

TOM PAULIN AND ULSTER: SUBVERSION OR SABOTAGE?

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In one of the poems in his recent collection *Love's Bonfire* (2012) Tom Paulin makes an attempt at juxtaposing Irish subversive narratives, one of which he has been a staunch supporter of ever since his *Liberty Tree* of 1983. "A Spruce New Colour" (*Love's Bonfire* 6) depicts two options of Irish republicanism/nationalism: the 1798 uprising of the United Irishmen, to which the Easter Rising was indebted, and the 1981 hunger strikes, whose participants took inspiration from the 1916 tradition. Between these options, physically and metaphorically, lie two bridges: the old one in the village and the newly erected suspension bridge in the bypass. When compared with Seamus Heaney's "At Toomebridge" (*Electric Light* 3), Paulin's poem seems to put an emphasis on co-existence rather than division. In this way, it marks an evolution of themes oscillating between subversion and sabotage in subsequent volumes of Paulin's poetry and prose.

Addressing the major subject of Paulin's engagement with his Ulster Protestant community of origin, this article confronts a number of issues preoccupying the Irish writer in the context of state policy for more than a century: identity, struggle, home, language, tradition, politics, myth. Some of these themes are evoked by Elmer Andrews in his Introduction to his collection *Contemporary Irish Poetry*:

To be an Irish poet means something peculiar, infuriating, crippling and exhilarating all at once: to subvert language through an extravagant regard for it, to define oneself constantly through opposition, to display a profound impatience with the real world, to confuse poetry with politics, and politics with race, tribe and *mythos*. Most of all it is to inherit. (3)

Andrews's concluding remark encapsulates the spirit of Yeats's poetry, with which Paulin interacts when commemorating the Irish republican tradition. His dialogues with Yeats and Heaney, together with his activity in the Field Day Company (regarded by critics such as Edna Longley or Gerald Dawe as a bastion of nationalism), come into the orbit of his wrestling with the unionist heritage, a wrestling which is partly concerned with the United Irishmen radicalism as an alternative to 1916 and other versions of Irish republicanism also examined by Yeats, Heaney, and other Irish poets. Paulin's struggle as an admirer of the 'Irish revolution' with the stagnation and mythology of Northern Ireland attests to his private and public quest aimed at reintroducing the past in order to transform the present, an attempt ventured – not always successfully – by many contemporary Irish poets.

Despite subtle differences in meaning – sabotage appears to be defined in more concrete terms than subversion – both terms are concerned with undermining an entity representing or belonging to the enemy. While subversion *can* imply an action carried out from within, the agent of sabotage *must* be located on the target territory

and is often subject to the conditions of warfare. I will use the differentiation between these two terms according to the position of the agent as the basic category to describe the position which Paulin assumes in his writings. Subversion will thus denote actions carried out mainly from the outside, the 'territory' with a more comprehensive scope than the one of sabotage. Hopefully, the following analysis will further elucidate this distinction, yet we must keep in mind that the specifics of Paulin's "fluid identity" ("Q&A" 31) may mean that these two terms may sometimes overlap or even swap places with regard to his work.

Bred by the "ahistorical one-party state with a skewed and uncertain culture" ("Q&A" 31), Paulin's lack of certainty about individual and communal identity is not an isolated phenomenon among Northern Irish poets, coming closest, perhaps, to his fellow poet from a Protestant background, Michael Longley, and his predecessor in this respect, Louis MacNeice. Paulin's English birthplace and current address does not preclude the fact that Northern Ireland, where he spent his formative years, functions as his lifelong point of reference. This relation between the poet and space is not only an outcome of his biography, but also a matter of personal choice. While factors such as passing time and the Northern Irish peace process, about which Paulin was "cautiously optimistic" (Wroe), may have helped to alleviate these anxieties to some extent, the identity issue remains one of the fundamental drives behind Paulin's revolutionary spirit.

Paulin's writings have been classified by some critics as rebellious: titles of articles on the poet such as "The Writer as Revolutionary" (Heawood), "Tom Paulin: Underground Resistance Fighter" (Andrews), or "Poems of a Northern Protest-ant" (Dawe) are not unusual. It might be tempting to align his work with his controversial media presence as a hailed or condemned partisan of hot political issues. However, whereas in his public pronouncements he firmly stands by revolution, his writings are marked by ambivalence when it comes to defining both the enemy and the goal of this revolt.

It would appear that Paulin's *œuvre* abounds with acts of subversion: his work tends to be perceived as such by critics and by the author himself. His criticism of power and hegemony involves political, linguistic, historical, and social phenomena on a micro- and a macro-scale, ranging from the cosmic view, through the institution of empire (including the British one), and further narrowing down to Britain, Northern Ireland, to end up with the Protestant community with its political options of historical republicanism and contemporary unionism. The majority of these *loci* are further linked to language with its subcategories of orality, rhetoric, and linguistic varieties such as Standard English or Ulster dialect. Below and above this tangled network one encounters the notion of home. Paulin challenges some of these ideas from the outside as a subversive, but the further he circumscribes his perspective, the more he engages in sabotage from within. It is not only an inherited or acquired background which enables him to endorse both of these positions, but also his personal choice.

