge," "not even [...] a reincarnation" (O'Casey, *Letters* I 166), learned from him, his plays swinging shatteringly between comedy and tragedy. Although rooted not in the countryside but in the realism of tenement life, there is more than a whiff of Synge's Maurya and Christy Mahon in *Juno and the Paycock*. Denis Johnston added further irony to the mix, even using some of Synge's characters in his cataclysmic *mélange*, *The Old Lady Says No!*. Eugene O'Neill's first glimpse of the Irish players performing *Riders to the Sea* spurred on his own desire to create. Samuel Beckett also denied a comforting closure for his tramps and in a rare public statement praised *The Well of the Saints*. And finally, the older Yeats himself, echoing Old Mahon in "Why should not old men be mad?," in the harshness of *Purgatory* and the audacity of Crazy Jane, would also acknowledge that poetry must have its roots in the "foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart" ("The Circus Animals' Desertion," *Poems* 392).

After the original founders had died, the Abbey Theatre with few exceptions paid little attention to the playwright who led them into the theatre of the future. Although an Irish translation of *Riders to the Sea* was produced at the Queen's Theatre in 1960 and *The Playboy* and *Shadow of the Glen* were twice revived, few playwrights during this fifteen-year interregnum showed any influence, popular Michael J. Molloy and John B. Keane being the most obvious exceptions. *The Enemy Within* was produced in 1962, but then Brian Friel too disappeared from the stage of Ireland's national theatre for many years, although throughout his work we continue to find intriguing suggestions of Synge.

The bridge between Druid Theatre and the Abbey began with Tom Murphy, whose first plays were produced in Galway. At the Abbey in 1979, Murphy directed *The Well of the Saints*, which bears many similarities in use of silence and stillness to his own plays. The same year he wrote and directed *Epitaph under Ether*, a compilation of Synge's life and works. "Yeats as a playwright doesn't mean anything to me," he has admitted. "Synge [...] I admire greatly, I admire him, not because of his Irishness, but because of the outrageous premises that he uses whether it's *The Well of the Saints* or whether it's *The Playboy*" (Murphy 357-58). Dealing with "a neglected, forgotten peasantry," finally himself turning back to the rural kitchen setting, Murphy has come to terms with Synge (Lanters 206-7). Observing the parallels with, and actual borrowings from, *The Playboy of the Western World*, Nicholas Grene has pointed out that Murphy's *A Thief of a Christmas* is "a re-working and extending [of] Synge's peculiar version of carnival, his sort of black rite of comedy" (Grene 232). It is possible also to compare the storied Mommo in Murphy's magnificently black comedy *Bailegangaire*

to determined old Maurya of *Riders to the Sea*, both driving their granddaughters/daughters to the same weary impatience – although rightly Murphy, having duly observed Synge as reference point, has like Friel taken his own road.

Playwright Vincent Woods might also be considered in the tradition of Synge. *At the Black Pig's Dyke*, produced and toured by Druid in 1994, bears the same harsh marks of fantasy-realism Hynes so admires, works “teetering on the verge of the abyss” (*Theatre Talk* 205). But just as copying the inukshuk for other situations and times diminishes its meaning (we now see it on corporate logos, clothing, even children's games – “build your own inukshuk”), so it is difficult to recognise Synge in many of his acclaimed ‘successors.’ Which brings us, inevitably, to Martin McDonagh.

It is the director Hynes herself who has drawn most attention to similarities between McDonagh and Synge. I am inclined to believe that her close collaboration with McDonagh has emphasised a kinship between the two playwrights. *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, the Leenane Trilogy [*The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *A Skull in Connemara*, *The Lonesome West*], and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* all had their first productions under Hynes's careful tutelage. This is not new in the history of Irish theatre – you will recall how another brilliantly innovative director, Joan Littlewood, encouraged Brendan Behan to ‘update’ and ‘revise’ *The Hostage*. But I must confess that, much as I respect Hynes, I find little of the genuine Synge spirit in his so-called successor. I suspect that the artifice of the playwright in Synge becomes the artifice of director-cum-dramatist in Hynes/McDonagh. The younger playwright may be more familiar with theatre than he claims, but the driving commitment may well be Druid's director. A production of *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* has recently opened in Istanbul, translated by the director as a satire on terrorism.

That Synge hovers behind McDonagh's plot lines is obvious – to cite only a few examples, the two murders in *Playboy* are paralleled in *A Skull in Connemara* (the title from Beckett, who took it from Synge); the title *The Lonesome West* comes from Michael James's “sainted glory this day in the lonesome west” (Synge, *Plays* II 65); the trilogy's sad Father Welsh bemoans that “God has no jurisdiction in this town” (McDonagh, *The Lonesome West* 175), and in fact the priest is banished in the opening scene of *Playboy*. Maureen, titular Beauty Queen of Leenane, scalds her mother's hand even more brutally than Pegeen scalds Christy with the burning sod; and so on. There is a recognisable ‘Synge-song’ in the dialogue, and the characters voice similar longings for adventure and otherness. But with few exceptions (notably Girleen, Father Walsh/Welsh and Crippled Billy, all losers), the characters are surface only, with none of the richness of nature, wildness interwoven with poetry, that Synge discovered in the west. Despite a similar swing between horror and laughter, the audience reaction to these later plays is more hysterical, Bergsonian, than the word-play we find in Synge; one is reminded of his condemnation of Baudelaire's “satanic laughter.” Synge insisted that the Dionysian elements be balanced by the Apollonian; in McDonagh's western world there is no beauty, and only occasional rifts of

helpless compassion – rather we are overwhelmed by the darkness of brutal, senseless violence and a grotesquerie without the light. Yet while audiences leave the theatre after McDonagh's plays drained by their gusts of laughter, objections to the violence in Synge's are still frequently voiced by critics, as are objections to the degeneracy of the peasants he depicts (Harris 74-82).

Why not the same confused response to McDonagh? Has the sensibility of the audience changed? McDonagh himself has admitted to the influence of film and television, which has led to his 'postmodernist' label, though he declines to participate in the 'ism' game (O'Toole). That term itself is troubling in its catch-all tendency, often too loosely used to identify the rejection of boundaries and rigidity of distinctions, discontinuity, fragmentation, and dehumanisation. This vague use of the term 'postmodernism' fractures the very topic of this collection of essays, denying responsibility in representation and representation in responsibility. Even Synge can be drawn into this whirlpool of manners, for he too celebrated the Dionysian, mocked the desperation of violence (political, Oedipal, social), and mingled extravaganza with heroics. But the desperation in his characters, not frequently noticeable in McDonagh, is real. Perhaps the greatest difference lies in the amount of work required of the audience. McDonagh has claimed that stage plays are "the easiest art forms. Just get the dialect, a bit of a story and a couple of nice characters, and you're away" (Feeney 24-25) – a far cry from Synge's laborious re-stitching. In order to grasp the hollow shallowness of McDonagh's characters, we have to recognise the incongruity of the clichés and the lack of moral distinction between what is humanly significant and what is not: a quarrel over Taytos is just as likely to cause murder as the withholding of evidence. No, although I admit the originality of Martin McDonagh and his innate ability to fetch a good story, I cannot see the Synge spirit in his works, even though in true postmodern pastiche he has cannibalised his predecessor's plays.

If I were to identify Synge's most obvious descendant I would choose Marina Carr. The Mai's hundred-year-old grandmother has much in common with the thirty-year old Widow Quin, who also had relations with a "foxy skipper" from beyond the seas, but even more striking is the language they speak, like Synge's grounded in character and landscape, summoned out of their own dark. Finding their own true voice, Carr's Hester Swane, Portia Coughlan, the Mai, like Synge's characters, live in a dual world (aptly called the "Midlands") that holds both promise of dreams and an "incredible darkness" (Hynes, *Theatre Talk* 205). Carr too reveals the dysfunction and damage of a society the world would rather ignore. Yet, again like Synge, as Christopher Murray has noted, "Myth rather than politics shapes her narrative" (Murray 237). "In a way you could define literature as one endless conversation with the dead," Carr has acknowledged of her own work (Carr 191), and although she reaches back further than Synge's Alceste, Shylock and Quixote, both build on a firm substructure of the past and the bedrock of personal experience. Like Synge she celebrates a balance between theatricality (the grotesque and the carnival – extravaganza) and the world of fancy, straddled by the perpetual outsider. Like Synge too she admits

that “the best lines I’ve ever written are things I’ve heard and I’ve just written them down” (Ni Anluain 48). However, she is no parodist or mimic; Marina Carr’s work is, as Synge felt all art should be, possible to only one person at one period and in one place. Her most recent play, *Ariel*, digs deeply into psychic darkness, moving far beyond Synge in her exploration of the passion of destruction.

Despite my fondness for *The Well of the Saints*, I have dwelt on *The Playboy of the Western World*, because it has served as an indicator, like the inukshuk, not only for Yeats and the early Abbey Theatre, but for later directors and playwrights seeking direction. The other play by Synge forever anthologised is, of course, *Riders to the Sea*, which leads us back to Marina Carr. As powerful as it is brief, at first sight the play seems the odd one out in Synge’s eight hours of theatre – in fact, Yeats considered *The Shadow of the Glen* better. However, even this play distressed the first audience, some of whom left because they could not bear to see a corpse on stage.

Certainly in *Riders to the Sea* there is no joy, nor the obvious contrapuntal effects of Rabelaisian versus rhapsody, light versus dark. Yet the play has its basis in the few months he spent on Aran, where he observed the hearth-wrenching eviction of an old woman and her family, the despair and wildness of a mother’s grief over yet one more drowned son, and the shock of recognition in the dangerous gusts of beauty he experienced on the cliffs of Aranmor. One of his early notebooks begins with the lines: “I cannot say it too often, the supreme interest of the island lies in the strange concord that exists between the people and the impersonal limited but powerful impulses of the nature that is round them.” Quickly moving on to the middle island, he settles “in a small cottage with a continual drone of Gaelic coming from the kitchen that opens into [his] room” and walks the cliff paths listening to “the endless change and struggle of the sea” (Synge, *Prose* 75n1, 57). That drone would echo throughout his first finished play, translated into the moaning of an old woman who grieves over the loss of all her men, while the wind and sea control rhythm, action, and mood. The play is the most formally musical of all his works, a tone poem in its sustained mood. The only counterpoint to the sea (the word appears on practically every page) is the insistent voice and presence of Maurya; in this world where past is imposed on present, pagan on Christian, there is no room to identify with daughters and son, no matter how deftly though minimally their characters are drawn. Inevitably the ritual renews itself, eroding past and future. As each past loss is relived in the present, Maurya becomes, like the island, a rock herself, beaten against by the relentless sea. No wonder the figure of the mother would rarely surface again in Synge’s plays, and when she does is celebrated as an outsider (raucous, vivid Mary Byrne in *The Tinker’s Wedding*; the frightful hag threatening Christy Mahon’s future before *The Playboy* begins).

All of Synge’s plays were written within a few short years. What would he have done had he lived beyond 1909, eventually married Molly Allgood, been around for the first

world war, 1916, the troubles? There were already signs of his restlessness – dissatisfied with the unfinished *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, he pleaded with Yeats to add a stronger element in the character of the grotesque Owen. Although Gregory, who directed the first production, may have imposed some of her own trademark on the language of Synge's *Deirdre* (especially suspect is the line "I have put away sorrow like an old shoe that is worn out and muddy"), finally it was left in the form they found it. There were also signs that Synge was becoming impatient with the restrictions of the Abbey Theatre and its folk tradition. Among his notebooks there are drafts of unfinished scenarios, including one dialogue between Rabelais and Thomas à Kempis and another between Lucifer and a Lost Soul from Maynooth, two "Scenarios for Thieves," and a comic Ossianic exchange between seven sly kings (arranged round the stage in a semi-circle of beds) and a monk, with a hawkler, horseman, houndman, boatman, harper, storyteller, and gravedigger as mocking chorus (*Plays* I 220-31).

What of the Abbey itself a hundred years on? Recently Desmond Cave, one of the theatre's senior actors, acknowledged in an interview in the *Irish Times* that Ireland still has a love-hate relationship with the Abbey ("Fanning the Abbey Flame"). Perhaps, as Synge discovered, teetering on the edge of public opinion is not all bad. For comedy, with its essential attribute laughter, is always subversive; the truth lies in its perception. As Tankred Dorst said in his international message on World Theatre Day,

Theatre is an impure art and therein lies its vital power. Unscrupulously, it uses everything that stands in its way. It is forever betraying its own principles. It is, of course, not immune to the fashions of the times, it avails itself of images from other media [...] It stammers and falls silent. It is extravagant and banal, evasive, destroys stories while creating new ones ... [T]he theatre will always be able to fill itself with life – as long as we feel the need to show each other what we are and what we are not and what we should be. (Dorst)

Therein lies the theatre's responsibility, reflecting the present and pointing, as does the inukshuk, to the path of the future, while making use of those materials on the ground on which we stand.

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'THE DEATH OF AN AUTHOR': COLLABORATIVE VOICES IN J.M. SYNGE'S *DEIRDRE OF THE SORROWS* (1910)

Lucie Pereira

In his essay "The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes seeks to decentralise the position of authors in relation to their work. In Barthes' view, the conceptual death of the author is necessary for writing to express itself freely so that "disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins" (142).

In the case of J.M. Synge, the writing of his last, uncompleted play, *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, was accompanied by the gradual deterioration of his health. He had been diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease and was informed after his second operation on 5 May 1908 that the tumour was inoperable. The idea of adapting the legend of Deirdre arose at the same time as the first symptoms became apparent. The earliest draft of the play is dated 5 September 1907, and he subsequently produced a considerable number of notebooks and typescripts ordered chronologically and alphabetically.

The storyline is very similar to the famous legend of *Tristan and Isolde*. A young, beautiful girl is predestined to bring destruction and sorrow to Ulster. In order to prevent this, the aged king Conchubor has her raised in a secluded place until she can be made his bride. However, she meets a young man named Naisi and elopes with him and his brothers to Scotland. After seven happy years spent in exile, they are called back to Ireland under the king's pledge of safety and protection. On their arrival, the treachery of the king is revealed: the three brothers are slain and Deirdre commits suicide.

Synge's uncompleted play is based on anonymous medieval prose texts. The re-creation and theatrical re-presentation of an ancestral tale thus implies the co-existence of multiple voices and intentions, some drawn from a mythical past. Since the author died before completing the play to his own satisfaction and had himself expressed great anxiety about the fate of the drafts, the disconcerting question of responsibility towards the intended text inevitably arises. By analysing the individual and collective forces at work before the author's death as well as the multiple responsibilities involved in the act of posthumous collaboration, this paper will look at the process of transmission, transformation, and editorial preservation of textual and pre-textual meaning.

Adapting ancient Irish folk material to a modern audience was an exercise that was new to Synge. On 29 November 1908, he wrote to an American admirer of his work, Louis Untermeyer: "I am at work on a saga play – after the *Playboy* I wanted a change from Peasant Comedy – [...] on the Deirdre story that Yeats and so many

others have treated [...] in one way or other" (CL 227).¹ The legend had indeed been adapted six years earlier by George Russell (AE) and published in the *All Ireland Review* of 1901.² Synge hated this version as he felt it was too disconnected from reality.³ Lady Gregory had also provided a prose account of the story in her *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* in 1902 and Yeats's play *Deirdre* had been performed at the Abbey Theatre in 1906. Synge's desire to turn to folk material may thus have been prompted by an imitative drive to add his name to the long list of modern adapters of the Deirdre myth. The change from peasant comedy to Irish saga was probably not an easy one to make. The legendary characters belonged to an inaccessible pre-Christian era to which Synge could not relate personally. He remarked in a letter to the New York journalist Frederick J. Gregg on 12 September 1907: "I am a little afraid that the 'saga' people might loosen my grip on reality" (CL 56) and four months later confessed to the New York lawyer and collector John Quinn: "these saga people when one comes to deal with them seem very *remote*; – one does not know what they thought or what they ate or where they went to sleep" (CL 121). The experiment therefore appeared as a challenge to Synge, whose creative imagination had always worked from what he knew, from observations and subjective impressions anchored in reality.

The mystery surrounding the origins of the tale further complicated this retrospective process. It has widely been agreed that the legend of Deirdre, like many other Celtic stories, was initially transmitted orally. The tale later underwent major alterations and the fifteenth-century version *Oideadh Chloinne hUisneach* appears as a Christianised and romanticised re-telling of the twelfth-century primary text *Longes Mac n-Uislenn*. The extent of the influence of a pre-Christian oral tradition on the first written narratives is difficult to prove as in its unwritten form, and later in the first medieval narratives, the legend had already absorbed the thematic, aesthetic, and ideological elements carried by the early individual voices (storytellers, scribes, etc.) that had re-fashioned the myth. Barthes' definition of text as "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (146) can be applied to these multiple vehicles of textual meaning. The eradication of these creative voices or, as Michel Foucault put it, "the voluntary obliteration of the self" (117) probably favoured collective interest in the story and was a necessary condition for it to acquire a new mythical dimension. J.M. Synge was aware of the complex origins of the legend. Unlike Yeats and Russell, Synge probably did not rely on nineteenth-century English translations, but read the original texts. He strove to retain the Celtic flavour of the tale and attended Henri D'Arbois De Jubainville's course in Old Irish at the Sorbonne.

1 The sigla *CL* and *D* are used throughout for references to Synge's *Collected Letters* (Vol. 2) and *Deirdre of the Sorrows* in *Collected Works* (Vol. 4), respectively.

2 *The All Ireland Review* was a weekly literary journal published in Kilkenny from January 1900 to January 1906 and edited by Standish J. O'Grady.

3 Synge criticised Russell's work for being of "the fancy land only" ("Various Notes" 348).

During his sojourn on Aran from 21 September to 9 October 1900 (or 1901),⁴ he translated into English a manuscript written about 1740 and based on the later medieval version. This school exercise book containing fifty-seven leaves and entitled "The Fate of the Children of Uisneach" is preserved in Trinity College Dublin (MS 4,341).

Faithfulness to the multiple pre-texts demanded a death-like disconnection from one's subjective impressions and contemporary reality. In Synge's version of the legend, the physical death of the protagonists is described as a necessary precondition for the legend to transcend time and for the story to be "remembered for ever."⁵ Michel Foucault underlines that the same logic is displayed in Greek epics where "the hero accepted an early death because his life, consecrated and magnified by death, passed into immortality; and the narrative redeemed his acceptance of death" (117). There is definitely a Greek touch to J.M. Synge's dramatic treatment of the legend. Deirdre is certain that she will only achieve mythical status by choosing to accept a premature tragic death. Her hubristic pride also recaptures the mood of Greek tragedy, as she prophesies before killing herself that "there will be a story told of a ruined city and a raving king and a woman will be young forever" (*D* 267). Just like Yeats's Deirdre, she defies time by making events into legends and by asserting the need for the story to be carried through time, triumphantly unaltered.⁶ The ideal story should thus *be told*, its legendary status prevailing over the agents of its transmission. This is also symbolised in Deirdre's "half-finished piece of tapestry,"⁷ which conjures up the image of the Fates, the Greek goddesses who presided over the births and lives of men. In the same way, the thread of the story metaphorically escapes, at least to a certain extent, authorial control.

Deirdre of the Sorrows was also the unique personal investment of a dying man, as its continuous rewriting mirrored the progression of the author's final intentions. Paradoxically, despite its being based on a pre-established text, it is considered to be the most autobiographical of his plays. He undoubtedly identified his fiancée Molly with the tragic heroine, and openly expressed in his letters a desire to see her play the part of Deirdre. The fact that he mentally visualised his young girlfriend as a beautiful tragic heroine is not in itself surprising or indicative of a wider identification process. But, written at a time of great physical suffering and under a growing sense of a fatal outcome, his version of *Deirdre* became very much reflective of his own

4 The exact year is uncertain.

5 On the theme of eternal remembrance being achieved through an early death, consider W.B. Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902): "They shall be remembered for ever, / They shall be alive for ever, / They shall be speaking for ever, / The people shall hear them for ever" (*Collected Plays* 86).

6 Yeats's Deirdre offers her bracelet to a nameless musician: "[...] you are wearing this [*Gives Musician a bracelet*. / To show that you have Deirdre's story right" (*Collected Plays* 194).

7 The "half-finished piece of tapestry" appears as a central element in the opening stage directions.

tragic condition. In that light, one no longer finds a Machiavellian representation of the evil monarch, as had been the case in most of the previous texts. Instead, the figure of the king becomes humanised to the extent that the reader cannot help pitying him for his loneliness in old age: "it would be a good bargain [he says] if it was I was in the grave, and Deirdre crying over me, and it was Naisi who was old and desolate" (*D* 259). The sixteen-year age difference to Molly undoubtedly preoccupied Synge. At 37, Synge was not old, but he was in the last year of his life. The identification was thus two-fold: like King Conchubor he feared that his young love would reject him on account of their age difference and his deteriorating physical condition, but he probably found consolation in the thought that he would never become "old and desolate," that he, like Naisi, was to be eternally young. As Maurice Bourgeois underlined in his biography of Synge, published four years after the writer's death: "it is because he bids farewell to life that he grasps it to the full" (217). Synge's Deirdre is therefore made to live passionately and fully until she feels it is time to die. In that, she is distinguishable from the classical Greek heroine, as she is not trying to escape from her fate but freely chooses to follow it. These few examples suffice to illustrate the extent of J.M. Synge's emotional involvement in the writing of what became a very personal version of the tale.

But works are also produced under defined social circumstances and texts are themselves producers of ideologies. Yeats remarked in *The Death of Synge* that Synge displayed no interest in politics and rarely drew political implications: "I cannot remember that he spoke of politics or showed any interest in men in the mass" (*Synge and the Ireland of his Time* 11). He also suggested that Synge never commented on other authors, including Yeats himself, and was only concerned with his own writings: "For him nothing existed but his thought. [...] I do not think he disliked other writers – they did not exist" (*The Death of Synge* 17).

Synge gave a naturalistic grounding to *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. By rooting the myth in contemporary reality, he created what Nicholas Grene called "a saga play in peasant dress" (175). According to Maurice Bourgeois, he "adapted a more or less supernatural theme to the requirements of his realistic art" (214). A Rabelaisian note was introduced through the grotesque character of Owen, who was not present in the original. He serves as the raving fool of the tragedy who declares, "It's a poor thing to see a queen's nose reaching down to scrape her chin," or complains of being "so lonesome you'd squeeze kisses on a cur dog's nose" (*D* 225, 223). But if Synge strove "not to loosen his grip on reality,"⁸ then the adaptation also had to operate on the linguistic level, hence the odd juxtaposition of colloquial and elevated styles. Making kings speak like peasants may indeed seem unusual, yet as was underlined by Declan Kiberd and Maurice Bourgeois, such linguistic primitivisms were in fact truer to the real spirit of the legend, as they best recaptured the crudeness of the first medieval

8 This fear is expressed in a letter to Frederick J. Gregg: "I am a little afraid that the 'saga people' might loosen my grip on reality" (*CL* 56).

tale. The farcical aspects of the play further betray a certain pragmatic desire to anchor the text in a more contemporary social reality, as opposed to the polished style and dreamy idealism of AE's and Yeats's versions.

The fact that J.M. Synge was not, in Yeats's view, famous for being politically involved makes it all the more interesting to determine to what extent the political context still invades the text, whether this had been intended by the author or not. As the work of Pierre Bourdieu has emphasised,⁹ individual and collective forces go hand in hand and the social contextualisation of the figure of the author renders authorship necessarily collaborative. The author exists as an autonomous self, but also functions within a given society. Synge achieves the transposition of what Louis Althusser calls the "real conditions of existence"¹⁰ into a popular legendary tale by, for example, having Deirdre go back to Ireland willingly, although she is aware that certain death awaits the lovers there. Some patriotic and political choices are therefore at stake and one of the reasons she gives Fergus to justify her return to Ireland is that "it's a lonesome thing to be away from Ireland always" (*D* 237). By contrast, in the medieval accounts of the legend, the heroine goes back to Ireland reluctantly, singing the beauty of Scotland. It is then well possible that the political context in 1909, with the growing nationalist sentiments that would lead to the 1916 Easter Rising, favoured the representation of a heroine ready to sacrifice her life for Ireland. In that context, the figure of Deirdre became assimilated collectively with the situation in Ireland even before Synge's version. As Mary C. King underlines, "Deirdre was already well established in the mythology of Irish nationalist aspirations as a typological figure whose tragic fate represented that of Ireland" (161). The running ideologies of national independence thus became transposed onto the adapted text.

In the last stages of Synge's life, the growing awareness that he would not have sufficient time to complete his *Deirdre* led him to express his last wishes regarding his unpublished material. It appears that Synge felt uncomfortable with the idea that soon he would no longer be present to monitor what was to be done with his works. He thus decided that W.B. Yeats's sister Elizabeth, who directed the Cuala Press, should publish his *Poems and Translations*, to be followed by *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. But he then told W.B. Yeats in a letter dated 29 April 1908: "I will not be able to have Deirdri [*sic*] for your sister – I have written to tell her" (*CL* 151). On 4 May 1908, the day before his second operation, he had written a will-like letter that stated his desire to have Yeats as editor of his works:

This is only to go to you if anything should go wrong with me under the operation or after it. I am a little bothered about my 'papers.' I have a certain amount of verse that I think would be worth preserving, possibly also the 1st and 3rd acts of 'Deirdre' [...]. It is rather a hard thing to ask you but I do not want my good things destroyed or my bad

9 Consider, for example, Bourdieu's work on Flaubert.

10 See Louis Althusser: "men represent their real conditions of existence to themselves in an imaginary form" (294).

things printed rashly [...]. Do what you can – Good luck. J.M. Synge. (Yeats, “Preface”, *Synge and the Ireland of his Time*)

Synge survived his second operation but his condition soon deteriorated. In February 1909, he had to go to hospital for the third and last time. He took the typescript of *Deirdre of the Sorrows* to Elpis Nursing Home, where he died on 24 March 1909. The different drafts were later transmitted to Yeats:

In the summer of 1909, the Executors sent me a large bundle of papers, [...] manuscripts and typewritten prose and verse, put together and annotated by Synge himself before his last illness. I spent a portion of each day for weeks reading and re-reading early dramatic writing, poems, essays, and so forth [...]. (Yeats, “Preface”, *Synge and the Ireland of his Time*)

By publishing Synge’s confidential letter and alluding to the Executors, Yeats became his official editor following the wishes of the moribund author.

Faithful to the last wishes of his friend, Yeats worked with Molly’s advice at constructing an ideal text out of the chronologically and alphabetically ordered drafts. Lady Gregory assisted them and recalled in *Our Irish Theatre* the difficulties of the collaboration: “After he had gone, we took infinite trouble to bring the versions together, [...] but it needed the writer’s hand” (82). During the summer of 1909, the three of them tried to bring order and form into the innumerable typescript pages. They had to determine which drafts to use as copy-texts for the first printed edition. Would the last version be most representative of the author’s final intentions? In his preface to the first edition of *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, Yeats points out that this is not necessarily the case, as Synge “would have made several more [versions] always altering and enriching” (D 179). However, the text finally produced draws substantially on the final drafts. The other dilemma for Yeats was to choose whether he should follow his friend’s last wishes and alter certain scenes himself or leave the text as it was. Yeats opted for the second alternative, refusing to corrupt the text by rewriting certain passages: “Synge asked that either I or Lady Gregory should write some few words to make this possible, but after writing in a passage we were little satisfied and thought it better to have the play performed, as it is printed here, with no word of ours” (D 179).¹¹

This decision was made contrary to authorial intention. In his letter to Yeats, Synge also implied that the second act of his *Deirdre*, with which he was deeply dissatisfied, should not go into print. This posed structural problems to the editor, who could not have a play published with the middle-act missing. In the end, *Deirdre of the Sorrows* confronted the editor with a desire to reproduce an authoritative text, but also with the realisation that this was not possible.

11 Synge had apparently asked Yeats to include Owen in the first act and have him steal a knife left by king Conchubor in Lavarcham’s cottage.

As desired by Synge, *Deirdre of the Sorrows* was subsequently left in the hands of Elizabeth. In 1910, the Cuala Press was in its first independent years, having previously existed as an all-women co-operative industry, with an embroidery department, under the name of the Dun Emer Press. The Cuala Press preserved the ideological and typographical principles of Dun Emer, as formulated in the publicity leaflet the co-operative produced in 1904:

A wish to find work for Irish hands in the making of beautiful things was the beginning of Dun Emer. [...] Everything as far as possible is Irish: the paper of the books, the linen of the embroidery [...]. The designs are also of the spirit and tradition of the country. (Miller 15)

The young women employed there were trained not only in printing, but also in Irish dance, language, and games. The paper used was an Irish mould-made all-rag paper, produced locally at Swiftbrook Paper Mills in Saggart, County Dublin. Although the type was Caslon, not an especially Irish type, and the ink was German, the spirit of the press was decidedly Irish. The pressmark of the Dun Emer Press, "The Lady Emer Standing by a Tree" drawn by Elinor Monsell, was used on Cuala title pages until 1925 and further emphasised both the Irishness and feminine dimension of the press. The figure of the melancholic young woman and the Celtic symbolism of the tree seem particularly appropriate to introduce the first edition of Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*.

As Jerome J. McGann points out in *The Textual Condition*: "Meaning is transmitted through bibliographical as well as linguistic codes" (57). The Irish nationalism inherent in the press was reflected in the pressmark of its title pages and colophons that stressed a Gaelic provenance. If *Deirdre of the Sorrows* is already based on a Celtic tale, the colophon further insists: "Printed & published by Elizabeth Corbet Yeats at the Cuala Press, Churchtown, Dundrum, in the county of Dublin, Ireland, finished on May eve, in the year nineteen hundred and ten."¹² The insistence on "May eve," instead of 30 April, is not *insignificant*. "May eve" bore a Celtic resonance, being the night of the pagan feast of Bealtaine. The nationalist messages implicit in its bibliographical codes (such as the title page, pressmark, and colophon) emphasised the role of such paratextual elements in generating meaning derived from the ideologies of the press rather than the text itself.

In his poem "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," W.B. Yeats pays homage to J.M. Synge: "And that enquiring man John Synge comes next, / That dying chose the living world for text" (*Collected Poems* 149). Yet, after the author's death, the living world was in charge of giving textual unity to the diverse drafts and notebooks of the

12 The colophon was to be parodied by James Joyce in the opening dialogue between Stephen and Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses*: "Five lines of text and ten pages of notes about the folk and the fishgods of Dundrum. Printed by the weird sisters in the year of the big wind" (11).

unfinished *Deirdre*. However, this collaborative editorial responsibility enabled the materialisation of Synge's uncompleted play and allowed readers to take part, in their turn, in the process of textual transmission. *Deirdre of the Sorrows* was staged at the Abbey Theatre on 13 January 1910 with Molly playing the part of Deirdre, as Synge had wanted. Nevertheless, the shadow of the author was still present. Maunsel and Co. in Dublin published the first trade edition in 1911. Long after these inaugural publications, editors persevered in their attempts to produce a text that would remain as close as possible to the one originally intended. The most recent example is Ann Saddlemyer's genetic editing of Synge's works, which provides a detailed account of the different draft variants of the text on the left-hand page. The reader is thus made more aware of the plurality of Synge's intentions as they evolved through time. Yet if intentions vary with time, does an objectively definable authorial sense still exist?

The collaborative and social aspects of text-production do not obliterate the figure of the author. For obvious reasons, a legend cannot survive unaltered, but needs to be reshaped in different forms and by various agents in order to raise collective interest and survive. Although the author has limited control over what is eventually signified (and even more so if he dies prematurely), I would argue against Barthes that his voice still lives on, even after the birth of the reader.

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THE CONTEMPORARY FIRST-PERSON NOVEL IN IRELAND: RENEWAL OF AN OLD TRADITION?

Elke D'hoker

During the last two or three decades, the Irish novel has undergone a renewal and has met with unprecedented success. While this success is most aptly measured by production numbers and sales figures, it also becomes palpable in critical studies of the Irish novel published before the great boom in Irish fiction-writing. In *The Irish Novel* James Cahalan still feels it is necessary to apologise for the lack of a strong novelistic tradition in Ireland, and in *The Irish Novel in Our Time* Patrick Rafferty concludes his historical sketch with rather hesitant references to promising new writers such as John McGahern, John Banville, Edna O'Brien, and Aidan Higgins. These writers have now fully realised their promise and have been joined by a large generation of younger writers who have expanded and explored the Irish novel in all directions. Surely, Rüdiger Imhof would no longer be able to write, as he did in 1989, that "the bulk of books published during the last couple of decades is decidedly old-fashioned and conventional, not to say parochial" (Imhof, *Banville* 11).

One particular feature in this relatively recent reinvigoration of the Irish novel is the ever-increasing popularity of first-person fiction. A superficial glance at the shortlists of literary prizes or even a quick perusal of *Books Ireland* reveals that a substantial body of the novels published over the last ten or twenty years have been written at least partly in the first-person mode.¹ Most of the major contemporary Irish novelists have published at least a few first-person novels (cases in point being Edna O'Brien, Roddy Doyle, John McGahern, Dermot Bolger, Glenn Patterson, Anne Enright, Éilís Ní Dhuíbhne, Emma Donoghue, Hugo Hamilton, Joseph O'Connor, and Colm Tóibín), while many others novelists, such as John Banville, Patrick McCabe, Anne Haverly, Robert McLiam Wilson, and Neil Jordan, have made first-person narration almost exclusively the hallmark of their writing.

This observation gives rise to the hypothesis that there may be a connection between the increased popularity of the first-person novel and the qualitative and quantitative boom of the contemporary Irish novel. In other words, the question is whether this foregrounding of the character-narrator in the contemporary Irish novel is simply part of a wider international trend or instead presents a renewal or a strengthening of a specific traditional characteristic of the Irish novel in particular. In support of the former option, one could refer to the first-person novels published abundantly outside Ireland, by well-known writers such as Kazuo Ishiguro, Graham Swift, Jeanette Win-

1 A quick calculation revealed that 40% of all fiction reviews in *Books Ireland* between 2001 and 2003 concerned first-person novels.

erson, or J.M. Coetzee. On the other hand, the latter is supported by remarks often made – although less often firmly demonstrated – about the novel tradition in Ireland.

It has indeed been a long-standing complaint among critics of the Irish novel that, unlike the English or the French, the Irish did not produce any truly great realist novels. Instead of a wide social canvas, a formal coherence, and an omniscient narrator, the Irish novel presented an anecdotal structure, a loose plot, and colloquial diction. Nowadays, these elements are no longer frowned upon as deficiencies, but perceived as distinctive characteristics of the Irish novel tradition. Roy Foster defends these traits arguing that “the assertion that Irish literary culture is deficient in great novels may simply indicate that Irish writers had neither the time nor the inclination for novels that were formal in conception and linear in structure, as in the great age of English or French fiction” (Foster 3). James Cahalan asks rhetorically,

Why do Irish novels tend to have strong narrators and weak plots? [...] Perhaps partly because of the power of the oral storytelling tradition in Ireland, as well as the virtual absence of a middle class in Ireland as both subject and audience. (15)

In the rest of his very useful study, however, he focuses on thematic rather than formal or narratological concerns and hence fails to provide a sustained discussion of strong narrators or loose plots in Irish fiction.

In order to provide an answer to the questions I formulated earlier, precisely such a discussion is required. A comprehensive discussion would be outside the scope of this article. Therefore, I will restrict myself to a brief overview of the first-person narrator in the canonical history of the Irish novel in order to establish whether strong first-person narration is indeed a familiar feature of Irish literary history and whether it is justifiable to claim that the oral storytelling tradition influences not only the short story, as is generally accepted, but also the Irish novel.² Before we delve into Irish literary history, however, it may be necessary to clarify the rather vague term, ‘strong narrator,’ so that we know what we are looking for.

