THE CHANGING SYMBOLISM OF GREYHOUND SPORTS IN THE WORK OF BRYAN MACMAHON

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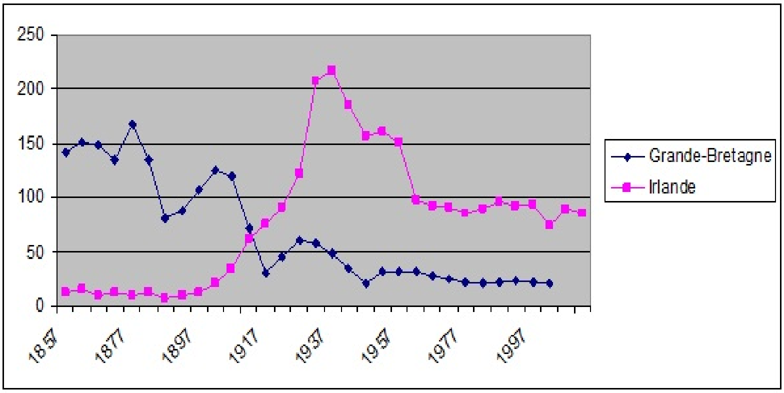
In the period spanning from the codification and spread of organized sports from nineteenth-century Great Britain to today's globalization of the phenomenon, notions of Irish identity have been strongly influenced by the branch of nationalism which was to wrench a Republic away from the British Empire. The two main forces which have been identified as central to any understanding of such nationalism are political struggle and literature. However, according to academic research on the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), mainly, sport has also played a part in defining what it means to be Irish (Bairner; Cronin; Cronin, Murphy & Rouse). Indeed, in addition to hurling and Gaelic football, the first part of this chapter will show that greyhound coursing was also instrumental in shaping a very similar aspect of Irish identity, at least among its followers, as the sport became popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, wrenched its independence from the British controlling body for coursing in August 1916, and eventually achieved full independence seven years later. It will then be shown that the only significant use of coursing in Irish literature, in *Children of the Rainbow*, a novel written by Bryan MacMahon in 1952, serves a similar purpose, travelling some way towards reconciling sport with literature as well as politics. However, another piece of writing by the same author a short time before the advent of the new century yields a totally different picture: "My Love Has a Long Tail". Therefore, the third part will show how both literature and the historical development of greyhound sports can bear witness to the changing nature of Irish politics and identity.

Contrary to what some enthusiastic followers of the leash have claimed, coursing is not the oldest Irish national sport and was not born either in the cradle of the Olympic Games, as quite every historian of the sport assumes. Indeed, even though in the second century, Arrianus recommended that not more than two dogs should be let loose at any one time on a single hare and that true sportsmen are glad if the hare escapes, he makes no mention whatsoever of any competition between the dogs (Arrianus; Brown xxvii). A study of the origin of the greyhound and original rules of the sport as well as a consideration of these findings within the hunting, social, and economic context of the time makes it possible to trace the origin of the sport back to sixteenth-century Britain (Daniel, "Birth of Coursing"; Daniel, *Des lévriers*). Yet, nowadays, coursing is hardly indulged in except in Ireland, where it was far more popular than in Great Britain for most of the twentieth century, which is paradoxical, given the traditional antagonism between the two islands.

The parallel with the GAA may appear far-fetched. However, while initially codifed in opposition to rugby football, association football, and the ideology they were supposed to be serving as vehicles for, none of today's emblematically Irish sports were originally specifically so. Moreover, so-called national sports were not immune from British influence either, as they are part of the codification process which originated across the Irish Sea. Similarly, even though it originated in Great Britain, coursing was on the wane there when it picked up in Ireland, and the popularization of this sport coincides with the period leading up to eventual Irish independence from Great Britain (fig. 1).

Figure 1:
Number of Coursing Clubs in Great Britain and in Ireland
(Source: Daniel, *Des lévriers* 139)



While Ulster is unanimously recognized as "the cradle of coursing" in Ireland (Magee), before declaring a moratorium on this sport in 2002 and eventually banning it in 2010, Northern Ireland had only two coursing clubs by this time, one which, according to famous greyhound man John Martin, "has been the scene of some hot protests from the Rev. Ian Paisley's DUP" and another which did "well to survive in a hostile terrain" (Martin, "Irish Clubs").[1] On Ulster's fall into insignificance on the Irish coursing scene, see fig. 2.

