

Britta Olinder, Werner Huber (eds.)

PLACE AND MEMORY IN THE NEW IRELAND

Irish Studies in Europe

Edited by

Michael Böss, Werner Huber, Catherine Mignant, Hedwig Schwall

Volume

2

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IN THE NEW IRELAND**

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B.O., W.H.

INTRODUCTION

Britta Olinder

"Place and Memory in the New Ireland" was the theme of the Fifth EFACIS conference held in Gothenburg, Sweden, in December of 2005. The topic was related to the ongoing 'Memory Project' of the Nordic Irish Studies Network (NISN), which has since resulted in *Recovering Memory: Irish Representations of Past and Present*, edited by Hedda Friberg, Irene Gilsenan Nordin, and Lene Yding Pedersen (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007). One of the five sections therein explicitly deals with "Memory and Place," a nexus that seems quite natural, since these two concepts have to do with belonging and rootedness, both geographically and historically, representing two different dimensions. The question is what they mean today, in the new prosperous conditions of Ireland.

Beginning in the past, Kerby Miller's "Re-Imagining the Imaginary: A Challenge to Revisionist Mythology" explores different interpretations of Irish history including separate Protestant identities, causes, and consequences of Irish emigration, and Irish relationships, past and present, to empire and imperialism. His main argument is that Revisionist mythology has simplified and distorted the facts and that the Two Traditions paradigm does not promote full understanding, neither of the Irish past nor of its present situation. Hence, he claims that the long-suppressed voices of the Ulster Protestant victims of the Famine must be recovered and "in the process we may learn that the Two Traditions paradigm offers no more infallible guide to Ireland's future than it does to Ulster's past."

Continuing on an historical note in "Reconstructed Memory: Irish Emigrant Letters from the Americas," Graham Davis examines Irish emigrant letters to find how a culture of exile and individual development in the new-found context contribute to keeping the memory of Ireland "in aspic," while Irishness is being invented and reconstructed.

In her account of urban regeneration in Belfast since the late 1980s ("Urban Regeneration in Belfast: Landscape and Memory"), Valérie Peyronel points to the sectarian conflict between the two groups of inhabitants. The rebuilding of the city after the Troubles led to a rediscovery of the significance of place and its relation to a history of industrial distinction and memories of prosperity as well as of violence. The Victorian heritage as a non-divisive or neutral memory of place is promoted to make traces of more recent sectarian divisions disappear.

Another way of handling the memory of the conflict is seen in Jim Sheridan's film *In the Name of the Father*. In Yann Bévant's analysis ("Anticipating the Peace Process: *In the Name of the Father* as a Myth-Breaking Message"), it becomes a presage of the peace process as the main character learns to handle his memories by express-

ing them in words and committing them to a tape recorder, thereby freeing his own history, as he remembers it, from the interpretation by others. The historical myth of the Other – as seen both from an Irish and an English point of view – is shattered when prejudice, fed on memories of conflict in the colonial history of Ireland, is defeated by the correction of false representations or myths concerning both the past and the present.

The importance of demythologising tradition and nation is further emphasised in "Irish Animation and Radical Memory" by Thomas Walsh who also takes up the dialectic of old rural Ireland in contrast to its modern urban counterpart. His focus is on the independent Irish animation industry emerging in the 1990s along with the Celtic Tiger economy; his prime example is the animated short film *Give up Yer Aul Sins*, which splits the narrative between place and memory by making a child in urban Dublin re-tell a Biblical story in imaginary rural terms. This lack of connection is interpreted as a sign of globalisation and of a new Irish identity.

The literature section is opened by Harry Clifton, who read some of his poetry (including "Dag Hammarskjöld") at the conference reception in Gothenburg's City Hall. Later he sent us his memory poem of travelling through Sweden after the conference. We are happy and grateful to be allowed to print these poems here.

In "'Chipped and tilted Marys': Two Irish Poets and Their Contemporary Contexts," Patricia Coughlan sets the scene for poetry criticism by opening up the poetic worlds of two women poets, Moya Cannon and Vona Groarke, whose work, while not yet among the best known, marks "the development of a feminine aesthetic in Irish poetry." The "chipped and tilted Marys" of her title, sharing "a vital role with Mother Ireland in *her* various manifestations," become reference points for an ambiguous tradition. As far as memory is concerned, Coughlan particularly notes Groarke's sense of history, her "searching historical reflexivity" but also glimpses of haymaking as an individual memory and a thing of the past for the whole community.

While many Irish writers face the themes of place and memory head-on, setting their work in recognisably Irish places and memories, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, as Borbála Faragó shows in "'Watch me wherever I go': Ambivalence and Misdirection in Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's Poetry," circumnavigates these themes by talking about their opposites: hidden spaces and subdued, silent memories, bringing the reader's attention to the liminal and the tacit. Her poetry creates a space for the expression of the unsaid, unearthing not only concealed memories, but also the double bind of remembering and forgetting within the psychic landscape of contemporary Ireland. Her liminal spaces and silent narratives stimulate a reading strategy which looks for interpretation within the context of both spatial and communicative latency.

In "'Out-and-out weary of excavating in the past': The New Irelands of Cathal Ó Searcaigh and Dennis O'Driscoll," Mary Pierse contrasts the "memorable images

of Ireland" we are used to from classical writers like Yeats and Joyce with the excavated memories of place in O'Driscoll and Ó Searcaigh. She finds "surprise vistas" in "patterns of recollection that are true to urban and rural experiences of the twenty-first century in Ireland while yet connecting it with the mythical and historical pasts." She comments on the function of memory and how it becomes mixed with modern international influences.

Before moving on to prose fiction we remember how the tone of the conference was set by Deirdre Madden reading from her novel *Authenticity* on the opening night. Ms. Madden has graciously permitted us to reprint the chapter recording, in my interpretation, the meeting during a walk in the Wicklow hills of two characters who are already dead when the action of the novel sets in. The two main characters have no idea that the mother of one ever met the father of the other, but here it is marked as a memory by the use of italics throughout the chapter. For the reader of the novel the characters are recognised by the walking outfit of one and the wristwatch of the other. Madden's intricate web of past and present combined with graphic descriptions of place would have been the perfect subject for a critical study in the context of this conference.

In "Place, Time, and Perspective in John McGahern's Fiction," Martin Ryle focuses on the change of perspective, when, after a career in the metropolis, the native insider returns as an urban outsider but still remembering the landscape before him as a functional site for rural work or play, while the tourist would regard the same landscape merely in aesthetic terms. The power of native memories of a rural childhood is set against the power of metropolitan culture.

Memory in Patrick McCabe's fictional world of male protagonists is always related to place and to a dominant female character, as David Clark maintains in "Mammies, Trollops, and Re-Claimers of the Night: Women in Patrick McCabe's Fiction." There is a difference between what might be called the subjective memory of the main character and the more objective one presented to the reader. The confusion between reality and fantasy leads to invented memories of mother figures. As far as place is concerned, the invented locations of small Irish towns avoid both the traditionally romantic countryside and modern urban development to represent a "claustrophobic memory of the stifling mid-sized communities."

In "Here and Then, There and Now: Place and Memory in Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's Fiction" Giovanna Tallone demonstrates how Ní Dhuibhne intertwines past and present, time and place, not least in childhood memories. Place becomes a catalyst for time: "In memory the past that is remembered and the present of the act of remembering co-exist and Ní Dhuibhne's use of place and memory reproduce this effect."

Finally, in "Frank McGuinness and Armand Gatti: Plays of Memory and Survival," Joseph Long examines McGuinness's treatment of history, memory, identity, and

sense of place in his two Ulster plays *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme* and *Carthaginians*. Long primarily demonstrates how the Irish playwright transforms the influence of French dramatist Armand Gatti in the embodiment of memory and representations of utopian space and time-out-of-time.

As this collection hopefully shows, place and memory, especially in Irish terms, are categories opening up historical developments, social and political issues and a rich field in film and literature. Turning our minds to the place of the conference, however, there is one memory that participants keep referring to: the Lucia procession of young girls, all in white and carrying candles, singing Christmas carols in Latin, English, and Swedish.

Britta Olinder, December 2008

RE-IMAGINING THE IMAGINARY: A CHALLENGE TO REVISIONIST MYTHOLOGY¹

Kerby A. Miller

"Re-Imagining Ireland" is nothing new. For centuries the Irish and others have contested the "facts" and interpretations of Ireland's troubled history, interrogating "what it means" and has meant to be "Irish" at home or abroad. Contemporary Irish historians, like their predecessors, have played a major supportive role in the "re-imagining" process. From the 1930s and especially since the 1960s, their dominant paradigm has been "Revisionism."² Allegedly blessed with unbiased, "value-free" perspectives and armed with new "scientific" methodologies, Revisionists have claimed to write "objective" history. Their efforts have been prodigious: they have uncovered new evidence, illuminated experiences of hitherto neglected groups, and "imagined" novel and challenging ways of understanding Ireland's past.

The Revisionists' main objective, however, has been to deconstruct, destabilize, and expel from the realms of "responsible" discourse (public as well as academic) what they condemn as the "dangerous myths" of Irish Nationalist history: that is, the "traditional" accounts and interpretations of Conquest and Resistance that allegedly fostered the Easter Rebellion of 1916, the Irish Revolutionary and Civil wars of 1919-23, the sociocultural and political inadequacies of independent Ireland, and, especially, the recent "Troubles" in Northern Ireland. Indeed, one wag suggests that Revisionists, if miraculously granted the opportunity to prevent just *one* occurrence in the Irish past, would choose the Easter Rising rather than the Conquest, the Famine, or Partition. Compromised by that agenda, Revisionist scholarship often seems scarcely more "objective" than the much-maligned "old-fashioned" Nationalist history it has largely supplanted.

No history, popular or professional, Nationalist or Revisionist, is "value-free," but rather is conditioned, consciously or unconsciously, by the historians' political culture: by the socioeconomic, cultural, political, and academic hierarchies – the prevailing systems of rewards and punishments – in which they function. As Fintan O'Toole suggests provocatively, one of the independent Irish state's greatest failures was that, out of parsimony or philistinism, from the 1920s it failed to co-opt most of Ireland's young intellectuals into the state's "founding" Nationalist and Catholic mythologies, thus alienating and obliging them to seek nourishment from other sources that

1 This essay originally appeared in a slightly different form in *Re-Imagining Ireland: Transformations of Identity in a Global Context* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006) and is reproduced here by permission of the publisher.

2 The most balanced survey of revisionism is Brady, *Interpreting Irish History*. My thanks to colleague Ted Koditschek for his invaluable comments on early drafts of this essay.

were contemptuous of those mythologies and/or of the new state itself (95-96). Yet complicating O'Toole's analysis is that after 1921 the Irish state's leaders and apologists were themselves necessarily ambivalent towards at least some Nationalist mythologies, as in the wake of Partition and Civil War the logic and emotive power of Thirty-Two County Republicanism threatened "from within" the new state's stability and legitimacy.

The 1960s, however, marked the Irish establishment's critical if long-disguised break with traditional Nationalism. The state's abandonment of autarchic Sinn Féin economic policies for total immersion in an international "free market" controlled by Anglo-American financial and corporate capitalism – coupled with the explosion of Northern Ireland's smoldering conflict – persuaded most Irish academics to embrace new socioeconomic and historical mythologies better suited to the needs of the Globalized, Post-Nationalist future which, Dublin's politicians and pundits now promised, would bring Ireland the economic prosperity, social stability, and political closure which the old faiths had failed to deliver.

Revisionist interpretations of Irish history generally reflect this convergence of Neoliberal economic and of (allegedly) Post-Nationalist political perspectives.³ Indeed, historical Revisionism is somewhat akin to that Neoliberal project, Privatization. Both strip "property" (material or cultural) from national, public ownership or common understanding and entrust it to privileged, "cosmopolitan" élites. Both purport to be objective, inevitable processes that liberate individuals from the stultifying effects of "mistaken" past policies and understandings. Both appropriate liberal or humanistic terms and values – concerning individual "freedom," "dignity," and "agency," for instance, to condemn the alleged dangers of "paternalism," "dependency culture," or "victimization history." Yet both subvert such terms to validate new forms of economic and cultural domination – and *old* forms as well: for just as Privatization's apostles ignore its consequent inequities of wealth and power, Revisionists (despite their Post-Nationalist pose) rarely critique British Nationalism or Ulster Unionism with the vigor and asperity they apply to Irish Nationalism. Finally, both impose degrees of legal, structural, or philosophical conformity designed to preclude policy-reversal or intellectual challenge.

Thus, just as the ascendancy of Neoliberalism has constricted public debate on contemporary socioeconomic and political questions, so the hegemony of Revisionism has restricted research or marginalized alternative perspectives on many critical issues in Irish history. Yet Revisionism itself needs to be deconstructed and its basic assumptions denied their mystifying authority – not only to restore a healthy equilibrium to Irish historical scholarship, but perhaps also to help Ireland's inhabitants

3 Revisionism is not ideologically homogeneous; its practitioners include a few Marxist-Unionist and some devoutly Catholic "traditionalist" scholars, but for different reasons they share the Neoliberals' aversion to the Irish Nationalism of Tone, Mitchel, Pearse, and Connolly.

"re-imagine" a more coherent vision of themselves, their past, present, and possible future. In the remainder of this paper, therefore, and drawing largely on my own research, I propose to interrogate Revisionist interpretations of three historical issues of contemporary importance: first, Ulster Protestant identities; second, the causes and consequences of Irish migration; third and finally, Irish relationships, past and present, with empire and imperialism.

Ulster's Protestants: Only "Two Traditions?"

In Ireland, historically and currently, questions of ethnoreligious or "national" identities invariably have political connotations. Unfortunately, the prevailing Revisionist model of Irish ethnic identities and relationships – the "Two Traditions" paradigm – is deficient. The term suggests the paramount and permanent existence of only two Irish groups whose adherents have totally distinct historical experiences, antagonistic political cultures, and conflicting material interests. One group is characterized as Gaelic, Catholic, Nationalist, and "Irish"; the other as English/Scottish, Protestant, Unionist, and "British."

The Two Traditions paradigm does not promote full understanding of the Irish *past*. By merely substituting a two-traditions model for the old unitary Nationalist one, Revisionists have failed to grasp the complexity they normally celebrate. Ironically, in the guise of "pluralism" the Two Traditions paradigm simply reifies what Frank Wright calls the Ulster Protestants' "settler ideology" as well as the "natives'" Manichean analogue (20 and *passim*). Consequently, the binary model ignores or de-emphasizes similarities, common interests, and instances of cooperation between Protestants and Catholics, and it ahistorically homogenizes both Traditions, slighting the diversity, complexity, and sociocultural and (among Protestants) denominational conflicts within each group. And although the Two Traditions paradigm purportedly illuminates *cultural* distinctions, its concept of culture is limited: culture is conceived as an independent variable, divorced from socioeconomic and other contexts; and culture and cultural conflicts are "naturalized" as virtually primordial and eternal.

In fact, ethnic cultures and identities are impermanent, situational, contingent on ever-changing historical and environmental factors. Among them, demographic factors are crucial but are often ignored, although between the early 1700s and early 1900s dramatic population changes surely conditioned the development of Irish Protestant identities. For example, between 1732 and 1911 the proportion of Ireland's Protestants who lived *inside* the future twenty-six-county Irish state fell from nearly 51 to less than 29 percent, primarily because in the 1700s, long before the rise of modern Irish Catholic Nationalism, southern Ireland's Protestant communities began to decline precipitously, largely due to high emigration rates that exceeded those among Ulster's Protestants. As a result, by 1911 the six counties of the future Northern Ireland contained almost three-fourths of the island's Protestants. Equally

important, between 1831 and 1911 the Protestant proportion of those six counties' inhabitants rose from 57 to 67 percent, and yet between the early 1700s and the early 1900s the *Presbyterians'* share of that region's Protestants fell from at least three-fifths to less than half. The sociocultural and political implications of these and other demographic changes were surely momentous – for the rise and fall of 18th-century Irish Protestant Nationalism, for instance, or for the subsequent consolidation of Ulster Unionism.

The Two Traditions paradigm is equally unhelpful for understanding *contemporary* Northern Ireland. Instead, the Two Traditions model may be a prescription for eternal sociocultural and political partition in Northern Ireland and between it and the rest of the island. For example, the paradigm's most recent elaboration, by those promoting a pan-Protestant "Ulster Scots" identity, only historicizes and exacerbates ethno-religious polarization by implicitly denying all associations with "Ireland" and the "Irish." Moreover, in its common usage that term erases from historical consciousness the large and important body of northern Anglicans, primarily of English descent, who are subsumed in an "Ulster Scots" hegemony which in turn logically implies Presbyterian primacy in the North's sociocultural and political history. Yet, as we have seen, during the last three hundred years Ulster's Protestant population has steadily become *less* Presbyterian, from over 60 percent in the early 1700s to less than 40 percent by 1971. Crucially, it was the Ulster Presbyterians whose disputatious political culture – once the bane of Anglican bishops, landlords, and officials – was subsumed in the zealous monarchism and Tory conservatism that traditionally characterized Ulster's Anglicans – as well as in the latter's most distinctive institution, the Loyal Orange Order.

For the past half-century Revisionist historians have "re-imagined" the Irish Nationalist Tradition – subjecting it to intense analysis, exposing its contextual nature, its ambiguities, contradictions, contingencies, and inadequacies. However, the re-imagining process must be impartial if relationships in Northern Ireland, and between northern Protestants and the inhabitants of the rest of the island, are to achieve peaceful and constructive resolution. If the interrogation and deconstruction of Irish Nationalist "mythologies" are healthy, valuable exercises, then it would be fair and salutary to interrogate and deconstruct those of Ulster Unionism as well.

In the 1790s the United Irishmen asked if Irish Protestants and Catholics were forever condemned "to walk like beasts of prey over fields which [their] ancestors stained with blood" (Curtin 21). Ironically, one "field" that members of the Two Traditions might explore mutually and profitably is the Great Famine of 1845-52, perhaps in the process discovering that historically they have more in common than hitherto imagined. Of course, the Famine's traditional interpretations appear to corroborate a Manichean view of Irish history. In Nationalist mythology the Famine confirms the malevolent nature of the Union with Britain and the rapacious character of the Protestant landlord class. In Unionist mythology there was no Famine in "Protestant Ulster,"

because God spared his Chosen People to reward their fidelity to the Union and their sociocultural and moral superiority to Ireland's "feckless" and "disloyal" Catholics.

And yet, between 1831 and 1861 Ulster's Presbyterian and Catholic populations declined by nearly identical rates – by eighteen and by nineteen percent, respectively. It was the Famine-era experience of Ulster's *Anglicans* that was exceptional, for their numbers fell merely thirteen percent in the same period. Patronage from an overwhelmingly Anglican landlord class and magistracy, membership in Ireland's legally privileged church, and fellowship in the Loyal Orange Order (then still predominantly Anglican): all these may have sheltered poor communicants of the Church of Ireland from the pressures that starved or exiled poor Presbyterians and Catholics.

Local studies discover even more remarkable patterns. Between 1841 and 1851, for instance, the population of ten contiguous overwhelmingly Protestant and heavily Presbyterian parishes in mid- and east-County Antrim declined overall by more than one-seventh, and losses in several parishes were comparable to those in west Munster and Connacht: 21 percent in Glenwhirry parish, 24 percent in Raloo, and an appalling 36 percent in Kilwaughter.

It is vital to remember that, when Kilwaughter's Presbyterian cottiers and other poor Ulster Protestants died of hunger or famine fever, suffered eviction, or migrated to the disease-ridden slums of Belfast or of cities overseas, their fates were determined not by members of the "other Tradition" – by their "ancient Catholic foes" – but instead by Protestant landlords, officials, merchant-creditors, head-tenants, and employers: in short, by Ulster's upper and middle classes, whose members mythologized the Famine as devoid of Protestant suffering and, a few decades later, mobilized the North's poor Protestants to defend a Union and a socioreligious hierarchy that had signally failed to protect many of their ancestors from destruction and dispossession.

In early 1848, John Mitchel, a Protestant Irish Nationalist from Newry, County Down, published his "Letters to the Protestant Farmers, Labourers, and Artisans" of Ulster, urging them to join Ireland's Catholics in revolution against a Government and a landlord class which, he argued, were responsible for the "Great Hunger."⁴ However, Ulster Protestants' political culture, as it had evolved since 1798, allowed for neither a Nationalist nor a class-based interpretation of the Famine experience, as between 1798 and the 1840s a combination of socioeconomic, religious, and political factors (not least the massive emigration of disaffected Presbyterians) had largely eradicated among northern Protestants the ecumenical Nationalism of the United Irishmen – creating instead a pervasive loyalty to the Union and its upper- and middle-class Protestant champions.

4 Mitchel's "Letters" first appeared in his Dublin newspaper, *The United Irishman*, in spring 1848; in 1917 they were republished as *An Ulsterman For Ireland*.

As a result, Ulster Protestant victims of hunger, evictions, and parsimonious relief could not express their pain, grievances, and resentments within the context of a hegemonic religious and political culture that denied their very existence. We must recover their long-suppressed voices. In the process we may learn that the Two Traditions paradigm offers no more infallible guide to Ireland's future than it does to Ulster's past. Perhaps a critical perspective may discover or "re-imagine" other, conflicting "traditions" – one or more of which may provide better guideposts to a brighter future than the perpetual polarization and partition to which the Revisionist model would consign us.⁵

Irish Migration: "Exile" or "Opportunity"?

At its peak in 1845 the Irish population was about 8.5 million. Remarkably, between 1600 and 2000 roughly the same number of Ireland's inhabitants emigrated. Yet if Ireland has been an "emigrant nursery" (see Mac Laughlin), to a lesser degree it also has been a migrants' destination: for the Celts in prehistoric times, for Vikings and Normans in the Middle Ages, and for 250,000 to 400,000 Protestant settlers, principally English and Scots, between the 1500s and the early 1700s. In recent years perhaps 100,000 "new immigrants" and refugees, primarily from Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia, have come to Ireland. Thus, Ireland's people have for centuries been familiar with what is now called Globalization, as geography and history placed their island at the Atlantic crossroads of the emergent Anglo-American economic and political empires.⁶

Despite that long familiarity, however, the "story" of Irish emigration has always been contested. The interpretations of its causes, character, and consequences have long been subjects of controversy for the Irish in Ireland, for the non-Irish members of the "host societies" overseas, and for the emigrants and their descendants in the far-flung Irish Diaspora. Contending "meanings" and disputed "lessons" of Irish emigration have emerged from debate both among and within these groups. Invariably the results of these contentions – the voices and interpretations that became dominant – reflected the interests and outlooks of those classes that enjoyed the greatest social and cultural authority. Put simply, the "meaning" of Irish migration was and is a profoundly political question, inextricably related to power relationships in Ireland and in the Diaspora.

5 The 1831-61 demographic data are described and interpreted in greater detail in Miller, "The Famine's Scars." On similar discrepancies between Ulster Presbyterian and Anglican growth and out-migration rates in 1766-1831, see Miller et al., *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan*, 656-77. For elaborations of the arguments in this essay, see Miller, "Ulster Presbyterians and the 'Two Traditions'," and "Forging the 'Protestant Way of Life'."

6 My research on transatlantic Irish migration is set forth in numerous publications, especially in *Emigrants and Exiles* and *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan*.

For example, Ireland's own "possessing classes" (Lee 376, 390, and *passim*) have always "explained" Irish emigration in ways that buttressed their sociocultural and political hegemony – often in conflict with variant interpretations advanced by representatives of subordinate groups. This was true even in the 1720s, when Ulster Presbyterian clergymen described their people's migration in starkly religious and political terms – as flight to a New World "Canaan" from "Egyptian bondage" to rack-renting landlords and persecuting Anglicans. By contrast, Irish magistrates and ministers of the legally established Church dismissed Scots-Irish grievances as "imaginary" and insisted their departures were due merely to personal ambitions or "strange humours."

Likewise, during the nineteenth century British officials usually contended that Irish emigration was natural and beneficial – the inevitable result of free-market forces – whereas Irish and Irish-American Nationalists argued that emigration was at root involuntary "exile" caused by poverty and famine, which in turn were the results of British misgovernment and landlord oppression. Much evidence, historical and contemporary, served to corroborate the Nationalist interpretation, as in the minds of Irish Catholic country-people the conquests, confiscations, and persecutions of the past merged seamlessly with *An Gorta Mór* and the wholesale evictions that occurred during that and other crises. Of course, the Nationalists' interpretation of emigration-as-exile caused by political malevolence served to mobilize the Irish at home and abroad against British rule and landlordism. Yet it also *de*-mobilized the impoverished masses in Ireland and overseas, for it obscured the socioeconomic and cultural conflicts between them and the Irish and Diasporan middle classes, whose economic, religious, and political enterprises benefited immeasurably from the departure (or, overseas, from the arrival) of Ireland's dispossessed.

For instance, the wealth of Ireland's "strong farmers" and graziers often derived from the fields and flocks of their evicted and emigrated neighbors, while the former's security against reprisals was ensured by the mass departures of disgruntled peasants. Likewise, the Catholic Church's influence at home was strengthened both by the disappearance of lower-class, non-practicing Catholics and by remittances from the faithful overseas, while the Church's expansion abroad was based largely on the Diaspora's increasing size and wealth. Finally, emigration ensured that in Ireland *bourgeois* Nationalists were rarely threatened by class conflict, whereas the great numbers of Irish overseas enabled both Diasporan Nationalists and ordinary ethnic "machine" politicians to build and fund successful organizations.

In the early twentieth century the semi-official Irish Catholic interpretation of emigration-as-exile, caused solely by British/landlord tyranny, remained pervasive – despite occasional objections from socialists such as James Connolly, and although logically it soon became untenable, since after 1921 it was the Catholic *bourgeoisie*, empowered by Irish independence, that proved unwilling or unable to stem mass migration. From the late 1950s, however, Irish politicians and economists formulated

new strategies to attract massive foreign investment and create an export-based, high-tech economy fully integrated into a U.S.-controlled, transnational capitalism. Ideally, they promised, the consequent prosperity would halt and even reverse the tide of emigration. But when departures soared again in the economically troubled late 1970s, 1980s, and early to mid-1990s, Dublin's political establishment hastened to excuse and even encourage the new exodus, both to reduce welfare costs and to protect their new economic order from social and political upheaval. In turn, the establishment's Neoliberal and Revisionist intellectuals produced new interpretations of Irish emigration.

In the new dispensation, historic and contemporary Irish migrations no longer were viewed in negative, communal, or nationalistic terms. No longer was the Irish emigrant a homesick "victim" of British misgovernment or a vengeful "exile" whose "atavistic" Nationalism might destabilize Anglo-Irish relations or lend support to Northern Irish Republicans. Nor was emigration interpreted as resulting from systemic inequalities *within* Catholic Irish society or from the regional imbalances and social inadequacies of the Globalization process itself. Rather, in an ironic echo of nineteenth-century British voices, Irish emigration became the natural result of politically uncontrollable yet ultimately benign "market forces" operating on "a small island." The Irish emigrant was now portrayed as either a fortunate escapee from a repressively "traditional" Catholic Ireland, still blighted by *its own* perverse failure to fully embrace capitalist modernity, or, more commonly, as a confident, ambitious, adaptable individual who – after a few years of certain success abroad, honing entrepreneurial skills in Los Angeles, London, or another "world city" – would return to help indoctrinate Irish society and culture in the techniques and outlooks of global capitalism.

Thus, with emigration as with the Two Traditions, Revisionists merely substituted one monolithic explanation ("opportunity") for another ("exile"). And the new explanation serves the same function as the old, for the Neoliberal interpretation of Irish emigration promotes what Ireland's governing classes call "social stability" by "explaining" all departures, past and present, as the product of voluntary, individualistic, rational, market-based decisions, rather than as the result of flawed policies or social inequalities that might be susceptible to political solutions. Of course, the rapacity of the "Celtic Tiger" inevitably generates new examples of "uneven development," and these may stimulate mass migration in the future as in the past. But whether that would generate challenges to the dominant, depoliticized interpretation of Irish emigration is problematic. Mary Robinson's "Light for the Diaspora" may still burn in the Irish presidential residence, but the recent closure of the Republic's *only* center for Irish migration studies (at University College Cork) may be a more accurate reflection of the Irish élite's real attitude toward those it formerly eulogized as "Mother Ireland's Banished Children."

The Irish: "Imperialists" or "Rebels"?

The notion of an "Irish Empire" overseas, recently advanced by historians, filmmakers, and journalists,⁷ at least partly reflects the same political impulses driving Revisionist interpretations of Irish migration and Nationalism. Apparently, the revision of Irish migration demands more than its divestment of traditional, communal, and Nationalist connotations, or its "normalization" as modern, individualistic, and market-driven. It also requires its conceptual relocation in the matrix of British Imperialism, specifically, and of Western (or "white") military, economic, and cultural conquest, colonization, and exploitation of native peoples in the Americas, Australasia, Asia, and Africa, generally.

Revisionist logic is simple: if the Irish Catholic experience abroad can be re-interpreted as one of wholesale and enthusiastic participation in British and American imperial and colonial adventures and in genocidal assaults on dark-skinned peoples (as well as in the Catholic Church's offensives against indigenous cultures), then the "exceptionalist" assumptions that underpin traditional Irish identity and Nationalism – and the latter's alleged affinities with Third World suffering and resistance – can be fatally discredited.⁸

Of course, evidence exists to corroborate the Revisionists' image of Irish migrants and their descendants as racist and imperialist. Although Daniel O'Connell provided an authentically "Irish" language of anti-slavery and anti-racism, most of his countrymen overseas rejected his injunctions. Indeed, Irish-Americans may have played pivotal (if subaltern) roles in the construction of racial hierarchy in the U.S., their efforts to gain acceptance and advantage by "becoming white" expressed through urban politics, trade union practices, policing, and race riots.⁹ Likewise, during the nineteenth century, in India and elsewhere, Irish Catholics often comprised a disproportionate number of ordinary soldiers in the British Army overseas – as also in the U.S. Army on the western frontier and in the Spanish-American War. In short, many Irish responded as members of oppressed groups often do when they encounter others even lower in status or more vulnerable than themselves.

Yet the Revisionists' basic assumptions are confused and faulty. To the degree those assumptions are Neoliberal, stressing individual volition or "choice" (as in the emi-

7 E.g., in addition to the documentary film "The Irish Empire" (1998), see Jeffrey, ed., *An Irish Empire?* and "Part Three: The Empire" of Bielenberg, ed., *The Irish Diaspora*. To be sure, the authors of the essays in these works vary in their assessments of the Irish Empire concept.

8 To be fair, some who employ an Irish Empire concept have a different project: to challenge the complacency and insularity of many Irish and Irish-Americans by summoning them not to abandon Nationalist or anti-imperialist ideals but to extend their application beyond mere rhetoric and their own communal experience.

9 See Ignatiev and Roediger, but these scholars are ideologically worlds apart from Neoliberal Revisionists who seek to discount the radical and internationalist aspects of Irish Nationalism.

gration-as-opportunity thesis), they fail to recognize that attitudes and behavior regarding race and imperialism, like those respecting ethnic or national identity, are socially constructed as well as situational and contingent.

Irish Catholic migrants overseas (and especially in the U.S. and British armies) encountered social structures, legal systems, and hegemonic cultures that were already hierarchical and often deeply discriminatory. Their own "alien" or "undesirable" characteristics – as Irish, Catholic, working-class, impoverished, and often Irish-speaking – posed major obstacles to employment or even sufferance in what were often highly insecure, ruthlessly competitive, and even trenchantly hostile environments. Few migrants enjoyed wealth, power, or incentives sufficient to do aught but adapt to their host societies' basic "rules." In the process of adaptation, moreover, most migrants created and relied heavily on their own familial, social, and cultural-religious networks, which in themselves also promoted ethnically exclusive (and perforce "white") attitudes and behavior.

Enmeshed in such circumstances, it was not surprising that Irish migrants usually internalized and demonstrated loyalty to both their host society's and their own sub-society's reinforcing conventions, particularly when it seemed both "natural" and in their material and political interests to do so – *and* also when failure to do so threatened to incur economic deprivation, social stigma, and even legal punishment. A wholesale Irish rejection of American slavery, for example, likely would have generated – and probably institutionalized permanently – a nativist backlash far more powerful than the "Know-Nothing" movement. These are not "excuses" but merely sad and almost inescapable realities.

However, the Irish Empire thesis is at least equally flawed to the degree that, paradoxically, its underlying assumptions are also (as in the Two Traditions model) homogenizing and essentialist. Indeed, the thesis implies a kind of "racial" essentialism: the "Irish" were "white" and therefore must always have formed a part (however subordinate) of the "master race" and its thrust to global empire. Yet it is revealing that Revisionists often can sustain the Irish Empire thesis only by ignoring their otherwise beloved Two Traditions paradigm. Indeed, sometimes they willfully conflate the identities of Irish Catholics and Protestants abroad – obscuring key distinctions among those they lump indiscriminately together as "Irish" – in order to imply that the former's allegedly hyper-"collaborationist" record overseas belies Nationalist analogies between the historical experiences of Ireland's Catholics and of the dark-skinned subjects of "real" colonial exploitation in the Anglo-American empires.

However, the distinctions that Revisionists thereby slight were real and important. For example, it was Scots-Irish Presbyterians, not Irish Catholics, who, if simply by chronological precedence and sheer numbers, perpetrated most of the "Irish" violence against Native Americans in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For the same circumstantial reasons, it was the Scots- and Anglo-Irish in the U.S. who comprised the great majority of the "Irish" who practiced slavery and legalized white

supremacy in their crucial, formative periods. Further, it was Anglo-Irish Protestants, not Irish Catholics, whose status and connections enabled them to constitute the overwhelming majority of the "Irish" officers in the British Army overseas, the British East India Company, and the British colonial administrations and police forces. Thus, to the degree that it *is* legitimate to speak of an "Irish Empire" abroad, it was an Empire dominated, not by Irish Catholic Nationalists, but by Irish Protestants – and, in the British colonies, principally by wealthy and privileged Irish Protestants, that is, by the same kinds of people who dominated Ireland itself.

The point of this argument is not to invert the political implications of the Two Traditions paradigm. Irish Catholic migrants were not morally "superior" to, or more "innocent" than, Irish Protestants. It was primarily factors such as timing, class, and circumstance that implicated many of the latter more broadly or deeply than their Catholic countrymen in imperialist and racist systems abroad. It may be that Irish Protestants could transpose a "settler ideology" overseas – and colonial governors frequently re-"planted" them in frontier regions precisely because of that belief. However, Catholic Ireland's conquest and colonization – and the elaborate systems of rewards and punishments thereby imposed – also inevitably generated emulative and even collaborationist responses. Likewise, poverty, ambition, and the need to please no doubt fostered adaptation to dominant systems and outlooks that promised acceptance, opportunity, even privilege, to migrants longing to escape from customary deprivation and proscription.

Nevertheless, Revisionist advocates of an Irish Empire ignore much contradictory evidence. That evidence suggests that – because of a complex of sociocultural, political, and psychological factors, rooted in their own legacies of resistance to conquest and colonization – individuals of Irish Catholic birth or descent (along with some Irish Protestants who shared similar burdens and perspectives) may indeed have been disproportionately prone – relative to other "British" migrants – to interact with native or subject peoples overseas on comparatively equal terms, to empathize with their plight, and even to support their struggles for liberation.

For example, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Irish and Irish-American Nationalist newspapers almost invariably applauded "native" uprisings against British colonialism, and the Irish-American press strongly criticized U.S. imperialism in Cuba and the Philippines. Many Irishmen of Gaelic or Old English origins – such as William Johnson in early eighteenth-century New York, R.R. Madden in mid-nineteenth-century Cuba and Western Australia, and "His Majesty [David] O'Keefe" in early-twentieth-century Micronesia – were unusually successful in mediating sympathetically between native and imperial, traditional and capitalist societies and cultures. Remarkably, the records of almost every major slave revolt in the Anglo-American world – from the West Indian uprisings in the late 1600s to the plot discovered on the Civil War's eve in Natchez, Mississippi – were marked by real or purported Irish participation or instigation. Even Frederick Douglass, a bitter critic of Irish-American

racism, related how Irish laborers in Baltimore offered to help him escape from slavery.

In class and national conflicts, the evidence of disproportionate "Irish" (often including Protestant, especially Presbyterian) migrant participation in protest, radicalism, and rebellion is even greater and more varied. Transatlantic examples range from the "London hanged," the Nore and Spithead mutinies, the Democratic-Republican Societies, and the Whiskey Insurrection of the 1700s, through the Latin American revolutions and the activities of the Chartists, the Molly Maguires, and the Knights of Labor in the 1800s. In Australia notorious Irish involvement in sociopolitical unrest extends from the convict rebellions of the early 1800s to the Eureka Stockade in 1854, from the legendary exploits of bush-rangers like Ned Kelly to the dockland radicalism of the early 1900s. In New Zealand, even the Maori uprisings were reputed to have support from disgruntled Irish Catholic immigrants, as were the Canadian rebellions of 1837 and later of Louis Riel.

Much Irish involvement in such activities is incontrovertible, but much must be qualified by words like "alleged," "rumored," or "reputed." Yet this is one instance in which *reputation* is as important as reality. Reports of "Irish" insubordination, unrest, conspiracy, and rebellion generally originated among governing officials and conservatives – lay and clerical, the latter Catholic as well as Protestant, many of whom were often Irish themselves. These men felt they had ample reasons to fear what they perceived as perennial "Irish" dangers to hierarchy and empire. Conservatives such as Boston's John Adams, for example, saw inevitable threats to "law and order" from the "motley rabble of . . . Irish teagues," whom he blamed (alongside "saucy boys, negroes and molottoes . . . and outlandish jack tars") for the "mobs" that in 1770 precipitated the Boston Massacre.¹⁰

In the late 1700s such allegations were legion. Influenced by American, French, and Irish radicalism, many Protestant as well as Catholic Irish, at home and in the New World, embraced a broadly and politically "Irish" identity that embodied for them (and for their adversaries) dreams (or nightmares) of political revolution, social upheaval, and personal liberation. Sadly, of course, in 1798 the United Irish Rising failed, and the "Age of Revolution" soon became one of political and religious reaction and repression. In Ireland most Protestants fled to the shelters of Unionism, of evangelicalism, and/or of America, while most Catholics gravitated to "faith and fatherland" movements that were narrowly sectarian and *bourgeois*-controlled. In the U.S. conservatives posed a modernized "Scotch-Irish" ethnicity as an exclusively Protestant,

10 Adams cited in Young 96-97. Revealingly, the "Irish" killed in the Boston Massacre (Caldwell and Carr) were men who later would be called "Scotch-Irish." For Adams and other Anglo-American conservatives, it was not religion that marginalized and stigmatized such people as "Irish Teagues" or "Wild Irish," but rather their poverty, "subversive" ideas, and "insubordinate" behavior.

socially "respectable," and politically "safe" alternative to the formerly ecumenical and ultra-democratic connotations of "Irishness."¹¹

Contrary to the Revisionists, however, it was not the much-maligned Irish Nationalists of the 19th and early 20th centuries who first constructed the image of Ireland's Catholics (and their former Protestant allies) as inveterate rebels against political and social authority. Rather, it was earlier Protestant (and Catholic) conservatives and counter-revolutionaries, for whom "essential" (or "Wild") "Irishness" seemed the inveterate enemy of the hierarchical systems, deferential habits, and genteel norms that maintained the prevailing, unequal distributions of rights, property, and power. Perhaps the Irish Empire thesis appeals to those who wish today's Irish to acknowledge and fulfill their allegedly imperialist legacy. But much evidence suggests that a once extensive "Irish *Anti-Empire*" – "When 'Irish' Meant 'Freedom'" – might provide more fruitful themes for historical inquiry as well as for popular inspiration.

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RECONSTRUCTED MEMORY: IRISH EMIGRANT LETTERS FROM THE AMERICAS

Graham Davis

Roy Foster has pointed out that when Irish historians in the last generation began to examine the received truths of conventional historiography, some of the most agonised responses came from émigrés: "With emigrant communities everywhere the memory of homeland has to be kept in aspic. The perspective over one's shoulder must remain identical to that recorded by the parting glance – even if that happened two (or more) generations back, and even if the remembered impression is spectacularly contradicted by the mother country itself as experienced on return visits" (xiii).

In a similar way, ownership of received historical memory is fiercely guarded. Kerby Miller, a leading American specialist on Irish emigrant letters, has identified a culture of exile among the Irish abroad. The rationalisation of migration sought refuge in a retrospective oppression history in which migrants are depicted as unwilling victims of English rule. The open declaration of the motive of individual advancement was unacceptable in a traditional, rural environment where community and family loyalties were dominant. The culture of exile was a cloak to disguise individual aspirations. In reality, Miller has argued that Irish emigration was surrounded by conflicting pressures, and emigrants themselves possessed highly ambivalent attitudes. Many farmers and tradesmen believed emigration was essential for the process of modernisation, a process synonymous with increasing bourgeois dominance and made possible only by a clearing out of the poor cottiers and landless labourers from Ireland. Emigration reduced the fear of potential agrarian violence in resistance to consolidation of holdings among the large farmers. For parents on small holdings, it also eased the way for the painful disinheriting of children without the prospect of unbearable family conflict. Miller has suggested that the theme of emigration as exile, manifest in speeches, newspapers, and most especially the emigrant songs of the period, provided a way of reconciling tensions and anxieties. The idea of enforced exile became incorporated into the mindset of many Irish emigrants, serving as a rational explanation for their departure and continued absence, even long after they had prospered and had no realistic intention of returning to Ireland (125-6).