Structuralist narratology classifies narrators according to their degree of perceptibility, which ranges from a maximum of covertness in so-called weak narrators to a maximum of overtness in so-called strong narrators (Chatman 196-8; Rimmon-Kenan 96-99). Signs of overtness, in mounting order of perceptibility, are description of setting, identification of character, temporal summary, definition of character, insight into the character’s (un)consciousness, and commentary on the story or narration. Following this scheme, I-narrators are among the most overt of narrators since they – almost invariably – judge events, interpret thoughts and feelings, and self-consciously com-

2 Many commentators have noted the influence of the storytelling tradition on the Irish short story. Sean O’Faolain and Frank O’Connor noticed the link in their early studies of the short story and several more recent articles have traced the influence of folklore and storytelling in the works of writers as diverse as William Carleton, James Stephens, Frank O’Connor, and Liam O’Flaherty.

ment on the process of narration. The fact that they can easily be identified as a character within the story further heightens their perceptibility. Yet, even within the class of overt first-person narrators, an additional distinction can be made between unobtrusive I-narrators, who tend to hide behind the story they are narrating and stronger or more obtrusive narrators, who are very much present in the story they tell. Examples of unobtrusive I-narrators can be found in Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*, John McGahern's *The Leavetaking*, and Edna O'Brien's *The Country Girls*. Strong or obtrusive narrators appear, for example, in Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, Neil Jordan's *The Dream of a Beast*, or John Banville's *The Book of Evidence*. Precisely because the personal experiences, diction, and opinions of these strong narrators can be seen to shape and influence the story they tell, they are especially vulnerable to charges of unreliability. This leads to an ironic distance opening up between the story as it is told by the narrator and the story as it is construed by the reader from the contradictions, idiosyncrasies, or gaps in the narration.³ This second, hidden story may then either supplement or contradict the first. Famous examples of such double-levelled narratives in Irish literature are Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* and Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*. Although reliability is itself largely a matter of degree, it is clear that the unreliable narrator stands at the far end of the scale of weak vs. strong I-narrators. Suspicions of unreliability are therefore easy markers in the search for obtrusive I-narrators in the Irish novel.

It is notoriously difficult to clearly demarcate the Irish – or Anglo-Irish⁴ – novel from the English one in the early decades of the novel tradition. During the eighteenth and even in the nineteenth century, many Irish novelists lived in both England and Ireland, writing primarily for the English market and looking for publishers in London. Yet, while it is necessary to consider the Irish novel – just like the Scottish or early American novel – within the wider context of the English novel (or rather, the novel in English), it is also possible to look for specific interests in form and subject-matter that might set apart novelists with special ties to Ireland from those with no links whatsoever. This pragmatic approach should enable us to look for specifically Irish themes and formal characteristics in the works of, say, Goldsmith, Swift, or Stoker, without having to engage in the controversy about their national identity or socio-cultural allegiances. Laurence Sterne will be considered here in this manner: not as

3 Wayne Booth first introduced this term in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: "I call a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author's norms), *unreliable* when he does not" (158). This rather vague definition has recently been the cause of considerable debate (see e.g. Nünning and Phelan), but in practice, readers seem to know quite well when a narrator's representations or interpretations are suspect.

4 Although I am aware of the concerns which prompted the use of the term 'Anglo-Irish' for Irish literature written in the English language in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I will – for convenience's sake – employ the term 'the Irish novel' for novels written by Irish authors from the eighteenth century to the present.

the founding father of the Irish novel, but rather as one of the first great innovators of the first-person novel who – perhaps not entirely by coincidence – happened to have links with Ireland.⁵

In the early years of the English novel tradition, first-person narration was the dominant mode of narrative representation. Inspired by existing genres such as the travel narrative and the picaresque novel, Daniel Defoe wrote *Robinson Crusoe* – and most of his other novels – as first-person narratives. Similarly influenced by the popularity of authentic ego-documents in the eighteenth century, Samuel Richardson let Pamela tell her own story in letters and diary entries. It was only by means of the editorial narrator's 'I' – traditionally read as the voice of the author – that Fielding instituted the omniscient third-person mode, which became the model for realist representation in the decades to come. With *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, however, Sterne breaks new ground, not only in the novel tradition in general, but also specifically in the exploration of first-person narration. In the novels of Defoe, Richardson, and many of their followers, the story is of primary importance and I-narration is simply considered the most convenient and convincing mode of conveying that story to the reader. In *Tristram Shandy*, however, the emphasis shifts from story to narrator, from the events and facts of the plot to the narrator's idiosyncratic way of telling these events. Tristram is clearly a strong narrator who foregrounds his opinions and ideas, draws attention to himself as narrator rather than as protagonist, and self-consciously reflects on the problems of narrative representation. Similarly, while Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding did their very best to establish their narrator's reliability (cf. Nünning 91), the whimsicalities of Fielding's highly eccentric narrator show precisely the opposite, namely that a narrative cannot possibly be a fully reliable representation of facts. Sterne makes very clear that the narrator's perspective is of necessity limited and that his opinions and characteristics colour and distort his narrative. In addition, *Tristram Shandy* and an older, but lesser known Irish first-person novel, Thomas Amory's *The Life of John Bunclce, Esq.*, share the conversa-

5 That the controversy about someone like Sterne is still going on is evident in Imhof's recent *A Short History of Irish Literature*. In an argument of over one page, he sets out to demonstrate that Sterne and his novel are "thoroughly English" and that "there is no Irish literary tradition in the light of which *Tristram Shandy* could be appreciated" (26). Although Sterne's links with Ireland are admittedly rather small, I think that the Irish oral storytelling tradition might provide an interesting backdrop against which to consider some of the very peculiarities and innovations that have made *Tristram Shandy* famous as the first anti- or meta-novel. I agree therefore with Cahalan, who claims that "it is possible to discover the features of a particular kind of Irish novel even among Irish writers who, although born in Ireland, did not choose to write novels about Ireland" (7).

tional style, the loose, anecdotal plot, and the eccentric narrator which were later construed as indicative of an Irish oral tradition.⁶

Another Irish novel which brings all of these traits to even greater acclaim is Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*. Although this novel is, strictly speaking, neither the first novel set in Ireland, nor the first novel written by an Anglo-Irish writer, the publication of *Castle Rackrent* in 1800 is often perceived as the beginning of the Irish novel tradition. Incidentally, the near-mythical status of this novel is similar to Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, which is often celebrated as the first modern American novel.⁷ Both of these novels interestingly share a first-person narrator who 'speaks' with a markedly colloquial voice and whose (real or professed) naïveté gives his narrative an ironic double edge. In a brief historical overview of unreliable narration, Ansgar Nünning pronounces Thady Quirk therefore the first unreliable narrator in British fiction. Nünning reads Thady as an "incredibly naïve servant [whose] sense of family honour and loyalty not only borders on the absurd, but also distorts his chronicle of what he believes to be an illustrious family" (91). Although Nünning's reading of Thady's story may itself be rather too naïve, *Castle Rackrent* certainly is the first truly double-levelled narrative in the English novel. In the preface, the Edgeworths themselves point out that Thady's blind "partiality to the family" distorts his narrative, but they consider this distortion to be so blatant that it "ceases to be dangerous" (62). Indeed, underneath Thady's rather ambivalent description of the Rackrent family, the reader easily detects Maria Edgeworth's cautionary tale about bad management and absenteeism in the Irish Big Houses. Yet, it remains a point of discussion among critics and readers in how far Thady himself is aware of this hidden story or, even more disingenuously, had a hand in the Rackrents' downfall himself. Perhaps Edgeworth herself gave the most accurate description of her narrator, when she wrote in the post-script:

All the features in the foregoing sketch were taken from life, and they are characteristic of that mixture of quickness, simplicity, cunning, carelessness, dissipation, disinterestedness, shrewdness, and blunder, which, in different forms, and with various success, has been brought upon the stage, or delineated in novels. (121)

Apart from the question whether Thady is a crafty schemer or a naïve and faithful servant, it is clear that Thady is a highly obtrusive narrator, whose voice and personality shape and determine his narrative. As Marilyn Butler indicates, Thady's voice – with its colloquial diction, its many non-sequiturs and inconsistencies – must have

6 Cahalan argues: "Buncle establishes a speaking narrative voice engaged in the telling of a seemingly formless, long tale – a pattern that would become very familiar in the Irish novel" (12) and Imhof agrees: "In structure the book is episodic, displaying an affinity with the Irish oral tradition in its delight in fantasy and regression" (*Short History* 37). In an article on this novel, Ian Campbell Ross sets out to prove "Amory's debt to Irish oral narrative" (76).

7 As Ernest Hemingway famously said: "All modern American fiction comes from one book by Mark Twain" (as quoted in Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* 18).

substantially subverted the common expectations of contemporary readers (9).⁸ Edgeworth herself insisted on the oral origins of the novel and she succeeded quite well in retaining this oral quality within the written narrative: "The only character drawn from life in *Castle Rackrent* is Thady himself, the teller of the story [...] I heard him when first I came to Ireland, and his dialect struck me, and his character, and I became so acquainted with it that I could speak it without effort" (as quoted in Butler 4). *Castle Rackrent* may therefore also be the first example of what the Russian formalists have called *skaz*, a written narrative that imitates a spontaneous oral account in its use of dialect, slang, and idiom of a particular person.⁹ It is perhaps also a sign of its uniqueness that the innovative style and narration of *Castle Rackrent* did not find any immediate followers. Edgeworth did not publish another book like it and although many Irish writers would become fond of using Irish colloquial diction, it remained for a long time safely embedded within the narrative of the omniscient narrator.

In fact, in the course of the nineteenth century, writers increasingly preferred the omniscient narrator, possibly, Nünning argues, because "novelists proceeded from the assumption that an objective view of the world, of others, and of oneself can be attained" (92). Still, even in the mid-nineteenth century, the high point for the Victorian realist novel, some first-person narratives continued to be written. First among those are fictional autobiographies or memoirs, such as Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, or W.M. Thackeray's *The History of Henry Esmond*. This genre, which still owed a great deal to authentic memoirs and autobiographies, was subsequently used for comic purposes in W.M. Thackeray's *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq.* If in the traditional retrospective first-person novel, the narrator is a fairly unobtrusive figure who focalises most of the story through his or her younger, experiencing self, in the comic autobiography the focus is very much on the eccentricities of the narrator. In the case of *Barry Lyndon*, we even have a highly untrustworthy narrator who unwittingly condemns himself as conceited, arrogant, and selfish through his own story. While *Barry Lyndon* is usually considered the first in the genre of comic autobiography, which was rather popular during the 1840s and 50s, it is worth noting that Thackeray found inspiration for his novel in Ireland. In a letter, Thackeray intimates that his main charac-

8 See Hollingworth for an enlightening and subtle study on Edgeworth's use of colloquial speech in her work.

9 In most critical accounts, *Huckleberry Finn* is referred to as the first example of *skaz* in the English language, but a case could be made for this to be *Castle Rackrent*.

ter is based on one of his many Irish acquaintances¹⁰ and that the innovative narrative mode of the novel is partly modelled on Charles Lever's *Harry Lorrequer*:

I have in my trip to the country, found materials (rather a character) for a story, that I'm sure will be amusing. I want to write it & illustrate it, and as you see how Harry Lorrequer succeeds both in the Dublin Magazine & out of it, why should not my story of BARRY-LYNN [...] answer in as well as out of Regina. (as quoted in Anisman 38)¹¹

Charles Lever's *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer* features a narrator who, although highly similar to Barry Lyndon, is rather less disagreeable. Looking back on his life, Lorrequer tells us – with pride and abundant hyperbole – of his adventures, which mainly consist of lying, bragging, and trying to cheat other people. Lorrequer is clearly an unreliable narrator, both epistemologically – one has to take his story with more than just a grain of salt – and ethically, since selfishness and conceit colour his narrative as well as his actions. However, since most of the characters he meets have similar defects, his actions are never really vicious, and, while Lyndon ends his life in prison, Lorrequer ends up marrying the rich heiress he loves. The formal differences between both novels are again revealing for the Irish novel tradition: while *Barry Lyndon* has a coherent plot and a clear moral message, *Harry Lorrequer* consists of a series of anecdotes and its tone is merely comic. The novel is also closer to *Tristram Shandy* or *John Bunclé*, as the narrator “hold[s] forth, taking listener and reader wherever wit and imagination lead” (Cahalan 68).

Apart from the (comic) fictional autobiography, the mystery novel is another nineteenth-century genre in which the first-person narrator proved its lasting popularity. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, and – within the Irish tradition – many of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's Gothic novels are cases in point. When studying the narrative voice in *The House by the Churchyard* and *Uncle Silas* – an I-witness and an I-protagonist, respectively – one is struck by the emphasis on oral storytelling. Although in fact, both narrators write down their stories, they frequently refer to the process of ‘telling’ their story. While the narrators of *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* write letters and journals, Charles de Cresseron in *The House by the Churchyard* opens his tale with: “We are going to talk, if you please, in the ensuing chapters of what was going on in Chapelizod about a hundred years ago” (1). Maud Ruthyn in *Uncle Silas* ends her tale somewhat more ambiguously with: “I have penned it. I sit for a moment breathless” (423). Although the narrator of *The House by the Churchyard* is not an entirely plau-

10 Rather good-humouredly Thackeray once called Ireland “a nation of liars,” referring to the fact that cunning and storytelling, whether true or false, were in high popular esteem (Sanders vii). *Castle Rackrent* is also mentioned as one of the sources for *Barry Lyndon*, precisely because of its narrative technique (Anisman 34).

11 Although Anisman exhaustively lists the real and literary models for *Barry Lyndon*, he curiously fails to take up this hint, perhaps because *Harry Lorrequer* does not really belong to the established canon of the Victorian novel. Similarly, Andrew Sanders neglects to mention *Harry Lorrequer* as a source for *Barry Lyndon*, even though he mentions Thackeray's acquaintance with Lever and with his work (xvii-xix).

sible I-narrator – he assumes the properties of an omniscient narrator after the first chapter – he styles himself as a storyteller throughout, and his wise and humane voice effectively holds together the various plots, anecdotes, and characters that make up this Irish mystery novel.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the first-person novel went into further decline. Following Henry James's famous injunction "dramatize, dramatize," showing (or *mimesis*) was promoted as the highest ideal to which the novelist could aspire. In practice, this meant that novelists sought to efface the narrator as much as possible.¹² The modernist novel found other means of entering and exposing individual consciousness – e.g. through the use of free indirect style and interior monologue – and the invariably overt I-narrator was doomed to lead a more marginal existence in short stories and 'lesser' genres such as the detective novel.¹³ During the first half of the twentieth century, very few first-person novels were written, either in the Irish or the English literary traditions. A major – and again Irish – breakthrough came after the Second World War with Beckett's rigorous exploration of I-narration in his *Trilogy*. In the history of the first-person novel, Beckett's *Trilogy* constitutes a limiting case. It presents an extremely denuded form of I-narration which explores both the limits and the possibilities of the genre. Molloy, Moran, Malone, and the narrator of *The Unnamable* are narrators and almost nothing but narrators. All props of occupation, history, relationships, etc. are increasingly left behind. We only read, or even hear, a voice telling stories about itself and about others who turn out to be very much like this self. Even though the narrator in *The Unnamable* expresses the wish to reach the end of storytelling, to reach final silence, he must or will go on narrating. For the words he speaks not only create stories, but also the author of the stories. In this way, Beckett illustrates some basic truths about all first-person narrators, even about all forms of storytelling. Although the influence of Beckett on the contemporary novel is much less researched than the influence of Joyce, there might be a connection between his *Trilogy* and the boom of first-person narratives in the decades that followed. While Beckett's influence could be demonstrated in novels by John Banville, Neil Jordan, Edna O'Brien, or Robert McLiam Wilson, further research will have to determine whether his unprecedented exploration of the first-person novel did indeed prompt other novelists to try their hand at first-person narration.¹⁴

12 On the decline of 'diegesis' and the corresponding popularity of 'mimesis' in fiction of the first half of the twentieth century, cf. Rimmon-Kenan 106-8.

13 Although writers like Conrad and James published (most or all of) their major novels in the third-person mode, they famously experimented with I-narrators in their shorter fiction, e.g. *Heart of Darkness* and *The Turn of the Screw*.

14 I am thinking for instance of the analysis of storytelling in John Banville's *Ghosts*, of the almost surreal monologue in Neil Jordan's *The Dream of a Beast* and Edna O'Brien's *Night*, and the insistence on bodily functions by the narrator in Robert McLiam Wilson's *Ripley Bogle*.

Apart from the possible influence of Beckett, however, a number of other reasons could be adduced to explain the popularity of the first-person novel since the 1950s. In his collection of essays, *Consciousness and the Novel*, David Lodge surmises that “in a world where nothing is certain [...] the single human voice, telling its own story, can seem the only authentic way of rendering consciousness” (87). Himself a steady practitioner of the omniscient narrator, Lodge hastens to add that “of course in fiction this is just as artful, or artificial, a method as writing about a character in the third person.” Still, what matters is that first-person narration is perceived as a more plausible way of telling a story, perhaps because of its affinities with ‘real’ ego-documents, such as autobiography, diary, or memoir. The idea seems to be that if in real life we cannot know what other people think, the novelist should not pretend to be able to in fiction either. In the Irish context, this mimetic explanation might perhaps account for the first-person novels of John McGahern, Jennifer Johnston, and Deirdre Madden, which remain firmly rooted within the realist tradition.

Another reason for the popularity of I-narration is that it provides an excellent way of exploring the way the mind works: how it remembers or fails to remember things, how it cheats itself about motivations or aims, and – as Beckett’s novels already showed – how it constitutes itself in and through storytelling. This interest certainly pervades novels like Ronan Bennett’s *The Catastrophist*, Anne Haverty’s *One Day as a Tiger*, John Banville’s *The Newton Letter*, or Roddy Doyle’s *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*. As in this last novel, a first-person narrator is also often used to give voice to other or ‘marginal’ forms of consciousness, such as that of a child, a traumatised woman, or a voiceless historical figure, like William Hazlitt’s Sarah Walker, who tells her side of the story in Anne Haverty’s *The Far Side of a Kiss*. In a more extreme form, this interest in marginal, eccentric, or even aberrant forms of consciousness is realised in the numerous first-person narratives of murderers, madmen, or psychopaths, such as John Banville’s *The Book of Evidence* or Patrick McCabe’s *The Butcher Boy*.

A final preoccupation of the Irish first-person novel in particular (although something similar is at work in the Scottish novel) is the exploration of the more or less colloquial Irish voice.¹⁵ Starting with *Castle Rackrent*, Irish fiction has tended to stage Irish dialect partly for comic purposes. This comic or even grotesque dimension still pervades the novels of Patrick McCabe, whose unreliable and highly ambivalent narrators are reminiscent of Thady Quirk. On the other hand, the comic and bragging Irish voice of *Harry Lorrequer* finds its postmodern counterpart in novels like Robert McLiam Wilson’s *Ripley Bogle* or Roddy Doyle’s *A Star Called Henry*. Yet, in some of his other novels, Doyle stages the narrator’s distinctly Irish voice in a less comic and

15 This renewed attention to the oral quality of the narrative voice could also be interpreted in the light of what Walter Ong has called “secondary orality”: the new proliferation of oral speech via television, radio, telephone, etc. in our contemporary technological age. In contemporary Scottish literature, such use of colloquial ‘Scots’ can be found for instance in the novels of Irvine Welsh, Alan Warner, and Candida McWilliam.

more authentic manner. The same holds true, although somewhat less noticeably, for Clare Boylan's *Room for a Single Lady*, Anne Haverty's *One Day as a Tiger*, or James Ryan's *Home from England*.

In general, however, the preceding explanations are not exclusively Irish. They also hold true for many other English novel traditions, in some cases especially for other more 'marginal' traditions such as the Australian or the Scottish novel. It cannot therefore be denied that the rise of the first-person novel in Irish literature is part of a wider international trend. Still, it is clear that the Irish novel, more than its British or American counterparts, has a surprising history of strong and unreliable narrators, which is partly rooted within an oral tradition. With a change in the literary climate, the Irish novel seems to have been freed from trying to observe standards of morality and realism dictated by London and can self-confidently indulge in what it has always been good at: telling highly amusing and highly ambivalent stories in an attempt to outwit reader and listener alike. Put differently, if – as Imhof (*Banville* 11) asserts – the Irish novel has lagged behind in postmodern experiment, it is clear that with the first-person novel, it has successfully hooked on to an international trend. Although the success of the Irish novel in the past few decades is certainly due to a number of different factors, the contemporary revival of an Irish tradition of strong and eccentric first-person narrators may at least have been one of them.

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“FRIGHTENED WITH MY OWN HATRED”: TELLING VIOLENCE IN JENNIFER JOHNSTON’S *FOOL’S SANCTUARY* AND *THE INVISIBLE WORM*

Teresa Casal

Introduction

I would like to start by quoting two writers. Colm Tóibín writes in his “Introduction” to *The Penguin Book of Irish Fiction*:

How is it then that we can find a shape for Irish writing which goes beyond the personal into the communal? How is it that we can make the following statements about Irish writing: there is almost no version of domestic harmony at the beginning of an Irish novel; there is no Irish novel which ends in a wedding, or a match being made. Irish fiction is not like that; Irish fiction is full of dislocation and displacement. (Tóibín xxiii)

Jennifer Johnston said in an interview given to Michael Kenneally in 1984:

I think that we have all misunderstood each other, but I also think we understand each other terribly well. I think that the two cultures in Ireland cannot live without each other and that we have created in the past fifty years a situation that is hanging by very narrow threads as to how we’re going to go in the future. [...] We have to realize how much we gain from each other and from the past and the suffering. And we seem to be finding it very difficult to do so. (Johnston, Interview, Kenneally 16)

Towards the end of his “Introduction,” Tóibín notes, on the one hand, that “the violence of the past thirty years has also come back to haunt Irish fiction in the work” of various writers, while, on the other hand, he raises the question of whether “now that the violence is fading and the society moves slowly towards Anglo-Irish Agreement and European Union, [we] will see a waning of the national themes in Irish writing” (Tóibín xxxiii). Implicit in Tóibín’s words, and explicit in many critical accounts of Irish representations of the family,¹ is the assumption that the absence of domestic happiness in fiction mirrors the national misunderstandings pointed out by Jennifer Johnston in her diagnosis of the state of affairs between the so-called “two cultures in Ireland.” As the two communities hopefully learn to co-exist, and as Ireland increasingly opens to the European Union and to contemporary migrations, other cultures may emerge into representation, and new formats for co-existence may be required in order to accommodate plurality rather than the traditional duality between Catholics and Protestants that finds its cultural and biological representation in heterosexual

1 For recent studies, see Backus, Corbett, and Ferris.

marriage.² However, the late 1980s, which are the backdrop to the novels under discussion, reflect Johnston's assessment of the thorny relations between "two cultures" seemingly unable to acknowledge a shareable ground, which has been made vividly present by the polarised results of elections in Northern Ireland.³

In this essay I will argue, first, that *Fool's Sanctuary* (1987) and *The Invisible Worm* (1991) can be read as allegories of pre- and post-independence Ireland, respectively; secondly, that the relation between conflicting cultures is rendered through a dialogic discourse; and finally I will assess the implications of such an intersubjective representation of reality and its relation to the open endings to be found in Johnston's novels. In other words, I will be looking at how discourse relates to the issue of violence and the maiming effects of hatred raised in these novels.

Allegories of Pre- and Post-Independence Ireland

My pairing of these two novels does not proceed from a strictly chronological convenience – nor, for that matter, from a wish to appropriate binary models and marriage allegories for my own purposes. It so happens that, just as Johnston's novels constantly engage in intertextual relations with other works (as *Fool's Sanctuary's* variation upon *The Tempest* and the Blakean title of *The Invisible Worm* illustrate),⁴ there are intertextual links among her novels. In fact, *Fool's Sanctuary* and *The Invisible Worm* can be read as two complementary views of the difficult relations between the two cultures in Ireland: had Miranda, the protagonist of *Fool's Sanctuary* and the daughter of a Protestant Anglo-Irish household, married her Catholic love, Laura, the

2 A film such as Eugene Brady's *The Nephew* uses the locus of the family to address the scope of the notion of Irishness: can Irishness, and the metaphor of the Irish family, accommodate a black nephew, the offspring of an interracial marriage? Is blackness compatible with Irishness? Among other things, this refers to the racial homogeneity traditionally associated with Irishness, be it of Catholic or Protestant denomination. As in Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game*, where Jody, the black British soldier stationed in Northern Ireland, complains that "[t]his must be the only place on earth where they call you nigger to your face," the conspicuous foreigner highlights overlooked features of home.

3 I refer to the election of 26 November 2003, the results of which show a marked radicalisation of the two communities' political allegiances, with Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party and Gerry Adams's Sinn Féin attracting the majority of Protestant and Catholic votes, respectively.

4 On Ireland and *The Tempest*, see Baker and Callaghan. On the Blakean undertones in *The Invisible Worm*, see Diaz Fabre. *The Invisible Worm* has attracted careful critical attention in studies on Irish representations of the family: for a perceptive reading of the novel within a study of the fictional daughters of the Big House, see Frehner; for a comparative reading of the novel within the Gothic family romance, see Backus 216-40. On incest in recent Irish fiction, see St. Peter's "Petrifying Time." On *Fool's Sanctuary*, see Peach 38-67 and Lanters.

main character in *The Invisible Worm*, could have been her granddaughter and hence her story can be one possible answer to Miranda's what-if questions.⁵

Set in the Anglo-Irish house of Termon, the anglicised form for the Irish word meaning 'sanctuary,' *Fool's Sanctuary* features Miranda Martin as its narrator and protagonist. On her deathbed in the mid-1980s, she sets out to assemble "the cast of [her] play" (FS 3),⁶ that is to recast and reassess in her mind the events which took place in the family home in the early 1920s, a time which was as crucial for the shaping of the rest of her life as it was for defining the future of her nation. The first-person opening of her narrative – "There are no new days ahead of me" (FS 1) – misleads her readers into thinking that her re-visitation of the past is prompted by purely personal circumstances, hence her need to face the question of "how [life led her] to that moment" (FS 1). However, when trying to answer that question after staging her mental play, she confesses to another motive behind her gesture, thereby linking past and present violence and projecting her personal act of retrospection into a communal frame:

Sometimes now when I read the papers, hear the news on the wireless, I try to conjure up those dreams again, recreate the pain of the past.

I can't any longer.

My indifference to the events of the last few years, the re-stirring of the pot of violence, frightens me, even now as I lie here. I suppose I must have destroyed in myself the power to feel passion, pity, rage.

My only hope is that God will forgive me for the wilful destruction of myself. (FS 131-32)

What happens then in that Indian summer of 1920 in a house called Sanctuary, yet with its walls "cluttered [with] the paraphernalia of war" (FS 30) of its past inhabitants? Eighteen-year-old Miranda, like her Shakespearean predecessor, hardly remembers her late mother and has a surrogate mother in her Irish Nanny. She lives with her father, Mr. Martin, who, instead of fighting for King and/or Country like all his male ancestors, followed his mother's example and became a landlord.⁷ Assisted by

5 I agree with Peach's remarks both on the frameworks underlying much "adverse criticism of Johnston" and on more productive frameworks within which to read her novels: as he points out, much of the first comes "from naturalistic or historical approaches to [Johnston's] fiction that do not offer the best frameworks within which to discuss it." He contends that since her characters are rather "sites of ideological conflict or embodiments of ideological positions that are challenged, [...] this is where the interest of the reader who wishes to take Johnston on her own terms must lie and critical discussion must concentrate on following the ideological conflicts through the pattern of recurring motifs, of thesis and counter thesis, of the fusion of the natural with the mythical" (Peach 101).

6 All subsequent page references indicated in this manner are to *Fool's Sanctuary* (FS) and *The Invisible Worm* (IW), respectively.

7 Having kept her father's accountancy books in her youth (FS 8), it can be assumed, although she never returns to the issue, that Miranda ensured her survival by following in her father's and grandmother's footsteps and became a landlady herself, assisted on the home front by Nanny and, after her death, by Peggy Dillon, Mr. Dillon's sister.

his faithful employee Mr. Dillon, and by Dillon's son and Miranda's beloved Cathal,⁸ Mr. Martin wrote "pamphlets on re-afforestation and land reclamation" (*FS* 6) as a form of reparation to the land that had been ill-treated by his own kind.

During the weekend of life-changing events, everyone converges at Termon: Cathal, who has become involved with the IRA while studying in Dublin, and Miranda's brother Andrew together with his English comrade Harry Harrington, both in their military uniforms and invested with an intelligence mission for the British Armed Forces. The IRA plots to assassinate the two British officers, and Cathal is supposed to facilitate access to the house, since the rebels ignore the maxim that a door kept unlocked is a "welcoming" sanctuary – in fact, a "fools' sanctuary" (*FS* 99), as its owner calls it. After hesitating about whether to carry out his job (*FS* 99), Cathal enters the house, sees sleepy, tired and ageing Mr. Martin (*FS* 102) and, acting on his emotions rather than on his ideology, informs him of the plot to kill Andrew and Harry, thus enabling the two officers to escape while turning himself into an "informer [and] traitor" (*FS* 101) who is promptly executed by his own comrades. Miranda justifies her choice to remain "virgo intacta in so many ways" (*FS* 35) as a decision to "align [her] life with [Cathal's] death" (*FS* 98). She says "no, forever" (*FS* 59) to Harry's repeated proposals to her, thus refusing to re-enact the metaphor of an Act of Union between England and Ireland.⁹ She does, nonetheless, engage in "foolish speculations" (*FS* 131) about whether her "tentative love" (*FS* 131) for Cathal would have survived in post-independence Ireland and concludes that, had he "moved towards politics, after the fight was over; shifted into that grey area where expediency becomes a slogan, rather than a possibility" (*FS* 131), she "would have hated it [for] there was too much of [her] father in [her] for that to give [her] pleasure of any sort" (*FS* 131). The question with which she remains is whether her "self-imposed solitude was a sin" (*FS* 98) "for not exploring the possibilities of love" (*FS* 97-98).

Thus, the allegory of pre-independence Ireland provided here is centred and viewed from the microcosm of the Anglo-Irish stronghold, its own conflicting allegiances, and its ambivalent relations to the surrounding Irish human and natural environment. The

8 Mr. Martin finds in Cathal his "sounding board" (*FS* 31) and sponsors his studies at University College Dublin.

9 Miranda's and Harry's incompatibility is recurrently associated with his Englishness. Harry is considered to embody some English features or, at least, some of the Irish prejudices about the English: although "he doesn't ride badly, for an Englishman" (*FS* 69), he is considered "uncomplicated" and "unaware" (*FS* 43-44), refraining from looking beyond the surface of things and thus "[v]ery English [in] not wanting to disclose things" (*FS* 59). Mr. Martin corroborates Miranda's view by noting that he is "the sort of straightforward chap it's pleasant to have around. Uncomplicated" (*FS* 122). Harry, although "seduced" (*FS* 59) by Ireland – "He saw us in radiant autumn light [...]. We were never plain, pain-filled people to him" (*FS* 59), says Miranda –, has his own prejudices about the Irish, hinting at their alleged emotional garrulousness: "I think that like most Irish people I've ever met you just talk on about things you don't understand very well" (*FS* 45).

political issues of legitimacy and betrayal that are central to *The Tempest* are addressed in *Fool's Sanctuary* in problematising and non-conclusive ways. In *The Tempest* the previously overthrown order is restored according to Prospero's assertive design. In *Fool's Sanctuary* two conflicting notions of order are displayed, a militaristic and a utopian one: the militaristic is materialised in the Anglo-Irish War and represented in the text by the two contending parties, the British military and colonial power, embodied in the Anglo-Irish Andrew Martin and his English friend Harry Harrington, and the Irish Catholic and IRA commandant Cathal Dillon, who defends war as a means to gain freedom for Ireland; the utopian model, which is conservative in its means and progressive in its aims, is represented by the Anglo-Irish landlord Mr. Martin and his Irish friend and employee Mr. Dillon. It is the militaristic model that is sanctioned by history, but it is also its premises, namely its foundations in violence and war, that are questioned and set against Mr. Martin's ideas for gradual transformation through a fair redistribution of "seized land" (Bowen 31).¹⁰ These are considered more threatening than a mere change from English to Irish rule and alarmingly branded as "Bolshevism" (FS 44). Like Gonzalo in *The Tempest*, Mr. Martin is scorned for his unrealistic ideas,¹¹ and it is only in the course of her retrospective re-assessment of history that Miranda sees "how much closer he was to sanity than we gave him credit for" (FS 35).

Unlike Miranda Martin, Laura Quinlan, the thirty-seven-year-old Protestant Anglo-Irish protagonist of *The Invisible Worm*, chose to marry Maurice Quinlan, who, like her own father, belonged to the Republic's "new nobility" of "energetic[,] powerful" (IW 111) Catholics who achieved success in business and politics. Like Cathal, Maurice was a protégé of her father's, who hired him to look after the mill, even if Laura later claims that she "could have run that mill [...] just as well as he [did]" (IW 59), adding that she "shouldn't have married Maurice" and should instead "have lived [in her family home] alone" (IW 59), in other words, should have followed Miranda's course. Laura chose to marry Maurice in order to take possession of her mother's house¹²

10 Bowen's description of Bowen's Court ("Imposed on seized land, built in the rulers' ruling tradition") betrays a self-consciousness akin to Mr. Martin's sense of inherited guilt and responsibility (Bowen 31).

11 Andrew dismisses his father as "a foolish, rather boring old man [who] passed his life in a dream" (FS 111). Mr. Martin's position is reminiscent of Shaw's Fabian socialism which, as Duddy points out, "distinguished itself from revolutionary Marxism by working with a 'top down' rather than a 'bottom up' model of strategic action" so that "its first appeal was to well-placed, influential, middle-class individuals and groups rather than to a prospectively revolutionary proletariat." Duddy further adds that the "non-revolutionary nature of Fabian strategy does not imply a complaisant vision of the future society, certainly not as far as the role of the state is concerned" (Duddy 289).

12 As she remarks: "This is my house. [...] [F]or three generations it had descended through the female line" (IW 4). She also admits to Dominic that she "wanted to deprive [her] father of this place [and] sling him out. Maurice thought [she] was crazy" (IW 170).

and make her father leave it and to avoid the fate of “the traditional Irish daughter” (*IW* 121) who is supposed to look after her father. She also “did try to have a daughter” (*IW* 4), for she “believe[d] in continuity, the handing down of secrets” (*IW* 4), but “all those seeds were rejected” (*IW* 4).

At the beginning of the narrative Laura’s father has just died, asking for her forgiveness (*IW* 170), while she remained “frightened [...] with [her] own hatred” (*IW* 170). Again suggesting a collusion of personal and communal forms of hatred, news of Anglo-Irish talks over Northern Ireland as well as of talks in Brussels over subsidies are on the radio (*IW* 99-100).¹³ Maurice brings home Dominic, a former priest who had been forced into the priesthood to fulfil his parents’ expectations and left after his mother’s death. Trust grows between Laura and Dominic as they realise that they are both “sacrificial lambs” (*IW* 121). Dominic becomes a catalyst for Laura’s unbidden memories, while he articulates his own story. Although no longer a priest, he acts as a confessor to the Protestant Laura, and only in him does she find the willingness to listen that she had sought in her mother when she told her about the events in the summerhouse. Then, upon hearing the fifteen-year-old (*IW* 66) Laura saying that she had just been raped by her father, Mrs. O’Meara first disbelieved her daughter (*IW* 174-5) and, on the following morning, after bidding Laura “to carry on as if nothing had ever happened” and begging her not to “hate him” (*IW* 178), she “went out and drowned herself when she wasn’t able to handle things” (*IW* 141). As Laura tells Dominic this, she also commits herself before a witness to “see the whole thing through. Life and all that” (*IW* 141). This “emergency exit” (*IW* 141) implies facing precisely what her mother had avoided: the pain, the past, and the “empty page” (*IW* 181) of the future. As she confesses that she is “tired of hating” (*IW* 179), Laura also refuses Dominic’s proposal to run away with him (*IW* 179), thereby refusing to re-engage in the available pattern of a patriarchal marriage, with its inherited notions of female fragility and dependence upon male power and protectiveness.