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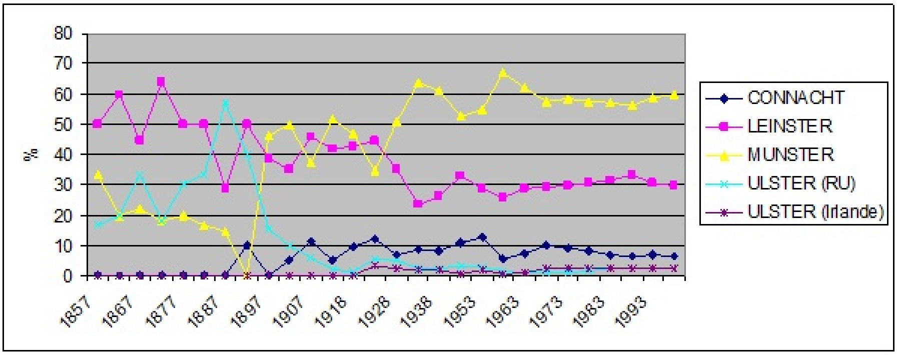
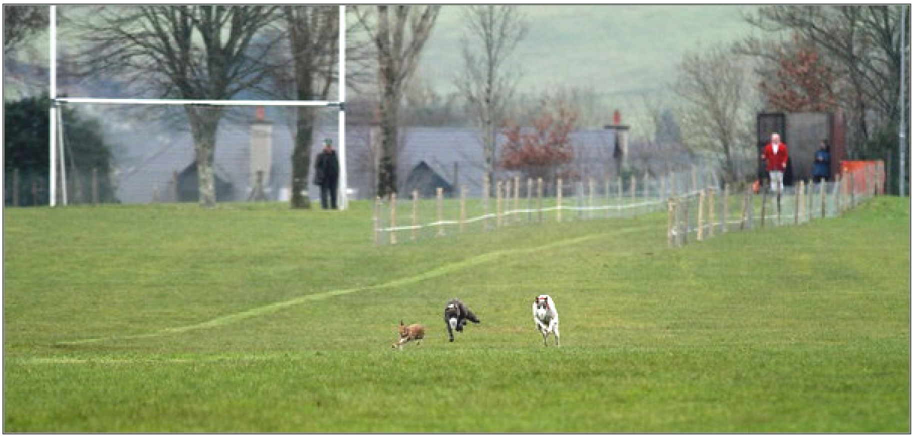
[1] Martin also authored *Tales of the Dogs: A Celebration of the Irish and their Greyhounds*.

Figure 2:
Relative Number of Coursing Clubs per Province, 1857-2011
(Source: Daniel, *Des lévriers* 142)



The history of the creation of the Irish Coursing Club (ICC) shares significant parallels with that of the GAA (and there is further evidence of a continuing relationship between the two organizations as apparent in fig. 3, where a coursing meeting is held on a GAA ground). Indeed, the number of Irishmen on the lists of suspended owners published by the National Coursing Club (NCC), the British controlling authority, was so high that in 1906 it became necessary to set up a subcommittee in charge of settling conflicts in Ireland ("Minutes of the Meeting … 1906"). But on 13 July 1916 ("Special Meeting") the executive committee decided to take full control of Irish affairs again, barring those who did not comply from competing, reminiscent of the famous GAA bans on players competing in English sports such as soccer, rugby and cricket. It appears that the subcommittee's secretary deliberately hampered its workings to trigger off such a crisis. So much so that on 14 August, 1916, like the GAA thirty-two years earlier, and at the very same place (Thurles, County Tipperary) – even though the decision had actually been arrived at in Clonmel ("Irish Coursing Government"; "Coursing Crux") – delegates supported a resolution that enjoined the NCC to place Irish coursing within the jurisdiction of an autonomous Irish body or else face the possibility of Irish coursers setting up their own stud-book and pocketing the registration fees ("National Coursing Club Meetings"). As coursing in Ireland was as popular as in Great-Britain, the NCC was left with little choice but to comply or face bankruptcy. Therefore, three days before the expiry of the ultimatum, an extraordinary general meeting of the NCC ratified the creation of the ICC ("Minutes of the Special Meeting … 1916").