The same power of choice is responsible for his quest for artistic liberation. One of the exemplary techniques which he applies to divulge subversive tendencies towards authoritarian systems is a focus on the periphery, not the centre, of the empire (British, German, Soviet, etc.). Simultaneously, he seeks a positive alternative to these systems by widening his lens to the panoramic view of the international Protestant experience, multiculturalism, community of writers, etc.

One of the enemies confronted on a macroscale is the United Kingdom, the former British Empire, and Standard English. The poet occupies an ideal position from which to launch a subversive attack: not only does he live in England but he also works at the smithy of the British soul: Oxford University. In fact, Oxford in this case can act as a correlative of his public and personal involvement in other symbols of Britishness such as the BBC or his publisher Faber and Faber.¹ From these headquarters, he both admires British literary and cultural heritage and criticises it. His essays devote much space to celebration of values such as a republican spirit or the use of the English vernacular in literature and to a critique of others, such as the perceived poetic shallowness of contemporary Britain, revealing hesitations in the judgement of his host country.

In his collection of essays *Minotaur: Poetry and the Nation State* the poet expresses appreciation of the Protestant imagination with its supremacy of individual conscience and dismay at its “single-minded, driven violence and ferocity” expressed, for instance, in “a characteristically Protestant wish to break with the past and destroy the aesthetic” (12-13), although this approach seems to perfectly embody the revolutionary flair of that imagination which he openly advocates. His concept of fluid identity may be partly responsible for this inconsistent attitude: “I am a protestant with lapses and uncertainties about the nature of that imagination” (“Hiding” 253). Paulin seems to channel his cultural and political heritage into two categories: a wide spectre of international Protestantism, on the one hand, and an underground tunnel of radical Presbyterianism, on the other, thus providing an alternative for the official parochialism of unionist Protestantism. This is one of the points in Paulin’s work where the past (represented, for instance, by the history of seventeenth-century Europe and of 1798 in Ireland) negotiates the present. Just as historical publications on the occasion of the golden jubilee of the Easter Rising related 1916 to a wider net of political events preceding it, moving “the historiography of the event [...] from the narrow (though of course important) focus on conspiracy and martyrdom to the more general question of the Rising as an episode in the history of all Ireland and indeed of the British Isles” (Boyce & O’Day 165), Paulin also extends the context of the radical Protestant tradition onto an all-Irish and international plane, though at the same time celebrating the Ulster locality of 1798.

1 On this occasion, one cannot fail to observe analogies between Paulin’s path into British media and the literary establishment and that of W.B. Yeats, Louis MacNeice, or the group of Irish poets published by Faber and Faber since the 1960s.

This subversive dichotomy in Paulin's writings connects to a further one concerned with contrasting the periphery of the empire (Ireland, Central Europe)² with the panoramic sweep of world wars and the history of Protestantism on the other. These issues receive the most profound treatment in his long poem "The Caravans on Lüneberg Heath" (*Fivemiletown* 55-66) and in the collection *The Invasion Handbook*, where authoritarian power is embodied not only in the institution of the empire but also in mainstream history. By reviving geographically and historically marginal events, Paulin tries to restore the history of the protest of 'minor' communities and individuals (*vide* his 'Everyman' persona Simplex) to its proper place; this includes restoring the history of the United Irishmen uprising to the history of the British Empire, of all empires, of republicanism, and the history of the world.

The issue of Protestantism represents one of the points where Paulin trespasses from the firm ground of subversion into the shaky ground of sabotage. While the authority he stands up against as a subversive can be broadly defined as Britain, monarchy, empire, and their manifestations in literature and language, the power he confronts as a saboteur already verges on his own territory, namely Ulster Protestantism. It is at this point where Oxford becomes his vantage point. It situates itself somewhere between the outside (of the poet's physical bearings) and the inside (of his psychological bearings). In other words, instead of looking around he looks across the Irish Sea following his sense of identity, however elusive it may be.

Looking at Ulster unionism from Oxford, he takes on the air of an external observer: "Middle-class [Ulster] Protestants are still clinging to a British identity, but nobody over here wants them. There is no fellow feeling" (Wroe). The seemingly innocuous qualifier "over here" clearly defines the opposition between Britain (here) and Northern Ireland (there) or, in fact, between Britain and nowhere, for Ulster Protestants are depicted as homeless. The sides of the conflict have swapped their positions in the trenches: Britain is identified with an ally, while Paulin's community of origin becomes a target.

In the same interview (Wroe), Paulin uses the expression "Glorious Revolution" in the positive sense of the term. Although he quotes it in the context of unionism, by using this term together with its controversial epithet he affiliates himself with English Protestantism which fostered it. His esteem for the notion of rebellion as such prevails over his silence about the central figure of that particular revolution, responsible for the completion of the conquest of Ireland. Paulin's support for this historical event places him with Ulster unionists ("certain civic and secular values" of this community) and against the rest of Ireland, although generally he "supports the SDLP's constitutional route to a united Ireland" (Wroe). This step from subversion into sabotage again creates much confusion about where he eventually stands. "United Ireland"

2 Other subversive spheres of his writing, from his interest in Central Europe to censorship, literature as cipher and the reader as accomplice, are also directed against systems controlling human thought and speech, including totalitarianism.