Michael Kenneally, a Canadian literary scholar, has identified a need to employ the techniques of textual criticism to emigrant letters, not merely to extract historical detail. Letters can be examined as linguistic and rhetorical forms of self-expression. In the search for identity and nationhood, it can be revealing to focus on the tone and tenor of language, the stock phrases, the omissions and silences. His own trawl through unpublished Canadian sources reveals shifting notions of home, a nostalgic remembrance of interior space, and the importance of familiar things recalled. A

more limited life in Canada meant that heaven became the real home, a place where the family would be re-united. Over time there was a discernible evolution of self revealed in letters to Ireland.

This last insight has quite a modern ring and ties up with the work of Mary Corcoran, a sociologist, who has interviewed returning Irish migrants after spending time working abroad during the 1990s, returning to a more prosperous Ireland enjoying the benefits of the Celtic Tiger and forming part of an increased return migration process, a reversal of population loss over many decades. She writes of Irish migrants reconstructing their identity as a result of the migrant experience and being often critical of Irish ways that now seem old-fashioned in a slower pace of life.

These four ideas – the memory of Ireland kept in aspic, the culture of exile, a discernible evolution of self, and an invented or reconstructed Irishness – form the context of an examination of a selection of nineteenth-century Irish emigrant letters, drawn from Canada in the north, through the United States to Mexican Texas in the south.

First, however, it is important to recognise that the emigrant experience extended to several million people. A small and unrepresentative sample left the trace of a written record in the form of letters and journals. They wrote as individuals and their stories represent a wide spectrum of experience. The journey of migration and settlement involved great hopes, much privation, heartache, many setbacks, and it should be acknowledged, the prospect of a better life in the New World, if not for the individuals themselves then most likely for their children. Emigration was commonly a family strategy, mostly self-funded and often involving several stages of movement for different family members. So, we should be wary of an all-encompassing meta-narrative that tells the story of the Irish in Canada, or the Irish in America. Irish emigrants were not a homogeneous group and their experiences were diverse rather than uniform. It really did matter *where* you came from in Ireland, *when* you left the country, *what* you took with you in the form of skills and capital, and *where* you settled. Opportunities could be immense for pioneer settlers in territory that was opening up in parts of Canada, Australia, in Argentina or Mexican Texas, and very few for those who arrived in settled communities in the east-coast cities of the United States, with little but physical labour to offer the job market.

Letters

The first letter is taken from the first Peter Robinson state-assisted emigration scheme from Cork and Kerry to Upper Canada in 1823. It was written by Catherine O'Brian from Ramsay Township to her brother on February 20, 1824. It contains the familiar presence of formulaic phrases in the opening paragraph: "I embrace the opportunity of writing to you these few lines to let you know that I and my family is [sic] well, thank God for his kind mercies & hope that this will find you in the same." The unusual reference to "a most agreeable passage" and to being "amazingly well

treated" may owe something to a loyalty to the organiser of the scheme, Mr. Robinson, who was "kind and attentive" in administering "to our comfort and convenience" and a genuine gratitude that "we are now most agreeably situated on a good lot of land with good neighbours all around in a flourishing settlement." The letter also contained the obligatory detail on wage levels, as an encouragement for other family members to join them:

Thos. has got and has the prospect to get plenty of employment at one dollar per day of wages and found in board and lodging, but he is more inclined to work on his land, and notwithstanding working out considerable [sic] he has got about four acres chopped down and hopes to have an acre or two more again spring [sic] and we have every prospect of doing well and of having plenty ...

The wages for labouring men is from ten to twelve dollars per month and found or by the day from two shillings & sixpence to three shillings. (Robinson Papers)

The letter continues in a generally buoyant tone: "This is a most delightful country I believe none in the world more healthy no sickness of any kind affects us, nor any of the settlers here, no want of bread, for all have plenty and to spare, and no man living willing to work but may live happy."

The purpose of the letter was to encourage her brother, Robert, to come out to Canada on the next Peter Robinson scheme in 1825: "embrace the opportunity for you may never have the like again." Practical advice was then given on what to bring: "plenty of clothes both for bed and body for that is our greatest want in this country" and also "all the pots and pans earthenware & other cooking utensils that you have."

However, the most telling section of the letter refers to brother John who was not encouraged "to come to this country if he would not resolve to work better than he did at home," and "if he would keep from the drink he might do well, but the rum is cheap four shillings and sixpence per Gallon and a great many of our settlers likes it too well which may prove their ruin, for a drunkard will not do well here." This last passage reveals a significant attitude to the new home in Canada. What accompanied the act of migration and settlement into a new land was the belief in a new start, not merely the opportunity to make a more plentiful and prosperous life, but the leaving behind of what some migrants saw as the curse of old Ireland, the inveterate fondness for alcoholic drink.

Catherine O'Brian does not reveal any lingering nostalgia for the land of her birth, but there is plenty of evidence that this was a common feature of emigrant letters, suggestive of the pain of separation from family, friends, and familiar surroundings in Ireland, but also a means of keeping the connection with the old country. In the following account, a passionate desire to remember and return to Ireland is most keenly felt by the next generation, what the Rev. M.B. Buckley described in Montreal as "a transmitted passion":

I met several people from Cork, and they were overjoyed to meet me, who could tell them the history of the beautiful citie for the last generation. To some I spoke the Irish language and their delight was inconceivable. I may here remark that wherever I go I

find the love of Ireland amongst the Irish to be the most intense feeling of their souls – an all-absorbing passion, running like a silver thread through all their thoughts and emotions. They think forever of the old land, and sigh to behold it once more before they die. One man who drove us one day for an hour refused to take any payment. He was from Ireland and we were two Irish priests, and that was enough for him! "What part of Ireland do you come from?" I asked. "From Wicklow, sir; I am 32 years in the country." "And do you ever think of the old country?" "Think," he exclaimed, "Oh! yes sir, I do think of the old country, not so much by day as by night. In my dreams at night I see as distinctly as ever the lanes and alleys where I played when a boy. I fancy I am at home once more, but I awake and find I am in Montreal, and am like never to see my native land again." This dreaming of Ireland I found quite common, many people would give all they have in the world to get back again and live in Ireland steeped in poverty, rather than flourish wealthy in this strange land. And what is stranger still is, that amongst the young people, those love Ireland most who are born here of Irish parents. Their love is far more intense than the love of those who were born in Ireland. Philosophers must account for this; it appears to me to be a transmitted passion; they hear their parents constantly speak in terms of affection of the land of their birth. (Buckley 50-51)¹

Speaking to a visitor from Ireland was similar to a letter written home and for transmitted passion, we can identify a reconstructed memory, a longing for identity that was fabricated and a generation old, to the extent it was mediated through what parents could remember of the Ireland they left behind.

Appropriately, the next letter is taken from Kerby Miller's huge collection and fully exemplifies the nostalgic element in the sense of loss in the "culture of exile." Mary Ann Rowe (c.1860-c.1899) in the 1880s was a domestic servant living in the suburban community of Dedham, Massachusetts (Miller & Wagner 76). Her letter is in two sections – one strongly nostalgic for home, looking back remembering good times – and the other reassuring those back home that life was good, and looking forward to a better future.

Instead of the ritual, formulaic opening, Mary Ann begins awkwardly and apologetically in writing to her friend: "It is not through any lack of friendship that I stayed so long without writing to you. I do feel so bad when I go to write to home. I don't be the better of it for a long time" (29 Oct 1888). This suggests the possible pain of leaving Ireland but also, having left, there is a difficulty in trying to re-connect with home.

Part of this may be the feeling of homesickness evident in the next section of the letter:

I would never have left poor Dunnamaggan if only I thought I would be so homesick. I cannot banish the thought of home out of my mind. There is not a night but I do be dreaming about you or someone from home. I dreamed last night that little John was dying. I fancied I was looking at him and had the pleasure of kissing him before he died. I hope and trust nothing is the matter with any of them.

The letter continues with the pleasure of remembering former days, Sunday afternoons playing with little children in Ireland. However, the tone of the letter changes abruptly with a description of Mary Ann's happy situation in America:

1 Buckley's *Diary* was edited by his sister. I am indebted to Professor Michael Kenneally for this source.

Yet I am living with a very nice family here in Dedham, Massachusetts. They are very nice people. I would not be allowed to go outside to put out the clothes even when the dew was on the grass without rubber boots on me, my mistress is so very careful of me. And I am within two or three minutes walk from the church. There is a splendid church here in Dedham and three priests. I can go to mass every Sunday and to confession whenever I want to. Dedham is a very nice place and it a country looking place – when you look around, there is nothing but trees.

What is revealed here is an acceptance of her new situation, representative of so many young Irish women who began to dominate domestic service in the United States and replace native black domestics in the process. The conditions female domestics enjoyed were invariably superior to conditions back home in Ireland and also allowed Irish servants to save enough money to pay for remittances, often in the form of pre-paid tickets for passage to America, and also to save for the proverbial "bottom drawer," an investment in marriage prospects that were superior to those in rural areas of post-famine Ireland (Diner 89-92).

Irish female migrants, while representing half the migrant stream out of Ireland during the nineteenth century, did have different experiences from Irish men, even from the same family. This is because separate spheres operated in the world of work, and working conditions remained very different for domestic servants, the archetypal woman at work, primarily living in middle-class households, and Irishmen who worked predominantly, and more visibly, in outdoor labouring employment. Often such labouring work involved continued migration in search of further employment or better prospects. This was especially prevalent in the field of hard-rock mining in the United States. It is well documented that from the 1880s Irish copper miners from Bearhaven in West Cork took a well-trodden path in a process of skill migration to mining centres in Michigan, Utah, California, and to Butte, Montana, the biggest copper mine in the world run by an Irishman, Marcus Daly (Emmons 13-34).

Three letters taken from the Hurley Collection in Cork Archives reflect changing conditions in the far west of America in the 1880s and 1890s, not least from the perspective of an itinerant miner. Michael Hurley, writing to his sister Kate in Ireland from Shasta County in California, on December 5, 1886, excuses his failure to write home as he was not permanent in any one place. He promises to compensate with the price of a new dress. He then compares the problems of Ireland with the prospects in America, becoming quite lyrical in describing the Californian climate:

I am sorry that times are so bad in Ireland now, next year might be good if a couple of weeks of California Climate was in Ireland last harvest it would be very much need there never is any rain here in summer time and sometimes very little in winter cant see a cloud the sun shines here not as in northern climes obscurely bright but one unclouded blaze of living light.

With sun as a metaphor for good times in California, the tone of the letter is largely negative towards life in Ireland, viewed from 6,000 miles away. He dismissed the advice his sister gave him to return home on economic and political grounds: "You were advising me to come home a few years ago if I did I might be like Patrick and Tim

Hurley now living in misery trying to raise the rent to pay the tyrant Lords I hope the time will come when they can't collect no more rents." Even his smug dismissal of Irish relatives in San Francisco carries with it a rejection of the old curse of the Irish – itself a rejection of the habits of home: "The Hurleys of Castelview have come down in the world. John in San Francisco is not doing well either, he likes his beer too well."

On January 13, 1891, Michael Hurley wrote to his mother in Ireland from Spokane Falls, Washington. Writing from long distance gave him the courage to admonish his mother for buying a farm: "I was astonished to see that you gave (£) 750 for that place. I think you must have been out of your mind no wonder times would be hard in Ireland when people are that foolish to pay so much for such a little place and such rent after." Then the contrast with life in north-west America that carries a certain smugness despite his own roller-coaster experience: "I have got that much money after all I have lost but I don't want to give it all for that place and then going into debt for stocking it. I can do better here."

News from Ireland, even for an itinerant miner, was freely available, but it only confirmed his sense of fatalism and negativity about Ireland's future: "Things look purty [sic] badly messed up back there now Parnell & Mrs. O'Shea have caused some trouble I am afraid it will delay home rule for a while Ireland never was on the point of gaining anything but something happened to prevent it." By contrast, America was booming and was obviously the place to be: "The wilds of America are becoming Civilized rapidly a few years ago there was nobody but Indians where this town stands and now there is about 30,000 people in it 6 and 7 stories [sic] high."

Michael concluded his letter with a message to his younger brother: "Tim you are better pin up the collar of your shirt and get married and run that place yourself I don't want it hoping this will find you all in health and happiness I will conclude for the present." Michael, while continuing to take an interest in Ireland and his family's welfare, sees his future in America. It is a reminder that emigration for many was not merely about individual advancement but was part of a family strategy.

By March 12, 1894, when brother Dennis Hurley wrote to his mother from Carson City, Nevada, the boom times were over in the silver mines:

Very bad times in United States, everything low with a great scarcity of money and work. Nevada and other silver producing states, who owing to the low price of silver which in place of selling at 129 cents per oz. is now selling at 59 or less than half of the par value. Archbishop Walsh of Dublin has written a book on this subject which is highly praised by friends of silver the world over. I am still at work but retaining it very insecure now.

Like his brother Michael, who had not written to him lately, Dennis was not averse to giving advice to his younger brother in Ireland:

Tim, my dear brother, you should look more to other requisites in a wedded partner than L.S.D. It is not like going to the bakers after a loaf of bread, all much the same. Some girls are better for a man to marry, even without a shilling than others with a good fortune. Look to qualities of head and heart, thrift, intelligence, cleanliness and

cheerfulness, no lazy untidy old mope. Do not postpone what you intend to do as you are not getting young.

The letter also contains other family news that links up with Michael's earlier letter: "John Hurley, Castleview, died in San Francisco Dec. 19 leaving 8 children to mourn his loss. Wife and self are well thank God, and hope this will find you all well."

The final set of letters form part of an emigration scheme to Mexican Texas in the years 1829 to 1834. The first group of Irish settlers were recruited in New York, Philadelphia, and New Orleans by two Irish *empresarios* or agents of the Mexican government, John McMullen and James McGloin, to move to San Patricio on the Nueces River, in the province of Coahuila y Texas. The main attraction was the promise of land grants of 4,428 acres per family, surely one of the best deals available to new settlers in the Americas in the nineteenth century (Davis 4). As part of the practice of boosterism in encouraging migration, letters home were included in the emigrant guides of the day. Jemima and Mary Toll, who came from New York to settle in San Patricio, were quoted to endorse settlement in the new colony:

I found this country equal to what was said in the hand bills and better again ... really I was astonished when I came amongst the colonists to see them all full of comfort, plenty of Corn, bread Mush Butter Milk and beef and what perhaps those who sent false reports never enjoyed before. As for pigs and fowls they are as numerous as flees ...

Do not be daunted the prospect here is good ... you'll have no work, your daughters can milk 50 cows for you, and make butter which is 25 cents a lb here, in Matamoros 50 cents. A cow has 2 calves in 10 months a sheep and a goat 3 yearlings in 15 months. The healthiest country in the world. The richest land will show like Gentlemens domains in the world. Fine wood and water as in any part of the world. As for fowl and fish of every kind no man can believe, but those that see. (Woodman 168-69)

Clearly there is some hyperbole in this account, not in the description of plenty or in the reproductive capacity of animals able to graze all year round in the pastures of the Texas Coastal Bend, but with regard to health which ignored the hazards of cholera, malaria, and yellow fever or the more obvious dangers to homesteads from hostile Indians and Mexican bandits in a frontier zone. Yet, the key sentence revealed the aspiration to own sufficient land to become like gentlemen in Ireland. It could not be more clearly expressed that emigration, or in this case, a further migration from the United States to Mexico, was seen in terms of social and economic advancement. In a number of cases the dream was fulfilled as 4,428 acres was to become the basis for building up large estates.

The second group of Irish settlers were recruited directly from Ireland by *empresarios* James Power and James Hewetson for the colony Refugio, located on the Mission River, a few miles inland from the Texas coast. Power returned to his native county Wexford to encourage would-be settlers to go to Texas with him on the promise of abundant land and future prosperity. As proof of the great deal on offer, he took members of his own family, his married sister, Elizabeth, and nephews, Martin Power and Thomas O'Connor. Surviving letters between Martin Power, a young cripple, who

was duly assigned his land grant in the Power-Hewetson colony in 1835, and his father, Daniel Power, back in county Wexford reveal an emotional tug-of-war between father and son (Power papers). In Martin's first few years in Texas, he witnessed a cholera outbreak in New Orleans, en route to Texas, shipwreck off the Texas coast, the destruction of property and massacres of settlers in the Texas Revolution of 1835-6, and further depredations and killings by Comanche Indians. Daniel Power, on hearing of all the disasters that befell the colonists, urged his son to return to Ireland. Despite all that happened that might well have persuaded him, Martin resisted his father's pressure and, in a letter of 1839, revealed his true motives for going to Texas and staying there:

The only thing that ever caused me to leave was the dulness of the times and fearing not with standing all my brothers off duty and hard labors to add to little stores – that they would be at least tore to pieces by making two farms of one. I have thought deeply for the past two years I spent there you know were getting mity [sic] little better and we all doing everything in our power.

I have for my time at least 80 pound a year since I left Ballinhash to present date ... I know you would not at this time insist on me to go home ... and not only that but see the door open to make an independent fortune in a short time.

Martin's memory of home and family in Ireland is bound up with the pressure of subdividing the land among the sons that was being resisted in south-east Ireland to preserve the viability of tenant holdings. This produced its own pressure for younger sons to emigrate and look for a better life in the New World. The chances of tenant farmers owning their land in Ireland at that time were remote. The opportunity to own a sizeable amount of land in Texas was an attractive alternative, even when all the hazards had been encountered. Martin stayed and died in Texas without fulfilling his dream.

However, his cousin, Thomas O'Connor, mentored by his uncle James Power, was to become "the cattle king of County Refugio," building up a vast ranching empire of 500,000 acres and becoming one of the richest men in Texas before his death in 1887. His eldest son, Dennis O'Connor, himself a millionaire rancher with his brother Tom, wrote a draft letter to the *Galveston News* dated December 22, 1888 (O'Connor). In a long letter written in crayon he revealed the extraordinary journey made in terms of his allegiance and identity, as he looked back on his roots in Ireland and Texas. It is an exceptionally revealing example of the evolution of self:

I was born in this Refugio County in the Republic of Texas in 1839 of Irish parents of the colony of Power and Hewitson. Enlisted and served as a Confederate Soldier throughout the rebellion. When in military camp I read Gen. Grant's terms of surrender to Gen. Lee + army I expressed myself thus – I believe it not, for the history of man gives no record of such magnanimity but if it be true then I intend to become a loyal citizen of the great nation whose servants met such acts. We disbanded [disbanded] I went home and dispassionately watched the proceedings of my southern brethren. All my political schooling was democratic, had voted for S.A. Douglas. My father [Thomas O'Connor] was a slave owner. I registered as a voter, took the amnesty oath and had as I expressed it, a country again.

Yes, Sir, I decend [sic] from the Emerald Gem of the ocean and I am proud of that decent [sic] next in point of esteem to my citizenship of the United States, the Galveston News to the contrary notwithstanding. I can spread out the tail of my coat widely and most defiantly under these suns and your Queen's police dare not tread there lest they tramp upon Uncle Sam's Striped and starry handkerchief not so safe an undertaking as collecting rents in the land of the shamrock. It is scarcely worthwhile to say republicans are not dynamite advocates. But I must presume to suggest that you dealt in that commodity superfluously ... I will concur with you by answering you that if I were compelled to choose between the occupation of using dynamite on English landlords in Ireland or elsewhere by word or insinuation [sic] deride or slander a downtrodden people I would certainly prefer the former especially if it would terrify one of the oppressors of mankind but for one single moment.

In one life, Dennis O'Connor had moved from being a citizen of the Texas Republic to a citizen of the United States after annexation. He then fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War and once again became a proud citizen of the United States, thanks to the magnanimity of the surrender terms. In politics he became a Republican, even though his father, Thomas O'Connor, had been a slave owner. However, what is most striking is Dennis O'Connor's passionate identification with Ireland, another example of reconstructed memory, but most specifically with the poor oppressed Irish tenant farmers. Clearly, this sense of oppression history had been handed down from his father, whose family were tenant mill farmers in Kilmuckridge, County Wexford. At the time of writing the letter, Dennis O'Connor was a powerful millionaire rancher and landowner with many tenants of his own on his estate that extended into several Texas counties. In economic terms, he had far more in common with landlords in Ireland than with poor, "oppressed" tenants who, following Gladstone's Land Acts 1871 and 1881, were in a much better system than in 1834 when Thomas O'Connor left Ireland at the age of 17. The O'Connor farm in Kilmuckridge was eventually purchased under the provisions of Conservative government legislation which enabled tenants to acquire their own farms over time. The current owner of the hundred acre farm is Dennis O'Connor, a direct descendant of Thomas O'Connor's elder brother, Dennis.

Conclusion

The letters discussed here, extending in time from the 1820s through to the 1890s, and drawing on the experience and perceptions of Irish emigrants in Canada, the United States, and Texas, as part of Mexico, as an independent republic and as part of the United States, illustrate the themes with which this essay began. The memory of Ireland could be frozen in aspic and fiercely defended in the New World. It could also be rationalised as part of a culture of exile, with the dream of one day returning to Ireland, or at least of being reunited in heaven with family members at home. Negative memories of Ireland could also justify fulfilling a dream of enjoying better times in the Americas, even to the extent of communicating an irritation with the ways of the old country and its prolonged destiny of enduring hard times. What is also ap-

parent is a reconstructed memory of Ireland that becomes incorporated into a journey of self-discovery: the old self in Ireland, oppressed and restricted, and the new self in a dynamic America, taking advantage of better opportunities to prosper. Finally, there is the phenomenon of a transmitted passion for Ireland, stronger among the generation that had never been there but had acquired a reconstructed memory from Irish parents.

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URBAN REGENERATION IN BELFAST: LANDSCAPE AND MEMORY

Valérie Peyronel

Recent research in urban studies has pointed out that while "for decades" it had been assumed that "globalisation was eclipsing communities" and "mobility" was "liberating people from locality," "the significance of place is being rediscovered" (Gaffikin & Morrissey, "Understanding" 25). Place, indeed, is where individuals live, where they become involved in social patterns and networks while simultaneously shaping their personal and collective identities, where they can plan their future, but also where they have their roots. For E.S. Casey, place "is necessary for its power to direct and stabilize us, to memorialize and identify us, to tell us who we are in terms of where we are as well as where we are not" (xv). On the basis of the above-mentioned statements one may assume that place, as a keeper of roots and memory, and globalisation, as a booster of mobility and standardisation, mutually challenge each other.

To check this hypothesis this paper considers the case of Belfast, a city which has been successively transformed by industrialisation, conflict, and, since the early 1990s, the effects of a particularly noticeable economic recovery largely due to favourable global perspectives and their consequences in terms of investment and capital mobility with a view to seizing new business opportunities. It is a city where past and present are entangled.

This paper therefore focuses on the regeneration of Belfast City Centre since the late 1980s, analyses the objectives which have prevailed in the implementation of public policies, and attempts to assess the impact of such policies on individual and collective memory as well as their limits.

Urban Regeneration Programmes and Economic Recovery

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Belfast was the "industrial heartland" of Ireland. Commentators recognised, among other virtues, her "eminent status in the modern world, her high commercial and industrial distinction, her wealth and influence" (Crawford 35). The consequences of this economic wealth on the landscape were materialised by the transformation of the previously decaying Georgian town into a "buoyant Victorian and Edwardian city." By 1900, the population of Belfast had reached nearly 350.000 inhabitants, five times as much as the 1800 figure (Walker & Dixon 70). Consequently, next to the elegant middle-class buildings, this demographic boom had also induced the development of large areas of poor-quality terraced housing (Gaffikin & Morrissey, "Urban Economy" 43-45).

The next major change occurred in the early 1960s, which were marked by buoyant office and commercial development within and around the City Centre. Then in the 1970s, the combined effects of the economic crisis and the continuous de-industrialisation process led to a massive population decline in the City Centre, which was accelerated with conflict.

Between 1971 and 1991, the population of Belfast declined by a third, from 416.700 to 279.230, particularly in the inner city (*Draft Strategy* § 3.2). Indeed, in the 1970s, Belfast's inner city lost 42% of its population and in the 1980s another 23%: the wealthiest share of those who left the inner city migrated to more peaceful and welcoming quarters or suburbs, while the poorest clustered in the peripheral areas. According to the Department for Social Development, DSD, the disaffection for the inner city, together with economic difficulties and weakened social structures all contributed to the dereliction of the city centre. "This out migration left those who stayed behind in the top of urban decay exemplified by high rates of unemployment, poor housing and a weakened social structure which offered little protection from a range of problems associated with urban decline" (*Draft Strategy* § 3.2). Furthermore, the outbursts of violence not only played a part in this damaging process but also justified the multiplication of visible signs of social division. If the walls erected to separate Protestant from Catholic neighbourhoods in the suburbs could not be perceived in the inner city landscape, the blind iron curtains on shop-windows or the proximity of barbed-wire fences on the very outskirts of the city centre (the security cordon), were constant visual reminders of the persistent conflict.

A turning-point occurred in the late 1980s. The shift from the industrial to the service sector contributed to the transformation of the landscape, with an emphasis on office and retailing expansion. The renovated area extended to the river shores with the development of the Waterfront Project engineered in the Waterfront Laganside Scheme.¹ "As of March 2000, investment in the Laganside area was \$ 570 million, which was distributed through 214.500 square feet of office space, 425 apartments and an additional 600 jobs" (*Washington Times*). The Government's programmes for the relocation of jobs in the city centre also played a part in the economic recovery of central Belfast. The inflow of employees fostered demand for local service and retailing facilities, whose suppliers in turn became attracted by the availability of potential consumers and low occupancy costs (in particular in the case of non-local investors²), while they were no longer deterred by security threats. As Frank Gaffikin and Mike Morrissey have underlined, "such prestigious developments signalled not just an economic revival but also a political recovery of a city subject to years of de-

1 The Laganside Corporation was set up by the Government in 1989 to secure the regeneration of Belfast riverside and waterfront areas.

2 In an interview in 2001, Laganside Development Corporation Chief Executive, Mike Smith, explained that the corporation usually pre-rented buildings before they were even built. He also quoted British Telecom and Hilton Hotel, who had received their site for free but had then put 75% of their own equity in their properties.

liberate destruction" ("Role of Culture" 167). The development and revamping of Castle Court bore witness to this business confidence, further fostered by the removal of the security cordon in the early 1990s, as confirmed by the Department for Social development: "The excellent trading performance of Belfast branches of major multiples and the perceived growth in retail demand have encouraged a high level of developer interest in Belfast City Centre leaving it poised for growth" (*Draft Strategy* § 3.4).

Capitalising on the bullish economic trend, a number of major urban renovation and environmental schemes of the City Centre were implemented by organisations like Making Belfast Work founded in 1988 to "strengthen and target more effectively the efforts being made by the community, the private sector and the government in addressing the economic, educational, health and environmental problems facing people living in the most disadvantaged areas of Belfast" ("Making Belfast Work" website). Since 1997, the Belfast Regeneration Office (BRO) have directed and coordinated the implementation of a regeneration strategy aimed at the most deprived areas in and around Belfast, drawing funding from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, complemented by programmes like Making Belfast Work (Gasworks, The Diamond Rathcoole, Engage with Age, Farset), Urban Development Grants, Area Project Teams, Comprehensive Development Schemes, Environmental Improvement Schemes. The Belfast Regeneration Office also acts as the Managing Authority for European Funding streams under the PEACE programmes.³

As far as governmental programmes are concerned, the Department for Social Development is the supervising authority. Its most relevant publication regarding the renovation of Belfast City Centre is the *Regeneration Policy Statement* published as a follow-up to the *Belfast City Regeneration Policy Framework* of July 5, 2003. The objectives of the Framework as stated in the introduction of the executive summary, are to "provide the direction needed to guide and maximise the regeneration potential of this investment in the City Centre for the benefit of Belfast and the province as a whole" (1). The Belfast City Council also participates in the consultation and decision-making process, and The Royal Town Planning Institute in Ireland have been asked to issue recommendations in the field of heritage conservation.

Urban Regeneration as a Tool

The terminological analysis of some of the major framework documents issued by the Belfast Regeneration Office, the Department for Social Development, the Royal Town Planning Institute, and Laganside Corporation provides a useful insight into the objectives underlying the regeneration of Belfast City Centre and raises the following

3 The PEACE I and PEACE II programmes as well as the URBAN programme are European funding programmes meant to support economic and social development in Northern Ireland as a contribution to peace.

question: Has the change in Belfast City Centre townscape been merely dictated by economic considerations or has any space been left to conservation, references to the past, and if so, which past?

On the one hand, the renovated modern (contemporary) Belfast townscape is meant to reflect economic recovery and business confidence. First of all, the City's appearance is important. While the Belfast Regeneration Office insists on the necessity to "encourage [...] physical regeneration" (*Draft Strategy* § 5.4), the Department for Social Development points out that "the public realm should be the shop window for the City, presenting a strong and positive message as a first and last impression" (*People and Place* 11 § 3.6). The link between aesthetics, attractiveness, and economic recovery is underlined: "The quality of the public realm of the City should provide an aesthetically inviting image and fundamentally should prime and support economic and social development" (*Belfast City Centre* § 5.5). The ultimate objective of this regeneration process is to make Belfast a competitive location for international investment, opening it up to larger business relations: "There is a need to strategically position Belfast in the international marketplace, defining the characteristics that would entice a company or individual to invest in or visit the City rather than go elsewhere" (§ 3.6). One of the major aspects of this new policy is to enhance trading facilities to foster exchange and encourage people to actually come and visit downtown Belfast, "to support and strengthen the City Centre as the premier regional shopping destination" (§ 1.3). Such a policy is part of a long-term strategy, in which the economic recovery of the City seems to be playing a key part "to provide opportunities within the City Centre to help establish a twenty-first-century economy placed to compete with other European cities" (§ 1.3).

On the other hand, the urban regeneration of Belfast City Centre must meet conservation objectives and enhance the past. One of the seventeen principles listed in the *Belfast City Centre Regeneration Policy Framework* is to "build upon the City Centre's rich historic character through complementary and contemporary design" (§ 1.3). For the Department for Social Development, nineteenth-century Belfast is to be considered as the core of historical heritage: "In spite of much new development, the City still retains a substantial Victorian and Edwardian landscape" (§ 1.3).

The Royal Town Planning Institute in Ireland takes a wider view of the historical heritage of Belfast and lays the emphasis on the gap between the modern and historical spaces of the city:

The Area's strong architectural, industrial and marine heritage has been undermined by insensitive development, dereliction, pollution and community conflict [...] There is enormous potential to develop partnerships to conserve and promote a confident identity using its built capital, townscape and history. (*Priority Issues* § 5)

The historical heritage of Belfast is not only supposed to attract visitors, tourists, and investors, it also plays a part in reinforcing the roots of the locals by offering "a vision

that encapsulates this distinctive place and its rich complex history will be an important contribution to the definition of common identity" (Priority Issues § 4).

This analysis of the terms used in some fundamental framework documents from various sources reveals two possible approaches to urban regeneration strategies in Belfast City Centre. The first approach lays a particular emphasis on economic development and "highlights Northern Ireland's integration with social and economic processes common to other peripheral regions" (Gaffikin & Morrissey, "Understanding" 27). The renovation of Belfast's urban landscape thus aims at presenting the City as taking an active part in the global economic development process. Concomitantly, this economic revival contributes to the elimination of the traces of dereliction and conflict and, furthermore, creates a neutral space accessible to all. Frank Gaffikin and Mike Morrissey have suggested that such a development was deliberately advocated in urban public policies: "To offset the segregation of the ethnic spaces (West Belfast etc.) government has tried to emphasise common accessibility to the 'neutral spaces' of the downtown and waterfront" ("Role of Culture" 178). The second approach lays more emphasis on the area's specific history and cultural heritage, implying that regeneration should thus be coupled with the conservation of historical buildings whose importance is to be enhanced in the urban landscape.

Consequently, at first sight, there seem to be two contrastive views of the possible relation between urban regeneration and the evocation of the past: one which deliberately tends to obliterate the immediate past of dereliction and conflict and another one which openly refers to a more distant Victorian and Edwardian past. However, both approaches converge towards a process of selective regeneration which simultaneously points to the future and to a distant past, while obliterating more recent periods of troubled history. Under the vibrant declarations in favour of urban regeneration, the partly hidden agenda also has to do with peace and community relations in Northern Ireland. Place is to be used as the catalyst of a non-divisive memory, that of the nineteenth-century Victorian heritage, or as a crucible for future developments. Hence the traces of a more recent painful past must disappear. But to what extent can this strategic combination influence the shaping of memory and the behaviour of Belfast's residents and visitors?

In his essay entitled "The False Urban Memory Syndrome," Austin Williams presents history as a tool which can be used to embellish current reality:

Abstractions such as memories, historical events or folklore from a previous generation can be captured, reinterpreted and given a role in redefining the sense of what the place was and is. The purpose is to hold onto the past and to create added colour to the contemporary urban lived experience. (1)

Such a statement indeed pleads in favour of the historical approach for Belfast urban regeneration schemes. However, the impact of such a diversion of history to the benefit of the present is questionable. In his book *The Image of the City*, published in 1960, Karl Lynch had expressed the opinion that people held in their minds an image

of the city essential to their experience and interaction with it (60). Echoing these words in his comparative study of Belfast and Berlin, William J.V. Neill underlines that "in society, memory is not abstract like history, it cannot exist outside the people who do the remembering" (5). From his point of view, the consequence is that "in the city which, as theatre for social action, depends on memories, signifying practices are constantly involved in the making and changing of meaning" (7).

This "making and changing of meaning" is all the more important as individual experience (and memory) is part of a larger collective experience of the urban environment and simultaneously participates in the shaping of, and is shaped by, collective memory, which can be described as a common story, not necessarily personally experienced, and transmitted from one generation to the next. In their research paper "The Just City, Place and Community Planning: From Politicised Places to Lived Spaces," Birgitte Mazanti and John Pløger conclude that "places represent individual experiences: but the meaning of the particular place can be made of collective schemes of signification, collective memory as well as collective amnesia."

Urban Regeneration, Memory, and Conflict

At this point, one could conclude that if the renovated townscape in Belfast has to do with fostering exclusively positive and/or neutral memory, then the policy which consists in making appropriate use of the brightest parts of history and in supporting economic development to foster a favourable and enticing experience of the City can indeed participate in the making of both a positive collective memory and a positive individual one. But this may sound too optimistic, and contradicting theories underline the limits of this process.

First of all, the rehabilitation of the Victorian and Edwardian past of Belfast, considered as a pillar of positive common identity, seems to have been, so far at least, less extended and successful than expected. In his comparative work on Belfast and Berlin, William J.V. Neill expresses the view that instead of the enhancement of historical buildings "third-rate market led neutral post-modern architecture has prevailed" (18), thus eclipsing the visible traces of historical heritage. The target which consisted in fostering positive memory by capitalising on the historical townscape has been missed to the benefit of a renovated but neutral landscape deprived of its identity.

The trouble is that neutrality, which also largely underlies Belfast regeneration policies and which can be considered as a way to favour the collective amnesia of a troubled past, is also difficult to handle. According to Lefebvre's analysis in *The Production of Space*, published in 1991, "the modernisation of western industrial society has resulted in an artificial and abstract form of spatiality," implying that "what is understood in modern society as 'real space' is an abstract construction, an abstract space, which gives privilege to mental space, marginalises social space and sup-

presses the lived space of daily life" (55). The conclusion one may draw from Lefebvre's analysis is that a neutral townscape enables imagination to escape beyond control. This is a double-edged sword. In the particular case of Belfast, the imagination of the City Centre visitor is thus set free to memorise the current neutral renovated urban environment either positively or negatively. In the second case, the emotion derived "either from conflict-related accounts of the past or from experienced events" may well prevail in the building up of memory, thus obliterating the desired positive effects of the neutral townscape. Indeed, as Austin Williams has explained in his theoretical analysis of what he has called "the false urban memory syndrome," one's approach to the urban environment is also largely subjective and emotion-driven: "While there may be an element of psychosomatic neurosis about these feelings, it is understandably true that place and memory can have an emotional reality for many of us" (1).

The impact of Belfast City Centre regeneration policies on positive and consensual memory is also challenged both by the strong cultural, political, and denominational marking of close neighbourhoods like West Belfast and North Belfast and by the dereliction which prevails in some poverty-stricken areas of suburban Belfast. The visual markers of segregation are the symbols of resistance to neutrality. Neil Jarman, the author of extensive research into mural paintings and other cultural markers in Northern Ireland, has acknowledged that "on any journey, real or virtual, through the working-class areas of Belfast, one is bombarded by a panoply of visual statements" (81) and that in particular "it has been widely noted how murals and other displays are sometimes situated as territorial indicators or as boundary markers – as a warning or a challenge to the 'other'" (83). These territorial markers are clear references to "particular groups and historical activity" (*Belfast's Peacelines*). As for socially-deprived areas, a large share of the regeneration strategies advocated by the Belfast Regeneration Office and the Department of Social Development is dedicated to these areas where social deprivation prevails and where the meaning of regeneration extends far beyond the mere renovation of the urban space: it also means education, employment, safety. The *Draft Strategy* also addresses this issue as part of the Belfast Regeneration Office's contribution to Belfast City Vision for 2025: "We want to see run-down areas converted into attractive, safe and well-designed neighbourhoods that meet residents' expectations. Residents will be able to say that they have reasonable income, good housing, the opportunity of employment and access to social and leisure services" (§5.1).

For the time being, however, a visit to the neutral, economically booming, and aesthetically more pleasant downtown Belfast may well foster a better perception of society in Northern Ireland for people from the segregated and economically deprived parts of Belfast, while their roots still remain in their own quarters. As long as urban and social policies have not totally blurred the contrast between the City Centre and its more deprived and segregated neighbourhoods, the impact of downtown urban regeneration on visitors' minds can be questioned. And it will take even longer to erase

their individual and collective memories of recent conflict and deprivation than to eradicate the reality of the conflict itself.

Conclusion

Beside its business-driven development, the public realm of Belfast City Centre is indeed meant to be a world of its own, at the crossroads of all political, cultural, and religious allegiances, or socio-economic classifications, a place for all, "the shop window of Belfast, the first and last impression for those who live and work in the City, and those who visit" (*People and Place* 11). The City Centre spaces are supposed to "provide common ground where people of all backgrounds can meet and participate in the life of the regional capital" (*People and Place* 12). But one can, indeed, question the capacity of occasional and brief visits to the neutral city centre to offset the effects and consequences of segregation and dereliction elsewhere and to concur to the making of a sense of "common" place. William J.V. Neill, for instance, doubts "the capacity of the shared cultural spaces on Belfast's waterfront emphasising youth culture and a cosmopolitan outlook to dispel cultural and ethnic tensions" (19). In his study of memory in context, Robert Samuel has expressed the view that "memory is historically conditioned, changing colour and shape according to the emergencies of the moment" (12). In fact, the use which can be made of urban regeneration and economic prosperity in the City Centre as a support for improved community relations among Belfast residents remains very vulnerable and closely related to the daily events and context.

The renovation of the City Centre cannot convey the expected strong and positive message of a post-conflict era on its own: it is, of course, part of a much wider political, economic, and social process that also has to do with equal opportunities and economic and social progress for all. Neither will any urban renovation process provide the answer to the political future of Northern Ireland. A cleaner, better-looking, busier and more cosmopolitan City Centre can contribute to the slow process of erasing the "darker side of memory," to leave more space for a common cultural heritage and for brighter prospects. But for the City Centre to actually participate in such a process, there must also be an appropriation by all across the political, economic, and social spectrum of that "neutral" part of town as a piece of evidence that the city can become what people make of it and not what they remember of it. As underlined by Frank Gaffikin and Mike Morrissey, "without a greater sense of common ownership and stake-holding in the City by the two sides of the community, there will not be the civic pride necessary to market the city to its full potential for tourism and investment" (Hall 70).

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ANTICIPATING THE PEACE PROCESS: *IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER* AS A MYTH-BREAKING MESSAGE

Yann Bévant

In the Name of the Father was first released on cinema screens in 1993. Jim Sheridan's film is directly inspired by the story of Gerry Conlon, a young Northern Irish Catholic who was unjustly sentenced and imprisoned together with his father for the murder of five people in an IRA bomb attack in 1974. The case went far beyond the mere question of the individuals concerned to become emblematic of a conflict in which, to many Irish eyes, British institutions played a bad part. Furthermore, there is also the symbolic aspect of the timing of the film's release, as it coincided with that of the Downing Street Joint Statement, which was a stepping stone for the Peace Process in Northern Ireland. The following analysis rests on two essential aspects of the notion of conflict, a notion which constitutes the central question in the film.

The first aspect is the conflict between Gerry Conlon, a marginal, unimportant character, and the judicial and police system. This conflict serves as a metaphor of the Irish nationalist struggle which eventually goes beyond the mere Northern Irish context to reach out to a never-ending conflict between two nations, in which 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland are but the latest development. This historical context makes up the wall the film's main character stumbles against. So it could be yet another film about Irish grievances against the 'Brits' carrying an unreconstructed Irish Republican message, and many critics like Conor Cruise O'Brien or Richard Grenier readily jumped to such a conclusion. The story actually suggests a more sophisticated message as, by playing the rules of the game in a system he initially rejects, Gerry Conlon eventually breaks down the wall of mistrust and misunderstanding and does so thanks to somebody who apparently belongs to the other side, an English lawyer.

The second aspect is a logical development of the first. Gerry's predicament cannot be reduced to a struggle against a hostile world; it has much to do with the choices he has to make, not only as an individual but also as a kind of go-between, as he is both heir to the weight of past history and builder of a future which may take a different shape according to the way he acts.