Figure 3:
Race to the Hare: Millstreet: Coursing Season 2010[2]



Symbolically started shortly after the 1916 rising, the process came to a logical end after the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty and subsequent Civil War, with the publication of the first *Irish Greyhound Stud-Book* in 1923 (Morris), severing the last bonds still uniting that nationalist, if not "national," sport with Great Britain, if not the UK, since the ICC, very much like the GAA again, has responsibility for coursing and racing in the thirty-two counties of Ireland. Even though such a setting is not typical of all coursing meetings held in Ireland, the GAA goal posts in the background of the above picture (fig. 3) are symbolic of some community of spirit. What is interesting in the context of the construction of a nationalist Irish identity through sport and the concentration of the historians of Irish nationalism on literature is that the use of coursing by MacMahon tells quite a similar story.

Bryan MacMahon was born and worked all his life in Listowel, Co. Kerry, as a schoolmaster (Fitzmaurice; MacMahon, *The Master*). He wrote numerous plays and short stories as well as a handful of novels and is the only writer of fiction making significant use of coursing in Irish literature, to my knowledge. This is probably because he lived in one of the strongholds of this competition, but also because it serves a significant literary purpose. In *Children of the Rainbow*, a novel narrating everyday life in a fictionalized Listowel called Cloone in the early years of the Free State, coursing is only referred to in the first chapter. However, the sport provides the key thanks to which the reader can make sense of the handful of occasions on which violence or bloodshed is construed as love,[3] culminating in the closing paragraphs when the main character/narrator eventually kisses Madcap O'Neill, the girl he has secretly been in love with all along:

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[2] Photograph © Yvonne Harrington.

[3] At least two other instances are worth mentioning: when Metal Belly tries to recover the watch Trouble-o'-the-world has stolen from him, just before they both disappear (eventually happening to have fled together): "His right hand made a cream-and-black rope

> *"Strike me, Ches!"* she said, in a low voice.
>
> *At first I failed to understand her.* She lifted her face slightly. Her lips - how red! Her breasts - how braced by nature and the moment's compulsion! Her face - how drained of colour except where the points of anger or pride or what-I-could-not-name glowed on each of her cheekbones ! Her lashes – how long, hiding her eyes!
>
> *Suddenly I understood.*
>
> *My right hand came up: open it was and eager with anger. I struck her fully on the side of the face. The head went sickeningly sideways. I felt a strange exhilaration take me.* Slowly she shook her head free of megrim. Slowly, driftingly, a wing of her dark hair came down over her face. For a moment she allowed me to see her eyes where they were hiding in the thicket of her hair.
>
> *"Again!" she said, quietly.*
>
> *Again I struck. The head jerked. The mouth that had already been twisted now turned to a full wryness. After the second blow her dry lips again framed the word that I eagerly awaited. The third time I struck with all my force.* For a time the head hung limply: when it had lifted I saw the pencilled line of blood come vertically down from the mouth corner. I saw that her eyes were alight with triumph and that her soul was out of its hiding-place. I was unutterably churned.
>
> *My fingers became officers of iron, eager to take command.* I saw the woman's hair beside the autumn land. It was as if all the walls of the world were breaking.
>
> As we came together, we were breathing strangely. For a moment our bodies trembled: then they were bound.
>
> ***First I tasted the saliva, then the blood. The blood was better***. (*Children* 340-341; my emphasis)

This weird, cannibalistic anticlimax may stem from the fact that in *Children of the Rainbow* "the young men of the South told themselves that the history of their country had invariably justified those who were extreme" (*Children* 277), and because, in the words of Pádraic Pearse, "bloodshed is a cleansing and a sanctifying thing, and the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood. There are many things more terrible than bloodshed; and slavery is one of them" (Pearse 99). Indeed,

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of the woman's hair. The bellman twisted the rope on his finger then shifted his arm suddenly so that the rope coiled around the back of his hand. […] As yet *her dilated eyes indicated that she accepted the punishment as a type of inverted caress, the sort of hurt a woman loves* [...] *As she moved away, she laughed again, inciting the bellman to further sweet violence* […] *The throat gladly accepted the hands, as though expecting to find in them a strange delight*" (*Children* 175-177; my emphasis). On the same night, when Chestnut (the narrator) fights the group of tinkers she belongs to: "It was the first time I had fought with the lust to kill on me. On my entry into the mêlée I feared for my eyes, my nose, my front teeth, my navel and my genitals. But when a blow from an ash-crop slurred across my cheekbone, I readily sloughed my terror*. A strange glory took possession of me* [...] Into the fight I went, side by side with Finn Dillon and the others, clubbing, kicking, biting, swearing, shouting, *until at last I felt the salt of my own blood on my tongue and the silk lightness of foam on the corners of my mouth. Here was a lust such as I had never known before!* (*Children* 178-179; my emphasis).