(and “SDLP,” to a certain extent) situates him as a supporter of nationalism,³ “constitutional route” implies opposition to violence. These paradigms remind one of the long history of Home Rule projects (“constitutional route”) undermined by Ulster unionists’ military preparations in 1912-14. The conundrum reflects the complex, not to say paranoid, reality of Northern Ireland and its history of violence. In some of his poems, Paulin refers to the appropriation, by contemporary unionist paramilitaries (UDA), of both the Irish republican tradition of 1798 and the Ulster crisis of 1912 as a continuum of violent protest; the poet himself, especially in *Liberty Tree*, denies this appropriation by depicting 1798 as the opposite of 1912 in the UDA’s separatist claims. Paradoxically, the unionist ‘theory’ of continuous violence corresponds to Irish republicanism appropriating the tradition of the largely Protestant 1798 as a precursor of the largely Catholic 1916, or, as in Steward Parker’s *Northern Star*, a precursor of the Romantic nationalist cycle of vengeance. The history of these appropriations dates back to at least the nineteenth century: as D.G. Boyce observes, Ulster Protestant ideology

accommodated the home rule movement as comfortably as more radical nationalism: the men of ‘98 were as much the property of Redmond and his followers (especially his followers) as they had been of Parnell and his, and the new Sinn Féin party and its. The Irish party did not, in principle, rule out the use of force to achieve freedom. (50)

A part of the problem with interpreting 1798 seems to reside in its assessment as a unifying or separatist event, in the shifting emphasis put on either its Protestant initiation, its fairly unified development, or on later sectarian fights. A similar, perhaps more famous case of appropriation of Irish history is the endorsement of the 1916 Easter Rising as the heritage of the Provisional IRA. On the commemoration of the ninetieth anniversary of the Rising, Gabriel Doherty recognised “an opportunity and a determination to re-assess the Rising more thoroughly in its own right and with less regard to the identification of the event with the Provisional movement,” the process “championed by revisionist historians from the 1970s onwards and, ironically, embraced by that movement as part of its rhetorical and ideological arsenal” (378). In addition and also ironically, this opinion is shared by some of their unionist opponents, who can see “‘no valid distinction’ between killings of the two periods [of 1916 and the Northern Irish conflict]” (Lord Laird; qtd in Doherty 390).⁴ Paulin has been aspiring to reas-

3 Doherty observes that “the SDLP was the only party with elected representatives in Northern Ireland to send a full delegation, including its party leader, to the parade” marking the ninetieth anniversary of the Easter Rising (464n.).

4 Further ironies observed by Doherty include the absence of Gerry Adams at the ninetieth anniversary parade, and Ulster unionists’ vehement reaction to that commemoration: 1916 was judged “an act of terrorism directed against the British state” (DUP) and “the end of the long and honourable tradition of constitutional Irish nationalism [replaced by] the blood-sacrifice ethos of armed republicanism which led directly to the partition of this island and the Irish civil war” (UUP). “The irony of such a comment,” Doherty continues, “bearing in mind the vituperative contemporary criticism of the Irish party by northern unionists, the formation of the UVF from within their ranks, and their support for partition during the debate over home rule, was apparent to many south of

sess the United Irishmen Rebellion in its own right, by focusing on Ulster Presbyterianism as opposed to official and paramilitary unionism.

Paulin's move from subversion to sabotage seems a double one if we take into account his perception of his own situation as an *entryiste* writer, which he expounds in the Introduction to *Ireland and the English Crisis* (1984). Contributing to the general reflection of some Irish writers on their role in Britain as "entertainers" or "media clowns" (Yeats,⁵ Joyce, MacNeice, Deane, etc.), Paulin indicates otherness as the crucial feature of an immigrant or *entryiste* writer and calls for the recognition of such authors' neo-colonial identity. The *entryiste* writer, he argues, does not really belong; his social role "involves being unconsciously stateless and nationless" (18-19). Paulin would seem to be withdrawing from subversion and sabotage altogether here, were it not, again, for the inconspicuous qualifier "unconsciously."