Post-independence Ireland is thus represented through the childless mixed marriage of a successful and charming Irish Catholic male and a girlish Anglo-Irish female who had been abused by her seductive and powerful Catholic father and abandoned by her cold and “mocking” (*IW* 116) Protestant mother.¹⁴ The fact that the house had

13 The latter often provide the excuse for the “daft ritual” (*IW* 163), which is the shared code for Maurice’s extra-matrimonial escapades.

14 Of her parents’ respective social status Laura says, “The triumph of the successful wrapped him [whereas m]y mother was never treated with such deference. I always got the feeling they didn’t want her over the threshold, staring perhaps, evaluating, making judgements in her head” (*IW* 97), thereby rendering, not only how her mother was viewed by her father’s community, but also how she presumably viewed them. Laura responded positively to her father’s “smiling confidence [and] the warmth of his power” (*IW* 97) and, like her father’s Catholic friends, feared her mother’s “mocking laughter” (*IW* 116) and was “aware of [her] aloneness when she was with her [mother], but never with him” (*IW* 117).

descended through the female line for three generations (*IW* 4) hints at the emasculation of the Anglo-Irish since independence and reverses the colonial representation of the relation between the two communities, where the coloniser is featured as "imperially male" (Heaney 74)¹⁵ and the colonised as vulnerably female. Even though power has changed hands, the power- and property-based nature of the relation has remained. Just like Prospero, who claimed to be the authoritative voice in his island, just like Andrew, in *Fool's Sanctuary*, who echoed the coloniser's position and tried to discredit Cathal, the "emotional hothead" (*FS* 110) who ironically saved his life, so do Laura's father and husband voice the authoritative discourse in the Republic. While Laura's father casts himself as a hero who fought for independence, both men are critical of the Anglo-Irish "empire building" and "soldiering" (*IW* 12) connections, even though they like "things to be done with style" (*IW* 34) and hence find the Anglo-Irish museum-like houses to "have their uses" (*IW* 81).

Both Miranda and Laura thus feel the need to engage in a critical appraisal of inherited discourses in order to build their own narratives. Like Miranda, Laura rejects her husband's version of her family when echoed by Dominic and warns him that "Maurice isn't always right, you know" (*IW* 23). In her own version, she is not confined to sectarian alliances and divides, but also focuses on gender and class, thereby pointing to a more complex and interdependent social network than the inherited one based on sectarian antagonism. Referring to her great-grandfather's travels accompanied by his servant Markey, Laura notes women's ability "to keep things going" at home:

Weren't women amazing, that they could cope with all that? Such strength. I envy them that strength. It would have been easy enough, I suppose, for my great-grandmother, but I often used to wonder if Mrs. Markey hated my great-grandfather for taking her husband away like that. (*IW* 22-23)

However, if her father's and husband's version of history is publicly sanctioned, Laura's and her mother's are confined to the private sphere of their household and

15 Heaney's opening of the second stanza of his poem "Act of Union," "And I am still imperially / Male, leaving you with the pain" (74), echoes the popular iconography of colonisation (e.g. as represented in *Punch*), in which Ireland figured either as a vulnerable female in need of protection (akin to Miranda requiring protection from her Caliban) or as a wild, simian, Calibanesque creature driven by instinct and requiring the guidance of reason. In either case, Heaney's notion of the pain caused by this imperial guidance is conspicuously absent; on representations of the Irish in caricature, see Cheng 15-74. In *The Invisible Worm*, what Laura says of her mother could well stand for the subaltern position and the self-alienating attitude of the Anglo-Irish in post-independence Ireland: "I think she hated being a woman. I think she hated having to turn over her independence to someone else. She escaped inside her head, and of course in her boat" (*IW* 82).

discredited by husbands who choose what to hear (*IW* 23).¹⁶ The underlying implication in these conflicting views of history is that, as was suggested in *Fool's Sanctuary*, empire-building and nation-building share the same male-centred militaristic notions of heroism. Being based on antagonism,¹⁷ both are self-assertive and refuse to listen to the other, thus proving unwilling to create a space inclusive of diversity.

Telling the Pain of the Past

Unlike Laura, who needs an interlocutor to help her reconnect her fractured self, Miranda has no material interlocutor, and it is in the mind that the dialogue with her cast takes place as one last attempt to “search for the clue” (*FS* 7). Miranda acts as a female, post-magic Prospero who steps down from the aloofness, omniscience, and omnipotence that characterises Shakespeare’s Prospero. Her status as narrator and main character and the dynamics inherent in this are dramatised through a grammatical split between the first-person (telling) and the third-person (told).¹⁸ This narrative device establishes some dispassionate detachment between narrator and character and emphasises the temporal vantage point and the benefit of hindsight of narrator over character. The dialogic nature of her words (addressed to someone, be it Cathal, God, or the audience of her mental play) further present the act of making sense as relational and language-based so that thinking and writing become means of re-inscribing her solitary life within the community. By explicitly resorting to the frame of a play, itself a variation of a very well-known play, she also pays tribute to the relevance of aesthetic experience in as much as it provides common ground for private experience to be shared through empathy. The impulse behind Miranda’s re-

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- 16 Just as Dominic is the sole listener to Laura’s version of things, she had been the recalcitrant listener to her mother’s warnings about her husband’s heroic version of his role in Ireland’s independence: “Daddy fought for freedom,” [Laura] said, eliciting the following reply from her mother, “Don’t you believe it. [...] Daddy fought for Daddy” (*IW* 31).
- 17 The relation between these two views is itself antagonistic, in that the colonised rebels against the coloniser but is caught in the same dynamic. Memmi argues that the colonised and the coloniser are caught in a similar and mutually defining predicament which results in a “painful discord” (296) within themselves, while the coloniser either “rejects colonialism [and] resigns himself to a position of ambiguity” (111) or accepts “the reality of being a colonizer [...], that is, a usurper” (118). The colonised, in turn, “always considers the coloniser as a model or an antithesis [and] continues to struggle against him” (296).
- 18 In the novel’s structure, first-person sections alternate with third-person ones: while the first are often evocative, interpretative or speculative, the latter are dramatic and offer an immediate rendering of scenes and dialogue. Sometimes the grammatical shift occurs within the same narrative section, as the reflective mood gives way to a dramatic one, as is illustrated in the following passage which introduces the encounter of the four youngsters on the beach: “If I could be there again. / If I could change time around, I could have said, Run Cathal. [...] Above *us* [Miranda and Cathal] I saw two men [Andrew and Harry] [...]. / *He* [Cathal] stopped walking and put both his arms around *her* [Miranda]” (*FS* 19-20; my italics).

creation of the past is to “look properly” (*FS* 43) at her characters, while acknowledging that she “may not be right [for] people are so complicated [that] even if you watch carefully, they’re hard to understand” (*FS* 43). However, she tries to understand the misunderstandings between her mother and father from their respective points of view and distances herself from her brother’s ‘hard words’ such as “Order. Discipline. Obedience,” which she considers “frightened [...] and frightening” (*FS* 95), thus pinpointing that the source of their apparent strength is an unacknowledged fear. By assembling the cast of her play, she is thus seeking imaginative closeness with her characters and engaging in a language more tentative, less assertive, and more inclusive of human complexity than either her brother’s fear-ridden ‘hard words,’ or her previous silent indifference.

If Miranda’s memory play dramatises the various voices and points of view of her characters, it does so within the very dramatisation of her own internal dialogue between an experiencing young ‘she’ acting as the object of a reflective dying ‘I.’ It is in this internal space and split that her subjectivity emerges as distinctive from the dogmatic ideological discourses evoked and highlighted in Cathal’s fate. The procedure illustrates what Luce Irigaray describes as “[t]he subject’s highest task”:

[It] is to constitute himself as human, to constitute the objectivity of his subjectivity as human. This subjectivity is essentially relational. Whoever is capable of providing in oneself a place not only for the other but for the relation with the other is human. (Irigaray 80)

Whereas the relation between Miranda’s present ‘I’ and past ‘she’ creates the space for a “relational becoming,”¹⁹ whereby she “constitute[s] the objectivity of [her] subjectivity,” Laura’s narrative starts out by dramatising a split, where ‘I’ and ‘she’ remain disconnected and fluid, and a relation between them needs to be created:

I stand by the window and watch the woman running.
Is it Laura? [...]
I am Laura. [...]
Perhaps, I think to myself, she is running towards something.
I think that on good days.
On the other days I know she is running away.
That makes me laugh.
What’s the point in that? (*IW* 1)

19 “Human being only exists thanks to a relational becoming which is proper to it” (Irigaray 81). Irigaray’s subsequent remarks on the nature of the ‘I’ who engages in the relational process of subjectivity corroborates my point on the self-reliability of Miranda’s use of personal pronouns. Miranda differs from Laura, who is “not sure in which tense [she] live[s], the present or the past” (*IW* 83). This may explain why Laura needs a catalyst to her unbidden memories, while Miranda can stage this dialogic space by herself. As Irigaray puts it: “In order that the ‘you’ take place in a relation with the ‘I,’ the ‘I’ has to secure a faithfulness to its Being in which the other can trust. In the elaboration of this temporality, the ‘I’ must be listening both to the ‘you’ and to the self” (Irigaray 82).

The narrative thus becomes the site where the woman watching and the woman running finally run towards each another, so that, in the end, one ceases to run away from the other, "*Prehaps*" (*IW* 182).²⁰ The missing link between the woman watching and the woman running as well as the fluid identity of the running woman, who "could be any age," "all ages[,] all women" (*IW* 66), feature as symptoms of the repressed memory, which becomes embodied memory, of survivors of extremely violent experiences. In Roberta Culbertson's words:

The survivor most often [...] becomes silent about his victimisation [...]. This silence is an internal one in which the victim attempts to suppress what is recalled [...], or finds it repressed by some part of himself which functions as a stranger, hiding self from the self's experience [...]. It is external as well: the victim does not tell what she recalls, in part because others do not seem to hear what is said, partly because of a conviction that she will not be believed, and more basically because she cannot make the leap to words. (Culbertson 169)

As it happened, Laura's first impulse after her father's abuse was to tell her mother.²¹ However, Mrs. O'Meara disbelieved her daughter and then abandoned her by committing suicide. It is therefore Dominic who provides the context wherein the loose, haphazard syntax of Laura's memories emerges. The story begins to surface unexpectedly, "as if possessed of a life independent of will or consciousness" (Culbertson 169), when, following the cue of the music on the radio, Laura tells Dominic that she had "killed [her] mother" (*IW* 48), then wondering why she had said that, since she "had never really brought to the front of [her] mind such a possibility" (*IW* 48).

Yet, this is by no means a purely verbal phenomenon: abuse, hatred, and guilt lodged in the body (a body that refused to forget as much as it refused to procreate) are released through a multifarious process of "disinterring the past" (*IW* 42), which includes verbal and physical action. Laura's inadvertent confession is preceded by a decision made shortly after her father's funeral to "rediscover the old summerhouse" (*IW* 42), where she had been abused and which had been let to "drown" (*IW* 41) un-

20 "Prehaps" is the way Dominic used to pronounce that word of hesitation and doubt as a child; this is the childhood token that he involuntarily leaves with Laura, just as she offers him a toy train, which stands for the "immaculate vision of the past" (*IW* 180) and with which she "was never allowed to play [...] unless someone was in the room with [her for it was] just so perfect" (*IW* 13). As she integrates his word into her vocabulary and considers that "*Prehaps* [her] dreams in the future will be of him," she also hopes that "he won't carry [her] burden, as well as the present [she] gave him, for too long" (*IW* 181, my italics). The tokens exchanged thus signal the instrumental role performed by the encounter itself, which enabled Laura and Dominic to begin to re-connect, both within their fractured and bruised selves, and with the world from which they felt exiled. Yet, the fact that they part as well as Laura's parting wishes also suggest that, for the process of re-connection and re-integration to proceed, this encounter needs to be balanced by separation and differentiation.

21 In fact, she had already tried to persuade her mother to send her to boarding school, but Mrs. O'Meara did not oppose her husband's decision to keep their daughter at home and within his reach. Facing her doubting mother after the rape, she retorts: "I am telling the truth. Why do you think I wanted to go to boarding school?" (*IW* 175).

der shrubs and bushes after her mother's drowning. Moreover, Laura's body undergoes a form of death and rebirth, a slumber punctuated by feverish memories which re-enact her pain and her impotence (*IW* 128), before she can go back to the previously oppressive light (*IW* 128). In her longing for the pre-verbal "safe, lapping waters of the womb, darkness" (*IW* 125), Laura relives the same impulse that prompted her mother to drown, even if she is too drained of energy "to kill [her]self" (*IW* 125); yet, a competing impulse to be released from the voices of the dead makes her ask Dominic for help, accepting his offer to listen (*IW* 159). Through telling, she separates herself from both her parents and, in that sense, is born as an individuated subject.

Pain thus makes its way through the body into consciousness in three interconnected ways: through dreaming, one of the means by which one's unconscious offers itself as an object to one's consciousness; through deliberate confrontation with the material remains of the past; and by embodying memory into shared word. All of these processes are relational: dreaming involves a relational space within the self; physical action involves relation between the self and the world; and a shared or shareable word enables the emergence of a subjectivity capable of mediating between the conscious and the unconscious, affective and cognitive experience, the private logic of dreams and the public form of narrative.²²

Implications

Narrative thus works for Miranda and Laura as a stage where not only the voices of different characters can meet (as in Bakhtin's description of the dynamics of the polyphonic novel), but also for the different voices of herself. Narration is therefore represented as a relational (inter- and intra-subjective) space, both in the dynamics that it enacts and in the dynamics in which it participates vis-à-vis its addressees. This awareness of separation and relation within the self and between the self and the other requires language awareness, and this includes languages of the mind as well as of the body. As we have seen in *Fool's Sanctuary*, Cathal acts against his ideological beliefs and according to his yet unacknowledged affections when he responds to the sense of vulnerability and abandonment emanating from Mr. Martin's sleeping body. It is also in the silent language of embrace that the two men acknowledge their mutual affection (*FS* 120). However, this is a shared, hence socialised, non-verbal language, quite unlike what happens with Laura, in *The Invisible Worm*,

22 Laura's processing of her painful memories enacts Culbertson's description of survivors' accounts, as Ruth Frehner has pointed out (Frehner 212). See also Culbertson: "The task then is to render body memories tellable, which means to order and arrange them in the form of a story, linking emotion to event, event with event, and so on. In so doing it becomes possible to return the self to its legitimate social status as something separate, something that tells, that recounts its own biography [...]. Telling, in short, is a process of disembodying memory, demystifying it, a process which can only begin after memories have been re-membered and the mystical touched by a buried self seeking its own healing" (179).

whose alleged madness derives from the fact that the secrets lodged in her body are manifested in the body only and remain socially unacknowledged. This causes not only her isolation from society, but also her alienation from her own pain, which is but a more acute form of the numbness which frightens Miranda.

These novels feature characters afflicted by inner and outer exile and stage the moments when they break out of the deadlock of destructive violence by engaging in a tentative language of relation and thereby reparation of broken links. This is, however, not a language of fusion, as is ostensibly shown, first, by the fact that it is and remains dialogic and questions precisely the dogmatic and self-enclosed language of ideologies; and, secondly, by these women's rejection of marriage, of the "act of union," as their form of "self-begetting."²³ In fact, if this refusal of marriage as a solution is clear in Laura, it is no less present in Miranda's regret at having "align[ed her] life with [Cathal's] death" (*FS* 98), in that her option echoes a heroic and self-sacrificial notion of love and is the romantic counterpart to the heroic notions of male bravery in the service of King or Country.

If both military and romantic heroism may lead to "wilful" (*FS* 132) self-destruction; if, in Miranda's words, life is associated with "the power to feel passion, pity, rage" (*FS* 132) and love with "the discovery of a mutual language" (*FS* 36), how do these two women engage with language in their attempt to understand their own past? Both use an interrogative, rather than an assertive language; both address someone, living or dead or God, and even God ceases to be a bearer of certainties and becomes a willing listener. The possibility of a mutual language is thus explored in the space between an inherited language of fear and a tentative language of trust. If the future is to be an indeterminate "empty page" (*IW* 181) rather than a predictable repetition of the past; if, as Johnston put it, "Ireland [is to be] united in a different sort of way, a way that is not going to create more violence,"²⁴ then her novels seem to suggest that dialogue within the self and between the self and the other is the means to break away from the "frightened and frightening" (*FS* 95) idiom of violence. Perhaps.

23 Drawing on Gayle Greene's use of the term, Christine St. Peter studies three Irish 'self-begetting novel[s]' which "[fictionalise] Irish women's struggle to write and publish" (St. Peter, *Changing Ireland*, 3; 16-39). I use the term more inclusively to account for the process whereby women (or men struggling to emerge from pre-formatted identities) beget their sense of self, regardless of whether it be for artistic or other purposes, since the development of a sense of self is inherent to the process of becoming authors of their (possibly tentative) narratives.

24 Johnston, Interview, González 18.

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“NORTHERN AND TROUBLED, SOUTHERN AND PEACEFUL”: ABSENCE, PUNISHMENT, AND THE DISAPPEARED IN FILMS ON THE NORTH OF IRELAND

Yvonne Igoe

The title of this paper has its origins in a comment by the Dublin photographer David Farrell in his series of photographs *Innocent Landscapes*. Farrell's photographic collection recorded the digs at the 'Sites of the Disappeared.' His work witnessed the search for the absent. Invisibility is one aspect of the disappeared, who, despite having received extensive media coverage, have not been the focus of many films. Additionally, it is also a label that has itself been applied to the border between the North and South of Ireland (Cleary 98). If Farrell's preconceptions of the binary opposition of troubled North and peaceful South were challenged by the investigation of the disappeared, then so too are film audiences' perceptions of the border. For if the North really does represent a place that is unable to escape the troubles, and if the South is viewed as peaceful, where does the border lie?

This paper has emerged from my work investigating the nature of representations of the Irish border. I have selected a number of films that deal with aspects of the troubles, such as punishment, abduction and disappearance, and the impact of the border on their narratives. While the border does feature as a subtext in a number of films in Ireland, the chosen films interact with the concept of borders in different ways. In the course of this analysis, I will investigate the level of success that each cinematic approach has had in dealing with the subject.

The films that will be considered are Joe Comerford's *High Boot Benny* (1993), Vinny Murphy's *Accelerator* (2000), Johnny Gogan's *The Mapmaker* (2001), and Anne Crilly's short film *Limbo* (2001).

Joe Comerford is a director whose work has often challenged received notions of Ireland. In particular, the conflict in Northern Ireland had an influence on three feature films: *Traveller* (1982, written by Neil Jordan), *Reefer and the Model* (1987), and *High Boot Benny* (1993). These films deal with characters who are marginalised by social and political conditions in Ireland. The travellers in Comerford's film *Traveller* find an opportunity to engage in the black economy by smuggling goods across the border; but they are drawn into the 'troubles' after encountering a republican hitch-hiker, Clicky, and later the British army on the back roads of the North. The spectre of the border hangs over the characters in *Reefer and the Model*. The three main male characters are republicans who are hiding out in the West of Ireland due to previous paramilitary activities, while the 'model' of the title is a former prostitute who has re-

turned home pregnant from England. Despite their distance from the border, they cannot escape its influence. As Martin McLoone has observed, "Comerford's films are always deeply metaphorical, so that his marginalised characters and oblique narratives can be read as symbolic motifs of contemporary Ireland" (McLoone 134).

The portrayal of characters on the margins of society is visible again in *High Boot Benny*, where a troubled teenager finds refuge in 'the Mount,' an unconventional school located south of the border. Many of the ideas in the film deal directly with the issue of partition and the conflict that has emerged between warring tribes and factions. However, Brian McIlroy has noted that Comerford's interest in this particular type of institution has its roots in a personal story as his own father attended an alternative school that aimed to educate together children from different traditions. The school was shut down following pressure from the Free State government in the 1930s. McIlroy points out,

Comerford's interest in this subject arose from the fact that the closure of the school was symptomatic of an intellectual closure of many issues in Ireland, and not just the unresolved situation of partition. (McIlroy 83)

In *High Boot Benny* pressure is placed upon the 'free thinkers' from many groups in the cross-border community. Matron, the principal of 'the Mount,' is put under pressure to close her school, not only by the Catholic Church, but also by paramilitary groups and state forces (the British army and possibly the RUC) who cross the border from the North into the South. As a marginalised character (female, liberal, Protestant) located in the South she finds herself trapped between the various groups who have tried to exert differing forms of political, social, or moral control over the land. The sign outside the school reads, "Independence in education is a dangerous aspiration." It is equally applicable to Matron, whose ideas are perceived as threatening the uneasy status quo of life in this border area.

Matron, the 'silenced' priest Manley, and Benny form a dys-functional family (there is an incestuous tone in the relationship between the surrogate mother figure and Benny). As Kevin Rockett says, Comerford has a tendency in his representations to treat the breakdown of the conventional family "as a metaphor for the continuing conflict in Northern Ireland" (Rockett 133).

The director expresses his preoccupation with the Northern conflict in his politically-engaged cinematic approach; *High Boot Benny* is a film that reflects the director's concerns with alternative cinemas. He eschews a formulaic Hollywood approach in favour of a cinema that actively interrogates the consequences of the border and how the social, political and cultural repercussions of partition have impacted on the different characters in the film. Brian McIlroy, who has both critiqued and criticised Comerford's work, remarks that "tellingly, the film relies upon setting for much of its effects. The border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is used as a potent metaphor for the many divisions present in modern-day Ireland" (McIlroy 83).

The use of the border landscape in the film evokes a sense of wildness and brutality that is not as easily reconciled as the hard primitivism of other films representing Ireland, for example *Man of Aran* or *Ryan's Daughter* (see Gibbons 194-257). There is no escaping the bloody heritage of the land. Even in the opening scenes of the film, Benny daubs blood and entrails from trapped rabbits onto a border sign.¹ We see an incursion into the south by the British army as part of a surveillance operation. They seem to regard the border as invisible. The British soldiers are continually being watched by Benny, but it is not obvious if anyone else is watching. Shortly afterwards Benny discovers the body of the school caretaker, who has been killed by Republican paramilitaries.

An atmosphere of suspicion pervades the film. Benny is questioned by the RUC, but refuses to say anything. Later, after preventing two local girls (one a respectable doctor's daughter, the other the 'orphan' who works in the school) from taking blood to a wounded IRA man, he is punished by the IRA. It is a brutal and powerful scene. Comerford presents the image of a young man covered in tar and feathers, his arms outstretched and tied to posts. These images are intercut with Manley and the schoolboys singing and dancing like Native Americans. This subtext of the frontier mythology is interesting; by the end of the film Manley and Matron, the last of their tribe, have been wiped out because their ideas of tolerance and a liberal education pose a threat to those in power. It appears now that Benny is also an 'orphan.' Having witnessed the murder of the others, he is left with no choice but to follow the path of the 'orphan' and join the Republicans.

On the surface, Vinny Murphy's film *Accelerator* presents an entirely different filmic representation of Ireland than that of *High Boot Benny*. Its structure is based on the recognisable sub-genre of the 'road race movie' and was created with a specific audience in mind. Murphy wanted to make a film that moved beyond the idea of the 'troubles' to a fast-paced action-driven narrative that was youth-centred.

The film is about Johnny T, a joyrider from Belfast, who escapes to Dublin following threats from paramilitaries. He wants to get to Barcelona. To raise money, he agrees to take part in a road-race from Belfast to Dublin. Three Belfast couples and three Dublin couples head North to start the race. But they are all joyriders. This has implications for their prospects of success.

Observing armed British soldiers on their arrival in Belfast, one member of the Dublin gang remarks that it is 'another country,' but another retorts that it is 'another planet.' This idea of alien terrain is continued as the drivers steal six cars and leave Belfast.

1 "Behind every rock, and just over every hill, one feels the presence of masked military or paramilitary gunmen engaged in an incoherent and inconclusive bloodbath (blood, entrapment and death permeate the film). This is a nightmarish border community of the imagination." (McLoone, 135)

The Northern couples have the advantage of local knowledge in this race and therefore Crunchie, one of the Dublin drivers, suggests they follow the Northerners 'to the border' so they can also get past any possible security checkpoints.

When the racers split up, the light-hearted energy of the earlier section of the film gives way to the tension of the race. It becomes obvious that there is more at stake than the pot of money in this challenge. The drivers are rebelling against laws and rules imposed by state control. However, state security forces are not the only threat to their success. It soon becomes apparent that this is not just a race to Dublin, but also a race past the border. It is not only an attempt to escape the malevolent atmosphere of the borderlands where the British army and Gardaí are constantly watching, but also to evade paramilitary groups whose own version of community policing involves delivering immediate justice.

The first victim in this territory is Crunchie, who naively asks some locals for directions to Dublin. He looks very young, has an obviously southern accent, yet is driving a car with Northern registration plates. When their suspicions are aroused they send him in the wrong direction, trap him in a cul-de-sac, and subsequently administer a punishment beating with a hurley, a baseball bat, and various other weapons. The hurley could indicate that this is a Republican paramilitary group, but Murphy emphasised when promoting the film that the filmmakers did not intend to produce yet another film about the 'troubles.'

Meanwhile the first couple past the border (they are from the North) are also hospitalised when their high-speed chase with the Gardaí ends up in an horrific car crash. Using a similar symmetry, Murphy has the two eccentric couples (one from the North, the other from the South) wandering around safely but out of the race.

Having worked as an actor and director for many years, and more recently with youth drama in Dublin, it could be argued that Murphy was trying to address a side of Irish life that is often ignored. There are disillusioned teenagers who do not see much of a future for themselves in modern Ireland and decide to live for the moment. From the outset of the film, it is apparent that Whacker, Johnny T's Dublin rival (in love and racing), is extremely disturbed and alienated. His self-destructive behaviour is foreshadowed by several actions early in the film, including carrying a handgun on the train to Belfast and indulging in a high-speed race with Johnny T.

When they both approach the border they are stopped at an army checkpoint. This moment provides a central turning point for the film when Whacker brandishes his gun and shouts out: "Shoot to kill motherfuckers!" Johnny's sister, Boo, is wounded in the subsequent exchange of gunfire. The three and Whacker's girlfriend, Louise, go to the hospital to get treatment for Boo. They have to leave when security forces appear, and so begins the final race to the border. Whacker appears to have accepted his fate, and when the army helicopter starts to close in on them, he forces Johnny and Louise to leave (with the prize money, now tainted by blood), while he has his final showdown with the soldiers.

The problem with this film is revealed in these scenes at the border when Whacker ends up being riddled with army bullets. It starts out as an action adventure film aimed at a youth audience, then it descends into a grim conclusion as the only two youths left standing have to wade across a river to free themselves of the problem(s) of the North. But the images that remain with the audience at the end of the film are of the victims, the hospitalised, the lost, even the bloodstained Whacker, all of whom have been damaged by entering this borderland terrain. If Johnny T and Louise have any future, it is in Barcelona, far away from this landscape.

Landscape is a key element in Johnny Gogan's *The Mapmaker*, a suspense thriller set in a border town in the North of Ireland. Revisiting the subject of place and identity, Gogan shows how a geographical location can have multiple interpretations and histories that are connected to the power relationships of a border community. As Penning-Rowell notes,

Landscapes [...] carry symbolic meanings that are not so wholly innocent as might at first be thought. Created landscapes can be assertions of power – over nature or over neighbours – and our cognition of landscapes is selective and sometimes deliberately distorted in the pursuit of our own interests. (Penning-Rowell 115)

The problems that arise in the fractured community of a border town are mediated by the appearance of the main character, the mapmaker. As an outsider, the mapmaker, Richie Markey, attempts to make sense of the events that develop from the present and a troubled history. Hallam and Marshment observe that this type of character is often used in thriller films. The audience encounters

[a]n outsider whose character serves as a point of alignment in relation to a situation with which they are assumed to be unfamiliar. [...] audiences need a point of entry into a situation which is provided by a character more like themselves than the subject of the film. (Hallam & Marshment 156)

By making a Southern Quaker the protagonist of his film, Gogan has decided to create an 'outsider' whose fundamental belief is that of 'bearing witness.' The idea of being a witness to events that unfold is central to the film. In *Richie*, we encounter a protagonist who appears to happen upon events, rather than take direct action himself. He is also treading in his grandfather's footsteps, a man who was part of a boundary commission that decided on the path of the Irish border in the 1920s.

Throughout the film Richie expresses anxiety about the claims that his grandfather was the man who leaked the commission's decisions to the press and so in turn may have been a traitor. However, it is not only his own relative that haunts him; he becomes involved in the story of Peter Nolan, a man who was abducted over a decade earlier but whose body was never found. He strikes up a friendship with the man's son, who is called 'Cub' and who assumes that Richie has arrived in the town to use his map-making technology to find Peter's body.

The film strikes an uneven tone from the outset, featuring a po-faced voiceover that sets the scene (undoubtedly for an audience unfamiliar with the situation) with references to his “reading optimistic things about the border country opening up.” However the following lines provide the key to the film’s central mysteries: “old wars are like old lovers, their ghosts hang around long after the guns have gone silent.”

Ghosts permeate the film: Richie’s grandfather, Peter Nolan, and a murdered RUC officer called Dawson Cooper. Cooper’s sister Jane and her husband Robert are members of the committee who hire Richie to make the map. Tension arises between the two men when the mapmaker finds archaeological remains on farmland and secures an injunction preventing destruction of the site by Robert’s forestry team.

Richie reveals himself as being more aligned with the landscape than with particular communities and tries to stay apart from the men in the local pub. The influence of frontier mythology also seeps into *The Mapmaker* when some of the forestry team, who are shown to be Loyalists, enter the ‘saloon’ and have a showdown (albeit verbal) with the Republican regulars. This tone gives way to suspense when Richie stumbles upon Peter Nolan’s skeleton while walking the land as he works on his map. But while Richie affords closure for the Nolan family, he himself cannot shut out the problems that arise from his discovery. Unseen forces leave him a copy of Peter Nolan’s ‘confession’ tape. During this interrogation Nolan is accused of being a spy for the British, but he insists that he was merely guiding an archaeological team around the sites in the area.

In a morbid twist, the mapmaker uses the confession tape to draw his map. As Cub says, his father knew the “country better than any book,” and so Richie uses this knowledge of place names to create the map. Jane rebukes him for using a “dead man’s words” to bring the map to life. But we find that nothing is as it seems in this border town. The film collapses in on itself as the format fails to hold the narrative together. We learn that, in a sense, Jane instigated Peter’s death, because she wanted revenge for the loss of her brother Dawson. She felt that someone had to be killed in retaliation: an eye for an eye. We discover that her husband Robert also benefited from Peter’s death. When the archaeologists left, the forestry team were able to continue to tear up the land which Robert describes as a “heap of barren earth,” a quote that reveals his affinity with destruction. Richie almost ends up becoming an informer himself when he telephones the RUC chief Devlin to tell him what he has learned, but when no one answers, he is finally forced to take action himself.

There are many flaws in *The Mapmaker*, yet it is a very rich text. It attempts to engage with ideas of *dinnseanchas*, or place names, concepts that were also addressed in Brian Friel’s *Translations* and are a frequent feature of Irish poetry in Irish and English. The question of whether southern Irish film directors (see O’Rawe) have the ability to deal adequately with the fragmented nature of a border community is not resolved by *The Mapmaker*. Despite an attempt to introduce an alternative character to mediate events for the audience, Gogan is not capable of overcoming the stereo-

type that there is only one division in society in the North of Ireland. Joe Cleary notes that since the 1970s

[t]he partition of Ireland no longer stopped at the inter-state border: the militarization of local territorial boundaries and the increased segregation of its two communities have effectively produced a whole series of internal partitions within Northern Ireland. (Cleary 101)

One notable success of the film is the cinematography that mirrors the work of David Farrell's *Innocent Landscapes*. In both texts the camera records an absence. Through Owen MacPóilín's camera-work, the landscape itself becomes a character in the film. As the light changes, the shadows stretch across the verdant and rich hills, suggesting a sinister presence hidden in the half-light.

Just as Farrell's work had an influence on the screen images of *Mapmaker*, the final film under consideration here is also deeply connected to the search for the disappeared. *Limbo* (2001) is a short film written and directed by Anne Crilly. This relatively recent film reflects on a number of issues that arose in the aftermath of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. It is a meditation on motherhood and the denial of closure for people who have suffered the loss of a family member. As a maternal narrative, it seems to be a more successful interrogation of the effects of the 'Troubles' than the other films, by choosing to focus on the families' need for resolution following the trauma of bereavement (be it from 'punishment' or abduction or that of a still-born child).

It tells the story of Carmel, a woman from Derry whose baby boy was stillborn. He was buried on unconsecrated ground because of Catholic church policy. The film deals with her attempts at reconciliation with the past. One day, she sees a news report about Seán Ó Cinnéide, who disappeared in the mid-1970s. New information has come to light about the whereabouts of his body, so a dig is underway on the Donegal coastline to search for his remains. Carmel, who is a regular visitor to this area, decides to approach Seán's mother, Eileen, and express her support.

The border is not visible in this film, but in a way this invisibility makes sense. These abductions and disappearances took place across the border; therefore the resolution of the issues that arise from this must also traverse the borderlands. The brief friendship between the two women provides solace for Carmel, who says little during her meetings with Eileen. It is left to Eileen to express what is affecting both of them: "Cén mháthair nár mhaith léi adhlacadh ceart a thabhairt dá pháiste" ("What mother wouldn't want to give a proper burial to her child?").

Eileen says it is like being in a continual wake, a state of limbo, and that she will not have peace ("suaimhneas") until her son is at rest. Carmel has experienced a similar loss and is unable to grieve properly because of the denial of closure. Even when the search is unsuccessful, Eileen says that although Seán's body has not been found, she feels that she now has a resting place to envisage when she thinks of him rather

than the blank limbo that existed before. Carmel now realises that she wants to be able to imagine a similar place of rest for her dead son. Her husband warns her against digging up the past, but she echoes Eileen's comment by saying she wants some picture in her head of the place where her young child was buried. With a priest, they go to an unmarked grave in the hills (it resembles another site for the disappeared), and after a brief blessing the priest leaves saying that limbo no longer exists. Carmel is stunned to hear this, but the ceremony affords her the opportunity to express her grief.

Crilly manages to weave together the different experiences of two mothers. She makes a powerful statement as she draws uncanny comparisons between the Catholic Church and paramilitaries. Both hurt many families by denying them the expression of grief associated with a Christian burial. As a maternal narrative, *Limbo* is strikingly different from the other films discussed above. By adopting a personal approach, the director (like Margo Harkin in *Hush-A-Bye-Baby*) has created a personal film. This enables her to meditate upon the impact of the troubles in a way that avoids the idea of a 'divided community' or other stereotypes that posit an inherently violent people and landscape in Ireland, especially in the North. It would do other filmmakers good to note this approach, as the tendency towards creating a macroscopic view of conflict can rarely avoid the idea that Ireland is afflicted by "the bleeding sore that is Northern Ireland" (McLoone 135).

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ULSTER-SCOTS HISTORY AND CULTURE: A NORTH CHANNEL PERSPECTIVE

John Erskine

Shortly before the outbreak of the 1798 rebellion, a French traveller in Ireland, Jacques Louis de Bougrenet, Chevalier de la Tocnaye, journeyed along the County Antrim coast and reached the village of Cushendun. In this part of the country, he paused to observe, the inhabitants, who were Catholics and, unusually for the province, spoke only Irish (CLT 217).¹ La Tocnaye continued his journey down the coast and then turned inland:

Quitting the coast I had to cross the mountains to get to the interior and I stopped at Brushin [Broughshane] where most of the inhabitants are Presbyterians. One could hardly imagine that he is among the same people. The way of speaking and even of dressing is much more Scotch than Irish. (CLT 218)

Later, when he arrived in Belfast, La Tocnaye observed: "Belfast has almost entirely the look of a Scotch town, and the character of the inhabitants has considerable resemblance to that of the people of Glasgow" (CLT 222).