as stated by the narrator at the very beginning of the novel: “In the year 1925, after the bitter centuries, Southern Ireland had decided to take stock of the measure of freedom she had gained” (*Children* 1). However, the inhabitants of the village of Cloone are not so much slaves to some foreign occupying forces as to forces within: estrangement from their original culture and civilization, on the one hand, and the weight of Christian morals on the other hand. Indeed, this pooling of blood is very reminiscent of the experience the young villagers go through – “[We] felt – oh, the magic of it! – that our bloods were pooling” (*Children* 268) – when they assemble around the eldest man in the village, Old Font, who holds a finely chiselled gold necklace which has just been dug up, marvels at the craftsmanship of his ancestors and takes pride in his line of descent, before criticizing the young people for abandoning the customs and language of their forefathers and urging them to reclaim their glorious heritage:

> Implicit in [his] trembling fingers was the brag that so long ago we had been glorious. That we had not been a painted people living in burrows! That our scribes had had miraculous inks in the dawn of scribing! That our artificers had the skill to cut such beauty! (*Children* 268)

This is because there is a close dialectical relationship between the story of Chestnut, the narrator hovering between childhood and manhood, and that of the Cloonies, as the story of Chestnut is also that of a quest for “beauty” in some authentic pre-colonization, pre-Christian Ireland set against the history of Ireland’s fight for freedom.

This is illustrated by Metal Belly, the bellman of Cloone, “who had modelled himself on Charles Parnell” (*Children* 28). Indeed, a model of integrity, Metal Belly had secretly left the village some time before to follow a beggar woman – ironically called Trouble-o’-the-World – after he had let her come into his kitchen and have something to eat, sinful though it might appear to God and the country’s patriots: “From the upper murk of the wall, the dead patriots looked down upon him. Charles Stewart Parnell was there: he, too, had been a moral man until he had succumbed to such a voice” (*Children* 145). However, contrary to Parnell, who did not achieve any independence for Ireland and whose political career was ruined by the Church after it was revealed that he had been having an affair with a married woman for some years, Metal Belly is to save the village for the very opposite reason, on account of his liaison with Trouble-o’-the-World, and free the villagers, not so much from the oppressor without, however, as from the oppressor within, i.e. Catholic morals. This is evident on his coming back to the village after it had been burnt down to ashes by a “cleansing” (*Children* 306) fire, at the exact moment when the Cloonies were about to scatter away:

> And then, O neighbours of creation! it seemed as if the Almighty God had abruptly deserted His business of mating the magnificent animals of Africa, of arranging the wheeling of sky-balls and the superintending of the twisting of the myriad elvers in the slime of Saragossa. And had turned His eye on scabby scalded Cloone ! [...] Swaying on the

> hill-road was what seemed to be a bright green flame with a horseshoe of red-yellow beneath it. (*Children* 318-319)

Indeed, just as God might, Metal Belly enjoins Chestnut to guide his people, much as Daniel O'Connell, the second main charismatic nationalist leader in nineteenth-century Irish history, mustered hundreds of thousands of people in his 1820s campaign for Catholic Emancipation. Yet, however Biblical the metaphor, Metal Belly is a Pagan God superseding the Christian one, as shown by the bell:

> The chapel bell had ceased its ringing. […] When the bell's [Metal Belly's] tongue hit the metal everyone halted [...] The people of Cloone respected the sound of the bell: it had called their fathers together to hear the uncrowned King of Ireland state that no man had a right to set a boundary to the onward march of a nation. Almost it could be said that this bell had given Ireland what measure of freedom was hers. (*Children* 330)