Disparaging oppressive systems worldwide including the unionist statelet, Paulin has nonetheless never got "entirely detribalized" from his Ulster Protestant background (*Minotaur* 13). While longing for self-definition – "It must be great to be really Irish – or really English" ("Q&A" 31) – he opposes the idea of ancestor worship. His portrayal of the Ulster Protestant community as homeless is not a coincidence in this context. The poet has devoted some of his essays to Ulster Protestants' self-perception as the Chosen People or Hebrew Children (*Minotaur, Ireland and the English Crisis*) evident in the mythology of the 'roots' invented by Ian Paisley after the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement which the unionists regarded as Britain's betrayal (*Minotaur* 14). Interestingly, Paulin deemed this agreement Ireland's betrayal: "the successor to the treaty which partitioned Ireland in 1921," the agreement "gave the Irish government influence over the administration of the Northern Irish state" (*Minotaur* 14-15). Paulin's recognition of the enemy loses clarity: while the unionist mythology becomes a target of his scorn as a substitute for logical reasoning, the drive behind it arouses his sympathy: "I'm concerned with the unionist experience. I hope I understand the feelings of agony and displacement and not belonging which are part of that imagination, and I think that the historical experience of the culture needs to be treated sympathetically" ("QA" 32). A pronounced subversive anti-Zionist when commenting on international politics, he performs sabotage on the unionist Biblical Hebrew mythology and a sort of self-sabotage when using it ironically to frame the concept of home in poems such as "Priming the Pump" (*Walking a Line* 56).

the border" (463n.). "Martin Mansergh also pointed out the hypocrisy of contemporary unionist criticism of the republicans' association with imperial Germany in 1916, bearing in mind their own willingness to do likewise two years earlier" (402).

- 5 Yeats advised Katharine Tynan: "remember by being as Irish as you can you will be the more original and true to yourself and in the long run more interesting even to English readers," which can be achieved by promoting "that wild Celtic blood, the most un-English of all things under heaven." Paulin calls this statement "another version of expatriate contradiction – inhabiting two places at one time" ("Salid Oil and Alexindrines: Yeats's Letters," *Minotaur* 155 [sic]).

This perplexing stance is partly connected again with the feeling of homelessness which Paulin shares with his community of origin, though he circumscribes it to his personal trajectory in poems such as “Fortogiveness” expressing penitence about leaving Belfast:

so forgive me Lord that I caught the Liverpool boat
all those years back
and then took a train to Hull. (*The Wind Dog* 56)

Navigating between homelessness and Irishness which Paulin associates with expatriation, in “Chuckling It Away” (*Fivemiletown* 53) he adds socialism to this amalgam embodied in the figure of James Larkin. The marriage of republican and socialist ideas with exile in Larkin’s biography continues Paulin’s reflections on Irishness started in the preceding volume, *Liberty Tree*.

Another factor which should be considered in the context of Paulin’s subversive/saboteur position is the concept of tribe, used extensively in the Northern Irish context. Paulin applies it to his personal situation (not entirely ‘detrribalised,’ ‘married out of his tribe’) and to his socio-historical meditations. In the poem “The Unholy One?” dark “gods of family tribe the subconscious” fight the gods of “social and political life” (*The Wind Dog* 65). Anticipating the fall of the unionist state in the poem “Loyal as Ever,” its community appears as the “long lost tribe / a tribe that mightn’t exist” desperately clutching to their waste land (*Walking a Line* 75). On the other hand, in “Matins” (*Walking a Line* 10) tribe is associated with recollections of childhood.

Subversion and sabotage blend again when Paulin applies his notion of tribe also to the underground, which in his writings offers shelter to a whole series of figures: from the “tribal gods” (*The Riot Act*, the play written for the Field Day Company); to unionists and Paisley representing tribal “subterranean energy” inspired by “anonymous historical experience” (“Paisley’s Progress,” *Ireland and the English Crisis* 162, 171); to 1798 insurgents; to Paulin himself as a subversive; and to the subconscious of the writer hesitating, just as Heaney does in “Punishment” (*North* 37-38), whether to take part in the “civilized outrage” or in “tribal, intimate revenge.” In his most recent collection (“The Choice,” *Love’s Bonfire* 51), he leaves the gods of socio-political life with their “tribal chant” – probably unionists preoccupied with the ‘democratic’ foundations of their “desert prison” state, hence the identification of the former opposites of society vs. tribe – and “crosses over” again, like in the Liverpool boat years ago. This time, however, he “discovered not the side itself / but the other in that phrase *the other side*.” Whether this discovery of otherness could be interpreted as tolerance remains disputable; “breaking from the bonds of kin” costs him exclusion from community and a sense of guilt. Haunted by his “spineless” identity, feeling bad “like a criminal or an agent,” an outsider at home and abroad, he nonetheless accepts his eponymous and seemingly long overdue choice: the life of the *entrystiel inner emigré*. He claims to discover the middle ground, the territory of “sifting shadows” against tribal monoliths; instead of marking evolution of his position, however, this move arguably proves to continue his previous preoccupations.

Another area which illustrates Paulin's position in between subversion and sabotage is the sphere of language. He recognises the power of print as a form of tyranny opposed to the freedom of speech. *A New Look at the Language Question*, his pamphlet written for the Field Day Company, argues against the English Standard for a Hiberno-English dictionary to house the homeless accents of Ireland. In this way, Paulin moves from the macro-scale of the dominant language (English) to the micro-scale of its dialectal (Hiberno-English) forms. In a saboteur spirit, Paulin ingeniously sketches the historical, political, and linguistic levels of the Ulster vernacular in two poems devoted to the Drumcree standoff (1995), an important event in the ongoing conflicts over Orange parades.