Less than twenty years later, Sir Walter Scott, on a voyage in the company of Robert Louis Stevenson's grandfather, landed on the north coast of County Antrim near Dunluce Castle. Scott breakfasted at a nearby farmhouse and observed: "Mrs More, the good wife, a Scoto-Hibernian, received us with kindness and hospitality which did honour to the nation of her birth, as well as of her origin" (Scott 114).

Neither Scott nor La Tocnaye expressed particular surprise at the presence of Scottish traits and traditions in Ulster. Nor indeed should they have, for geographical proximity has long influenced the two places and the relationship between them.

At their closest point (between north-east Antrim and Kintyre) only some twelve miles of water separate the coasts of Scotland and Ulster. Indeed, in his account La Tocnaye likened the narrow stretch of water between the two places to a large river rather than the sea (CLT 217), adding that even his horse seemed to admire the dramatic view across to the Scottish coast (CLT 211). Yet perhaps to talk of the sea 'separating' the two places is itself to betray a very modern point of view, for until comparatively recently water was regarded as much a means of communication as a barrier to it. Indeed, the first settlers are thought to have arrived in Ireland by way of the North Channel; early ecclesiastical contacts were made across the channel in both directions, *from* Whithorn and *to* Iona; the Kingdom of Dalriada exercised a sea-borne hegemony over both coastlines; Scots settled in Ulster before, and after, the

1 All references indicated in this manner (CLT) are to *A Frenchman's Walk through Ireland, 1796-7* by the Chevalier de La Tocnaye, first published in 1798.

official Plantation of the early seventeenth century; and educational, economic, and personal ties, for both Protestant and Catholic, continued to develop the relationship over later centuries. Inevitably, therefore, the very proximity of the two coastlines, the one visible daily – weather permitting – from the other, has had a profound and enduring influence in shaping the experience and history of the two places. Thus, instead of talking of separation it might be equally accurate to observe that the very narrowness of the North Channel has acted as a link rather than a barrier between Ulster and Scotland.

G.M. Trevelyan has summarised the longevity, diversity, and continuity of this cross-channel interaction thus:

The history of these early times no less than the settlement of Protestant Ulster in James I's reign and the Irish immigration into Clydeside in recent times, reminds us that the connection between West Scotland and North-East Ireland is a constant factor in history. (Trevelyan 57)

In other words, from the earliest times to the present – from Mesolithic settler and missionary saint to migrant seasonal labourer and contemporary medical student – the waters of the North Channel have witnessed and carried a constant traffic of people and ideas between Scotland and Ulster.

The Ulster-Scots

The diversity and continuity of Trevelyan's 'constant factor' need to be borne in mind in examining any aspect of the Ulster-Scottish connection. Indeed, in focusing on the Ulster-Scots community, we are seeking to define and examine only one particular aspect of this Ulidio-Scottish² interaction, albeit a substantial one. When we talk of the 'Ulster-Scots' we are not talking of the totality of the Ulidio-Scottish connection outlined above; rather, we are examining, broadly speaking, the community of Scottish descent established in Ulster, officially and unofficially, around the time of the Plantation in the seventeenth century.

The Plantation as such was not as tidy an undertaking as it is often imagined to be. The fact that large numbers of Scots had settled already in Counties Antrim and Down before the Plantation meant that Antrim and Down were excluded from the official Plantation scheme. Under that scheme, major Scottish settlement occurred, beyond Antrim and Down, in north Londonderry, north Tyrone and east Donegal: in other words, in those areas which were nearest to Scotland. Scottish settlements, particularly outside these areas, did not always maintain their distinctive Scottishness, often being absorbed into a locally dominant English culture. Similarly, strong Scottish settlement often drew small neighbouring English and Irish communities into their cultural influence. To this day Ulster-Scots language, in particular, extends be-

2 I use the term 'Ulidio-Scottish' to embrace the relationship between Ulster and Scotland at its widest and to avoid any confusion between the term 'Ulster-Scottish' and the more specific 'Ulster-Scots.'

yond community, cultural and denominational boundaries, as it is regional rather than confessional. In Ulster few boundaries are impervious.

With this qualification in mind, we need to examine some of the traits of the Ulster-Scots community and its descendants. There had been Scottish settlement in north Antrim before the Plantation, settlement by Highlanders who were Gaelic-speaking and Catholic. The Plantation and its accompanying unofficial settlements marked a significant change in the Ulster-Scottish connection. The settlers who came in the seventeenth century were largely Lowlander, Scots-speaking and Protestant.

Religion

The nature of Lowlander Protestantism was distinctive. It is important to remember that the Reformation which Scotland had experienced differed considerably from that of her English and Irish neighbours. In the sixteenth century Scotland was an independent country, neither its crown nor its parliament being united with those of England. Scotland's Reformation experience was derived directly from Europe and particularly, because of the 'Auld Alliance' with France, from francophone Europe. In consequence, the Reformation in Scotland was largely Reformed (that is, Calvinist rather than Lutheran or Anglican in character), so giving Scotland her distinctive Presbyterian polity, although Presbyterianism as such, after an ecclesiastically turbulent century, was finally established only under the Revolution Settlement of the 1690s.

In Ulster, Presbyterianism had a similarly unsettled history. Yet the common religious experience of the seventeenth century, the signing of the Scottish Covenants,³ and the stories of the sufferings of the Covenanters became enduring symbols of persecution, righteous resistance, and eventual triumph for Scots in Scotland and Ulster alike.

Furthermore, within Presbyterianism there are certain attitudes and tenets which contribute to our understanding of the Ulster-Scots community. Presbyterianism is radical in its origins, democratic in its structures, and egalitarian in its outlook. Presbyterianism has no hierarchy of bishops, but exercises governance through a series of related church courts and committees with elected chairmen. It mistrusts and is instinctively suspicious of centralised authority and is structured to contain it. Additionally, fundamental to Presbyterianism is the Reformation commitment to the right of private judgement. Such a religious background has inevitably affected political and social attitudes. Marianne Elliott has commented on these attitudes thus:

3 The Scottish Covenants – the *National Covenant* of 1638 and the *Solemn League and Covenant* of 1643 – were assertions, in differing circumstances, of Scotland's religio-political independence. The Covenanters – those who adhered to the Covenants – were suppressed, at times ruthlessly, by government in the latter part of the century. For a treatment of the Covenanting tradition in Scottish history and literature, see Cowan.

Translated into political terms such beliefs could be profoundly revolutionary. [... Presbyterians] were seen by successive governments as the most volatile element in Irish society, more dangerous even than the Catholics. From as early as 1649 they were deeply anti-parliamentary, and state discrimination throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries intensified their sense of persecuted purity and alienation from an infidel state. The outcome was an ingrained dislike of the entire hierarchical system of prelacy, aristocracy and authoritarianism in government, a notorious lack of deference towards landlords and politicians alike, and a tendency to resist as a matter of religious principle. (Elliott 117)

Ulster-Scots independence of mind and lack of deference are described well by a writer in the 1830s who, clearly exasperated at his failed attempts to influence an Ulster-Scots community in County Antrim, concluded:

... their dialect, idioms, customs, and manners are purely Scottish and by no means pleasing. Their manners, even when intending civility, are far from being courteous. [...] They are more than a little stubborn. [...] It is difficult to persuade them to any change. They may be led, but they won't be driven. (Day & McWilliams 11)

The last remark – on being led but not driven – is remarkably astute. Indeed, such Presbyterian attitudes gained them no friends. John Milton railed against the Presbyterians of Ulster when they protested at the English parliament's execution of the king, Charles I, in 1649. Later, in the 1790s, an exasperated Sir Boyle Roche described the Presbyterians as “a turbulent, disorderly set of people whom no king can govern, or no God please” (Smyth 55).

Earlier, in 1733, Jonathan Swift, who had been an Anglican curate in County Antrim and who continued to smart under the indignity he experienced there – his church had been virtually empty while the neighbouring Presbyterian meeting-house had been well-filled –, had argued against the removal of the legal restrictions that prevented Presbyterians from holding public office. When a Presbyterian delegation visited Dublin to seek redress, Swift mocked them, expressing the view that, should they be successful, they would be even less likely than the Scots to secure government employment: “For, after all, what Assurance can a *Scottish* Northern Dissenter, born on *Irish* Ground, have, that he shall be treated with as much Favour as a TRUE SCOT born beyond the Tweed” (Swift 275).

Swift's use of the term ‘Dissenter’ reminds us of the tripartite nature of eighteenth-century Irish society: Protestant, Catholic, and Dissenter. The term ‘Protestant’ referred only to the Anglican Church, while the Presbyterians, along with other smaller nonconformist groupings, formed the third part of Irish society – the Dissenters.

It is important to re-emphasise at this juncture that the Ulster-Scots community is not co-extensive with the Presbyterian community. There are many Presbyterians who do not claim to be Ulster-Scots, just as there are many Ulster-Scots who are not Presbyterians. Nonetheless, much of Ulster-Scots culture is rooted in Presbyterian history and, in seeking to understand the Ulster-Scots community, we can find important clues within the Presbyterian experience.

Education

One of the tenets of the Scottish Reformation – that each person should be able to read the Bible for himself – meant that the Reformation movement placed an emphasis on education. In consequence, the Scottish Reformers sought to establish not only a church, but also a school in every parish. The Ulster-Scots community sought to reflect this same emphasis on education. However, as Dissenters, Ulster-Scots found that access to the only university in Ireland, Trinity College in Dublin, was barred to them.

Hardly surprisingly, the Ulster-Scots community found the solution to their university education across the North Channel in Scotland. Hundreds, indeed thousands, of students walked to the cross-channel ports, crossed to mainland Scotland, and proceeded to walk the long road to Glasgow and the other Scottish universities. It was a journey which took several days. Today there are many Ulster students in Scottish universities. Many of them think that they are doing something new. They are not: it has been going on for centuries.

The presence of so many Ulster students in Scottish universities especially during the eighteenth century was particularly significant. The flowering of learning and ideas in what became known as the Scottish Enlightenment had its effect on the Ulster-Scots students and on their social and political outlook. Indeed, an Ulster-Scots student, Francis Hutcheson, who later returned to Glasgow to become Professor of Moral Philosophy, was known as the “Father of the Scottish Enlightenment.” Like many of his fellow students Hutcheson was entered into the books of the university as ‘Scotus Hibernus,’ Scotch Irish. His influence on his students, many of whom taught in Britain, Ireland, and America, is incalculable.

The importance of this educational relationship between Ulster and Scotland should not be underestimated: it reflects an experience different from that of the other parts of Ireland. Bruce Lenman has characterised the situation thus:

Anglican Armagh in this period may have looked to Dublin but Counties Londonderry, Antrim and Down did not. They looked to Glasgow and the west of Scotland, the heartland [...] of a Scottish Enlightenment which was also a northern Irish Enlightenment. (Lenman 116)

Indeed, a recent writer on the Enlightenment has referred to Ulster as “the other Scotland” (Herman 63). The historian L.M. Cullen was also remarking on the strength of the educational and intellectual connection between Ulster and Scotland in the eighteenth century when he observed: “A pan-Scottish world grew up on both sides of the North Channel with Glasgow as its intellectual centre” (230).

Moreover, Ulster-Scots students did not simply take their ideas back to Ulster but also to America. This was the era of considerable Ulster-Scots emigration to America and the emigrants took with them their own radical disposition sharpened by the thinking of the Enlightenment. Terry Eagleton has talked of Ulster and Scotland at this time as forming “an intellectual free-trade area, with outposts in North America”

(121). Ian McBride observed that the ‘Scoti Hiberni’ students from Glasgow “not only sustained the intellectual life of Presbyterian Ulster but as Scots-Irish emigrants to North America they became the chief exporters of enlightenment to the colonies” (74). In both places, such thinking had political consequences.

Literature

Unsurprisingly, reading and literature within the Ulster-Scots community, like education, also reflect their Scottish origins. In the eighteenth century the writings of Allan Ramsay joined the works of earlier Scottish authors among the stock issued by the Belfast and provincial presses. However, the publication of the writings of a new poet, Robert Burns, at the end of the eighteenth century, put the popularity of previous writers in the shade. The publication of the Edinburgh edition of Burns’s poems was swiftly followed by a pirated edition published in Belfast, the first centre outside Scotland to publish the bard’s works. The local newspaper press celebrated the bard by publishing poems to, about and by him. In Ulster itself, a school of vernacular poets, known as the Rhyming Weavers, wrote and published poetry in the same mode as Burns. It used to be asserted that these authors were mere imitators of Burns, but it is now recognised that they were of, and writing within, the same tradition, and also drawing on the same sources as Burns himself. One of the Weaver Poets, Samuel Thomson, who had met Burns, described his own poetic identity thus:

Indeed Fate seems to have mistook
The spot at first design’d for me;
Which should have been some flow’ry nook
In Ayr or on the banks of Dee.

I love my native land, no doubt,
Attach’d to her thro’ thick and thin;
And tho’ I’m *Irish* all *without*,
I’m every item *Scotch within*. (62)

Indeed, the Weaver Poets have recently become a new area of study for Scottish Burns scholars.⁴ One earlier critic, John Hewitt, while recognising the importance of Burns for the Weaver Poets, concluded that Burns taught them to do better what they would have done for themselves (16-17). Nonetheless, these poets have never found a place within the established canon of Irish literature.

While the literary voice of the Weaver Poets was certainly distinctive, so too was the language of the communities from which they came. This Ulster-Scots language, certainly different, was by no means pleasing to all. One writer, William Carleton, found it so unpleasant that he took the decision to banish it utterly from his writing. On introducing one of his works, Carleton says:

4 See, for example, the chapter “‘On Irish Ground’: Burns and the Ulster-Scots Radical Poets” in McIlvanney (220-40).

In the language and expression of the northern peasantry he [Carleton] has studiously avoided local idiom, and that intolerable Scoto-Hibernic jargon which pierces the ear so unmercifully — but he has preserved everything Irish, and generalised the phraseology so that the book, wherever it may go, will exhibit a truly Hibernian spirit. (xi)

Later, vernacular writers in Scotland turned to prose and included writing in the Kailyard tradition.⁵ The authors of this tradition were popular in Ulster, and writings in the same style also emerged there.⁶ Scottish periodical literature also appeared regularly in Ulster, from the *British Weekly* to the *People's Friend*.

Industry and Politics

The Ulster-Scots community provides parallels with Scotland in areas other than religion, literature, and popular culture. The Scottish historian, Tom Devine, recognised the continuing nature of the connection with Ulster when he wrote that: “[f]or Irish Presbyterians, Scotland in the early nineteenth century was not a strange land [...] and the links [established at the Plantation] with the mother country had been strengthened in subsequent decades through trade, education and family links” (500). Indeed, as the nineteenth century progressed, Belfast and Glasgow, the industrial capitals of Ireland and Scotland, saw the emergence of a Lagan-Clyde industrial corridor, with the development on both rivers of shipbuilding and heavy engineering. Indeed, in the previous century, Belfast’s first shipbuilder, William Ritchie, was a Scot, just like the town’s first printer, Patrick Neill, who had been invited to Belfast from Glasgow by the town’s mayor. That mayor, like many of the town’s merchant class – a class which was to be debarred from political influence by the provisions of the Test Act in the eighteenth century – was himself of Scottish descent.

Additionally, Ulster-Scots and Scots shared common ground politically after the eighteenth century, through their espousal of Liberal politics, but strains appeared in the relationship when Liberals in Ulster, facing the prospect of Home Rule for Ireland, became Liberal Unionists and later Conservatives. Eminent Ulster-Scots, like Thomas Sinclair, appealed for Scottish Presbyterian and English nonconformist support in their campaign, but their success was limited. Nonetheless, as Graham Walker has suggested, at the beginning of the twentieth century the unionist case seemed effectively ‘hijacked’ by Ulster-Scots imagery when opposition to Home Rule was symbolised by the adoption of a Solemn League and Covenant (Walker, “Scotland and Ulster” 95), in a direct appeal to Scottish seventeenth-century history and to

5 The school of Kailyard (literally ‘cabbage garden’) writing depicted, in a sentimental manner, rural idylls in which certain characters exemplify solid and often self-sacrificing virtues. The best known writers in this school are Ian Maclaren, J.M. Barrie, and S.R. Crockett. Barrie and Crockett also wrote in other genres.

6 The best known Ulster writer of this genre was Archibald M’Ilroy. Among his works in this style were *When Lint was in the Bell* (1897) and *The Auld Meetin’-Hoose Green* (1898). M’Ilroy’s work, while consciously within the genre, is relieved by humour.

a sense of persecuted piety and righteous resistance.⁷ Furthermore, perceptions of the very nature of political sovereignty itself also display an important Scottish influence. Scottish tradition locates sovereignty with the people; English tradition centres sovereignty on the Crown in Parliament. In summarising Mrs Thatcher's attitude in the 1980s to the possibility of political devolution for Scotland as "We say no, and we are the state," the Scots replied, "Well we say yes, and we are the people."⁸ An instinctive, rather than a conscious, acknowledgement of this tension is often detectable in contemporary Northern Ireland politics.

Re-Presenting the Tradition

The recent revival of interest in, and the assertion of, an Ulster-Scots tradition and identity therefore do not represent a new phenomenon. The emergence of Scotch-Irish heritage groups in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century, the adoption in Ulster of Scottish historical symbolism at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the publication of Woodburn's book *The Ulster Scot: His History and Religion* during the First World War, all point to the existence of a community identity, hitherto rarely articulated but valued nonetheless. The current reawakening of interest in Ulster-Scots language and culture, inspired initially by the resurgence of interest in the Scots language in Scotland, therefore draws on an established but unasserted identity.

Shortly after the publication of Woodburn's book, one of John Buchan's characters, Andrew Amos, "the last of the Border Radicals," described Ulster as "a dour, ill-natured den, but our own folk all the same" (58). If an increasingly diverse Scotland no longer feels able to adopt such a simplistic attitude towards a diverse Northern Ireland and if, as Graham Walker has suggested, Ulster-Scots and Scots have, over past decades, neglected "their striking historical intimacy" (*Intimate Strangers* 189), then political change, in both places, may renew old relationships.

Scotland's reluctance to engage with Ulster over the last thirty years for fear of exacerbating its own sectarian problems – problems complicated by immigration from Ulster and often perpetuated through football allegiance – and Ireland's difficulty in coming to terms with a culture apparently alien to a largely monist national model may now be transformed through the structures put in place by the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement.

If the Good Friday Agreement recognises, as it seems to do, different identities and cultural allegiances not as a problem but as a means to a solution founded on diver-

7 See also footnote 3. While taking its title from the Covenant of 1643, the spirit and nature of the Solemn League and Covenant of 1912 took its inspiration from the National Covenant of 1638, not only in its intent and outlook but also in the widespread popular response to it.

8 Canon Kenyon Wright to the opening meeting of the Scottish Constitutional Convention, 30 March 1989.

sity, and if the Agreement recognises, as it does, not simply a north-south but also an east-west dimension to Northern Ireland's complex set of relationships, then the Ulster-Scots tradition ceases to be an anomaly and becomes instead a contribution to accommodation and cultural wealth.

Talking of the early Christian period, Proinsias MacCana observed that one might with justification "speak of a North Channel culture-province within which obtained a free currency of ideas, literary, intellectual and artistic" (105). Since insular study can sometimes neglect Trevelyan's 'constant factor,' the poet Michael Longley has warned of the tendency "to undervalue, even to ignore, the Scottish horizon" (34). If, as Edna Longley has suggested, Ulster is indeed a cultural corridor, then new circumstances may allow the North Channel to become, once again, a connection instead of a barrier.

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REPRESENTATION AND RESPONSIBILITY: WOMEN IN NORTHERN IRELAND/THE NORTH OF IRELAND: A CONVERSATION IN DESCANT¹

Myrtle Hill and Eilish Rooney

This paper is in the form of a conversation in descant. The musical term “descant,” meaning counterpoint added to a basic melody, is appropriate to the conversation in which we have been engaging in writing this paper. The “basic melody” of our conversation is comprised of both our friendship and commitments as feminists. The counterpoint comes from our diverse experiences and analyses of the conflict in the north and from our different disciplinary approaches: Myrtle history, Eilish literature. Hopefully, readers will register the counterpoint in how we approach our own stories and in our approaches to representation and responsibility. We each write from our work and lives in northern Irish history, culture, and politics. We each have two contributions.

Myrtle’s Opening Contribution

My reflections on this theme were stimulated by the recent experience of researching and writing a study of women in twentieth-century Ireland (Hill). As an academic exercise, this ambitious project generated a range of challenges relating to sources, methods, and interpretations, and these were further complicated by my own experience of living in the society and through the times about which I wrote. The resulting personal and political dilemmas reinforced and sharpened my professional awareness of the complexities of both the approaches to, and the consequences of, remembering and retelling the stories of the recent past. In my contributions to this conversation, I offer some examples of the difficulties I encountered and some observations on the links between “official” and “unofficial” accounts of the past.

Like most forms of knowledge, history has been subject to critical scrutiny in recent decades, with both feminism and postmodernism promoting epistemological and contextual interrogation of traditional sources, narratives, and methodologies (Jordanova 91; Shapiro 8). While debates continue to both clarify and problematise theoretical positions, there is general agreement that “the writing of history is not an innocent or transparent affair” (Bannerji 15). Shaped by outside forces, its inclusions, exclusions, assumptions, and interpretations produce partial, often competing versions of the truth. This is particularly relevant in so-called post-conflict societies, “where ‘the past’ is often the first and most contentious item on the agenda” (Hayner 5) In a context where [re]constructions of past events become inextricably linked to contemporary

1 We would like to express our thanks to Dr. Jennifer FitzGerald for her helpful and insightful comments on an earlier draft.

2 See also Ardoyne Commemoration Project.

political agendas, who gets to tell the “stories” which find their way into the public domain and how and where that telling is done are more-than-usually important considerations (Johnson et al.).

My own particular interest has been in feminist history, and there is no doubt about the values uncovered in methodological and analytical approaches which challenged women’s invisibility in every sphere of social, economic, and political life. While the work of recovery, of writing back in those who have been left “outside history,” is ongoing, the deployment of gender as an analytical tool – interacting with class, sexuality, ethnicity, race – marks a more significant and perhaps more enduring phase in the quest for “a way of looking at the past that expands our vision” (Kessler-Harris 108). Applying a gendered lens to source materials is one area that can reveal much about the construction, perpetuation, and dissemination of images and ideologies about womanhood. For example, the activities of women who, by engaging in politically motivated violence step outside the boundaries of ‘acceptable’ female behaviour, have been subject to manipulation and distortion, particularly by the media. From the 1916 Rising, through the Anglo-Irish and Civil Wars to the more recent period of armed conflict, both contemporary and historical opinion has been shaped by the portrayal of female participants in emotionally gendered terms – they have been variously described as fanatical, “unwomanly,” “caged cats,” and have been compared to the “knitting harridans of the French Revolution” (Ryan). This construction of the “frightening cult of the violent women” ignores any possibility of “rational and committed participation in armed struggle” on the part of women paramilitaries, thus both disempowering them politically and marginalising them historically. Similarly gendered, the masculinist discourse of national histories also misrepresents or appropriates women’s political activism (Benton). Our attempts to reconstruct and interpret the past thus necessitate constant, rigorous, and detailed analysis of the power inherent in both past and present discourses (Jenkins).

However, nationalist historian Margaret Ward, while acknowledging the “welcome challenge” brought to Irish history by the insights of discourse analysis and agreeing that nationalism is a heavily gendered concept, urges feminist historians both “to look at the evidence from the writings and actions of women themselves and to interpret male nationalist discourse within its shifting historical context” (Ward 120). The latter point places the Irish discourse on both nationalism and woman in a wider context – the interwar period is the best example of how popular notions of “traditional” womanhood, shaped and manipulated by conservative social and political movements, crossed national and international boundaries. And there is no doubt that incorporating the words of militant women into the story of nationalism provides useful insights into the motivations and commitment underlying their actions. Reading the letters, diaries and other records kept by women republican prisoners, whether in the 1920s or the 1970s, for example, shifts the historical perspective, highlighting political aspirations, which often led to alienation from Church and family. Oonagh Walsh, dis-

cusssing the reaction of imprisoned militant female republicans to the Church's ex-communication in 1923 argues that

their participation in hunger strikes, formal organisation on military lines, self-proclaimed equality with male counterparts, refusal to accept anything less than the status of political prisoners, and willingness to challenge the precepts of the Church – all these indicate their autonomy as revolutionaries. (Walsh 85)

Fifty years later, republican activist Marion Price, in a letter written in 1974, while she was on hunger strike in Armagh prison, explained to her mother the priorities which had led to her situation:

Of course I hate the suffering you are all going through and I would take that away if I could... I'm not being morbid but sometimes we achieve more by death than we could ever hope to living. We dedicated our lives to a cause that is supremely more important than they are. (qtd. in D'Arcy 43)

The stories of Ireland, nationalism, and womanhood can thus be rendered more "truthfully" multi-faceted and complex.

The feminist historical project remains incomplete, with important gaps remaining. For example, the social and political significance of the women who first publicly protested about sectarian housing problems in the early 1960s is largely absent from mainstream histories of the Civil Rights Movement which their actions stimulated (Shannon). Feminist history also has its own limitations; for the purposes of this paper, I will refer to only one – the danger that "projects of recovery, of rendering visible, may continue, produce and reinforce conceptual practices of power" (Himani Bannerji; qtd. in Gallagher et al. 6). Determined by the agendas and priorities of the age in which they write, histories of women in Ireland, like those of men, have, until relatively recently, favoured the champions of popular causes, most notably, nationalism and feminism. This bias has left women living in Protestant, loyalist, and unionist communities, already marginalised in conservative patriarchal communities, with only a fragmented and superficial recorded history. One woman described how, arriving as an undergraduate student at the University of Kent in the 1970s, she felt herself to be "falling through the net in my new enlightened environment, where Ulster Unionists were regarded as *Sun*-reading Ayatollahs" (Agnew 186). Another described how as a Protestant woman she experienced her identity as "other to English women and the English state, other to Catholic women and Catholic domination in Ireland as a whole, and other to Protestant men in Northern Ireland" (Moore 6). Whether within or outside their home country, women in the north (like men) are positioned within one or other of the two dominant discourses, with no acknowledgement of either the multiple facets or the instability of identity, which shape their experiences.

The inclusion of a gendered analysis, while broadening and challenging traditional [male]stream histories, is of course politically motivated; historians are constructors of narratives as well as readers of sources, and the selection and interpretation of evidence are hugely important in determining the kind of story that emerges (Roberts). But, as Susan Friedman argues, the politics of competing histories need not paralyse

the need to tell the stories; rather, by focusing on history as “versions of the past, we foreground the role of the narrator as a mode of knowing that selects, organises, orders, interprets and allegorises” (Friedman 232).

There are also more subtle ways in which historians create their own meanings and incorporate them into the historical narrative. How we employ language is deeply significant – and, unlike previous work on eighteenth- or nineteenth-century subjects, I had extreme difficulty in finding an appropriate narrative voice with which to speak about recent, much-disputed historical events. The decision to include the ‘voices’ of various militant activists, particularly during the most recent period of bloody conflict, led to anxious deliberations about how to talk about emotive and painful episodes which were within the living memory of the writer (who carried her own personal political and social baggage) and in which women from different political persuasions participated. There were broader issues, too; in a country whose political make-up is disputed, how one names a place – Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland/ the North – is a clear indication to local readers of the narrator’s religious and political sympathies. To call a peace or community group “neutral” if they are in receipt of government funding is equally telling, even if that is how the group perceives itself, and descriptions of peace activists are also problematic. Peace is, after all, more than the absence of violence, and the pursuit of peace therefore must follow a political agenda, whether or not that is articulated, acknowledged, or even understood. There is no doubt that the fact that my own story was subsumed within this larger one further complicated the task of searching out and trying to make sense of the multiple meanings of history.³

Eilish's First Contribution

My part of this conversation begins with thinking about the past. It is about remembering and forgetting, the impacts these have on the future, and efforts to situate some women’s voices in the process. I begin with Edward Said’s reflections on struggles over “national narrative” and turn to Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* in order to consider remembering and forgetting in times of transition and I note some ways that the past is being dealt with in the North of Ireland. I end this first contribution with a counterpoint of women’s voices from the *Field Day Anthology*. My short conclusion simply calls for critical attention to how the conflict in the north is “represented” in Irish Studies.

Said’s observation occurs in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* (Carroll & King). The text is arguably a controversial intervention in the field of Irish Studies (Lloyd 48). The controversy is a contest over contemporary discourse on Ireland that is framed in competing understandings of the centuries-old British-Irish geopolitical relationship, and all that that implies. The impacts of theory upon politics and upon future concep-

3 I found William Cronon’s essay, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History and Narrative,” particularly helpful in considering these issues.

tions of the polity are rarely as clearly delineated as in the realm of postcolonial studies on Ireland. At stake is the constitutional legitimacy of the state of Northern Ireland (6 counties) and, by inference, if occasionally not stated, the status of governance in the Republic of Ireland (26 county state). Said reminds us that the “struggle over the national narrative” is ongoing in stable societies as well as in places like the North of Ireland:

All over the world, in as many societies as one can think of, there is a struggle over the national narrative, what its components are, who its main constituents are, what its shaping forces are, why some elements have been silenced and why others have triumphed [...] the struggle over a collective, uneven history and monolithic ‘historical standards’ goes on [...] with the gradually clarified understanding that the royal road to a nation’s identity is its public memory, the official pantheon of heroes, the monuments, holidays and honorifically designated offices that so often conceal the continuing challenge from ‘below.’ (Said 180)

Whilst women have not fared well in the “official pantheon of heroes” in Irish history, the study of how gender figures and works in British-Irish relations is virtually a green field site for research. The development of gender sensitive analyses is part of the “continuing challenge from ‘below’” that comprise feminist efforts to make women visible within the contested “national narrative” of “Ireland”.

Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* (1987) involves an unrecorded history of slavery in the USA. I link it into this conversation in order to consider alternative ways of breaking silences. Towards the end of the novel the community living on Bluestone Road, Ohio, in the 1870s, where the novel is set, learn to forget the past. So, a novel, about re-mem-bering, closes on a communal act of learning to forget. In the end, even the character Beloved, who also refigures slavery, is forgotten. She has disappeared. About her the novel’s narrator concludes:

All trace is gone [...] The rest is weather. Not the breath of the disremembered and un-accounted for, but wind in the eves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather. Certainly no clamour for a kiss. (275)

The clamouring of the past ceases. The “breath of the disremembered,” living through seasonal sounds, ceases. The sounds become “just weather.” The community on Bluestone Road attains a kind of forgiving, redemptive quietness. Morrison recognises that remembering may be too hard, may disallow survival. *Beloved* is dedicated to the ‘Sixty Million and more’ who did not survive the Middle Passage. The survivors did not look back. Of them she says:

They tried to make a life. I think Afro-Americans in rushing away from slavery ... also rushed away from the slaves because it was painful to dwell there, and they may have abandoned some responsibilities in so doing ... there’s a necessity for remembering ... in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. (Darling 5-6)

Beloved is also a redemptive, fearless, and fictional approach to remembering slavery and seeing the present in the past. I have drawn on Morrison’s work in *Beloved*

and in her literary and cultural critique of racism in the USA⁴ in my work on narratives of the northern Irish conflict.⁵ Remembering and forgetting are important in any place. They are particularly important at times of traumatic transition and change. This is the case at this 'post-conflict' transitional stage of the political process in the north of Ireland when people are both remembering personal-political experiences and are trying to re-member: to find out and put together what happened.⁶ This is all part of the "struggle over the national narrative" and of unearthing what is hidden.

In the course of the peace process there has been an upsurge of projects, publications and approaches to remembering the past. The community-based *Dúchas* living history archive has its origins in the aftermath of the IRA cease-fire of 1994.⁷ It is rooted in the belief that there is a unique history to be uncovered by the West Belfast community "from the point of view of the people who lived through [it]" (*Dúchas*). The archive is also politically rooted within a frame of human rights and equality. Initially, it was seen as a way of involving "local" people in the process of conflict resolution and peace building.⁸

A unique text and moving account of the human cost of the conflict is contained in *Lost Lives*. The subtitle denotes the authors' intention to record, "The stories of the men, women and children who died as a result of the Northern Ireland troubles." It begins with deaths in 1966 and provides the details on the deaths of over three and a half thousand people killed as a result of the conflict.

Another powerful, public, and evocative approach to facing the past was taken in 2000 by local BBC Radio Ulster in a series called *Legacy*. In the mornings just before the nine o'clock news, the radio went silent. From the void a voice spoke, no introductions. The person, often without giving a name, recalled what happened to them. Events that had been forgotten, ignored, or unknown to listeners were recalled with the freshness of personal grief or anger, and sometimes with stoicism or sadness; unbearable grief, broken voices. Often the voice would give no clue as to the speaker's political or religious affiliation – making the account in some ways more provocative for listeners caught in the inevitable act of searching for 'identity' clues. The medium of the interview, its techniques and paraphernalia were all invisible, the effect powerful, the politics subtle – we were, and are, all in this together.

4 For analyses of the legacy of slavery and also critiques of contemporary racism in the USA, see Morrison & Brodsky Lacour; Morrison, *Race-ing Justice*; Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*.

5 See Rooney.

6 Some of this has official recognition; for example, the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, Judge Cory's investigation and others. For outstanding cases of state killings, see Rolston.

7 The Irish word *dúchas* means 'one's native place, one's heritage or lineage and the ties that bind you to that place.' It means a sense of belonging or the experiences that make us what we are. The project is based in Falls Community Council, Belfast.

8 The *Dúchas* archive was the basis of my research at Cornell Law School (NY) as Visiting Scholar in 2003: "Telling Stories from the North of Ireland" (unpublished Cornell presentation).

That is the power of the appeal of personal stories. It is used by many “remembering” projects that seek funding from state-sponsored agencies. However, a problem with the approach is that it erases the politics, history, and sectarian realities of state-citizen relationships in the north. It reframes what happened in a series of moving personal stories of grief and loss. Whilst seeming to democratise suffering it offers no critique of the political or historical contexts within which to understand what happened. This is not the stated purpose of many of these remembering initiatives, and perhaps not the intention. But this absence of purpose is also purposeful. It erases context, causes, and consequences. It erases responsibilities and suggests that violence was the sole source of suffering and that human suffering was the sole outcome of the violence.⁹ History, politics, human rights, equality, and justice all disappear in the moment of their apparent evocation in personal narratives. In these narratives of the past violence is the cause and bears no relation to the context. This offers a way of abandoning responsibilities whilst arousing empathy, of setting aside difficult, contested realities. It offers ways of remembering and forgetting that engage the personal and set aside the political. Compelling personal narrative can also avoid the past. Sometimes avoidance may be necessary at a personal or even communal level. As Morrison says, “there’s a necessity for remembering [...] in a manner in which the memory is not destructive” (Darling 5-6); but also in a manner where responsibilities are faced and even disputed rather than ‘abandoned’ into the future.

The space reserved for ‘women’ in the “struggle over the national narrative” in the north of Ireland has traditionally been linked to narratives of peace-making. The representation of women’s roles is a powerful narrative and national trope in the discourse of good and evil in conflict wherever in the world it occurs. In the northern conflict the positioning of women as essentially opposed to non-state violence is a powerful, arguably formative material, cultural, political, and ideological resource. The “pantheon of the heroes” is a decidedly gendered space.