Parallel to this counter-chronological revisiting of the political history of Ireland's fight for independence against the backdrop of Christian mythology, and just after Metal-Belly-Parnell-God has instructed Chestnut-O'Connell-Moses to guide his people, the metaphor moves forward, and in very much the same way as Parnell "fell" and Metal Belly "rose," the village is redeemed thanks to the (birth and) apparition of Metal Belly's mulatto rather than the death of Christ. Indeed, just as Metal Belly is opposed to Parnell, O'Connell, who achieved emancipation for Catholics, is opposed to Chestnut, who is to achieve emancipation *from* Catholicism:

> Then […] the women heard the cry of a child from the wagon. From lip to lip of the women the light ran. They started to laugh. Not to laugh so much as to cry out. It was hunger in the form of a laugh. The western woman came forward out of the ranks of the women: throwing her shawl wildly from off her shoulders she laughed out full and free thus sponsoring all the women's hunger. (*Children* 321)

Indeed, ever since Patrick Kavanagh's *Great Hunger*, "hunger" has been associated with the spiritual and sexual hunger of the Irish peasant, and it is very clear – as the bell of "Mary-without-Stain" makes way for Metal Belly's – that the villagers awaken back to their senses thanks to the appearance of a redeeming Christ. What holds for men holds for women:

> On the crowd's edge, a man cupped his hand around his mouth. *"Is it takin' after the sire or the dam?"* he shouted.
>
> *"The sire, begod!"* Metal Belly said proudly. Everybody was cheering and stamping and laughing. Men threw one another aside with the dint of an *earthen glee*. (*Children* 322; my emphasis)

If Metal Belly is asked whether the child takes after the sire or the dam, this is because the novel seems to be merrily combining the male and the female, the human and the animal, the greyhound in particular: "Trouble-o'-the World went deep into the interior of the wagon and brought the child to the door. It was a black-haired boy, the drawn stamp of his father and as healthy as a hound" (*Children* 321-323).[4] Indeed, far from being accidental, the metaphor takes the reader back to the first chapter of *Children of the Rainbow*, when Madcap O'Neill first aroused Chestnut's sexual desires, on the coursing field, across the river which stopped the (cleansing) fire, where the "Cloonies" or "clones" reproduce asexually under the aegis of Mary "Without Stain," she who conceived without the stain of the original sin, the immaculate conception.

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[4] See also MacMahon's *The Lion Tamer and Other Stories*: "Country boys are like greyhounds: they get all their courage when they are in the pack, especially if the pack happens to meet in darkness" ("The Lion Tamer" 6); and "Either that or (absurdity of

On the coursing field, the atmosphere is highly sexualised, and the first coursing match is unequivocally constructed as a sexual act, Chestnut's greyhound being an extension of his manhood, a phallic weapon literally penetrating the hare as it digs its teeth into her:

> The hare was unslotted and the hounds slipped. Tidy pulled away from her brindled rival with facility. Nearing the hare she gathered herself low. I found myself crouching in sympathy with her. She seemed to be sending all the muscled venom of her body into her head and urgent mouth. My dark little lady went into the hare in a long harsh thrust. Her throat tightened on her game. She held her grip, then rolled over and over in a flurry of black legs. (*Children* 6)

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the hare should be a metaphor for women, as suggested by an old lady bending over the dying bed of a girl who died when giving birth on returning from the town: "The limed bird! The meshed salmon! The mangled leveret [sic]!" (*Children* 227). However, this is not peculiar to the novel, as the hare is a traditional allegory of women in many societies including Celtic Ireland. Indeed, the Folklore Commission recovered many versions of a tale featuring greyhounds set on a hare caught in the act of sucking milk from a cow, ending up with the dogs biting her, and the hare turning out to be a woman, as in County Clare, for example:

> One man was walking his greyhounds early in the morning. They started a hare and chased her. When the man caught up with them, he came up with a young woman leaning against a wooden gate. He asked what she was doing here. She said she was looking after the turkeys. But the man saw blood running down her leg. This was evidence that she was the hare (Guibert de La Vaissière 333; my translation).

