

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

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

Myrtle’s Opening Contribution

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

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

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

2 See also Ardoyne Commemoration Project.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Eilish's First Contribution

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5 See Rooney.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10 Derogatory name for Catholics.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Myrtle's Second Contribution

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Eilish's Second Contribution

Last Words: The Call of the Future

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

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

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