In *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Volumes IV–V: Irish Women’s Writing and Traditions*, the section on contemporary northern women includes women’s voices – in interviews, stories, poems, and journalism, selected from the voices of women in print at the time. The following four voices are not representative of the section as a whole, but they are chronological snapshots of the range of voices. The first is that of a woman who remained anonymous, perhaps for the reason that she speaks of being lesbian in the north and in the context of the conflict. Two poems follow. In one the speaker is the widow of a man shot dead; the other is a woman who has been strip-searched. The last extract is from an interview with Mary McAleese,

9 The violence referred to in these ‘apolitical’ approaches is invariably that of non-state militaries, and explicitly or implicitly it is IRA violence. Republicans were responsible for over two thousand deaths, loyalists for over one thousand and state forces for over three hundred and fifty deaths. The scale of loss can be calculated as over two thousand four hundred deaths per million of population.

before she became President of Ireland. She reflects on the revisionist writing of Irish history.

(1) Anon., “Between the Lines – Living in Belfast” (1986);

repr. in *Field Day Anthology V*: 1500.

You have to ask ‘is sexuality enough?’ Can you ignore where you came from? Can you ignore the war situation in the six counties? I think for any woman in Belfast to say that she’s a lesbian and that’s enough for her is absolute nonsense...

You have the loyalist women sitting in one corner and the Taiges¹⁰ in another and the neutrals swanning in between – and that’s a reality, it’s not imagination. I think it’s becoming more and more obvious that there’s going to be a real shindig soon. It’s building up with the political climate – the Anglo-Irish talks and the ‘Ulster Says No’ campaign. You’re labelled a republican supporter or a Shankill Roader and the twain do not cross lines – or if you do you have protection with you. And it’s getting worse because it hasn’t been tackled, it has been avoided just as it has been by the women’s movement...

Solidarity amongst lesbians or women with different points of view is a utopia that will never happen until people start talking and confronting their differences and that’s not going to happen for a long time. The divisions are getting more entrenched and sometimes I think it’s never going to change because it’s so deep, it’s right in the skin and how do you get out of that? Maybe we never will. Sometimes I look at the women and I think, will we ever get to a point where we say, ‘yes, we feel strongly about some things but lets start talking. Let’s look at the national question, let’s look at lesbians, let’s look at the isolation of Protestant working class women in east Belfast who will not come to a conference because they know there’s representation there from the republican movement’...

(2) Margaret Curran, “The Widow’s Tale” (1987);

repr. in *Field Day Anthology V*: 1501.

Bullets don’t whine.
Close range
Bullets make loud flat sounds.

Jack’s death sank like a stone
Into the well of yesterday’s news.
A few ripples of sympathy
Marked the spot
Plus a riddled shirt.

Now he’s a number on a notice board
Not my husband; kind father;
Just 3079.

10 Derogatory name for Catholics.

And I'm left with a bullethole
 In the mind
 Plugged with Valium.

**(3) Sinéad Nic Shrabhog, "Strip Search" (1989);
 repr. in *Field Day Anthology V*: 1506.**

If I strip an onion
 I cry.
 Shed the silken dress,
 Shred the seeping flesh,
 Cut to the quick.

Our strange hands expose
 Your body's layers.
 We take away your anger.
 Your lover's touch
 Spoiled in shame's solitude.

**(4) Mary McAleese (1993);
 repr. in *Field Day Anthology V*: 1520-21.**

I had been born and reared in Ardoyne, knew it inside out: lived in Andersonstown, knew what it was like. It was a degree of authenticity you're not likely to meet every day of the week in Dublin. But I found slowly but surely that I became silenced by two things. One was the glazed-over look when you started to talk about the problems in the North and in particular when you started to recite the things that happened to you personally. The second was this business of constantly being labelled as a Northern Catholic from a place like Ardoyne. You ran the risk, if you opened your mouth on the subject, of being labelled a fellow traveller with the Provos.

Martin, my husband, and I felt, looking back, that our lives in Dublin had been a very shocking experience. We had left Northern Ireland because of the bigotry here: both our families had been victims of that. We both have a phenomenal love for the Republic, however – Dublin isn't the Republic and revisionism isn't Ireland. But I went there first when Conor Cruise O'Brien was in the ascendant – and if ever anyone was a culture shock, Conor Cruise O'Brien was to me. Here was this extraordinarily arrogant man, in the process of revising everything that I had known to be a given and a truth about Irish history – and who set in motion a way of looking at Northern Ireland that we are only now beginning to grow up and grow out of.

It was a myth, destructive, took the truth and ran away with it, revised current Irish history in a way that allowed a kind of apologetic Catholicism to develop, that ran away from confronting the dark side of Northern Ireland. There are things that have got to be said, without running the risk of being called sectarian – or being called a Provo, which is exactly what happened to me in the Republic.

Myrtle's Second Contribution

In the course of my own research, I found many examples such as those cited by Eilish, of 'unofficial' stories where, encouraged through creative writing classes or community projects to commit their memories to print, 'ordinary' women from working-class backgrounds provided a record of how they experienced the conflict. Feminist historians have long sought out and utilised such 'alternative' historical sources so that "memories, experiences, daily practices and oral histories now jostle with conventions of disciplines, allowing for recreations never seen before" (Himani Bannerji; qtd. in Gallagher et al. 7). Silvia Calamati's *'The Trouble We've Seen ...': Women's Stories from the North of Ireland* is another example, a small volume consisting of twenty-one accounts of the experiences of individual women in a militarised, strife-riven society, told in their own words. Most of the stories were taped during the 1990s; all are told by nationalist women, most of whom are working-class. The situations they describe so graphically are shockingly painful: a mother of eleven tells how she was blinded by a rubber bullet, a sister recalls the death of her brother during a hunger strike, others describe incidents of state brutality, of their experiences of interrogation, imprisonment, the searching of homes and bodies. The wording of the stories themselves is direct, straightforward, unembellished by literary devices; the very 'ordinariness' of the contexts in which they take place reinforcing the stark horror of these life-changing dramas. Calamati explains how, after recording the experiences of these women, "the tone of their voices as they talked, and their pain-filled silences" (2) left her unable to proceed with her transcriptions, until the murder of one of her interviewees, solicitor Rosemary Nelson, convinced her of the need to provide "a sounding board" for their voices. While the case of Rosemary Nelson is relatively well known, the circumstances of her murder and the accusations of police collusion with loyalists are as yet unresolved. To read her own account of harassment and intimidation is thus particularly poignant. Most of the other incidents recorded have been ignored or misrepresented by the media, or told only in their immediate aftermath. The practicalities of coping with the emotional and physical scars inflicted by brutality, sectarianism or poverty are less dramatic, but more lasting features of everyday life. Collectively, these stories convey something of what it is like to live in an area under occupation, more frightening because of the perceived 'normalisation' of the process. While politicians continue to prioritise different aspects of the 'peace process,' these women continue to cope with the consequences of war.

In official histories, however, "some sources are singled out as being more 'authoritative', 'objective' or valuable than others"; the "experiential sources which are most likely to illuminate the historically unmapped features of women's lives are considered to be 'subjective' [and] therefore, lacking in credibility," while historians "privilege the voices of the powerful/influential and the articulate" (Gallagher et al. 15). Moreover, Eilish has rightly pointed to the limitations of personal witness, which strip memories of their wider context and absolve both writer and reader from the com-

plexities of political analysis. On the other hand, it has been argued that dominant historical discourses must be challenged by the recovery and recording of personal and collective memory – a complex and theoretically sophisticated task, but one which acknowledges and confronts the relation between past and present and the political uses of history (Johnson et al. 211-12). Recent studies of the politics of memory stress the inter-relationship between individual, community and national memories; Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, for example, claims that it is “human, individual memories on which social memory depends and of which most historical sources are composed” (156). The implications highlighted by such studies are surely pertinent to the work of professional historians concerned with the interpretation of the past, the appropriation of memory and complicity in forgetting.

Historical memories and collective remembrance can be instruments to legitimate discourse, create loyalties, and justify political options. Thus, control over the narrative of the past means control over the construction of narrative for an imagined future. What and how societies chose to remember and forget largely determines their future options. (de Brito et al. 38)

Our responsibility is to ensure that multiple perspectives are at least acknowledged, and that it is not only the most dominant voices that are heard and legitimised. The Ulster poet John Hewitt, himself concerned throughout his work with the selectivity of history and its subsequent omission of the fragmentary, the marginal, accidental and peripheralised, asked that historians,

... Give us instead
The whole mosaic, the tesserae,
That we may judge if a period indeed
Has a pattern and is not merely
A handful of coloured stones in the dust.
("Mosaic," Hewitt 313)

To see if a pattern is indeed discernible, we need to stand back, employ our imagination as well as our skills, and sharpen our awareness of the shifting perspectives that give both shape and substance to the historical record.

Eilish's Second Contribution

Last Words: The Call of the Future

Listen for the silences. Scrutinise the 'official story' of what comes to be 'remembered' and how representations of what happened in the north during the conflict become the official narrative. Listen for the voices that do not provide comfort but provoke critical discomfort, that reveal the processes of exclusion. The inclusion of the voices of various women in the northern narrative can be accommodated. It is not of itself a challenge to the official narrative. 'Women' and 'others' are on occasion conditionally and comfortably admitted to the discourse. The condition is that the premises and postulates of the official narrative of state innocence and masculine dominance

are maintained, not in some unchanging, fixed way, but in a manner that maintains the legitimacy and monopoly of the official story. Counter-stories will be told, accommodated and allowed. Permitted, even, into the 'pantheon of Irish Studies.'

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TO ACT OR NOT TO ACT: PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATIONS OF IRISH POVERTY IN THE 1830S

Anne-Catherine Lobo

The Irish Poor Law was entered into the statute book in 1838.¹ Officially, it erased an anomaly: while England had been endowed with a Poor Law during the reign of Elizabeth I,² the Irish destitute had been left to their own devices and to the charity of their countrymen. The bill voted on was modelled on the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. This piece of legislation was the result of the work of the Poor Law Commission set up in 1832 and chaired by Edwin Chadwick, a staunch Benthamite. In practice, it drastically reduced the possibility of outdoor relief. Relief was only to be given to paupers, as distinct from the poor, and it was to be given in workhouses. To avail themselves of poor relief according to the terms of the 1834 amendment, people were to live in workhouses, where they would be given bread and board and have to work in return. These workhouses were to be erected by unions of parishes, and run by boards of guardians, under the supervision of commissioners at national level. Life in the workhouses was strictly organised, with separate wards for men, women and children, irrespective of family ties. The “less eligibility principle,” as it was called, aimed at maintaining a minimal safety net for the most destitute, while striking at the supposed roots of pauperism, making application for poor relief wholly unattractive, and in the hope of compelling employers to pay decent wages, without trusting the Poor Law to supplement them in cases of severe distress. This principle was recalled by Lord John Russell, then Home Secretary, when introducing the government’s plans for a similar law for Ireland, in February 1837:

The principle of that Bill [...] is to place the pauper labourer, the pauper who cannot find work, and the infirm who apply for support, in a situation more irksome than that of the independent, industrious, and successful labourer. [...] by offering all such persons a residence in the workhouse; by giving them [...] a sufficiency of food, warm clothing, and a comfortable warm residence; but at the same time placing them under a certain degree of confinement; so that, while they have the necessary clothing, the means of subsistence, and often a warmer residence in the winter, than the independent labourer possesses, yet the restraint is so irksome to them, that they are not willing to subject themselves to it, except when really in a state of destitution.³

My purpose here is not to go into the details of that law, its implementation, and its utter inadequacy during the Famine, but rather, to go into some of the terms of the

1 Poor Relief (Ireland) Act.

2 Second act (chapter two) of the 43rd year of the reign of Elizabeth.

3 Hansard, 3rd Series, 1837, 36: 457-58. From contemporary accounts, it seems that Russell is offering a rather rosy picture of life in the workhouses. Those were already called the “Poor Law Bastilles” at that time, and there is no evidence of much comfort in them; indeed, comfort was not part of the initial project.

debate that took place in the Imperial Parliament between 1824 and 1838, i.e. between the first major parliamentary inquiry into Irish poverty and the passing of the Irish Poor Law. Over that period, the possibility and “expediency” of devising some form of public relief for the poor in Ireland was repeatedly addressed in Parliament. Different possibilities had been contemplated and rejected before the adoption of the government’s bill: these varied from an extension of the Elizabethan Poor Law to Ireland to more specific and local measures, often intermingled with schemes of public works and of state-aided emigration. Given the extent and amount of poverty in Ireland, any measure carried a lot of financial implications, hence protracted, if not procrastinating debates. Besides, the debates were constantly interrupted by the emergence of more pressing issues, or by drastic changes in the terms of the debates. Thus, whatever headway had been made since 1829 was simply washed away by the issue of Catholic Emancipation. Considerations were resumed, only to be interrupted afresh by the parliamentary reform debates of 1831-32. The subject surfaced again, but then the adoption of the English Poor Law Amendment Act caused further delay: time was necessary to implement the measure, to see how it worked, and if it could be adopted as the framework within which the question of distress in Ireland could be dealt with.

As far as Ireland is concerned, the debates took place against a backdrop of dramatic population growth, of rampant agrarian and/or sectarian rioting, and of intense religious proselytism.⁴ In England, they unfolded in a climate of intense perplexity. Indeed, what was to become known as “the Irish question” had somehow failed to dissolve with the definitive exile of Napoleon. The agrarian dimension of the problem had not disappeared with the recovery following the post-1814 slump. The debates also took place in a changing ideological context. The rise of utilitarianism as a mode of dealing with what we would call social questions completely altered the terms of the debates at the half-way mark.

Ultimately, the issue of a Poor Law for Ireland – does Ireland need one? and if so which? – raises different questions, and among others, the question I would like to develop here, i.e. the manifold question of responsibility. Who is responsible?, in the sense of: who is at the origin of this situation? Who is responsible?, in the sense of: who is to pay? Who is responsible?, in the sense of: who is to decide upon such a question?

Representation of the hard facts of Irish poverty converged: miserable dwellings without any comfort within, many people having barely enough to survive, mendicancy, etc. At the time the government introduced its Bill, these facts had been documented by several reports by committees and commissions. In 1836, an English MP, Mr G.P. Scrope, drew an alarming picture of Ireland during a vehement protest

4 The “New Reformation” was launched by William Magee, the Protestant Archbishop of Dublin, in October 1822.

against what appeared to him as procrastination on the part of both government and parliament. He referred to two million people under-fed for half of the year and forced “to prolong existence, by feeding on weeds of the earth or sea, so unwholesome as to turn their very blood yellow!”; living in “hovels inferior in comfort and healthiness, and the means of shelter, to the sties in which we lodge our swine”; whose “clothing by day (if such it can be called) consists of mere rags, or the very tattered remnant of rags!”; the consequence of it all being “premature old age, besides malignant fevers, and other diseases which shorten the lives of all, and mow down, by a sort of slow torture, thousands of victims, whom direct famine has spared!” (Hansard, 3rd Series, 1836, 33: 594). The expression is, of course strikingly dramatic, yet there was a consensus on the facts.

Who is responsible? or, can the Irish poor be blamed for their own situation? Answers can be grossly listed under two main categories. Yes, Irish poverty was, if not wholly, at least largely attributable to intrinsic characteristics, which had already hardened into well-established clichés by then: laziness, short-sightedness, ignorance, drunkenness, and a propensity to devote more energy to politics than to farming. Or: no, Irish poverty was to be attributed to causes much above those who suffered from it, be they absentee landlords, abuses of landlord power, or even the conquest. On the occasion of the second reading of the 1837 Bill in the House of Commons, Mr G.P. Scrope lamented that

there was nothing [in the Bill] to compel the wealthy – there was nothing to compel the landholders – there was nothing to compel those who might be themselves the cause of the great increase of pauperism, by the neglect of their own property, or by their proceedings, with a view to political objects, to support the poor.⁵

His criticism bore upon one specific and crucial point: who shall bear the burden of the taxes? Indeed, this question was of the utmost practical relevance, and it was inextricably bound up with that of responsibility for the state of affairs. The Bill provided for the payment of the rates by those who worked the land. To bolster his criticism, he refers to a visit he had made in Ireland and sums up his observations with the conventional description and the attending conventional pathos: “he found the people living in wretched hovels, which were without windows and without doors, while the wretched inmates were unprovided even with straw to make their miserable beds.” He then goes on to contrast this wretchedness with the income of the landlord, estimated at £20,000.

Did the individual to whom he referred support the poor? Did he contribute in aid of the funds of any of the excellent charitable institutions of the neighbourhood of his estate – or did he, as the poor man always did, give ‘the bid and the sup’ to the poor peasant who came to see him? In the course of his inquiry he could find but one instance in

5 Hansard, 3rd series, 1838, 42: 711. The end of this charge is a reference to the practice of subdivision of holdings encouraged by some Irish landlords in order to foster their interest by the creation of 40s. freeholders, after the enfranchisement of Catholics in 1793.

which any portion of the great fund which he received had been appropriated to charitable purposes on the estate. (Hansard, 3rd series, 1838, 42: 711)

To him, a Poor Law is necessary, since in its absence, charity amounts to making the poor pay for their own relief: “And what class was it by whose kindness and charity that the poor were now supported? It was the poor themselves” (Hansard, 3rd series, 1838, 42: 711).

Irish society was globally represented as dysfunctional, especially to British eyes. Inevitably, in the course of the debates, the issues of social unrest, of violence, of agrarian outrages, surfaced again. It was hoped by some that a legal provision for the destitute would contribute to more acceptable social behaviour. On February 10, 1837, Lord John Russell even went out of his way to demonstrate that England would have been a far less civilised country without a Poor Law. In his speech, he first dramatically recalled the violence that prevailed during the reign of Henry VIII – and the gangs he mentioned must have reminded all MPs of Irish secret societies – and concludes:

Now, that was a barbarous state of society, which it was most difficult to remodel: but the means taken were many combined together. Various changes were made; [...] but there was one in particular, which, I think, tended to the improvement of the country, to the establishment of peace, and to the creation of that which I consider almost the greatest benefit that can be conferred on any country, namely, a high standard of comfortable subsistence for the labouring classes – that one was the establishment of poor-laws.⁶

At first reading, this argument may sound a little far-fetched, and in any case hard to substantiate. Yet, he was perhaps trying to establish that the degree of “civilisation” or “advancement” of a society can be judged by the amount of protection it affords its weakest members.

Such considerations would probably have weighed little if Irish poverty had been confined to Ireland. But it was clear that it was becoming an economic, political, and social time-bomb, threatening British stability. For want of employment at home, many people crossed the Irish Sea to seek employment, either temporary or permanent, in Great Britain. It is a well-known fact that these Irish migrants often accepted lower wages than English workers, hence occasional popular outbursts of anti-Irish feeling. This phenomenon was not confined to the large industrial centres. In 1830, Thomas Law Hodges, MP for Kent, thus declared to the Committee that “of late years this town [London] particularly and others, are so blocked up by Irish labourers that few Englishmen now find employment out of their own parishes,” which, to him, deprives parishes of the channels by which they used to be drained of their “surplus population.”⁷ This increased the burden of the Poor Law. Besides, such witnesses were also alarmed by the low standards of living accepted by the Irish and feared a contamination and a degradation of the popular classes in Britain. Such fears naturally found

6 Hansard, 3rd series, 1837, 36: 456.

7 *First Report of the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland.*

their way to Parliament: many petitions from English counties were presented, demanding a Poor Law for Ireland, so that the Irish poor would remain at home. They were occasionally voiced by English MPs, and sometimes very bluntly – even in the Lords, as the following statement shows: “It was because he [the Duke of Richmond] thought Poor laws for Ireland the best means of getting rid of those who ought to remain at home that he had ever been the advocate of them” (Hansard, 3rd series, 1836, 33: 899). Irish poverty was spreading beyond its natural boundaries. In Britain, Irish poverty was increasingly represented as a major threat at home, even in the quietest and most prosperous counties.

Who, then, was to decide upon such a question? Taking a broad view of things, this may appear as an almost absurd question: as soon as the question reached parliamentary level, the decision could not but rest with the Imperial Parliament and the British Government. But what was the involvement of Irish MPs in the debate, and what was their share of initiative? As I have just explained, there was strong pressure from within Britain, as Irish poverty was gradually less of an exotic fatality and more of a domestic problem (a side-effect of the Union). As could be expected, Irish MPs had a lot to say on the issue, as they, together with their electors, would have to pay for the cost of any measure which should be eventually decided upon.

There was pressure within Britain, there was pressure from Ireland, all the more so as the frequent airing of the matter at Westminster and the repeated inquiries made public opinion impatient for a solution, or a definitive non-solution in the case of those who were hostile to any measure of public relief. For indeed, the necessary sums would be borne by local taxation. In the 1830s, before the government took the legislative initiative, many private member’s bills were drafted and offered for consideration.

O’Connell could see an assault on the intrinsic value of the Irish people, and on the reliability of its representatives in the contemplated measures, and perhaps even more in the way they were presented. As far as the people were concerned, here is one instance:

He feared that the effect of the introduction of Poor-laws into Ireland would be to make youth careless and manhood reckless, if there were a certainty that old age would be provided for. It would, he was apprehensive, be the cause of depriving poverty of its remunerating quality, of loosening the close ties of social life, and inducing callous hard-heartedness to the necessities of relations. (Hansard, 3rd series, 1835, 26: 1213).

He further expatiates on the moral virtue of the Irish people, and adds that “[t]he present Resolution would go far to do away with this moral feeling, and it would be as in England, where a son or a daughter would be found battling with their father or mother for sixpence and a shilling” (Hansard, 3rd series, 1835, 26: 1213).

But “old ascendancy,” ultra-Tory Commoners and Lords, who could hardly be suspected of entertaining similar feelings for the Irish people, surprisingly developed this idea along similar lines. On June 25, 1835, the Duke of Richmond presented a peti-

tion in the House of Lords, in which the inhabitants of Clare pressed for the establishment of a Poor Law. Among the counter-arguments given by the Earl of Limerick, we can read:

If they [the Poor Laws] were introduced there [in Ireland] he believed that they would do away with all the kindly and charitable feelings that now existed in that country. Ireland, cursed as it was with many misfortunes, was happily distinguished by the possession of the best feelings of human nature. The affections of the people were strong; and there were no instances of a pauper not being relieved by the inhabitants, or of a poor child not being relieved by its parents, or of poor parents not being relieved by their children. That would no longer be the case if the Poor-laws were introduced there, and money was taken by force of law from those who possessed it, for the relief of the needy. (Hansard, 3rd series, 1835, 28: 1201-2)

Of course, such arguments were partly a rather awkward attempt at hiding reluctance towards the heavy taxation which was bound to be involved, but not only. Such politicians were also left resentful: over the past decades, their traditional prerogatives had been curtailed in the name of something that was not yet called “utilitarianism,” let alone “cost-effectiveness.” Police reforms had placed the enforcement of law and order in the hands of distinct, state-appointed and state-controlled bodies. Reforms of the Grand Jury laws had also curtailed their local power and subjected their actions to state-scrutiny and arbitration. An impending Poor Law meant that they would be further disowned as elements of social stability – no matter how defective traditional elites had proved. Hence paradoxical convergences of representations of Irish poverty among such politically opposed representatives as Daniel O’Connell and the Marquis of Westmeath or the Earl of Limerick. No matter whether the issue was represented in terms of identity or of authority: for them, and the ideological groups they represented, the shift of the question from charity to policy was to be resisted.⁸

At that stage, it seems necessary to return to the terms of the report that eventually came to shape the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. In the following passage, the Commission tries to define what the standards for the administration of relief should be:

The standard, therefore, to which reference must be made in fixing the condition of those who are to be maintained by the public, is the standard of those who are to be maintained by their own exertions. But the evidence shows how loosely and imperfectly the situation of the independent labourer has been inquired into, and how little is really known of it by those who award or distribute relief. It shows also that so little has their situation been made a standard for the supply of commodities, that the diet of the

8 Daniel O’Connell, initially hostile to the introduction of a Poor Law into Ireland, changed his mind between 1835 and 1836. He explained this by an improvement of the economic situation of Ireland. It may be doubted whether this reported change was such as to enable the country to raise immediately the large funds (close to £1 million, according to contemporary estimates) which were necessary. This change may also be explained by O’Connell’s broader strategy of alliance with the Whigs; in 1836, it was becoming clear that the government intended to act. Nonetheless, he remained vigilant to all practical considerations likely to curtail the traditional functioning of society.

workhouse almost always exceeded that of the cottage, and the diet of the gaol is generally more profuse than even that of the workhouse.⁹

Here, a hierarchy clearly emerges: the “independent labourer” is presented as the “standard,” or norm, criminals form the very bottom of society, and paupers appear to stand half-way between both. What, then, is the status of paupers in such a representation?

The metaphor of the disease would be adequate in that case. Testimonies referred to above display evidence of a fear of contagion. How should Irish pauperism be prevented from contaminating the body politic, not only of Ireland, but of the whole of the United Kingdom? How could the disease be prevented from reaching the heart?

Several facts could substantiate this comparison. First, the organisation of the workhouse itself. Those establishments were soon called the “Poor Law Bastilles,” owing to the rigid, prison-like regime which presided over their organisation. Here, it could be argued that there was a criminalisation of pauperism. Nonetheless, I will insist on the medicalisation of pauperism, because it seems that the initial idea was containment. This report deals with the British Poor, but in the case of pauperism, and given the composition of the House of Commons, we could not help having a class analysis, taking in regional variations. Besides, it would be consistent with earlier policies regarding poverty and pauperism in Ireland. From the 1810s onwards, much was written in favour of schemes of assisted emigration. Emigration as a solution to Irish pauperism was repeatedly considered in all official inquiries on the subject. Interestingly enough though, the commissioners never seem fully convinced by what they advocated; they advocated it half-heartedly, and for want of an adequate, long-term domestic solution. The 1830 Report places “emigration” among the thirteen “remedial measures” suggested. Thus, the Report runs:

As the low condition of the labouring classes, whatever may be considered its primary cause, is traceable to the altered proportion now existing between the number of the people and the amount of capital which can be profitably employed in creating a demand for labour, former committees have considered that one remedy for this evil is to be found in emigration.¹⁰

The scientific reasoning leading to this simple conclusion did not dispel the commissioners’ misgivings on the question, and they asserted the need to check that the public money thus spent in assisting emigration “might not be more profitably employed.” Eventually they suggested an indirectly assisted emigration scheme: candidates to emigration would be given jobs in public works, i.e. rate-financed works like bog-drainage; their wages would be kept for them until they could pay for their passage. The cost of emigration would thus be borne by those who were to benefit from it. The thirteenth measure considered is “a compulsory system for the relief of the

9 *Report from His Majesty’s Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws.*

10 *Third Report of the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland.*

poor,” in other words a Poor Law, although the Commissioners were careful not to air the word frequently.

Taking a broad view of things, it could be argued that such schemes partook of eighteenth-century medicine, when bleeding was a handy remedy, especially as far as organisms brimming over with life and animal spirits were concerned. The prophylactic approach to pauperism embodied in the 1834 Amendment Act could be linked to a more modern vision of medicine, hoping to eradicate the disease, or at least, should it prove impossible, to contain it by adequate sanitary measures.

In February 1837, when calling upon the House of Commons to resolve itself into a Committee to work on a Poor Law for Ireland, Lord John Russell had strongly asserted that such a law, providing the weakest with a minimum institutional safeguard against utter destitution, would, among other results, tend to promote or restore social concord and harmony, “showing a disposition in the state and in the community at large to attend to the welfare of all classes” (Hansard, 3rd series, 1837, 36: 455). If we put it in more modern terms, the contemplated measure would at least contribute to mending the social fabric of Ireland. Yet, Russell’s model – the new English Poor Law – is not consistent with what was after all a fairly modern vision of society. The same inconsistency is manifest in his analysis of the operation of this law in England, as appears from another part of his address to the Commons, quoted above. Similar inconsistencies appear in Russell’s assessment of responsibilities. He made it clear from the outset that it was in vain to inquire into the deeper causes of the evils of Irish society, of which pauperism, as well as disregard for the law, were symptoms. Yet, he does raise the question of responsibility. The landlords are described as victims of a violent state of society, being themselves products of mendicancy, directly connected with the absence of legal provision for the poor.

It [this state of society] has produced, too [...] the indifference or neglect as to the manner in which their property is cultivated and their tenants live. In a great part of Ireland, the same indifference prevails as to the comfort of the tenants on the part of the landlords. [...] A great amelioration, I believe, is taking place in Ireland; but generally, the landlords in Ireland regard the connexion as a mere bargain between them and the tenant, by which they are to obtain a certain rent from him. (Hansard, 3rd series, 1837, 36: 465).

This section of the speech moves from understanding to criticism. Other sections clearly have punitive overtones:

A person possessed of considerable property, who looks only to receive the rents of his estate, may be careless as to the number of persons who may be found in a state of destitution, in a state of mendicancy, or ready to commit crime and act as marauders in the neighbourhood of his estates; but if he is compelled to furnish means for the subsistence of those who are destitute, it then becomes his interest as well as his natural occupation to see that all persons around him are well provided for, that they are not in want of employment, and that his immediate tenants can live in a state of comfort. (Hansard, 3rd series, 1837, 36: 455).

In other words, having to pay for the maintenance of the destitute would be a punishment for not attending to the duties of property.

Russell, and through his speech the whole official attitude towards the issue of Irish poverty, goes back and forth between understanding and stigmatisation – hence the importance given to Russell’s speech in this paper. Strikingly enough, the same oscillation is perceptible in his references to the population. To him, the blame for the economic state of Ireland cannot be put on the population either:

On the contrary, we have it in the evidence of those examined by Mr Lewis, and particularly from one gentleman of Birmingham, that he never found the Irish labourer to refuse work, or fail to perform it to the utmost of his industry and capability. There is not, then, a want of industry amongst the people. (Hansard, 3rd series, 1837, 36: 462)

Yet, through apparently casual remarks, he describes a people prone to take advantage of their fellow-countrymen’s charity by begging far away from their residence, likely to cheat on any system of relief, pretending severe illness to be admitted into an institution. Hence his insistence on a Poor Law, which would enable Parliament to outlaw vagrancy, thus containing paupers in their specific areas, and whose operation would ensure that cheating would be too “irksome” to consider. This is also manifest in his dismissal of quick and massive emigration:

It would at once be supposed by them [the colonists] that we are sending in amongst them a vast quantity of our useless population, paupers who conferred no benefit to the country they were exported from, and, therefore, as they would argue, likely to prove an evil instead of a benefit and productiveness to the new soil in which they were to be placed. (Hansard, 3rd series, 1837, 36: 474)

It becomes difficult here to discern the difference between the colonists’ putative reaction and the government’s own approach. Especially so as, a few minutes earlier, he had argued that there would also be some kind of didactic value to the workhouse system: “it will have many collateral advantages, as, for instance, accustoming the people to see examples of cleanliness and regularity, order and peace in the workhouses” (Hansard, 3rd series, 1837, 36: 473), thereby suggesting both that the people were deficient in the above listed virtues and could not find local suitable examples either. The global representation and the subsequent solution-finding process are strongly marked by a sanitising approach to Irish poverty.

In the light of all this, the references to the civilising effect of the Elizabethan Poor Law upon England may also have served as a *captatio benevolentiae*, in order not to ruffle the Irish MPs at Westminster, be they those whose sympathies clearly leant towards Ireland’s traditional elites or those who tended to vindicate its people. Examples of implicit distrust, not only of the Irish people, but also of the elite of Irish society, could be multiplied.¹¹ In this, Russell’s speech is typical of the whole official approach to the question: upper-class attitudes, well-meaning Whiggism and cold

11 For instance, the government was not favourable to the active presence of the clergy, of any denomination, in the boards of guardians which were to run the workhouses, whereas their traditional place in society seemed to fit them for this office.

utilitarianism. A similar attitude could be traced in the new English Poor Law. Yet, the notable difference lay in the scale of the problem: in 1836, the Commissioners had estimated the number of very poor or destitute people in Ireland at 2.3 million. Another notable difference is that all earlier initiatives towards some system of poor relief had aborted or had been thwarted before the government eventually took the matter in hand. This in itself was an implicit criticism of Irish representatives. This final government initiative did not drastically modify the terms of the debate.

In conclusion, if we take Irish MPs' view of the question, we have a dual representation of the same material, amply provided by the various official inquiries into the matter.¹² A faulty people or defective elites – the government's representation seems to contain both. The solution preferred, that of the workhouse system, rested on the representation of poverty as something almost criminal, as demonstrated above. It rested on a punitive approach to Irish poverty, through taxation on the one hand and through the quasi-reformatory nature of the institution devised. It was also based on an hygienist approach, in which Irish poverty was a local and large-scale disease to be confined, lest it should spread to the British body politic or to the empire at large.

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12 1823-24, 1830-31 and 1835-36, to mention only the bulkiest reports produced.

DE VALERA REMEMBERING: A STUDY IN MEMORY AND SELF-REPRESENTATION

Michael Böss

The introductory chapter of Lord Longford and Thomas P. O'Neill's *Eamon de Valera* may be read as the story of how de Valera grew up to identify with the lives and conditions of the ordinary Catholic rural labouring families among whom he was raised. In time, he was to identify these people as *the* Irish people, for example, when he responded in Dáil Éireann to a slur on his claimed foreignness:

I have been brought up amongst the Irish people. I was reared in a labourer's cottage here in Ireland. I have not lived solely amongst the intellectuals. The first fifteen years of my life that formed my character were lived amongst the Irish people down in Limerick; therefore I know what I am talking about; and whenever I wanted to know what the Irish people wanted I had only to examine my own heart and it told me straight off what the Irish people wanted. (*Dáil Éireann, Public Sessions* 275)

In the biography by Lord Longford and O'Neill, de Valera is represented as Irish to the bone: as personifying traditional rural values and representing a nation which had been exiled from its true self, but which had finally been vindicated after centuries of struggle against all odds. A key to their biographical narrative, thus, is a passage towards the end:

An Irish immigrant mother – a Spanish-American father dying when he was very small – a return [sic] to Ireland, his mother remaining in America – an upbringing by an uncle in what he himself has called a labourer's cottage – no psychiatrist could have forecast the outcome of such an inheritance and early environment. The President never tired of expressing his gratefulness to his grandmother and his uncle Pat, but from his earliest years, without father and mother to guide him, he had to fend for himself compared with others. One cannot say what effect this must have had on a small boy's formation. In fact, he grew up with a strong confidence in himself, powerful family affection and a surpassing love of Ireland. (471-72)

In spite of the biographers' claim that no psychiatrist could have forecast the outcome of de Valera's upbringing, establishing mental connections between his childhood and manhood is precisely what a number of historians have tried to do.

Owen Dudley Edwards, for one, argues that the harsh circumstances and deprivations of his childhood affected de Valera's later social and national convictions. Edwards thinks that his "surpassing love of Ireland" can be reasonably seen as compensating for the lack of any permanent family and the rejection by his mother; suffice it to say [...] that it involved a massive self-identification" (28). Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh also finds the early Bruree years "crucial to de Valera's psychological development and to his own self-perception in his life," and he argues that de Valera's boyhood years reassured him in his self-image as representing the 'plain people of Ireland.' In other words: he was not the foreigner that some of his critics held him to

be (Lee & Ó Tuathaigh, 16-17). Joseph Lee is convinced that de Valera's memories of his childhood affected his later view of the role of women in Irish society. Lee claims that he subconsciously strove "to obliterate the memory of his own childhood," denying what had really happened. Instead he clung to "an ideal image of the Irish family as a loving haven of self-less accord." The social directives of the 1937 Constitution, thus, were written in a way which "made strangely little allowance" for women who shared the plight of his own mother (207). Thus, the general conclusion that historians have drawn is that de Valera's way of representing himself was a product of both construction and repression of memories.

In this essay I will take these suggestions a few steps further, on the basis of a reading of Lord Longford and O'Neill's account of de Valera's childhood, for which they strongly depended on de Valera's own version.