This is because in Celtic mythology there is a metaphorical equivalence and relationship between woman and nature as givers of life. So much so that the Celtic calendar (fig. 4) was fashioned on the moon, which undergoes in one month (seven dark nights, seven dark/clear nights, seven clear nights, seven clear/dark nights) what nature (winter, spring, summer, autumn) and women (bleeding, impregnated, pregnant, delivering) go through in one year. And as the yielding of fruit was logically seen as the end of the natural cycle, the year began on 1 November, which marked the beginning of winter. The second quarter began on 1 February which marked the beginning of the agricultural year. The third one began on 1 May which marked the passage from flower to fruit. And the fourth quarter spanned from 1 August to 31 October. Therefore, nature was thought to reproduce life thanks to the rotting process

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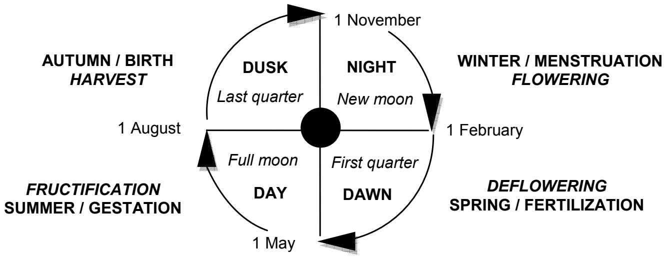
absurdities) the greyhound is present in everyone, together with the bittern, the plaice and the elephant" ("Ballintiernain the Morning" 37).

vegetation went through in winter. And given the metaphorical equivalence between nature and women, women were thought to reproduce life thanks to the blood they no longer shed when pregnant (see fig. 4).

Figure 4:
The Wheel of Life and Death in Celtic Mythology
(Source: Muller 277)



Men and Nature entertained an exchange relationship. Nature fed Men in their lifetime then the decaying bodies of dead Men fed Nature. Similarly, the blood of Women fed Nature during menstruation and babies-to-be-born during pregnancy. Life and the alternation of seasons were made possible thanks to blood, and such a clear parallel was drawn between the fertility of women and that of nature that it was necessary that land take a blood bath in winter in order to be fertile. This is why the Chieftain (as the representative of mankind) in Pre-Christian Celtic Ireland was ritualistically put to death, as a sacrifice to nature, for nature to be able to feed his people in turn. Later on, on 26 December,[5] the Chieftain was to be replaced by a wren, chased, killed, and paraded by young men on a bush decorated with ribbons as a symbol of nature and menstruation, that is a symbol of the wheel of the year that needs blood to turn. While no similar traditional festival has ever been uncovered, the hunting or coursing of hares with dogs could be interpreted in the similar fashion.

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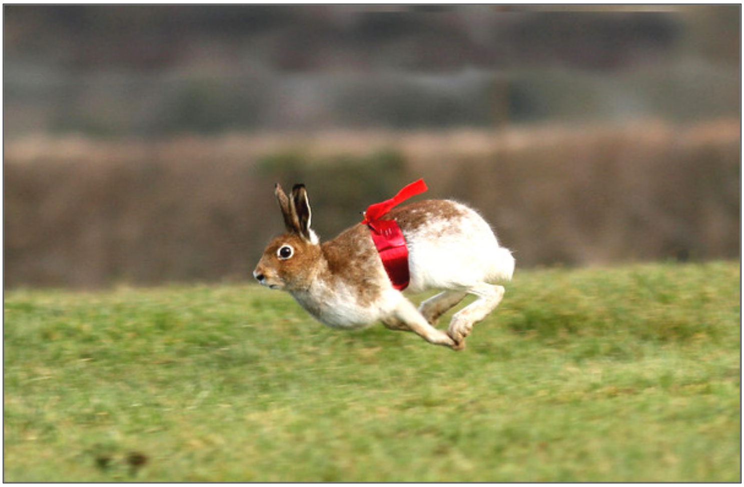
[5] As one lunar month lasts 29.5 days, it was necessary to add 11.25 day or 12 days (hence the leap year) for months not to run ahead of seasons, since 132x29.5 is 354 days. As a period nowhere to be found on the wheel of the year, those twelve days were both outside and at the centre of time and life, that is the hub of the wheel which is made to turn thanks to the death of life as well as the womb of the year to come. It seems to have been believed that these twelve days embodied the twelve months to come, that it was possible to forecast the weather of the twelve months ahead out of each of these twelve days. Therefore, it was tempting to try and influence the future. So much so that 26 December became a favourite for rituals aiming at impregnating nature with human blood. Human blood was replaced by animal blood, and 26 December has remained a favourite with sportspeople up to this day. Those twelve days span from 25 December to 6 January in the Christian calendar and used to span from 31 October to 11 November in the Celtic calendar (for further on this see Muller).