In "Drumcree Four" (*The Wind Dog* 72-73) the speech of the Paisley-like orator is probably characterised by the deep articulation characteristic of the local accent "that strains like Ulster" (73), the simile obviously indicating political and religious oppressiveness and zest. The oration is reduced to auditory properties reflecting the emotional charge and the rhetorical value of the speech and acutely matches the image of an obese and asthmatic Paisley, whose declaration of war resides in verbs implying violence and civil war. The epithet "archaic," orchestrated with "tribal," sends the reader to the historical sources of the conflict and would exquisitely sum up the situation: a group of people in antique uniforms, members of a sectarian Masonic organisation established in the eighteenth century, celebrating a seventeenth-century battle, and on this occasion violating social rules which constitute the norm of twentieth-century European democracies. But it does not sum it up, Paulin seems to suggest. It is not that the past eclipses the present; rather, the past serves as a pretext to justify the here and now. In a former "tribal huff" similar to Paisley's, the unionist community largely refused participation under Irish Home Rule and an all-Irish state, choosing exclusion. Analogously, it can be argued that the 1916 Easter Week insurgents did not realistically include that same community with all its difference in their declaration for the new Ireland; as Boyce argues, "they completely ignored the implications of the Ulster crisis" (60).

The Orangemen in Paulin's "Drumcree Three" use a local accent – "intil the which it had bin drapped" (*The Wind Dog* 18) – in the context of yet another myth of origins claimed by Ulster unionism: the story of Cadmus and the dragon. The same occurs with respect to members of the UDA: "ye cannae sit in this coul chamber / wi a bare head [...] put you a hood on" ("Cadmus and the Dragon," *Walking a Line* 93-101). The loyalist paramilitary organizations appropriate Greek and Celtic traditions and history to create their own mythology:

we're no Piltown Planters
but the real autochthonous thing
– we're the Cruthin aye
a remnant of the ancient British people. (95)

The Cruthin mythology and approach to Gaelic tradition differentiates the UDA from Official unionism, defining its hostility towards Britain. The UDA, who define them-

selves as progressive, appropriate the history of republicanism (“who rose again in 98”), but also take pride in the unionist legacy (who rose “in 1912”), blending it all with the story of Cadmus and the dragon in a convoluted slip of the tongue: “*Dadmus and the Cragon / or With the ‘DA in Craigavon*” (96). The opposing objectives of the two events (Ireland’s independence versus opposition to Home Rule and the subsequent division of Ireland) were grotesquely arrayed into one history of violence. By presenting the UDA’s views, Paulin stresses the mythology of the ‘continued’ resorting to force (1798 insurgents and 1912 Ulster Volunteers) used to justify terror in the North. An even more evident case of this mythology in operation is the current UVF claims to have descended from the UVF of 1913. Curiously, 1798 is appropriated by Ulster unionist paramilitaries as a predecessor of 1912, and by Irish republican paramilitaries as a predecessor to 1916. Historians have proposed 1912 as a possible prelude to 1916 in its recourse to violence while the Easter Rising has been viewed as partly a reaction to 1912; each moment is marked by very different aims but with similar separatist tendencies (Boyce). Historian Tim Pat Coogan considers 1912 a precondition for the Easter Rising, particularly through the formation of the Irish Volunteers in response to the founding of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) (Tim Pat Coogan; qtd. in Doherty 401). Violence seems the key to the recurrence of events from the Irish past. Trying to revive the forgotten 1798 ideals of unification against such an interpretation of the cycles of Irish history, Paulin in his poetry searches for a nobler tradition within his community than the one presented from various saboteur perspectives. Presbyterianism of 1798 “chooses the free way, not the formal,” being the religion of “a people who share / A dream of grace and reason” (“Presbyterian Study,” *Liberty Tree* 49-50). Though applying religious identification, this ‘dream of reason’ in *Liberty Tree* precedes the vision of the ‘secular *République*’ (68) which Paulin envisages for Ireland.

Quoting samples of Ulster speech from saboteur standpoints in different poems, i.e. referring it to Orange parades or the UDA, Paulin determines the internal enemy as narrow-minded political and military unionism. In other poems, however, such as “Martello” (*Liberty Tree* 54-58), where a civil servant’s Ulster accent becomes a target of ridicule for the British, he expounds the fragility of the unionist community. In *A New Look at the Language Question* he further observes that the Protestant minority consciousness makes them believe that their dialect is threatened both by British and Ulster English, “the provincial language of Official unionism” (14-15). On the other hand, from the perspective of his own “linguistic biography,” Paulin remains a linguistic outcast, neither a subversive, nor a saboteur. In “Same Ould Strop” (*Love’s Bonfire* 45), an Irish-Scots-English *dinnseanchas* set in Ulster,⁶ the poet declares “no rights of knowledge / no rights of property / on [...] these placenames,” opting for the name “Eglish” as the “more familiar” to his identity which is “hard to place.” Paradoxically, the *dinnseanchas* Paulin makes out of “Eglish” (“softer greener / and more fa-

6 “Benburb Eglish Caledon / – add Drumbo / [...] that clanky sound *dinnseanchas*.”

miliar / it's a milkygreen / nut on a hazel") is set against the "clanky" placenames resounding with the metal acoustics of Paisley's oratory, and rather than Ulster dialects it reminds the reader, if only by coincidence, of the rural imagery and mythology of the Irish language and tradition in Heaney's "Anahorish" (*Wintering Out* 16).