As the readers are informed in the "Prologue," O'Neill and Longford had had privileged access to de Valera's own library of private papers for a number of years. However, when writing the biography they compared their observations with de Valera's own account of his life. *Eamon de Valera* should therefore be read as a result of two processes of representation: that of O'Neill and Lord Longford and that of Eamon de Valera himself. It is the latter with which I will be concerned here.

The fact that de Valera's personal memories play such a "prominent part" (xx-xxi) and that he gave it his official approval as "authoritative" (xv) has, in the absence of a true autobiography, been seen as a blessing. As John Bowman says, the book represents "the nearest thing possible to an autobiography": a "preferred rationalisation at the end of his career, his final self-justification, echoing what he had been saying at crossroads, chapel gates and in the Dáil for the previous half century" (191). However, as I will demonstrate, the text does not only convey rationalised memory. In spite of its strong emphasis on matters of public interest, it also opens doors into the more irrational and secret layers of de Valera's mental world.

In order to limit my material to suit a study of this size, my focus will only be the first chapter of the book, which consists of a summary of de Valera's childhood.

My argument is that this chapter may be characterised as a multi-layered 'composure' in which de Valera's 'story' of his own life is integrated in both family memory and nationalist historical narrative. I suggest that this 'composed' story served to root de Valera in a genuine Irishry and thus give him the authority to speak on behalf of the Irish nation. However, it also involved a repression of painful feelings of personal abandonment and loss.

Although many interviews could be conducted on the basis of papers from de Valera's private library, there were none concerning his childhood. It appears that the two biographers had decided not to compensate for this by incorporating popular 'memories' and 'stories' which had been in circulation for decades and which had

appeared in early biographies such as the one by M.J. MacManus (1944). This choice probably reflects the personal wish of de Valera, who, in this way, was free to narrate this chapter of his life from his own point of view.

The reader may be struck by the high degree of selectivity and internal coherence in the resulting sparse account. It is clearly meant to stress the continuity between de Valera's childhood and his later political career. However, at times its character of edited narrative appears to cover up the gaps and disruptions that characterised de Valera's real life, and the reader may wonder about things lightly brushed over or omitted. Not surprisingly, the silences pertain especially to matters of a private nature. But the events and experiences brushed over – and the 'story line' itself – hold clues to an understanding of such silences. In order to explain this, I first need to discuss the nature of memory, especially the interaction between individual and social memory.

The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs once suggested that a family, like any community and group, has its own peculiar mental world, which is structured by its collective memories. Halbwachs demonstrated how this mental world influences the formation of individual memory. He argued that the individual member of a family may recollect the past in his own manner, but is only able to retrieve and attach meaning to recalled events in the past by being a member of a kinship group that is constantly exchanging impressions and opinions about each other. Such exchanges take the form of shared 'family memories.' Family memories serve to preserve the mentality of the group by regulating expressions of feelings and articulating its general attitudes, norms, and beliefs (54-59). Individual memories are thus given shape and colour by 'stories' that families narrate about themselves and their members, and also by the way they relate to each other.

As for an individual's memories of his early childhood, family memories are particularly important since they often stem from stories he has been told about himself later in life. This means that memories which an individual may believe to be authentic are in fact recollections based on 'family memory.' Other memories may be of more personal origin, however, especially memories about events which have had a lasting significance. Such memories are pregnant with emotions and notions that have been associated with these events and experiences over time. Indeed, when certain scenes which took place in the family home are remembered particularly well, it may be because they represent a condensation of all the feelings that have been associated with them in the course of an individual's life. This means that such remembered scenes may in fact be made up of elements from several periods and events, before and/or after. Halbwachs explains this phenomenon with a reference to Chateaubriand's memory of how an evening was spent at the manor of Combourg when he was a child. And he asks,

is this an account of an event that happened only once? Was he particularly impressed, on one evening more than any other, by the silent comings and goings of his father, by the appearance of the hall, and by the details that he throws into relief in his depiction? No: he undoubtedly assembled in one single scene recollections of many evenings that were engraved in his memory and in that of his family. What he portrays is the summation of an entire period – the idea of a type of life. One gets a glimpse of the character of the actors not just as developed by the role they play in this scene, but also in terms of their habitual style and entire history. (60)

Personal memories are not only shaped by family memory but also by the individual's later conscious reflections and his identification with other social groups. As functional elements of an individual's and a group's ongoing process of identity formation, memories are, therefore, never quite stable but are continuously being re-created and re-interpreted. Due to the interactive relationship between individual and group, the distinction which Halbwachs makes between 'autobiographical memory' and 'historical memory' is only analytical.

Autobiographical memory is memory of events that an individual has experienced personally in the past. Historical memory is not remembered directly by the individual, but is stored by social institutions such as museums, political parties, schools and churches. However, the individual may integrate historical memory into autobiographical memory by reading, listening, and taking part in historical commemorations and festive occasions. This is indeed one of the ways in which an individual learns to identify his own life with a larger community, such as a nation. But Halbwachs stops short of elaborating this aspect in detail.

To help us understand the integration of personal and national memory, we therefore need to draw on other theories of memory. Theories developed within oral history are particularly relevant, not least for the way in which Eamon de Valera accounted for his own childhood.

In the 1980s, Richard Johnson and Graham Dawson, members of the Popular Memory Group at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, studied how personal and national myth may interact. The ideas they developed were later elaborated by the Australian historian Alistair Thomson in *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*. Thomson coined the aptly ambiguous term "composure" for the process of memory-making and described the choice of the term as follows:

In one sense we 'compose' or construct memories using the public language and meanings of our culture. In another we 'compose' memories which help us to feel relatively comfortable with our lives, which gives us a feeling of composure. We remake or repress memories of experiences which are still painful and 'unsafe' because they do not easily accord with our present identity, or because their inherent traumas or tensions have never been solved. We seek composure, an alignment of our past, present and future lives. One key theoretical connection, and the link between the two senses of composure, is that the apparently private process of composing safe memories is in fact very public. Our memories are risky and painful if they do not conform with the public norms or versions of the past. We compose our memories so that they will fit with what is publicly acceptable, or, if we have been excluded from general public ac-

ceptance, we seek out particular publics which affirm our identities and the way we want to remember our lives. (Thomson, 241-42)

Thomson's theory of memory is a valuable addition to Halbwachs' pioneering approach to memory. Combining the two, I will, therefore, proceed to a discourse analysis of passages of de Valera's narrative of his childhood as described by Lord Longford and O'Neill. I will demonstrate how it reflects the interaction between personal memory and family memory, in the way Halbwachs suggests, and, from the perspective of Thomson's theory, how it may also be read as a composed and composing text repressing unresolved, personal tensions and traumas, additionally constructing 'safe' and 'meaningful' memories adapted not only to personal needs but also to popular expectations and public versions of the nation's past, thus integrating private into political story.

One of the crucial passages of the account is the one in which Eamon de Valera describes his separation from his mother in early childhood. Obviously, de Valera had few, if any personal memories of the first three years of his life and of this event, which proved to have a strong effect on his sense of self. Most of what he 'remembered,' thus, was derived from family memory, i.e. things he had been told later by his foster parents, the Colls of Bruree, after he had returned to Ireland from his 'exile' in America. Although he believed at that time that they were his own memories, they are more likely to have been composed of bits and pieces from family memory integrated into his personal memory during the process of identity formation he went through, finally becoming elements of his self-narrative.

The 'story of Eamon' begins with an account of how he grew up in a family disrupted by harsh social and personal circumstances. His mother, Kate Coll, was the daughter of a poor labouring family from a townland outside Bruree in Co. Limerick. In 1879, she had emigrated to the United States where she met Vivion de Valera, the son of a Spanish immigrant. Kate and Vivion married in 1881 and settled in Manhattan, where Eamon (registered at birth as George, but baptised as Edward) was born on 14 October 1882.

Vivion had originally studied to be a sculptor, but had injured an eye and therefore had to find other means of supporting himself and his wife. He first turned to book-keeping and then to teaching music, but without much success since his health "deteriorated," as the reader is told without being given any clue as to the precise nature of his ailments (1). It later appears that he suffered from tuberculosis.

However, it is not made quite clear exactly why Kate and Vivion "had to part in 1884 after less than three years of marriage" (2). It was the circumstances of their separation which later caused de Valera's problems as a child in Ireland and led to the suspicion that his parents were not married and that de Valera, therefore, was an 'illegitimate' child. Be that as it may, what is important for our purposes is the fact that de Valera himself believed – and wanted the public to know – that this was not so.

However, it cannot be denied that the account of his parents' separation – and the loss of his father – is remarkably depersonalised. It is explained as a product of fate and circumstance: they “had to part” – this is said in a manner that indicates it was not a result of their own decision.

Vivion seems to have accepted his father's ‘offer’ to send him to Denver, where the air was supposed to be healthier, leaving his wife and their two-year-old son behind in New York. We are then given to understand that had it not been for Kate's “reserves of inner strength which carried her through many crises” (2), she would not have endured, since for unknown reasons they were not given any similar offer of support from his family.

Hence, Kate had to continue working, as she seems to have done all along, due to her husband's bad health. As a consequence, she had to leave her infant in the care of another Bruree immigrant, Mrs Doyle. However, “[t]his arrangement was hardly ideal.” Therefore, “it” was decided – again, Kate's own part in the decision seems to have been deliberately toned down – to send him back to her own mother in Ireland, accompanied by her brother Pat, who had first joined her in New York but now had decided to return to Ireland (2).

De Valera's only memory of parting with his mother is conveyed in the form of a condensed image which reflects the trauma of his second experience of loss and separation. The experience is represented in a scene which pictures a child being moved into an unknown, empty space, “leaning over the teak rail of the ship and watching the blue-green sea spreading out in a broad tail behind him” (2).

We learn soon after that the reason for Kate's decision to send Eamon back to Ireland was that “the little boy would be much happier in the friendly Bruree atmosphere” (2). The experiences that Eamon de Valera later recalled from his life with the Colls in Bruree, however, cannot strike the reader as particularly happy. His first memory from the Coll house is waking up alone in a deserted house the morning after his arrival. Indeed, he has little to offer that may convince his readers that his mother's family were an ideal replacement for the loss of his mother's care and affection. Admittedly, we are told that he “grew particularly fond” of his Aunt Hannie (3). However, this is the only time we hear about any emotional attachment to members of his mother's family. Indeed, we learn almost nothing about them, apart from the fact that his grandmother was “not yet fifty” and “energetic” and that his Uncle Pat was “twenty-one” and “severe” in his punishments (2-3).

In the context of such information, his memories of “slender fifteen-year-old” Aunt Hannie might be seen as revealing the emotional deprivation he experienced as a child. Hannie seems to have been the sole object of his affections and a substitute for the mother he had lost. Eamon remembers how she used to lace his boots for him and dressed him up on special occasions “in the velvet suit he had brought with him from America,” thus reminding him of his mother. But it was only a few short years before she too “had to go to America.” The day she left from Bruree station,

“[g]randmother and child waved her goodbye, tearfully,” leaving him to endure yet another loss (3).

That this loss is associated with the loss of his real mother is indicated in the passage which follows immediately after:

America must have seemed no further away than Dublin to a child in Bruree, for the next year there was another arrival off the boat from New York. It was Kate de Valera home for a visit. There were a few glorious weeks and a trip to Limerick and then she went back again. Soon after her return she married Charles Wheelwright – Uncle Charlie to her son. (3)

Kate’s new married life had meant that she could stop working. However, surprisingly, she did not decide to send for her son. Her decision did not even change when Eamon, at the age of twelve, wrote a “firm letter” to his Aunt Hannie asking her to “persuade his mother to arrange for him to come to America” (5-6). Now that his grandmother had died (in 1895), his uncle was planning to get married and his closest friend was about to leave the village, Eamon apparently felt more lonely and isolated from the local community than ever before. The locals had always regarded his uncertain origins with suspicion and never accepted him as one of their own, a fact which was reflected in recurring clashes between Eamon and the boys of the village. However, there was no reaction to the letter.

Feelings of loss, hurt and solitude emanate from the “one vivid memory” (1) Eamon de Valera had preserved about his years as an infant with his mother in New York:

A large room in a New York apartment, 1885. Beside the fireplace sits a man. On the floor lies a small, fair-haired boy. A slim pale-faced young woman is bending over him, dressed in black. The child’s eyes are fixed wonderingly on the shiny metal fittings which ornament her handbag. (1)

This memory, with which the chapter opens, is a perfect illustration of how family memory may inform and shape individual memory. It may also serve to illustrate Halbwachs’ notion of memory as an expression of condensed feelings associated with a particular experience.

“This snapshot of the past is all that de Valera remembers of his American origins,” the biographers write (1), leading their readers to understand that the memory goes back to the days when he was in the care of Mrs Doyle. Later they refer to it as a “mental picture” (2). The latter term is probably the most accurate one, for it is not likely that there ever was such a photo. Nevertheless, it certainly does resemble one, for the scene is not seen through the eyes of the child himself, but from an external point of view. Rather than being a recollection of a single incident, it should therefore be regarded as a mental scene made up from a ‘core memory.’ Eamon de Valera’s core memory might have been the shiny “fittings” on his mother’s handbag encrusted by vague recollections of being the object of maternal love and care, and of his distant father, here represented by the unidentified man sitting next to the fireplace. These memories were given final shape by family memory later in his life.

Many of Eamon de Valera's childhood memories have political overtones. It seems to have been a deliberate wish on his part to narrate his childhood in a manner that made it clear to the public that his political convictions were based on personal experience, not abstract ideas. As initially explained, there were obvious political reasons for such an 'editorial' choice: in this way he could demonstrate his own roots in Irish soil and history and legitimise his political position as leader of the Irish nation. Such 'political' – or 'social' – memories illustrate Johnson's thesis that individual memory may be composed so that it conforms to public versions of the past, as some of the most obvious examples may serve to illustrate.

De Valera recalls the village of Bruree as "a very self-sufficient community," for example. Although the newly built railway "had opened it up to industrial goods," it still had the "fascinating craftsmen" of the traditional social and economic order, such as a cooper and three boot-makers (4). The village, in other words, is represented as an ideal, self-contained community, the kind of village de Valera knew from the novels of Charles Kickham, which he is known to have appreciated (Edwards 33-34; Comerford).

In this model community there was a foreign element, however: the barracks, "by no means a popular place" (4). It is with these barracks that de Valera's first political/public memory is associated: the response of the locals to the shooting of three people in Mitchelstown in 1887. A similar political memory is associated with his task of lookout when his uncle illegally grazed his cattle along the road.

At times, family and political/public memory are associated. Like so many others at that time, the Colls saw the land dispute as part of the national struggle, and their sympathy with Parnell and the Home Rule Movement was vividly illustrated on the walls of the loft of their cabin, which were covered with political cartoons from the *Weekly Freeman*.

Political/public memory was also kept alive by the local priest, indeed it was from him that de Valera learned to link local and personal experience with the political story of the nation. At Sunday mass, Father Eugene Sheehy, who had been a radical supporter of the National Land League and spent time in prison for that, would deliver "fiery sermons" in which he would combine the preaching of the gospel with the telling of local and national history (4). De Valera recalls via his two biographers:

Occasionally on St Munchin's Day, a parish holiday, he delivered his most famous sermons based on local Bruree history. Little de Valera sat with the other servers on the side steps of the altar drinking in every historic detail. Father Sheehy, eyes closed and long nose reaching his lips, retailed the golden exploits of bygone days, as if in ecstasy. By the time he checked his gold watch for the last time, Bruree seemed not only the capital of Limerick but of Munster and of Ireland. (4-5)

"Who knows what seeds of patriotism he sowed?," the biographers ask, stating the obvious. Dudley Edwards does not. On the contrary, he uses this particular memory for his thesis that it was in the local parish church that de Valera learned to identify

nation and faith and to play his role in politics as that of a 'priest-king' administering politico-religious doctrines and rituals to his people (Edwards 7-20).

Eamon got his first knowledge of Irish history from Father Sheehy's sermons, Irish history being absent from the curriculum at Bruree's national school. It was not until he enrolled at Blackrock College that he developed his perception of Irish history as reflecting a series of injustices suffered by its people. History was a central subject here. However, it is a memory from a lesson in elocution which gives the reader the most striking picture of de Valera's birth as a nationalist.

For that lesson, Eamon had been asked to prepare a recitation of Thomas Campbell's poem "The Downfall of Poland." Identifying completely with the theme and hero of this nationalist epic, de Valera recalls how he had rendered its lines so passionately that, upon finishing it, his teacher turned to the class and said jokingly, "I didn't think we had an O'Connell here" (8). "A truer word than he knew," is the biographers' comment.

The comment confirms the initial claim of this article that the first chapter of the biography consists of a selection of memories narrated by Eamon de Valera which all serve to show how seeds sown in the protagonist's childhood and youth grew in time into political flowers.

To conclude, the account of de Valera's childhood is a complex construct literally authorised by de Valera himself. Having been repeatedly told over many years it takes the final form of a narrative in which personal, family memory, and political history/social memory are integrated into 'autobiography.' This semi-autobiographical chapter, then, should be regarded as 'composure' in two senses. Firstly, it represents composure in the sense that it was by such self-narrative that de Valera was capable of repressing uncomfortable memories of abandonment and loss. It represented a self-interpretation which gave meaning to his life and stability to his identity. It was also composure in the sense that it was in full accord with public norms and political notions of Irishness and Irish history.

De Valera's self-narrative served him in his political career by rooting him in a genuine Irishry. In this way he felt justified in acting and speaking on behalf of the Irish people. Re-presenting himself, he was able to claim that he represented Ireland, indeed, that he knew the heart of the Irish nation and knew what the Irish people wanted.

As I hope to have demonstrated, however, as much as appropriating Ireland by means of his own self-narrative, he appears to have appropriated himself.

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THE IRISH IN POST-WAR BRITAIN: TOWARDS GREATER VISIBILITY?

Gráinne O’Keeffe-Vigneron

Introduction

The Irish in Great Britain in the post-World War II period have received limited recognition with regard to monitoring, research, and policymaking at both central and local government level compared with other ethnic minorities. This article proposes to examine whether an Irish dimension is included or excluded at local government level in monitoring procedures and policy initiatives and the factors affecting this. This will be done through an analysis of the preliminary results of interviews carried out in a selection of London boroughs.

Firstly, this article will trace how the Irish migrant generation went from a largely “invisible” minority in post-World War II Britain to a certain level of assertiveness, finally becoming recognised in the 2001 British census under the “Ethnic Group” category. It has been argued that the invisibility of the Irish has been one of the key reasons why an Irish dimension in monitoring and policy has been largely absent (Hickman & Walter 7). Both this invisibility and exclusion from the “Ethnic Group” category of the census, when it was introduced in 1991, effectively meant that the Irish were excluded from many policy initiatives aimed at minorities in Britain. While thousands of Irish migrants have successfully integrated into British professional and cultural life, research has consistently shown that sectors of the Irish community are over-represented against indicators of disadvantage.

Secondly, the results of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) report will be analysed. The authors, Professors Mary Hickman and Bronwen Walter, sent out questionnaires in the early 1990s to local authorities to find out to what extent an Irish dimension was included in monitoring (Hickman & Walter 63). During the 1980s, and more especially the 1990s, the Irish became much more visible, but it was only in 1997 that this important piece of research was published. This report showed there was indeed a need for monitoring of the Irish in order to combat the difficulty that some section of this population was experiencing and brought the Irish issue of discrimination and disadvantage into the national arena. A brief analysis of these results will be given to show where the Irish were situated at local government level at this time with a special emphasis on the London area, where a third of the Irish population in Britain lives.

Thirdly, the preliminary results of interviews that were carried out with officials in a selection of London boroughs will be discussed.¹ The aim was to determine devel-

1 Each respondent signed a consent form, but in order to respect privacy the names of the interviewees in each borough will not be cited.

opments since the publication of the CRE report in relation to monitoring for the Irish community and to find out what the driving force behind this monitoring at local government level was. The specific reasons for inclusion or exclusion of an Irish category at this level were not detailed in the CRE report. The results of these interviews also aimed at determining the influence of, firstly, the recent inclusion of “Irish” under the “Ethnic Group” category in the 2001 census and, secondly, the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000.²

Methodology

Interviews in a selection of London boroughs, eight in total, were carried out over a two-month period (see Table 1). These interviews were with members of Equality and Diversity Units and, where this unit was not in operation, with the Chief Executive and Director of Administration. These boroughs hold 28.5% of the Irish population in London according to the results of the 2001 census (Table KS06: Ethnic Group). A cross-section of boroughs with both large and small Irish populations and boroughs that had not included an Irish dimension in their monitoring systems at the time of the CRE report were chosen. In addition, some of the boroughs had an Irish voluntary organisation present and some did not. This cross-section was selected to increase the reliability of the information produced. The interviews were structured and the questions were prepared with the help of a member of the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister, the central government department that is responsible for policy concerning local authorities in Britain.

From Exclusion to Inclusion?

When the Irish government withdrew from the Commonwealth and declared a Republic in 1949, Irish citizens were still to be treated with the same rights as British citizens under the *Ireland Act 1949* (Lee 300). This gave them a special status in Britain even though the country was no longer a member of the Commonwealth and meant that the Irish could still continue to supply labour on the British market.

The British government introduced legislation, the *1962 Commonwealth Immigration Bill*, to control the influx of immigrants from Commonwealth countries who came to Britain, like the Irish, to participate in the post-war reconstruction boom (Hickman, “Binary Opposites” 55). The government excluded the Irish on the ground that it was impossible to police the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic (Hickman, “Reconstructing” 299). In addition, the Irish were needed to meet the demand for un-

2 The Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 was the government’s response to the recommendations made in the Stephen Lawrence inquiry report. It amends and strengthens the 1976 Race Relations Act, so, for the first time ever, councils are prohibited from unlawfully discriminating in any of their functions. This places a general duty on councils to promote racial equality and, now, all local authorities must publicly demonstrate their awareness and commitment to race equality regardless of the size or the make-up of their workforce or local community.

skilled labour and were preferable to Commonwealth immigrants, as it was thought they would integrate much easier, sharing the same skin colour and language (Hickman, "Binary Opposites" 55).

Since the *Immigration Act 1971*, Ireland has been part of the Common Travel Area. Irish citizens have not been subject to control, and under the *British Nationality Act 1981* nationals of the Republic of Ireland have "settled status" without restrictions on length of stay (Central Office, *Immigration* 13). The Irish were not to be treated "any differently than British citizens" and could travel to and from Britain without hindrance. This is very significant because the *exclusion* of the Irish from controls on entry and Ireland's special status with the United Kingdom directly contributed to the subsequent *invisibility* of the Irish in British society (Hickman, "Reconstructing" 289).

They were constructed as the "same" as the British and they were excluded from the restrictive immigration legislation which came to determine which groups were defined as "ethnic" and, therefore, different from the mainstream population. The non-inclusion of the Irish here also meant that an Irish dimension was subsequently ignored in debates surrounding harmonious race relations (Hickman, "Reconstructing" 289). However, it must not be forgotten either that the discourse of immigration in British society became increasingly racialised from the riots of 1958 through to the 1960s.

When discrimination and racism against immigrants became officially recognised, legislation was introduced to combat this. The *1976 Race Relations Act* defines discrimination on racial grounds as being on grounds of "colour, race, nationality or ethnic and national origins" (Central Office, *Race Relations* 6). The definition of a racial group to include ethnic or national origins obviously includes the Irish. Nevertheless, even though the legal framework was present to include the Irish, they were not automatically recognised in official discourse as a distinct ethnic minority group subject to racism and discrimination like the "visible" minorities. Yet, they remained silent and kept a low profile. The "Troubles" in Northern Ireland and the association in British mindsets between Irish and terrorist may also have prevented them from openly asserting their rights (Hickman & Walter 127).

The 1980s was a period of change in British society for immigrants when "ethnic minority groups" largely replaced the term "migrants." Ethnic minorities included both the migrant generation and the second and subsequent generations. Change began to occur also at this time for the Irish, especially in London. The Greater London Council (GLC) recognised the problems that the Irish community could encounter. This recognition was in no small part due to both the work of Ken Livingstone, fervent advocate of the Irish and the leader of the GLC at this time, and the campaigning of the Deputy Leader, John McDonnell. The GLC published a policy report on the Irish community in the early 1980s. This was significant as the GLC acknowledged the importance for more funding for Irish community needs. It concluded that the Irish

community was disadvantaged in many areas such as housing, employment, and mental health (GLC 6-8).

The GLC was abolished in 1986, under the Thatcher Government, before significant progress could be made but this period marks the point of departure for a more open articulation of an Irish identity in British society. Following its abolition, the onus was then on the local authorities to include an Irish dimension in ethnic monitoring procedures. The CRE’s statutory “Race Relations Code of Practice” (1984) for the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity in employment called for the use of monitoring recording the ethnic origin of individuals (Hickman & Walter 63). However, because of the overwhelming association of ethnicity and blackness in Britain, the Irish were not automatically included in ethnic monitoring procedures.

The Results of the CRE Report

The authors of the CRE report carried out a postal survey in 1994 contacting 514 local authorities in England, Wales, and Scotland to determine whether ethnic monitoring took place and whether an Irish dimension was included or not (Hickman & Walter 64). Sixteen out of the 33 London boroughs carried out some form of ethnic monitoring which included an Irish category at this time (Hickman & Walter 64). For most of the authorities recognition came in the late 1980s and 1990s. But even when a local authority adopted the Irish monitoring category, it was often extended to only a few of the possible areas of employment and services (Hickman & Walter 64).

Only two London boroughs at that time, Brent and Southwark, claimed to monitor in all seven areas which were surveyed – personnel, housing, education, social services, environmental services, leisure and council tax benefit (Hickman & Walter 64). Nevertheless, it was also discovered that most authorities appeared to make no further use of the statistics they had gathered. One official even asked: “*WHY is IRISH to be monitored as a separate group within WHITE?*” (Hickman & Walter 67). This evidence shows that even when an Irish dimension was included in monitoring, it was not largely translated into policy initiatives, and there was incomprehension on the part of officials as to why the Irish needed to be monitored separately in the first place.

Monitoring of the Irish community is needed as Irish-born people are statistically more likely to be socially disadvantaged, experience high levels of physical and mental health problems and long-term disability and are also over-represented as users of psychiatric services (London Civic Forum 5-6). Research shows that Irish men are the only group whose life expectancy worsens on emigration to England (Greenslade 40). The 2001 census shows that 34% of the Irish population in Britain is over 60, 25.6% have a limiting long-term illness and just over 21% live in accommodation rented from the council or other social rented (other social rented includes rented from a Registered Social Landlord, Housing Association, Housing Co-operative and

Charitable Trust) (Table T33: Migration). What is an even more surprising figure is that over 37% are cited as having no qualifications or qualifications unknown (Table T33: Migration). The Irish figure also highly among homeless people, and as recently as November 2003 an offer for employment was advertised at "The Passage," a centre for the homeless based in London, for an Irish Persons Coordinator.

During interviews carried out with members of the Irish voluntary sector in London, it could be established that the level of Irish people's needs was still high even though the Irish population had gone down since the 1991 census by over 60,000 people (Owen 4). The Brent Irish Advisory Service (BIAS) sees about 2,500 people each year and the London Irish Centre about 2,000 both from the Irish migrant population and second- and third-generation Irish (Interviews O'Callaghan and Kivlehan). There is a particular problem with older Irish people who find themselves in difficulty after not having made adequate provision for their retirement. They become isolated and some finish up living in bad accommodation. Members of these organisations have also noted that a lot of younger people are coming to them, some with no accommodation and not enough money to get started, and others with drug- and alcohol-related problems. Therefore, there is still need amongst a certain section of the Irish in London.

Interview Results

Finally, the evolution of the situation since the publication of the CRE report and the inclusion, after much lobbying by certain sectors of the Irish community, especially the Federation of Irish Societies, for the incorporation of the Irish under the "Ethnic Group" category will be analysed. It was argued at the time that the Irish should be included under this category because there was a section experiencing disadvantage and there was a requirement for a more accurate picture of the extent of Irish need. It was also hoped that this would encourage more extensive monitoring at local government level.

According to the 2001 census, the Irish in London form just over three per cent of the ethnic minority population (Table KS06: Ethnic Group). This places them in fifth position after the Indians, Africans, Caribbean and the Other White categories (Table KS06: Ethnic Group). The London borough which has the largest Irish population, nearly seven per cent, is Brent, followed by Islington, Hammersmith and Fulham, Ealing, Camden and Harrow all having a representation of over four per cent Irish in their borough (see Table 1).

The boroughs with some of the most active Irish voluntary sectors are Camden, where the London Irish Centre is based and where the Federation of Irish Societies was based until recently, Brent, where BIAS works from, and Islington, where the Action Group for Irish Youth (AGIY) and various housing associations are located, one of the principal ones being Innisfree Housing Association.

Fourteen boroughs were contacted and ten replies received and eight officials agreed to be interviewed. One borough said it could not provide information even though the Irish represent over four per cent of the population and another did not reply when a sample of the questions to be discussed were sent. Therefore, interviews were carried out in eight London boroughs and each person received a copy of the questions before the interview (see Table 1).

When asked about the size of the Irish population in their borough, every respondent got this information from the census. One respondent said the National Survey preceded everything else (Interview Haringey). All respondents monitored according to the census categories and some, but not all, even went further than this and monitored to reflect the make-up of the local community, for example, including categories such as Turkish, Somali, Kosovo.

When asked if a specific Irish category was included in ethnic monitoring systems the answers were varying. Five of the boroughs (Camden, Brent, Islington, Haringey, and Southwark) had included the Irish in their monitoring systems for many years, although monitoring was uneven between departments. The other three (Wandsworth, Havering, and Barnet) did not monitor the Irish at the time of the CRE report and had only recently included an Irish category.

A further question asked was what concrete changes or policy initiatives these data had initiated in those boroughs which had been monitoring the Irish in the past. It was difficult for the respondents to give specific answers. One official said the question was being asked at the moment concerning what to do with data and they were carrying out impact assessments (Interview Southwark). However, this borough had introduced a programme for travellers as a result of monitoring and a proportion of these travellers were of Irish origin. It was also mentioned during interviews that funding had been given to the Irish voluntary sector. It could be argued that this has the tendency to show lack of commitment in dealing with Irish need and handing over responsibility to the voluntary sector. Apart from the traveller community, none of the respondents could name any concrete changes that had come about in the last few years for the Irish in their borough. There seemed to be more concern over the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers.

Each respondent was given five choices concerning the influence on the inclusion of an Irish category in monitoring procedures: recent inclusion of “Irish” under the “Ethnic Group” category in the census, Irish voluntary sector lobbying, central government policy, the CRE report on the Irish, or other influences. The answers here varied. In the boroughs where the Irish had been included for some time answers ranged from: because we have a large Irish community, the influence of the community, Irish voluntary sector lobbying, people of Irish descent driving things forward, Irish councillors or councillors of Irish descent. For those boroughs, which had never monitored the Irish in the past and had now included this category, the clear impetus was recognition in the 2001 census under the “Ethnic Group” category.

When the three boroughs, which had not carried out monitoring of their local Irish community in the past, were asked about the role played by the CRE report, the answers varied. One respondent had heard about the launch ceremony for the report but had not attended. Another respondent had not read the report, and the third had read the report but it had had no influence on monitoring procedures, even though at that time the CRE had encouraged an Irish dimension to be included. The other respondents, in the local authorities that had included the Irish in monitoring procedures in the past, had all read or heard of the report. One respondent noted that an important aspect of this report was that it sent out a positive message showing the commitment of the CRE towards the Irish, but it does not seem however to have initiated any concrete changes with regard to policy-making (Interview Southwark).

The influence of the Race Relations Amendment Act was another area covered. Under this Act all public authorities must produce a Race Equality Scheme and revise it every three years. Most of the respondents said that the Race Equality Scheme meant no more or no less for the Irish than for other minorities. However, this Act does place a legal duty on local authorities to take racial equality into account in policy-making, service delivery and employment practices. In one borough the Irish were specifically mentioned in the Race Equality Scheme (Interview Southwark).

Conclusion

To conclude, the Irish in Britain have remained largely invisible in post-World War II British society and have been excluded from much of the research and policy-making at local government level in the past. The policy document published by the GLC in the 1980s brought Irish issues to the fore in London, even though the GLC was abolished before much progress could be made.

However, it took until the end of the 1990s to get a major piece of research out into the public arena. This publication showed that indeed Irish discrimination and disadvantage did exist for sections of the Irish community in Britain. It highlighted the lack of comprehension by officials as to why an Irish dimension should be included in monitoring practices. At the time, 48% of London boroughs monitored the Irish, but the results were, for the most part, not translated into policy initiatives. The campaign for inclusion of an "Irish" heading under the "Ethnic Group" category of the 2001 census was considered essential in getting recognition for the Irish on a national level and also to generate a clearer picture of the Irish community in Britain.

From the preliminary results of the interviews, it can be concluded that the inclusion of the Irish under this category means that authorities that use the census "Ethnic Group" category headings, which was the entire sample, now include the Irish in their monitoring procedures. This will mean that more data will be generated on the Irish in the future.

Local authorities now also have a statutory duty to promote racial equality under the Race Relations Amendment Act. However, even though more comprehensive data

will be available in the future at borough level, unless a strong Irish voluntary sector or a vocal Irish community are present to put Irish issues on the local agenda, the risk is that the data will not be used to create policy initiatives for the Irish.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the Irish are present in data monitoring systems. In the boroughs where they were included before the 2001 census, this has been largely due to voluntary sector lobbying and a strong community presence. The local authorities that did not include an Irish dimension in monitoring procedures in the past have been greatly influenced by the inclusion of the Irish in the 2001 census under the “Ethnic Group” category alongside the “visible” ethnic minorities. However, since the CRE publication there has been little evidence of concrete initiatives aimed at the Irish community at local authority level in the London area, which is in keeping with the results of the CRE report. Much work remains to be done if monitoring procedures are to be translated into policy initiatives for the Irish community in the future.³

3 I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to Piaras MacEinri, Director of the Irish Centre for Migration Studies (ICMS), University College Cork, for his comments on an earlier version of this paper.

Table 1:**Population of "White Irish" in London Boroughs**

Source: 2001 Census of England, Table KS06: Ethnic Group

Inner London

	<i>Population</i>	<i>%</i>
Camden*	9,149	4.62
City of London	241	3.35
Hackney	6,117	3.01
Hammersmith/Fulham	7,983	4.83
Haringey*	9,302	4.29
Islington*	10,057	5.72
Kensington/Chelsea	5,183	3.26
Lambeth	8,689	3.26
Lewisham	6,990	2.80
Newham	3,231	1.32
Southwark*	7,674	3.13
Tower Hamlets	3,823	1.94
Wandsworth*	8,151	3.13
Westminster	6,574	3.62

Outer London

	<i>Population</i>	<i>%</i>
Barking and Dagenham	2,753	1.67
Barnet*	10,545	3.35
Bexley	3,025	1.38
Brent*	18,313	6.95
Bromley	4,652	1.57
Croydon	7,130	2.15
Ealing	14,285	4.74
Enfield	8,398	3.06
Greenwich	4,862	2.26
Harrow	9,057	4.37
Havering*	3,390	1.51
Hillingdon	6,911	2.84
Hounslow	6,198	2.91
Kingston upon Thames	3,201	2.17
Merton	5,464	2.90
Redbridge	5,559	2.32
Richmond upon Thames	4,805	2.78
Sutton	3,664	2.03
Waltham Forest	5,112	2.34

* = local authorities where interviews took place

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DECONSTRUCTING MEDIA REPORTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE: AN ANALYSIS OF FRAMING IN IRISH PRINT MEDIA COVERAGE OF SEXUAL ABUSE, 1993-2002

Michael J. Breen

Introduction

The mass media play a significant role in setting public agendas on a wide variety of issues, such as attitudes to criminal sexual deviance. The literature dealing with the influences of media content on consumers shows that content can influence public perceptions on various issues, as well as helping to form or sustain attitudes. Media coverage can also alter public perceptions of the central participants in the process, depending on the type of coverage (Brewer & McCombs). As Fico and Balog indicate, agenda setting research indicates that “differences in news media attention to particular issues subsequently influences differences in the public’s assessment of the importance of those issues” (23).