As mentioned above, Jim Sheridan's film is based on a true story, which remained a bone of contention in Anglo-Irish relations for many years. In October and November 1974, the Provisional IRA bombed two pubs in Guildford and Birmingham, England. The attacks triggered violent anti-Irish feelings in British public opinion. As a result, the *Prevention of Terrorism Act* was rushed through Parliament. For the first time since its promulgation the new law made it possible to suspend the *Habeas Corpus*

Act (a law prohibiting imprisonment without charge and without access to a lawyer) for a maximum period of seven days in cases connected with terrorism. It is under the provisions of this piece of legislation that several Irish people were arrested and jailed, thereby becoming the ideal suspects. After having been bullied into confessing crimes they had not committed, they became at the same time the perfect scape-goats and the best evidence of the efficiency of the police and of British courts. In the following years, the fate of the so-called Guildford Four and Birmingham Six became increasingly important in Anglo-Irish relations, all the more since, in spite of new evidence, the British stubbornly rejected any retrial of the convicted men. The campaign in favour of a revision of the trial gained momentum, became an international issue and eventually culminated in the retrial of the Guildford Four in 1989 and of the Birmingham Six in 1991 and the subsequent release of them all.

By choosing to make a film on such a topic, Sheridan does not only tell a story based on facts, nor does he simply describe a particular aspect of the bitter relationship between the British (and more particularly the English) and the Irish, i.e. the harm done to the latter by the colonial and condescending attitude of the former. What Sheridan tries to do is to provide analysis and meaning in what could have been merely a terrible blunder but had actually become one of the most powerful myths in the recent history of Anglo-Irish relations. The cases of the Guilford Four and the Birmingham Six encapsulated a number of difficult issues: the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland and the status of the Province, the claim by the British authorities that they were neutral in the conflict between the two northern Irish communities and that Britain was but "an honest broker."¹ Furthermore the 'episode' lasted for years, which contributed to a dramatisation of what was at stake; to many Irish minds, the individuals who had been convicted became symbols of British prejudice.

In short, something which in different circumstances could have been interpreted as a malfunction leading to a serious judicial mistake calling for redress attracted attention because it had been elevated to the status of myth, and the ideological contamination springing from such a status made any tentative step towards a critical attitude next to impossible – not only on the British side. From an Irish perspective, the case took the value of a Great Historic Test: Would the British eventually prove able to acknowledge past mistakes and redress not only the wrongs in the case, but adequately address Irish historic grievances generally? Jim Sheridan's message goes even a step further asking questions like: What about us, the Irish people? Are we capable of overcoming our own prejudices in our relation to Britain and the British, particularly when the North is at stake? Can we get over the old shibboleths of Irish nationalism and drop the posture of victims and martyrs, which is after all nothing but the anticipated response of the colonised to the coloniser? The purpose of the film is not to provide a documentary, nor even a screen adaptation, as Rob

1 The term was used by Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland such as Sir Patrick Mayhew and Peter Brooke.

Ritchie and Mike Beckham had done with Chris Mullin's book on the case. The aim of the film is to take a critical and introspective stand on the nature of the response that must be made to a denial of justice, mythologised into the perfect representation of the constant process of victimisation in Anglo-Irish relations, a process which in turn makes self-defence legitimate.

The story of Gerry Conlon as told by Sheridan reveals a double quest. Gerry, in a very existentialist, Sartrean way, is thrown into the world, and his life does not make sense. He first appears as an actor in a story which initially seems largely beyond his grasp. This first quest, the quest for meaning and self-assertion, the translation from object to subject, leads him to political commitment and to following in Joe McAndrew's² tracks. Gerry Conlon, however, soon finds out that McAndrew's truth is no better than that of the 'Brits' he rejects and that the IRA man responds exactly as he is conditioned to do by the myth he lives in. In other words, if Gerry Conlon really wants to set himself free, he has to break free from the deterministic attitudes generated by the myth. From then on, his campaign for rehabilitation in the name of his father appears first of all as a quest to destroy the illusions that keep him and his likes mentally imprisoned. By getting rid of a conditioned response that only keeps the vicious circle going (McAndrew's example) and by showing the inadequate nature of the representations created by the myth (not all English people are prejudiced or unreliable; Irish people are not violent by nature; to be true to the fathers does not necessarily imply the way of the gun, and what seemed to be solid facts are eventually exposed as lies and forged evidence), Sheridan's main character brings down the myth itself and sets the future free.

From Outcast to Rebel

The story starts *in medias res*, as we are introduced to an already convicted and jailed Gerry Conlon. He is telling his story to an English woman – and we will learn at a later stage that she is his lawyer and will manage to re-open the case for a new trial. This introduction allows us to discover Gerry's former life. Gerry is no romantic hero, nor even an activist. He is a petty thief who has no true faith. He has no hesitation when it comes to lying, even to family and friends. Aunt Maggie declares: "He is no angel," and his father asks: "Are you going to be a liar and a thief all your life?" In fact, Gerry is adrift more than that he is a malevolent character. By playing the baddie, he does at least exist in his own eyes as well as in his father's. This is revealed by the conversation he has with his father in the cell: "That's when I started to rob to prove that I was no good [...] then I knew I was bad [...] I started to tell lies [...] you know what that means: words don't mean anything." Paradoxically, Gerry's speech highlights the symbolic importance of words and therefore of representations, as he himself claims that his behaviour was in the first place conditioned by his

2 The IRA activist he meets while in jail.

father's statement. By becoming an unreliable petty thief, Gerry seems to try and conform to his father's words, as a person of faith would do with regard to the word of God. Such a situation obviously heralds the two quests that await Gerry.

Up to his arrest by the security forces Gerry is unable to bring meaning to his life, which seems governed by the whims of fate. It is by mistake that soldiers believe he is a sniper on the roof at the beginning of the film and that he is the cause of the riot. It is by chance that he finds himself in the IRA hiding place, and this is the reason why he has to flee to Britain to avoid being knee-capped by the paramilitaries. Once in England, it is by chance again that he meets Jim Deptford and that he robs money in a prostitute's flat, and both events will have terrible, adverse effects during the trial. Sartre was evoked earlier on, and a parallel with Albert Camus' main character in *L'Étranger* could also be made at this stage: Just like Meursault, Gerry is the toy of a series of unpredictable events over which he has no control and he ends up in jail. Contrary to Camus' hero, Gerry is, however, not sentenced to death, but, by voicing his disappointment that the death penalty is no longer available, the judge who condemns him echoes the hatred of the public attending the verdict. To a large extent, Meursault's and Gerry's predicaments are quite comparable, but there is something more in Gerry's case. He and his friends are found guilty of a crime they never committed. After the trial, his father prophetically remarks: "At least you told the truth in there. That will stand you."

Gerry's awareness is progressive. At the beginning of his term in jail, he is still a character without direction, whose life is as fragmented as the big jigsaw of the West Indian man with whom he takes drugs. The motif of the jigsaw, a map of the British Empire, and the very character of the West Indian, yet another colonised subject, are reminders of Gerry's own condition and sense of guilt. Broken by other people's notions of them, both men seem at a loss and unable to stand for what they truly are. As Martin McLoone aptly remarked: "This is the problem of cultural imperialism, the colonisation of the unconscious in which [...] the colonised culture can finally only recognise itself in the image promoted in the first instance by the colonising culture" ("National Cinema" 152-53). Yet the scene of the jigsaw is the starting point of Gerry's evolution. The insert shot on the jig-saw representation of the broken Empire, the sarcastic remarks of the wardens, the open hostility of the English prisoners who call Gerry and his father "Irish bastards," all this leads Gerry to see what he did not want to see when he was in the hippie community, in spite of Jim Deptford's attitude and in spite of Charlie Burke's ominous statement that whatever he may say or do the fact that he belongs to the Northern Irish Catholic community sticks to him as a second skin and is the main – negative – marker of his identity in English eyes. From the moment he accepts such a definition of himself, Gerry finds what he thinks is his place in the world. He becomes a political animal, and the petty thief vanishes. He used to live on the fringe of a system, a system that he now rejects for ostensibly ideological reasons. Contrary to his father, he does not want to appeal against the judgement, because he has no confidence in the British judicial system, or in the

British generally. At this stage, Gerry is not aware that he is falling into another trap and that he is still conforming, though in another way, to the image of the colonised. He has only moved from one representation of the myth – the defeated and crushed colonised native – to another, which reads like an oxymoron – the colonised rebel. A dialogue between his father, Giuseppe Conlon and Joe McAndrew is particularly relevant of this stage:

Giuseppe – For God sake will you stop all this?
Joe – You're weakening my position Giuseppe.
Giuseppe – It will end in violence.
Joe – Good.
Giuseppe – What's good about that?
Joe – That's all they understand.

This conversation makes sense in diegetic terms, but it also hints at old contentious issues in the history of Anglo-Irish relations. It brings back to mind, among other things, the famous Treaty of Limerick, signed in 1691. That the British government should not respect a Treaty, that is to say the rule of law by which they initially vowed to abide, was something the Irish republican movement, in various periods and most notably up to the late twentieth century, considered as the best proof that only the balance of strength – and therefore violent means – had a bearing on the attitude of the British authorities. Joe McAndrew's republican cue obviously echoes this long-standing argument, but Sheridan is certainly not satisfied with this rather Manichean vision of things. If his film makes no concession and underlines the actual failures and responsibilities of the British, it also calls for a deep and genuine reassessment of traditional Irish viewpoints. Consequently, Gerry's new political awareness confronts him with another deadly trap. By accepting the perception of others as a way of defining his own identity, Gerry may well again conform to what is expected of him – as when his father saw him as a petty thief – and become just like Joe McAndrew. Contrary to Giuseppe Conlon, McAndrew is ready to retaliate, and he triggers off a fight in the prison. Later on, he organises a militant protest which is harshly repressed, and he takes revenge on chief warden Barker by burning him severely during a film session.³ This episode is concluded by Gerry's voiceover: "Barker was maimed for life and Joe was sent to another prison. He is in solitary confinement somewhere. We've had no news of him since then. The new chief screw had the yard painted and I was back walking in circles again."

The episode and its conclusion are quite telling. McAndrew's hatred is exactly what Dixon expects on Gerry's face during the beat-up. When he reacts as a rebel who does not hesitate to use his companions as instruments to serve his cause and when he resorts to ruthless violence, McAndrew conforms to the mythologised representation of the Irish barbarian expected by members of the British security forces such as Dixon, but also by the regular Englishman in the street such as the one who

3 The spectator cannot but notice the intertextuality of the scene, as the film on screen is Coppola's *The Godfather*.

shouts "hang the Irish bastard" during the trial. The fresh circles of paint followed by the picture of the prisoners in the prison ward have a symbolic function: when repression backfires and violence considered legitimate by the prisoners erupts, revolt is justified and then calls for more repression. As an activist McAndrew becomes for a while Gerry's surrogate father, because Gerry is a newborn political animal. But McAndrew's blind violence and eventual failure accelerate Gerry's awareness that violence only calls for more violence and that the vicious circle built by the myth will not bring down the prison walls.

Articulating a Myth-Breaking, Post-Colonial Discourse

The prison context also leads Gerry to re-examine the set of relationships he entertains with his father as well as to reassess his father's words. At the beginning of the film Gerry refuses to listen to his father, who in the Belfast context is actually often at pains to make himself heard. Yet, in prison, Giuseppe's importance becomes obvious. He becomes a central character in the story because he acts as a go-between, and we realise that from the very start he has played such a part: by talking to the local commander he prevents his son from being knee-capped by the IRA, and one scene at the beginning announces Giuseppe's line of action in prison: during the riot we see him between the security forces and the mob, trying to calm things down. Both in the scene of the riot and with the IRA Giuseppe gets what he wants through talk. Giuseppe actually goes beyond appearances: when he communicates with the wardens, it is because he can see the human beings beyond the agents of the system. When the prisoners are playing in the snow, Gerry's voiceover expresses surprise at the fact that Giuseppe seems indifferent to the news concerning his call for an appeal. But the spectator knows what Giuseppe is interested in, what is shown at that very moment: he is watching one of the wardens feeding a pigeon, and the scene we can see through Giuseppe's eyes restores the man's inner humanity. As the poet Panait Istrati said, beauty is in the eye of the man who knows how to watch; and the scene strongly suggests that Giuseppe refuses to close his mind, thereby expressing his refusal to be stripped of his own human dignity. This is what he wants Gerry to understand when he points at his head and says: "All they've done is black out the light. They can't black out the light in here."

To Giuseppe, maintaining his humanity consists in the first place in refusing to reduce other human beings into mere objects. This is why he cannot support McAndrew's strategies in spite of the wrong done to him, and this explains why, in the strongest terms, he condemns the vicious attack on Barker. Giuseppe, in short, rejects fate, but he also rejects concepts and ideas that go against human dignity. In this respect, he appears not only as McAndrew's antithesis, but also as a guide who shows Gerry the way forward. He is a torchbearer and one who cannot be deceived by illusions like the men in Plato's cave.

The dying Giuseppe eventually passes on the torch to his son, and three scenes in the film perfectly illustrate Gerry's take-over. First, the scene when the two men face each other, hands on cheeks in a mirror-like attitude. Gerry no longer turns his back on his father as he was shown doing many times at the beginning of the film. Then, a second significant scene takes place when Giuseppe gives his son a tape-recorder and tells him: "you're a good talker. Talk." Giuseppe symbolically passes on his own weapon to Gerry, and encourages him to keep his words in memory. By telling his story in his own words, Gerry will free his individual history from external interpretation and from appropriation by others. It is a double act of liberation. Last but not least, the scene of Giuseppe's death: Giuseppe is asleep and breathes loudly, while Gerry is smoking a cigarette in his bed. The cigarette goes off, and Gerry has to use his lighter. As the light appears, Giuseppe ceases to breathe. This scene harbours a strong symbolic connotation, which is dramatically echoed in the next one, when prisoners throw blazing pieces of paper out of the windows: the walls of the prison cannot contain Giuseppe's light, the bearer of which is now Gerry.

Gerry, thus, carries on his father's legal fight. The words he speaks when he meets Gareth Pierce are revealing of the change in the nature of his quest: "I'd never thought I could trust an English person again, especially a lawyer." Later on, Gerry tells her: "My Da always saw the good in people. He recognized it in you the minute he saw you Gareth." Now Gerry himself can see the woman behind the lawyer. Like his father, he is now able to go beyond appearances and to consider human beings in their full dimension.

At this stage, it could be argued that films on Ireland and Northern Ireland advocating the use of peaceful means to solve the conflict have been numerous and that Sheridan consequently breaks no new ground but simply follows in their footsteps. Films such as *Shake Hands with the Devil*, *The Gentle Gunman*, or, more recently, *Patriot Games*, all denounce violence as a dead end. Yet the argument does not hold, as the vast majority of the films carrying such a message in the last 50 years were not shot from an Irish nationalist perspective, but from a British or American point of view. Sheridan is perfectly clear about where he speaks from. He has his hero say: "I can't forget what they did to my family, I just can't forget." After the appeal and the release of the prisoners, Gerry also declares:

I am an innocent man. I spent fifteen years in prison for something I didn't do. I watched my father die in a British prison for something he didn't do. And this government still says he is guilty. I want to tell them that until my father is proved innocent, until all the guilty ones are brought to justice, I will fight on, in the name of my father and of the truth.

Just like the main protagonist in his film, Jim Sheridan has voiced his conviction that it was necessary to free speech in order to free the truth; in other words to break free from the conventional and imposed representations so as to genuinely reassess on both sides the totality of Anglo-Irish relationships. It is only if such a condition is fulfilled that the sacrificed generations will rest in peace in the eyes of future gene-

rations; that wounds will begin to heal and that a process of reconciliation will be made possible. Sheridan clearly makes his point in an interview available with the video release of the film: "It was just a way to say you're old-fashioned, get over, evolve." Sheridan's remark was aimed at all sides, and his point was repeated, though in less challenging terms, in 1994: "Liberation is only possible if all sides of the conflict examine their actions [...] and change" (Mansfield 7).

Such positioning also has an additional merit: it hints at the limited influence of Hollywood codes on Sheridan's work. Many critics have also pinpointed the difference between American and British traditions when it comes to representing Ireland on the screen (e.g. Caughie, Rockett and Hill). The American tradition, beginning with *The Lad from Old Ireland*, shot by Sydney Olcott in 1910, borrows the linear pattern, popularised by westerns, and privileges optimistic endings. The main counter-example would be John Ford's *The Informer*, released in 1935, which resorts to expressionist techniques. Sheridan, however, stops short of actually affixing a Hollywood culture stamp on *In the Name of the Father*. Though the narrative is undoubtedly closer to the American tradition than to the British one, its ideological content is difficult to relate to either of them. Sheridan's film does not revel in the superiority of American values, as is often the case with American-made films on Ireland, from the above-mentioned *The Lad from Old Ireland* to *The Devil's Own* and *Far and Away*, to name but a few. A number of themes present in the film are likely to appeal to American audiences: free will versus determinism and the importance of individual self-assertion, for instance. Yet, the film was not primarily made for an American audience, nor even for an Irish-American audience revelling in nostalgia for old Erin. Basically, Jim Sheridan knows the recipes to make sure that his films will reach large audiences, and he uses them to Irish ends. To reach out to international audiences is a way of popularising his message, and to do so Jim Sheridan borrows American cinematic codes, which are familiar to international audiences because of the influence of Hollywood cinema world-wide, and fills them with concepts inherited from his own European and post-colonial background. Thus, in her book *L'image et son interprétation*, French academic Martine Joly reminds the reader of the importance of Barthes' theory of myth as revisited by Pierre Bourdieu and underlines that to Bourdieu it is essential to understand myth as a doxa that must be fought by analysing and understanding the mechanisms through which it is produced and imposed on people. This is exactly Jim Sheridan's line of argument in *In the Name of the Father*, and the originality of the film partly rests on its hybridity: its signifiers are to a large extent American, its signified belongs to something else that could be interpreted as post-colonial thinking applied to Ireland and to Anglo-Irish relations.

To conclude, *In the Name of the Father*, far from exonerating the British from any responsibility for the violence experienced by the North of Ireland, pinpoints the major importance of their historical involvement and its contemporary consequences. Through his film, Sheridan calls for a genuine reassessment not only of the British presence in Ireland, but also of traditional British views on the Irish, which, because

they are biased, prevent change. But the film also claims that Irish nationalist violence is counterproductive and as Manichean as British prejudices and only serves to reinforce and legitimise the oppressive character of British-Irish relations, at least as far as the North is concerned.

Gerry eventually reaches self-respect by getting rid of his sense of guilt and by recovering his self-confidence as an Irishman and his dignity as a human being, both identities being intrinsically interwoven in a post-colonial context.⁴ He has understood that the main responsibilities are borne by other people, that is the British, and as long as they refuse to admit such a fact, the struggle will go on. Hence the football metaphor: "they fouled the fucking ball, Gareth, they fouled the fucking ball and they are as guilty as sin," which is also a reminder of his own sense of guilt about the football medal. But he has now learnt that such a struggle, contrary to the example provided by McAndrew, can have a victorious outcome only if blind hatred fed by the mythologised representations of the Other is destroyed for good.

Another way therefore exists for Gerry and those of his generation, and if they follow this new path they will manage to free themselves and assert their legitimate identity. Such a way is made possible because there is no inevitable fate in Anglo-Irish relations, as the character of Gareth Pierce shows, and change is a matter of political will. The film went public in 1993, the year of the Downing Street declaration. The joint statement by Prime Minister John Major and Taoiseach Albert Reynolds explicitly put an end to years of criminalisation of the Republican movement and paved the way for a negotiated settlement of the conflict in the North. This political watershed was followed some years later by Tony Blair's apologies in the name of the British State for British responsibilities in the Great Famine of the mid-nineteenth century in Ireland and in the sufferings endured by the Irish at the time.

Through a metaphorical and post-colonial reading of Gerry Conlon's story, *In the Name of the Father* remarkably manages to grasp and herald the oncoming ideological transformations in the relations between Nationalist, and more particularly Republican Nationalist, Ireland and the British State, thus bringing an important contribution to the understanding of a historical myth-building process, the source of noxious

4 Again we can quote a number of significant exchanges:

Giuseppe – I want you to have respect

Gerry – Respect for who

Giuseppe – For yourself

...

Giuseppe (to Gerry) – You're better off being guilty

...

Gareth – It's not the stairs that are killing your father Gerry

Gerry – Why, what is it then?

Gareth – It's your lack of faith

Gerry – Faith in what?

Gareth – In yourself

stereotypes and false representations that poisoned Anglo-Irish relationships up to the end of the twentieth century.

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IRISH ANIMATION AND RADICAL MEMORY

Thomas Walsh

In *Transformations in Irish Culture* (1996), Luke Gibbons considers the transformative potentials of modern media and technologies such as television and how they have acted upon expressions of indigenous Irish culture. According to Gibbons, these potentials are particularly evident in the use of American TV genres by indigenous Irish producers in their depiction of contemporary Irish society. Gibbons also argues that contact between external modern media forms and internal indigenous Irish culture reactivates latent radical potentials inherent in traditional culture, which then resurface to problematise the symbolic expression of Irish modernity. Gibbons states:

Tradition itself may often have a transformative impact, particularly if it activates muted voices from the historical past [...] It is in this context that I argue, in relation to the influence of television on Irish society, that it was home-produced programmes, not imported products, that posed the greatest challenge to taboo areas in Irish society. These programmes often borrowed heavily from formats and genres evolved elsewhere [...] and this exposure to external forms was vital to their success [...] the innovative thrust of these programmes did not entail a blanket repudiation of "traditional" or national values, but rather allowed them to re-work the specificity of Irish culture. (Gibbons 4)

In his treatment of Gibbons' argument, Martin McLoone describes this re-emergence of radical elements of indigenous culture as a "radical memory" and furthermore points out how Gibbons identifies similar processes at play in the Modernist writing of Joyce and Beckett (McLoone 104-105).

This article will first consider animation as a Modernist art form using a particularly American heritage in an Irish context, something that suggests a similar awakening of a radical indigenous tradition in the work of contemporary Irish animators. Since this radical memory is generated through a tension between tradition and modernity, it will also be explored by addressing the relationship between tradition as a localised memory and modern Ireland as a place in an increasingly globalised world. This contact between the local and the global and the potential liberating results of cultural contact for expressions of contemporary Irishness will be discussed in relation to a case study of Brown Bag Films' animated short film *Give Up Yer Aul Sins* (2001).

One of the more important concepts of commercial animation, in terms of the role it plays in representing contemporary culture, is its existence as an essentially Modernist and modernising art form relying on a particularly strong American heritage. Animation emerged as a proto-cinema in the nineteenth century and established itself alongside live-action cinema at the turn of the twentieth century with films such as Stuart Blackton's *Haunted Hotel* (1907) and Emile Cohl's *Fantasmagorie* (1908). Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein saw in early Disney cartoons a primal "plas-

maticness," a primordial energy that represented life's potential resistance to the regulated Fordist¹ society of America, maintaining that

in a country and social order with such a mercilessly standardized and mechanically measured existence, which is difficult to call life, the sight of such "omnipotence" (that is, the ability to become "whatever you wish"), cannot but hold a sharp degree of attractiveness. This is as true for the United States as it is for the petrified canons of world-outlook, art and philosophy of eighteenth century Japan. (5)

Similarly, Paul Wells makes use of Frederick Karl's division of Modernism into three distinct types: radical, conservative, and moderate (Wells 27), to theorise animation as a potentially radical form of Modernist representation that addresses concerns of human agency in an industrial, Modernist period. Wells points out:

Animation was a language by which the "ephemeral" understanding of the Modern could be both philosophically suggested and literally depicted. The early animators were essentially taking the codes and conventions of the comic strip, vaudevillian performance, perspective drawing and observational modes of realist representation, and re-designing a form. (26)

During the early twentieth century the Western society most representative of Modernist conditions was, as suggested by Eisenstein, that of the United States. Thus Donald Crafton notes how early animation in Europe was known as "le mouvement américain" (16) being closely associated with American cultural production.

The industrially produced Disney film was to become such a dominant presence that it turned into an orthodoxy against which other animated forms defined themselves as reactionary or experimental, with fine-art practices invested in their aesthetics. As a result a binary opposition developed in animation discourses between the American commercial form, epitomised by Disney, and the European auteurist form, exemplified by the productions of European filmmakers such as Oscar Fischinger and Berthold Bartosch (see Halas & Manvel 14-15).

So where does Irish animation fit into this debate? Irish animation finds itself in the borderland between the two and might signify an Irish culture negotiating a path be-

1 American entrepreneur and industrialist Henry Ford embraced highly regulated and standardised assembly-line methods in his production of automobiles in the early twentieth century. These manufacturing methods can be seen as emerging alongside the development of a capitalist economic system, from the mechanisation of labour brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Theorists such as Marx and Lukács have regarded the mechanisation of work processes that resulted in the division of labour as detrimental to human social relations, and it is from such conditions that there emerges an experience of the modern as regulated, fragmented, contingent, and having a "dominant urban context" (Stangos 8). These experiences are seen as being reflected in the aesthetic productions of the period, as explained by Chris Barker: "The process by which industrialization, capitalism, surveillance and the nation-state emerged we may call 'modernization.' 'Modernism' refers to the human cultural forms bound up with this modernization" (134). The fragmented production processes used by Ford in manufacturing are reproduced in social processes and thereby arguably produce what might be called a "Fordist" society.

tween a homogenising American globalism and a heterogeneous European socio-cultural individualism, resulting in what might indeed be a "new" Ireland.

Irish animation began with James Horgan's two-minute film of Youghal's clock gate tower. This film is dated around 1910, making it contemporary with Stuart Blackton's *Humourous Phases of Funny Faces* (1906), often lauded as the first animated film ever produced (see Maltin 2). The following decades were, however, less prolific, high points being Gunter Wolf's TV commercials in the 1960s and the work of Aidan Hickey and Quin Films in the 70s and 80s, culminating in Hickey's award at the Anney Animation Festival for his film *An Inside Job* (1987) (see Horgan 10).

A defining point in the development of the current industry occurred in the late 1980s when the Don Bluth studio, attracted by tax incentives offered by the Irish government's Industrial Development Authority (IDA), relocated the hub of its operations to Dublin. The terms under which Bluth established a facility² in Ireland were reported at the time by Brendan McGrath, who explains:

The company set up in Balgriffin in September last year with an original job target of 120, but this major expansion follows the successful launch of a full length feature film "An American Tail" [...] The expansion is being supported under the IDA's International Services Programme and this support will include assistance in the training of artistic staff by a group of Sullivan staff who are moving to Ireland. Sullivan has agreed with the IDA that the Balgriffin operation will be a fully integrated unit including key activities such as creative design as well as film production [...] The IDA has agreed to fund extensively the specialist training programme in classical film animation which is not currently done in Ireland [...] Sullivan Studios was approved for £ 2.2 million in capital and employment grants by the IDA for the first stage of the project [...]

Don Bluth was an ex-Disney animator who had grown disillusioned by the quality of productions in the studio during the 1970s and as a result established his own studio in an attempt to revitalise the "Golden Era" of animation production, which he felt was best represented by films such as *Pinochio* (1941), *Bambi* (1942), and *Peter Pan* (1953). Discussing their departure from Disney in 1979, Bluth's long-time producer Gary Goldman accounts for the decline of filmmaking at the studio:

The stories at Disney were getting young – younger than we wanted to go [...] And Walt Disney wasn't there any more – it was a committee approach to making movies. When you watch *Bambi*, there's bite: it tells you something about the world. But *The Fox and the Hound* was ho-hum – baby fodder, pabulum. You want to move someone in a film to a point that it will change their life. Our main reasons for leaving though, were that the animation had become minimal – they had eliminated things like shadows, rays of sunlight, smoke. Disney's special effects department was less than five people by the time we resigned. (qtd. in Johnston)

2 Bluth, with the financial help of American businessman Morris Sullivan, established a studio in Ireland which was initially known as the Sullivan Bluth Studio. However, McGrath in his article mistakenly calls the facility Sullivan Studios.

With this focus on recapturing the quality of early Disney feature films, Bluth's arrival in Ireland brought with it an animation style with a strong American heritage and a realist aesthetic.

The animation scene in Ireland went from being a small cottage industry, more attuned to independent European cinema, to embracing a large-scale industrialised and commercial American model. The sheer scale of this move is suggested by Goldman, who states:

We didn't leave America, we took America with us. We took 87 artists, their families, 17 dogs and cats, and moved everybody to Ireland, where we proceeded to teach the talented Irish artists how to deal with what we do. Within a year and a half we were 400 strong. We were the largest animation studio in Europe. (qtd. in Ward & Smith)

Not only did the presence of such a large commercial studio have a profound effect on the professional standards of animation in the country, but it also brought with it the creative impetus and financial interest to establish animation courses designed to produce future employees trained in the production methods and visual style of an American studio. The significance of the American studio as a graduate employer was pointed out by Jerome Morrissey, principal at Ballyfermot College of Further Education (BCFE³), one of the foremost animation schools at the time: "We have the best resources of all here – young people with artistic talent and an interest in the area. Parents can now encourage their children to pursue an artistic course in college, because there are loads of jobs there" (qtd. in Foster). Before the arrival of Bluth there was very little interest in animation education, except for night courses run by American animator Harry Hess at the National College of Art and Design. After Bluth's arrival two main animation courses emerged: the first was situated at BCFE, which, as suggested above, with its strong connection to the Bluth studio catered for the commercial American studio process. The second was an alternative course established at the Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT), which came to be associated with the auteurist European style of animation, due in part to an interdisciplinary approach with its Visual Communications Diploma course.⁴

Irish animation, like its live-action counterpart, has in the past been dominated by foreign companies, usually American or British, using Irish resources to make their own films, with little support for indigenous Irish productions.⁵ What support there was

3 BCFE was known at the time as Ballyfermot Senior College and has since re-branded its animation courses as "The Irish School of Animation."

4 Maeve Clancy points out the unusual split between animation education in Ireland, which exposed students to both commercial and fine-art based forms of animation production.

5 The dominance of foreign film industries over indigenous Irish film production is the main polemic in Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons, and John Hill's seminal book *Cinema and Ireland* (1987). In particular, Rockett's assessment of the Ardmore film studio illustrates the institutionalised attitude towards film production in Ireland, which prefers to attract foreign industry rather than support its indigenous filmmakers (95-126).

had come from the European Union's MEDIA project established to counter the dominance of American Hollywood productions in European cinemas (see McLoone 114). It is only since the advent of the second Irish Film Board in 1993 that resources such as Irish Flash, Frameworks and Short Short schemes have been directed to support indigenous animation productions, as part of CEO Rod Stoneman's concept of creating "market-responsive" auteurs (see Stoneman).

Part of the tension that informs the contemporary Irish animated text is derived from its genesis during the Bluth period, but texts are also affected by the necessity for adaptation and engagement with European partners in order to sustain film production in a global marketplace. It was, however, the initial investment, provided and inspired by the Bluth studio, that led to rapid modernisation in animation techniques and advancements in animation education. When the studio finally collapsed in 1995, it left behind a highly skilled workforce that was to build an independent industry, free to represent issues of a new, more confident and cosmopolitan Irish identity emerging at the turn of the millennium.

Arguably the emergence of an independent Irish animation industry in the 1990s is analogous to the emergence of a so-called "new" Ireland under the conditions of the Celtic Tiger economy, a point taken up by Maeve Connolly in her alignment of contemporary Irish animation with entrepreneurial initiatives in a new, more affluent Irish society:

During the 1990s, however, artisanal experimentation has given way to new forms of entrepreneurialism [...] This transformation of indigenous animation parallels other developments within film and the arts, and can be considered within the context of a broader process of cultural and economic "reinvention." (Connolly 84)

If one is to herald the emergence of a new and reinvented Ireland, then one must simultaneously consider the passing of an old Ireland. If one looks at how Raymond Williams considers the representation of places, with urban space as the modern and futuristic and rural space as a pre-modern past, then a new Ireland might be seen as an essentially urban, cosmopolitan place and an old Ireland as a rural place or a rural memory that resurfaces as a radical memory to disrupt this new urban modernity, which might be seen as a modernity being imposed from an external source.

Raymond Williams also illustrates a certain relationship between memory and place:

It is significant that the common image of the country is now an image of the past, and the common image of the city an image of the future. That leaves, if we isolate them, an undefined present. The pull of the idea of the country is towards old ways, human ways, natural ways. The pull of the idea of the city is towards progress, modernisation, development. (297)

The question is, however: might it also be possible to see memory as place? It is interesting then to consider how this relationship might be disrupted and how ideas of memory might be separated from place by the processes of globalisation. This dichotomy of rural and urban places points to a tension between the traditional and the modern that still lingers in contemporary Irish culture. If, in terms of the contemporary

Irish animation industry, the animated form can be read as a technological and Modernist art-form, then its depictions of Irish memory as a localised place can be deemed to be disrupted by a Modernist aesthetic that is essentially global (and arguably American).

As Gibbons observes, "Ireland is a First World country but with a Third World memory" (3), ascribing modernity to concepts of an Irish "place," while deeming its cultural memory to be rural and underdeveloped. McLoone, writing in relation to representations of the Irish in contemporary Irish cinema, notes how for much of the twentieth century Irish national identity was profoundly effected by a conservative cultural nationalism, and this conservatism was inherited from the various cultural revivals at the turn of the previous century. In his treatment of Irish representations in live-action film, McLoone considers how the quest for an Irish cultural nationalism is underpinned by a debate between modernity and tradition, and Irish live-action cinema takes this modernity/tradition binary as one of its themes. As McLoone points out,

the emphasis on history has inevitably resulted in the valorisation of tradition and the past at the expense of the new and the modern, giving Irish nationalism a paradoxical radical conservatism [...] the literature on nationalism in general has stressed that it is essentially a process of modernisation, an inevitable path towards economic development that has been characteristic of capitalist development universally [...]. The central dialectic here is that between tradition and modernity and is a recurring theme in Irish cinema [...]. (13)

The ideological use of a mythical past and the invoking of a common ancestry and memory are not particular to Ireland. The engagement of a people's memory allied to acts of imagination is a common strategy in creating a dominant national hegemony. In *Imagined Communities* (1991) Benedict Anderson argues that the concept of the "nation" is a modernist construct stemming from the values of the Enlightenment; it is an act of imagination that allows disparate people to believe themselves as belonging to a greater unified entity (see Anderson 6-7). As discussed by Richard Kearney in *Postnationalist Ireland* (1997), one of the aspects of modern nationhood is its connection to a particular geographical territory, an actual physical place occupied by the people (see Kearney 3). It is the communal memory of people connected to a particular place that gives rise to distinct, modern nations.

Representing a new Ireland, therefore, might question the old Ireland in two ways: firstly, it might challenge the use of memory in creating a conservative nationalist hegemony, and, secondly, it might question the legitimacy of discrete territorial and cultural boundaries in an increasingly globalised world.

Writing about the effects of globalisation on localised cultures, Arjun Appadurai disconnects cultural memory from its containment within national borders; the past thus becomes a storehouse of cultural scenarios that might be adopted in any place at any time. For example, considering the popularity of American music of the 1950s in contemporary Filipino culture, Appadurai observes how one country's past may re-emerge as another country's present (see Appadurai 326). In a globalised world cul-

tural memory can become separated from place, but also it is not necessarily confined to the past; memory can literally become a new place. Appadurai states: "I would like to suggest that the apparent increasing substitutability of whole periods and postures for one another, in the cultural styles of advanced capitalism, is tied to larger global forces, which have done much to show [...] that the past is usually another country" (327). If one separates Irish cultural memory from Irish territorial space, it becomes just another scenario amongst others in a global context; this allows it to be reactivated not as an atavistic return to the past, but as a modern critique of the present, as a radical memory.

Just as an old Ireland was dominated by a conservative cultural nationalism, with its media falling under the influence of Anglo-American models of modernity, then representations of a new Ireland must necessarily produce a critique of the old. Animation as a modernist and potentially radical form of representation can facilitate this questioning through its representations of place and memory, and a close textual reading of Brown Bag Films' *Give Up Yer Aul Sins* (2001) might serve to illustrate some of the issues involved in such a representation.

Give up Yer Aul Sins was made at the Brown Bag Films animation studio in Dublin and was produced and directed by Cathal Gaffney, Darragh O'Connell, and Alan Shannon, all of whom were former students at BCFE and trained in commercial animation practices associated with the Bluth studio. Ultimately *Give Up yer Aul Sins* questions the role of Catholic teaching in a modern, albeit romanticised urban Ireland. It does this by splitting the narrative between place and memory; the place is urban Dublin, and the memory is a child's retelling of a Biblical story in fantastical rural terms which are not culturally identifiable with modern Irish space. This splitting of place from memory can be read as a result of globalisation, but it is also a sign of a new Irish identity capable of critically engaging with the processes of its own formation.

Ireland's cultural nationalism in the last century was informed by a tension between tradition and modernity. The Modernist writing of Joyce and Beckett provided a valuable critique of the Celtic revival's mythologising of the past. In the case of *Give Up Yer Aul Sins*, animation operating as a Modernist and a modernising art-form serves a similar demythologising role, calling into question the accuracy of memory and illustrating the subjective nature of the remembering process, which is infused with the particularities of a certain place. Here, the mythology of the Christian story is disturbed by an urban Dublin vernacular, and Catholic myth is rendered as a comic satire by the innate innocence associated with the animated form.

Give Up yer Aul Sins is a text heavily invested in evoking a sense of childhood memory and a romanticised urban space. The tension between tradition and modernity, or what might equally be called a discrete national territory and a postnational global culture, is articulated in both the form and the narrative content of the film. It is a hybrid text; its soundtrack is taken from actual recordings made in the Dublin of the 1960s by schoolchildren telling Bible stories. The use of this soundtrack invokes an

oral storytelling tradition, as well as being a form of documentary when placed in its social context. If it is possible to see the Irish Republic of the twentieth century in postcolonial terms and, more specifically, the new Ireland of the twenty-first century as a bourgeois neo-colony dominated by neo-colonial global capital,⁶ then the use of an oral storytelling soundtrack poses an alternative method of transmitting communal memory, thereby problematising the televisual media of the metropolitan centre.

This recorded dialogue, taken from a real historical past, is overlaid with the modernist aesthetic of animation, and through this process is turned from documented memory to contemporary fantasy. Thus, the memory of a traditional past and the lived reality of an urban modernity are collapsed together in the animated form, using childhood innocence to engage adult irony. A once naïve Irish culture is now mature enough to evaluate and critically engage with its own past.

The film's split narrative form also illustrates the tension between tradition and modernity. The first narrative concerns children in an inner-city school being asked to tell Bible stories to a television crew. The representation of place here is a key element; the narrative is noticeably urban: there are establishing shots of a romanticised Dublin city in the opening sequence. The presence of a TV crew with camera and microphones and the simulated unsteadiness of the camera working to suggest a real authorial presence, all point to a sense of modernity (and arguably a greater sense of a "real" space). The second narrative is the Bible story itself, depicted as essentially rural rather than urban. It is more fantastical in its realisation, it does not call attention to its own artifice. There are no depictions of technological filmmaking apparatus such as a camera or a microphone, neither are there any simulated camera moves to suggest the presence of a filmmaker. In the contrast between these two narratives, the modern Irish identity is inscribed as a self-consciousness articulated through modern media such as television, whereas the imagined myth that constitutes an old cultural nationalism is regarded as a divinely-inspired meta-narrative like the Bible. This myth of a communal memory, which also plays on stereotypes of the Irish as unsophisticated, childish, and dominated by the Catholic clergy, is rendered through the prism of modernity as a naïve and fanciful story.

What we see is an urban space representing rational secular modernity and a rural space as atavistic and childish memory. The animated art-form can equally be seen as modernist, borrowed from a global and American culture, whereas the act of oral storytelling can be seen as local, traditional, and Irish.

6 Denis O'Hearn, in his assessment of Ireland's Celtic Tiger economy, illustrates its dependency on foreign investment, thereby suggesting Ireland's position as a neo-colony dominated by foreign capital. He states: "Clearly, rapidly rising dependence on foreign investment is the most salient feature of Irish tigerhood. It is barely an exaggeration, then, to say that the Irish tiger economy boils down to a few American corporations in computers and pharmaceuticals" (O'Hearn, 73).

This is where we locate a film like *Give Up Yer Aul Sins*. This film is the product of an industry that once existed on the periphery of an American animation history and is now seeking to re-assert itself as the subject of its own discourse. It is a text that uses the techniques gleaned from its American animation heritage to articulate a new Irish consciousness in an age of postnationalist globalisation. Its depiction of memory and place is an integral part of its process of enunciation.

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TWO POEMS

BY HARRY CLIFTON

Dag Hammarskjold¹

You will never be good enough, Dag Hammarskjold –
From across the years, from another life,
I hear your Lutheran father, ageless and cold,
Condemning you to the world, without a wife
To distract you, in the white nights
When consciousness rules, and a midnight sun makes bright
Your Stockholm office, and life must never extend
Beyond the arctic circle of your professional friends.

The years go by, the city now is New York –
And there I see you, above the United Nations
On your cold podium, priest and clerk
About whom the ethical forces multiply,
And babels of simultaneous translation
In space that conscience clears, while the wish to die
Prepares, already, the sacrifice you foretold –
You will never be good enough, Dag Hammarskjold.