Generally, Paulin's militancy does not contradict his fascination with the oratory skills which he admires in the Protestant tradition and with sound in general, all of which open a way to artistic liberation. In an interview Paulin remarked: "Ulster Protestant is a culture which could have dignity, and it had it once – I mean that strain of radical Presbyterianism, free-thinking Presbyterianism, which more or less went underground after 1798" (McDonald, *Mistaken* 100). In a series of poems on the United Irishmen, Paulin takes up the task of 'unearthing' the memory of the heroic tradition, associating the vernacular with the republican ideal. In *Liberty Tree* he again acts as a saboteur: "I searched out gaps / in that imperial shrub: a free voice sang / dissenting green" ("Under Creon" 13). Setting the "northern starlight" of 1798 against the "usual dusk" of the modern North, the poem attempts to elegise the 1798 heroes, McCracken and Hope: "I had pressed beyond my usual dusk / to find a cadence for the dead" (13). In "Father of History" (*Liberty Tree* 32) Paulin again lists the names of dead heroes, just as Yeats did in "Easter 1916":

Munro, Hope, Porter and McCracken;
like sweet yams buried deep, these rebel minds
endure posterity without a monument,
their names a covered sheugh, remnants, some brackish signs.

Knowledgeable about the failure of the 1798 rising and the subsequent amnesia,⁷ Paulin is unable to reproduce the spirit of the rising:

like an epic arming in an olive grove
this was a stringent grief and a form of love.
Maybe one day I'll get the hang of it
and find joy, not justice, in a snapped connection,
that Jacobin oath on the black mountain. ("Under Creon" *Liberty Tree* 13)

This sense of hesitation and failure accompanies both Paulin's and Yeats's writing on these crucial moments in the history of Irish republicanism (1798 in "Under Creon" and 1916 in "Easter 1916" respectively). Both of them believe in the role of the poet

7 Paulin investigating the amnesia around 1798 is not unusual among Irish poets. Among the 'ancestral voices' in his play *Northern Star*, Stewart Parker summons Henry Joy McCracken convinced about *misremembering*. Derek Mahon, in his poem "Northern Star" *in memoriam Parker*, commemorates "weaver and printer, ideologue" (Hope, Neilson, McCracken) whose deeds gradually dissolve in "a world transfigured by starlight / – till all fade *oblivionwards*" (153-154; emphasis added). Mahon observes that the failure of the 1798 Rising left the souls of the Irish "still incomplete," alluding to Parker's ghosts as uncompleted souls caught in the cycle of retributions. Parker, in turn, strikes a dialogue with Yeats's *Cathleen* in the image of the Phantom Bride and the exploration of memory. The comparison between Paulin's and Mahon's poems and Parker's play reveals interesting aspects such as the living tradition, the continuous past, the sound of the ideal, the position of the victim and the perpetrator, etc.

as a vessel of memory. Paulin's diagnosis of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, the play devoted to the same 1798 Rising he eulogises in his poems, refers the reader to "Easter 1916." Paulin observes that at the end of the play "the news of the French landing at Killala Bay in 1798 charges the play with a strict and dedicated passion, that 'curious astringent joy' which both terrifies and inspires" ("The French Are On the Sea," *Ireland and the English Crisis* 101). In this phrase, Paulin relates Yeats's comment on Nietzsche ("curious astringent joy") to his texts on the resurrections of 1798 and 1916: the formulation "both terrifies and inspires" attributed to *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* finds its continuation in Yeats's "terrible beauty" of "Easter 1916." The author of "Under Creon," in turn, is filled with the Yeatsian mixture of 'reluctant' inspiration; "naming it out in a verse" entails the sense of necessity and effort ("I had pressed beyond my usual dusk / to find a cadence for the dead"). Despite the lack of joy in commemorating 1798, this poem opens the volume suffused with the spirit of celebrating this republican tradition, which tunes *Liberty Tree* with *Cathleen's* energising ending. Patricia Craig remarked that Paulin's 1798 ideal, "this distinctively Northern, democratic drive," can be considered "in tandem with the Ascendancy ethic envisaged by Yeats, since both postulate a kind of Irishness in keeping with the Yeatsian view of the eighteenth century as 'the one Irish century that escaped from darkness and confusion'" (119). Paulin's commemorative urge may be also compared to Yeats's "images of heroic individualism based on a mythologisation of Anglo-Irish tradition, as the source of courage, grace, action and culture" (Andrews, "Introduction" 4).