Figure 5:
Hare Festooned with Ribbon: North Kilkenny: Coursing Season 2010[6]



This is the path Bryan MacMahon encourages us to follow as a “white-marked hare festooned with ribbons” (*Children* 17), a distant ancestor of the one depicted above (fig. 5), eighty-five years on, is released on the coursing field. Indeed, Sylvie Muller explains that just as with the Chieftain – made “menstrual” through sacrifice – both the wren and the hare are androgynous creatures. Indeed, the hare depicted in traditional Irish tales is very similar to those snakes that emerge from the sex of women, take hold of their bodies and dry up their breast, and in popular belief as well as in actual life, both are known to steal milk from cows. Therefore, as symbolic representations of menstruation, they are beneficial when earth is in need of blood, as shown by the Easter hare, but can prevent conception and lactation, that is to say spread infertility. So that for winter to turn into summer and for blood to turn into milk, that is for nature to yield fruit and for women to deliver babies, it was considered necessary that they should be sent underground in order to feed earth with their own blood and make way for summer. This is what a farmer in one tale whose greyhounds had killed a hare that had been sucking milk from his cows can bear witness to, as on coming back to his farm, the churn was full of the long-awaited milk. This is also why in a further legend from Cloone, county Leitrim, the hole which a priest dug to bury the hare his horse had kicked dead is known as “Butter Hollow,” as the hole was later found to be full of butter (Guibert de La Vaissière 334; my translation). After the beginning of summer, 1 May, the spilling of blood was likely to trigger a counter clockwise reaction, from milk to blood or summer to winter, and spread fruitlessness:

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[6] Photograph © Yvonne Harrington.

> Men from the town beyond gibed us:
> "Murderin' rogues, the Cloonies!"
> "Don't fall into the river goin' home Sonny Macnamara!"
> "Kissin' an' bleedin' like the Cloonies!" (*Children* 6)

Therefore, if the *Cloonies* are said to be "kissin' and bleedin'" by the *townie*s, just like Chestnut and Madcap O'Neill, this is because both Chestnut and the whole village take a journey back into a pre-colonization, pre-Christian, pantheistic Ireland in which life springs from death, when the fertility of man and nature were dependent upon one another, in which bloodshed is necessary for life to be reborn, as exemplified by the killing of hares by greyhounds.

However, a little more than thirty years later, the second and last time that Bryan MacMahon was to use greyhound sports in his works of fiction in any substantial way, the story was quite a different one. In his 1985 short story "My Love Has a Long Tail," the Listowel writer tells the story of an old man of very little means tricking the local taxi driver into driving him to and from the Cork greyhound race track to have his one greyhound auctioned there. However, far from using the greyhound as an allegory for some ideal authentic Ireland, the greyhound stands for small backward Ireland and small Irish people left behind by the accelerating pace of modernization. This is made explicit by the "toothless" ("My Love Has a Long Tail" 55) retired smallholder with a small face dominated by: "askew steel-rimmed spectacles, one of the lenses of which, by the vice of being vertically cracked, made it sometimes appear that its owner had three eyes" ("My Love Has a Long Tail" 50). Indeed, for the taxi driver whom he managed to trick into driving him and his greyhound to the auction sales in Cork, Mike definitely belongs to the past, and for the better: "narrowing his eyes, Tom noticed that the old fellow was in the company of town and city handlers and not among the well-dressed owners. The smallholder owner was a thing of the past, he told himself with some satisfaction" ("My Love has a Long Tail" 56). Even though the short story deals with racing rather than coursing, greyhounds still stand for rural Ireland, as shown by Mike, whom Tom advises to get out of greyhounds:

> I will not forget my hounds! you're a townie, so what do you know about the countryside at break o' day? The line of light in the east. The first stirrings of the bird. We steppin' together, him and me. Muscle forming on his hindquarters as his body sheds fat. His motions those of a healthy hound. Then, when the time comes, there's the brace of hounds in slips. The hare goin' up the field. The hounds pullin' the slipper after them. Yeh, yeh, yeh! Who can whack that? Eh? Before I die I hope to own a hound that will make the whole of Ireland ring with my name. ("My Love Has a Long Tail" 60)

Yet if the dialectic of town and country has been retained by the author, it now works the other way around. Indeed, the pathetic smallholder with his greyhound wearing an "obviously homemade (cover) crudely cut out from white cloth, still more crudely affixed to its right flank" ("My Love Has a Long Tail" 55) is depicted as completely out of touch with modern life, triggering "incredulous(ness)" ("My Love Has a Long Tail" 57) and even "disdain" ("My Love Has a Long Tail" 58) on the part of the auctioneers.