Your table is empty, the dinner guests have gone –
Your bachelor suite, too classical for the blues,
Has only a chattering monkey on a chain
To keep you from loneliness.... Why not telephone
Korean fruitsellers, streetgirls below in the rain,
To visit you in your pain? Or must you refuse,
With all New York around you, women and gold
For a voice that screams in your sleep, and can't be controlled?

You will never be good enough, Dag Hammarskjold –
Exhausted man, I read in your book of changes
Gethsemanes of sleepless transit lounges
In the small hours, the missions that failed
And left behind them average evil and good
In the holding centres, innocent phials of blood
Being stacked like bullets, under refrigeration –
Awaiting their hour, like massacre or salvation

1 Harry Clifton, *The Liberal Cage* (Oldcastle, Co. Meath: Gallery, 1988): 30-31. Reprinted by permission of the author and the publisher.

No one controls.... So fly home to your father
As long as you live, immaculately attired
For the state of grace you desired
Under alien skies, in a different weather
Than ours which radio silence disconnects
And plunges you out of, there when you least expect:
Relax, enjoy that journey, be consoled –
You will never be good enough, Dag Hammarskjold.

Crossing Sweden

1

There it is, the cold interior
Older than history... Time, you might say,
Arrested, on an eighth day

Of Creation – the silences of churches,
The bibles shut forever.
After Apocalypse, pine and birch

Eternally on the move
To claim it back, an earth betrayed
By Lutheran spires, hipped roofs.

Eros the love-child frozen out –
A shaggy horse by the water-butt
Eating its heart out, stamping its hooves...

Grant me a death-wish. Drop me here
To rot in the Varmland. Spare me the train
Through Sweden and the years.

2

'...Hallsberg, as the nothing name suggests,
Is a place of transit. Here, the traveller waits
Between trains, and the assembled ghosts

A million strong, a hundred years old,
Thread themselves through the needle's eye
Of New World passage – souls, to be bought and sold

In the cornfields of Iowa, the studios of Burbank,
London's slums, the deepsea ooze
Of Greenland, where the blind Titanic sank....

An airbridge of glass is hovering over the lines
And the frostbound trains are still.
Do you hesitate forever, diseased in will,

As the miracle happens? They are passing through
To Canada, Argentina, the chances of a lifetime,
As you yourself must do...'

3

Insistently, a foreign tongue
I can only interpret as Song
Comes over the air, as the train roars on.

Even as it speaks
Ice breaks, and fast-flowing rivers
Take over, the dazzle of lakes,

The shutter-speed of sun through trees
As the mind clicks into gear
And the eyes unfreeze.

A windfarm's slow propeller
Threshes cloudy skies –
I wonder who lives out there, who dies,

And see my own reflection
Rushing past, to the greater world
Of Stockholm Central, Gothenburg,

As the changes are announced
In that Scandinavian, singsong tone
I recognise, now, as my own.

It wants to be helpful, to be kind.
Abroad in the north country
Of my own mind,

I hear it – any tongue will do –
Interpreting the hinterland,
Hurling me through.

"CHIPPED AND TILTED MARYS": TWO IRISH POETS AND THEIR CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS

Patricia Coughlan

A chipped and tilted Mary
grows green among rags and sticks.
Her trade dwindles –... (Cannon, "Holy Well," *Oar* 16, ll. 15-17)

She wasn't frightening at all
as with her halo at a rakish angle,
she trod on plaster clouds and stars
behind a row of five pence candles...(O'Reilly, "Ninety¹ Eighty-Four," 15, ll. 5-8)

In this essay, after considering some ideological and critical contexts, I focus on two poets, Moya Cannon and Vona Groarke. These two differ in range and substantial achievement – Groarke's work is more varied and larger in extent; their styles are also quite different, Cannon preferring open, rhythmically looser forms, while Groarke is something of a virtuosa in the use of traditional metres and rhyme. I choose them partly for this contrast, and because both have produced work which deserves serious critical consideration as part of the developing contemporary canon and warrant the attention of readers on both aesthetic and thematic grounds. They offer, in quite different modes, a combination of poetic effectiveness with an unusually reflective contemporaneity. In particular, their work is a striking example of the vastly stronger presence of women in Irish poetry and their now far more evident contributions to it. Furthermore, while acknowledging their differences from the distinctive 1980s tones of strongly feminist writing, I find that their work does significantly advance the development of a feminine aesthetic in Irish poetry, in ways partly different from each other and partly – perhaps surprisingly – similar.

There are, of course, several more established voices with considerable reputations from the 1980s or earlier (Ní Chuilleanáin, McGuckian, Ní Dhomhnaill in Irish, Boland). A larger potential list overlaps with these (e.g. Meehan, Higgins, Hardie, Dorcsey, and others) and there is a host of other more recent arrivals, some outstandingly talented, such as Caitríona O'Reilly (from whom I take the second quotation above), Sinéad Morrissey, Leanne O'Sullivan, Dorothy Molloy.² Between them, these poets conduct a sustained exploration of our times which I find to be more willing to address the much-changed conditions of contemporary Ireland than most work by male poets over a comparable period, at least as impressive aesthetically and more varied in method and tone. This is not to ghettoise them as women, but to be aware

1 *Sic*; presumably a misprint for "Nineteen-."

2 Sadly, Molloy died as her first collection *Hare Soup* was in press.

of the continuing male domination of the received view of Irish tradition, a tradition of a more markedly masculine cast in poetry (and drama) than in fiction.³ I find the work of women poets, at its best, at least as stimulating as an object of critical enquiry as the oedipal regressions and identitarian insistences of the canonical, which is to say masculine, tradition (Yeats, Kavanagh, Kinsella, Heaney, Montague, and others). Women's work, even when it is not avowedly feminist (as poetry from the 1990s onwards often is not), pointedly departs in various directions from the concerns of that canon. It also diverges from the rather laddish, jokey styles of some well-received younger Irish male poets, whose writing is modish in the manner of 1990s British figures such as Simon Armitage.⁴

I return now to Cannon's and O'Reilly's Marys – considering some others also – in order to develop my discussion further, especially insofar as it concerns women, focusing on this Marian ideal of femininity, so prominent in the dominant ideology of Ireland over many decades. Cannon's and O'Reilly's Marys are differently chipped and tilted. On the surface, Moya Cannon's "Mary" is a statue, which is damaged because of exposure to all weathers, set as it is in the open air by a holy well. But this physical attrition of the painted-plaster object by time and the rain further signifies the "dwindl[ing]" in late-twentieth-century Ireland of popular Catholic devotion, a well of faith which had seemed inexhaustible. Cannon wryly calls Marian intercession a "trade," gesturing with mild irony towards the more materialist 1990s. O'Reilly's poem, a lyric of childhood memory which also explores the polarities of gender roles, alludes to both the notorious Anne Lovett case and the brief resurgence in the mid-1980s of a cult of moving statues in rural Marian grottoes (see *Tóibín*). Her poem opens with the child recoiling from a male Irish saint who "meant business / with his high cheekbones and stiff mitre," and turning to Mary's "side of the altar" (ll. 1-2, 4). Both these lyrics are reflections about the inheritance of Marian piety, which, up to the rapidly secularising 1980s, had offered so powerful an instance of loving heavenly compassion and such a compelling ego-ideal to girls and women within Catholic culture.

Both are more or less demystifying, but the two also differ. Cannon's poem goes on to connect the physical properties of limestone, from which water can suddenly spring up and sometimes flood out, with the idea (a mental or spiritual one) of natural strength and the suggestion of communal renewal. This symbolic suggestion remains equivocal, however: "Images of old fertilities" may "testify" either to geological facts or to metaphysical blessings "in the hill's labyrinthine heart" (ll. 10-11, 22). By contrast O'Reilly plays out a sequence of individual feelings and reactions. Admiring childhood

3 Among many possible discussions of this and related problems, see for instance Ní Dhomhnaill, "What Foremothers?" and Ní Fhrighil's account of Boland's and Ní Dhomhnaill's perspectives on the question.

4 Guinness's anthology takes a different position on this point, bidding to create a new canon (the authors are presented as not just *some*, but *the* new Irish poets) and, as I shall argue, from a markedly east-coast, urban, and formalist perspective.

awe and self-identification with the apparently lipsticked but also barefoot image of femininity are followed later by fear at the uncanny power of "whole crowds of Marys" weeping "bloody tears in their groves, / making signs with fragmented hands" (ll. 15-17), and finally adult anger at the death – alone, after giving birth – of sixteen-year-old Anne Lovett and her officially fatherless infant. The poem's speaker represents Marian devotion, then, in three ways. First it is a childlike self-identification with, and cleaving to, a role-model and mother-figure combined. Then it becomes a state of terror before a supernatural power associated with physical injury: "bloody tears," "fragmented hands" (ll. 16, 17). It culminates in a sad disempowered entanglement – played out before a "hapless" Mary – in that collective hypocrisy which permitted the useless deaths of Anne Lovett and her infant. The poem's sensibility and setting are urban (the male saint, medieval bishop Laurence O'Toole, is patron of Dublin city). However, Marian shrines, most depicting Our Lady of Lourdes, are widespread in Ireland though they postdate the holy wells, which are much older spiritual sites, perhaps associated with fertility in the pre-Christian era.

Vona Groarke's long graveyard poem, "Or to Come" also describes a "grotto with the kneeling, ashen girl" (the teenage visionary Bernadette of Lourdes, but with more than a hint of Anne Lovett from Granard in the Irish midlands, Groarke's own home territory). The "blue-robed figure" has a "bemused face" and looks beyond a praying man "at a sky which she / seems to think may bring her some relief": this is a milder version of O'Reilly's fundamentally sceptical stance (Groarke, *Flight* 30). Both find an inter-text in Paula Meehan's fine earlier poem "The Statue of the Virgin at Granard Speaks," which adopts a passionate tone rather than O'Reilly's and Groarke's dryer ironic one (Meehan ll. 41-42). By contrast with these other three texts, Cannon's delicate suggestion of a natural spirituality, or a spiritualised external nature, is connected with a countryside far from cities and with long-sustained vernacular spiritual traditions.

In their divergence, O'Reilly's and Cannon's lyrics conveniently indicate several sets of important contestations in post-modern Ireland: between urban and rural, secular and spiritual, traditional and modern feminine roles and identities. One, O'Reilly's, reads the supernatural as a projection of human desires and points to the social destructiveness of some of its past uses in Ireland. The other, Cannon's, is more tentative and indeterminate, leaving open the question whether a metaphysical reality exists, and more elegiac. Nevertheless they share an interrogative mode about inherited Irish ideological forms and practices which in the past had hegemonic status. Finally, where O'Reilly specifically addresses gender ("*her* side of the altar"), Cannon focuses her enquiry on the nature of the spiritual more generally, though significantly this has been realised through devotion to the idealised feminine figure of Mary by the well's past pilgrims.

The extraordinary economic success of the Republic from the mid-1990s is known worldwide. Its social effects and those slower and deeper internal alterations of the Irish social order and of values which have been continuing since the 1960s are,

however, only beginning to be culturally assimilated. In particular, the crucial role of women in positive Irish ideological change has not yet been adequately considered.⁵ The sequence of distressing and notorious events and revelations, mainly from the earlier 1980s onwards, concerning abuse of children and adolescents of both sexes and of women, which cracked open the apparently unified surfaces of Irish Catholic and cultural ideology, has likewise not yet been accommodated into the collective self-understandings of Irish people, despite its now-routine naming.⁶ Concurrently, over roughly the same period the physical face of the Republic has been much altered by galloping and poorly planned urbanisation, together with a tilting of the population balance towards the eastern side of the island and, in rural areas, the gradual shrinking of agricultural livelihoods. Globalisation and undreamt-of affluence have worked simultaneously to distance more and more of the population from traditional rural ways of life and thus to undermine many of those cultural formations which in earlier generations had been felt to sustain Irish identity.⁷

These and other alterations in Irish life are still in the process of being registered in the literary imagination, and Cannon and Groarke both contribute actively to their mediation in Irish writing. Literature, however, never merely reflects social forces and items, but subjects them to a more gradual metamorphosis by its own inner forms and visible tropes. Furthermore, these two poets, as do many of those I have named above, bring Irish feminine voices – altered as these are and will further be by women's emergence and redress – to a new prominence in Irish collective identity and consciousness. They are active in the process of the necessary redefinition of Irish culture in post-modernity.

However, the conventions of poetry criticism – especially in reviewing – have been, or have become, decidedly unwelcoming even to much thematic, let alone social or ideological, discussion (and especially when that explicitly critiques social-structural gender arrangements). Only in criticism on major poets does theme become a category directly addressed, and in those cases it tends to focus primarily on the theme of the nation, its antagonists, and its survival or modification. I see this distaste for the visibility even of ideas themselves, let alone a politics, in poetry, as a kind of self-

5 See Connolly on both the deep, if hitherto unnoticed, continuity of Irishwomen's struggle for social agency and the intense resistance of historiography to acknowledging women's roles, conditions and contributions. Ferriter's is, to its credit, the first general history to attend at all adequately to this topic.

6 See longer discussion, Coughlan, "Irish Literature," and references therein. Inglis is indispensable, though its account of mothers in Irish emotional life could be seen as implicitly misogynist; Colin Coulter's edited volume is a vigorous critique of globalisation and the negative effects of neo-liberal economic policies on contemporary Ireland; this is a salutary counter-text to the unquestioning approval of the Celtic Tiger by commentators both in Ireland and internationally.

7 The thriving condition in post-modernity both of traditional music and of GAA games are counter-examples, which may be considered as maintaining the earlier forms of the imagined community.

denying ordinance which risks impoverishing the realm of poetry and has the effect of further isolating it from audiences and from recovering its traditionally powerful role in society at all.⁸ Furthermore, strong formalist views currently prevail internationally in powerful quarters of reviewing, discussion, and reception of contemporary work in English. A fiercely regulatory approach is associated with a handful of well-placed and influential poetry critics.⁹ This is inimical to poetic work which situates itself in any very marked ideological terms, whatever these may be. It also sets its face, in the interest of a somewhat reified privileging of narrowly defined formal skill, against avant-garde formal experimentation in poetry. It therefore has a reactionary effect on both the thematic and formal character of verse. This exacerbates the existing tendency of Irish poetry towards formal conservatism, dominated as it was for much of the last century by the long shadow of Yeats, who despite his own dismantling of grand narratives nevertheless bequeathed to his successors, especially those oedipally in search of an equivalent mastery, strongly traditional metres and styles.

Women's writing, when conceived as such, has often met with disapproval from the commissars of poetry reception, because it is said to be driven by an imperative outside the sacred circle of an aesthetic realm represented (in my view falsely) as capable of transcending, and indeed requiring to be purged of, questions of power. However, there is now widespread recognition of the 1980s flowering in Ireland of energetic feminist literary activity, though its achievement of aesthetic merit is still contested. Ailbhe Smyth and Eavan Boland were among the most prominent figures working to develop, in a male-dominated literary world, a writing and publishing milieu more welcoming to women.¹⁰ Boland, in her dual role as both poet and critic, is the best known of a number of activists and had been part of the wider Irish women's movement since the late 1960s. Her essays critiquing the exclusion of women *qua* poets from the traditions of Irish writing, combined with their immobilisation as idea-

8 Denman, one of the finest Irish poetry critics, argues that "poetry speaks a language that is apart from the more general discourse of society" (2). However, the unusually strong oral traditions of Irish culture still give poetry a certain public reach and prestige unusual in other technologically advanced societies, and this cultural background is partly in tension with the more dominant and prescriptive sites of Irish poetry criticism – perhaps productively so.

9 Both Harvard critic Helen Vendler and Edna Longley in Belfast exercise considerable authority in the anglophone poetry world, in both cases formalist in complexion, though in Longley's case with a strong tendency to champion writers from Northern Ireland. Sadoff makes a lively and effective attack on New Formalism, especially in American poetry. With a different, partly populist, perspective, Bloodaxe publisher Neil Astley has argued that a clique of British male critics, especially those at the *Guardian* newspaper, also wield a baneful and fiercely regulatory power over the canonisation of contemporary poets' work.

10 Smyth's influential anthology, while aesthetically uneven, was nevertheless invaluable in positing a specific cultural position and voice for Irish women's writing.

lised symbols, appeared mainly in the 1980s.¹¹ Boland's representation of herself as a solitary pioneer may have been overstated.¹² But her main argument, denouncing the occlusion of actual women behind the stereotyped and silenced figures of Mother Ireland, Cathleen Ní Houlihan, and their variations, was rightly influential. It did not merely challenge male domination of Irish poetry and writing in general; it also initiated what is a continuing struggle to reconcile the emancipatory impulse of nationalism with the equally imperative claims of women to equality and to be heard as public voices. Or rather, it memorably and ably restated this tension: as we can see from Lyn Innes's vital work on the heroic phase of Irish nationalism in the Revival period and after, Boland's arguments were echoing the protests of many leading female figures in the national struggle, who saw themselves marginalised or excluded before, during and after the process of State formation.¹³

Boland's interventions have had much influence; however, it is currently being argued that women's poetry has now moved beyond feminism.¹⁴ In 1999, Groarke herself disavowed that marked self-identification as *women* poets which had characterised her predecessors in the period of second-wave feminism (since roughly the 1970s). Working as guest editor in 1999 on a "Women Irish Poets" issue of the international poetry journal *Verse*, Groarke reported that "what I most enjoyed about the experience of editing this feature was the discovery that the best of Irish women poets are not writing 'Irish Women's Poetry'. There is no convergence of subject-matter, no orthodoxy of theme or tone" (Groarke, "Editorial" 8).

Groarke was commenting on the mass of submissions she received, from scores of amateur writers as well as published poets. But it is generally true that most of the female poets emerging from the 1990s to date do not announce themselves as feminist. Most show a definite, if implicit, shift away from the proclaimed motives and thematic concerns of their predecessors and older contemporaries – Meehan, Dorsey,

11 These are conveniently collected in Boland, *Object Lessons*. See Dillane for a pioneering discussion of the practical circumstances of developing Irish women's poetry over the two decades from about 1980. Several essays by Meaney offer important theoretical discussions of and from this period.

12 It excludes, among others, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, also writing distinguished poetry in Dublin since the 1960s. Apart from her poetry, Ní Chuilleanáin's edited volume (1985) was important then for its dual focus, not only on women's creative work but also on the way the prevailing male-dominated culture constructed women from outside.

13 Broom argues somewhat too optimistically that "the relationship between discourses of femininity and ... of nation *naturally alters* when women become more involved in the actual institutions of the nation, and as social norms change" [113; my emphasis]. But perhaps there is nothing "natural" about such changes, which must be struggled for, particularly where foundational and therefore slow-changing cultural formations are concerned. See also Carol Coulter's comparative historical discussion of the tension between discourses of nation and female agency internationally.

14 Wheatley proposes that it is "[l]argely thanks to the efforts of Boland, Ní Chuilleanáin, McGuckian and others" that Groarke and her contemporaries "can afford to be more relaxed in their roles" as women writing (264).

Higgins, Mary O'Malley, who more openly question Irish gender, and in some cases class, arrangements.¹⁵ This does not, however, amount to specific rejection of the fundamental aims of the women's movement; it may be rather that, like other women from about 1990, especially of younger generations, they are reticent about taking up ideological positions.¹⁶

Nevertheless, in the Cannon and O'Reilly poems I started with, we have seen both poets investigating (differently) the primary Irish ego-ideal for women, Mary, virgin mother, who shared a vital role with Mother Ireland in *her* various manifestations. O'Reilly's poem in particular takes up an emphatically gendered stance. It coolly indicts the double bind of Marian devotion, which traps women by making a claim to all-embracing maternal love within a social system which in reality functions by denial, silence, and the concealment of human suffering behind surface respectability. It would evidently be misleading to label these poets, or others I do not have room to discuss, as post-feminist. They draw upon the imagining into being by those very predecessors – perhaps especially Ní Chuilleanáin, who achieves a less obtrusively discursive lyric style than Boland's – of a range of voices and gestures thus made available for deployment by female poets. They proceed to adapt those voices towards their own poetic ends. This apparent muting of feminist aims may, then, partly register the pressures of those increasingly formalist requirements for poetry which I have noted. But it is also likely to be part of a generational reaction to the concrete improvement of Irish women's conditions and status by the many legislative reforms and social changes since the 1970s, which seemed to culminate, in symbolic terms, in the 1990 election of President Mary Robinson in the Republic.

Another factor may be the advent not just of post-modernity (the historical period in which we all live), but of post-modernist influences on both feminism and writing. We might see here the more diffuse and fluid anti-identitarian attitudes of third-wave or "difference" feminisms, which developed internationally from about 1980, reacting against the rather monolithic character of earlier second-wave or "Women's Liberation" formations from the late '60s onwards (see Segal 47). Difference feminisms can be political and have actively addressed questions of power when they reject the hegemonic white and bourgeois character of those formations. But other strands such as the effectively quietist – and overwhelmingly influential – thought of American theorist Judith Butler raise a question whether post-modernist feminist thought

15 Of the trio Meehan, Higgins, and O'Malley, the first two originate in the non-bourgeois environments of inner-city Dublin and Galway's public housing estates, and the third in remote, non-affluent Connemara: in the work of all three these origins are also thematic and performative. Dorsey's equivalent performative poetic identity is lesbian as well as feminist.

16 Reviewing Fleur Adcock in 2001, Fryatt commented critically on how "the repudiation of a confessional or feminist stance ... has penetrated every level of women's poetic production," remarking pointedly that such repudiation would have excluded the work of Plath (87).

still carries forward the fundamental emancipatory aims of its second-wave predecessors.¹⁷

It is significant that in her "Editorial" Groarke goes on to say there are

no received notions of what is appropriate or what is beyond our reach ... Despite my pleasure in completing this feature, I hope I will never do another on this topic. In fact, I hope that all such issues will eventually be redundant. In the meantime, any takers for a companion issue of "Irish Men Poets"?

The position she takes here is far from disavowing feminist aims themselves, only "received notions" about what should go on in poetry. What she resists is the prescription of subject-matter and any limitation on the "reach" of women poets, with whom she identifies ("our reach") as a collectivity. She is rejecting whatever she sees as restricting women's access to, and practice of, poetry-making, and vehemently expressing her awareness of the continuing fact that that access and that practice are still marked as a derogation from a male norm. Groarke's upbeat tone (perhaps psychologically necessary to a practitioner) is also countered by Catriona Clutterbuck's well-considered comment two years later that in "the current climate in Irish literary culture ... women's right of access to the poetry tradition has no sooner been secured than it is being undermined by denials of there ever having been real difficulty involved" (112).

Many read post-modernism as a depoliticising turn in which the active, socially transformative and emancipatory role of art has been lost or relinquished. One might argue that where poetry is concerned this coalesces with, or is even directly discernible in, the already-mentioned influence of New Formalism on the styles, diction, and rhythms of poetry in English. The influential and intellectually distinguished poetry journal *Metre*, edited either in Dublin or by Irish expatriates since its foundation in 1996, has to a degree a formalist agenda: its reviewers tend consistently to praise metrical and what one might call well-regulated verse over looser, more oral-influenced writing, on the one hand, and avant-garde work on the other. Guinness's "Introduction" to her Bloodaxe anthology and its selection policy might be judged broadly to share these tastes.¹⁸ On the other hand, a commendable aspect of *The New Irish Poets* is its highly unusual even-handedness as to gender: of the 33 poets anthologised, fifteen are women. But it shows evidence of selectivity on the basis of region, which strengthens a certain flavour of east-coast urbanity. In 2003 Justin Quinn, sometime editor of *Metre* and himself a poet, made a bid to canonise what he called "The Irish Efflorescence": a group of younger poets, two of them *Metre* editorial board members, who met what one might call the house criteria of practising metrical forms and what he called "outward-looking[ness]." His list is disarmingly introduced as follows: "Rock and roll it isn't: Vona Groarke, Sinéad Morrissey, Conor

17 Sullivan's "Feminism" is an outstanding discussion of these issues in the specifically Irish contemporary context.

18 Guinness approvingly describes *Metre* as an Irish version of the London magazine *Thumbscrew* ("Introduction," *New Irish Poets* 14).

O'Callaghan, Caitríona O'Reilly, Aidan Rooney-Céspedes, and David Wheatley aren't going to sell out the Point, but they are, in lower case, a new generation of important Irish poets." Other comments of Quinn's are worth noting also, both for their acuteness and for a certain tendentious, even partisan quality. Observing that they are not "preoccupied with the binary opposition of Ireland and England," he concludes that "it seems accurate to say that they are the first genuinely post-national generation." Neither are they concerned, he says, "with the myths of rural culture that animated Patrick Kavanagh's poetry"; and "while Eavan Boland, through tireless polemic both in and out of poetry, has cleared a space for Irish women poets to emerge, her style has not been taken up by her juniors; it is hard to imagine that she would want it otherwise."

Quinn's short essay is stylish, intelligent, and persuasive in its own terms. But it is also a good example of post-modernist disengagement. In its sensibility it too shows a regional bias (roughly towards the eastern half of the country), and one might even argue that it aims at a radical dismantling of the specificities of Irish poetic tradition. Groarke gets into Quinn's list; Cannon, a north-westerner who lives in Galway and does not use traditional metrical forms, does not. Both, however, are probably equally "post-national," and both also take a deep interest, as *poets*, in Irish histories, ancient and modern. Irish poetry considered as an institution would bear systematic social as well as regional and gender analysis. Despite an informal and popular view – coinciding with, and fostered by, often unthought assumptions within the academy – about the purity of poetry as a notionally non-ideological zone, questions of geographical origin, class, and ideological adherence are relevant, along with gender, to the production, dissemination, reception, and ultimate evaluation of poetry, and therefore to the reputations and perceived stature of poets.¹⁹

Both Cannon and Groarke are published by Gallery Press, the most prestigious of Ireland's few poetry publishing houses, though Cannon first published *Oar*, her début collection, with the then Galway-based Salmon, which focused especially on women's work. Cannon consistently sets Western scenes, Groarke either suburban or midland-rural ones. But both unselfconsciously use feminine viewpoints in varying ways. Cannon, while currently less prominent than Groarke, is fairly well recognised in Ireland; abroad, however, she has been rather more noticed by United States critics than British ones. In the mid-1990s she was invited to edit a year's issue of *Poetry Ireland Review*, the poetry journal of central importance founded in 1981, whose ideological, regional and stylistic character is rather more varied than that of *Metre* (*PIR* 38: 1994-95).

19 See Bertram's excellent and disturbing work on gender in British poetry; Mulhall's research for the "Women in Irish Culture Project" at University College Dublin and Warwick University promises to provide similar perspectives on Irish poetry. On the underlying masculinism of lyric subjectivity in general, see Coughlan, "The Whole Strange Growth."

Moya Cannon

The prevalence of western rural settings in Cannon's work and her own bilingual Donegal origins predispose us to read her as a poet of the Irish west and of cultural tradition. In part this is accurate, but it would be mistaken to interpret it as a sign of unproblematic adherence to traditional nationalist ideology. Her work tends to strip the inherited landscapes of the western seaboard of their mythical and stereotypical role in national identity formation. It resists projections of originary cultural purity upon those landscapes and tries to arrive, on the one hand, at a more material apprehension of them and their histories and, on the other, at a fresh vision of their cultural roles in post-modernity. "Murdering the Language," for instance, recalls the mental structuring of the world in the schoolroom by grammar – "[w]hat performs the action, what suffers the action?" (*Parchment Boat* 6). The protagonist notes that the children never wondered why, in the world, "victories won in blood are fastened in grammar" (l. 17). However, this poem's destination is not a straightforward nationalist or post-colonial one: it repudiates "the cold schools" to seek "a new, less brutal grammar" (l. 29) which could accommodate the fact "that this northern shore was wrought / not in one day, by one bright wave, / but by tholing the rush and tug of many tides" (ll. 31-33). The last stanza pivots the poem against its own apparent initial adherence to the familiar narrative of colonial oppression: the "*many tides*" [my emphasis] represent a model of diverse cultural fashioning, not just the *one* "bright wave" of notionally singular Gaelic origins.

The Heaneyesque word "tholing" indicates his strong influence on Cannon, not just in terms of diction and regionality. On a first reading, Cannon seems to be developing her thematic perspectives also from the early and middle Heaney's work. There is a stress similar to his on tools, things made, products of labour and craft (her two collections to date are entitled *Oar* and *The Parchment Boat*). Digging down into the land and finding older things buried under the surfaces figures prominently. She also draws on Kavanagh, especially on his work extolling attachment to place and the representative importance of rural districts considered remote from metropolitan perspectives.²⁰

On closer acquaintance, however, it becomes evident that while Cannon has used such Heaney and Kavanagh motifs as starting-points, her imagination develops in different directions from the Estyn Evans impulses of the early Heaney and, ultimately, from the thematic uses to which Kavanagh puts his localism. Certain clusters of ideas and motifs are characteristic preoccupations. Nests and homing figure largely ("Crow's Nest," *Oar* 47, now anthologised for school students, is a prominent example). So is a motif of the crushing of objects and physical features by their mutual contact: in "Song in Windsor, Ontario" (*Parchment Boat* 32), ice-plates "crumple

20 She praises Kavanagh for managing "with all his contrariness, to cut through Celtic mist and Bohemian jungle to rescue real landscapes and townscapes and to find a solace, a kind of rooted transcendence in both," and cites R.S. Thomas on seeking "a state / not place of innocence and delight" ("Editorial" 2).

each other / to show / how mountain ranges are made" (ll. 7-10).²¹ The fine lyric "Tending" (*Parchment Boat* 21), which achieves an Imagist effect, describes how the fire in individual logs quickly dies down unless their "burnt ends are tilted together," when in that "moment's touch, recognition," they produce "gold and blue flame" which "wraps the singing wood" (ll. 3-6). "Tending" offers, in six lines, a spare and poised objective correlative for the mutual wearing and attrition in human contact, amounting even to mutual using up and destruction, but also to moments of ecstasy and transfiguration. Its quality of brevity and containment is characteristic of Cannon's best work. In a minor key it echoes Donne's classic formulation of this idea in "The Canonization": "Wee are Tapers too, and at our owne cost die" and "Wee dye and rise the same, and prove / Mysterious by this love" (ll. 21, 26-27). But where Donne characteristically combines the erotic and the sacred, Cannon's small ecstatic epiphany of mutual immolation is not so expansive. "Tending" neither demands nor rules out an erotic reading. Another piece, "Eros," explicitly concerns human sexual attachment and uses natural processes as its images; it also dwells on a necessary sweeping away and breaking open of surfaces. Pointedly resisting the transcendent, it defines erotic delight as "not at all like being in heaven / but like being in the earth" (*Oar* 36, ll. 2-3). Like "Tending," however, "Eros" withholds gender marking and so it develops a shared experience without differentiation.

"Oysters" (*Parchment Boat* 20) proposes an obvious analogue between the animal's physical life and a human ideal of emotional being:

the pull of that huge muscle beside the heart
 which clamps the shell shut
 before a hunting starfish or a blade
 but which opens it
 to let in the tide (ll. 23-27)

comes together with the capacity to incorporate foreign objects and "endless filtering/ to sustain a pale silky life" (ll. 16-17). This implies the value of receptivity and not shutting the self away from the surge of circumstances, while retaining both the ability to protect the self from injury and the instinct to tell the difference. There is a suggestive parallel in Ní Chuilleanáin's fine Magdalene poem, where water-weeds lying "collapsed" under the surface all "wait for the right time," then when the tide turns, "[f]lip all together their thousands of sepia feet" ("St Mary Magdalene Preaching at Marseilles," *Magdalene Sermon* 23). In Ní Chuilleanáin the mystery of Magdalene's self-alteration from sinner to saint is signified and deepened by this rhythmic, slightly comical beauty of the water-weed's turning at "the right time." The two poems meet in

21 On crushing, we might compare Eavan Boland's "The Latin Lesson," where the crushing of eucalyptus leaves to make aromatic oils is used both negatively, to symbolize the negative effects of Catholic models of femininity and convent education, and positively, to stand for the processing of the words of poems to make meaning (*Outside History* 78-79). Boland leaves the image poised between the two, but her interest is in the crushing effects of the actions of *culture*, whether benign or not, whereas Cannon steadily focuses on *nature* and its effects of attrition.

turning what in nature is a mechanism into a poetic sign for human acts and experiences, and in particular for the capacity to change direction in the human self: a notion close to Keats's "negative capability." Both implicitly disavow notions of human agency as complete conscious control, and also western narratives of the domination of nature as a prime aim of human knowledge and action. One might consider Cannon, in particular, as an eco-feminist. While she does not, to date, thematically foreground gender, nevertheless her work does at many points support a gendered reading: the non-gendering in "Eros" is itself an implicit comment on the conventional polarisation of male and female in poetic expressions of sexuality. I shall return to gender and its role.

In Cannon's poetry belonging to the west is a vital element whose performative importance outstrips her biographical origins. It combines with the unobtrusive but exact and deep knowledge of Irish linguistic and material culture shown by her personae to complicate and alter the unitary, perhaps even monolithic, character of Boland's sense of Irish tradition. Boland's celebrated and much-needed critique of the subaltern positioning of women in Ireland, paradoxically carried out by means of the notional elevation of an iconic feminine, found its most apposite application to Revival traditions of Irish writing in English, and it cannot reliably be applied, without major revision, to writing in Irish and to Gaelic cultural traditions in general. Cannon's immersion in these traditions might predispose her to resist this overarching and uninflected character of Boland's generalisations. Also, her characteristic poetic subjectivity avoids the dominant model ultimately derived from Romanticism. In that model, individual introspection plays the crucial role: it elaborates a constitutively masculine suffering subject who wrestles with inner conflict, meanwhile projecting this oedipally upon a landscape conceived as more or less passive and maternal, alternately nurturing and cruel (Coughlan, "Bog Queens" and "Strange Growth"; Sullivan, "Treachery"). Cannon sedulously avoids instating such a persona: her conceptions both of selfhood and of nature are at odds with this dominant tradition. It is the point at which she most markedly diverges from both Heaney and Kavanagh, despite their influence upon her poetic voice in other respects. The overt tensions in her thematics are between modernity (here taken together with post-modernity) and closeness – sometimes presented as harsh exposure – to those non-human phenomena which we can only, inadequately, name as "nature." Also, it is a conscious gesture in her style to understate rather than advance propositions emphatically: "In today's soundbyte culture when people are assailed by stimulation all the time, they become sated. To get their attention, you have two options: either by using shock tactics, or through understatement. I prefer the latter. You have to take the risk of speaking quietly at times" (Donovan interview). We should not misread this restraint as mere diffidence: it is a deliberate speaking-position, adopted throughout her work. Furthermore, we have seen that she is far from unproblematically nationalist, and she also resists pastoral appropriations of the Irish landscape. "Holy Well" is one example of her delicate interrogation of contemporary Ireland's abandonment of its own vernacular religious practices, but we should not over-read the many realisations of a felt

power in natural objects and, especially, processes either as nature-mysticism or as what is known in contemporary New Age discourses as "Celtic spirituality."²² I believe her poems apprehend and present this power rather as the cumulative trace, in our minds, of the hundreds of previous generations who inhabited this terrain.

To consider other characteristic ideas and motifs of Cannon's may help in understanding her vision. Along with the crushing I have noted, a recurrent motif is the process of things being wound into other things, classically in nests, literal or figurative (in *Oar*, the crow's nest low down in the ruined house near the Atlantic cliffs, but also the nest-like structure on a river weir in which fast-food cartons and a Coca-Cola can have been caught up; see "Crow's Nest" and "Nest," *Oar* 47, 46). There is a related idea of being – or not being – caught inside something and trapped, such as the tiny "room-sized fields" in "West" (19). The motif of collecting objects (typically, as birds do to make nests) produces one of her finest poems, "Votive Lamp" (52), significantly placed last in *Oar*. This uses an individual persona, not adopting the muted "we," indicating a community, which is a much more frequent position in Cannon. Moving house, the speaker is landed with – clearly unwanted – Catholic devotional objects from previous occupants. After "the Pope and the Sacred Heart / went off on the back of a cart" (ll. 1-2), with its dismissive rhyme, she cannot quite get rid of the red brandy-glass-shaped light which shone upwards onto the Sacred Heart image in so many Catholic houses for generations. Now its "red glow" illuminates instead her collection of "my life's bric-a-brac" (l. 31), including a dead friend's photograph, "three hazelnuts gathered from a wall," and a postcard "from Asia" of three "leather-skinned shamans" (ll. 19-21). With a wry wit, this addresses the situation of very many Irish people in post-modernity. No longer within the former nearly all-embracing circle of Catholic belief and practice and aware of other meaning-systems, many feel a contradictory combination of relief at something escaped (well caught in the "Sacred Heart / back of a cart" rhyme) and of longing for Catholicism's totalising, Providential account of the world, recalled from childhood: "If I'd been brought up in the clear light / of reason / I might feel differently" (ll. 9-11). Cannon's idea of removing the Sacred Heart image itself, but being unable to dispense with the light that shone on it, is a spare and powerful image for the vanishing of the transcendental signified, the fleeing of the oracles, but the unsettling persistence of the place where they were, in other words, of the desire for inner meanings which they purported to satisfy. Ultimately, the poem retains the *idea* of the sacred, but it is significant that the word is used to name her own saved and found objects, which seem to "cluster" around the light. Furthermore, she has "designed none of this" (l. 24); the poem keeps in play both the notion of some residual force which causes this effect and the very different,

22 As I believe Cusick does. While her serious and extended discussion of Cannon's work is timely and welcome, I am sceptical of Cusick's repeated identification of humility before nature as a moral ideal in Cannon's work and of a tendency to over-extend the attribution "Celtic" to all of Ireland's early inhabitants. Haberstroh helpfully, though briefly, situates Cannon as a questioner of the romanticising reification of the west of Ireland.

ultimately secular one: "whether / the small star's constancy, / *through other lives and other nights*, / now confers some sanctity" on *her* cherished collected things (ll. 29-31; my emphasis). This seems to redefine "sanctity" as our sense of the past, of the unseen presence and steadying, benign power *of our willingness to reflect* on our predecessors' lives in "other nights": perhaps of their sheer endurance. The poem is especially interesting because, like "Holy Well," it refrains from metaphysical insistences. Instead, it frames a place now empty, like the lamp which no longer shines on a sacred image. The protagonist's aloneness and her demystified state of mind signify the persistence of unfulfilled longing and of spiritual *potential* into Irish post-modernity. Cannon remarked to an interviewer in 1997 that "the meaning we find in the world around us is always our own projection" (Donovan).²³ This is a perspective as secular as Coleridge's Kantian statement that human enlightenment by nature is always the result of self-projection upon the inanimate: "...we receive but what we give, / And in our life alone does Nature live" (Coleridge ll. 47-48).²⁴ Her work is important to contemporary Ireland, because it resists two opposed but equally reductive stances towards Ireland's inherited beliefs and practices of devotion: she avoids both the advocacy of a re-mystifying Catholic hegemony and a detached, tourist-like appropriation of older cultural patterns as folkloristic "local colour."

Two striking nature-poems, "Hills" (*Oar* 30) and "The Foot of Muckish" (*Oar* 32), like her work in general, avoid the controlled iambic rhythms of her younger contemporaries; they work primarily by metaphor. "Hills" concerns the intense attachment of the persona to a local mountain landscape, "my wild hills." It sets up a trope of startling physicality to realise this bond, alternating erotic moments with predatory ones. First, "[m]y wild hills come stalking" (l. 1), and the speaker fails either to "cast them off" (l. 3) or limit their power by "lyricis[ing] about heather" (l. 6). The compelling power she knew in childhood, when they seemed "half the world's perimeter," overcomes such "elegant" and "disinterested discourse" (ll. 8-9). Now they return forcefully upon her, insisting on their inextricable and vital place in her consciousness:

I know them blue, like delicate shoulders.
I know the red grass that grows in high boglands
and the passionate brightnesses and darknesses
of high bog lakes. (ll. 12-15)

They are figured as the contours of a human body, but writ larger and stranger, and intensely rendered, with erotic vividness: "red," "high," with "passionate brightnesses and darknesses." The culminating conceit has them present in her very body and yet

23 Compare "Night" (*Parchment Boat* 40), which describes a brilliant night sky as "our windy, untidy loft / where old people had flung up old junk" (ll. 24-25), including "a clatter of heroes, / a few heroines..." (ll.27-28).

24 A reviewer's comment that Cannon's landscapes "exist as both the territories of primal forces, and the heartlands of a folkish Catholicism" is not only unsympathetic to her project: it may also miss the careful indeterminacy of her perspectives as to metaphysics or at least the distance her speakers maintain from literalist or traditional belief (Guinness review).

simultaneously outside civilisation: in "the murk of winter / these wet hills will come howling through my blood like wolves" (ll. 17-18). We cannot read this fantasised land-body as gendered because the signals are contradictory. In traditional terms, hunters and wolves both connote aggressive masculinity, as "delicate shoulders" usually do femininity. Furthermore, if the speaker has, metaphorically, a passionate affair with this landscape, both s/he and it are rendered as both active and passive. Cannon does make the poem turn on a binary, but it is that of wild/tame, nature/culture. The speaker's disavowal of the elegant detachment of mere lyric discourse, including perhaps her own at an earlier time, repudiates a nature-poetry based on scenery which seeks to contain the material land and even virtually to consume it.²⁵ Finally, the hills seem both outside and within the human, ready to return as a never-tamed nature, "howling through my blood" (l. 18) and imperfectly repressed by her inchoate efforts to "cast them off" (l. 3). Cannon's opposition of lyric elegance and an intense, potentially predatory passion suggests the beautiful/sublime distinction: the utterly untameable quality of these hills makes them non-human and decisively raises them above the feminised realm of the aesthetic. In this respect the poem seems after all to show Romantic influences, but to the extent that it does, it constructs the protagonist as a non-feminised subject: the sheer intensity of "these wet hills" possesses, but also empowers, her. Cannon may allude to Kavanagh and adopt his trajectory through repudiation of the native terrain to rapprochement, as in his poem "Innocence" (101). But she notably steps outside the conventional identification of the feminine with nature and of nature as feminine which Kavanagh performs when he makes his woman-landscape equivocally spouse and mother and has his speaker first cast her from him and name her "a ditch / Although she was smiling at me with violets," then in the end return to "her briary arms" (Kavanagh, "Innocence" ll. 9-11).