Just as with Yeats and many other writers, Paulin also searches for a definition of Irishness and the Irish nation. In "The Book of Juniper" (*Liberty Tree* 21-27), the poem attempting to describe "something not fully formed: the sense of Irish identity" (*Faber Poetry Cassette*), the author bases his search for that identity on a dream vision of the United Irishmen ideal, symbolised at the end by "the only / tree of freedom" on the Irish coast (27). The poem joins in the Irish tradition of the political *aisling*, although written in English and expressed in the form of a lament of an Irish wanderer and the wind. In "Martello" (*Liberty Tree* 54-58) Paulin extends the definition of the Irish nation with various versions of republicanism, epitomised in their heroes: alongside Napper Tandy, the United Irishman who sailed to Ireland in a French warship, appears Barney McLoone, the IRA member who "rowed a German spy / across the Gweebarra," and Robert Emmet ("We're nearly a nation now, before the year's out / they'll maybe write Emmet's epitaph"). Reading Yeats's letters, Paulin concludes that Yeats also "identified with the radical nationalist tradition – Tone, Emmet, Mitchel" (*Minotaur* 156). Indeed, the myth-making qualities of Emmet's rebellion "were to be even more pervasive in Irish history than those of 1798 itself" (Kee 69), although to a certain extent Paulin has been trying to compensate for it: instead of writing about sectarian fights which ensued from 1798, he sets it against contemporary violence.

"A Nation, Yet Again" (*Liberty Tree* 45), written after Chekhov but alluding to one of the unofficial anthems of Irish nationalism, is another attempt to link the republican

traditions originating from the North (1798) and the South (1916): “these hands stir / to bind the *northern* to the *southern* stars” (emphasis added), he says about the role of the poet, “the half-sure legislator” striving “to better, raise, build up, refine / whatever gabbles without discipline” by means of the “classic form / that’s in the blood.” Boldly acting as a representative of his generation activated by “new reasons for a secular / mode of voicing the word *nation*,” Paulin ardently believes in his ‘rage for order’ like a Romantic poet taking the world in his hands; otherwise, he deeply believes in the spirit of the Enlightenment. When defending the Field Day Theatre Company, he says: “I certainly am not a romantic Irish nationalist; I can’t be and I don’t think Field Day affirms that type of romantic position” (“Q&A” 32). Field Day’s practices are not out of the context of Paulin’s poem: his poetic mission to introduce the “classic form” of the secular republic in Ireland by starting with the language and its form (to “refine / whatever gabbles without discipline”) complies with the attitude of Brian Friel, one of Field Day’s founders: “the political problem of this island is going to be solved by language.” Out of Field Day’s cultural state (the ‘fifth province’) emerges a possibility of the political one (McGrath 147).

Paulin’s practice hinges on such a linguistic solution, associating the radical ideal with sensuous, mainly auditory imagery, “a limber voice, a spiky burr” of “the eager accent of a free sept.” The dialect becomes “secret code,” “a new song for a new constitution,” the “resurrection” Paulin dreams of in contemporary Ireland, “a form that’s classic and secular, / the risen *République*” alternative to being “loose, baggy and British” (“And Where Do You Stand on the National Question?” (*Liberty Tree* 68)). Again from a saboteur’s position in the underground, he creates a kind of poetic ‘secret society’ of local historians for the promotion of the republican tradition in “Presbyterian Study,” performing “a brief act of mnemonic rescue” (*Ireland and the English Crisis* 92) and drawing attention to the fact that school curricula in the North are also to blame for the lack of awareness of 1798, either because they teach history of international rather than local Protestantism or because they virtually limit the history of Ulster Protestantism to two dates: 1690 and 1912.

In *Love’s Bonfire* Paulin’s programme of linguistic and political liberation already becomes a part of the reconciled mosaic composed of the three options co-existing in Northern Ireland, two of them subversive. “A Spruce New Colour” (6) enters a dialogue with Heaney’s “At Toomebridge” (*Electric Light* 3) and paints the grim Toome landscape: the police station (a reminder of the RUC), the hunger-striker poster (Kevin Lynch of the INLA), and the monument of “a Presbyterian,” the massacred United Irishman. Characteristically for his 1798 nomenclature, Paulin defines the insurgent (Roddy McCorley) by his religious denomination, while Heaney uses simply “the rebel boy.” Despite the inclusiveness of Paulin’s term, who understands, under Presbyterianism, the Protestant republican ideals of 1798, it sounds more restricted than Heaney’s. Heaney however, in this part of his poem, concentrates on the “negative ions” of sectarianism and division: the hanging of the boy and the checkpoint at Toomebridge, the name of which resounds with McCorley’s story (the Irish *tuaim*:

mound, burial place). As a matter of fact, both poets try to break free from the oppressive character of the place by making music out of it; moreover, that same oppressiveness becomes the driving force of their poetry. Heaney's poem is begotten in the infinite "continuous present of the Bann," passes through the 'airy phase' of "Where negative ions in the open air / Are poetry to me," and descends on the river again, trespassing the narrow point of older and newer history ("where the rebel boy was hanged in '98" and the Troubles). Close to his birthplace, the "invisible, untoppled omphalos" ("The Toome Road," *Field Work* 15), Toome has become one of the recognisable symbols of Heaney's poetic world. In an earlier poem written at the height of the Northern Irish conflict, "Toome" (*Wintering Out* 26), he descends underground to dig in, as he often does, the archaeological cavern under the mythical bog. As Floyd Collins argues, in this poem Heaney "recovers a vibrant cultural identity common to all factions in the North" (64). In a similar attempt at uniting divergent factions, Paulin in "A Spruce New Colour" continues his previous "new song for a new constitution" by imaginatively replacing death and defeat with the song and triumph of ideals:

the young man
 – a Presbyterian –
 who – I don't want to say *hangs* –
 who walks in the song. (*Love's Bonfire* 6)

