

BOUNDARY CROSSINGS

New Scholarship in Irish Studies

Edited by

Michaela Marková, Radvan Markus,
Hana Pavelková and Kateřina Jenčová

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	5
Introduction	7
Radvan Markus	
“Bits of Broken Pottery”: Metahistorical Elements in Thomas Flanagan’s Historical Novel <i>The Year of the French</i>	16
Maciej Ruczaj	
Beyond the Boundaries of the Self: Padraic Pearse’s <i>The Singer</i>	30
David Vichnar	
From Inheritors to Survivors: Joyce, Kiely, McGahern, Banville and Muldoon	44
Nils Beese	
“Closed Communities”: Kafka in the Criticism and Late Poetry of Louis MacNeice	62
Florence Impens	
“A Very European Poet”: European Intertextuality in Derek Mahon’s <i>The Yellow Book</i>	74
Daniela Theinová	
“My Dream Sister”: Irish Women Poets Deconstructing the Muse	87
Michaela Marková	
Perspectives of Motherhood in Kate O’Riordan’s <i>Involved: A Privileged Position or an Imposed Social Role?</i>	98

Hana Pavelková “And Yes... It Is a Monologue.” Contemporary Female Voices on Stage	111
Claire-Louise Noelle Mann Crossing Nomadic Cultural Boundaries: To What Extent Can Irish Traveller Writing Be Described as “Resistance Literature?”	123
Rhona Ní Chearbhaill Ar deoraíocht sa bhaile: Guth an aisimirceora i ngearrscéalta Chonamara	135
Hynek Janoušek Gearóid Iarla agus Dafydd ap Gwilym: Nuálaithe sa Traidisiún	150

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INTRODUCTION

The title of the present volume, *Boundary Crossings*, echoes the persisting tendency in academia to embrace the global and the interdisciplinary. Although almost all the essays in the collection focus on the traditional discipline of literary studies, the diverse topics covered reflect the multiplicity of identities and histories that characterise the field of Irish Studies. The contributors take the opportunity to cross the boundaries and explore the rich history, culture, language and politics of the Irish. Some of the authors deal with well-established issues, building on existing research, while others examine under-researched topics. In any case, all the essays demonstrate that Irish Studies still offers numerous vistas to be opened up. It is thus our hope that this collection will not only demonstrate the diversity of current research by postgraduate students of Irish Studies but that it might also broaden the experience and skill sets of its readers.

The opening essay by Radvan Markus accentuates the need to consider new research methods and approaches that could be applied in the field of Irish Studies, either to discuss the well-established themes or to investigate new topics. In particular, the essay addresses the self-reflexive presentation of history in much of recent historical fiction and drama and it proposes using the concept of metahistory to scrutinise the contentious manners in which historical events are frequently explained. As Markus points out in the introduction to his essay, metahistory problematises the boundary between history and fiction as it exposes the often simplistic, subjective ways in which histories are rendered. Incapacitating mythologised histories, the concept seems suitable for application in the Irish context. However, regardless of its

possible merits, metahistory as an analytical tool is still rather underused in connection with the Irish historical novel, and Markus thus sets out to fill this gap.

In his analysis of *The Year of French* (1979) by Thomas Flanagan, Markus relates the way the events of the 1798 rebellion are depicted in the novel to other existing interpretations, using the concept of metahistory to show how the story defies any possible totalising readings. Constituent aspects of the concept are first carefully outlined and then applied to the text, resulting in a well-informed reading of Flanagan's novel that presents us with a whole range of perspectives of the 1798 rebellion. Markus rightly observes that parts of the narrative resonate with Michel Foucault's principle of discontinuity, which accentuates the fragmentary nature of history. What follows is that any interpretation of a historical event is necessarily limited, since it needs to fill the gaps with fiction. As pointed out in the essay, both the topic of the 1798 rebellion and the concept of metahistory are also highly relevant for the discussion of another – this time more recent – historical event, namely, the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

Maciej Ruczaj also emphasises the point put forward by Markus about the problematic boundary between literary texts that reflect on history and the historical events themselves in his essay on Padraic Pearse's play *The Singer*. Although he is aware of the overall complexity of this play, Ruczaj focuses primarily on the main protagonist MacDara, "the superhero of Irish nationalist literature," and documents how the relationship between the self and the nation evolves. Contrary to common belief that nationalism stands for "a victory of the collective over the individual," Ruczaj argues that individual emancipation and national awakening can concur. To support this view, Ruczaj first comments on the nineteenth-century narratives of the self and provides valuable background information on Pearse's view of nationalism that is evident in the play. Rather than depicting Pearse's stance as comprising two antithetical types, Ruczaj asserts it would be more appropriate to regard the nature of his nationalism as paradoxical as it accommodates the tensions between both the collective and individual aspects of it.

According to Ruczaj, MacDara undergoes a transformation similar to that discussed in Nikodem Bończa-Tomaszewski's *Źródła*

narodowości except that, in the case of MacDara, the secular and the sacred merge as the community he partakes in is established “through the participation in the splendid and defiled body of Christ, even if He is standing here not for the universal brotherhood of the Church, but for a particular community of the Gaels.” Through the process of emancipation, death and rebirth of the self, MacDara gradually attains a state where both his individual and communal identities are affirmed. However, to consummate the process, MacDara sacrifices himself to guarantee the existence of the community. His journey, which consists of a series of boundary crossings and is often seen as Pearse’s “literary rehearsal” of the Easter Rising, demonstrates just how complex and paradoxical Irish nationalism can be.

The following essay by David Vichnar provides a brief account of how a number of selected (Northern) Irish authors, including John McGahern, Benedict Kiely, John Banville or Paul Muldoon, have responded to James Joyce’s legacy either in their works or in their critique. Joyce’s influence on his Irish literary successors, Vichnar maintains, is a doubly marginalised topic in the field of Irish Studies. In his essay, Vichnar attempts to overcome the difficulties faced while assessing one’s literary influence on others together with those rooted in the idea of causality itself so as to complement the small number of works on Joyce’s literary descendants. Firstly, to contextualise his essay, Vichnar discusses Dillon Johnston’s *Irish Poetry after Joyce* which he sees as the only real precursor to the subject he is writing on. It is due to its scope, Vichnar claims, that Dillon’s work does not directly engage with many of Joyce’s works. Nevertheless, one of the topics Dillon comments on at the end of his work is of particular interest to Vichnar, namely, Joyce’s influence on Paul Muldoon’s poetry.

Following a discussion of possible reactions to Joyce’s writings in a number of works by contemporary Irish authors, including McGahern and Kiely, Vichnar moves on to Banville. In his assessment of Joyce’s influence on Irish literature, Vichnar detects a shift here. Unlike the other authors discussed in the essay, Banville appears to consider Joyce’s art from a much broader perspective. However, Vichnar argues that it is only Muldoon whose engagement with Joyce reflects the true complexity of his *oeuvre*. Elaborating on Johnston’s precursory reference, Vichnar

suggests Muldoon's poetry be read through the prism of Joyce's experimentation. He chooses Muldoon's three recent poetry books *Hay*, *Horse Latitudes* and *Maggot* to exemplify how the author responds to three prominent Joycean topics: error, catalogue and structure. Such an approach implies, inter alia, a crossover between prose and poetry that opens up new possibilities for further cross-genre dialogues.

Artistic legacy is also the topic of Nils Beese's essay, which discusses Louis MacNeice's late poetry, drawing parallels between this and the works of Franz Kafka. Beese's essay is valuable not only because of its perceptive reading of MacNeice's poetry but also its commentary on MacNeice's criticism, an aspect of his career which is still largely underdiscussed. Although little is known about MacNeice the critic, Beese claims that through his criticism of Kafka, MacNeice found topical and stylistic inspiration for his final collection *The Burning Perch*. Due to problems MacNeice had with the accuracy of the figures of speech available to him, which he found unsuitable for his purposes, he had to look elsewhere for inspiration. Beese argues that MacNeice found appropriate formulations in Kafka's *On Parables* and thus adopted this style of writing so as to be able to express himself pertinently.

In his comparison of the two authors, Beese goes as far as to suggest that, for MacNeice, Kafka was not only a source of literary inspiration but a fellow sufferer as he felt equally alienated from society. Beese analyses MacNeice's last book of criticism, *Varieties of Parable*, to provide further evidence to support this claim. Through Kafka's parables, Beese asserts, MacNeice was able to explore his personal concerns without having to be in harmony with the reality outside his work. Such an approach seems most fitting for MacNeice's self-exploration because of its multi-layered, discernable meaning. Although MacNeice's tone in *The Burning Perch* is much darker than in his other collections, Beese's essay demonstrates that parable writing in fact enables MacNeice to look beyond the melancholy.

Like Vichnar and Beese, Florence Impens also considers the topic of intertextuality, namely in Derek Mahon's *The Yellow Book*. Although foreign influences are a relatively prominent topic elsewhere in Mahon's work, Impens asserts that it is only in *The Yellow Book* that the poet alludes to a number of different works of

literatures, often within a single poem. Some critics fail to explain the impulse that lies behind such multiplicity in Mahon's poetry and denounce it as a mere unsubstantiated listing of sources. However, Impens warns against such a simplistic view and argues that Mahon, as *artiste maudit*, in fact occupies the border space between different literatures, as discussed by Pascale Casanova in *La République Mondiale des Lettres*.

Such a location enhances Mahon's relational bond with literatures both inside and outside the official canon, confers subversive quality to his writing and broadens the definition of what it means to be Irish. It is from this position on the border that Mahon addresses the issues of his interest such as, for example, the fate of imagination in the face of mass consumption. Impens maintains that Mahon's defence of imagination is not merely an artistic stance but a life perspective which the author so skilfully translates into poetry. She goes on to say that although Mahon criticises industrial development, which might make him appear overtly nostalgic, he does not seem to descend to old-fashioned morality. Furthermore, Impens contextualises Mahon's poems in *The Yellow Book*, particularly "Axel's Castle" and "Remembering the '90s," to show that his efforts to defend literature against rapid technological development forms an integral part of a wider movement.

Mahon is linked to the poets discussed in the next essay, by Daniela Theinová, by *généalogie hérétique* [heretic genealogy], the subversive quality of a poet who stands on the margins of his or her own (national) literary space. Theinová examines works by female poets such as Eavan Boland, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin or Medbh McGuckian, to document how these authors have managed to find their own voice in the face of (male) poetic traditions. Her assertion concerning the liminal space resonates not only with Casanova's *généalogie hérétique* but, as it relates to the position of women in general, even more closely with Julia Kristeva's theory of female subjectivity. As Theinová states in the introduction to her essay, women can turn their liminality into a constitutive part of their discourse, into "a field of force." She then proceeds with an analysis of the individual female poets to support this assertion and complements her discussion by perceptive reading of the cited poems.

The first author to be discussed is Eavan Boland, whose poetry, Theinová argues, shows how an author can appropriate the conventional tropes, such as that of the “inspiring feminine.” This is followed by a section on Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin documenting how this author’s efforts are in certain aspects, including attesting the timelessness of one’s experience, more successful than Boland’s. Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill allegedly goes even further than Ní Chuilleanáin in claiming the actual unattainability of the muse with whom all the poets discussed engage. However, it is mainly in her reading of McGuckian’s poetry, which concludes the essay, that Theinová’s argument comes closest to Kristeva’s *le sujet en procès*. Through her analysis of McGuckian’s poems, Theinová illustrates how the uneasy relationship between the author’s self and the muse constantly makes McGuckian redefine herself as the subject. Yet, it is most important that although some of the authors might have allowed the muse to remain tacit for a while, none of them make her completely silent.

Claiming the right to one’s voice being heard is also the subject of Michaela Marková’s essay, with the difference that Marková focuses on a work by a contemporary fiction writer, Kate O’Riordan, one of the “new generation” of (Northern) Irish authors whose works have been praised for promoting innovative approaches to literary representations of the Troubles. Examining O’Riordan’s novel *Involved*, Marková responds to the appeal made during the debate on the current state of affairs in Northern Ireland: to (re)evaluate the conciliatory process, including its literary representations, so as to determine the reasons for the present-day impasse.

In her essay, Marková sets out to depict strategies used by the female protagonists of O’Riordan’s novel to change the way Irish (nationalist) patriarchal ideology determines their future. She documents what types of social roles Irish patriarchy prescribes to the women in *Involved*, discusses their reactions to these and explores whether the women’s behaviour manifests any subversive potential. Similarly to Theinová in the previous essay, Marková draws on Kristeva’s writings, which support her essay’s argument about female subjectivity. Although the protagonists’ efforts to achieve their subjectivity do not prove to be subversive enough to

overthrow the patriarchal order, Marková argues that they might be more effective in the long term.

In her reflection of Irish monological plays featuring women, Hana Pavelková continues with the discussion of how femininity is either constituted or affected by Irish patriarchy. Pavelková opens her essay with a consideration of how prominent the narrative mode of a monologue is in contemporary theatre production, in the English-speaking world as elsewhere. As Pavelková maintains, this recent trend does not always generate widespread enthusiasm and indeed critics such as Ben Brantley warn against the possible overuse of monologues. However, Pavelková points out that despite all this attention surrounding the monological plays, the Irish monologues written for female protagonists (either by male or female authors) are still relatively underdiscussed and thus deserve our attention.

First, Pavelková comments on the strikingly unbalanced ratio of contemporary Irish female and male playwrights. The reasons for this are, for example, the difficulties encountered by women attempting to publish their works. Pavelková presents a selection of monologues featuring women both to discuss the importance of their themes and also to demonstrate their rich diversity of form. However, she is well aware of the possible obstacles that might diminish the plays' originality and alludes to the reasons why, for example, the productions of Sebastian Barry's *The Pride of Parnell Street* and Abbie Spallen's *Pumpgirl* have been less successful than Dermot Bolger's monodrama *The Holy Ground*. Had Barry and Spallen been as innovative in their use of the theatre medium as in their use of language, Pavelková concludes, their plays could have been more successful.

The use of language is also of interest to Claire-Louise Noelle Mann. In her essay, Mann addresses the role played by orality in Irish Traveller culture. Given the frequent misrepresentation of the issues concerning the Traveller community, Mann's essay represents welcome progress. However, this situation, Mann notes, is slowly improving because of the increasing frequency with which the genuine accounts of Irish Travellers' experience are beginning to appear. Mann asks whether the new mode of representation Irish Travellers now employ – that of an autobiography (or biography) – can empower them and help challenge their

marginalised status in mainstream society. It is obvious that the (auto)biographies can be termed political acts, as through these Travellers assert their right to speak and to be heard, but Mann asks whether such terminology is in fact appropriate. In other words, could such accounts be considered to be resistance literature?

Although the term “resistance literature,” as defined by Ghassan Kanafani, might seem appropriate to the discussion, Mann rightly observes that it is problematised by some of the Travellers’ relationship to land. Mann suggests that Barbara Harlow’s definition might be more apt since it describes resistance literature from a wider perspective, as “a problem of contested terrain, whether cultural, geographical or political,” and it also befits the Travellers’ means of expression. However, Mann concludes her essay by saying that the most pertinent term to describe the issue is probably Alan Sinfield’s “dissident literature” as not all Travellers strive for subversion. This enables their action to be viewed as an inevitable social phenomenon that represents a challenge to the pre-existing conceptions about them held by mainstream society. Mann’s essay thus comes full circle to the point alluded to in Markus’s contribution that, due to the contentious way (historical) events are often explained, it is not appropriate for people to automatically accept narratives as fixed. Indeed, they need to be considered from a much broader perspective.

One very suitable, and long overdue, candidate for the act of boundary crossing in the area of Irish Studies is the seemingly impenetrable border between the two principal languages used in Irish literature and criticism – Irish and English. It is not the intention of the compilers of this volume to ponder upon the reasons why this situation came about, but rather to provide a platform, however limited in scope, for the relevant scholarship in both languages to communicate in a meaningful and mutually respectful way. After all, the uneasy and often conflicting relationship between Irish and English throughout the history of Irish letters may be, perhaps from a more felicitous point of view, seen as a major source of richness. Such a platform, poses its own challenges, however. It is impossible, due to the inevitable power relations involved in any act of translation (the more so when a minority and major world language are involved) to opt for the easy solution and

agree upon English as the only medium of communication, and the wholesale use of Irish would be as limiting as it would be unrealistic.

Therefore, this volume acknowledges the vital need for a beneficial degree of bilingualism in the realm of Irish Studies. The two Irish language contributions included at the end provide a fitting summary to the collection as they highlight the possible both negative and positive aspects of the act of boundary crossing conceived in general terms. Rhona Ní Chearbhaill concentrates on the marginalisation faced by migrants returning to the Gaeltacht due to the “siege mentality” of their equally marginalised original communities, as reflected in twentieth-century short stories from Connemara. Finally, Hynek Janoušek uses the theme of *amour courtois* in Irish and Welsh mediaeval poetry to illustrate the vital importance of boundary crossing for cultural enrichment.

The authors hope that the numerous acts of boundary crossing “perpetrated” in this volume will have the last above-mentioned effect – that they will enrich the reader with fresh perspectives on Irish culture. The ultimate goal is for the ideas of the contributors to cross the boundaries of the individual essays in order to make inspiring connections between the diverse topics covered in this collection – or perhaps even go beyond these.

Michaela Marková
Radvan Markus

“BITS OF BROKEN POTTERY”: METAHISTORICAL ELEMENTS IN THOMAS FLANAGAN’S HISTORICAL NOVEL *THE YEAR OF THE FRENCH*

Radvan Markus
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The notion of “metahistory,” which, broadly speaking, refers to the problematisation of the positivist concept of history and the consciousness of the narrative strategies and political arguments used when histories are written, has been well established in contemporary thought, especially since the publication of Hayden White’s eponymous monograph in 1973.¹ Although White focussed on the analysis of prominent historians and philosophers of history, his fundamental questioning of the border between history and fiction inevitably attracted attention to the exploration of metahistorical features in recent fiction and drama. Linda Hutcheon’s identification of “historiographic metafiction” as one of the most distinctive postmodern novelistic genres has exposed the over-reliance of literary criticism on the paradigm of the realistic historical novel as established by Walter Scott and drawn awareness to the peculiarly self-reflexive way history was presented in numerous historical novels published in the second

¹ Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). The themes are further explored in Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). For a more in-depth analysis of the theoretical basis of the present enquiry, see Radvan Markus, “History, Fiction and Identity in the Works of Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur,” *Litteraria Pragensia* 20.39 (2010): 16-30.

half of the twentieth century.² These trends were subsequently explored in great detail by the German literary critic Ansgar Nünning, who, in his monograph *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion*, proposed a typology for the modern British historical novel, and more recently by Mark Berninger, who did the same in the field of British and Irish historical drama.³

Nevertheless, the possibilities of this theoretical approach have not yet been made full use of in the Irish context, especially in the field of the historical novel, as illustrated by the fact that the only monograph on the Irish historical novel to date, James Cahalan's *Great Hatred, Little Room*, is very much grounded in the traditional perspective.⁴ The present essay strives to remedy this gap at least in the case of one historical novel, *The Year of the French* (1979), written by the American author Thomas Flanagan.⁵ As can be inferred from the title, it deals with the Connacht episode of the 1798 rebellion – the landing of a small French invasion force in County Mayo in August that year and the subsequent ill-fated campaign of the French and their Irish allies against the overwhelming English forces. Despite its considerable length, number of characters and great complexity, the novel enjoyed brilliant success at the time of its publication, both commercially and on the level of critical reception. Nevertheless, none of the academic articles subsequently written about the book have fully explored the profound engagement with the very concept of history writing on its pages.⁶ Therefore, this essay will attempt to relate how history is presented and reflected upon in *The Year of the French* to existing interpretations of the 1798 rebellion in Irish historiography as well as to the relevant concepts in the theory of history.

² See Linda Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

³ Ansgar Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion*, Band I (Trier: WVT Trier, 1995). Mark Berninger, *Neue Formen des Geschichtsdramas in Großbritannien und Irland seit 1970* (Trier: WVT Trier, 2006).

⁴ James M. Cahalan, *Great Hatred, Little Room* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1983).

⁵ Thomas Flanagan, *The Year of the French* (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1979).

⁶ The only critic to at least draw attention to one of the numerous metahistorical passages in the book was Benedict Kiely. See Benedict Kiely, "Thomas Flanagan: The Lessons in History," *A Raid into Dark Corners and Other Essays* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000) 166.

In his above-mentioned monograph, Ansgar Nünning neatly divided the corpus of the British historical novel into the categories of documentary, realistic, revisionist and metahistorical novel (along with the category of historiographic metafiction already discussed, which is, however, hardly distinguishable from the metahistorical novel).⁷ It is of definite interest that *The Year of the French* largely defies these categories by being virtually “all at once.” The category of documentary can be used to relate to the structure of the book, which intersperses passages in the third person mediated through various reflector-narrators with a collage of fictitious diaries, letters and eyewitness accounts, presented as written by a number of the novel’s characters. Moreover, at least one of these accounts, Arthur Vincent Broome’s *Impartial Narrative of What Passed at Killala in the Summer of 1798*, is clearly based on a real historical document and generally it can be argued that Flanagan’s work is probably the most thoroughly researched novel on 1798 ever written.⁸ The quasi-documentary structure also relates to the metahistorical level of the text as it emphasises the fragmentary nature of the historical record, which, as will be seen, is one of the principal themes of the novel.

In Nünning’s typology, the terms “realistic” and “revisionist” are largely defined by their relation to official historiography – while realistic novels endorse its findings and are complementary to it, revisionist novels challenge official views of history by creating alternative interpretations.⁹ Although this distinction may have some validity in countries such as Great Britain, where history is not such a contested issue, it becomes problematic in cases such as the 1798 rebellion, which has been constantly reinterpreted in Irish historiography and politics right up to the present day. Interestingly, strong links can be established between Flanagan’s novel and a much discussed trend of Irish “official” historiography, which was at the same time “revisionist” as it attempted to destabilise the established nationalist version of Irish history.

⁷ Nünning 256-92.

⁸ Broome’s narrative is based on the eyewitness account of Joseph Stock, who was Protestant Bishop of Kilalla at the time of the French invasion. See Joseph Stock, *A Narrative of What Passed at Killala, in the County Mayo, and the Parts Adjacent, During the French Invasion in the Summer of 1798* (Limerick: John and Thomas McAuliff, 1800).

⁹ Nünning 262-76.

The term “revisionist” is notoriously difficult to define in Irish historiography, as it is still very much a moot point even in relatively recent debates, and it remains doubtful whether this term can be consistently applied to any clearly defined group of historians. However, both the proponents and the critics largely agree that there was a distinctive trend in Irish historiography, dating back to the 1930s, but most prominent in the years 1960 to 1990, which shared two characteristics.¹⁰ On the theoretical level, it was informed by the positivist theory of history, most famously formulated by K.R. Popper, combining a belief in objectivity in history with a deep mistrust of larger historical narratives, including nationalist ones.¹¹ On a more practical and political level, there were also more immediate reasons for the deconstruction of nationalism: among others, it was a reaction to the highly conservative state ideology of post-independence Ireland, and, above all, an effort to maintain a distance from the ideological basis of the IRA campaign in Northern Ireland.

In connection to the interpretation of the 1798 rebellion, the term “revisionist” has been associated with the view that emphasises the contradiction between the lofty idealism of the United Irishmen and the bloody sectarian conflict which was characteristic of much of the actual fighting, especially in County Wexford. In short, what had been previously seen as a heroic struggle for national independence became, in the words of the historian Roy Foster, one of the scholars most commonly associated with revisionism: “a brave, tragic but essentially reactive and atavistic jacquerie.”¹² Although

¹⁰ For an overview of the “revisionist” debate, see, for example, D. George Boyce, Alan O’Day, eds., *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), or Seamus Deane, ed., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, Vol. III (Derry: W.W. Norton, 1991) 561-611. The most influential critiques of “revisionism” include Brendan Bradshaw, “Nationalism and Historical Scholarship in Modern Ireland,” *Irish Historical Studies*, 26.104 (Nov. 1989): 329-51 and Seamus Deane, “Wherever Green Is Read,” *Interpreting Irish History*, ed. Ciaran Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994). A balanced and highly personal account can be found in Tom Dunne, *Rebellions: Memoir, Memory and 1798* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2004) 78-101.

¹¹ See Karl R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (London: Routledge, 1957) and Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 1945).

¹² Roy Foster, “Remembering 1798,” *The Irish Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 218. In this statement, Foster summarised the works of the earlier historians Dickson and Pakenham, who wrote directly about 1798. For a full-fledged narrative

this view was subsequently criticised as reductive because it concentrates excessively on Wexford, and ignores the political dimension of the rising and the inspirational value of the United Irishmen, its emphasis on the sectarian outrages committed by both sides of the conflict has proved an important *caveat* for any future interpretations.¹³

That Flanagan largely subscribed to the “revisionist” picture of the rebellion is evident, for example, from his 1990 review of Marianne Elliot’s biography of Wolfe Tone. Here, he argues that in contradiction to Wolfe Tone’s ideals and to his great regret, “the rebellion had turned into sectarian violence at its most savage, Catholics and Protestants murdering each other under the banners of their rival creeds.”¹⁴ He also emphasises that Tone’s words of regret “are worth quoting also because today, in one part of Ireland, the sectarian killers on one side of the divide imagine that they act within a tradition of patriotic murder and martyrdom for which Tone lay down the terms, both by word and by example,” and praises Elliot along with Roy Foster as “one of a number of young Irish historians who offer to their countrymen the lenses of actuality rather than the mirrors of mythology,” which chimes both with the political motivation of the revisionist interpretation and its underlying theoretical assumptions.¹⁵

Evidence of this view of the rebellion can also be clearly found on the pages of Flanagan’s novel. The figure of the “regretting Wolfe Tone” is reflected in the character of the Protestant United Irishman Malcolm Elliott, who, after witnessing the sectarian turn of the rising in Wexford, becomes doubtful about the whole idea of rebellion and continues to act only on a vague principle of honour. When, at the desperate stage shortly before the final battle of Ballinamuck, the French General Humbert asks the curate Murphy, who sees the rebellion as a holy war against Protestants, to deliver a sermon to the insurgent army, the idealist Elliott loses the last of his illusions:

of the rebellion inspired by “revisionism,” see Thomas Pakenham, *The Year of Liberty: The Story of the Great Irish Rebellion of 1798* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969).

¹³ The most outspoken criticism of the “revisionist” view of 1798 can be found in Kevin Whelan, “’98 after ‘98,” *Tree of Liberty* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Thomas Flanagan, *There You Are: Writings on Irish and American Literature and History* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2004) 360.

¹⁵ Flanagan, *There You Are* 361, 362.

[...] And yet it was not as a Protestant that I took the greatest offence. I had once seen in our conspiracy a union of hearts, pledged to sweep away forever the rancorous discord of creeds by which our land was disfigured. It had proved in vain hope, nursed in Dublin and Belfast by city-bred men, lawyers and merchants and physicians. Beneath the dark skies of Ireland, between bog and ocean, moorland and hill, it crumbled to dust.¹⁶

The “revisionist” position, as described above, is also partly reflected on the metahistorical level of the book. In accordance with the underlying historical positivism of the revisionist historians, the novel is full of insistence on distinguishing between truth and myth, warning against the dangerous potential of mythologised histories. In this respect, the conflicting historical narratives which had informed the conduct of both the Mayo peasants (historical resentment against colonial dispossession) and the Protestant loyalists (the siege mentality of civilised colonisers among barbarians) are in turn explored and subjected to irony and criticism, with an undercurrent of reference to the conflict in Northern Ireland which was exacerbated by views of history that had changed very little during the course of the years.¹⁷

In a similar vein, criticism is directed against the subsequent mythologising of 1798 itself, illustrated by the example of the oral histories of the Mayo rebellion, which, according to the novel, mercifully effaced the bloodiest memories, arbitrarily chose to celebrate particular characters over others, or even elevated villains in the place of heroes. Such is the message of the following passage

¹⁶ Flanagan, *The Year of the French*, 367. All subsequent quotations are from this edition. However, despite the scathing critique of the United Irishmen, Flanagan’s position as regards the interpretation of the rebellion is far from adopting the “British point of view” as the “revisionists” have been accused of. Largely because he did not accept the black and white picture of the nationalist version of Irish history, Flanagan was able to subject certain aspects of the British policy to a very subtle and scathing critique, such as in the ironic reference to the policies which led to the Famine (404).

¹⁷ Contemporary references in the novel are discussed in Tom Paulin, “The Fire Monster,” *Encounter*, 54.1 (January, 1980): 57-64 and Robert Tracy, “Who Fears to Speak of ’98, ’63, ’64, ’65, ’66, ’67, ’68, ’69, ’70?: ‘The Year of the French’ and the Nineteen Sixties,” *Irish University Review* 28.1 (Spring /Summer 1998): 1-10. Apart from the Northern Irish link, Tracy also suggests a connection to the student protests at the Berkeley campus in the 1960s.

from the recollections of Malcolm Elliott's wife Judith, who is English, but a fervent Irish patriot all the same:

And yet within two years, wonderful to relate, the rising had began to fade from Mayo memory, or rather to recede into that past, compounded of legend and fact, which lies as an almost palpable presence upon the heavy Irish landscape. [...] Songs were sung [...] the most in Irish but a few in English, and these celebrated chiefly young Ferdy O'Donnell, a Mayo youth, or Malachi Duggan, described to me by Malcolm as a most fearful ruffian but transformed by folk imagination into a Robin Hood. No song of those that I heard enshrined the memory of Malcolm Elliott, their gallant leader.

(575)

Much to Flanagan's credit, however, his criticism does not stop here and the book does not, in a simplistic manner, contrast the faulty folk or community memory to the "only true" version of history sanctioned by professional historiography. This brings us directly to the metahistorical, or "metahistoriographical" level of the book. Flanagan's novels abound in fictional historians who are usually very much aware of the limitations of their craft and of the inevitable fictional or possibly mythological element even in their scrupulously fact-conscious rendition of history.¹⁸ The ideas expressed by Flanagan's historians are thus akin to the theories of Hayden White, briefly mentioned above, with the important difference that, at least in some of his writings, White seems to celebrate – or at least legitimise – this fictional licence of the historian and the use of history for political purposes, while Flanagan is much more critical and pessimistic.¹⁹

There are two such self-conscious historians – metahistorians by definition – on the pages of *The Year of the French*: the above-mentioned Protestant minister Arthur Vincent Broome, author of *An Impartial Narrative*, and the historical character of George Moore (the grandfather of the famous novelist), who wrote an unfinished

¹⁸ Another example besides the work analysed here would be the fictional historian Patrick Prentiss from Flanagan's historical novel *The Tenants of Time*.

¹⁹ See especially Hayden White, "The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation," *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) 58-82.

book on the Girondist party of the French Revolution. Both of them enter the novel with fairly far-reaching ambitions in the historiographical field, which are, however, frustrated in the end. Broome begins his narrative as follows:

Some years ago, when I first took up the pastoral care of the wild and dismal region from which I write, I was prompted to begin a journal in which would be set forth, as I encountered them, the habits, customs, and manners of the several social classes, with the thought that it might someday furnish the substance of a book with some such title as *Life in the West of Ireland*.

(16)

Although he promptly narrows his focus to the events of the rebellion itself, he nevertheless continues with a lengthy and ambitious exposition, which sets a detailed “stage” for the upcoming events. In his disillusioned recollections in the book’s epilogue, this prompts Broome to ironically refer to himself as the would-be “Gibbon of Mayo,” calling to mind the famous eighteenth-century English historian of ancient Rome. However, “doubt seeps in,” even in the discussion of this illustrious figure whose diligent methods in examining the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire often served as an example to more modern historians. After expounding upon the magnificent canvas of Gibbon, which reaches “from Hellespont to the pillars of Hercules” and where “each cause and reason is locked securely into place,” Broome follows with a profound metahistorical passage, worth quoting in full:

Perhaps it had not been like that at all. Perhaps all had been chaos, chance, ill-luck, perhaps even Providence, perhaps the ancients were indeed punished for their sins, as was once believed. Perhaps Gibbon is but a master magician, a sorcerer of language, a Simon Magus of stately paragraphs. Perhaps it is not Rome that we have seen, but Gibbon’s imagination bestowed capriciously upon the past rather than upon mountaintop or sunset or ruined abbey or other romantic flummery. And the past remains therefore unknowable, shrouded in shadow, an appalling sprawl of buildings, dead men, battles, unconnected, mute, half recorded. Perhaps we learn nothing from history, and the historian teaches us only that we are ignorant.

(617)

The image of a historian as a “sorcerer of language” has a direct connection to the theory of Hayden White, who describes exactly the same kind of imposition of rhetoric on the mute facts of the past, an inevitable “violence of interpretation.” Whereas White, however, sees inherent value in rhetorical strategies of illustrious historians such as Gibbon, and argues that they are able to secure the immortality of their works even after their factual basis is proved faulty, Flanagan does not allow for such a possibility.²⁰

The emphasis on fragments and ruins brings *The Year of the French* to the proximity of another prominent theorist, Michel Foucault, who in his introduction to *The Archaeology of Knowledge* emphasises precisely the principle of discontinuity and argues for a historical method which would fully acknowledge the fragmentary nature of its raw material. Such a method should abandon the notion of “total history,” organised around some governing principle (as in Gibbon’s analysis of the reasons of the fall of Rome), in favour of “general history” which would, without any pretensions at completeness, show only legitimate relations between various facts.²¹ In Foucault’s theory, eloquent documents are transformed into opaque monuments – fragments and ruins – and history “aspires to the condition of archaeology.”²²

At the end of his epilogue, Broome comes to the same conclusion as Foucault. It is, however, far from detached theory, but inextricably linked to the development of his character. As a born Englishman, he comes to his parish in Kilalla full of pride in the achievements of the British Empire and prejudices against the native Irish. In the course of events, however, his attitude changes with his growing attraction to the Irish-speaking culture and his inability to draw a clear line between the concepts of civilisation and barbarism. His final words in the book comment both on his scepticism towards the writing of history and his sadness at being unable to penetrate the world of the Mayo peasants: “We know parts of a world only, parts of a history, shards, bits of broken pottery.” (635)

²⁰ Hayden White, “Interpretation in History,” *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) 58.

²¹ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2001) 9.

²² Foucault 7.

The other historian from the pages of *The Year of the French*, George Moore, comes to similar conclusions, but from a different personal angle. He was a real person, to whom Flanagan was drawn as, in his own words, he “was fascinated by the idea of a man thinking about the French Revolution in the wilds of Mayo when suddenly it is dropped upon his doorstep” and because in the surviving fragment of his historical work Moore “speculates, in a strikingly modern way, upon the ways in which histories can be written.” (430) Similarly to Broome, Moore, too, is initially presented as an ambitious historian, firmly devoted to the time-honoured maxim that a historian should always be an aloof commentator, personally detached from the events he or she describes, and from their political consequences.

Moore’s intention to write a book on the Girondist party of the French Revolution is introduced with the following words: “For a year now, he had been laboring upon an experiment, an attempt to treat recent history with that meditative neutrality which other writers bestowed upon the past.” (43) When, as a residing Mayo landlord (one of the few Catholics to achieve such status), he involuntarily becomes involved in the historical event of the 1798 rebellion, he takes great effort to live up to his maxim: he refuses to assist the local loyalists in the suppression of a Whiteboy outbreak and, at the same time, strongly dissuades his young and idealistic brother John from participating in the United Irish movement. In George Moore’s uneven struggle not to become involved, his chief weapon is irony, according to White one of the four master tropes underlying all of historiography, and the principal mode in which most of modern history after Ranke has been written.²³

For a long time, Moore also retains the belief that history stands high above archaeology in its ability to trace relationships between facts. After pondering upon a monastery ruin and the nameless faces of figures carved on a tombstone, he concludes that similarly to the ordinary peasants who perished during the rebellion, “they too have slipped below history,” and continues: “History was not objects, mere shells of the past, hieroglyphic whorls. It was perceived relationship, patterns formed by passion and power.” (438)

²³ White, *Metahistory* xii.

In the course of the events, however, it becomes clear that this is a highly constructed viewpoint, which simply cannot hold as Moore becomes more and more entangled in the nets of history in the making. His entanglement is chiefly caused by the fact that, as one of the prominent United Irishmen in the county, his beloved brother John is appointed by the French "President of Connaught" and, after the suppression of the rebellion, faces trial and a probable death penalty in Castlebar jail. It is precisely the reminiscence of his brother that leads him to conclude the meditation quoted above by a sudden turn to the personal significance of history: "In the end, history was memory. History was his father." (439)

The climax of Moore's involuntary involvement comes when, as a way of ingratiating the government in his effort to alleviate John's fate, he is forced to publish pamphlets aimed at persuading Irish Catholics to support the Union with Britain. Although his support of this political measure is genuine, he bitterly regrets having compromised his detached position:

Never again would he survey the world from his balcony of cold and superior amusement, judging, appraising, condemning. His irony, in which he had taken pride as a function of his intelligence, would become a shell, each year more brittle and more thin, a mannerism, a gesture. John's reckless folly had bound him hand and foot, delivering him into a world which he had learnt to despise.

(545)

Ironically, George Moore's sacrifice for his brother is in vain as John dies in prison before he can save him. In the end, Moore entirely loses his faith in the interpretative powers of history writing and abandons his project of the history of the Girondists. This is described by a powerful image, which, as in the case of Broome analysed above, deconstructs the distinction between archaeology and history: "He had been left at last with a frozen puddle of history, muddy water frozen in the depression of a woodland path, dead leaves and broken twigs dim beneath its filthy surface." (604)

It may seem from these failures that all we learn from Flanagan's historians is the ultimate impossibility of writing history, at least in the traditional sense. Yet the novel presents a tentative option of escaping from this cul-de-sac, both on its thematic and formal level –

the possibility of presenting history not as an organised narrative, but as a series of verbal images, evocative and often interconnected, but never structured as a totalising entity.