Sonnet-length, "The Foot of Muckish" (*Oar* 32) stages an epiphany from childhood. The town-dwellers on the coast visit the wild terrain of Muckish mountain only to cut turf and so, in the adult persona's phrase, consider it "beyond our pale" (in miniature mimicry of the division of wildness from civility during settlement periods in Irish history). The middle section is a scene: as the "clumsy, dark-hearted child" of ten comes down the mountain "over the last shoulder," the smaller mountain opposite "rose up in a cliff" and "rocked a lake between its ankles" (ll. 7-10).

At first this seems threatening; it recalls the much more tremendous passage in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, where the boy in the boat feels the towering mountain gather itself and pursue him as he rows frantically down the lake (I, ll. 404-12). But Cannon switches the affect of her poem away from this terror: the hill which rises up so suddenly at first seems threatening, but the gesture resolves itself into one of contain-

25 Cusick reads this as referring to Yeats's and Synge's Revival representations of western landscapes and their "privileging of cultural scripts" (74); to me it seems closer to recent work such as Michael Longley's, with its careful naming of bird and plant species, which might be read as a gesture of control such as Cannon is resisting here.

ment and protective love which strongly suggests a parent holding and rhythmically rocking a child sitting at its feet. This modulates into the offering of a gift, making the enfolded lake

A sixpence
a home for all the little dark streams,
a moon
in the miles of acid land. (ll. 11-14)

In the Ireland of Cannon's childhood, the silver sixpenny coin was the classic gift or "tip" a child got from a visiting uncle, or the parish priest, or any other adult from outside the household. The homeliness of this cultural memory reinforces the kind-parent image from just before, making the landscape a protector and gift-giver. Then "a home for all the little dark streams" gathers in the "dark-hearted" child, deepening the previous suggestion of holding and blissful enfolding. Then the lake is transformed from the pleasingly round and shining sixpence into "a moon," not unattainably far away but present to human sight, shining over "the miles of acid land."²⁶ This final phrase reasserts the wild inhuman character of the terrain, yet the feeling of loving protection, gift, and illumination – all sparely indicated – counterbalances this harshness, comforting and enlightening the "clumsy" child still half-present within the poem's adult speaking self.

The twenty-syllable last stanza is verbless, Imagist or haiku-like, and instead of the experience of fearful diminution which the foregoing non-human land might suggest, it is at once joyful and consolingly miniaturising. The child-sized persona is echoed strongly in "all the little dark streams" for which the lake, itself nurtured by the parent-like, rocking mountain, provides "a home." The troping of the lake both as sixpence and moon makes both seem like gifts to the child, the coin almost magically becoming a pure, shining circle, immemorial symbol of completeness, soaring above the "miles of acid land." Cannon here re-imagines the landscape as cradling and tendering, while the poem's temporal moment is, significantly, a liminal one between day and night, where a lake glimmers with the last light of day and at the same time holds the promise of moonlight.

Other intertexts suggest themselves, particularly and contrastingly, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's "Cailleach," in which a daughter experiences as terrifying hallucination her mother's earlier dream of being an earth-giantess, feet in the sea and, for shoulders, the mountains encircling the bay (*Feis* 31; Smyth 215-6). One might well read Ní Dhomhnaill as ironising, even sending up, Heaney's pervasive female gendering of natural features. Cannon's landscape, by contrast, is non-gendered: adults of either sex might rock a small child between their ankles or marvellously bestow sixpence on a little girl or boy unpractised (in earlier generations) in getting or spending. So if her poem is also an implicit response to Heaney's gendering system, it uses

26 Possibly Somerset Maugham's once very widely-read novel *The Moon and Sixpence* suggested this associative chain.

a different tactic from Ní Dhomhnaill's: the speaker has her own rational subjectivity, of which she recalls the ten-year-old stage, and is part of a human community with a pragmatic relation (the harvesting of fuel) to the bogland below Muckish. No sense of identification with the landscape is involved, nor is there any sense either of wooing or being born from it, as in Heaney's headily erotic and murky bogland tropes.

The final Cannon poem I shall discuss is "Listening Clay" (*Oar* 33), which focuses on those sounds that "were here before the word, / and have no significance in law /... / sounds without a history" (ll. 9-10, 13). While proposing a continuum between human and non-human, it diverges sharply from Kavanagh's seamless joining of nature with the Christian sacred. Cannon's interest is in the assertion of an immemorial and irreducible underlying reality to be encountered both in non-human natural phenomena and in those instinctual behaviours which humanity holds in common with it. The dedication "for Caitríona" once again signals the poet's divergence from stereotypical and traditional nature-as-feminine personifications, just as her treatment of nature avoids mystification. Here two rational subjects are posited, one inviting the other to consider the class of sounds "that we can, / and do, trust." These are listed with spareness and restraint:

a gale in the trees,
the soft click of the stones, where the tide falls back,
a baby crying in the night. (ll. 4-6)

In an intensified tone the next stanza holds these sounds above mockery and distinguishes them from cerebration, commerce, history, law, and the word itself. Hélène Cixous seizes upon Lacan's theory that the place of the feminine in language is "refusal of the discourse of the master" and of "the tyranny of all-knowing" and turns it, against itself, to assert a positive position: this poem parallels Cixous' move (251).²⁷ Cannon uses language here to speak the unspeakable, to represent that which, while it is outside the realm of the Lacanian Symbolic order, nevertheless can be apprehended:

Endlessly repeated,
immutable,
they are sounds without a history.
They comfort and disturb
the clay part of the heart. (12-16)

Neither persona nor dedicatee is identified with these literal, pre-linguistic sounds. Instead, both are placed, with the implied reader, in a shared human category by the striking figure which closes the poem: just as comfort and disturbance must co-exist, so these sounds, like the being of their hearers, are at once material ("clay part") and al-

27 Qtd. in Yorke 116-117 and 214 n.14. Mitchell and Rose describe how for Lacan "the absolute 'Otherness' of the woman ... serves to guarantee for the man his own self-knowledge and truth." They link this fundamental gendering to his "attempt ... to rejoin the place of 'non-knowledge' which he designated the unconscious ... and thereby to undercut the very mastery which his own position (as master and analyst) necessarily constructs" (50).

ways already infused with feeling ("of the heart"). The internal rhyme of "part" and "heart" further binds together this concrete body and its own inescapable infusion with emotion.

Vona Groarke

In the first poems of her début collection, *Shale*, Vona Groarke builds up a landscape stripped to almost archetypal elements: shore, river, lake, island, lighthouse, windmill, stones, trees. A characteristic focus on dwelling-houses, however, quickly becomes apparent and marginalises the former elements, which nevertheless remain as mutely oppositional presences, beyond and outside houses. Place-names are infrequent in Groarke, though some topographical features, especially the many lakes which characterise the midlands, her region of origin, are discernible in her work. Occasionally, a location is named for thematic purposes, her Edgeworth poem "Patronage" (*Shale* 22) offering the most obvious example. Groarke's Irish landscapes markedly avoid invoking the chthonic or any hint of cosmic gendering. In some of her finest poems the settings, like Elizabeth Bishop's, function as grounds of philosophical reflection by a human subject who is characterised by her thought and constituted in meditation. These poems are effective in devising tropes to bring insight to the themes – philosophical, aesthetic, or social – broached in the poems; there are already good examples in her first collection.

Groarke's 1999 *Other People's Houses* names a preoccupation which could be considered central to her work as a whole. She circles round the ideas of house and home, proposing ideas both of safety and enclosure, sometimes as protective and enabling, sometimes as confining and provoking frustration. However, her representations of domesticity differ from those in Boland and, indeed, in Rita Ann Higgins. Groarke's cooler and better-regulated speakers strike quasi-Augustan notes, sometimes similar to those of Derek Mahon. Using an ironic, poised narrator, she skillfully deploys quotidian detail to produce a formally elegant, tactically detached, and ultimately dystopian vision of post-modern Ireland's suburbanisation. Many of the pieces in this volume have a strong degree of public referentiality: for instance, the technically accomplished "Open House" (*Other People's Houses* 16), which is in forty-six rhyming couplets and near-perfect traditional metre.²⁸ At the level of theme, however, there is almost always a half-hidden risk: that these carefully managed enclosures – of the soulless Tiger-era estate "Sycamore Court," but also of the speaker's own surface composure – will be cracked open by some apocalyptic force. That force is, however, not always imagined as an interior one. Thus, the narrator is divided physically from her neighbour (in the poem's inspired phrase, "sleeping partner," with its tension between connotations of business and sex) only by "one course of bricks," al-

28 This is predominantly anapaestic, a galloping "da-da-dum" rhythm which in English poetry usually suggests comic effects; Groarke combines this with iambs and occasional trochees at the start of the line.

beit socially by all the fencing off of bourgeois codes of individuality, and only an extraordinary event could bring them together. Such a fateful happening can, however, only be imagined as half religion and half kitsch: "as happened to Lazarus, or the guests on *Blind Date*" (l. 90). The limitations of this speaker's imagination are meant as satiric, but Groarke's own forms are so neat and her control of her material so strong that the poems can give the impression of over-regulation and thereby themselves risk mirroring the over-ordered pastiche of civility which they are satirising in the social world.²⁹ Generally she is at her most interesting and intense in the briefer, more lyrical and sombre pieces. Her quasi-meditative, philosophical work, such as "What Becomes the River?" (*Shale* 13), the fine title poem of *Flight* (*Flight* 16), and others broaching the experience or apprehension of loss – of meaning or of some part of the self, or both – and psychological terror are well worthy of more and more sustained attention by readers and critics (see Morrissey). I shall discuss these last.

Thematically, one might divide Groarke's work to date roughly into four main kinds, with some overlap. First there are social-satiric poems, set in a recognizable Ireland and wryly anatomising the visual aspects of our surroundings, especially of the contemporary built (all too often jerry-built) environment. The second kind is the loose narrative of a female persona who traverses some unsatisfactory, alienating relationships and sexual encounters to reach a lasting love-partner, who becomes a husband, and to set up a two-child family in a suburb. The moves between houses can be read as successive moments in this narrative, whose conventional character is sometimes mildly geyed by the main speaker. More often, however, the poet stages epiphanies which aim to valorise the situation emotionally, despite its surface adherence to social norms frequently ironised. Groarke thus interweaves her interest in the concept of home and in the range of its possible realisations, relatively successful or largely failed, with her representation of a familiar and rather normative bourgeois romance. These poems about spousal and family contentment and children are much more conventional and reach less towards that creative disturbance where the highest potential of the lyric form is seen.³⁰

The third kind is linked with the first two in again focusing on the house, domesticity and related matters (cooking, farming). These pieces echo the first kind in sketching Irish houses of various sorts; but now their public, often historical, thematic aspect is dominant. Some of Groarke's most praised and prize-winning poems are in this vein, for instance "Imperial Measure," about the incongruous luxury with which the 1916 rebels were victualled, "Or to Come," an impressive long poem in "Country Churchyard" mode, and "The Way It Goes," about a decayed, perhaps "Big," house, all collected in *Flight* (63, 30, 20 respectively). These pieces overflow the short lyric genre to become

29 Reviewers at the time expressed impatience and a sense of repetition and confinement at this collection's unvaried focus on the topic of houses (e.g. Costello 51).

30 Such as "Sunflowers," "Maize," and "Tonight of Yesterday" (*Flight* 23, 24 and 25), the last two dedicated "for Tommy" and "for Eve" respectively.

descriptive poetry, frequently elegiac in tone, and in this developing towards a non-lyric genre, they interestingly indicate the influence of Goldsmith, whose *Deserted Village*, Groarke observes, was inescapably present in her midlands childhood.³¹ Groarke's account of earlier Irelands, of several kinds and periods, and of their complex legacy, is a topic worthy of longer investigation, but it is important at least to observe the complexity with which she approaches the theme of Irish histories in a pluralistic way, as many rather than one. In this respect, despite its urbanity of tone, Groarke's work meets Cannon's.

A number of shorter pieces, more clearly lyric in genre, also exemplify this investigation of past, and by implication, public social values. "The Lighthouse," about rural electrification, explicitly announces itself as diverging from a received narrative by beginning "I heard her tell the story another way" (*Other People's Houses* 34). It centres on three women in a household and their sense of alarm and estrangement when they first turn the switch and see themselves "stranded in a room that was nothing like / their own /.../ their house undone and silenced / by the clamour of new light" (ll. 26-27, 29-30). The transformation destroys "the music / of the room when it was still" (ll. 9-10): the fire's "rustle," a teaspoon's "single held note" (l. 11), knitting sounds and the clock's "flutter." It also sweeps away the "familiar shine" (l. 19) of the china cups, the copper pans, and a wedding ring (l. 20). Female companionship is indicated only by these discreet metonymies, but meanwhile outside this domestic context the priest preaches about "the dawn of a new age" and a "crowd of overcoated men" are cheering for "progress and prosperity" (ll. 21, 22, 25). Groarke sounds a minority note here: in holding back from an uninflected endorsement of the process of modernisation in Ireland she indicates a position about what is currently a vexed question among social and cultural critics. It is significant that in registering losses as well as gains, Groarke adopts a viewpoint specifically marked as feminine.³² The poem's picture of women's shared, contented being within their house implicitly poses questions about the rhetoric of "progress and prosperity" as unalloyed good, both then and now.

Another piece with a markedly feminine perspective is deftly humorous. In "The House of Hair" (*Other People's Houses* 22), a hairdresser's salon is a converted brothel, and the professional service she capably performs is now for both men and

31 Groarke, who was born "two fields away from Lissoy parsonage," has drawn parallels between Goldsmith's vision of depopulation and economic mismanagement and socially destructive forces in contemporary Ireland, where "traditional rural communities are swamped by dormitory estates and golf courses are made from redundant farms" (Viney). See also Groarke, "High Talk."

32 The poem's negative judgement about the modernising effect of electrification is strikingly paralleled in Clear: "But new facilities created new work. Electrification showed up the dust and the need for interior decorating ..." (169), and "[a]quification and electrification ... lessened the opportunities for contact with neighbours" (183). However it is important to note that these are counter-currents to the concretely positive effects of electrification on women's labour and consequently their lives (170, 202). On wider debates about the modernisation model, see Connolly 10-13, McCarthy 12-41.

women. The poem keeps a straight face about its own sustained *double entendre*, emphasising the hairdresser's skill, grace, sexiness ("she was quick and supple and made-up," l. 4) and her perfume ("[i]t drew the room around her fingertips, / the turn of her breasts, her thighs, her shallow hips," ll. 8-9). She is calmly aware of her own attraction. The men would "close their eyes as she'd finish them off," brushing away the hair from "each chin" (ll. 10-12). The poem's persona waits her "turn" to have her hair cut "up short" and given her to have a wig made. Instead she puts it away and when after three years she finds it, in the last lines of the poem, it has "loosened out and strayed / to fill the bag with soft, dark fur / that didn't smell of me, but of her skin" (ll. 16-18). It is a sensual moment, charged with the unsettling presence of another woman's active sexuality which ambushes the speaker within her own house (turning it too into a "house of hair"). Groarke shows skill and panache in her diction and her activation of the hair-sex connotations: the final "loosen[ing] out" and "stray[ing]" echoes the "calls at *wayward* hours" (l. 2; my emphasis) which the hairdresser continues to get from "gentlemen not looking for a trim" (l. 3), and the speaker's own shorn haircut seems to be a transfer of sensual power from her to the other woman, a sexual energy which is stored, dormant, in the drawer, to be erotically reactivated in this last stanza.

If "The House of Hair" notes an erotic frisson below the everyday surfaces of small-town life, other short poems approach contested Irish histories from varied angles, but also work from notably feminine perspectives, for example "Shot Silk" (*Flight* 62) and "House Fire" (*Other People's Houses* 37). "Shot Silk" explores the past confinement of gentlewomen indoors with their stitching work, while "candles flinch / from a fire seen on the hill." "House Fire," in form a prose poem, is about the Traveller custom of ritually burning the caravan dwelling of the recently dead, with all their possessions inside. In both of these, as in a third, "Workhouses" (*Other People's Houses* 36), Groarke develops a searching historical reflexivity, marked by compassion, from the vivid imagining of temporal detail. She has perfected the skill of staging her scenes with such restraint that no intrusive propositionality or argument is required. Thus, while some of these poems' settings suggest Eavan Boland territory, the two poets' styles differ sharply, because Groarke usually achieves those general judgements which are always present in poems by poetically incorporating them in the material itself and making them seem to arise from it without strain. Boland, by contrast, especially in her work on more public and historical themes, tends towards semi-detachable statements or declarations. She also deploys the questionable device of assuming, as poetic speaker, the identity of some female victims of history, for instance, the Famine emigrant aboard ship.³³ The risk of appropriating the positions of such subaltern subjects in the past is more subtly negotiated in Groarke.

33 "I am the woman / in the gansy-coat / on board the *Mary Belle*, / in the huddling cold ...," "Mise Eire" (Boland, *Outside History* 28-31). Meaney argues that Boland sometimes presents "versions of femininity ... shocking in their stereotyping," despite her seeking, as Broom puts it, "to oppose women's histories" to previous "appropriation[s] of the feminine to evoke the nation" (Meaney 146, quoted in Broom 116).

In these poems about Irish histories, she makes especially effective use of the uncanny: eerie events are suggested, or an aura is generated, to mark the incomensurability of historic suffering and of the hardships of others with glib post-modern attempts at assimilation. Far from the wax figures of the heritage industry, Groarke's sense of history is mordantly etched, and taking her work as a whole, the nuanced quality of these historical scenes resists accommodation to either of the binaries – revisionism or nationalism – which have riven Irish historiography and public discourse.³⁴ "Shot Silk" renders life in gentry houses not as a gracious cultural idyll with peacocks and metaphorical gazelles in the manner of Yeats, but as claustrophobia, containment of female desire, and self-importance, the whole paradoxically and shakily held together by the sense of external threat, more like Bowen's consciously preposterous enclaves and their equivocal relation to their radical antagonists in the hills.³⁵ In Groarke "a seam of dust is brightened by a flicker of outside," and the woman sewing a rent in her calfskin glove will "leave no mark" (ll. 13, 20).

At the other extreme of rank from this shut-in affluence, the workhouse, even when stripped to its site alone, so retains its charge of terrible abjection that "the field around" one of these ruins is still "never ploughed in Spring" (*Other People's Houses* 38). The prose-poem "House Fire" (*Other People's Houses* 37) develops a powerful, if implicit, argument. Organised as seven short stanzaic paragraphs, it attends delicately to the symbolism of the burning, so much at odds with the vesting of security in material houses by settled people: "The fire was to silence whatever might call her [the dead woman] back. The fire was supposed to set her free." The "supposed to" frames the symbolic effect of the burning with scepticism on the part of the – evidently settled – speaker, who also records how the Traveller group leave immediately afterwards. There is subsequent "talk" of whistling sounds and blue lights in the wreck, and a *cordon sanitaire* around the spot ("[n]o one will touch it") is preserved by everyone from the local authority and shoppers to "the usual scrappers," "the winos and the skangers." This suggests both the near-universal social aversion and self-distancing from Travellers in contemporary Ireland and an underlying unease about the social other expressed as fear of haunting. Ironically, despite the "sagging roof and shattered glass," in life the Traveller woman kept her windows "netted and intact." She had a sense of order and exercised it in her surroundings, implicitly contradicting the stereotype of Traveller chaos and filth. The flicker of uncanny effect in the poem leaves these antinomies unreconciled. The poem ends with "indelible shadows on the lock-up wall" left by the fire, symbolically signifying the projection onto these

34 This reflective ideological understanding may be connected with the fact that she holds a qualification in Heritage Management and has worked as a curator.

35 "Ladies had gone not quite mad, not even that, from in vain listening for meaning in the loudening ticking of the clock" (Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* 174); see also *The Last September* (passim).

others of the settled community's anxiety about the viability of its system of purity and danger.³⁶

There are many other fine Groarke poems which would repay discussion, several foregrounding questions of gender. Among these is "Thistle" (*Flight* 18-19), based on a girlhood memory of haymaking, where the child sent merely to weed at the hay-field's edge – "the only girl / in a field bristling with hands, a stray in the herd" (ll. 15-16) – resented her solitary and repetitive labours and the men's and boys' visibly productive, satisfying and communal ones. Then she sang "small words in a small tune to kill the hours / that *skirted* their rough talk and fine acres" (ll. 35-36; my emphasis). Now grown, she has become both a car driver, speeding by, and the memorialist (perhaps in less "small words") of the once universal annual hay-saving, now short-circuited by modern silage machines.³⁷

"The Idea of the Atlantic" (*Shale* 20), headed "for my mother," concerns a mother's terror of the ocean and the daughter consoling her and leading her to the "land-locked" place (l.29), where she will "make peace with the dark" and never have to fear the storm (ll. 32-33). With the powerful opening image of a file of the drowned who walk blank-faced at the bottom of the sea, the poem pits human affection and protective love against the ocean's terrible destructive power. Here the antinomy of sea and land carries the force of death versus life, in a poem ultimately not about topography: this ocean and land are places in the psyche. Its narrative is dreamlike: "[i]f once you look down, you'll be lost" (l. 9). The daughter-speaker enacts a tender assurance, piquant because it swaps roles and makes her into the saving guide. In this respect it recalls poems by Mary Dorsey which also focus on the mother-daughter relation, where the elderly mother grown childlike must be looked after by the adult daughter.³⁸ Dorsey, however, works with a looser, more oral style, and Groarke is much more tight-lipped and formally contained; in her poem the role-exchanging character of the relationship is not stated but allowed to arise implicitly.

It is evident at this point that despite Groarke's uninterest in the kind of explicit feminist statements made by much 1980s Irish women's poetry, very many of her poems either adopt woman-identified perspectives or can be understood as feminist critique, or both. I have already noted her pointed comment in 1999 about the disparity between the general public awareness of Irish male poets as a coherent group, and the absence of such awareness in the case of Irish female ones.

I turn finally to the fourth kind of poem Groarke writes: the philosophical, meditative lyric. This strand of her writing carries especial aesthetic and thematic effect. Of

36 I draw here on Hayes, who both historicises and theorises representations of Travellers, and on Douglas' classical anthropological study of pollution and purification ritual.

37 This piece is intertextual with Heaney's "The Wife's Tale," also a haymaking poem; Groarke's implicit revision of Heaney would bear analysis.

38 See especially "Trying on for Size," Dorsey 25.

these poems, less numerous than her more social and historical work, I have room to discuss only two, one from *Shale*, "What Becomes the River?" (*Shale* 13), and the later "Flight" (*Flight* 16). The theme of the first is ceaseless process in the physical world, with its never-finished breaking down and building up again, and the sheer opacity of natural objects and energies to human thought. With an unmarked speaker who adopts no subject-position ("I," "we" or for that matter "you"), the poem opens and closes with the same sequence of words: "Breathe the clean air of death. The river." But their syntactical function changes, from the initial command or injunction to the statement of a purpose at the end. Austere, unadorned, and technically skilled, in its five three-line stanzas this meditation achieves a cool containment recalling Wallace Stevens. Among Irish predecessors, it is more akin to Thomas MacGreevy at his sparest, or Beckett, than it is to the dominant Yeats or Kavanagh modes. Groarke takes her epigraph for this collection from Elizabeth Bishop, some of whose work "River" also recalls, especially in its implicit disavowal of the emotive lyric speaker.³⁹

"What Becomes the River" offers two apparently contradictory propositions, themselves Zen-like paradoxes: that "this is always something else," and yet that "everything becomes itself" (ll. 13-14). However, a third statement allows their reconciliation, at a price (identity as usually understood by humans): "Everything becomes the river" (l. 11). The river is the flow of sheer process, indivisible ("is this the same sea or a different sea / that comes a little further on the shore?" (ll. 3-4)), and, like the cold sea in Bishop's "At the Fishhouses" (though without Bishop's startling metaphor of the earth's rocky breasts), it is indifferent to human reactions.⁴⁰ "[E]ach wave breaks / and is broken like a stone" (ll. 6-7). Formally, without quite being a sestina "River" resembles one, by repeating certain key end-words: "river" (ll. 1, 11, 15), "stone" (ll. 2, 7), "still" (ll. 9, 10). Its use of caesura, to make a pause in a line, and of enjambment, to draw the eye and ear on over the ends of lines, is especially beautiful. This makes it seem to enact, in words and rhythm, the alternation of absolute arrest and unstoppable flow in the phenomenal world, which is the poem's argument. The opening and closing lines, taken together, exemplify this enactment: in line 1, "[b]reathe the clean air of death. The river..." the mind craves the completion offered in line 2, "...has no more strength than a stone." But by the time we reach line 15 and the end of the poem, we are ready for the first line to become the last and we can

39 The Bishop epigraph, from "The Riverman" (105-09), is "I waded into the river / and suddenly a door / in the water opened inward" (ll. 22-24). Although "The Riverman" draws on shamanistic material, has an indigenous Brazilian speaker and is not a meditative lyric, it has another passage which seems to prefigure Groarke's poem: "Look, it stands to reason / that everything we need / can be obtained from the river" (108-10). Wheatley also notices "River" and finds a resemblance to Louise Glück in its elemental quality (261).

40 "...dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free, / drawn from the cold hard mouth / of the world, derived from the rocky breasts / forever, flowing and drawn..." ("At the Fishhouses," 64-66, ll. 79-83).

now recognise that "[t]he river" is both the only closure we can expect and a consummate one; so now we can agree "to breathe the clean air of death. The river" (l. 15; my emphasis). The enjambment mimes the endlessness of process, the Heraclitean flow according to which everything becomes the river: even the sea is "held close" in it, *in potentia* (l. 12).

The opening appears dark, even suicidal in mood, when it invokes death and endows it with the quality of "clean air." Yet, within the poem's systematically, ascetically reduced world, there is extraordinary consolation in the climactic proposition, which has the quality of a revelation: "That everything becomes itself..." (l. 14) and because we cannot stop there, we are willing to fall or flow, joyfully, over the final line-break in order "...to breathe the clean air of death. The river." The elegant balance of this double formulation recalls St Augustine's injunction, which Beckett admired: "Do not despair: one thief was saved. Do not presume: one thief was damned." That everything becomes itself is a triumph, but it does so only in order to breathe the clean air of death. "What Becomes the River" attains the peculiar power to send us back through its own sequence, rearranging itself in our minds as we think and rethink it, coming up against the paradoxical perfection of its sheer simplicity.

Thematically it overlaps to some degree with Cannon's "Listening Clay" – the poems share a gesture to the irreducible pre-verbal reality of the physical world (the sea, waves, stones, wind) – but the effect is ultimately different, since Groarke's voice removes itself scrupulously from any acknowledgement of feeling, while Cannon's includes human empathy as elemental, with its "we" stance, its dedication to a named other, and its inclusion of "a baby crying in the night." Groarke's is purer, Cannon's more humane.

At first reading, "Flight," which is much longer, offers more items from the actual world and is less ascetic than "What Becomes the River," but it gives this impression primarily because of its rich store of metaphors. The whole poem considers flight as an image of writing. It starts with jet-trails, "bleached flight-lines" in a pale dusk, already dissipating even as one sees them. They are likened to how the breastbone of a tiny bird, "golden oriole or wren," would look if it were "ground to powder" in the speaker's right hand. "Flight" does not stage personal lyric emotion; all we know of the persona is the constitutive activity in which we see her/him engaged: that of poet.⁴¹ There is a "my right hand" (l. 6; my emphasis) but no "I": the speaker is kept carefully minimal. Principally, "Flight" brings together intimations both of the gift – or achievement – named in its title metaphor and of the death awaiting all living things. The tenor of this governing metaphor is the exhilaration and felt power of achieving meaning in language, and this is indicated in the many references to the activity of writing: "uninscribed" (l. 1), "calligraphy" (l. 17), "slight / precision of the black and

41 Since the speaker's gender is particularly unmarked, I say "her/him" to avoid the usual assumption either of a masculine default position or of an alignment between the gender of speaker and poet.

white" (ll. 22-23), "squat characters" (l. 26), and the self-referring "these lines" (l. 39), the poem's last words. Successive bird-descriptions and references are, with one important exception, the primary metaphorical material (or vehicles) marshalled to illustrate and thicken this tenor. The poem works calmly through this series of tropes towards an ending of elegiac poise and quiet expressive power. Near the beginning, there is an almost-definition of poetry as "the point at which two rumours coalesce, / one to do with vision, one with voice" (ll. 7-9). "Vision" represents understanding, poetic and philosophical insight, and "voice" the words of actual poems, the realisation of "vision" in language. The poem's beauty derives partly from Groarke's formal virtuosity, which is never more satisfyingly exercised than here. Since "Flight" is *about* poetry, it elegantly functions both as theme and form, method and meaning. But as well as this "voice" there is also a luminous "vision" in another sense, of the detail of the world: for instance, "the calligraphy of swallows / on a page of cloud; tern prints on snow..." (ll. 17-18) and a vivid description of how a bird works up to taking off: "[o]ne minute, it's ruse and colour, the next, wingspan and whir" (ll. 10-11). Colloquial language is unsettled, made to come alive in an almost Beckettian way: "...something loses the run / of itself and slips airborne" (ll. 13-14), "soon to be thin air; nothing to write / home about; an advancing quiet ..." (ll. 34-35).

Despite the thematic austerity and apparent abstraction of "Flight," there is a striking thread of explicit gendering in its argument, in its one main non-avian trope. In the tenth stanza, patterned delicately with half-rhymes and assonances, we come

to a sequence of hard words laid
one on the other and back again
like a schoolgirl's braid,

chaotic and restrained; that cannot
be taken in hand; that's here now, but
working up to clearing itself out... (28-33)

The schoolgirl's braid – or plait – is of course a social artefact, though made, like poems, from natural material. It weaves together in a pattern the strands of an unruly, abundant bodily thing, hair (making an interesting subdued echo of "The House of Hair"). The braid is a paradox, both "chaotic and restrained," and the poem describes it as on the point of escape, ready to dissolve itself (echoing the earlier metamorphosis of "ruse and colour" into "wingspan and whir"). By synecdoche, the braid in turn signifies the schoolgirl herself: a figure of promise and intense energy, tightly contained for the moment but about to move out, to take off towards an unknown freedom. The whole tenor of the image is to celebrate – explicitly as an image of poetry-making – this disruptive potential, here pointedly marked as feminine. In the poem's complex system of thought this is set against death which, at the end of the poem, "like a moth in a paper lantern, / is rattling in even these lines" (ll. 38-39).

In this conclusion Groarke quietly arrives at an assertion about the potential of poetry which is probably most familiar from Shakespeare's sonnets: the idea of the immortality of art, which Shakespeare himself took over from numerous predecessors in the

Western tradition (e.g. Sonnets 55, 63-65, 81). But her version altogether strips the idea of the charge of personal feeling and individual triumph in that tradition. At first glance the ending looks simply like a rueful but dignified acknowledgement of mortality, and it *is* such an acknowledgement. But Death's "rattle" faces two ways. It powerfully suggests the terrible sounds of the deathbed, but it also describes the moth, struggling inside the paper lantern. If we think carefully about the metaphor, we remember how it is the moth's instinctive attraction into the paper lantern – now become its chamber of death – which causes its eventual immolation. But death rattles inside the poem *like* the moth inside the lantern: so, looked at the other way round, it is the poem – "even" these lines – that kills it off. The brilliance of this figure is in holding together both meanings: the wry acceptance of death's inevitability and the quality of freedom and permanence – of a kind of "flight" beyond death – a good poem can have, in the realm of the imagination. Like the effect of "What Becomes the River," the poem simultaneously registers both loss and gain: the moth in the paper lantern can fly like the birds, but at the end is trapped by its attraction to the light, and, unlike the schoolgirl growing up, cannot fly away. So flight, contradictorily, faces both ways: it stands for release, freedom, soaring, the triumph of the work realised, but also for how we are drawn on to self-immolation by our irresistible desires, and death rattles in all we can utter.

Like the best of Cannon's work, Groarke's most effective poems may originate in the specific times and places of Ireland in the 1990s and may often use those circumstances as their point of departure and their context, but in both cases they often also reach a more general applicability, by their poetic skill, grace, and vision. Both also unselfconsciously add to, adapt, and re-envisage both Irish and feminine ways of viewing the world and of remaking it in the virtual realm of poetry.

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"WATCH ME WHEREVER I GO": AMBIVALENCE AND MISDIRECTION IN EILÉAN NÍ CHUILLEANÁIN'S POETRY¹

Borbála Faragó

"You are reaching me in translation," says Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin in her poem "A Posting" (*Brazen Serpent* 45). This is simultaneously a warning to, and a sheltering of, the reader. Although the real "me" remains hidden in translation, a metaphorical "reaching" is accomplished. This playful teasing of the reader is characteristic of Ní Chuilleanáin's work. Spatial and psychic distances are created to be overcome and transcended, merely to be rebuilt. Ní Chuilleanáin's preferred linguistic tool to achieve this effect is silence – not just silence which signals the "unsaid" in a poem, but also silence which is intricately written into language. As the "unseen joints of the text" (Iser 183), blanks play a crucial role both in the writing and the reading processes. Poetry in particular, given its spatial dimensions, can host various manifestations of blanks. However, beyond the visual and grammatical gaps, the poems of Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin simultaneously intensify and broaden the significance of silence as the compositional tool that drives her poetry. Ní Chuilleanáin creates and recreates silences by populating her work with silent figures and figures of silence. This essay offers an exploration of Ní Chuilleanáin's silence and hidden locale as sites of creative constructions.

Hidden Pianissimo – Silence as Creative Impulse

Both keeping back information and disclosing blanks play crucial parts in problematising interactive expectations between writer and reader. By disrupting patterns of communication Ní Chuilleanáin draws attention to the problem of communication itself and its ethical implications.

Ní Chuilleanáin's "The Informant" offers an interesting example in this regard. The poem's two protagonists – the old woman and the young man – both contribute in their own way to creating the silence which carries with it the ultimate locus of "meaning." The first stanza opens with a roundabout description of the old woman and the observing man:

Underneath the photograph
Of the old woman at her kitchen table
With a window beyond (fuchsias, a henhouse, the sea)

1 An extended version of this article appeared in the *Irish University Review* 37.1 (2007): 68-83.

Are entered: her name and age, her late husband's
 Occupation
 (A gauger), her birthplace, not here
 but in another parish, near the main road.
 She is sitting with tea at her elbow
 And her own fairy-cakes, baked that morning
 For the young man who listens now to the tape
 Of her voice changing, telling the story. (*Magdalene Sermon* 36)

Ní Chuilleanáin's misdirection is particularly evident here: the old woman's position is consistently associated with words like "underneath," "beyond," "not here," "another parish," "near." In other words, the focus of our gaze slips off its target and the woman is only allowed to appear in peripheral vision. This is further emphasised by the fact that she is on a photograph, and by looking at her the reader follows the gaze of the on-looking young man. It is in fact only the young man who "physically" appears in this stanza, listening to the tape he prepared earlier – which, of course, means that he is also removed from the location where his presence was of significance. Thus, both protagonists are simultaneously absent and present: we hear the woman's voice, see her on a photograph, and we see the man silently listening to the tape. No direct visuals and no direct communication. Despite first appearances, the image presented in the first stanza is still and quiet. It is into this silence that the man's first question erupts: "*Did you ever see it yourself?*" (36). This request for visual confirmation – of what we do not know – is met with an affirmative "once, I saw it." This enigmatic "it" is repeated three times and yet it remains veiled and hidden. The next question asked by the young man "*can you describe it?*" is followed by the tape-recorder's answer:

... But the sound
 Takes off like a jet engine, the machine
 Gone haywire, a tearing, an electric
 Tempest. Then a stitch of silence.
 Something has been lost. (36)

Significantly, the retelling or describing of "it" converges in the "stitch of silence" and is forbidden to surface. The information is *not* passed on. However, a quieter voice resumes the storytelling about a man who disappears slowly – at first only bodily, with his "child's voice" lingering behind, and then completely. And then, the concluding stanza has another surprise in store. The interviewing young man asks something out of sync with his bland, factual questioning in his quest for facts and truths. He becomes interested in what the woman thinks, rather than what she knows, and asks: "*You find this more strange than the yearly miracle / Of the loaf turning into a child?*" With this question he seems to acknowledge the existence, or the validity of, a mythological otherworld occupying the old woman's life. This question is in stark contrast with the sceptical "*Did you ever see it yourself?*" of the first stanza and implies a subtle change in attitude. Interestingly, now the tape does not buckle up and the old woman's answer is there for all to hear: "well, that's natural, she says, / I often baked the bread for that myself" (37). It seems that this answer has been there all

along: her freshly baked fairy cakes are already there in the first stanza, in the photograph. The interview is just a detour. However, the poem remains fundamentally enigmatic. Who is the informant? Is it the old woman who gives the interview and with that gives away some of her fairy-world? Or is it the young man who prepares the tape? Or is it the tape-recorder itself which gives the most important piece of information by keeping silent? Or is it the "man" in the old woman's story who "speaks in a child's voice" and disappears? Or is it the poet, who creates all this confusion and misinformation? And, even more significantly, what is the information? Is it something the man said in his child's voice, or something the old woman said or the thing that the tape-recorder kept silent? Or is it something the young man came to understand? The mysterious information and its source remain hidden from the reader throughout the poem. The point of reference slips out of focus. Critical works on this poem do not fully clarify these questions. Paul Scott Stanfield reaches the following conclusion:

The answer [of the old woman in the last stanza] assimilates the pagan to the Christian, combining ancient magic with the mysteries of the Incarnation and of the mass, and locates the synthesis within the female realm of home and hearth. Just that quietly Ní Chuilleanáin gives us a homely but awe-inspiring vision of the female sacred. (107-8)

However, within the frame of reference of the "homely, awe-inspiring vision of the female sacred," the man with the child's voice is difficult to place. If this poem is a celebration of a feminine folklore, the presence of the two men seems to be somewhat problematic. Ní Chuilleanáin herself comments on the gender issue of "The Informant":

There is one [poem] about the informant which is not about any particularized folk image but about the woman who actually transmits folk information. And I suppose I was really commenting on the way in which there is a kind of interaction between the people who are seen as possessing the folk wisdom, who are the women, and the men who come and interview them, ask questions, and reduce what they have to say to manageable form for some kind of activity. (Haberstroh 64)

Ní Chuilleanáin places the emphasis on the interaction between the young man and the old woman, and on the manipulation of gathered information, rather than on a presumed revelation of hidden feminine wisdom. Lucy Collins sees the question of agency as the central issue of the poem. In her illuminating essay she argues that the informer represents a form of authority which is different from the political. Commenting on the last lines of the poem, she says: "Here the individual is the repository of valuable knowledge, which cannot be transferred to any other medium with ease: attempts to bypass the human agency here are doomed to failure, so that the individual becomes a crucial conduit between different worlds" (179). This emphasis on individual agency can prove helpful in unravelling the poem, so far as it suggests that the most significant issue is the possession of knowledge rather than its transmission. However, another comment by Ní Chuilleanáin further complicates the depiction of the central focus of the poem:

In "The Informant" I was actually writing about – which I've never done, and I don't usually identify with – a particular death in the north, the deaths of the soldiers who

were dragged out of a car at a funeral and shot – Medbh McGuckian wrote about those too. It seemed particularly awful. I don't want to put it, as many people say with what has happened in the north of Ireland, that one death was worse than another, but that one did seem particularly tragic. I was writing again about ways of speaking about these things. (Ray 64)

The concept of violence introduces a new dimension and is vital to the poem's understanding. All three characters are subjected to symbolic violence: the old woman is robbed of her true identity through representation, the young man's tape-recorder breaks down, and the man of the recounted story is taken away by fairies presumably. And it is precisely these acts of aggression which remain untold and hidden in the prevalent silence of the poem. When the tape-recorder breaks down, it fails to describe what actually happens in the old woman's story, depicting instead an "electric tempest" which culminates in silence. This "stitch of silence" is the secret revelation of the real "way of speaking about these things" mentioned by Ní Chuilleanáin. In other words, Ní Chuilleanáin's refusal to establish a fixed, identifiable narrative in a seemingly plot-driven poem is indicative of her continuing desire to express in silence what language fails to deliver. "The Informant," therefore, yields meaning when it is sought in the unsaid and the hidden, in the allusive gaps of meaning symbolised by the mechanical rupture of the old woman's voice.

I opened this essay by quoting from "A Posting" and pointed out how Ní Chuilleanáin uses silence as a tool of simultaneous misdirection and seduction. The language of this poem, disguised in "translation" and immaterialised as a "voice with no taste or weight," pulls the reader into the eerie landscape of the imagination, where our view is obscured and the desired clarity of meaning is likened to "a light struggling to climb around / the bruised edges of a cloud" (*Brazen Serpent* 45). The second part of "A Posting" charts the journey of the wandering mind in search of something concrete, tangible, or at least nameable. However, as we read on,

At the sound of the voice the sea is gone
 The beach a rock-salty rainbow
 The flat bay a sudden gulf, even crabs
 Shuffled out of sight, even the word
 Brushed out that would name the starshaped
 Creature that clings to a rock shaped like a skull. (45)

The poetic voice creates silence and disguise, and the reader's attempt to comprehend and analyse fundamentally fails as the images slip out of focus. The subject not only evades the poetic gaze but further frustrates it by its own, inherent vagueness and plurality. Like into a black hole, the images collapse and dissolve, and the process of reading prompts void and silence.