Although the 'action' of the poster of the hunger striker is also to hang ("tied high on a lamppost") and the police station is "built [characteristically for Northern Ireland] like a barracks behind high walls and screens," the coda of 'walking in the song' has the functional power of a volta, suddenly opening the image of the coexistence of Ireland's different stories into a new perspective, just as the new bridge at Toome at the beginning of the poem puts the town in a new perspective.⁸ This new spirit is all the more visible after the preceding poem in the volume, "A Noticed Thing" (5), where the orange windsock becomes "a symbol [...] drained of its usual orange colour [...] all used up" of the exhausted unionism. The music made by the republican boy and Paulin himself in "A Spruce" continues his earlier deliverance-by-sound poems, especially in *The Wind Dog*.

The theme of hunger strikes and its strange coexistence with contending options of Irish republicanism (1798 in "A Spruce") has already been raised by Paulin in his excellent essay on Yeats's "1916" as a "hunger strike poem" (*Minotaur* 133-150). Paulin traces the fate of the text from its creation when it "looks less like an urn in a national museum and more like a pamphlet or a piece of journalism," through its first publica-

8 The disruptive element of Paulin's image of the new bridge is the comparison of its structure to "Jacob's ladder / which in a way is where it all began." Used by the Orange Lodge as one of its symbols, and by Paulin in the same context ("Drumcree Four"), one could assume that it is a negative, dividing motif, close to Heaney's checkpoint. On the other hand, its frame of reference – the new bridge and new perspective – would suggest its Biblical dimension of hope and success, or even its affinity with republican ideals "where it all began."

tion in 1917, when it came out “as a kind of underground, dissident or *samizdat* text,” to its official publication in 1920, three days before Terence MacSwiney’s death in consequence of a long hunger strike. This publication placed MacSwiney, a poet and playwright, in the line with other poet-heroes of 1916, MacDonagh and Pearse. Although Paulin clearly brings Yeats’s poem into the circle of his own subversive preoccupations, objectively speaking Yeats’s move “to publish these poems in this context” can be considered “a political act, and a bold one: probably the boldest of Yeats’s career” (Conor Cruise O’Brien; qtd. in *Writing to the Moment* 106). Strangely enough, indicating the frequent use (and abuse) of Yeats’s poem, “ALL IS CHANGED” provided a headline in *The Irish Times* for the news about the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 and caused a reaction of “a member of a local unionist Association somewhere in Co. Armagh.” The man “formulated his opposition to the agreement by saying that the headline had been taken from a poem by Yeats and that this poem was pro-Sinn Féin” (“Yeats’s Hunger-Strike Poem,” *Minotaur* 135). Beside Paulin’s belief that Yeats was “a naked politician disguised as an aesthete” (*Writing to the Moment* 107), the example quoted not only indicates that poetry can act as socio-political reference, but also that republican history filtered through Irish history can indeed be handled and mishandled to eventually evolve in astonishing directions.

Paradoxically, as one can conclude from this analysis of Paulin’s positions on the two sides of the unionist barricade, the instruments of liberation lie close to the instruments of oppression. Most of the former are concerned with the republican ideal and the qualities of the vernacular. The poet’s exploration of the Protestant radical tradition not only offers an alternative to militant unionism and ‘green’ nationalism but also completes the picture of the Irish republican movement as a whole. Conversing with Yeats, Heaney, and other fellow poets on the subject of 1798, 1916, and hunger strikes, Paulin’s attempts at unearthing the memory of the United Irishmen and restoring it to its proper place in the national heritage challenges his Ulster unionist background and community, together with the all-Irish amnesia surrounding 1798. Just as with Yeats, Heaney, or Longley, Paulin believes in the possibility of ‘mnemonic rescue’ by poetry, in the poet’s public role, in poetry revealing the workings of national memory. His search for a self-definition has simultaneously become a search for the definition of the Irish nation, while his ‘writing to the moment’ and historical perspective disclose the perplexing use of history by the republican and unionist traditions. His poetry has been progressing towards a greater freedom of expression and a more inclusive view of history and politics. It seems thus justifiable to say that, instead of being “enchanted to a stone” by his revolutionary views, be it subversion or sabotage, Paulin’s political and poetic choices enabled by his position of an (inner) outsider, however psychologically unsettling it proves to be, has permitted him to significantly contribute to the discussion on the republican tradition and its evolution in Irish history.

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