The importance of the concept of image for the book as a whole is emphasised by its presence in the opening passage, which introduces the Gaelic poet Owen McCarthy, the principal character of the novel, for whom the search for images lies at the core of his craft:

[McCarthy] carried with him an inch or two of whiskey, tight-corked in flask of green glass, and the image which had badgered him for a week. Moonlight falling on a hard, flat surface, scythe or sword or stone or spade. It was not an image from which a poem would unwind itself, but it could be hung as a glittering, appropriate ornament upon a poem already shaped. Problems of the craft.

(1)

The passage is of interest not only since it introduces the idea of image, but even more so because it outlines its limits. The image can never function as a governing concept, from which a whole poem, or a historical interpretation, "would unwind itself," but rather a less ambitious, albeit no less perfect, "ornament." When the image described above is transformed, in McCarthy's mind, into a totalising symbol of the whole rebellion, it leads to tragedy and bitter disillusion. As McCarthy tells his friend and fellow poet Sean MacKenna during the night before his final execution:

Do you remember that poem that kept worrying me? The moon and the bright curve of metal. For a time, when the madness came on me in Killala, I thought I had the answer to it, when I saw the curve of some fellow's pike. But that was a part of the madness itself, like the drums and the muskets and the banner of green silk. The image lay there upon the dirt floor of my mind, and nothing would give life to it.

(611)

Metaphoric images that can somehow capture a certain aspect of a historical event are not only thematised in the novel, but become part of its very structure, serving to illustrate many subtle points that the book makes about the rebellion. One example out of many might be the passage in which George Moore, who is walking on

the shore of a lake, deplores his brother's romantic nature and his involvement in the hopeless effort of the United Irishmen. The passage ends with the following description of a natural scene: "Some distance away, a wild swan floated with her cygnets, elegant and calm. Her ugly feet could flail and trample, fouling the shore." (207) This image, when connected to what preceded, easily acquires metaphoric significance, succinctly summarising George Moore's sceptical view of revolutionary ideals, which may look beautiful on the surface, but become a cause of much ugliness when put into actual practice.

This central role of metaphor in a book full of irony has an interesting parallel in White's theory, which incorporates Giambattista Vico's idea that the progression of the master tropes is circular, proceeding from metaphor through metonymy, synecdoche and irony back to metaphor. The presentation of history in *The Year of the French* can be seen in this light as lying on the interface of irony, which, according to White, characterises most of contemporary historiography, and the much more direct trope of metaphor, which was prominent in earlier periods.²⁴ This power of metaphoric images, although with acknowledged limits, is the only ray of hope in a book which can otherwise be seen as entirely pessimistic and bleak as regards the outcome of the rebellion, the possibility of unity between different groups of Ireland's population, the fate of Gaelic culture, or even the possibility of studying history as such. It may therefore be argued that metaphor saves the novel from turning the trope of irony, brilliantly applied to deconstruct both the narratives of Irish nationalism and British imperialism, upon itself, and thus ending in utter nihilism. Despite all the irony, the possibility of presenting history at least in some form is asserted.

It is possible to conclude that Flanagan's *The Year of the French* is a profoundly metahistorical book, which thematises on many levels the problems inherent in writing histories of any kind. It is one of the principal merits of the novel that it refuses to give easy answers to difficult questions, such as the relationship between history and myth, but strives to present them in all their complexity. The underlying philosophy of history remains that of scepticism,

²⁴ See, for example, White, *Metahistory* 38.

informed by the awareness of the fragmentary nature of the historical material. The method of using metaphoric images, which offers a tentative escape from this dilemma, can only give us disconnected glimpses of the dark sea of history. At the same time, however, Flanagan does not look at history from some detached, neutral viewpoint, as the character of George Moore vainly attempted to do, but is painfully aware of the personal significance of both the historical events themselves and their subsequent interpretations.²⁵ The result of Flanagan's metahistorical inquiry is therefore not empty historical relativism, an accusation levelled at White, but a deeply ethical stance, clearly directed not only at the past itself, but also at related problems in the present, such as the conflict in Northern Ireland. The resultant combination of the metahistorical and the personal transcends the dependence of the novel on the "revisionist" trend in Irish historiography and makes *The Year of the French* one of the most interesting and moving novels ever written about the 1798 rebellion.

²⁵ The ethical problems connected with the historian's "detachment" face to face traumatic events in the past are discussed on theoretical level in Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et Récit. L'intrigue et le récit historique* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1983) 339.

BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF THE SELF: PADRAIC PEARSE'S *THE SINGER*

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Dealing with Padraic Pearse's *The Singer* always requires balancing on the uneasy border between literary text and history. Pearse's last play reached a wider public only after his death and thus, inevitably, has always been read through the lenses of what followed in the biography of its author. At the same time, the text itself provided one of the most powerful and influential readings of this chapter of Irish history and Pearse's role in it.¹

Moreover, this basic, confused relationship between the text, its author and their reception(s) seems to be just the most visible of the multiple examples of "boundary crossing." Starting from the most basic level of the literary medium, *The Singer* is the only play by Pearse written directly in English, following quite a substantial body of Irish-language dramatic texts. At the same time, the language of the play – as Máire ní Fhlathúin points out² – has the disconcerting quality of a "literal translation" from Irish. This is all the more interesting when we consider that Pearse's entire work is

¹ Admittedly, although it is virtually impossible to find an analysis of the Easter Rising that does not mention *The Singer*, most of the texts limit themselves to the ritual invoking of the closing lines of the play, without any further discussion of the text as a whole.

² Máire ní Fhlathúin, "The anti-colonial modernism of Patrick Pearse," *Modernism and Empire*, eds. Nigel Rigby and Howard J. Booth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 163.

characterised by a type of “linguistic border” between his literary (Irish) and political (English) writing, a border that is crossed by this very text. This may suggest that with *The Singer* (just as with Pearse’s “English” poems from the final period before the Rising – “The Rebel” and “The Fool”) we find ourselves on new ground where the cultural proposition of “Gaelic” Ireland is definitively linked to the political complement of a “free” Ireland. This merger of the man of letters and the political activist in Pearse – the author of *The Singer* – problematises in turn the question of genre. As a dramatic text written in the run-up to the political performance of Easter Week, *The Singer* seems – according to many critics – more of a “rehearsal” or “blueprint” for the coming revolution, reverting and blurring the boundaries between performance and life, gesture and action, metaphor and reality.³

This essay attempts to disconnect – at least to some extent – the text of the play from its direct historical context to concentrate on the play’s protagonist, MacDara, the superhero of Irish nationalist literature. Quite deliberately, this examination will seek theoretical guidelines and structural analogies outside the context of Irish Studies, relating the story of MacDara in the context of continental Romantic nationalism and “popular Nietzscheanism.” The inherent tension between the principles of individual freedom and collective duties in Pearse’s thought serves as a starting point for examining the relationship between the self and the nation. Contrary to the common view, nationalism cannot be seen as a victory of the collective over the individual; the processes of the emancipation of the subject and national awakening in nineteenth-century history and writing are often concomitant and in fact interdependent. In the present essay, this new concept of nationalism is applied to *The Singer*. The play is described as the narrative of the simultaneous individual emancipation and national awakening, culminating in a further stage in which nationalist messianism meets the discourse of the *Übermensch*.

³ See, for example, Ben Levitas: *The Theatre of Nation. Irish Drama and Cultural Nationalism 1890-1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 224-25; David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) 110.

I

In September 1913, writing from his “Hermitage” at St. Enda’s, Pearse expressed his longing for “a missionary, a herald, an Irish-speaking John the Baptist, one who would go through the Irish West and speak trumpet-toned about the nationality to the people in the villages.”⁴ Conscious of the fact that the Irish-speaking West would not produce such a figure in any foreseeable future, he created one himself. MacDara, however, is much more than a Gaelic arch-propagandist of the nationalist cause; I suggest that his story be read as a *Bildungsdrama* of the Irish national hero, a narrative of the national awakening and simultaneously of the emancipation of the self which (in terms of historical and sociological value) should be set alongside other great contemporary Irish narratives of emancipation: the stories of Christy Mahon and Stephen Dedalus.

Such a comparison may seem sacrilegious to present-day critics, just as it might have seemed sacrilegious (in the opposite sense) to the nationalist critics a few decades ago. After all, MacDara’s Connemara village, united to struggle against the Gall, may seem the antithesis to the deeply ironic de-politicisation of the agrarian violence in Synge’s *Mayo*.⁵ And Pearse himself, under the name of Mr Hughes, serves in *Stephen Hero* as a direct antithesis to the emblematic emancipatory figure of young Dedalus. They seem to form straightforward and mutually exclusive pairs, starting with Christy, the playboy of the Western World achieving the final liberation of the self and MacDara, the “Messiah of the West” who implements Pearse’s notion of “service so excessive as to annihilate any thought of the self.” Next we have Stephen, the cosmopolitan artist “flying from the nets” of family, religion and nation to search for individual fulfilment and Mr Hughes, a fanatic Irish-Irelander preaching narrow-minded cultural unity and purity.

On the other hand, if we consider Pearse’s literary and pedagogical practice separately from his political engagements, we encounter a very similar emphasis on the individual and the subjective. In his literary criticism (within the context of the Irish-

⁴ Padraic Pearse, “From the Hermitage,” *Political Writings and Speeches* (Dublin: Maunsel and Roberts, 1922) 167-68.

⁵ On the de-politicisation of violence in *The Playboy*, see Nicholas Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 90-91.

language literature), Pearse was a tireless preacher of art based on the expression of the self. As an educationalist, he remained a promoter of education derived from the idea of the cultivation of the individual (and unique) self of a pupil.⁶

Shall we therefore assume that there are two antithetical Pearses (as quite often occurs in contemporary criticism)? That there is a “good Pearse” – a progressive (anti-colonial) modernist and a “bad Pearse” – a prophet of anachronistic sanctified violence and organic collectivism? Instead, we should probably follow Gal Gerson’s insight into the paradoxical nature of Pearse’s nationalism in terms of the tension between the collective and the individual:

Collective action, according to Pearse, did not depend on the commands of an established hierarchy, but on an inner imperative, which would lead different people in different paths to “a common meeting place [...where] on a certain day we shall stand together, with many more beside us, ready [...] for a trial and a triumph to be endured and achieved in common.”⁷

“Inner imperative” – with its obvious Kantian echoes – again brings us towards the same notion of the autonomous subject fostered in Pearse’s literary and pedagogical writings, only this time in the context of political nationalism. Similar intimations of the paradoxical foundations of his thought can be traced as far back as various “obituaries” of the 1916 rebels, from Yeats’ “all changed, changed utterly,” through Arthur Clery’s meditation over the oxymoronic nature of Irish “Catholic Revolution,”⁸ to what is probably the most bold and insightful description of Pearse as both a “great Catholic” and a “great Nietzschean writer” made by Padraic Colum.⁹ All these utterances open up a complex theme of the relation between *Self* and *Nation*.

⁶ See, for example, Philip O’Leary, *The Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival, 1881-1921* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994) 108, or Declan Kiberd, “Patrick Pearse: Irish Modernist,” *The Life and After-Life of P.H. Pearse*, eds. R. Higgins and R. Uí Chollatáin (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009).

⁷ Gal Gerson, “Cultural Subversion and the Background of the Irish ‘Easter Poets,’” *Journal of Contemporary History* 30. 2 (1995): 333-47.

⁸ Arthur Clery, “Pearse, MacDonagh and Plunkett. An Appreciation,” *Studies* VI (June 1917) 212-21.

⁹ Gerson 338.

II

In his monumental biography of Nietzsche, Heidegger delineates the central process of modern philosophy, the emancipation of *subiectum*, announced most prominently by Cartesian *cogito*, and finding its climax (as well as its breaking point) in Nietzschean philosophy. The nineteenth century is, however, the age of the self in a more “popular” sense: it is the time when the idea of *subiectum* as the autonomous, self-proclaimed and self-governing entity leaves the cabinets of philosophers and enters the popular imagination, articulated in novels, poetry and history writing. By the end of the nineteenth century, the images of revolt against the tyranny of class distinctions, official morality or political system – which a hundred years earlier remained a marginal feature (actually verging on insanity from the point of view of the dominant discourse) – became commonplace. In its extreme form, symbolised by Stendhal’s Julian Sorel or Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, the self is established as the sole lawmaker and sense-giver, perfectly autonomous and desiring total control of its universe.¹⁰

According to contemporary Polish scholar Nikodem Bończa-Tomaszewski, a discernible pattern can be detected in the majority of nineteenth-century narratives of the self, while not reaching, however, the extreme position of the *Übermensch*. A cycle of psychological development starts with the discovery of subjectivity and its gradual establishment, concomitant with the rejection of limitations imposed by society and external reality, i.e. of the forces that threaten the sovereignty of the subject. Nonetheless, the process generates an unbearable suffering born from the feeling of “cosmic loneliness.” This, in turn, often leads to the desire for a new type of communal experience. And in the nineteenth century, the most common harbour for the tormented self was the idea of nation.¹¹

According to Tomaszewski, national consciousness – as an intrinsically modern construct – depends on the prior awakening of the separate individual self and its emancipation from traditional social structures and loyalties. Only the inherent interdependence

¹⁰ Nikodem Bończa-Tomaszewski, *Źródła narodowości. Powstanie i rozwój polskiej świadomości narodowej w II połowie XIX i na początku XX wieku* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2006) 53-61.

¹¹ Tomaszewski 58.

of both processes can resolve the paradox of the nineteenth century as both the age of the self and the nation. Drawing on numerous literary and historical biographies of the period, Tomaszewski construes a typical “national hero”: a young male deeply connected to his *Heimat*, yet alienated from it by the convulsions of modernity and passing through the process of self-discovery in total opposition to and rejection of the external world. The final affirmation of the “I,” resulting in the “cosmic loneliness” often described by the metaphor of death, leads to the desire for a reconstruction of the relation to the “not I,” but on new grounds that reflect the newly gained subjectivity. One of the effects was a powerful drive to “change the world,” i.e. to remake the external reality to the image of the self, expressed in the Romantic “philosophy of the deed.” Another was the appearance of the modern nation as a both “imagined” and “material” fellowship of equal, liberated individuals.¹²

As Tomaszewski suggests, the problem with grasping the relationship between the self and the nation springs from *a priori* identification (derived mainly from Hobbes) of the nation as a *subiectum* in itself, i.e. another collective self which automatically deprives the individual of subjectivity the moment he enters the superior entity. The concept of the nation, however, has its roots in the more ancient understanding of communal bonds derived from Christian political theology and its idea of the community as a body (*soma/corpus*). In Greek philosophy, *soma* is a part of man separate from the self and through which “I” participates in the external reality. It thus enables the establishment of a community without denying the identity of each member. In Christian theology, the idea of *soma/corpus* acquires a transcendental dimension: the unity of the Church is guaranteed by the participation of each particular body in the *corpus mysticum* of Christ. Furthermore, as Ernst Kantorowicz’s seminal work demonstrates, medieval jurists applied the theological concept to the political reality, creating the image of the “king’s two bodies” – one temporal, the other mystical, with the second enabling each particular member to

¹² Tomaszewski 52-103.

participate in the community.¹³ This concept leads to the notion of the body of the *patria* – the unity of people and territory made possible and guaranteed by the person of the ruler.¹⁴

Both theological and political concepts were essentially vertical. The community was constituted and its perseverance guaranteed through the person of the ruler (Christ/king, even if this was through their mystical, not earthly, bodies): “To use modern apparatus – only a king has full subjectivity.”¹⁵ A modern nation retains the basic features of the theory with a significant shift: through the process of emancipation of the self, everyone becomes a king and participates in the mystical body of the nation to the same degree without the need for mediation from a central, unifying figure. On the contrary, the process reaches its fulfilment with the “appropriation” of *patria* by the individual, i.e. with identification and acceptance of its every aspect (from language and customs to landscape and climate) as “mine.”¹⁶

III

Now I would like to apply the concept of the mutual interdependence of the process of the individual emancipation and the awakening of the national consciousness to reconstruct from the text of *The Singer* a “spiritual biography” of its protagonist.

MacDara’s story provides an example of the parallel narratives of subjectivisation and nationalisation. The process of emancipation of the self is structured as the gradual transcending or transgressing of all the external limitations of the awakening subject. MacDara’s basic characteristic is his non-conformist attitude – a typical feature of a Romantic hero – which forces him into a series of conflicts with various types of authorities: religious, political and communal. The process of emancipation starts with the exile from his *Heimat* – an atemporal village in Connemara. He leaves behind the basic traditional structures of the family and the locality, with their

¹³ Ernst H. Kantorowicz’s theory is laid down in his principal work *The King’s Two Bodies. A Study in the Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

¹⁴ Tomaszewski 106-110.

¹⁵ Tomaszewski 125.

¹⁶ Tomaszewski 125-26.

limited horizons and set rules, which provided the existential and intellectual framework of individual lives. Throughout the ensuing journey, all other elements linking him to “not I” are loosened: as a man, he rejects the earthly love of a woman; as a teacher, he is deprived of the love of his pupil; as a poet, he finally abandons and rejects his vocation of a “maker of songs.” The process of alienation from society and its most basic rituals reaches its peak: “I could neither pray when I came to a holy well nor drink in the public house when I had got a little money. One seemed to me as foolish as the other.”¹⁷

The process culminates with the final transgression, rejection of the basis of the individual and communal existence:

Once, as I knelt by the cross of Kilgobbin, it became clear to me, with an awful clearness, that there was no God. Why pray after that? I burst into a fit of laughter at the folly of men in thinking that there is a God.

(118)

This newly acquired knowledge is, however, by no means a Nietzschean “gay science.”¹⁸ Emancipation reveals itself as a process consisting of suffering, imaginatively described as the death of the old man or, in terms borrowed from mysticism, as a passage through the “dark night” of the deepest depravation and deprivation. In the paradigmatic Romantic text – Adam Mickiewicz’s *Dziady* (*Forefathers’ Eve*) – the protagonist builds a tombstone to symbolise the death of his former self and mark a new beginning, highlighted by a change of name (from Gustavus to Conrad). Similarly, MacDara – deprived of “all illusions” and his creative powers appears to the people met on his way as “a wandering, wicked spirit.” (118)

In the case of both Mickiewicz’s Gustavus-Conrad and Pearse’s MacDara, the process of death and rebirth of the self are paralleled by a movement towards “national illumination.” When MacDara abandons the microcosm of his native village, the source of his

¹⁷ Padraic Pearse, “The Singer,” *The Literary Writings of Patrick Pearse*, ed. Séamas Ó Buachalla (Cork: Mercier Press, 1979) 100-134. Further references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text.

¹⁸ And in fact, at the last moment, MacDara shrinks from becoming the Irish-countryside Zarathustra, saying to himself: “why take away their illusion [...] their hearts will be as lonely as mine.” (118)

creativity seems to wither as a result of his exile: "When I first went away my heart was as if dead and dumb and I could not make any songs." (115) Nevertheless, a gradual transfer from the level of *Heimat* to that of the wider fellowship of the nation is triggered. Whereas for his fellow "mountain men" the utmost horizons reached no further than Oughterard and Galway, MacDara's progress towards Dublin is concomitant with the widening of his "imagined community." Crucially, it is gradually perceived as "his own" and – most importantly – mapped, absorbed and articulated in a series of poems:

The first song I made was about the children I saw playing in the street of Kilconnell. The next song that I made was about an old dark man that I met on the causeway of Aughrim. I made a glad, proud song when I saw the broad Shannon flow under the bridge of Athlone. I made many a song after that before I reached Dublin.

(115-16, emphasis mine)

The people and the landscape, the human and topographical element, all merge together into the first intimation of the *corpus* of the *patria*. What in his youthful poems was just an emotion ("love for the people" and "great anger against the Gall") now becomes a material reality, gaining a corporeal existence.

In Tomaszewski's theory, nationalism – even if relying heavily on religious symbolism – is essentially a secular and *secularising* movement. On the other hand, in the context of Pearsean (as in Mickiewicz's) national discourse, the sacred and the secular constantly interact and merge. The final step towards the birth of the subject is linked to the symbolic "deicide"; and, at the same time, the moment of illumination and reawakening is clothed in the imagery and language of mysticism. The process of re-embrace of the Divine and a return to the community are concomitant; they are in fact articulated through the single monologue and a single set of images. The newly regained God reflects the transformative and generative power of suffering: He is the God of "abjection" and "loneliness." Yet, even more crucial, He is also the tribal God of the Gaels. He is identified with the people.

The fact that the religious illumination merges almost invisibly (and indivisibly) into the national illumination again seems characteristically Pearsean. In his political pamphlets, Pearse

provides only two metaphors for the community of the nation. The family is an obvious metaphor, while the other – the Church – is more complex.¹⁹ As stated above, the unity of the Church in theological terms results from individual participation *in* the body of Christ. At the same time, the image of Christ's body – due to its theological complexity and religious practice – bears an inherent tension between the suffering human body of the Crucified and the glorified mystical body of the Resurrected.²⁰ That same tension is now transferred to the national level:

The people, Maoilsheachlainn, the dumb, suffering people: reviled and outcast, yet pure and splendid and faithful. In them I saw, or seemed to see again, the face of God. Ah, it is a tear-stained face, blood-stained, defiled with ordure, but it is the Holy Face!

(119)

IV

What in MacDara's songs remained merely a spiritual intimation of the national community is – after the moment of revelation – exchanged for a concrete material communion with “the people”: “I have lived with the homeless and with the breadless.” (119) Contrary to the general secularising discourse of European nationalism and similarly to other Catholic national discourses such as Polish, this communion acquires a vertical dimension parallel to the mode of existence of *ecclesia* in St Paul's concept of *corpus mysticum*. In MacDara's monologue, the community is established through the participation in the splendid and defiled body of Christ, even if He is standing here not for the universal brotherhood of the Church, but for a particular community of the Gaels.

¹⁹ In “Ghosts,” Pearse claims: “Like a divine religion, national freedom bears the marks of unity, of sanctity, of catholicity, of apostolic succession. Of unity, for it contemplates the nation as one; of sanctity, for it is holy in itself and in those who serve it; of catholicity, for it embraces all the men and women of the nation; of apostolic succession, for it, or the aspiration after it, passes down from generation to generation from the nation's fathers.” Pearse, *Political Writings and Speeches* 226.

²⁰ See Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 302.

The movement towards affirming both the individual and communal identity fails to completely eradicate the vertical, transcendent dimension, which leads to one more – final – step in the process of the development of MacDara’s self and the final act of boundary crossing, this time linked to a discourse of the Romantic messianism.

The vision of the community of the suffering nation, established through participation in the suffering body of Christ, does not solve the problem of the enormous energy generated by the emancipation of an exceptional individual who desires to channel this energy into the reconstruction of this (and this-worldly) community. The vision remains passive, whereas the inherent characteristic of the emancipated *subiectum* is a will to act, to actively change the external reality. The subject fulfils itself through a *deed* as testified by the whole Romantic philosophy, from Schelling to Carlyle.²¹ “The deed for the Romantics is not simply *any* human activity but rather the act of transformation, which by itself creates the new world.”²² The nineteenth-century “obsession with the deed” can be easily detected as one of the central features of Pearse’s political writings, with its constant attacks on the “current generation’s” reluctance to act and their preference for the politics of a “debating society,” which in reality means choosing the animal vegetation instead of exercising will. Reading Pearse’s diatribes against the majority who succumbed to the vision of comfortable and respectable life as opposed to the rare phenomenon of Man (with a capital “M”), one cannot but think about the Nietzschean dualism of the Last Man and the *Übermensch*.

The tension between deliberative rationalism and “will to power” is directly reproduced in *The Singer* through the debates between MacDara and his brother Colm with the “elders” of the village about the legitimacy of the insurrection.²³ The philosophy of the deed is articulated most explicitly in MacDara’s statement:

²¹ See Isaiah Berlin, *Korzenie romantyzmu [The Roots of Romanticism]*, trans. A. Bartkiewicz (Poznań: Zysk I S-ka, 2004) 36, 124, 137-140.

²² Tomaszewski, 84.

²³ And – it must be added – these debates in *The Singer* anticipate very prophetically the imminent disagreement among the Volunteers.

Aye, they say that to be busy with the things of the spirit is better than to be busy with the things of the body. But I am not sure, master. Can the Vision Beautiful alone content a man? I think true man is divine in this, like God, he must needs create, he must needs do [...] The true teacher must suffer and do. He must break bread to the people, he must go into Gethsemane and toil up the steep of Golgotha.

(117)

Again, in a typically Pearsean mode, the language and imagery of religion and eternity is invoked only to be translated into the political and temporary context. Following the model of Gnostic²⁴ revolutionaries of all times, MacDara transforms the politically passive message of Christianity (“Vision Beautiful”) into the activist desire to change *this* world. As in the case of the prophets of Romantic millenarianism – Mazzini, Michelet and Mickiewicz – it necessarily gives rise to the messianic imagery. From the point of view of Tomaszewski’s theory, it might be said that we are confronted with a specific situation when the subjective emancipation and “national illumination” are achieved solely by one outstanding individual who absorbs into his self the whole community of the nation. The Romantic millenarian nationalism of Mazzini and Michelet acknowledges the necessity for the “initiator people,” the more conscious minority group who fight for “the whole” even if both thinkers prefer the vision of the “collective Messiah.”²⁵ Only Mickiewicz proposes a specific image of the individual Redeemer – “the Man-Word, the organ of God’s revelation” whose mission is “to lead the lesser and weaker brethren.”²⁶ This concept found its literary expression in Gustavus-Conrad, who claims: “I and motherland are one. / My name is Million / because for millions do I love / and suffer agonies,” and later:

I love the whole nation.
I have embraced all its past and
coming generations, pressed them to my heart as a friend,
a lover, a bridegroom, a father.²⁷

²⁴ In a sense given to the term by theorists of the modern mass political movements such as Eric Voegelin or Alain Besançon.

²⁵ Jacob Talmon, *The Political Messianism. A Romantic Phase* (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1961) 262-65.

²⁶ Talmon 272-73.

²⁷ Mickiewicz’s text quoted in George Brandes, *Poland: A Study of the Land, People and Literature* (London: William Heinemann, 1885) 246.

MacDara echoes this attitude: “My heart has been heavy with the sorrow of mothers, my eyes have been wet with the tears of the children” (the motif elaborated in Pearse’s poem “The Rebel”) and puts it into practice – facing the enemy alone in a redemptive act of sacrifice. The “bodily” metaphors of both texts take us back to the image of Christ’s body – at once tormented and glorified – as the guarantor of the unity and identity of the community of the Church. In the final passages of the play, MacDara moulds himself into a substitute Christ, offering his own body²⁸ – at once earthly and temporary, and glorified by the act of sacrifice – as a similar guarantor that the community of the nation exists. The language used in MacDara’s final speech (“one man can free a people as one Man redeemed the world”) is the language of Catholic organicist theology that enables all humanity to participate both in the body of Adam (and his sin) and the body of Christ (and his sacrifice).²⁹

V

MacDara’s journey – away from his *Heimat* and back again – forms a physical correlative to the more crucial spiritual evolution which consists in a series of boundary crossings. The abandonment of the native village is concomitant with the gradual repulsion of the old, “unformed” self, culminating in the establishment of the sovereign subject deprived of any social and spiritual bonds with society. Secondly, there is an opposing movement of appropriation or absorption of the external reality – the *corpus* of the *patria* now identified as “mine” – into the self. Finally, MacDara transcends the boundaries of his earthly, temporal, body, moulding it through the act of sacrifice into the mystical foundation of the national community.

Though often unbearably pathetic and displaying all the awkwardness of Pearse’s literary style, *The Singer* remains a crucial text in Irish literary history, not only in the most commonly invoked association as a “literary rehearsal” to the Easter Rising,

²⁸ We should notice the prominence of the motif of body in the final lines of the play, from Maire’s “there will be many a noble corpse to be waked before the new moon,” through the mention of Christ “hung naked before men” to the scene of MacDara’s exit, him “pulling off his clothes as he goes.”

²⁹ 1 Cor 15: 21-22.

but also in a more general sense as one of the key texts of Irish nationalism. It exposes its innermost complexities and paradoxes: the tension between the horizontal, democratic concept of the nation of liberated individuals and the vision of the outstanding Messiah figure (group) who reaches full emancipation before the rest of community; the interaction of the individual and the collective principle; and finally, the complex relationship between the theological and the secular in the nationalist discourse.

FROM INHERITORS TO SURVIVORS: JOYCE, KIELY, McGAHERN, BANVILLE AND MULDOON

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The aim of the present essay is not (and cannot possibly be) to provide an exhaustive account of the potentially inexhaustible field of Joyce's influence on Irish literature – a field of actions and counteractions, of cross-sections and intersections, of permeation and resistance. Instead, it attempts to reflect on the advantages and drawbacks of any such undertaking, to sketch the coordinates of any such field, and to map the particular field in question. The reasoning of this essay is deductive rather than inductive, and the particularly Irish focus will be secondary to its more general concerns.

This essay deals with a topic that is doubly marginalised within the vast majority of contemporary Joyce literary criticism. Despite the re-historicising critical trends of the 1980s and 1990s (whether new historicism, cultural studies or postcolonial studies), there is little evidence that literary history and studies of literary influence and reception have managed to overcome the “neglect, disuse, and atrophy” in which Robert Martin Adams found them in 1977. The reason, in Adams' opinion, was that historical trends “grow out of and are founded on observed similarities among writers,” and yet “the way in which a particular writer resembles others of his

species is precisely the least interesting thing about him.”¹ More importantly perhaps, the question of literary influence is one of diffusion, dispersion and diversion, so much so that the very idea of causality, underlying any real sense of historicity, ceases to apply: “Particularly when [a writer] has a great number of predecessors, to whom he relates not only directly but through second and third parties, his indebtedness being not to an individual or two, but to a number of disparate figures in a number of different cultural strains [...], the very idea of ‘history’ becomes absurd.”² Although this essay seeks to provide a more nuanced, and hopefully fruitful, analysis of literary influence, Adams’s caveat looms in its background throughout.

Secondly, Joyce scholarship has – albeit with the two important, if also rather obvious, exceptions of Samuel Beckett and Flann O’Brien – overwhelmingly preferred to deal with Joyce’s precursors rather than his contemporaries, and much less still his successors. Thus, the legions of “Joyce and X” book titles where X stands for a literary personage living and writing before 1900 (in the interval from Homer to late Victorians or French Symbolists) are paralleled by the meagre unit of only a handful of pioneering titles that can claim to have, however slightly, disturbed the overall field: *Afterjoyce* (1977) quoted above, David Hayman’s ambitious – yet ultimately marginalised – edited volume *In the Wake of the Wake* (1978), and the encyclopaedic – albeit primarily focused on reception through criticism and translation rather than through creative response – two-volume compendium, *The Reception of James Joyce in Europe*, co-edited by Wim Van Mierlo and Geert Lernout in 2004.³ Works from outside the industry, such as Morton P. Levitt’s broadly comparative *Modernist Survivors* (1989), Augustine Martin’s collection *James Joyce: The Artist and the Labyrinth* (a collection of contributions on many issues not reduced to reception only), or Dillon Johnston’s *Irish Poetry after Joyce* from 1997, have rarely

¹ Robert Martin Adams, *Afterjoyce: Studies in Fiction after Ulysses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) ix.

² Adams ix.

³ *In the Wake of the Wake*, eds. David Hayman and Elliott Anderson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978); *The Reception of James Joyce in Europe*, eds. Wim Van Mierlo and Geert Lernout, 2 vols. (London: Continuum, 2004).

earned their due.⁴ Moreover, even the chapter on “Irish influence” in the Mierlo-Lernout compendium, while asserting “the central position of Joyce in twentieth-century Irish writing,” focuses on “writers in Irish” only.⁵

Dillon Johnston’s work deserves to be discussed here at some length, forming as it does the only real precursor (known to the author) to the subject of the present essay. Despite its title, boldly proposing to rethink postwar Irish poetry as departing not so much from Yeats as from Joyce, and its scope – dealing at length with no fewer than eight poets (Clark, Kinsella, Kavanagh, Heaney, Devlin, Montague, MacNeice and Mahon) and a handful of others in less detail – Johnston’s book offers little by way of direct textual negotiation of the joint issues of (Joycean) influence, tradition, or genealogy. The only work by Joyce included in the abbreviation section, and thus directly dealt with, is *A Portrait* and the only substantial engagement with Joyce’s text is Johnston’s postcolonial reading of the tundish episode. Unsurprisingly, then, Joyce’s influence emerges first and foremost by way of an exemplary life rather than poetics or aesthetics:

A practical consequence of his celebrated exile was to make Paris, especially, a literary Van Diemen’s Land where Irish writers such as Beckett, Denis Devlin, Brian Coffey, Thomas MacGreevy, and John Montague lived part, if not most, of their lives. Joyce’s aligning of the Irish writer with the great European literary tradition set a standard for eclectic reading and polyglot writing that was not lost on these exiles or on poets of the next generation such as Derek Mahon and Seamus Deane.⁶

When it comes to Joyce’s literary influence, it is that of the mimetic hyperrealist, rather than linguistic experimentalist, that Johnston’s account chooses to follow:

The “fullness of life” that Joyce brought to the pages included that commercial class Yeats condemned as “paudeens” and the bustle of

⁴ Morton Levitt, *Modernist Survivors: The Contemporary Novel in England, the United States, France, and Latin America* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987); James Joyce: *The Artist and the Labyrinth*, ed. Augustine Martin (London: Ryan, 1990); Dillon Johnston, *Irish Poetry after Joyce*, 2nd ed. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

⁵ Frank Sewell, “James Joyce’s Influence on Writers in Irish,” *The Reception of James Joyce* 469.

⁶ Johnston, *Irish Poetry after Joyce* 28.

“pavements grey” the poet would escape. Furthermore, by attending to the meekest and poorest urban characters, Joyce broadened the Irish writer’s longstanding respect for the rural poor to an all-embracing literary democracy. [...] Secondly, Joyce’s faithful descriptions of mundane nonpoetic aspects of the city encourage Irish poets, urban and rural, to create from the actual details of their own lives.

(31; 33)

For Johnston, Joyce as an influence on Irish poets is essentially a writer of autobiography unabashed by its most mundane or intimate traits who chooses to live and write in the isolation of exile, enduring “calumny from [his] audience,” a “martyrdom [which] is the writer’s professional responsibility.” (37) Although Johnston attempts to further refine this generalisation by bringing aboard Joyce’s “ideas on history, point of view and dramatic voice,” his lines of influence are consistently tentative at best:

In the decade following the death of Joyce, readings in his work *may have encouraged* the irony in MacNeice, the rhetorical evasions of Devlin, and the role-playing of Kavanagh by which these writers eased the burden of authority in their poetry.

(38, my emphasis)

Treatment of Muldoon’s poetry comes towards the conclusion of Johnston’s study, in the final chapter entitled – curiously for a book examining the influence of Joyce the cosmopolitan – “Toward a Broader & More Comprehensive Irish Identity.” Johnston is chiefly concerned with Muldoon’s 1983 collection *Quoof*, praising it for its “version of the Irish tradition, which complements rather than supplants the various versions of Kinsella, Montague, Heaney, and Mahon” in that its method “suggests a new way of addressing the issue of violence in the Irish tradition: by unmasking it and disclosing its various universal aliases rather than by giving it a purely Irish or regional character.” (272) In Johnston’s account, Joyce’s influence on Muldoon, and on postwar Irish poetry as a whole, seems to be one of degree rather than kind:

These poetic versions of the Irish tradition comprehend a wider vision of the universe and include in “the more comprehensive Irish identity” Joyce’s sense of humanity’s universal plight [...] and flight

“between a micro- and a macrocosm ineluctably constructed upon the incertitude of the void.”

(272)

The paradigm shift towards Joyce yields a tradition and genealogy barely different from that commencing with Yeats. In Johnston’s account, Joyce’s impact seems to hardly have taken effect on any direct plane beyond the general expansion of both the *what* and the *how* of Irish tradition, and his function appears not to have gone too far beyond the example to live by rather than to write according to, Johnston’s concluding quote from the “Ithaca” episode of *Ulysses* notwithstanding.

I would like to begin by addressing the topic of Joyce’s influence in a broader, theoretical, quasi-structural way, and complement this broadness by a closely comparative treatment of one of its most fruitful cases. Broaching the theme at a recent conference on “Joycean Literature” in June 2011, at Birkbeck College, University College London, in a keynote speech titled “Reflections of Joyce,” Derek Attridge called for further analytical precision in approaching this vast field, particularly with regard to its location and quality. The location is entailed in the question of which part of Joyce’s oeuvre is seen as the *émetteur* of influence – with the Joyce of *Dubliners*, authors such as John McGahern or Colm Tóibín come to mind; the Joyce of *A Portrait* is quite palpably behind Roddy Doyle’s *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*,⁷ and a range of lesser-known Irish variations on the *Bildungsroman*; as I will attempt to show, Joyce’s paronomasia of guilt and his concept of typography as an error-generating machine in *Finnegans Wake* seems echoed in much of Paul Muldoon’s recent poetry. With *Ulysses*, it is even possible to distinguish between the influences of individual episodes: to take but one most recent example, the character of Molly Allgood in Joseph O’Connor’s *Ghost Light*, with an ashplant in her apartment, her mother’s saying “Bloom where you are planted,” as well as her cat-speech, all point to Molly Bloom as she appears in “Calypso” and “Penelope.”⁸

Given the sheer scope and variability of the sources of potential Joycean influence, Attridge’s contention that a writer uninfluenced

⁷ Roddy Doyle, *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1993).

⁸ Joseph O’Connor, *Ghost Light* (London: Harvill Secker, 2010).

by Joyce is one purposefully defending himself against his influence, seems far from overblown. Though the *émetteurs* and *récepteurs* be legion, the manifestations of the *transmission* – that is, the forms of influence taken and how the writer has responded to Joyce – can, taking a loose cue from Attridge, be grouped into four types: the *nod*, the *echo*, the *contest*, and the *countersignature*. The categories are to be understood as follows: the *nod* entails tapping into the immense Joycean reservoir of allusive, citable material, reverential or not; the *echo* designates the recall and elaboration of a Joycean theme or technique, conscious or not and often parodic (the early Samuel Beckett and Flann O’Brien top the list); the *contest* lies in a rejection, successful or not, of the most broadly conceived Joycean “style” in favour of all that he himself had refused while shaping this (the names of Aidan Higgins and John Banville are the first to come to mind).