John Cage's famous piece 4' 33", otherwise known as "Silence," offers a suitable illustration. In 1952, a tuxedoed performer got up on a stage, sat at a grand piano, opened the lid, occasionally turned some music pages, but otherwise sat as quietly as possible for 4 minutes and 33 seconds, then rose, bowed, and left. The point is that "Silence" is not silent at all. While the performer makes as little sound as possi-

ble, Cage breaks traditional boundaries by shifting attention from the stage to the audience and even beyond the concert hall. As Peter Gutmann describes it:

You soon become aware of a huge amount of sound, ranging from the mundane to the profound, from the expected to the surprising, from the intimate to the cosmic – shifting in seats, riffling programs to see what in the world is going on, breathing, the air conditioning, a creaking door, passing traffic, an airplane ringing in your ears, a recaptured memory. This is a deeply personal music, which each witness creates to his/her own reactions to life. Concerts and records standardize our responses, but no two people will ever hear 4'33' the same way. It's the ultimate sing-along: the audience (and the world) becomes the performer.

Silence therefore is fundamentally unattainable – a point acknowledged by Cage himself, who said "try as we may to make silence, we cannot." The visual imagery of "A Posting" reinforces this idea, as the silent landscape escapes visualisation and naming. The language of silence in this poem is an ever failing approximation. As Simon Critchley puts it in relation to Beckett's work: "If language is a medium that no longer satisfies us, then there is no resource outside of language to which we might turn for support" (154). It seems therefore, that language, like the strange "star-shaped creature," clings to our minds, and our readerly performance guarantees the failure of authorial silence. Even if what the author allows us to see is only a "rock shaped like a skull," like Hamlet, we also attribute language to it and say: "that skull had a tongue in it and could sing once" (Act V, Scene 1).

"Alcove in the Wind" – Spatial Misdirection and the Imagination

Ní Chuilleanáin's poetry offers a rich portmanteau of sacred and secular spaces that assist in the creation of her peculiar silent language. Several of the places depicted in the poems are transitory – left behind, approached, or approximated – while others are mere imaginary fragments and memories. Ní Chuilleanáin's poetic technique of guiding the reader through illusionary spaces, in my belief, offers a direct insight into the workings of her compositional process. While our visual senses are distracted by her architectural and geographical imagery, the poem writes itself into our deeper consciousness, where, by sharing in the poem's silence, we gain (some) access into the rich symbolism of Ní Chuilleanáin's work. This section looks at a few poems that demonstrate the poet's characteristic spatial misdirection, either through geographical or architectural symbolism.

"Daniel Grose" (*Brazen Serpent* 34) is a poem which figures the ruin of an abbey and its representation as a drawing. The process of the building's ruination is associated with a symbolic birthing of its own depiction:

The breach widens at every push,
The copingstone falls
To shatter the paved floor.
Then silence for three centuries
While a taste for ruins develops.

The following stanza traces the artist's (i.e. Daniel Grose's²) creative process as he is "training his eyes / on the upright of the tower" to draw the scene. What becomes apparent is again a lack, in this case a lack of human presence:

Where is the human figure
He needs to show the scale
And all the time that's passed
And how different things are now?

But this desired human presence is very much qualified by the gaze of the male artist creating the scene. The following three negatives – "no crowds engaged in rape or killing, / no marshalling of boy soldiers / no cutting the hair of novices " – recall military imagery familiar to the imagination of Lieutenant Grose. However, the evoked femininity of the ruin (in its birthing imagery of the first stanza) forbids the representation of such masculine presence. Instead, the artist draws an old woman:

The old woman by the oak tree
Can be pressed into service
To occupy the foreground.
Her feet are warmed by drifting leaves.

Yet, the old woman does not bend into service but retains an authority which reaches beyond the confines of Grose's visual representation:

He stands too far away
To hear what she is saying,
How she routinely measures
The verse called the midwife's curse
On all that catches her eye, naming
The scholar's index finger, the piper's hunch,
The squint, the rub, the itch of every trade.

Guinn Batten convincingly argues that the woman, the mysterious *cailleach*, is empowered precisely because she is "at least twice removed from a speaker who is watching her through his instruments of measure [...] through which he fails either to see or to hear her" (185). In the same way, Dillon Johnston also sees the woman as a representation of agency and authority: "The *cailleach* represents the poet herself as the return of the repressed, a baroque *extravagance*, who, literally, 'takes us beyond' the framed or bound space of engraving, aside from the geometrical perspective, beyond spatial into poetic measure and, thereby, into unrepresentable time" (202).

Convincingly, both Batten and Johnston give importance to the individual agency of the mythological *cailleach*-figure of the old woman, emphasising her power as speaking subject. Batten also offers a compelling comparison between the feminised body of the ruin and that of the old woman. She notes:

Finally in this poem the body of the woman persists as an irreducible remainder of the Enlightenment perspective that would represent the landscape as map or as art. Pre-

² Author and illustrator of *Antiquities of Ireland* (1792).

cisely in doing so, she prevents the surveyor from obtaining a unified perspective, further shattering both landscape and woman into the part objects of science and of art. A reminder, stuck in the opened gap between subject and object, male and female, colonist and coloniser, of what the masterful perspective does not enclose in its grasp of totality, the body therefore serves precisely as the "breach" that will produce an alternative to representation itself. It offers its own perspective on what and whom history, and community, hurts. (186)

The poetry's symbolism (connecting the "push" of the ruin to the "midwife's curse" of the old woman) also supports this argument. However, arguably, it is less in the physical that this connection is played out than in the spatial misdirection employed by Ní Chuilleanáin. The purpose of the presence of the military surveyor is precisely to highlight this. It is his (mis)directed gaze and failed understanding which creates the strongest bond between the ruin and the woman. The readers of the poem are forced to follow his efforts in representation – as "he needs to show," so do we have to see. However, the image of the old woman remains twice removed and distant, strikingly similar to the old woman in the photograph of "The Informant." Indeed, in "Daniel Grose" it is also the possession of knowledge, as opposed to its transmission, that is emphasised. In other words, the positive affirmation of a feminine authority and agency remains filtered through failed representation and misplacement. What ultimately "speaks" in "Daniel Grose," as in "The Informant," is the secret, out-of-place silence of Ní Chuilleanáin's poetic representation.

"The House Remembered," from her earlier volume *The Second Voyage*, offers a visualisation from the point of view of the speaking subject's memory. There is no intermediary or artistic representation in the way: the reader sees directly through the eyes of the poetic subject. However, the concept of space is influenced by temporal distortions as subjective memory directs and misdirects the readerly gaze. The conceptual house therefore remains fluid, changeable, and unsettled, despite the first line's claim to the contrary:

The house persists, the permanent
Scaffolding while the stones move round.
Convolvulus winds the banisters, sucks them down;
We found an icicle under the stairs
Tall as a church candle;
It refused to answer questions
But proved its point by freezing hard. (55)

As the point of reference shifts between the outside and the inside, the inanimate objects are also displaced and given agency. The house is taken over by bindweed and ice, symbolically affirming time's effect on the poetic vision. The building seems hostile and inaccessible – a memory resisting disclosure. However, by the second stanza there is a subtle transformation, when

The house changes, the stones
Choking in dry lichen stupidly spreading
Abusing the doorposts, frost on the glass.

It is almost as if the house remembered was struggling to come to life again, and indeed the following lines see the appearance of "human" imagery:

Nothing stays still, the house is still the same
But the breast over the sink turned into a tap
And coming through the door all fathers look the same. (55)

The maternal breast and the "fathers" coming through the door position the house within a highly individualised temporal context. However, the parental heritage is generalised and misplaced: the breast is there for everybody (on tap) and the distinctiveness of the father is lost. Sheila C. Conboy offers a more straightforward – and markedly different – interpretation of the image of the house:

The house actually becomes a metaphor for the mother, whose permanent presence similarly allows a child the safe space in which to imagine. Yet Ní Chuilleanáin admits that such stability is an ideal, for just as the mythically powerful pre-oedipal mother must ultimately disappoint the daughter, so too the house one grew up in must eventually move from sacred to secular – "the breast over the sink has turned into a tap." Ní Chuilleanáin portrays the mind grasping the real and the ideal simultaneously: "The stairs and windows waiver but the house stands up." Thus, she intimates that poetic imagination allows her combined images of house and mother to "stand up" in spite of their difference in reality. (Conboy 66)

"The House Remembered" is not a house characterised by succinct details of childhood reminiscence. Rather, it is a representation of the enticing but inaccessible conceptualisation of memory, which is intricately and irreversibly coupled with forgetting. The desire to access the past is mocked by the conclusion of the poem, where the house again and again gives way to new interpretative possibilities: "The stairs and windows waver but the house stands up; / Peeling away the walls another set shows through" (55). Finally, the speaker gives in to the emotional burden of forgetting to remember and only remembers to forget: "I can't remember, it all happened too recently. / But somebody was born in every room." However, no information is disclosed about the people who were born in the house, and so they remain identified by it. Thus, the house remembered is also the house forgotten, and Ní Chuilleanáin yet again calls attention to knowledge which is stored but not given away. The reader's gaze has followed the visual representation of a building, but rather than seeing it clearly, has been rewarded with hearing the silence of the unsaid.

Ní Chuilleanáin's rich architectural imagery offers a wide range of possibilities for discussing spatial misdirection. Poems like "Fireman's Lift" (10), "The Architectural Metaphor" (14), and "The Glass House" (21), to mention only a few examples from *The Brazen Serpent*, direct the reader's attention inwards, into the silent interiors of buildings and their representation. In poems where the gaze remains "outdoors," the geography of the landscape takes over the role of architecture, calling attention to the peculiar deposits of stored knowledge. Whether inside or outside, Ní Chuilleanáin's cryptic spaces invoke ambivalence and misdirection, confirming the poet's strategy of generating meaning within the silent liminal.

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**"OUT-AND-OUT WEARY OF EXCAVATING IN THE PAST":
THE NEW IRELANDS OF CATHAL Ó SEARCAIGH AND DENNIS
O'DRISCOLL**

Mary Pierse

In the wider world and far beyond Europe, the predominant and memorable images of Ireland have often been those selectively inscribed in literature by giants of Irish poetry and prose. William Butler Yeats and James Joyce have been responsible for a diverse collection of portraits, from the nature scenes of "The Wild Swans at Coole" and "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" to the early twentieth-century economic and social stasis, political struggles, and religious preoccupations of Joyce's *Dubliners*. For a long period, Celtic Revival and Celtic Twilight atmospheres continued to overhang and to colour the portrait of Ireland, despite the political actuality of national uprising and emergent republic that featured in "Sixteen Dead Men" and "Parnell's Funeral." The later poetic landscapes of Austin Clarke and Patrick Kavanagh contributed different snapshots of a struggling people, whether or not on a "stony gray soil," and, in due course, the excavation of place and memory was once again undertaken, this time in multidimensional constructs by Seamus Heaney. However, a fresh millennium and current prosperity deserve to be reflected by a more recent generation rather than by those born before World War II, and there is no shortage of Irish poets who provide diverse glimpses of new developments in Irish life and land. This essay will suggest that the perspectives of two younger, but established poets, Dennis O'Driscoll and Cathal Ó Searcaigh, provide some surprise vistas and yield up patterns of recollection that are true to urban and rural experiences of the twenty-first century in Ireland while yet connecting with the mythical and historical pasts.

In documenting a changing society, the choice of particular poetic sources must always owe much to personal preference, but, in this case, the selection is also based on the wide panoramic view afforded by their combined insights: from disparate locations, with divergent preoccupations, attitudes and subject matter, and writing in two different languages, Ó Searcaigh and O'Driscoll must inevitably provide a range of widely-assorted sketches of contemporary Ireland. Dennis O'Driscoll is an urban-based, career civil servant and lawyer, a perspicacious reviewer and critic; he is a poet after hours, and his poetry, in the English language, bears witness to our electronic and telecommunications age. Cathal Ó Searcaigh is a full-time poet who has returned to live in his birthplace in rural Donegal; widely travelled and open to new horizons, he spends months of the year in Nepal. Although for a brief period Ó Searcaigh wrote poetry in English, he now writes mainly in Irish, his first language. If the linguistic equilibrium is not exactly mirrored in the population at large, it is merited by the numbers and vibrancy of Irish-language poets; the urban/rural balance is actually

reflected in the latest census figures that show 40% of the population still lives in rural Ireland, and many more again are country-born and maintain strong links with their place of birth.

"Out and out weary of excavating in the past" is a direct translation of lines in the poem "Miontragóid Chathrach" by Cathal O Searcaigh,¹ and his purposeful path away from digging might be read, in part, as a determined avoidance of the Heaney heritage. Dennis O'Driscoll does not "dig" in the past either, although he is often identified as an elegiac poet, preoccupied with death and the dead and remembrance – and also, apparently somewhat incongruously, as an office poet. On occasion, those two facets, of yesterday and today, mesh and overlap. O'Driscoll has admitted to being intrigued and repelled by the language of commerce; he is determined not to represent it in a totally hostile and satiric way, and yet he clearly feels impelled to present the fears and failings of those who people that world. That acknowledgement of complexity underlies his dispassionate dissections; in mounting the scrutinised specimens for the reader, the assemblage is given its own distinctive tone or discrete slant, its wide or narrow focus. Personal experience is distilled rather than bulk-dispensed and the range of observations runs from birth to death. Lines from his poem "Someone" offer typically unsettling juxtapositions of life and mortality: "someone is dressing up for death today, a change of skirt or tie / eating a final feast of buttered sliced pan, tea," "someone today is leaving home on business / saluting, terminally, the neighbours who will join in the cortege," and "someone's coffin is being sanded, laminated, shined / who feels this morning quite as well as ever."² A certain distinctive flavour of O'Driscoll's poetry can be discerned in those lines: its matter-of-fact, yet faintly ominous approach; its anonymous location; its reverse gear away from an older-style lyric poetry; its blending of the perennial with the ephemeral and modern; the slight distance of its speculation; its provision of the moment's markers for latter-day sociologists and historians in the mention of sliced pan, laminated coffin, and business trip. On the page, the absence of capitals and punctuation emphasises the arbitrary nature of time allocation and demarcation.

Echoes of the same inevitable mortal fate sound in "Kist," but this time weighed by a sense of personal loss:

Preparing me for your
death, strands of silver,
coffin-handle bright,
thread your oak-brown hair.
And, as I pace behind the hearse,
my own face in its glass

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- 1 "Miontragóid Chathrach" was first published in the collection of the same name in 1975; a later version of the poem was published as "Déagóir ag drifteáil" (*trans.* 'Teenager Drifting') in *Out in the Open* (152-159).
 - 2 This poem originally appeared in O'Driscoll's 1982 collection *Kist*. It is also the poem chosen by him to open his 2004 collection, *New and Selected Poems*.

takes on the wrinkled grain
of coffin wood. (*New and Selected* 14)³

Those lines sing, they hint, they warn and toll, and they advance with the pace of a dead march. O'Driscoll, still in his twenties when he wrote that poem, was perhaps supersensitive to the issues of death and bereavement because of the early deaths of his parents; perhaps, too, it was the era of nuclear holocaust fiction, of the early warnings by Greens of the planet's destruction. But illness and loss continue to feature in O'Driscoll's collections and they emerge in "Residuary Estates (IV)" with a blend of news bulletin tone, sad portent, and chilling banality:

the calm between the storms
is the silence in which
the dead are not named
until relatives have been informed (*New and Selected* 63-64)⁴

Here again, the lower-case letters and the absence of punctuation evince an unpretentious and minimalist floating of an instant and a thought, with a certain warning-bell rhythm, and it is left suspended on the page – in a way mirroring the temporal hiatus of that endangered calm.

Death reappears repeatedly, rather bleakly and terrifyingly so in "Towards a Cesare Pavese Title": "Death will come and it will wear your eyes"; "You are up to your eyes in death. / Death takes after you, eyes the image of yours," and "Death makes eye contact at last. / Death will come and it will steal your looks" (*New and Selected* 156).⁵ Its presentation in "Saturday Night Fever" is saturated in a rather Beckettian black humour:

Playing tonight at the X-Ray-Ted Club,
The Chemotherapies, drugged to the gills,
the lead singer's pate modishly bald.
And who will your partner be?
Alzheimer, the absent-minded type,
with the retro gear, everything a perfect mismatch?
Huntington, grooving his hippy-hippy-shake routine?
Thrombosis, the silly clot, trying to pull a stroke?
Angina, who can be such a pain, and yet is all heart? (*Exemplary Damages* 19)

The distance, coolness and penetrating objectivity of O'Driscoll's diagnostic skill are qualities clearly seen in his more recent collections such as *The Bottom Line* (1994), *Quality Time* (1997), *Weather Permitting* (1999), *Exemplary Damages* (2002), and "Foreseeable Futures" (2004, in *New and Selected*). Not alone are those volume titles brief and pithy, but the phraseology recognisably pertains to the lived experiences of the Irish in the past decade or so. Very suitably a part of *Weather Permitting* is the poem "Celtic Tiger," an appellation that, however unsuitable, is the journalistic

3 It had been the title poem in the 1982 collection *Kist*.

4 The poem was originally published in *Long Story Short*.

5 Originally published in *From Weather Permitting*.

shorthand for Irish economic advancement in the last fifteen years. Dennis O'Driscoll's poetic collage paints us, warts and all, and the following extracts constitute an atmospheric trailer for the totality:

Ireland's boom is in full swing.
 Rows of numbers, set in a cloudless blue
 computer background, prove the point.

The poem is dotted with "young consultants, well-toned women"; it alludes to "tax-exempted town-house lettings," and the "passing four-wheel drive." The older generation earns but a three-line mention:

The old live on, wait out their stay
 of execution in small granny flats,
 thrifty thin-lipped men, grim pious wives ...

That latter one is a grey picture, far from the international flavours of the final three lines:

Time now, however, for the lunch-break
 orders to be faxed. Make yours hummus
 on black olive bread. An Evian. (*New and Selected* 145)⁶

That was O'Driscoll's astringent mapping of Ireland 1999, and, in its recognition of a land of youth and a work-centred existence, it leads on from the lines in section 38 of "The Bottom Line," where it is confirmed that "Over decades, I have said goodbye / to my retiring colleagues" and "We promise to stay in touch but, of / course, we never do," "they drop out of our cast" (*New and Selected* 107).⁷

In addition to the Irish human cast, there is a built landscape and O'Driscoll contributes disparaging detail to that topography in "The New," a section in the poem "Fore-seeable Futures":

The distinctive
 Irish bungalow
 built by instinct,
 needing no plans,
 just the heft
 of direct labour
 and the odd day's
 back-up from
 a local handyman.
 Look how quickly
 it takes shape,
 breeze block showing
 through plaster
 like visible panty line. (*New and Selected* 241)

One could suggest that the physical arrangement of the lines bears a certain similarity to the geometric predictability and lack of architectural excellence in some of those

6 The poem was originally published in *Weather Permitting*.

7 The poem was originally published in *The Bottom Line*.

Irish bungalows. In the construction of this more recent Ireland, the older world still lurks though, apparent sometimes by its absence, and sometimes when lamented, even with the cynical perspicacity of section II of "Exemplary Damages":

Our one true God has died, vanished under
a rainbow's arch, banished like a devil
scalded by holy water; but our lives remain
eternally precious in the eyes of man.
We love one another so much the slightest
hurt cries out for compensation: sprain your
ankle in a pothole and City Hall will pay
exemplary damages for your pains [...].

A similarly caustic evaluation of consumerist and big brother society features in the subsequent eight lines:

We are equal under law as we once were
in His sight – just as He kept tabs
on the hairs of our heads, the sparrows
surfing the air, we are all accounted for,
enshrined in police department databases,
our good names maintained by the recording
angels of mailshot sales campaigns,
rewarded with chainstore loyalty points. (*Exemplary Damages* 23)

The Irish society that is thus enumerated and listed is also divided, and yet coupled, by O'Driscoll in the contrasting vignettes of "Them and You":

They wait for the bus.
You spray them with puddles.
They queue for curry and chips.
You phone an order for delivery.
They place themselves under the protection
of the Marian Grotto at the front of their estate.
You put your trust in gilts, managed funds,
income continuation plans.
They look weathered.
You look tanned.
They knock back pints.
You cultivate a taste for vintage wines.
They get drunk.
You get pleasantly inebriated.
Their wives have straw hair.
Yours is blonde.
They are missing one football card
to complete the full set.
You keep an eye out for a matching
Louis XV-style walnut hall table. (*New and Selected* 137)⁸

If Ireland was once the island of saints and scholars, and later the alleged site of repression by a bourgeois clergy, its current negotiation of God and Mammon is not

8 Originally published in *Quality Time*.

neglected by O'Driscoll. In "Missing God," the poet says, "we confess to missing Him at times," and one of those occasions is the wedding day:

Miss Him during the civil wedding
 when, at the blossomy altar
 of the registrar's desk, we wait in vain
 to be fed a line containing words
 like everlasting and divine. (*Exemplary Damages* 29-31)

In the middle of a nearly godless society, working on its smooth image, sophisticated in its business methods and its epicurean tastes but yet divided between "them and us," we find the humans who are caught in the whirl of commuting, living, loving, marrying, raising families. Imprisoned by timetables, they still have a nostalgic twinge for the Home Town, and for the "red barn," the place "you fled from to the city / or vowed you'd retire to some day." Those extracts come from "So Much Depends," and the poem concludes:

Come back, Grandma Moses, lead us
 from the desert of downtown
 to the promised land of the red barn. (*Exemplary Damages* 77-78)

As in the case of Dennis O'Driscoll's other insights into, and portrayals of, today's Ireland, that yearning rings true – as does the restrained and intertextual method of its presentation.

* * *

Tension and disconnectedness between Ireland past and present, urban and rural, and young and old, are also apparent in the work of Cathal Ó Searcaigh, whose poetry contrasts markedly with the work of O'Driscoll in that it displays an immediacy, an engagement, and a passion that are not features of O'Driscoll's lines. Ó Searcaigh admits to being keenly influenced by the strong storytelling tradition of his Donegal youth, but that sway does not result in shades of a Wandering Aengus. Without any anxiety of influence, the divide between past and present appears in many different poems and guises, and its manifestations include gently ironic and intertextual pokes in the direction of a twentieth-century James Joyce and of the early nineteenth-century Irish poet Antoine Ó Raiftearaí. Those could be deemed to be rather daring assaults on two stars of the Irish literary firmament, and they establish both the original, independent outlook and the fearlessness of Ó Searcaigh. Instead of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Ó Searcaigh writes a "portrait of the smith as a young artist" in his poem "Portráid den gabha mar ealaíontóir óg." This young artist is not leaving Ireland "to forge in the smithy of his soul" etc.; this one is coming back, seeking a return to his native place, from both exile near Dublin and from further away. He is heading back to the home sod where he could really be a wordsmith, hammering out the shapes of local idiom. The sounds and sparks of the forge are to be heard in the lines:

. . . Ach i gceárta na teanga
bheinnse go breabhsánta,
ag cleachtadh mo cheirde gach lá;
ar bhoilg m'aighe ag tathant bruíne
ag gríosú smaointe chun spréiche
ag casúracht go hard
caint mhíotalach mo dhaoine.

. . . But in the smithy of my tongue
I'd be hale and hearty
Working at my craft daily
Inciting the bellows of my mind
Stirring thoughts to flame
Hammering loudly
The mettlesome speech of my people.
(*An Bealach 'na Bhaile/Homecoming* 84)⁹

Antoine Ó Raiftearaí's poem "Mise Raiftearaí!" (or "I am Raftery") is etched into the memories of millions of Irish people because it featured on school curricula for generations. Thus, there would be immediate and widespread recognition of the metrical and assonantal link between "Mise Raiftearaí an file lán dóchas is grá" (*trans.* "I am Raftery the poet, full of hope and love") and Ó Searcaigh's version: "Mise Charlie an scibhí, lán éadóchais agus crá" (*trans.* "I am Cathal the skivvy, full of despair and torment"). There are parallel associations, and chasms, between the next lines of both poets:

Mise Charlie

Mise Charlie an scibhí
lán éadóchais agus crá
ag caidreamh liom féin
ar mo lá *off* ón Óstán;
síos agus aníos Hyde Park
ar fán i measc scuainí
doicheallacha an Domhnaigh
is, a Raiftearaí, *fuck this for a lark.*

(*An Bealach 'na Bhaile/Homecoming*
202-203)

Mise Raifteirí

Mise Raifteirí, an file, lán dóchais is grá
le súile gan solas, ciúineas gan crá,
ag dul síos ar m'aistear le solas mo
chroí
fann agus tuirseach go deireadh mo
shlí;
tá mé anois lem aghaidh ar Bhalla
ag seinm cheoil do phócaí folamh.

(*trans.*) "I am Cathal"

I am Charlie the skivvy
Full of anguish and despair
Keeping myself company
On my day off from the Hotel;
Up and down Hyde Park
Wandering among the hostile
Sunday queues
And Raftery, fuck this for a lark.¹⁰

(*trans.*) "I am Raifteirí"

I am Raifteirí, the poet full of hope and
love,
With lightless eyes, in peace free of
anguish,
Going my way by the light of my heart,
Weak and tired to the end of my jour-
ney:
I'm now turning for Balla
Playing music for the empty pockets.

Here is Ó Searcaigh engaging with the Irish literary heritage, taking it on, but on *his* terms and using its structures to announce a new era, rather strikingly in the vernacu-

9 The poem was first published in *Súile Shuibhne*. English translation by Gabriel Fitzmaurice.

10 The English translation of this poem from *An Bealach 'na Bhaile/Homecoming* is by Lillis Ó Laoire.

lar of "is, a Raiftearí, *fuck this for a lark.*" If one expected a minority-language poet to be weighed down by angst, or to be hide-bound by insular tradition, this poet is not, any more than he is a clone of any so-called "foreign" predecessor.

From the time of his early attraction to the Beat poets, to Ginsberg, Corso, and Ferlinghetti, all mentioned in his 1975 poem "Déagóir ag Driftáil" / "Drifting" (*Out* 152-153),¹¹ Ó Searcaigh has publicly delighted in exploring world literature and poetry. He has enthused about his finding of, amongst many others, Kerouac, Tennessee Williams, Umberto Saba, Emily Dickinson, Oscar Wilde, Walt Whitman, André Gide, and Constantin Cavafy. The latter four names are part of what Cathal Ó Searcaigh calls his "Who's Who of Homos," his gay fraternity of literature, "a pinkish place" ("Challenging" 222). Being a gay poet makes Ó Searcaigh even more of a rarity, a gaily pink poet in the hither fastnesses of conservative, rural Donegal, one who publishes poetry and travel literature in Irish and who embraces Buddhism and oriental influences, while simultaneously weaving them all into a myriad shapes, some classical and traditional, others new either in their vision or their combinations. In his visibility, in his cosmopolitanism, his awareness of history and place, his refined and stylish analysis of poetic structures, his appreciation of simplicity, his artistic craft, Cathal Ó Searcaigh constitutes a most significant indicator of aspects of today's Ireland.

In Ó Searcaigh's long poem "Gort na gCnámh" / "Field of Bones,"¹² the title may refer to a physical place but the content, while meshed with the landscape and the seasons, is, primarily, a devastating representation of a phenomenon that long remained unspoken, or unrecognised, in Irish society: incest. Even with today's greater awareness of child sexual abuse, the lines stand out as a truly shocking evocation of the crime and an empathetic exposé of the female victim's torture, bound up with a place, that field of bones. It is a powerful poem, from which the only adequate quotation would be its entire length. When talking about place and memory, Ó Searcaigh says that the notions of memory and sense of place, as expressed by the Greek poet Cavafy, appeal to him: the exploration of buried selves; memory as a redemptive power that can hold and transform into art the ephemeral life of the senses. Interestingly, he says "Memory is the means to dig, to unearth, to discover the ages of our Being, the artefacts of our feelings" ("Challenging" 223-5). This is the mature Ó Searcaigh, reversing the rebellious decision of his furious seventeen-year old self, who wrote: "Tá mé dubhthuirseach de rútaí, / de bheith ag tochailt san aimsir chaite" (*trans.* "sick-to-death of roots, / of digging in the past tense").¹³ While this is a very early poem, it demonstrates salient features of Ó Searcaigh's poetry: his preoccupation with sound, with assonance and consonance; the richness of his vocabulary;

11 Translations by Frank Sewell. "Déagóir," an earlier Irish-language version of the poem, dates from 1973.

12 *Out* 66-76. The translation is by Frank Sewell. The poem was previously published in Irish in *Na Buachaillí Bána* (63-69).

13 The translation is by Frank Sewell.

his facility for working within recognised poetic structures (in this case, the complex rhyming system of classical Irish poetry); his awareness of place; and his sense of difference. The English translation takes poetic licence, but, as happens with several translations into English, it misses the mixture of sound power, heartfelt angst, and stamp-the-foot teenage desperation of "Teastaíonn fuinneoga uaim! Teastaíonn eiteoga uaim!" This would translate literally as "I want windows! I want wings!" but its frantic "Let me out" message has been rendered poetically, gently, and anaemically as "wanting windows, wanting wings."

Where place is concerned, the place names of Ó Searcaigh's Donegal are recorded for posterity in his poems. It is part of his homage to tongue, place, and tradition; it follows the Irish poetic tradition of according sacredness to place. However, it also arises to a certain extent from his sense of crisis, since, as English invades his Irish-speaking area, original place names and language are being forgotten (see *Caiseal* n.p.). The priority he attaches to record of place and its celebration is evident in the complex *fuaimneacht* or resonance of the poem about Caiseal na gCorr, where he lives and where he feels his relevance and importance, "ag feidhmíu mar chuisle de chroí mo chine" (*trans.* "operating as the heartbeat of my race").¹⁴ On a lighter note, he says that he wants "to give Caiseal na gCorr and its environs a literary aura [...] so that the local place An Bhealtaine would become as erotically charged as Byzantium in the gay imagination." His playfulness with words spurs him to give what he calls an "etymologically bent reading" to that name, to translate Caiseal na gCorr as stone fort of the queer (rather than any of the many other meanings of *corr*). He jokes too about how the local Baile an Gheata or Gate Town became corrupted into Gaytown in English. While this verbal sporting is part of Ó Searcaigh's liveliness, his underlying concern is serious: "My persistent recitation of these names is a way of making memorable what is being forgotten. It is an act of repossession in the face of communal amnesia." (*Caiseal* n.p.).

Ó Searcaigh can be quite apprehensive about the situation of his native language, while being very aware that translation of his poems into English (by Seamus Heaney, amongst others) has given him a new lease of life, has led to translations into many other languages, and provided him with an international profile. He identifies the importance of Irish-language heritage for others who write in English, and he sees the ghost of Irish structures, words, and ideas in the English-language poetry of several of today's Irish poets, amongst them Heaney, Montague, Muldoon, and Meehan ("Challenging" 219). Ó Searcaigh strongly welcomes the influences of English-language poetic scope, range, and influence. However, he is convinced that if the Irish well-spring were to run dry, the result would be impoverishing for all. His 1997 poem "Cainteoir Dúchais" (*trans.* "Native Speaker," *Out* 134-135) provides a

14 From the poem "Anseo ag Stáisiún Chaiseal na ngCorr" in *An Bealach 'na Bhaile/ Homecoming* (94-97).

wry image of the invading forces, and it confirms the globalising waves and commodity domination seen by Dennis O'Driscoll:

Cainteoir Dúchais

Bhí sé *flat-out*, a dúirt sé
i gcaitheamh na maidine.
Rinne sé an t-árasán a *hooveráil*,
na boscaí bruscair a *jeyes-fluideáil*,
an *loo* a *harpiceáil*, an *bath* a *vimeáil*.
Ansin rinne sé an t-urlár a *flasháil*
na fuinneoga a *windoleneáil*
agus na leapacha a *eau-de-cologneáil*.
Bhí sé *shagáilte*, a dúirt sé,
ach ina dhiaidh sin agus uile
rachadh sé amach a *chruiseáil*;
b'fhéidir, a dúirt sé, go mbuailfeadh sé
le boc inteacht
a mbeadh Gaeilge aige.

Native Speaker

He was flat out, he said
during the morning.
He managed to *Hoover* the flat,
to *Jeyes-Fluid* the bins
to *Harpic* the loo and *Vim* the bath.
Then he did the *Flashing* of the floor,
the *Windolene*-ing of the windows
and *Eau-de-Cologne*-ing the beds.
He was shagged, he said
but no matter
he'd go out cruising;
Maybe, he said, he'd meet
some game fella
with Irish.

The typical tolerance, self-deprecation, and self-mocking tone in "Cainteoir Dúchais" is also to be found in Ó Searcaigh's poem "Trasnú" (*Ag Tnúth* 277-279). That word *trasnú* epitomises the hidden complexities in Ó Searcaigh's deceptively simple presentation of it – it can mean crossing, traversing, contradicting, intersecting, heckling, interrupting, and all of those meanings might apply. The uncertainty adds a strong note of unease and a degree of regret to the poem; the invasions by another language, and by an international culture, are seen to be embedded in the Irish lines, places, and memories:

Tá muid ar strae
áit inteacht
idir Chath Chionn tSáile
agus an *Chinese takeaway* [...]
Tá muid leath réamh-stairiúil
agus leath-*postmodern intertextúil* [...]
ag buaiceallacht *dinosaurs*
le Fionn Mac Cumhaill [...]
ag súgradh go searcúil
le Cáit Ní Queer [...]
Tá muid teach ceanntuách
agus bungaló *mod conach* [...]
Tá muid rince seiteach
agus hócaí pócaí cairiócaíach.

We are wandering
somewhere
between the Battle of Kinsale
and the Chinese takeaway.
We are half prehistoric
and half postmodern intertextual.
herding dinosaurs
With Fionn Mac Cumhaill;
playing lovingly
with Cáit Ní Queer;
We are thatched-cottagey
and mod-con bungalowed;
We are set-dance-ish
and hokey-pokey karaoke-ish.

The intertextuality and wide range of references in "Trasnú" are somewhat camouflaged by the half-humorous, bittersweet couplings. However, important memories and traditions of an older Ireland are recorded for the present and for posterity: the inspiration of heroic memories of Fionn Mac Cumhaill, and the literary structures of the Fiannaíocht cycle stories; the built heritage of thatched cottage; the recreational dances of the ordinary people; the Irish aisling or vision poetry in which, from the

eighteenth century onwards, political longings took the place of previous amatory addresses. The substitution of "Cáit Ní Queer" for Kathleen Ní Houlihan¹⁵ (or for Dark Rosaleen) evinces a cheeky familiarity with Cáit and makes it clear that the vision is neither on a pedestal nor burdened with a nation's woes; the reference brings the poem right into the present, links it with the earlier Irish models, and sets the stage proudly for Ó Searcaigh's homoerotic poetry, a sub-genre that would not have seen the light of day when the wider world received its pictures of Ireland from the pens of Yeats and Joyce, Clarke and Kavanagh.

The poetry of Dennis O'Driscoll and Cathal Ó Searcaigh, both widely-esteemed and gifted writers, could hardly be more different. Yet, in terms of conveying an accurate image of a twenty-first century Ireland, their contributions are not contradictory. Rather they are complementary in their depictions of the present and in their prognostications and intimations concerning the future. In an attempt to provide a brief poetic portrait of today's Ireland, the extracts and allusions in this essay are necessarily brief. It would be a pity if readers were to limit themselves to those few poems when the surprises and delights of their collections are widely available. The music, drama, and word-painting of their poetry comprise a valuable and exciting artistic store; it is wholly a spin-off and a bonus that they also furnish an honest and comprehensive account of the compounds and complexities of Ireland today.

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FROM *AUTHENTICITY*, A NOVEL

BY DEIRDRE MADDEN¹

Chapter Thirty-Five

As she turns on to the narrow track, a single sheep high on the slope notices her. Bleating, it moves down the hill, and is joined by two, three others, then quickly six, ten, twenty, more, until every sheep on the slope is heading her way. 'You creatures,' she calls laughing, 'I have nothing to give you,' as they cluster by the wire that separates the track from the field. She can hardly hear her own voice over the loud humming sound of their bleating. Their backs are all stained indigo; and they run alongside the wire, tripping and tumbling, following her as she walks along until another line of wire halts their progress, penning them in. As she walks on up the valley, she can hear their sad weird cries gradually dying away.

The track stays close to the course of a river for some distance, so that she has the slope of the hill on one side and the tumbling peaty water on the other, until suddenly it rises steeply, leaving the river far below with the rowans that fringe it, with its pools and stones. The land opens out and is unfenced now. The rowans, she thinks, the rowans ... She comes here in all seasons. She has never been out of Ireland – she never will be – but she cannot think that there is anything anywhere more vivid than the rowans when they have their berries on a clear cold day when the sky is bare – the red of the berries, the green of the leaves, the hard blue of the sky. Even the Mediterranean, she thinks, cannot offer such strong and powerful colours. But it is not like that today, for now everything is grey and dun and soft blue, muted colours of green, the old gold of faded bracken.

When human memory has been outlived, the landscape remembers. She passes potato drills from the last century, low soft shadowy ridges in the thin soil. She passes the ruins of a farmhouse, forlorn now, its windows all shattered, its front door rotted and fallen, the roof collapsed in on itself, like a fire late at night. A pert wren vanishes. The track along which she is walking is not the original route up the valley but then the track cuts into the old path, which is bounded by drystone walls. Panting from the steepness of the climb, she stops. Looking back, she can see where the old road ran straight down, the stones of its walls broken and tumbled now, but still there, resilient, because the landscape does remember. In the distance she can see other grey ruins, deserted houses, and she finds it strange how utterly and completely the human community has gone from this mountainside.

1 Deirdre Madden, *Authenticity* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002): 370-374. Reprinted by permission of the author and the publisher.

There are few trees now – a few tough hawthorns, their branches and trunks covered with lichens. She is tired but has almost reached her destination. Every time she comes here she returns to the same place, to a particular fold in the mountains. The path continues on from the point where she stops but not for much further. She settles down between the stones that form a crude seat. She is out of the wind here, and she looks back down the valley, where the slopes softly interlock. In the foreground, directly in her line of vision, there is a single thorn. The sky is a crown of light, drifting, theatrical. It is not a fine day and the sky is constantly changing. She lies back and watches huge torn grey clouds move swiftly overhead, expanding, contracting, like liquid added to another liquid, like coloured ink in water; the same fringed dissolving quality. She likes it when this happens at night, when huge wild clouds are blown swiftly over a wild moon.

Once, many years earlier, a strange and beautiful thing happened to her here. She was sitting on that day where she is sitting now, leaning back against the side of the hill with its low plants, its grasses and ferns. She had fallen into a sort of half-hypnotised, half-enchanted state, thinking of the landscape in which she was sitting but not in a willed or forced way, receptive rather than seeking to impose a thought or idea. She was aware of her own breathing, rising and falling, rising and falling; aware of the great slope of the mountain on which she sat. And then all at once she realised that the ground beneath her was alive. The earth was alive. It was as though the land against which she was leaning was the flank of a massive animal. And the sky too, the moving, shaggy clouds, the tumbling river, the thorn, the stones themselves, everything, everything, interconnected and living and complete. It was a sacred, astounding moment, and it passed as swiftly as the rushing clouds. She has never told anyone and she has certainly never forgotten it. This is why she has come to this place today, why she constantly returns. She feels she can enter here into the life of things in a way that is not possible otherwise or elsewhere. It has become a place as of which one might say, 'This is where we saw the kingfisher.' 'This is where we found the rare wild orchid.' One comes back not in the hope of finding such things again, but in gratitude for the mystery that was revealed there once.

Sitting in that same spot now, she loses track of time. Her thoughts drift. She thinks about her own life in a vague, open-ended way, wondering what will happen to her in the years to come. On her wrist she wears a gold watch and she studies it with pleasure, thinking of the man who gave it to her. At night before she goes to sleep she places it carefully in its flat leather box and then sets it open on the dressing table beside her, so that it will be the first thing she sees in the morning when she wakes. The watch has a lozenge-shaped face and a supple gold bracelet, as if fashioned from the skin of some fabulous mythical fish. As she looks at it today, she realises that all her cherished thoughts of the future are an illusion. The things she is thinking about have not yet happened and there is no guarantee they ever will happen; there is no fixed promise that anything will happen, that there is a future. Just at that moment, she hears someone approach.

A stranger. A hill walker. It is rare for her to meet anyone on this path. Once, in winter, she met a shepherd and his dog out foddering sheep, and on two or three other occasions she has met hikers like this man. He has been on up the valley beyond where the path runs out and far on into the mountains, and now he is returning. He stops and they greet each other. The man is exceptionally tall and somewhat eccentrically dressed. He is wearing heavy walking boots and thick socks, the short trousers of an alpine hiker. The effect is faintly ridiculous and she tries not to laugh. On his head is a knitted woollen hat as tight as the cap of an acorn on a nut. His face is flushed and excited.

'Have you had a good day?'

'It was marvellous.'

'How far did you get?'

'Up beyond the watershed so that you could see down into the next valley, and then back down again into this one.'

'Are you out from Dublin?'

He nods. 'And you, you live locally?'

She nods in her turn.