This paper deals with one contemporary issue of major significance in Ireland and elsewhere today, that of sexual abuse. After decades of denial, the extent of sexual abuse of both adults and children is being brought to light. It is clearly important that a sociological perspective is provided on this issue, in addition to examining criminal and therapeutic dimensions. To that end this paper focuses on the critical role of the mass media and the contribution of the media to shaping public opinion and serving as information providers on this core issue. It provides an initial analysis of newspaper coverage from the newspaper of record, *The Irish Times*, as a preliminary exercise to the examination of the attitudes of media professionals with respect to the issue of sexual abuse in Ireland.

The Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland report (SAVI), commissioned by the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre and carried out by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) in 2002, has shown that more than 42% of women and 28% of men reported some form of sexual abuse or assault in their lifetime (McGee et al. xxxv-xxxviii).

Further research by the RCSI indicates that the public is significantly misinformed about the prevalence, nature and source of sexual abuse, underestimating the level and extent of abuse generally, underestimating the conviction rate of abusers, overestimating the rate of incest, overestimating the extent of abuse carried out by specific categories of individuals (e.g. fathers, strangers, and clergy), overestimating the level of reporting to the civil authorities, and holding a stereotypical perspective of abusers as a certain type. At the same time the public has a good understanding of some issues related to the rape of women but are conflicted about the motivations for rape. This paper asks “why is it so?”

This research is part of a much larger project which focuses on the Irish coverage on sexual abuse in Ireland and locates itself as a service to media professionals, health professionals, and academics, as well as providing a basis for developing public policy. No research has as yet been published which undertakes a thorough examination of the media coverage in Ireland, in the light of media professionals' perspectives and the current state of knowledge in the public domain. In that respect the overall project breaks new ground.

One recommendation of the SAVI Report was that a "national public awareness campaign" be put in place as part of a programme for educating the Irish public on the issues involved. The authors of the SAVI Report were quite specific:

The role of the media is crucial in developing an accurate and comprehensive understanding of sexual violence among the general public. Strategies to support the media in its representation of sexual violence should be considered as part of the public awareness campaign. (McGee et al. 290)

The overall project is a partial response to that recommendation, focusing as it does on the state of public knowledge of, and media content on, sexual abuse with a view to relating these to the existing state of knowledge on the topic in Ireland.

This is a timely and necessary development if the issues associated with sexual abuse are to be tackled at a national level. By coming to a clear understanding of the state of Irish research on the topic, while at the same time appreciating the dimensions of media coverage to date as well as the attitudes of media professionals, a way forward for public education can emerge which highlights the role of the academy and the media working in tandem.

Literature Review

Scholars have different views about the coverage of sexual abuse in the mass media. Hawkins et al. deal with how prevention of abuse requires publics to be educated. The need to focus on research and intervention strategies is seen as particularly important (Brawley). Franklin & Horwath as well as Goddard & Saunders see media coverage as sometimes abusive in itself and doing a disservice to victims.

The widespread condemnation of 'name and shame' campaigns in the UK as well as the mixed public reaction to the 'outing' of paedophiles after release from prison has given rise to concern about the nature of some elements of media coverage, as well

as mixed reactions by members of the public.¹ Both Kitzinger and McDevitt have written on the nature of sexual abuse as constructed in media reports in Ireland and elsewhere. Wilczynski Sinclair, as well as Jenkins, raise questions about moral panics in respect of sexual abuse reportage. As Alder Polk contend,

the gradual evolution of an internationalised media, capable of the instantaneous transfer of 'infotainment' around the globe [... has created] a special appetite for the bizarre and unusual. (134)

The use of sexual abuse reportage in this context is not conducive to public education (Franklin & Howarth; Tomison). This project adds considerably to the literature by focusing on media construction in the Irish context.

Mass media play a role in the formation of public opinion, are selective in the messages transmitted, and are directive in trying to shape and mould opinion (Shoemaker & Reese). While there are clearly external forces at work in terms of what enters the news, it is abundantly evident that there is much left to the choices of the individual editor or journalist, as well as many influences that act from within media organisations (White; Breed; Bass; Altheide; Weaver; Gross; Stempel; Schudson; Shoemaker; Shoemaker & Reese). Gatekeeping theory suggests that it is important to understand what 'gates' apply in relation to the coverage of various issues, in terms of examining what is covered, to what extent, and what is omitted from coverage (Shoemaker).

Kahneman Tversky conducted a number of experiments that indicate clearly the power of frames. Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock report on the effect of framing in priming values differentially, establishing the salience of the one or the other. Edelman indicates the significance of omission in frames. Entmann cites the Cold War as an example of how frames follow Gamson's understanding of diagnosis, evaluation, and description by the fourfold process of defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting remedies. Norris shows how news frames bundle key concepts, stock phrases, and stereotyped images to reinforce certain

1 In December 2001, the *News of the World* retreated from its 'name and shame' campaign targeted against British paedophiles, with the stated aim of publishing details of all 100,000 of them. *The Independent* had referred to the campaign as the more extreme folly that continued to engage in scare-mongering, sensationalism and incitement to vigilante action. In the wake of the *News of the World* campaign, some parents in Portsmouth had their children carrying banners saying "Kill Them" and vigilantes gathered outside the homes of suspected paedophiles, shouted abuse and threw stones. An innocent man with a name similar to one of those listed by the newspaper had his windows broken and abuse hurled at him. Two vigilantes were jailed for life at the Old Bailey for murdering a retired sea captain whom they wrongly suspected of being a paedophile, by firebombing his flat in Grimsby. In another incident, a suspected paedophile was battered to death with a toaster, frying pan and iron bar by vigilantes in Glasgow. In Gwent, a group of protestors, who could not tell the difference between a paediatrician and a paedophile, hounded Dr Yvette Cloete, a respected paediatrician, from her home.

common ways of interpreting developments. This paper continues the theoretical analysis of framing in relation to the specific issue of sexual abuse which has not been previously researched.

Methods

The data for this content analysis were drawn from *The Irish Times* library on the Lexis-Nexis database. For each of ten years, 1993-2002, a sample of five weeks was drawn to yield fifty weeks in all. For each of these fifty weeks, all stories meeting the search criteria² were recovered from the Lexis-Nexis database. This yielded a total of 1127 stories. On subsequent examination, only those stories dealing with the issue of abuse per se in Ireland were deemed acceptable for analysis.³ This resulted in a total data set of 494 stories, on which this paper is based.

Following selection stories were coded by date, year, length in words, and page number. Each story was then assessed to ascertain the outcomes to certain variables as seen in Table 1.

2 (sex AND (abuse OR assault OR attack OR offence OR harassment OR molestation)) OR (rape OR bestiality OR buggery OR incest OR (gross AND indecency) OR paedophile OR (child AND molester)).

3 For example, stories dealing with rape in wartime, stories of sex crime overseas or stories of agricultural production of oil-seed *rape* were all omitted.

Table 1: Coding variables and assigned categories/values

VARIABLE	POSSIBLE VALUES
category of crime	child sexual abuse; adult sexual abuse
specifics of crime	rape, sexual assault/abuse, gross indecency, buggery, incest, sodomy, murder, sexual harassment
gender of victim	male, female
profession of victim	open-ended
relationship of victim to perpetrator	stranger, parent, sibling, uncle/aunt, other relative, authority figure, boyfriend/girlfriend, partner spouse, recent acquaintance, ⁴ colleague, other/not specified
gender of perpetrator	male, female
profession of perpetrator	open-ended
type of story	court report, news, letter to the editor, op-ended.

Results

Table 2 shows the frequency of occurrence for each of the years in the sample. The years are not evenly distributed with the highest number of stories occurring in 1994 and the lowest in 2001.

Table 2: Frequency of story by year

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1993	40	8.1	8.1	8.1
	1994	84	17.0	17.0	25.1
	1995	56	11.3	11.3	36.4
	1996	41	8.3	8.3	44.7
	1997	39	7.9	7.9	52.6
	1998	66	13.4	13.4	66.0
	1999	58	11.7	11.7	77.7
	2000	47	9.5	9.5	87.2
	2001	26	5.3	5.3	92.5
	2002	37	7.5	7.5	100.0
	Total	494	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 shows the frequency of story by type of crime. Of the 494 stories in the sample, only some 12 are unspecified as to the type of victim, either because the text did not make the victim type explicit or else related to both children and adults simultaneously. It is interesting, nonetheless, to note the ratio of child sexual abuse to adult sexual abuse stories, of 2:1.

4 It was not originally intended to include this category but its occurrence in so many reports made it imperative.

Table 3: Frequency of story by type

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Child	321	65.0	65.0	65.0
	Adult	161	32.6	32.6	97.6
	Not specified	12	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	494	100.0	100.0	

The frequency of crime type is seen in Table 4, with sexual assault (generalised abuse) as the most commonly reported in newspaper stories with rape second. There are 15 references to murder as the outcome or principal component of sexual crime.

Table 4: Frequency of story by specific crime type

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Rape	149	30.2	30.4	30.4
	Sexual assault	294	59.5	60.0	90.4
	Gross Indecency	1	.2	.2	90.6
	Buggery	10	2.0	2.0	92.7
	Incest	14	2.8	2.9	95.5
	Murder	15	3.0	3.1	98.6
	Sexual Harassment	7	1.4	1.4	100.0
	Unspecified	4	.8		
	Total	494	100.0		

Tables 5 and 6 indicate the gender of both victims and perpetrators within the story texts. Of the victims whose gender is identified, females outnumber males by a ratio in excess of 2:1. In relation to perpetrators, however, female perpetrators comprise only 1.4% of all perpetrators.

Table 5: Frequency of story by gender of victim

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	112	22.7	22.7	22.7
	Female	240	48.6	48.6	71.3
	Unspecified	142	28.7	28.7	100.0
	Total	494	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: Frequency of story by gender of perpetrator

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	377	76.3	76.3	76.3
	Female	7	1.4	1.4	77.7
	Unspecified	110	22.3	22.3	100.0
	Total	494	100.0	100.0	

The relationship, if any, between the perpetrator and the victim is given in Table 7. The relationship is manifest in about 45% of all stories. Within these 223 stories, spouses/ partners, parents, siblings and other relatives account for 63 cases, about 28% of specified perpetrators; authority figures (clergy, medical personnel, policemen, etc.) account for 52% of specified perpetrators.

Table 7: Frequency of specified relationship between victim and perpetrator

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Other/Unspecified	271	54.9	54.9	54.9
	Authority figure	117	23.7	23.7	78.5
	Parent	37	7.5	7.5	86.0
	Stranger	22	4.5	4.5	90.5
	New acquaintance	18	3.6	3.6	94.1
	Uncle/Aunt	9	1.8	1.8	96.0
	Other relative	9	1.8	1.8	97.8
	Partner/Spouse	5	1.0	1.0	98.8
	Sibling	3	.6	.6	99.4
	Boyfriend/girlfriend	2	.4	.4	99.8
	Colleague	1	.2	.2	100.0
	Total	494	100.0	100.0	

In the coding of these stories, references to the profession of the victims and perpetrators was recorded where it occurred. In 494 stories, only one victim was identified in terms of a profession – a prison officer – and that was in relation to sexual harassment. The profession of perpetrators is given in Table 8. In about one third of cases a profession is identified. The greatest concentration of these occurs in relation to clergy or religious perpetrators, with 94 of the 161 (58%) identified cases specifying those professions. Teachers are the next largest group (N=10, 6.2%) followed by sports coaches (N=9, 5.6%), soldiers (N=8, 5%), with guards/policemen comprising 4.3%, N=7.

Table 8: Frequency of specified profession of perpetrators by story

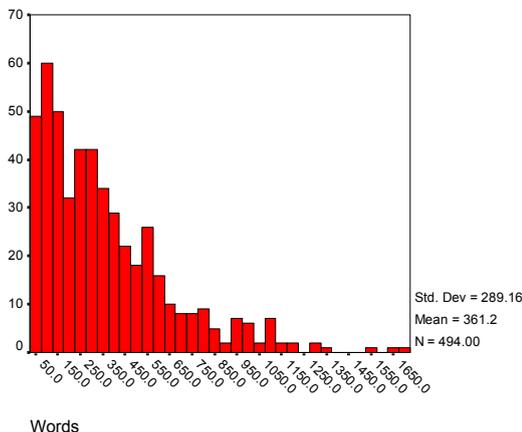
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		331	67.0	67.0	67.0
	Cleric	80	16.2	16.2	83.2
	Religious	14	2.8	2.8	86.0
	Teacher	10	2.0	2.0	88.1
	Coach	9	1.8	1.8	89.9
	Soldier	8	1.6	1.6	91.5
	Campaigner	6	1.2	1.2	92.7
	Garda	6	1.2	1.2	93.9
	Farmer	4	.8	.8	94.7
	Mariner	3	.6	.6	95.3
	Radio Owner	2	.4	.4	95.7
	Shopkeeper	2	.4	.4	96.2
	Doctor	2	.4	.4	96.6
	Manager	1	.2	.2	96.8
	Apprentice	1	.2	.2	97.0
	Barman	1	.2	.2	97.2
	Bus Driver	1	.2	.2	97.4
	Businessman	1	.2	.2	97.6
	Tiler	1	.2	.2	97.8
	Car Valet	1	.2	.2	98.0
	Caretaker	1	.2	.2	98.2
	Chiropractor	1	.2	.2	98.4
	Cleaner	1	.2	.2	98.6
	Taxi Driver	1	.2	.2	98.8
	Prison Officer	1	.2	.2	99.0
	Cook	1	.2	.2	99.2
	Policeman	1	.2	.2	99.4
	Nurse	1	.2	.2	99.6
	Scout Master	1	.2	.2	99.8
	Window Cleaner	1	.2	.2	100.0
	Total	494	100.0	100.0	

Finally, the length of story was also coded. This is a measure reported directly from Lexis-Nexis. Descriptive statistics are given in Table 9. The data can be seen graphically in Figure 1, a histogram of story length.

Table 9: Count, maximum, minimum, mean and standard deviation for story length in words

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Words	494	30	1701	361.19	289.162
Valid N (listwise)	494				

Figure 1: Histogram of story length in words



Looking at some of the variables in pairs, significant differences emerge. Table 10 breaks down the year data in terms of two kinds of crime, child sexual abuse and adult sexual abuse. Apart from 1993, the number of reports about child sexual abuse outstripped those of adult sexual abuse.

Table 10: Cross-tabulation of year by crime type

		Year										Total
		'93	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02	
Category of crime	Child	17	69	47	24	27	33	41	23	12	28	321
	Adult	23	15	9	17	11	32	16	20	10	8	161
	Not specified					1	1	1	4	4	1	12
Total		40	84	56	41	39	66	58	47	26	37	494

Looking at sub-categories in the two types of crime, we see other differences emerge in Table 11. In the adult category, the most common sex crime type against adults is rape (n=88, 55%) compared to sexual assault as the most common sex crime type against children (n=240, 75%).

Table 11: Cross-tabulation of category of crime by crime type

		Specific crime						Total
		Rape	Sexual assault	Gross indecency	Bug-gery	Incest	Murder	
Category of crime	Child	53	240	1	6	13	5	318
	Adult	88	51		3	1	10	160
Total		141	291	1	9	14	15	478

Turning to the issue of victim gender, we can see strong differences between the crime types in Table 12. Of those child victims whose sex is identified, 29% are male and 35.8% female, compared to 11.8% for adult males and 77% for adult females. In terms of reporting then, it would appear that boys and girls have about equal levels of sex crime against them, whereas sex crimes against adults are six times more likely to be against a woman than a man.

Table 12: Cross-tabulation of category of crime by victim gender

		Victim gender	Victim gender	Victim gender	Total
		Male	Female	Unspecified	
Category of crime	Child	93	115	113	321
		29.0%	35.8%	35.2%	100.0%
	Adult	19	124	18	161
		11.8%	77.0%	11.2%	100.0%
Total		112	239	131	482
		23.2%	49.6%	27.2%	100.0%

If we examine the relationship, such as it is, between victim and perpetrator in terms of crime type, we see the data in Table 13. Based on these figures, the perpetrators of sex crimes against adults are twice as likely to be strangers as the perpetrators of sex crimes against children. Family members (parents, spouses/partners, siblings, uncles/aunts, other relatives) are responsible for 16.5% of child sexual abuse and 6.2% of adult sexual abuse. The largest identified category in relation to child sexual abuse is that of the authority figure (33%), whereas the largest category in relation to adult sexual abuse is that of recent acquaintance.

Table 13: Cross-tabulation of victim's relationship to perpetrator by category of crime

Victim's relationship to perpetrator	Category of crime		Adult		Total	
	Child					
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Stranger	10	3.1%	12	7.5%	22	4.6%
Parent	36	11.2%	1	.6%	37	7.7%
Sibling	3	.9%			3	
Uncle/Aunt	8	2.5%	1	.6%	9	1.9%
Other relative	6	1.9%	3	1.9%	9	1.9%
Authority figure	106	33.0%	11	6.8%	117	24.3%
Boyfriend/ Girlfriend			2	1.2%	2	.4%
Partner/Spouse			5	3.1%	5	1.0%
Other	150	46.7%	109	67.7%	259	53.7%
New acquaintance	2	.6%	16	9.9%	18	3.7%
Colleague			1	.6%	1	.2%
Total	321	100.0%	161	100.0%	482	100.0%

Looking at the same crime category in relation to the identified professions of abusers, a similar picture emerges. The data are shown in Table 14. Again, these data need to be treated with some caution. Of those whose profession is specified, the largest categories in relation to children are clergy (24.3%), religious (3.8%), teachers and coaches (each at 2.8%), whereas for adults the largest categories are soldiers (3.1%) and guards (1.9%). It should be noted that these figures are generated from very different bases, with a profession being identified in 42.7% of child sexual abuse reports but only 15.5% of adult sexual abuse.

Table 14: Cross-tabulation of perpetrator's profession by category of crime

Perpetrator's profession	Category of crime		Adult		Total	
	Child		N	%	N	%
	N	%				
Unspecified	184	57.3%	136	84.5%	320	66.4%
Apprentice			1	.6%	1	.2%
Barman			1	.6%	1	.2%
Bus Driver	1	.3%			1	.2%
Business-man	1	.3%			1	.2%
Campaigner	6	1.9%			6	1.2%
Car Valet			1	.6%	1	.2%
Caretaker	1	.3%			1	.2%
Chiropractor			1	.6%	1	.2%
Cleaner	1	.3%			1	.2%
Cleric	78	24.3%	2	1.2%	80	16.6%
Coach	9	2.8%			9	1.9%
Cook	1	.3%			1	.2%
Doctor	1	.3%	1	.6%	2	.4%
Farmer	2	.6%	2	1.2%	4	.8%
Garda	3	.9%	3	1.9%	6	1.2%
Manager	1	.3%			1	.2%
Mariner	3	.9%			3	.6%
Nurse			1	.6%	1	.2%
Policeman	1	.3%			1	.2%
Prison Officer			1.6%		1	.2%
Radio Owner	1	.3%			1	.2%
Religious	12	3.7%	2	1.2%	14	2.9%
Scout Master	1	.3%			1	.2%
Shopkeeper			2	1.2%	2	.4%
Soldier	3	.9%	5	3.1%	8	1.7%
Taxi Driver	1	.3%			1	.2%
Teacher	9	2.8%	1	.6%	10	2.1%
Tiler	1	.3%			1	.2%
Window Cleaner			1	.6%	1	.2%
Total	321		161		482	
	100.0%		100.0%		100.0%	

Finally, looking at the issue of crime type and word length, we see that there are differences in story length according to crime type. The data are given in Table 15. Stories about child sexual abuse tend to be about 30% longer than stories about adult sexual abuse. This difference is statistically significant ($t=4.14$, $p < .001$).

Table 15: Mean, medium and standard deviation for story length by crime type

		Category of crime	
		Child	Adult
Words	Mean	398.69	292.11
	Median	314.00	257.00
	Std. Deviation	307.761	242.769

Discussion

The background for any analysis of these figures is the empirical data provided by the Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland study (SAVI), which was carried out by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland at the request of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre.

The data in the tables and analysis above are empirical evidence of the content that is typical in *The Irish Times* when it comes to issues of sexual crime. As can be seen from the above, child sexual abuse appears to be double that of adult sexual abuse. There are twice as many stories about child sexual abuse and they tend to be significantly longer than those about adult sexual abuse. Female victims predominate in both categories, but male victims constitute at least 30% of child sexual abuse, whereas they make up only about 12% of adult sexual abuse. Rape or buggery of children accounts for some 20% of all child sexual abuse reports but constitutes more than 50% of all adult sexual abuse.

Examining those cases where the profession of the perpetrator is identified, the stories about child sexual abuse indicate that of 127 cases, clergy or religious are connected with 90, about 71%. In relation to adult sexual abuse stories, the profession of the perpetrator is identified in only 25 of 161 stories. The largest identifiable group within these 25 are soldiers, who constitute almost 20% of all reports.

The examination of the naming of perpetrators is worthy of further examination, predominating as it does in the case of child rather than adult sexual abuse. This predominance is statistically significant ($t=416.4$, $p<.001$) indicating that it is not a random or chance occurrence. Stories in which the perpetrator is named are also likely to be longer; 'named' stories have a mean of 331 words compared to 426 for 'unnamed' stories. This is also statistically significant ($t=3.4$, $p<.001$), again indicating that it is not a purely random occurrence.

It is important to note that the stories in the database can often refer to the same event several times if it is reported on different days over time. But it is also reasonable to suggest that the random nature of the sample is sufficient to ensure that what is here is pretty much representative of *The Irish Times* coverage of sexual crimes over the last ten years. There is, nonetheless, a significant discrepancy between what is represented here and what is represented by the findings of the SAVI report.

According to the SAVI report the ratio of boys to girls experiencing child sexual abuse is about 5:4, with more girls experiencing such abuse than boys (McGee 2002). SAVI goes on to report that one sixth of all contact-sexual-abuse of boys and one quarter of all contact-sexual-abuse of girls is penetrative, either orally, anally or vaginally. These data are in broad agreement with the empirical reports in *The Irish Times*.

From the SAVI report we also learn that "a quarter (24 per cent) of perpetrators against girls were family members, half (52 per cent) were non-family but known to the abused girl and a quarter (24 per cent) were strangers" (McGee 2002). This is not balanced out by the news media reports. In the ten years under examination, only in

43 of 62 cases where the perpetrator relationship was identified, was a family member responsible, some 69% of cases. In relation to boys, SAVI states, "fewer family members were involved in child sexual abuse of boys. One in seven perpetrators (14 per cent) was a family member with two-thirds (66 per cent) non-family but known to the abused boy. One in five (20 per cent) were strangers." In the news media reports, only in 8 of 73 cases where the perpetrator relationship was identified was a family member responsible, some 11%.

Finally, there appears to be a discrepancy between the newspaper reports of various groups/professions involved in abuse and the SAVI findings. SAVI states:

A relatively small percentage of perpetrators fitted the current stereotype of abusers of children: strangers were in the minority – over 80% of children were abused by those known to them. Fathers constituted 2.5% of all abusers with clerical/religious ministers or clerical/religious teachers constituting 3.2% of abusers. The most common other relative or authority figure categories were uncles (6.2%), cousins (4.4%), babysitters (4.4%), brothers (3.7%) and non-religious/clerical teachers (1.2%).

This profile made clear that apart from the broad conclusion that perpetrators of childhood sexual abuse are most likely to be known to the child and to be male, there are no prominent clues to identify likely abusers. Reflecting on what therapists see in counselling for abuse, while experiences such as sexual abuse by fathers are relatively rare, the chances of seeking therapy are dramatically increased if the abuse experienced is perpetrated by a close family member such as a father (McGee 2002).

In the newspaper context, fathers or mothers constituted 35 cases of 135, or 26% of all child sexual abuse cases, where the relationship was identified. Where SAVI identifies clergy/religious as being responsible for 3.2% of all child sexual abuse, the newspaper reports indicate clergy/religious as responsible for 75% of the sexual abuse of boys and 35% of the sexual abuse of girls. Where SAVI indicates teachers responsible for 1.2%, the newspaper reports indicate 5.7%.

What is evident is that there are significant discrepancies between the empirical evidence provided by the SAVI report as to the nature and extent of sexual abuse in Ireland and the representation of that abuse in the Irish print media. While there may be a variety of influences at work, it is important to ascertain the fundamental reasons for these discrepancies.

There are a number of historical dimensions here that are also significant. In recent years there have been numerous reports about abuse of children, physically, sexually, and emotionally, arising from the infamous 'industrial schools,' run by various religious orders in Ireland for the state. These have resulted in a number of investigations and tribunals with a large number of former residents coming forward to make complaints. The level of complainants may well skew the data.

In addition, the Catholic Church worldwide has been struggling with disclosures of sexual abuse of children by clergy. While there is as yet little evidence to suggest that

such abuse is more or less likely by clergy, the Catholic Church has been a central player in such reports. The prevalence of such reports also adds to the data.

These concerns aside, it is manifest that certain dimensions of sexual abuse remain uncovered, when comparing the SAVI data to the data in this paper. Much abuse is hidden, especially in interfamilial settings. Similarly, much abuse is not reported to the authorities, as in the case of rape.

Table 16: Dublin Rape Crisis Centre statistics on reporting of cases to the civil authorities, 2002.

	Child Sexual Abuse	Adult Rape/ Sexual Assault	All Cases
Reported	22%	37%	33%
Dropped	8%	16%	14%
Pending	40%	40%	40%
Convicted	29%	11%	16%
Guilty Plea	0%	1%	1%
Acquitted	2%	2%	2%
No information	21%	31%	28%

Table 16 above indicates the scale of the problem. In 2002, when the topic was already well aired and public, some 78% of all child sexual abuse cases brought to the attention of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre had not been reported to the civil authorities, with the figure of 63% applying to adult cases. There is little reason to believe that the situation is better elsewhere in Ireland. Further research on the media construction of sexual crime, together with an understanding of media professionals' self-understanding of their role in this process, remains a priority.

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PUBLIC REPRESENTATIONS OF A PRIVATE CHOICE: IRISH DAILY NEWSPAPERS AND THE REFERENDA ON ABORTION OF 1992 AND 2002

Jean Mercereau

In Ireland, as elsewhere, the press has always considered the formation of public opinion of great importance, although its effects are difficult to define with any degree of precision. Almost thirty years ago, Fred Hirsch and David Gordon, in a book called *Newspaper Money*, had already written that

the influence of the press on particular events including general elections is notoriously limited. Much more important is the broad influence over the climate of opinion, an influence which sets the boundaries and, to a large extent, the agenda of political action. (Hirsch & Gordon 35)

In other words, newspapers have come to influence more what the public thinks *about* rather than *what* it actually thinks. This is already a lot, of course, and, because of the social essence of the topics they propose to their audiences, it gives newspapers a strong responsibility for bringing (or not bringing) essential issues to the forefront of public debate. In the case which I propose to study here – the two Irish referenda on abortion of 1992 and 2002 – this responsibility was probably increased by the fact that abortion, unlike divorce for example, did not mobilise the public (Hug 200), and was consequently not likely to boost the sales of newspapers. According to a survey published by *The Irish Times* on 18 November 1992, abortion was only ninth on the list of people's preoccupations, far behind unemployment or health questions. Therefore, what I will try to evaluate is how Irish newspaper editors showed some sense of responsibility in stimulating the public debate, setting the agenda and playing their part in the forming of public opinion. In order to answer this question I have conducted a comparative analysis of the print editions of the five Irish morning newspapers in circulation in 1992 – *The Irish Independent*, *The Irish Times*, *The Irish Press* (until May 1995), *The Star*, and *The Cork Examiner* – over a period of two weeks (one before polling day, one after) in November 1992 and March 2002, concentrating on how they reflected this issue.¹

1 One could argue that Irish versions of some British papers on sale in Ireland, such as *The Irish Sun* or *The Irish Mirror* – which, together, sell almost 200,000 copies every day – should be considered alongside their Irish rivals. Indeed, these two newspapers only remain British from a strictly economic point of view, since they are edited and produced in Ireland, by Irish people, for an Irish audience and dedicate an ever-expanding portion of their contents to Ireland. I decided, however, not to include them, because they have only recently been integrated into the Irish market (in 1996).

The first of the two referenda on abortion considered here took place on 25 November 1992, the same day as the general election. The voters were asked to vote on three questions: (1) the freedom to travel between Ireland and another state, (2) the freedom to offer or obtain information on services available in another state, and (3) the acknowledgement of the right to life of the unborn with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother. The referendum came as a consequence of the so-called X case. In this case, the Supreme Court had overturned a decision made by the High Court, which had prohibited a fourteen-year-old girl from travelling to the UK for an abortion. The reason given by the Supreme Court was that the girl was liable to commit suicide if her pregnancy was not terminated. However, the court also made the decision that there was no absolute right to leave Ireland if the intention was to get an abortion. As the two decisions caused considerable confusion about the interpretation of the constitutional amendment of 1983, the Catholic Church and the anti-abortion lobby demanded a new referendum in order to secure an absolute ban against abortion. Liberals, on the other hand, were strongly critical of the restrictions on a woman's right to travel implied by the decision. The political situation in 1992 was complicated by the fact that the controversy coincided with the campaign for the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. In order to avoid a coupling of the two issues, the recently elected Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds, insisted on two referenda: first, a referendum on the Treaty, in which a special protocol had been included securing the protection of Article 40.3.3 (outlawing abortion), and, later, a referendum in which the questions raised by the Supreme Court ruling could be addressed. The government ended up proposing three amendments. The first two amendments (the right to travel and the right to information) were supported by the Catholic Church, but the polemical wording of the third amendment alienated both sides of the campaign.²

Over the two weeks covered by this study, between 18 November and 2 December 1992, Irish daily newspapers showed great differences in the importance given to the referendum. While *The Irish Times*, for example, dedicated four editorials exclusively to it, and *The Cork Examiner* three, *The Irish Press* only mentioned it on three occasions, *The Star* once and *The Irish Independent* not at all. This variation in the importance given to the event is also reflected in the occurrences on the front page or the number of articles, especially of opinion, as the following table reveals:

2 The third proposal of the 1992 referendum stated that "it shall be unlawful to terminate the life of an unborn unless such termination is necessary to save the life as distinct from the health of the mother where there is an illness or disorder of the mother giving rise to a real and substantive risk to her life not being a risk of self-destruction." Unlike the first two amendments, which were approved by 62.3% and 60% of the voters, respectively, the third proposal was rejected by 65.4%.

Table 1: Front pages, editorials and articles devoted to the referendum on abortion by Irish morning newspapers between Wednesday, 18 November 1992, and Wednesday, 2 December 1992

Title (Year of foundation)	Circulation (July-Dec 1992)	Issues analysed	Abortion on front page	Editorials on abor- tion	Total articles on abortion (information/opinion)
<i>Irish Inde- pendent</i> (1905)	149 000	13	4	-	29 (26/3)
<i>Irish Times</i> (1859)	93 000	13	6	4	41 (33/8)
<i>Star</i> (1988)	85 000	13	-	1	7 (6/1)
<i>Cork Ex- aminer</i> (1841)	56 000	13	6	3	22 (16/6)
<i>Irish Press</i> (1931)	50 000	13	1	3 (mentioned)	17 (10/7)

First of all, we can suggest two reasons why *The Irish Times* was the Irish newspaper to give greatest emphasis to the referendum on abortion. On the one hand, and from a journalistic point of view, this newspaper has always given great importance to its public mission, which was, for example, made official by its Memorandum of Association in 1974.³ On the other hand, according to *The Irish Times*, what was at stake on a more political level, was much more than abortion. In the name of progress, maturity, and honesty, the newspaper urged its readers to accept the first two amendments, but refuse the third:

There is much to be learned from our EC neighbours who [...] have put in place a legislation which spells out precisely the circumstances [– not least the time limits –] within which abortion may be available. This is the route of maturity and honesty, and it is the route most likely to ensure the rights of women to health and to life. The first step in that direction is to vote the approval of the amendments on travel and information on Wednesday, while voting no to the third proposal. (*Irish Times*, editorial, 21 Nov 1992)

On the whole, while giving clear instructions to its readers through its editorials (as it had on other moral issues, but not for general elections in the previous thirty years), *The Irish Times* obviously strove to bring the issue into the public debate, to give voice to both sides of the question and to provide its readers with documents de-

3 Article 2, (d), (ii), C (1), (2) & (3) of the Memorandum of the Association of the Irish Times Trust Company established in 1974 reads as follows: “The objects for which the company is established are [...] in pursuance of the foregoing end and to enable the readers of *The Irish Times* to reach informed and independent judgements and to contribute more effectively to the life of the community to ensure that the following principles govern the publication of *The Irish Times*: (1) that news shall be as accurate and as comprehensive as is practicable and be presented fairly; (2) that comment and opinion shall be informed and responsible and shall be identifiable from fact; (3) that special consideration shall be given to the reasonable representation of minority interests and divergent views.”

signed to help them understand the issues involved - for example, a guide entitled "From Conception to Birth" or "A Voting Guide on the Three Issues in the Three Referenda" (*Irish Times*, weekend supplement, 21 Nov 1992). By doing so, the editors obviously seized the opportunity of the referendum to reinforce the reputation of the *Times* as a quality newspaper or a newspaper of record.

The Irish Press, although it was already going through serious difficulties which would eventually lead to its closing down three years later, sought to play the part that was assigned to it by Eamon de Valera in 1931: of representing de Valera's vision of Ireland as rural, Gaelic, Catholic, and republican. While concentrating on the general election, in which it urged its readers to vote Fianna Fáil, the editors of *The Irish Press* approached the issues of the referendum from the stated conviction that "abortion in any but exceptional cases is abhorrent to most Irish people. [...] A vote for the amendment will [...] ensure that abortion cannot become widely available" (*Irish Press*, editorial, 25 Nov 1992).

The Irish Independent showed a degree of indifference to the referendum and chose instead to concentrate on the general election, probably because it was considered much more likely to attract readers. It gave, for example, great emphasis to the polemic between leaders of Fine Gael and Labour about who should be the next Taoiseach.⁴ It was not likely, therefore, to have had much influence on the outcome of the referendum other than by encouraging a general indifference in its readers.

The same could be said of *The Star*, Ireland's only tabloid daily newspaper, which was also partly owned by Independent Newspapers (as well as by Britain's Express group).⁵ Apparently, the issue of abortion was no longer as important for the selling of newspapers as the general election. For both of these titles, the questions of who would win/lose and who had won/lost were much more newsworthy than trying to evaluate the positions on a complex moral issue which puzzled most readers.

In the end, the biggest surprise probably came from *The Cork Examiner*, the Republic of Ireland's oldest daily paper. Besides giving more importance to the referendum on abortion than most of its rivals, *The Cork Examiner* did its best to make up for the lack of information and consequent confusion among the voters. However, what was most striking was that it denounced the referendum in all of its three editorials on the subject. Its editor, Fergus O'Callaghan, also showed great clear-sightedness by ending his comment of the results with this prediction: "We could be facing into a third referendum in something like ten years" (*Cork Examiner*, editorial, 27 Nov 1992).

Indeed, a second referendum on abortion was to take place in March 2002, although in quite a different context. Following the narrow 'Yes to Divorce' in November 1995,⁶

4 In the end, however, it was neither John Bruton nor Dick Spring, but Albert Reynolds who was elected.

5 Property of Richard Desmond since 2000.

6 Yes: 50.3%, No: 49.7%.

the debate on abortion was reopened in 1997 with the C Case, when a teenager, pregnant after a rape, was allowed to travel to the United Kingdom for an abortion against her parents' will. In the following years, Bertie Ahern's Fianna Fáil government prepared the ground for a new referendum on abortion, which was finally announced in October 2001. Supported by the Catholic Church and the pro-life movement, Bertie Ahern personally committed himself to the campaign, while all the other parties as well as the Alliance for a 'No' vote, an umbrella group for several political and civil groups, and other associations⁷ supported the 'No.' The referendum proposed to remove the threat of suicide as a ground for abortion, but, unlike in 1992, it did not coincide with a general election. This probably put greater responsibility on the press since the mobilisation of the public seemed very low from the beginning. As far as their coverage of the event is concerned, the newspapers more or less doubled the space they devoted to the referendum.