The last and most pertinent category, the *countersignature*, refers of course to Derrida’s theorisation of the issue of signature – which bears on the related topics of originality and plagiarism as well as influence – and denotes a coming to terms with Joyce that is most relevant, if also the most difficult to measure. In Derrida’s account, the signature is not only the uniquely private expression of a similarly unique personality, but it is also always already part of the public domain, a repeatable sign designed to function in the absence of any such personality:

By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer. But, it will be said, it also marks and retains his having-been present in a past now, which will remain a future now, and therefore in a now, in general, in the transcendental form of nowness (*maintenance*). This general maintenance is somehow inscribed, stapled to the present punctuality, always evident and always singular, in the form of the signature. This is the enigmatic originality of every paraph. For the attachment to the source to occur, the absolute singularity of an event of the signature and of a form of the signature must be retained: the pure reproducibility of a pure event.⁹

⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (New York: Chicago University Press, 1984) 307-330.

In legal terminology, countersigning entails adding a second signatory to a document for the purpose of verifying the authority of, or bestowing validity upon, the signature. For Derrida, countersignature designates everything that rewrites what is written, that makes a signature what it is, remarking and remaking it in the process. What makes use of the Derridean *countersignature* most pertinent is its rootedness in Derrida's own grappling with Joyce's *Ulysses*, in his 1984 Frankfurt Symposium plenary lecture (translated and published in book form), "*Ulysses Gramophone*."¹⁰

As long as, for Derrida, any text bears a signature, not so much in its author's psychology, but rather in the idiomatic set of written marks that constitute it, then such a written structure invites repetition, rewriting, countersignature. And it is this solicitation of other texts – responses, commentaries, interpretations, controversies, imitations, forgeries and influences – this generation of textual links, that builds up what is commonly known as a "tradition" and what Derrida chooses to conceptualise as an ensemble of "countersignatures." In the lucid account of one of Derrida's interviewers, "the question of Joyce's signature" has to do with its "generosity":

Will it make itself an invulnerable fortress, impregnable to attack and outstripping, endow itself with a kind of omnipotence such that no one, no commentator to come, can ever get the best of, ever circumscribe and circumnavigate "James Joyce"? Or will his signature invite invention, novelty, something new, giving itself up to innumerable, incalculable innovations to come?¹¹

Just like a signature – Attridge's memorable address sought to show – a work of literature is both private and unique, yet also always public and depersonalised, part of the genre and, as such, a solicitation of other countersignatures, works of literature written in its presence. The second half of the present essay will, then, attempt to apply Attridge's typology to both artistic and critical response, beginning with three instances of writers critically dealing with another writer, and concluding with a particularly

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, "*Ulysses Gramophone*," *James Joyce: The Augmented Ninth*, ed. Bernard Benstock (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988) 27-75.

¹¹ *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, ed. John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997) 190.

productive example of an Irish writer “countersigning” Joycean influence.

John McGahern’s essay, laconically entitled “Dubliners” (*without* italicisation) begins by comparing Joyce’s *Dubliners* to George Moore’s *The Untilled Field*, two writers and collections close in time and place, but otherwise far removed: “Moore’s genius was erratic and individualistic,” whilst “Joyce’s temperament was essentially classical,” and so “to look towards Moore for any tradition is not useful.”¹² This is arguably an oversimplification on McGahern’s part, as it has been shown that Moore shaped his collection on his European predecessors (Turgenev and, closer to Joyce, Flaubert and Maupassant), and thus was much less “individualistic” than McGahern would have us believe. However, as regards Joyce’s tradition, we indeed have to look abroad to Flaubert, Chekhov, or Ibsen. To this effect, McGahern quotes Flaubert’s letters to George Sand in order to tease out the similarities in Joyce’s and Flaubert’s methods. Hence, a reading of *Dubliners* follows, based on the premises that “the method in *Dubliners* is that people, events, and places invariably find their true expression” and that “everything is important in *Dubliners* because it is there and everything there is held in equal importance.” (68-69) Close readings of passages from “Counterparts” and “Grace” ensue, in order to prove McGahern’s concluding remarks:

[P]un, coincidence, and echo are used as a writer of verse would use the formality of rhyme [...], drawing together the related instincts of the religious, the poetic, and the superstitious. The prose never draws attention to itself except at the end of “The Dead” [...], it enters our imaginations as stealthily as the evening invading the avenue in “Eveline.” Its classical balance allows no room for self-expression [...] Joyce does not judge. His characters live within the human constraints in space and time and within their own city. The quality of the language is more important than any system of ethics or aesthetics. Material and form are inseparable.

(71)

McGahern’s account blends acute critical insights and well-managed close readings with some gross oversimplifications (in particular, his claims concerning the self-expressionless style or lack

¹² John McGahern, “Dubliners,” *The Artist and the Labyrinth* 64.

of judgmental/moral perspective are highly – and quite easily – contestable), while maintaining a reverential tone throughout. Thus, although McGahern's sweeping statements on style seem to reflect more his own short story output, or, what he believes to have gleaned from Joyce, rather than the complex textual effects of *Dubliners* themselves, his contribution is valuable in one respect in particular: in acknowledging the foreignness – i.e., non-Irishness – of Joycean tradition, its literary cosmopolitanism and internationalism: a rare enough phenomenon in the current, particularly postcolonial, critical dealings with Joyce. As a whole, McGahern's piece is a critical nod of gratitude for the potential his precursor's writing seems to have opened up for others.

In "Joyce's Legacy," Benedict Kiely speaks of his own personal experience of writing "in [Joyce's] formidable shadow," an experience whose all-pervasiveness is best attested to by a comment on Liam O'Flaherty, who is said to have written "as if James Joyce had never existed."¹³ Kiely reverses the usual direction of the exchange to speak of Joyce's Irishness, in which his "artistic isolation, deliberate choice of exile, silence and cunning" coincide with "a great deal of the varied furniture of the mind that produced three of the most remarkable novels of modern times," which was "shaped by various manifestations of Irish nationalism; from the hard pride of Parnell down to the loud-mouthed intolerance of the Citizen in Barney Kiernan's pub." (47) For Kiely, an understanding of Joyce's sentiments vis-à-vis his country and countrymen can be gleaned from his correspondence with Grant Richards, the English publisher of *Dubliners*, whose tone "moves from the sceptical tolerance of a man trying to reason with the obtuse, to the downright anger of a man whose arguments have been blunted against dunderheads" (51), already foreboding his lifelong struggle against censorship. In a bird's eye view of Joyce's artistic development, Kiely stresses the importance of its Dublin-centeredness (if not Ireland-centeredness): Joyce's "inability to forget the city," his well-known self-identification (already observed by Frank Budgen) as a Dubliner much rather than an Irishman, coupled with his double refusal to be "bound down by the dogmas of one artistic school" and "by the dogmas of one

¹³ Benedict Kiely, "Joyce's Legacy," *The Artist and the Labyrinth* 41.

church." This mixture of clinging to orthodoxy while entertaining various heresies all contributed to the making of "the most insatiable experimenter in the history of the novel." (55) Contrary to the misgivings of "most readers" for whom it is "inexplicable folly," Kiely insists on the crucial importance of *Finnegans Wake* in the entire oeuvre, as, for him, Joyce is "one of those writers who must be followed all the way." (58) Kiely praises the *Wake*, asserting that

with all its oddities, obscure symbolism, associative words, melting into character, and of all characters into mist and nothingness, with its extreme adherence to doubtful philosophical and historical theories, *Finnegans Wake* is one of the most remarkable works of genius in modern literature.

However, this praise is soon enough paired with critical qualification,

[a]s a record of mankind the book is very likely a failure, because of that doubtful cyclic theory of history, because Joyce, being a great laughter and not a philosophic historian, being also a pedant, buried his meaning under a million pedantries and a million puns,

and concluded with downright pessimism:

It may be that *Finnegans Wake* was in the art the terrible mistake of James Joyce, because it offered neither to himself nor to younger writers any outlet from the circle, charmed but vicious, like the snake eating its own tail.

(60)

Thus, Kiely's is a problematic tribute, blending reverence with scepticism, and ending on a note of explicit critique, bringing a charge of artistic uselessness. Nonetheless, its critique, for all its seriousness, is aimed at merely one – however important – of the trajectories taken, and products created, by Joyce's art. Sounding the reverberations of Joyce's life in his art, and of his art in the life of his contemporary countrymen, mapping its individual stages and defining the uniqueness of its whole, Kiely's article acknowledges and cements Joyce's reputation, and can thus be positioned halfway between a reverential nod and a full-fledged contest.

The change in tone of Banville's contribution is heralded at the very onset of his "Survivors of Joyce," right in the opening gambit:

The figure of Joyce towers behind us, a great looming Easter Island effigy of the Father [...]. When I think of Joyce I am split in two. To one side there falls the reader, kneeling speechless in filial admiration, and love; to the other side, however, the writer stands, gnawing his knuckles, not a son, but a survivor.¹⁴

The Joyce of Banville towers *behind*, not *over*, contemporary writers, who no longer pare their Dedalian fingernails, but instead gnaw their knuckles at what they've been given to survive. Banville goes on to chart a binary opposition of "useful" artists (the four random samples are Catullus, Piero della Francesca, Beethoven and Henry James), "the strugglers, the self-conscious ones, the *sentimental*," whose work is "exoskeletal." In contrast to these, another haphazard quartet (Virgil, Vermeer, Mozart, James Joyce) produces work whose "methods are well-nigh invisible," the greatness of whose art "rests in the fact [it is], in an essential way, *closed*, [...] *mysterious at [its] core*," and there is something "uncanny" about it. (74)

Now, the problems posed by such a binary when applied to Joyce's texts are too glaring to be swept aside even for Banville himself, for it is precisely their self-conscious de-/re-constructedness that ranks among the defining traits of Joyce's texts. What writer, asks Banville, could have been more self-conscious than Joyce? And what writing was more of the *process* than his? At this point, Banville invites us to consider the "evidence":

What is it, in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* [...] that compels our awed attention? Is it, in the former, the sense of "real life" that is conveyed through Bloom and Stephen and Molly and the myriad other characters, so that we seem to look at ourselves, as it were, through the wrong end of a telescope, dainty, loveable, and wonderfully clear – is this what brings us back, over and over, to *Ulysses*? [...] In *Finnegans Wake*, is it the element of the crossword puzzle that attracts us? [...] The more of it we decipher, the more we "use it up." Of course, it is not serious diminishment; but anyone who has ever completed a crossword knows that curious, ashen

¹⁴ John Banville, "Survivors of Joyce," *The Artist and the Labyrinth* 73.

sense of futility, of nausea, almost, that comes along with the "solution." [...] We are asking: what is it fascinates us about *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*? – what quality is it in such works that prompts us to set them up as canonical? [...] What constitutes the quality of the numinous in them? What is it that speaks to our need for texts, for Holy Writ?

(77)

Banville's answer, insistently, is the quality of *closure*, accompanied by the quality of *strangeness* and (though without reference to Russian formalism) *estrangement*. The process by which this estrangement ushering in "a different order of understanding, which *allows* the thing its thereness, its outsideness, its absolute otherness" comes about in literature is *style*. Banville asks: "Has Dublin ever *spoken* so vividly as it does in *Ulysses*, in the *Wake*? And yet, from such works, what do we *know*, that we have not always known?" And answers: "Nothing, except style." (79)

The most pertinent question, then, remains whether it is productive, or even possible, to speak of *a style* with Joyce. There *had been* one, Banville notes, in *Dubliners*, *A Portrait* and the Telemachiad of *Ulysses*, but it was a style "Joyce knew better of – or worse, depending on your opinion of the rest of *Ulysses*, and the *Wake*," and the transformation that took place after *A Portrait* or very early on in *Ulysses* is considered to be "one of the great mysteries of Modernism." (79) This transformation, to Banville's mind, endowed Joyce's writing with "the absence of, or the concealment of, a unified, recognisable style" – and it is this absence that gives to Joyce's work "its peculiar, impregnable, *frightening* authority." The authority derives from yet another transformation:

[Joyce] is one of those writers... or should I say, *he is a writer* (for he is probably unique) whose work is utterly free of solecisms, of errors of judgement, of mistakes: for such things, should they seem to appear, are immediately transformed, by a sort of continuous chain reaction, into *inventions*. I happen to think that a formulation such as "The heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit" is pretty ghastly, yet when one comes across it in its context, the surprise of it, the – possible – humour of it, the *ambiguity* of it, leaves one breathless. [...] Do not mistake me; I am not criticising. I believe the trick that Joyce pulled in creating at least two great, closed

works of art out of an aesthetic that *seemed* to descend from the ethereal to the earthly, is the true mark of his genius.

(80)

Thus, Banville's is, again, a complicated, *contestatory* praise: for him, not only is Joyce's influence overpowering in that its universality and stylelessness erodes, subverts, and stymies attempts at constructing a particular *style*, but Joyce's art is ultimately useless for others, since its example, for all its virtuosity and vision, has little – or nothing – to teach. "As a reader," concludes Banville, "I can only applaud. As a writer, I feel, to paraphrase Simon Dedalus, that I have been left where Jesus left the Jews." (81) Of McGahern's, Kiely's and Banville's essays, the last is the most courageous, extreme, and hence also the most problematic – a case in point of a contestatory coming to terms with a precursor whose greatness is not only a reservoir of further potential, but also a hindrance to be sidestepped.

Paul Muldoon's engagement with Joyce has taken on various forms of critical nods and echoes, but most importantly, also that of artistic countersignature. The fact that, following a series of prose writers, a *poet* is discussed as "countersigning" Joyce's influence, deserves some substantiation beyond mere reference to Johnston's precursory example. As Adams and others have shown, although Joyce studied novelists, both modern and traditional, the authors who had the most profound effect on his imagination were not generally writers of prose fiction. Joyce himself fashioned his own literary tradition chiefly, with the sole exception of Flaubert, on poets (Homer or Dante), dramatists (Shakespeare or Ibsen), both (Goethe) and non-literary artists/theorists (Vico, Wagner). Finally, to read Joyce's heritage in the form of an experimental poet has the convenience of disposing with the traditional baggage of character, plot motifs, narrative procedures, done to death in most conventional accounts of prosaic influence, and focus on what Joyce himself considered crucial: *style*. Following Johnston, to read Muldoon through the prism of Joyce's experimentation is to sidestep the troubled issue of Yeats's shadow cast over twentieth-century Irish poetry, and also to suggest a prose-poetry crossover which opens up new pathways for a cross-genre dialogue.

Here, Muldoon's recent poetic work will be under focus, but I would like to begin with the essay collection *To Ireland, I*¹⁵ which contains one of Muldoon's few critical "nods" to Joyce – an explicit treatment and use of his work. In a passage doubly relevant in that it expands upon, thinks through and expresses explicitly what lies buried deep in the pile of amassed Joycean detail, and also points to his own understanding of the troubled relationship between poetry and politics, Muldoon notes the parallel between Michael Furey's unromantic employment in the gasworks and his equally unromantic death.

This "Eriny," Muldoon notes,

which we shouldn't fail to miss on this occasion, is yet another device used by Joyce to ensure that "The Dead" is indeed a story of "public life," in which Joyce undercuts the rhetoric of cultural nationalism, revelling in the very thing he repudiates [...]. It's a brilliantly effective way of addressing an issue raised by Gabriel, confronted by Miss Ivors, when "he wanted to say that literature was above politics." Joyce knows that literature is never above politics.¹⁶

As critic John Kerrigan has pointed out, Muldoon's ostensible slip of the pen in the exhortation against "failing to miss" is in fact a clever manoeuvre with which to "hinder as well as help [...] Muldoon's identification with the views of Joyce, rather than with those of his character Gabriel Conroy" in that the expression "repudiates what it revels in, leaving the reader uncertain how confident the poet is in what he convincingly – but he knows simplistically – asserts."¹⁷

Muldoon's literary oeuvre is marked by a similar hindrance of identification. Two crucial parallels can, nevertheless, be pinpointed at the outset: it is an oeuvre purposefully and provocatively immersed in experimentation (both conceptual and linguistic) and the limits, as well as horizons, of obscurity; and, it is an oeuvre from, and of, a personal and literary exile. Here, I will glean Joycean signatures as they are countersigned in Muldoon's

¹⁵ Paul Muldoon, *To Ireland, I*, *Oxford Clarendon Lectures of 1998* (New York and London: Faber, 2008).

¹⁶ Muldoon, *To Ireland, I* 66.

¹⁷ John Kerrigan, "Paul Muldoon's Transit: Muddling through after *Madoc*," *Jacket* 20 (Dec. 2002), <http://jacketmagazine.com/20/kerr-muld.html>, 25 Aug. 2011.

three recent poetry books *Hay*, *Horse Latitudes* and *Maggot*,¹⁸ leaving aside, among others, his *Madoc: A Mystery*, “by common consent, the most complex poem in modern Irish literature [...] – a massively ambitious, historiographical metafiction,”¹⁹ brimming with Joycean nods and echoes. The point, here, lies elsewhere – the three examples chosen here are meant to illuminate Muldoon’s reworking of three essentially Joycean topics: the error, the catalogue and, most generally, structure and structuring.

A case in point of Muldoon’s countersignature is a text from the collection *Hay*, “Errata,” prominent in that, a list poem of typographical corrections, it sums up the overall concern of the collection as a whole – error, particularly in relation to intentionality. The questions posed by this error list concern their origin – were they made by Muldoon himself or were they “found” somewhere in translation/transition? – as well as their status as mistakes – were they simply made, or were they made as mistakes? Thus, not only is “Errata” concerned with the expressive (Joycean) facet of error, leaning to the view Joyce shared with the psychoanalysis of his day that mistakes are possessed of a deeper, cryptically loaded meaning, but the text also seems to thematise as literature the concerns of much of the genetic criticism dealing with Joyce’s late works, particularly *Finnegans Wake*. In addition to these, “Errata” as a poem goes even beyond Joyce in exploring the relationship between error and rhyme. That errors often rhyme is a truism self-obvious enough, and the view of poetry as a medium of mistakes (with the poet’s rhyming mind all too easily prone to error) harks back to Plato, but Muldoon seems to transcend these shibboleths to inquire into the possibility of poetic redress, endowing his mistakes with a dimension at once painfully and meaningfully personal:

¹⁸ Paul Muldoon, *Hay* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998); *Horse Latitudes* (New York and London: Faber and Faber, 2006); *Maggot* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010). Though, certainly, in none of Muldoon’s literary works above is his engagement with Joyce as explicit as in his libretto to Daron Hagen’s 2005 chamber opera, *The Antient Concert*, a sixty-minute “dramatic recital” taking place in the eponymous Dublin concert hall in August 1904 when, legend has it, John McCormack was Joyce’s opponent in the tenor competition.

¹⁹ John Goodby, *Irish Poetry since 1950* (London: Manchester University Press, 2000) 296.

For "Antrim" read "Armagh."
 For "mother" read "other."
 For "harm" read "farm."
 For "feather" read "father."²⁰

For all its syntactic simplicity, the juxtaposition between lines one and two ushers in a whole series of distinctions: the one topological and Irish, the other English and personal; the one *conceptual*, stressing the substantial difference between two almost adjacent places (and, Kerrigan suggests, also implying the likelihood that "the poet's border obsessions might throw errata into reverse and make him mistakenly correct what is for him the less familiar reading"²¹); the other *typographical*, a *lapsus calami*. It is possible, in fact, to read all the lines in the text as invitations to introduce as well as remove mistakes, which consequently become alternatives. Similarly, any reading of *Finnegans Wake* is an exercise in the reader's editorial intervention in the text, foregrounding language as writing, paradoxically, by subverting typography as the apparatus of solidified and codified meaning – this, Kerrigan observes, "because an 'Errata' list is an index to a printed text, an invitation to cross words or just letters out and write others in."²² In addition to their conceptual richness, the emendations also reflect the turns of Muldoon's own artistic career – streaming from the epicentre of "Errata," they seem to infect the entire collection, so that in "Bruce Springsteen: *The River*," one reads of Muldoon's American exile from Ulster: "So it was I gave up the Oona for the Susquehanna, / the Shannon for the Shenandoah."²³

Just as Joyce's catalogues (in, for example, the "Cyclops" episode or I.5 of the *Wake*) thematise their exclusions as much as their inclusions, frequently revolving around some empty centre, Muldoon comes up with multiple variations on the topic of listing. The eponymous opening piece of *Horse Latitudes* consists of nineteen sonnets, composed – Muldoon himself has revealed – as the US invaded Iraq, each entitled with a toponym of a famous battle scene (all beginning with the letter "B" – as if to suggest the

²⁰ Muldoon, "Errata," *Hay* 87.

²¹ Kerrigan.

²² Kerrigan.

²³ Muldoon, *Hay* 41.

“missing” Baghdad) where horses or mules played a major role. Interspersed within those battlegrounds are accounts of a personal “battle” with cancer, as well as a commentary on the agenda of the Bush regime.

As James Fenton has suggested, the principle of organisation – like the portmanteau technique in Joyce’s *Wakese* and his jocoserious use of the Humpty Dumpty motif – harks back to Lewis Carroll and “The Hunting of the Snark,” where a crew consisting of Bellman, Beaver, Butcher and so forth hunt an entity called Boojum.²⁴ The parallel transformation of their influence is that both Joyce and Muldoon employ Carroll’s primarily amusing wordplay to aesthetic, even political, ends. Surpassing even Carroll, and countersigning Joyce, too, is Muldoon’s complex language, brimming with blends, neologisms, nonsense and nursery rhymes: from the obsolescent “proud-fleshed” or the mildly bizarre “hip-hirple” to the full-fledged absurdity of “Jim-jams and whim-whams / where the whalers still heave to / for a gammy-gam,” whilst conservatively heeding the dictate of the occasional (and more often than not, multilingual) rhyme, the jocosity of “Carlotta / terra cotta” contrasted with the seriousness of, for instance, “Roma / Hypersarcoma.”²⁵

The last Joycean countersignature, one of structuration, encapsulates the two above, as both the possibility of error – and *correction* – as well as that of listing – and *omission* – imply a closed structure within (and only within) the bounds of which these binaries can be put into practice. Joyce, notoriously, gravitated closer and closer towards circularity, from the dead priest of “The Sisters” to “The Dead” Michael Furey of *Dubliners*, to the “riverrun” of the *Wake*. In his 2010 collection *Maggot*, Muldoon explores circularity on the micro level of individual poems. Again, the opening poem entitled “Plan B” is a case in point, as each of its sections begins with an adaptation of the last line of the preceding one, ending with an image of “a book balanced on my own head,” harking back to the opening line “On my own head be it,” completing the text’s circularity – standing it, as it were, on its own

²⁴ James Fenton, “A Poke in the Eye with a Poem,” *The Guardian* 21 Oct. 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/oct/21/featuresreviews.guardianreview6>, 25 Aug. 2011.

²⁵ Muldoon, *Horse Latitudes*, 3-4, 53.

head.²⁶ It is crucial that the operations are those of adaptation or paraphrase, and not mere repetition; thus, the poems offer rereadings and rewrites of themselves. The circularity can also be regarded within one single-page text: the poem entitled “@,” a dishevelled sonnet with a procession of similes (“Like the whorl of an out-of-this-world ear... / Like the ever-unfolding trunk of the elephant in the room... / Like the scrolled-down tail of a capuchin monkey...”) ending on a pun that harks back to the poem’s title: “you’ve lost track of where she’s at.”²⁷

What has hopefully emerged from the three examples above is an illustration of the complex and idiosyncratic nature of Muldoon’s reworking, rewriting, and countersigning of some of the crucial Joycean themes. That any engagement with concerns overtly Joycean can be a hazardous venture has been amply proven by the three authors-disguised-as-critics above; and this also still remains an issue in some current Muldoon criticism: for instance, the *Wall Street Journal* reviewer writing on *Hay* warns, “Mr. Muldoon’s example shows just how dangerous it is to swallow Joyce whole.”²⁸ However dangerous the swallowing, Muldoon’s example also demonstrates just how much there is to chew on, digest and regurgitate.

²⁶ Muldoon, *Maggot* 3, 9.

²⁷ Muldoon, *Maggot* 74.

²⁸ *Wall Street Journal*, 13 Apr. 2001.

“CLOSED COMMUNITIES”: KAFKA IN THE CRITICISM AND LATE POETRY OF LOUIS MACNEICE

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This essay will examine the influence of Franz Kafka on the late poetry of Louis MacNeice. By analysing MacNeice’s attitude towards Kafka in his critical writings, it aims to show how MacNeice’s aesthetic in his final collection *The Burning Perch* is, stylistically and thematically, greatly influenced by Kafka. As will be highlighted, MacNeice’s choice of Kafka as a major continental literary authority is not random. He is carefully selected in order to find a way to explore themes dear to MacNeice at the end of his life: childhood fears, anxiety about personal isolation and claustrophobia in a dehumanised society.

Varieties of Parable, his posthumously published Cambridge Clark lectures, were out of print until 2009, which suggests that MacNeice the critic has thus far been disregarded. This neglect may be due to a grudge against the poet who declared “all literary critics are falsifiers in that they try to disintricate the value or essence of a poem from the poem itself.”¹ Although Ben Howard claims that MacNeice’s apparent objections to literary criticism originated rather in “his awareness of criticism’s inherent limitations,”²

¹ Louis MacNeice, *The Poetry of W.B. Yeats* (London: Faber, 1967) 15.

² Ben Howard, “In the Shadow of the Gasworks: Louis MacNeice and the Critical Office,” *The Sewanee Review* 99.1 (1991): 63.

MacNeice was convinced that criticism was inevitably imprecise and flawed in its evaluation of poetry and the poet. "The poet," MacNeice says, "is a maker, not a retail trader. The writer today should be not so much the mouthpiece of a community [...] as its conscience, its critical faculty, its generous instinct."³ It is this fear of reductive critical systems that leads to MacNeice's conviction that "the man who reads a poem and likes it, is doing something far too subtle for criticism."⁴

All of this seems somewhat problematic when we consider that MacNeice wrote criticism himself. Apart from *Varieties of Parable*, in which he stresses the importance of parable writing for his own poetic works, he also produced *Modern Poetry* (1938), a reflection on contemporary poetry with his own experience as a poet in mind, and *The Poetry of W.B. Yeats* (1941). Despite the ostensible academic nature of these works, however, MacNeice confesses in *Modern Poetry* that "a man who writes poetry himself is certain to be prejudiced when he comes to criticise poetry"⁵ and concludes that "I do not, therefore, profess to attempt a reasoned, balanced, objective, or historical criticism of my contemporaries."⁶ The style of *Modern Poetry* is aphoristic and idiosyncratic – MacNeice rarely attempts to be objective, but, as Walter Allen suggests, to derive critical authority largely "from his own practice as a poet."⁷

Allen also argues that MacNeice's "criticism is always partly autobiographical: whatever he writes springs out of his own experience of poetry as reader and writer."⁸ This accords with some statements by MacNeice – for example, when he declares that "the content of poetry comes out of life,"⁹ and that "literary criticism should always be partly biographical."¹⁰

A subtle reading of MacNeice's criticism thus allows insights into his life and poetic practice. *Varieties of Parable*, the last book of

³ Louis MacNeice, *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) xxi.

⁴ MacNeice, *Modern Poetry* 53.

⁵ Louis MacNeice, *Selected Literary Criticism of Louis MacNeice*, ed. Alan Heuser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) 57-58.

⁶ MacNeice, *Selected Literary Criticism* 58.

⁷ Walter Allen, "MacNeice as Critic," *Time Was Away: The World of Louis MacNeice*, eds. Terence Brown and Alec Reid (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1974) 57.

⁸ Allen, "MacNeice as Critic" 55.

⁹ MacNeice, *Selected Literary Criticism* 98.

¹⁰ MacNeice, *Modern Poetry* 75.

criticism is, for instance, of crucial importance to his last poetry collection, *The Burning Perch*, as both were composed at the same time.¹¹ Although *Varieties of Parable* has been criticised for its loose terminology, as well as MacNeice's overemphasis of the similarities of the writers he addresses,¹² it is still – I would argue – an invaluable source of reflection of MacNeice's personal taste, discoveries and influences.

From the beginning of *Varieties of Parable*, we are told of a personal development in MacNeice's own poetic approach:

In poetry as a writer I have [...] confin[ed] myself largely [...] to the external world and therefore at times bec[ome] a journalist rather than a creative writer. In the 1930s we used to say that the poet should contain the journalist; now I would tend more often to use 'contain' in the sense of control or limit. [...] What the poet is far more concerned with is that 'inner conflict' [...] which [...] requires metaphorical writing.¹³

This indicates not only a clear break from MacNeice the journalist; it also suggests a shift from empirical focus to spiritual endeavour. As he says, "what I myself would now like to write, if I could, would be double-level poetry" (8) – "the kind [of writing], which on the surface may not look like a parable at all." (2-3)¹⁴

Before analysing how this shift can be felt in his poetry and what role Kafka occupies, I will first look at the main argument in *Varieties of Parable*, as well as Kafka's role in MacNeice's criticism in general. The use of the word 'parable' in the title is significant. MacNeice is concerned with linguistic confinement – with the difficulty of expressing ideas and feelings in language: "I don't like the word 'parable' and it suggests something much too narrow for my purpose, namely the parables of the New Testament. On the other hand the other possible words seemed even less satisfactory" (1).

¹¹ MacNeice wrote both works in the early 1960s. *Varieties of Parable* was composed in 1963 and *The Burning Perch* between 1961 and 1963. The note "On *The Burning Perch*" for *The Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, as MacNeice's biographer Jon Stallworthy says, "must have been one of the last things he wrote before his death on 3 September 1963." Jon Stallworthy, *Louis MacNeice* (London: Faber, 1995) 480.

¹² Allen, "MacNeice as Critic" 60.

¹³ Louis MacNeice, *Varieties of Parable* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965) 8. Subsequent references are given in parentheses in the text.

¹⁴ The terms "parable writing" and "double-level writing" will be used synonymously.

The biblical connotations of 'parable' make MacNeice uneasy, but at the same time, other less fitting words — symbolism, allegory, fable, fantasy and myth — can all "be squeezed under the umbrella of 'parable.'" (2) A definition of 'parable' based on words which can be "squeezed" under it, is arguably vague, as is the *OED* explanation that MacNeice bases his concept upon: "According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, 'parable' means 'any saying or narration in which something is expressed in terms of something else'. 'Also,' it adds, 'any kind of enigmatic or dark saying.'" (2) MacNeice thus relies on vagueness and on the refusal of precise meanings. This is another example of the break from the straightforward precision of journalistic writing, which "in the photographic sense is almost played out and no longer satisfies our needs." (26)

The move away from journalistic writing involves a struggle, however. Discussing Kathleen Raine's theory on double-level writing, "which postulates that in all the greatest poetry there is 'an upper, linguistic layer, whose symbolic counters are words', and 'a lower, symbolic layer [...] that has little to do with words at all,'" he stresses that his "first reaction to such statements [was] to feel very uncomfortable." Subsequently, he wonders whether it is appropriate "for a writer to concern himself with something that has little to do with words at all" and comes to the conclusion that "here we confront one of the eternal paradoxes: man wants to express himself because he cannot express himself." (55) Double-level writing seems to come closest to solving this essentially unsolvable dilemma of finding the right expression for complex human feelings.

Interestingly, this concept is prefigured in Kafka's story "On Parables." A parable on parables, this story revolves around the question of whether parables are applicable to daily life or if their wisdom is contained in a different sphere of language. Apparently, even "the sage" cannot translate into a "more precise" language that could be of help in "the struggle [of] everyday [life]." Kafka suggests: "All these parables really set out to say merely that the incomprehensible is incomprehensible."¹⁵ Truth, that is, what lies beneath the layers of language, is unattainable — or as Stanley Corngold says, "the perpetual postponement [...] seems in every

¹⁵ Franz Kafka, "On Parables," *The Complete Short Stories*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (London: Minerva, 1992) 457.

case to be the final claim."¹⁶ Whereas Kafka's metacritical story is very ambiguous as to a possible conclusion in this matter, MacNeice is certain that the writing of parables, writing that entails more than just the overtly perceived meaning of words, is an adequate tool of expression for human experience. In his mind, Kafka "create[s a] special worl[d],"¹⁷ and thus counteracts "the single-track mind and the single-plane novel or play [which] are almost bound to falsify the world in which we live."¹⁸

Kafka's parables, as MacNeice reads them, have more than one layer of meaning. Their relationship to real life is not easily discernable and no system of belief is clearly exposed. MacNeice's Kafka in *The Castle* explores "the possibilities of an image which presented itself to his imagination."¹⁹ Thus, for MacNeice, Kafka's writing is that of an author whose consciousness acts as a seismograph of modern times: one who is honest to himself even when honesty carries the risk of unhappiness. MacNeice writes, "his whole work can be regarded as the self-examinations of a lawyer haunted by evil, and therefore also haunted by truth." (135) This point is noteworthy, as it reflects MacNeice's own interest in self-exploration through parable writing. For MacNeice, parable writing plumbs the depths of one's own experience. In this mode of thinking, creative work becomes personal and autobiographical. By means of the modern parable, a writer can explore individual concerns without having to be in harmony with the reality that exists outside the work. In parable writing, there is an intrinsic "inner reality," a "spiritual, or indeed a mystical, element." (77)

Furthermore, MacNeice can empathise with Kafka's characters: "It seems to me that in both *The Trial* and *The Castle* the ordinary reader, *qua* Everyman, is bound to identify himself with K. *qua* Everyman." (137) The stories all have in common what MacNeice calls a "wry dream logic," in which "the scholasticism of Angst" (136) is the underlying driving force of the narrative. MacNeice can recall similar dreams or nightmares, in which one is "prey to

¹⁶ Stanley Corngold, "Kafka's Later Stories and Aphorisms," *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka*, ed. Julian Preece (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 105.

¹⁷ MacNeice, *Varieties of Parable* 5.

¹⁸ Louis MacNeice, *The Dark Tower and Other Radio Scripts* (London: Faber, 1964) 21.

¹⁹ MacNeice, *Varieties of Parable* 134. Subsequent references are given in parentheses in the text.

nagging anxiety" (139), or feels paralysed, numbed or haunted by some ominous outside conspiracy. For him, nightmares and "dreams ha[ve] a lot to do with me myself and with my world." (7) They are important for MacNeice because of their connection to the 'real' world which Kafka enables him to explore.

One characteristic that accompanies the nightmarish quality in Kafka's writing is claustrophobia. This form of anxiety is all-encompassing for MacNeice, as it is not just personal but, "conditioned by time and place, by the general experience and attitude of the community in which he finds himself." (51) For MacNeice, Kafka is "not only more specialist but more universal than" any other writer, expressing the feeling of claustrophobia in "closed communities." (133)

Similar to Kafka's fiction, the roots of anxiety in MacNeice can be found in childhood and social confinement. In *Zoo* (1938), he reflects on his "harassed and dubious childhood" and his growing awareness "of the North of Ireland as a prison." Additionally, he recalls that he was haunted by "many nightmares," which might have been the result of his parents' daily threat before going to bed that "you don't know where you'll wake up." He writes: "When I came home [from school] I belonged nowhere. There was a great gulf between myself and the bare-foot boys in the street."²⁰ Twenty-five years later, he similarly states: "My childhood was rather lonely, [and incidentally, at one period I had a lot of nightmares and all that.]"²¹ Evidently, his childhood memories of the North of Ireland are connected with the idea of claustrophobic "closed communities" and even bear a close resemblance to Kafka's childhood memories in *Dearest Father*, in which Kafka describes his "attempts at independence or escape, with the smallest imaginable success."²² Kafka also grew up in an environment under strict and stern parental guidance in which self-creation outside the given social structures seemed impossible to realise. In this light, Kafka becomes a fellow sufferer for MacNeice.

²⁰ Louis MacNeice, *Zoo* (London: Michael Joseph, 1938) 79.

²¹ Louis MacNeice, *Selected Prose of Louis MacNeice*, ed. Alan Heuser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) 272.

²² Franz Kafka, *Dearest Father*, trans. Hannah and Richard Stokes (Richmond: Oneworld Classics, 2008) 81.

Both also share similar disillusionment and alienation from the current community and social structures. In the poem "New Jerusalem," for example, MacNeice voices his bitterness over a society in which citizens are unable to become independent-minded individuals:

As for citizens, what with their cabinets
Of faces and voices, their bags of music,
Their walls of thin ice dividing greyness,
With numbers and mirrors they defy mortality.²³

'They' have no face, no individual consciousness which would enable them to step away from ideas imposed from the outside. The impersonal greyness of an almost inhuman mass of citizens is reminiscent of Kafka's "inextricable confusion [...] of foreshortened human figures" in *Amerika* in which the protagonist, Karl, feels like a "lost sheep."²⁴ Thus, similar to Kafka's experience, MacNeice feels painfully isolated and marginalised from society, as it threatens the individual with being dissolved in its prevalent and all-encompassing grey structures. This anxiety over his position in society, social changes and his childhood memories are the underlying mechanisms at work in *The Burning Perch*.

His fears are both overtly and covertly addressed in this collection. After MacNeice had completed the volume, he wrote that he "was taken aback by the high proportion of sombre pieces, ranging from bleak observations to thumbnail nightmares."²⁵ Indeed, *The Burning Perch* is a lot darker in tone than most of his other collections and a general lack of comfort is palpable. The use of parable writing or double-level writing in *The Burning Perch* enables MacNeice not only to directly address his personal troubles, but also to look beyond the initially very gloomy perspectives. The dedicatory poem "To Mary" outlines the mode and aim of the volume: "Though nightmare and cinders, / The one can be trodden, the other ridden, / We must use what transport we can."²⁶ *The Burning Perch* is a journey that fuels itself with elements of phantasmagoria and retrospection. The poem continues:

²³ Louis MacNeice, "New Jerusalem," *Collected Poems*, ed. Peter McDonald (London: Faber, 2007) 591.

²⁴ Franz Kafka, *Amerika*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken Books, 1962) 39.