'You're fortunate to be able to come up here,' he says, 'whenever you want.'

He thinks of the long drive back to the city, of the traffic, of the river of tail lights before him. He thinks of the suburban house to which he will return, of his family, of all the constraints of his life during the week to come. For a moment he envies this stranger so much and not just for where she lives but for her youth, her happiness. She is in her early twenties with thick curling hair, and grey eyes in an open trusting face. There is no evidence of her having already made any of those simple, fatal errors that can close a life down. She is wearing a tweed skirt and thick stockings, a dark blue jacket and a green scarf. 'It'll rain soon,' he says. 'I doubt if we'll make it back down before it breaks.'

'I don't mind. I like walking in the rain.' As he looks at her, he is overcome by an inexplicable sense of pity and compassion for this stranger. He has no idea why this should be but all at once it makes him feel close to her.

'When I was up in the mountains today something happened.'

She listens as he struggles to find words to convey the experience he has had. He evokes the physical aspect of the landscape that had triggered it – the brown velvet flanks of the mountain, the heather and thick bracken. In the silence a single bird was calling. The shifting light and the stones, the faraway pine forests, black as a winter lake: he tells her of all these things and of how, under his gaze, they had suddenly opened to afford him a remarkable insight into their nature. When he has finished they remain in silence for a few moments.

And then she says, 'Exactly the same thing happened to me here once.'

The valley is now a tunnel of light. The strong blink of sun that heralds rain reaches its pitch of intensity. He suggests that she walk back down the valley with him; she thanks him and stands up, brushes a few wisps of dry grass from her skirt. They set

off together and walk in companionable silence. The rain begins to fall and the sky darkens, all is greyness. She pulls her scarf up over her head. They walk through soft veils of rain under slow clouds. They pass the thorn, the broken wall that marks the abandoned road, they pass the empty farmhouse. They descend to the tree line, to where the hawthorns and the rowans grow, to where the river flows, its peaty water falling over stones. They see the sheep muster. When they reach the point where the track meets the road there is a man tending a bonfire and he greets them. They stand opposite him and all three look into the flames. The man's face, seen through the haze of the heat, gives the impression of something seen through water. They feel simultaneously the heat of the fire and the chill of the rain; there is a smell of smoke and decay. They take leave of each other standing by the bonfire to return to their lives, to fulfil their destinies.

Neither of them ever forgot the other. Neither of them ever spoke to anyone else of what had happened that day. They never met again.

PLACE, TIME, AND PERSPECTIVE IN JOHN MCGAHERN'S FICTION

Martin Ryle

The last few years have seen the publication of major new work by John McGahern, especially *That They May Face The Rising Sun* (2002) and *Memoir* (2005), confirming his place in the front rank of Irish writers. Substantial critical appraisals and appreciations appeared in the years immediately before McGahern's death in 2006 (*IJR*, Maher, Whyte). Rapid change in Irish society in the late twentieth century has altered the context in which we read McGahern. Eamon Maher praises *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, because it "manages to capture for eternity the rituals and customs of a rural Ireland that may not survive another few decades of globalisation," and suggests that McGahern, like Tomás Ó Criomhthain in his depiction of the Blaskets, is "attempting to build up a picture of a civilisation that will soon have disappeared" (Maher 132).¹

Too much emphasis on the elegiac aspect of McGahern's oeuvre and on its evocations of nature and landscape risks allotting it to the genre of comforting pastoral nostalgia. (*That They May Face the Rising Sun* was published in the USA under the title *By the Lake*.) To assert that his work's socially critical aspect has been "marginal" (Crotty 42, cf. Maher 58) is to misrepresent its nature and its reception. Against this risk, one must recall McGahern's own acknowledgement of the critical dimension of his early work – for example, the comments reported in Colm Tóibín's *Bad Blood* (86) and Julia Carlson's interview with McGahern (esp. 63-66). In a recent article, Grace Ledwidge has stressed the sheer patriarchal bleakness of the world of his first novel, *The Barracks*. While there was certainly an element of elegiac retrospect in McGahern's last two books, criticism should emphasise that McGahern's historical imagination, like Thomas Hardy's, is complex and dialectical. He avoids idealised retrospect and he is not in any simple sense the representative of the world about which he writes. McGahern is not one of the many rural or regional writers who have produced "partial" images and "idealisations" such as Raymond Williams deplored (Williams 37), but one of the few who resist the simple binary of bad metropolis versus good marginal place. His early work was received as that of "a realist, a naturalist, even, who wrote of [...] squalid and oppressive aspects of Irish rural life" (Sampson, *Outstaring Nature's Eye* 6), and the banning of *The Dark* underlined its critical, indeed subversive, force. Twenty years ago, Colm Tóibín saluted him for writing about the north-west "so well, so accurately [...] that his work [is] almost more real than the places themselves" and for his integrity in sustaining an individual, critical voice during a long period when the Republic was a "monolith" that offered no comfort to "personal isolation and pain" (*Bad Blood* 85). The affirmative vision of his

1 For McGahern's admiration of Ó Criomhthain, see "What Is My Language?".

last novel depends crucially (if tacitly) on the perspective of an "outsider"; and a tension between the views of "outsiders" and "insiders" runs back through his fiction, suggesting how, when rural society is represented in writing, this involves a negotiation between marginal and metropolitan cultures.

That negotiation is my subject here. I explore some tensions which in McGahern's case, as in others (I briefly discuss Hardy's *The Return of the Native*), haunt representations that "capture" the marginal world of childhood only by attaining a certain distance from it. The self whose formation McGahern's novels portray comes to being not in "rural Ireland" alone, but in the relationship between marginal and metropolitan locations: between Ireland's north-western border region, Dublin and London – between the past and the native place, and the city and the future. The novels depict precisely localised experiences; and since (as the publication of *Memoir* confirmed) their authenticity is underwritten by their evident autobiographical basis, we know these are the experiences of a writer. However, their themes of voluntary and enforced exile and of overlapping local, regional, national and transnational identity resonate across twentieth-century rural Ireland. Not just the author, but many of his subjects and readers, are caught up in displacement and double vision, which is both disconcerting and enriching.

Aesthetics and Displacement

That They May Face the Rising Sun opens with an evocation of landscape: "The morning was clear. There was no wind on the lake." To consider this foregrounding of aesthetic response leads into the wider questions about place, time, and the regional novel with which we are concerned. None of McGahern's earlier novels starts by evoking rural scenery, but representation of nature and landscape has always been significant in his fiction. Again and again, from *The Barracks* (1962) to *Amongst Women* (1991), he revisits the same area of County Roscommon a few miles east of Boyle. Even in *The Leavetaking* and *The Pornographer*, which deal mainly with urban life, the protagonists' rural childhoods remain a key point of reference. In *The Barracks*, Elizabeth Reegan's awareness of the natural setting in which she is living, and dying, counterpoints her social experience as wife and step-mother. The ageing Moran in *Amongst Women* stares into "the emptiness of the meadow" at the back of his house, conscious of the "fresh growth, a faint tinge of blue in the rich green" and of the fact that others will live to see the new grass mown, but he will not (178-79). McGahern's notations of place, light, weather, and season are never rhetorical or effusive, but their aim goes beyond the rendering of material detail: as in the high tradition of romanticism, contemplation of nature evokes Wordsworth's "sense of something far more deeply interfus'd." The writer's concern is not only with a particular landscape, but with the power of nature to provoke reflection on mutability and to offer aesthetic pleasure and a sense of cyclical renewal (as Sampson, in particular, has emphasised in his readings).

The full sensuous evocation that makes the native place an object of pleasure and a token of spiritual elation for the reader draws on the insider's intimate memory. However, that kind of aestheticised vision has often been regarded as the prerogative of the outsider – the metropolitan tourist, artist or writer, who frames the rural world in culturally alien terms. Scenic tourists visiting marginal places have had the leisure and the disposition to admire scenery that for local people was the site of labour and daily life. As Denis Cosgrove puts it, the country dweller "does not enjoy the privilege of being able to walk away from the scene as we can walk away from a framed picture or tourist viewpoint" (Cosgrove 19; see Ryle 8-9; see also Jacobs). The country labourer may know nothing of the conventions of aesthetic perception that unite the artist with metropolitan patrons and readers.

Assumptions about the privileges of visitors apply less generally today, within and between prosperous European nations: for a century, rural "natives" have been getting educated, with consequences that preoccupy McGahern (as they preoccupied Hardy). Yet that process has been uneven, partial and divisive. The protagonist of Patrick Kavanagh's *Tarry Flynn* (1948) claims that his insider's knowledge of the land he farms allows him to appreciate it better than the "visitors" whose admiration of "what were called beauty spots" he finds incomprehensible (63-4). But Tarry's responsiveness to nature is linked with his love of reading and writing – exceptional pastimes, which set him apart from almost everyone else in the townland. John Wilson Foster describes Tarry as "an insider who has [...] gained the objectivity of an outsider" (34). In a pattern found from *Jude the Obscure* and *Sons and Lovers* to Edna O'Brien's early work, the sensibility that makes protagonists objectively aware of their native place – in aesthetic, cultural or social terms – also sets them apart. When (as often) the novel has an autobiographical basis, we sense the near-identity between protagonist and writer-to-be: in "writing a novel whose hero flees the land [...] the author is apt to be drawing upon the facts or aspirations of his own life" (Foster 40). This writer, a "deracinated, déclassé exile," who breaks into print by telling a metropolitan audience about "those who have stayed at home" (George O'Brien 36), is the paradigmatic insider-become-outsider, seeing with double vision and speaking with a double voice.

Nevertheless, such experiences of displacement are not peculiar to writers. Many people have lived lives of departure, memory, and ambiguous belonging in the region McGahern depicts, and across rural Ireland, during the twentieth century. (Ireland in the early 1960s had "the highest emigration rates [and] the worst unemployment rates [...] in northern Europe," Lee 24-25.) This ambiguity of belonging is crucial in McGahern, whose novels invariably involve the viewing or remembering of the native place by an "insider" who is becoming or has become an "outsider." *Amongst Women* might seem an exception, but Moran's second wife, Rose, who marries him after coming back from twelve years in Glasgow, is central to the novel's play of perspectives.

Double vision is already vital in *The Barracks*. Elizabeth Reegan's heightened awareness of the Roscommon village to which she returns is the fruit of her self-development as a nurse in London, where she was able to discover "her uniqueness" through sexual, emotional, and intellectual experiences unattainable in Ardcarne (86). While Ledwidge argues that Elizabeth is "the most interesting and complex of McGahern's female characters" (92), she is at the same time typical of a general pattern of growth through displacement – and typical, too, in that her departure proves to have been provisional and temporary. Many outsiders prove unable or unwilling finally to break with the rural past. McGahern differs from his literary precursors and contemporaries (Joyce, Beckett, Edna O'Brien, Brian Moore) who chose permanent exile. His fiction, in reflecting this, mirrors a common experience, in which ruptures rarely have the absolute quality we might hope for or fear.

Return to the Margins

Because they never definitively leave the native place, McGahern's protagonists remain caught in a double time-frame. In her paper "Can the Native Return?" Gillian Beer explores how place/time relations in *The Return of the Native* intersected with late-Victorian ideas of progress. Beer focuses on Clym Yeobright, the educated country-dweller who leaves remote Egdon Heath for Paris and whose return sparks the novel's tragedy. Clym is said to be "in a more advanced state of development than his neighbours," and Beer shows that anthropologists then saw "country-dwellers [...] as existing in an earlier phase of cultural development than that reached by cosmopolitan European man" (9). Place equals time: the metropolis represents the present and the future, against the backward margin. Beer comments, too, on Hardy's double vision: his writing "enters a claim to be at home on the heath," but requires us to "sustain our outsider's gaze" (19).

In these cultural relations, the "outsiderly" metropolitan perspective may dominate because it is identified with a "more advanced" phase. As the acquired voice drowns out original speech, how can the author not misrepresent the birthplace? For Irish writers published in London – as McGahern, Edna O'Brien, and many others have been, often from the start of their careers – this problem has a post-colonial dimension: Eve Patten recalls J.T. Leerssen's remarks on "the destinator vector towards an English audience" whose powerful influence has tended to make the Irish writer into an intermediary and a "detached observer" of the country she or he comes from (Patten 137-38; cf. Kiberd 136, on nineteenth-century precedents).

Any writer so placed must find some accommodation between metropolitan culture's power and the power of native memory. This is all the more problematic if what is intimate has the weight of constraint, while what is foreign figures as emancipation. For all that, the work may ultimately contest the claims of the metropolis. Displacement may make the exile aware of the native place's virtues as well as its limitations. Com-

parison may encourage a critical assessment of metropolitan modernity and a rejection of its exclusive claim to define the future. Clym surprises his uneducated fellow dwellers on Egdon Heath and upsets his socially ambitious mother, when he expresses disillusionment with life in Paris, admiration for some old Egdon ways, and determination to return and live where he was born. Paradoxically, it is his "advanced state of development" that makes him reject the acquisitive materialism of the metropolis, epitomised in the jewellery business (or "nick-nack trade," as the heath-dwellers call it) to which he was apprenticed. Clym raises, and Hardy raises through him, the question of whether metropolitan "development" is true progress. The same question is increasingly posed by McGahern's fiction, especially his last novel. *That They May Face the Rising Sun* celebrates a place that might seem behind the times, but might equally be seen as somewhere it is still possible to live well, because the future has not yet caught up with it.

This celebration of rural life – and it is now an unequivocal celebration, springing from the new prominence given to the beauty of nature – is hard-won. The writing works through vividly realised particulars, as Sampson shows in his fine close reading ("Open to the World"), and it successfully challenges the general suspicion of pastoral modes. Critical receptivity towards the rural-elegiac is a very recent turn in Ireland: only a decade ago, Declan Kiberd claimed Irish ruralism had been "like other forms of pastoral [...] a wholly urban creation" (481). Realist writing about the Irish countryside, since the early fiction of Edna O'Brien and of McGahern himself, has stressed backwardness and repression, as well as community and natural beauty. Mary Dorsey's story "A Sense of Humour" (1989), with its image of sexist, beer-swilling rural Ireland, is as canonical in its way as were the Kerry autobiographies of Ó Criomhthain, O'Sullivan, and Sayers in the aftermath of Independence. Dorsey's heroine, who has left her husband and returned to live and work in her parents' depressing small-town pub, ends up standing by the Dublin road: she has walked out of the bar and exults in the sudden realisation that she need no longer be held "prisoner" by a misplaced belief in "place." "She had allowed herself to be bound by the trappings of situation: this sky, these patched, stony fields ..." But now, she will leave, and be free (Dorsey 42-3). The only other rural story in Dorsey's collection, "A Country Dance," which paints a similarly negative picture, was chosen by Toibín for inclusion in his Penguin anthology of Irish fiction.

McGahern has traced that path of revulsion and departure. However, his major protagonists – as opposed to many second-order characters – never fully embrace the city, even in anticipation. He writes no parallel to O'Brien's defiant sentence in *The Lonely Girl*: "And the ship named *Hibernia* moved steadily forward through the black night, towards the dawn of Liverpool" (252). In *The Pornographer* (1979), memories and loyalties associated with the hero's country childhood connote compassion and authenticity. In their unresolved tone, that novel and *The Leavetaking* (1974) reflect an uncertain literary purpose and an underlying ambivalence as to whether the city (Dublin and London) offers liberation or ensnares the characters in falsity.

When McGahern returns, in *Amongst Women*, to his old terrain, the perspective remains critical. Moran is a fuller, subtler depiction of the inarticulate, manipulative and violent father-husband who dominated the early novels. The patriarch is himself a victim, the damaged embodiment of a dominant – though weakening – structure of feeling and character. In this he resembles Eamon Redmond, the protagonist of Tóibín's *The Heather Blazing*, which came out the following year. Tom Herron's view of Redmond as an "aphasic," purely pathological figure (Herron 189, fn. 25) misses, I think, the ambiguities and the empathetic quality of Tóibín's novel. The authority these patriarchal men feel compelled to exert diminishes not only those who must obey it but those who exercise it. All Moran's children must escape that authority's shadow and leave the place where it held sway (Roscommon or Ireland). Two end up in Dublin and three in London. Luke, the eldest, maintains to the end a complete silence about his life in England. Thus, the tensions of the early novels remain: tensions in the "family romance" and national story that began with the War of Independence; tensions between escape and memory. But they are presented here with a new evenness of tone.² The character closest to the narrator, in her watchful reticence and psychological insight, is Rose, Moran's second wife. She resists and outlives Moran and will inherit Great Meadow (aspects of her resistance are discussed by Siobhan Holland and by Robert F. Garratt). As we have noted, Rose, like Elizabeth Reagan, has spent years abroad before returning, in a "more advanced state of development," to the native place.

Foster has noted that Irish writing displays "recurring topophobia, hatred of the place that ensnares the self," even as "the memory of place" remains a central inspiration (31). The comment's aptness to McGahern is obvious. The "hatred" in *Amongst Women* is the unexpressed, inexpressible hatred felt by Luke, the successor to the abused son in *The Dark*. But Luke's voice is unheard. The reticent Rose and the impassive narrator are the speakers we remember. This achievement of objectivity is a settling of accounts with the past, a transcendence of "hatred." From one point of view, it marks the narrator/subject's final transformation into the writer as "exteriorised, detached observer." Yet it is this "more advanced state of development," achieved by way of exile, that makes it possible for the native to return, and even – in the books that follow – to celebrate the place of birth.

That They May Face the Rising Sun: A Note on Reticence

After a period in London, Europe, and North America, McGahern returned in the early 1970s to the northwest of Ireland, buying a farm in Leitrim, near Mohill (see the chronology in Maher xi-xiv). This district eventually became the setting of *That They May*

2 As Sampson notes, the new lucidity and objectivity of *Amongst Women* owed much, stylistically, to McGahern's work in the short story form (see *Outstaring Nature's Eye*, 189, 192-93; and see also Garratt, especially 127).

Face the Rising Sun, whose central character, Joe Rutledge, has come back to Leitrim after a career in London. In the novel, Mohill is never named, but a reference to the "statue of the harpist," Carolan, identifies the town – at any rate to those, mostly "insiders," who know the statue (206). Joe is closely identified with the narrative point of view: the only scene in which he is not present is an early conversation in which his neighbours Patrick and Johnny speculate about what has brought him and his wife Kate to live here. I therefore think it mistaken to argue that Rutledge is "not a focalizing consciousness" (Sampson, "Open to the World" 150). However, the novel never explicitly encourages us to reflect on how and why Joe is central to the vision that it embodies, or on the differences that set him and Kate apart from their neighbours.

Rather, reticence is the novel's preferred strategy for negotiating difference, a strategy pursued by the narrator, by Joe and Kate, and sometimes by the other characters too. The Rutledges differ from their neighbours in ways that reflect both their metropolitan experiences and their decision to leave the city (like Yeobright) for the country. Topics which mark difference and evoke reticence include watching TV (Joe and Kate seem not to have one, but this is never stated, and they never discuss it with their friends Jamesie and Mary, who do); the violence in the North (Joe deplors it, but is more than once told that, on this matter, silence is wiser than speech); sexual mores, reflected in turns of phrase that Kate finds hard to listen to, but seldom objects to explicitly; the ethnic diversity of London, described by Jamesie's brother Johnny in terms that Kate and Joe appear to find troubling or quaint, but do not directly challenge; and religious observance, with Joe declining to give a reasoned response when Jamesie affectionately mocks his refusal to attend Mass.

A final difference, central to the book's own appeal, concerns pleasure in the natural world. This is surely what brought the Rutledges to Leitrim and keeps them there. However, they do not speak often or at length about their delight in their new home. Invited to resume their London careers, they turn down the opportunity, knowing it will be their last. We do not hear the conversation in which this decision is reached – although we are told of it following a paragraph describing the lake, "an enormous mirror turned to the depth of the sky" (186). Later, Joe looks back on his day and feels that "this must be happiness." Yet he resists articulating such an idea: "As soon as the thought [that he was happy] came to him, he fought it back ... happiness could not be sought or worried into being, or even fully grasped" (192; cf. 136).

As we have seen, aesthetic delight in nature and landscape, and the happiness this can bring, has been regarded as the prerogative, or foible, of outsiders. This seems to be the view of Patrick and Johnny, in the scene I have referred to – the only scene from which Joe is absent:

"Another thing that brought them here was the quiet. Will you listen to the fucken quiet for a minute and see if in the name of God it wouldn't drive you mad?"

As if out of a deep memory of timing and ensemble playing, both men flung themselves into a comic, exaggerated attitude of listening, a hand cupped behind an ear, and stood as frozen as statues in a public place. (81)

Here, too, the difference between the returned natives and the insiders remains, clearly visible, but not something to talk about between neighbours.

Do we conclude, then, that the novel shows, unchanged, the persistence of the space-time gap between "advanced" metropolis and "country-dwellers [...] in an earlier phase"? I think not: it implies, though it does not explore this, that things are on the verge of change. It is set in 1987 and 1988, a dark time in the Irish north-west. Tóibín, walking in the mid-80s in north Leitrim, along "the road between Rossinver and Kiltyclogher, the heart of rural Ireland," saw only desolation and depopulation: final evidence that de Valera's dream of prosperous rural Ireland was mere mockery, "a joke from a bitter satirical sketch." Tóibín notes that the county's population, having fallen from 150,000 to 27,000 in the 145 years after the 1841 census, was falling still at this time (*Bad Blood* 75-76). The war in the North, whose repercussions either side of the Border are his main subject, was intense. The sole evidence allowing us to date *That They May Face the Rising Sun* is Joe's angry comment on the Enniskillen Remembrance Day bombing of 1987, which he refers to as a recent event (238).

However, the novel was addressed to, and published in, a very different moment. By the time it came out in 2002, the war in the North seemed definitively over, and the long-depopulated north-western Border region was sharing in Ireland's unprecedented prosperity. As second-home owners or year-round residents, as returned natives or incomers, people are moving to Leitrim, even to small towns like Manorhamilton or Drumshanbo. In doing so, they are expressing an aesthetic choice. To be "brought here by the quiet" is no longer such a comical eccentricity; perhaps love of "nature" will no longer be such a mark of the outsider. The book's movement of reverse emigration, from the metropolis back to the "margins," reads now like an anticipation of the present.

This present, with the future it portends, raises its own new questions. Why is the metropolis becoming, in Ireland as elsewhere in Europe, a place some people are no longer seeking, but leaving? If country-dwelling becomes a privilege of the mobile classes, what will this mean for "the country" as a cultural and ecological terrain? How long will it take before intensive rural development alters irreversibly even places like Leitrim which have so far been relatively unaffected? These are among the questions implied by the generalised mobility and opportunity, whose rhythms have taken over from the intimate, familial ebb and flow, the movements of personal escape, memory, and return, that McGahern's fiction charts.

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MAMMIES, TROLLOPS, AND RE-CLAIMERS OF THE NIGHT: WOMEN IN PATRICK McCABE'S FICTION

David Clark

Patrick McCabe's fictional world is one which, it may be argued, is centred on a series of male characters who are ironically juxtaposed as dysfunctional figures within an imperfect social milieu. The tension which arises between the fictional character and his environment is created by a deceptively complex narrative pattern, a pattern which is largely anchored in the memory of a particular time and place which evoke the childhood, adolescence, and/or youth of the male protagonist. The literal reality of these factors is, however, largely unimportant in comparison with the perception of these as felt by the character, a perception which he (for it is always a he) considers to be his "memory" of that time and place. It is, of course, of great importance to differentiate between the character's perception of the past and the events as the reader discerns them after breaking down the layers of narrative inconsistency which reflect the dislocated consciousness of the principal character. Memory, in the works of McCabe, is always related to two principal factors, that of place – the physical landscape in which the memories are rooted – and that of the female character, intrinsically linked to that place, whose dominance over the male protagonist is such that all memory is filtered through his experiences with the female, generally the mother or the "anti-mother."

The memory, therefore, of McCabe's characters is always intrinsically untrustworthy. They are unreliable both as narrators and as characters, in that they provoke the reader into erroneous conceptions, which are only dissipated by the reader's own processing of the "facts" as they are presented. Time and place are used with great skill to create the illusion of "reality." A myriad of references, from historical events to artefacts drawn from popular culture, explicitly place the action of the novel within a particular period, such as the early 1960s with the Cuban missile crisis, cheap comics, and the signs of Seán Lemass' "new Ireland" in *The Butcher Boy*, or the musical and fashion trends of the 1970s in *Carn*, *Breakfast on Pluto*, and *The Dead School*. Such exactitude provides a contrast with the usually confused consciousness of the main protagonist. Similarly, although McCabe's geographical landscape is composed of a series of non-existent small towns in the Irish heartland, these locations are instantly recognisable. McCabe steers clear of the romanticism of the traditional ideal of rural Ireland, but also of the urban vision of the modern Republic. His, rather, is the claustrophobic memory of the stifling mid-sized communities with their prejudices, entrapment, and hypocrisy.

The main characters that inhabit the fictional landscape of McCabe's novels are, as we have noted, dysfunctional males, but their memory (and thus the consciousness

from which their attitudes and actions evolve) is rooted in the relationship with a member of the other sex, most notably with the mother, the mother substitute, and/or the implied antithesis of the mother figure. Despite, therefore, the apparently male-centred perspective of McCabe's fiction, the role of the female characters which populate his work cannot be understated.

Generally speaking, the representations of womanhood which appear in his fiction can be grouped into three main types. Most important are the maternal figures – the "mammies" – central to the emotional life (or lack of it) of their sons and who are regularly searched for throughout the lives of the male protagonists, often re-appearing as girlfriends, wives, or fantasy figures. The prostitutes (or "trollops") – the apparent antithesis of the maternal ideal, frequently – and paradoxically – share this maternal territory, creating a web of confusion, denial, and self-doubt which invariably interferes with the desires and aspirations of the protagonists. The memory of the mother and the fantasy memory of the perfect partner are continually used to shape the structure of the weak male characters whose "place" (both geographically and socially) within society is conditioned by women, who are always stronger, more astute, and responsible for much of the originality and tension present in McCabe's fiction.

In McCabe's first novel, *The Butcher Boy* (1992), the figure of the mother is typically idealised. Francie, the young protagonist, states early in the novel that "me and ma were great pals" (5), but she suffers from a severe mental illness. After her "break-downs," her son believes that she is taken to the garage to be repaired. As is common in McCabe's work, the father is a useless drunkard who plays a negative role in the emotional development of the child. Guilt, one of the main themes in McCabe, appears when Francie, after running away to Dublin, returns with a present of reconciliation for his mother to be cruelly informed that she has committed suicide. Francie, typically, blames himself for his mother's death. As Nancy Chodorow (176) famously states, boys are "taught to be masculine more consciously than girls are taught to be feminine," but, as she stresses, the absence of a valid male role model can lead the male child to identify more closely with the mother figure than with the father. In such cases, therefore, it is not abnormal for the boy to resort to a female role model. The negative model provided by the father leads Francie to a rejection of masculine culture, a rejection which is reinforced by the usurpation of his friendship with Joe by Philip Nugent, aided and abetted by both Francie's own mother and Philip's mother, Mrs Nugent. This is further exacerbated by his sexual mistreatment at the hands of the priest at the Industrial School to which he is sent. The death of his mother and his own guilt for this precludes the adoption of a secondary mother figure and will eventually lead to Francie's murdering Mrs Nugent.

The relationship of the child with the "mammy" as described by Chodorow is of fundamental importance in *The Dead School* (1995), a story of two teachers from two different generations. Malachy Dudgeon is a young teacher with "modern" perspec-

tives on the educational system, while Raphael Bell, a representative of the first post-Independence generation, is strongly opposed to the "modernity" which he believes to be ruining his patently De Valeran perspective of Ireland. Raphael's mother is extremely proud of her son. From the West Cork countryside, she is a "shawlie," a "fat woman in a plaid shawl" (34), who, after her husband is killed by a Black and Tan, like Francie's mother in the previous novel, degenerates into insanity. Malachy, on the other hand, is affected by his mother's infidelity – she is converted into a "trollop" in the public opinion because of her sexual infidelities with Jemmy, a farmer, down at the boathouse, which results in his father's suicide and which will later be repeated in his own life as the love of his life, Marion, repeats this infidelity.

Bell's obsession with his "mammy" is typical of that suffered by many of McCabe's characters:

Back then to the house, out of breath and all excited and in your hand this time a lovely stick of barley sugar for your mammy! "Now there's a good boy doesn't forget his mother!" said Uncle Joe. "Our Raphael always thinks of his mammy, don't you Raphael?" said his daddy. "That's a sign of a good child," said Uncle Joe, packing baccy into his pipe while Raphael's mammy beamed and the happiest child in the world sat down by the window [...] (37)

Malachy's obsession, in contrast, is based on the shame and disgust which he feels at his "mammy's" betrayal of the family values. Ironically, but typically, once again in McCabe both characters seek partners who reflect the dominant characteristics of their "mammies." Bell's wife, the Northern-born Nessa, is docile and maternal, while Malachy's partner, Marion, repeats the infidelity of his mother. Again the absence (in Bell's case), or the weakness (in that of Malachy), of the father is fundamental to an understanding of their behaviour. Both characters base their lives on the memory of the mother, a memory which conditions their being in a way which shapes their personality. Thus, Bell's life is dedicated to doing the things that he believes his mother would have liked, whereas Malachy's resentment of his mother's sexual infidelity and of his father's failure to act converts him into a pathetic figure: indecisive, aggrieved, and bitter.

The obsession with the mother in *Breakfast on Pluto* (1998) is based on childhood abandonment. Patrick Braden is the illegitimate son of a priest and his young housekeeper who has been left in the care of the "baby-farmer," Whiskers Braden or "Hairy Ma" – a typical stout-slugging Players-smoking "shawlie." Pat's reaction to the situation is an attempt to convert himself into a version of his mother, someone whom his fantasy has turned into someone "so beautiful she looked not unlike Mitzi Gaynor" (8). He starts by cross-dressing, wearing foster-sister Caroline's dresses at the age of thirteen, and stealing Mrs O'Hare's "smalls" from the clothes-line. He then leaves his foster-home to start a relationship with the corrupt politician and gun-runner, Mr Dummy Teat, who likes to use Patrick as a mother substitute calling him "mammy": "'Oh. Mammy!,' he'd say when he got in one of his moods and I came up with the idea of inserting my thumb into his mouth. It was quite a spontaneous gesture on my

part – but, oh boy, did he love it! 'Oh, Mammy, Mammy!' He'd cry, sucking away on it like nobody's business!" (34).

After her lover's murder, Pat moves to London to work as a transvestite prostitute where, in a climate of anti-Irishness provoked by the IRA bomb campaign, he is mistreated by his customers, almost at one point being strangled to death. Following his obsession with the figure of his mother, he starts a strange relationship with his landlady, Louise, a widow whose son (of Irish father, Shaunie) has died and who uses Pat as a substitute for her dead son, while Pat calls Louise "mammy." "'Oh my silly boy, my Shaunie Shaunies!' she'd say, and I'd say 'Mammy!' After a while I started to really like it, just sitting there on her knee and being engulfed by all this powdery warm flesh. I never wanted to get up in fact" (91).

Dave Smith notes how feminist theory has shown that women are "oppressed/hidden/repressed/marginalized" by male-centred "social and psychical structures" which "place biological men as enforcing agents for these structures," but which, at the same time, give women the *privilege* "to escape them or to be displaced by them" (34). Pat is a biological male who, unlike the biological woman, is not "privileged" to escape or reject this and thus is stranded in a "no-person's-land" of confusion and guilt. The invented memory of the mother evokes what Marianne Hirsch has called "a myth of female separateness which underscores value and empathy" (134), to which Pat aspires, but to which he can never gain admission. The end of the novel shows Pat converted into an imitation of his "mammy," an "Old Mother Reilly" dressed in a housecoat and headscarf, converted at last into his own mother and "wired to the fucking moon" (198).

Both *Mondo Desperado* (1999) and *Emerald Germs of Ireland* (2001) highlight obsessions with the figure of the "mammy." The first, a series of inter-related short stories, boasts such magnificent examples as "The Bursted Priest." A young boy who wishes to become a priest is – in the literal sense of the word – blown up by a group of schoolmates. The boy, Declan, is typically obsessed with his overweening mother, who "knitted him a grey balaclava with matching tasselled woollen scarf which she had persuaded his teacher Master Petey to allow him to wear for the duration of the school day" (23).

This repeats the recurrent McCabe theme of the mammy who over-protects her child leaving him open to weaknesses, public ridicule, and alienation, as well as mental problems or obsessive and/or compulsive behaviour. At the end of the tale Mammy is "eating flies in St Jude's Nursing Home, insisting that she is pregnant with a little girl who is going to be a nun," but the people of Barntrosna, the small town where all the stories in the collection are set, insist that "if Mrs Coyningham had left things the way they were and never minded about the bloody old balaclava, Fr Declan would be above in the chapel saying Mass this Sunday" (27).

Emerald Germs of Ireland is arguably one of the most under-rated works of Irish fiction of the present decade. A series of murder ballads in prose, the "novel" – if such it can be called – is a "biography" of Pat McNab, a mass-murderer (or not), obsessed, predictably, with his mammy. The work relies on a permanent confusion between reality and fantasy – which reflects the confusion of Pat's own mind, ironically reflected upon by the multi-voiced narrator throughout the novel, which, in keeping with McCabe's style, does not fit comfortably into any narrative character. His relationship with his "mammy" can be summed up in the following extract: "Just as Pat daren't open his mouth to his mother about most things, for no matter what you said to Mammy (as he always called her, for as far back as he could remember) she always seemed to take it up as you saying: 'Well then! That's the end of our relationship, I guess! I'll be off to live my own life! Toodle-oo!'" (4).

This is, of course, typical of McCabe's mummies; hysterically over-reacting to any sign of independence shown by their sons, who are typically forced to plead forgiveness through a feeling of intense guilt. The ironic narrative voice always tries to rationalise the totally irrational: "but there is something special about the relationship we all have with our mothers" (6). Pat murders his mother with a saucepan, and the series of subsequent murders, fantasies, and hallucinations are all related to the omnipresent figure of the "mammy," whose influence on her son from ultra-tomb is every bit as strong as it was when she was alive.

In McCabe's penultimate novel, *Call Me the Breeze* (2003), the "mammy" situation is further complicated in the psyche of the "wannabee" Charles Manson cum Travis Bickle sociopath narrator, Joey, from his mobile home in the non-existent border town of Scotsfield. The fragmented structure of the novel slowly reveals the relationship between Joey, his "mammy," his father, and the mysterious figure of Mona. Joey's "mammy" is hospitalised in a vegetative state, while Mona is present throughout the novel. *The Life and Times of Doughboy McBlob*, Joey's best-selling autobiographical novel, reveals the "truth" behind her situation:

Mona Galligan was in love with my father. She aborted her baby and became an alcoholic sometime in the 1950s. Then she drowned herself in the reservoir. I loved her very much and used to go to her house every day. When my mother would be cursing my father. It was with Mona Galligan that I first experienced the hunger for rebirth into a world transformed. They threw her baby – or what was left of it – into the sea off Howth Head near Dublin. She told me that one time when she was drunk. I don't think she knew she was telling me. They used to call her the Chivers jelly. Mona Chivers jelly was what they would call her because she shook so much with the gin. (166)

Joey, it would seem, had visited Mona every day after school, effectively converting his father's mistress into a surrogate "mammy." He wanted "to climb inside her stomach so [he] could become her baby" (93), while she thought that he could be born again to her. After Mona's death, Joey continues the relationship with an inflatable doll with a black wig. Mangan, an elderly tramp who lives in a caravan near that of Joey, discovers his secret:

Pulling at yourself and talking in women's voices ... I seen you putting a wig on her! A long black wig – I seen it! ... Through yon window. I seen what you be doing! Calling out her name! Mona! Mona! I know who you were talking about, sure enough! I seen her about the town, years ago, same black hair and all! Yes! That's what youse be at, you and her! You and your Mrs...Mona! Oh aye, Mona Galligan, that fired herself into the reservoir! Aye! Riding the dead! Riding the dead – that's your game and don't tell me any different! For these eyes don't lie – dressing her up and talking to her. (88-89)

McCabe's characters, like Joey, are continually in search of a surrogate "mammy." If the "mammy" is still alive, she tends to discourage her son's attempts to form a "normal" relationship with another woman. If the mother is dead (or in a vegetative state), the same discouragement will be produced by the feelings of guilt instilled within the son by the memory of the "mammy" and her ethical code. For McCabe's mammies, the most obvious conclusion to be drawn about the woman who tries to usurp her son's love is that she is a "trollop." "Trollop" is defined by the *OED* as "a slattern, slut; also, sometimes a morally loose woman, a trull." In McCabe's milieu, moreover, "trollop" is a term which is applied to the woman, a member of the community, who has, in fact or by common consensus, transgressed, or is thought likely to be able to transgress at some point, a series of sexual norms held by that community and most specifically by its moral guardians, the mammies. "Trollops" in these terms can range from Mona, who has had sexual relationships with Joey's ne'er-do-well father, to Josie, in McCabe's second novel *Carn* (1989), who, despite being herself a victim of sexual cruelty, is considered to be a "trollop." The fact that both of these women have been severely mistreated by apparently "respectable" men does not save them from being tarnished with the epithet of "trollop." Society, in applying such a term, visits the crimes of its men-folk on their victims, something which is obviously harshly reminiscent of some of the darker episodes in recent Irish history, most notably, but not exclusively, that of the Magdalene Sisters.

In his study on social response to prostitution, Andrew Ross focuses on the case of Peter Sutcliffe, the "Yorkshire Ripper," to analyse the hypocritical standards which are used to judge prostitution. When police, press, and public believed that Sutcliffe singled out prostitutes as his victims, the social reaction was hypocritically mute. As Ross says, the "mission to kill all prostitutes was recognised notoriously, at all levels of interpretation, from that of the popular press to that of the professional lawyer, as a moral mission, and therefore less culpable than the asocial desire to kill 'all women'" (48). Thus, society judged between "the 'blemished' or 'disreputable' victims, as opposed to the 'innocent' victims, implying, of course, that the former deserved to die while the 'innocent' did not" (Ross 49). "Trollops" in McCabe's fiction are subject to both verbal abuse from the women and the physical abuse from the men in the communities in which they reside and, like Sutcliffe's victims, are judged according to the restrictive moral views of society.

The world of women is, it would therefore appear, thus far divided into a world of mammies (over-protective mother figures who are socially dysfunctional themselves, but who nevertheless represent the accepted norms of the community) and trollops

(women who are part of the community but who are rejected by that community because of real or perceived sexual deviance from the social precepts). What, it might be asked, if the women do not fit into either category? Surprisingly, these are few and far between in McCabe's work, but those who escape such categorisation are worthy of study. The most significant example of this third grouping is Ms Evans in *The Dead School*. Ms Evans arrives at the school where Raphael Bell is maintaining the "good old Irish traditions" and where Malachy Dudgeon is having problems with both his pupils and their "mammies." Evans is the representative of the Parents' Committee set up by the "ridiculous, new-fangled Department of Education regulations" (158) and her plans for the school, where Bell is headmaster, include the abolition of the compulsory carrying of rosary beads, the abolition of school uniforms, and of compulsory sports. A pro-abortionist, Evans admits publicly to having had an abortion herself. The resulting reactions by the traditionalist Bell are predictable:

I mean if someone in training college in 1931 or '32 had said to Raphael, "You're going to work your back off for the children of Ireland and it's all going to be destroyed on you by a woman who had an abortion," he would have laughed himself sick. If he had even known what an abortion was, that is, which he didn't. If there were such things as abortions in 1932, then Raphael Bell didn't know about them. He was too busy saying the rosary with Paschal O'Dowd and running around the place visiting the sick. (157)

Evans – the "anti-mammy" – she who, according to Bell's logic, kills rather than conceives, provokes Bell's decline into alcohol and insanity. Despite her progressive outlook, however, she is not portrayed as a "positive" character within the novel. Her fictional role is rather to act as Bell's nemesis than to bring any degree of optimism into the sad, repressed state of the Irish Republic in the 1970s. Despite organising an anti-rape march to "Reclaim the Night,"¹ McCabe's depiction of Evans is far from the figure of the altruistic leftist that she tries to convey.

It is difficult to encounter "positive" characters anywhere in McCabe's fiction. Indeed, the only characters with any dignity are certain females who avoid being placed overtly into McCabe's somewhat rigid categories. In *Carn*, Sadie is a rebellious girl whose positive outlook is eventually defeated by the twin vicissitudes of motherhood and terrorism. Josie, in the same novel, is also conditioned by motherhood – or lack of this, because of her self-inflicted abortion, but her independence and integrity are apparent until her death. Outside this early work, however, it is not easy to find characters with positive connotations.

An exception is to be seen in the figure of Noreen in the eponymous story "The Forbidden Love of Noreen Tiernan," which closes *Mondo Desperado*. Noreen, the perfect village girl, refuses to become a model and goes to London to train to be a

1 Interestingly, according to Ross the "Reclaim the Night" marches were begun by feminists in the wake of the Sutcliffe murders as a result of the police poster which stated, "The next victim may be innocent." McCabe ironically jibes, therefore, at the hypocrisy of self-proclaimed radicals such as Ms Evans who in fact share the hypocritical distinction between prostitutes and "innocent" women.

nurse. Against all seeming odds, Noreen initiates a lesbian sado-masochist affair with a fellow nurse. Word of the scandal reaches her village, Barntrosna, and a group which can be seen as an ironic cross-section of Irish society, consisting of her mammy, the parish priest, her boyfriend and a local protestant landowner, go to England to rescue her. Noreen apparently sees the error in her debauched ways and returns to marry Pobs – but misses her relationship with Steph, the butch lesbian, to whom she returns.