Table 2: Front pages, editorials and articles devoted to the referendum on abortion by Irish morning newspapers between Wednesday, 27 February 2002, and Wednesday, 13 March 2002

Title	Circulation (January-June 2002)	Issues analysed	Abortion on front page	Editorials on abortion	Total articles on abortion (information/opinion)
<i>Irish Independent</i>	170 000	13	5	1	73 (66/7)
<i>Irish Times</i>	120 000	13	7	4	84 (60/24)
<i>Star</i>	105 000	13	1	2	15 (13/2)
<i>Irish Examiner</i>	64 000	13	5	3	41 (25/16)

In the absence of *The Irish Press*, I will begin with *The Irish Independent*. Although it did not dedicate a single editorial and only one front page to abortion during the week preceding the referendum, it did give it one full-page report every day. On the whole, however, it seemed too busy reporting rapes, sex abuses, assaults, and murders to give abortion more than an accumulation of snippets of news – what John Merrill once called “supermarket journalism”: a little bit of everything for everybody (Merrill, 6). In particular, great importance was given to the rapist involved in the X case in 1992, who was again sentenced for other sexual assaults ten years later.

The most interesting characteristic of *The Independent's* coverage, however, lies in its sudden change of attitude from polling day onwards. First of all, on the day of the

7 Such as the Irish Family Planning Association, the National Women's Council of Ireland, or the Mother and Child Campaign.

referendum, it dedicated almost half of its front page to the photograph of a dog with the title: “One Dog One Vote: Now Charlie is a Ballot Boxer,” after a dog received a polling card bearing its name. Beyond being provocatively trivial, the choice of this news for a front page on such a day may be interpreted as: what is the point of talking about abortion to people who want to hear about something else? Obviously, while *The Independent* must have felt it could not possibly avoid mentioning the referendum, it deliberately chose to make as light of it as possible. As if to confirm this logic of entertainment, on the day the results came out, *The Independent*, after a week of indifference, suddenly put great emphasis on the referendum. On Friday, 8 March 2002, for instance, most of the front page was about the victory of the ‘No,’ under the huge title “Backlash for Bertie.” Above all, only then did *The Independent* dedicate an editorial to the vote putting the blame on the government, reporting that “the demand for another poll was a figment of politicians’ and campaigners’ imagination” (*Irish Independent*, editorial, 8 March 2002). Accordingly, no less than seven full pages – 30 articles – gave every possible detail about the results and the leaders’ reactions. Rather than the satisfaction of seeing the personal defeat of a Taoiseach whom *The Independent* supported in the 1997 election,⁸ this sudden interest may be explained by finally having the opportunity to put a face on the ‘Yes’ campaign and to criticise a personality rather than evaluate a moral issue.

On the whole, *The Independent’s* attitude over the two weeks seemed to rely on a typical characteristic of the so-called sensationalist press: exploiting people’s emotions afterwards instead of trying to shape their opinions beforehand. In doing this, *The Independent* was not very far from *The Star*, which, however, gave somewhat more importance to the referendum than ten years earlier. This time, it dedicated two editorials to it (on the day of the vote and of the results) and its front page after the results (with the headline “Oh NO Bertie”). To be fair, however, some credit must be given to *The Star* for encouraging its readers to “make their voices heard,” as its editorial stated on voting day, when they were obviously not the most likely to be interested in this issue. In a more sensationalist style, *The Star* did the same as *The Independent* by focusing on personalities rather than on ideas, as can be deduced from both newspapers’ habit of calling politicians by their first names among others.

As in 1992, *The Irish Times’* coverage of the 2002 referendum was quite different. First of all, it devoted four of its editorials (two during the previous week, one on polling day and one on the day of the results) and seven consecutive front pages to the issue. Again, this is in no way surprising for a newspaper which had always given great importance to moral issues and, once again, took the opportunity to put in practice its motto: “to give our readers a reasonably complete service not only of the news they want to hear but of the news which we think they should hear.”⁹ One could ar-

8 By means of a famous front-page editorial on polling day, which declared: “It’s payback time!”

9 Extract from *The Irish Times’* editorial in its centenary edition (8 June 1959).

gue, of course, that a comparative analysis shows a real correspondence between the profile of the readers of *The Irish Times* and of the so-called liberal electorate and that it is easier for *The Irish Times* than for any of its rivals to insist on serious issues without risking to put off its readers. Nonetheless, it is true that as far as the 2002 referendum was concerned, it did make a particular effort not only to bring the issue to the forefront of public debate, but also to cover both sides of the campaign – for example by showing, on the same page, two doctors defending opposing views (4 March 2002) and on another the Taoiseach defending the ‘Yes,’ while a former Taoiseach, Garret Fitzgerald, explained his reasons to vote ‘No’ (2 March 2002). In addition, we should not forget that *The Irish Times* came closest to giving precise voting instructions to its readers – although not as openly as in 1992 – by warning them against the dangers of a ‘Yes’ vote: “Ireland’s time-honoured, hypocritical policy of pass-the-parcel would continue. [...] It would extend the fudge, enshrining it in the Constitution” (2 March 2002). After the results – a very close victory of the ‘No’¹⁰ – *The Irish Times* did not hide its satisfaction of seeing “hardline conservatism vanquished as never before,” to quote Fintan O’Toole (5 March 2002). There is no doubt that the newspaper thought it had played an important part in what it presented as the victory of progress over obscurantism.

However, calling on its readers to do their citizens’ duty and trying to help them make up their minds is – at least in the context of the 2002 referendum – not only the privilege of *The Irish Times*. Indeed, *The Examiner*, now known as *The Irish Examiner*,¹¹ also played its part as a potential actor in public life in its own way – more humbly and in a less sophisticated manner. While not giving the referendum as much coverage as *The Irish Times*, it did bring it to its readers’ attention, not least by publishing no less than sixteen opinion articles over two weeks – an impressive total in comparison with the *The Independent’s* seven. Above all, as ten years earlier, it gave great emphasis to the confusion felt by the electorate, blaming both the lack of information given to the public and the divisions within the medical profession, the churches, and even parties. While urging its readers on the eve of the referendum to vote (in its editorial entitled “Go Out and Vote,” 5 March 2002), it explained that

in keeping with the long-established policy of this newspaper, we do not presume to tell our readers which way to vote on this complex political and moral question. On the contrary, by commenting on the eve of such a crucial vote, our aim is to inform voters, to help people make up their own minds, so that they can vote according to their convictions.

Besides, it is probably in *The Examiner* that we can find the most realistic and sensible conclusion: “Whatever its outcome, it is painfully clear the referendum will not stop a

10 Yes: 49,6 %; No: 50,4 %.

11 The newspaper first changed its title from *Cork Examiner* to *Examiner* in 1996, to *Irish Examiner* in 2000, in order to reflect a growing national dimension. In spite of these changes, over 95% of *The Irish Examiner’s* readers in 2002 came from the Munster region.

single Irish woman from going to England for an abortion, a tragic journey undertaken by thousands every year" (*Irish Examiner*, editorial, 6 March 2002).

What conclusions should we draw from this brief study of the attitudes of Irish daily newspapers at the time of the two referenda on abortion of November 1992 and March 2002? First of all, although I have tried to avoid resorting to the usual clichés and stereotypes often applied to Irish newspapers (*The Irish Times* is 'good,' *The Irish Independent* is 'not so good,' *The Star* is 'even worse,' *The Irish Press* is 'partisan,' and *The Examiner* is 'provincial'), each newspaper seemed to reveal quite a lot about itself. The independent newspapers, for example, proved to be "commercially rather than politically or ideologically driven," to quote an expression used by John Horgan (Horgan 51). After all, both obviously have to follow a logic of entertainment. *The Irish Press* has, once again, shown that it may have had "its finger on the pulse of ordinary people," as its last editor, Hugh Lambert, once put it (Kenny 157), but its main objective nonetheless remained propaganda. In the end, only the widely respected *Irish Times* and, in a more unexpected way, *The Examiner*, may be said to have fulfilled their role as platforms for debate and forum of opinions, by basing their coverage of the referenda on ideas and issues and not merely on facts, and by refusing to give up any attempt at reflection for the sake of entertainment. My point has neither been to present an elitist and Manichaeian view of the press of the Republic of Ireland, nor to argue that every newspaper should be an intellectual institution rather than a commercial undertaking. Instead, I have tried to show that, considering that two out of three national newspapers sold every day in Ireland are now controlled by the same group¹² and given the circulation of Irish versions of British tabloids (which do not seem to bother much about their contribution to the public debate),¹³ maintaining a capacity to live up to their social responsibilities may represent the greatest challenge of Irish daily newspapers in the future.

12 Tony O'Reilly's Independent News and Media owns *The Irish Independent*, *The Evening Herald* and half of *The Star*, which together represented 64.6% of the total circulation of Irish newspapers between January and June 2003, or 48.8% including British newspapers on sale in Ireland.

13 For instance, between January and June 2003, 79,000 for *The Irish Mirror* and 114,000 for *The Irish Sun* against 63,000 and 77,000, respectively, in 1996. On the whole, over 30% of daily newspapers sold in the Republic of Ireland in 2003 were British.

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FAITH AND RESPONSIBILITY IN CONTEMPORARY IRELAND

Catherine Mignant

Jesus says, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Mt 19: 17). Commenting on The Dialogue of Jesus with the Rich Man in his 1993 encyclical letter entitled *Veritatis Splendor*, Pope John Paul II warns that if no-one can "escape from the fundamental question: what must I do? How do I distinguish good from evil?," the only possible answer must be through obedience to the truth of Christ. He goes on to say that "in order to make this 'encounter' with Christ possible, God willed his church" and that only the respect of the Church's moral teaching will ensure man's salvation as well as freedom (*Veritatis Splendor* 1-3). "The moral life," he argues,

presents itself as the response due to the many gratuitous initiatives taken by God out of love for man. It is a response of love, according to the statement made in Deuteronomy about the fundamental commandment: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children' (Dt 6: 4-7). (*Veritatis Splendor* 4)

Trying to define the meaning of 'religion,' Jacques Derrida suggests that it is precisely the function of religion to provide *the* ultimate answer to all questions man may ask himself. No response, however, is possible unless a legitimate authority prescribes in an absolute truth this response on the basis of a sworn faith. The Latin *respondeo*, from which the term 'response' is derived, means to provide an answer, to be worthy of and to pledge oneself in return. The term is therefore closely associated with the notion of obligation and akin to that of responsibility, which is derived from the same Latin word. To Derrida, religion means responsibility since it implies a promise of truth and the presence of God who is the (absent) witness of that truth. "Si peu qu'on sache de la religion," he comments, "on sait qu'elle est toujours la réponse et la responsabilité prescrite, elle ne se choisit pas librement en un acte de pure et abstraite volonté autonome" (Derrida 44-45, 53-54).

Attempting to define the concept of responsibility in the contemporary religious context is, however, no easy task. Indeed, Derrida's theory suggests a reciprocal obligation of the type induced by the parable analysed by Pope John Paul II in the above-mentioned encyclical. According to Catholic teaching, both the Creator and the creature are answerable to each other through the intermediary of the Church. There can be no distinction between morality and faith and no questioning of the legitimacy of the Church's authority. It seems, however, that nowadays such an understanding of religious responsibility is challenged in Western societies, as many within and outside Christian circles denounce the excessive authority of the churches as depriving men

of their innate freedom and condemning them to absolute irresponsibility. Ronald Hutton, Professor of History at the University of Bristol and (obviously sympathetic) specialist of the contemporary neo-pagan movement in England, thus argues:

I think that neo-paganism appeals to a certain type of individual, which means that its catchment areas is both going to be big and going to be limited.

It doesn't, for example, attract (in some ways it actively excludes) the sort of person who feels completely personally disempowered, trashed by life, broken, and is seeking for a higher force on which to rely totally. That sort of person would go to the kind of religion that tells you you are nothing, that their deity is everything, and you should lose yourself entirely and service the deity and thereby be rebuilt.

Modern paganisms depend very heavily upon people who are very independent minded, pretty self-confident, anxious to express their own creativity, and deeply resentful of an authority that makes claims based upon the past or upon superhuman forces that can't be substantiated or practised. (Hutton 6)

Such a critical attitude is not restricted to neo-pagans. It appears that the purpose of *Veritatis Splendor* is precisely to warn Catholics and non-Catholics alike of the dangers of a free interpretation of the Church's teachings, which may lead to a questioning of "the intrinsic and unbreakable bond between faith and morality":

At the root of these presuppositions is the more or less obvious influence of currents of thought which end by detaching human freedom from its essential and constitutive relationship to truth. Thus the traditional doctrine regarding the natural law, and the universality and the permanent validity of its precepts, is rejected; certain of the Church's moral teachings are found simply unacceptable; and the Magisterium itself is considered capable of intervening in matters of morality only in order to 'exhort consciences' and to 'propose values,' in the light of which each individual will independently make his or her decisions and life choices. (*Veritatis Splendor* 2)

It seems in fact that the questions of individual responsibility and personal understanding of truth stand at the very heart of postmodern religiosity. The question which can be raised as a consequence is that of the effects of the evolution of the representation of responsibility in connection with religion in our ultra-individualistic age. Examining the case of the Republic of Ireland, this paper will argue that a re-definition, if not a re-invention, of religion may very well become necessary in the short run.

Ireland is undeniably part of the global religious village in spite of its long-lasting attachment to Catholic orthodoxy. As early as 1988, Christian Churches collaborated to launch Dialogue Ireland, an organisation designed to react against the proliferation of new religious movements of all kinds, from sects to Eastern philosophies but also New Age and neo-pagan groups, among others. Their ambition was, and still is, to keep up to date with the development of such movements, to establish contact and initiate dialogue with adepts, and to "provide pastoral support to members and former members of NRMs and their families according to their needs."

Much more worrying to the Catholic Church are no doubt the results of the European Values Survey 1999/2000, which more than confirm those of the second wave survey of 1990. Church attendance has indeed dropped more in Ireland than anywhere else

in Western Europe. As concerns shift in church legitimacy, Ireland is again the country of western Europe where confidence in the Church has most dropped. It thus appears that fewer and fewer people consider that the Church gives adequate answers to moral problems, family problems, people's spiritual needs and social problems. Religiosity, however, remains quite high by European standards, and the number of non-religious persons has dropped. Permissiveness has also slightly increased, even if it remains at a relatively low level when compared with other countries. All in all, however, all data point to a decrease in the influence of the Catholic Church's teachings on people's lives, even if atheism remains extremely limited. As in 1990, there seems to be no connection between the loss of confidence in the church and any significant decrease in religiosity.

As early as 1994, the Irish Theological Commission noted:

The New Age challenges the Church to look at the way she serves people. [...] For if she does not meet the real needs of believers, people will go outside the Church. This is demonstrated by the fact that many are turning to new ways to get help and are finding that the 'New World Servers' are only too willing to respond. (Irish Theological Commission 1)

The Commission's proposal, however, did not go beyond a critical analysis of New Age postulates, followed by defence of the Catholic creed based on the belief in an eternal truth dictated by God and in "the reality of sin which Christ had come to overcome" (Irish Theological Commission 1). Official documents later issued by the Catholic Church confirmed that no compromise was possible in the field of absolute truth. In his 1998 encyclical letter entitled *Fides et ratio*, John Paul II thus proclaimed that in an age when "the search for the ultimate truth seems often to be neglected" (*Fides et ratio* 9), there was no option left for him but to reaffirm that "dogmatic statements, while reflecting at times the culture of the period in which they were defined, formulate an unchanging and ultimate truth" (*Fides et ratio* 138). In the same way, the report on the New Age phenomenon released by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in 2003, while confirming the Irish Theological Commission's 1994 diagnosis,¹ still persevered in its determination to correct mistaken assumptions about the Christian message (Pontifical Council 6). Whereas, however, the Irish Theological Commission set itself the task to "refute encircling errors" in the hope of letting "the radiant fullness of Catholic faith speak for itself" (1), the Council for Interreligious Dialogue now seeks to understand and suggest compromise, in a context where the Church actually "need[s] to resist the pressure of the dominant culture." "Emphasising what is lacking in other approaches should not be the main priority," the Commission states, "[i]t is more a question of constantly revisiting the sources of our own faith, so that we can offer a good, sound presentation of the Christian message" (Pontifical Council 34).

1 "People feel the Christian religion no longer offers them – or perhaps never gave them – something they really need" (Pontifical Council 6).

Times have changed. Even in the Irish Church, not everyone has actually been able to resist the pressure and many have put forward views which fully justify John Paul II's comment that

[n]ote should be taken of the lack of harmony between the traditional response of the Church and certain theological positions, encountered even in seminaries and in Faculties of Theology, with regard to questions of the greatest importance for the Church and for the life of faith of Christians, as well as for the life of society itself. (*Veritatis Splendor* 2)

As an observer notes, Glenstal Abbey thus intriguingly seems to attract young men to the monastic life more than any other monastery in Ireland, because "the monks [...] have managed to reinvent themselves very well." It may be so because they are allowed "a lot of freedom." After doing the rounds of religious orders, young William Fennelly eventually chose Glenstal, because, as he says, "I feel that they don't pretend to possess the truth. It suits my own approach to how people relate to God" (Andrews). To Mark Patrick Hederman, who has been a monk at Glenstal for several decades, "despotism itself" (Hederman 34) is wrong and does not correspond to what God ordained. Catholic ethics as still understood by the ecclesiastical authorities "must inevitably prove inadequate," since "[i]t proposes a morality that fails to comprehend what we are as human beings. It neither asks nor answers the right questions" (Hederman 35). He continues to say that "such a morality must cease to be an 'asceticism of punitive discipline'" (Hederman 35). To philosopher and theologian P.J. McGrath, a former lecturer at Maynooth, the very notion of Church infallibility is ludicrous. "Infallibility," he argues, "will provide certainty only if one is already certain, not merely that the Church is infallible, but also as to where one finds the infallible voice of the Church. [...] Who in the Church is infallible? In what circumstances? Concerning what subject-matter?" (McGrath 95). And he concludes: "Fallible man cannot be provided with an absolute assurance against error" (McGrath 97).

The question of the infallibility of the Church is a very serious one if we consider that what is at stake is the legitimacy of Church authority. If several understandings of the Scriptures are possible, the very notion of absolute and ultimate truth loses much of its credibility, which, in turn, justifies the loosening of the bonds of obedience that have held the Catholic Church together for centuries. Besides, as has amply been demonstrated above, the response that the Church offers no longer seems to satisfy the needs of the faithful. Why then should the latter endorse the responsibility to perpetuate a moral teaching that has such shaky foundations? Why should they accept responsibility for acts that are condemned by traditional morality but may be seen as acceptable according to other criteria?

To Mark Hederman, the fundamental mistake of the Church was to misunderstand what God expected of man. What was subsequently denied to man was the right to

be human. His animality was condemned and divine perfection was the model set before his eyes. This, he says, was particularly true in Ireland:

Something in the Irish temperament, something about our geographical isolation, something about our historical circumstances, caused a symbiotic alignment between the newly emerging Irish Republic and such angelic idealism. It was a conspiracy of wishful thinking and desire to control an otherwise irrepressible reality. It is the almost irresistible temptation of fascism when faced with anarchy. It demands order, hierarchy, central government. It arranges everything according to its own categories of superiority. Everything must lead step by step to the highest point, which must be singular and from which must flow all legitimation and authority. The one point that remains is invested with totalitarian power over all the others. (Hederman 34)

The result was the coming into existence of a “schizoid culture” founded on the great divide between “spirit and flesh, soul and body, mind and matter, heaven and earth,” but also male and female and, even more, good and evil, right and wrong. All this fundamentally goes against the message of God, for “as one of the first Christian teachers, Irenaeus, born in 130, put it: ‘The Glory of God is humanity fully alive’” (Hederman 28). This, in turn, means accepting human diversity and accepting to be oneself. That is the best way to honour God, who never asked us to be anyone but ourselves. Hederman then concludes that man must learn to accept the darkest parts of his personality as God-given and he goes so far as to question the notion that if you do not conform to traditional moral prescriptions you will be punished for eternity (Hederman 31).

This view is no doubt echoed by those outside the Church who have opted for a more personal understanding of religious feeling whatever their affiliation. Distinctions between good and evil have become blurred, belief in hell and the devil as well as in the notion of sin have lost considerable ground and becoming reconciled with one’s own nature has become a priority. Feeling good in body and mind has become a central preoccupation, hence the fashion of yoga, reflexology, and acupuncture, which were all listed by the Irish Theological Commission as part of the New Age problem as early as 1994. Dialogue Ireland, for its part, also mentions the enigmatic Tony Quinn as a New Age guru who offers courses in yoga and holistic medicine in thirty centres across Ireland. Reconciliation with one’s sexuality is also on the agenda of most neo-pagan groups, whether Wiccan or neo-Celtic.

In 1994, The Irish Theological Commission sought to demonise new religious movements by denouncing what its report called “the Lucifer connection.” The more balanced report of the Council for Interreligious Dialogue, whilst regretting the past systematic demonisation of new religious perceptions stresses that the “exaltation of humanity overturns the correct relationship between Creator and creature, [...] one of its extreme forms [being] satanism.” But what is perceived as a central difficulty in any attempt at initiating dialogue with the members of these groups is mostly, among other things, their rejection of the notion of sin and the absence of revelation and salvation.

Far from being attributable to any form of actual satanism, latent hostility to Church authority is no doubt connected with the desire of human beings to be reconciled with their nature. Moral relativism and the polytheism of values, which are characteristic of the postmodern age, are a privileged expression of man's desire to accomplish his humanity fully, which implies taking advantage of his innate freedom. As Christian churches in general and the Catholic Church in particular systematically tried to deny man's humanity, it has become common to seek religious models in oriental philosophies or in archaic societies. In this manner, French sociologist Michel Maffesoli argues that contemporary society seeks to redeem life and its diversity, even in its most sulphurous aspects:

Contre le progressisme judéo-chrétien, s'employant à expliquer (ex-plicare, enlever les plis) toutes choses, s'affirme une pensée 'progressive,' sagesse impliquant toutes les manières d'être et de penser, impliquant l'altérité, impliquant l'errance. Voilà bien la mutation post-moderne, celle qui accepte les 'plis' des archaïsmes prémodernes. (Maffesoli, *La part 15*)

Restoring human nature to favour also means accepting that man is more than simply endowed with reason. Imposing the notion of an absolute truth defined by God was a way for Christianity to rationalise religious feeling and to deny the validity of individual human perceptions. Based on personal imagination and experience these were indeed a threat to the institution which feared to lose control: man's animality had to be curbed at all costs for order to be maintained in the community formed by the faithful. Yet modern anthropologists and biologists have demonstrated that imagination stands at the core of human greatness. Pope John Paul II is right to lay the blame for disobedience on scientific discoveries when he notes that even within Church circles, "it is no longer a matter of limited and occasional dissent, but an overall and systematic calling into question of traditional moral doctrine, on the basis of certain anthropological and ethical presuppositions" (*Veritatis Splendor* 2). Indeed, contemporary anthropologists actually insist on the innate duality of man. In his magisterial study of human nature, which he significantly calls *Le paradigme perdu* ('the lost paradigm'), Edgar Morin thus argues that *homo sapiens* is also *homo demens* and that it is precisely this capacity to go beyond rationality which has allowed the extraordinary development of the human species. Imagination plays a key role in defining human perceptions of reality. To Morin, religious feeling itself, the origin of which is to be found in the necessity for *sapiens* to be reconciled with death, must be understood as a response provided by imagination to unbearable grief and unacceptable loss. Reality and illusion, objective truth and myth thus go hand in hand, as do absence and presence, or life and death, which are believed to be one due to man's inner duality (Morin 107-26).

Some biologists' recent conclusions confirm such assertions. Thus, in their controversial book entitled *Why God Won't Go Away*, American brain specialists Andrew Newberg and Eugene D'Aquili argue that religious ecstasy produces visible alterations in some areas of the brain, which justify the feeling mystics have of union with

the divine.² This, however, is not to say that men necessarily imagine or invent their gods, and the two scientists' theory can be reconciled with religious belief if we admit that if a divine spirit exists, the only way he can make himself known to human beings is through their brain. In the same way as quantum physics demonstrates that the human brain builds its own reality, this theory establishes that there can be no representation of God or the divine outside the human brain. Such hypotheses clearly support the views of progressive Christians such as Mark Hederman or of most adepts of new religious movements, who are convinced that God can be found inside man. Responsibility to God is therefore primarily responsibility to man, individual responsibility towards oneself or the divine in oneself. Such perceptions lend little credibility to the existence of a transcendental personal God represented by an authoritarian human institution feeling responsible to the community rather than to the individual, whose divine nature it denies. To the Council for Interreligious Dialogue, such reconciliation between science and religion is a result of the "tendency to interchange psychology and spirituality, which developed from the end of the 1960s." It is also to be connected with "transpersonal psychology, strongly influenced by Eastern religions and by Jung," which "offers a contemplative journey where science meets mysticism" (Pontifical Council 14).

Rejecting Christian moral teachings also necessarily means rejecting its patriarchal interpretation of the society willed by God. New religious tendencies aim to give women the place they deserve in contemporary society. Wiccan covens, and also, perhaps more surprisingly, neo-Celtic groups insist on the existence of a male spirit and a female spirit as the fundamental deities that should be venerated. Apart from what remain minority communities in Ireland, some Catholic feminists have taken an active part in the attempt at modernising Church teaching as concerns the place of women both inside Irish society and inside the Church. For instance, Clare Murphy, a member of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, based in Dublin, published a book significantly entitled *Woman as Church*, in which she defends the view that feminism is a fundamentally Christian movement and that "the rejection of patriarchy includes the search for a new morality, not an acceptance of immorality" (Murphy 25). To Mark Hederman, each individual has both male and female characteristics anyway, which must also be accepted as part of our human nature. "It is understandable," he says,

that we try to hide the evidence, bury the body and throw the alarm-clock down the stairs, which must be part of the motivation to obliterate the 'feminine' both in ourselves and in itself, because it prevents us from being hard, durable and immortal diamonds, embodying, as it does, what is soft, tender, ephemeral. [...] Whatever the explanations, it is true that our culture and so-called 'civilisation' have undervalued and degraded the

2 "Les faits donnent à penser que les origines les plus profondes de la religion se fondent sur l'expérience mystique, et que les religions persistent parce que les connexions du cerveau humain continuent de fournir aux croyants une gamme d'expériences unitaires qui sont souvent interprétées comme des assurances que Dieu existe" (Newberg et al. 190-1).

feminine, both as part of each one of us and as incarnated in over fifty percent of the human race registered as human. And this balance has to be restored. (Hederman 57)

Talking about neo-paganism, Ronald Hutton denies that searching for a new form of spirituality is an escape from the Age of Reason. To him, it is even "quite reasonable in itself." Indeed,

[i]t's a reaction to an oppressive social morality that limited how people could express themselves, and particularly damned things like human sexuality as something sinful and fearful. It was a reaction to a social system which disempowered women in spiritual and very often in social and political terms. (Hutton 3)

But it is even more than that: "it's a reaction to urbanisation and industrialisation which makes people value the world of nature as something precious and lovable, and perishable, rather than something dominant and frightening that you need to propitiate" (Hutton 3). In the name of nature, the divine and divinely-inspired individual thus has a responsibility both towards the creature and Creation. Not only is ecology part and parcel of contemporary religious thinking, but preserving the earth is considered as the primary religious responsibility of humanity. "A big priority for me is healing the land," writes an Irish Shaman. "I asked my power animal recently," she continues, "[...] was there any message it wanted me to impart. The answer was very simple: tell people to honour the Land" ("Irish Shamanism" 3). The neo-pagan Celtic Coven of the Dagda's Cauldron for its part claims: "We believe modern paganism as a phenomenon is no accident. After experimenting with patriarchal religions and industrialisation there has come a genetical racial call in our species to return to the Garden." Webmaster Peter Doyle then goes on to say: "Evolution has allowed us to stand above all species on the globe. This is a great gift but with this gift has come a terrible responsibility to cherish, respect and maintain in so far as we can the denizens of our natural environment" ("Paganism and Conservation" 1). The head of the Irish school of witchcraft, based in Castlepook near Mallow, Co. Cork, agrees, when he states "magic is about tuning into nature and taking the time to say thank you to the world around us" (Lister). The Catholic Church has also been marginally contaminated, as the development of eco-theological thinking demonstrates. To Catholic priest and eco-theologian Daniel O'Leary, to whom the Gaia theory obviously appeals, it is thus necessary today to recover the lost feeling that we belong to the world created by God and that we wrongly assumed we had a right to dominate (O'Leary 182-98). Father Seán McDonagh, for his part, wishes the Church realised the importance of the rhythms of the Earth and the Cosmos (O'Leary, 195). Sister Stanislaus Kennedy comes close to defending the cult of Mother Earth when she claims: "Now is the time to revere the earth as our mother and the sky as our father" (Kennedy 44).

However, the Catholic Church's official position about ecology is far less enthusiastic, especially as "deep ecology" serves the theory justifying the belief in the possibility of human union with the cosmos resulting in divine cosmic unity (Pontifical Council 15-17). Another type of criticism which the Church addresses to what the members of

the Council for Interreligious Dialogue see as a new form of gnosis concerns the ultra-individualistic nature of religious quest. This is a spirituality “of the self” and “for the self,” a form of “philosophy of egoism” (Pontifical Council 18-19). This approach to the sacred is a personal response to personal problems and as such implies the individual responsibility of oneself towards oneself. Religion should be understood as providing a collective response to a situation affecting the community, in the hope of serving the community. The question which is raised is the following: can an authentic religion exist outside collective responsibility (notably understood in social terms), which implies authority and discipline? To Eoin Cassidy, a senior lecturer in philosophy at the Mater Dei Institute, the answer is clearly in the negative. Religion should not be understood as “a form of escapism” (Cassidy 61).

According to the accepted definition of ‘religion’ based on tradition, authority, and obedience to that authority, no self-legitimised belief or religiosity/spirituality can be given the name of religion. Yet, the latter seem to correspond to the needs of an important proportion of our contemporaries, as is made obvious by the success of such books as John O’Donoghue’s world best-sellers (*Anam Chara* in particular) or Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist*. Our day and age is characterised by the longing for a God of love provided with infinite healing powers, who can reconcile us with our lives and ourselves. The quest is unsatisfactory and therefore endless, since only loosely coherent New Religious Movements are prepared to accept the notion of self-defined and self-legitimised creeds and practices.

The issue that postmodern religiosity raises is in fact clearly that of the individual’s relationship to authority, legitimacy, and responsibility. Sociologist Alain Ehrenberg’s classic study of the nervous breakdown in contemporary society shows that it is the pathological answer to life in a society in which “norm is no longer based on guilt and discipline, but on responsibility and initiative” (Ehrenberg 16). Some people, it seems, simply cannot cope.

In the religious field, those who reject the teaching and the authority of the Church are desperately seeking for a tradition that might legitimise their beliefs. In recent years, under the influence of the so-called reconstructionists, an attempt has thus been made in neo-pagan circles to research into the roots of their beliefs. To them, lack of serious scholarship has been detrimental to the credibility of neo-paganism, as has fanciful embellishment of non-historical traditions (in the case of Wicca, for instance). Seeking to create the sense of a community and thus providing a convincing response to people’s quests, committed neo-pagans now plead for “authenticity,” which is one of the keys to credibility. A Celtic neo-pagan thus writes: “While acknowledging that spirituality is an individual matter, it is important to remember that people representing themselves as experts and spiritual guides have a responsibility to clearly differentiate between facts and conjecture” (“Neo-Paganism” 3). Inventing one’s spirituality is one thing, creating a religious community is another. In the absence of a dogma by which a group of people could abide, it is extremely difficult to

create the sense of a community. The veneration of individual autonomy and human diversity as well as the belief in human fallibility³ complicate matters further, as does the global and syncretic nature of the creeds and religious practices involved.

The only common denominator between the members of the loosely connected postmodern tribes, as Michel Maffesoli calls them, may very well be their perception of a 'sense of place,' their adoption of a territory as central to their cultural and hence religious identity. "Le lieu fait lien," he says and thus creates a community (Maffesoli, *Notes* 70-76). Dialogue Ireland notes that "due to its Celtic origins, Ireland is fast becoming the place to be for wiccans and pagans of all kinds." Ironically, if most leaders of neo-pagan Celtic groups across the world, particularly in the United States, are of Irish origin, most of those based in Ireland, be they neo-druidic or wiccan, are foreigners. Identification with the land is the result of individual choice and in most cases has no basis in the personal life of the people involved. In many cases, connection with the land is just as virtual as the existence of the communities themselves. Indeed, most of these communities only exist on the Internet and suffer from the fact that their members find it impossible to actually meet. Virtual religious communities of solitary cyber-faithful have so far not succeeded in providing the hoped-for response and they remain a symptom of unease and despair in a dehumanised world.

Compounding these difficulties is the fact that there are many who by seeking a legitimising tradition that might accommodate their own representation of the divine actually try to reinvent an open-minded form of Christianity. The people whom Darren Kemp calls the "Christaquarians" come from all Christian traditions but are trying to reconcile Christianity and New Age priorities (Kemp VII 15-22), much to the dismay of Christian Churches, which reject such compromises even if they acknowledge, as Dialogue Ireland puts it, that the vast majority of [New Religious] movements "were set up with good intentions" and that "in many instances, the Church has much to learn from them" (Dialogue Ireland 1). Given the context and the evolution of mentalities, even within progressive Christian circles, we may wonder if the very definition of the concept of religion may not be made to evolve under the pressure of dominant individualism, taking the form of the passionate defence of individual autonomy in all its aspects. Less than one third of the Irish now believe in a personal God. The overall European figure has dropped to 38 per cent, even though 68 per cent of Europeans claim they believe in God. The Catholic Church is right to take the threat of the New Age mentality very seriously, since it now has insidiously contaminated the mass of the faithful. All Christian churches are concerned about this phenomenon: one of its expressions in Ireland is no doubt so-called Celtic Christianity. An article published in *Christianity Today* magazine in 2000, while expressing puzzle-

3 Thus the archdruid of Ár nDraocht Féin, a neo-druidic community based in the United States, claims: "The only dogma promulgated by any group so far has been the 'Doctrine of Archdruidic Fallibility'. [...] Members of Neopagan Druid groups are encouraged to (politely) argue with their leadership to form their own opinions and special interest groups, and to communicate as much as possible with both 'insiders' and 'outsiders'."

ment at the realisation that a “web search on the word *Celtic* identified 976 sites while a similar search on *Jesus Christ* located 896,” noted that Christians had much to learn from this tradition, in that it restores “the sense of God’s loving” and “active presence” as well the sense of God’s fundamental immanence (“Saving Celtic Christianity”). Whether Christian Churches in Ireland and elsewhere want it or not, a re-definition of the essential tenets of Christianity is under way as a result of changes induced by postmodern religiosity. It must be understood as a true challenge, since it is unlikely they will be able to survive unscathed (Lenoir, 367-95). The meaning of religion has already evolved in that the pick-and-choose mentality characteristic of our time already pervades both lay and clerical approaches to Christianity. Churches provide a form of legitimacy that believers need. Yet maintaining the authority of churches in the difficult context of the twenty-first century will necessitate an effective capacity to adapt to pluralism, which goes against the core of their dogma, since they believe that they are the holders of an absolute, universal, and eternal truth. It will be their responsibility to decide whether or not they take steps to provide the response people need to feed their faith and if they are prepared to lose part of their soul in the process.

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