²⁵ Louis MacNeice, "Appendix 7: VII On *The Burning Perch*," *Collected Poems* 795.

²⁶ Louis MacNeice, "To Mary," *Collected Poems* 576.

[...] Both crunching
 Path and bucking dream can take me
 Where I shall leave the path and dismount
 From the mad-eyed beast and keep my appointment
 In green improbable fields with you.

One possible way of interpreting these lines is that ‘nightmare and cinders’ are necessary agents that help the poet to transform himself. He wants to face his fears, ‘dismount,’ as it were, from them, and thus overcome them. It is a daring, self-confident, almost reverse Dantean decision to consciously leave the ‘straight path.’ In the last poem of the collection, “Coda,” MacNeice writes, “But what is that clinking in the darkness? / Maybe we shall know each other better / When the tunnels meet beneath the mountain.”²⁷ Thus, MacNeice summarises the attempt of this volume to confront parts of his inner emotional life below the surface, something he had not faced previously in such a direct and honest manner.

The personal pain and inevitable isolation in this process are felt throughout the collection. The narrator treads on unstable ground and is, therefore, in constant danger of losing agency. Particularly the retrospective poems dealing with childhood incorporate these features. In “Soap Suds,” for example, as well as sensory memories of the past, an underlying outside threat is ominous: “And the grass has grown head-high and an angry voice cries Play!”²⁸ The idea of a claustrophobic, almost suffocating space is accompanied by a hostile command from an unknown authority. In “The Habits,” a person’s life struggle with outside control and the accompanying instilling of habits is described. The crucial stanza ends in “His parents said it was all for the best.”²⁹ The overarching parental control has a haunting quality like the nightmarish scenes in Kafka’s “The Judgement,” in which the father even controls the way he wants his son to kill himself: “I sentence you now to death by drowning.”³⁰

A form of communication breakdown is apparent in these works by MacNeice and Kafka. There is no gentle speech: only aggressive controlling commands. The act of silencing is also the

²⁷ Louis MacNeice, “Coda,” *Collected Poems* 610.

²⁸ Louis MacNeice, “Soap Suds,” *Collected Poems* 577.

²⁹ Louis MacNeice, “The Habits,” *Collected Poems* 597.

³⁰ Franz Kafka, “The Judgement,” *Metamorphosis & Other Stories*, trans. Michael Hofmann (London: Penguin, 2007) 49.

process of taking away agency. MacNeice's "Birthright" is one of the clearest examples of this:

When I was born the row began,
I had never asked to be a man;
They never asked if I could ride
But shouted at me 'Come outside!'³¹

There is no two-way communication. 'They' forcibly take control over the speaker through the loudness of their voices. The speaker has lost any form of agency, is isolated, and terrified. As a final result, he is paralysed: "The sun came up, my feet stuck fast."³²

This loss of self-determination resulting in paralysis due to ominous control by a fear-instilling authority comes across in many poems. The nihilistic "Greyness is All," for instance, presents a depressing image of a horrified and suffocating person waiting for "some fate / Contrived by men," but the relevance of this is unclear:

But, as it is, we melt and droop
Within the confines of our coop;
The mind stays grey, obtuse, inert,
And grey the feathers in the dirt.³³

Similarly, in "The Grey Ones" the focus is on what "lay shrined behind the haunted door" [...] "on which stands guard for ever more / A beggar with a flaming sore."³⁴ The image of a person waiting, and thus wasting, his entire life because of instilled doctrines seems to have strong parallels to Kafka's parable "Before the Law." It appears that the man in this short story could have had the chance to find out what lies 'behind the haunted' door, to have a final all-encompassing clarity of life and afterlife, had he only dared challenge what he had been taught all his life not to challenge.³⁵ Like in "Greyness is All" and "The Grey Ones," inertia is the not necessarily inevitable but nevertheless unchallenged *status quo*.

³¹ Louis MacNeice, "Birthright," *Collected Poems* 594.

³² Louis MacNeice, "Birthright" 594.

³³ Louis MacNeice, "Greyness is All," *Collected Poems* 598.

³⁴ Louis MacNeice, "The Grey Ones," *Collected Poems* 584.

³⁵ Franz Kafka, "Before the Law," *Metamorphosis & Other Stories* 197-98.

There is a deeply expressed fear in many poems that all-embracing societal normative behaviour will, as it were, 'infect' the speaker, so that he will, consequently, give in to authority and become part of the indistinguishable bland mass. In Kafka, this fight against authoritative corruption of the individual, resulting in a loss of personal identity, is unsuccessful most of the time. Many of his protagonists either disappear or bodily disintegrate. Josefine disappears after having defended the independence of art all her life;³⁶ another artist, the hunger artist, is more straw than body before he dies.³⁷ Similarly, in stanza X in MacNeice's "As in their Time," the subject is threatened: "He had lived among plastic gear so long / When they decided to fingerprint him / He left no fingerprints at all."³⁸ 'They' have managed to alienate the subject from any individual identity; assimilation to a modern mass society has been accomplished.

In other poems, the speaker tries to avoid lifelong suffocating paralysis by irreversible measures, because of the apparently futile fight against the flux of modernity. In the chilling poem "The Suicide," for example, a guided tour explores the private space of a person who has just killed himself by jumping out of a window. Strangely, in evidence of Kafka's influence, the beginning and the end of *The Trial* seem to reverberate in this poem — the initial invasion of privacy, loss of agency and dignity, and K's successive nightmarish wandering through a labyrinth, only to be eventually murdered "like a dog."³⁹ Shortly before his death, K. sees a figure at a window spreading his or her arms. It is an unexpected image but, perhaps, a somewhat soothing one of someone who seems to take final control over his or her life. The figure is able to regain liberty by jumping out of a window, out of a confined suffocating space, even if this inevitably means death. MacNeice hints at the different levels of reading double-level writing: "I would venture the generalisation that most of these poems are two-way affairs or at least spiral ones: even in the most evil picture the good things, like the sea in one of

³⁶ Franz Kafka, "Josefine, the Singer, or The Mouse People," *Metamorphosis & Other Stories* 264-82.

³⁷ Franz Kafka, "A Hunger-Artist," *Metamorphosis & Other Stories* 252-63.

³⁸ Louis MacNeice, "As in their Time," *Collected Poems* 598.

³⁹ Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. Breon Mitchell (New York: Schocken Books, 1998) 231.

these poems, are still there round the corner."⁴⁰ Thus, "The Suicide," at first sight horrifying and "enigmatical or dark," might indeed have a "good thing round the corner."

Being able to die as a form of liberating escape is denied in "After the Crash" and "Charon," two of MacNeice's most powerful but also most disturbing poems. In both of these, the reader clearly encounters a "complex amalgam of the real with the surreal."⁴¹ Unlike other poems (for example, "Birthright"), in which the thought of life as a condition heading towards death is expressed in horror, "After the Crash" and "Charon," present death as a desirable but paradoxically unattainable condition. By distorting the logic of biological law, the reader is drawn into a special world that is ruled by laws of time and space which differ from those in our known world. "When he came to he knew / Time must have passed because / The asphalt was high with hemlock."⁴² As Terence Brown has analysed, "the 'because' [...] is quite illogical."⁴³ The speaker would have had to notice the height of the hemlock during the accident only to realise the change in this after regaining consciousness. Also, how is it possible to know that "in the dead, dead calm / It was too late to die"?⁴⁴ The image is ordered from within with an indiscernible self-consistent logic and, accordingly "resist[s] all rational explanation."⁴⁵ Meaning is elusive and cannot be pinned down.

"Charon," similarly defies conclusive meaning in its modern parabolic writing. The environment in this phantasmagorical journey through London is extremely hostile: the crowd has "aggressively vacant / Faces," "the inspector's / Mind is black with suspicion,"⁴⁶ similarly to Joseph K.'s paranoia towards anybody. The infernal journey culminates in the paradoxical exclamation of the ferryman that "If you want to die you will have to pay for it."⁴⁷ Escape from this anxiety-ridden self-estranged world through

⁴⁰ Louis MacNeice, "On The Burning Perch," *Collected Poems* 796.

⁴¹ Richard Danson Brown, *Louis MacNeice and Poetry of the 1930s* (Horndon: Northcote House, 2009) 127.

⁴² Louis MacNeice, "After the Crash," *Collected Poems* 585.

⁴³ Terence Brown, *Louis MacNeice: Sceptical Vision* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975) 141.

⁴⁴ MacNeice, "After the Crash" 586.

⁴⁵ Brown, *Louis MacNeice* 149.

⁴⁶ Louis MacNeice, "Charon," *Collected Poems* 592.

⁴⁷ MacNeice, "Charon" 593.

death is postponed. A comparable paradox is Kafka's apparent last words to his doctor "Kill me or you are a murderer."⁴⁸ In this exclamation and in "After the Crash" and "Charon," the subject is 'held hostage' in a stagnant world. At the moment when the poems end suffering is upheld, release from the painful and dolorous position is denied.

How one can possibly read anything redeeming into this form of double-level writing seems at first elusive. The fact that ultimate meaning appears to escape any reading might lead to some form of insight or truth for MacNeice and for any open-minded reader. The dark and enigmatic sides to the poems might therefore be a form of personal coming to terms with buried childhood fears, anxiety about personal isolation, and claustrophobia in a dehumanised society. By facing them, that is, by consciously putting them into parable writing, MacNeice seems to have found a way to finally be able to "dismount from the mad-eyed beast"⁴⁹ of haunting past and present fears.

The greatness of the poems lies not only in their openness of meaning but the personal honesty with which they are written, and with which they explore a territory of nightmarish dream logic that MacNeice had not previously entered. In this daring but convincing and successful enterprise, Kafka seems to have given him a literary genealogy concerning technique and themes. In him, MacNeice has found a fellow twentieth-century writer who struggles with deep personal fears linked to past memory and present unstable conditions. Significantly, the fact that MacNeice overtly and covertly hints at many motifs from Kafka's oeuvres enables MacNeice to noticeably overcome his position of apparently writing from a limited cultural space in which he is seen as a Northern Irish writer, or an English writer, and so on. Kafka has helped him in this endeavour to find poetic strength through parable writing and to artistically confront issues and fears not only of personal and Irish importance, but of a wider cultural dimension in the context of twentieth-century Europe.

⁴⁸ Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995) 76.

⁴⁹ Louis MacNeice, "To Mary" 576.

“A VERY EUROPEAN POET”: EUROPEAN INTERTEXTUALITY IN DEREK MAHON’S *THE YELLOW BOOK*

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Introduction

Describing Derek Mahon in 1992 as “a very European poet [...] who happens to be Irish,”¹ Eileen Battersby was underlining the role of foreign influences in the work of that year’s winner of the *Irish Times*/Aer Lingus Literature Prize for Poetry. Mahon’s is a highly literary work, one which he himself called “a forest of intertextuality.”² While the general reader can sometimes be taken aback by the variety of allusions that are not always easy to identify, the critics, as Mahon’s ironical comment suggests, are not necessarily in a better position: engaging in an intellectual challenge with the poet, they pride themselves in tracking down all the relevant sources but still cannot see the forest for the trees. Their analysis often remains a mere catalogue of texts which ultimately fails to explain the creative impulse that lies behind what they perceive to be a disconcerting multiplicity.

Nowhere is this more perceptible than in the reception of *The Yellow Book* (1997). In this collection, Derek Mahon alludes to Greek, English,

¹ Eileen Battersby, “A Very European Poet,” *The Irish Times* 10 Nov. 1992: 12.

² Derek Mahon, “Remembering the 90s,” *The Yellow Book* (Oldcastle: The Gallery Press, 1997) 29.

German, French and Irish literature, sometimes even in the same poem. Some quotations are identified, but often only by punctuation marks; normally, Mahon alludes to texts which the reader needs to be familiar with in order to be sensitive to the complexity of his modern palimpsests. Peter McDonald makes a harsh comment on this: "by the end of the book, one is left with the feeling that Mahon is reading too much, and that, if he can't kick the habit, he ought at least to try some better books."³ According to McDonald, intertextuality in *The Yellow Book* amounts to "reading-lists," "allusions to post-modernity and assorted items of hackneyed academic jargon."⁴

The references in the collection, however, are easily seen to share a common background in *fin de siècle* literature and in the symbolist and decadent movements that flourished throughout Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. The title itself makes it clear, borrowed by Mahon from a prominent literary magazine published in England between 1894 and 1897, and so does "Landscape," Mahon's translation of the poem "Paysage" from Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens* which serves as an epigraph. McDonald, whose review is a thorough attack on Mahon's recent poetry, reads the poet's choice of 1890s texts as directed by marketing purposes, and

the title, along with the unrelenting references to the 1890s in particular and Decadence in general, leave no room for doubt as to the poet's marketing pitch. Perhaps, bearing in mind the increasing tedium of millennium gabble, Mahon has released his book just early enough to avoid the impression that his readers will have heard this all before. Such wariness might, however, be understandable even now, for *The Yellow Book* works over some familiar territory, both in terms of the kinds of things people tend to say about the ends of centuries (the world is getting worse, ourselves getting older, nothing being much fun anymore), and in terms of the poet's own repertoire.⁵

The dismissive tone of this comment is unjustified, and I would argue that there is a far more deeply rooted reason behind Mahon's

³ Peter McDonald, "Incurable Ache," *The Poetry Ireland Review* 56 (Spring 1998): 118.

⁴ McDonald 118.

⁵ McDonald 117.

attraction to symbolist and decadent writers of late nineteenth-century Europe. Certainly, the timing is appropriate and *The Yellow Book* is in part a literary exercise where a poet at the turn of a new millennium tips his hat to writers of the end of the previous century. But there is much more to it than McDonald would have us believe, and I would like to demonstrate on the basis of the theory of literary spaces developed by Pascale Casanova in *La République Mondiale des Lettres*⁶ that Derek Mahon uses intertextuality to position himself within the context of both Irish and European literature.

I

Pascale Casanova's essay provides us with a powerful tool for understanding how a writer uses the past and intertextuality in order to find his own voice and, more importantly, in order to be heard on the international literary stage.

According to Casanova, all texts and authors, past and present, are part of a worldwide structure which she calls the world republic of letters. This literary world space is characterised by continuous struggles and revolutions, in which writers fight for recognition and literary legitimacy; it is "*l'univers où s'engendre ce qui est déclaré littéraire, ce qui est jugé digne d'être considéré comme littéraire, où l'on dispute des moyens et des voies spécifiques à l'élaboration de l'art littéraire.*" [the universe where what is considered literary is created, what is deemed good enough to be recognised as literary, and where one debates the question of how literary art is formed, both in terms of means and specific ways.]⁷

The world republic of letters is undemocratic, and its structure a slowly evolving hierarchy in which dominated writers (or writers from dominated spaces) fight for existence along with dominating writers (or writers from dominating spaces) who work in the capitals of the international literary space. It is organised "*selon l'opposition entre les grands espaces littéraires nationaux, qui sont aussi les plus anciens, c'est-à-dire les plus dotés, et les espaces littéraires les plus*

⁶ Pascale Casanova, *La République Mondiale des Lettres* (Paris: Seuil, 1999). The book was subsequently translated into English by M.B. Debevoise and published by Harvard University Press in 2004.

⁷ Casanova 14. All translations from Casanova's essay are my own.

récemment apparus et peu dotés." [around the opposition between the big national literary spaces – which are the oldest and consequently the wealthiest – and the literary spaces which were formed later and are less endowed.]⁸

The modern Irish literary space, which Casanova studies later in her book, is currently making the transition from the less endowed to the richer category. Relatively new, it only began to take shape at the beginning of the twentieth century after the long domination of London. Modern Irish writers in English have since been looking for ways to define their identity in the context of the nation, pre- and post-independence, and in relation to other neighbouring spaces. Indeed, writers are not merely the passive recipients of a cultural heritage which fashions them and in reaction to which they must attempt to assert their originality. On the contrary, they create their own past and the links between their work and that of their contemporaries.

It is precisely through intertextuality that writers are able to manifest their relationship with their native literary space, when they decide to "*perpétuer, ou de transformer, ou de refuser, ou d'augmenter, ou de renier, ou d'oublier, ou de trahir leur héritage littéraire (et linguistique) national.*" [perpetuate, transform, refuse, build upon, deny, forget or betray their national literary (and linguistic) heritage.]⁹ Observing how a writer is drawn to specific texts, within or outside the national literature, the critic is able to understand what position the writer feels s/he is occupying on the national and international stages. Then, knowing the writer's position, the critic can explain why a particular author will be more attractive.

Eccentric writers, by which I mean writers who create their work away from the normative literary centres, either of their national literary space or of the world republic of letters, tend to look into the "*répertoire transnational des solutions littéraires*" [transnational repertoire of literary solutions]¹⁰ to define their own artistic identity. For Casanova,

Seuls les grands subversifs savent revendiquer et reconnaître dans l'histoire même, c'est-à-dire dans la structure de domination de l'espace

⁸ Casanova 120.

⁹ Casanova 65.

¹⁰ Casanova 443.

littéraire, tous ceux qui, mis dans la même situation qu'eux, ont su trouver les issues qui ont fait la littérature universelle.

[Only the great subversives know how to claim and recognize in the course of history itself, i.e., in the structure of domination of the literary space, all those who, put in a situation similar to their own, have been able to find the outcomes of which universal literature is made.]¹¹

It is my belief that Mahon is one of these great subversive figures. Focusing on two poems, "Axel's Castle," and "Remembering the '90s," I will attempt to show how Mahon's representation of symbolist poetry mirrors his position within Irish and European writing.

II

In "Axel's Castle"¹² and "Remembering the '90s,"¹³ Mahon is writing from his flat in Fitzwilliam Square in Dublin, where he contrasts the modern world with the refinements of the aesthetic and decadent movements. Up in his attic, he casts himself as a *poète maudit* [an accursed poet], just like the Parisian speaker in Baudelaire's "Landscape" earlier.

With its title, "Axel's Castle" sets the tone: the poem is an intertextual exercise in symbolism, and literary references multiply in its fifty-odd lines. "Axel's Castle" is an allusion to both *Axël*, the unfinished play by Villiers de l'Isle Adam, widely considered to be a symbolist masterpiece and set for the most part in Axël d'Auersperg's castle in Germany, and to the name of the essay on symbolist literature published by Edmund Wilson in 1931: *Axel's Castle, A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930*. In what Peter McDonald would call one of his many reading-lists, Mahon mentions his favourite trilogy – "Petronius, *A Rebours*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" – which quite clearly points towards decadence and dandyism. Although the author of the *Satyricon* is not mentioned elsewhere, J.K. Huysmans and Oscar Wilde are two of the artists around whom the poem is organised, and many unidentified

¹¹ Casanova 444.

¹² Mahon, *The Yellow Book* 14.

¹³ Mahon, *The Yellow Book* 28-29.

quotations and allusions only make sense when read in relation to their work.

For instance, while it may at first seem somewhat obscure, the line “I sit here like Domitian in a hecatomb of dead flies” is a veiled reference to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The image of the emperor appears in Mahon’s unpublished notebooks of the period several times, as in the two following excerpts:

Nero admires ‘the beauty of the flames’; Domitian kills flies with a pen. Domitian banished the philosophers! (What do psycho-analysts want?) Shortly before Domitian died, a raven perched on the Capitol creaking ‘Cras! Cras!’ (tomorrow! tomorrow!) – a medieval emblem of hope.¹⁴

Domitian threw dice and tormented flies (with a pen). Desmond in Dolce Vita¹⁵

But it is in this extract from the eleventh chapter of Wilde’s novel that we find the most distinctive echo:

In the seventh chapter he tells how, crowned with laurel, lest lightning might strike him, he had sat, as Tiberius, in a garden at Capri, reading the shameful book of Elephantis, while dwarfs and peacocks strutted round him and the flute-player mocked the swinger of the censor; and, as Caligula, had caroused with the green-shirted jockeys in their stables, and supped in an ivory manger with a jewel-frontleted horse; and as Domitian, had wandered through a corridor lined with marble mirrors, looking round with haggard eyes for the reflection of the dagger that was to end his days, and sick with ennui, that *taedium vitae*, that comes on those to whom life denies nothing [...].¹⁶

With a few words from Wilde’s novel, Mahon’s solitude in Fitzwilliam Square becomes a variation on the decadent *ennui*

¹⁴ Derek Mahon, holograph note in a scrapbook 1996-1997, Derek Mahon Papers 1948-2008, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹⁵ Derek Mahon, holograph note in a scrapbook 1996-1997, Derek Mahon Papers 1948-2008, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹⁶ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray and Selected Stories* (New York: Signet Classic, 1962) 156-57, <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=WilDori.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=11&division=div1>, 22 Sept. 2011.

experienced by the hero of Gray's favourite book, in a delicate interlocking structure that sees Mahon identifying with the central character in one of the books he himself most appreciates, just as Dorian does in the following excerpt:

I have no peacocks, porphyries, prie-dieu,
 no lilies, cephalotis, nepenthes, 'unnatural' vices,
 yet I too toil not neither do I spin, I too
 have my carefully constructed artificial paradises
 and I'm going crazy up here on my own.
 I sit here like Domitian in a hecatomb of dead flies.¹⁷

Similarly, Hugh Haughton, in his inspiring study of Derek Mahon's poetry, identifies the image of the "armchair explorer" and the ensuing contempt towards mass tourism in the poem as a rewriting of the disdain for travel expressed by the protagonist of *A Rebours*. In his words,

This alludes to Des Esseintes who thought travel 'a waste of time, since he believed that imagination could provide a more-than-adequate substitute for the vulgar reality of actual experience.' Decorating his dining room as a ship's cabin he was 'able to enjoy [...] all the sensations of a long sea-voyage, without ever leaving home.'¹⁸

Choosing as companions both Jean des Esseintes and Dorian Gray, the speaker of the poem portrays himself as a man who criticises the contemporary world for its increasing dependence on technology, who cultivates singularity against the "package crowd" and who finds solace in aestheticising life and a shelter in literature. Alone with his "carefully constructed artificial paradises," he stands as a Dublin equivalent of the Baudelairian poet who, "*voisin des clochers,*" wrote his *Tableaux Parisiens* at the end of the nineteenth century, "*les deux mains au menton, du haut de [sa] mansarde.*"¹⁹

¹⁷ Mahon, *The Yellow Book* 14.

¹⁸ Hugh Haughton, *The Poetry of Derek Mahon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 279-80. Haughton's quotations from Huysmans's novel are taken from *Against Nature*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Penguin, 1959) 35-37.

¹⁹ Charles Baudelaire, "Paysage," *Les Fleurs du Mal et Autres Poèmes* (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1964) 104. The collection was first published in 1857. Rendered in

“Remembering the ‘90s” dwells on these “artificial paradises” en vogue at the time among *poètes maudits* and other aesthetes and which Mahon himself had experienced. The the same ghosts as in “Axel’s Castle,” haunt the poem and Wilde makes an indirect appearance with the mention of the “selfish giant,” a passing reference to one of his short stories. However, if the subtext remains symbolist literature, the emphasis shifts slightly from the representation of the accursed poet as a solitary artist in his ivory tower to an image where decadence has become more than an artistic stance and has descended into alcoholism. Mahon is now one in a long list of writers, “Dowson, Johnson, Symons and Le Galienne” – and Tristan Corbière, the author of “les amours jaunes” – who spent most of their lives on the margins of society, either suffering from addiction (Dowson and Johnson), mental health issues (Symons), or chronic illness (Corbière), or, like Le Galienne, feeling at odds with the consumerist culture developing in the modern world. These writers each mirror some aspect of the poet’s life, but while the “heroes” of the 1890s are dead, Mahon has survived to be the “decadent who lived to tell the story”²⁰ of addiction and marginalisation, which he does through constant intertextual references to the others’ work. The genealogy in fact goes as far back as François Villon, the fifteenth-century French poet and author of “Je me meurs de soif auprès de la fontaine,” which Mahon half translates and half quotes. But it is Ernest Dowson, perhaps because he is the artist whose fate is the closest to Mahon’s experience (both writers suffered from alcohol addiction), which seems to be his favourite literary Doppelgänger. The lines

A rueful veteran of the gender wars,
 in ‘the star-crowned solitude of [mine] oblivious hours’
 I remember London twilights blue with gin
sub regno Cynarae, the wines and the roses
 where ‘She-who-must-be-obeyed’, furs next the skin,
 drove us to celibacy or satyriasis:
 forgive me, love, for my apostasies²¹

Mahon’s translation of the poem under the title of “Landscape,” as “in an attic near the sky” and “chin in hand, up here in my apartment block.” Mahon, *The Yellow Book* 11.

²⁰ Mahon *The Yellow Book* 28.

²¹ Mahon *The Yellow Book* 29.

allude to three of Dowson's poems: "To One in Bedlam" (in the quotation), "Vitae Suma Brevis" (the famous "wine and roses") and "Non Sum Qualis eram Bonae sub Regno Cynarae." "To One in Bedlam" sees the poet addressing a patient of the mental institution, and identifying with his "lamentable brother," his "long, laughing reveries" and his "melancholy," at odds with the modern world of "men who sow, reap / All their days, vanity."²² "Vitae Suma Brevis," the title of which is taken from a line by Horace, "*Vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat inchoare longam*," is Dowson's variation on the Latin poet's famous theme of *carpe diem*, and an invitation to live life to the full and with passion, with 'weeping," "laughter," "love, desire and hate."²³ In a way, "Non Sum Qualis..."²⁴ puts "Vitae Suma Brevis" into practice, as the speaker in the poem declares his passion for his former lover Cynara, whom he cannot forget, despite the wine and the company of other women. With the quotation from "To One in Bedlam," Mahon re-imagines himself as the patient in the hospital, this time remembering the nights fuelled with alcohol and sensual love he spent in London, which he evokes with references to the other two poems by Dowson. Under the cover of literary allusions, Mahon is writing about his own life experiences: his struggle with alcoholism and his rehabilitation at Saint Patrick's Hospital in Dublin, which he directly deals with in "Dawn at Saint Patrick's."²⁵

Like "Axel's Castle," rich in literary allusions, "Remembering the '90s," is a reaction to a fading book culture. Evoking the 1890s and drawing parallels between the end of both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries is also an occasion for Mahon to comment on the echoes between the previous industrial revolution and the rapid technological upheavals through which we are living, and to express his fear that culture is dying. In the future, Mahon says, literature will be disregarded as litter,

new books will be rarities in techno-culture,
a forest of intertextuality like this,

²² All the quotations in this sentence are from Ernest Dowson's poem "To One in Bedlam," <http://www.bartleby.com/103/56.html>, 21 Dec. 2011.

²³ All the quotations in this sentence are from Ernest Dowson's poem "Vitae Suma Brevis," <http://harpers.org/archive/2008/03/hbc-90002566>, 21 Dec. 2011.

²⁴ <http://poetry.elcore.net/CatholicPoets/Dowson/Dowson16.html>, 21 Dec. 2011.

²⁵ Derek Mahon, *Collected Poems* (Oldcastle: The Gallery Press, 1999) 169-71.

each one a rare book and what few we have
 written for prize-money and not for love,
 while the real books like vintage wines survive
 among the antiquities, each yellowing page
 known only to astrologer and mage
 where blind librarians study as on a keyboard
 gnostic encryptions, secrets of the word,
 a lost knowledge; and all the rest is lit(t)erature.²⁶

With its highly intertextual content, Mahon's *Yellow Book* is both a vestige of a dying literary culture and a last attempt at changing the way things are going. With the final line, a pun based on a translation from Paul Verlaine's "*et tout le reste est littérature*" in "*Art Poétique*" (*Jadis et Naguère*, 1874), it is as if Mahon refused to give in and accept the equation between texts and rubbish which he evokes in the same movement.

This wariness vis-à-vis contemporary mass culture can partly explain Mahon's attraction to symbolist texts: the literary movement is after all intricately linked with the notion of "art for art's sake," and with a counter-reaction to the modernisation of western European countries at the end of the nineteenth century. Similarly, a hundred years later, Mahon is emphasising the importance of the arts and trying to preserve literature in his poetical palimpsests. He is like Walter Benjamin writing in "Unpacking my Library"²⁷ about book collecting and literature, an essay which is indirectly brought to mind with the reference to Hegel in "Axel's Castle." "Only at dusk Minerva's owl will fly; / only at dusk does wisdom return to the park" is indeed an image which, as David G. Williams rightly observes, derives from Hegel's preface to *The Philosophy of Right*, in which one can read "the owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering."²⁸ But it is no coincidence that Benjamin refers to the same

²⁶ Mahon, *The Yellow Book* 29.

²⁷ Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999) 68. The essay was first published in *Literarische Welt* in 1931.

²⁸ David G. Williams, "'A Decadent Who Lived to Tell the Story': Derek Mahon's *The Yellow Book*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 23:1 (Summer 1999): 122. The exact quotation in Hegel's own words is "die Eule der Minerva beginnt erst mit der einbrechenden Dämmerung ihren Flug." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Vorrede," *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, Werke Band 7 (Frankfurt a. M.:

text²⁹ in an essay about the importance of book culture. It serves to emphasise that Mahon's enterprise in *The Yellow Book* is part of a wider movement, and needs to be read along with similar projects in other periods and countries. It is on this last aspect that I would now like to focus and reflect in the light of Casanova's theory of literary spaces.

III

Who are the literary figures whom Mahon evokes in the two poems under study, and more generally in *The Yellow Book*? Along with canonical writers such as Plato and Hegel, the list comprises Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Tristan Corbière and Joris-Karl Huysmans as well as Richard Le Galienne, Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons and Oscar Wilde. In his association with these writers, Mahon recreates a personal "*généalogie hérétique*"³⁰ [heretic genealogy] which Casanova saw as a characteristic of the subversive poet who stands on the margins of his own national literary space.

Most of the nineteenth-century writers on the list are figures of the *artiste maudit*, whose life was spent on the periphery of mainstream culture and/or society. Their fascination with symbolism and decadence signalled a distancing from the modernisation embraced by the society of their times. These writers echo Mahon's concerns regarding the transformation of Dublin during the Celtic Tiger, and his decision to stand back from a world he sees as materialistic and fake. Some of them also reflect his personal struggle with addiction. They form an imaginary community of like-minded people and become – in Brendan Kennelly's words – "helpers," "mirrors," "stimulants," and "media"³¹ that guide Mahon in his writing and help him express his position in modern society.

Suhrkamp, 1979) 11-29 <http://www.zeno.org/Philosophie/M/Hegel,+Georg+Wilhelm+Friedrich/Grundlinien+der+Philosophie+des+Rechts/Vorrede>, 21 Dec. 2011.

²⁹ Benjamin writes "But as Hegel put it, only when it is dark does the owl of Minerva begin its flight."

³⁰ Casanova 244.

³¹ Brendan Kennelly, "Derek Mahon's Humane Perspective," *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Irish Poetry*, eds. Terence Brown and Nicholas Grene (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989) 148.

What is most striking, however, is that Mahon evokes writers from major European literary spaces: France, the UK and Germany, as well as the transnational European canon *par excellence* that is classical literature in his use of intermediary intertextuality. In one single reference to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* in "Axel's Castle," the poet conjures up both ancient Greek civilization and Germany in the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For Mahon, whose poetry does not always match the issues developed in modern Irish writing and in the ongoing debate about Irishness, and who famously said in 1981,

I just found it impossible to live there [in Ireland]. I went back there recently only to rediscover the impossibility of living there. Although certain aspects of it survive in my memory, I have in many ways turned my back on it in life terms. I think it's my right to do so³²

intertextuality is a way of expressing his ambivalent feelings toward Ireland in literary terms and of reacting against the reception of his poetry in a purely Irish framework. More than being Irish and *only* Irish, his work, he implies with his choice of intertexts, is European *and* transnational; and it sustains the comparison with major European writers who have nourished his imagination. With *The Yellow Book*, Mahon points to how he wants us to consider his work. Choosing to portray the turn of the twentieth century as a symbolist and cosmopolitan era, while the same period also saw the beginning of the Irish Revival and the development of a new national literature, Mahon clearly does not want us to read his poetry within the context of Irish writing as much as within that of a wider European republic of letters, and as the work of a western transnational writer.

Contrary to what Peter McDonald claims, *The Yellow Book* is far more than "an authorial monologue that ebbs and flows through a set of familiar preoccupations."³³ It also deserves better than to be regarded *only* as "a literature from alcoholic recovery."³⁴ The collection

³² Derek Mahon, "'Each Poem for Me Is a New Beginning': Willie Kelly in Interview with Derek Mahon," *The Cork Review* 2.3 (June 1981): 11.

³³ McDonald 117.

³⁴ Patrick Crotty, "Apocalypse Now and Then: *The Yellow Book*," *The Poetry of Derek Mahon*, ed. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2002) 278.

retraces an autobiographical genealogy whereby Dublin and Mahon at the end of the twentieth century become the descendants of *fin de siècle* Europe. With allusions to symbolist poetry, Mahon portrays himself as an *artiste maudit* on the margins of the Irish national literary space but at the heart of the world republic of letters, with constant references to major European literary spaces. For these reasons, I believe that it is time to read intertextuality in Mahon as something more than a literary game played between a high-brow poet and his readers and to focus on what it says about Mahon's perception of his own position among contemporary Irish and European writers.

“MY DREAM SISTER”: IRISH WOMEN POETS DECONSTRUCTING THE MUSE

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It is now a well-known fact that many of the women who started writing and publishing poetry in Ireland between the 1960s and 1990s, a period coinciding with the somewhat belated upsurge of Irish literary feminism, saw the pre-existing tradition as problematic. Despite their many differences, poets such as Eavan Boland, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, or Medbh McGuckian shared a concern about the absence of the female voice from the literary canon and historical narrative. They have all claimed repeatedly that they found it difficult to establish a poetic voice of their own when faced with the tradition that normally prescribed silence for them (as women and as poets). This essay aims to show how women have often been able to turn this to their own advantage and how the repossessed image of the self and the muse has served to enhance the possibilities of the speaking “I.”

Examining the ways in which some of the major female poets of the time responded to the issues of poetic inspiration, this essay sets out to argue that it is from a figurative liminal space located between two extremes (such as inside/outside or silence/speech) or the constitutive poles of identity (the Self/the Other) that the practical as well as creative aspects of poetry making are frequently and effectively addressed. In this context, the liminal is defined as a point of interface, located in most cases in a disputable interstitial space or threshold through which the speaking subject approaches

its mysterious, unattainable Other, often coinciding with the muse. As Irene Gilson Nordin argues in her discussion of poetry by Ní Chuilleanáin and Ní Dhomhnaill,

[s]uspended in a perpetual state of displacement, the speaking subject is a “subject-in-exile”, and the constant crossings made between the borders of the unconscious and the conscious, between silence and speech, can be seen as a metaphorical quest that the subject makes.¹

I

Eavan Boland made the once deeply felt disparteness of her experience as a woman and as an author the focal point of her early poetry. In her own words, she used the “flawed space” between the two polarised forms of her existence as a springboard to creativity: “In a certain sense, I found my poetic voice by shouting across that distance.”² As Frank Sewell argues, quoting Lloyd Gibson, “power lies at the interface between separate identities.”³ Sensing herself as located firmly between the given “obligations of her womanhood and the shadowy demands of her gift,”⁴ Boland turned that very liminality of her situation into a constitutive part of her discourse, transforming it into a positively defined “field of force.”⁵

In her essay “New Wave 2: Born in the 50s; Irish Poets of the Global Village,” Boland asserted that “all poems in their time [made] a fragile, important negotiation between an inner and outer world.”⁶ It is interesting to note that the notion of inside and outside rarely coincides with a clear-cut binary polarisation in her

¹ Irene Gilson Nordin, “Beyond the Borders of Home: The Subject-in-Exile in the Work of the Two Contemporary Irish Poets Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill,” *Proceedings from the 8th Nordic Conference on English Studies*, eds. Darind Aijmer and Britta Olinder (Göteborg: Göteborg University, 2003) 260.

² Eavan Boland, *Object Lessons* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006) xi.

³ Lloyd Gibson, “Pleasures of the Interface,” paper given at the conference *Fabulous Transgressions: Defining the Grotesque in Contemporary Literary and Visual Culture* (1997). Quoted in Frank Sewell, *Modern Irish Poetry: A New Alhambra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 187.

⁴ Boland, *Object Lessons* 247.

⁵ Boland, *Object Lessons* 240.

⁶ Boland, “New Wave 2: Born in the 50s; Irish Poets of the Global Village,” *Irish Poetry since Kavanagh*, ed. Theo Dorgan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996) 137.

poetry. By “inner and outer world” she means a mixture of various opposing concepts, such as the tensions between the conventions prescribed by the community and the demands of her profession, between the public and the private mind, and between the limits of the inherited literary past and her own experience. While the poet-persona abounding in her poems from this period is mostly located within the walls of a house, the speaker’s ability to shape-shift or to leave the confines of her locale behind often serves to transgress the boundaries of the suburban setting and to extend the poems’ representational limits. Boland uses her in-between position as a starting point from which she repossesses the Irish woman’s past. It is on this figurative threshold that she finds her inspiration and creative energy.

A convenient illustration of such a beneficial in-between space is to be found in “The Muse Mother”⁷ from *Night Feed* (1980). The poem opens with the poet-persona standing by a window, watching a woman in the neighbouring garden “working a nappy liner” over her child’s mouth until it begins to rain and this forces her to move out of the speaker-poet’s visual field. The very elementariness of the scene described is intended to suggest the timelessness of the woman’s experience. Her potential as muse lies in her spanning of the past as well as the future: “she might teach me / a new language // to be a sibyl / able to sing the past.” Read in this manner, the poem’s key message is clear: that which is eternal is *bound* to be suitable as a subject for poetry. Yet, Boland also sets out to demonstrate the unattainability of the muse and thus the irreconcilable polarity of the woman-poet experience. The narrative position of the poet is shown as ultimately incompatible with that of the mother who is left secluded in a distinct climatic and acoustic environment:

but my mind stays fixed:

If I could only decline her –
 lost noun
 out of context,
 stray figure of speech –
 from this rainy street

⁷ Boland, *New Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005) 102.

again to her roots,
 she might teach me
 a new language:

What is of particular interest in the poem are the implications of its contradictions and paradoxes. As already suggested, it is often from a distinct interstitial position, symbolised here by the semi-transparent, wind-swept window pane, that Boland deconstructs cultural and literary stereotypes and replaces them with images allegedly taken from the lived experience of women. In "The Muse Mother," she makes as if she wished to counter the tradition of the petrifying, monumentalising male gaze and its reliance on the abstract feminine as a source of inspiration. By mentioning the hope of a new language, she creates expectations of a changed perspective. Yet, her craving for an alternative medium, a language facilitating representation that would not result in the confinement of the woman within the boundaries of the poem, is left unsatisfied.