And it comes as no surprise that no bid is made for *Parsley Sauce* and that Mike has to take him back home.

Mike and his likes are shown as totally out-of-place left-behinds, and Bryan MacMahon seems to feel no compassion for the helplessness of such a fast-disappearing old Ireland:

> 'Peter, you bastard of a spy,' he jerked aloud as if the other could hear him, 'I'll best you yet.' Then turning to address others at an imaginary audience, 'You too, Hogan, bastard of a big farmer up there on the hill ready to gobble up my few acres. And you, bastard of a driver, Tom, that bled me white. Ye bastards at the track who put me last on the list. You bastard of an auctioneer and your penciller with the eyes of a fox. Ye bastards standin' around that gave no bid or that puffed when it suited. Ye bastards from Amsterdam that never turned up. You bastard at the traps with your long slip. You bastard at the store pressing me to pay. Ye bastards in Brussels who won't let us live! Ye're nothing but a pack of bastards, the lot of ye. But before the face o' Christ I'll beat ye all yet!' ("My Love Has a Long Tail" 63-64)

As explained in the first part of this paper, most of the symbolism of greyhound coursing derives from the killing of the hare, the spilling of blood in winter, which was deemed necessary for life to be reborn in the summer. Interestingly enough, once it was made compulsory for greyhounds coursing in enclosed areas to wear muzzles, Tommy Conlon, in the *Sunday Independent*, could write of greyhounds as: "Eunuchs in a harem of hares" (Conlon). This seems to have been the view taken by Bryan MacMahon in a novel set in north Kerry in 1925. However, in 1985, thirty-three years after publishing *Children of the Rainbow*, the Listowel writer apparently took a totally different view, using the greyhound as a symbol for backward, rural Ireland losing pace with modernization. This may be because the greyhound sport taking place in the novel is slightly different from that referred to in the short story. Indeed, races between six greyhounds running after a dummy hare on an oval circuit have little to do with coursing. But this may also be because Ireland was in the process of turning away from the isolationism that characterized the middle decades of the twentieth century and had joined the European Economic Community, a development that would eventually set her on the road to the Celtic Tiger years. Indeed, whatever his literary taste for Gaelic Ireland and Irish (he is the translator of the classic Irish-language text *Peig: The Autobiography of Peig Sayers of the Great Blasket Island* [1973]), folklore and travellers' lore (*The Honey Spike*, 1967), local customs, ancient traditions, and rural life, Bryan MacMahon was a modern man with a modern outlook. While his reputation as a writer is said to have suffered for never having being banned by the Censorship of Publications Act (O'Donoghue 40), he was not averse to criticizing rigid enforcement of Catholic teaching, as shown in John O'Brien's *The Vanishing Irish*. What is more, his own teaching and educational outlook were most progressive, as one can gather from his 1992 autobiography, *The Master*, among other sources. Lastly, even though the sport of coursing is said to also exist in Portugal, the United States of America, and Pakistan, Ireland is, to my knowledge, the only country in the world where it is carried out under the aegis of a recognized national association. And even though it is backed by the Irish State, the average Western European citizen is more and more critical of such blood sports. So, Bryan MacMahon may also have come to endorse the new mood.

Finally, the use of greyhound sports in *Children of the Rainbow* and “My Love Has a Long Tail” might also be seen as a perfect illustration of the dilemma confronting the so-called ‘patriots’ or ‘separatists’ as well as some leaders of the 1916 Rising who, possibly contrary to the Church, craved for a culturally authentic but also industrialised Ireland: “Rural society was to retain all its traditional values, but was to be modern at the same time in some unspecified way” (Garvin 80). Greyhound sports as used in the fictional world of Bryan MacMahon are also illustrative of two distinct Irish contexts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While *Children of the Rainbow* extols some glorious, pantheistic, Gaelic past glorified by the fight for freedom and exacerbated by the cult of sacrifice and martyrdom, “My Love Has a Long Tail” depicts a more forward-looking society.

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