Noreen's mammy had been warned by a neighbour, Mrs Donnelly, about the dangers of letting her daughter go to London: "Tramps, whoremasters, madmen, the whole lot of them! Every low form of life that God put on this earth is to be found there – waiting for the likes of you and me! Waiting for her – Noreen! Your daughter!" (190).

The head nurse explains the situation to Mrs Tiernan:

She turned out to be quite a little madam, didn't she – your little daughter! Coming here with the sweet Miss Colleen Irish act – butter wouldn't melt in her mouth – and the next thing you know she's involved not only in lesbian affairs but waylaying unsuspected people right, left and centre! No, nursing wasn't good enough for her! Or for that half-man, half-woman trollop she took up with! Couldn't be satisfied with an honest day's work for an honest day's pay, could she, no, it had to be mugging, if you don't mind, razor gangs, drugs and God knows what else! (213)

Noreen is, in social terms, certainly in the social terms of Barntrosna, deviant, but it must be insisted that as a character she is positive within the terms of McCabe's fiction. She compares favourably with the other characters in the story who, in typical McCabe fashion, all have unconfessed sexual hang-ups – Eustace De Vere-Bingham with his "Alicia" fantasies, the sexual inadequacy of Noreen's boyfriend Pobs, the closet homosexuality of the Priest, the cross-dressing local bank manager found in a London club. So in her own – slightly exaggerated – way, Noreen reclaims the night by making her own choice and returning to Steph, her girlfriend, and her sadomasochistic relationship.

McCabe's negative treatment of the Irish woman in his fictional oeuvre must obviously be seen in terms of the author's fictional conception of the human condition. Mother Erin is not a viable concept for this writer, his Cathleen Ni Houlihan would force her children to wear scratchy balaclavas and grey tasselled scarves – in the classroom. Through comic stereotypes, however, I would suggest that McCabe reflects, hyperbolically, the prejudices, shortcomings, maliciousness, and frustration of ordinary Irish men and women in a way few contemporary writers would dare.

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HERE AND THEN, THERE AND NOW: PLACE AND MEMORY IN ÉILÍS NÍ DHUIBHNE'S FICTION

Giovanna Tallone

"Preoccupation with place," writes John Wilson Foster, "is a preoccupation with the past. The past is constantly made contemporary through an obsession with remembered place" (Foster 30).

In Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's fiction preoccupation with place and with the past comes to the fore in the specificity (D'hoker 133) and variety in space and time that characterise her fiction. Geographical settings ranging from Ireland, France, Italy, and Northern European countries to North America, on the one hand, and different time settings on the other, are juxtaposed as the present time of contemporary Ireland interweaves with a distant time, whether it be the future that has become the past in *The Bray House* or the historical past of nineteenth- and twentieth-century events, such as the Great Famine in "Summer Pudding," the Second World War in "Lily Marlene," or the Troubles in the North as a present-absent background in *The Dancers Dancing*. Place and memory intertwine productively in many ways, indicating Ní Dhuibhne's concern with intertextuality and storytelling. The use of Irish folklore in postmodern perspectives, for example in the collection *The Inland Ice*, is conducive to the exploration of "divergences and continuities between tradition and modernity" (Fogarty in *Midwife to the Fairies* xi) so that past and present are simultaneously co-present. In memory the past that is remembered and the present of the act of remembering coexist (Campbell 223), and Ní Dhuibhne's use of place and memory reproduces this effect.

From her early story "Midwife to the Fairies" onwards, this is shown as a *fil rouge* in her fiction. It is Ní Dhuibhne's first experiment in the use of an intertextual technique, where she "counterpoint[s] a modern story with a traditional story" (Moloney 107) replacing the vague location of the legend with precise references to Co. Wicklow. An old legend and its rewriting in a modern context is thus a way of juxtaposing past and present, tradition and modernity, something that is emphasised by the alternate use of the verbal forms of simple present and simple past. This turns out to be a recurring linguistic and strategic choice in Ní Dhuibhne's fiction, so that the deictic notions *here and now/hic et nunc* and *there and then/lille et tunc* often overlap and mingle. The obsessive presence of the past is highlighted by the use of different tenses, a linguistic device that focuses on the problematic relationship between past and present. In a similar way, in Ní Dhuibhne's stories the permanence and continuity of place is a container for time, a reminder of the permanence and continuity of time that can turn into a form of persecution, as place keeps memories alive. Examples of this from Ní Dhuibhne's novels and some of her short stories will be the focus of this paper.

Reviewers of Ní Dhuibhne's fiction have variously pointed out the "indelible impression of each place" (Ferrie), for example in the collection *The Pale Gold of Alaska*, and the obsessive preoccupation with childhood memories (Dunne 175) in her debut collection *Blood and Water*. Places are not nameless entities but recur regularly and sometimes obsessively. "Kingston Ridge," for example, opens with a list of place-names: "We had cousins in London, Birmingham, Leeds and Holyoke, Massachusetts" (*Blood and Water* 43), while in "Fulfilment" place-names are timeless repositories for stories: "Killiney is the Anglicisation of *Cill Iníon Léinín*, the chapel of the daughter of Léinín. Who she was I do not know. Perhaps a saint like Gobnait of Cill Ghobnait. Or a princess like Isolde of Chapelizod. Perhaps she was just the daughter of a butcher" (132). Places and place-names are thus conservative in often mysterious ways, suggesting a continuum of time (Reynolds 9) so that a journey in space is also a journey in time.

This is true of the futuristic framework of the novel *The Bray House*. For the group of archaeologists who venture for the first time to the wasteland Ireland has become after nuclear disaster, Ireland is both a physical and a virtual space, whose landmarks along the coastline exist as names: "Bray Head, the Little Sugarloaf, the Big Sugarloaf, Lugnaquilla, the Three Rock Mountain" (*Bray House* 54). They are "rounded haunches," "pointed breasts," "humps. Lumps. Tumors" (54), scars over a non-existing landscape witnessing a place and a time that are no more. Robin Lagerlof's remark "I had been *there* before" (55, emphasis added) is anticipated by a previous observation "*Now here we were*" (36, emphasis added) when the ship approaches the coast of East Anglia. The references to space and time thus seem to get blurred, overlapping and mingling as mentioned before. "There" appears in the text in its anaphoric use (Fillmore 63), as it refers to the identified destination of the archaeological trip. The use of the past tense also enhances the distance in time besides the distance in space implied in the deictic "there." However, the past tense clashes with the "here and now" in "*Now here we were.*" The distance implicit in the past tense overturns the *ille et tunc* into *hic et nunc*. The time marker "now" thus suggests the quintessential metaphor of the novel as archaeological dig, a "now" that goes deep into the "then" and unearths it in a timeless present. Under the disguise of scientific exploration, geographical location turns into time. In the here and now of the excavation light is shed on the here and then. In excavating the house in Bray, Robin comes face to face with the communal past of Ireland and her own traumatic past. In the overlapping of here and now, place is thus an interface for time and memory.

The Bray House itself opens in the past tense with a specific reference to space and time, the *ille et tunc* of the story: "We embarked at Gothenburg just before dawn on 28 April" (5). With few exceptions, the novel uses primarily the simple past, thus following the traditional pattern of Science Fiction that exploits the use of past tenses to speak about the future, to reach the future of an imaginary world of tomorrow (Weinrich 69).

In a novel which is mainly concerned with the power of narrative and the authority of written texts (Hand 104), the predominance of past tenses is consistent with the concern of the story as story, thus recalling what Harald Weinrich termed "*die erzählte Welt*," the narrated world, the result of fiction, the domain in which time is the depository of merging past and present. Paradoxically, in the report of the excavation of the Bray House, which covers the second part of the novel between Chapters Twelve and Sixteen, the use of the past tense to give background information is followed by the prevalence of present tenses in the actual account of the finds within the house, to be followed again by the past tense in the interpretative analysis. The report is thus an inset text breaking up the story line, but it is also an act of fiction. Its reliability is to be doubted under its disguise of truth. Alternating the use of past tenses, narrative verbs, and present tenses, commenting verbs, to use Weinrich's definition, the interpretation is a mere act of fiction. Objects and documents of the residents of the Bray House provide an input for stories about them. For example, entries in Murphy McHugh's diary about meeting "BOB" are interpreted as pub-going habits with one Brian O'Brien (*Bray House* 160). The use of the past tense in Robin's report thus creates a narrated world which is nothing but the result of her own figments and imagination, an act of storytelling, enhancing the distance of the wasteland of Ireland as fictional space.

The obsessive scars of the past mark Robin in *The Bray House*, Detta in "Holiday in the Land of Murdered Dreams," Polly in "The Moon Shines Clear, the Horseman's Here," and Carmelita in "The Garden of Eden." For all of them, the place of now is the place of then; by returning to familiar and nearly forgotten places, or by venturing into unknown ones, they set out on a journey, an act of obsessive remembering.

Stories with a setting in a historical past make use of the past tense to provide the context of the narrated world. For example, "The Pale Gold of Alaska" sheds light on space and time to introduce the life of the emigrant Sophie, following in her steps to the various places she visits with her husband: "Soon after her eighteenth birthday, Sophie left Donegal and went to America with her sister Sheila" (*Pale Gold* 1). Likewise, in "Summer Pudding" the reference to a specific location provides a context of estrangement for the Irish refugees stranded in Wales "in the last year of the Famine" (Moloney 109): "We camped at Caer Gyby for three days waiting for Father Toban" (*Inland Ice* 44).

However, in the historical past of "Gweedore Girl," set in Derry in the early twentieth century, the simple present is occasionally used in a narration mostly told in the simple past. The story opens with a direct question introduced by a *verbum dicendi*: "Mrs McCallum asked, 'Can you cook?'" (*Inland Ice* 2). Away from home to work as a maid, the protagonist and first-person narrator switches to the present tense when recalling her own family and the place she belongs to, the point of reference of her life: "We own our own farm, ten acres, and we own a boat and a seine net" (4). When describing the time spent at the McCullums', present and past tenses alternate. The

present is used to describe the daily routine of the house chores: "In the morning I get up at six and light the range and bring them tea in bed" (10); the same routine is, however, anticipated a few pages earlier by the use of the past tense: "I had to do everything in the house. Clean everything, scrub everything, cook everything, wash everything and also mind the baby" (6-7). The description of the room she lives in is in the present tense, too: "My bedroom is a room at the back of the kitchen, cosy and warm in winter, at least" (11).

The frequency with which this linguistic strategy is used is indicative of a stylistic choice that is functional to the narrative and has a multiple effect in terms of the texture of the story. In fact, present and past tenses overlap to provide both distance and proximity, the events of the Gweedore girl's life are both looked at from afar and brought to actuality. And in particular their interlacing sheds light on the story as story, on its metanarrative construction, and the use of first-person narration gives rise to "a mingling of post-modern dissonance with the immediacy of direct address" (Fogarty in *Midwife to the Fairies* xii). In fact, this story, too, turns out to be a story about telling stories. Elliot, the butcher boy who will later deceive her, entertains her by telling stories and in his company she also becomes a story: "My life turned into a big long story that went on and on and I kept finding things in it that I hadn't ever thought about" (*Inland Ice* 14), so much so that she becomes public domain: "They wrote about me in the paper" (28). In a similar way to "The Wife of Bath" from the collection *Eating Women is not Recommended*, in which the fictional self of Alisoun melts in water, she creates a distance between her real and her fictional self, or rather she makes herself a story to come to terms with her own life. In fact, the story closes with the present, as the girl takes control of her own story/life: "His name is Seamus and he is a good boy, kind and funnier than Elliot, and earning much more money. I know I can marry him any time I want to" (28). Like the protagonist of the legend "The Search for the Lost Husband" that underlies the collection *The Inland Ice*, she is "tired of all that fairytale stuff" (262), and the use of the present tense provides reconciliation between past and present selves.

The strategy of alternating past and present tenses is not a peculiarity of "Gweedore Girl," but turns out to be a recurring narrative and linguistic pattern. In fact, it is a fairly constant practice in Ní Dhuibhne's short fiction to find an opening in the present tense to a present or past situation, and alternating stretches of past and present are often graphically indicated by blank spaces.

In "The Flowering," Lennie, a young woman of the 1990s, is determined to "discover her roots" (*Eating Women* 7). The narrative opens and closes in the here and now of contemporary Ireland, something that gives it a circular pattern framing the tale of Sally Rua, Lennie's ancestor, a tale nested within Lennie's untold story. "The Flowering" is a multifaceted story in which different layers intersect. It is a story in which place, represented by a house, is a continuum in time, it is a personal story of madness, but it is also a story which reflects on Ireland's past and on the uses of the past.

However, the present tense that opens the story also introduces the story-within-a-story of Sally Rua: "But look, there she is, hunkered over the black stool in the bottle-green dimness of that cavernous byre ... There she is! Sally Rua. Lennie's great-aunt" (12). In the repetition "there she is," Sally Rua is both here and now in the present image of the mind and there and then in the past, which emphasises the postmodern awareness of it being a story, "a yarn, spun out of thin air" (22). The physical description of the girl is in the present tense too: "People who dislike her ... say she is a snake ... although boys who love her compare her, more conventionally to a swan" (12).

The narrated world, however, soon gains ground through the use of the past tense and the prevalence of spatial elements, "house," "cottage," "church": "She lived in that house in Wavesend ... In the mornings she went to school in the low white cottage beside the church. The rest of the day she was engaged in all the busy activities of the home" (12). The narrative verbs of the past shed light on the postmodern feature of the story as story and on Lennie's awareness of the power of transformation embedded in creativity, which provides a theoretical framework for Sally Rua's story as a successful lace-maker and artist, and her collapse into madness when deprived of "the work she loved" (22).

Memory and invention underlie "The Moon Shines Clear, the Horseman's Here," where the alternating use of past and present tenses marks the obsessive intricacy of things past leaving their mark on the present. After many years of absence, Polly returns to the village of her youth. The place itself makes tragic memories sharper, and the interlacing of past and present tenses has the serpentine effect of endlessly going into and out of the past, just as Polly is endlessly going into and out of the village. The story – or stories – of her past are set alongside the story her old mother tells herself, an old legend the end of which she has forgotten and which strikingly resembles or retells Polly's own story. Place is a catalyst for time, bridging the gap between the here and now of Polly's return with the here and then of the house she used to live in. While the first paragraph is in the present ("The house is a holiday house"), the second paragraph opens a long stretch in the past tense, starting with "Polly lived at home in this valley until she was almost eighteen" (134). The juxtaposition of spatial and temporal referents (home, valley, Polly's age) magnifies the double obsession with space and time that characterises the story. Occasionally, however, a present perfect form is used: "She has read somewhere that in everyone's life are seven devils, and only when you meet them and overcome your fear of them can you find your guardian angel" (140). Not by chance does this verb form appear in a paragraph about telling stories, since in spite of being afraid to talk to her mother, one of her devils, Polly is ready "to regale [her] with the story of her life" (149), so as to regain her own space and reconquer her own time.

Stories survive just as Polly has survived the death of her boyfriend and her unwanted pregnancy, experiences that have banished her from the life of the valley.

The recollection of a film made in the village is a metaphor for the exclusion from an experience which had involved the whole community: "Everyone had been an extra. Katherine and Siobhan had been schoolgirls in the classroom scenes. All the other people had been villagers, or men drinking ... in the pub ... But Polly had not participated. ... The film had been a disappointing experience, an experience of total exclusion for Polly. No wonder she had forgotten all about it" (141).

The narrated world is cast through the medium of the past perfect this time, a procedure that is functional to the narrative. It is the tense of a very distant past, something forgotten and therefore put behind the past tense of memories, something that also provides a descriptive background. However, not only does the past perfect underlie the distance of time, it also sheds light on the process of "total exclusion" (141) recurring from the past to the present. Thus, the use of the past perfect emphasises both the distance from the here and now of the villagers and the here and then of the recollection. It also sheds light on the world of film as a prototype for the world of fiction, a world magnified by being narrated.

When Polly's mother is engaged in her own narrated world, she tells her story in the past, yet she is introduced in the present tense, since her act of narration is endless and timeless. "That is what she does all day. She tells stories ... There's nothing else, there, just herself, but she is engaged in a long monologue ... not monotonous, but unbroken, fluent as a river" (156-7). Like the fiction of the story her mother is telling, the story of Paddy's death and Polly's pregnancy are told in the past tense. The episodes are made into stories in order to come to terms with place and memory. It is a form of therapy.

"Holiday in the Land of Murdered Dreams" is also the story of a returned character and of unwanted pregnancy. The story appears in the 2003 collection *Midwife to the Fairies* and in a slightly different version under the title "The Master Key" in Dermot Bolger's *Ladies' Night at Finbar's Hotel*. By calling herself Detta, Bernadette starts a new life in Holland after leaving her child for adoption. Her return to Dublin after twenty-seven years, now as a guest in the same hotel where she worked as a young girl, is at the request of her son, who has managed to trace her back. The story covers the few hours in Dublin before the meeting as well as Detta's youthful years during the summer of her Leaving Cert. The present time of her return is turned into a narrative past, and the past tense also relates the events of the very distant past that led to her pregnancy, which is made more emotionally painful by the significance of the place, Finbar's Hotel. The two different time levels are thus made into a continuum by the use of a common grammatical tense. Interestingly enough, the present tense is used in the very final part of the story, where memory takes over and "later and then become now" (*Midwife to the Fairies* 118). These words mark the sudden shift to the one and a half page that closes the story in the present tense: "Detta holds her baby up. She counts his eyes and his ears and his fingers and his toes. She turns him round and looks at the strip of fair hair on his back. She puts him to

her breast and lets him suck" (118). Chronological time is overturned in the intensity of forgotten feelings and the use of the simple present sheds light on an experience which had long been suppressed. "Twenty-seven years later, but she is getting it again: the happiest moment of human life" (118).

The *bildungsroman* *The Dancers Dancing*, indebted to the early story "Blood and Water," is set in 1972 in the Donegal Gaeltacht where a group of teenage girls attend Irish college. The historical context is fleetingly present with the two Derry girls who share the house with the protagonists. Unlike the story from which it develops, the novel is told in the third person, and, unlike the story, it is told mostly in the present tense. In fact, "Blood and Water" uses the present as a frame to contain the past experiences of adolescence and look at them from the perspective of an adult narrator. The opening of the story, "I have an aunt who is not the full shilling" (*Blood and Water* 109), leaves room for the memory of reiterated experiences recounted in the past, while the present is resumed in the final part of the story: "My aunt is still alive ... I never go to Inishowen now ... My aunt is not altogether well" (120).

This standard procedure in the stories is abandoned in *The Dancers Dancing*, in which the use of the present tense provides freshness and immediacy to the young girls' experiences. The novel opens with a reiterated image of watching land from above – "Imagine," "look" – so that visual perception is both here and now and there and then. The referents themselves partake of both the present and the past and survive time. The land is here and now, but it is also there, if seen from a distance, and it is also then: "You see what the early mapmakers imagined" (1). This flight of the imagination is not different from the process of narration; in a way it is a meta-narrative reference, a foray into the past with the immediacy of the present. The invitation to look at the map, to go into it, is an alternative way to enter the text; the map is a text, a story, since "every picture tells a story" (3). The pictorial vision of what is being seen that closes the first chapter is a list of things perceived on the map and seen from a distance; the demonstratively implied distance – "that is the story" (3) – bridges the gap between here and now, there and then. Likewise, the awareness of the story being a story closes Chapter Two: "By now, their future is their past, an open book, a closed chapter" (5). This implicitly draws the attention to the act of narration as a backward look, but also to the choice of using the present tense, Weinrich's "commenting tense," as the prevalent narrative mode of the novel. "An open book, a closed chapter," with the open reference to written words gives rise to expectations concerning the story as text, and thus suggests that the story we enter when entering the map is now over. The time marker "by now" is a prolepsis, casting an eye both at and from the future.

The use of the present tense in the novel can thus be explained as a textual strategy that sheds light on July 1972 as the everlasting present perceived by the four young protagonists during a seminal experience (Warwick) of their lives. This is also consistent with the perception of time in the Gaeltacht: "It is hard for the children to

imagine that there was another life *before this*, before the Gaeltacht ... *The norm is this*: living communally, chanting sentences and songs in class, playing games, dancing every night" (*Dancers* 135, emphasis added). The "now" implicit in "before this" and "the norm is this" make a connection between space and time: the space of the Gaeltacht is the space of "now," "here" is perceived as time now.

Occasional forays into the past provide background information about Orla's family and the girls' friendship. However, in the private and magical space of the burn time is suspended, clock time and chronological time stop. Hidden and feeling protected by the isolation of the place, Orla enjoys playing with the echo, giving vent to the few bad words she knows, and narration in the present tense overlaps with the past: "She tries out all the taboo words she knows ... She does not know very many, as a matter of fact, since *people didn't at that time*. ... Still, there is a surprising store of words in Orla's head that have never before emerged into the light of day, into the sound of light" (201, emphasis added).

The wavering between past and present and the return to the present tense highlight the process of narration, the story being told, as the time marker "at that time" provides the detachment of a story told at a future time. In a way, it is the same detachment with which the opening map unfolds. The here of the burn bridges the gap between now and then, or rather now and then are one. The burn is also the focus of a passage in the past tense that represents a significant experience. Orla's encounter with the burn provides a moment of peace and it is framed in the present and cast into the past tense as if it were a story Orla goes back to every now and then:

After the visit to the burn, Orla is filled with courage ... In the burn, she was a part of whatever whole encompassed the water and the weeds Her heart beat in time with the bubble of the burn down there, her feet gripped the stones ... Orla belonged to the river. She was nothing there, nothing more than a berry dripping to the water or a minnow floating under the surface of a pool. Nothing. And completely herself ... (73)

Only in the final chapter, significantly entitled "Now," does the point of view of the historical present of retrospection – then – shift to the present time – now. Orla writes in the first person now, thus revealing herself as the subjective consciousness of the novel (Traynor 276). In this change of point of view, the distance of time and the continuity of past and present become the focus. If the past tense is used to fill in the ellipses of her life between the summer of 1972 and "now," occasional present continuous forms emphasise the transience of "now," of the fleeting moment. The beach where she is sitting now ("I am sitting on the beach as usual," *Dancers Dancing* 239) is like time a transitory place between what happened and what will happen; the beach is once again the space that contains time, the location for memories, where her summer love for Micheál comes back. Not by chance, therefore, does the novel close on a present perfect form of duration, the tense that bridges the gap between past and present: "Since then I have not seen him" (242). There and then, here and now become one, and look backward and forward simultaneously, thus recalling the

few lines the girls used to sing together when their story was still an open book: "Que sera sera! Whatever will be will be" (4).

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FRANK MCGUINNESS AND ARMAND GATTI: PLAYS OF MEMORY AND SURVIVAL

Joseph Long

In Frank McGuinness's two Ulster plays, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme* (premièred in 1985) and *Carthaginians* (premièred in 1988), memory, identity, and a sense of place engage to negotiate the painful passage from past to future and to articulate a possible strategy for survival, for the individual and the group. Both plays centre primarily on a group of characters rather than on individuals: they focus on what constitutes the group, what process brings them together in the first place and what sustains the fragile identity that the group represents. The group has endured an historic and destructive experience: in the earlier play, the annihilation suffered by the Ulster Volunteers at the Battle of the Somme, in July 1916; in the later play, the events of Bloody Sunday, when, on 30 January 1972, thirteen young protestors taking part in a Civil Rights march were shot dead in the streets of Derry by the forces of the British Army. In both plays, there is a particular tension between personal experience, historic moment, and the possibility of healing. The outcome for the group becomes a pointer for ourselves.

In *Carthaginians*, a group of people from the city of Derry – three women, three men – is squatting in the cemetery outside the city walls. Each of them in different ways, directly or indirectly, has been shattered by the events of Bloody Sunday, although not all the pain was inflicted by the toll of political events. Maela, in particular, has suffered the loss of her daughter, who died of cancer on the infamous Sunday, but, as she walks home from the hospital, at every street corner the tally of the dead is spiralling upwards and the city itself is becoming a living mausoleum of the slain:

I'm walking home through my own city. [...] Two dead, I hear that in William Street. I'm walking through Derry and they're saying in Shipquay Street there's five dead. I am walking to my home in my house in the street I was born in and I've forgotten where I live. I am in Ferryquay Street and I hear there's nine dead outside the Rossville flats ...
(*Plays One* 352)

To reach this point of recognition and tell her story, Maela has an inner journey to make. The central scene of the play, Scene Five, is a fantastical and farcical acting-out of the traumatic events of the infamous Bloody Sunday. It forms a play-within-the-play, scripted and stage-managed by Dido, and derisively entitled *The Burning Balaclava*. This burlesque acting-out takes on the healing function of a psychodrama. Dido distributes the *dramatis personae* on a principle of cross gendering and the reversal of roles. Thus, the one-time republican activist Paul is given a blond wig and must play the part of the Protestant girl friend, Mercy Dogherty. "How am I a Protestant with a name like Docherty?" he objects. "You spell Dogherty with a 'g'," retorts Dido (332), the relevance of the proposed emendation being far from clear. Most of

the characters discover they are to be named as variants on Doherty/O'Doherty. "Everybody in Derry's called Doherty," comments Hark, "it's a known fact" (332). Dido himself is left to play two parts simultaneously, the pram-pushing Doreen – "one of life's martyrs who never complains" (334) – and the British Soldier, "in deep torment because he is a working-class boy sent here to oppress the working class."

The Burning BalACLava is the catalyst that allows the characters in the play to release themselves from the grip of the past, to realise that they are themselves the very Dead whose resurrection they have been waiting for. This play-within-the-play has been compellingly analysed in terms of group psychotherapeutic practice and, in particular, the techniques of psychodrama developed by J.L. Moreno after the First World War (Mikami 42-46). The present study has other parameters. It will examine, in each of these two plays, McGuinness's specific treatment of history, memory, and identity, and the dramaturgical choices that correspond to his understanding of the interrelationship between these issues. It will further examine to what extent that treatment and those dramaturgical choices are informed by models of representation present in the work of French filmmaker and dramatist Armand Gatti, whom McGuinness met in the late seventies. The seminal influence of Armand Gatti's work on the developing dramaturgical practice of the Irish playwright has never been examined or recognised.¹

Dido is an openly gay character and when in Scene Five he enters brandishing the script of his newly written playlet, he is outrageously dressed in drag. As gay playwright, he has assumed the identity of Fionnuala McGonigle. By mischievously playing on his initials, Frank McGuinness has projected a figure of the author into his own text, but this playwright, we learn to our surprise, is French. With a name like Fionnuala? *Sans problème* – it is to be pronounced Fionn –u –ala! Dido-in-Drag reveals his character's mission: "Oui. I have come to your city and seen your suffering. Your city has changed its name from Londonderry to Derry, and so I changed my name to Fionnuala in sympathy. What I see moves me so much I have written a small piece as part of your resistance" (331).

The target of this lampooning might well be seen in general terms, not so much with reference to the events of January 1972, but rather to circumstances nine years later, when the death of Bobby Sands and the ordeal of the Republican hunger-strikers created unprecedented interest and sympathy throughout continental Europe and, more specifically, brought droves of French journalists and intellectuals to Derry. The attention of foreign media was generally received with suspicion by the nationalist community of Derry, who had learned by experience to mistrust the appropriation of their situation and their objectives by left-wing ideologues of every hue. One French playwright and filmmaker had, however, won the trust of the Derry Youth and Community Workshop, and that was Armand Gatti. Through my own mediation, he put in

1 Some of the material presented in this paper appears, however, in my earlier study of McGuinness.

place a community-based film project and, after a lengthy period of preparation, the first week of the shooting schedule in May 1981 coincided, by a painful irony of circumstances, with the death of Bobby Sands and the turmoil that ensued in Northern Ireland. Gatti's community-based film was addressing, among other themes, the collective memory and sense of place among the largely working-class population of Derry.² The experimental scripting of his film had involved gathering stories and experiences from among the unemployed young people, both Catholic and Protestant, attending the Workshop, as well as those of the adult population of Derry who had agreed to take part in the project. Having assembled these anecdotes into a formal script, Gatti invited the young people and the adults to play, in the film, the fictionalised version of themselves, as it appeared in the script. In most cases, this was agreed. Thus, it came about that a real-life episode in the life of the Workshop was transposed into the film, namely an exercise in group dynamics, in which the young people were called upon to act out roles most opposed to their own beliefs and situations: Protestant young people were to re-invent themselves as IRA activists, Catholic youngsters were to project themselves into the role of members of the RUC or the British Army, pacifists were to be militants, hardliners were to be clergymen, and so forth. The Director of the Workshop at the time, who had devised this experiment in self-questioning both in real life and in the fictional world of the film, was a visionary community leader who was widely known by the nick-name of Paddy Bogside and whose real name was Paddy Doherty. The issue which, in the film, challenges the assumptions of the young people is the death of a British soldier who falls victim to a shooting incident and who is revealed to be an unemployed young man from the north of England, whose social circumstances have brought him to that end.

Dido's lampooning of these stereotypes in *The Burning Balacclava* has therefore a more specific target than might at first appear. The targets, all in all, are many and varied, and include some of the most sacred icons of nationalist sentiment. The pathos of Sean O'Casey's evocations of nationalist motherhood in *Juno and the Paycock* is derisively parodied at several points, with lines such as: "Son, son, where were you when my Sacred Heart was riddled with bullets?"³ The media icon of a nationalist Catholic priest – in fact, the future Bishop of Derry – waving a white handkerchief under gunfire is subverted by the character Seph, playing Fr Docherty and waving two great white sheets. The socialist construction of the British soldier as an alienated working-class youth is ironised by the reference to his "deep torment." The wider target of all this is, clearly enough, the inadequacy of any ideology or any form of representation to account comprehensively for the contradictions of experience

2 Armand Gatti's Derry-based film *Nous étions tous des noms d'arbre* was distributed in the UK with the co-operation of the British Film Council by Other Cinema, under the title *The Writing on the Wall*, and was shown on Channel 4 television in March 1983 (Prix Jean Delmas at Cannes Film Festival, 1982).

3 Cf. Mrs Tancred: "O Blessed Virgin, where were you when my darling son was riddled with bullets ..." (O'Casey 115).

and the manner in which discourse appropriates and distorts the reality it claims to express, an issue which McGuinness's play has in common with Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City*.

Fionnuala/Frank McG's ironic deconstruction of Gatti's script and indeed of his very presence in Derry is therefore part of a larger scheme of displacement and clearly not a specific score to settle with the French writer. Nonetheless, it has to be admitted that Frank's personal encounter with Armand Gatti had been somewhat fraught. Gatti's own ideological position is complex enough. He has never been a member of any political party. His driving philosophy is a form of utopian anarchism, which he traces back, in part through his own father's experiences, to the Anarcho-Syndicalist movement of the 1920s. It has as its references, among others, Antonio Gramsci in Italy and, in Russia, Bakunin and Makhno. Frank McGuinness's engagement with politics, notwithstanding the Republican tradition of his family, is based on personal witness and an acute awareness of the ambiguities on every side. He felt, as he has expressed to me more than once, that there were enough complexities in the Northern situation without Gatti adding further complexities of his own. On the other hand, his encounter with Gatti's dramatic writing, some years earlier, had been a shock and a revelation, and he acknowledges to this day the extent to which Gatti's work first opened up for him the full potential of theatre and the "utopian space" of the stage.

The encounter with the French playwright dates back to 1977, when Gatti came to University College Dublin for the English-language premiere of his play *The Stork*, which I had translated and staged with a talented group of student performers. Frank McGuinness was cast in the role of Engineer Kawaguchi. As often in Gatti's formal drama, the character is based on documented, real-life experience. On 6 August 1945, the fictitious Kawaguchi, like his real-life counterpart, was working on a construction site in Hiroshima, at the moment the first atomic bomb was dropped. Being a strong swimmer, he escapes by the river from the inferno on either bank. By evening, he makes his way to the shore. He clammers onto a freight train, not knowing where he is or where he is going. Three days later, the train has brought him to Nagasaki, in time to witness the second bomb. In order to dramatise experience of such scale and intensity, both personal and historic, Gatti moves away from the conventions of realism and its contrived plausibility. Thus, Frank McGuinness as performer is not asked to make himself up and move and speak as if he were a survivor who had received two massive doses of radiation within three days. There might seem to be something presumptuous, even obscene, about such a mode of representation on the stage. Instead, at the start of the play, the performers present themselves as a group of volunteer workers clearing the ruined streets of Nagasaki. They have decided not to take part in the celebrations to mark the Commemoration of the Dead: instead, they present a play and each performer has chosen an atomised object from the rubble of the city. Thus, Frank McGuinness's character has chosen a burnt-out watch, and that object will conjure up the Engineer Kawaguchi to

whom the watch once belonged. The performer may therefore speak *as the watch*, that is, as a carbonised relic, or as the one-time Kawaguchi, or indeed as the volunteer worker in the here-and-now. The play will thus move seamlessly between "that time" before the bomb, the time immediately after the bomb, and the present time, that is, the time of performance. A central issue of the play is how can those from the period before the trauma find a language to speak to us in the present day – how can a carbonised watch speak to us and what can it say? – and, indeed, how can we, in the here-and-now, as volunteer workers or as members of their audience, find words to cope with what is an undeniable part of our own past, of our memory, and of what we have now become.

The group of volunteers, in *The Stork*, has come together around a dying child – Oyanagi, a victim of atomic radiation – with the project of making a thousand paper storks to save her life. She dies, and the thousandth stork, which was never made, becomes the central symbol of the play. Here Gatti has transposed the Japanese legend of the crane as giver of health, and the practice of hanging paper cranes, in the origami tradition of paper folding, around the bed of a sick person. His use of the legend echoes the real-life experience of Sasaki Sadako, a Japanese child victim of the effects of radiation, whose vain attempt to construct a thousand paper cranes before she died became the emblem of the Peace Movement in the fifties. In Gatti's play, Tomiko, one-time Hostess of the Tea Ceremony, pieces together a garment for the Day of the Dead: "Do you know why I took to sewing this kimono today? Because I thought that Oyanagi must have grown. And that she would be happy to see that we think of her as a living person, already of an age to wear a woman's kimono" (119). Her gesture reaches out to that of Maela, in *Carthaginians*, as Maela lays out her child's garments on a grave and, in her state of denial, makes ready for her dead daughter's birthday:

Greta What age would she have been?

Maela You mean what age she is?

Silence

I'm saving for her birthday. (*Whispers*) A leather jacket. (300)

What vision of salvation, if any, is offered in the play? In both the Irish and the French play, the hope of a positive future is invested in the character who challenges the enclosed existence of the group, their self-imposed incarceration, and their refusal of a world that is moving on without them. In McGuinness's play, it is Dido who suggests, in the final scene, the possibility of reconciling past and future, or rather of carrying the memory of the past into the future, without denial or capitulation, as he takes leave of the others in a movement of transcendence: "While I walk the earth, I walk through you, the streets of Derry. If I meet one who knows you and they ask, how's Dido? Surviving. How's Derry? Surviving. Carthage has not been destroyed. Watch yourself" (379).

In Gatti's play, it is the demobilised soldier Enemon who leaves, who sets out to challenge the world, and it is Tomiko, in the final scene, who evokes, like Dido, the possi-

bility of the past speaking to the future, and enters a plea for recognition and acceptance:

Forgive us if our district is different from yours. Ours faces the sea – Yours faces the sky – Between the two the ruins of Nagasaki circle the earth. – If one day they come to rest among us, who will be able to recognise them, and who will know how to speak to them? We are clumsy in what we call life. (162)

In March 1979, McGuinness had traveled to Belfast to see an earlier play by Armand Gatti, produced by The Lyric Theatre, *The Second Life of Tatenberg Camp*, and which I had directed for The Lyric. The play is rooted in a different historical context, that of the Holocaust, but engages with similar themes of past and present, of memory and identity, and the need to find a language capable of uttering the unspeakable. Tatenberg Camp is a fictitious name, standing in a sense for all of the camps, but its location identifies it with the notorious camp at Mauthausen, in Austria, close to the banks of the river Danube. Gatti does not bring us directly into the violence of the camps: instead he locates the action some ten years later. A group of survivors is still squatting in the railway station that served the camp, in a post-war world that has wiped them from memory: a Spanish deportee, a Ukrainian, Jews from Cracow or from the Baltic states. The reality of this situation is historical and corresponds to what the young Gatti found when, as a journalist, he visited Austria in the mid-fifties, ten years after the liberation. However, the play has nothing of a documentary drama. The characters are caught in a world where no fact is verifiable: who was traitor? who was victim? Did the Jewish Kapo play a double game, feigning collaboration, while secretly saving lives? Did Moïssevitch kill him in the end? In Gatti's dramaturgy, there is no healing psychodrama to release the stranglehold of the past: in its place, a surreal carnival on an imagined Prater in Vienna, where the characters are caught in nightmarish sideshows, and the figures from his past return to engulf Moïssevitch in the unrelenting self-questioning of the survivor: "Do you know the reproach that Mordochy threw in my face? (Mordochy Auerbach!) and Sabbatay Zaks? That I was in luck the day they asked: who do you want to save, your wife or your mother? I was alone. And they both sent their mothers off to die. Not you? You sent your wife ..." (82).

The long monologue scene which closes *The Second Life of Tatenberg Camp* and in which Moïssevitch is inexorably drawn in by the figures from his past – "What do you want of me now? I can give you nothing..." (81) – points to the lengthy monologue of the Elder Piper which opens *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme* and during which his dead comrades, the figures from his past, surround the lone survivor. The real affinities, however, between the two playwrights are not so much on the surface, in the coincidence of situations or characters, but in fundamental dramaturgical choices: a flexibility, for example, in the representation of time and space, a concept of character which is not based on a psychological model but more on the function of witness, the embodiment of memory within the structure of a group. For example, when McGuinness comes to represent the reality of trench warfare and

the soldier William Moore cracking up under the trauma of gunfire, he consciously avoids, as he says himself, "the trap of realism, of people running and going *bang, bang*."⁴ Instead, he imagines the scene of the rope bridge on the cliff face of Carrick-a-Reede, on the north Antrim coast, where Moore is brought by his comrade Millen and forced to cross over, in an attempt to regain his nerve. As he moves across the rope bridge, Moore – a dyer by trade – enters into a time beyond death, in which he sees his comrades waiting for him beyond the grave and in which his own life is encapsulated in an intuition of selfhood and integrity: "This bridge is a piece of cloth. It needs colouring. I'm a dyer. When I step across, my two feet are my eyes. They put a shape on it. They give it colour. And the colour is my life and all I've done with it. Not much, but it's mine. So I'll keep going to the end" (160).

The undermining of the realist parameters of time, space, and character was not, of course, entirely new to Irish dramatists in the early eighties. Frank McGuinness has frequently paid homage to Brian Friel, both for his daring in the issues that he introduced to the Irish stage and for his innovations in dramatic form. Friel's innovations are blended more discretely into the traditional, realist practice of mainstream Irish theatre, and not fore-fronted in the flagrant manner of the French dramatist, but they are no less radical. *Faith Healer*, for example – premièred in Dublin at the Abbey Theatre in 1980, after a less successful New York première directed by José Quintero with James Mason in the title role – is constructed as four monologues, delivered in turn by each of the three characters, who never encounter each other on stage. When Frank Hardy, the Faith Healer of the title, returns for the final act, we realise before long that he is recounting the process and the circumstances of his own death. Frank McGuinness frequently cites this production as the catalyst which clarified, in his own mind, his ambition to become a writer and in particular to write for the stage. Nonetheless, it is clear from the preceding discussion that it was the work of the French playwright which suggested the dramaturgical models or systems of representation, which Frank McGuinness took over and made his own, and which he adapted to the staging of memory, identity and survival in the Ulster plays.

The dense and complex texture of Frank McGuinness's writing for the theatre brings together many influences and experiences. On the one hand, it is firmly rooted in the mainstream of Irish writing, bringing the creative imagination to bear upon the central issues of conflict, memory and survival that have deeply marked his generation. At the same time, it has remained open to the forces of renewal that have characterised dramatic writing and theatre practice in continental Europe over recent decades. This paper has demonstrated how the encounter with the work of one continental writer suggested alternatives to the realistic mode for the representation of time and space, and in the relationship of character and performance.

4 From a discussion with UCD International Summer School students, Abbey Theatre Dublin, July 1995.

Frank McGuinness has extended the accepted boundaries of what can be represented on the Irish stage, and he has explored a full gamut of different modes of representation, contributing to widening the horizon of expectations that an audience brings to the experience of theatre. His theatre is, in a sense, a theatre of extremes. In *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, an intimate chamber piece with three characters, he brings us close to a form of realist document drama, based as it is on accounts by Brian Keenan of his hostage experience. In *Mary and Lizzie*, premièred by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the London Barbican in 1989, he sketches out an epic canvas, closest perhaps of all his plays to Armand Gatti's "utopian space," where imagination has only the limits that it invents for itself. In that play, the historic journey of Mary and Elizabeth Burns brings the audience from a time-out-of-time and a surreal Irish location where women chant in Gaelic in the tree-tops, to the city of Manchester in the mid-nineteenth century and a dinner party with Karl and Jenny Marx; and from a descent into the underworld to meet the sisters' dead father to a space and time closer to the present day, that is, to the Stalinist work-camps and the long queues of women in deportation. The scope of the issues which Frank McGuinness opens up in his theatre and the energy of his explorations in dramatic form assert the place of contemporary Irish theatre within the mainstream of European memory and imagination.

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