The dual promise constituted by the window's interface and the hope for a new language is compromised by the shift in focus, by the poem turning away from "this rainy street" and its own poetry to old "figures of speech" and unknown roots. As in many of her corrective attempts to re-insert women in the narrative of Irish poetry and history, Boland is unable to keep to a single point on her agenda. As a result, the speaker-poet's mind stays "fixed" in concentration on her excessive, self-prescribed task. Boland portrays herself as unable to reach out to her suburban muse, sensing herself to be as much "out of context" as her ultimately silent object. No matter how banal the situation, the muse remains elusive. Paradoxically, it is the poet's urge to pin down her muse, her failure to acknowledge the essentially elusive, liminal quality of the muse that prevents her from appropriating the conventional trope of the inspiring feminine.

Boland's "Muse Mother" offers an illustration of both the possibilities and the limits of the interstitial space, of how "fragile [the] negotiation between an inner and outer world" can indeed be. What follows is an examination of how some of the other major poets of the period have gone about resolving the issues of poetic inspiration and about reconciling the conflicting identities of the speaking subject and the silenced object, the artist and the muse.

II

The tension between the concern about the silencing of women in the Irish past and the sense of the unspeakability of the woman's experience is tractable in poetry by Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin whose work also abounds with the motif of a pregnant interface. "The Absent Girl"⁸ from Ní Chuilleanáin's second collection, *Site of Ambush* (1975), revolves around an apparently immobile yet dramatic image of a woman-girl reclining against a courtroom window. The transparent and at the same time very corporeal female figure is one of Ní Chuilleanáin's frequent personas made "conspicuous by [their] silence."⁹ In the course of the poem, she moves from the identity of a young girl to that of an aging woman and further to a mere spectre of her former self, becoming less real than the clock seen through the glass. In fusing the woman figure with the questionable borderline of the window, Ní Chuilleanáin's poem supports the idea of the timelessness of the persona's experience much more successfully than we have seen with Boland.

They pass her without a sound
and when they look for her face
Can only see the clock behind her skull;

[...]

The clock chatters; with no beating heart
Lung or breast how can she tell the time?
Her skin is shadowed
Where once the early sunlight fell.

The window connects the woman to the world outside, yet it reminds us of her acute sense of loneliness and separation, of the immutable fact of her absence from the court of history. Yet, while it heightens awareness of her seclusion, the cold glass also serves to give the persona access to the awaiting past and the lived-through future, making her experience eternal.

As Guinn Batten writes, the greatest merit of Ní Chuilleanáin's carefully balanced lyrical narratives has been in encompassing

⁸ Ní Chuilleanáin, "The Absent Girl," *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008) 30.

⁹ Ní Chuilleanáin, "The Absent Girl," 30.

polarities and ambiguities, in “finding throughout her career subtle strategies for representing by *not* claiming to represent authentic ‘muscle and blood,’ for serving others by *not* serving as a subject who represents what she calls in [this] poem ‘the absent girl.’”¹⁰ In her own commentary, Ní Chuilleanáin identifies her persona as one of the women in history who had to face the “experience of being invisible.”¹¹ Indeed, the blankness of the image recalls one of her nun characters, Sister Custos, whose “history is a blank sheet.”¹²

Although Ní Chuilleanáin never explicitly speaks about her muse, in my view, this intangible, ever becoming female image can be said to represent not only the women absent from the court of history, but also the unattainability of the muse. I would also argue that the power of the poem follows precisely from the fact that Ní Chuilleanáin deliberately simply demonstrates the blankness of the central image, without writing over the emptiness, without attempting to fill it with words. Instead, she consciously lets silence speak.

III

If the muteness of the “muse” does not come as a surprise in Ní Chuilleanáin, it does so in the case of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill whose provocative, ostentatiously spoken idiom can be said to be the opposite pole of Ní Chuilleanáin’s reticence. In “Filleadh na Béithe” [The Return of the Muse], the muse figure is directly confronted by the poet-speaker. As we shall see, however, its potency lies in non-verbal means of communication.

Unlike her contemporary Paula Meehan, who believes that “[t]here should be a law against muses [since] they’ve been affliction on humanity since time began,”¹³ Ní Dhomhnaill has

¹⁰ Guinn Batten, “Boland, McGuckian, Ní Chuilleanáin and the Body of the Nation,” *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*, ed. Matthew Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 186.

¹¹ Patricia Boyle Haberstroh, *Women Creating Women* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996) 103.

¹² Ní Chuilleanáin, “The Real Thing,” *Selected Poems* 68.

¹³ Eileen O’Halloran and Kelli Maloy, “An Interview with Paula Meehan,” *Contemporary Literature* 43.1 (2002): 27.

claimed to be “a muse poet.”¹⁴ With reference to Julia Kristeva’s concepts of the pre-symbolic and the *chora*, Ní Dhomhnaill speaks about the muse as “the never-to-be-accessed-again body of the mother.”¹⁵ Understood as the necessary drive of poetry, the muse is at the same time seen as problematic: “There have been periods when I’ve gone dry because there is nobody or nothing in my immediate vicinity which carries that particular focus.”¹⁶

In “Filleadh na Béithe,”¹⁷ a creative crisis is averted with the return of “The Prodigal Muse” (in McGuckian’s translation). Here is the blustering, rather risqué description of the process, as reported to the muse:

Siúlann tú isteach im’ chroí
chomh meafaisech, chomh haiclí,
amhail is nár fhágais riamh é
ar feadh na mblianta.

You saunter back in
as cool and dandy
as if you’d not been
on your travels
since the Lord-knows-when.

[...]
Tá sceitimíní
áthais orm timpeall ort.

[...]
I come out in
an all-over body-rash,

Faoi mhaide boilg as tsimléara
is faoi chabha an staighre,

my erect nipples
in for a nuzzling

geofar láithreach
na coda beaga.

by the stomach of the chimney
stack, or the cubby-hole
under the stairs.

Obviously, undermining the traditional, romanticising notions of the poet-muse relationship is not the only goal and achievement of the poem. Through the suggestion of sexual embrace, the poet transgresses the opposition between the I and the Other, requisite for inspired imagination. Yet, despite the fleshly desire produced

¹⁴ Loretta Qwarnström, “Travelling through Liminal Spaces: An Interview with Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill,” *Nordic Irish Studies* 3.1 (2004): 70.

¹⁵ Qwarnström 70.

¹⁶ Qwarnström 70.

¹⁷ Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, “Filleadh na Béithe” / “The Prodigal Muse,” trans. Medbh McGuckian, *The Water Horse* (Winston-Salem: Wake Forest University Press, 2000) 90-91.

by the appearance of the muse, the latter's presence remains rather shadowy: "Siúlann tú isteach im' chroí" [You enter my heart]. The inconclusive sketching of the muse, including its sex, brings to mind John Montague's axiomatic remark on women authors and the muse, as reported by Ní Dhomhnaill: "You can't be a muse poet because people will think you're a lesbian."¹⁸ Ostentatiously demonstrating that she does not care what anyone might think, Ní Dhomhnaill crosses the limitations of a tradition and challenges expectations. Typically, while she pretends to denounce the trope, she finds a way to approach the muse. As Frank Sewell has it, Ní Dhomhnaill uses "transgression as a strategy in the process of becoming the master/mistress of her self, life, and work."¹⁹

IV

Medbh McGuckian recognises a similar concept of the muse: "The muse is a person, a real human being, but the muse energy is very mobile. The muse is always so unattainable."²⁰ Like Ní Dhomhnaill, McGuckian uses the space of the poem to come together with her muse, but the encounter normally leaves her uncertain about her own role: "It is a funny process, that there is this other person, who you can't actually speak to in real life, but you can in this space that you create. [...] and it's not something you can control."²¹

In "The Rising Out"²² from McGuckian's second collection, *Venus and the Rain* (1982), this lack of control acquires a more definite shape. The muse, ironically presented as a disturbing element, is not only spoken to, but does most of the talking – and will not be stopped. The poem is an account of an inspiration crisis that arrives in the shape of an uninvited visitor – an anti-muse pictured as the persona's alter ego. As such, it is an early enactment of the poet's creative process as described some twenty years later: "[...] and then you have to do that liminal thing again, of suspending

¹⁸ Qwarnström 71.

¹⁹ Sewell 186.

²⁰ Kimberly S. Bohman, "Surfacing: An interview with Medbh McGuckian," *The Irish Review* 16 (1994): 104.

²¹ Elin Holmsten, "Double Doors: An Interview with Medbh McGuckian," *Nordic Irish Studies* 3.1 (2004): 96.

²² Medbh McGuckian, "The Rising Out," *Venus and the Rain* (Oldcastle: The Gallery Press, 1994) 36.

the conscious, or letting the conscious and the subconscious drift in and out of each other, like dreaming.”²³

My dream sister has gone into my blood
 To kill the poet in me before Easter.
 [...]

She gentles me by passing weatherly remarks
 That hover over my skin with an expectant summer
 Irony, soliloquies that rise out of sleep,
 And quite enjoy saying, “Rather a poor year.”
 I continue meanwhile working on my arm-long
 “Venus Tying the Wings of Love,” hoping
 She will recede with all my heroes, dark
 Or fair, if my body can hold her bone to term.

Illustrating the uneasy relationship between the author and her inspiration, the poem ironically deconstructs the whole muse business. Strategically dismissing the anti-muse as a figment of her own imagination, the poet hopes that “She will recede with all my heroes”: identified with her other creations, the “dream sister” no longer presents a threat. Participating in the persona’s fluid identity, the chimerical muse-saboteur can be contained “if my body can hold her bone to term.” But although it is suggested that she is “my own invention,” a “dream,” it is not at all clear *who* is dreaming her – whether it is *me* or *it*. Like Lewis Carroll’s Bruno or Queen Alice, McGuckian’s poet-speaker, connate with the poem’s object, keeps fading in and out of her subjectivity.

In my mind,
 I try and try to separate one Alice
 From the other, by their manner of moving,
 The familiar closing of the unseen room,
 The importunate rhythm of flowers.

“The familiar closing of the unseen room” evokes the hazy, shifting world behind Alice’s looking glass. Similarly to Carroll’s novels with their underlying chess-board structure and the abrupt transitions between the vivid yet obscure scenes, McGuckian’s

²³ Holmsten 94.

highly allusive idiom accumulates apparently unconnected images without reference to any context-giving reality. In addition to these contrasting spaces, McGuckian often employs baffling architectural elements of passage like “The window not made to open”²⁴ or the “Door that we close, and no one opens, / That we open and no one closes,”²⁵ to name just a few from the same collection.

The questionable thresholds that remind us of Ní Chuilleanáin’s revealing boundary lines and her open-jawed pauses²⁶ are crucial points in McGuckian’s creative process. In their relative abundance, they may be said to represent the moment of transition between identities in which the speaking subject originates. Indeed, in the poem discussed here, it is immediately after the mention of the “The familiar closing of the unseen room” that the potential of the anti-muse is recognised and that the poet’s work comes to fruition in the final image of “the rising out”:

[...] her dream
is the same seed that lifted me out of my clothes
And carried me till it saw itself as fruit.

V

As we have seen, the meeting with the muse mostly entails a bi-directional crossing of limits leading away from one’s consciousness and at the same time down into the innermost depths of the subconscious. The striving for a voice of one’s own may be interpreted as a search by the speaking subject for a state of wholeness existing apart from the conscious or “real” self. This delicate transaction between the inside and outside world is often facilitated by a questionable threshold or interface, which is the point at which one’s own poetic voice and inspiration can be attained, but at which it is also perpetually being lost. As if in keeping with Kristeva’s concept of the speaking subject as a subject “on trial” or a “subject-in-process,”²⁷ the speakers of the poems discussed above seem to be as indefinite and elusive as their

²⁴ McGuckian, “Ode to a Poetess,” *Venus and the Rain* 13.

²⁵ McGuckian, “On Not Being Your Lover,” *Venus and the Rain* 32.

²⁶ See Ní Chuilleanáin, “St Margaret of Cortona,” *Selected Poems* 72.

²⁷ Julia Kristeva, *The Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) 22, 25.

(mostly silent) inspiring other which coincides with the image of the muse. In all the above examples, the muse is acknowledged and respected as ultimately unnamable and unknowable, as something that can only be missing in every effort to pinpoint creative inspiration to the last. Consequently, the muse figure can be said to be allowed to remain tacit (or to speak) but never to be silenced (with the exception of Boland's urban muse). This is precisely where most of these poets succeed in countering the stereotypical trope of the inspiring feminine which they perceive as prevailing in the masculine tradition.

PERSPECTIVES OF MOTHERHOOD IN KATE O'RIORDAN'S *INVOLVED*: A PRIVILEGED POSITION OR AN IMPOSED SOCIAL ROLE?

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Kate O'Riordan is often ranked among the “new generation” of (Northern) Irish fiction writers who came of age during the Troubles and who have often been commended for altering perceptions of Northern Ireland and the conflict. The view put forward in their works differs from the “traditional” Troubles narratives that tend to uphold reductive perceptions of the region as being a dark, secluded place doomed to nothing but sectarian violence.¹ Arguing the contrary, the authors of the “new generation” Michael Parker asserts, have over the years “shown themselves to be well ahead of their political counterparts [in] extraordinary acts of imagination, gestures of magnanimity, mutual respect and trust” and have thus played “a potent, transformative role within the riven cultures of Northern Ireland.”²

¹ The other authors include, for example, Colin Bateman, Glenn Patterson, Robert McLiam Wilson, and Deirdre Madden. For a detailed discussion of fiction written by these authors, see Eve Patten, “Fiction in Conflict: Northern Ireland’s Prodigal Novelists” in Ian Bell, ed., *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995) 128-48 or Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles Since 1969: (De-)constructing the North* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002).

² Michael Parker, *Northern Irish Literature, 1975-2006: The Imprint of History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) xvi, 98. In his assessment of fiction by the “new

However, such a view of contemporary Northern Irish fiction has recently been re-evaluated with respect to socio-political development in Northern Ireland after the ceasefires and the 1998 Agreement. Despite the fact that the violent phase of the Troubles has drawn to a close, the conflict continues to resonate both socially and culturally. Critics differ as to whether the unresolved nature of the conflict or extent of attention devoted to identity and its formation in the region is responsible for this; however, they claim that fiction writers currently find themselves unable to adequately reflect upon the Northern Irish condition in their works. Indeed, Richard Kirkland maintains that “the critical project that might chart a possible move beyond [...] has [actually] yet to begin.”³ With this statement in mind, this essay will discuss Kate O’Riordan’s first novel *Involved*.⁴ It will first document what roles the female protagonists in particular play in creating the socio-political climate; then it will evaluate the strategies the main character employs to (re)define her identity; and, finally, the present essay will consider how successful the novel is at envisaging positions a woman can embrace to create or re-affirm her subjectivity.

Involved depicts the story of middle-class Anglo-Irish Kitty Fitzgerald from West County Cork, focussing on her relationship with working-class Catholic Danny O’Neill from Belfast. Being in a long-term relationship is a new experience for Kitty; yet, since its very beginning, she is aware that her new role requires her to meet certain conditions. Kitty behaves according to the general theory of gender socialisation and looks at the prominent female figures in her life for inspiration so that she would be able to adjust her identity accordingly. The women she takes as her role models are her mother, her boyfriend’s mother and her boyfriend’s sister.

O’Riordan takes this opportunity to depict the impact Irish (nationalist) patriarchal ideology has on women from different generations and social classes and with different religions from both the Republic and Northern Ireland. Ann Owens Weekes asserts that the female protagonists of contemporary (Northern)

generation,” Parker is highly optimistic in asserting that the new works, which have emerged from the Troubles, have brought resolution within reach.

³ Richard Kirkland, *Identity Parades: Northern Irish Culture and Dissident Subjects* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002) 3.

⁴ Kate O’Riordan, *Involved* (London: Flamingo, 1995).

Irish Troubles novels written by women are often “overwhelmed by impotence,” especially “in the face of a meaningless violence.”⁵ This essay will now document how the respective protagonists react to imposed, gendered polarisations and it will examine whether, and how, they attempt to extricate themselves from the image Irish paternal iconology ascribes to them.⁶

The first woman Kitty compares herself to is her mother Eleanor. While she was still single, Kitty openly defined herself in opposition to the ideal of femininity exemplified, she thought, by her mother. Despite being an English Protestant, Eleanor married Kitty’s Irish Catholic father as she thought that his high social status and income would make her happy.⁷ Determined only to make use of the benefits her social role offered her, Eleanor failed to acknowledge one of the demands her new role required – to bear children – to which, nonetheless, she was eventually forced to submit. Hence, Eleanor considers her daughter an unavoidable nuisance. Unaware of the reasons for her mother’s emotional coldness, Kitty is unable to relate to her in other ways than by deprecating her, which, she asserts, makes her strong in fact, strong in resistance.

In *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*,⁸ Adrienne Rich claims that if a daughter is to find her own subjectivity, she needs to gain knowledge of her suppressed bond with her mother. Although Kitty thinks the contrary, she is not as independent of her mother as she would like to imagine. After her father’s death, Kitty seems to follow Rich’s dictum as she feels a sudden urge to reconnect with her mother. Her desire to explore the relationship with her mother might correspond to one of the phases of female psychosexual development; however, her reaction to her mother’s

⁵ Ann Owens Weekes, *Irish Women Writers: An Uncharted Tradition* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990) 95.

⁶ Since the image paternal iconology considers to be an ideal is that all women should seek to embrace is to be a mother, this essay is grounded in theories of motherhood advanced by Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray and Adrienne Rich.

⁷ The narrative does not problematise either Eleanor’s nationality or her religion as O’Riordan focuses exclusively on how Eleanor adjusts to her role as a woman.

⁸ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1997).

eventual display of emotions does not completely comply with what would normally be expected.⁹

The fact that Kitty's mother openly admits she hates Kitty should have made it easier for Kitty to commit the symbolic matricide, which Luce Irigaray considers to be crucial to the daughter achieving subjectivity.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Kitty is unable to do so. Contrary to her own expectations, Kitty does not feel hate for her mother "but love. Nothing like the easy, warm love she felt for her father, but love all the same. A twisted, tormented kind of love [...] impotent, [yet] superfluous."¹¹ It is likely that such a reaction is caused by Kitty's discovery of the fact that although her mother has always seemed to be a strong person outwardly content with her status, the requirements of her social role in fact make her rather unhappy, to such an extent that she has tried to find solace in alcohol.¹²

Regardless of Kitty's previous resistance to her mother, there is no sign that the discovery of her mother's unhappiness gives Kitty a sense of personal satisfaction. Contrary to Freudian theory of psychosexual development, although Kitty does not commit the symbolic matricide, she still seems able to proceed from the phase of repression to that of identification.¹³ Recognition of her mother's subjectivity seems to be as important a developmental goal as separation from her. Nonetheless, since Kitty's relationship with her mother is otherwise almost non-existent, she has to look elsewhere for a role model for her own female self. With new hope, she consequently turns to her boyfriend Danny's mother, who seems to offer a positive maternal model.

⁹ For a detailed description of psychosexual development, its stages and behaviour supposed to be typical of these, see Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1962).

¹⁰ See "Interview" in Janet Todd, ed., *Women Writers Talking* (New York, Holmes and Meier, 1983) 232-45.

¹¹ O'Riordan 108.

¹² The depiction of the mother's side of the story, especially that of her subjectivity, within the daughter's narrative represents a highly important change in portrayal of the mother-daughter relationship in Irish women's writing as such. On changing tendencies of Irish women's writing, see, for instance, Heather Ingman, *Twentieth-century Fiction by Irish Women: Nation and Gender* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

¹³ For the impossibility of matricide and occlusion of such an issue in psychoanalysis, see André Green, *The Tragic Effect: The Oedipus Complex in Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

Ma O'Neill represents an epitome of what nationalist patriarchal propaganda perceives to be the ideal role for a woman: she is confined to the home.¹⁴ To be more specific, all her activities are restricted to the realm of the kitchen, outside of which she becomes afraid of making any wrong moves, and she thus grows addicted to the household routine that offers her a sense of security. Although Caitriona Moloney suggests that Ma O'Neill is a prototype of Joyce's "sow that eats her farrow," "a bloodthirsty maternal figure who inspires the men to violence,"¹⁵ she is more a victim of nationalist patriarchy than its avid supporter.

Despite the fact that that Ma O'Neill can be quite domineering, she does not say anything that would support the view that she inspires her sons to die for the nationalist struggle (even if her silence might imply she gives consent). As long as her oldest son Eamon stays with her (the two of them live together), she is content enough to think of his involvement in paramilitary activities and keeps herself busy with baking or ironing. Even when she is confronted with the consequences of his violent acts – a blood-stained coat – she does not question either his personal motives or the organisation's grounds of justification but offers to clean the garment for him:

She indicated his coat on the chair with her head.

'There's blood on your coat.'

'Aye.' A sigh.

'I'll dab it with cold water while you're having your bath. Cold water for blood, you know.'¹⁶

Moreover, Ma O'Neill has let Danny "slip the net because she has [...] control over the older brother. Danny is the new generation and he can go off and do his own thing."¹⁷ Therefore, contrary to

¹⁴ It has been argued that Northern Irish nationalists maintained the same view of the roles of women in society as that put forward in Article 41 of the 1937 Constitution of the Republic of Ireland. See, for example, Begoña Aretxaga. *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹⁵ Caitriona Moloney, "Interview" in Caitriona Moloney, Helen Thompson, eds., *Irish Women Writers Speak Out: Voices from the Field* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003) 215.

¹⁶ O'Riordan 31.

¹⁷ O'Riordan in Moloney and Thompson 215.

Moloney's assertion, Ma O'Neill does not *ensure* that the struggle continues through her sons, but rather she *admits* that it does.¹⁸

Ma O'Neill seems to have accepted the fact that her social role is strictly home-based. She has learned to live with its constraints and has taught her daughter Monica that she should not want much from life. Monica originally accepted this because "you listen to your mother."¹⁹ Nevertheless, she feels hurt when her wish to study is categorically ruled out. While acknowledging that it must have been extremely difficult for Ma O'Neill to put her two sons through college,²⁰ Monica asserts that she herself was left with little choice as regards her future. The fact that she had no choice is also the only reason why she does not leave Northern Ireland despite the lack of long-term prospects there:

There's nothing here for anyone in this Godforsaken hole [...] I'm bloody stuck here aren't I? Stuck here in dreary old Belfast with a dreary old husband and this dreary old life [...] And how did I get like this? Hmm? Because I did what was expected of me [...] Eamon and Danny were expected to go to college, expected to have careers while I [...] who have twice the brains of the two of them put together, was expected to get married. It's an ancient story, isn't it? You wouldn't think that it still goes on in the civilized world but sure as everyone keeps telling us, we're fairly uncivilized up here anyways.²¹

Such indignation over having no say about one's own future highlights one of the issues related to the quality of women's lives in patriarchal Northern Irish society.²² The above statement is

¹⁸ It is actually quite atypical that Ma O'Neill neither condemns nor encourages Eamon's actions as her husband was killed owing to his involvement of sorts.

¹⁹ O'Riordan 120.

²⁰ At times such as the Troubles, Northern Irish working-class Catholic women were often the sole providers of the family income as their husbands were unemployed, imprisoned or had been killed. In the case of Ma O'Neill, her husband was killed. For the financial standing of Northern Irish working-class Catholic women during the Troubles, see Rosemary Sales, *Women Divided: Gender, Religion, and Politics in Northern Ireland* (Routledge: London, 1997).

²¹ O'Riordan 120.

²² Elsewhere, Monica's narrative highlights other issues concerning the lives of women in Northern Ireland apart from educational opportunities, such as dependence on prescription drugs and alcohol abuse. High prevalence of both these addictions in women is often seen as a legacy of the Troubles. See, for instance, Leslie Boydell et

particularly noteworthy as Monica comes from a family that cherishes and encourages those values she indirectly criticises. This episode could have been developed into a wide-ranging discussion on women's social roles; however, the narrative focuses primarily on depicting the negative effects of nationalist patriarchal ideology rather than engaging the protagonists in the aforementioned discussion.

Owing to the mother figures that have featured in her life, Kitty's perspective on motherhood is far from traditional. Although she is originally determined not to accept the ready-made roles imposed on women by patriarchal ideology, when she is faced with the choice of whether or not to have a child, she decides to become a mother. Some might suggest that this decision of Kitty's is quite escapist as it is in accordance with what patriarchy expects of women rather than exemplifying an approach that would radically challenge it. Such a suggestion echoes Judith Butler's criticism of Kristeva's approach to the semiotic. However, as the following paragraphs will document, both Kristeva's semiotic and Kitty's quest for her subjectivity, culminating in the novel in her motherhood, have a subversive potential. In her early works, Kristeva examines the semiotic (the pre-paternal) and its relationship to the symbolic (the paternal). She asserts that women are particularly close to the semiotic, which can be disruptive of the symbolic order.²³ This assertion has led many to believe that the semiotic is to be identified with the feminine and that it can be independent of the symbolic. Butler objects to such an approach as it concedes

that the semiotic is invariably subordinate to the symbolic, that it assumes its specificity within the terms of a hierarchy which is immune to challenge. If the semiotic promotes the possibility of the subversion, displacement, or disruption of the paternal law, what meanings can those terms have if the symbolic always reasserts its hegemony?²⁴

al., *Women Speaking Across the Border: The Impact of the Border and the Conflict on Women's Health and Roles* (Dublin: Institute of Public Health in Ireland, 2008).

²³ See, for example, Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," *Poetics Today* 6.1/2 (1985): 133-52.

²⁴ Judith Butler, "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva," *Hypatia* 3.3 (1989): 105. Butler rejects Kristeva's semiotics because it "can never become a sustained political practice" (106).

Therefore, O’Riordan risks that her novel might recycle the patriarchal construction of women since some might view her portrayal of Kitty as emphasising her “quintessential link with nature through maternity.”²⁵ However, Kitty’s attempt at mothering defies the traditional patriarchal construction of motherhood as she has a child out of wedlock and remains a single parent who moves away from the rest of her and her partner’s families.

In her later works, Kristeva elaborates on the qualities of the semiotic.²⁶ She acknowledges the fact that it is not independent of the symbolic; however, as she says, this does not mean it cannot undermine or disrupt its structures. Consequently, instead of Butler’s full-scale refusal of the symbolic, Kristeva advocates the view that one should neither identify with the symbolic order nor remain excluded from it but oscillate between the semiotic and the symbolic.²⁷ Kristeva sees women as particularly well equipped to navigate the passage between these two firstly because of their position on the margins and secondly because of their potential experience of motherhood which enhances their recognition of alterity.²⁸

Throughout the novel, Kitty deals with various issues concerning her gender, religion or social status, frequently finding herself on the boundary between positions. The way she navigates her passage between these boundaries provokes different reactions. Concerning the representatives of the paternal, Danny’s brother Eamon perceives Kitty’s behaviour as challenging although not all

²⁵ Kennedy-Andrews 262.

²⁶ See, for example, *Intimate Revolt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). In this work, Kristeva defines the semiotic as trans-verbal rather than pre-verbal. Such a new perspective on the semiotics resembles Bracha Ettinger’s theory of the matrixial borderspace, which is sometimes advanced to substitute Kristeva’s theory. For further details of this theory, see Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2006).

²⁷ As Kelly Oliver argues, such oscillation represents the potential for effective political practice in Kristeva. Kelly Oliver, “Julia Kristeva’s Outlaw Ethics,” Kelly Oliver, ed., *Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Julia Kristeva’s Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993) 9.

²⁸ However, such a position is not exclusive to women only. Anyone who has been positioned as a stranger or exile and who has thus had to resolve the uncanny feeling induced by the conflict between the known and the strange has the potential to negotiate the passage between self and the other. There is no room to discuss this in greater detail here; however, a section of my PhD thesis, under the working title *Narratives of Difference*, is devoted to this topic.

her actions are necessarily meant to be subversive. Kitty poses a threat to Eamon, as he is convinced that she wants to deprive him (and the establishment he represents) of his power over Danny. Therefore, as his behaviour implies to Kitty, Eamon is determined to prevent this from happening:

I can see it on Eamon's face [...] every time he looks at me, like he's accusing me or something. The way he puts his arm around Danny's shoulder before they go out.

[...]

As Eamon closed the door behind them Kitty had the distinct feeling that his eyes were making two laser impressions on her back.

[...]

She continued to feel aggrieved, not so much by Danny as by Eamon and his role in all of this. He had no compunction about wrenching Danny from her at this time.²⁹

The more effort she makes to learn about Danny's background so as to understand the place he is from, the more insecure and defensive Eamon seems to become. Danny, on the other hand, reacts differently. Originally, Danny criticises Kitty for her alleged lack of knowledge of Belfast:

You don't know the first thing about where I come from, it might be just as well the other side of the moon for all you know with your pretty little pictures of grimy streets full of fanatics and madmen [...] To the likes of you and bloody "Daddy" we're all not much better than some strain of fucking – I don't know what – mongrel, yes, that's it.³⁰

However, Kitty's unremitting interest in getting to know more about the place and people's attachment to it makes Danny change his attitude. This change resembles the transformation Kitty is going through herself. Heather Ingman, paraphrasing Kristeva, explains that the way to become more tolerant of the other is "to first learn to embrace the other (strangeness, monstrosity) within

²⁹ O'Riordan 117, 127, 148.

³⁰ O'Riordan 43. It is quite ironic that Danny's critique follows the passage that describes Eamon's killing of a neighbour's dog to issue this neighbour with a final warning.

ourselves for, by accepting the other in ourselves, our own radical strangeness, we will accept the other.”³¹ The more Kitty learns about her self and how her values differ from those of other people, the more tolerant she seems to become of them. Therefore, Kitty seems to be on the right way to achieving her subjectivity, although there are still a few problems concerning her identity that she needs to attend to.

These issues surface when Kitty finds herself under sudden duress after her father dies. Regardless of her previous efforts to embrace Danny’s “otherness,” she suddenly acts condescendingly towards him. Desperate to cut off the umbilical cord between Danny and Mother Ireland, Kitty decides to inform on Eamon; yet, her act is motivated merely by her personal need rather than by her moral conscience. According to the theory of psychosexual development, Kitty should have been able to shift her concern from primary-drive gratification; however, her ego submits to her id and so she acts according to her instincts without considering the impact her decision might possibly have on other people.

Only later, when she embraces motherhood, is Kitty able to resolve the remaining psychosexual conflicts (such as sorting out her feelings towards her mother). Through her son, Kitty gains experience that without a child, Kristeva argues, she would only rarely encounter. It appears that the bond with her preschool son enables Kitty to break the boundaries between her self and the other:

Her hands flexed within the pockets, eager with anticipation, in a moment or so they would hold him. The rest of her body tingled in a state of expectancy too. It was like that, as though there was a gaping empty socket where a limb should be – a feeling of incompleteness until he was attached again [...] Before she could let him off she had to hold his hand for one small portion of the journey, just to get her feeling of completeness, then he could go.³²

However, more information as regards this bond is required to assess its quality and level of importance for Kitty.

³¹ Ingman 30.

³² O’Riordan 194, 195.

The end of the novel seems to suggest that the power of sectarian politics is greater than Kitty's desire for individual identity.³³ Since Kitty dares to contradict the cause Eamon pursues, and because Eamon sees Kitty's behaviour as excessive and irrational, he has to find out where she went after she had informed on him. Although the location of Kitty's hideout is revealed, this might not necessarily have to mean she is going to be eliminated.³⁴ Instead, a different aspect of the story, a possibility neglected because of Kitty's expectations of a dire future, needs to be considered.

Despite the fact that Kitty does not find an unproblematic and definitive solution, her position might still be viewed positively if we apply Kristeva's *le sujet en procès* [subject-in-process] to it. Contrary to the conventional understanding of subjectivity, Kristeva claims that

a living being is not merely a structure but a structure open to its surroundings and other structures; and that interactions occur in this opening that are of the order of procreation and rejection, and that permit a living being to live, to grow, to renew itself.³⁵

Such a model of subjectivity, Kristeva proposes, enables us to view the self as heterogeneous and always in process. This means not only that any given self-understanding is to be questioned but also that one's subjectivity is formed in relation to others. Kitty's future is left open-ended and her identity in question. She still has the chance to develop a vision of the "human venture as a venture of innovation, of recreation, of opening, of renewal."³⁶

Although the novel tends to emulate the pattern of separation between the private (feminine) and the public (masculine), O'Riordan is conscious of the gap between these two worlds and uses this knowledge to problematise the way this dichotomy is

³³ The novel is not celebratory in the sense of how Michael Parker assesses writing of the "new generation" since the way it envisions the future is rather undetermined, if not bleak.

³⁴ Even though this remains a possibility, predicting such a course of events might be making assumptions about the IRA on the basis of unconfirmed rumours.

³⁵ Julia Kristeva in Ross Mitchell Guberman, ed., *Julia Kristeva: Interviews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 26.

³⁶ Guberman 26.

usually perceived (as the relationship between the empowered male object and the disempowered female subject) and also to challenge the way both of the worlds have been presented in “traditional” Troubles narratives. In the “love-across-the-barricades stories,” for example, the private often figures as a sphere where the protagonists are, thanks to their romantic involvement, allowed to overlook the contradictions of the public.³⁷ *Involved* dispels this myth of an apolitical domestic realm. It documents that it is impossible for the protagonists to shut the problems out as the socio-political issues pervade both the public and the private realms. The public, on the other hand, which in the Troubles thriller normally functions as a battlefield where the dominant males attempt to settle the communal problems, is also used by women as a space for self-realisation in *Involved*.

Through her portrayal of how Eamon sees the local prostitute, Maureen, O’Riordan also describes how the role of the male gaze functions in female sexual objectification. The way Eamon construes Maureen divests her of her subjectivity; reduces her to a mere sexual object he comes to detest as soon as he uses it to satisfy his needs:

Eamon shifted onto his elbow and stared down at her. He could barely disguise his disgust. [...] She so resembled a hapless sheep when she rolled her eyes and offered that vacuous smile. As ever, he was wondering how he could possibly have entered her. Right now, a jar of pig’s liver seemed an eminently more attractive proposition.³⁸

Such behaviour, as Elmer Kennedy-Andrews asserts, is indicative of the “masculine desire to fix the woman in a stable and stabilising identity.”³⁹ Danny also seems to hold what Laura Mulvey describes as “the determining male gaze [that] projects its fantasy onto the female figure.” However, as the narrative documents, his (male) framing of experience does not allow him anything more than temporary pleasure in looking at Kitty’s body. Moreover, regardless of Danny’s wish to position himself as the empowered

³⁷ Nevertheless, such a resolution is often merely figurative or temporary.

³⁸ O’Riordan 24.

³⁹ Kennedy-Andrews 256.

subject, it is up to Kitty to allow him the “pleasure.” In deference to his feelings, Kitty chooses to suppress her own so her disempowerment is a voluntary one.

This situation demonstrates that although Kitty is determined to extricate herself from the image Irish paternal iconology ascribes to women, she in fact uses the same practice that patriarchy applies to subjugate them, which would somehow confirm Weekes’ assertion of “impotence.” However, even though Kitty’s overall efforts are not sufficient to subvert paternal ideology, this essay has attempted to demonstrate that she is not helpless but possesses the power to take effective action. Although it is questionable whether Kitty is going to be brought unlimited satisfaction by her relationship with her son, she seems to be drawing power and plenitude from their emotional bond: “Now that she had Kevin, she didn’t need anyone else [...] now it did not seem to matter how much love she poured into one person. Kevin was a bottomless vessel.”⁴⁰ Her decision to become a mother is a conscious one rather than merely escapist since Kitty is determined to use motherhood to her own advantage, for her own purpose – not that expected by the patriarchal order.

⁴⁰ O’Riordan 197.

“AND YES... IT IS A MONOLOGUE.”

CONTEMPORARY FEMALE VOICES ON STAGE

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In the mid 1990s, the American critic and journalist Ed Siegel sighed: “All the world’s a stage, but are all stages now devoted to monologues? It seems that way lately.”¹ Similarly to Siegel, other theatre critics and scholars have noticed the amazing number of monologues not only in the Anglophone theatre, but also in Europe. There are more and more theatre festivals devoted primarily to this dramatic form² and monologues have become a regular part of the repertoire both in “traditional” and “alternative” theatres. Arguably, the monologue phenomenon might be considered one of the significant trends in contemporary drama. Despite their overall popularity, the reception of monologue plays is not always favourable. The number of monologues has recently been so high that, for example, the American critic Ben Brantley bitterly commented that “For a while it looked as if all it required to stage a play in New York was a lone actor with a) multiple personalities; or b) a good imitation of a famous dead person; or c) a lot to confess

¹ Ed Siegel, “Molly Sweeney Masterclass Take Monologues to an Art Form” *Boston Globe*, 25 Feb. 1995, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-157146582.html>, 8 Jan. 2012.

² International festivals of monodrama are held regularly, for example, in Germany (THESPIS festival), in Slovenia (Festival of Monodrama), and in the Czech Republic (Divadlo jednoho herce).

about his [sic] personal life.”³ In Ireland, the critical analyses of the recent boom of monological plays focus primarily on masculinity since the majority of contemporary Irish monologues are written by star male playwrights for male actors (e.g., Conor McPherson, Dermot Bolger, Mark O’Rowe, Enda Walsh, Owen McCafferty, etc.).⁴ As Brian Singleton rightly points out, “the monologue was the primary form of drama by Irish male authors for the stage in the 1990s and in the early twenty first century. The focus here has been on Irish masculinities as constructed by male authors and male characters in dramas that do not permit women to appear on stage.”⁵

The imbalance between the number of monologues written for men and for women is most striking⁶ and therefore this essay will draw attention to the less numerous contemporary Irish monologues for women written not only by men, but also by female playwrights. First, Janet’s monologue in Sebastian Barry’s *The Pride of Parnell Street* (2007) and the monologues in Abbie Spallen’s *Pumpgirl* (2006) will be analysed as typical examples of a text-based, minimalist, literary dramatic tradition. Dermot Bolger’s monodrama *The Holy Ground* (1990) and Geraldine Aron’s *My Brilliant Divorce* (2003), on the other hand, are more experimental in their treatment of the theatre medium and, especially in Bolger’s case, manage to transcend the traditional realism of the “me and my mates”⁷ world of the characters. The aim of the present essay is not only to add a brief analysis of femininity, as presented by both male and female playwrights, but also to examine these monologues for women not merely in the context of

³ Ben Brantley, “The Week Ahead: May 15-21: Theatre,” *New York Times*, 15 May 2006, Arts and Leisure, 31, quoted in Michael R. Schiavi, “The Tease of Truth in I Am My Own Wife,” *Theatre Journal* 58.2 (May 2006): 205.

⁴ See Eamonn Jordan, “Look Who’s Talking, Too: The Duplicitous Myth of Naive Narrative,” Brian Singleton, “Am I Talking to Myself? Men, Masculinities and the Monologue in Contemporary Irish Theatre,” or Eckart Voigt-Virchow and Mark Schreiber “Will the ‘Wordly Body’ Please Stand Up? The Crises of Male Impersonation in Monological Drama,” both in *Monologues: Theatre, Performance, Subjectivity*, ed. Clare Wallace (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006).

⁵ Singleton 276.

⁶ The Irish Playography Database lists 57 monologues for one female cast and 117 for one male cast. <http://www.irishplayography.com/search-advanced.aspx#>, 9 Sep. 2012.

⁷ Aleks Sierz, “‘Me and My Mates’: The State of English Playwriting, 2003,” *New Theatre Quarterly* 20.1 (2004): 79-83.

contemporary Irish drama but in a broader international context with a focus on the performative aspects of these monologues that might make the plays attractive also for non-Irish audiences.

One of the reasons for the uneven representation of women in contemporary Irish monologues is that many plays for solo performances by women are unfortunately unavailable in print, particularly those written by female playwrights.⁸ For instance, Jennifer Johnston's *Christine* (1989) or *Twinkletoes* (1993) or Elaine Murphy's latest play *Little Gem* (2010) have been published, but many other plays by women have not. For example, Nell McCafferty's interestingly titled monologue *Sheep, Shite and Desolation* (1994), based upon the author's experiences of an open lesbian living in a remote area of county Cork, was performed at a festival called *There Are No Irish Women Playwrights* at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin, but it does not exist as a published script, similarly to Mia Gallagher *Normality* (2001), Billie Traynor's *Redser* (2001), Ena May's *A Close Shave with a Devil* (2001) and many others.⁹ The position of women writers and playwrights has undoubtedly improved significantly in comparison to previous decades, yet it is still far from being equal. As Mária Kurdi notes in the conclusion to her recent study *Representation of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama*, "the small number indicates a recognizable general problem of women playwrights in Ireland: the publication of their texts is 'often a struggle,' and the relative lack of the availability of their texts 'prevents them from intervening in the dominant exchange of images and debates within the culture.'"¹⁰

When we compare the number and impact of monologues for women written by Irish women playwrights with their American or European counterparts, the result is even more conspicuous. Unlike the rare Irish plays for solo actresses written by women, there are British and American ones that have been much more internationally successful. For instance, Joan Didion's autobiographical confessional

⁸ See Irish Playography, Advanced Search – unpublished scripts.

⁹ Other unpublished scripts include, for example, Nell McCafferty's *A Really Big Bed* (1995), Mary Halpin's *Are You Listening To Me Gaybo?* (1997), Iris Park's *I Am A Man* (2010), Carolyn Swift's *Lady G* (1987), etc. See Irish Playography.

¹⁰ Mária Kurdi, *Representation of Gender and Female Subjectivity in Contemporary Irish Drama* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010) 222.

monologue *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2009) with Vanessa Redgrave at London's National Theatre received a highly positive reaction from both critics and audiences, Heather Raffo's deeply moving poetical collage *Nine Parts of Desire* (1994), consisting of nine monologues about the lives of women in Iraq during the war, was performed by the playwright herself to large critical acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic, and Eve Ensler's notorious *The Vagina Monologues* (1996), which started as an Off-Off-Broadway solo piece for Ensler herself, has since been performed by star actresses such as Glenn Close, Whoopi Goldberg, Jerry Hall or Kate Winslet.¹¹ The one-woman documentary monologue *My Name is Rachel Corrie* (2006), based on the emails of a young American pro-Palestinian activist who was killed by an Israeli bulldozer while protecting a Palestinian home, ran successfully at the Royal Court Theatre and caused a political furore on Off-Broadway. The rejection of the play by the artistic director of the New York Theatre Workshop, James Nicola, even provoked a heated discussion about censorship and the role of theatre in contemporary society.¹²

Given the above-mentioned problems with access to some of the contemporary Irish monologues for women, this essay has to limit its analysis to plays that have been published. It focuses, however, on monologues that have not only been performed in Ireland, but have travelled internationally. *Pumpgirl* by Abbie Spallen had its world premiere at Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2006, then moved to London's Bush Theatre and New York's Manhattan Theatre, while the Irish production came as late as November 2008 in Queen's Drama Studio in Belfast. Sebastian Barry's *The Pride of Parnell Street* premiered at Dublin Theatre Festival in 2007 and was subsequently transferred to the Tricycle Theatre in London and later also to Broadway. Dermot Bolger's *The Holy Ground* opened at Gate Theatre in 1990 and was performed, for example, at Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1992 and in New York in 2010. The most successful play, however, is Geraldine Aron's *My Brilliant Divorce* which has been translated into many languages and performed in 31 countries around the world, including the Czech Republic.

¹¹ Rebecca D'Monté, "Voicing Abuse/Voicing Gender," *Monologues*, ed. Wallace 210.

¹² See, for example, <http://rachelcorriefacts.org/default.aspx> or http://www.democracynow.org/2006/3/22/my_name_is_rachel_corrie_a.

If we are to examine the monologue representations of contemporary Irish women, one of the first questions that comes to mind is probably whether male and female playwrights present women in a different light. Although we might expect there to be many differences, the playwrights' concern with domestic violence against women might be considered a unifying theme, Geraldine Aron's bitter comedy *My Brilliant Divorce* being the rare exception. In Sebastian Barry's *The Pride of Parnell Street*, the female protagonist Janet is brutally beaten by her husband Joe, while in Abbie Spallen's *Pumpgirl*, the eponymous heroine is repeatedly attacked by her boyfriend Hammy, who later even participates in her sadistic gang rape, and Monica in Dermot Bolger's *The Holy Ground* is a victim of a lifelong psychological oppression by her fanatic husband Myles.¹³ Although the fate of Geraldine Aron's protagonist Angela is not as tragic as the other three examples, the way in which the relationship between Angela and her ex-husband who has left her for a younger girlfriend is presented is far from optimistic. Melissa Sihra wrote in her introduction to the collection of essays *Women in Irish Drama* that "The lack of positive outcomes for many of the female protagonists in plays by women, from all periods of the twentieth century, can be read as a potent response to the false legacy of the New State, and reveal an unresolved disaffection."¹⁴

I would argue that the representation of women as victims is not exclusive to Irish women playwrights, but is relevant to Irish drama in general. Moreover, violence against women is unfortunately an international and long-lasting problem and thus the representation of women as victims is very common, yet it does not mean that plays such as these do not resonate and address an important issue. For instance, Sebastian Barry wrote *The Pride of Parnell Street* in 2004 in order to support Amnesty International's campaign "Stop Violence Against Women," which is undoubtedly a meritorious act. As he recalls, the inspiration was an incident during the 1990 World

¹³ Frank McGuinness's *Baglady* (1985) has not been included in this essay since it has been discussed elsewhere. See Hana Pavelková "Unreliable Storytellers on Stage: *Faith Healer*, *Baglady* and *Not I*," *The Politics of Irish Writing*, eds. Kateřina Jenčová, Michaela Marková, Radvan Markus, Hana Pavelková (Prague: Centre for Irish Studies, 2010) 224-32.

¹⁴ Melissa Sihra, *Women in Irish Drama* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 2.

Cup: "After the football matches, there was a sea change between elation and when fellas watching games got home to their flat. They would attack their wives. The women's refuges would be full the next day."¹⁵ What is particularly noteworthy about Barry's play, however, is that although Janet is a victim of physical violence, she is not presented as submissive nor masochistic, as she finds the courage to leave her husband and start a new independent life. It is the male playwright Sebastian Barry who points to the alarming fact that most of the female victims obediently return to the men who attack them:

JANET: He done the worst thing next on nigh killin' me. He killed me love, didn't he? [...] And I didn't go back to him, like a lot a'girls do, no, I didn't. And I don't know why girls go back, but they do, everyday of the week.¹⁶

Given the seriousness of the issue, it is not surprising that most of the contemporary monologues written for women, by both male and female playwrights, are tragic. Unlike in contemporary monologues for single male performers penned by male Irish playwrights, which are basically savage black comedies, "illustrating anti-social masculinity, its aggression and cruelty as well as its communicative shortcomings,"¹⁷ almost no humour is involved when women are concerned and the audience unanimously sympathise with the female victims. Although *Pumpgirl* and *The Pride of Parnell Street* include many jokes and both Spallen and Barry use black humour, the scenes where violence against women is described are not funny at all. The darkly blasphemous exaggeration of Quentin Tarantino or Martin McDonagh that brings comic relief even to the most drastic scenes is missing.

As mentioned above, the reception of the monologue plays has not always been favourable and the reaction of American critics and audiences to Abbie Spallen's *Pumpgirl* and Sebastian Barry's *The Pride of Parnell Street* is worth examining as these two Irish

¹⁵ Gwen Orel, "Sebastian Barry Returns with *The Pride of Parnell Street*," *Village Voice*, 21 Jan. 2010, <http://www.villagevoice.com/content/printVersion/1327224>, 9 Sep. 2011.

¹⁶ Sebastian Barry, *The Pride of Parnell Street* (London: Faber, 2007) 32.

¹⁷ Voigt-Virchow and Schreiber 295.

monologue plays are representative not only of the merits but also of the problems inherent in the contemporary boom of Irish monologue playwriting. Both Broadway productions of *Pumpgirl* and *The Pride of Parnell Street* received very mixed reviews, praising the playwrights for their virtuoso use of language (for example, Caryn Jones argues in her review that “Ms. Spallen is adding a fresh, female voice to the boys’ club of Irish playwrights,”¹⁸) but criticising, among other things, their lack of originality. In his review of Barry’s play, Ben Brantley sarcastically comments that “though *Parnell Street* doesn’t speak in clichés, it rarely surprises. [...] When the characters admit that they haven’t been entirely honest with you, it’s unnecessary, you knew exactly when they were lying, and you probably knew why.”¹⁹ Caryn James complains about Abbie Spallen in a similar vein: “*Pumpgirl* is hardly the most original play to come from Ireland lately.”²⁰ Not only is *Pumpgirl* set in a traditional rural setting, but Spallen’s approach to the title character of *Pumpgirl*, a petrol station attendant “who walks like John Wayne and looks like his horse,”²¹ is also mainstream. Like many other playwrights, Spallen uses the monologue form of drama to represent a previously muted subaltern narrator. “I just got fascinated with this character because I don’t think anybody like that has actually been represented in a play before.”²² Spallen explains, “[...] I just thought there was one of those people in every town. I’m interested in people that are more forgotten, people that sort of exist on the peripheries.”²³

Reviewers also criticised the use of the monologue form, since as Helen Shaw argues, “twin monologues rarely make a strong

¹⁸ Caryn James, “From Ireland, Love Songs in the Key of Desperation,” *New York Times*, 5 Dec. 2007, <http://theater.nytimes.com/2007/12/05/theater/reviews/05pump.html>, 4 Apr. 2011.

¹⁹ Ben Brantley, “Looking Back, in Wistfulness and in Stereo,” *The New York Times*, 29 Sept. 2009.

²⁰ James 1.

²¹ Abbie Spallen, *Pumpgirl* (London: Faber, 2006) 25.

²² Abbie Spallen in Justin Bergman, “Memo to Yeats: Ireland Has Changed,” *The New York Times*, 18 Nov. 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/18/theater/18berg.html?_r=1, 3 Mar. 2011.

²³ Abbie Spallen in Lori Fradkin, “‘Pumpgirl’ Playwright Abbie Spallen Explains the Difference Between Theatre and Burger King,” *New York Mag*, 4 Dec. 2007, http://nymag.com/daily/entertainment/2007/12/pumpgirl_playwright_abbie_spal.html, 13 Mar 2011.

enough structure to support an evening.”²⁴ Formally, these two plays are almost identical. Very long alternating monologues are narrated from a void by characters who do not react to each other and are present on an almost empty stage throughout the play. Loneliness being one of the central themes, the monologue format is a logical choice, yet the playwrights must be very inventive and creative to keep their audience in suspense. As pointed out in reviews, once you replace action with static narration, “the production becomes essentially a literary experience of listening”²⁵ and the play might very easily become “trying even for the best of audiences.”²⁶

Spallen and Barry are not the only contemporary Irish playwrights who have failed to use the monologues in a thrilling and exciting way – the minimalist set design, i.e. empty stage with three chairs, and the actors merely delivering their micro-narratives for the entire performance, appear on Irish stages with striking repetitiveness: from Brian Friel’s *Molly Sweeney*, Conor McPherson’s *Port Authority* and *This Lime Tree Bower*, Mark O’Rowe’s *Terminus* and *Crestfall* to Elaine Murphy’s *Little Gem*, to name just a few examples. Similarly to these playwrights, Spallen relies exclusively on language and the power of storytelling. Other theatrical means, such as movement, staging, choreography, etc., are of no interest to her: “I don’t particularly think that I write theatre, per se; I think I am more interested in writing drama.”²⁷ says Spallen, thus, in my view, unintentionally pointing to the potential weakness not only of her monological play but of other text-based contemporary writing for the stage. The complexity of Samuel Beckett’s *Play*, which uses the same means and structure, has unfortunately not been recaptured in recent Irish drama.

The mixed reception of *The Pride of Parnell Street* and *Pumpgirl* by non-Irish audiences might also be due to the fact that both plays

²⁴ Helen Shaw, “The Pride of Parnell Street,” *New York Time Out*, 8 Sept. 2009, <http://newyork.timeout.com/%5Btimeout-url-channel%5D/%5Btimeout-url-section%5D/48860/the-pride-of-parnell-street>, 7 Sept. 2011.

²⁵ Tom Sellar, “The Irish Gift for Gab Not Always Welcome in *Pride of Parnell Street* and *Spinning the Times*,” *The Village Voice*, 8 Sept. 2009, <http://www.villagevoice.com/content/printVersion/1348557/>, 9 Sept. 2011.

²⁶ Paulanne Simmons, “The Pride of Parnell Street,” *CurtainUp*, 3 Sept. 2009, <http://www.curtainup.com/prideofparnell09.html>, 9 Sept. 2011.

²⁷ Spallen in Fradkin 1.

are so firmly set in a specific linguistic setting that the audience had problems actually understanding what the actors were saying and had to be provided with a glossary of Dublin dialect in Barry's case and Armagh dialect in Spallen's. Some reviewers even complained about the frequent use of swearwords. In *The Pride of Parnell Street*, one critic counted "118 occurrences of the F-word and its derivatives"²⁸ and it has been noted that in *Pumpgirl* we often hear "c-words, f-words, b-words and pretty much every other letter in the alphabet words."²⁹ Nevertheless, it is arguably the lively and suggestive verbal evocation of low-life contemporary Dublin and desolate Armagh countryside that is, in the opinion of many critics, Barry's and Spallen's greatest achievement.

In his Edinburgh Fringe Award-winning one-woman play *The Holy Ground*, Dermot Bolger also addresses the issue of domestic violence and oppression of women, using powerful imaginative language and black humour, but contrary to the "literary" monologues by Spallen and Barry, Bolger's text with carefully elaborated stage directions serves as a foundation for a rich and thrilling theatre performance. He creates a credible dramatic situation and justifies the choice of monologue rationally – Monica, a widow in mourning black, is going through her recently deceased husband's letters and putting them in a black plastic sack, she is alone in an empty house and talking to herself, as people in such situations sometimes do. The performance consists not only of minimalist delivery of the text, like the two previous examples, but the stage presence of the actress, her movement, the props and the set are carefully orchestrated. The actress playing the widow changes her voice to impersonate various people from Monica's life and includes lively conversations in direct speech in the monologue. The performance by actress Pat Leavy, who starred in the original production in Gate Theatre, Dublin in 1990, was a *tour-de-force*. The props in *The Holy Ground* function as triggers for Monica's stream-of-consciousness-like recapitulation of her life with her husband Myles, whom she imagines sitting in a comfortable armchair we see on stage. Her chair, on the contrary, is a hard

²⁸ John Simon, "Dublin Thief Loses Son, Shoots Smack, Robs Tourists," *Bloomberg News*, 9 Sept. 2009, http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=21070001&sid=abMg.06U_I80, 7 Sept. 2011.

²⁹ Lewis 1.

wooden kitchen chair – to metaphorically symbolise the difference between their lives. The chairs also function as her communication partners: she touches them for support or angrily swings them or pats them tenderly and thus the actress creates minimalist but powerful stage imagery that is missing in Spallen or Barry. The use of monologue in *The Holy Ground* is also justified for another reason. Monica is alone not only after her husband's death, but it turns out that she had been alone during their marriage, too. Having no-one to talk to, she even invented and later desperately killed her imaginary children, similarly to Martha in Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*:

(Myles' voice as she turns) 'Are you mad, woman! Don't think I don't hear you, up in that spare room talking away to yourself!'

She fights to put herself back together.

That's what I was, a crazy woman inventing children for herself. Oh, God forgive me, but who else had I to talk to from dawn to dusk?³⁰

In her confessional monologue, Monica finally manages to break the silence by telling us her story, in which she is voicing the mental abuse she had to suffer, but she speaks bitterly about her body as well, her denied sexual desire and the ensuing death-in-life. After discovering that they were not going to have children, her impotent husband became a religious fanatic and turned her into a void, an absent character. In a monologue by a woman who was forced to silence, "a connection is made between the female body and the process of speech as a form of resistance."³¹ As Mireia Aragay rightly points out, "it is first and foremost through strategy of representation, of giving voice, of turning Monica into a presence and a speaking subject, that Bolger effects a deconstruction of the myth of the submissive, suffering, maternal Irish woman."³²

As opposed to the majority of contemporary Irish drama for women, represented by the three previous examples, Geraldine Aron's monodrama *My Brilliant Divorce* is a comedy with a happy

³⁰ Dermot Bolger, "The Holy Ground," *Plays 1* (London: Methuen, 2000) 117.

³¹ D'Monte 216.

³² Mireia Aragay, "Reading Dermot Bolger's *The Holy Ground*: National Identity, Gender and Sexuality in Post-Colonial Ireland," *Links and Letters* 4 (1997): 61, <http://ddd.uab.cat/pub/lal/11337397n4p53.pdf>, 8 Jan. 2012.

ending. Aron's heroine Angela is very funny, intelligent and has a great sense of humour. No-one tortures her, rapes her or kills her, which, as mentioned above, is sadly a very exceptional representation of women on Irish theatre stages. Instead of depicting "unrepresented muted victims," Aron focuses on the familiar absurdities of day-to-day contemporary women's life experiences. Her protagonist is a middle-aged, middle-class, educated woman who has to deal with the problematic relationship with her husband who has failed to fulfil her expectations. It is not surprising that *My Brilliant Divorce* has become a box office hit among the mainstream audiences in so many countries around the world. Although the play is about loneliness and despair, it is in fact a very entertaining "well-made play" and female spectators in particular can easily identify with Aron's Angela and enjoy the performance. As Charles Spencer commented, "A peculiarly frosty heart is required to resist *My Brilliant Divorce*."³³ The success of Aron's monologue lies not only in the unsentimental, sarcastic, "laughing through tears" approach of the playwright who manages to create "a wonderful mixture of comedy and pathos,"³⁴ but also in its theatricality. Similarly to Bolger, Aron gives detailed stage directions concerning movement, lighting, music, choreography or use of props. The playwright deliberately subverts any attempts at realistic staging – Angela's only companion is her dog Axl "a medium sized dog on wheels, aged eleven."³⁵ Aron uses various pre-recorded voices and sounds, including fireworks to mark the passing of time. The actress also has to enact other characters, which gives her the opportunity to show off her acting skills and to create many funny and mainly embarrassing situations, which the audience are likely to appreciate with bursts of laughter and applause.

To conclude, from the straightforward storytelling and static realism of Spallen and Barry to the ambiguous stream of consciousness and rich theatre performances of Bolger, Irish women are represented as victims of male violence, who are given a voice to speak for themselves and with whom the audience

³³ Charles Spencer in Geraldine Aron, *My Brilliant Divorce* (London: Samuel French, 2003) back cover.

³⁴ Spencer in Aron, back cover.

³⁵ Aron 1.

unanimously sympathise. This voicing of their experience as a form of resistance, a deconstruction of the oppressive ideology, breaking the silence, links these plays with other muted groups in Anglophone theatre that have also used monologues for this purpose.³⁶ Geraldine Aron's comedy *My Brilliant Divorce* is an exception to the rule and demonstrates that the female voices on Irish theatre stages are not all tragic after all. Abbie Spallen defends her choice of the monologue form assertively with the following words: "And yes... it is a monologue. [...] I know why I wrote one... because it was cheap and I had no money and no investment from any source and a ridiculous thing called a credit card from some very stupid bank on which I was going to fund a production."³⁷ It is an understandable excuse, but I would argue that money is not the main problem. Perhaps, if Spallen and Barry and others were as innovative, ambitious and creative in their use of the theatre medium as in their use of language, they could write monological plays that might offer not only to the Irish but also to international audiences a valuable and attractive insight into the lives of contemporary Irish women, whose underrepresentation in contemporary Irish monologues is regretted by so many theatregoers and critics alike.

³⁶ Singleton 260.

³⁷ Spallen in Lewis 2.

CROSSING NOMADIC CULTURAL BOUNDARIES: TO WHAT EXTENT CAN IRISH TRAVELLER WRITING BE DESCRIBED AS “RESISTANCE LITERATURE?”

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In *Traveller Ways, Traveller Words*, Chrissie Ward describes how the way of life for Irish Travellers in Ireland has changed since her childhood: “Well, we use’ ta travel in the country an’ the roads, the roads was narrower but the land was wider.”¹ It would appear that as contemporary Ireland has grown wealthier and “widened” the development of its housing, industrial output and road systems, it has, at the same time, edged out one of its oldest communities. Large boulders sitting at the entrance to many traditional camping grounds have become commonplace, while other land is simultaneously fenced off as private space, prohibiting Travellers from legally establishing new sites. In her youth, Ward recalls her family being able to set up a roadside camp to gain some respite from the weariness of travelling across the country: “If it was a long road, and we were after doin’ a lot of goin’, we’d rest for a week, if the ponies was a bit tired.” In more recent times, however, such temporary sites last little more than a few days, or hours. “Now, well most always. Maybe you’d be lucky now if you were in a remote

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¹ Chrissie Ward, “Chrissie Ward,” *Traveller Ways, Traveller Words*, ed. Gearoid O Riain (Dublin: Pavee Point, 1992) 42.

place.”² In contemporary Ireland, there is now less room for Travellers, both in the sense of more boulders “narrowing” the land and also in the minds of many settled people.

The key aspect of Traveller culture, for all Travellers, is their nomadic identity. This is not the same as being constantly on the move. Indeed, such a life would be both impractical and exhausting. In fact, many members of the Travelling community live in houses for years and this does not make them any ‘less’ of a Traveller, either. Michael McDonagh explains that, “Nomadism is more than travelling from A to B [...] Nomadism is your whole outlook on life. It’s how you view life and it means that you view things in a different light [...] The physical act of moving is just one aspect of a nomadic mindset.”³ This nomadic mindset permeates all elements of Travellers’ lives, from living in extended family units to undertaking seasonal manual work, to choices of vehicles and trailers and popular cultural symbols of horses, horseshoes, wheels and tents. However, as much as nomadism dictates cultural differences from settled or sedentary people, it must allow for interaction between the two modes of living. Peripatetic nomads such as Irish and Scottish Travellers need to interact with ‘country people’ in order to trade their goods and skills and make enough money to survive.

Travellers were once a far more welcome sight in Irish towns for their skills in tinsmithing, chimney sweeping and scrap collecting. On the country farms, Travellers would provide seasonal labour and camp next to the farms they cropped, travelling along the same circuits of road that their families had trodden for generations. Often, Traveller musicians entertained communities and passed on popular songs and tunes. In more recent times, however, Travellers appear to be much less tolerated by the settled community. Their traditional skills are far less in demand, meaning that there is reduced contact between Travellers and settled people. Council halting sites are often located in urban wastelands, away from sedentary residents who protest about falling house values if they live closer, isolating the Travellers further. Compounding this, the image of Travellers presented in the media is almost universally

² Ward 43.

³ Michael McDonagh, “Nomadism,” *Travellers: Citizens of Ireland*, ed. Erica Sheehan (Dublin: Parish of the Travelling People, 2000) 33.

negative and exploitative, focussing on stereotypes by which the English once labelled the Irish, and have themselves passed on to the Traveller as being “drunken, lazy, stupid, ignorant, violent and superstitious.”⁴ Against this background of ignorance and misrepresentation, the Irish government has historically formed taskforces and legislation which view Travellers as an “itinerant problem” to be solved, normally by assimilation into housing estates. Charles Haughey’s clumsily-worded address to the Commission on Itinerancy sums up the pervading attitudes in 1963: “there can be no final solution of the problems created by itinerants until they are absorbed into the general community.”⁵ Sadly, in 2011, there is little change in policy, as reported by *The Irish Times*: “The Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) says failures by local authorities to keep to commitments in their Traveller accommodation plans are forcing families to give up on getting Traveller-specific accommodation and to move into private rented housing.”⁶ In contemporary Ireland, Travellers have very limited choice of accommodation: either to stay permanently in council halting sites, run the gauntlet of illegal roadside camps and fines of 3,000 euros, or take up housing that separates them from their family and culture.

Paul Delaney identifies one of the reasons for Travellers’ isolated position in society as their reliance on oral history and cultural transmission. “In many respects, the marginalization of Travellers in Irish life has been exacerbated by the prevalence of non-literacy in Traveller culture.”⁷ This aspect of Traveller culture has precluded them from having any real engagement with authority on governmental decisions that directly impact upon their way of life.

- ⁴ Sinead Ni Shuinear, “Why Do Gaujos Hate Gypsies So Much, Anyway? A Case Study,” *Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity*, ed. Thomas Acton (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire, 1997) 48.
- ⁵ *Ireland, Commission on Itinerancy, The Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* (Dublin: Stationary Office, 1963) 111.
- ⁶ Kitty Holland, “Travellers ‘Denied Promised Housing’,” *The Irish Times*, 1 Feb. 2011, <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2011/0201/1224288694918.html>, 23 July 2011.
- ⁷ Paul Delaney, “A Discourse on Nomadism: Travellers and Irish Writing,” *Facing the Other: Interdisciplinary Studies on Race, Gender and Social Justice in Ireland*, eds. Borbála Faragó and Moynagh Sullivan (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008) 232.

Recently, many Irish Travellers have begun to redress the balance by discussing their culture in the form of autobiography, biography, or as part of group Traveller community projects. One of the first examples of this is Sean Maher's *The Road to God Knows Where* (1972), in which the author describes his childhood, growing up and travelling around Ireland with his family, giving the reader insight into how his education and later life was influenced by his Traveller culture.⁸ Nan Joyce's *Traveller: An Autobiography* (1985) focuses on the transition of Nan from a small child living precariously on the roadsides of Ireland into a strong, outspoken woman who found herself running in the Irish general election of 1982.⁹ Pavee Point Travellers' Centre is an Irish organisation that promotes Travellers' Human Rights and has published literature on Irish Traveller culture, such as *Traveller Ways, Traveller Words* (1994), a collection of interviews with Irish Travellers living on various halting sites throughout Ireland.¹⁰ Pecker Dunne is possibly the most widely known Irish Traveller in Ireland, due to his busking in Irish towns, cities and to the crowds waiting to see GAA games. He describes his upbringing and life as a Traveller musician in *Parley Poet and Chanter* (2004).¹¹

There is also a corresponding number of works by Scottish Travellers, such as Sandy Stewart's *The Little Book of Sandy Stewart* (1988) transcribed and edited by Roger Leitch, which details his life with his family in a tent in Perthshire, Scotland.¹² Sheila Stewart wrote the biography of her mother Belle Stewart's life, *Queen Among the Heather: The Life of Belle Stewart* (2006) detailing her experiences as a Scottish ballad singer, before going on to write her own autobiography, *A Traveller's Life* (2011).¹³

This form of literature is a fairly new phenomenon, as research in this area has previously taken such forms as a mass (non-Traveller) questionnaire, participant observation studies and other

⁸ Sean Maher, *The Road to God Knows Where* (Dublin: The Talbot Press, 1972).

⁹ Nan Joyce, *Traveller: An Autobiography*, ed. Anna Farmar (Ireland: Gill and Macmillan, 1985).

¹⁰ Pavee Point Travellers' Centre, 22 Dec. 2011, www.paveepoint.ie, 23 Dec. 2011.

¹¹ Pecker Dunne, *Parley Poet and Chanter* (Ranelagh: A&A Farmar, 2004).

¹² Roger Leitch, ed. *The Little Book of Sandy Stewart* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988).

¹³ Sheila Stewart, *Queen Among the Heather: The Life of Belle Stewart* (Edinburgh: Burlinn, 2006); *A Traveller's Life* (Edinburgh: Burlinn, 2011).

records taken by scholars from outside Traveller culture. The question then arises: can a new body of literature written by Travellers help empower them and help challenge their marginalized status in mainstream society? Can Irish Traveller writing represent resistance?

Barbara Harlow, in *Resistance Literature*, defines “Literature [...] presented by the critic as an arena of *struggle*” as literature of resistance.¹⁴ This term was first used in 1966 by the Palestinian writer and critic Ghassan Kanafani in his study of Palestinian literature produced under Israeli occupation. In his study, Kanafani makes the distinction between writing composed under occupation and that created in exile, thus establishing the idea of a powerful overseeing authority “which has either exiled or subjugated [...] a given population and has in addition significantly intervened in the literary and cultural development of the people it has dispossessed and whose land it has occupied.”¹⁵ It would follow that literature produced by individuals living under these conditions (such as Travellers) which speaks against the narratives of a subjugating authority, can be regarded as resistance literature.

However, when applying the term “resistance literature” (a term which has emerged through conflict over rightful land ownership) to the writing of Travellers, we in fact encounter a complication of definition caused by the relationship of some Traveller families to land. In the case of several Irish Traveller groups in the UK who were encouraged to buy land by the British government and build their own sites where local provision had fallen short, the idea of an authority occupying another population’s land holds fast. At the time of writing this article, resident Irish Travellers at Dale Farm in Essex were in the process of being evicted from land that they had purchased over ten years previously. Despite there being an established halting site adjacent to the land, Essex council used planning law to evict Travellers from their own land, rip up ‘hard standing’ asphalt caravan bases and plough large furrows into the earth to prevent them moving back onto it.¹⁶

¹⁴ Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987) 2.

¹⁵ Harlow 2.

¹⁶ Patrick Barkham, “Dale Farm Residents Soldier on after Neighbours’ Eviction,” *The Guardian*, 3 Nov. 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/nov/03/dale-farm-struggle>, 28 Dec. 2011.

Dale Farm is no isolated incident. Planning permission for Traveller site development in the UK is refused around 90% of the time, even if they own the land.¹⁷ Failure to obtain planning permission then results in eviction by local councils and the land often being made unfit for future use as a site by installing boulders or creating deep trenches. But for other Travellers, particularly in Ireland, their only claim to legitimate residence on land may be an oral record of historical use over many generations. They do not claim actual land ownership, just the right to seasonal use of it. Under these considerations, Kanafani's definitions of an authority "occupation" of land and minority groups being in "exile" and "dispossessed" become slightly problematic. In these situations, Travellers never had their own land in the first place, yet are still being moved from wherever they choose to stay. They are either in permanent exile or have never been in exile at all. Here, Harlow's wider consideration of "resistance literature" being "a problem of contested terrain, whether cultural, geographical or political"¹⁸ is more appropriate when applied to the written output of some Irish Travellers.

Literature written by Travellers can be firmly labelled as a literature of resistance when tracing how sedentary society has "significantly intervened in the literary and cultural development of the people." Travellers have relied on oral culture above the written word for many generations, due to traditional choices of manual work which have little use for literacy above basic skills, and the fact that any information could be easily passed on via movement around the country. However, this does not mean that Travellers hold no interest in becoming more educated. The underlying problems of access to education by Traveller children remain unresolved to this day. Evicting Traveller families often means removing children from schools in which they have become established. Compounding this, council provision of services is based on the principle of supplying them to "indigenous families" and a transient population such as Travellers may be denied these services on the proviso that they are not seen as "indigenous" to one particular

¹⁷ *The Liberty Guide to Human Rights*, "Planning Permission for Caravan Sites," 17 June 2008, <http://www.yourrights.org.uk/yourrights/rights-of-gypsies-and-travellers/planning-permission-for-caravan-sites/index.shtml>, 20 July 2011.

¹⁸ Harlow 22.

area.¹⁹ Where children are allowed to remain in schools, they face a curriculum offering poor engagement with their cultural background, or they may only be able to access the limited provision of visiting teachers at their halting site.

Many of the autobiographies written by Travellers, including those by Nan Joyce and Pecker Dunne have, by necessity, been created from taped interviews recorded by interested academics from the settled community and transcribed, edited and arranged into chapters. The very process of bringing these narratives of resistance to a wider audience may arguably have involved manipulating them in order to fit mainstream expectations about Travellers or an academic audience. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak addresses the problematic nature of narrative production: "in the constitution of that Other of Europe, great care was taken to obliterate the textual ingredients with which such a subject could cathect, could occupy (invest?) its itinerary."²⁰ Therefore, the editors of Traveller autobiographies may find themselves at risk of recreating the same situation, speaking for their objects of interest and deciding which cultural elements are the most important to exhibit. In saying this, many of the narratives are printed in a form as close to the spoken word as possible, retaining the individual's grammatical features and dialect (at times making them challenging to interpret, as in Roger Leitch's "demotic narrative" of Sandy Stewart²¹) and some of the most recent Traveller authors are able to write unaided, such as Sheila Stewart. Until the complex problems of education that Travellers face are resolved, their autobiographies (transcribed or not) still provide a useful source for us to gain knowledge about the "nomadic mindset."

Travellers' reliance on the oral transmission of culture leads on to a further characteristic of resistance literature as defined by Harlow, its "ephemeral" output, such as "newspapers and cassettes."²² Traveller writing, especially autobiographical works,

¹⁹ Pat Brady, "Still Waiting in Hope," *Travellers: Citizens of Ireland* 110.

²⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988) 280.

²¹ Leitch, *The Little Book of Sandy Stewart* vii.

²² Harlow xvii.

take the form of a collection of recited memories, stories, songs, folklore, music and tattered photographs resembling an unofficial scrapbook of personal history. Communities that traditionally rely on oral transference of culture are at a disadvantage when they come up against cultures that prioritise literacy, that consider them to be too primitive in terms of modern abstract thinking. Or, as Christine Walsh explains: "The ways in which oral cultures perceived the world tend to be dismissed within literate cultures as 'naïve [sic].'"²³ Due to their existence on the boundaries of mainstream culture, the historical origins of Travellers have no official record and, indeed, Travellers themselves have a variety of ideas about this. The pervading notion of Irish Travellers being descendants of 'dropouts' from society at the time of the last famine or the Cromwellian evictions has been the most common line of narrative in official government legislation, which also conveniently reinforces the perception of Travellers being "helped" by encouraging them to "re-integrate" into mainstream sedentary society.

In this respect, Traveller writing acts as a force by which engrained subjugating ideas can be challenged and rewritten by the community most affected by them. Leigh Gilmore supports this idea when she states "writing an autobiography can be a political act because it asserts the right to speak rather than be spoken for."²⁴ It is perhaps ironic that "primitive" and unofficial ephemeral cultural output that is usually dismissed within literate cultures may now help provide the official line on the history of Traveller origins. Songs performed and attributed to Irish Travellers have been found in collectors' volumes dating back to the early eighteenth century²⁵ and one linguist has suggested that their language (known to academics as "shelta" but more commonly amongst Travellers as "cant" or "gammon") is over 350 years old.²⁶ Recent genealogical research has revealed the community to be a "distinct ethnic minority who separated from the settled

²³ Christine Walsh, *Postcolonial Borderlands: Orality and Irish Traveller Writing* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008) 2.

²⁴ Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) 40.

²⁵ Sharon Gmelch, *Tinkers and Travellers* (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 1975) 138.

²⁶ Donall P. O'Baoill, "Travellers' Cant – Language or Register?" *Irish Travellers: Culture and Ethnicity*, eds. May McCann et al. (Belfast: University of Belfast, 1994) 160.

community between 1,000 and 2,000 years ago.”²⁷ This information was broadcast on the national television channel RTÉ 1, making it available to the majority of the Irish population, both sedentary and Traveller.²⁸

For the reasons set out above, it is my assertion that literature written by Irish Travellers must inherently be a literature of resistance. The very fact that a number of individuals from such a disempowered, stereotyped and marginalized community have managed to create personal narratives must be seen as representing a challenge to the pre-existing conceptions mainstream society holds about them. By individuals retelling their life stories, their achievements, their everyday battles of cultural survival, or simply how government legislation has affected their family relationships, they shape a tool by which they begin to alter their position at the boundaries of Irish society. Unfortunately, it is unclear how effective this tool can be in real terms of political empowerment and changing legislation that impacts upon Travellers’ lives. One of the Traveller authors, Nan Joyce, helped found the Travellers’ Rights Committee and ran as a candidate in the general election of 1982. However, after attracting a large number of votes, she was later charged with jewellery theft, and although the charges were ultimately dropped, she felt that her good reputation had been destroyed. “When the woman beside her heard I was Mrs. Joyce she moved her handbag. I could see her catching onto her bag and it nearly killed me.”²⁹ The received stereotype of the thieving itinerant had reasserted itself once more.

For Alan Sinfield, it is “dissident literature” rather than “resistance literature” that holds the key to challenging authority, and some aspects of his argument fit the writing of Travellers more closely. In his examination of *Othello*, Sinfield suggests that the potential for literature that subverts established ideological narratives necessarily emerges from the very nature of modern society, and not through the efforts of unique individuals. Subverting established narratives then becomes an inevitable social phenomenon, not a heroic undertaking by individuals with

²⁷ Joe Cahill, “DNA Study: Travellers a Distinct Ethnicity,” 21 May 2011, <http://pavee.ie/mediamonitor/?p=9384>, 3 Sept. 2011.

²⁸ *Blood of the Travellers*, prod. Scratch Films for RTÉ, RTÉOne, 22 and 29 May 2011.

²⁹ Joyce 115.

matchless insight or bravery. Having a rich oral culture of stories and ballads would arguably naturally influence Travellers to tell their own life stories, have them written down and published. A small number of the autobiographies do include a wish to redress the opinions of settled people, but most appear to simply want a record of aspects of their culture they deem to be under threat. Governments must be seen to be actively improving the function of society in order to be perceived as effective and thereby hold onto power.

It is Sinfield's contention that this activity creates its own subversive elements. "Conflict and contradiction stem from the very strategies through which ideologies strive to contain the expectations that they need to generate. This is where failure – inability or refusal – to identify one's interests with the dominant may occur, and hence where dissidence may arise."³⁰ Here, Traveller writing can be seen in the light of inevitable narrative challenge, becoming an automatic reaction to policies that challenge their nomadic culture, instead of a heroic battle of "resistance." If the narratives of dominant ideology go against a particular group's self-identity, they will always find a way in which to express their own narratives. Instead of a nation striving against exile and occupation (as with Kanafani and Harlow's "resistance literature"), a "dissident" group may simply choose to carry on living their lives as Travellers, homosexuals, followers of a minority religion or any other cultural denominator that is not supported by those in authority, by any means possible. Sinfield's subtle terms of definition also allow for an element of failure in disagreements against dominant culture that is not addressed in "resistance literature." "Dissidence" I take to imply refusal of an aspect of the dominant, without prejudging an outcome. This may seem like a weaker claim, but I believe it is actually stronger insofar as it posits a field necessarily open to continuing contest, in which at some conjunctures the dominant will lose ground while at others the subordinate will scarcely contain its position."³¹ This is readily applicable to marginal groups such as Travellers who may, for example, gain the

³⁰ Alan Sinfield, "Cultural Materialism, *Othello*, and the Politics of Plausibility," *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) 752.

³¹ Sinfield 757.

support of the Minister for Education whilst simultaneously losing the fight to place a Traveller child in a local school.³²

For the reasons above, Sinfield asserts a stronger claim than Harlow and also, in my view, a more pragmatic one. Irish Travellers make up such a small part of the Irish nation that they cannot hope to overthrow the entire government, even if we believed that they really wanted to. The growing published body of Traveller writing, be it autobiographies or community projects by Traveller groups, academic studies or suggested policies of action by Traveller organizations, can perhaps work best to maintain the existence of Traveller culture and the importance of the “nomadic mindset” by voicing narratives that contest those held by sedentary society. The stark reality of regular evictions of roadside camps and the inadequate numbers of council-supplied halting sites and group housing remind us that the practicality of living a nomadic existence in twenty-first century Ireland is far from easy.

Literatures of resistance or dissonance may voice concerns of minority or subaltern cultures, but their ability to enact measurable change for these communities is limited. Yet, non-Traveller fascination with the nomadic way of life appears to be increasing as fast as any new autobiographies by Irish, British or Roma Travellers can be published. A Guardian writer comments that “A quick stroll around the busy WH Smith in London’s King’s Cross Station yesterday threw up no fewer than four bestselling memoirs by Gypsy and Traveller authors in the non-fiction paperback chart.”³³ Whether this general public interest in the daily lives of Travellers can be channelled into lobbying the Irish government and changing legislation remains to be seen, but it may serve to reflect the way in which more Travellers have come to realize that they have a right to be represented in their own words. “Travellers are now creating a climate in which they are willing to speak openly,” adds Gill Scott, of the London Gypsy and Traveller Unit, in the same article. It is interesting that in the very week the above article was published, the eviction of Europe’s largest Traveller site at Dale Farm was being fought in the UK court system and sedentary people from the protest community were sharing their knowledge

³² Pavee Point, “Pavee Point Deplores School Ruling,” 25 July 2011, <http://paveepoint.ie/2011/07/1377/>, 30 July 2011.

³³ Laura Barnett, “The Gypsy Life Is a Bestseller,” *The Guardian*, G2, 22 Sept. 2011: 2-3.

and experience with Irish Travellers in the hope of equipping them with skills to better defend their halting sites and communities from destruction by the hands of the government.

Walsh offers some further hope for positive representations of the “nomadic mindset” in her links between ecological narratives, the Traveller way of life and what they could achieve for the future of Ireland. “Proponents of saner development policies in Ireland and abroad, including ecologists and environmentalists are increasingly highlighting the fact that certain values are lacking in the modern ethos.”³⁴ The creation of hundreds of Irish “ghost towns” (housing built as holiday homes or suburban estates in remote parts of the country which stand virtually empty years after their completion) has drawn attention to the fact that it is simply not prudent to build houses on every spare piece of land in order to turn a profit. Nor do people want to live in isolation, far from schools, work and recreation; even if Travellers are expected to do so in council halting sites.

In recent times of recession, the nomadic traits of traversing the country (even world) in search of work, reliance on extended family for support, and simply being as adaptable as possible appear eminently sensible, even to sedentary populations. Perhaps then, the key to creating real change in society that will impact upon the lives of Travellers lies in combining their experiences with other groups with marginal interests, working to reshape the boundaries of what constitutes Irish society. Pecker Dunne was far ahead of many in this respect when he travelled across America and Australia in his youth. He found many similarities in the lifestyles that he came across, from Aborigines to the musician Woody Guthrie and his background of the “Okies” (American migrant workers of the Depression.)³⁵ As Walsh says, such narrative exchange can “challenge our complacency and broaden our awareness of other modes of living, being, and narrating our lives.”³⁶ Resistance can be focused on changing established mainstream attitudes and knowledge, but it can also be about enriching them. In writing about their lives and making their experiences available to mainstream society, groups such as Travellers do not wish to change to way society works, but instead offer us possibilities of alternative modes of living within national boundaries as well as across them.

³⁴ Walsh 118.

³⁵ Dunne 26.

³⁶ Walsh 119.

AR DEORAÍOCHT SA BHAILE: GUTH AN AISIMIRCEORA I NGEARRSCÉALTA CHONAMARA

Rhona Ní Chearbhaill
(Coláiste Phádraig, Baile Átha Cliath)¹

A person [...] is a personality because he belongs to a community, because he takes over the institutions of that community into his own conduct.²

As any displaced and dispossessed person can testify, there is no such thing as a genuine, uncomplicated return to one's home.³

Baineann an dáimh le háit agus le pobal na háite sin leis an eispéireas daonna féin. Fágтар an t-imirceoir, dá bhrí sin, i suíomh leochaileach agus beidh tionchar nach beag ag baile an duine sin ar a shaol feasta. Ní heisceacht an t-imirceoir Gaeltachta atá fuinte agus fáiscithe as riachtanas na himirce. Ba ghné lárnach de thaithí na Gaeltachta i gcoitinne, i gcuid mhór den fhichiú haois, na cineálacha éagsúla imirce. Bhí sí mar dhlúthchuid de shaol Ghaeltacht Chonamara agus Árann, gné is cosúil, a raibh súil léi, ar glacadh léi agus go deimhin a raibh muintir an phobail sin ag brath

¹ Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Ollamh Máirín Nic Eoin, a léigh dréacht den aiste seo dom.

² George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934) 162.

³ Edward Said, "The Treason of Intellectuals," *Al-Ahram Weekly* 435 (Meitheamh 1999): 24-30, weekly.ahram.org.eg/1999/435/op1.htm, 9 Eanáir 2011.

uirthi. Cé gur féachadh go traidisiúnta ar an imirce mar aistear aon-treoch, léiríonn litríocht chruthaitheach agus bheathaisnéiseach an cheantair go mba dhlúthchuid an t-aistear fillte san eispéireas imirce. Ón léamh agus ón taighde atá déanta agam féin ar aisimirce an réigiúin, is léir gur mórfhoinse léargais an litríocht ar an taithí saoil seo.⁴ Tá aghaidh tugtha le blianta beaga anuas ag socheolaithe agus ag tíreolaithe ar an litríocht mar fhoinse léargais ar an taithí imirce.⁵ Baineann saothar Mhichíl Uí Chonghaile, *Conamara agus Árainn: 1880-1980*, leas as an litríocht chruthaitheach chun léargas a thabhairt ar ghnéithe de stair shóisialta an réigiúin sin. Féachann sé ar thaithí imirce an réigiúin agus tagraíonn sé do ghné na haisimirce, dúil an imirceora aghaidh a thabhairt ar a bhaile agus an t-aistear sin á chur i gcrích. Ar cheann de na téamaí is suntasaí atá tagtha chun cinn agus litríocht na haisimirce á fiosrú ná go mbraitheann pearsana na scéalta go mór as alt agus as baile iar fhilleadh dóibh. Déanfar plé sa chomhthéacs seo ar thrí ghearrscéal a léiríonn díláithriú fisiciúil, cultúrtha agus morálta na bpríomhphearsana thar thrí ghlúin éagsúil. Ní hannamh gurb é cúram an ghearrscéil guth a sholáthar don rud nó don duine imeallaithe nó don “submerged population group”⁶ mar a thug Frank O’Connor orthu ina staidéar ceannródaíoch ar an ngearrscéal *The Lonely Voice*. Tabharfar cluas le héisteacht anseo do ghuth an deoraí in “Nóra Mharcais Bhig”⁷ le Pádraic Ó Conaire (1882-1958), “An Taoille Tuile”⁸ le Máirtín Ó Cadhain (1906-1970) agus “An Filleadh”⁹ le Pádraic Breathnach (1942-). Téama seanphléite é téama na deoraíochta i litríocht na Gaeilge ach is í an taithí imirce ar an gcoigríoch is mó a bhíonn faoi chaibidil. Deoraíocht an aisimirceora agus é/í fillte ar a bhaile dúchais a bheidh á plé anseo, áfach. Scagann na téacsanna liteartha seo na tuiscintí seanbhunaithe faoi dháimh imirceoirí lena

⁴ Tá an taighde seo mar chuid de thráchtas PhD atá ar siúl agam, “An Aisimirce go Ceantar Gaeltachta Chonamara agus Árann: léiriú na litríochta agus na heitneagrafaíochta.”

⁵ Féach Paul White, “Geography, Literature and Migration,” *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration*, eag. Russell King et al. (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁶ Frank O’Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1963) 17.

⁷ Pádraic Ó Conaire, *Scothscéalta*, eag. Tomás de Bhaldraithe (Baile Átha Cliath: Sáirséal agus Dill, 1956). Foilsíodh an scéal seo den chéad uair in *An Claidheamh Soluis* sa bhliain 1902.

⁸ Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *An Braon Broghach* (Baile Átha Cliath: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1948).

⁹ Pádraic Breathnach, *Bean Aonair agus Scéalta Eile* (Baile Átha Cliath: Clódhanna Teo, 1974).

gceantar agus lena bpobal dúchais. Aismirceoirí atá easnamhach agus máchaileach i súile a bpobal a chuirtear inár láthair sna gearrscéalta ach is riléir gur toradh iad ar chúngaigeantacht agus ar shrianta na bpobal céanna freisin.

Déanann an t-antraipeolaí George Gmelch sainmhíniú ar an aismirce mar “the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle.”¹⁰ Léiríonn na gearrscéalta atá faoi chaibidil, áfach, go mbraitheann an t-aismirceoir coimhthíos leis an mbaile a bhfillleann sé air agus fágтар é idir dhá thine Bhealtaine, as alt agus as áit sa bhaile. Is é staid seo an aismirceora agus é idir dhá thír is díol spéise dom i bhfiosrú na litríochta agus tógtar ceisteanna maidir leis an ngaol mothálach a bhraitheann an pobal i leith a gcuid aismirceoirí féin chomh maith. Tá staidéar fairsing déanta ag Madan Sarup ar chúrsaí féiniúlachta agus ar thionchar an bhaile dhúchais ar dhéantús an fheiminéin sin. Ceistíonn sí coincheap an bhaile féin: “Where is home? Is it where your parents are buried? Is home the place from where you have been displaced, or where you are now? Is home where your mother lives?”¹¹ Íomhá idéalach atá sa bhaile a shamhlaíonn an t-imirceoir agus é as baile, ach tá lúb ar lár sa tsamhail seo:

Such an idealized view of ‘home’ also overlooks the fact that these places have been changed by the migrants’ act of leaving. The mass departure of migrants leaves places drained of their life-blood. It creates communities of old people and landscapes of empty farms and semi-derelict villages.¹²

Ní thuigtear don imirceoir ar uairibh nach ann do bhaile a óige. Is chuig an mbaile seo, mar sin féin, is mian leis an aismirceoir filleadh, filleadh a bhfuil brí shiombalach ag roinnt léi. Sainíonn an tábhacht a shamhlaíonn an tíreolaí Russell King le haisimirce chuig baile ar leith, mian an aismirceora Ghaeltachta mar a léirítear sa litríocht í: “the return only has meaning if it is to their place of birth and upbringing. Only there can they rediscover themselves, enjoy

¹⁰ George Gmelch, “Return Migration,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 9 (1980): 136.

¹¹ Madan Sarup, “Home and Identity,” *Traveller’s Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, ead. George Robertson et al. (London: Routledge, 1994) 94.

¹² Russell King, “Migrations, Globalization and Place,” *A Place in the World?: Places, Cultures and Globalization*, ead. Jess Massey et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 28.

the warmth of family and kin, achieve some admiration and social prestige for what they have done and where they have been.”¹³ Ní thugtar aitheantas ar bith do shaoltaithí imirce na bpríomhphearsana sna gearrscéalta atá á bplé anseo, áfach, ach is amhlaidh a léirítear drochmheas ar na nósanna a chleachtann siad, nósanna a shamhlaíonn an pobal leis an gcoigríoch. Deir Máirín Nic Eoin agus Aisling Ní Dhonnchadha i dtaobh litríocht imirce na Gaeltachta:

Más rud é an imirce a chlaochlaíonn an duine, ní bhíonn tuiscint i gcónaí ag an bpobal sa bhaile ar nádúr an chlaochlathé sin. Léirítear drochamhras faoin imirceoir ar éirigh leis, drochmheas ar an duine a bhíonn ag maíomh as a ghaisce agus trua don duine a chlis nó don duine a chaill a shláinte “i dtír an allais.”¹⁴

Beireann an tagairt thuas go hachomair ar dhearcadh an phobail i leith taithí na himirce agus i leith na n-aisimirceoirí féin mar a nochtar é i litríocht Ghaeltacht Chonamara agus Árann. De réir fhianaise na litríochta sin, éilíonn an pobal go rachaidh ógánaigh an cheantair ar imirce ar chúiseanna eacnamaíocha agus sóisialta ach éilítear chomh maith go bhfillfidh siad ar an mbaile sin arís. Feictear tagairtí go minic sna scéalta próis, don chailín óg a imíonn thar sáile d’fhonn spré a shaothrú le go bpósfaidh sí buachaill óg sa bhaile agus don fhear óg ar imirce, arb é an díocas oibre agus an dúil sa ragairne a phríomchomharthaí sóirt agus an aisimirce rathúil a sprioc. Ní áit fháilteach í an baile, áfach, do dhuine nach bhfilleann ina ghaiscíoch; is fearr leis an bpobal an íomhá rathúil den imirceoir ar an gcoigríoch, fiú más íomhá bhréagach í, ná dá bhfillfeadh duine abhaile ina cheap magaidh. Baineann défhiús le héilimh an phobail agus fágtar an t-imirceoir go minic idir dhá shaol sa tír thall agus sa bhaile iar fhilleadh dó. Ba mhinic gur chuir aisimirceoirí agus a gcuid scéalta áiféiseacha maidir leis an saol thall dlús le himirce na n-óganach ar an mbaile. Riachtanas chun marthana is cosúil is cúis leis an gceilt a dhéantar ar thaithí imirce na n-aisimirceoirí. Is spéisiúil an méid atá le rá ag Sarup i dtaobh imirceoirí, agus iad sa tír aíochta:

¹³ King 29.

¹⁴ Aisling Ní Dhonnchadha, Máirín Nic Eoin, “An Brollach,” *Ar an gCoigríoch: Diolaim Litríochta ar Scéal na hImirce*, eag. Aisling Ní Dhonnchadha, Máirín Nic Eoin (Indreabhán: Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 2008) 17.

Any minority group when faced with hostile acts does several things. One of its first reactions is that it draws in on itself, it tightens its cultural bonds to present a united front against its oppressor. The group gains strength by emphasizing its collective identity.¹⁵

Is féidir an rud céanna a rá maidir leis an bpobal a d’fhan sa bhaile. Rud lárnach i gcruthú na féiniúlachta is ea a ndearcadh orthu féin mar phobal a bhfuil cultúr ar leith acu. Neartaítear féiniúlacht an phobail trí ghrúpa eile a shamhlú nó a chruthú lena féidir codarsnacht a dhéanamh leo. I dtaithí na haisimirce, is é an t-aisimirceoir an “duine eile” nó an strainséir sin. Bagairt ar chleachtais chultúir is ea an strainséir:

A stranger is someone who refuses to remain confined to the “far away” land or go away from our own. S/he is physically close while remaining culturally remote. Strangers often seem to be suspended in the empty space between a tradition which they have already left and the mode of life which stubbornly denies them the right of entry. The stranger blurs a boundary line. The stranger is an anomaly, standing between the inside and the outside, order and chaos, friend and enemy.¹⁶

Má fheidhmíonn an strainséir nó an t-aisimirceoir chun tuiscintí agus nósanna traidisiúnta an phobail a chinntiú, feidhmíonn siad siúd a d’fhan sa bhaile mar shlí ag na haisimirceoirí lena n-aistear agus lena ndul chun cinn a thomhas, “‘they’ are at once the record of our journey.”¹⁷

Bíonn teagmháil ag imirceoirí le cultúir eile nuair a théann siad ar imirce ach is féidir a mhaíomh go dtarlaíonn an rud céanna tar éis dóibh fillleadh ar an mbaile. Déanann David L. Sam agus John W. Berry sainmhíniú ar an athchultúrú mar na hathruithe a thiteann amach in iompar an duine tar éis dó a bheith i dteagmháil le cultúir eile, “the meeting of cultures and the resulting changes.”¹⁸ Má tá an

¹⁵ Sarup 95.

¹⁶ Sarup 101-102.

¹⁷ Robertson et al. 3.

¹⁸ David L. Sam, John W. Berry, “Introduction,” *The Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology*, ead. David L. Sam, John W. Berry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 1.

dá chultúr iomlán éagsúil óna chéile mar a bhí cultúr na Gaeltachta agus cultúr na tíre thall, beidh iarmhairtí síceolaíocha mar thoradh ar theagmháil an dá chultúr sin. Cén chaoi, mar sin, a n-éiríonn le haisimirceoirí a tógadh i bpobal cultúrtha ar leith ach a bhfuil cleachtadh anois acu ar shaol na tíre aíochta, dul i gcleachtadh ar an saol sa bhaile athuair? Is minic go mbíonn tionchar ag an dá ghrúpa, na haisimirceoirí agus an pobal sa bhaile, ar a chéile, an rud ar a dtugann Sam agus Berry “reciprocal influence” air. Tugann Berry le fios go gcuirtear tús leis an bpróiseas athchultúraithe nuair a dhéanann an t-imirceoir teagmháil leis an tsochaí sin. D’fhéadfadh ceithre thoradh a bheith leis an bpróiseas seo, a dtugann Berry comhshamlú (assimilation), comhtháthú (integration), scaradh (separation) agus imeallú (marginalization) orthu.¹⁹ Léiríonn pearsana na ngearrscéalta atá faoi chaibidil agam san aiste seo go bhfuil féiniúlacht de chuid an bhaile acu ach go bhfuil tuiscintí agus nósanna a bhaineann go dlúth leis an taithí saoil sa tír aíochta ar a dtoil acu chomh maith. Dealáíonn na tréithe seo de chuid Berry ó mhuintir an bhaile iad agus déanann an pobal imeallú orthu agus éilítear go ndéanfaidh siad athchultúró lena bpobail dhúchais. “Re-socialization” a thugann Berry air seo, áit a mbíonn ar an duine seanscileanna nó scileanna nua a shealbhú más mian leo riachtanais chultúrtha agus eacnamaíocha an phobail a shásamh. Má theipeann ar an aisimirceoir na riachtanais seo a chomhlíonadh, fágfar ar imeall na sochaí é/í nó cuirfear iachall air/uirthe an baile a fhágáil athuair. Is éard atá curtha romham san aiste seo ná féachaint ar thrí ghearrscéal ar leith a léiríonn an tslí a dtéann na príomhphearsana i ngleic le dúshláin athchultúraithe na haisimirce. Tugann na scríbhneoirí seo, arbh de bhunadh Chonamara iad, léas ar an taithí saoil seo ó aimsir na hathbheochana go dtí tréimhse na seachtóidí, am a raibh borradh mór faoi chúrsaí aisimirce sa cheantar Gaeltachta seo. Tá tuiscintí éagsúla ar an eispéireas fillte le sonrú sna scéalta seo a phléann taithí aisimirce thar thrí ghlúin éagsúil. Tugann siad, mar sin féin, léargas sainiúil dúinn ar chaidreamh easnamhach an aisimirceora lena phobal dúchais agus ar staid na deoraíochta is dual don imirceoir nach dáimh leis a bhaile ná a mhuintir feasta.

¹⁹ Luaite in Sam et al. 19.

“Nóra Mharcais Bhig”

Bunaíodh *The Anti-Emigration Society* i 1903 agus cuireadh tús le feachtas frithimirce a bhfuil a rian le sonrú ar litríocht na tréimhse. Ba bheag ar an dream seo agus ar ghrúpaí náisiúnaíocha eile go raibh an tuath agus, níos measa fós, na Gaeltachtaí, á mbánú ag an imirce. Baineadh leas as an aisimirceoir máchaileach a d’fhill ón gcoigríoch le cur ina luí ar mhuintir na tíre gan dul ar imirce. Nuair a foilsíodh gearrscéal Phádraic Uí Chonaire “Nóra Mharcais Bhig” in *An Claidheamh Soluis* den chéad uair in Eanáir na bliana 1910, cuireadh an fo-theideal “fíor-sgéal a bhaineas leis an imirce” leis. Tá aidhmeanna frithimirce leis an ngearrscéal ach tugann sé, mar sin féin, léiriú lom ar choimhlint intinne an aisimirceora atá as alt i gcathair Londan agus ina bhaile dúchais iar fhilleadh di. Is fiú féachaint ar chomhthéacs sóisialta an imirceora a thug ar an duine an baile a fhágáil sa chéad áit agus litríocht na haisimirce á hiniúchadh. Deir Edward Said maidir le staid na deoraíochta sa leabhar *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*: “Exile is produced by human beings for other human beings.”²⁰ Deoraíocht cruthaithe agus sealbhaithe ag an duine agus ag a phobal atá le sonrú sna gearrscéalta atá faoi chaibidil.

Iontas atá ar mhuintir Ros Dhá Loch nuair a chloiseann siad go bhfuil an iníon is óige le Marcas Beag le dul ar imirce. Níor theastaigh óna hathair go saothródh sí spré óir bhí an gabháltas le fágáil aici agus toisc nach raibh aon oidhre eile ag Marcas bhí “gá” le Nóra sa bhaile. Tá seasamh Mharcais sa phobal scriosta ag an mbeirt mhac a d’imigh uaidh agus a chuaigh ar an drabhlás: “Bhí sé náirithe acu. Bhí an pobal ag déanamh magaidh faoi. Bhí sé ina staicín áiféise ag an mbaile – é féin agus a chlann.”²¹ Sainíonn ainm Nóra agus ainm an scéil go deimhin, gur maoin de chuid Mharcais í agus gur chóir di, dá bhrí sin, fanacht sa bhaile de réir rialacha na sochaí agus dlisteanú a dhéanamh ar stádas a hathar sa phobal. Ach de réir rialacha an phobail chéanna, tá ar Nóra an baile a fhágáil “i ngeall ar aon pheaca amháin.”²² Ní fios go cinnte céard é an peaca ach déantar an léamh air go minic go bhfuil sí ag súil le páiste agus

²⁰ Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) 174.

²¹ Ó Conaire 85.

²² Ó Conaire 88.

tugann sí aghaidh ar chathair choimhthíoch Londan toisc go bhfuil “sí féin agus gach duine ar bhain léi náirithe aici os comhair an phobail uile.”²³ Cé go n-éiríonn le Nóra imeacht ón mbaile in aghaidh thoil a hathar, ní éiríonn léi domhan a hathar a fhágáil ná dearmad a dhéanamh ar a cuid dualgas dó. Go deimhin, is ar a hathair a fhilleann sí i dtreo dheireadh an scéil.

Maraon le go leor de charachtair Uí Chonaire ar deoraíocht sa chathair, téann Nóra ar bhealach a haimhleasa agus iompaíonn ar an striapachas d’fhonn airgead a shaothrú. Cuireann sí síntiús le gach litir a sheolann sí chuig a muintir arae tá an íomhá den imirceoir rathúil níos tábhachtaí ná aon rud eile. Soláthraíonn Pádraigín Riggs léamh eile dúinn ar an gcúis go bhfágann sí:

[...] is amhlaidh a bhí an dara persona riamh ann, ach bheartaigh Nóra imeacht toisc gur léir di go raibh an dara Nóra sin ag éirí ró-láidir, agus thuig sí nach mbeadh slí di i Ros Dhá Loch. Mar sin mheas sí imeacht go dtí áit eile ina mbeadh slí di.²⁴

Díbrítear iad siúd nach gcloíonn le dlíthe an phobail agus a d’fhéadfadh an domhan oileánach agus cúng sin a chur as a riocht. Pé cúis go socraíonn Nóra dul ar imirce, níl áit di sa bhaile, i measc a muintire, agus díláithriú fisiciúil agus morálta atá i ndán di feasta. Tuigtear leis an bhfocal díláithriú go raibh láthair chinnte ag an duine tráth agus gur gné thábhachtach de shaol an duine an láthair nó an áit sin. Ní haon iontas mar sin go bhfilleann Nóra ina hintinn istigh ar an mbaile ar éalaigh sí uaidh: “Tuige ar fhág sí an sráidbhaile uaigneach úd a bhí thiar i measc na gcnoc ar bhruach na farraige móire?”²⁵ agus déanann sí na litreacha a sheolann a hathair chuici a bhfuil nuacht an bhaile iontu a léamh agus a athléamh. Tearmann siombalach atá san íomhá idéalach den bhaile. D’fhéadfaí an argóint a dhéanamh i gcás Nóra agus muid ag tarraingt ar áiteamh Riggs, nach raibh áit di sa phobal an chéad lá riamh. Nuair a thugann sí cúl leis an saol fabhtach a bhí á chaitheamh aici thall agus nuair a fhilleann sí ar an mbaile, déanann sí ionchollú ar an gcath idir nósanna an phobail a d’fhan sa bhaile agus na

²³ Ó Conaire 88.

²⁴ Pádraigín Riggs, “Nóra Uí Chonaire,” *Oghma* 1 (1989): 37.

²⁵ Ó Conaire 90.

nósanna úd atá mar thoradh ar shaol truailithe a bheith caite aici thall:

An bhean úd a bhí ar fán an tsaoil uair ag cur in aghaidh na mná eile nár fhág an baile riamh agus nach raibh ag iarraidh ach fanacht ann go socair suaimhneach. Ba dhian an comhrac é. Ba threise ar an olc ar uaire, shíleadh sí, agus ansin d’fheictí í ag déanamh ar theach an phobail.²⁶

Is éard atá sa chomhrac seo dar le Riggs ná “comhrac idir an Nóra idéalach a shamhlaíonn Marcas, ar thaobh amháin, agus an cailín daonna soghonta a bhfuil an drochbhraon céanna inti is atá ina deartháireacha mí-ámharacha, ar an taobh eile.”²⁷ Tá ríméad ar Mharcas Beag go bhfuil an iníon tagtha abhaile agus cuma an rachmais uirthi ach gaisce os comhair an phobail is bunús leis an ríméad seo. Dearbhaíonn filleadh gaisciúil a iníne a sheasamh sa phobal cé gur faoi bhréagriocht an tsaibhris é. Ligeann sí don olc a thoil a imirt uirthi ar deireadh thiar, áfach, agus teipeann uirthi a laige a cheilt. Díbríonn a hathair ón mbaile arís í agus a meisceoireacht á samhlú aige le nósanna na coigríche. Múineann an t-aistear abhaile ceacht tábhachtach do Nóra, ní féidir léi filleadh ar an mbaile a shamhlaigh sí i Londain mar nach ann dó agus nárbh ann dó riamh.

“An Taoille Tuile”

Foilsíodh an gearrscéal “An Taoille Tuile” i 1948 agus áirítear é ar cheann de mhórscéalta luatha Mháirtín Uí Chadhain. Cur síos cruthaitheach ar shaoltaithí a mhuintire féin atá ina shaothar luath agus feictear an duine ag dul i ngleic le saol achranach, ach mar a deir an scoláire Gaeilge, Gearóid Denvir, “an té atá in ann cruachan a dhéanamh in aghaidh na hanachaine, déanfaidh sé bun agus tiocfaidh slán.”²⁸ Seo bunús an dúshláin athchultúraithe agus ní mór don duine ar mian leis páirt a ghlacadh i saol an phobail, saol atá bunaithe ar shaothrú talún agus cladaigh, an dúshlán sin a shárú. Tá an cladach sa scéal seo mar láthair codarsnachta agus coimhlinte idir an t-aisimirceoir agus an té a d’fhan sa bhaile, idir

²⁶ Ó Conaire 95.

²⁷ Riggs 37.

²⁸ Gearóid Denvir, *Cadhán Aonair: Saothar Liteartha Mháirtín Uí Chadhain* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar, 1987) x.

an tsochaí agus an coimhthíoch, agus idir an pobal baile agus an strainséir. Is í Mairéad an strainséir sa chás seo. Éilimh eacnamaíocha ba chúis lena himirce. D'imigh sí chun airgead a thuilleamh dá cleamhnas ach is iad paisinéireachtaí a triúr deirfiúracha a chuireann bac ar Mhairéad teacht abhaile go ceann deich mbliana. Bhí an tuairim ag a comharsana go bpósfadh sí thall agus an aois óg a bhí uirthi ar fhágáil di. Ina ainneoin sin, éiríonn léi fillleadh ar a grá Pádraig. Ní gaiscíoch í, áfach, agus tá díomá ar a máthair chéile faoina laghad spré a shaothraigh sí i Meiriceá. Caithfidh sí dul i dtaithe athuair ar chruatan oibre Chonamara tar éis di dul i gcleachtadh ar sclábhaíocht de chineál eile le deich mbliana anuas i Meiriceá. Níl sí ach mí sa bhaile nuair a chuirtear amach ag baint fheamainne í. Deir Aisling Ní Dhonnchadha gur tástáil fiúntais atá sa lá oibre seo, áit a gcaithfidh sí "a chruthú dá fear agus don phobal sin gur bean chéile mhíotalach shaothraíoch atá inti agus, thairis sin, gur féidir brath uirthi mar bhall pobail fiúntach iontaofa a thuigeann agus a chomhlíonann dualgais chóras chomhar na gcomharsan."²⁹ D'imigh Mairéad sula raibh sí oilte i gceart ar sclábhaíocht an chladaigh agus níl aici anois ach leath-thuisceant ar obair na farraige, rud nach raibh na Loideáin, an chlann lena bhfuil siad ag baint fheamainne, i bhfad ag cur ar a súile di:

"Rabharta mór é," a deir Mairéad go simplí. De bharr di a dhul go Meiriceá chomh luath as tús a hóige ní raibh thar smearthuisceant anois aici ar chuid de na cúrsaí baile a raibh a n-ainmneacha i ndlúth agus in inneach a cuimhne.

"Rabharta mór," arsa an Loideánach agus gotha easpaig air a mbeithí tar éis diamhasla dalba a lua os a chomhair. "Rabharta mór na Féile Bríde! Níl tú taithithe ar na rabhartaí fós, a stór, agus ní hiad is cás leat."³⁰

Murar chás léi iad go dtí sin ba ghearr go mbeadh sí cleachtaithe orthu. Cé gur fonn spraoi is túsce a bhuaileann í ar an trá, is garr go dtuigeann sí nach spraoi atá i gceist le hobair an lae. Glacann sí lena cinniúint go fonnmhar, áfach, cé go mb'fhéidir gur fonn saonta é:

²⁹ Aisling Ní Dhonnchadha, *Idir Dhúchas agus Dualgas: Staidéar ar Charachtair Mhná sa Ghearrscéal Gaeilge 1940-1990* (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar, 2002) 99.

³⁰ Ó Cadhain 37.

“Nach iomaí mo leithéid eile istigh sa bpobal,” arsa sise léi féin, “a chaith fiche bliain i Meiriceá, agus atá chomh gafach leis an sclábhaíocht seo inniu is dá mbeidís gan an baile a fhágáil riamh.”³¹

Tuigean Mairéad nach bhfuil sí mar bhall dá pobal dúchais níos mó ach go bhfuil sí mar bhall den ghrúpa aisimirceoirí atá ag cur fúthu sa cheantar le fada an lá. Glacann sí leis an bhféiniúlacht seo agus tugann faoi dhúshlán an chladaigh ach is léir roimh i bhfad nach bhfuil sí in ann ag an obair agus gur mó de bhac atá inti ar uairibh thar aon ní eile. Níl sí feistithe i gceart don obair ach oiread agus in áit bróga táirní is “toy toys” agus “cóitín scagach Meiriceánach” atá uirthi. Déanann sí iontas a laghad cúthaileachta atá ar an mbeirt bhan eile a sciortaí a chrochadh aníos go gcuimhníonn sí “nár fhágadar an baile riamh.”³² B’údar suntais riamh éadaí an aisimirceora, mar a léiríonn Grace Neville sa taighde a rinne sí ar dheasghnátha na himirce i bhfoinsí béaloidis na hÉireann:

Anyone familiar with these archives will be struck by the unquenchable interest in the clothes of the returned emigrants, especially those of the women. The effect these clothes had on the home communities was profound.³³

Déanann an pobal taithí imirce an aisimirceora a cheilt ar ógánaigh eile an cheantair ach is mór idir an té a chuaigh ar imirce agus an té a d’fhan sa bhaile. Go deimhin, samhlaíonn Nóra Loideáin na héadaí seo agus easpa Mháirín in obair an chladaigh mar rud dearfach, obair ar éirigh léi éalú uaithi:

“Is sraimlí an éadail é,” a deir Nóra Loideáin. “Dá mbeinnse i Meiriceá, a Thiarna, is fada go bhfágfainn é. Tiocfaidh mo phaisinéireacht an samhradh seo.”³⁴

³¹ Ó Cadhain 38.

³² Ó Cadhain 44.

³³ Grace Neville, “Rites de Passage: Rituals of Separation in Irish Oral Tradition,” *New Perspectives on the Irish Diaspora*, eag. Charles Fanning (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000) 127.

³⁴ Ó Cadhain 41.

Cé go n-éireoidh le Nóra éalú ó éadáil an chladaigh, is ina bun a bheidh Mairéad feasta. Má tá sí ina coimhthíoch sa chladach, tá a fear céile ar fhill sí lena phósadh chomh coimhthíoch céanna léi ag deireadh an lae oibre. Cuirtear críoch dhorcha leis an scéal nuair a bhriseann ar fhoighne Phódraig agus bagraíonn sé go fóchmhar uirthi le “glór borb coimhthíoch.”³⁵ Mar is léir don scoláire Gaeilge, Máirín Nic Eoin, i gcás an scéil seo, “is í an imirce an comhartha idirdhealaithe, agus is minic a bhreathnaítear sa litríocht ar an aisimirceoir mar dhuine atá dealaithe ar bhealach suntasach ón gcuid eile den phobal.”³⁶

“An Filleadh”

D’fhág na mílte Éire arís sa tréimhse iarchogaidh agus is chuig an mBreatain a bhí a bhformhór ag triall an uair seo. In ainneoin go ndeachaigh sochaí na tíre i gcleachtadh ar an eisimirce athuair, bhain lagmhiseach agus duairceas leis an tréimhse seo. Léiríonn an staraí Pádraig Ó Treabhair nárbh amhlaidh imirce na gcaogaidí agus imirce na mblianta a chuaigh roimhe: “bhí an ollimirce sna 1950idí tar éis géarchéim a chruthú don stát Éireannach nuabhunaithe, a raibh diminsean síceolaíoch chomh maith le diminsean eacnamaíoch ag roinnt léi.”³⁷ Foilsíodh “An Filleadh” le Pádraic Breathnach i 1974 ach is féidir é a léamh i gcomhthéacs na himirce ó na caogaidí ar aghaidh. Caitheann Breathnach solas ar fhadhbanna athchultúraithe an fhir óig ar imirce agus sa bhaile iar fhilleadh dó. Is fiú na tuiscintí ar an dlíáithriú cultúir a léiríonn an scéal a chur i gcomhthéacs an taighde atá luaite i dtus na haiste seo maidir le dúshláin dlíáithrithe an aisimirceora a bhfuil taithí aige ar a bheith lasmuigh de shrianta a phobail thuaithe. Is trí intinn phríomhphearsa an scéil, Séamas a athchruthaítear dúinn saol na bhfear Gaeltachta ar deoraíocht i Sasana agus léirítear dúinn an diminsean síceolaíoch a bhí ag roinnt le himirce na tréimhse. Tá Séamas go mór as alt ar an láthair monarchan agus fanann sé ina

³⁵ Ó Cadhain 50.

³⁶ Máirín Nic Eoin, *Trén bhFearann Breac: An Dlíáithriú Cultúir agus Nualitriocht na Gaeilge* (Baile Átha Cliath: Cois Life, 2005) 155.

³⁷ Pádraig Ó Treabhair, “An Imirce Éireannach: Léargas na Staire,” Ní Dhonnchadha agus Nic Eoin, *Ar an gCoigríoch* 37.

thost i measc a chomhoibrithe arae ní thuigeann siad é mar a thuigfeadh muintir a bhaile féin:

I mbuil a mhuintire féin, chuirfí aitheantas eile air. Thuigfí a nádúr dílis. Leo siadsan bheadh sé chomh baileach hacmhainneach le duine, ag greann, ag biadán, ag nuaíocht; in ómós a bheith ina shuí ar a thóin tuirseach nós balbháin chráite [...] B'é a mhí-ádh, dar leis, go raibh sé ag obair anois in éineacht le daoine strainséartha i gcathair choimhthíoch i mbun scileanna a bhí nua; agus go raibh sé i dtuilleamaí na ndaoine seo nárbh fheasach dhóibh é nó cé dár díobh.³⁸

Maolú ar an gcoimhthíos cathrach is ea an meabhrú dá láthair chinnte ina bhaile dúchais agus don mheas atá ag muintir a phobail dhúchais air. Ainneoin go ngoilleann fonóid a chomhoibrithe air i dtús an scéil, tacaíonn na héagóracha a imríonn siad air lena chinneadh filleadh abhaile. Tá an traen abhaile mar láthair machnaimh dó, áfach, agus ceistíonn sé a chinneadh fillte ar an turas:

Bhuail tocht bróin é. Bhí deireadh le cuid amháin dá shaol! Slán beo le scléip, le rancás, le gnéas, le peaca. Bhí taitneamh thar meon aige leis an bpeaca, anois, mar bhí sí ag éalú uaidh go pras. Tuige sa diabhal a raibh sé ag imeacht as Londain? Éalú ab ea?³⁹

Múnlaíonn a thréimhse i Sasana mar choimhthíoch é agus tar éis go dteipeann air socrú i Sasana, filleann sé ar an teip sa bhaile arís. Tuigeann sé anois nach leis Londain níos mó agus soilse na cathrach ag sleamhnú thairis. Turas isteach sa dorchadas atá sa turas abhaile feasta. An Éire a bhí aige ina aigne ní raibh inti riamh ach áit aoibhinn agus mheidhreach ach ní mar sin a bhíonn a bhaile nuair a bhaineann sé amach é. Iontas atá air nuair a thiteann múr báistí mar nach le báisteach a bhí súil aige ach le haimsir bhreá, “an cineál aimsire rómánsaí a bhí tiomsaithe ina mheabhair aige d’Éirinn.”⁴⁰ Tá bac cumarsáide cruthaithe ag an imirce idir é agus a thuismitheoirí agus is údar díomá dó gur mó caint a dhéanfaidís leis dá mbeadh sé tar éis teacht abhaile ón sráidbhaile nó ón

³⁸ Breathnach 14.

³⁹ Breathnach 18-19.

⁴⁰ Breathnach 21.

aonach. Feictear é i dtreo dheireadh an scéil agus é idir dhá chomhairle an mbeidh air imeacht arís:

An dtiocfadh leis fanacht ina leithéid seo áite? Ní thiocfadh sé ina chleachtadh choíche! An mbeadh air filleadh arís ar Shasana? Fadhbanna is fadhbanna. I ndeireadh thiar nár mhéanar don duine marbh?⁴¹

Is minic go ndéanann na haisimirceoirí cúis a bhfillte abhaile a iniúchadh ach gabhann Séamas céim níos faide agus ceistíonn sé fiúntas a bheatha. Aisimirce í seo a bhfuil teipthe uirthi is cosúil agus cé gur éirigh leis filleadh go fisiciúil ar a bhaile, tuigtear dó nach mbeidh suaimhneas ar fáil dó san áit ach go mbeidh sé idir dhá thír feasta. Baineann défhiús le cinneadh Shéamais agus sonraítear gur éalú ó uaigneas agus ó aonarachas na cathrach a bhí uaidh seachas filleadh ar bhaile a bhfuil “uaigneas reilige”⁴² i nglórtha na madraí agus nach féidir cumarsáid cheart a dhéanamh le do mhuintir ann.

Tá iniúchadh nach beag déanta ar dheacrachtaí athchultúraithe agus comhshamhlaithe an imirceora Ghaeltachta thar lear ach tugann litríocht aisimirce Chonamara léargas luachmhar dúinn ar scéal an aisimirceora mar dheoraí ina bhaile féin. Nochtar dúinn, sna gearrscéalta a bhí faoi chaibidil san aiste seo, braistintí agus mothúcháin an duine a théann i ngleic leis an díláithriú fisiciúil agus cultúrtha sa tír aíoichta, agus sa bhaile iar fhilleadh dó. Coimhthígh iad na príomhphearsana a pléadh; níor éirigh leo imeacht go hiomlán óna mbailte ina dtaithí imirce ach ní féidir leo filleadh ar bhaile a n-óige ach oiread. Feictear na pearsana ar imeall na sochaí agus ar thóir slí isteach sa phobal athuair ach ní féidir leo éalú ón tuiscint go mbaineann siad le pobal imeallaithe atá scoite ó luachanna agus ó nósanna a bpobail dhúchais. Go deimhin, déanann an pobal baile a dtuiscintí saoil a chaomhnú trí shaoltaithí na n-aisimirceoirí seo a cheilt ar ógánaigh eile an cheantair. Éilíonn an pobal go ndéanfaidh na haisimirceoirí céanna athshóisialú lena muintir agus athfhoghlaim ar scileanna oibre a bpobail ach nuair a theipeann orthu dul i ngleic leis na dúshláin athchultúraithe seo, is staid easnamhach idir dhá shaol agus idir dhá thír atá i ndán dóibh

⁴¹ Breathnach 26.

⁴² Breathnach 25.

feasta. Tógann na téacsanna liteartha atá mar ábhar anailíse san aiste seo ceisteanna tábhachtacha maidir le tionchar na haisimirce ar an duine féin agus ar a phobal. Tá solas le caitheamh ar na straitéisí sóisialta a mbaineann an pobal agus an t-aisimirceoir araon leas astu agus iad i mbun na coimhlinte seo. Más mian linn tuiscint níos gléine a fháil ar an duine díláithrithe seo agus é ar bhóthar na deoraíochta, agus ar na cúiseanna go mbraitheann an t-aisimirceoir mar choimthíoch ina bhaile féin, ní mór dúinn aghaidh anailíseach a thabhairt ar ábhar litríochta an cheantair agus na Gaeltachta i gcoitinne.

GEARÓID IARLA AGUS DAFYDD AP GWILYM: NUÁLAITHE SA TRADISIÚN

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Tá an t-alt seo ag plé le beirt fhear a d'íoc a gcion féin do chultúir a dtíortha sa dóigh gur leasadh le heilimintí úrnua na cultúir chéanna—beirt fhilí meánaoiseacha a chuaigh le traidisiúin liteartha chasta a dtíortha féin agus a d'fhág buan-lorg a n-ardéirime orthu: Gearóid mac Mhuiris (1338-1398) in Éirinn agus Dafydd ap Gwilym (fl. 1315/1320-1350/1370) sa Bhreatain Bheag. Cuireadh filíocht Dhafydd ap Gwilym i gcomparáid le saothar Ghearóid dhá uair cheana féin,¹ ach níor dearnadh iarracht smaoineamh go cruinn ar an gcosúlacht a bhí idir an éacht a bhí déanta acu beirt, laistigh de theorainneacha na dtraidisiúin. Toisc nár éirigh mórán téamaí d'fhilíocht an ghrá cúirte aníos i litríocht na Gaeilge ach níos déanaí, breathnófar go gairid ar chosúlachtaí idir amhránaíocht ghrá na Gaeilge agus filíocht Dhafydd ap Gwilym. Samplaí is ea an dá chás a léiríonn neart athléimneach an traidisiúin dhúchasaigh agus a chumas téamaí iasachta a shú isteach chuige féin agus nuachruth faoi leith a chur orthu.

An 14ú haois, tréimhse bhroidearnúil réabhlóideach ar fad ab ea í i gcultúr agus i bpolaitíocht an dá thír. Ní miste breathnú go gairid ar na cosúlachtaí idir cúlraí cultúrtha na beirte filí sula mbeimid ag lorg na gcosúlachtaí atá idir a gcuid saothair liteartha.

¹ Féach Rachel Bromwich, *Aspects of the Poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym* (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1986) 60; Gwynn ap Gwilym, "Dafydd ap Gwilym a Gearóid Iarla," *Taliesin* 28 (1974): 43-51.

Cuireadh Éire agus an Bhreatain Bheag faoi smacht na Normannach agus páirteanna forleiththeadacha díobh i bhfáinne a nuachaiseal mór. Ar a shon sin, cé gur baineadh gach súil de neamhspléachas leis an gCoróin Angla-Normanach nuair a theip ar an ardríocht in Éirinn agus ar chumhacht na bhflatha dúchasacha sa Bhreatain Bheag, an teanga agus an cultúr dúchais, mhair siad slán agus beoite le spreagthaí nua tríd idirghabháil na gcloíteoirí. Na *huchelwyr*, na sealbhóirí talún uaisle dúchasacha, chuir siad cosaint ar chéannacht pholaitiúil agus chultúrtha na Breataine Bige. Mar is eol don saol, rinneadh na Normannaigh cosúil leis na Gaeil de réir a chéile, chomh cosúil, go deimhin, gurbh ar éigean a chonacthas aon difríocht idir an dá chine faoi dheoidh, rud a spreag Statúidí Chill Chainnigh sa bhliain 1336. Agus ní raibh sna statúidí sin ach admháil gur theip ar an gconcas in Éirinn.²

Ní mar gheall ar chumhacht na n-uaisle áitiúla, áfach, ab ea é gur coinníodh céannacht chultúrtha na dá thír: Leis na céadta bhraitheadh an chumhacht sin ar chumhacht éigin eile – cumhacht an fhocail fhileata. Bhí an file ina sheirbhíseach ag an uasal (mar a bhí an gabha nó an buitléir, abramis), ach bhí stádas dlíthiúil agus sóisialta faoi leith aige – ceann de na tréithe a fuair sé le hoidhreacht ó na draoithe anallód, is dócha.³ Roimh theacht na Normannach bhí filí na hÉireann níos cosúla leo siúd, ach moladh na n-uaisle ab ea a bpríomh-dhualgas sa tréimhse chlasaiceach agus iad ag glacadh leis an saothar a bhíodh ar chúram na mbard, nó céimeanna níos ísle den lucht filíochta.⁴ Go mór agus go fada moladh ab ea buntéama na filíochta Breatnaise ó thús báire. “Ystyried glyw,” an taoiseach a scrúdú, a deir Gwyn Thomas agus é ag lua Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr (fl. 1155-1195), duine de phríomh-fhilí meánaoiseacha na Breatnaise.⁵ Sea, an taoiseach a scrúdú – a urraim a chraoladh i measc a phobail agus a chuid sinsearachta is a chrógacht mhíleata is a mhórchroí a chéiliúradh – sin é a bhí de dhualgas ar na filí. Ach nach raibh siadsan ina n-uaisle freisin? Thuigeadar nach bhféadfaí déanamh dá n-uireasa agus ba mhinic gurbh ar comhchéim a labhraidís

² Cathal Ó Háinle, “Na Dánta Grá,” *Léachtaí Cholm Cille VI: An grá i litriocht na Gaeilge*, eag. Pádraig Ó Fiannachta (Má Nuad: An Sagart, 1975) 35.

³ J.E. Caerwyn Williams, *Traddodiad Llenyddol Iwerddon* (Caerdydd: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1958) 36.

⁴ Williams 124-25.

⁵ Gwyn Thomas, *Y Traddodiad Barddol* (Dinbych: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1976) 111.

lena bpátrúin mar a rinne Cynddelw agus é á chur féin in iúl mar dhuine d'ardfhillí a sheanteanga ("pen prifeirdd o'm heniaith")⁶ nó Muireadhach Albanach Ó Dálaigh (fl. timpeall 1213) agus é ag cosaint a cháis tar éis dó stíobhard brúisciúil a mháistir a thua chun báis.⁷ Ar ndóigh, bhíodh an-mheas ag cách ar ghairm an fhile agus bhíodh uamhan a aoire ar an saol mór; an té a bheadh feannta le teanga an fhile, d'fhéadfadh sé bás a fháil mar gheall ar an aoradh. Agus nach raibh daoine ann a fuair bás!⁸

B'íomaí bliain ab éigean d'fhillí an dá thír a chaitheamh ag freastal ar oiliúint ghairmiúil le máistreacht a bhaint amach ar rúin na teanga liteartha agus ar bhéaloideas a dtíre. Úsáideadh an teanga liteartha nár athraíodh mórán i gcaitheamh na gcéadta in éineacht le meadaracht chasta dhán díreach na Gaeilge nó *chanu caeth* na Breatnaise. Ní mór dúinn a thabhairt faoi deara áfach go raibh bundifríocht idir an dá theanga liteartha, an-difríocht a bhaineann lena nginúint. Teanga labhartha, a bheag nó a mhór, a bhí i dteanga na bhfilí Éireannacha nuair a daingníodh i dtús an 13ú haois í,⁹ ach teanga thacair ar fad a bhí i dteanga na nGogynfeirdd, filí Breatnacha a chleachtadh a gcuid éalaíne idir an dara leath den 12ú haois agus an chéad leath den 14ú haois. Bhaintí feidhm as comhréir agus stór focal na *hengerdd*, as teanga fhilíocht Aneirin agus Taliesin, agus is amhlaidh go raibh na seanfhillí úd ag saothrú sa 6ú haois!¹⁰ Ní foláir cuimhneamh air agus muid ag plé leis an athrú a rinne Dafydd ap Gwilym (agus lucht a linne) ar fhilíocht na Breatnaise.

Is é bun agus barr an scéil seo gur feiniméan sóisialta atá i bhfilíocht an dá thír sa tréimhse seo, rud nach raibh an rialtas

⁶ Thomas 111-12.

⁷ Williams 146.

⁸ Chum Dafydd ap Gwilym *englynion* casta ar fad (seanmheadarchtaí Breatnaise) ina bhfuil sé ag aoradh tréithe pearsanta agus véarsaíocht shuarach a chéile iomaíochta, Rhys Meigen, a fuair bás tar éis dó á gcloisteáil. Cuireann Rachel Bromwich i gcomparáid é sin le cumhacht na haoire fileata in Éirinn, agus í ag aithris an cháis chéanna a luaitear le Caerwyn Williams. I 1414 bhí an Sir John Stanley, Tiarna Leifteanaint na hÉireann, aortha ag Niall Ó'hUiginn agus fuair sé bás cúig seachtaine ina dhiaidh sin mar gheall ar ghangaid na haoire. Féach Bromwich 62 agus Williams 147.

⁹ Williams 126.

¹⁰ Thomas 118, 122.

iasachta mall á thuiscint.¹¹ Cé go maireann corrdhán pearsanta mar a fheictear le caointe cumhachtacha le Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh († 1387) agus Cynddelw i ndiaidh a mac a cailleadh, moladh agus aoradh ab ea na modhanna ba choitianta i bhfilíocht chlasaiceach na Gaeilge agus na Breatnaise chomh maith ón 12ú haois go dtí an 17ú haois nuair ar mheath an t-ord sóisialta agus pátrúnacht na n-uaisle a chothaíodh na filí. Ar a shon sin tháinig an-athrú ar fhilíocht an dá thír sa 14ú haois tar éis dóibh dul faoi anáil litríochtaí na Fraincise agus an Bhéarla a shaibhrigh le nuathéamaí liriceacha iad, le hábhar fhilíocht an ghrá cúirte agus lena fhritéis, an traidisiún goiliárdach, agus le toirt de théamaí agus *seánraí* iasachta nach mbíodh le fáil ach thar teorainn le príomhshruth fileata na Gaeilge agus na Breatnaise chomh maith.¹² Is fíor gur cheaptaí filíocht ghrá sa dá thír roimhe, féach an duan *Gorhoffedd* leis an bhfile de dhuine uasal, Hywel ab Owain Gwynedd, nó *rhieingerddi* na n*Gogynfeirdd* (dánta do mhná uaisle) i dtraidisiún na Breatnaise,¹³ agus an dán “M’anam do scar riomsa a-raoir” le Muireadhach Albanach sa Ghaeilge.¹⁴ Ar a shon sin, is annamh an dán atá ar marthain ón tréimhse mheánaoiseach roimh an 14ú haois, ina bhfuil grá (nó mothúchán éigin eile) á fhuaimniú de ghlór liriceach pearsanta. Glór liriceach pearsanta, sin é ceann de bhuntréithe saothar Ghearóid Iarla agus Dhafydd ap Gwilym mar a chéile.

Cad is ciall leis an bhfrása “glór liriceach pearsanta?” Mar gurb é an bealach is lú achrann lena fheiceáil seo, tosaítear ag plé le hábhar na filíochta féin. Cuireann Gwynn ap Gwilym béim ar bhunchosúlacht i gcúrsaí cultúr agus teanga na sochaithe ina rugadh an bheirt fhilí. Fuair sé amach fiú amháin go raibh gaol i bhfad amach eatarthu, ach nach raibh an gaol ró-fhada ach glúin amháin ag Dafydd lena éileamh de réir an tseandlí Bhreatnaigh

¹¹ Ní raibh moill ar an rialtas coiníleach a thuiscint cén saghas tábhachta a bhí le gairm an fhile maidir le coinneáil an nemahspléachais chultúrtha sa dá thír, agus bhí siad faobhrach sa tóir ar an namhaid sin, go háirithe in Éirinn. Féach Williams 148-149. Sa Bhreatain Bheag, bhí siad ag iarraidh smacht foirmiúil a chur orthu ar a laghad. Féach John Davies, *Hanes Cymru* (London: Penguin Books, 1992) 241.

¹² Seán Ó Tuama, “The New Love Poetry,” *Seven Centuries of Irish Learning 1000-1700*, eag. Brian Ó Cuív (Cork: Mercier Press, 1971) 97, 99.

¹³ Marged Haycock, “Y Corff Perffaith,” *Léachtaí ‘Merched a Llenyddiaeth’* (Aberystwyth: Prifysgol Aberystwyth, 2009).

¹⁴ Ó Háinle 38-39.

Chyfraith Hywel Dda.¹⁵ Os a chionn sin, deir sé gur daoine cleachtaithe le trí theanga ar a laghad, idir ghnáthchainteanna chomh maith le teangacha ceoil agus filíochta, a bhí iontu. Is tábhachtach le hap Gwilym gur cheap Gearóid agus Dafydd liricí grá i meadarachtaí dáin dhírigh agus *chanu caeth* faoi seach agus gur chomhcheangal faoi leith a bhí ann i gcomparáid le liricí grá sa chuid eile den Eoraip. Is féidir glacadh leis an méid seo, ach caithfear cur leis nach as na meadarachtaí amháin a bhaineadar feidhm ach as an traidisiúin dúchais ar fad in éineacht leis an mbéaloideas agus an scéalaíocht.¹⁶ Ach ní ag leanúint an spreagtha iasachta chéanna a bhí an dís. Léitear an dán le Gearóid i dtosach:

Mairg adeir olc ris na mnáibh!
bheith dá n-éagnach ní dáil chruinn;
a bhfuadarad do ghuth riamh
dom aithne ní hiad do thuill.

Binn a mbriathra, gasta a nglór,
aicme rerab mór mo bháidh;
a gcáineadh is mairg nár loç;
mairg adeir olc ris na mnáibh.

Ní dhéanaid fionghal ná feall,
ná ní ar a mbeidh grainc ná gráin;
Ní sháraighid cill ná clog;
mairg adeir olc ris na mnáibh.
Ní tháinig riamh acht ó mhnaoi
easpag ná rí (dearbhtha an dáil)
ná príomhfháidh ar nách biadh locht;
mairg adeir olc ris na mnáibh.

Agá gcroidhe bhíos a ngeall;
ionmhain leó duine seang slán, —
fada go ngeabhdaois a chol;
mairg adeir olc ris na mnáibh.

¹⁵ Ap Gwilym 49.

¹⁶ Tá *Duanaire* Gearóid breactha le tagairtí do scéalta dúchais na Gaeilge. Luann Cathal Ó Háinle dán grá amháin atá fite fuaite leo. Féach an dán “XXIX. Comórtas scéalaíochta lena ghrá geal” in Gearóid Mac Niocaill, eag., “Duanaire Gearóid Iarla,” *Studia Hibernica* 3 (1963): 49-51. Féach freisin Ó Háinle 37-38. Maidir le Dafydd ap Gwilym, féach an díospóireacht in Bromwich 132-151. Tugann Bromwich faoi deara go luann Dafydd “Derdri” (Deirdre, leannán Naoise) agus “Nyf” (Niamh, leannán Oisín), agus “Cuhelyn” (Cú Chulainn). Féach Bromwich 139-41.

Duine arsaidh leathan liath
 ní hé a mian dul 'na dháil;
 annsa leó an buinneán óg bocht;
 maírg adeir olc ris na mnáibh!¹⁷

Luann Gwynn ap Gwilym cuid de dhán le Dafydd ap Gwilym – “Y Bardd a’r Brawd Llwyd,” “Cosaint na Ceirde” in aistriúchán Sheáin de Búrca agus é á chur i gcomparáid le dán Ghearóid. Ach cé gur beag nach ionann focail nó smaointe an trí leathrann a leanas don cheathrú rann de dhán Ghearóid, agus dá chosúlacht teachtaireacht an dá dháin, tá difríocht i bhfoinse an fhriotail:

Bean an bláth is spéiriúla
 ar neamh thuas ach Dia É féin.
 Ó bhean a rugadh gach neach
 den chine daonna, ach triúr;
 dá bhrí sin ní hionadh grá
 ar mhná ná ar chailíní.¹⁸

Merch sydd decaf blodeuyn
 Yn y nef ond Duw ei hun.
 O wraig y ganed pob dyn
 O'r holl bobloedd ond tridyn.
 Ac am hynny nid rhyfedd
 Caru merched a gwragedd.¹⁹

Tá áirithe ag Cathal Ó Háinle go mbaineann dán Ghearóid le traidisiún na ngoiliárdach a dhéanadh “muga magadh de gach uile short: an rud is mó a raibh urraim ag dul dó, ba é sin an rud ba bhinne a ndéanadís ceap magaidh de.” Deir sé freisin gur “ag cosaint na mban ar an magadh sin atá Gearóid.”²⁰ Os a choinne sin, cé gur ceann de na pointí i ndán Dhafydd é sin chomh maith, is difriúil an sruth iasachta a ritheann tríd:

Is trua nach eol don ainnir
 mholta, a shiúlann sa choill,
 caint an bhráthar luchdhathaigh
 ina taobh liomsa inniu.
 Chuaigh mise chuig an Bhráthair
 go n-admhóinn dó mo chionta,
 d’inis mé dó, gan amhras,
 gur sórt baird a bhí ionam,
 a bhí le fada i ngrá

Gwae fi na wŷr y forwyn
 Glodfrys, a’i llys yn y llwyn,
 Ymddiddan y brawd llygliw
 Amdanai y dydd heddiw.
 Mi a euthum at y Brawd
 I gyffesu fy mhechawd.
 Iddo ‘dd addefais, od gwn,
 Mae eilun prydydd oeddw’n,
 A’m bod erioed yn caru

¹⁷ Tomás Ó Rathile, *eag., Dánta Grádha* (Corcaigh, Baile Átha Cliath: Cló Ollsgoile Chorcaí, 1926) 4.

¹⁸ Luaitear an t-aistriúchán den dán “Y Bardd a’r Brawd Llwyd” i *Dafydd ap Gwilym: Dafydd ap Gwilym*, aist. Seán de Búrca (Baile Átha Cliath: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1974) 4-11.

¹⁹ Luaitear “Testun Golygedig: 148 – Y Bardd a’r Brawd Llwyd,” 4/5 *Aibreán* 2007, <http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net>, 20 Meán Fómhair 2011.

²⁰ Ó Háinle 39.

le cailín geal dú-mhálach,
 is gan agam ó mo níon
 leas ná bua dá bharr sin,
 ach mé de shíor i ngrá léi
 agus anró orm dá réir,
 's nár liom í cé gur scaip mé
 a cáil trí chríocha Choimre,
 is gur mhian liom í a fháil
 sa leaba, taobh le balla.

Rhiain wynebwen aelddu,
 Ac na bu ym o'm llawrudd
 Les am unbennes na budd,
 Ond ei charu'n hir wastad
 A churio'n fawr o'i chariad,
 A dwyn ei chlod drwy Gymru
 A bod hebddi er hynny,
 A damuno ei chlywed
 I'm gwely rhof a'r pared.

Is samhlaoidí iad samhlaoidí thraidisiún an *amour courtois*, samhlaoidí mar sheirbhís an ghrá agus galar an ghrá agus cráifeacht an ghrá, a mbaineann Dafydd feidhm astu anseo agus i ndánta eile.

An chosúlacht is tábhachtaí atá idir an bheirt fhilí, is ciúta fileata í. Ghlac Gearóid leis na foirmeacha is simplí den dán díreach agus chuir sé struchtúr an charúil Eorpaigh leo.²¹ Tharraing sé téamaíocht na n-amhrán aindiaga a chuir Richard Ledrede, easpag Chnoc Osraí, ar buile le cléirigh Chill Chainnigh, isteach i dtraidisiún fileata na Gaeilge.²² Chum Gearóid a chuid dánta i réim mhór de théamaí áfach, mar is léir óna *Dhuanaire*. Agus is filíocht phearsanta ar fad í nach mór. Sa dán V, iarrann sé ar a “dhearbhchairde,” na taoisigh Ghaelacha, gan a bheith i bhfeirg leis toisc go bhfuil sé ag tabhairt fúthu ar ordú an rí. Deir sé go bhfuil na Gaill eile á aoradh mar gheall ar a chairdeas leis na Gaeil agus míníonn sé dóibh gur fearr leis a bheith creachta acusan ná a bheith i mbraighdeanas “ag ríogh Shaxan i Lunainn.”²³ Cibé an téama a bhfuil sé ag plé leis, is annamh nach mbíonn Gearóid ag úsáid stíl scríbhneoireachta atá díreach agus lán de thagairtí cuí do bhéaloideas agus scéalaíocht na tíre. Is é an cas céanna é ag saothar Dhafydd ap Gwilym. Cé go leanann sé traidisiún na n*Gogynfeirdd*, agus é ag baint úsáide as comhfhocail chasta, mar shampla, is é an *cywydd* príomh-mheán a chuid filíochta – meadaracht sholúbtha “b[h]unaithe ar aonad seachtsiollach” a “bhfuil ornáideachas ar leith nó *cynghanedd* ann atá déanta as comhardadh agus uaim inmhéanach.”²⁴ Sa mheán fileata seo baineann sé feidhm as gach acmhainn atá ina theanga dhúchais. Faightear seansamhlacha de

²¹ Ó Háinle 39.

²² Féach Robin Fowler, “Introduction,” Ó Raithile xv.

²³ Féach téacs an dáin i Mac Niocaill 17-19, go háirithe na rainn 4-8.

²⁴ de Búrca 3.

sholáthar na n*Gogynfeirdd* taobh le taobh le focail úrnua, amach ón deil, mar a déarfá, focail ón mBéarla agus ón bhFraincis a mbaintear nuachialla meafaracha astu.²⁵ Ní féidir a rá go dtarlaíonn an rud céanna i bhfilíocht Ghearóid, ach is cosúil go bhfuil próiseas éigin cosúil leis sin ar siúl ag Gearóid agus é ag tagairt do bhéaloideas na hÉireann ina chuid dánta grá (sa dán “XI. Tar éis do bhean gan ainm staicín magaiigh a dhéanamh de,” mar shampla).²⁶ Is cinnte chomh maith gur bhain sé tastáil as na tualangachtaí a bhí sna meadarachtaí níos simplí den dán díreach agus é ag cur an charúil iontu.²⁷

Ní leasc le Dafydd ná le Gearóid téamaíocht agus foirmeacha fileata an phobail. Sa dán “Cosaint na Ceirde,” bhain Dafydd úsáid as an *traethodl*. Is foirm í a ndearnadh an *cywydd* di. Is foirm í, áfach, atá gan ornáideachas fuaimniúil na *cynghanedd* agus a úsáideadh i measc céimeanna níos ísle na bhfilí Breatnaise. Bhain Dafydd úsáid as an bhfoirm toisc go raibh sí ag oiriúint don chás a bhí i gceist aige. Bhain Gearóid úsáid as an gcarúl agus as na foirmeacha níos simplí den dán díreach toisc gur chuir siad ar a chumas labhairt faoina eispéaras speisialta mar fhile na Gaeilge agus mar dhuine nár Ghael ná Gall é. Friotal fileata faoi leith, féiniúlacht fhileata, miotaseolaíocht phearsanta. Seo iad na tréithe atá i gcomhar ag Dafydd agus Gearóid. Seo iad na tréithe a chuireann ar shúile an léitheora macalla na ndánta eile go léir a chloisteáil agus é ag léamh nó ag éisteacht le dán áirithe amháin.

Tá pointe amháin eile le lua anseo. An pointe seo, ní bhaineann sé ach le Dafydd amháin agus le cosúlacht atá idir a chuid saothair agus litríocht níos déanaí na hÉireann. Phléigh mé cheana gur bhain Dafydd úsáid as an *traethodl* toisc gur oir sí don chás a bhí i gceist aige sa dán seo thuas. Arís is arís eile, cuireann sé masc an chliaraí air féin:

²⁵ Bromwich 8-9.

²⁶ Ó Háinle 38.

²⁷ Deir Cathal Ó Háinle: “Bhain Gearóid úsáid as an gcéad líne den dán mar líne dheireanach sna rainn eile ar bhealach a chuirfeadh carúl i gcuimhne duit. Níos ba ea é sin aige: féach DuanGh XXII, agus féach freisin XI agus XXIII r. 1-3 a théann i gcosúlacht leis sin. Bhain carúl leis an traidisiún neamhléannta.” Ó Háinle 39. Bhain Gearóid úsáid as an ae freislighe agus ógláchas rannaíochta móire agus ógláchas rannaíochta bige ina *Dhuanaire* agus sa dán a luadh thuas. Féach Mac Niocaill 8. Mar sin de, cheangal Gearóid an carúl le meadaracht thraidisiúnta óglachas rannaíochta móire.

Ó neamh a thagann sonas ach tagann brón as ifreann. Cuireann filíocht gliondar croí ar shean is óg, tinn nó slán. Ní córa teagasc duitse ná cumadóireacht domsa, is más éigean duit an déirc ní mór domsa an chliaraíocht. Nach rainn is óideanna iad na hiomnaí is na rosca? Duanta do Dhia naofa iad na sailm a chan Dáibhí fáidh.	'O'r nef y cad pob digrifwch Ac o uffern bob tristwch. Cerdd a bair yn llawenach Hen ac ieuanc, claf ac iach. Cyn rheitied i mi brydu Ag i tithau bregethu, A chyn iawned ym glera Ag i tithau gardota. Pand englynion ac odlau Yw'r hymner a'r segwensiau, A chywyddau i Dduw lwyd Yw llaswyr Dafydd Broffwyd?
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An *clerwr*, an cliarach, duine a bhí lasmuigh d'ardtraidisiún an fhile ghairmiúil in Éirinn agus sa Bhreatain Bheag chomh maith, ba trína shaothar féin, tríd an sruth ísliteartha úd a chuaigh an *amour courtois* agus a scáth goiliárdach agus an *fabliau* isteach in ardtraidisiún an fhile ghairmiúil.²⁸ Feictear an sruth goiliárdach sa dánta grá le Gearóid, ach tá tuilleadh le fáil i bhfilíocht Dhafydd a chuirfeadh litríocht níos déanaí na hÉireann i gcuimhne duit.

I dtosach an dáin le Dafydd, feicimid leannán an fhile agus í ag siúl sa choill ina bhfuil a cúirt (“y forwyn glodfrys, a’i llys yn y llwyn”). Tá dán nó dánta eile le Dafydd a chloisimid agus muid ag léamh an fhocail “llwyn.” Is cúirt idéalach an ghrá agus eaglais an ghrá a chiallaíonn an choill do Dhafydd, áit atá gan gach toirmeasc atá ar an ngrá daonna sa chúirt agus san eaglais. Is ansiúd a bhfriotáiltar aifreann an ghrá ar na leannáin.²⁹ Maíonn Dafydd gurb aireachtáil chráifeach ar fad é an grá daonna. Mar sin de, an mothúchán agus grá collaí, níl siad contrártha ar aon chaoi le creideamh i nDia, dar leisean. An grá daonna a mholadh tríd ealaín na filíochta, ciallaíonn sé sin go bhfuil tú ag glacadh páirte sa dúile i do thimpeall féin le hiomlán do nirt, go bhfuil tú ag breathnú ar an domhan cruthanta go cruinn, go bhfuil comhbhá agat leis. Cén

²⁸ Is deacair ar fad a chinneadh an traidisiún ísliteartha dúchais nó tionchar na dtraidisiún iasachta (líteartha agus íslíteartha mar a chéile) a spreag an cor nua sin i bhfilíocht an dá thír. Is cinnte go leor gurb athruithe sóisialta agus polaitiúla agus eacnamúla a ghríosaigh an t-athrú a tháinig ar bhlas agus dhath a bhí ar chaint an fhile. Pléann Huw Meirion Edwards leis an ábhar seo go forleitheadach; féach Huw Meirion Edwards, *Dafydd ap Gwilym: Influences and Analogues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), go háirithe 67-108.

²⁹ Féach an cywydd “Offeren y Llwyn” [Aifreann Coille] i de Búrca 106-109.

chaoi a gcuirtear friotal ar an méid seo i bhfilíocht? Léitear aon dán ar bith le Dafydd ina bhfuil sé ag cur síos ar an gcréadúr, an *llatai*, a théann ar theachtaireacht ghrá dó chun a leannáin, an dán “Yr Wylan” [An Faoileán], mar shampla, nó an *cywydd* “Y Deildy” [teach faoi dhuilliúr] ina bhfuil Dafydd ag cur síos ar choill na Bealtaine mar theach lena aghaidh féin agus le haghaidh a leannáin. Cuirtear an ceann deireanach seo i gcomparáid leis an amhrán grá “Coillte Glasa an Triúcha”³⁰ mar shampla agus feicfear go bhfuil an-chosúlacht eatarthu maidir leis an téamaíocht agus na samhlaoidí. Ní foláir nó go mbeadh sé an-suimiúil taighde cruinn a dhéanamh ar an ábhar seo agus comparáid a dhéanamh ar an gcaoi a n-oibríonn na *seánraí* éagsúla d’fhilíocht ghrá na hEorpa meánaoisí in amhráin tuaithe na Gaeilge ón ré 1600-1850³¹ agus i saothar Dhafydd ap Gwilym.³²

I saothair Ghearóid agus Dhafydd mar a chéile, tá glór liriceach pearsanta agus téamaí an ghrá (agus téamaí eile mar a chonaic muid) fite fuaite ina chéile. Tá an bheirt acu ag glacadh le meadarachtaí agus scéalaíocht a dtíortha dúchais féin agus iad á meascadh le traidisiúin iasachta. Tá cuid mhaith tastála déanta acu agus nach bhfuil blas nua-aimseartha ar an tastáil sin? Tagann cuid mhaith athbhri de. Tá a lán grinn agus íoróine le haireachtáil sa dá dhán a luadh. Mar shampla, faightear téama an fhir éadmhair (“y gŵr eiddig”) sa dán thuas le Gearóid agus i gcuid mhaith de dhánta Dhafydd agus baintear úsáid ghreannmhar de iontu (cé go bhfuil a lán éisceachtaí i saothar Dhafydd). Ina dhiaidh sin is uile, is cinnte go bhfuil an greann agus an íoróin sin doroinnte as gach rud eile in ealaín na beirte: An bhfuil Gearóid i ndáiríre ag cosaint na mban nó an bhfuil sé á n-aoradh nó an bhfuil sé ag déanamh an dá rud sa dán a luadh thuas? Cé go bhfuil Dafydd cinnte dá bhua sa díospóireacht leis an mbráthair bocht agus é ag caitheamh mhasc an chliaraigh, tá dánta eile ann ina bhfuil a ghlór lán aiféala nó doilís fiú, dílis agus bréagach. B’fhéidir go bhfrithchaitheann an athbhri speisialta seo dinimic an traidisiúin nach bhfuil in aon chor ach liteartha amháin. Mar a léiríonn sampla saothar na beirte filí, bhí ag Éirinn agus ag an mBreatain Bheag traidisiúin fhileata

³⁰ Féach téacs an amhráin i Seán Ó Tuama, *An Grá in Amhráin na nDaoine* (Baile Átha Cliath: Clólan Uí Mhathúna, 1960) 275-76.

³¹ Ó Tuama 1.

³² Bromwich 97-100.

sholúbtha. Cé go bhfuil cuma an-choimeádach ar an dís, bhí siad lán seiftiúlachta agus iad ag freagairt do nuathéamaí iasachta agus do na hathruithe a bhí ar siúl i mbeatha an dá shocháí.

